

Librarianship as a Career in India: A Study of Student Preferences

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ABSTRACT

It is always curious to know what attracts to the students in choosing librarianship as a career. The Library and Information Science (LIS) education are more than a century old in India. The LIS education is imparting at various levels from certificate to doctoral. Every level has different objectives and job opportunities. The study intended to know about the preferences of the students pursuing their bachelor and master degrees in LIS. A survey, using an online questionnaire on Google form application was conducted in from September to November 2018. A total of 92 specific responses from the LIS student who are pursuing their degrees. The general finding of the study shows that the majority of the students select the librarianship by choice as the first choice in regular mode of education.

Keywords: LIS education, Mode of degree, BLIS, MLIS, Librarianship, LIS profession, Career, Librarian, Information professional, Professionalism

INTRODUCTION

The LIS education in India has begun in 1911 when W.A. Borden, a student of Melville Dewey started a training program. The initiation was taken by the ruler of Baroda state Saiyajji Gaikwad III to develop manpower for the libraries. Sharma (2001) states that A.D. Dickinson also attempted to strengthen LIS education by starting a training program at Punjab University Lahore. After a series of various training courses by the library associations, Dr S.R. Ranganathan started first full-time course in Madras University. The Delhi University was the first which started an independent department of library science in 1947 (Sharma, 2001:153). Presently, there are more

than 180 institutions in India who are imparting LIS education by offering various courses.

Sharma (2001) defined a professional who supervises another professional in a Library and Information Centre (LIC) of a college, university or a special library. However, in the case of a school library, he refers to the librarian as a professional. This definition of an LIS professional is expressed that the librarian profession in a broad sense. Another important criterion is the supervision of the subordinates or paraprofessionals.

Whenever a student enters into the LIS schools he/she does not think about such broad concept of librarianship. However, slowly and gradually with

time, they built a broader sense. The profession broadly categorised as academic and non-academic. The academic is categorised as an assistant professor, associated professor, and professor and non-academic professional are known as assistant librarian, deputy librarian and librarian in a university system as the nomenclature laid down by the UGC. Another category is known as paraprofessionals who supposed to do routine and operational level of work in a library system. The librarianship is a broad concept comprised non-academic career opportunities in public, private and semi-public sectors from a school, university up to a national library of a nation. The LIS education is being imparted from certificate to doctoral level in India.

The study is intended to find out the opinion and preferences of the students about the career opportunities in the Indian environment. It is not a common phenomenon to know about the tendencies of youngsters who are just beginning their career in the LIS, yet this study may fruitful to learn about how the repo of the profession has started in their minds. However, the LIS field as a career in India has grown up like other professions, yet it does not get such a reputation even after a century. Hence, this study focused on the root of the profession and tries to understand why and how the new students select this profession, what criteria and parameters motivate them to join the LIS career in the current reputation of the profession. Information professional plays a significant role in the society by imparting informal education and information they required.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

It is necessary to know what the student thinks about the profession at the initial stage. It is because at this stage majority of the professionals have built an image of the profession and the work, duties and responsibilities they have to do in future and this

picture remains in their mind even if they become the professionals. The negative image of the profession which emerged in the society is a seed of this initial image of the profession.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Being a library professional, several times a thought comes in the mind whether we meet the academic criteria of a professional. A profession is closely related to the identity and stereotype association with the culture of a profession and public perception. Till now, we are considered as record keeper and preserver of books who supposed to maintain silence in the library. This perception does not allow contributing to the profession in the society. Seminelli (2016) believes that the majority of the public perception of the library strongly associated with the physical boundaries wall of libraries and books rather than on librarian. By this perception, the user naturally creates a negative image of a librarian. Pagoswsky and Rigby (2014) state that the library users poorly understand what librarians do that leads to an underestimating impact and unimportance of librarian. On the contrary, there is pressure on librarians from users to serve best of services from management to work under paucity of fund and a high cost of the documents.

It is the responsibility on the shoulders of youngsters who are coming from different subject background and environment. They are enthusiastic and full of energy. However, there are hindrances from the stereotyped librarians to give them the freedom to change the perception of the profession. Indeed, librarianship is one of the emerging professions. As such, it represents one of the oldest as well as one of the youngest too (Butler, 1951).

