

The Impact of Accreditation Standards in Developing Library and Information Science Master's Degree Program in Jordan: A Comparative Study with American Library Association (ALA) Standards

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Abstract

Standards and their application are a tool to reach the required level of academic performance to ensure providing the society and labor market with a distinct level of graduates. Library science, as an academic field, is in dire need for such standards to raise the level of the scientific field and of functionality and library services. This is the ultimate goal of the field. This study evaluated Jordanian standards for Master Degree in Library Science through a comparison with the ALA standards. The study concluded that Jordanian standards are general for all postgraduate studies in all scientific fields, so there are no specific standards for the master's program in library science. The Jordanian standards are issued by a commission which is not linked with the profession and this makes the standards lack too many necessary requirements for the scientific knowledge of libraries as a field of study and as a profession.

Keywords: Standards; Master's Degree; ALA standards; postgraduate studies; Jordan .

Introduction

In light of significant competition among universities, at the national and global level, on upgrading the scientific environment to reach an outstanding level of graduates, the importance of the standards appears in upgrading and developing the scientific academic environment. Standards and their application are a tool to reach the required level of academic performance to ensure providing the society and labor market with distinct level of graduates. Library science in Jordan as an academic field is in dire need of such standards to raise the level of the scientific field and, therefore of functionality and library services which is the ultimate goal of the field.

In Jordan, library science education generally started in 1958 with short courses in library science presented by UNESCO experts (Bouazza&Nimer, 1986) . Academically, the field went through several stages starting with the Community Colleges Middle diploma which is a two year post-secondary institution; a bachelor degree; and then a Master's degree which is established in the University of Jordan in 2007 which is a unique program for Master's level in Library Science in Jordan (LS Department, 2012) . The accreditation standards for this program are issued by Higher Education Accreditation Committee (HEAC); a governmental body responsible for accrediting all higher education establishments in Jordan. This study examines the Jordanian standards for the Masters level in Library Science by comparing them with the American standards for the same degree. The rationale for selecting the American standards is that the United States is considered one of the leading countries in library science education which is a result of high-level standards with commitment of applying these standards effectively. The main reason for the success of these standards in developing library science field in USA is that they are formulated and developed by a jurisdiction body with the field, which is the American Library Association (ALA). The present study is aims to identify weaknesses in Jordanian standards through the comparison with American standards as an attempt to develop typical and applicable Jordanian standards, knowing that there are other universities considering the establishment similar programs.

Study Importance

This study concentrates on evaluating the existing Jordanian standards for the Master's Degree in Library Science. There is only one university offering this degree in Jordan at the present time, and there are several universities planning to offer the degree in the near future. So, the diagnosis of the weaknesses of the standards is an important step towards building a coherent program which leads to a distinct level of graduates.

Objectives of The Study

The study is carried out in order to achieve the following objectives:

- 1- Giving an overview for both present Jordanian and ALA master's degree programs accreditation standards.
- 2- Comparing the elements that make up both standards leading to M.A. degrees in LIS.
- 3- Recognizing weaknesses in Jordanian standards by a comparison with ALA standards for developing appropriate solutions.

Methodology

This study uses the comparison as a method to evaluate existing Jordanian accreditation standards which leads to master degree in library science. American Library Association's standard has been chosen to compare with. The researchers chose ALA's Standards to conduct this study for several reasons. First, many of the faculty members in public and private universities in Jordan were graduated from American universities. Second, most of the Jordanian students studying abroad now are studying in the United States. As well as due to the great development in library profession in United States. Comparison operation criteria based mainly on the main sixth ALA standards.

