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Surbhi Arora & Rupak Chakravarty

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Research Data Management Skillset & Competencies of Library Professionals among North Indian University Libraries

Surbhi Arora ^a and Rupak Chakravarty ^b

^aGSSSS, Manauli, India; ^bDLIS, Panjab University Chandigarh, India

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the Research Data Management (RDM) skillsets and competencies of library professionals within North Indian university libraries. Employing a survey method, data was collected from professionals, resulting in an 84% response rate. The data, analyzed using SPSS. The study reveals that a significant number of library professionals require further development in several key areas. These include awareness of new government initiatives (e.g. Shodh Chakra), proficiency in metadata creation (e.g. using Dublin Core standards), and advanced technical ICT skills (e.g. data storage infrastructure and architecture). Additionally, there is a need for enhanced subject-specific knowledge, familiarity with various research methods (e.g. data analysis and visualization), and competencies in data description, documentation, and curation. The study also highlights the importance of skills related to developing Data Management Plans (DMPs), staying current with RDM trends through refresher courses, utilizing originality checking tools, and understanding legal, policy, and advisory aspects (e.g. intellectual property, ethics, and licensing). This research underscores the critical need for ongoing professional development to equip library professionals with the necessary competencies to effectively support RDM practices in academic environments.

KEYWORDS

Research Data Management Services (RDMS); RDM Skillset; RDM Competencies

Introduction

RDM has emerged as a pivotal area that is prompting a re-evaluation of how academic libraries support the research process.¹ It is noted that RDM offers new opportunities for libraries and librarians to play a more integral role in supporting research activities.² Librarians can take on various roles in data management to assist researchers, and the management of research data has increasingly become a key service area for libraries. However, the lack of sufficient RDM knowledge and expertise among library staff has hindered their ability to provide these essential services.

To better understand this challenge, the study examines six North Indian universities. The research focuses on identifying the additional knowledge or skills that library staff need to effectively offer RDM services to research scholars. By investigating these factors, the study aims to outline the necessary competencies and training that library professionals require to deliver comprehensive RDM services, thereby enhancing their support for the research community.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to identify the additional knowledge and skills that library staff need to effectively provide research data services to research scholars.

Review of Literature

Kahn et al. (2014) surveyed to explore the views that were expressed during the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) workshop held in cooperation with the UK's Digital curation center. The study assessed the librarians' views on the changing RDM landscape and considered how those changes might affect the role of academic librarians in South Africa. The study compared those views with experiences garnered through the DCC's work to support universities in the UK. The study revealed that a large proportion of respondents, 31 of 41, indicated that they were not aware of such policies or frameworks. The study also revealed that institutions had a lack of RDM policy. The study concluded that RDM awareness among respondents were relatively good, but there was a need to stress upon the RDM policy themes, skills and other relevant resources.³

Cox et al. (2014) studied the importance of seeing RDM as a daunting problem for librarians. The study was based on in-depth telephone interviews of 26 librarians. Each interview focused on three main topics i.e. the current state of support for RDM, the perceptions of respondents about the skills needed to support RDM and the story of how RDM policy was developed. The interviews were recorded and coded in NVivo. Results revealed that the library's position was unclear about the management of research data. IT staff focused on active data storage and security, whereas librarians were more interested in preservation and sharing. RDM was not one agenda but many separate issues intertwined together, such as storage, information security and openness. Some solutions have also been suggested by interviewees such as development of institutional data repository system, data catalogue, training and advisory service solution. The study concluded that RDM seems to be significantly more complex than information problems and there was a need to acquire skills, positive attitudes and attributes to deal with a wicked problem.⁴

Steeleworthy (2014) examined the organisational and library responsibilities toward RDM services. The study was based on policies of RDM and its interpretations. The study showed that RDM was not a new library function; it was shown as like other functions such as the creation of collections, sorting, management and preservation. IT staff's job was to collect, archive, clean and maintain data through technology, while ethical staff's function was to do all the above tasks and to resolve all ethical concerns such as IPR, anonymity and data protection. The study concluded that in order to manage the research data, there was a need for collaboration among IT staff, ethical board staff, data librarian, ethical board staff and other stakeholders.⁵

