



Professional Librarian Skills Development: A Case Study

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Professional Librarian Skills Development: A Case Study

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Abstract

Introduction. Presents reflections on the outcome of a research project conducted at the School of Communications and Arts of the University of São Paulo, regarding librarian training, their field of expertise and the need for continued education.

Methodology. The methodological design compiled in the research project involved planning-presenting the project, and developing the questionnaire for data collection. The electronic form was applied to an intentionally random, stratified sample of 18,374 active librarians throughout Brazil, totalling 3,320 responses that were statistically treated and compiled.

Analysis. Once the data was collected using the electronic forms, we analysed the collected information and the literature, cleansed the information and standardized the bibliographic records and statistical processing of data that formed the results presented in this research project.

Results. As the world gets more sophisticated and diversified, the competence required of the professional librarian, which in a first stage is highly technical – remembering that it is impossible to dispose of or move forward without it being well established – grows and includes other important responsibilities in the new organizational environment. We must work towards a holistic qualification, valuing management, methodological, cultural, multidisciplinary and systemic skills – all highlighted in the economy of knowledge.

Keywords: professional librarian; information on practices; professional skills; information management

1. Introduction

In Brazil, there are 129 theology and 42 library science courses, which leads us to believe that Brazil has more need of prayer than of information. Of the 42 courses, 34 are housed in federal universities, leading to the conclusion that library science courses, in the private sector, provide low profit. Private disinterest can be explained by the low number of stakeholders. This also explains the admittance tests in higher education showing library science as an unpopular choice of professions. Such findings suggest that the field no longer speaks to the contemporary world – and that is probably due to the configuration of existing courses. The profile, content and quality of library science courses are motives for controversy since the first course was opened, when it was settled more regularly in the third decade of the twentieth century. Initially, the courses had a fairly technical content, since their goal was to reveal rules and procedures to prepare human resources to work in libraries – governmental in their majority.

When, a few decades later, it was understood that these courses could be taught in universities and within its rules, the content – which was strongly technical – was expanded to three or four years, with some remaining technical humanities classes. In 1962, a federal law recognized the librarian profession, determining that only those with a library science degree could be hired as librarians. The law also specified that to obtain a bachelor's degree in library science, it was necessary to also be a “holder of a diploma issued by a higher education library school, official, of rank, or officially recognized”. This law determined that the professional practice is a prerogative of librarians with a diploma acquired by higher education graduation, which, in Brazil, is accessible to those who have attended a primary school of eight years and secondary school of three years. After that and being 18 years of age, approximately, the person is offered a professional choice and the candidate chooses the course that interests him/her most. So, the ones who opt for this field are post-adolescents. A current trend shows that the course is also in demand as a second option, usually by those who have already graduated in the humanities field and want to expand their professional scope.

With the institution of the first minimum curriculum in 1962, these discussions have become more intense. Twenty years later, came the second minimum curriculum and the field was already immersed in bigger debates due to the rapid technological changes in the field of information. No new minimum curriculum came since, but debates remained and became more pronounced, with the new and ever-changing

scenarios happening in the workplace. The theoretical and practical changes were so fast and profound that they resulted in more questions than answers to the universities' courses in library science. While some traditional areas of knowledge have undergone profound changes but retained their identities, such as medicine or chemistry, the information/communication fields move in a continuous process of rebuilding and repositioning, synchronized to the development of technology and the constant social changes caused by them.

In addition to technological changes, Brazilian library science faces a heterogeneous socio-economic and cultural landscape. In a 516 years-old Brazil, there is a multifaceted socio-cultural layout that plays with extremes in the same geographical area: schooling, wages, quality of life and well-being. In addition to this diversity – that so motivates sociologists, economists, writers... – there is a segmentation determined by various types of libraries: children's, public, university connected, for corporations and others. Therefore, library science is plural, reflecting this diversity. If the courses trained professionals for these differentiated needs, several courses with different profiles would exist.

In addition to the diversity of people and of demands, which make library science more multifaceted, there is another challenge, more complex and controversial: the internet. An example: the Brazilian school library that did research based on encyclopaedias, was devastated with the advent of Google, since “copy and paste”, a generally accepted procedure, simplified the lives of schoolchildren everywhere. With Google, the librarian role of mediation turned secondary – it could not compete. It is within this scenario that the entrants in library science courses have to transverse: they will have to face information that integrates with communication inseparably and that are aimed at different audiences in different regions gradually migrating to the digital world. For the courses and faculty of library science, the doubts and the challenge remain: what type of professional should be trained?

This research sought to answer a fundamental question: whether the courses are training for this time and age, and if the professionals who graduate are aware of the flaws and shortcomings they should complement through professional development.

2. Research Objectives

Two basic questions guided the preparation of the questions: a. Do librarians

believe to have received good education? b. What additions they regard as necessary to feel more updated and face the job market with more security? The remaining questions are somehow connected to these two.

It should be noted that library science courses are spread across the vast Brazilian territory, with a higher concentration in the southeast macroregion – states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro –, an area of industrial concentration and increased economic development. Generally speaking, courses offer the same content and aim to train generic professionals, who are able to adapt their knowledge to the specific demands of their jobs.

3. Data Analysis and Results: The research universe

Brazil has 18,374 active librarians and 34,805 librarians enrolled in the Federal Board of Library Science/Regional Library Science Councils System – according to data published on the website of the Federal Board of Library Science in June 2013. It should be noted that library science courses, in addition to the evasion rate, suffer a loss after graduation: there is a number, still unavailable to us, of professionals who graduate and then leave the field. From these professionals, 3,320 responses were obtained, 18% of the total universe of active librarians composed the study sample. The largest concentration can be found in more developed areas (41%) – south and southeast regions of Brazil, especially in São Paulo –, and 85% of the sample were females.