Literature Review

When we reviewed the literature of accreditation standards, we found an important study that addressed the issue of accreditation standards in Jordan. In his study, Younis (Younis,2002) divides his paper to several sections: higher education system in Jordan, historical overview for library science education in Jordan, private universities, library science education in private universities and the Jordanian standards for bachelor degree in library science in Jordan. The study presents large amount of information regarding the historical aspect of library science education in Jordan. It also presents the Jordanian standards for bachelor degree in library science, which is originally written in Arabic language. Younis explains the Jordanian standards, but does not criticize them. It is worth mentioning that the standards are the same in private and public universities. Our current study is different from Younis's study in that. We studied accreditation standards for Master's Degree in library science and criticized them through a comparison with the American Library Association (ALA) standards.

Younis(Younis, 1992), In another study historically overviews library science education in Jordan during the period from 1960 to 1991. He exposed library education in Jordan through all of those who contributed in the development of this education. He starts with short training courses presented by Jordan Library Association, Ministry of Education training courses, University of Jordan training courses and the Post – graduate Diploma which was presented by the University of Jordan. In her paper, Goblaskas(Goblaskas,2012) aims at assessing the equivalency of master's degrees in library science accredited by American Library Association (ALA) and The Chartered institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). She explains that, there is no an international agreement for equivalent or comparable university degrees, and countries have their own local accrediting procedures and organizations. Also, the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) has issued a set of guidelines for equivalency and qualifications, but unfortunately, these guidelines are not applied. Survey and comparison are used as a research method to perform the study. Core competencies and program curriculum in both ALA and CILIP accredited programs are compared. The survey is used to gathering data about ALA accredited program graduates who have been working in UK and, CILIP. Accredited program graduates had been working in USA or Canada. The study concluded that the post graduate diploma accredited by CILIP, is equivalent to ALA accredited Master's degree and, also there are no significant differences in the professional knowledge between ALA and CILIP accredited program's graduate as employers in UK and USA, who employed foreign – credentialed employee, stated.

Enser's (Enser,2002) describes in a brief historical introduction, how the Chartered Institute of Library Professional (CILIP) in UK was formed when The Library Association and the Institute of Information Scientists merged in 2002. The study shows that (CILIP) is now responsible for accrediting library science programs in UK through its accreditation board, and it has accreditation instruments which incorporate a Course Accreditation Checklist. This checklist depends on criteria built by the former Institute of information science which determined five main subject divisions in Library and Information Science. Enser explained in his study that (CILIP) also concentrated on two other things in the program: research method skills and the practical experience. For research method skills, students should get courses and then demonstrate their skills individually in a project. The practical experience might be a prerequisite for admission or as one of the study courses. When the accreditation process starts, the accreditation board takes into consideration the following: course syllabi, host department expertise, staff experience, institutional support for the program, and investigating university continuing commitment to the program. The study shows that in the recent years UK Quality Assurance agency for Higher Education (QAA) is playing a vital role in higher education accreditation in UK and universities have entered in an assessment system ruled by QAA. Enser believed that QAA's evaluation framework became "the primary driver in curriculum management in UK ".¹ As we see, both of the two previous studies highlighted the importance of the specialized establishment in the standards formulation because it's in direct contact to scientific field.

The relation between student's success and accreditation standards were discussed in Rivera and Huertas's study (Rivera and Huertas2008)which was conducted in the business schools in the United States and Puerto Rico. They took into consideration college policies, procedures, program content and the effectiveness of these elements on students. They defined success and learning terms and explained the nature of the relationship

between them. They also discussed how success indicated the effectiveness of learning. Rivera and Huertas found that, when talking about the success of the students and how assessment processes promote it, it is necessary to get data about learning performance of each student. They also concluded that; in spite of the differences among accrediting agencies, they have symmetrical assessment standards to test the level of student achievements.

In a comparative study, Khan and Mahmood(Khan and Mahmood,2013) studied the curriculum in Pakistani LIS schools through comparing it with the Pakistani Higher Education Commission (HEC) curriculum. The study tried to find gaps in Pakistani LIS curriculums because it lacked uniformity despite the presence of (HEC) standards. The study concluded that LIS in Pakistan offered courses without depending on (HEC) curriculum as a reference, and just one of the nine LIS schools offering Master degree depended on (HEC) curriculum.

