



Global Metamorphosis and Soft Skill Development for Library Professionals

Dr. Suchismita Majumdar

Librarian, Sir Gurudas Mahavidyalaya, Kolkata.

Abstract

The twenty-first century has witnessed libraries evolve from traditional repositories of information to dynamic, user-centered knowledge hubs. The demand for soft skills, including communication, teamwork, adaptability, empathy, problem-solving, leadership, and cultural intelligence, has intensified. This paper recognises the growing significance of soft skills in library and information science (LIS) practice within a rapidly changing global context. The study identifies the essence of soft skill development in enhancing professional performance, innovation, and supports the delivery of services. It also observes the alignment between soft skill development and global trends such as digital transformation, multicultural engagement, and knowledge sharing. The findings emphasise the need to embed soft skill training into LIS education, continuing professional development, and reframe institutional policies to ensure soft skill development. The paper asserts that the integration of soft skills is fundamental for library professionals to sustain relevance and resilience in the evolving information ecosystem.

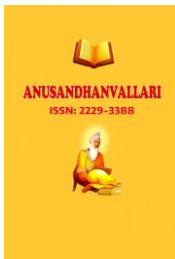
Keywords: Soft skills, Library professionals, Global metamorphosis, Professional development, Communication, LIS education, Digital transformation.

1. Introduction

The transformation of libraries in the 21st century has triggered a change in the soft skills required for Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals. Soft skills have emerged as essential determinants of professional success. The global metamorphosis triggered by digital innovation, globalization, and patterns of information-seeking behaviour has necessitated the acquisition of skills by library professionals for operating in a dynamic, hybrid environment. This shift demands a multitude of soft skills, interpersonal, cognitive, and emotional skills, that enable librarians to adapt, communicate, and provide service.

The global information landscape has become increasingly complex. Artificial intelligence, open access, digital preservation, and collaboration have revolutionized the process of knowledge generation, dissemination, and search. Users now expect instant access, personalized support, and inclusive spaces for learning and collaboration. Consequently, librarians evolve as facilitators. In this context, soft skills such as communication, empathy, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and ethical judgment are indispensable to technical expertise. Interpersonal interactions are now at the core of library service. The library professional interacts with diverse user groups, interprets requirements, and delivers the required information. In multicultural and multilingual societies, intercultural communication and emotional intelligence foster inclusivity and trust. Teamwork and collaboration skills are equally vital, as modern libraries function through interdisciplinary projects, consortia, and networked resource-sharing initiatives that rely on collective decision-making and coordination. The global metamorphosis has introduced automation, data analytics, and virtual services that require agile mindsets and the capacity to learn and unlearn. Librarians who can inspire teams, lead innovation, and adapt services to emerging community needs become catalysts for institutional resilience. Similarly, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities enable the library professionals to evaluate and respond effectively to misinformation or the digital divide. The future of soft-skill development in librarianship lies in embedding the skills into every dimension of professional education and practice.

The explosion of digital data, intellectual property concerns, and privacy issues necessitates ethical judgment and value-based decision-making.



Professional education must integrate both hard skills and soft skills.

The global metamorphosis of the information environment has redefined the role of librarians as libraries become increasingly hybrid, integrating physical, digital, and virtual services. The success of professionals now depends as much on their soft skills.

Ultimately, the convergence of technology, human interaction, and ethical responsibility defines the new paradigm of librarianship.

2. Review of Literature

Soft skills encompass interpersonal, emotional, and cognitive abilities that enable effective interaction and service delivery. Saunders (2020) emphasizes that alongside core knowledge, librarians must possess essential soft skills to function effectively.

Sweetman (2016) highlights that modern library workplaces demand flexibility, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities, indicating a shift from routine tasks to dynamic service roles.

Empathy is a foundational soft skill in librarianship. Birdi, Wilson, and Tso (2009) identify empathy as central to public librarianship, enabling professionals to understand diverse user needs and foster inclusive services. Phillips (2017) discusses empathetic services as integral to everyday library interactions, particularly in engaging youth and marginalized communities. Mi (2005) introduces cultural competence as a precursor of empathy, emphasizing the need for librarians to navigate multicultural environments effectively, especially in healthcare and global contexts. Emotional intelligence (EI) has gained prominence as a key competency. Lucas (2020) establishes that emotional intelligence (EI) enhances workplace relationships and service quality by enabling professionals to manage emotions and respond appropriately to users. Hamid and Younus (2022) demonstrate a positive relationship between soft skills and productivity among academic library professionals, reinforcing the practical value of EI and interpersonal competencies.

