



Library And Information Science Professionals Learning Approach Towards Soft Skills Enhancement Through MOOCs Platforms

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how professionals in the field of Library and Information Science engage with Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) to enhance their soft skills. The study aims to provide insights into the selection of MOOCs and motivational factors which affects their pursuit of soft skills development. It will help to understand how digital learning platforms can be leveraged to support ongoing professional growth in the LIS sector. Early-career individuals prioritize foundational skills, leadership, creativity, and relationship-building. As they gain experience, the focus transitions to refining soft skills, personal, and professional development. For those with extensive experience, the emphasis returns to leadership, creativity, and maintaining high professional standards. Understanding these evolving needs is crucial for designing effective MOOCs. Tailoring offerings to address early-career research interests, mid-career development, and advanced professional challenges ensures that LIS professionals receive relevant and impactful support throughout their careers.

Keywords: Soft skills, MOOCs, skills enhancement, learning approach, library and information science professionals

Introduction:

Soft skills act as a complement to technical skills which helps to create a productive environment. Skills and knowledge are intertwined, knowledge provides the theoretical understanding and context needed to apply skills effectively, while skills allow to put the knowledge into practice. They are crucial for creating a harmonious and productive work environment, as they influence how individuals work together and handle challenges. The soft skills-also called life skills are defined by World Health Organization as “abilities for adaptive and positive behavior, that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. According to the eLene4work definition “Soft skills represent a dynamic combination of cognitive and meta cognitive skills, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills. Soft skills help people to adapt and behave positively so that they can deal effectively with the challenges of their professional and everyday life.” According to Geisinger (2016), skills such as collaboration, teamwork, and cross-cultural sensitivity are essential for effective teamwork and problem-solving.

The term 'soft skills' includes various interconnected skills and attributes. Rotherham, Andrew J., Willingham, Daniel T., (2010) defined soft skills as "21st-century skills" which are essential for success, further recommending soft skills help in change in the economy and world at large. Tzoc and Millard (2011) noted that both current students and practicing librarians should pursue additional non-curricular opportunities to enhance their competencies in the technical areas discussed in their study to remain marketable. Fortunately, the areas with the most significant gaps also offer considerable opportunities for independent learning. Cobb, Meixelsperger, and Seitz (2015) emphasized that while soft skills are challenging to define and measure, both scholars and employers recognize their value in the workforce. These skills include curiosity, initiative, understanding, communication, a sense of professional responsibility, and the ability to address and learn from mistakes. Notably, communication is highlighted as one of the most sought-after soft skills.

Ashalatha (2016) categorized soft skills for librarians including listening skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, public relations, customer service, leadership, teamwork, negotiation, writing, teaching,

presentation, time management, and conflict management. The Learning approach of every professional depends upon their personal needs, with purpose such as to boost the earning potentials, increase knowledge and skills which will help to gain good employability. At an entry level, a professional may need to structured courses from work on improving their soft skills which are not taught during the professional degree that an individual learns. Soft skills involve a range of competencies, including personality development, interpersonal relationships, and teamwork. As the years of experience grows the skills required changes. Hence various soft skills are listed to know the interest of LIS professionals in upskilling.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) offer a flexible and accessible way to cultivate soft skills, which are vital for both personal and professional development. It provides wide range of eminent universities and institutions. Since 2008, when the MOOCs were introduced by George Siemens and Stephen Downes, these online courses have transformed education worldwide by providing flexible, accessible learning opportunities to a global audience. MOOCs are flexible and accessible, allowing learners to access the course materials through internet from anywhere across the world, breaking down the geographical barriers to education. Since the MOOCs are conducted on larger platform the financial burden on the learner is less comparative to traditional learning mode, making it more feasible financially. Engaging in MOOCs often involves participating in global forums, discussions which can broaden professional networks and offer fresh perspectives. MOOCs have not only helped the regular students but it has also helped the working professionals to enhance their knowledge without disrupting their careers. This flexibility is particularly advantageous for LIS professionals who often juggle multiple responsibilities and seek convenient ways to advance their skills.

