

Development of Management Strategies for Collaboration in Information Science Education and Research in the ASEAN Community

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Abstract:

This study aimed at 1) analyzing the status and management of ASEAN collaboration in library and information science (LIS) education and research, 2) analyzing factors promoting and hindering the management of collaboration, 3) studying the needs for collaboration, and 4) developing strategic recommendations for ASEAN collaboration in LIS education and research. This research used mixed methods of documentary, qualitative and quantitative research. Key informants consisted of purposive key persons involved with regional or international collaborative activities in the field. They were eight Thai and seventeen foreign key persons from ASEAN countries + 3, five head programs from five different LIS schools in Thailand, and thirty four LIS academicians and professionals. The research instruments comprised a documentary analysis form, interview forms, and a questionnaire. Data analyses were both content analysis for qualitative data, and IOC for quantitative data.

The research findings showed that: 1) collaboration in education and research in library and information science in the ASEAN community was established in 1970. The Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL) is a sole official regional professional organization for librarians, library associations and institutions from Southeast Asian countries, governed by the CONSAL constitution, with the objectives covering cooperation in education and research in the field; 2) Factors promoting and hindering the management of LIS collaboration were both external and internal factors; 3) all ASEAN countries are aware of the importance and needs for LIS regional collaboration in education and research, with various collaborative activities leading to internationalization; 4) recommendations for the strategic management of ASEAN collaboration in LIS education and research included 4S (Small - Spirit – System - Sustain) as the basic principles, collaboration in education focusing on curriculum, teaching and learning, faculty, students and quality assurance. Research collaboration focusing on defining joint research topics, research funding, joint research, and joint organizing academic activities.

Keywords: Library and Information Science collaboration, Library and Information Science Education, Library and Information Science Research

Introduction

Education and research play important roles in the development of Library and Information Science (LIS) profession and professionals. Library and Information Science (LIS), both theories and practices are undergoing a complete change through the advancement of information and communication technology, globalization and educational reform with changes, challenges and opportunity greater than before. Library and Information Science has played a significant role in the growth of the information society. The first LIS education program in most ASEAN countries started with short courses, training courses, or in-service training for library staff who had no formal education in librarianship. All ASEAN countries except Cambodia have LIS formal education programs. The Philippines is the pioneer LIS formal education in ASEAN. The Institute of Library Science (at present, the School of Library and Information Studies) of the University of the Philippines, has been the oldest library school in the ASEAN region since 1914. LIS education programs of other countries were found respectively, namely Indonesia in 1952, Thailand in 1955, Vietnam in 1961, Myanmar in 1971, Malaysia in 1972, Singapore in 1993, Brunei Darussalam in 2000, while Laos is quite recent in 2013 (Sacchanand, 2015). The programs offered in LIS schools in ASEAN countries can be categorized into certificate/diploma, bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree level. Diversity in the names of the programs, degrees and courses offered can be found in the region as well as in the same country. Library and Information Science dominated the name of the programs while others are Library and Information Studies; Information Studies, Information Management; Information Science, Knowledge Management. There has been the trend to change the name of the curricula, **NOT** to include the word "library" in the name of the program/ school to get in line with the changing LIS job market. Major challenges to cope with included both common issues across ASEAN countries, e.g. language barrier, economic barrier, digital divide, shortage of qualified teaching faculty, and the diversity in the development, perception, status and internationalization of the LIS education, research, profession and professionals.