Siddiqui (Siddiqui and Walia,2013) examined the reality of the situation of Library and Information Science (LIS) post graduate courses in United Kingdom (UK) and India. This was done through a comparative analysis for ten library schools in each country as samples. The study deeply analyzed: examinations, elective courses, information and communication technology courses, practical courses, student evaluation methods and teaching methods. The study presented several suggestions to enhance (LIS) Master's Degree programs in India. The suggestions were:

- a. Enhancing program's nomenclature.
- b. Offering a greater number of elective courses.
- c. Focusing on specialized materials like e-learning and web publishing.

The study concluded that LIS program reforms in India needed practical actions to be developed. The study also indicated the importance of standards in raising the whole level of the programs.

In their editorial (Schartz and Hernon 2004)discussed several issues regarding library science programs accreditation. They said that it is very important to librarians and library science schools to participate clearly in library science programs accreditation operations. they asked that to how extent American Library Association (ALA) can interact with other associations out of library science field to develop a new vision for assessment . Schwartz and Hernon expected that the Committee Of Accreditation (COA) In ALA and library science schools, work together to evaluate program outcomes , and they should be leaders not just recipients in the assessment operation . Schartz and Hernon calls for that COA and library science schools should interact with other accreditation bodies in formulating an approach to be use by academic institutions in developing information skills.

(Khoo,C.,Shaheen,M., Chaudhry,Abdus. 2003) studied topics regards to developing accreditation standards and procedures for library science education programs. The study is concentrate on creating such standards in a specific geographical area which is Southeast Asia . the researchers examined several international accreditation standards and its main features . A questionnaire was distributed in fourteen library science schools from five countries in Southeast Asia to gather information regarding regional accreditation schemes for library science education. The study concluded that regional accreditation standards will provide a program quality, improving graduates mobility, encourage dialogue between library science schools in the region and more documented policies and procedures.

In (Singh,2003) study several issues dealing with library science education in India were discussed. One of these issues was the accreditation standards. Singh mentioned that there is "no national accreditation body for library science education in India" this situation affected negatively on library education field because new many library science schools are opening without a presence of standards to assure the quality of the programs and the graduates.

In a study regarding the effect of the ALA accreditation standards on library education programs (Mounce,n.d.) focused on deans program points of view regarding standards influence on library education programs. A questionnaire was developed end e-mailed to 49 deans. The questions were distributed on six axes which are actually the six ALA accreditation standards : mission, curriculum, faculty, students, administration and financial support and finally the physical resources and facilities. The reached to one conclusion that the accreditation standards issued by ALA considered more influential in general than in a certain area.

Results

A comparative operation between Jordanian and American standards went through with the following main points: standards issuing authority; scope of the standards; curriculum; faculty; students; administration and financial support; and physical and financial resources.

- 1- Authority: Jordanian standards for undergraduate and postgraduate studies are issued by governmental establishment called "Higher Education Accreditation Committee" and these standards are compulsory for public and private universities(heac,2013). While in the United States of America, the American Library Association (ALA) which is an independent body issues the American standards(ALA accredited programs

.2015). It is worth mentioning that Jordanian Library and Information Association was established in 1963 and one of its objectives is “To develop the means and ways, and leads to the advancement of the situation of personnel in the field of libraries and information, and to develop their qualifications” (Jila,2012).

