

Curriculum based Competencies imparted in LIS Schools: Outlook of LIS Professionals working in Special Libraries

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Abstract

The paper aims to find out the employability skills and competencies imparted in LIS schools to work efficiently in libraries. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from LIS professionals working in different special libraries in New Delhi. The findings revealed that with the changing information and communication technology environment, a set of technological skills are highly desirable, nevertheless such new desired skills are lacking among LIS professionals. There are many factors responsible for lacking the suitable skills, however the majority of the professionals are of the opinion that the LIS curriculum and training imparted in LIS schools of the country are not providing sufficient competencies needed for working in special libraries and its orientation is not relevant with the new changing landscape of librarianship.

Keywords: Employability skills, LIS curriculum, Special Libraries, Competencies, Changing nature of jobs in libraries.

1. Introduction

Library and Information Science is a multidimensional discipline that experienced a massive change due to the introduction of the digital environment. It demands new and diversified job roles and duties to provide a wide variety of services to the patrons. Due to the changing nature of libraries, employers seek fresh employability and skills. Employability refers to the set of capabilities, skills, attributes, expertise, knowledge, and abilities that are essential for employment and graduates are expected to inherit during the tenure of their educational program. Certainly, the LIS profession and professionals are not exempted from this. LIS departments and educators play a vital role in this as they are the ones who prepare young professionals to step into the job market, get employed, and prosper. However, even after being settled, rapid technological advancements have compelled LIS professionals to pursue frequent education and training in the form of proficiency building programs, refresher courses, and short-term courses (Tadasad, 2015). "A 'special library' is not an entity; it exists as an integral part of a highly specialized kind of organization whether it be an industrial corporation, research, or service institution, a trade association, a government agency, or a museum. Since it exists to serve the members of that organization, it is necessary to provide in the training program an orientation to the structure, functions, and activities of the varying

types of organizations” (Leonard, 1950). It has always been difficult to describe what “Special Libraries” actually are. There are many definitions existing in literature given by experts, but none can relevantly define special libraries. There are 29 definitions in *The Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* (Vol. 28, pp. 389-394), but we are yet to find the generally accepted definition. However, libraries can be labeled as “special” if it has a specific subject, particular class of users, form of collection or institutional association. The evolution of Special Libraries is linked with the development of research institutions in India. Their growth was prompted by the growth of research institutions. Scientific research and developments were highly neglected during the colonial period but boomed after two world wars and took a pace of rapid growth. With the eruption of ICT, Indian libraries have experienced a drastic transformation from conventional libraries to modern libraries. The foundation of research institutions such as the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Defense Research and Development Organization, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Indian Council of Medical Research led the way for the establishment of special libraries. Currently, 11,295 libraries are working in India for their parent organization (Singh, 2006). Due to the speedy growth in technological developments, special librarians must possess technical competencies and skills to adapt to the drastically evolving information environment. Special libraries deal in diversified resources with a limited scope and serve specialized users. Because of information overload, the issue lies in disseminating information by filtering out the relevant and helpful information (Romo, 2015). One of the major challenges special libraries face is the sudden up-rise in the development of technology and adaptation of technology in different spheres of society, especially in research and education. This development has directly influenced the special libraries, such as through the e-resources and massive amounts of information in the digital form. However, LIS professionals are not bounded by serving resources only but dispensing into patrons' knowledge processes. Special libraries are meta-knowledge centers working as stimuli for knowledge synthesis. Research and development organizations and universities are reservoirs of knowledge and intellectual content. Information professionals have a big role in starting the knowledge management process thus they must possess expertise and skills beyond the competencies required in traditional library practices (Mandal, Podder & Choudhari, 2012).

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the employability skills needed by the LIS professionals in special libraries.
2. To identify the curriculum-based competencies among LIS professionals in special libraries.
3. To identify the gap of skills and competencies offered in LIS schools and those demanded by job providers.

3. Research Methodology

A structured questionnaire on a 5-points Likert scale was designed to collect responses from LIS professionals who are working in different special libraries in New Delhi. Both offline as well as online responses were collected from the selected special libraries. The collected responses were formulated to determine the skills and competencies needed by LIS Professionals in executing different functions of the special libraries. Besides, the observation and in certain cases where the responses were not either comprehended by the professionals or not filled completely, interview was conducted to further validate the responses.

4. Significance of the Study

After the thorough review of literature, it has been realized that there have been studies conducted at national as well as international level, however in India, not enough researches have been carried out to ascertain the competencies needed by LIS professionals. It was also found that most of the studies are devoted to the academic libraries, and a very few tried to explore the needs of special libraries. Thus, this study tried to identify the employability skills required by the LIS professionals to work effectively in special libraries. It also stated the suggestions and recommendations that will assist in proficiency building and special training courses for LIS schools regarding the change in curriculum and training programs offered.