The methodological design compiled in the research project involved planning and presentation of the project, and development of a questionnaire for data collection. The electronic form was applied to an intentionally random, stratified sample of 18,374 active librarians throughout Brazil, with a total of 3,320 responses that were then statistically treated and compiled.

The research could only be performed with the collaboration of the Federal Council of Library Science, which aided by sending the electronic form via the internet to all librarians.

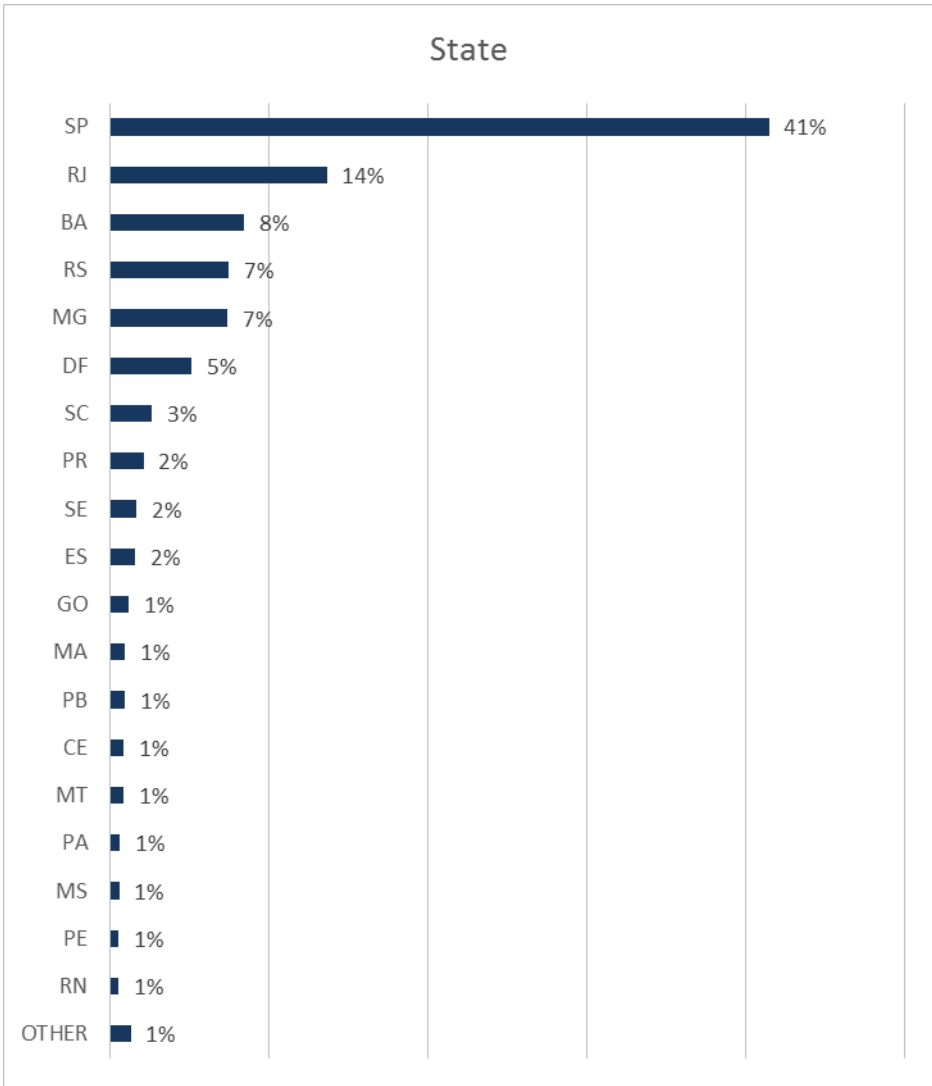


Chart 01: Regarding the region each interviewee resided in, the highest concentration was in the southeast – 41% of the interviewees live in the state of São Paulo, followed by 14% in Rio de Janeiro and 8% in Bahia. Source: Research Data

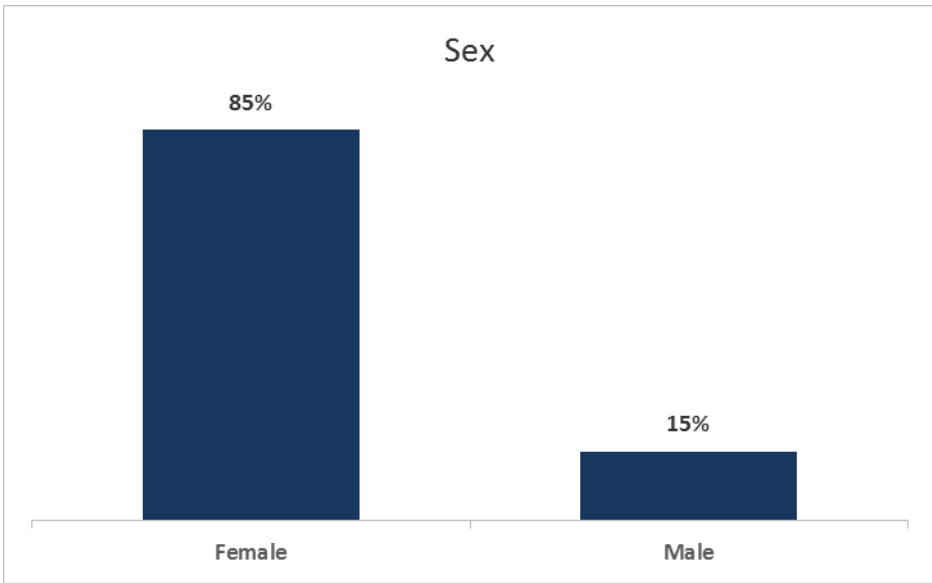


Chart 02: 85% of the interviewees are female. Source: Research Data

3.1. Where do they work?

To understand the profile of Brazilian librarians, it is essential to know in which fields they act professionally.

