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Challengers and concerns encountered by doctoral students in LIS education in Sri Lanka

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Doctoral degree is the highest academic qualification that can be obtained by the Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals based on their original research, theory building or theory evaluation. In Sri Lanka, Doctoral degree program (PhD.) in LIS was started at University of Kelaniya in 2002 and at NILIS in 2007, 29 years after starting of the Bachelor's degree program and 09 years after starting the Masters program in LIS. According to past records, very few students completed the degree in time. Secondly, it is noticed that a significant number of students who have enrolled have dropped out at different stages of their study program. Thirdly, though a significant number of LIS professionals, especially all Assistant Librarians in the university sector complete the Masters in LIS, many are slow in pursuing a PhD. No study has been conducted to identify why the LIS professionals are reluctant to enroll in Doctoral programs or those who do dropout without completing. This study is expected to fill this void and it is expected that the findings would help the LIS educational Institutes to strengthen their Doctoral programs. The objective of the study is to identify the reasons for the low enrolment rate, delayed completion, and the dropouts in the Sri Lankan LIS doctoral Programs. Qualitative interviews and document analysis were employed for the study. Students who have registered for the MPhil./ PhD. programs conducted by the National Institute of Library and Information Sciences (NILIS) and the University of Kelaniya, selected senior staff members of the same institutions and library professionals who have not enrolled for a PhD. Program were selected as the study population. The study revealed that lack of research supervisors, limitation of funding opportunities, absence of motivation from employers and family commitments are key factors to reduce the enrolment rate for PhD. programs. The majority (67%) of the candidates who have registered for PhD. are university library professionals. It is found that a few candidates (06%) completed their studies within minimum period of candidature. A considerable number of candidates (36.33%) were reported as dropouts. Inadequate institutional support and guidance from course coordinators and supervisors, limitation of funding opportunities, study while working, and less motivation from the employers, are some of the challenges encountered by the doctoral students which leads to delay or incomplete the study. Absence of significant number of doctoral graduates in the field of LIS, lack of motivation factors such as promotions in the employment, financial benefits after completion the degree and funding opportunities to cover expenses of the study program decrease the PhD enrolments. Technical support extended by the university should be increased to complete the degree in time. Proper guidance including By-Laws will attract more candidates to the program. Weight of the research component at the Masters degree level has to be increased which will lead to an increased practice of independent research. More institutional support should be extended to minimize the difficulties face by the candidates. PhD qualification shall be considered for the promotions and financial rewards.

Keywords: Doctoral Students, LIS Education, Sri Lanka

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