The need and impact of learning "Personality Development & Communication Skills" in LIS education: a case study

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to probe the need and impact of teaching personality development, social and communication skills as part of Library & Information Science (LIS) education. The Master programme at the Department of Library & Information Science at University of the Punjab, Lahore was taken as a case to study in this regard as the Department started a full 3 credit hour course on 'Personality Development & Communication Skills' in 2007. To meet the objective of the study, a web-based survey was used for data collection. Those 4 sessions' students who studied in this course were asked to respond to the survey. The findings revealed that overall the course had a meaningful influence on students' personality growth, behaviour modification and social skills. However, written communication skills were not much improved. The majority of respondents acknowledged the need for extensive learning of social and communication skills for LIS professionals as part of LIS education. It is assumed that this study will raise awareness in this regard among other schools in the country and in the sister countries with comparable conditions.

Keywords: Personality development; Communication skills; Library and Information Science education; Social skills; Soft skills; Library and Information Science professionals.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

While mentioning unique characteristics of services as compared to goods, Kotler and Bloom (1984) state that service cannot exist separately from its providers, be it persons or machines. They further mention that "services are highly variable, as they depend on *who* provides them and when and where they are provided" (p. 148). It shows the importance of human resources in the success of any service organisation. The quality of services is directly influenced by the competencies of their providers – both professionals and front-liners.

The same is true in library and information service environments. Experts have produced a huge amount of literature on the needed competencies for Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals as well as on designing a curriculum for meeting those needs. An overview of various local and international LIS curricula shows that LIS schools generally focus on developing professional competencies. However, the emerging competitive scenario has enhanced the requirement of developing other sets of skills for

delivering better services and meeting market needs. The literature on management, human resource management and leadership demonstrate that professionals must not only develop professional competencies but also focus on developing people and communication skills in order to succeed. One ought to develop a desired professional persona that includes most of these skills. Recent studies in Pakistan have shown the demand for imparting good communication skills during formal LIS education. (Ameen 2006; Chaudhary 2007; Ullah 2010; Warraich 2008; 2011). This author's experience as an academician, member on various expert panels for LIS job interviews, as well as observation and communication with peers has shown that generally LIS professionals exhibit a lack of needed social and communication skills (SCS). This often results in lost employment opportunities.

Keeping in view the need to develop good personality and communication skills in emerging LIS professionals, a mandatory, full 3 credit hour course on 'Personality Development & Communication Skills' was introduced in the Department of Library & Information Science, University of the Punjab (PU), Lahore, Pakistan in 2007. PU is the oldest university in Pakistan and LIS education was established there in 1915 by an American, Asa Don Dickenson. Presently, eight library schools in public sector universities and three in private sector offer the master degree programme in LIS. However, this particular course is being offered only at the PU.

This author was assigned by the then Head of the Department to instruct the course in 2007 in the first semester of the Master programme. Later, after the author became the department head in 2009, it was decided, in 2010 and 2011, that instructors from the field of business and communication studies to conduct the course. It appeared that an assessment of the course's impact on students' personality and communication skills development should be made in an empirical manner in order to investigate the need and impact of the course on LIS students' personality development, and social and communication skills.

The literature was searched to find the definitions and theories of personality development, communication and social skills in general and in particular with reference to LIS professionals. It appeared that the literature on psychology deals at length with personality development theories and presents various definitions of the concept of personality. A definition by Carver and Scheier (2000) appeared quite comprehensive. It states, "Personality is a dynamic organisation, inside the person, of psychophysical systems that create a person's characteristic patterns of behaviour, thoughts, and feelings" (p.5).

Social skills are also referred to as people skills and soft skills. The term 'social skills' has been used in this study. A precise social skills definition could not be found in the available resources. Riggio (1986) states that there is perhaps no adequate single definition of social skills. The variety and assortment of dimensions labeled as social skills is enormous. Phillips (1978) states that social skills have been defined as the extent to which one communicates with others in a manner that fulfills one's rights, requirements, or obligations to a reasonable degree without damaging the other person's similar rights. They are said to promote positive, goal–driven and effective problem–solving behaviours by Rich and Schroeder (1976). Rather than indulging into discussion about defining social skills at length, based on the literature of psychology, the most frequently referred social skills' proficiencies are as follows: communication skills, conflict resolution and negotiation, personal effectiveness, creative problem solving, strategic thinking, team building, and influencing skills. Similarly, there are many dimensions of communication. A

simple definition by Dwyer (1993) is, "any behaviour, verbal or nonverbal that is perceived by another" (p. 4).