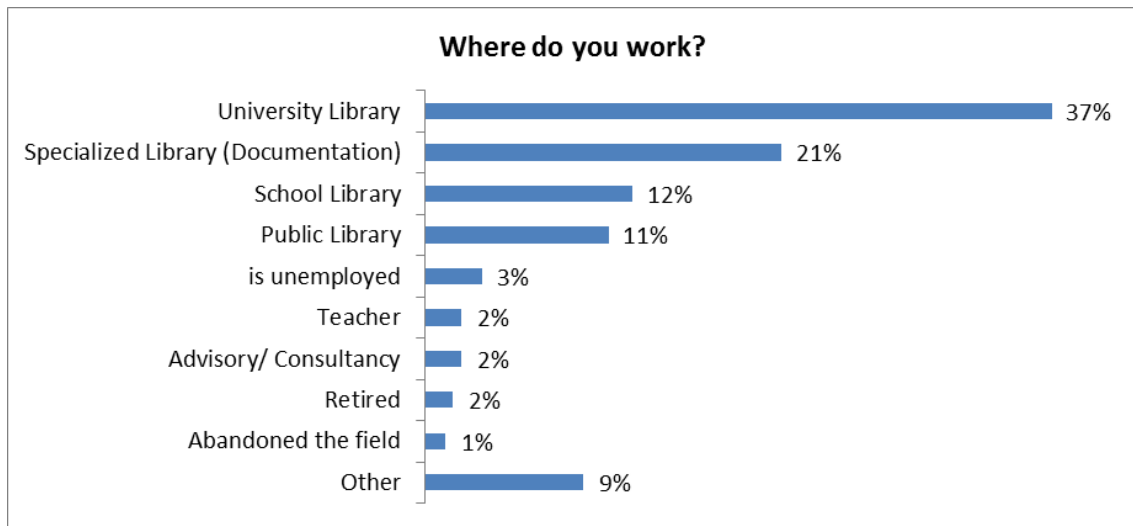


Chart 03: Area in which Librarians work. Source: Research Data

University libraries, both public and private, are the largest employers. This is due not only to the evident need for libraries in higher education institutions, but also to legislation requiring libraries to approve the functioning of these institutions. In view of this requirement, the university workplace has become the desire and the hope of hundreds of librarians who graduate every year. Most of these libraries have standard procedures and routines and those hired only integrate into this stable organization without any professional challenges.

The second largest segment is dedicated to the information services focused on a group or a specific interest. Generally, these services exist within companies and government agencies. They create information services, generally small, with reduced staff directed to the care of a small group of experts in one field or another: lawyers, publishing groups, museums, companies of various branches and others.

The third largest group is composed of school libraries. Education in Brazil is divided into three segments: the primary education, for schoolchildren aged between 7 and 15 years; secondary education, with a duration of three years; and the higher

education, which receives young people aged 18 years or more. In Brazil, according to the School Census of 2010, published on the Brazil Education Site, about 194,939 basic public and private schools exist in the country. Law No. 12,244 of May 24, 2010 establishes the universalization of libraries in the country's educational institutions –, demanding the existence of libraries and librarians at most 10 years after the date of enactment of the law. However, the number of librarians devoted to the school services is the more dramatic, contrasting demand and response.

*“Brazil needs to build over 64,300 libraries in public schools by 2020 to meet the goal of universalizing these spaces, under Law 12,244. The legislation, passed in May 24, 2010, requires all managers to provide for a collection of, at least, one book for each student enrolled in both the public and private network. Five years from the deadline, 53% of the 120,500 public schools in the country still do not have a library or reading room. From today, it would be necessary to build and equip more than 1,000 libraries per month to meet the requirements of the law. The survey was conducted by the Qedu site, of the Lemann Foundation, at the request of the **Agência Brasil**, based in the data of the School Census of 2014 (Beraldo, 2015).”*

Librarians working in public libraries form the fourth largest segment. Brazil has 5,570 municipalities (IBGE, 2015), more than 70% of those have less than 20,000 inhabitants and 90% do not have librarians. The relatively high number of librarians working in public libraries is due to the high concentration of libraries in cities like São Paulo, which boasts of a network of 116 libraries (SNBP, 2015). There is no statistical data regarding the distribution of professionals working in public libraries, but empirical observation shows that large state public libraries – in each state capital – are home to the largest contingent of librarians.

Data from public libraries in Brazil: in order to support the development of national cultural policies geared to city and state public libraries, the SNBP systematically performs data updating about this kind of cultural facility. The last update was done in April 2015, within the scope of More Public Libraries Project.

There are 6,102 city, district, state and federal public libraries, in the 26 states and the Federal District, divided as follows: 503 in the north, 1,847 in the northeast, 501 in the midwest, 1,958 in the southeast, and 1,293 in the south (SNBP, 2015).

