THE SURVIVAL OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCES IN A TURBULENT PUBLIC UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

The public university system of Sri Lanka faces a number of difficulties. The National Institute of Library and Information Sciences (NILIS) was established affiliated to a university with World Bank aid. However NILIS had to face several problems at the inception and it was almost closed down. The author describes the threats encountered by LIS schools in other countries and the strategies at the macro and micro level, adopted especially by the developed countries, to survive and develop. She further explains different strategies adopted for the survival of NILIS. Expansion in participation with other departments and expansion alone using a variety of innovations take prominence here.

Keywords: Library schools; Library and information science education; Public Universities; Higher education; Sri Lanka

PUBLIC UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF SRI LANKA

General education in Sri Lanka consists of primary education (grades 1-5) and secondary education (grades 6-13). Net enrolment in primary education has reached 95 percent of the age cohort, while secondary enrolment is over 70 percent. These ratios are the highest in South Asia, and comparable to East Asia. A total of 13 public universities offer tertiary education in Sri Lanka, with total enrolment in undergraduate degree programmes of about 40,000 students. A very small number of private fee levying institutions also offer courses leading to degrees from foreign universities. But this stands in sharp contrast to primary and secondary education. Participation rate in university education is less than three percent of the age group, versus an average of eight percent in South Asia. (UGC, 2003)

The University Grants Commission (UGC) is responsible for planning and coordinating the university education, allocating funds to universities, maintaining academic standards, regulation of the administration and undergraduate admission to universities. However, there is no formal legal and

regulatory framework for accreditation and quality control of tertiary education. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education of Sri Lanka and the UGC have limited institutional arrangements and tools to carry out three of the main functions of governance-policymaking, programme implementation and quality control (UGC, 2003).

Sri Lankan universities are funded 95% by the government, 3% by the students and 2% by other sources. Yet, expenditure on higher education as a proportion of GNP is low in comparison to South Asian countries and other low and middle-income countries. Furthermore, resources within the tertiary education sector are not allocated according to performance criteria. The tertiary education system needs an effective mechanism for controlling and monitoring institutional and faculty performance and promoting the responsible exercise of authority at each level of university management. (UGC, 2003)

Undergraduate unemployment is high in Sri Lanka. For instance, among graduates below 25 years, 58 percent are unemployed, while among graduates aged 25-30, 35 percent are unemployed. Student unrest is often closely related to poor employment prospects faced by graduates. In part this is due to the lack of relevance of what they have learnt at the university to the needs of the employers (Arulpragasam, 1999). Training the youth for employment is a new challenge for the university because they were emphasising only the academic aspects. Now it has become necessary to address the demand from employers (Jayatilleke, 1997).

Information Technology has posed a challenge to Sri Lankan universities. The technology is ever changing at a rapid speed and it is expensive and complicated to keep up with the existing technology. Constant changing of technology needs constant staff training, which involves time and cost. Because of these factors Sri Lankan state universities are falling behind in using information technology in their courses and university administration.

Deterioration of quality and greater dependency on public funds raises the issue of accountability to the society with regard to the activities of the university system. Universities have been isolated islands of academic activities. In a climate where the country needs its intellectual resources to the maximum possible extent, such isolation is no longer desirable or tolerated by the society. An interaction with the country's business, research and industrial sectors is of primary importance.

The Government has recognized the fundamental weaknesses of the undergraduate education system and the urgent need to address its major

shortcomings. The Government is in the process of instituting a series of reforms in education. Over the past decade the Government has conducted a number of comprehensive surveys of the education sector, with the assistance of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank to identify key issues requiring attention and reforms. These survey findings were reviewed widely among key stakeholders including universities, academics, student groups, public sector officials and representatives of the private sector. The changes have also been informed by other World Bank international initiatives. Following these suggestions, the UGC began to promote the proposed reforms which extended to Curriculum, Staff Development, Career Guidance, Quality Assurance and Accreditation, Corporate Planning and legislative requirements. In April 2000, the Government sought World Bank assistance to develop a project in tertiary education to support these reforms and the implementation will commence in 2003 (UGC, 2003).

THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF LIBRARY & INFORMATION SCIENCES (NILIS)

Inter University Committee of Librarians (IUCL) with the intention of establishing a postgraduate institute to train the university library staff, prepared a proposal to seek funds from international organisations. By this time, the Ministry of Education started the Second Phase of the General Education Project (GEP2), with the World Bank assistance. Under this project, 4000 school libraries were being developed to promote resource-based learning. Since there was a severe lack of trained library professionals, it was decided to develop 4000 teachers as teacher librarians at the beginning and the project was searching for an organisation to undertake this responsibility. The proposal to establish the institute was submitted to the World Bank and it agreed to fund the establishment of NILIS on the condition that it trains these teacher librarians. NILIS was established in 1999 by an ordinance under section 18 and 24 of the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978 as an institution affiliated to the University of Colombo.

