



## 66th IFLA Council and General Conference

Jerusalem, Israel, 13-18 August

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**Code Number:** 052-099(WS)-E  
**Division Number:** VII  
**Professional Group:** Library Theory and Research: Workshop  
**Joint Meeting with:** -  
**Meeting Number:** 99  
**Simultaneous Interpretation:** *No*

### **From theory to practice: a case of research in library and information science in Thailand**

**Chutima Sacchanand**  
*Sukothai Thammathirat Open University*  
*Nonthaburi, Thailand*

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#### **Abstract**

*The author outlines the background of research in library and information science in Thailand. Reasons for its minor role and impact are summarized. Collaboration between theory and practice in library and information science, in the case of STOU, is presented as evidence - based practice*

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#### **Paper**

##### **I. Background**

Research in library and information science in Thailand had a long history before the offering of library education in the country. In the past, historical research works were conducted. The prominent ones which are still valuable reference sources are about the history of the National Library by Somdej Krom Phraya Damrong Rajanuparb (1916) and the Vajiranana National Library of Siam by George Coedes (1924).

After the establishment of the Department of Library Science in the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University in 1955, a two year diploma program in library science was offered to those who graduated with a bachelor degree in any field. In almost all courses for the diploma, students had to write term papers using research techniques. As many of the papers were valuable, the Department of Library Science selected and published those which were useful to library work and library education, including papers of faculty members, as a

"Library Science Papers Series" which was started in 1965. The first book of this series was "Frances Lander Spain: Founder of Modern Library Service in Thailand" (1965) by Professor Suthilak Ambhanwong, the then Head Department of Library Science.

The first masters degree program in library science was offered at Chulalongkorn University in 1964 and was an important step towards research in library science in Thailand. Writing a thesis was a requirement for partial fulfilment of the masters degree in Arts majoring in library science. This two year program required 34 credits for course work (24 credits required courses and 5 credit elective courses) and 26 credits for thesis. In the academic year 1973, the Department revised the curriculum. The total credits were 48, with 30 credits for course work (16 credits required courses and 14 credits elective courses) and 18 credits for thesis. Between the academic years 1977 and 1984, the number of thesis credits was lessened to 9 credits with more course work required.

## **II. Impact of research in library and information science in Thailand**

The number of theses in library science in Thailand showed an increasing trend as more library schools offered masters degree programs in library and information science. Besides theses, there were also research works in library and information science conducted by librarians and faculty members.

Many research works conducted about library and information science in Thailand showed that research in library and information science in Thailand had a minor role and impact on academics, professionals and society. The reasons can be summarized as follows:

1. **Research topics** The small number of research works consisted mainly of theses of graduate students. Usually they followed the same practice in areas of study and methodology. Research topics were not relevant to the needs of the users. They were not oriented to practice and some were too idealistic. This was supported by Srirat Wattana (1982) whose research work showed the reasons that faculty members did not use research in library and information science were because the research results were no different from their common-sense and that research topics, research objectives and methodology should be considered in this matter.
2. **Dissemination of research results** Dissemination of research results was a major obstacle in putting research into practice (Chitra Tubsaeng 1975; Srirat Wattana 1982 ; Yupadee Charusub 1984 ; Chutima Sacchanand 1994; Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University 1994). Problems in dissemination of research results can be summarized as follows:
  - a. Dissemination of research was limited to library professionals and practitioners.
  - b. Research results were scattered and nobody was responsible for dissemination.
  - c. The institutions which collected the research were far away and usually did not allow borrowing outside.
  - d. Abstracts of theses and research were not completed and not up-to-date.
  - e. Users were not informed about research relevant to them.
3. **Recognition of the importance of research** It was found that library administrators did not use research works in library science. One reason was that they did not consider it important (Yupadee Charusub 1984). The seminar conducted by Chulalongkorn University (1985), reported that library administrators did not read research and were not interested in suggestions from research works because they were usually compromising and did not lead to real problem - solving. The causes were due to these major factors:
  - a. Research problems/questions were not significant because the researchers selected the problems that interested only themselves, about their own libraries/institutions, and were not the real problems of the profession or the library community.
  - b. The quality of some research works was still questionable because the research methodology, data analysis, conclusions and recommendations in some research works were very simplistic.
  - c. Library professionals, including librarians, faculty members, and students lacked the ability to recognize the value of research and they were not equipped with

knowledge and competencies in research.