The emergence of digital libraries and Web 2.0 technologies has reshaped professional expectations. Partridge, Lee, and Munro (2010) conceptualize the "Librarian 2.0" as being equipped with communication skills, technological awareness, and adaptability.

Henderson (2020) highlights the importance of soft skills, where collaboration, communication, and teaching abilities are crucial for managing research data services.

Some studies also point out the gaps between required and existing competencies. Ahmad, Ameen, and Ahmad (2021) indicate the hurdles, including the requirements for skill training and institutional support. Similarly, Hu et al. (2022) emphasize that working librarians prioritize communication, adaptability, and user engagement as core competencies.

Yadav (2022) identified that job advertisements in Indian context increasingly demand soft skills such as teamwork, leadership, and communication, reflecting global trends. However, LIS curricula often lag in addressing these.

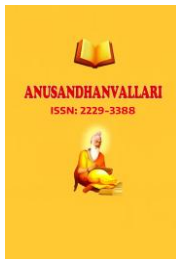
The need for curriculum reform is widely acknowledged. Varalakshmi (2010) discusses challenges in LIS education in South India, highlighting the necessity of integrating soft skills training. Yadav (2022) reinforces this by advocating for curriculum alignment with industry expectations.

VKJ (2021) prioritizes internships to develop interpersonal and professional skills in accordance with actual professional requirements.

Continuous learning is essential in the evolving information landscape. Bordoloi, Das, and Das (2020) recognise MOOCs as an essential part of lifelong learning for LIS professionals to enhance both technical and soft skills.

Padmaja and Mukul (2022) emphasize the need for professionals to upskill to adapt to digital transformation.

Global metamorphosis has increased the importance of intercultural communication and inclusivity. To serve diverse, global communities, library professionals need to develop cultural sensitivity and global awareness. This aligns with Mi (2005) on the contemporary perspectives on inclusive librarianship.



Soft skills are indispensable for modern LIS professionals. Digital transformation demands adaptability and continuous learning. Any difference between LIS education and professional expectations needs to be explored. The global metamorphosis of libraries has re-engineered the professional landscape, making soft skills a core component of librarianship.

3. Soft skills for library and information science professionals and the global metamorphosis

- Digital transformation and technological convergence led to the shift from print-based to digital and hybrid libraries. It has transformed the way information is accessed, stored, and disseminated. Adaptability, continuous learning, and problem-solving are essential to address the transformation. Librarians who demonstrate adaptability embrace new technologies, learn emerging digital tools, and guide users through online databases, e-resources, and digital literacy programs with confidence and patience.

- Globalization of information access has enabled knowledge to transcend geographical and linguistic boundaries through open access, global databases, and collaborative networks.

Cross-cultural communication, empathy, and cultural intelligence are becoming essential soft skills for librarians. Librarians use intercultural sensitivity and effective communication to serve diverse user groups, promote inclusivity, and manage information services that respect global diversity and multilingual contexts.

- User-centric and experience-oriented services involve personalization and engagement on user-focused services. These require important soft skills such as empathy, active listening, and service orientation.

- Libraries now play a vital role in organizational learning, knowledge sharing, and interdisciplinary collaboration in the era of Knowledge management and collaboration networks. Soft skills involved in addressing the change are teamwork, leadership, and collaboration.

- Librarians with strong interpersonal and leadership skills coordinate teams, manage institutional repositories, and engage in collaborative research and networked projects effectively.

- The exponential growth of digital content has created challenges in evaluating and using information ethically. Librarians apply analytical and ethical reasoning to teach information literacy, guide users in evaluating sources, and promote responsible use of digital information.

- Libraries are evolving into social learning spaces, contributing to literacy, sustainability, and civic engagement. Through community outreach, advocacy, and social initiatives, librarians act as facilitators of learning, inclusion, and empowerment within their communities.

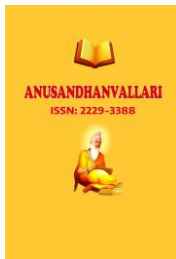
- The post-pandemic era has normalized virtual collaboration, remote access, and digital service delivery in a remote and hybrid work culture. Librarians employ organizational and communication skills to manage virtual reference services, conduct webinars, and maintain seamless coordination among distributed teams.

- Libraries increasingly depend on analytics for planning and evaluation in assessment. Analytical thinking, problem-solving, and attention to detail are the essential soft skills required. Librarians interpret data trends, analyze user feedback, and communicate findings clearly to inform strategic decisions and policy-making.

- Rapid global change demands continual learning and emotional resilience. Librarians cultivate self-awareness, set learning goals, and maintain emotional balance to remain effective and future-ready professionals. Motivation, emotional intelligence, and stress management should be the essential soft skills acquired for addressing emotional challenges among library professionals.