These four groups of professionals represent different sides of the same profession. Since librarians provide services to different publics and expectations, the tools and processes they employ are also different. This is a situation that directly affects the courses that train librarians. When you want to train professionals to work in school libraries, it is crucial that they know their audience: children and adolescents. This means that knowing Jean Piaget is more important than knowing Melvil Dewey. Those who want to work with strategic information for businesses should seek subsidies in the Administration area. In Brazil, the university education model provides basic training for professional practice for people aged between 18 and 22 years, and after that *lacto* or *strictu sensu* specializations in graduate school.

The philosopher Pierre Lévy, professor of the chair of Research in Collective Intelligence at the University of Ottawa, stresses the importance of educating oneself to the world's complexity. He observed: "to every place we direct our gazes with sufficient accuracy and perseverance, the world in which we live is revealed as complex". The possibilities opened up by a qualification that takes into account this complexity, are ample and appropriate to the coming professional scenario.

Of those interviewed, 77% attended a graduate course, with 59% seeking a *lato sensu* graduate course or specialization course and 18% already have the title of master or PhD. Part of the latter act as teachers in library science courses. A significant sample data indicated that 53.6% of the interviewees graduated after the year of 2000.

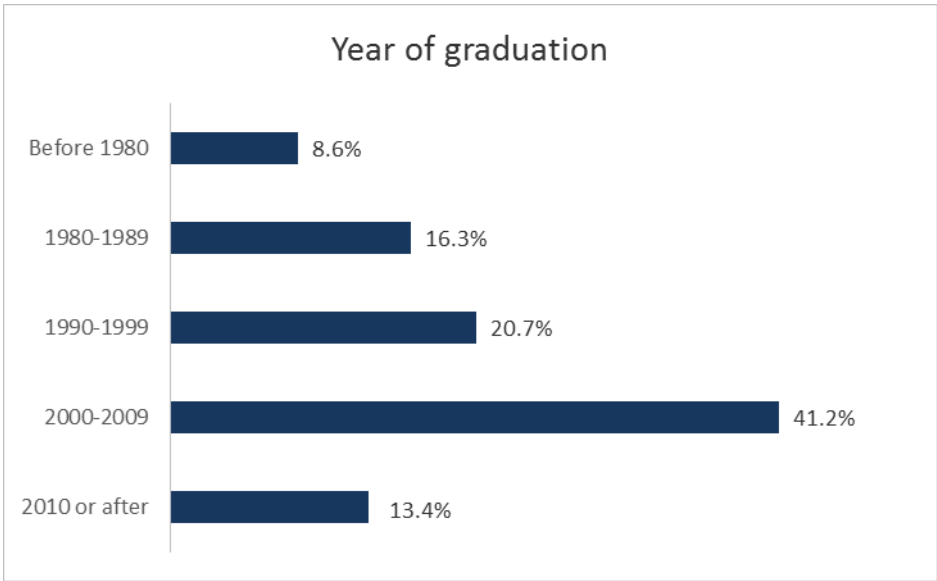


Chart 04: Most of the interviewees are professionals graduated after the year of 2000, with special note to the stretch between 2000 and 2009 (41%). Source: Research Data

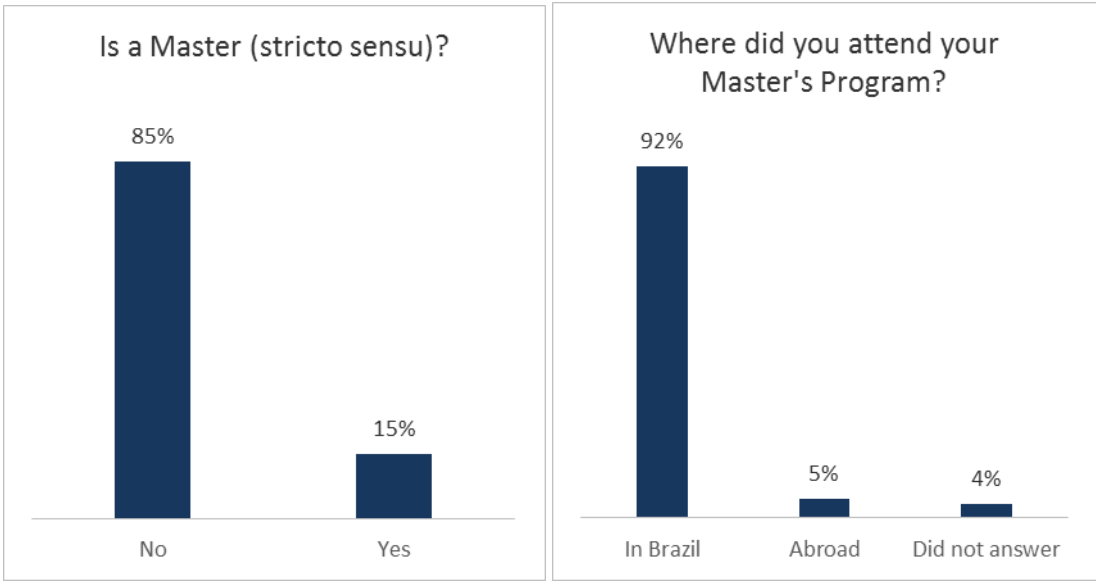


Chart 05: 15% of the interviewees had a master's degree, with 5% having studied abroad. Source: Research Data