The principle academic, administrative and accounting officer is the Director. Board of Management, consisting of University Professors, representatives from the ministries of Tertiary Education and Science & Technology and senior library & information professionals, is the executive body. The Academic Committee makes recommendations about the academic activities of NILIS. The committee consists of the Director, representatives from University of Colombo, library professionals as well as reputed IT personnel. There are several Boards of Studies in areas such as education, information technology, management and

library and information science to design curricula. Qualified academics in these special fields hold membership of these boards.

Education Programmes

There are two types of programmes conducted by NILIS. There are short-term programmes (workshops, seminars, lectures, short training programmes and certificate courses) for which, certificates of participation are awarded, and Diplomas and Postgraduate programmes for which the University of Colombo awards the certificate. The following courses are conducted at present.

- Certificate in School Librarianship – a six months course for school library staff who have no training in librarianship before.
- ICT training for School or Teacher Librarians – A two months course for school / teacher librarians.
- Diploma in Teacher Librarianship – a 300-hour diploma course for trained teachers.
- Postgraduate Diploma in Teacher Librarianship – one-year (full time) course for teachers with a Bachelors degree from a recognized higher education institute.
- Postgraduate Diploma in Library and Information Science – two-year (part time) course for those with a Bachelors degree from a recognized university. This is an entry point for the new entrants to the profession.
- Masters in Teacher Librarianship – one-year (full time) course for teachers with a Bachelors degree and a Postgraduate Diploma in Education or any other discipline from a recognized higher education institute.
- Diploma in Library and Information Management – A three-year course for young school leavers, about to be started.

All these courses are offered in Sinhala and English medium depending on the student numbers.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES FACED BY LIS SCHOOLS

This section discusses the challenges encountered by the schools of LIS under two headings; threats imposed by the social environment of the schools and the threats imposed by the university system. Throughout the paper the term "Schools of LIS" (SLIS) is used to refer to any unit, department, school, institute or any such element, which is involved in the LIS education within a university. Almost in every country Library and Information Science (LIS) education is being predominantly conducted at the tertiary level and more often than not, it exists within the university system. This is common to Sri Lanka as well.

While a detailed discussion on LIS education, its problems and prospects in Sri Lanka can be found in Wijetunge & Wilson (1998), it needs to be mentioned that history of LIS education in Sri Lanka reveals that several LIS programmes which commenced under the auspices of universities have failed. The on-going programmes also do face problems including lack of resources, lack of quality and relevance to current employment market. Therefore, if LIS education is to thrive within the university system it must be planned systematically. A knowledge of factors affecting the successful existence and development of any course of study within the university environment is essential, for any organisation, which conducts LIS education at university level, to avoid its failure.

The environmental threats faced by the other academic disciplines of the universities are not unfamiliar to the SLIS located within the universities. However, due to the nature of the discipline there are several factors which affect the SLIS specifically. The following sections discusses some of the major threats encountered by SLIS in general and the counteractive measures adopted by other countries, especially the developed countries.

(a) Impact of Information and Knowledge Societies

Information is used as an economic resource and organisations make greater use of information to increase their efficiency; use of information by public is greater and an Information Sector is developing within the economy. The function of this information sector is to satisfy the general demand for information facilities and services.

The knowledge society transcends information society. Although librarians have a reasonable amount of particular knowledge and expertise in this area there is little evidence that librarians are recruited for these posts. Research findings show that people employing their skills in a knowledge management environment do not necessarily come from the information profession. The necessity of reengineering the SLIS curricula to comply with the new market demands is echoed strongly by Yaacob and Zakaria (2001).

(b) Impact of Information and Communications Technology

Developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are imposing a challenge on the LIS profession as well as on LIS education. Rapid technological developments and radical drop in software and hardware prices

have brought the computers within the reach of everybody. Teaching and learning methods have been revolutionised with the developments of ICT.

ICT on the other hand enables the end-user to receive information on to his/her desktop circumventing the librarian. There is a growing perception of employers and the public that the advent of readily accessible and low cost information retrieval systems provides ample opportunities for acquisition of knowledge. The mere existence of the library and the LIS professionals as intermediaries are sometimes questioned by the society.

Thus disintermediation has profound effects on the employment opportunities and the status of LIS professionals. "The library" to which library and information science education has been catering to is increasingly becoming irrelevant. Changing social priorities and developments in ICT are driving the emergence of a new library that will be organised in a new way to deliver new services. This implies a need for change regarding the skills, nature of duties and employment and the social role of the information professional. It also implies essential changes in the LIS education (Miksa, 1996).

(c) Emerging Employment Market

Traditional employment opportunities mainly in the public and academic libraries are shrinking as a result of financial cut-downs. Nevertheless, employment prospects for those with information handling skills are increasing in the broader field of information resources management in business and commerce, government, medial and health etc. Employers are hungry for information professionals who can bridge the gap between traditional librarianship and computer science.