Renwick et al. (2017) examined the scenario of RDM services and the role of the librarian to provide RDM services in the Caribbean, St Augustine Campus libraries at the University of West Indies. To collect the data, a questionnaire method was used. The response rate was 65%. To analyse the data, Microsoft Excel and SPSS software were used. The study revealed that researchers' experiences were less than one year for involvement in the RDM and the survey method was mostly used for the data collection. Results also revealed the method of back-up, i.e. flash drives, external hard drives, and emailing oneself. Regarding assistance from the librarian, they wanted help such as archiving of data, use of that data, easy retrieval, storage and backup of data. The study stressed upon RDM policy recruitment, awareness and collaborations with other departments. The study also recommended that the library work should be divided into 2 teams, first for policy making, awareness and collection of data and second for technical support.⁶

Kvale (2017) explored the development of RDM courses at the University of Oslo (UiO), focusing on experiences and best practices in organizing RDM training through the university library. The study was based on recommendations from the report *The Data Explosion – A Great Challenge and a Big Opportunity* (Working Group Storing and Sharing of Research Data, UiO, 2015), which mapped existing data practices at UiO. The findings revealed that the UiO library developed RDM courses and training programs to enhance data management practices. A structured portfolio of training modules was designed to cater to various university stakeholders. Researchers and PhD students were identified as requiring strong digital skills for effective data management. Consequently, the study introduced Software Carpentry and Data Carpentry

training sessions, expanding on existing UiO initiatives through collaborations. Research support staff received specialized courses on data management plans (DMPs) from an administrative perspective, emphasizing H2020 requirements and the use of DMPonline for plan development. Participants were also introduced to metadata concepts and given an overview of available RDM services at UiO. For master's students, a tailored course based on the DataOne education modules was developed. Additionally, library staff participated in Library Carpentry courses, which fostered skill development and improved the use of digital tools in daily workflows. Further meetings and workshops were organized to reinforce learning. Notably, these courses were accessible to researchers, support staff, and librarians beyond UiO. To promote RDM awareness, UiO hosted events such as Carpentry Week, featuring an Open Science mini-seminar, workshops, and the Research Bazaar – a global initiative aimed at enhancing digital literacy in research. These events fostered collaboration and addressed challenges associated with emerging research tools and requirements. The study concluded that acquiring and adapting new RDM skills is essential for modern researchers and library staff. It emphasized that RDM skills could be strengthened through structured courses, seminars, and workshops. Furthermore, UiO's open-access RDM modules serve as valuable resources for stakeholders, and similar initiatives should be implemented across universities and institutions to enhance RDM competencies.⁷

Tang and Hu (2019) conducted an international survey on preparedness, roles, challenges, and training regarding RDM practice. The purpose of the study was to find out the current practice, behaviour & perception of the librarians to provide RDM service. The study was based on the questionnaires that were prepared on Survey Monkey. Results revealed that most respondents came from the USA. The institutions were providing services for RDM planning, data sharing, and its dissemination. There were some variations in data creation and facilities of entry. Location differences regarding data organisation, curation services, metadata, preservation, processing, software and visualisation services were also found between the USA and non-US countries. The study also revealed challenges in providing RDMS such as limited and unskilled staff, marketing and outreach of RDMS and lack of collaboration among different departments of campus. The study concluded that critical skills, expertise and training in RDM were important for libraries. The study proposed that librarian should collaborate with other departments and libraries to share their expertise around the world to provide RDM resources and services at all possible levels.⁸

Mushi et al. (2020) identified and implemented RDM services for the library at the University of Dodoma, Tanzania. The objective of the study was to find out the RDMS which was needed to implement in the institution so that research data could be accessible by the international community. A case study and survey method were selected to collect the data. The results revealed many factors regarding RDM within themes, such as components and services to support RDM, policy and strategy of the institution regarding RDM and data repositories. The study also presented a model, which had 4 phases i.e. strategy, policy, procedures and infrastructure, awareness creation, skills development and repository content development, management of active data, data selection and preservation.⁹

Liu et al. (2020) studied to precisely analyse and compare the policies of the USA, the UK and Australia to identify the current RDM practices. The study was based on a survey method. It was found that in the areas of access, retention, sharing, storage and possession, the analysis found similar underlying facts of the policies. Overall, the DMP was defined as important and initial stage of RDM. The study also revealed the variations in the RDM focus areas and observed non-specific retention time for research data. Results also showed that all UK universities had RDM-training facilities and RDM organisations with websites, while data were handled either by the library or university staff in other countries. Access, intellectual property sharing and preservation were the focus activity of an overall university in the USA. The UK focused on the sharing, access and retention of knowledge, while Australia concentrated on storage, retention and access. The study concluded with similarities and differences in RDM practices and recommended to universities that data access, sharing, protection, storage, record, transparency, ownership, IPR, use and reuse should be prioritised to obtain high-quality results.¹⁰

