

Professional Competencies of LIS graduates and the Role of Curriculum

Dr. Pallavi Gogoi

Librarian, Tinsukia College, Tinsukia, Assam, India

***Corresponding Author:**

Dr. Pallavi Gogoi

Email: pallavi_siv@yahoo.co.in

Abstract: Library and Information Science (LIS) profession is now considered more as a technical profession rather than an academic one; with expectation of high level technical knowledge and skills on the part of the professionals. The challenge before the LIS educators is to prepare professionals with required knowledge, skills and abilities to work in today's hybrid environment of library and information systems. The issue which requires serious attention here is, that whether the existing LIS curriculum is able to meet the competency requirements of the LIS professionals or not. Due to the changing needs and growing technologies, the level of competency requirement is also changing day by day, demanding LIS professionals to be competent with divergent technologies and varied environments, be it the traditional, digital or virtual. The paper aims at finding out the professional competencies acquired by the LIS professionals during formal education of LIS and its correlation with the practical application in the professional life. An analysis of the course content of Masters programmes in LIS from the universities of North East India is made to fulfil the requirements of the paper.

Keywords: Professional Competency, LIS Curriculum, North East India.

INTRODUCTION

In this age of ever increasing information, nothing is static and the demand from a particular profession is bound to change along with time. The professionals also must feel the requirement of a particular age and should equip themselves according to the needs and demands of the time; by this way only the profession and the professionals will be able to survive. With increasing demand of Information professionals in almost all the sectors of the society, the LIS graduates must be prepared to compete with other similar category professionals such as information, management and IT sector Professionals; for which they must equip themselves with all the competencies and skills to meet the requirements of different services sectors. The responsibility and the challenge also lie with the LIS educators to train up the future professionals to meet the challenges of present day society. The curriculum also plays an important role to prepare the future professionals in a systematic manner.

Professional Competency: What Literature Say?

To play their role properly the information professionals must give emphasis towards developing their competencies which can either be professional or personal competencies.

Competencies are the set of abilities through which a person can efficiently accomplish the designated tasks within an organization. The library

professionals have acquired over the years various skills to successfully handle the information storage, retrieval and dissemination activities. The competencies are acquired through different levels of education or through training and experiences. Along with the traditional skills the library professionals should also acquire the technological skills to handle information in modern environment [1].

Tanloet, P & Tuamsuk, K [2] defines core competencies as the characteristics of information professionals that reflect their knowledge, skills, and personal attributes which they appropriately and successfully use in the various activities associated with the information profession towards the accomplishment of library's goal.

Canadian Association of Research Libraries [3] identifies the following seven Competencies for CARL Librarians 1. Foundational Knowledge 2. Interpersonal skills 3. Leadership and Management 4. Collections Development 5. Information Literacy 6. Research & Contributions to the Profession 7. Information Technology Skills

According to Kumar [4] professional competencies relate to librarian's knowledge of various information sources, technology, management and research and the ability to use these areas of knowledge for providing library and information services. These

are combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to discharge specific duties and responsibilities. Knowledge comprises the understanding of LIS and of other disciplines that underlie its professional practice. Skills refer to the abilities to use one's knowledge effectively. Attitude refers to the moral values essential to undertake professional practice.

The ALA Core Competencies of Librarianship[5] includes eight broad areas of fundamental knowledge, skills, and abilities. Each broad area includes a listing of concepts that the professionals should be able to employ when appropriate:

- i. Foundations of the profession
- ii. Organization of knowledge
- iii. Technological knowledge and skills
- iv. Reference and user services
- v. Research
- vi. Information resources
- vii. Continuing education and lifelong learning
- viii. Administration and management.

The National Knowledge Commission [6] recommends some skills which are required to fulfill the changing role of libraries for LIS professionals are: (i) Library and information-handling skills; (ii) Service orientation; (iii) ICT knowledge skills; (iv) Communication and training skills; (v) Marketing and presentation skills; (vi) Understanding of cultural diversity; and (vii) Knowledge mapping skills.