To meet these new demands new information professionals will be more likely to move on to non-library jobs than traditional library and information science graduates. The emerging market is thinly spread across a wide range of occupations and professions. However this market is vast and expands rapidly. Within a decade it may be larger than the conventional market for LIS graduates. (Raber and Connaway 1996). Nevertheless only the best will fit in.

CHALLENGES IMPOSED BY THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Apart from the major challenges imposed by the information and knowledge societies and the emerging ICT, there are several other factors, which makes a significant impact on contemporary SLIS located within the universities.

(a) Credibility of LIS as an academic discipline

One reason why library schools lack esteem enjoyed by other professional schools is the total lack of dynamic scholarship. Library schools lay more emphasis on professional work and the clerical work and highlights different kinds of training required by these groups. There is no sophisticated body of theory underlying modern library education because the profession generally, and library education specifically, have not made it a matter of central concern. (Ostler, Dahlin and Willardson, 1995, p.22). Even today, LIS education is seen in this light by most university academics.

(b) Recruitment of students

Alemna (1994) comments that as long as the students believe that they can find employment in another field they are unlikely to be attracted towards LIS. Schools are searching for outgoing assertive and dedicated students for library schools in Africa and library educators have hoped that that they could alter the stereotype of the profession by attracting more dynamic students to the field. But this has not been successful. Some of the SLIS are now resorting to interviewing prospective students to identify candidates with desirable characters but according to this author its success remains to be seen.

While the SLIS attempt to attract and select the best students on one hand, on the other hand they are faced with the problem of only a few students applying for LIS programmes. The courses are not popular among the students therefore the numbers applying are not adequate enough to eliminate the weaker ones through a rigorous selection process. It is a matter of enrolling the minimum number of students necessary to maintain the programmes.

(c) Financial viability of LIS programmes

Public universities in which most of the SLIS reside do face financial constraints especially those, which mainly depend on government funds. SLIS feel the financial strains more than the other departments because of their special nature. Financial cutbacks are usually directed at weak spots. Library schools are weak because of their small size, predominance of women as staff and students, lack of research and their tendency to relate more to the professional world than the academic world. (Large, 1997).

The financial viability of LIS programmes is strongly questioned by the university academics as well as the administrators. Do they represent a cost or a benefit? Do they promise a reasonable return or investment? Do they threaten

the financial security of the university are questions often asked about the SLIS. If SLIS cannot provide positive answers to these questions, there is a danger of being gradually wiped out by the more powerful, both politically and financially, within the university.

MACRO SURVIVAL STRATEGIES OF LIS SCHOOLS

Survival in the context of SLIS is defined as "the ability to stay in business and grow in an uncertain environment, as evidenced by a constant or increasing number of student enrolments…" (Ceppos 1992, p.277). SLIS, especially in the UK, USA and Canada have adopted a variety of strategies to survive the turbulent environment, which threatens not only the future developments but also their mere existence. Survival strategies can be grouped into two types; macro level strategies adopted by LIS as a discipline and micro level strategies adopted by individual institutions. Macro level strategies make an attempt to respond to the environmental challenges that identifies LIS as a weak, non-academic discipline. As a whole there are several measures taken by the SLIS within the universities to breathe a new life in to the LIS discipline. These include curriculum innovations, commencing undergraduate degrees and increasing research and quality assurance. The following sections briefly discuss them.

(a) Curriculum innovation

The most common technique is the curriculum innovation. SLIS especially in the developed countries are considering curricular revisions of individual units as well as individual courses. Curriculum innovation is defined as "curricular or programme change aimed at introducing new technologies and/or expanding application environments" (Ceppos, 1992, p.277). Several trends in curriculum innovation can be identified from the literature.

(b) Incorporating ICT, Information / Knowledge Management

As a response to the emerging Information and Communications Technology (ICT) developments, SLIS have started incorporating ICT extensively into their curricular. Not only in the developed countries but also in the developing countries, ICT has received due attention. The most obvious cry in the curricula change is for "more IT". Speaker after speaker talked about introducing IT to the LIS curriculum, or stepping up what little was there at the International Conference for LIS educators in the Asia and Pacific region (Calvert ,2001)

Development of Information / Knowledge Management courses occurred for various reasons such as the increasing acceptance of the courses of information management, recognition of needs in the marketplace and university and department mergers, which facilitated Information Management courses. A number of speakers have stressed the need of catering to information/knowledge disciplines at the ICLISE (2001)

(c) Incorporating Entrepreneurial Skills

The simple model of a library school preparing students for a career as a professional librarian is now outmoded. The role of information in today's society is widely recognised. As a consequence all organisations are trying to become learning organisations. In this endeavour the role of information professional becomes significant. In the context of higher education it means that courses should be producing graduates with more employability. In addition to the subject knowledge and related critical and analytical ability, courses are expected to equip students with a range of enterprise skills including interpersonal communication, teamwork, report writing skills, numeracy and computer literacy. Therefore developing these skills in students is becoming a standard practice in LIS courses.