For the purpose of the study, statements of basic desired behaviours, thoughts, feelings, and needed professional communication skills were shortlisted from the course outline in addition to suggested readings and available literature to assess the impact of the course on students' personality growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review was conducted on the subject of personality development in the LIS context. It revealed that it is a rich area of psychology. It appeared in the LIS literature mostly when discussing the types of needed professional competencies, their incorporation in the LIS educational programmes, and the challenges of acquiring them. The following section reviews the most relevant works.

Increasingly, it has been recognised that professionals with better communication and social skills build better relationships with other units within the organisation. Cronin and Martin (1983) argue that librarianship is a service profession, which involves face-to-face contact with the public. As in any people-directed profession, the importance of interpersonal skills cannot be overstated. They discuss why social skills training is so relevant to contemporary librarianship and outline elements of a social skills training package for librarians. Latham's (2002) study reported that few LIS schools teach courses specifically in technical and professional communication. He made a content analysis of recent job advertisements for information professionals, titles and descriptions of courses offered at American Library Association (ALA) accredited LIS schools, and recent job announcements for LIS faculty. It revealed that while effective communication skills were widely sought by employers, few LIS schools were addressing that need. The paper argued that instruction in technical and professional communication is vital to the success of information professionals in the workplace and that LIS schools should recruit faculty and develop courses to support such instruction. Another relevant work by Agada (1997) analyzed the role of learning behavioral approaches for library practice, and urged that social skills training be included in Nigerian LIS curricula. Agada concluded that many librarians, including Nigerian librarians, lack strong communication and social skills. The introduction of behavioral science courses in the curriculum of Nigerian library schools would help overcome this weakness with positive gains in students' cognitive and social skills.

Hai-lan (2009) addressed the issue of librarians' personality development from a different perspective. Based on a discussion of Chinese traditional culture and the theory of Chinese ancient cultivation of an ideal personality, the author points out that the concept of "being a good person before doing a good job" in the traditional, moral conception possesses practical significance for personality development of librarians and library managers.

The need to integrate these perspectives in library education is enhanced by the client-centered service philosophy in library practice. Cronin and Martin (1983) demonstrate that some library school curricula today reflect this philosophy by offering courses such as psychology of information use, group dynamics, diagnostics of information–seeking, and organisational behaviour and change. At the University of Pittsburgh, for example, behavioral courses constitute an information counselor track, a specialization devoted to preparing students to adapt behavioral approaches to library practice. Ideally, instruction

in these courses ought to be laboratory intensive. However, the integration of practice rehearsals has proved problematic. Often, more emphasis is placed on the theoretical knowledge necessary to analyze and explain psychological phenomena than on the skills and attitudes for intervention in the processes involved. Consequently, students lack opportunities to develop appropriate social skills dispositions in library school. Sattar (2007) demonstrates the importance of learning social skills for information professionals. A most recent doctoral study by Warraich (2011) established that the university libraries' leaders consider "communication skills" as the most needed skills for information professionals to develop.

The review of relevant available studies establishes that LIS experts have started pondering upon the need for learning social and communication skills for information professionals. Nevertheless, the inclusion of such learning is still not common in LIS academic programmes everywhere.

METHOD

A quantitative research design using a web-based survey method was conducted to address the objective of the study i.e. to assess the effectiveness of the 'Personality Development & Communication Skills' (PDCS) course at the Department of Library & Information Science, University of the Punjab and its instructional methods. Specifically, the objectives are to:
   a) Investigate the need and impact of the course on LIS students' personality development, and social and communication skills,
   b) Find out if the curriculum needs any change to meet the desired aims, and
   c) Seek suggestions for the better implementation of the course.

A self-completion questionnaire, based on the reviewed literature and the prescribed course readings on the subject, was developed. It contained structured questions with a couple of open-ended ones (Appendix A). The web-based survey tool '*SurveyMonkey*' was used to distribute the questionnaire and collect responses from those students who studied the course in the previous four academic sessions. The population consisted of 300 students and the data was collected within a month. The survey link was sent to four professional LIS electronic groups in Pakistan (viz. *paklag, librarianwelfare, libcoop and dlis*). The students were asked to respond as fairly as possible. They were assured that the intent of the study was to assess the effectiveness of the course and its instructional method. They were sent e-mail reminders and personal request were made through their friends to respond to the survey. After collecting 100 responses, as the author had the basic *Surveymonkey* account which allowed processing of only 100 responses, and within the available time, the survey was closed. It was assumed that the respondents would fairly choose their responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire contained sections on demographic information, personality indicators, identified social skills, and communication skills. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked about the course's value to them and requested to suggest improvements of the course and its implementation. The demographic data (Table 1)

shows that the majority of the respondents are female (58%, 55) and from the latest session (39%, 37).

