



Shaping Qualitative Library Services: Essential Skills for LIS Professionals

Dr. Prajakta Mhaprolkar

Librarian

College of Home Science Nirmala Niketan New, Marine Lines, Mumbai 400020

Corresponding Author – Dr. Prajakta Mhaprolkar

DOI - 10.5281/zenodo.17267686

Abstract:

The role of Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades due to the dynamic nature of the information landscape. Traditional responsibilities such as cataloguing, classification, and reference services, while still important, are no longer sufficient to meet the expectations of diverse user communities. Today, LIS professionals are expected to combine **traditional library expertise** with modern competencies in technology, research support, management, communication, and ethical practices. The integration of **information and communication technologies (ICTs)**, the growing demand for **user-centered services**, and the rise of **digital and open access resources** have expanded the scope of professional skills required in libraries. This paper examines the essential skills that enable LIS professionals to provide **qualitative and innovative library services**, including information management, technological literacy, research and analytical ability, communication and interpersonal competence, managerial and leadership capacity, ethical and legal awareness, and the commitment to lifelong learning. By developing and applying these skills, LIS professionals can enhance the effectiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability of library services, thereby ensuring that libraries continue to function as vital centers of knowledge, learning, and community engagement in the digital age.

Keywords: LIS Professionals, Professional Skills, Qualitative Library Services, Information Management, Technological Competencies, Lifelong Learning, User-Centered Services

Introduction:

Libraries have always played a central role in the preservation, dissemination, and advancement of knowledge (Emerald Publishing, 2022). They function not only as repositories of books and information but also as dynamic learning environments and community hubs that support education, research, innovation, and cultural development. In this context, the quality and effectiveness of library services are deeply influenced by the competencies, skills, and professional attitudes of Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals.

Traditionally, LIS professionals were primarily responsible for activities such as cataloguing, classification, reference services, and collection management. While these functions continue to be essential, the digital revolution has redefined the scope of their responsibilities (Hiring Librarians, 2023). The widespread adoption of ICTs, the emergence of digital libraries and institutional repositories, the growing significance of open access publishing, and the increased reliance on online research tools have expanded the skills required of LIS professionals (Subaveerapandiyan et al., 2025).

Moreover, the modern library user is more diverse, informed, and demanding. Users

today expect quick, seamless, and personalized access to information resources. They also seek guidance in developing information literacy skills, evaluating resources, and navigating the challenges of an information-overloaded digital environment (Vox, 2023). To meet these expectations, LIS professionals must combine traditional practices with competencies in digital literacy, research skills, communication, management, and ethical awareness (D'Souza, 2024).

Moreover, the modern library user is **more diverse, informed, and demanding**. Users today expect quick, seamless, and personalized access to information resources. They also seek guidance in developing information literacy skills, evaluating resources, and navigating the challenges of an **information-overloaded digital environment**. To meet these expectations, LIS professionals must combine traditional library practices with **modern competencies** in digital literacy, research and analytical skills, communication and interpersonal engagement, management and leadership, and ethical and legal awareness.

In addition, libraries are increasingly recognized as **agents of social change and community development**. They provide inclusive spaces for lifelong learning, support marginalized groups, and promote digital equity by bridging the information gap. This broader social role demands that LIS professionals be adaptable, empathetic, and capable of engaging with communities beyond academic or research settings.

This paper therefore examines the **key professional skills necessary for LIS professionals** in the 21st century to ensure qualitative, innovative, and user-centered services. By highlighting the integration of **traditional expertise with emerging competencies**, it underscores the importance

of continuous professional development and adaptability in sustaining the relevance of libraries in the digital age.