Special Libraries Association[7] relate Professional Competencies to the knowledge of the practitioners regarding various information resources, their use and access, application and management of technology, and the ability to use the knowledge such gained for providing quality information services.

Corral [8] shows that all professionals need a complex mix of specialist, generic and contextual competencies. His model contextualizing professional competencies reflects that specialist's core professional competencies must be surrounded with supporting interpersonal competencies for effective performance. Along with the managerial competencies a professional also needs some context specific competencies which

are related to a particular organization or institution, where the person works; to understand the structure and policies of the organization. Some other skills are completely personal such as time management, interpersonal relations etc.

The major challenge faced by the library and information professionals are due to the development in the field of Information and Communication Technology. The professionals must recognise the changing nature of technology and should acquire the skills and competencies accordingly to face the challenges brought by the technology.

Professional Competency among LIS Graduates:

The study on professional competency of LIS graduates is based on a survey conducted among LIS graduates. The study has been conducted to find out the views of the library professionals regarding the competency requirement at the workplace and also to find out the level of the competencies acquired during formal education of librarianship,

LIS professionals working in different capacities at the colleges and universities of Assam were considered for the study. A total of 30 copies of questionnaires were distributed among the target group, which was selected on convenience basis. A 100% response is received from the respondents. The respondents were selected purposefully, who were graduated within last fifteen years to ensure that they are familiar with competency requirement of the present day library professionals as well as to ensure that they are qualified with the current course structure. The questionnaire was divided into three major parts to collect the views of the LIS professionals regarding competencies required at the workplace; the competencies acquired during formal education of librarianship to meet the practical requirements at the workplace and at last; an open ended question was put to gather suggestions from the respondents regarding improvement needed in the curriculum to meet the practical requirements of the present day librarians.

The following tables show the distribution of questionnaires according to gender and designation:

Table 1: Questionnaires distributed according to gender(n=30)

Male	Female
08(26.67%)	22(73.33%)

Table 2: Questionnaires distributed according to Designation(n=30)

Designation	Number of respondents
Librarian	15(50%)
Library Assistant/ Professional Asst.	08(26.67%)
Others	07(23.33%)

A number of competencies have been selected covering both traditional and modern areas of competency along with some personal competencies. The respondents were required to tick against a particular area of competency showing its level of

requirement according to them. In all the areas 100% response have been received except marketing and presentation skills, where 96.67% and 90% responses received respectively.

Table 3: Competencies required at the workplace(n=30)

Competencies	Low	Medium	High
Collection Development	-	05	25
Collection Processing	-	-	30
Communication and Interpersonal	05	20	05
Computer skills(H/W, S/W)	-	10	20
Database Management	02	15	08
Document Handling	-	03	27
Document Preservation	09	15	06
E-Resources Management	05	11	14
Information Resources	-	02	28
Internet Searching	07	12	11
Leadership and teamwork	04	11	15
Library Automation	02	10	18
Managerial Skills	08	10	12
Marketing Skills	12	11	06
Presentation skills	08	14	05
Research	10	12	08
User Services	01	05	24
Web Page Designing	11	12	07

The above table shows that the traditional skills and competencies are still in great demand in workplace for present day library professionals of academic libraries of Assam. Among modern competency areas computer handling skills, library automation, E-resource management, Internet searching etc. are also needed to some extent. Other personal

competency areas such as Managerial Skills , Leadership & Teamwork, Communication Skills are also necessary to achieve success and improve professional status. It is important to note here that, requirement of professional competencies depends upon the working environment, and also on the professional status of the professionals.

