

Study of Employability and Needed Skills for LIS Graduates

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the employability of LIS graduates, its trend, and the skills needed to enhance employability. It is based on a study conducted on the employability of LIS graduates of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda over a period of ten years. Findings show that employability of LIS graduates is nearly 100 %. Employability trends can be traced to changes in the nature of employers, salary and designation in recent years. Further, communication skills and IT skills are found to be very indispensable employability skills that the LIS graduates should possess. This finding has implications towards regular revamping of LIS curriculum design in a way that would enable the LIS graduates to meet the expectations of changing information job market.

Keywords: Employability, employability skills, employability trend, LIS graduates

1. INTRODUCTION

Library and information science (LIS) schools throughout the world are increasingly challenged to develop such human resources who could fit the changing information environment. Today, LIS job market, driven by social and technological changes, calls for a new cadre of skilled and competent professionals to deliver information effectively to all. India, one of the rapidly growing economies of the world, needs to be concerned about this trend and must focus on quality LIS education. The LIS schools are required to appraise the employability status of their products in the job market and accordingly develop new competencies to enhance employability of their LIS graduates. A review of trends relating to employability of LIS professionals on regular basis needs to be done to understand the employability status of the graduates and their relevance; changing requirements of the job market; and the corresponding changes to be made in the curriculum.

1.1 LIS Education in India

During its more than 100 years of journey, LIS education in India has witnessed many revolutionary changes. Once started as a vocational library course, it has now transformed into a fully-fledged library and information science discipline incorporating various multidisciplinary ideas and emerging information and telecommunication technologies that can withstand the challenges thrown upon by the digital environment.

Most of the library schools in India have redesigned their curriculum several times to accommodate the contemporary information management practices. No longer, the libraries are required to perform traditional jobs only. An array of modern practices and services based on technology are implemented in the recent past which actually transitioned the libraries in India and also helped in elevating the status of LIS professionals to some extent. Efforts have been made to adapt the basic framework for LIS courses as well as the model curriculum prescribed by the Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) of UGC (University Grant Commission, 2001)¹ by most of the LIS schools. A balance between traditional and technological components is observed in their syllabi to fulfill the objectives to develop both core professional skills and IT skills among the LIS job aspirants.

At present there are various levels of LIS education starting from one year basic bachelor of LIS and one year master in LIS degree programme to higher level research programs in LIS are being imparted mostly in university-level institutions, in few training institutes, library associations, etc. A survey of websites of Indian universities reveals around 120 universities offer one year BLIS, 70 offer one year MLIS, 21 offer two year integrated MLIS, 16 offer MPhil and 63 offer PhD programmes. The passed-out students from these large number of universities constitute the available human resources every year and expected to be absorbed in the LIS job market.

1.2 Employability of LIS Graduates

It is undoubted that to be employable in the today's libraries and information centres the LIS graduates have to equip themselves with the necessary advanced knowledge, skills and attitudes. However employability of LIS graduates in India is governed by a number of factors. First, India, being a populous country and the largest democracy of the world, requires huge number of libraries and information centres which can deliver information for the inclusive development of all the citizens. Demand for an equally large number of LIS professionals is there to manage these libraries located in academic, industrial, and government sectors. Further, libraries exist in many forms: many with just a solo post to run the show on one-man-ship basis to a large number of specialised positions to extend an array of information services. A glance at the employment portals suggests that there is an increasing need of LIS professionals to manage libraries of all sizes and forms. Second, if one looks at the supply side, there is an unplanned proliferation of library schools and many offer LIS education without any heed to accreditation⁷. Curriculum designing is inefficient in many schools since they hardly make effort to keep pace with the changing competencies owing to development in ICT, interdisciplinary research, and diverse user expectations. Further, the problem becomes more complex when these schools produce surplus number of graduates than the required manpower. Then, obviously one would question: Are the graduates coming out from these schools employable? Since employers expect the job aspirants to be equipped with the skills suitable to the changing information environment doubts are raised about the quality of LIS graduates; of them how many could grab the opportunity.

To deal with the above situation implications are there for the LIS educators to design the curricula which can develop the necessary knowledge and skills. At the same time the LIS professionals should be aware of the changing job requirements and should learn to build up certain competencies not only to be employable but also to maintain the job as well as to contribute qualitatively towards the LIS profession.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of literature on employability of LIS graduates reports that a sizeable number of studies have been carried out to explore employability skills, compatibility of LIS education and employability, employers' expectations, employability trends and so on.

