# Collaboration in LIS Education in the Asean Region and Beyond: Issues and Trends

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**Abstract.** The paper describes the author's experience in regional collaboration activities in LIS education. The author found that networks and relationships formed through organizing and participating in conferences and workshops provide a basis for regional collaborative activities. A taxonomy of collaboration in LIS education is presented, listing the different types of collaborative activities that LIS schools can engage in, and the benefits that schools can derive from them. The main benefit of regional collaboration has been in giving students international and cross-cultural exposure, and in the training of PhD students. Continuing effort is needed to internationalize LIS education, as well as encourage research collaborations and formation of research clusters in the region.

## Introduction

In the first decade of the 21st century, LIS education in the region has shown increased focus on e-learning and online programs, developing research capabilities and increasing research output, and revising education programs to prepare graduates for a new information environment and a globalized industry environment. These initiatives require expertise and resources beyond individual LIS schools. LIS schools have had to pool resources through various kinds of cooperation and collaboration. Ocholla (2008) pointed out that "collaboration is about sharing and exchanging of knowledge and skills" (p. 469) to solve problems faster through collective effort.

To raise the quantity and quality of research, and to address new research areas require faculty development through:

- Sponsoring faculty to pursue PhDs and post-doctoral research in other countries

- Having visiting and adjunct faculty from other institutions to support research and education programs

- Organizing regional and international workshops and conferences, and sponsoring faculty to attend conferences in other countries.

These require collaboration between LIS academics as well as cooperation between LIS schools.

Developing e-learning courses and online programs also require a lot of resources and expertise that may not all be available within an institution. Furthermore, the nature of the distributed Web environment makes it possible to develop and mount online courses and programs in a distributed mode with lecturers from different institutions and countries, or in a consortium format with a few institutions collaborating in a joint program.

Curriculum and education programs have also undergone tremendous changes to prepare graduates for the complex and evolving information and technological environment, a complex job market where employers are looking for people with a range of competencies, and a complex globalized work environment. Internships and overseas experience are increasingly important, and this requires cooperation with overseas institutions to offer student exchange programs and overseas internships. International faculty are also being recruited to introduce students and faculty to different teaching methods and different perspectives.

Virkus (2007) reviewed extant definitions of the term *collaboration*, noting that it is often used interchangeably with *cooperation* and *partnership*. He defined *collaboration* as "a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship between individuals to achieve common

goals", and *cooperation* as "a structure and system of interaction designed to facilitate the accomplishment of a goal through people working together" (p. 3). He also noted that the concept of *international collaboration* is closely related to *globalization* and *internationalization. Internationalization* was defined by Knight (2004) as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education". Teichler (2007) characterized the difference between internationalization and globalization as follows:

> Internationalization addresses an increase in cross-border activities amidst a more or less clear persistence of national systems of higher education, while globalization assumes that borders and national systems get blurred or might even disappear ... Second, the terms are often discussed in relation to different issues. While internationalization is used to refer to physical mobility, academic cooperation, international knowledge transfer, international education, etc., globalization tends to be associated with competition and market-steering, trans-national education and commercial knowledge transfer. (p. 28)

LIS schools in the region are actively engaging in various kinds of collaboration and cooperation both within a country and across countries, as well as internationalization of their education programs.

Collaboration is easiest to implement at the individual level. For example, academics from other institutions can be invited to the host institutions for various purposes—visiting or adjunct appointments, external examiners, and giving talks and workshops. Academics from several institutions can also collaborate to organize a conference or workshop. Formal cooperation between institutions are more difficult to develop, but are needed for student exchange programs, faculty exchange, joint programs, and collaborations in associations and consortia.

The amount and types of external collaborations that a school engages in probably depends on the following factors:

- The stage of development of the school—for example, a new school will probably need technical assistance from other schools or other countries in developing its education program, and will have more visiting faculty.

- The policies of the parent university or school—for example, whether the parent school or university encourages its faculty to participate in national and international activities, and values overseas student exchanges and MOUs with other universities.

- Leadership of the school dean and senior faculty in engaging in international activities.

- Faculty members' interests, and social and leadership attributes.

The Appendix presents a "taxonomy" of collaboration, listing the different types of collaborative activities that LIS schools and educators can engage in, and the benefits that schools can derive from the collaborations.

## Collaborations Through Conferences and Workshops: A Personal Experience

The most common kind of collaboration is the organization of international and regional conferences and workshops. Organization of and participation in conferences/workshops creates and nurtures relationships and networks among LIS educators that form the basis for other kinds of collaborations. This section provides an account of my experience with organizing and participating in conferences/workshops in the region, and how it has helped in collaborative activities.