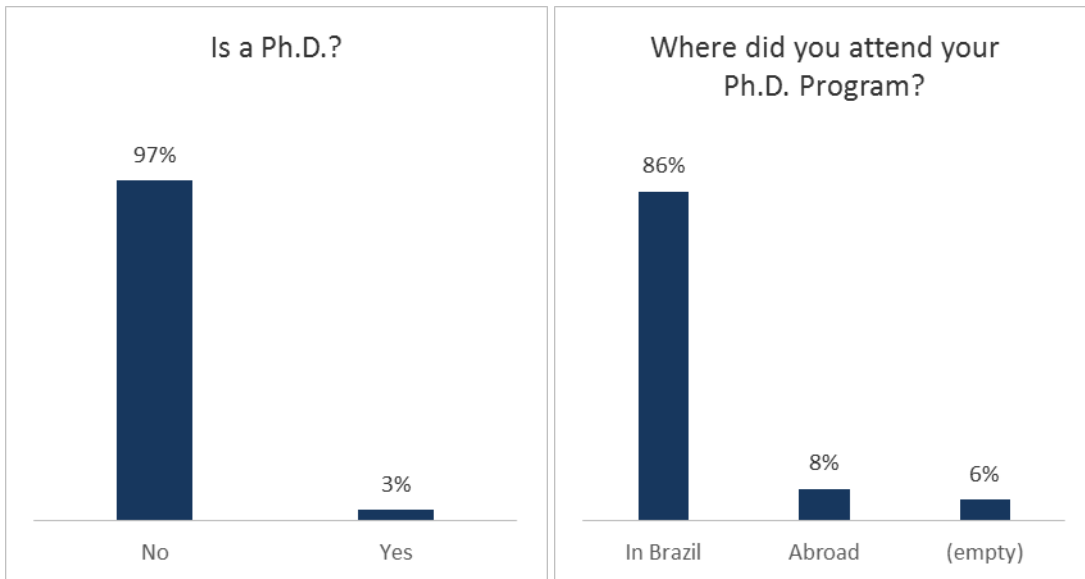


Chart 06: 3% of the interviewees were Ph.D.s, with 8% having studied abroad. Source: Research Data

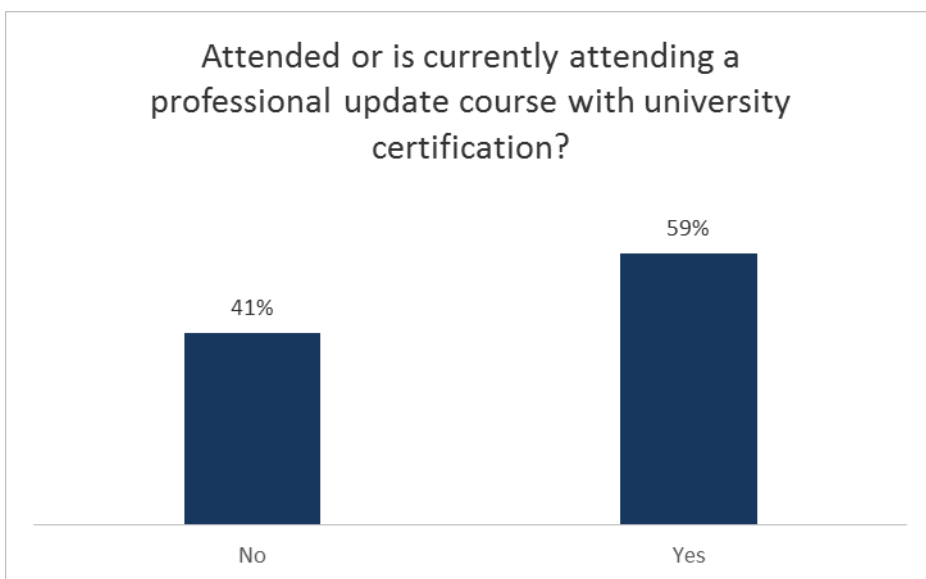


Chart 07: 59% of the interviewees stated they attended or are currently attending a professional updating course with university certification. Source: Research Data

Most professional dynamics of the next decade are still not clearly established. The professions will continue to diversify, and new ones, many do not even exist yet, will be in great demand. More than specific technical skills – which in the case of library science is absolutely indispensable –, most new or renewed professions will

require the practice of many cultural capabilities. Training the twenty-first century librarian will be about balancing the binomial expert (technical dimension) versus the generalist (qualification for complexity), in an intelligent way, because intelligent are the future possibilities in the labour market.

4. Analysis and Results: Degree of approval of the received training

Generally speaking, librarians in Brazil appear to be satisfied with the courses they attended, since good to great evaluations summed up 81% of the total.