Okamoto & Polger⁵ carried out a content analysis of 149 job advertisements meant for Canadian and American academic libraries and found that

marketing and promotional skills; responsibilities such as public relations/liaison; outreach activities; and web communications are increasingly important employability skills for academic librarians.

Opinion of LIS professionals in Pakistan in relation to the LIS curricula and its relevance to market needs was analysed by Warraich & Ameen.⁸ The findings show that analytical capabilities, decision-making skills, technological skills, and communication skills, are indispensable to enhance the employability of LIS professionals. But the challenge lies in translating these skills into curricula and its proper implementation to transfer them among students. This finding has gathered support from findings of similar studies like that of Buarki, Hepworth & Murray¹, Safahieh & Asemi⁶, and Missingham⁴. Communication skills and ICT skills have been recognised as essential qualities for LIS graduates' employment as found in these studies.

Krishankumar & Sharma³ pointed out some of the major issues that affect the employability of fresh LIS graduate. (1) internal promotion policy, (2) proxy librarians-teachers are made as librarians and (3) entry of non- professionals (IT professionals) into professional positions

Chakravarty & Sarkhel² studied the compatibility of LIS education with the today's market demand for LIS professionals in India and found that there is a gap between them. Lack of placement cell and medium of instruction often proved to be major hindrances in getting jobs. Unlike other professional courses LIS course providers rarely offer any placement opportunity. Further, LIS students with non-English-medium schooling background do not fare well in the job market as the LIS job world has become more sophisticated where communication skills matter much. Career counseling and placement opportunities for passed out students; industry-LIS interface; development of soft skill and information literacy as a part of LIS curriculum; and better infrastructure to impart core and technological skills are some of the recommendations made by the authors to enhance employability of LIS graduates.

A synthesis of these reviews provides an understanding that studies on employability of LIS graduates were mostly conducted either to find the employability skills in current context or to explore the gap between the LIS curricula and the market needs; and to provide an insight into the employability trend which has been affected by certain issues as raised by experts. However these studies could not help much in understanding the employability of LIS graduates of any particular Indian library school. Thus the present study is an attempt to find out the employability of LIS graduates of Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda which has been taken as the sample for conducting this study.

3. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present study are to:

- Find out employability of LIS graduates of Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda
- Explore the employability trends of LIS graduates
- Explore the employability skills
- Suggest how to enhance employability of LIS graduates

4. METHODOLOGY

The present study was based on a survey of fresh LIS graduates. A total of 84 students, who completed their Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree course during 10 academic years (from 2003-04 to 2012-13) and graduated from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara were taken in this study. These passed out students took jobs in different library and information centres at local, state and national level. All of them, i.e., 84 fresh LIS graduates were the target population and at the same time they also constituted the sample group. Data for the study was collected in two phases: Phase 1: Data on first employment of the fresh LIS graduates was collected from the records maintained in the Dept. of Library and Information science, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. As it is a continuing trend that the passed out students immediately get employed, it is easy to track and keep their employment details when they are still in contact with their alma mater. However, employment details of 79 out of 84 LIS passed out graduates could be collected for the study. The rest, five graduates could not get back to the department regarding their employment information. Therefore, employment details of 79 graduates were collected to explore the employability of these LIS graduates. Phase 2: To examine the trend in employability and to explore the employability skills a follow up survey was carried out. However, all the passed out LIS graduates of ten years could not be contacted for this round of data collection.

A brief structured questionnaire was designed to administer among the LIS graduates who have moved on in their career. In phase 2, data from the LIS graduates was collected mainly through e-mail contacts maintained in the department records. In some cases data was collected personally from the participants and phone call was made for follow up as well as for updating data. Although the questionnaires were distributed among all the 79 LIS graduates through e-mail, only few i.e., 40 responded to that.

The scope of the present study is to explore the employability of LIS graduates through the analysis of employment details of LIS graduates,

who have passed out the MLIS degree course from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda over a period of ten years only.

5. ANALYSIS

Following four aspects have been analysed: (a) LIS graduates profile, (b) Employability of LIS graduates; (c) Employability trends of LIS graduates and (d) Employability skills.

5.1 LIS Graduates Profile

Demographic information of a total of 84 MLIS students, passed out during the ten academic years 2003-04 to 2012-13 from the Dept. of Library and Information science, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda is presented. Table 1. The ratio of female students is more than the male students in the LIS department. There were 60 (71 %) female students while male students were 24 (29 %) of the total passed out students. It can be interpreted that librarianship is a preferred profession among the female students than the male students.