This study examines how Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals' approach Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) designed to enhance soft skills. The study highlights the growing emphasis on soft skills within the LIS field. As the nature of professional roles evolves, these skills are becoming critical for success and career advancement. The increasing importance of soft skills in professional development, coupled with the rise of MOOCs as a flexible learning medium, provides a significant context for this research. The study focuses on LIS professionals, including librarians, archivists, and information managers, who have engaged or are engaging in MOOCs aimed at soft skills development. The research also provides brief information about MOOCs provided on various platforms. Information on the features of different platforms, such as Coursera, edX, and SWAYAM, helps demonstrate the variety of learning experiences and resources available for developing soft skills.

Table 1: Soft skills courses available on MOOC platform

Sr. No.	Course Title	Platform
1	Collaborate Effectively for Professional Success	Coursera
2	Communicating with Presence Specialization	Coursera
3	Decision-Making for Everyone Specialization	Coursera
4	Delivering Quality Work with Agility	Coursera
5	Developing Interpersonal Skills	Coursera
6	Emotional Intelligence: Cultivating Immensely Human Interactions	Coursera
7	English in the Workplace: Soft skills	Coursera
8	Essential Skills for Your Career Development	Coursera
9	How to Get Skilled: Introduction to Individual Skills Management	Coursera
10	Leadership and Influence	Coursera
11	Leadership and Negotiation Skills Specialization	Coursera
12	People and Soft Skills Assessment	Coursera
13	People and Soft Skills for Professional and Personal Success Specialization	Coursera
14	Solving Problems with Creative and Critical Thinking	Coursera
15	Teamwork Skills: Communicating Effectively in Groups	Coursera
16	Workplace Culture for Everyone Specialization	Coursera
17	Soft Skills: Collaborate Effectively	edX
18	Soft Skills: People and Power Skills Assessment	edX
19	Soft Skills: Present with Purpose	edX
20	Developing Soft Skills and Personality	SWAYAM
21	Soft Skills	SWAYAM
22	The importance of interpersonal skills	The Open University

Review of Literature:

Kumar A., Buragohain, D., and Singh V., (2022) in their paper aim to investigate MOOCs, which have garnered significant interest from academics across various disciplines worldwide. Their study analyzes and evaluates the barriers to and potential of implementing MOOCs, with a particular focus on Library and Information

Science (LIS) in Northeast India. By reviewing existing literature, they propose a comprehensive conceptual model that will aid in designing and developing a framework for MOOC courses in LIS.

Lazarus, F. C., and Suryasen, R., (2022) in their study examined various issues related to MOOCs and identified key factors influencing the adoption of MOOC-based curricula. Additionally, they proposed a research model designed to facilitate the integration of MOOCs into curricula and enhance the quality of higher education.

Sharma, R., and J.C. Sharmila Devi., (2022) in their study, aimed to assess the readiness to effectively utilize and maximize the productivity of MOOC platforms. The paper reviewed various MOOC platforms and noted that many are relatively new, with limited research conducted thus far. The research identified significant opportunities for further study, including the popularity of MOOCs among students and educators, the impact of capital investment, and strategies for improving the quality of MOOCs.

Yaseen.S., Ravichandran.R., Rajirajan., (2022) in their study, highlighted the adverse effects of the post-COVID era on job markets. They emphasized the need to increase upskilling and reskilling efforts by 70% through investment in workforce development to remain competitive in the near future. The study also suggested that individuals must become proficient with technology to adapt effectively and align with organizational culture. To benefit both the economy and government, the study recommended a well-defined approach to ensure that intangible human resources are not wasted. This approach would help avoid the costs associated with inadequate reskilling and upskilling, ultimately contributing to the country's GDP by creating more value-added employees.