When I joined the Division of Information Studies at Nanyang Technological University after completing my PhD at Syracuse University in 1996, the Division had little contact with other LIS schools in the region. The school was just two years old and offered a part-time

MSc program, with five faculty members (excluding me) recruited from Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the US. The school had some ties with schools in these countries through the faculty members and through external examiners who were also from these countries. I had only a hazy idea of the LIS schools in other ASEAN countries and didn't know any of their faculty members. My colleagues and I were just busy surviving and developing the MSc program.

I gradually got to meet LIS educators in the region through regional and international conferences:

- *CONSAL (Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians)* is an important conference for regional networking. I met Dr Diljit Singh and other Malaysian academics at CONSAL X 1996 in Kuala Lumpur. At the subsequent CONSAL XI 2000 in Singapore, my colleagues and I organized a post-CONSAL Workshop on Information Science Education (WISE) where I met Dr Sajjad ur Rehman from the International Islamic University of Malaysia (he later moved to Kuwait University), and a few Thai colleagues including Dr Chutima Sacchanand and Dr Sujin Butdisuwan. These became life-long friends and long-term collaborators! I presented a report of this Workshop at the IFLA 2000 conference (Higgins & Khoo, 2000). A group photograph of the workshop participants is given in Figure 1.

- *IFLA World Library & Information Congresses* is another important venue for regional networking, as some LIS academics in the region are active in its Sections and Committees, and regularly present at the conferences. At the IFLA 1999 Congress in Bangkok, I was impressed with a dynamic Dr Pimrumpai at the Satellite Meeting on LIS education at Chulalongkorn University, as well as met more Thai LIS educators.

- *International Conference for Library and Information Science Educators in the Asia Pacific Region (ICLISE 2001)* organized by the International Islamic University of

Malaysia was perhaps the first conference in the region focusing on LIS education, where I met many LIS academics from Malaysia and the region.

- *International Conference on Asian Digital Libraries (ICADL)* is an important forum for LIS educators in the region who specialize in digital libraries and information technology. The conference series has facilitated a confluence of two academic communities—computer science and LIS. At the ICADL 2002 conference in Singapore, I met Dr Shigeo Sugimoto from Japan, Dr Shalini Urs from India, Dr Sherry Chen from Taiwan and several Taiwanese researchers. I later met Dr Joyce Chen of Taiwan at ICADL 2005 in Bangkok, organized by Dr Pimrumpai. Out of the ICADL community arose the idea of forming a consortium of information schools, inspired by the iSchools movement in the U.S. The Consortium of iSchools Asia-Pacific (CiSAP, http://www.cisap.asia) was officially launched under the leadership of Dr Shigeo Sugimoto at ICADL 2008 in Bali, Indonesia.

- *LIPER Workshops* were a series of workshops organized by the LIPER (Library and Information Professionals and Education Renewal) Project in Japan (Miwa et al., 2006) to review LIS curriculum in selected countries and to make recommendations for an LIS curriculum for Japan. Dr Makiko Miwa, who was my fellow student in the PhD program at Syracuse University, invited me to one of the workshops where I met Dr Chihfeng Lin from Taiwan. It was a fateful meeting as we found ourselves of the same mind about the need for an Asian conference on LIS education and research. Out of this discussion, the A-LIEP conferences came into being.

- *Asia-Pacific Conference on Library & Information Education & Practice (A-LIEP)*: I collaborated with Dr Diljit Singh (University of Malaya) and Dr Abdus Sattar Chaudhry (the head of my school) to organize the first A-LIEP in 2006. (A group photograph of the participants is given in Figure 2.) A Dean's Roundtable was held at the sidelines of the

conference to discuss the possibility of a regional accreditation system for LIS professional programs.  The conference was useful in gathering together Asian and Australian LIS educators who were not a part of the digital library community. Dr Chihfeng Lin and her colleagues at Shih Hsin University organized the second conference in Taiwan, and Dr Miwa and Dr Sugimoto and his colleagues at Tsukuba University organized the third in Japan. Dr Szarina Abdullah and her colleagues at the University of Technology, MARA organized the fourth conference in Malaysia, and Dr Kulthida and her colleagues at Khon Kaen University is organizing the fifth conference. At this conference, I hope to make contact with LIS educators from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