5.2 Employability of LIS Graduates

Employment data about the LIS graduates shows that they had joined the profession shortly after their course completion. Most of them got jobs immediately after they passed out. Many got the privilege of securing jobs even when their MLIS degree result was yet to be declared. Majority were absorbed within one or two months after they completed their graduation. This trend is observed throughout the tenure of ten years. This fact can be interpreted that employability of LIS graduates is high and there is a better scope for them in the LIS job market in India. Table 2 provides details of the first job taken up by the fresh LIS graduates in different types of libraries.

Table 1. Total no. of LIS graduates during the years 2003-04 to 2012-13

S. No.	Academic year	Female	Male	Total no. of students
1	2003-04	3	2	5
2	2004-05	4	1	5
3	2005-06	3	2	5
4	2006-07	6	4	10
5	2007-08	8	1	9
6	2008-09	10	0	10
7	2009-10	8	2	10
8	2010-11	5	5	10
9	2011-12	5	5	10
10	2012-13	8	2	10
Total		60 (71 %)	24 (29 %)	84 (100 %)

Table 2. Details of first employment of the LIS graduates

S. No.	Year of passing	No. of employed students out of total	Employment in different types of libraries						Designation*	Salary range
			School library	College library	University library	Higher Ed. Institutes	Public sector library	Private/ industrial sector library		
1	2004	5 (5)			1		1	3	L	Rs. 4000-6000
2	2005	5 (5)	3					2	L, LA	Rs. 4500-8000
3	2006	4 (5)					1	3	L, DO	Rs. 5000-10000
4	2007	9 (10)	1	3		3		2	L, LA	Rs. 5000-12000
5	2008	9 (9)	3	2	1		2	1	L, AL, LA	Rs. 8000-12000
6	2009	10 (10)	4	2	1		2	1	L, AL, LA	Rs. 8000-14000
7	2010	9 (10)	2	5	1	1			L, AL, LA, LT	Rs. 8000-16000
8	2011	9 (10)	2	5	1			1	L, AL, LA, LT	Rs. 8000-16000
9	2012	10 (10)	2	5		3			L, AL, LA LT	Rs. 8000-16000
10	2013	9 (10)	1	4		4			L, AL, LA LT	Rs. 8000-18000
Total		79 (84)	18	26	5	11	6	13		

* L: Librarian; AL: Assistant Librarian; DO: Documentation Officer; LA: Library Assistant; LT: Library Trainee

From Table 2, it is evident that out of total 84 LIS graduates 79, i.e., 94 % had secured jobs as per record. These students had got their first job immediately within two/three months after their result was out. Details of 5 graduates only were not available. Table 2 also shows the number of graduates employed in different types of libraries which are divided into six categories, i.e., libraries in school, college, university, higher educational institutes, public sector and private sector. Out of the total 79, eighteen were employed in school libraries; 26 in libraries of engineering college, medical college, management college, pharmacy college, etc.; 5 in university libraries; 11 in libraries of higher educational institutes like IIMs, IITs, DA IICT, etc.; and 6 graduates had their first jobs in public sector libraries including government run libraries and state-sponsored research libraries. The rest 13 graduates out of total employed graduates got absorbed in private sector libraries such as Paramount, L&T, ONGC, TCS, and others. The LIS graduates were appointed under various designations (Table 2). Librarian (L), Assistant Librarian (AL), Library Assistant (LA), Documentation Officer (DO) were the first job designations for most of the LIS graduates and later on many of them also employed as Library Trainee (LT). First salary drawn by these graduates ranged from Rs. 4000 to 10000 during the years 2004-2006, Rs. 8000 to 12000 during the years 2007-10 and from 2011 onwards it was Rs. 8000 to 18000 per month. Over the years, there is a slight improvement in salary drawn by fresh graduates.

5.3 Employability Trends of LIS Graduates

To explore the employability trends of LIS graduates passed out from the university over the years, a comparison of the job profile of the earlier batches and that of the recent batches with respect to employers, job designation, and salary drawn has been provided as follows

5.3.1 Trends with Respect to Employers

Table 2 provides an understanding that schools and private industrial organisations in and around the city were the major employers in the period 2004 to 2006. Mostly job opportunities were there either in school libraries or in libraries of private industrial organisations, i.e., 3 and 8 respectively out of a total of 14 employed graduates during those years. Although employment scope in private industrial organisations was drastically declined thereafter, but school libraries still have recruitment offers for LIS graduates.

Further, as there was a growth in the number of colleges and higher educational institutes, job opportunities for the graduates have increased over the years. At present, majority of the LIS students take jobs in these places immediately after they pass out. Figure 1 shows the employment trends of LIS graduates through the percentage analysis of total employment in different categories of libraries. College libraries emerged as the major employer with 33 % followed by school libraries which constitute 23 % of total employment. Only 6 % of total LIS graduates got jobs in university libraries.