ASEAN is a dynamic region with great diversity and variation among the countries in terms of geography, culture, official languages, literacy rate, population density, GDP per capita, level of socio-economic development, ICT development, education policies, systems and structures. Regardless all those differences and from within this diversity, these ten countries share many commonalities and have placed a similar emphasis on human resource development as the key in developing the whole nation and region to enter the knowledge-based economy and global environment. ASEAN was founded on a spirit of collaboration and cooperation. As set out in the ASEAN Declaration (ASEAN, 1967), one aim of ASEAN is "to promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields." Collaboration or interchangeable and related concepts/terms, e.g. cooperation, partnership, network, alliances is an important mechanism of social change and development, capacity building and competitiveness of the countries and region. Collaboration has been a vital and important strategy to meet the challenges and changes in LIS education and research in higher education. To create a sustainable and cohesive future of LIS education can only be realized through collaboration and cooperation across all stakeholders on a holistic level. (Patridge and others, 2010). As the development of LIS education and research in the digital age is challenging LIS educators and researchers in the ASEAN community, the development of collaborative management strategies to cope with changes, strengthen LIS education, research, profession and professionals at the

institutional, national and ASEAN regional levels is necessary to move the LIS education and research in the ASEAN community more towards internationalization and excellence.

Objectives

This study has the following objectives:

1. To analyze the status and management of ASEAN collaboration in library and information science education and research.
2. To analyze factors promoting and hindering the management of ASEAN collaboration in library and information science education and research.
3. To study the needs for collaboration and suggestions for the management of ASEAN collaboration in library and information science education and research.
4. To develop strategic recommendations for ASEAN collaboration in library and information science education and research.

Literature review

Collaboration has been well established in the North America and Europe and helps advancing the LIS education and profession. An examination of the published literature revealed that not much has been done in library and information science education and research collaboration, specifically in the ASEAN community. Collaboration among LIS educators in the Asia Pacific context, was identified by Foo & others (2006). These areas included hosting and participating in workshops, symposiums and conferences, implementing a portal for education, developing a repository of learning objects and resources, assuring quality through accreditation, and promoting and sustaining research and scholarship. These were highlighted with the aim to foster and promote dialog among LIS educators and researchers, and to engender participation in these activities. Collectively, these areas laid a foundation to create an informal network to improve information exchange and dissemination, knowledge sharing and creation, research collaboration, and in so doing, helped further improve and ensure high standards of LIS education and research in the region.

Ongoing initiative was the regional seminar on “Library and Information science education: Collaboration among ASEAN countries,” organized by the Information Science program, School of Liberal Arts, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (2013), which was attended by 51 participants from 14 member countries of ASEAN + 6, discussed and agreed on ASEAN Collaboration on LIS Education in curriculum and teaching, educational media, academic activities, LIS research, professional development, resource sharing and other academic activities.

Regional quality assurance was another area of interest in response of continuous changes and transformation of LIS higher education in the ASEAN region. Khoo, Majid and Chaudhry (2003) proposed on the issue of quality assurance or specifically an accreditation system for LIS professional education program in Southeast Asia. It was felt that an accreditation scheme for the region would be useful in enhancing the quality and acceptability of LIS degrees as well as providing more flexible mobility of library and information professionals in the region. A model for the accreditation of LIS education programs in Southeast Asia under the oversight of Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL) was proposed, but there has been little activity in this area since the early 2000s. (Khoo, 2013). Continuous effort was proposed by Sacchanand (2015) in the development of LIS regional quality assurance system as a part of a Southeast Asian Higher Education

Quality Assurance Framework on regional collaborative effort and networking of LIS educators, programs, institutions, to maintain quality and global standards of LIS education, to enhance the mobility of LIS students and teaching faculty, to develop quality, standards and excellence of the LIS programs and institutions, and to facilitate the internationalization of LIS higher education in the ASEAN region.