Selwent, M. (2020) emphasizes the importance of understanding training needs, which can be categorized into three levels: professional, organizational, and individual. Organizations recognize that one-time training programs are often insufficient for employee development. To be effective, training must be integrated into regular practices and adapted to new policies. Therefore, training modules should be expanded and supplemented with various workshops to ensure that new skills and knowledge become a routine part of everyday work.

Cinque M. (2017), Companies are increasingly seeking a skilled workforce, and it is crucial to offer young people opportunities to develop essential soft skills, such as entrepreneurial abilities, coping mechanisms, and self-directed learning skills. These competencies are vital for a smooth transition from full-time education to the labor market. The study reveals that both educational institutions and technologies like MOOCs are actively working to provide students with 21st-century skills, encompassing both soft and digital skills, to better prepare them for the demands of the workforce.

Bejalwar, S. A., & Kherde, M. R. (2021), in their study found that incorporating soft skills training from college level in the syllabus of Library Science courses is essential. By emphasizing that technical skills alone are insufficient, future library professionals will be better prepared to develop their soft skills. This holistic approach is expected to enhance their performance, lead to greater stakeholder satisfaction, and positively transform the perception of libraries through improved interpersonal abilities.

Williams, R. D., & Saunders, L. (2020), confirms that public librarians need a broad range of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) to thrive in their roles. While core domain knowledge—such as professional ethics, collection development, search skills, and reference interviewing—is crucial, survey results indicate that the majority of essential KSAs are actually soft skills. These include interpersonal and customer service skills, cultural competence, and the ability to work with diverse populations. The findings underscore the importance of developing and emphasizing strong personal, interpersonal, and communication skills. Emerging professionals should be prepared for the intense patron-focused and interpersonal demands of the job, including engaging with communities and demonstrating high levels of empathy and service.

Research Methodology:

The study is based on data gathered from the library and information professionals in Maharashtra. Questionnaire through google forms were distributed through emails to gather data from LIS professionals regarding their experiences, challenges, and outcomes related to MOOCs. The research focuses on librarians, archivists, and information managers who are either currently participating in or have previously engaged with MOOCs aimed at soft skills development. To identify the skill set preferences of Library and Information Science professionals and to explore the motivational factors influencing their pursuit of MOOCs. Google Form was utilized to distribute the questionnaire among Library and Information Science professionals.

The objective of the study:

- To assess the effectiveness of MOOCs in enhancing soft skills
- Investigate the motivational factors driving LIS professionals to engage in MOOCs for soft skills development
- To analyze various soft skills required for professional development of librarians

Research output:

This research will provide valuable insights into how Library and Information Science professionals engage with MOOCs for soft skills enhancement. It aims to provide implications for professional development programs and the design of future MOOCs. Understanding the motivations, challenges, and impacts of MOOCs on soft skills can aid in refining educational strategies and better support LIS professionals in their career development. It will assist the target audience to analyse their required skills, raising awareness among the professionals.

Analysis and interpretation of data:

The study is conducted in two major categories:

Skills: The skills selected by the LIS professionals. Leadership skills, creative skills, Interpersonal relationship skills, soft skills, managerial skills and team work. Within soft skills specific focus areas are communication skills, professionalism, courtesy, flexibility, work ethics.

Motivational factors: To examine the learning approach of LIS professionals' motivational factors were categorized as Continuing Professional Development, Personal Development, requirement for promotion, research, curiosity, peer pressure, other.

Data analysis: The data analyses consider the following factors: gender, Urban / rural location and age group.

Analysis of skill development:



Fig 1: Gender Based Skill Development

Table 2: Gender Based Skill Development

	Leadership skills	Creative skills	Interpersonal Relationship	Soft skills	Managerial skills	Team work skills
Male	34	33	33	25	15	15
Female	28	29	28	14	11	10

The table examines the preferences for learning skills among LIS professionals, with a focus on gender differences. The findings are as follows:

- Male LIS Professionals preferred learning leadership, creative skills, interpersonal relationships, and soft skills. Managerial skills and teamwork were the least preferred.
- Female LIS Professionals preferred creative learning, leadership skills, interpersonal skills, and soft skills. Managerial skills and teamwork were also the least preferred.