Singh and Pinki (2009) while discussing the skill and competencies of the librarian stated that the librarianship is an advisable and cherished profession preferred by many of the students nowadays. There

are a lot of scopes in this profession as far as job opportunities are concerned provided some commitment and a particular set of skills. Sinha and Pandey (2014) identified the status of job opportunities and employment of Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals in India through an analysis of job advertisements published on an online LIS blog.

Raju (2014) through the analysis of job ads found different types of knowledge and skills set requires for getting a job in the digital era in academic libraries in South Africa. While focusing on different generic skills and personal competencies in the digital environment he categorised these skills into discipline-specific knowledge and the personal characters of each LIS professional.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on an online survey conducted with a structured questionnaire on Google Form Application. However, the objective of the questionnaire was broadened that covered a large aspect of the LIS profession. The overwhelming responses from the teachers, working professionals, and scholars, and students received from all part of the country. However, only the responses received from the students are considered for this study. A total of 242 responses out of which 92 responses from the students of bachelors and master degrees are considered for analysis and the answers of the research questions.

Sampling

The LIS students doing their bachelor and master degrees either from regular or distance modes from the departments of Indian universities were the target population for this study. An online questionnaire using Google Form application was designed and distributed among various online LIS communities on social networking sites and WhatsApp groups in India. A total of 92 responses from the target

population were received. The same is considered for this study, the response rates for this study are not considered because of the unlimited nature of the population.

Limitations

The study begins in mind the fact that the newcomers have an inadequate outlook of the profession because till now they are getting an education to become an LIS professional. This study covers the preference and response received only by the students who are doing bachelor and master degrees either from regular or distance mode.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was undertaken to resolve various questions in mind given as follows:

1. What attracts youngsters to choose the LIS profession and for what purpose of selecting LIS as a career?
2. Do the students come by choice or by chance in the profession in Indian scenario?
3. What modes of education are preferred by the students in India?
4. What types of the subject background of the students prior to choosing Library Science as a career?
5. What kind of job preferences has the students in India?

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The data collected through the online questionnaire has analysed and interpreted in the subsequent tables and figures. In the interpretation, the researchers, respondents and scholars are used synonymously in the study. A total of 92 responses were analysed under subsequent headings, that is, the demographic information and opinions and preferences of the students about the LIS as a career.

Demographic Information

The respondents who participated in the online survey were 92 out of which 65.2% were male, 33.7% were female and only 1% of respondents were not preferred to say their gender. The details of the gender of the respondents are also given in Figure 1.

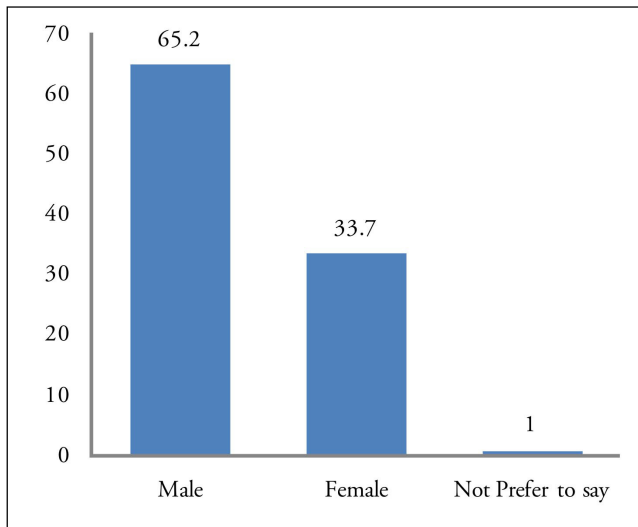


Figure 1: Gender of the Respondents

As this study intended to know the opinion and preferences of the youngsters, especially who entered into the student life and chosen LIS career. However, they may not aware about the librarianship at large yet we intended to get the initial information of youngsters who will become the LIS professional in future. The next question was intended to seek information about the age groups respondents. The responses received are given in Figure 2.

