**LIS Education and Library Practice in India: Bridging the Gap or Deepening the Divide?**

**A Critical Analysis of Teaching vs. Practicing Professionals**

**Abstract**

Library and Information Science (LIS) education in India faces a widening gap between academic instruction and professional practice, hindering the development of a workforce equipped to meet contemporary library demands. This study aims to examine the systemic factors behind this disconnect and evaluate whether current LIS education bridges or deepens this divide. By evaluating regulatory challenges, entrenched academic structures, and the absence of structured industry-academia collaborations, the research highlights the need for curricular reform, interdisciplinary integration, and ongoing professional development. Drawing insights from comparative studies, case analyses, and policy frameworks, this article proposes actionable strategies to realign LIS education with evolving technological and professional requirements. Establishing standardized accreditation systems, fostering hands-on learning experiences, and redefining faculty roles are essential to bridging the divide and ensuring LIS graduates are well-prepared for the future of library services in India.

***Keywords:*** *LIS education; library professionals; India; teaching–practitioner divide; curriculum reform; digital librarianship*

**1. Introduction**

Libraries are a cornerstone of India's knowledge infrastructure as they drive progress in education, research, and community development. The effectiveness of library services depends largely on the professionalism and preparedness of the library workforce, whose skills are cultivated through LIS education. Growth of rapid technological advancements and evolving user expectations have exposed a critical gap between academic preparation and professional practice. This study explores whether Indian LIS education is successfully narrowing the disconnect between theory and practice or if it is, inadvertently, widening this divide. This study aims to critically analyse the factors that contribute to this disconnect—including outdated course content, inadequate practical training, and rigid regulatory frameworks—with the objective of proposing actionable reforms that align academic teaching with contemporary library practice. It is important to note that this research predominantly draws on secondary literature and interpretative analysis rather than primary empirical data, which may limit the direct generalizability of its findings. Nonetheless, by synthesizing insights from established case studies, comparative models from developed nations, and extensive literature reviews, the study contributes valuable recommendations for curriculum reform, industry–academia partnerships, and policy adjustments that could drive much-needed improvements in India’s LIS education landscape.

Currently, more than 100 universities and institutions in India offer LIS education at various levels. Simultaneously, the country operates over 54,000 public libraries, including rural and urban branches. This scale highlights the critical need for professional alignment between academic preparation and field-level practices.

**2. Historical Development of LIS Education in India**

LIS education in India commenced in 1911 at the University of Madras, and its evolution accelerated after independence, influenced by educational reforms and international funding (Aman & Sharma, 2005). Prestigious institutions like Delhi University, Banaras Hindu University, and Aligarh Muslim University played critical roles in shaping curricular development (Dutta & Das, 2001). Additionally, Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad III of Baroda was instrumental in modernizing library services, advocating for public libraries, and promoting professional library training in India. His vision led to early advancements in LIS education, emphasizing the role of trained librarians in societal development. Similarly, W.A. Borden, appointed as the first librarian of Punjab University, introduced systematic library organization methods and contributed significantly to early LIS curriculum development by incorporating international best practices. However, the rapid expansion of LIS programs, now encompassing diverse levels of study, has not been paralleled by the establishment of comprehensive quality-assurance frameworks, which has led to significant differences in curricula and pedagogical approaches.

**3. Institutional Framework and Regulatory Environment**

Unlike regulated professions such as law or medicine, LIS in India is governed by a fragmented framework involving the University Grants Commission (UGC), state education departments, and professional bodies like the Indian Library Association (ILA). This decentralized regulatory environment results in inconsistencies in academic quality and accreditation standards. Although the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 promotes multidisciplinary learning and technological integration, it does not address the specific needs and challenges of LIS education. Consequently, institutions are left to devise curricula without a unified policy, further exacerbating issues of quality and relevance.

**4. Dichotomy Between Educators and Practitioners**

A critical problem in Indian LIS education is the disconnect between academic faculty and on-the-ground library professionals. Faculty recruitment is traditionally based on research credentials—such as UGC-NET clearance and Ph.D. qualifications—rather than practical experience. This policy often excludes seasoned librarians who may lack formal research qualifications, resulting in an academic environment that is detached from contemporary practices in libraries. As a result, graduates may be underprepared to meet industry demands, leading to employment challenges and professional dissatisfaction (Yadav & Gohain, 2016).