Overall, both male and female LIS professionals showed a preference for creative, leadership, interpersonal, and soft skills, while managerial skills and teamwork were less favored by both genders.

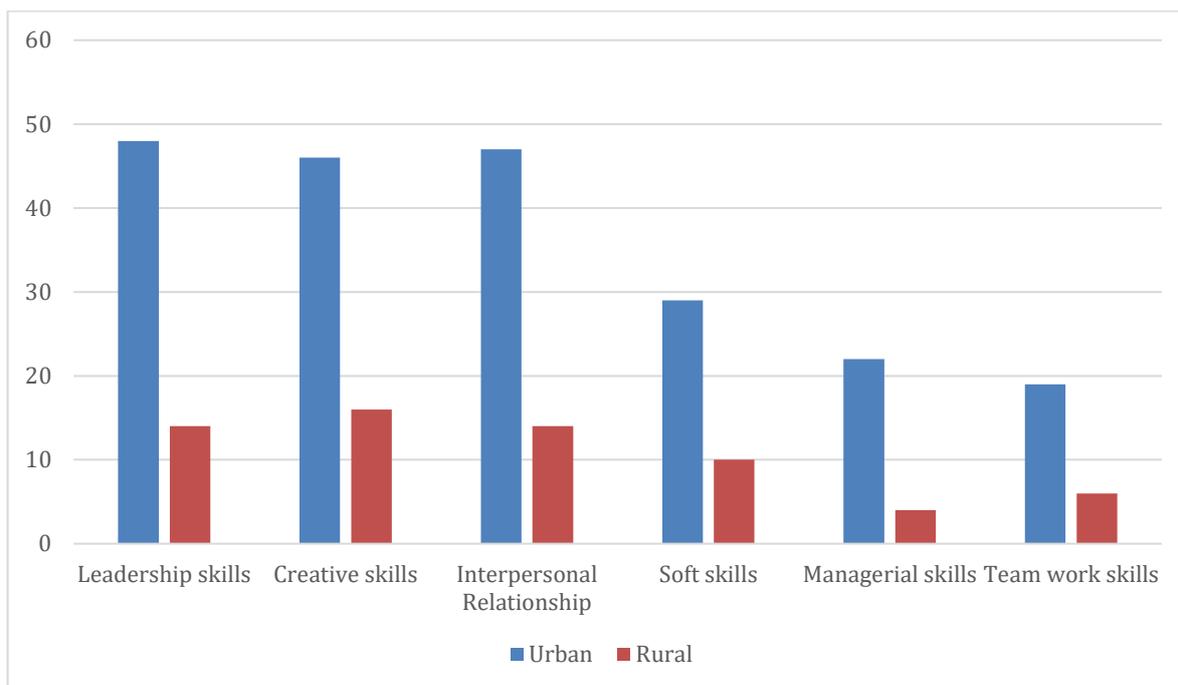


Fig 2: Urban / Rural Population

Table 3:Urban / Rural Population

	Leadership skills	Creative skills	Interpersonal Relationship	Soft skills	Managerial skills	Team work skills
Urban	48	46	47	29	22	19
Rural	14	16	14	10	4	6

LIS professionals residing in urban area preferred leadership skills over managerial skills whereas the rural population preferred creative skills over managerial skills. It can also be observed that, in both areas, teamwork is considered to be of least importance. This difference may come due to the needs required to serve the patrons in their library.

Urban LIS professionals tend to prioritize leadership skills more than managerial skills. This might reflect the demands of working in more complex, fast-paced environments where leadership can be crucial. Rural LIS professionals show a preference for creative skills over managerial skills. This could be due to different challenges or fewer resources in rural settings, where creative problem-solving might be more valuable.