- 2- Scope: in Jordanian higher education system, there are three levels of postgraduate studies: higher diploma degree (one year after bachelor), Master’s degree and Ph.D. degree. The Jordanian standards for the postgraduate studies include these three levels. This means that there are no specific separate standards for each level. At the same time, these standards apply for all scientific specialization, while American standards are specific for the Master’s Degree in Library Science. Because of the generality in Jordanian standards, we cannot find an introduction or a preface justifying the existence of the standards and what they aim at. In American standards, we can see an introduction explaining why these standards exist and how they work; and a definition for library and information studies field is presented. This is very important to determine the substantive area of the specialization. The American standards indicate in one of the paragraphs that “these standards are limited in their application to the assessment of the graduate programs of the library and information studies that lead to a master’s degree.” The specification in this paragraph is very clear and this is not available in Jordanian standards. As for the mission, goals, and objectives which must be relevant to the master’s program, are not recorded in Jordanian standards, thus, the purpose of the program and what it wants to achieve is unclear or unknown. This applies to the rest of the postgraduate scientific disciplines programs in Jordan. ALA standards explain, in details, school's mission and program goals and how they can be achieved. It also shows that the program objectives should reflect the main trait of library and information studies, field philosophy, research significance, interaction with other fields of knowledge and how library and information services contribute to the service of different segments of society.

- 3- Curriculum:

The curriculum in Jordan standards is divided into 3 sections. The Master’s degree section contains information about the minimum credit hours which students should study. They are (33) credited hours. The section also explains that students have two options for the degree: Comprehensive examination and thesis.

In the comprehensive examination option, students should pass (24) compulsory credited hours as minimum in addition to (9) elective credited hours as minimum too. In thesis option, student should pass a minimum (15) compulsory credit hours and (9) elective credit hours as minimum in addition to (9) credit hours for thesis and that is all what we can find in this section. So Jordanian standards don't mention topics related to the curriculum which we find in ALA standards. For example, ALA standards show that the curriculum is based on goals, objectives and the subject to the planning process which is characterized as systematic. It also shows that the Library and Information curriculum covers all operations and processes related to knowledge creation, selection, organizing and dissemination. The ALA standards determine the curriculum characteristics.

So the curriculum should develop ongoing commitment to the profession, linking theory and practice; keep pace with technological development; contributes to the development of library and information professionals and extrapolates future developments of the field.

- 4- Faculty:

The Jordan standards explains several specific subjects regarding this element :first, faculty members in the program. Second, academic ranking and the prerequisite for each academic rank involved in teaching students for MA degree. The standards determine the minimum faculty members in the program who hold Ph.D. degree according to the following percentage:

Professors %25 as minimum

Associate professors %75.

Assistant professors %25 as maximum.

We do not notice such distributions for teaching staff in the ALA standards which only mention that fulltime teaching staff should be sufficient in number and in specialty diversity without any indication to teaching staff scientific ranking.

Jordanian standards get more involved in specifying the condition for the teaching staff, such that they can join a teaching program. So, according to these standards faculty members In Jordanian program must possess the following:

Professors and associate professors must have in the last five years one of the following:

- At least two articles; published or accepted for publication in a scientific journal.

- Two published books.

-One published article accepted for publication in a scientific journal and a published article in an international scientific conference.

-Assistant professors must have in the last three years, at least two articles; published or accepted for publication in a scientific journal.

In ALA accreditation standards we do not notice such detailed conditions for teaching staff to get involved in

teaching or to be a committee member in a Master's thesis. ALA standards generally mentioned that faculty member should have effectiveness in teaching, technology skills, a good ability and record to accomplish research in the field. A main point found in ALA standards that we do not find in Jordanian standards is the evaluation of faculty member. ALA standards state that "procedures are established for systematic evaluation of faculty".

The Jordanian standards never specified the "scientific Journals" that are accepted for teaching staff article publication. So according to the Jordanian standards, the accepted Journals should have the following conditions:

- 1-Editor in chief and editors.
- 2-Consultant committee.
- 3-Started 3 years ago.
- 4- Continuous Publishing.
- 5-Should be "cataloged and classified"
- 6-Issued by an accredited scientific committee or establishment.