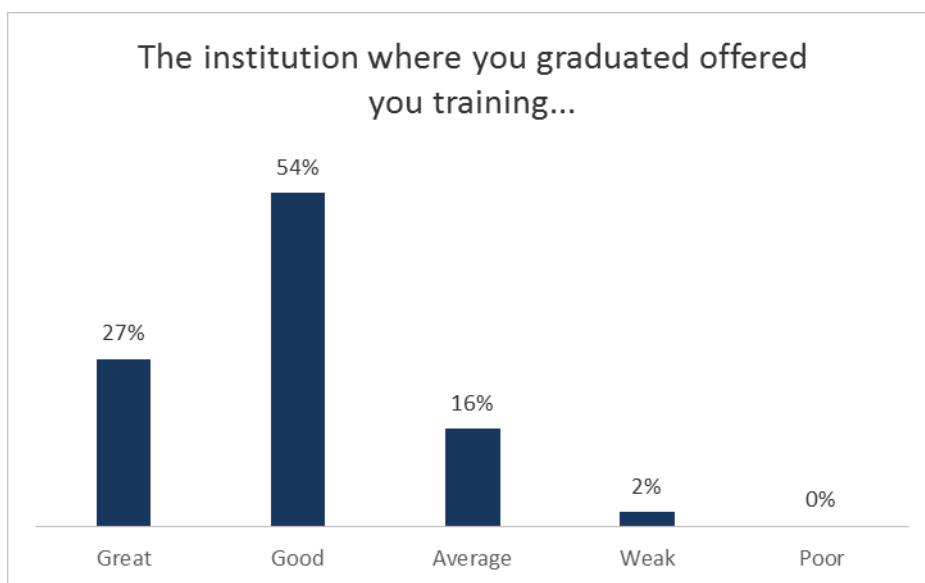


Chart 08: 81% of the interviewees considered that the institution offered them a great (27%) or good (54%) education. Source: Research Data

If we consider the researchers' evaluations regarding the regional distribution in Brazil, we found that the southern region (85.7%/34.2%) and the southeast region (83.2%/28%) concentrate the largest share of Great-Good and Good satisfaction, respectively, regarding the quality of the courses.

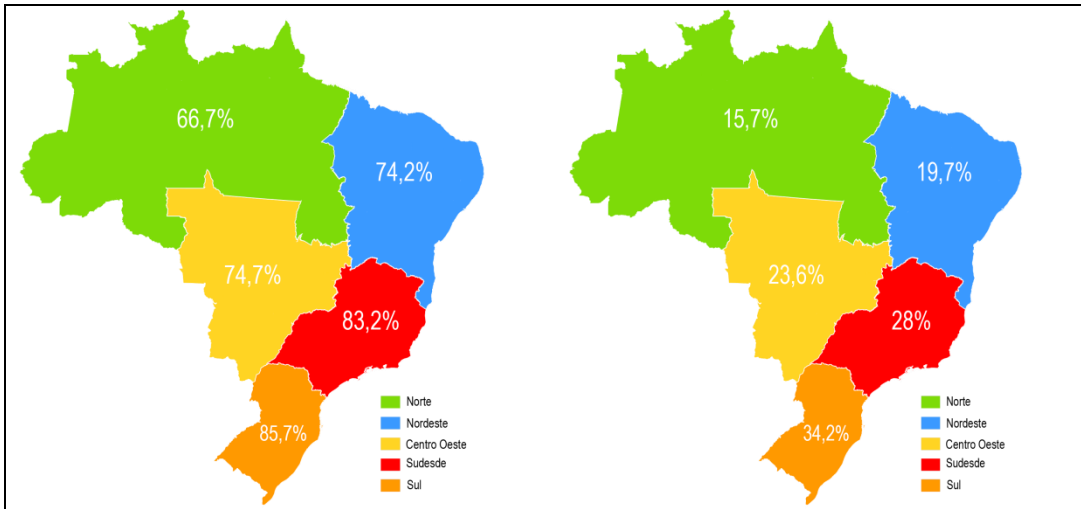


Chart 09: Great and Good Approval
Source: Research Data

Chart 10: Approval of the Course: Great
Source: Research Data

The following question, a development, refers to the quality of the course compared to the labour market. There is the assumption that the course’s content in the training of librarians does not correspond to the demand of the labour market. It is noteworthy that most of the interviewees works in university libraries, a professional sector that keeps more stable routines in the organization of its collection and the service provided to its users – a captive audience. Another factor that gives stability to these librarians is the collective character of the work in the libraries: almost all units have in their workforce several professionals who discuss innovations and make decisions together, sharing responsibilities. In addition, university libraries are integrated into systems that dilute individual action. For this type of work, library science courses certainly provide the knowledge foundation needed. Still, 50% of the interviewees stated that they were prepared “in terms”, which can be translated to “average”.

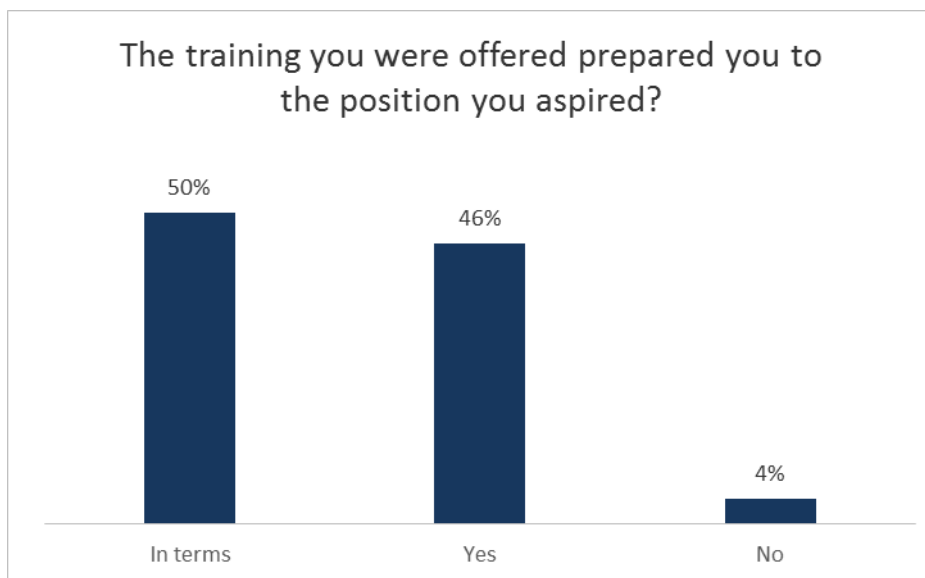


Chart 11: Only 4% of the interviewees thought that the training they were offered failed to prepare them to the position they aspired; 50% believed they were prepared “in terms” and 46% considered that they were completely prepared. Source: Research Data

