

Adapting Librarians' Professional Competences to Current Requirements through Initial Education and Lifelong Education

Elena Tîrziman

University of Bucharest. Faculty of Letters, Romania

elena.tirziman@litere.unibuc.ro

Maria Micle

*West University of Timisoara. Faculty of Political Sciences, Philosophy,
Communication Sciences: Romania*

(corresponding author, maria.micle@e-uvt.ro)

Abstract

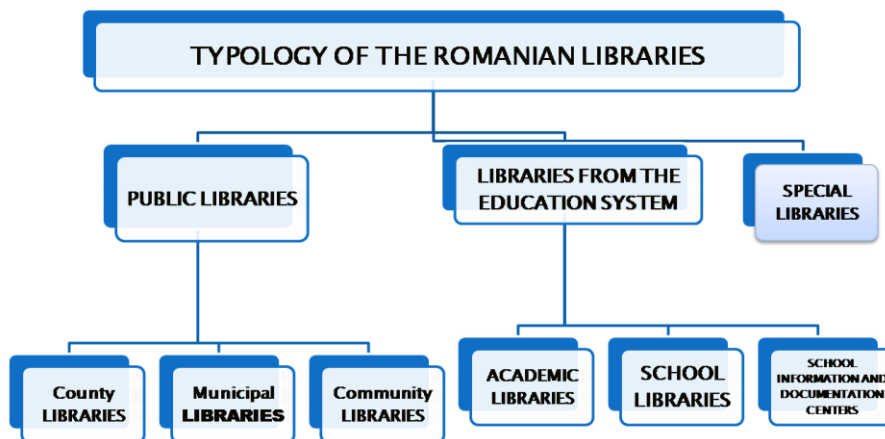
The alert pace of technological, information and social development of contemporary society prevent academic programmes of initial education (bachelor, master) in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS) from supplying graduates with enough knowledge and competences to meet the employers' requirements: this makes lifelong learning indispensable. The initial education and lifelong education options for graduate professional librarians in Romania as stipulated by the specific legislation are bachelor in LIS, bachelor in another professional field plus a master in LIS, bachelor in another field plus competence acquired otherwise than through formal education and assessed based on Occupational Standards as acknowledged by the National Agency for Qualifications. The beneficial effects of lifelong learning are blurred in Romania by the propagation of a traditional, outdated professional profile strongly marked by negative stereotyping and that still keep youth away from a career in the info-documentary field. To well adapt the profession of librarian to the requirements of our society (information technology and globalisation), lifelong learning programmes need to pay attention not only to specific professional competences but also to competences and activities related to institutional internationalisation and adaptation to the multicultural environment, educating the public in the spirit of information literacy, and revitalising the didactics and promotion of reading.

Keywords: *lifelong learning, librarian career development [Romania]; specific competences, transversal competences, occupational standard*

1. Introduction

The alert pace of technological, information and social development of contemporary society prevent academic programmes of initial education (bachelor, master) in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS) from supplying graduates with enough knowledge and competences to integrate on the labour market and meet the extremely specialised employers' requirements. In these conditions, lifelong learning is indispensable for one's professional evolution (in fact, it has been indispensable since the 1970s)¹.

We need to mention that the national system of libraries includes, in Romania, the National Library, public libraries, libraries from the education system, and specialised libraries. Administratively, they are subordinated to two ministries (the Ministry of Education – academic and school libraries – and the Ministry of Culture – the National Library, as well as to local authorities such as county councils or town halls (county, municipal, town, and commune public libraries). The professional community is represented by two professional associations – the Association of Romanian Libraries and the National Association of Romanian Public Libraries.



After being completely ignored during the communist period, academic education in the field of LIS (bachelor, master, doctorate and post-graduation courses) started being organised only after 1999. Initially, there were seven universities in the country of which only four have survived: the University of Bucharest, the “Babes-Bolyai”

¹ Claude DUBAR (1996). La formation professionnelle continue. 3e édition. Paris: La Découverte, p. 113.

University of Cluj-Napoca, the “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, and the West University of Timisoara¹

2. Features of Initial Education and Lifelong Education in LIS in Romania

Regarding the professional training of the librarians in Romania, it is legally stipulated, “The training of professional librarians is ensured by the Ministry of Education and Research after consulting professional associations through optional courses in high schools, post-high schools, short- and long-cycle higher education (including long-distance courses), post-graduation courses, MA and PhD, as well as other professional training forms”². This is why there are, in Romania, from the perspective of required studies as a graduate librarian, three training opportunities:

a) Bachelor in LIS

Graduates in LIS apply for jobs in academic libraries and part of the employees of the National Library has a degree in LIS. Applying for jobs in academic libraries is because they offer better professional opportunities than the other types of libraries dealing with research and highly trained audience. A second reason is that of the geographical location: academic libraries are in universities and universities are in big towns and cities.

