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## Perception of Indian LIS Faculty about the importance of Service related Competencies: An Analytical Study

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### Abstract

*Libraries and information centers are service oriented institutions. These provide different types of services to the library patrons who are in need of information. However, these competencies change with the changes brought about by the revolution brought about by technological developments. Social, educational, economic or even cultural changes also influence the competencies of library and information science professionals. Present paper highlights the importance of different competencies related to the service sector of library and information centers as perceived by the faculty concerned with teaching in the departments of library and information science departments in India. Questionnaire method is followed for achieving Results reveal that all the six enumerated competencies viz., (i) Information Discovery Tools, (ii) Library Networks and Consortia, (iii) On-line Reference & Information Service, (iv) Repackaging and Consolidation, (v) Records Management and (vi) Knowledge Management are perceived by faculty members as important competencies.*

### Keywords

Competencies; Library Services; Perception; Library and information science profession.

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## INTRODUCTION

Libraries are service oriented institutions having the objective to provide right information to the right person at the right time in the right amount and in the right form and format. Libraries as repositories of knowledge are concerned with acquiring information sources available in multiple formats, organize these sources of information, preserve these materials for the present and future generations and ultimately make the information available in these sources to those who are in need of it. Services generated in libraries are due to the efforts of library and information professionals who apply their knowledge and skills to maximum extent for the satisfaction of their customers. Services provided by libraries and information centers have gained more importance in the present era as people have realized the importance of information and knowledge for their overall progress and prosperity. Information has itself attained importance of valuable resources like air, water, food or shelter. Keeping in view the importance of information, libraries and information centers are supposed to provide pinpointed, exhaustive and expeditious information to the library patrons. As libraries are service oriented institutions, their existence greatly depends upon the satisfaction of the clientele. In the dynamic and ever-changing environment libraries have to provide services based on cutting edge technologies using latest tools and techniques. Virtual Reference Services, Digital products like wikis, podcasting, blogs etc., can be introduced in libraries and information centers. Digital libraries, networks and consortia can be exploited by LIS professionals for fulfilling the information needs of their consumers. These developments in the information landscape have direct impact on the curriculum being taught in library and information science schools.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Providing effective and efficient library and information services requires a certain set of skills, knowledge and competencies. Competencies have been defined as a generic set of knowledge, skills or attitude of a person that is casually related to effective behavior as demonstrated through external performance criteria (Griffiths and King, 1986). Competencies are essential for the survival and sustainability of any profession and librarianship is not an exception (Jones, 2003). In the introduction to the "Competencies for information professionals of

the 21st Century” developed by the Special Library Association, Jones (2003, p. 12) pointed out that “it is our unique competencies that make our profession indispensable to our communities, clients and constituencies” .Buttler and Mont (1996) identified knowledge of basic reference sources, collection management and conducting a reference interview as essential competencies of professionals. In the opinion of Gorman and Corbet (2003) competencies are an essential component in understanding the evolution of a profession and, educationally, in developing responsible professional education programs. Without clear guidelines on competencies, a profession is likely to get lost when marching toward an increasingly dynamic future. Today we lead our lives in a world where information and knowledge are momentous force in shaping society and require more sophisticated skills (Kannappanavar and Chidananda Swamy, 2005). There are a number of competency categories prevailing in the profession of librarianship. These categories are technical, managerial, technological or even related to the services offered by library and information centers. The National Knowledge Commission (2007) recommends the minimum skills required 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. Librarians in order to perform their professional duties need to be competent enough in all the professional spheres.

**OBJECTIVES**

As is evident from the literature review, providing effective and efficient services to the library patrons, library professionals need to be competent enough in different professional areas. Present study is focused on achieving following objectives

- To know the perception of faculty about the importance of competencies relevant for providing effective and efficient services to the library patrons.
- To suggest measures for inculcating these competencies among the faculty.

**METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE**

Questionnaire method is applied for conducting present study. Seven elements regarding technical competencies were identified and enumerated in the questionnaire. Faculty members were asked to rate their importance in LIS profession on a four point Likert scale with choices of “extremely important”, “very important”, “important”, or “not important”. Questionnaire was distributed among the sixty three faculty members of thirteen LIS departments in Northern India (Table.1). Fifty questionnaires were received and the data collected from faculty is analyzed statistically.

**Table 1: Faculty Status**

S.No	Name of institution	Faculty			Total
		Professors	Associate Professors	Assistant Professors	
1	University of Kashmir	1	x	5	6
2	Jammu University	2	x	2	4
3	Guru Nank Dev University	x	1	2	3
4	Punjab University	1	1	1	3
5	Punjabi University	2	1	1	4
6	Kurukshetra University	1	2	3	6
7	Delhi University	1	3	4	8
8	Aligarh Muslim University	1	4	2	7
9	Lucknow University	x	x	1	1
10	Banaras Hindu University	1	1	3	5
11	NISCAIR	2	1	3	6
12	BBAU Central University	2	1	2	5
13	IGNOU	1	1	3	5
Total		<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>63</b>

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Data collected from the respondents were incorporated into a SPSS statistical software file. The data were then analyzed using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. Findings from the analyzed data are presented under different headings as under:

**a) Information Discovery Tools**

In order to provide effective and efficient library services, library and information professionals are in need of through knowledge of information discovery tools. These may be the information sources belonging to different categories like primary, secondary or tertiary sources of information in either print or electronic sources. Information sources may be either freely available on internet or may be the proprietor based. LIP also requires evaluating different sources of information in order to know the authenticity and relevance of the information. Thus consulting a particular source of information requires a lot of knowledge and skills from LIP side. Information regarding particular topics can be discovered by using search engines and meta-search engines. So LIS professionals should be aware about the searching skills. How much important this competency regarding information discovery tools is essential for LIS profession from faculty point of view is indicated in Fig 1.

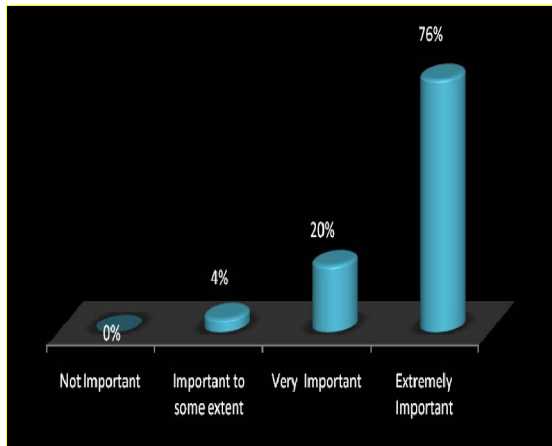


Fig 1

**b) Library Networks and Consortia**

For any library, attaining self sufficiency in the information sources has become a myth in the present information society. This is due to the information explosion, increasing demands from library patrons, inflation in the cost of reading materials and just like these other factors. Libraries throughout the world are cooperating with each other and are participating in the consortia in order to fulfill the information needs of the users. Faculty of library and information science were asked about the importance of knowledge and skills regarding library networks and consortia. Responses received indicate that majority of the faculty (58%) are treating it as extremely

important and 34% of respondents are of the view that it is very important in LIS profession (Fig 2).