- *Taiwan-Singapore-Thailand Workshop on Library & Information Research (TST Workshop)*: It was at the second A-LIEP conference in Taipei that Dr Abdus Sattar Chaudhry and I discussed with Dr Joyce Chen the need to promote research collaboration and develop research clusters in the region. We agreed to start with just three countries—Taiwan, Singapore and Thailand—for a focused workshop. This gave rise to three TST Workshops at the National Taiwan Normal University (Taiwan), Nanyang Technological University/National Library (Singapore) and Khon Kaen University (Thailand). The fourth Workshop at the National Taiwan Normal University and the fifth at Mahasarakham University were expanded in geographical scope to become the *Workshop of the Asia Library & Information Research Group (ALIRG)*. These workshops are different from the usual conferences in that the presentations are either research proposals to solicit collaborators, or PhD research proposals for comments. Moreover, the cost of organizing the workshop is borne by the host institution, and the workshop is free to participants, who take care of their own travel and accommodation. The workshops have not been very successful in forging research collaborations, but has been useful in serving

as a doctoral consortium where PhD students can present their research in a "safe" environment and researchers can share their research proposals.

There have been other useful regional and international conferences held in Asean countries in the past decade, including ICoLIS (International Conference on Libraries, Information and Society) organized by the Department of Library and Information Science, University of Malaya. However, the above conferences/workshops have been the most useful to me in developing ties with LIS educators and schools in the region. The ICADL conferences usually include a pre- or post-conference workshop on LIS education. The A-LIEP conferences usually include a dean's roundtable to discuss an issue of LIS education.



**Figure 1. Participants of the Post-CONSAL Workshop on Information Studies Education 2000 in Singapore**

**Figure 2. Participants of the A-LIEP 2006 conference in Singapore**

Many small workshops have also been organized by various schools with invited speakers from overseas, and these have been useful in developing the academic network in the region. I first met Dr Kulthida and Dr Lampang of Khon Kaen University at a workshop organized by Dr Sujin at Mahasarakham University, and renewed our acquaintance at the TST Workshop in Taipei. Dr Kulthida and Dr Lampang later organized the TST Workshop and A-LIEP conference in Khon Kaen.

Overseas study visits for student groups have also been useful in learning about LIS schools in other countries in the region. It was through a study visit from Mahasarakham University in 1996, that I met Dr Sujin for the first time.

The most ambitious collaborative initiative in the region is probably the Consortium of iSchools Asia-Pacific (CiSAP), with the purpose of developing an Asia-Pacific "brand of information education … to support its information societies because of the wide diversity in culture, language, socio-political environment and level of economic development" and

"educate [a] new breed of information professionals in accordance with regional demands, and to help the regional communities to build fruitful information environments" (http://www.cisap.asia).  Lin (2004) had pointed out "a great need for coordination of activities of LIS education in Asia and ... a great need for the creation of an organization similar to ALISE and EUCLID by LIS educators in Asia" (p. 5). CiSAP effectively functions as an association of LIS schools in Asia and the Pacific. Its "inclusive" definition of iSchools include both LIS schools as well as schools of "Information and Computer Technology, Media and Communication, Archives and Recordkeeping, and Business Management" that consider *information* to be "the central axis" of their academic programs and disciplines. The Consortium has organized several workshops and discussion panels at regional conferences. There are ongoing discussions of developing student exchange programs and faculty exchange among member schools.

Looking back on more than a decade of regional and international activities, it is clear to me that networks and relationships formed through meetings at international and regional conferences/workshops provide a basis for regional collaborative activities for many years in the future. Ocholla (2008), in his paper describing collaborative activities in Africa, also expressed the opinion that organizing pre/post conference workshops on LIS education "is an excellent way to begin unraveling a considerable portion of the current collaborative plight [in Africa]" (p. 475). Two other kinds of networks are useful for collaborative activities:

- Classmates and friends from the PhD program that we were in
- Former colleagues who have moved to LIS schools in other countries, as well as the networks of our current colleagues (i.e. friends of colleagues).

## Benefits and Challenges of Regional Collaborations

It is difficult to assess and measure the benefits of international and regional collaborations. I have listed possible benefits in the taxonomy in the Appendix, dividing them into 4

categories—benefit to students, faculty, institution and the academic community. Exposure to international and cross-cultural dialog and work experience are clearly beneficial to both students and faculty, but they are difficult to quantify.

Looking at the experience in my school, the main benefits of international collaboration have been in the area of PhD education. PhD students gain experience presenting their research at conferences and doctoral consortia. They benefit from feedback from the academic community, network with other PhD students, get to know academics and researchers in the field, identify potential external examiners, and even obtain leads for faculty positions.