### **III. Collaboration between theory and practice in library and information science: The case of Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU), Thailand.**

STOU is the eleventh public university and the first truly distance teaching university in Thailand and in ASEAN. Through the School of Liberal Arts, STOU has offered the Bachelor of Arts in Information Science, a two-year and a four-year program since 1991. It is also in the university's plan that the masters degree program in information science, majoring in information management, will be offered in the year 2002.

STOU has supported many research projects undertaken by faculty members and staff. Following the "*STOU Plan*," the first stage in the development of the distance teaching system in information science involved identifying the educational needs of the market through preliminary surveys and research. This needs assessment enabled STOU to know the needs of various target groups : librarians and other information professionals/personnel, including administrators of various types of library and information services/institutions. This formed a basis for curriculum design and development. Many research works have been conducted and used at various stages of planning and implementing STOU information science programs. The researchers who are STOU information science faculty members recognized the importance of research, the need to conduct research and to disseminate and use research results.

Before starting the information science undergraduate program via the distance education system which was to be a first for Thailand, Sompit Cusripitack (1978) conducted research to survey the needs of library and information services and professionals in Thailand. It was found that the majority of library/information service heads had no background in library and information science (88.00%). They supported offering of an education and training program in library and information science.

At the masters level as well, Chutima Sacchanand and Sukanya Teerapongpakdee (1995) undertook a survey of the educational needs and the feasibility of offering an information science master's degree program at School of Liberal Arts, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University. It was found that a significant number of the information officers surveyed (61.32%) wanted to study at the post-graduate level. This need for information officers would increase by 30.32% and continue to increase during 2000-2002.

Both administrators (45.21%) and information officers (47.43%) wanted the Information Science curriculum to emphasize theoretical and practical applications. The majority of the administrators wanted the information officers to obtain knowledge and skills in the following areas: information storage and retrieval, technology for managing information, and communication skills in information work. The STOU School of Liberal Arts was well prepared in all aspects to offer a master's degree program in Information Science. The School would also be able to meet all the standards fixed by the Ministry of University Affairs.

In calculating the expenses for the first group of students, an enrolment of 105 students was required to meet the break-even point. That number would be reduced to 62 students in the second year and 48 students in the third year. Using these enrolment figures, tuition was expected to be 1,000 baht per credit. To break even in the third year, the School of Liberal Arts would need at least qualified lecturers to obtain a ratio of one lecturer to every five students (1 : 5) which was the standard required by the Ministry of University Affairs. Research results of this study were an important basis for the School of Liberal Arts, STOU in planning the masters degree program, especially curriculum development, staff development and cost management.

Chutima Sacchanand (1996) also studied the development and status of graduate studies programs in library and information science in Thailand. This research has been used as a guideline for STOU in planning and implementing the masters degree program. It was found

that the first graduate studies program in library and information science in Thailand was offered at Chulalongkorn University in 1964 and at the time studied, there were eight library schools offering masters degrees in library and information science.

The development of graduate studies programs in library and information science has played an important role and has affected the academic strength, research, professional standards, image and status of this profession as a whole. All graduate library schools have relatively similar administrative and organizational structures. The objectives of these programs are to produce professional leaders, administrators and scholars. The curriculum structure and number of required credit hours are relatively similar and the number of credit hours ranges from 36 to 48. All graduate library schools have been prepared with staff, equipped offices, classrooms, computer laboratories, libraries, teaching materials and publications. As collaboration is one key factor to the success of STOU distance teaching system, results of this research are valuable for collaborative teaching/learning between STOU and other graduate library schools for full use of resources in library and information science in the country.