When we examine these conditions, we can realize that the first, second and the fourth conditions are just journal characteristics and any journal should have them. Regarding the third one, we do not find any justification for specifying 3 years for the first issue. The Jordan standards never mentioned the conditions of accept the scientific journals. The fifth condition states that the journal should be "cataloged and classified." It is completely an unclear and un-understandable condition because both operations are just a part of library procedures performed on information resources. It is very clear that the persons who proposed this condition do not have scientific information about both terms. It is most likely that this condition is translated from English to Arabic without assistance of library science specialist to explain what does "cataloged and classified" scientifically mean, and it was intended to be "indexed." The last condition specified that the journal should be "issued by an accredited scientific committee or establishment". This requirement also lacks the library science background, because most of the scientific journals in different scientific fields with a high impact factor are issued by an independent commercial publisher in addition to journals issued by universities and scientific institutions. So, by reviewing the conditions which should be required for scientific journals in order to be accepted in Jordanian standards, we can conclude that: they are inadequate and are not based on a solid scientific basis. A main point in ALA standards that we do not find in Jordanian standards is the evaluation of faculty members. Article III.8 in ALA standards stated that "procedures are established for systematic evaluation of faculty". The Jordanian standards do not mention such an important point and its main consideration is faculty members publishing activities despite the large defects regarding the requirements for scientific journals accreditation. The American standards also refer to the qualifications of faculty member such as technological awareness, teaching effectiveness, a good research record and planning skills.

5- Students:

When we examine what ALA standards included regarding student affairs in the master's degree program, we can find six articles. These articles deal with administrative policies for students, admission, financial aid, information about the program and its goals, curricula description, admission prerequisite if any, student application assessment, student evaluation, students organizations. On the other hand, we do not find a specific part regarding students in Jordanian standards, but one paragraph which is repeated 3 times in different sites in standards. This paragraph stated that "prerequisite material marks are not included in neither student total marks average nor the credited hours for the degree". The prerequisite materials are mandatory material to students who do not hold a bachelor's degree in libraries but have Bachelor in other disciplines. As we can see there is a big deference between the two standards, because there are many important details included in ALA standards not covered in the Jordanian standards.

6- Administration and financial support:

When we examine ALA standards regarding this topic, we can see that it includes nine articles. These articles cover the following topics: the importance of harmony between the school procedures and the general guidelines of the university; school's bodies representation; program's executive officer and title, salary, academic qualification, leadership skills and experience; school's administrative and staff commitment to achieve program goals; university on parent institution financial support; program personnel compensation; funds for research, travel and student financial aid; and program continues evaluation process. ALA standards try to bring all administrative and financial aspects in accordance with the academic environment in United States. This topic is completely missing in Jordanian standards, despite its big importance for organizing administrative and financial procedures for the program.

7- Physical resources and facilities:

In this section, ALA standards cover facilities and physical resources required to meet the needs of students and faculty such as library resources and services, information technology to accomplish program goals. As the administrative and financial support element is missing in Jordanian standards.

Discussion

- 1- Jordanian standards are general for all postgraduate studies in all scientific fields, so there are no specific standards for the master's program in library science.
- 2- Jordanian standards are issued by a commission which is not linked with the profession; and this is what makes the standards lack too many necessary requirements for the scientific knowledge of librarianship as a field of study and as a profession. This certainly applies to the rest of the scientific disciplines. The generalities in accreditation standards certainly lead to such results.
- 3- The (Higher Education Accreditation Commission) is a governmental commission, so there are some doubts about the level of implementation of the existing standards in public and private universities, while ALA is an independent body, and this puts ALA and its standards in neutral situation for library science schools in all over the states.
- 4- Scientific ranking is the key factor for faculty to be involved in teaching process according to Jordanian standards. The ranking, in turn, depends entirely and only on the faculty member publication activity without taking into account the scientific level of the journal.
- 5- Jordanian Library association should participate in developing library science teaching standards as it's a professional entity and through convince of (Higher Education Accreditation Commission) that professional associations should be involve effectively in developing higher education standards.

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