(d) Undergraduate Degrees

The LIS educators realising the weak academic credibility of LIS as a discipline has taken remedial measures to increase the credibility. In the USA some argued that a remedy to SLIS closures could be found in creation of undergraduate programmes. Closures occurred because departments do not offer a graduate curriculum. The status of the LIS graduate programmes was questioned by the university academics. They could not accept the legitimacy of LIS masters degrees without a relevant undergraduate degree (Large, 1997). LIS Masters programmes are less intellectually demanding than undergraduate degrees of most disciplines. Undergraduate professional training would help to meet the reasonable criticisms of the courses' rigour and sophistication level (Biggs, 1991). Undergraduate degrees are also considered as a good opportunity to increase the critical mass of students and to make it more profitable. But it is emphasised that undergraduate degrees in LIS should not replace the Masters programmes but complement them.

(e) Research

The contemporary SLIS are increasingly adopting measures to increase the quality and quantity of research carried out by them. In the UK, LIS research has

been carried out since mid 1960s. But in the 1980s and 1990s there has been significant increase in LIS research mainly due to the developments of IT and granting of university status to polytechnics with an increase of funding..

Research Assessment Exercise, which started in 1995/96, has imposed a considerable impact on the LIS research because the university departments are evaluated through this exercise and future funding is based on the assessment results. Therefore the SLIS are employing a variety of strategies to increase their research productivity. Through enhanced research and publication activities, not only the visibility of SLIS within the university can be enhanced but also the much-needed credibility as an academic discipline can be achieved.

(f) Quality Assurance

Towards the latter part of the 1990s more rigorous quality assurance procedures were implemented in SLIS especially because the parent universities were concentrating more on overall quality improvements. In addition, the professional associations monitor SLIS and their programmes because the professional associations of the LIS professionals insist on academic as well as professional quality in the LIS discipline. In the USA, UK, Canada and Australia the respective library associations accredit the LIS programmes. The SLIS have to go through an expensive and exhaustive procedure regularly to receive accreditation of the library association. Accreditation of a particular course by the library association, provide evidence to the prospective employers and the students that it has achieved the expected quality.

MICRO LEVEL STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL

Micro level strategies are the ones adopted by individual schools in order to survive the loss of dignity and eventual closures. These strategies adopted for institutional survival in a time of catastrophic change are very much the strategies adopted by business. The context is different because of the public service philosophy of the higher education system, but the environmental factors and to a certain extent organisational factors are similar (Wilson, 2000a). According to Wilson, there are three general families of survival strategy adopted by SLIS; a) loss of identity but survival of the function, b) divestment and contraction and c) expansion. These are discussed in the following sections.

(a) Loss of identity but survival of the function

If the competition is too strong, if the school is too weak or if schools cannot counteract the pressures of the institutional forces by establishing larger

academic units, this may be one alternative path to take. SLIS voluntarily can merge with a larger more resourceful and more successful academic unit or even the SLIS may be forced by the administration to merge. The original identity of the school is lost because the merger or take-over generally means the adoption of the other's name or the creation of a new one, but the courses will survive.

In the USA merging with other units into a large unit with a broader scope is viewed as a way of making it more visible and hence making it a less convenient target for the attacking forces. Some Canadian schools are trying to become less conspicuous, within a larger more powerful department or joining another unit of equal size and entwining LIS programmes with that unit so that they are indispensable to each other. (Curry, 2000).

Literature points out to another option, which affects the original identity but safeguards the programmes; merging two or three SLIS into one large unit. This would be a more drastic step than merging with units of other disciplines because one or more existing schools will be totally eliminated. However when the fact that some SLIS will have to be closed down in any case, planned merger would be the least painful and most effective mechanism for contracting the present number of existing schools. Another advantage is that it retains the identity as a library school although one that is different in structure and size and more viable. Closure or merging of some Australian SLIS is an example for this.

(b) Divestment and contraction

Becoming smaller by limiting programmes and/or enrolments to a level that would be supported within the organisation has been recognised by Ceppos (1992). Wilson (2000a) perceives that divest of programmes added in recent years in order to focus upon the core of what SLIS do and where the majority of staff competencies lie. He does not consider this a realistic strategy today because in the turbulent world, it is difficult to decide on the core. No SLIS in the UK has adopted this strategy but in the USA several SLIS have concentrated on clinging to undergraduate programmes. Wilson (2000a) asserts that this involves more risk than diversification.

(c) Expansion

Expansion seems to be the most sought after survival strategy of the SLIS under threat. Main forms of expansions are take-over, acquisition, merging and diversification. Ceppos (1992) has identified two key methods through which

SLIS diversify; forming new partnerships and expanding alone. Numerous expansion activities are depicted in Figure 1.