Aiodum-Asanre, Ikolo, and Ajuwon (2024) conducted a study on research data management (RDM) skills among health librarians in Nigeria. The primary objective was to evaluate the existing data management competencies of these professionals. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, utilizing a questionnaire adapted from Federer (2018) for data collection. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed for data analysis. The findings indicated that health librarians possessed a sound understanding of the RDM concept. The majority acknowledged RDM as the systematic process of managing data across all phases of the research lifecycle, including planning, collection, organization, management, storage, security, backup, preservation, and sharing. They were also aware of the importance of organizing and structuring data within collections. However, the study revealed that while health librarians in Nigeria had a strong grasp of institutional repository management, their core RDM skills were relatively low, particularly in terms of information technology (IT) proficiency required for RDM practices. Overall, they lacked the necessary expertise for effective RDM implementation. In terms of professional development, 55.5% of the respondents had participated in webinars, 65% engaged in self-directed learning, and 52% benefited from mentorship programs. The key challenges identified in providing RDM services included insufficient funding for training, the absence of RDM policies and regulations within Nigerian institutions, and inadequate IT infrastructure in health libraries. The study concluded that although health librarians demonstrated competence in general library and personal skills, these were insufficient for delivering comprehensive RDM services. It recommended that the management of health libraries should actively support staff training in RDM, while health librarians should also take the initiative to seek further professional development opportunities.¹¹

Methodology

The study employed a survey method to collect data from library professionals at six North Indian universities: Banaras Hindu University (Varanasi), University of Delhi (Delhi), Panjab University (Chandigarh), Guru Nanak Dev University (Amritsar), Jammu University (Jammu and Kashmir), and Maharishi Dayanand University (Rohtak). The study employs a survey research approach to gather data on the state of RDMS. The sample size was determined using a sample size calculator and further validated using the Krejcie and Morgan table (1970) to ensure the sample's accuracy and relevance. A pilot study was also conducted to ensure the effectiveness of the instruments. This initial stage allowed for a comprehensive review of the question order, accuracy, and overall clarity. After completing the surveys, the collected data was carefully organized and entered into spreadsheet software for in-depth analysis. The survey coding involved categorizing open-ended responses and identifying common themes in order to make the data easier to manage and analyse, allowing for the identification of patterns, trends, and significant insights. Visualizing the coded data to identify trends and patterns was achieved using statistical tools IBM-SPSS. These tools facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the status, patterns and trends pertaining to the research field and finding answers to the research questions. The study took a significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$) Critical Value (CV) to check the hypothesis. A total of 88 questionnaires were distributed, and 74 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 84%. The data was analyzed using SPSS software.

Gender Wise Analysis

With regard to the gender of the library professionals, their distribution is represented in the following table:

Table shows that a majority of the library professionals (58.1%) were male. Female library professionals make up the remaining (41.9%). DU had comparatively the most significantly prominent male representation with (87.5%) male library professionals. JU had a higher representation of female library professionals (100%) whereas, DU had the least female library professionals with (12.5%). With the exception of JU and PU, male library professionals outnumbered their female counterparts across all universities.

Designation and Work Experience

The below mentioned table reveals the population of library professionals in the selected universities as per their professional designation with work experience.

The table reveals the designation of library professionals selected for study. It was noticed that amongst the library professionals who responded to the survey, there were 4 librarians where 1 had less than 5 year experience, 2 had 21–25 years' experience, and 1 had more than 25 years' experience. There were five deputy librarians: one had less than five years of experience, one had six to ten years, two had eleven to fifteen years, and one had sixteen to twenty years. There were 15 assistant librarians, with 4 having less than 5 years of experience, 1 having 6 to 10 years, 3 having 11 to 15 years, 5 having 16 to 20 years, 2 having 21 to 25 years, and 1 having more than 25 years. In the 44 library assistants, 3 had less than five years' experience, 11 had six to ten years' experience, 20 had eleven to fifteen years' experience, five had sixteen to twenty years' experience, five had twenty-one to twenty-five years' experience, and one had more than twenty-five years' experience. Other 4 library professionals included 2 with 11–15 years of experience, 1 with 16–20 years, and 1 with 21–25 years.

