

# The Significance of Language Study in Library and Information Science: A Comparison of Two Programs in the United States and Honduras

**Charlotte Ford**

*Carmichael Library, University of Montevallo, USA. Email: cford6@montevallo.edu*

**Debbie Faires**

*School of Information, San José State University, USA. Email: debbie.faires@sjsu.edu*

**Sandra Hirsh**

*School of Information, San José State University, USA. Email: sandy.hirsh@sjsu.edu*

**Nítida Carranza**

*Dirección de Postgrado, Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán, Honduras.  
Email: ncarranza@upnfm.edu.hn*

This comparative case study evaluated the role of foreign language study within the Library and Information Science (LIS) curriculum of two programs in the United States and Honduras. The purpose of this research was to understand the significance and usefulness of language courses from the perspective of the students enrolled. Students who had completed language courses in LIS programs in both countries were surveyed with regard to their motivation for language study, application of language skills in the workplace, most and least valuable aspects of the courses, and overall usefulness of courses. The results suggest that students in graduate LIS programs are interested in learning foreign languages when the courses are targeted to the students' specific interests and professional needs. The findings provide a curricular enhancement model that could be adopted at other universities, with key considerations focused on customizing language courses to the LIS context, required and elective course offerings, course delivery formats and student motivation.

**Keywords:** LIS education, language study, languages for specific purposes, curriculum analysis, curricular enhancement, cross-cultural studies

## Introduction

In today's global society, proficiency in foreign languages is an important skill. English has become the international *lingua franca*, making it essential for professionals everywhere to master the language in order to conduct research and to communicate with their peers around the world (House, 2014; Maruanen, Hynninen & Ranta, 2010). For professionals in non-English speaking countries, this means learning the specialized terminology of

their fields, as well as the general vocabulary and grammar of the English language. In countries in which English is the national language, many professionals work in multicultural communities, where knowledge of a foreign language (or languages) can be a tremendous asset. While foreign language courses have not traditionally been a part of the curriculum in most graduate professional programs, some universities are starting to offer classes to help their graduates develop applied language skills that will enable them to successfully

communicate with people in their diverse communities (Long & Uscinski, 2012; Hardin, 2015; Sisneros & Alter, 2009).

Information professionals are members of an international community. They work with information products, software, and hardware from all over the world and share ideas and research with colleagues around the globe. In their day-to-day work, information professionals must also function effectively at the local level. They may provide programs and services to a wide range of people from different countries and cultures and who speak many different languages. Often, the patrons served by information professionals only speak fluently in their native language, not their host country language. Information professionals who can speak in their patrons' native languages and who have an understanding of their patrons' cultures can better meet the needs of their communities.

This paper investigates the role of foreign language study in Library and Information Science (LIS) graduate programs and how this role varies across countries. Few LIS graduate programs offer foreign language courses to their students and as a result little is known about how these courses can assist information professionals to understand users' needs. This comparative case study surveyed students enrolled in foreign language courses in two Master's programs in LIS: the School of Information at San José State University in the United States and the Maestría en Bibliotecología at the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán in Honduras. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the role of foreign language study within the LIS curriculum in the United States and Honduras, and to understand the significance and usefulness of language courses from the perspective of the students enrolled in these programs.

## Literature Review

The need for foreign language skills in the LIS field in the United States has

been studied periodically, particularly by surveying practicing librarians and analyzing job announcements. Cray (1982) surveyed librarians in public, academic, and special libraries to understand the role that foreign language skills played in their work. Cray found that more than one-third of the respondents (38%) reported that knowledge of a foreign language was a job requirement, particularly the ability to read a foreign language. A few studies have examined the requirement of foreign language skills by evaluating library job announcements. For example, one study analyzed academic and research library job announcements from 1966 to 2006 to see which types of positions required foreign language skills (Zhang, 2008). Zhang found that 20% of job announcements during the period studied indicated a preference or requirement for foreign language skills, with technical service and public service positions accounting for the majority of these requirements. Zhang also found that the percentage of job announcements listing foreign language skills as a job requirement in academic and research libraries peaked in 1986 and then began to decline, although language requirements remained strong for catalogers, bibliographers, and area studies librarians and rose for special collections librarians. Vetruba and Bischof (2010) conducted a survey of academic librarians in the United States and Canada and their attitudes and perceptions about foreign language skills in academic libraries. They found that 25% of the academic librarians in their study used foreign languages daily and 75% wished they had better language skills. The most frequent tasks they completed that required using a foreign language were selecting and evaluating materials, cataloging materials, and communicating with patrons. Examining a particular type of library position, Han and Hswe (2010) analyzed job descriptions for catalog and metadata librarian positions in the United States; they found that foreign language skills frequently emerged as required and

desirable competencies in job postings for these positions. Looking across these studies, there seems to be a consistent need for librarians with some foreign language skills for many types of positions and library environments (though most of the studies have focused on academic libraries).

How can English-speaking librarians gain these foreign language skills? Few researchers have studied foreign language courses in library and information science. Vetruba & Bischof (2010) found that the academic librarians they surveyed in the United States and Canada had mostly learned their foreign language through coursework at a university (79%), rather than on their own (3%) or in high school (7%). Online materials, manuals, and workshops aimed at library professionals interested in learning a language provide another way that practicing librarians can develop their language skills (e.g., Mango Languages, 2016; Staley, 2012; Del Torro, 2010; Alaniz & Pradanos, 2010). However, no studies were found that looked at the role of foreign language study in LIS graduate programs.