Students have been a prime concern of the university as STOU gears towards consumer orientation. In 1992, Chutima Sacchanand conducted a survey among students in the information science program to investigate their backgrounds; their motivations for studying, their needs in bringing knowledge and experience to use, and their problems in studying information science via the distance education system. The results of this study showed that the majority of students in information science via the distance education system were female, between the ages of 26 and 30 and living in Bangkok. The largest number of students had jobs and were mostly private employees. Personal interest and more knowledge and experience were the highest mean averages for students' motivation for studying. Students had a deep commitment to bring knowledge and experience from studying into use. In pursuing an information science program via the distance education system, textbook and workbooks were the primary learning tools and students faced only an average number of problems.

From this study, two major recommendations were made and put into evidence-based practice by the university as follows:

As it was found that students who were the second largest group had already graduated with a bachelor's degree program, STOU considered the possibility of offering courses at the graduate level to alleviate the need to repeat the bachelor's degree program and increase students' subject knowledge and to upgrade STOU's distance education program. Therefore, STOU decided to offer the masters degree program in information science and conducted feasibility research.

The findings about background, motivations and needs of students were used for the revision and development of the curriculum at diploma, bachelor and masters levels to suit the needs of the target group in information science. A new curricula oriented to business as well as technologies was recommended and has been reflected in the 2000 revised curriculum in information science of STOU. The availability of other supporting facilities, especially libraries, has been of interest, since information resources for information science graduate study are an important concern in starting the graduate program in information science by STOU, as this is a distance education system and students are scattered around the country.

Somsuang Prudtikul and Pensri Tipsuwannakul (1983) had investigated user services and collection needs of the users in order to provide some guidelines for the operation and development of STOU Library Service Centers. The results of the study showed that STOU students and all other users were satisfied with the STOU Library Service Centers and their services. Interesting suggestions were mostly on increasing the number of books and other materials especially cassette tapes/video tapes and extension of the hours of services especially on weekends and holidays. From these recommendations, the university increased the budget for collection development and improved library services.

Kriangkrai Kittitornsub (1993) investigated the opinions of users, service librarians and library staff of public libraries in Bangkok Metropolitan towards STOU Corners in those public

libraries. It was found that STOU Corners are useful not only to STOU students but also to the general public. A major recommendation is for the improvement of insufficient and not up-to-date collections.

Besides these projects, there are many theses conducted by graduate students as partial fulfilment for the masters degree in library and information science in Thailand. There are also some research works by librarians which are not specific to any library or institution but give the big picture. These are relevant and can be applicable to STOU and other university libraries, e.g.

*"Collaboration between library science departments and libraries in providing library practical experience"* (by Siriporn Punyayong)  
; *"An evaluation of information retrieval from CD-ROM databases of reference librarians in state academic libraries"* (by Prapai Inchan) ;  
*"Calculation of CD-ROM database search services fees in state academic libraries and users' attitude towards fee"* (by Mayuree Julagan).

#### **IV. Future research**

The last stage of the STOU plan is an evaluation and follow up research in order to obtain feedback that can be used to improve the curriculum, the teaching/learning process and the management of the STOU distance education system for effectiveness and efficiency. STOU administrators and information science faculty members recognize that evaluation is significant and a necessary part of accountability, quality control systems and resource allocation. Therefore, STOU pays attention to evaluation research. Various research topics include evaluation of the information science distance education program, follow-up studies of graduates, evaluation of study packages and services especially library services. Findings from the evaluation research will be put into practice as a basis for on-going improvement of the STOU information science programs.

#### **V. Summary**

Research in library and information science has its root in library practice. The development of theory and the design of research came only after the profession was well established. In Thailand there are many research studies in library and information science, with the majority being theses of graduate students. In the case of STOU, many research works have been conducted for the effectiveness of the information science degree program, and in providing the new program at the masters level. Through research works conducted, the Office of Documentation and Information at STOU library has continuously improved itself to better respond to the needs of its target groups, to provide support for teaching and learning, and to make the library an important component in the STOU distance education system. Theory and practice need to be seen as distinct and interacting components of the library and information science field.

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