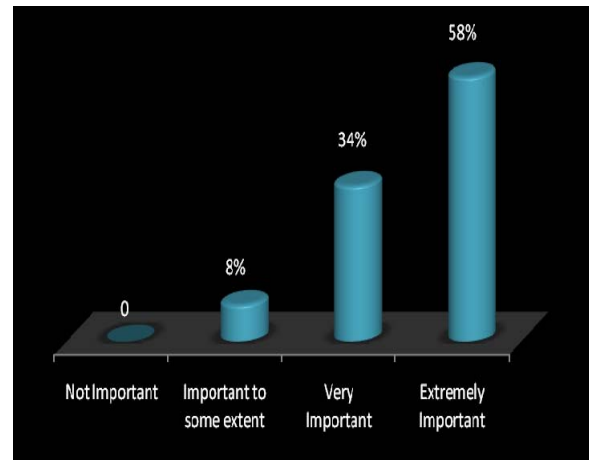


Fig 2

**c) On-line Reference & Information Service**

Reference services are regarded as the backbone of libraries and information centers. With the popularity of internet and other technological developments, libraries and information centers are using chat reference / virtual reference services / on-line reference services available to the library patrons. LIS professionals can provide reference services more quickly and in a cost efficient way with the aid of technology. However this requires knowledge and skills in the technologies associated with providing on-line reference services. LIS faculty when asked about the importance of competencies in providing on-line reference services gave different opinions. Majority of the respondents (46%) are of the view that these are extremely important and the same numbers of respondents have the opinion that these are very important for LIS professionals (Fig 3)

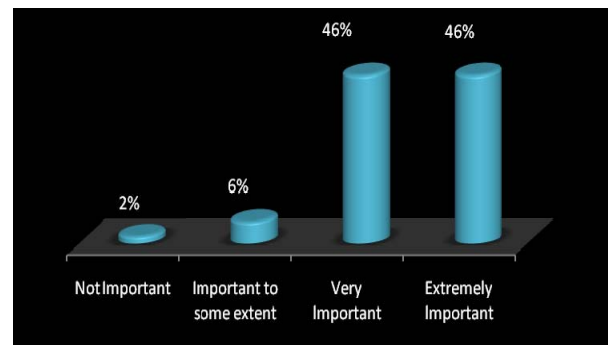


Fig 3

**d) Repackaging and Consolidation**

It is the responsibility and obligation on the part of Library and information science professionals to provide right information to the right user at the right time and in the right amount. Although libraries are providing indexing, abstracting and other such services, however due to information explosion, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary trends like factors compel library professionals to provide consolidation and repackaging services where evaluated information is condensed at one place and then provided to the user with the intention to facilitate the user to get relevant information with ease. How much important repackaging and consolidation is in the profession of library and information science from LIS faculty point of view is indicated in figure 4. It is evident that majority of the faculty (52%) are of the view that Repackaging and consolidation is extremely important and 32% perceive that it is very important in the profession of LIS.

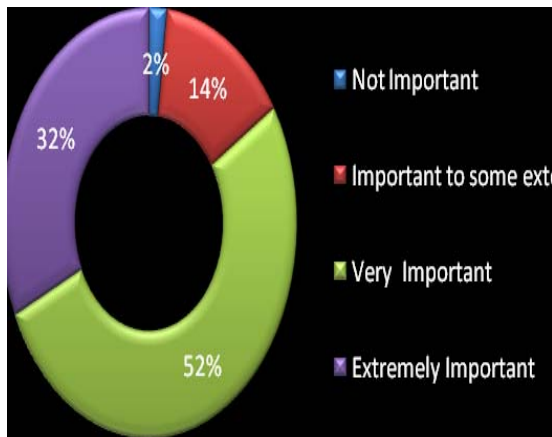


Fig 4

**e) Records Management**

Records Management is the practice of maintaining the records of an organization from the time they are created up to their eventual disposal. This may include classifying, storing, securing, and destruction (or in some cases, archival preservation) of records. Usually followed by special libraries and information centers, Records management is applicable in every organization. What is the importance of records management in libraries and information centers from the faculty point of view is shown in figure 3. It is evident from the figure that majority of the faculty (48%) are holding the view that Records management is very important in the profession of library and

information science. 30% of faculty are having perception that RM is extremely important (Fig.5).