This topic – training and labour market – emphasizes that the labour market for public libraries and, especially, school libraries is small and offers low pay. Perhaps as a reflection of this fact, the courses drastically cut classes related to these two fields. However, these two sectors are the most in need of competent professionals. Public libraries are often run by civil servants with no training, and school libraries, where they exist, are put under the direction of so-called “readapted teachers” – those who for some reason were released from their classroom duties.

It is noteworthy that, in the post-internet stage, public and school libraries are those that require more solid training since they require interdisciplinarity, a rare knowledge in the Brazilian university system. Professionals, even those trained after the advent of the internet, remain within the technical expertise that enables them to perform well in most conventional libraries. The training received might be considered as suitable, in this case, for them to wade through the job market with relative safety.

5. Data and Results Analysis: Desire to remain updated

Most interviewees (89%) stated they had some need to keep updated. This shows that there is an awareness that what the course taught them no longer corresponds to current demands.

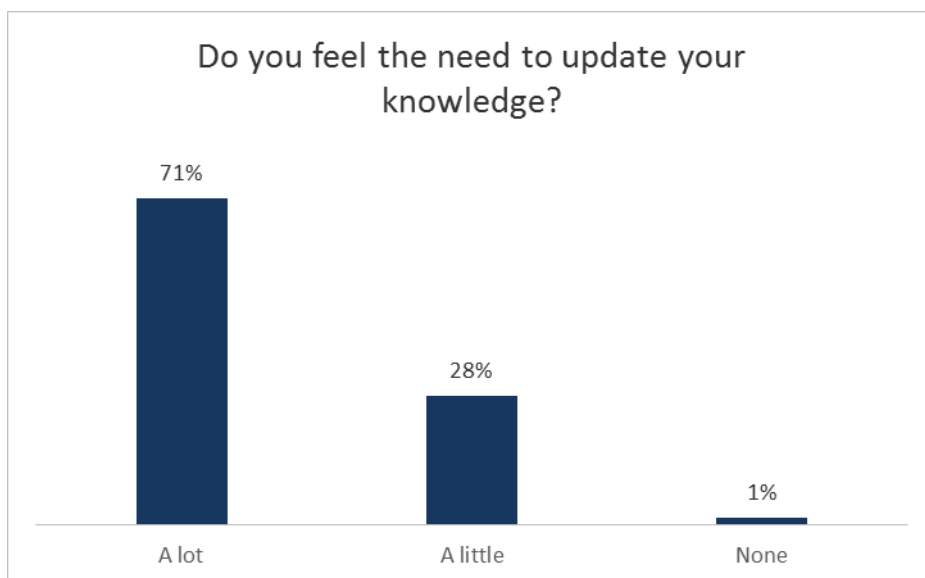


Chart 12: 71% of the interviewees feel a strong need of keeping themselves updated and 28% admit a little need to update professionally. Source: Research Data

In a practical point of view, continued education courses organized by universities try to meet these needs, providing librarians not only an update to what they have learned, but new practices they did not originally learn on their courses. In addition to these extension courses, master's and Ph.D. degrees are no longer intended exclusively for researchers and academics. The master's and even Ph.D. degree have drawn up a progressively larger number of librarians, who seek in the title a way to get more visibility and opportunities in the labour market.

6. Data and Results Analysis: Type of update desired

The diversity of updating courses that librarians picked as desirable for their professional advancement, fundamentally reveals that the field of information has won new sides, making it a field that incorporates knowledge from other fields. In any fields of work, including public and school libraries, familiarity with resources of information technology is required. Sectors previously considered "humanistic" as opposed to technological, presently cannot function without technology. And, so, it is no longer possible to be humanistic without technology tools.

Among the fields picked as the most desirable for professional updating, the highest incidence is in new areas that emerged in Brazil since 1995, when the internet

started to become more popular. It seems clear for librarians, from the answers obtained, that their field has undergone profound changes that require a repositioning of the profession in the society and, directly, in the labour market.

Apparently, the librarian profession and its training dances between two fields: information technology and culture. The first field covers the entire arsenal of contemporary devices to store, organize and disseminate information; while the second field, that of culture, covers the studies that provide direction and dimension to the social use of information. Libraries, museums and cultural centres form a complex, whose boundaries are difficult to be established, with information technology, necessarily, going through all of them.