**5. Review of Literature:**

The literature on Library and Information Science (LIS) education in India reveals that while the discipline has evolved significantly since its inception with early curricular developments documented by Aman and Sharma (2005) and Dutta and Das (2001), a persistent theory–practice gap endures. Numerous studies indicate that despite the expansion of LIS programs, graduates remain underprepared for the dynamic demands of modern library work due to outdated curricula, insufficient digital infrastructure, and minimal industry–academia collaboration (Yadav & Gohain, 2016; Sen, 2020; Singh & Thomas, 2022). Comparative analyses further highlight that while LIS programs in developed countries benefit from regular accreditation and curriculum updates, Indian programs are hindered by regulatory constraints and a lack of standardized quality assurance measures, prompting calls for comprehensive reforms and enhanced professional advocacy (UNESCO, 2018; Mukherjee, 2023). Collectively, these insights underscore an urgent need for integrated strategies that bridge the gap between academic instruction and practical application, ensuring that future professionals are well-equipped to navigate the challenges of digital transformation in the library sector. Regionally, studies from South and Southeast Asia echo similar concerns. For instance, Kamila (2015) and Aman & Sharma (2005) highlight gaps in digital training and practitioner engagement in LIS curricula across Asian nations, reinforcing the urgency for educational reforms.

**6. Objectives**

The primary objectives of this research are to:

1. Identify and analyse the challenges faced by practicing library professionals in India.
2. Investigate monopolistic pedagogical practices and the dearth of practical exposure in LIS education.
3. Compare the current state of Indian LIS education with international standards practiced in developed nations.
4. Propose actionable reforms to bridge the gap between academic theory and professional practice.

**7. Research Methodology**

This research follows a qualitative and interpretative methodology based on content analysis of existing literature, reports, and policy documents. Sources were selected from peer-reviewed journals, government reports, and LIS associations, spanning 2005–2024. Key themes—such as curriculum gaps, faculty–practitioner divide, and infrastructural issues—were identified and coded manually. No primary data collection (e.g., surveys or interviews) was conducted; thus, this study does not involve sample size or participant demographics. While this limits generalizability, the synthesis of credible sources offers valid insights into systemic challenges and reform strategies.

**8. Obstacles Encountered by Practicing Library Professionals in India**

Indian library professionals face multifaceted challenges largely stemming from systemic shortcomings in LIS education and infrastructural limitations:

**8.1. Obsolete Infrastructure and Technological Backwardness**

Many Indian libraries, especially in rural areas, lack modern technological infrastructure. A UNESCO report (2018) revealed that only 12% of public libraries in India are equipped with computers, and a mere 8% have internet connectivity. This technological gap significantly restricts the provision of digital services, maintenance of digital collections, and online user engagement—a situation further aggravated during the COVID-19 pandemic when virtual services became essential (Chowdhury, 2021).

**8.2. Discrepancy Between Skills and Market Demand**

The shift towards digital libraries has introduced new competencies such as metadata management, UX design, and research data management. However, interviews indicate that 70% of librarians feel they lack the training required to meet these modern demands due to inadequate curriculum updates (Yadav & Gohain, 2016). These skills mismatch directly impacts employability, particularly in modern academic and corporate library settings.

**8.3. Financial Limitations and Insufficient Acknowledgment**

Chronic underfunding in many libraries hampers the acquisition of digital resources, technological upgrades, and recruitment of skilled staff. Public libraries suffer particularly from low government funding, which, coupled with poor remuneration and job insecurity for librarians, undermines the profession’s appeal (Ameen, 2012).

**8.4. Workload and Work-Life Balance**

The rapid transition to online library services during the COVID-19 pandemic intensified workloads, as librarians became responsible for managing round-the-clock digital operations. Insufficient staffing and technical support exacerbated stress, leading to burnout and issues with work-life balance, particularly among night-shift employees (Sen, 2020).

**8.5. Professional Status and Identity Crisis**

Despite being critical knowledge workers, Indian librarians often lack visibility and institutional power. In many higher education institutions, they are classified as non-teaching staff, which results in reduced salary scales, limited promotion opportunities, and a diminished professional identity. This undermines both their credibility and their effectiveness in bridging academic and practical realms.

**9. Monopolistic Practices in LIS Education**

LIS programs in India are predominantly influenced by academic theorists, whose focus on research over practical expertise widens the divide between theory and practice.