Since my school does not currently have an undergraduate program, student exchange programs have not been important to us. However, the few students who have gone on overseas exchange have benefited from a different education environment and exposure to different cultures and lifestyles.

International collaborative activities do not seem to have resulted in significant overseas research collaborations. The TST Workshop series was initiated to encourage research collaborations and research clusters, but it has not had much success in this respect. This may be because of the lack of a critical mass of LIS researchers in the region. It is my hope that eventually several research clusters will be formed in the region, and researchers will build on and cite each other's work. The existing research clusters that I am aware of are the digital library cluster centered on the ICADL conferences, and possibly a school libraries cluster with the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) 2007 conference held in Taipei, and the 2013 conference to be held in Bali, right after the IFLA 2013 conference in Singapore.

## Conclusion

In the past decade and a half, LIS educators in the region have made a substantial effort to develop cooperation and collaboration in the region, particularly in organizing conferences and workshops, culminating in the formation of CiSAP—a consortium of information schools. Other activities listed in the Appendix have also taken place, including having visiting professors, student exchange programs, overseas study visits, etc. However, more needs to be done to encourage research collaborations and forming of research clusters through PhD student exchange programs, post-doctoral fellowships and faculty exchanges.

One issue that will become increasingly prominent is the regionalization and internationalization of LIS education and the mobility of LIS professionals in the region. This raises the question of whether LIS programs and courses are equivalent across the countries in the region, and whether the graduates of these programs are equipped to work as librarians and information professionals in other countries. This issue will certainly require regional cooperation to address. The possibility of a regional accreditation scheme for LIS professional programs has been explored at a number of workshops and conferences, and the issues have been analyzed by Khoo et al. (2003) and Majid et al. (2002). However, there has been little activity in this area since the early 2000s.

Most of the collaborative activities in the region have been informal and based on personal ties among a small network of LIS educators who appreciate the value and importance of such activities. Effort has to be made now to groom the next generation of LIS educators to engage in regional and international collaborative activities. It will be interesting to see whether relationships developed at the A-LIEP 2013 conference in Khon Kaen and the ALIRG workshop in Mahasarakham will make an impact on regional collaboration in the next decade or two.

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# Appendix. A taxonomy of collaboration in LIS education

Level (adapted from Ocholla (2008))

- Between individuals
- Between groups of people
- Within departments
- Between departments
- Intra-institutional
- Inter-institutional
- Within sectors
- Inter-sectoral
- National
- Regional
- International

Formality

- Formal
- Informal

Relationship

- Peer-to-peer (i.e. between equal partners)
- Unequal (e.g., technical assistance from a developed country in setting up a new LIS program in a developing country)

Activity

- Conference/workshop organization

    LIS research conference

    *ICADL (International Conference on Asian Digital Libraries)*

    LIS education conference

    *ICLISE 2001 (International Conference for Library and Information Science Educators in the Asia Pacific Region)*

    *A-LIEP (Asia-Pacific Conference on Library & Information Education & Practice)*

Professional conference

*IFLA World Library & Information Congress*

*CONSAL (Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians)*

*IASL 2007 (International Association of School Librarianship)*

Workshop organization (usually on the sidelines of conferences)

*IFLA 2013 Satellite Meeting on Global Collaboration of iSchools*

*ALIRG (Asia Library & Information Research Group) Workshop*

Discussion panels at conferences

- Education collaboration

    Joint program

    Joint faculty appointments

    Student exchange program

    Student overseas study visits

    Student internships

    Joint supervision of students

    Curriculum development

    External examiner

    Distance teaching

- Research collaboration

    Joint research projects (including joint publications)

    Journal editorial boards

    Faculty exchange (e.g. post-doc fellowships, visiting professor)

    *ACRC fellowship* at Nanyang Technological University for young researchers

- Association

    *CiSAP (Consortium of iSchools Asia-Pacific)*

    *IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations & Institutions)*

    *ASIS&T (Association for Information Science & Technology)*

    *ALA (American Library Association)*

    *IASL (International Association of School Librarianship)*

Benefit

- Student

Overseas exposure (e.g. student visits)

Overseas education experience (e.g. student exchange program)

Overseas work experience (e.g. internship)

Research experience

- Faculty

    Training (e.g. PhD scholarships, fellowships)

    Research experience (e.g. faculty on sabbatical)

- Institution

    Development of education program (e.g. joint programs)

    Recruitment of students

    Extended faculty resource (e.g. visiting professor may teach a new subject not previously offered)

    Enhancement of reputation

- The academic community

    Propagation of new ideas and research results

    Research collaborations