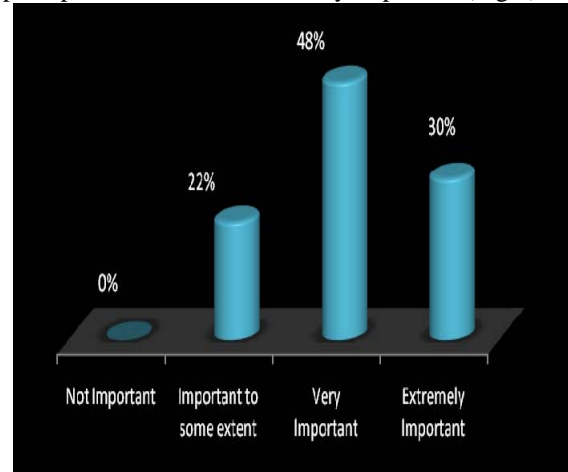


Fig 5

**f) Knowledge Management**

Knowledge management has attained an important place in the profession of LIS. Knowledge management deals with organizing both tacit and explicit knowledge in an organization with the objective to utilize it in a proper way. Library professionals apply different models of knowledge management. How LIS professionals feel about the importance of knowledge management is depicted in Fig 6. It is evident that majority of faculty (44%) hold the view that it is extremely important while 38% perceive it as very important in the profession of LIS.

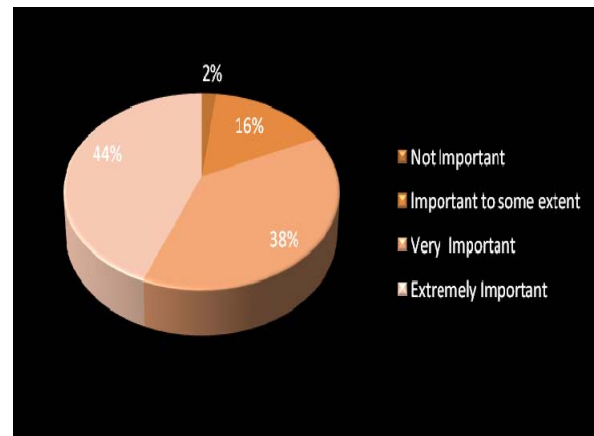


Fig 6

**Ranking of Competencies**

When mean value of these individual competencies is taken into consideration, the ranks achieved in terms of importance is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Service Competencies**

Rank	Service Competency Elements	Responses				Mean Score
		Not Important	Important to Some Extent	Very Important	Extremely Important	
1	Information Discovery Tools	0	2(4)	10(20)	38(76)	3.72
2	Library Networks and Consortia	0	4(8)	17(34)	29(58)	3.5
3	On-line Reference & Information Service	1(2)	3(6)	23(46)	23(46)	3.24
4	Repackaging and Consolidation	1(2)	7(14)	26(52)	16(32)	3.14
5	Records Management	0	11(22)	24(48)	15(30)	3.08
6	Knowledge Management	1(2)	8(16)	19(38)	22(44)	3.04

*Note: Data in parenthesis indicate percentage*

Competency elements are arranged according to the descending order based on the mean scores (Table 2). Of six competencies belonging to the service category, “*Information Discovery Tools*” with mean score 3.72 is at the first rank. Next came “*Library Networks and Consortia*”(3.52). This is closely followed by *on-line Reference and Information Services* (3.24), *Repackaging and Consolidation* (3.14), *Records Management* (3.08) and *Knowledge Management* having mean score of 3.04. These observations reveal the importance of these competency elements in the profession of library and information science and thus should be given enough space in the curriculum. From the finding of this study it is clear that all these competencies related to providing qualitative services must be given due place in the LIS curriculum..

**CONCLUSION**

Library and information science is a service oriented profession with the aim of providing information to users effectively and efficiently. Providing effective and efficient services to the library patrons depends upon the competencies and capabilities of the persons who are engaged in libraries for providing different services. Due to penetration of ICT in all the facets of libraries and information centers, mode of operations and mode of providing information services to library patrons has changed a lot. Keeping in view these developments in libraries and information centers, it is appropriate for library and information science departments to redesign and modify the curriculum with the aim to make it relevant for present day libraries and information centers. It is also appropriate that library associations, library organizations and library science departments should organize such programs whereby those who are working in libraries and information

centers will get an opportunity to refresh their existing knowledge and ass such will update their skills and competencies. These programs may take the form of seminars, conferences, workshops etc. Participants of these events should get full opportunity to express their views and on the basis of the feedback provided by the participants, new strategies must be designed for future events.

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