(d) Take-over, Acquisition and Merging

Merging here, in contrast to the mergers discussed in the previous section, means a jointly approved coming together i.e. the merging of School of Information Studies of the SUNY, Buffalo with the Department of Communications (Wilson, 2000a). He describes that acquisition, in the business world is buying the company on the stock market or by agreement with the private owners. In the education context mergers, the parent institution controls acquisitions and take-overs in order to accomplish institutional efficiency
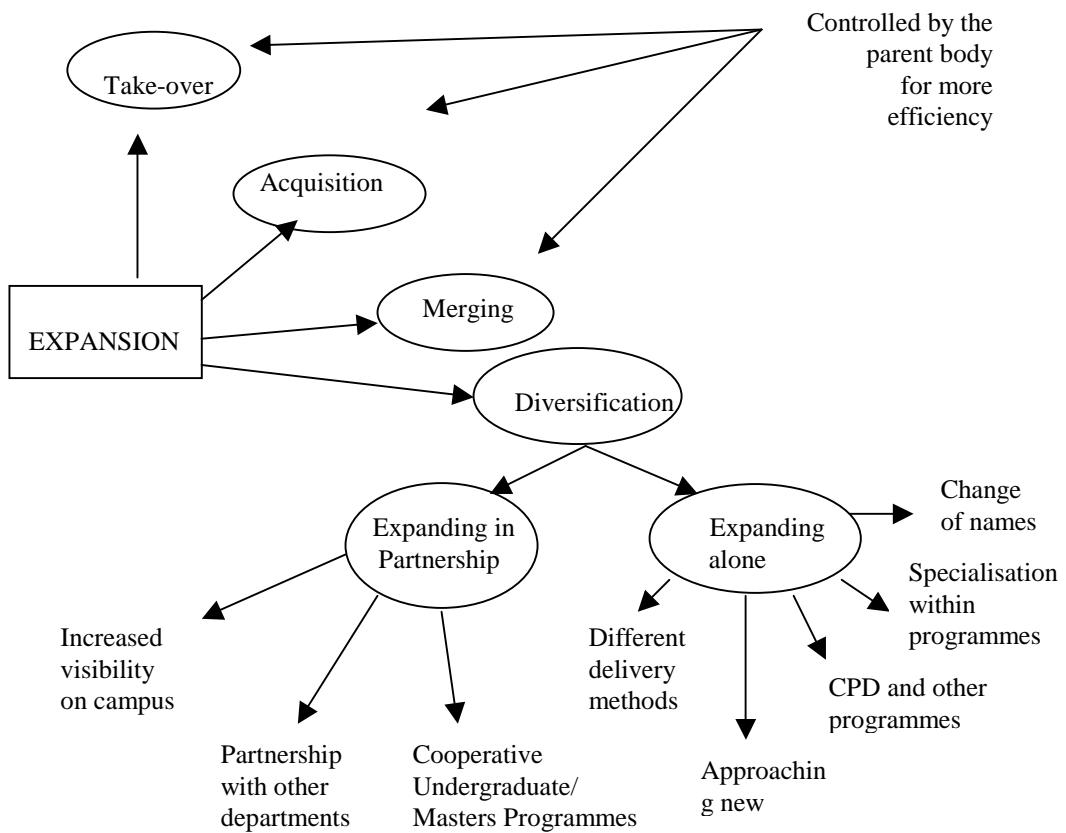
Figure 1- Different Options for Expanding

Dawkins era introduced major changes to the university system in Australia. As a result of these changes mega faculties, which consisted of large numbers of schools, were established within universities. SLIS were moving in with a range of other disciplines. At Charles Stuart, SLIS is grouped with computing and mathematics in a school of Information Studies, which is part of the Faculty of Agriculture and Science. At the Queensland University of Technology LIS has become a part of the business school. At the University of Technology, Sydney LIS joined with communications in the school of information studies. Through these merging, SLIS gain benefits but the degree of independence and autonomy may be compromised.

(e) Diversification through partnership

Two types of diversification can be identified; by forming new partnerships for preparation and delivery of courses or diversifying alone. Diversification through partnership includes several measures:

Increasing Visibility of SLIS
In a survey conducted by Rochester (1997) most library school Heads stressed the contribution made by the SLIS to the university as a positive factor. They have realised the significance of the congruence between the mission and goals of the school and those of the university. The visibility and the good reputation of the SLIS within the university is called 'perceptual capital' by these heads. The school's staff integrating into the academic and administrative processes involving in joint activities and interdisciplinary programmes with other faculties, becoming members of committees, getting involved in seminar programmes, increasing reputation for good research programmes and being successful in securing research grants were identified by the Australian heads of SLIS as measures which increase the visibility of schools within the university.

Partnership with Other Departments
Wilson (2000b) reports a number of service courses offered in alliance with other departments which are traditional partners in education, but such cross-listed courses with new disciplines are also increasingly offered by the SLIS of USA. Canadian SLIS have developed partnerships with other departments by offering course units for other degrees. Some heads argue that this could add strain on already overworked faculty, but others favor this endeavor (Curry, 2000).

Co-operative Undergraduate/Masters Programmes
Conducting undergraduate and postgraduate courses in co-operation with other schools or departments in the university is common especially in North

America. In addition to enhancing the school's survival potential these co-operative programmes have three advantages.