Table 4: Competencies acquired during formal education to meet the practical requirements at workplace

Competencies	To some Extent	To Large Extent	Not at All
Collection Development	10	15	05
Collection Processing	08	21	01
Communication and Interpersonal	12	02	16
Computer skills(H/W, S/W)	14	12	04
Database Management	15	08	07
Document Handling	07	23	-
Document Preservation	12	08	10
E-Resources Management	08	04	18
Information Resources	08	22	-
Internet Searching	16	10	04
Leadership and teamwork	09	05	16
Library Automation	10	16	04
Managerial Skills	12	04	14
Marketing Skills	08	01	21
Presentation skills	14	11	05
Research	10	16	04
User Services	12	15	03
Web page Designing	13	01	16

The above table shows that course curriculum is supporting the professionals to a large extent in competency development specially in the areas of Collection Development, Information Resources, Document Handling and Collection processing. It is seen that the professionals are not very much benefitted by the course curriculum in developing their communication skills, E-Resource Management, Leadership and Marketing Skills. In the later part of the paper, the analysis of the course curriculum from the universities of North East India also shows that there is not much content in the syllabus to represent these issues and there is lack of practical papers to support the students in developing some of the technical and personal skills in them.

Practicing librarians are the best persons to consult about the inclusion of practical issues in the curriculum. The various suggestions made by the

respondents includes recommendations for inclusion of issues like conflict management, stress management, decision making, problem solving along with more emphasis on practical aspects of different IT skills.

What present curriculum offers in the universities of North East India?

A curriculum is a fundamental part of any education programme. Curriculum provides a list of courses or modules offered in a programme and gives information on purpose, content, method, time/duration, etc. which are essential in a successful dispensation of manpower training and education [4].

In NE Region LIS education was started in the late 1960’s and presently it is imparted by 6 universities and two colleges affiliated to Sikkim University and Tripura University. The courses offered by the universities of North East India are:

Table 5: Universities providing LIS Education in NE India

Name of the University	Year of Commencement	of Courses
Gauhati University, Guwahati	1966	MLISc. (2 yrs integrated), Ph.D
North Eastern Hill University(NEHU), Shillong	1985	MLISc. (2 yrs integrated), Ph.D
Manipur University, Imphal	1986	MLISc. (2 yrs integrated), Ph.D
Mizoram University, Aizawl	2002	MLISc. (2 yrs integrated), M.Phil, Ph.D
Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh	2005	BLISc. - 1 yr (Self financing) MLISc. – 1 yr (Self financing)
Assam University, Silchar	2010	MLIS-2yrs , Ph.D

Along with the above universities two colleges namely D.S. college, Gangtok, affiliated to Sikkim University and Ranthakur College affiliated to Tripura university also provides one year BLISc course.

The present study covers the LIS courses offered by the universities of North East India. On the

basis of the core competencies as identified by a number of professional bodies, some of the core competencies were identified and on the basis of which, the course curriculum of the LIS departments of North East India were analysed to find out the course content meeting the competency requirement of the library professionals of the present day.

Table 6: Course content of LIS curriculum from the universities of NE India reflecting competency areas

Competency Areas	Course content
Administration and Management	Concepts, Principles, Schools, HRM, Financial Management ,Collection Development, Motivation, Leadership etc.
Communication and Presentation	Communication: concepts, types ,channels, barriers, Technical Writing.
Foundations of the profession	Concepts, Role in society, legal and ethical issues, Growth and development, Associations, Movement, Types etc.
Information Resources	Documentary, Non documentary, Electronic information sources, online-offline resources.
Organization of recorded knowledge and information	Classification and Cataloguing(Theory and Practice), Indexing, Database Management, vocabulary control etc.
Reference and user services	Reference Services, User study, User Education, Bibliography etc.
Research	Concept, types, Design, data collection, Analysis, Inference, Report Writing, Content Analysis, Bibliometrics etc.
Technological knowledge and skills	Library Software, Operating Systems, automation, networking, Internet, Searching, DBMS, ICT application in Libraries etc.

An analysis of the LIS curriculum of the Universities of North East India shows that all the competency areas are addressed by the curriculum to some or large extent. Almost similar course content is available in all the universities, except a few such as; regarding management competencies, Mizoram University course content covers issues like Project Management, Conflict Management and Change Management; Assam University includes interpersonal Relations under Management of Information Centres. In NEHU there is an optional paper on collection development.