- Libraries contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through education, equity, and access to information. Librarians with strong values advocate for sustainability, promote open knowledge, and mobilize communities toward informed citizenship.

- The introduction of Artificial Intelligence and automation in library services is a global metamorphosis. Integration of AI tools, chatbots, automated cataloguing, and recommendation systems is transforming library workflows and service models. Critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability are essential soft skills required by librarians.



Librarians with adaptive and analytical thinking can interpret AI outputs responsibly, design human-centered digital services, and balance automation with personalized human guidance.

- The rise of fake news and misinformation challenges the credibility of information ecosystems.
- The open-access and open-science movement emphasizes transparency and collaboration. Librarians can negotiate publishing rights, advocate for open-access policies, and guide researchers in data sharing and publication ethics.

- Global research increasingly crosses disciplinary boundaries, requiring integrated information support. Collaboration, networking, and communication are important soft skills.

Librarians collaborate across domains, communicate with diverse scholars, and curate interdisciplinary resources through cooperative and relational approaches.

- User behaviour and learning preferences have metamorphosed. Users now prefer access over smartphones and gadgets, instant information, and personalized recommendations. Librarians anticipate changing preferences, empathize with users' digital habits, and innovate services such as virtual help desks and interactive learning spaces to maintain engagement. Essential soft skills involved are empathy, flexibility, and innovation.

- Analytical skills and teaching aptitude of a library professional help in effective information literacy and research support services. Libraries are expanding in data management, research analytics, and digital scholarship. Librarians with collaborative and instructional skills support researchers in data curation, visualization, and ethical usage of data.

- Growing concerns over data breaches, privacy violations, and intellectual property misuse affect library operations.

- Cybersecurity and digital privacy awareness require ethical awareness, communication, and responsibility as essential soft skills. Librarians build user trust by educating patrons about digital privacy, promoting safe online practices, and upholding ethical data stewardship.

- Libraries worldwide are adopting inclusive practices. Librarians with compassionate and inclusive mindsets design accessible information systems, advocate for assistive technologies, and foster equitable participation for all users.

- Libraries respond to pandemics, conflicts, and environmental crises by serving as centers for credible information and social support, which is not possible without the skills of crisis management, resilience, and leadership. Librarians use emotional intelligence and leadership to maintain operations, support mental well-being, and provide reliable information during crises.

- Physical libraries are being redesigned as collaborative learning environments integrating technology and creativity. Librarians act as facilitators, encouraging collaboration, hosting workshops, and curating experiences that transform the library into an active learning hub.

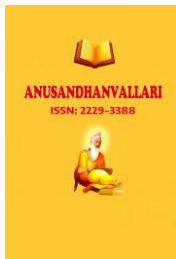
- Continuous professional development and global networking encourage international collaborations, and professional learning communities are shaping library practices across borders.

Librarians attend webinars and cross-border research projects, sharing expertise and building a global identity.

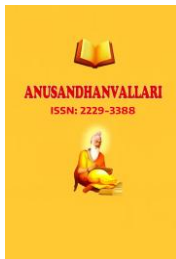
- Environmental sustainability and green practices are becoming part of library missions worldwide. Librarians with strong leadership and communication skills mobilize users toward environmental awareness, promote digital sustainability, and create eco-friendly library spaces.

- Libraries now participate in institutional policy framing on data management, intellectual property, and open access, involving soft skills such as negotiation, decision-making, and ethical leadership. Librarians employ negotiation and diplomacy to influence policy decisions that ensure fair access, transparency, and compliance with global information standards.

- Increasing mobility of students and researchers requires seamless access to resources across borders and institutions. Coordination, intercultural communication, and adaptability are required to coordinate with consortia, manage resource-sharing networks, and ensure equitable remote access for a globally dispersed user base.