- They are usually large enrolments, low cost programmes that generate funds for the whole school.
- Personnel resources granted to teach the undergraduate courses contribute to teaching load and research requirements of the masters programme and the school as a whole.
- The degrees act as a feeder stream for students interested in the graduate programmes. (Curry 2000).

Curry (2000) provides several successful examples of such co-operative degree programmes in the Canadian context and mentions that they take the advantage of the combined academic forces. In the USA, SLIS offer joint or dual degree programmes in particular with other units but in the UK such co-operative degrees are rare. (MacDougall and Brittain, 1993).

(f) Diversification alone

Certain schools have decided to expand on its own without forming partnerships with others. Analysis of the SLIS in the UK indicates that most of them are thriving alone through a variety of innovative initiations without forming partnerships with other departments.

Modular structure - Most universities have adopted modular structures for courses, based on a two-semester year. Credit accumulation and transfer schemes have also been introduced, enabling students to move not only within individual universities but also between institutions (Wood, 1997). These measures will enable the SLIS to expand their student numbers by attracting the prospective students who are otherwise not in a position to engage in full-time studying. Modularisation will enable the students to graduate with knowledge of several disciplines other than LIS.

Distance education – It is considered as an effective method of reaching new markets. By slight adjustment to SLIS programmes niche markets can be reached through distance education. Cohen (2002) predicts a considerable expansion of the market share by Hong Kong through this mode of education.

Franchising courses in other countries - This is a way of looking for entirely new markets through distance learning. With the support from a local SLIS, courses are conducted in a foreign country. The local school conducts examinations in this case and the parent university awards the degree. For instance the degree in information systems of Sheffield SLIS is franchised to a

college in Greece. Distance learning packages and residential schools are offered by Charles Sturt University with modifications to suit the local conditions in Hong Kong.

Attracting foreign students - Another venture to approach new target market groups. During the late 1980s Aberystwyth attracted a substantial number of foreign students from African and South East Asian countries. Most of the South East Asian universities have now adopted this strategy to expand their student population.

Specialisation - Seventeen SLIS in the UK, which are all university-based, though have a common core, have developed individual profiles along with the missions of their parent institutions. Institutional autonomy, staff interests, student profiles, local/national market opportunities, traditional areas of strengths or new developments emerging from internal restructuring are used in offering a variety of specialisation. Even if a single school cannot offer a wide variety of specialisation, in the British context different schools have developed their own individual profiles and the students can select the particular institution to suit their requirements. Through specialisation individual SLIS have carved out their own niche in the market enabling everyone to survive. Co-operation among the SLIS through BAILER (British Association for Information and Library Education and Research) may be a strong factor, which contributes to the selective specialisation. This kind of selected specialisation is apparent in the USA as well. In the Australian context, Archives, Records management and Information Management courses are offered by specific SLIS so that the market share for each discipline is divided undisputedly.

Continuing Professional Development and other programmes - As the useful life-span of knowledge gained in an initial degree or professional course declines, the need for continuing education becomes more urgent. Marketing the modules of taught courses bring in much needed extra funds to the SLIS at a lesser initial cost than designing courses specially as CPD programmes. But if the expertise is available within the schools there is no hindrance to offering special CPD programmes. Combining them with alternative delivery modes will increase the target groups. Australian SLIS employ distance education strategies to provide CPD to minimise the financial and personal costs to the participants.

Changing Degree/school names - Changing the School and Degree names is used as a strategy to counterattack the environmental threats faced by the SLIS. They have been active in renaming themselves to remove the "L" word. The explanation given is the need to reflect the expanding content of the field. The inclusion of the term "Information" has become almost universal. SLIS in the

UK have changed their names in a way that almost all the schools contain the term "Information" in their titles, but not at the expense of the traditional library education programmes except one particular department. It does not mean that the courses offered a decade ago still continues in the same format, but currency is introduced in a manner that the identity of the schools is not completely lost and the library as a valuable social and cultural institution is not forgotten. Change of names will draw the attention of others and indicate the expanding boundaries of the information profession.

THREATS ENCOUNTERED BY NILIS

As depicted in Figure 2, NILIS encountered two kinds of threats; external threats imposed by the LIS education field in which other members have been active for some time and internal threats imposed by the university system.

External threats
When NILIS was established there were two key institutions already offering LIS education for the past 30-40 years. Department of LIS at University of Kelaniya offers a Bachelors Degree, a Masters degree and a three-year part time course for paraprofessionals. Sri Lanka Library Association also offers a three-year part time course for paraprofessionals. These two institutions are recognized by all government organizations as the providers of LIS education and most of the recruitment schemes request the qualifications offered by them. Therefore the older institutes have a strong holding within the legal framework. NILIS as an infant institute has to build up the credibility among the employers of the country, from the scratch.

On the other hand, those who qualify from these two organizations have a problem of securing employment. Studies have shown that employers prefer recruiting candidates with other suitable qualifications such as proficient in English, having ICT skills and then train them in LIS.