The analysis of Figure 2 reveals that the majority, that is, a total of 62% (24+38) of the respondents were the youngsters from the age group of less than 26 years. The respondents from 27 to 33 years were 28.3% (16.3+12) whereas the respondents above 33 years were only 9.7%. However, the suggestions received from the respondents of less than 33 years may prove valuable because of their initial stage in the field. In

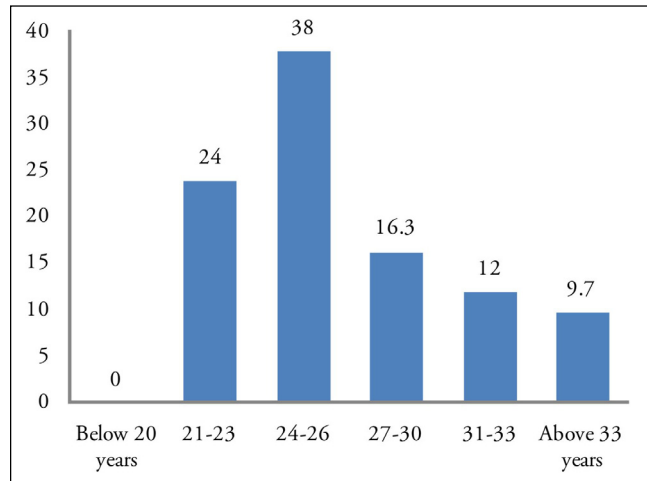


Figure 2: Age Group of the Respondents

order to the demographic information of the respondents, the next option was the qualification in the questionnaire. The responses received are given in Figure 3.

It is clear from the data in Figure 3 that the majority (73.9%) of the respondents were pursuing in the Bachelor degree in LIS, along with 52% of the respondents who were doing their master degree. It is also clear that the 17.2% of respondents have qualified NET/SLET in LIS. Therefore, it indicates that the master degree is less preferred by the respondents.

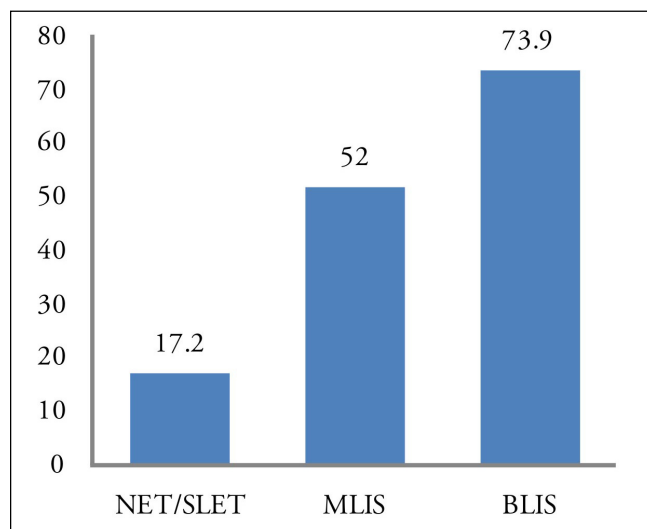


Figure 3: Professional Qualification

The LIS is a professional degree that creates Liberian and related cadre of professionals. Usually, it is done after the graduation of any subject field. An attempt to know what is the subject background of the students from they join the LIS field the next question was asked in the questionnaire. The responses received are given in Figure 4.

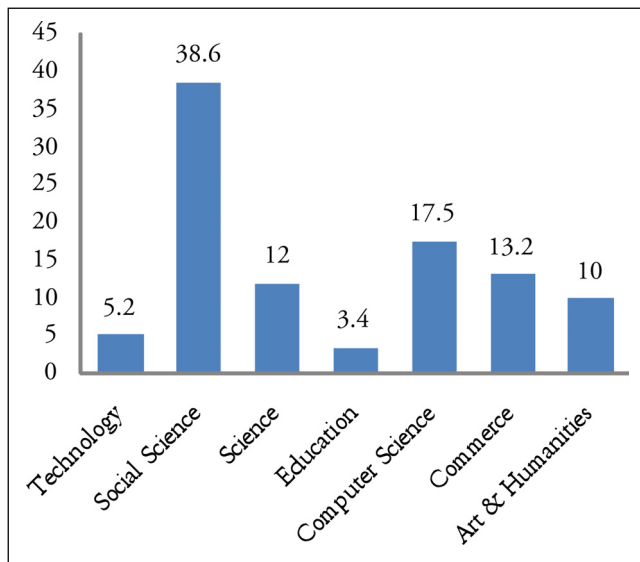


Figure 4: Subject Background

Figure 4 reveals that the 38.6% students who come in the LIS belong to the Social Science background, whereas 12% of the students came from the Science background. A new trend is also visible from the analysis that 17% of professionals came from Computer Science, 13.2% from Commerce and 10% from the Art and Humanities. In fact, overall responses show that a combination of different subject fields of professional comes in the LIS field.

