Use of Industrial Training for enhancing soft skills of undergraduates in Library and Information Science (LIS), University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka: Present status and future perspectives

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Abstract

Developing soft skills among students particularly the undergraduates has been a leading topic at university, government and mainly the corporate sector. It is observed that universities predominantly inculcate the Knowledge domain, while the tacit domains like Skills, Attitudes and Mindset for the undergraduates (KSAM domains/model developed by the UGC Sri Lanka 2012) are multiply available at the non-university sector mostly the corporate sector where the undergraduates are very easily able to grasp through internships/industrial training. The principal objective of this study is to explore the internship mechanism developed for LIS undergraduates University of Kelaniya (UK), to examine new steps introduced for the mechanism, to investigate the results of internship mechanism and to identify the new activities which can be conducted by the Department of Library and Information Science (DLIS), University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. Method used was a mixed approach using internships mechanism, staff, undergraduates and trainer/participating Librarians responses, observation, experiences and the action research. There are around 50 recognized internships institutions. They are libraries and information centers attached to various government and corporate sector institutions. They are named as Accredited Teaching Libraries and Information Centers (ATLIC). MOUs were signed with UK and ATLIC on 30th August 2019 for the further betterment of all stakeholders. Among them, the major category is university libraries. Undergraduates in 2nd year are sent for internship for two days in a week for three months and other three days they take part for lectures including two hour coaching session conducted by the Training Coordinator (TC) of DLIS. The TC at DLIS and the Training Supervisor/Trainer (TS) from training institutions are the main players of the internship mechanism. The Internship Record Book (IRB) and the Internship Feedback Report (IFR) submitted by interns are the main assessment tools however the observations and feedback of both the TC and the TS are used for final evaluation. Both innovative and prescriptive parts are to be compiled by the interns through IFR. The coaching shows positive results more than mentoring in developing soft skills of undergraduates. The major issues are the meager understanding and identity of ATLICs particularly the librarians and trainers towards this internship process. From ATLICs side, lack of awareness of the significance of training future career leaders of the profession, non-appointment of TS in training libraries, insufficient knowledge and competencies on training interns and many trainers were not very clear who is intern etc. were the main issues. Within this environment, it is much better the signed MOUs should be implemented soon. Between and among all stakeholders mean Vice-Chancellors, Chairmen, Director Generals, Institutional Heads, CEOs including the Librarians, the TS of both government and corporate sector have desirable shares on internship training. In addition to that the DLIS can pursue job-opportunities from ATLICs for LIS graduates, request research topics and research areas from ATLICs, offer more training programs and awareness workshops for ATLIC, design and develop curricular for short term courses, training programs, conduct workshops, seminars, organize joint conferences and symposia. From ATLIC side, they can work as resource persons as visiting lecturers, invited lectures, guest lectures, work as mentors, coaches for DLIS. ATLICs can develop their work and become real accredited institutions in future.

Keywords: Industrial Training, Internships, Soft Skills, Interns, Competencies, Training, Human Resource Management