Under these circumstances, many did not welcome NILIS to the LIS education arena. In the original project proposal it is stated that all LIS education programmes will be brought under NILIS once it is established, but this is not such a simple procedure. Since LIS is not a subject taught at University of Colombo there was no critical mass of students readily available for NILIS.

Internal threats
Funds allocated to NILIS for 2002 was barely adequate to cover staff salaries. Funds for other recurrent expenditure was minimal. It was

difficult to carry out the day-to-day operations like cleaning the building. There were no funds at all to recruit any other staff members. On the other hand there was an embargo on all kinds of staff recruitments, by the government, which barred even temporary recruitments.
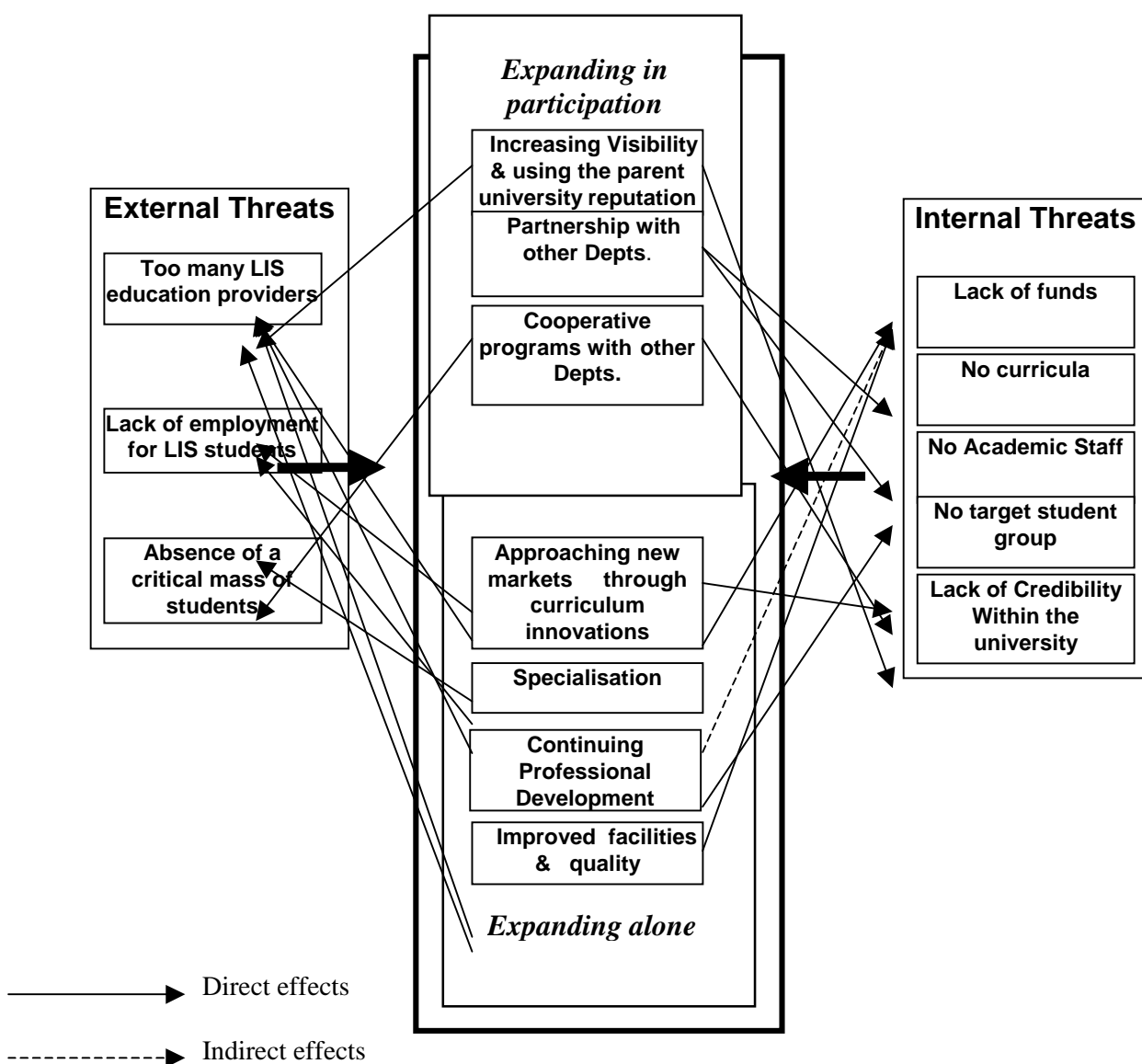

Figure 2 : Threats for NILIS and the Adopted Survival Strategies

The authorities were directing the spotlight of closure on NILIS because in their eyes it had not started any significant academic activities since its establishment. Lack of credibility of LIS as a weak discipline also contributed to the negative attitudes of the authorities. Ironically millions of rupees from the World Bank project were waiting to be spent on teaching/learning material furniture and staff scholarships. However, as a result of the discussions with the UGC authorities, they agreed to give it some more time to commence its activities and to develop by spending the funds available from the World Bank.