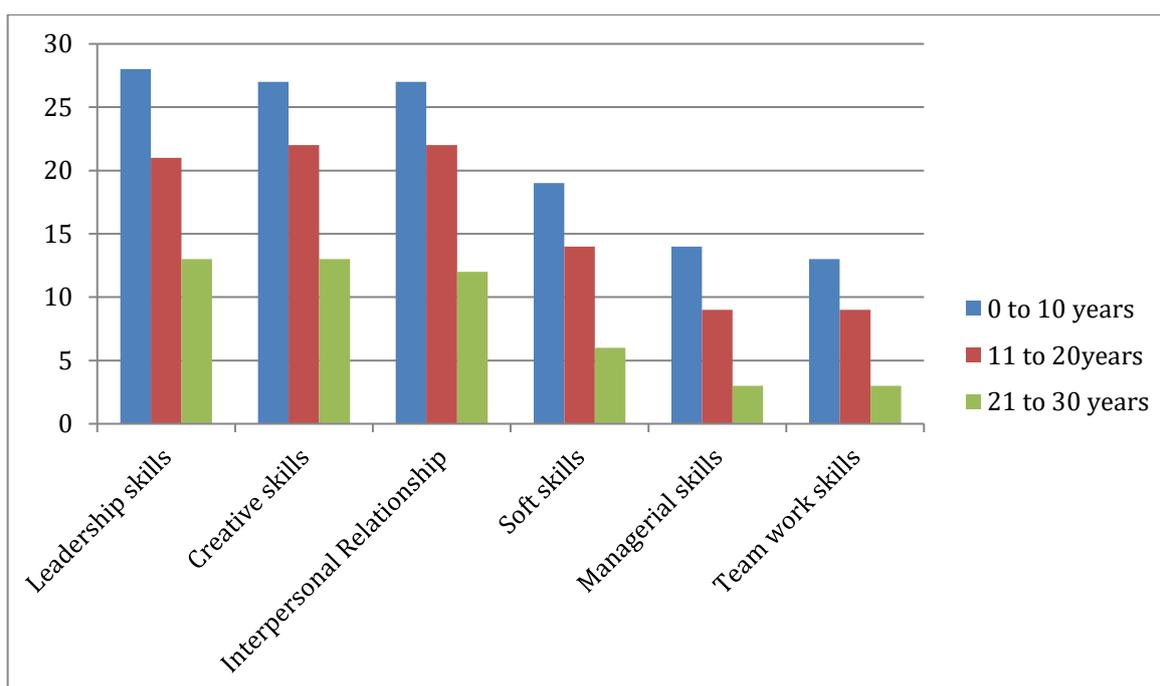


Fig 3 : Skill Development preference based on work experience

Table 4: Skill Development preference based on work experience

Work Experience	Leadership skills	Creative skills	Interpersonal Relationship	Soft skills	Managerial skills	Team work skills
0 to 10 years	28	27	27	19	14	13
11 to 20years	21	22	22	14	9	9
21 to 30 years	13	13	12	6	3	3