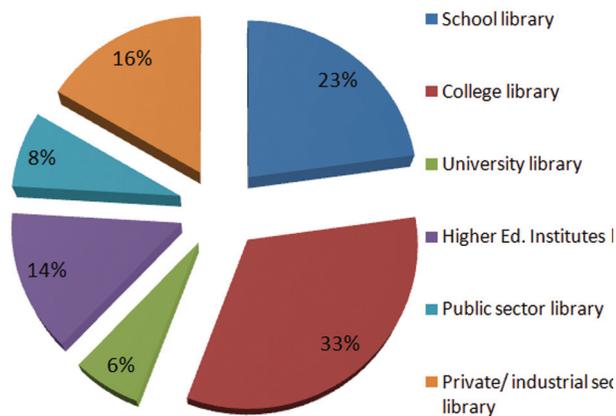


Figure 1. Employment trends of LIS graduates with respect to employers

5.3.2 Trends with Respect to Job Designation

The schools and the industrial organisations, which were viewed as the major sources of employment a decade back, ironically were having just a lone position as Librarian (L) to manage their libraries single-handedly. Assistant Librarian (AL) and Library Assistant (LA) were the other job designation of LIS graduates in libraries where more than one position existed. Later on employment opportunities for the graduates went better-off as newly established colleges and higher educational institutes of national importance started to offer more number of LIS positions. Apart from these designations the term ‘Library Trainee’ (LT) has been increasingly used recently to appoint fresh LIS graduates (21 of them) in institutes like IIMs, IITs, NID, INFLIBNET, DA IICT, and others.

5.3.3 Trends with Respect to Salary Drawn

The first salary drawn by the graduates during the years 2004 to 2007 was not at very attractive i.e., at that time a graduate could get a job with a minimum of Rs. 4000 and the maximum was Rs.10000. Thereafter, when the technical colleges and higher educational institutes of national importance appeared in the picture this development was actually instrumental in realising a decent pay for librarians. Therefore, during the years 2008 to 2013 the minimum salary was Rs. 8000 and the maximum was Rs. 18000. Mostly this amount of salary was offered by good schools, universities, institutes like IITs, IIMs and DA IICT. However, libraries of private colleges and organisations still do not offer good salary. During the years 2011-2013, most of the fresh LIS graduates (twelve of them) were offered a salary of Rs. 16000 or more.

5.4 Employability Skills

For better employment, certain skills are expected from the job aspirants. Therefore, to explore the employability skills the young professionals one questionnaire was developed to gather data on

their perception on employability skills and was administered among all the 79 LIS graduates who have now moved on in their career. 40 out of 79 LIS graduates responded to the questionnaire. The collected data helped to explore a number of professional skills as well as generic skills that are required to be employable in today’s libraries and information centres. Table 3 presents the perception of these LIS professionals on employability skills. These skills are categorised under seven broad groups: Communication skills; good academic record; professional skills; IT skills; research skills; customer service; and interpersonal skills.

Analysis of data indicates that generic skills or soft skills like communication skill was emerged as the most sought after employability skill followed by IT skills. Presentation skills, proficiency in English language and interview skill are viewed as the most important skill by all 40 (100 %) respondents. Today since most libraries operate with IT applications, competencies in IT skills are very much essential for LIS graduates to grab good offer. Equally important are the professional skills (90 %) which equip them with technical competencies to systematically organise knowledge in libraries through proper classification, cataloguing, indexing, collection management, etc.

Table 3. Perception of LIS professionals on employability skills

S. No.	Employability skills	No. of responses (%)
1.	Communication skills (presentation skills, proficiency in English language, interview skills)	40 (100 %)
2.	Subject knowledge (good academic record)	36 (90 %)
3.	Professional skills (cataloguing / classification / indexing, collection management, etc.),	36 (90 %)
4.	IT skills (online searching & retrieval, digitalisation, database management, web- page design, etc.)	38 (95 %)
5.	Research skill (report/ review writing)	26 (65 %)
6.	Customer services (help to users, outreach, creating awareness about information literacy)	26 (65 %)
7.	Interpersonal skills (team work, leadership, problem solving aptitude, interaction with management/ users)	32 (80 %)

The other important skills are: Good understanding about the subject domain; ability to serve users in innovative ways; research aptitude for information analysis and writing research reports and reviews; and interpersonal skills necessary for good organisational behavior, aptitude for team work and problem solving. The respondents were of the view that the above mentioned skills are very imperative for the LIS professionals to seek and maintain good jobs in today's competitive information job market.