- To address the digital divide and the disparities in digital access that continue to affect education and research opportunities globally, empathy, advocacy, and problem-solving skills must be developed. Librarians can advocate for digital inclusion, implement outreach programs, and design creative solutions to provide support for information access for underserved communities.
- The modern library workplace faces various challenges, including burnout, workload pressure, and hybrid work adjustments. Emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and stress management are skills that help librarians develop a positive work environment, mediate team conflicts, and improve well-being and productivity.
- The global information environment requires navigating complex ethical issues like AI, copyright, and data ethics.
- Soft Skills, such as ethical discernment, critical reasoning, and integrity, help librarians act as ethical stewards, guiding responsible use of information and sustaining a culture of transparency and fairness in digital knowledge ecosystems.
- Universities are moving toward transdisciplinary education requiring holistic information support. Collaboration, instructional design, and problem-solving help librarians to work with faculty and students across disciplines to integrate research skills into curricula and enable critical inquiry beyond subject boundaries.
- Artificial Intelligence literacy for users has become central to research and education. Librarians educate users on using AI responsibly, explain algorithmic operations in human terms, and bridge the gap between machine systems and user comprehension.
- Libraries are becoming active partners in digital humanities projects involving data visualization, text mining, and cultural preservation. Collaboration, creativity, and communication skills help librarians to collaborate with scholars and technologists, interpret complex data for diverse audiences, and creatively present cultural heritage through digital storytelling.
- Gamified learning and interactive programs are being integrated into library instruction and outreach. Soft Skills such as creativity, innovation, and collaboration help librarians design game-based learning activities and interactive experiences that make research skills and information literacy engaging for users.
- Global scholarship increasingly requires multilingual access and translation support. Cross-cultural communication, linguistic awareness, and collaboration shall help librarians support translation initiatives, develop multilingual metadata, and promote linguistic diversity in research.
- Libraries are required to maintain services during crises such as pandemics, conflicts, or natural disasters. Crisis management, communication, and emotional resilience are the key skills that enable librarians to coordinate emergency responses, sustain morale, and deliver reliable information during uncertain times.
- Libraries are evolving into collaborative spaces where users, researchers, and librarians co-create knowledge rather than merely consume it. Librarians use facilitation and teamwork to engage users in co-curation projects, digital exhibits, and community-driven knowledge initiatives, fostering shared ownership of information.
- Libraries increasingly partner with startups, incubators, and creative industries. Networking, innovation, and adaptability enable librarians to act as knowledge brokers, connecting entrepreneurs with research support, data, and co-working spaces.
- Libraries are being embedded in smart city ecosystems as hubs for digital inclusion and civic innovation. Leadership, collaboration, and strategic vision help librarians engage with civic planners, promote digital citizenship, and create participatory platforms for community problem-solving.
- Growing recognition of neurodiversity requires sensitive and flexible library environments. Empathy, observation, and adaptability enable the librarians to design calm, sensory-friendly spaces and adjust communication styles to accommodate varied cognitive and emotional needs.
- In an age of misinformation and manipulated data, libraries champion factual, evidence-based inquiry.



Critical thinking, persuasion, and ethical reasoning help librarians guide users in evaluating the credibility of information and facilitating research integrity and fact-checking.

4. Soft skills in Indian LIS education

The American Library Association (ALA) and the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) emphasize soft skills as vital to twenty-first-century librarianship.

Course titles and learning outcomes in various universities in India emphasize soft skill development. Professional communication (verbal, written, presentation skills), interpersonal & customer service skills (reference interviews, user engagement, active listening), teamwork and leadership (group projects, team management, leading library programmes), ethical judgement and professional values (codes of ethics, information rights, privacy), cultural competence and inclusivity (intercultural communication, accessibility, working with diverse communities), digital communication & remote service skills (virtual reference, social media, online instruction), critical thinking, problem solving & decision making (information evaluation, user needs analysis), reflective practice and lifelong learning (portfolios, seminars, micro-credentials) are the basic framework for inclusion of soft skill development opportunities for future professionals in the curricula of various universities.

Seminar presentations aim to build oral communication, persuasion, and seminar etiquette. It is encouraged to place students in service situations, such as reference desks and outreach projects, where customer service, teamwork, adaptability, and ethical decision-making are practised through hands-on exposure.

Projects and assignments that require teamwork help to teach negotiation, conflict resolution, and collaboration in planning and execution.

To strengthen soft-skill outcomes, every course-specific soft-skill outcome may be essentially mapped. Thrust must be given during the internships. Partnering with employers regularly can help assess soft skill development. Technology-enhanced soft-skill training and standardized frameworks for soft skills training in LIS, and clear assessment mechanisms for measuring soft skill development, shall be important in the future.

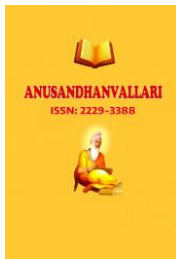
5. Conclusion:

Library and Information Science (LIS) education must clearly assess soft-skill development rather than leaving them implicit.

Library and Information Science (LIS) curricula worldwide must enhance experiential, interdisciplinary, and problem-based learning models that pertain to real-world scenarios. Assignments, collaborative research, and mentorship programmes can provide students with authentic contexts for soft skill training. Peer feedback and self-assessment can further strengthen learners' skills.