The problem with LIS faculties is the low attractiveness among youth because of the low prestige of the librarians and of graduates, on the whole: very low salaries and very low investments in education as part of the national policies in education in Romania

b) Bachelor in another Field + Post-graduation Programme in LIS

This is the type of professional training agreed with by most librarians, particularly librarians working in school and academic libraries. There is, though, a paradox in all this, which is accepted by Romanian legislation: post-academic programmes belong to lifelong education and they should, therefore, supply deep knowledge and professional competences at first cycle (bachelor) level while, in fact, what they supply is just initial education.

In exchange, this situation appeals to graduates added 30-503, trained in multidisciplinary fields (humanities, social sciences, engineering, etc.). The good news in all this is the large number of professionals with a different education than that provided by LIS and the subsequent supplementary professional competences in a field that requires a wide cultural horizon.

¹ Elena TÎRZIMAN. (2014). Repere în învățământul bibliotecomic românesc. In: *Transilvania*. Serie nouă , anul XLII , nr. 7, ISSN: 0255- 0539, pp. 52-55.

² Legea 334/2002, *Legea bibliotecilor*, art. 49.

³ According to a survey carried out in 2016 among the students in the post-graduation programme „Biblioteconomics, information and documenting” supplied by the West University of Timisoara during 2014-2016.

c) Bachelor in Another Field + Competences Acquired Otherwise Than Through Formal Education, but assessed based on Occupational Standards.

Public libraries support and encourage this variant of training dating back to the Communist era, when they also developed a training centre for the librarians within the Ministry of Culture (the BIBLIONET programme had a great impact on lifelong learning through its numerous training programmes for county and communal libraries.

There are reserves towards this alternative of professional training because certifying the level of professional competences is difficult to do; likewise, because of permissive legislation, it risks to allow into the system people that are properly trained. Adapting for this profession takes a long time or is never done in the case of professionals from other fields.

Besides the well-known formal training types (training sessions, specialised courses, etc.), there are also alternative, non-formal training types for the consolidation of professional competences:

Developing the opportunity of visiting as many representative libraries (from Romania and from abroad) as possible because positive models have a great emergent effect;

Participating in conferences and professional events for the opportunity of visiting libraries and seeing aspects of interest, getting solutions to one's own institutional problems, getting to know new colleagues and exchanging good practices;

Organising tutorship and mentorship programmes for the young librarians where prestigious (nationally and internationally) tutors in the field¹ help and encourage them to establish one's own goals for personal and professional development.

We have had positive feedback with all these alternative types of training from our students, particularly during documenting visits associated with practical training².

It would be of great help for the librarians to improve if their institutions could support their training financially. Despite the fact that the Law of Libraries stipulates that "The management of public libraries and the main credit officer are compelled to ensure the professional training of their trained personnel by allotting a minimum of 5% of the total personnel expenses in the budget"³, in practice very few libraries do that. For instance, only 10% of the students graduating in 2016 from the post-graduation programme "Library, information and documenting" of the West

¹ Experienced colleagues assisting debutants are called field tutors by Beatrice Pelpel, in *Guide de la formation tutorale*. Paris: Les Éditions d'Organisation, 1996. p. 9.

² Maria Micle, Agnes Lovasz. *A nem formális oktatás az "Iskola másként" oktatási program keretében Temesvárott*. In „Könyv, könyvtár, könyvtáros”, 23. Évfolyam 9. Szám (2014. szeptember), pp. 12-17.

³ LEGEA BIBLIOTECILOR. (2002). *Art. 50 from Legea 334/2002: Formarea profesională continuă a personalului de specialitate*. Available at: <http://www.kosson.ro/legislatie/281-bibliotecii-legislatie-romaneasca/592-legea-bibliotecilor-334-2002> [Access date: 14.12.2015].

University of Timisoara were financially supported by their employing institutions to pay their tuition.