Communication and presentation skills need more practice for improvement. Class assignments, seminars, discussions directly or indirectly help the students in developing their communication and presentation skills. Technical Writing is a compulsory part of curriculum at Dibrugarh University and it is an elective paper in Mizoram University. Content Creation, Abstracting & Indexing practical papers are included in Manipur University curriculum.

Foundation of any area or discipline is very much important to know for the professionals to identify their duties, responsibilities and role in the society. All the curriculums very well represent the basics of the profession in their course content.

Except the basic concepts of information Resources as shown in the table above, Mizoram University has a separate paper on Information Resource Development providing details of selection tools and categories of documents. In NEHU there is a particular unit on Environmental information sources: organizations and institutions.

No matter how technical the profession becomes, but the core area of the profession is always user services and there should be option in the curriculum itself to help the professionals in identifying and determining the need and requirements of the users. There is a full paper in NEHU on Information Users and their needs. Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University also covers user study as a part of a paper.

Search Strategy formulation, Internet searching, Web page design are part of practical papers in Manipur University; Assam University curriculum also includes internet searching as a part of practical paper. Creation of Digital Documents and Creation of Digital Library is also part of practical papers in Assam University. There are elective papers on E-Resource Management and Preservation in Mizoram University and Assam University. A separate paper on Information Literacy is available in Mizoram University curriculum.

Most of the universities offer optional papers/parts of paper for different types of library systems. this also helps the students to develop their knowledge in depth about a particular type of library system according to their own choice or interest. Manipur university provides a list of options under "Elective Information System" such as business, legal, industrial, health sciences, agricultural etc.. information systems.

Practice on operating systems, word processing packages, database design using library software are common in all the university curricula. Job Diary, Library tour and projects are also covered by the curriculum of all the universities.

With the growing needs and requirements of the users in diversified areas it is not possible for a single library to satisfy all the needs of all user groups; in the same way with emerging trend of specialization it is not possible for a single professional also to serve all the user groups. This creates demand on the curriculum to design it to equip professionals to meet specific user groups. But in a area like North East, with limited employment opportunities for the students, the specialization should not limit the opportunities even more for the students. So the responsibility with the LIS educators are far increasing to design the curriculum in such a way so that to equip students with all the tools and techniques so that they can serve in all capacities and in all types of library systems.

CONCLUSION

Looking into the diversified job opportunities for the LIS professionals in various libraries and information systems attached to organizations and institutions from different sectors, it becomes very difficult for the LIS educators to design a course structure which would prepare the students to work in various organizational set-up; along with maintaining the short duration of the course. Within the short duration of formal education the course structure must be able to prepare the students to hold a strong position among the competitors in the field as well as guide the students for further professional development and continuous learning. LIS graduates must be aware of the competencies required for various job categories and also with the additional skills which can upgrade their status and keep them a step ahead of other job seekers.

REFERENCES

1. Ajeemsha S, Madhusudhan M. Competencies for lis professionals in the working environment: analysis and dimensions. *International journal of library and information studies*. 2012;2(4): 18.
2. Tanloet P, Tuamsuk K. Core Competencies for Information Professionals of Thai Academic Libraries In the Next Decade (A.D. 2010-2019),

- Asia-Pacific Conference Library & Information Education & Practice. 2011;43:122-129.
3. Canadian Association of Research Libraries. Core competencies for 21st century CARL librarians. 2010.
 4. Kumar B. Employability of Library and Information Science Graduates: Competencies Expected versus Taught—A Case Study. *DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology*. 2010;30(5): 74-82.
 5. American Library Association. *ALA's Core Competences of Librarianship*. 2009.
 6. National Knowledge commission. *Libraries :Gateways to knowledge*. 2007.
 7. Special Libraries Association. *Competencies for Information Professionals of the 21st Century*. June 2003
 8. Corral S. Developing models of professional competence : the 6th World conference on Continuing Professional Development and Workplace learning for the library and Information professionals. 2005;26-40 .