Table 1: Demographic Information (N=95)

Sessions	Gender		Frequency	Percentage
	Male	Female		
2007-09	7	10	17	18
2008-10	9	13	22	23
2009-11	8	11	19	20
2010-2012	16	21	37	39
Total	40(42%)	55(58%)	95	100

Note: Percentages have been rounded

Personality Development

Respondents were asked questions related to the impact of the course on improving various personality traits. Findings indicate that the course has made a noteworthy influence on the development of the identified traits among respondents. The mean value demonstrates that the influence ranges from 'some extent' to 'moderate extent' regarding all attributes. The negative parameters i.e., 'not at all' and 'little extent' got less than 10% responses for all statements, except two i.e., stress management (n=16) and personal time management (n=13). Positive thinking got the highest mean value (3.96) followed by the 'physical appearance' (3.77). 'Enthusiasm for career planning' comparatively received the highest count (n=29) as noted by the phrase 'to great extent'. It was followed by 'take responsibility of your own behaviours rather than blaming others' (n=25). Table 2 presents these findings.

Table 2: Frequency and Mean of Development in Various Personality Traits (N=96)

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	*N*	Mean
Positive attitude	2	3	14	53	22	94	3.96
Physical appearance	2	5	28	37	22	94	3.77
Enthusiasm for career planning	7	7	19	33	29	95	3.74
Take responsibility of your own behaviours rather than blaming others	4	9	21	36	25	95	3.73
Self-confidence/self- esteem	4	8	25	36	23	96	3.69
Personal time management	3	13	24	40	15	95	3.54
Stress management (Stress tolerance; Impulse control)	1	16	26	38	13	94	3.49

Scale: 1= not at all, 2= to little extent, 3= to some extent, 4= to moderate extent, 5= to great extent

The data analysis reveals that overall the course had a meaningful influence on respondents' personality growth and behaviour modification. This had also been personally expressed by the students to the author, and many of them had written examples of the way it had affected their thinking and behaviour. Some of these examples are listed below:

a)   "My family tells me that I have become wiser now; it is because of this course".
b)   "I don't become angry easily now, and my blood pressure is in better control. I don't get furious now as I used to with my family members".
c)   "It has very positive impact and should be part of curriculum throughout our studies".

d)   "I have learnt to manage my time better, the number of SMSs sent has reduced much and now lesser time is wasted in unproductive activities."

Social Skills Development

Respondents were asked questions related to the impact of the course on improving their social skills. It was asked because imparting the basic theory and practice of social skills is also a part of the course. Table 3 presents the findings from ninety-four students who responded to this question. The response count for 'not at all' and 'to some extent' ranges from one to six for all traits. The most significant impact appears to be on the "learning to respect others' emotions". This trait received the highest (*n*=47) responses as 'to great extent' with a mean of 4.38. It was followed by the "respect cultural, religious, ethnic etc. diversity" (*n*=43). The learning of being "flexible and adaptable to change" got comparatively the lowest mean (3.69); yet it is more inclined towards the 'moderate extent' on the continuum. The analysis shows that the course has significantly influenced the identified social skills of respondents, as most of the attributes received a mean of 4 or above.

Table 3: Social Skills Development (N=94)

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	N	Mean
Have respect for others' emotions	1	1	7	35	47	91	4.38
Cooperative	2	2	7	45	37	93	4.22
Respect cultural, religious, ethnic etc. diversity	4	4	9	33	43	93	4.15
Understand others feelings	1	3	18	37	33	92	4.07
Ability to work in team	3	2	15	40	33	93	4.05
Give due respect to opposite gender as coworker	2	3	16	43	19	94	4.00
Tolerance for others view point	2	5	18	34	20	89	3.84
Flexible and adaptable to change	5	6	21	43	19	94	3.69

Scale: 1= not at all, 2= to little extent, 3= to some extent, 4= to moderate extent, 5= to great extent

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that students still lack the desired level of tolerance and adaptability after completing the course. It shows that our educational and social setup does not inculcate the value of respecting the diversity of opinion and tolerance for others' norms and ideologies from the childhood. It becomes difficult for the youth to appreciate the difference of opinion and adapt to the change. On the contrary, a university student is expected to be open, curious, and to probe, listen, absorb and adapt accordingly.