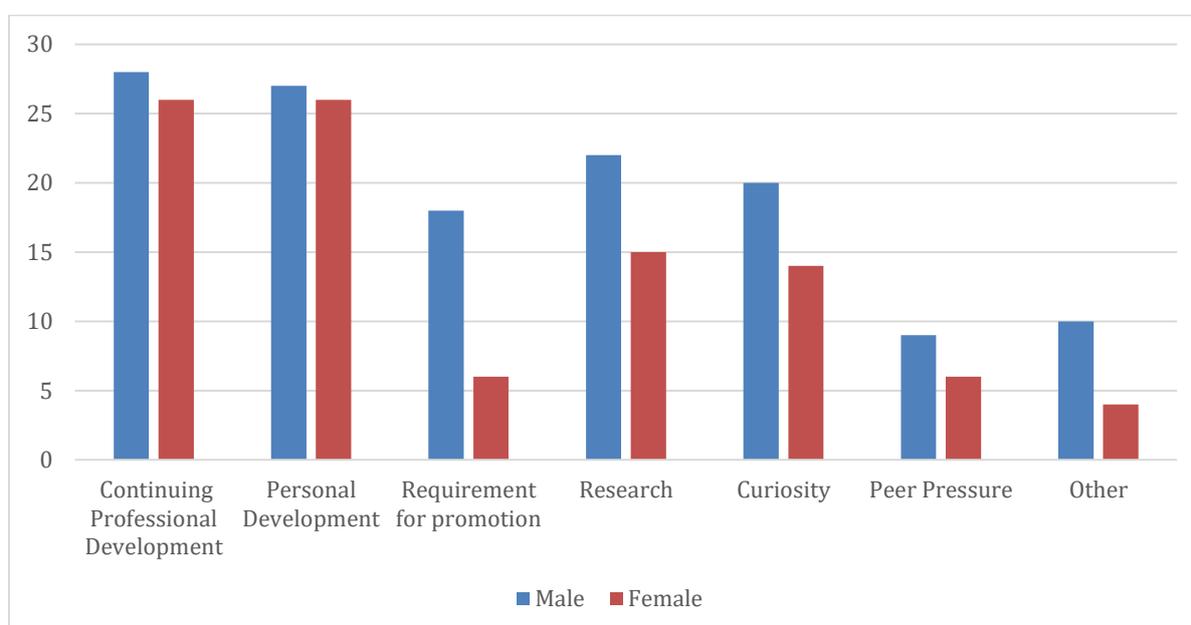
Professional learning skills of every individual changes according to the experience they gain in their field. Library and Information Science Professionals who have 0 to 10 years selected the leadership skills, creative skills and interpersonal relationship. It reflects on building foundation competencies that are important for initial career development.

LIS Professionals having experience of 11 to 20 years preferred leadership skills, creative skills, interpersonal relationship and soft skills. Which shows that preference in learning is given to capabilities building, adaptability and emotional intelligence as the professionals take on more complex responsibilities.

LIS Professionals having 21 to 30 years of experience had preference for leadership, creative skills. This shows that the professionals have evolved over the year and focus have shifted on strategic learning.

As LIS professionals gain more experience, their preference for learning skills evolves, with a consistent emphasis on leadership and creative skills across different experience levels.

Analysis of Motivational factors

**Fig 4: Motivational Factors based on Gender****Table 5: Motivational Factors based on Gender**

	Continuing Professional Development	Personal Development	Requirement for promotion	Research	Curiosity	Peer Pressure	Other
Male	28	27	18	22	20	9	10
Female	26	26	6	15	14	6	4

Table No. 5 examines the motivational factors for undertaking MOOCs among LIS professionals, with a focus on gender differences. The findings are as follows:

- **Male LIS Professionals:** The primary motivational factors were continuing professional development, personal development, and research & curiosity. Peer pressure was identified as the least significant factor.
- **Female LIS Professionals:** For women, the need for promotion was the least important motivational factor. Instead, they were more motivated by opportunities to develop creative skills, leadership skills, interpersonal relationships, and curiosity.

This suggests that while both genders pursue MOOCs for professional and personal growth, their specific motivations and priorities differ.