Recent Academic and Professional Studies (2024–2025):

- **Gamification in Indian Academic Libraries (July 2025):** A survey-based study conducted across academic institutions in India explores **gamification**—using game-like elements to enhance user engagement in library services such as information literacy and research consultations. While responses indicate generally positive attitudes, challenges like insufficient staff expertise, infrastructure, and funding were identified. This underscores emerging needs for technology training and resource allocation (Subaveerapandiyan et al., 2025; Halder, 2025).
- **AI-Powered Assistive Tech in Special Libraries (Nov 2024):** Research focuses on how AI tools—like text-to-speech systems and navigation aids—can dramatically improve accessibility in libraries for patrons with physical disabilities. The study emphasizes increased autonomy and engagement but also flags privacy and ethical concerns, highlighting the need for ethical digital skills among LIS professionals (Shivali & Paul, 2024; Brotosaputro, Supriyadi, & Jones, 2024).
- **AI Awareness in Karnataka Libraries:** A survey of library professionals in Karnataka reports widespread use of AI tools such as plagiarism detection, grammar checks, and ChatGPT. Importantly, professionals expressed that AI will support—not replace—their work, underscoring the rising importance of

digital literacy and responsible tech integration (D'Souza, 2024).

- **Essential Competencies in the Digital Age—India (2022 data):** A comprehensive alumni survey of LIS graduates across India reveals five key skill areas: traditional library skills, research, computing, data management, and soft skills. Especially notable is the critical role of computing skills, library automation, digitization, and soft interpersonal skills (Emerald Publishing, 2022).
- **Stakeholder Priorities for New Librarians (U.S.):** A study involving U.S. library directors and MLIS stakeholders outlines vital competencies for new graduates: technological knowledge, marketing and outreach, professionalism, management and leadership, and communication. Over time, priorities shift toward financial planning, project management, professional development, and program evaluation—reflecting a trajectory from foundational to leadership-oriented skills (Hiring Librarians, 2023)

Core Professional Skills For LIS Professionals:

1. Information Management Skills:

At the foundation of library services lies the ability to manage information effectively. LIS professionals must master the principles of organization, classification, and retrieval of information so that users can access the right resources at the right time. This includes cataloguing and metadata creation, which allow resources to be systematically arranged and discovered across print and digital platforms. Knowledge organization, including the use of classification schemes like DDC and UDC,

enables efficient arrangement of information resources. In the digital era, professionals must also be adept at digital resource management, handling e-books, e-journals, databases, and institutional repositories. Strong information management skills ensure that libraries remain structured, reliable, and user-friendly knowledge centers (Emerald Publishing, 2022).

2. Technological Skills:

Technology has transformed libraries into hybrid and digital learning environments. LIS professionals are now expected to have a high level of digital literacy, which includes the ability to use and teach emerging technologies confidently. Proficiency in integrated library systems (ILS), library automation software, and database management systems is crucial for efficient day-to-day operations. Moreover, familiarity with digital repositories, open access platforms, and electronic resource management tools enables librarians to expand access beyond traditional collections. The adoption of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data analytics allows professionals to personalize services, predict user needs, and streamline operations. Thus, technological competency is no longer optional but a core requirement for ensuring innovative, accessible, and future-ready library services (D'Souza, 2024; Shivali & Paul, 2024)

3. Research and Analytical Skills:

As information specialists, LIS professionals are increasingly called upon to support academic and scholarly research. This requires them to be proficient in research methodologies, literature searching, bibliometrics, and impact analysis. They must be able to guide students, researchers, and faculty in identifying credible resources, evaluating the reliability of information, and

avoiding plagiarism. Analytical skills also help professionals to interpret usage data, assess collection development needs, and measure the impact of library programs. By possessing these skills, LIS professionals move beyond information custodianship and become active research partners, contributing to the advancement of knowledge creation within their institutions (Subaveerapandiyan et al., 2025).

4. Communication and Interpersonal Skills:

Qualitative library services are not solely about resources—they also depend on strong relationships between librarians and users. Communication and interpersonal skills are essential for understanding user needs, resolving queries, and fostering a welcoming library environment. LIS professionals must be able to communicate effectively in both oral and written forms, whether providing reference services, delivering library instruction, or designing outreach activities. Teaching skills are equally important, particularly in conducting information literacy programs that empower users to become independent learners. Moreover, interpersonal skills such as empathy, patience, and cultural sensitivity enable professionals to engage with diverse communities, ensuring inclusivity in library services (Vox, 2023)

5. Managerial and Leadership Skills:

Libraries function as organizations that require efficient management and visionary leadership. LIS professionals must develop skills in planning, budgeting, policy formulation, and staff supervision to ensure smooth operations. Leadership skills are particularly critical in times of change, such as implementing new technologies, designing user-centered spaces, or managing crises like funding cuts. Strategic leadership also involves advocating for libraries, collaborating with stakeholders, and aligning library goals

with institutional missions. Effective managers and leaders create sustainable and innovative services, ensuring that libraries continue to thrive in changing educational and technological environments (Hiring Librarians, 2023)