Communication Skills

Ninety-eight students responded to this question. Table 4 shows that the overall impact on the improvement of communication skills was merely moderate, as the mean value for all skills mentioned in this regard ranges from 3.13 (write official letter, memo, report and job application) to 3.80 (listening attentively). Interview skills also received comparatively lower mean (3.14). The competencies needed for writing an official letter, memo, report and job application appears to be the weakest area. Overall, findings indicate that the course did not make much difference in improving basic communication skills development.

It is interesting to note that 'listening skills' got a higher mean value of impact than "speaking skills". It may be seen as a reflection of the country's social and educational

system. Socially, Pakistani children are taught to listen to their parents and are discouraged for raising questions and going into arguments with elders. Similarly, in schools and colleges, from grade 1 to 14, they are expected to listen to the teachers and stay obedient and are hardly encouraged to ask questions. Out of fear or respect they hesitate to participate in class discussion. Gradually, most of the learning is done through listening. This author's vast experience endorses that it becomes really hard to make the students ask and raise questions even at the university level.

Table 4: Frequency and Mean of Basic Communication Skills Development (N=98)

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	n	Mean
Listening attentively	3	4	17	49	16	89	3.80
Reading with understanding	2	4	27	40	20	93	3.77
Presentation skills	4	9	28	32	20	93	3.59
Speaking with clarity using appropriate voice tone	1	9	33	36	13	90	3.57
Using body language appropriately	3	12	26	34	16	91	3.53
C.V. preparation	5	8	26	37	14	90	3.52
Ability to write simple English correctly using proper words	5	12	29	36	12	94	3.40
Writing: Synthesizing ideas	3	15	34	34	5	91	3.25
Interviewing skill	5	18	35	20	10	88	3.14
Write official letter, memo, report and job application	5	27	21	27	11	91	3.13

Scale: 1= not at all, 2= to little extent, 3= to some extent, 4= to moderate extent, 5= to great extent

Overall Value of the Course

Ninety-five students responded to this question. The data in Table 5 shows that they gave high value to the course. Only 3 respondents checked the "of no value" option as opposed to 43 who declared it "of great value". This finding is further strengthened by their response to the next question that asks if they would suggest offering the PDCS course in the second academic year for further learning in this regard. Eighty out of 93 respondents wanted the course to be offered in the final year too and only four negated this need (Table 6).

Table 5: Overall value of the PDCS course for respondents (N=95)

	Frequency	Percentage
Of no value	3	3
Of some value	15	16
Of enough value	34	36
Of great value	43	45
Total	95	100

Table 6: Should be extended to second academic year for further learning (N=93)

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	80	86
No	4	4
Undecided	9	10
Total	93	100

The opinions shown in Table 6 establish that the respondents felt a strong need for further learning in all of these areas and that one semester is not enough to meet the deficiencies in the growth of desired personality, social, and communication skills.

Suggestions Obtained

The suggestions were obtained through an open-ended question to address the third objective of the study. It was assumed that the opinions of the course recipients will lead to the improvements in the content for future students. Students were asked to suggest ways to improve the course contents and its implementation. Only fifty students responded to the open-ended question. However, ten comments were excluded since they were neither about this course, nor suggestions/comments. The remaining 40 relevant responses have been analyzed for reporting.

Almost all 40 responses acknowledged the important role of the course in students' personality development. The following thematic categories (Table 7) emerged from the content analysis of the textual data provided by the respondents.

Table 7: Content Analysis of the Suggestions by the Respondents (N=40)

Thematic categories	Selected comments
Course Contents: Theory vs. practice (22 responses)	"It should carry more practice rather than theory [of personality & talk on personality development]". "Teachers should not use reading material…students should be given assignments in groups". "More presentations, workshops, practice of writing various kinds of official letters, CV preparation and improving physical outlook".
Syllabus Coverage (3 responses)	"The course has large syllabus and the duration is only four months". "The readings should be reduced"
Importance of the Course (12 responses)	"It must be included in the following semesters too as it is very much needed." "I found this course very important and beneficial. After the course I have felt positive changes in my personality and my family also felt the change". "I got a C grade in the course but I am happy that I felt positive changes in my personality".
Faculty (3 responses)	"The faculty who teach should be polite and the best".