Skills Required

The findings indicate that library professionals require additional knowledge and skills to effectively deliver RDM services. Essential competencies include awareness of government initiatives and compliance frameworks, proficiency in metadata standards such as Dublin Core, and technical ICT skills related to data storage, infrastructure, and security. Subject-specific knowledge and familiarity with diverse research methodologies are also crucial for managing discipline-specific data and supporting data analysis and visualization. Furthermore, skills in data description, documentation, curation, and the development of Data Management Plans (DMPs) are vital for ensuring data quality, preservation, and funder compliance. Continuous updating of RDM knowledge through refresher training, along with competencies in referencing, originality checking, and legal and ethical aspects of data management, is necessary to uphold research integrity. Collectively, these skills are fundamental for ensuring the quality, accessibility, and responsible management of research data.

It is found that (85.1%) of LIPs agreed that they required awareness regarding new initiatives of government (ex. Shodh chakra) while only a few (5.4%) disagreed and (9.5%) of them were confused. (82.5%) of staff agreed that they wanted metadata creation skills (ex through Dublin core standard) however (8.1%) of them disagreed with this requirement and (9.5%) of them were confused. (83.8%) of staff agreed that required technical ICT skills (e.g. data storage infrastructure, architecture etc.) whereas only negligible (5.5%) of them disagreed and (10.8%) of them were confused. (86.4%) of staff agreed that they need subject or disciplinary-related knowledge while only (5.4%) of them disagreed with this statement and (8.1%) of them were neutral. (85.1%) of staff agreed that they required knowledge of a variety of research methods (e.g. data analysis, data visualisation) while (6.9%) of them disagreed with this statement and (8.1%) of them were silent. (83.8%) of staff agreed that they required skills related to data description and documentation however only (4.1%) of them were disagreed and (12.2%) of them were neutral. (81.1%) of staff agreed that they required data curation skills while only (5.4%) of them were disagreed and (13.5%) of them were silent. It is also observed that (87.8%) of staff agreed that they required skills related to developing DMP while only a few (2.7%) them disagreed with this statement and (9.5%) of them were neutral. (87.8%) of library professionals agreed as they required refresher courses in RDM trends and technologies while (4.1%) of them disagreed and (8.1%) them were neutral. It is noticed that (86.5%) of staff were required referencing and citation skills while (4.1%) of them disagreed with this statement and (9.5%) of them did not respond. A significant number (79.7%) of staff agreed that they required originality checker

skills, while (9.5%) of them disagreed with this statement and (10.8%) of them were silent. It is also observed that (79.7%) of library professionals agreed that they required legal, policy and advisory skills (e.g. intellectual property, ethics and licensing etc).

Discussion

The findings of this study have important implications for the strategic development of Research Data Management (RDM) services in libraries. The strong consensus among library professionals regarding the need for advanced technical, metadata, subject-specific, and research methodological skills indicates a clear shift in professional roles toward active engagement in the research lifecycle. This transition closely reflects international benchmarks promoted by organizations such as the Research Data Alliance and the Association of College and Research Libraries, which emphasize competencies in data curation, stewardship, and research support. It underscores the necessity for institutions to prioritize structured capacity-building initiatives, including continuous professional development, targeted training in RDM tools and standards, and increased awareness of national research policies and government initiatives such as Shodh Chakra.

The alignment of these findings with global trends – particularly the adoption of the FAIR Principles and the growing use of international data repositories and RDM platforms – suggests that local capacity-building efforts must be situated within a broader international framework. Several global institutions provide strong examples of successful RDM implementation. For instance, Monash University has developed a comprehensive, institution-wide RDM strategy integrating policy, infrastructure, training, and collaborative governance involving libraries, IT services, and research units ([DCC](#)). Similarly, University of Westminster has embedded RDM within its virtual research environment, adopting a holistic and researcher-centric approach to integrate data management with the broader research lifecycle ([Insights](#)). In Canada, Queen's University demonstrates best practice through a structured RDM service model focusing on planning, training, and direct researcher support ([Guelph Journal](#)), while University of Cologne illustrates how decentralized institutions can implement coordinated, university-wide RDM frameworks through strong collaboration between libraries, IT, and research administration ([Data Science Journal](#)). These examples highlight key best practices, including integrated policy frameworks, cross-departmental collaboration, researcher engagement, and sustained investment in infrastructure and training.