Continuous professional development will play a decisive role in the coming decades by clearly differentiating itself from soft skills. Librarians must engage in lifelong learning. Professional associations facilitate this growth through international training, webinars, and certification programmes. However, future research should focus on developing measurable aspects of soft skills, identifying best practices across regions, and assessing the impact on user satisfaction, innovation, and institutional transformation. Developments in pedagogy and curricula in LIS education can create a new generation of globally competent, emotionally intelligent, and ethically grounded information professionals. Librarians shall mediate between diverse stakeholders, promote digital inclusion, and foster ethical information ecosystems that uphold human values. The librarian of the future will bridge technology and humanity to sustain libraries as vital centres of knowledge and innovation.

Soft-skill development is not a supplementary aspect of librarianship in the era of global metamorphosis.



References:

- [1] Mi, M. (2005). Cultural Competence for Libraries and Librarians in Health Care Institutions. *Journal of Hospital Librarianship*, 5. 15-31. DOI:10.1300/J186v05n02_02
- [2] Birdi, B., Wilson, K., & Tso, H. M. (2009). The nature and role of empathy in public librarianship. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 41(2), 81-89. DOI:10.1177/0961000609102827
- [3] Partridge, H., & Lee, J., & Munro, C., (2010). Becoming "Librarian 2.0": The Skills, Knowledge, and Attributes Required by Library and Information Science Professionals in a Web 2.0 World (and Beyond). *Library Trends*, 59. 315-335. DOI:10.1353/lib.2010.a407820
- [4] Varalakshmi, V. S. R. (2010). Library and information science education in South India: Perspective and challenges. *DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology*, 30(5), 19-31 DOI:10.14429/djlit.30.622
- [5] Sweetman, K. (2016). Workplace expectations for today's library: What do you need to be able to do in order to succeed in today's workplace? *Young adult library services*, 14(4), 40-43.
- [6] Phillips, A. (2017). Understanding Empathetic Services: The Role of Empathy in Everyday Library Work. *Journal of Research on Libraries & Young Adults*, 8(1).
- [7] Henderson, M., (2020) "Why you need soft and non-technical skills for successful data librarianship", *Journal of eScience Librarianship* 9(1) DOI:10.7191/jeslib.2020.1183
- [8] Bordoloi, R., Das, P., & Das, K. (2020). Lifelong learning opportunities through MOOCs in India. *Asian Association of Open Universities Journal*, 15(1), 83-95. DOI:10.1108/AAOUJ-09-2019-0042
- [9] Lucas, D.(2020). Emotional Intelligence for Librarians. *Library Leadership & Management*. DOI:10.5860/LLM.V34I3.7452
- [10] Saunders, L., (2020). Core Knowledge and Specialized Skills in Academic Libraries. *College & Research Libraries*, 81(2) DOI:10.5860/crl.81.2.288
- [11] Ahmad, S., Ameen, K., & Ahmad, S. (2021). Information professionals' soft skills status and barriers in its development: a mixed method study. *Library Management*, 42(1-2), 80-92. DOI:10.1108/LM-03-2020-0048
- [12] VKJ, J. (2021). On revamping and strengthening internship in libraries. *Annals of Library and Information Studies (ALIS)*, 67(3), 275-288. DOI:10.56042/alis.v68i3.45191
- [13] Hamid, A., & Younus, M. (2022). Why soft skills matter: Analyzing the relationship between soft skills and productivity in workplace of academic library professionals. *Libri*, 72(3), 263-277. DOI:10.1515/libri-2021-0116
- [14] Hu, Y., & Ocepek, M., & Downie, J., & Barker, L., (2022). Listen to Librarians: Highlighted Core Competencies for Librarianship from the Perspectives of Working Librarians. *College & Research Libraries*, 83. DOI:10.5860/crl.83.6.994
- [15] Padmaja, V., & Mukul, K. (2022). Upskilling and reskilling in the digital age: the way forward for higher educational institutions. In *Transforming higher education through digitalization* (pp. 253-275). CRC Press. DOI: 10.1201/9781003132097-15
- [16] Saunders, L., & Bajjaly, S. (2022). The importance of soft skills to LIS education. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 63(2), 187-215. DOI:10.3138/jelis-2020-0053
- [17] Yadav, A. K. (2022). An evaluation of library and information science curricula and professional perspectives in India. *International Information & Library Review*, 54(3), 242-254. DOI:10.1080/10572317.2021.1988393
- [18] Yadav, A. K. (2022). Key skills and competencies of LIS professionals in the digital library environment: a content analysis of job advertisements. *Library Management*, 43(1-2), 50-65.