3 Analysis of the Occupational Standard “Librarian (higher education)” in Romania (ANC. 2012): Components, Competences, and Academic Knowledge

Lifelong learning helps professionals adapt to the changes in their profession: in order to avoid a chaotic process of adaptation, we need to identify with accuracy activities and specific and transversal professional competences for librarians. This is why we needed a project for the national occupational standards for librarians. The initiative and implementation of this project belonged to the National Library of Romania: it materialised in 20102 as an Occupational Standard: Librarian (Higher Education) (Standard ocupațional: bibliotecar (studii superioare), acknowledged by the National Authority for Qualifications (Autoritatea Națională Pentru Calificări [ANC])¹.

As General Manager of this institution at the time, Elena Tîrziman, author of this study, was involved directly and coordinated the team working on the Standard. The document was issued only after a detailed analysis of all occupational aspects of the profession of Librarian (with higher education) included in the Code of Occupations in Romania (Codul Ocupațiilor din România [COR]) in the basic group 2622: Bibliotecari și specialiști în alte servicii de informare (Librarians and specialists in other information services) and identified through the Code COR 262202.

The professional competences of a librarian (higher education) are stipulated in the Standard as follows:

- C1. Communication in the official language.
- C2. Communication in other languages.
- C3. Basic competences in mathematics, science and technology.
- C4. Information technology competences.
- C5. Learning competence.
- C6. Social and civic competences.
- C7. Entrepreneurial competences.
- C8. Cultural competences.
- G1. Competence of organising one's own activities.
- G2. Applying legal stipulations regarding labour health and security and emergency situations.
- G3. Applying environmental protection standards.
- S1. Managing library documents according to ICTs.
- S2. Managing documents specific to library activities.

¹ *Standardul Bibliotecar Studii superioare și Analiza ocupațională în domeniul biblioteconomic*, developed upon demand by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and of the Ministry of Culture (2011-2012). Available at: http://www.anc.edu.ro/uploads/SO/Bibliot%20st%20sup_final.pdf.

The increasing level of exigencies in librarians with higher education asks them to proof such transversal competences as vast general culture, skills in at least one foreign language, and medium digital knowledge and skills (ANC, 2012).

The Occupational Standard also specifies for librarians with higher education wishing to get a promotion the activities defining this profession, the academic and practical skills needed and that serve as quality standards, and the degree of responsibility (ANC, 2012):

Developing library collections: onerous and free of charge acquisition through current and retrospective purchase, donations, transfers, legacies, international publication exchange, legal deposit (only for libraries with a legal right to deposit works);

Recording, organising and managing library collections: recording collections, organising collections, managing library collections;

Overtaking library documents: cataloguing, classifying/indexing library documents, reflecting library collections in catalogues and specific databases;

Storing and conserving library collections: preventive and long-term conservation of documents through organising deposits and digitalisation;

Communicating library collections: public relations with users and partners, communicating documents through reading halls and home borrowing;

Automating library activities: automating the flows of library documents, valorising library collections through digitalisation, promoting the library through website and social media channels, administering electronic library resources, developing online services for users through new communication technologies;

Valorising library collections: developing a national bibliography, developing a Catalogue of foreign books in Romanian libraries and a Repertoire of foreign periodicals in Romanian libraries (activities specific only to the National Library of Romania), editing specialised publications;

Scientific activities: research in the field of library, marketing, and public relations, developing intellectual work instruments;

Methodological activities (specific only to methodological libraries such as the National Library, county libraries, Teaching Staff House Libraries): disseminating information in the field of library and science of information, coordinating lifelong learning activities, coordinating control and analysis activities, feedback;

Developing management tools: plans, strategies, reports, policies and strategies of institutional development;

Promoting: public relations strategies, publicity, and marketing.

4. Conclusions

The contents of the Occupational Standards for the profession of librarian (higher education) developed by the National Library of Romania in 2012 (including one of the authors of this paper as a member) stipulates in detail professional activities and necessary competences: hence its importance as an instrument of expertise and professional assessment at national level when applying for a job or promoting. We believe that some of the transversal and specific competences mentioned here should be paid increased attention and be added new components such as:

Institutional internationalisation and adaptation to the multicultural environment;

Educating the public in the spirit of information literacy;

Revitalising the dynamics and promotion of reading, intensifying psycho-pedagogical competences for the librarians working with children.

The beneficial effects of lifelong learning on the consolidation of specific professional and transversal competences are hindered by the propagation in the society of a traditional, outdated profile that is marked by negative stereotyping (dust, routine, low-paid job) that prevents youth from making an option for LIS. This is why higher education institutions that organise programmes in LIS as well as methodological libraries need to develop “strategies” to better represent in their programmes the new competences required by this profession.

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