Initially the course content was too lengthy to be covered in 48 hours of student learning time. Furthermore, the size of the class used to be 50 – 55 students; therefore, it would become difficult to impart extensive practice of the skills at an individual level. As a result, the respondents suggested focusing more on the practical side of written communication and oral presentations.

Twelve respondents suggested that extensive imparting of the curriculum content should be available in the succeeding semesters too while stressing the importance of the course.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study establish that:

a) Introducing the course on *Personality Development & Communication Skills* in the LIS curriculum proved to be a very desired and important decision. Furthermore, the study revealed that for the students, even one full 3 credit hours course is not enough to learn the skills needed for becoming promising LIS professionals.

b) It also becomes evident that the course has quite positively affected the personality and social skills of the recipients. However, learning oral and written communication skills needs further time and efforts on the students' part.

c) The respondents repeatedly mentioned in the suggestions section that there must be more emphasis on practicing of all the skills, and it should be offered in the final academic year too for further learning.

d) It appeared that there is little LIS literature available on the subject and more, in-depth research is needed on the state of personality and communication skills of the LIS professionals, particularly in Pakistan.

e) This study may be raise awareness regarding the need of offering such course in other developing countries where social and educational setups are more or less the same.

As the Chair of the LIS Department at PU, the author worked on incorporating these suggestions after getting approval for curriculum changes from various Universities Committees. As an outcome of the study, a full 3 credit hour course titled "Communication and Leadership Skills for LIS professionals" has been introduced to be offered in the final (4th) semester of the Master in LIS programme, commencing from the October 2011 academic session.

Efforts are being made to make the learning of these skills more practical-based. Students are given more individual and group presentations for confidence building and other social skills. The business writing skills projects are given and the answers must be presented in the English Language for the written test of this course. For other assignments, students have the option for writing in English or in the national language, Urdu.

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Learning "Personality Development & Communication Skills" (PDCS) in LIS Education:
An investigation of the need and impact

1. The following list contains selected personality attributes and skills you were taught to become successful LIS profession. Please indicate degree of learning of each one of these after completing the course on PDCS using the scale 1 to 5 provided.
Note: It is important that you give answer as thoughtfully and honestly as possible. Be sure that the research merely aims to assess the effectiveness of the course and its shortcoming.

	Attributes and Skills	Not at all	To little extent	To some extent	To moderate extent	To great extent
A	**Personality**					
i	Physical appearance	1	2	3	4	5
ii	Self-confidence/self-esteem	1	2	3	4	5
iii	Positive attitude	1	2	3	4	5
iv	Take responsibility of your own behaviors rather than blaming others	1	2	3	4	5
v	Stress management (Stress tolerance; Impulse control)	1	2	3	4	5
vi	Personal time management	1	2	3	4	5
vii	Enthusiasm for career planning	1	2	3	4	5
B	**People/Social skills**					
i	Ability to work in team	1	2	3	4	5
ii	Have respect for others' emotion	1	2	3	4	5
iii	Understand others' feelings	1	2	3	4	5
iv	Respect cultural, religious, ethnic etc. diversity	1	2	3	4	5
v	Cooperative	1	2	3	4	5
vi	Tolerance for others' view point	1	2	3	4	5
vii	Flexible and adaptable to change	1	2	3	4	5
viii	Give due respect to opposite gender as coworker	1	2	3	4	5
C	**Basic communication skills**					
i	Reading with understanding	1	2	3	4	5
ii	Writing					
	a) Synthesizing ideas	1	2	3	4	5
	b) Ability to write simple English correctly using proper words	1	2	3	4	5
	c) Write official letter, memo, report and job application	1	2	3	4	5
iii	Speaking with clarity using appropriate voice tone	1	2	3	4	5
iv	Using body language appropriately	1	2	3	4	5
v	Listening attentively	1	2	3	4	5
vi	Presentation skills	1	2	3	4	5
vii	Interviewing skills	1	2	3	4	5
viii	Curriculum vitae preparation	1	2	3	4	5

2. Overall of how much value to you was this course? Tick your choice.
   a)   Of no value   b) Of some value   c) Of enough value   d) Of great value

3. Do you think that this course should be offered in the 2nd academic year also for further learning in this regard?
   a)   Yes   b) No   c) Undecided

4. What suggestion(s) do you have to improve:
   a)   The course contents, and
   b)   Its implementation (teaching)?