In contrast, while Indian initiatives such as Shodh Chakra reflect growing policy attention, implementation remains at a developmental stage. Therefore, aligning local practices with these global benchmarks – through investment in infrastructure, adoption of international standards, and systematic upskilling of library professionals – is essential for building sustainable, standardized, and globally interoperable research data ecosystems, ultimately enhancing institutional research visibility, compliance, and impact.¹²

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study reveals a substantial knowledge and skill gap among library professionals in North Indian university libraries regarding RDM. Key competencies – such as awareness of government initiatives like Shodh Chakra, proficiency in metadata standards (e.g., Dublin Core), advanced ICT capabilities, subject-specific expertise, and familiarity with research methodologies including data analysis and visualization – remain underdeveloped. Additional skills in data description, documentation, curation, and the formulation of Data Management Plans (DMPs), along with training in legal, ethical, and advisory aspects of research data, are also critically needed.

When contextualized globally, these gaps align with broader disparities in RDM adoption between developed and developing regions. While universities in Europe, North America, and Australia have long integrated RDM into research support structures – offering institutional repositories, standardized workflows, and mandatory DMP policies – such practices are still emerging within Indian

Higher Education Institutions, particularly in North India. Although similar challenges are observed in parts of Africa and Southeast Asia, many of these regions have begun implementing national open-data policies and capacity-building initiatives. Thus, the challenges in North India are not unique but are accentuated by limited infrastructure, lower policy awareness, and the absence of formal institutional mandates. Strengthening training, policy frameworks, and technological infrastructure is therefore essential for North Indian libraries to align with international RDM standards and effectively support the evolving research ecosystem. Based on the research findings, the study recommended Data Librarian Role Blueprint (DLRB)¹³:

- Academic and research libraries should formally recognize e-research and RDM support as a distinct and essential professional role within the librarianship framework.
- Libraries are recommended to adopt the proposed blueprint as a guiding model to help practitioners clearly understand and effectively perform the role of data librarians.
- Institutions should clearly define the core responsibilities of data librarians, including regular consultation with researchers and the management of research data across its lifecycle.
- Libraries should implement systematic processes for profiling researchers based on their specific queries, disciplines, research approaches, and RDM requirements, including technical support needs.
- Data librarians should categorize researchers according to their research data needs to enable the delivery of customized and efficient RDM and research data services.
- Performance frameworks for data librarians should emphasize proactive engagement with researchers, practical support, and the delivery of need-based RDM services.
- Academic institutions should invest in continuous professional development and targeted training programs to strengthen the competencies required for effective e-research and RDM service delivery.
- Academic institutions should provide structured and practical training to their librarians such as through develop basic to advanced RDM training programs for librarians (data organization, metadata, DMPs, data sharing), Use **modular training (short courses/workshops)** with hands-on practice like creating data management plans or uploading datasets.
- Academic institutions should provide training to use key tools such as DMP tools (DMP Tool), Repositories (DSpace, Zenodo), Basic data tools (Excel, R/Python) etc.
- Academic institutions should strengthen support to Establish **RDM support services in libraries** (help desk or data librarian role), support RDM policies in universities, Encourage collaboration between **library, IT, and research departments**.
- There should be create a **network among North Indian universities** (BHU, DU, PU, etc.) for sharing resources and training, introduce **continuous professional development (CPD)** and “train-the-trainer” programs for librarians.

Implications of the Study

This staged framework provides a realistic roadmap for North Indian University libraries, enabling progressive RDM skill development from foundational competencies to strategic, sustainable services aligned with global standards. The study recommended Prioritized RDM Competency Framework for Library Professionals

Tier 1: Foundational (Immediate Priority)

- Awareness of Policies & Initiatives: National RDM policies, Shodh Chakra, compliance.
- Core RDM Concepts: Data lifecycle, FAIR principles, open data.
- Data Management Planning (DMPs): Creating/reviewing plans, funder compliance.
- Legal & Ethical Skills: IP, licensing, privacy, ethics, and advisory support.

Tier 2: Operational (Intermediate)

- Metadata & Standards: Dublin Core, discoverability, interoperability.
- Data Documentation & Curation: Quality control, reproducibility, long-term preservation.
- Technical ICT Skills: Storage systems, repositories, security, infrastructure management.

Tier 3: Advanced (Value-Added)

- Subject-Specific Knowledge: Disciplinary data standards, tailored support.
- Research Methods & Data Analysis: Qualitative/quantitative analysis, visualization.
- Researcher Profiling & Custom Services: Categorizing researchers, targeted RDM interventions.

Tier 4: Strategic (Sustaining)

- Continuous Professional Development: Training on emerging tools, best practices.
- Performance & Engagement Frameworks: Proactive support, service assessment, impact evaluation.

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ORCID

Surbhi Arora  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4593-4195>

Rupak Chakravarty  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5046-1663>

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