NILIS did not have any planned curricula to be implemented even after three years of establishment. Therefore there was no immediate way to start earning the much-needed funds. Ironically there was no academic staff at NILIS to handle curriculum development. No funds were available to outsource the curriculum designing and the Director could not cope up with the entire workload of the institute. Though a considerable amount of funds for international consultants were available through the World Bank project, these were supposed to be spent for developing Teacher Librarianship programmes. Utilizing the World Bank funds were not easy due to the restricted and detailed procurement procedures. Identifying personnel had to be done through International Competitive Bidding or through linked academic institutions, which is a time consuming task.

Obtaining the services of international consultants had to be considered in depth because at this time the target student group of NILIS – 4000 teachers to be trained as teacher librarians were not available. Due to some administrative issues at the Ministry of Education, teachers were not identified for training for about three years. Director had second thoughts about spending a considerable amount of credit funds to develop a curriculum for a non-existing student group.

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

Two types of survival strategies were adopted to overcome the threats, using the theoretical framework discussed earlier.

Expanding in participation

At the beginning NILIS was not only unknown to the prospective students but also to the university staff. A number of promotional activities were launched including a newspaper supplement in three languages. Director participates in most of the university functions and meetings so that NILIS receives more exposure within the university. Reputation of the parent university was a strong point for NILIS waiting to be exploited.

Partnership was established with the University Of Colombo School Of Computing, Faculties of Education and Management, University Library and the National Library and Documentation Services Board and the School Library Development Unit of the Ministry of Education. Several Boards of Study were formed with the help of staff members from these organizations, with the main objective of developing the necessary curricula. This eliminated the problem of not having NILIS's own academic staff and funds to develop academic programmes. The staff members involved in curriculum development also teaches in our programmes and some of them have become co-ordinators of the programmes. In place of direct financial benefits, they get more recognition by being involved in curriculum development activities.

NILIS offered a module on Teacher Librarianship to the final year students of the Bachelor of Education programme conducted by the Faculty of Education. This was successful and the faculty has requested now to extend the subject to their postgraduate students as well. This not only helped to develop our credibility and visibility within the university, it provided the much-needed critical mass of students.

NILIS agreed to offer trainee positions to the students of the Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka. This provided six trainee Computer Applications Assistants, so that the middle level staff problem was solved to a large extent.

Expanding alone

Curriculum innovations were used to carve a special niche for NILIS so that we are not threatened by the other LIS education providers of Sri Lanka. Extensive coverage of ICT and Management Skills and concentration on Information rather than on traditional Library Science, including subjects like Records Management, teaching English as a subject in some courses are the key innovations. The Diploma course for school leavers was designed to suit a multitude of information related careers. This subject structure helped to draw more students to NILIS. It is also expected that these subjects will help them score more marks in the employment market. The Information Management was included in the name so that it appeals more to the prospective students than Library Science.

NILIS also made it a point to select a specialized area in LIS. Since it was established to train 400 teacher librarians, this was the specialization. Academic relationships were developed with some international organizations for Teacher Librarianship and most of the courses offered are for teacher librarians. This

helps to draw more students since the other SLIS do not offer teacher librarianship in Sri Lanka. Our specialization was further acknowledged by a series of five-day workshops held across the country for the teachers selected to become teacher librarians. These workshops were held with the aid of World Bank and in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. NILIS prepared a manual for this and trained the trainers.

NILIS had a period in which its target student group was not available. Though this was beyond the control of NILIS, the reflections it had on NILIS were harmful. It was affecting NILIS financially as well. To overcome the financial difficulties as well as to safeguard our credibility, we used Continuing Professional Development programmes especially in 2002. Several programmes including one by International consultants were conducted for the prospective visiting lecturers and the trainers of teacher librarians.

Under World Bank aid, NILIS received a considerable amount of teaching/learning equipment including a computer lab consisting of 20 computers and another 10 stand-alone computers. This was a plus point for NILIS over the other providers. Besides, the partnership with various departments of the university brings in the expertise of different disciplines to NILIS. Offering ample use of the computer lab for practice is attractive to prospective students.

Conclusion

As the first full time Director, the author had to face a number of critical problems at NILIS. The theoretical studies into LIS education, in which the author was involved, proved invaluable in overcoming these problems. There was no way that NILIS could merge, divest or close down. A number of strategies, which concerned expanding in participation and expanding alone, were used to rescue the institute, which the future information professionals would find precious.

As a result NILIS has overcome most of its problems and survived the threat of closing down. At present it has 120 students studying at different levels, and a couple of hundred will enroll for the three year course, in near future.

In future further steps will be taken to assure quality of the programmes and to get involved in LIS research. In the meantime it is expected to expand the academic activities covering a wider scope and hope that it will give receive due recognition from the university and funding authorities.

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