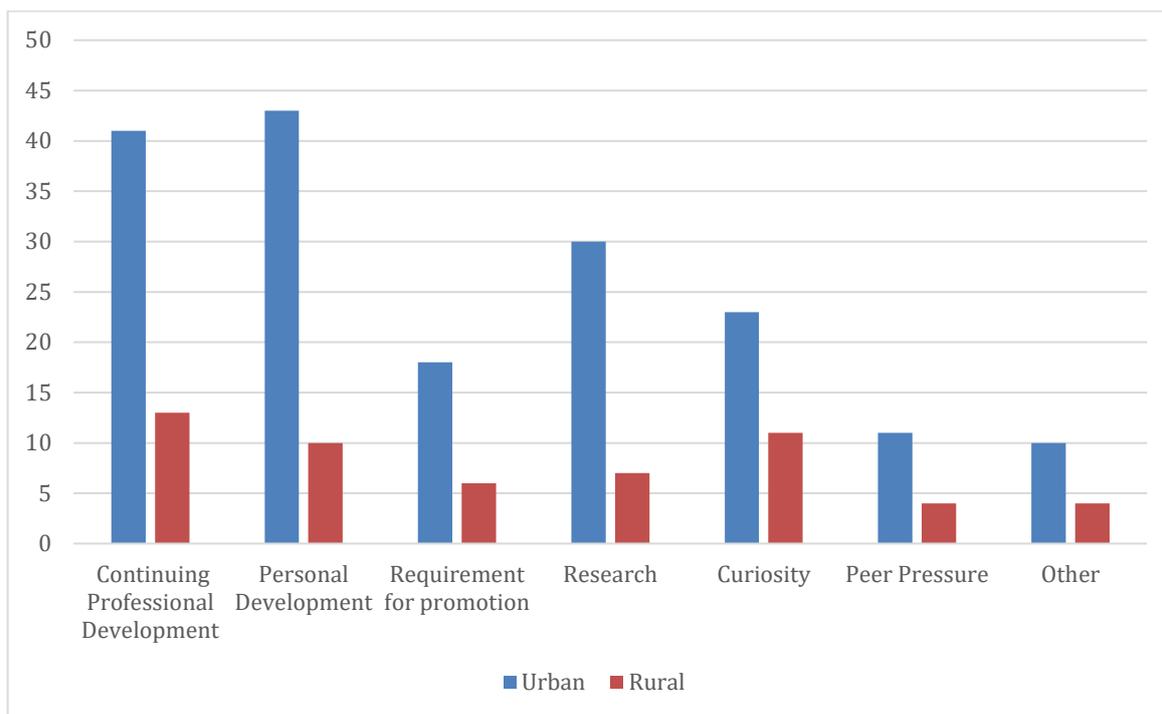


Fig 5: Motivational Factors based on Location

Table 6: Motivational Factors based on Location

	Continuing Professional Development	Personal Development	Requirement for promotion	Research	Curiosity	Peer Pressure	Other
Urban	41	43	18	30	23	11	10
Rural	13	10	6	7	11	4	4

It was found that motivational factor for LIS professionals in urban location was continuing professional development, personal development, research. Least preference was given to peer pressure, curiosity & promotion. Whereas motivational factor for LIS professionals based in rural areas were professional development, curiosity, personal development. Urban LIS professionals may have more access to resources and opportunities, which could explain their focus on professional development and research. In contrast, rural professionals may use MOOCs as a means to bridge gaps in resources and knowledge, driven by curiosity and a strong desire for personal and professional growth. This analysis highlights how motivational factors for engaging with MOOCs can vary significantly based on geographic location.