6. FINDINGS

On the basis of the above analysis of data on employability of LIS graduates the following observations have been emerged:

- Employability of LIS graduates of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda is satisfactory. The placement of these graduates is nearly hundred percent and they get jobs immediately after they graduated. This finding has implications to the LIS curriculum of the university. The curriculum gets revised regularly incorporating the latest developments in the LIS field and its design reflects the competencies and skills as per the expectations of the job market. Efforts are being made to implement these skills through seminar presentation, topical assignment, group discussion, team work oriented project, practical work in real library situation, web-page designing, extensive hands on training in database management and creation of digital libraries through proprietary and open source library management software.
- Further employability of LIS graduates can also be linked to the fact that the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda is the only English medium university in the state of Gujarat and hence its LIS graduates have an edge over their competitors from other universities in Gujarat when it comes to job prospects in the state-level.
- Academic institutions emerged as the major employment source. It is a trend that most of the graduates get their first jobs in academic libraries although in earlier years libraries of private sector were the leading employers. The designation for the library jobs offered to the LIS graduates differ from library to library. The most traditional one is 'Librarian' followed by Assistant librarian. Library trainee which is relatively a new designation concept is increasingly used now to accommodate fresh LIS graduates for a fixed period on temporary basis. This development finds reason in government policy that most of the sanctioned library posts are not filled up regularly and additional posts are not created

to handle increasing workload in libraries on permanent basis. Thus the employers have adopted this kind of temporary arrangement.

- Salary drawn by the LIS graduates was not satisfactory in the beginning years of the sample period of the study. Lower pay was associated with employment in private sector libraries. This situation improved over years as growing number of academic institutions started to offer good salary to the librarians as per their teachers. This development in salary could be attributed to the fact that young LIS professionals with right attitude and IT skills entered the profession which in turn changed the stereotype of librarians and helped in creating awareness about the worth of the LIS profession.
- Good communication skill is found to be very indispensable to enhance employability of LIS professionals. Proficiency in spoken English and clarity in presentation help in getting good placement. The IT skills are also indisputably the crucial skill that the LIS graduates should possess to meet the challenges of changing information job market. Further demonstration of professional competencies, analytical capabilities, practical problem solving, etc. is expected from the LIS graduates and regarded as equally important employability skills which the LIS graduates should acquire.

7. GENERAL SUGGESTIONS TO ENHANCE EMPLOYABILITY

In the light of the above analysis of data; experience of the author as a teaching faculty in LIS; and the review of related literature in the area the following suggestions are made to enhance employability.

- LIS curriculum generally gets revised on regular interval by all the Indian universities to accommodate new developments in the field. However theoretical knowledge of academic subject is not sufficient for the LIS job aspirants to survive; they have to develop certain important employability skills such as communication and ICT skills. Thus the LIS schools have to accept the challenge of how to incorporate these skills into the curriculum design and ensure its proper implementation so that those can be transferred to the students. To impart soft skills among the students specially designed workshop/programs should be an important aspect of academic schedule.
- Further the LIS schools should practice regular curriculum audit and gap analysis exercises at the time the syllabus is revised. Extensive surveys should be conducted to evaluate the

current employment need and accordingly market oriented competencies should be developed.

- Industry-LIS interface which provides a platform to assess employers' needs, unfortunately generally does not constitute a part of LIS curriculum. However this kind of interface in any form should be encouraged so that LIS departments can make their students aware of the cutting edge of the stock-of-trade and prepare them to develop suitable competencies accordingly.
- The LIS schools rarely make any aggressive attempt for placement of their students unlike other professional courses. Establishment of placement cell and career counseling for LIS students should be considered as an obligation for the LIS schools. Fresh LIS graduates should not only look for the employment possibilities from known sources (for example only in academic libraries as in this study) rather they should also get exposure to explore other profitable and exciting avenues such as big corporate houses, publication houses, research and statistical institutes, multinational organisations, etc.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The LIS course like any other professional courses would find takers, if it assures the graduates' employability. Through this study it is concluded that employability of LIS graduates is promising. Nevertheless to be employable LIS graduates need to develop certain set of market oriented and multi dimensional skills to meet the changing demands of the information job market. As communication skills; professional competencies; analytical capabilities; problem solving skills; and ICT skills are considered to be the important employability skills, the LIS schools should take note of this development and revamp their curriculum in such a way that it will enable the LIS products to meet the expectations of the job market.

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