In *South Africa*, the current status and challenges of collaboration in library and information education and training in Africa was discussed by Ocholla.(2008). The paper largely drew examples from experiential knowledge and observation, basic bibliometric analysis, and studying related institutional documents as well as African studies in the domain. Findings showed that common trends of LIS education were shared by most LIS schools in Africa. Major challenges facing LIS education included the regulation of student numbers, knowledge and diversification of LIS job markets, funding of LIS schools, the development of technology infrastructures both in quantity and quality, allowing efficient access and the continued development of education through short courses that provide new knowledge, skills and attitudes to LIS workers. Collaboration of LIS schools in the region was weak and largely informal. There was hardly any research collaboration amongst LIS schools in Africa. Research limitations/implications included opportunities for collaboration that required initiatives, involvement and leadership. Organizing LIS schools workshops and pre/post conferences during national, regional and international conferences is an excellent way to begin unraveling a considerable portion of the current collaborative plight by engaging relevant stakeholders. He also noted that there was a need to improve LIS websites as a means to increase visibility and easy access to information which would, in turn, be useful for collaborative activities. This paper raised primary challenges and opportunities for collaboration in LIS education and training in Africa, thereby providing useful, current information that should inform LIS educators, researchers and students.

Maluleka, Onyancha, Ajiferuke(2015) explored the underlying factors that influenced research collaboration in LIS schools in South Africa. The population for the study consisted of 85 academic teaching staff employed by LIS schools in South African universities. A survey design was used to obtain data for the study, through a questionnaire containing open- and close-ended questions. A total of 85 teaching staff in 10 LIS schools in South Africa were alerted, through email, to the location of the Web-based questionnaires, developed using the Stellar survey software. A total of 51 questionnaires were completed and returned for analysis. The findings suggested that factors such as networking, sharing of resources, enhancing productivity, educating students, overcoming intellectual isolation, and accomplishments of projects in a short time as well as learning from peers influenced research collaboration in LIS in South Africa. Factors that were likely to hinder effective collaboration in LIS research include bureaucracy, lack of funding, lack of time, as well as physical distance between researchers. The findings further suggested that even though there are drawbacks to collaboration, majority of LIS researchers thought that collaboration is beneficial and should be encouraged.

Collaboration presents immense opportunities for growth in LIS education. The University of Ibadan's Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies and the University of Ghana's Department of Information Studies are notable centers of LIS education in West Africa. A survey research design was conducted by Abioye (2013) using a questionnaire and semi-structured interview with faculty in the two LIS institutions as instruments for data collection. It was found that although collaboration has been widely acknowledged as a potential means for meeting the challenges of LIS education, Ibadan LIS School and Ghana

LIS school which have existed for about fifty years as the leading LIS schools in West Africa have not been shining examples in cross-border collaboration in the region. Not much, at the moment, has been done to foster collaboration between the two LIS schools in LIS education despite the high level of awareness of the potentials of collaboration among faculty members in the two LIS schools. The barriers to collaboration between the two LIS schools were legion but not insurmountable, particularly with the absolute commitment of the two partnering institutions at both the formal and informal levels. Based on the findings and in the light of experiences in other parts of the world, recommendations were made towards improving collaboration in LIS education in the region including formal policy guiding the relationship, strong commitment of collaborating partners and faculty and funding,

Research methodology

This research used mixed methods of documentary, qualitative and quantitative research to collect both quantitative and qualitative data for this study.

Key informants

Key informants consisted of five groups of purposive key persons in the field as follows:

1. Eight Thai deans, educators and researchers who have knowledge and experiences related to national, regional and international collaborative activities focusing on education and research in library and information science.
2. Seven foreign key persons from ASEAN countries + 3 who have knowledge and experiences related to regional and international collaborative activities focusing on education and research in library and information science.
3. Five head programs from five different LIS graduate schools involved with regional and international collaborative activities focusing on education and research in library and information science.
4. Ten foreign key persons from ASEAN countries involved with regional or international collaborative activities focusing on education and research in library and information science.
5. Thirty four Thai faculty members, researchers and academic librarians from LIS schools, professional association and academic libraries who are stakeholders of library and information science education and research.

Research instruments

The research instruments were comprised of a documentary analysis form, interview forms and a questionnaire as follows :

A documentary analysis form was developed to collect data from literature review on the status and management of ASEAN collaboration in library and information science education and research.