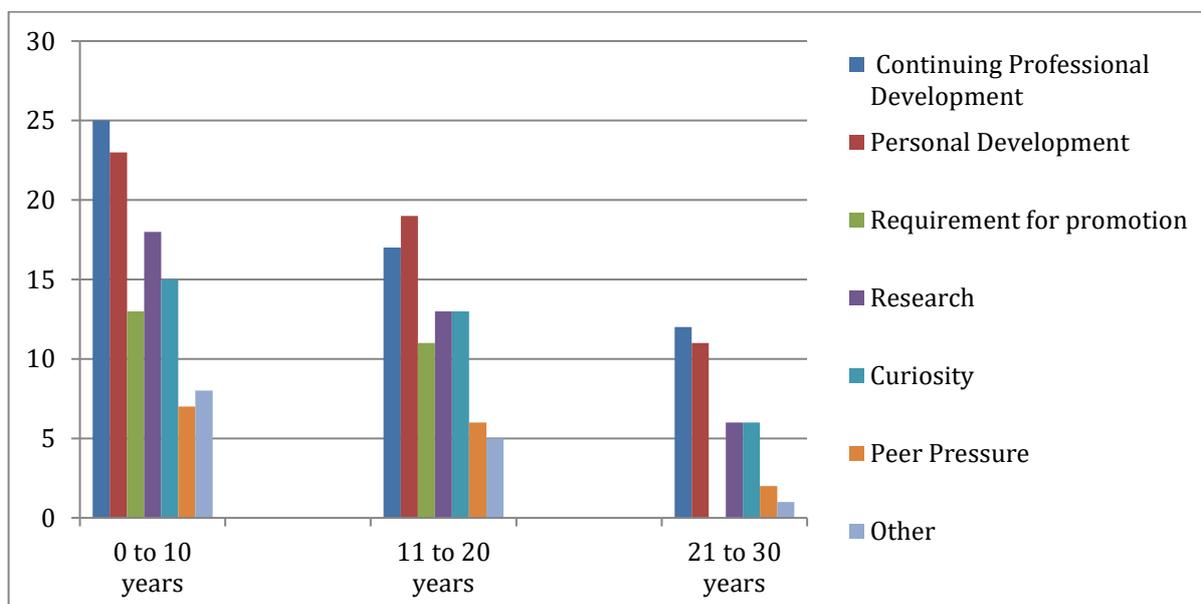


Fig 6: Motivational Factors based on years of experience

Table 7: Motivational Factors based on years of experience

	Continuing Professional Development	Personal Development	Requirement for promotion	Research	Curiosity	Peer Pressure	Other
0 to 10 years	25	23	13	18	15	7	8
11 to 20 years	17	19	11	13	13	6	5
21 to 30 years	12	11	0	6	6	2	1

Based on years of experience shows Motivational factor for LIS professionals with 0 to 10 years is research curiosity. Peer pressure was the least.

For 11 to 20 years, personal development, continuing professional development, research and curiosity. Promotion and continuing professional development, personal development, peer pressure was least motivational.

For age group of 21 to 30 years, continuing professional development, personal development. Promotion was least.

As LIS professionals advance in their careers, their motivational factors shift from a strong emphasis on research and curiosity in the early years to a focus on personal and professional development in mid-career, and finally to maintaining professional standards in later years.

Findings:

As LIS professionals gain more experience, their focus shifts from developing foundational skills to refining advanced competencies. It is observed that early in their careers, they prioritize leadership, creativity, and building strong relationships. As they advance, they start valuing soft skills more, recognizing their importance in handling complex roles. For those with extensive experience, the emphasis stays on leadership and creativity, with less focus on skills they feel they have already mastered or are less relevant in their current roles.

It is found that with advance in their careers, their motivational factors shift from a strong emphasis on research and curiosity in the early years to a focus on personal and professional development in mid-career, and finally to maintaining professional standards. Understanding these shifts can help tailor MOOC offerings to meet the evolving needs of LIS professionals throughout their careers. For instance, entry level professionals might benefit from courses that foster research skills and satisfy curiosity, while mid-career professionals might seek advanced courses for personal and professional development. For those with extensive experience, MOOCs might focus on maintaining expertise and addressing high-level professional challenges.

Conclusion:

The professional development needs of Library and Information Science professionals evolve significantly as they advance in their careers. Entry level LIS professionals require foundational skills, leadership, creativity, and relationship-building. Mid-career professionals focus on soft skills, personal, and professional development. Seasoned professionals prioritize leadership, creativity, and maintaining professional standards. Tailoring professional development opportunities to these evolving needs ensures that LIS professionals receive relevant support, enhancing their continuous growth and effectiveness in their roles.

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