Students Opinion and Preferences

In our higher educational system, the autonomy is granted to the educational units like college and universities to run and modify the pattern of education according to their locale requirement. Therefore, many departments' follows the UGC curriculum model of LIS education (i.e. 2 years integrated master degree)

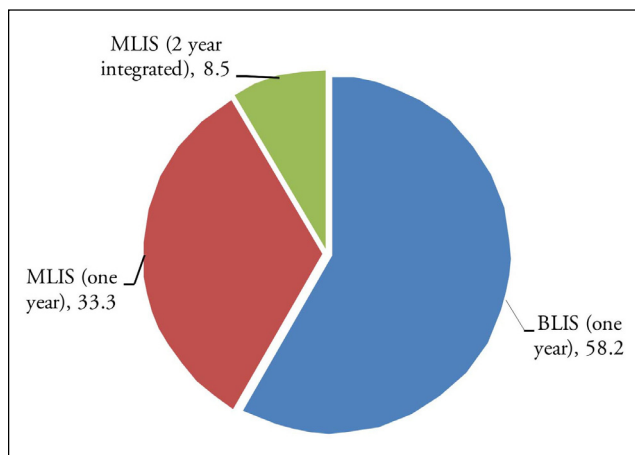


Figure 5: Nature of Degree Preferred

whereas, many departments still offering the bifurcated (BLISc. and MLISc. 1year each) library science degrees. Keeping in view of this fact, an option as given in Figure 5 has given to the respondents.

The analysis of data in Figure 5 reveals that majority of the respondents has preferred isolated patter, that is, BLISc and MLISc 1 year each degree of library science that according to them help to get a job opportunity after each one degree. However, in the 2 years integrated degrees program, students have to wait for the 2 years. It is also observed that this program (2 years of integrated MLIS) does not provide additional BLIS degree which is required by the public sector employers in India.

It is observed through empirical experience that there is a significant difference in a regular and distance mode of degree. Usually, the regular degree preferred over the distance degree by the interviewers because of its regular face to face discussions and more practical training. An attempt to find the opinion on the mode of degrees preferred by the students, four options as given in Figure 6 were given to the respondents.

The analysis in Figure 6 provides an insight into the mode of degrees preferred by the students. It reveals that majority, that is, 74.3% of the professionals have chosen the degrees through the regular mode of

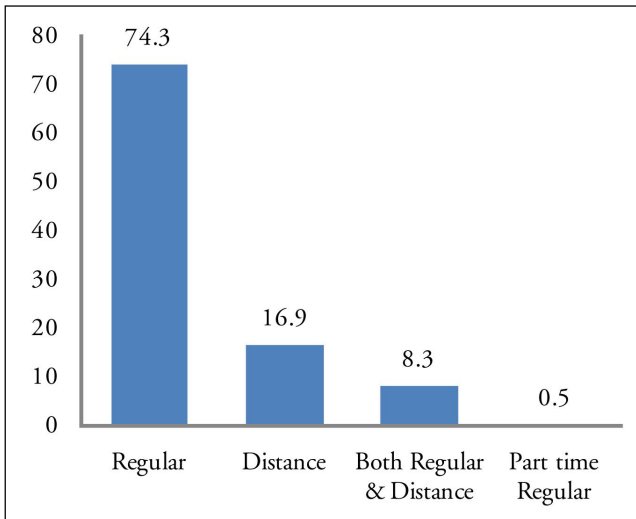


Figure 6: Mode of Degree Preferred

education; whereas only 16.9% of the respondents preferred degrees through distance mode. However, 8.3% people have selected degree by the combination of both the modes. It is important to know the timing of the educational preferences of the students whether they preferred part time or full time of degrees in LIS. The two options as listed in Figure 7 were given.