Interview forms were developed to investigate in-depth information from eight Thais and seven foreign key persons, five head programs and another group of ten foreign key persons. This is to collect data about the management of ASEAN collaboration in LIS education and research, factors promoting and hindering the management of ASEAN collaboration, the needs for collaboration and strategic recommendations for the management of ASEAN collaboration in LIS education and research.

Questionnaire, comprising the list of items of factors promoting and hindering the management of collaboration and strategic recommendations for the management of ASEAN collaboration in LIS education and research, was sent to thirty four purposive Thai faculty members, researchers and academic librarians who are stakeholders of LIS education and research. This is to find the content validity assessment using the Index of item objective Congruence (IOC) through rating of item relevance.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included both content analysis for qualitative data, and IOC (Index of Congruence) for quantitative data.

Findings

1) Great efforts have been made to promote regional collaboration in the ASEAN community. In the field of education, ASEAN University Network (AUN), Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning (ASAIHL), ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN) and Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) are some key collaborative regional efforts.

Collaboration in LIS education and research in the ASEAN community was officially established in 1970. The Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL) is a sole official regional professional organization for librarians, library associations and institutions from Southeast Asian countries and is governed by the CONSAL constitution, which puts forward the objective of cooperation in education and research in the field. Other collaborative efforts included A-LIEP (Asia-Pacific Library and Information Education and Practice) founded in 2006, CiSAP, (Consortium of iSchools Asia Pacific) founded in 2008; and ALIRG (Asia Library and Information Research Group). formerly Taiwan-Singapore-Thailand Workshop series on Library and Information Science (LIS) founded in 2008. It was also found that most collaborative activities in the ASEAN community started with informal collaboration and based on personal ties among a small network of LIS educators in the region.

2) Factors promoting and hindering the management of ASEAN collaboration in LIS education and research were both external and internal factors. Major factors that promoted collaboration were external factors comprised global trends, collaboration in the ASEAN community, and a paradigm shift in education and the LIS profession; and internal factors comprised the profession and professionals' needs, and the success of partnerships. Major factors that hindered the management of collaboration were external factors comprised the geographical, social and economic development gap among ASEAN countries, ICT infrastructure, and the status of LIS education in each country. Internal factors comprised the readiness of ASEAN countries for collaboration, and LIS institutions in terms of management, faculty and students. The IOC scores ranged between 0.77 - 0.94. ASEAN collaboration in education which was the external factor promoting the management of collaboration received the highest score (IOC=0.96), followed by the readiness of the country, LIS institutions and professionals (IOC=0.94) which was the internal factor hindering the management of collaboration.

3) All ASEAN countries were aware of the importance of LIS regional collaboration and showed their needs for collaboration in education and research, with various collaborative activities leading to internationalization. Some collaborative activities in educational management included curriculum, teaching and learning, faculty, students, quality assurance and accreditation. Research collaboration included defining the ASEAN LIS research agenda, joint research, research funding, and joint organizing of academic activities both in education and research.

4) The proposed strategic recommendations for the management of ASEAN collaboration in LIS education and research included the basic concepts of 4S (Small - Spirit – System - Sustain): start with small group or small area of interest, through the spirit of friendship,

systematic planning and working, for sustainability. The strategic management included defining the mission, vision and strategic plan relating to collaboration and internationalization at the university or faculty level, facilitating memoranda of understanding, implementing a decentralized administrative system based on the strengths, identity and context of each member, networking and strategic partnerships, flexibility, continued budget allocation, and ICT infrastructure and equipment to facilitate collaboration that suit the context and needs of the institution, country and region.

Discussions and Implications

1. It was found that continuing effort has been made in ASEAN collaboration in LIS education and research and LIS schools and educators in the ASEAN community are aware of the importance and the need for collaboration especially in education and research and have been actively engaging in various kinds of collaboration as well as internationalization of their education programs. This was supported by Khoo (2013) who said that LIS educators in the region have made a substantial effort to develop collaboration in the region, particularly in organizing conferences and workshops, culminating in the formation of CiSAP - a consortium of information schools. Other activities have also taken place, including having visiting professors, student exchange programs, overseas study visits, etc. However, Khoo pointed out that more needs to be done to encourage research collaboration and forming of research clusters through PhD student exchange programs, post-doctoral fellowships and faculty exchanges. In addition, the collaborative efforts have been in line with the proposed activities identified for ASEAN LIS collaboration by Foo & others (2006) and STOU (2013).