**9.1. Empirical Insights and Field Observations**

Informal surveys and case studies reveal striking statistics:

* 63% of LIS graduates reported feeling unprepared for contemporary library roles. (Yadav & Gohain, 2016),
* 78% of practicing librarians noted their exclusion from curriculum design and policy formulation. (Mukherjee, 2023),
* 85% of faculty members had not engaged in professional library work post-Ph.D. (Ganaie, 2016)

**9.2. Theoretical Overemphasis**

A significant proportion of the curriculum is dedicated to traditional subjects such as cataloguing and classification, while emerging areas like digital curation, artificial intelligence, and information literacy receive insufficient attention. Interviews suggest that 80% of LIS faculty members lack current practical experience, resulting in outdated syllabi (Ganaie, 2016).

**9.3. Resistance to Curriculum Reform**

Institutional inertia, coupled with bureaucratic red tape and a lack of industry input, has meant that many LIS courses have not undergone significant revision for over a decade. In contrast, developed nations such as the UK revise their LIS curricula every 3–5 years to remain responsive to technological advancements (Roy, 2016).

**9.4. Exclusion of Practicing Professionals**

Stringent regulatory norms—emphasizing Ph.D. qualifications and formal teaching experience—often exclude experienced practitioners from contributing to LIS education. In many developed countries, adjunct faculty with recent hands-on experience actively participate in curriculum development and teaching (Dutta, 2001).

**9.5. Limited Practical Training**

Only 30% of Indian LIS programs include hands-on training with modern digital tools, such as Integrated Library Management Systems (ILMS), when compared to 85% in the United States. The absence of mandated internships further limits students’ exposure to real-world challenges (Halder, 2012).

**10. Comparative Analysis: India vs. Developed Countries**

A comparative study reveals stark contrasts between Indian LIS education and practices in developed nations such as the USA and the UK.

**10.1. LIS Education Systems**

* **India:** LIS programs are largely heterogeneous, with no national accreditation body; distance-learning models, such as those offered by IGNOU, often lack practical components (Yadav & Gohain, 2016).
* **Developed Countries:** Accreditation bodies such as the ALA and CILIP ensure that LIS programs adhere to industry standards, with curricula emphasizing digital competencies, research data management, and mandatory field practicums (ALA, 2023; CILIP, 2024).

**10.2. Teaching vs. Practicing Professionals**

* **India:** There exists a pronounced divide between theoretically inclined educators and practitioners with on-the-ground needs (Ganaie, 2016).
* **Developed Countries:** Programs integrate working professionals through initiatives like the iSchools movement, which blends LIS with emerging data science practices, thereby enriching curricula with current experiences (iSchools, 2025).

**10.3. Infrastructure and Resources**

* **India:** Many LIS departments lack modern computer labs, digital libraries, and exposure to advanced ILMS, thus limiting practical training opportunities (Yadav & Gohain, 2016).
* **Developed Countries:** LIS programs benefit from well-equipped virtual labs and platforms such as DSpace and Koha, supported by robust governmental and professional funding (CILIP, 2024).

**10.4. Curricular Disparities and Pedagogical Challenges**

An examination of Indian LIS syllabi reveals:

1. **Obsolete Content:** Traditional topics like cataloguing and classification are taught without sufficient integration of contemporary innovations.
2. **Inadequate Practical Training:** Internships and fieldwork are either optional or not rigorously implemented.
3. **Limited Interdisciplinary Exposure:** There is insufficient integration with fields such as computer science, data analysis, and digital humanities.
4. **Lack of Industry Collaboration:** Curricula are often developed without meaningful input from current industry professionals.

**11. Breaking the Silence: Deep-Rooted Issues in India's LIS Education**

Beyond the gap between academic training and practice, several critical structural issues must be addressed.

**11.1. Digital Divide**

Many rural areas in India lack the infrastructure to support e-resources and digital training, leaving graduates unprepared for roles in digital library management (Kamila, 2015).

**11.2. Socioeconomic and Gender Constraints**

Although LIS programs attract students from various disadvantaged backgrounds, limited scholarships and career guidance, as well as persistent gender disparities—particularly in leadership roles—impede long-term professional growth (Ameen, 2012).

**11.3. Policy Neglect**

While the NEP 2020 prioritizes literacy, it falls short of addressing the specific needs of library development. With over 60% of government schools lacking functional libraries, inadequate funding further weakens the infrastructure of college and university libraries (NIEPA, 2022; UGC, 2023).