As the data in Figure 7 shows that majority (86.4%) of the respondents were preferred their degree in full-time basis whereas only 13.6% of the respondents

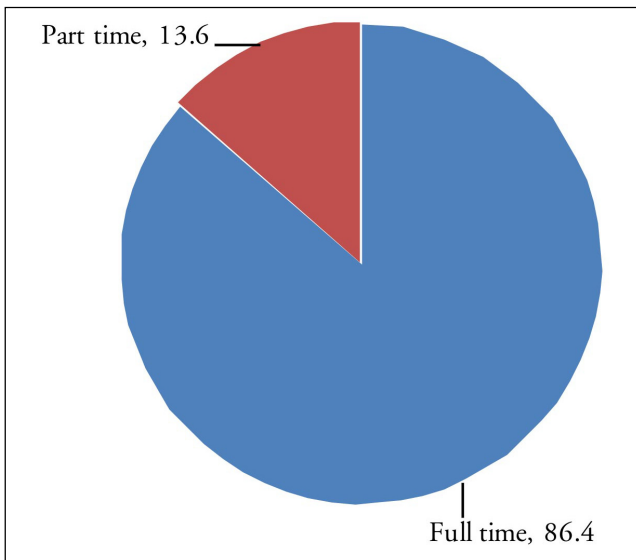


Figure 7: Time Preferences

interested in doing their degree in part-time mode. In India, various mode of LIS education is available according to the choice and flexibilities to them.

We have seen the profession selected as the first choice like doctors, engineer or teaching have grown like anything and it grown deep into the heart of society. However, in case of librarianship a career of the first choice, hardly people choose LIS as their first career. Some come by chance or some by accident into this field. To know if the student chose LIS as the first career the next question was given to the respondents, the responses are given in Figure 8.

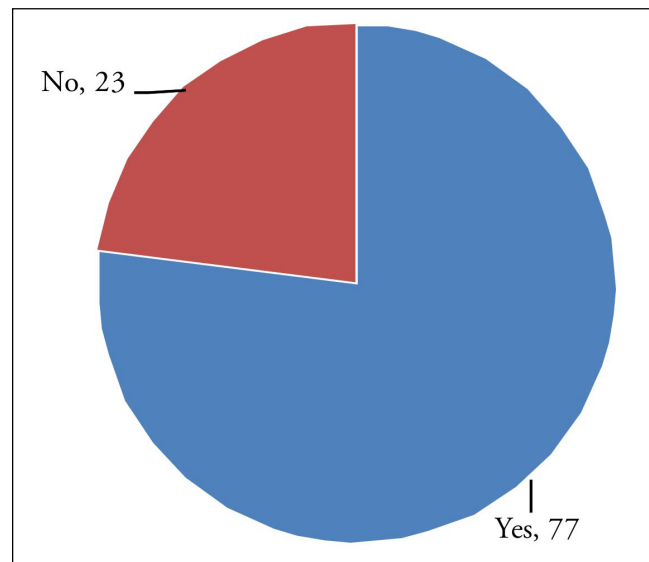


Figure 8: Librarianship as the First Career Choice

The analysis of Figure 8 reveals that the librarianship has chosen as their first career by 77% of the respondents, whereas 23% of the respondents have opted LIS as the second option. It may be considered as a positive sign for the future of LIS in India. However, 23% of the respondents come accidentally into the LIS profession. It is also considered a significant percentage that cannot be ignored.

It is worthy to any of the profession that people join that by choice otherwise everyone knows what happens of that profession. The reason for unwanted and

unwillingness of doing the right things is the choice of the profession, if the right person select the profession by choice, there is no question of unwillingness in doing right things arises. It also results in unfamiliarity of the profession in the society. Hence, it is attempted to know if students come from by chance or accident. The responses are given in Figure 9.

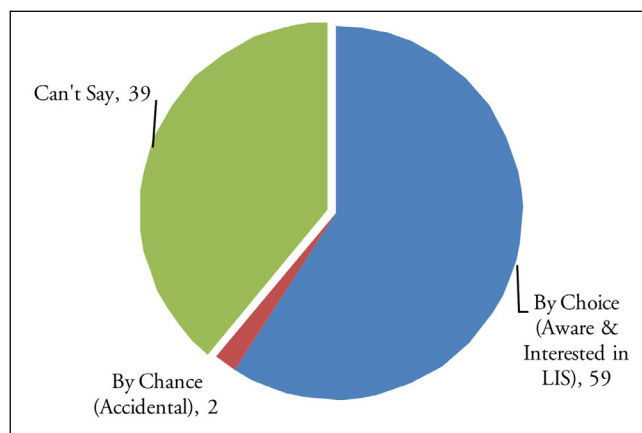


Figure 9: Selection of LIS Career

The analysis in Figure 9 shows that nowadays majority (59%) of the professionals comes by choice with full awareness and interest in the philosophy of the LIS profession. However, still there are new professionals who join the LIS as accidental or by chance. The situation of the accidental librarians is dangerous for this profession because neither justifies with their current nor they want to improve as it goes against them.