5. Literature Review

Robati and Yusuf (2014) conveyed the competencies needed by special librarians in the prevailing Iranian Library and Information Science curricula. The authors conducted a survey using questionnaires in Library and Information departments in Iran. The study suggested that LIS departments need to re-design the curricula at a distinct level of education, emphasizing interpersonal skills and Information technology competencies. Khan and Parveen (2020) conducted a study to recognize the core competencies for librarians working in special libraries and also computed the prevailing competencies of working librarians of the Punjab province against the guidelines produced by the Special Library Association (SLA) task force. The study also pointed out the challenges librarians faced in obtaining the SLA competencies and discovered the training needs. Thus, the study concluded that librarians of the Punjab province do not possess the required level of SLA competencies. However, the professionals have a decent level of competency in accessing information resources and their dissemination but the missing capability of human information-seeking behavior. The authors recommended that SLA should specifically observe special libraries of each member country and lay down standards in accordance with the staff, resources, services, and infrastructure.

Nagalakshmi (2012) elaborated the competencies needed and duties of special librarians. The special libraries are “special” either in terms of collection, users, or services they provide. Thus, the need of users in special libraries is also special, unlike regular students in an academic library. So the special librarians should possess special competencies such as library administration, interpersonal skills, updated ICT understanding, information literacy, etc. Besides, librarians should have sound expertise in an Information retrieval system and Knowledge management. The author concluded that librarians in special libraries should not only provide resources through CAS and SDI services but supply pertinent information. Robati & Singh (2013) conducted a study to identify the competencies needed by the special librarians at three levels of LIS education in Iran. The findings stated that 55 competencies were validated for the special librarians with associate degree qualification and 122 competencies were made relevant and necessary for the bachelors and masters degree qualification. The most important competency expected for the special library professionals is ICT. Besides, interpersonal skills were rated second most important. The results suggested that LIS departments in Iran need to re-assess the curriculum content at all levels of LIS education and put more emphasis on ICT competencies and communication skills.

Matarazo and William (1993) examined trends and future expectations concerning the special librarian/information professional’s growth. The authors inferred that special libraries demand a more profound emphasis on knowledge management, ICT, and information

evaluation techniques. To remain competitive in the workplace, formal education and continuing education providers must work cooperatively so that holistic educational opportunities are imparted to the special librarians and information professionals. Ahmed and Soraya (2015) examined the educational qualifications of library heads and the difference of services provisions of non-academic special libraries. Based on findings, the authors recommended having trained library and information professionals to provide better services and manage the libraries efficiently. The authors suggested that non-professional staff should learn from the LIS professionals and improve their education.

Mandal, Podder & Choudhari (2012) discussed the challenges faced by special libraries, the importance of knowledge management, and the role of LIS professionals with required skills and competencies in the 21st century. The authors concluded that the role of LIS professionals is not limited to information resources only but instilling the knowledge system into users. Thus, information professionals need to pay attention to knowledge management expertise and learn to organize all sorts of knowledge management resources for adding value to the services and meeting the user's needs. Muqueem (2014) stated, in her paper "Special Libraries in India: An Overview," that growth in communications systems and evolution in technology noticed an increasing role of information and its organization. The libraries established during the 1990s and after require new abilities like ICT skills, analytical skills, and Knowledge Management. The conventional version of the Library was based on the idea of books. The model has changed to the use of information. The technology is posing challenges, and thus it is necessary that librarians must possess the skills to use the latest technology. The expertise and professionalism should be imparted through LIS education and training programs. Kumar & Verma (2017) dealt with the idea of knowledge management and the role of library and information professionals in managing the knowledge and information in the special libraries. The libraries have become a storehouse of human intellect and literature explosion has created a dynamic change in the scholarly communication process. The importance of two types of knowledge (explicit and tacit) should be ascertained by the libraries. The effective use of technical services and development of skills and abilities of the employees should be the focal point of special libraries to implement the knowledge management efficiently. In a knowledge based society information professionals have to deal with the people's knowledge thus the characteristics of information professionals should be analytical thinking, reasoning, cooperation, and individual analysis.

6. Results and Analysis of Curriculum based competencies

From 15 different special libraries of Delhi, a total of 23 responses are received from LIS Professionals designated at different positions. The LIS professionals who responded through questionnaire were charged with different roles and responsibilities in the library. 48% of the professionals have the duty of performing reference service in the library. 30% are charged with the duty of overall library management. 26% have the responsibility of acquisition and technical processing of library collection. 35% perform digitization and Automation and 22% look after the conservation of library collection. Least number of professionals (13%) have circulation work.