**11.4. Insufficient Professional Advocacy**

The fragmented nature of LIS advocacy in India—marked by the absence of a centralized regulatory body and limited coordination among organizations such as the ILA—hinders effective policy influence and educational reform. Stronger networking, strategic partnerships with policymakers, and the formation of a centralized authority are necessary to effect meaningful change (Mukherjee, 2023).

**12. Bridging the Divide: Challenges and Solutions**

**12.1. Major Challenges**

Key challenges identified include:

* **Syllabus Obsolescence:** Outdated curricula that do not meet modern library service requirements.
* **Faculty Disconnect:** A significant gap in practical experience among educators.
* **Regulatory Barriers:** Rigid accreditation norms that prevent the involvement of experienced practitioners in academia.
* **Resource Constraints:** Insufficient infrastructure and financial limitations that impede technological upgrades and training.

**12.2. Recommendations for Bridging the Gap**

To realign academic instruction with professional practice, the following reforms are proposed:

1. **Curriculum Reform:**
	* Establish a national LIS curriculum committee comprising practitioners, academics, and industry experts.
	* Implement mandatory curriculum updates every 3–5 years to incorporate digital scholarship, artificial intelligence, UX design, and emerging library technologies (IFLA, 2021).
2. **Industry-Academia Partnership:**
	* Introduce **adjunct faculty roles for experienced librarians** to teach specialized courses and share real-world insights.
	* Mandate **internships and field practicums** for LIS students to gain hands-on experience in modern library environments.
3. **Role Exchange Model:**
	* Foster collaboration between academic and practicing professionals by periodically requiring LIS educators to engage in hands-on work in libraries and by inviting experienced librarians to deliver targeted course modules.
	* This exchange will promote mutual understanding and ensure that teaching is aligned with current industry practices (Singh & Thomas, 2022).
4. **Establishment of a National Accreditation Body:**
	* Form a Library and Information Science Council of India (LISCI) to standardize curricula and accredit institutions.
5. **Continuous Professional Development (CPD):**
	* Implement **mandatory CPD programs** to keep practicing librarians updated on digital tools, research methodologies, and leadership skills.
	* Offer **UGC-sponsored workshops** and partnerships with industry leaders to provide specialized training.
6. **Infrastructure Investment:**
	* Invest in **modern computer labs, digital repositories, and open-source Integrated Library Management Systems (ILMS)** to enhance practical learning.
	* Foster **public–private partnerships** to secure funding for technological advancements and training initiatives.
7. **Policy Advocacy:**
	* Reclassify librarians as **academic teaching faculty** to grant them equitable status in higher education institutions.
	* Involve LIS associations in national education reform initiatives to ensure that libraries and librarianship are prioritized in policy implementation (Mukherjee, 2023).
8. **Dual-Track Faculty Appointments:**
	*  Recruit faculty with **both academic and practical experience**, ensuring that practitioners are actively involved in curriculum development and teaching.
	* Establish **faculty exchange programs**, requiring LIS educators to work in libraries for a designated period to stay connected with professional realities.
9. **Legal and Institutional Reclassification:**
	* Redefine the professional status of librarians by reclassifying them as teaching staff, which will provide equitable opportunities for advancement and integration into institutional decision-making.
10. **Stakeholder Forums and White Papers:**
	* Institutionalize **national conferences and forums** where LIS educators, practitioners, policymakers, and students collaborate on curriculum and policy enhancements.
	* Publish **policy white papers** highlighting reform priorities and advocating for systemic changes.

**13. Discussion**

The findings underscore that the disconnect between academic training and professional practice in Indian LIS education is systemic. Outdated curricula, exclusionary faculty recruitment practices, and insufficient infrastructural support combine to leave graduates unprepared for the modern demands of librarianship. In contrast, LIS programs in developed nations benefit from regular curriculum updates, strong industry partnerships, and accreditation frameworks that ensure relevancy. Tailored solutions for the Indian context may include the adoption of open-source technologies, enhanced professional representation, and institutional reforms that reinvigorate the role of practicing professionals in academic settings.

**14. Conclusion**

Indian LIS education stands at a critical crossroads. On its current trajectory, the widening theory–practice gap risks rendering graduates redundant in a digital age. By embracing curriculum modernization, strengthening industry–academia partnerships, and investing in infrastructure and CPD, India can realign its LIS education with international standards. Such reforms will empower librarians, maximize their contributions to a knowledge-driven society, and help sustain the dynamic evolution of library services. Future research should evaluate the long-term impact of these reforms and explore further integration of digital innovations in LIS pedagogy.

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