Our profession is categorised into tow teaching librarianship and practicing librarianship, however, both have its pros and cons. But in many occasions it is felt that our professionals want to give first preferences to teaching. In this study, an attempt was made to find what future professional preferred. The responses are given in Figure 10.

The analysis in Figure 10 shows that 36% of the respondents agreed to work in any either in academic

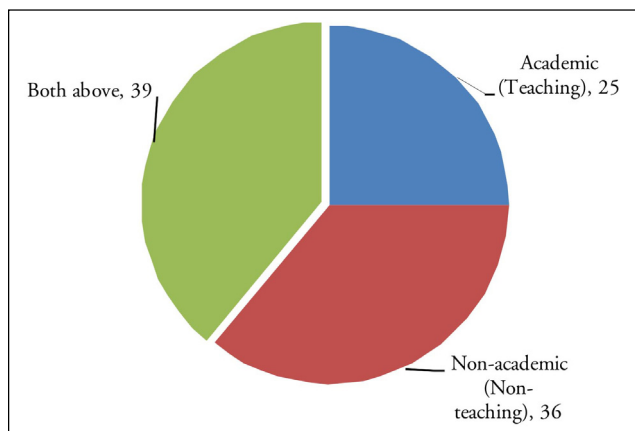


Figure 10: Preferences of LIS Career Option

or non-academic fields. However, 36% of respondents want to work in the non-teaching environment whereas 25% of the future professional wanted to work in the teaching field. A discussion with the students verbally, it comes to know that the first thing is to find a job which is considered a big deal in the Indian scenario. The increasing competition in the field also affects the choices of the professionals.

DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS

The study gazes at the qualifications, level and pattern of LIS education of students and their preferences. The study found that

1. The people from social science, art and humanities background preferred the LIS as a career. However, other students from other branches of knowledge have also started to select librarianship as a career option (Figure 4).
2. It is found that 1 year bifurcated BLISc and MLISc degrees are preferred by the students over the 2 year integrated master degrees (Figure 5). Since it provides freedom to select the higher education or job. The 1 year BLIS and 1year MLIS degree have enhanced the chances of getting a job in LIS filed. It provides and opens multiple path and opportunities for LIS professional in the Indian environment.

3. The students preferred the regular and full-time degree of the LIS field (Figures 6 and 7). The candidate who pursues their degrees through regular mode has better job opportunities than distance mode of education.
4. It is found that the majority of the students chose librarianship as their first career (Figure 8). It results in a positive aspect of the LIS profession in India and a bright future of LIS education.
5. It is found that the majority of the students come in the LIS profession by choice with full awareness and interest in the philosophy of librarianship (Figure 9). The thinking of the accidental librarians harms the profession a lot.
6. A new generation of the LIS professionals are willing to work in any given field either in teaching or practicing librarianship (Figure 10). The new LIS students have better job opportunities in the librarianship (Non-Academic) than teaching (Academic) field.

The findings of the study reveal a new concept of the LIS profession in India. It is throwing a positivism and energy among the new generations of the professionals.

CONCLUSION

The library is one of the many social intuitions that plays a significant role in disseminating information and knowledge. Actually, it works as a bridge between creator and consumer of information. During the recent years' incorporation of the ICT applications, the vast opportunities in librarianship have opened up for students from the various subject backgrounds. The librarianship has a wide scope not only in libraries and information centres but also in teaching, research and development, this trend has encouraged students to pursue LIS education. There are multiple fields and

sectors for the librarians like media, industries, research and development centre, academic, public libraries in private and public sectors. A demand of professional career in all these areas proves as a milestone for librarianship. The recent years also witnessed mushrooming of new LIS schools in India and diversity of the curriculum and pattern of the LIS courses. However, one side it provides the education to the students and the other side it creates problems of quality and accreditation of the courses. It also results in a large production of professionals that ultimately burdens on the profession. The UGC has taken various significant steps to recognise the library cadre equivalent with the teaching professionals in terms of service conditions and pay scales. The LIS profession is a developing profession of knowledge management and dissemination that throws a challenge before the professionals.

The transition into various others related filed makes it convenient of the selection of this field. The LIS profession provides chances to learn and develop once skills and personality to be competent to serve society.

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