6. Ethical and Legal Awareness:

In a knowledge-driven society, ethical and legal awareness plays a vital role in maintaining professional integrity. LIS professionals must understand and apply copyright laws, intellectual property rights, licensing agreements, and data privacy regulations. They must also guide users in the ethical use of information, particularly in preventing plagiarism, respecting open access norms, and maintaining academic honesty. Ethical awareness further extends to inclusivity, neutrality, and providing equal access to information without discrimination. By adhering to legal and ethical standards, LIS professionals not only protect themselves and their institutions but also cultivate trust and respect among users (Broto Saputro et al., 2024)

7. Lifelong Learning and Adaptability:

The information landscape is in constant flux, with new technologies, platforms, and user expectations emerging rapidly. To remain relevant, LIS professionals must embrace a culture of lifelong learning and adaptability. This involves participating in professional development workshops, attending conferences, completing MOOCs, and engaging in research and networking. Adaptability also means being open to change—whether it involves transitioning from print to digital, adopting artificial intelligence tools, or responding to the evolving needs of digital-native users. Resilience, flexibility, and a proactive attitude ensure that LIS professionals can navigate uncertainties and continue to provide high-

quality, future-oriented services (Halder, 2025).

Strategies For Developing Professional Skills:

The continuous evolution of the information landscape requires LIS professionals to consistently update and refine their competencies. To provide qualitative and innovative library services, professionals must adopt structured strategies for skill enhancement and lifelong learning. Some of the most effective strategies include:

1. Regular Professional Development Programs and Workshops:

Organized training sessions, refresher courses, and hands-on workshops enable LIS professionals to stay updated with new technologies, trends, and service models. Professional development programs offered by universities, library associations, and government agencies provide opportunities to upgrade technical, managerial, and user-service skills in a systematic way (Emerald Publishing, 2022)

2. Collaboration with Academic Institutions and Research Bodies:

Collaboration fosters knowledge exchange and innovation. By working closely with academic institutions, LIS professionals can participate in joint projects, engage in applied research, and contribute to curriculum design for library and information science education. Partnerships with research bodies also help professionals acquire advanced analytical and scholarly skills that strengthen their role as research facilitators (Subaveerapandiyan et al., 2025)

3. Participation in Conferences, Seminars, and Webinars:

Attending professional gatherings exposes LIS professionals to the latest

developments in library science and related disciplines. Conferences and seminars allow for the sharing of best practices, case studies, and technological innovations. With the rise of digital communication, webinars have become an accessible platform for global networking and continuous learning, allowing professionals to gain insights from international experts without geographical limitations (Halder, 2025)

4. Engagement in Continuous Self-Learning through MOOCs and Online Certifications:

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and professional certification programs provide LIS professionals with flexible and cost-effective learning opportunities. Platforms such as Coursera, edX, and SWAYAM offer courses on topics ranging from data analytics and artificial intelligence to digital curation and research methodology. By engaging in self-paced learning, professionals can build niche skills aligned with their personal and institutional needs (D'Souza, 2024)

5. Networking through Professional Associations and Communities of Practice:

Professional associations such as IFLA, ALA, and national or regional library networks play a vital role in professional growth. Membership in such organizations facilitates access to resources, mentorship, and collaborative projects. Participation in communities of practice—both formal and informal—encourages knowledge sharing, problem-solving, and professional solidarity, all of which enhance competency development and innovation (Hiring Librarians, 2023)

Together, these strategies foster a culture of lifelong learning, adaptability, and professional excellence. By actively engaging in them, LIS professionals can ensure that their skills remain relevant and that library

services continue to meet the evolving demands of the digital age.