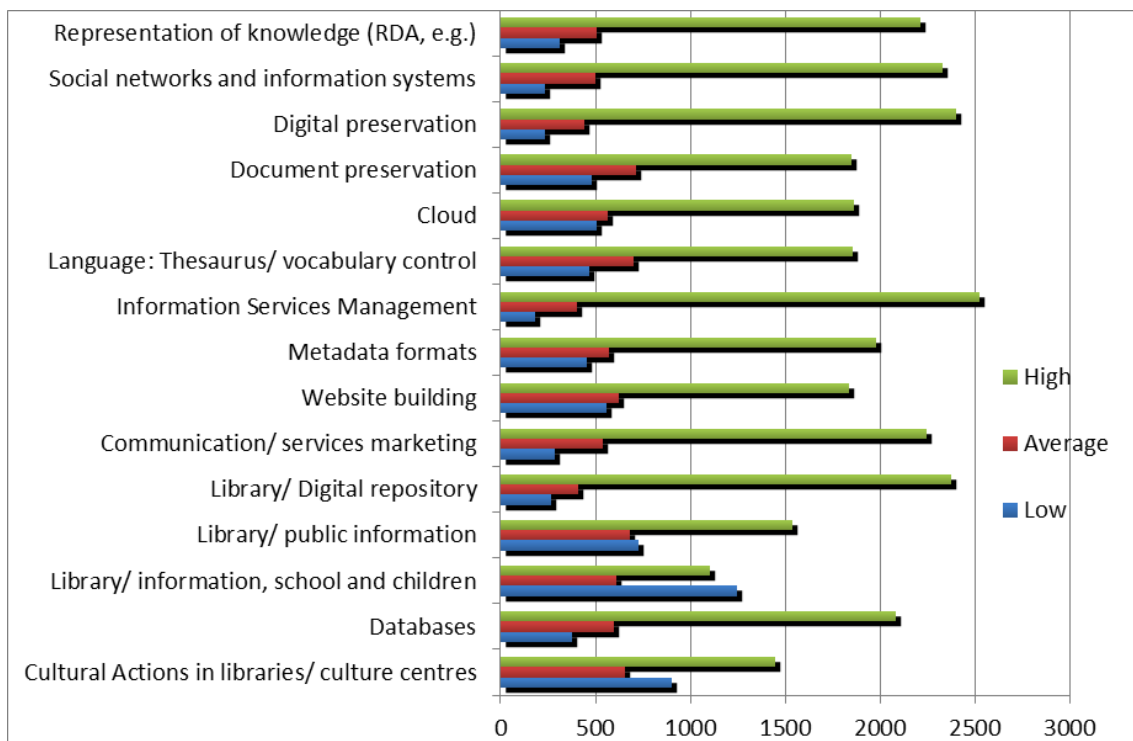


Chart 13: Degree of necessity of professional updating. Source: Research Data

Another contemporary phenomenon that arises in the librarian profession as the Sphinx that says “decipher me or I shall devour you” is the connection between information and communication, which was clearly separated before the internet. The librarian is not the professional who works behind the scenes anymore, but in the stage of communication, since it relates to all audiences and the interaction between librarian and public will give meaning to the task of organizing this information.

7. Conclusion

This paper is a summary of the research project being developed in the School of Communication and Arts of the University of São Paulo. We anticipate here the results of a research, allowing us to predict the possible conclusions. The general conclusion can be summed up in one sentence: “even with good library science courses, there is urgent need to update”. The rapid and profound changes in the contemporary world have put librarians face to face with the challenge of constantly refreshing and updating or facing its disappearance as a profession.

In any area or professional field, knowledge is the factor that currently adds more value to people, services and products. Due to this, qualification should be the goal of the training of professional librarians. Qualification is here understood as a logical result of a process that depends on what is loaded into the brain and not the mere enhancement of information without connections or contexts; memorization without critical reflection. To the extent that the world is sophisticated and diversified, the competence required of the professional librarian, which at first is highly technical – remembering it is impossible to dispose of it or move forward without it being well established –, extends and includes other responsibilities that are important in the new organizational environment. We must then think in a holistic qualification, valuing management, methodological, cultural, multidisciplinary and systemic skills – all highlighted in the economy of knowledge.

An economy of knowledge that can be pointed out as reference to the cognitive and pedagogical models, capable of dialoguing with the ever-changing world. Nowadays, intelligence means something else, it means grasping what others have not yet seen. This is particular to those who qualified comprehensively. It is a qualification to teach students to think, catalysing various multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary projects, valuing curiosity, the ability to explore, innovative solutions for new problems, constant update, a leadership profile, the autonomous pursuit of knowledge within the complexity of the world that surrounds us.

What is at stake in the contemporary world is not the librarian profession, but their training that makes it harder (more often than it makes it easier) to achieve the necessary changes. From this training derives a number of problems that affect the profession as a whole. It seems to reinforce the professional stereotypes that bind the librarian to libraries restricted to books made of paper. Even if the training is updated,

and it is something that happens in some courses, there is the public image of the librarian, which is a barrier to overcome. Librarians are more linked to the traditional library than to the management of information. An example of this is ads that seek librarians to work in companies. Rarely are these intended for information professionals, but rather, directed to the treatment of old files.

Apparently, the librarian, in their professional practice, failed to demonstrate that their skills go far beyond the physical organization of documents. This difficulty can also be attributed to the profile of the librarian's training in Brazil.

Most of those who choose library science at 17, 18 years do not have a clear notion of what it really means. After four years, if the course has not been abandoned – and the dropout rate is great – they graduate and go search for employment that does not always relate to what they learned as students. One of the actions to be implemented – and this already occurs in several Brazilian universities – is to opt for the course only after three years taking classes in another course that can provide them with the basis to make a career choice.

And, within library science, the second option should be made: the field they want to devote themselves to since they are clearly differentiated. The survey also reveals what we all knew already by simple observation: there is no single information professional, but several to take on the very roles they should play. The trend is for the library science courses to have a common base and then divide into many specializations according to market and society demands. But, above all, it is not enough to train good technicians, but those who have a clear perception of their professional makeup – their place and their role in society. It is not enough to train to the market's demands, it is necessary to train professionals who can change the market.

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