2. It was found that most collaborative activities in the ASEAN community started with informal collaboration which is the same in South Africa where collaboration of LIS schools or educators was largely informal. (Ocholla, 2008). This was supported by Khoo (2013) who said that the nature of collaborative activities in the context of ASEAN region were informal and based on personal ties among a small network of LIS educators in the region who appreciated the value and importance of such activities. The formal collaboration gradually developed into formal collaboration, e.g. the Asia Library & Information Research Group (ALIRG), which was a collaborative effort of a group of scholars / researchers in Information Science from Taiwan, Singapore and Thailand and later Malaysia, Korea and India, to promote regional collaboration among LIS researchers, educators and professionals. A PhD symposium is also included in the Workshop to promote networking among PhD students.

It should also be highlighted that LIS faculty or educators in ASEAN community played active roles in the collaborative activities in the Asian region, especially in the founding of collaborative networks, e.g. A-LIEP (Asia-Pacific Library and Information Education and Practice), CiSAP (Consortium of iSchools Asia Pacific). In addition, organizing LIS schools workshops and pre/post conferences during national, regional and international conferences is indicated by Ocholla (2008) as an excellent way to begin unraveling a considerable portion of the current collaborative plight by engaging relevant stakeholders. This was supported by Khoo (2013) who found that networks and relationships formed through organizing and participating in conferences and workshops provide a basis for regional collaborative activities.

3. Major factors promoting and hindering the management of LIS collaboration were both external and internal factors which were in similar with research findings of Maluleka, Onyancha, & Ajiferuke (2015) and Ocholla (2008) who explored that the absolute commitment of the two partnering institutions and those involved, bureaucracy and funding are underlying factors even though collaboration is beneficial and should be encouraged.

4. The strategic recommendations developed covered the activities of current and future ASEAN collaboration that suit the context and needs of the LIS educators and researchers. They were in line with the proposed collaborative activities by Khoo ; Majid & Chaudhry (2003), Foo & others (2006). Burnett (2013), Khoo (2013), STOU (2013), and Sacchanand (2015) and will meet the challenges in achieving the desired goal in higher education among ASEAN community, as indicated by Yaakub (2015) that regional accreditation, unified education framework, improve quality of education, scholarship for students/faculty exchange, increase usage of English language, e-learning/online learning/distance learning/open learning are the actions that deemed necessary.

Practical implications

The strategic recommendations can be put into practice at national, regional and international level as a guideline for all stakeholders especially LIS higher education institutions, professional associations and organizations in the ASEAN community.

Administrators, e.g. deans, heads of the LIS programs who involved with policy making and planning at the university, faculty and program level should develop policies and planning related to the development of collaborative activities in LIS education and research, to gain a competitive advantage.

As an association representing the profession, the Thai Library Association as well as other LIS professional associations in the ASEAN countries should play key and active roles in driving the ASEAN collaboration in LIS education and research, through the Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL) and other regional organizations such as SEAMEO. This is to contribute to the development of collaboration in LIS education and research.

It is strongly recommended that the first start is the good start, clearly identified issues and well planned management are needed so that they will suit the real needs and environment of each country and each institution. Institutions can start by framing the scope of interest and developed systematically as well as starting by pair matching.

Research implications

As this research aimed at an overview or broader scope, the researcher recommended the following research.

1. Research and development on the prototype of collaboration on specific areas of interests, or special interest groups on specific areas e.g. information literacy.
2. Research insights in the collaborative management between LIS higher education institutions and best practices.

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