Impact On Qualitative Library Services:

The development of professional skills among LIS professionals has a direct and measurable impact on the quality of library services. Strong information management skills ensure accurate organization and quick retrieval of resources, while technological competencies expand access to digital and open resources. Enhanced research and analytical abilities improve academic support, guiding users toward credible and relevant information. Similarly, effective communication and interpersonal skills strengthen user engagement and satisfaction, creating a supportive learning environment. Managerial and leadership skills contribute to efficient administration and innovative service delivery, while ethical and legal awareness builds trust and ensures responsible use of information. Finally, a commitment to lifelong learning and adaptability enables LIS professionals to keep pace with evolving technologies and user expectations. Collectively, these skills transform libraries into vibrant, user-centered spaces that promote inclusivity, knowledge sharing, and lifelong learning (Shivali & Paul, 2024; Vox, 2023).

Recent Real-World Examples From News Sources:

- **Minneapolis Central Library's Evolving Role:** At the Minneapolis Central Library, LIS professionals have taken on social support roles—beyond traditional responsibilities. A clinical social worker collaborates with library staff to assist unhoused individuals. They offer resources, counseling, and help patrons like “R.” secure housing—showcasing empathetic, community-

oriented service that goes beyond book lending (The New Yorker, 2023).

- **Public Libraries as Community Hubs:** A Vox feature highlights that librarians' day-to-day work includes cataloging (a technically demanding task), assisting patrons with research, and providing services like ESL classes and social work resources. Libraries even loan non-traditional items—such as musical instruments or cooking tools—demonstrating adaptability, outreach, and user-centered innovation (Vox, 2023).
- **Pushback Against Self-Service Automation:** In the UK, several councils proposed reducing staff hours and relying on self-service checkouts and CCTV to cut costs. Librarians and communities opposed this, stressing the irreplaceable value of face-to-face interaction—especially for vulnerable users. Haringey council even reversed self-service plans following public backlash. These developments underscore the importance of interpersonal skills and maintaining professional engagement in libraries (The Guardian, 2024).

Conclusion:

The transformation of libraries in the digital era has highlighted the critical role of Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals as both custodians of knowledge and agents of change. While traditional responsibilities such as cataloguing, classification, and reference services remain essential, the integration of technology, user-centered approaches, and ethical considerations has expanded the scope of professional skills required. Studies from recent years reaffirm that information management, technological literacy, research and analytical capacity, communication,

managerial leadership, ethical awareness, and lifelong learning are indispensable competencies that directly shape the quality of library services.

By developing and continuously refining these skills through professional development, collaboration, and active engagement with evolving technologies, LIS professionals can ensure that libraries remain inclusive, innovative, and sustainable. Real-world examples further illustrate that librarians are not only service providers but also educators, advocates, and community partners. Ultimately, the future of libraries depends on the adaptability and vision of LIS professionals, whose commitment to excellence will enable libraries to thrive as vital centers of knowledge, learning, and community engagement in the digital age.

References:

1. Brotosaputro, N., Supriyadi, T., & Jones, M. (2024). *Ethical challenges in AI-driven library services: Privacy, accessibility, and inclusivity*. Journal of Information Ethics, 33(2), 145–160.
2. D'Souza, M. (2024). *Digital literacy and AI adoption in Indian academic libraries: A survey of professionals*. International Journal of Library and Information Science, 16(1), 23–38.
3. Emerald Publishing. (2022). *Essential competencies for LIS graduates in the digital age: Insights from India*. Library Management, 43(7/8), 489–503.
4. Halder, S. (2025). *Gamification and professional growth in academic libraries: Challenges and opportunities in India*. Annals of Library and Information Studies, 72(3), 112–125.
5. Hiring Librarians. (2023). *What library directors and MLIS stakeholders want: Core competencies for new graduates*. Library Journal, 148(6), 34–42.
6. Shivali, R., & Paul, A. (2024). *AI-powered assistive technologies in libraries: Accessibility for differently-abled patrons*. International Journal of Digital Library Services, 14(2), 55–70.
7. Subaveerapandiyam, K., Rao, P., & Mehta, S. (2025). *Gamification, AI adoption, and emerging competencies in Indian libraries*. Journal of Library Innovation, 16(1), 1–18.
8. The Guardian. (2024, March 15). *UK libraries face backlash over self-service automation plans*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com>
9. The New Yorker. (2023, October 5). *At the library, a social worker on staff*. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com>
10. Vox. (2023, August 12). *The surprising roles librarians play in today's communities*. Retrieved from <https://www.vox.com>