Curriculum based competencies are content-specific competencies prescribed in the syllabus. The questionnaire is aimed to ascertain the competencies imparted through various contents of the LIS curriculum. Library Collection Development is the procedure of building and maintaining the collection of the library. It involves everything from analyses of information needs to weeding out the resources. Ability to manage overall library collection is preferred

as “very important” by the majority of respondents i.e. 48%. Ability to perform serials management operations is “important” according to 57% of professionals. Ability to perform shelving and shelf reading is “important” for 52% of professionals. Ability to acquire and evaluate library resources critically is “somewhat important” according to 48% of professionals. Among Information organization competencies, ability to construct and assign subject headings is marked “very important” by 52% of professionals. Classification and Cataloguing competency is “important” according to 52% of professionals. Information services are the services that are rendered in libraries. 57% of professionals marked ability to use traditional and electronic resources as “very important”. Ability to provide specialized information services is preferred as “very important” by 52% of professionals. Ability to develop and improve information services and Ability to utilize different tools for information services are “very important” by 48% of professionals. Research Competency in a broader sense is the possession of methodological knowledge and willingness to act and solve problems. Among Research competencies, ability to use statistical tools for analysis of data is considered as “important” by the largest number of respondents i.e. 57%. Ability to design a research proposal and project and Ability to analyze and interpret research data are “important” for 48% of professionals. Ability to propose research questions and draft hypothesis and Ability to conduct systematic literature reviews are “somewhat important” according to 48% of professionals. Reference and Information Services are the services where the user's needs are identified and then the rightful information is provided. This service is quite common among all types of libraries. Ability to collaborate reference services and resource sharing is preferred as “important” by the majority of professionals i.e. 57%. Ability to provide online and digital reference services, Ability to use online bibliographic databases, Ability to provide specific answers to reference queries, and Ability to develop specialized information services are marked as “important” by 52% respondents. Among Specialized Subject Knowledge, Ability to interpret, explain and apply resources and delivery methods for specialized users are weighted “important” by most of the respondents i.e. 57%. Ability to apply discipline specific methods to user needs and Ability to interpret, explain and apply discipline specific metadata, bibliographic descriptions, classifications and taxonomies are considered “important” by 52% professionals. In Customer Education and Training competencies, Ability to apply the principles and practices of bibliographic instructions is marked “important” by 57% professionals. Ability to evaluate and select existing or emerging instructional materials is marked as “important by 52% respondents. Ability to use emerging training and instructional techniques and Ability to interpret, explain and apply web-based education and training products, services and programs “very important by 48% professionals. Scholarly communication is the process through which scholar community or Academics create, disseminate and preserve scholarly content. Hence, Ability to design and manage an institutional repository, Ability to mediate with publishers on issues relating to archiving policies including embargo periods and article processing charges, and Ability to understand copyright and licensing issues pertaining to open access scholarly content are “important” according to the 57% of professionals. IP rights are the rights given to the creator of any work over its usage and transfer. Copyrights come under the purview of IP rights which involves author's right over its literary or artistic work. Ability to understand traditional and digital law and Ability to create awareness about various intellectual property rights especially new digital laws are “important” for 52% of professionals. Ability to understand copyright and other IP rights is “important” according to 48% professionals.

Table 1: Considered opinions of LIS professionals regarding curriculum based competencies necessary in a library

Collection Development Competencies					
	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to order and acquire library resources			11 (48)	8 (35)	4 (17)
Ability to perform serials management operations			2 (9)	13 (57)	8 (35)
Ability to perform shelving and shelf reading			2 (9)	12 (52)	9 (39)
Ability to preserve and conserve materials			3 (13)	11 (48)	9 (39)
Ability to manage overall library collection			4 (17)	8 (35)	11 (48)
Ability to evaluate library resources critically			11 (48)	8 (35)	4 (17)
Information Organization Competencies					
Ability to carry out cataloguing and classification of books			3 (13)	12 (52)	8 (35)
Ability to organize print and digital resources			3 (13)	11 (48)	9 (39)
Ability to use different databases and information systems			3 (13)	9 (39)	11 (48)
Ability to assess relevancy of information			3 (13)	9 (39)	11 (48)
Ability to construct and assign subject headings			2 (9)	9 (39)	12 (52)
Ability to perform indexing and abstracting of articles			2 (9)	11 (48)	11 (48)
Information Services Competencies					
Ability to conduct user education and orientation			9 (39)	11 (48)	3 (13)
Ability to provide requisite information to users			4 (17)	11 (48)	8 (35)
Ability to provide user assistance in accessing information			8 (35)	11 (48)	4 (17)
Ability to use traditional and electronic reference sources			7 (30)	3 (13)	13 (57)
Ability to utilize different tools for information services			3 (13)	9 (39)	11 (48)
Ability to provide specialized information services			2 (9)	9 (39)	12 (52)
Ability to develop and improve information services			1 (4)	11 (48)	11 (48)
Research Competencies					
Ability to write research reports			5 (22)	9 (39)	9 (39)
Ability to design a research proposal and project			8 (35)	11 (48)	4 (17)
Ability to analyze and interpret research data			9 (39)	11 (48)	3 (13)
Ability to propose research questions and draft hypothesis			11 (48)	9 (39)	3 (13)
Ability to conduct systematic literature reviews			11 (48)	9 (39)	3 (13)
Ability to use statistical tools for analysis of data		2 (9)	8 (35)	13 (57)	
Reference and Information service competencies					
Ability to provide online and digital reference services			2 (9)	12 (52)	9 (39)
Ability to use online bibliographic databases			3 (13)	12 (52)	9 (39)
Ability to search and retrieve relevant information			9 (39)	10 (43)	4 (17)
Ability to provide specific answers to reference queries			2 (9)	12 (52)	9 (39)
Ability to develop specialized information services			2 (9)	12 (52)	9 (39)
Ability to collaborate reference services and resource sharing			2 (9)	13 (57)	8 (35)
Ability to conduct reference interviews			8 (35)	11 (48)	4 (17)

Specialized Subject Knowledge					
Ability to apply discipline specific methods to user needs			3 (13)	12 (52)	8 (35)
Ability to interpret and explain subject specific resources			8 (35)	11 (48)	4 (17)
Ability to apply discipline specific research methodologies and citation guides and systems			4 (17)	8 (35)	11 (48)
Ability to interpret, explain and apply discipline specific metadata, bibliographic descriptions, classifications and taxonomies			3 (13)	12 (52)	8 (35)
Ability to interpret, explain and apply resources and delivery methods for specialized users.			7 (30)	13 (57)	3 (13)
Customer Education and Training					
Ability to apply the principles and practices of bibliographic instructions.			7 (30)	13 (57)	3 (13)
Ability to apply the principles and practices of information literacy			3 (13)	11 (48)	9 (39)
Ability to use emerging training and instructional techniques			4 (17)	8 (35)	11 (48)
Ability to evaluate and select existing or emerging instructional materials			3 (13)	12 (52)	8 (35)
Ability to interpret, explain and apply web-based education and training products, services and programs.			8 (35)	4 (17)	11 (48)
Ability to differentiate among learning styles and customized instructions			4 (17)	10 (43)	9 (39)
Open access scholarly communication					
Ability to understand the current trends and issues in open access and scholarly communication			4 (17)	11 (48)	8 (35)
Ability to understand the current trends and issues in open access and scholarly communication			3 (13)	9 (39)	11 (48)
Ability to manage OA publishing and open source software			2 (9)	12 (52)	9 (39)
Ability to design and manage an institutional repository			2 (9)	13 (57)	8 (35)
Ability to mediate with publishers on issues relating to archiving policies including embargo periods and article processing charges			7 (30)	13 (57)	3 (13)
Ability to understand copyright and licensing issues pertaining to open access scholarly content			7 (30)	13 (57)	3 (13)
IP Rights and Copyright laws					
Ability to understand copyright and other IP rights			8 (35)	11 (48)	4 (17)
Ability to understand traditional and digital laws			8 (35)	12 (52)	3 (13)
Ability to create awareness about various intellectual property rights especially new digital laws			8 (35)	12 (52)	3 (13)
Ability to provide advice to faculty members and students regarding copyright and fair use of knowledge			10 (43)	9 (39)	4 (17)

(1-Not at all Important; 2-Unimportant; 3-Somewhat Important; 4-Important; 5-Very Important).

7. Conclusion

Librarianship is a profession of utmost courtesy. The act of providing rightful information from the ocean of literature requires patience and expertise. Indeed, libraries are transforming into a more paperless and digital form from their traditional shape. The services in the libraries have also increased from merely delivering the right information to the right user at the right time. Thus, LIS professionals have to mold their skills in such a way that they fit in the current structure of the special libraries. The results of this study clearly depict that LIS professionals know which skills and competencies are needed in this age of digital environment and employability demanded by the recruiters and hiring officials. LIS professionals are equipped with traditional knowledge of special librarianship as it is given more emphasis in the LIS curriculum. Skills and competencies of the new age are given little importance whereas skills are preferred in the job market. There is certainly a dire need to assess and reform the existing LIS curriculum. More weightage should be given to the practical aspects of the course content. Internship and training opportunities must be provided to the fresh LIS graduates. Frequent short-term courses, special training, and refresher programs are needed to be developed and provided for the working LIS professionals.

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