Outside of the United States and Canada, even fewer studies were found that addressed the question of language skills for librarians. Fontanin (2008) developed an in-service English language training program for Italian librarians who were already in the workforce. Fontanin described a blended model for this training program which used a mix of onsite workshops and online components using a Moodle platform. Descriptions of English language workshops or courses for native speakers of other languages may also be found on the internet (e.g., “English for librarians,” 2016; Millot, 2014; “English for librarians,” 2012), and a practical manual for Korean librarians featuring English vocabulary and useful expressions for many different library departments and scenarios also exists (Haksul, 2004). However, the role of foreign language learning in LIS programs, either inside or outside of

the English-speaking world, has not been well-researched.

## **Methodology**

This comparative case study evaluated the role of foreign language study in LIS programs in two countries to understand the significance and usefulness of language courses from the perspective of the students enrolled in these programs. Current and former students in the foreign language courses were surveyed to determine:

- Student motivation for taking the language classes;
- How skills learned in these classes were being applied or would be applied in the future;
- The most and least valuable aspects of the language classes; and,
- How students rated the usefulness of the classes.

Two MLIS programs that offered foreign language courses to their students were selected for this study—one in the United States at San José State University (SJSU) and one in Honduras at the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán (UPNFM). The graduate program at San José State University in the United States, established more than 60 years ago, provided a fully online course delivery model; students could choose to take a foreign language course as an elective. The graduate program at the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán in Honduras was new, having just opened in 2015. The students in Honduras were required to take a “Technical English for Librarians” course; the rest of their courses were taught in Spanish. Courses at UPNFM were offered face-to-face (with occasional online sessions in some courses); the mode of delivery for the foreign language course was face-to-face. A key component of the language course design in both of these programs

was developing content that used library terminology and was tied to the library workplace environment.

### *Foreign Language Study at San José State University (United States)*

In 2011, the School of Information at San José State University partnered with the Department of World Languages to offer special sections of language courses designed to meet the specific needs of librarians and other information professionals. Faculty members in World Languages custom-created language and culture courses in Spanish (beginning and advanced), French (beginning and advanced) and Mandarin (beginning only) for LIS students. The overarching goal of this initiative was to prepare information professionals to meet the needs of diverse communities, through the study of languages and cultures. However, each of the language courses was taught a little differently.

#### *Spanish*

Students who studied Spanish learned to:

- Use proper Spanish expressions by following correct grammar agreement in articles, nouns, adjectives, and verbs;
- Recognize and use (a) basic, general vocabulary, (b) basic terminology and phrases in common areas such as health, immigration, banking, housing, employment, etc., and (c) basic and specialized library science and resources terminology;
- Understand basic Spanish conversational language and interact with Spanish-speaking patrons in the library context;
- Locate and use appropriate information in Spanish via information and communication technologies;
- Use conversational Spanish at a level

required for building professional collaborations and relationships with Spanish-speaking librarians and public agencies;

- Better understand Spanish-speaking cultures and peoples; and,
- Be able to communicate about most general and most library-related topics and be able to ask for and understand clarifications, using the basic past, present, and future tenses.

#### *French*

Students who studied French learned:

- French grammar;
- French vocabulary;
- Sentence structures in French;
- Discourse analysis;
- Activities in reading comprehension;
- Translation;
- Library and information science terminology and phrases in French, as well as vocabulary for areas or activities about which patrons often need information (health, immigration, banking, housing, employment, etc.).

#### *Mandarin*

Students who studied Mandarin developed a foundation in Chinese language and its culture that enhanced their professional preparation and ability to understand and speak basic Chinese conversational language. Specifically, they learned:

- Language: how to address people, talk about librarianship, introduce a friend, talk about daily schedules, arrange a meeting, handle various phone situations;
- Culture: the Chinese diaspora, Chinese regions and dialects, Women's script, Chinese painting and calligraphy, Chinese technology; and,
- Career: museums, databases, popular websites, major libraries, and library science-related vocabulary.

In keeping with the online nature of the graduate program, the language courses at San José State University were offered entirely online. The courses were designed to give MLIS students essential language skills and cultural knowledge necessary to succeed in Spanish, French, or Mandarin library environments through:

- Course materials accessed through the learning management system;
- Online textbooks and workbooks;
- Synchronous online meetings for group sessions and discussions, study groups, and office hours using Blackboard Collaborate Web Conferencing;
- Weekly recorded lectures; and,
- Student submissions of recorded oral assignments, enabling faculty to provide feedback on pronunciation.

***Foreign Language Study at the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán (Honduras)***

In developing their nascent MLIS program, faculty at UPNFM in Honduras chose to include in the Master's program a course that provided the basic tools of English for librarians for its students, most of whom had a basic knowledge of English and some of whom had a certain degree of mastery of the language. The "Technical English Applied to Librarianship" course was included in the program for several reasons:

- To promote language skills in the LIS profession in a multicultural and multilingual world;
- To facilitate reading LIS literature, since most of the information in LIS is written in English;
- To enhance librarians' ability to understand and make use of all kinds of technology, which often requires a good understanding of English;
- To enable librarians to read the original editions of information standards, which are mostly written in English. It takes considerable time for standards to

be translated and published in Spanish, despite the advances in translation technology;

- To improve English language proficiency so that—in a world in which most scientific information is published in English—librarians are equipped to help their patrons access, understand, and use information; and,
- To enable librarians to communicate with their colleagues at similar institutions in other countries and to establish strategic links for sharing information, staying up-to-date in their knowledge, and participating in professional exchanges.

The UPNFM Technical English class was offered face-to-face, with all materials made available on the Moodle platform for students to access outside of class. The course made use of authentic (real world) readings on each topic with corresponding vocabulary and worksheets, as well as videos. Topics covered in the Technical English class included:

- An overview of the library building and library websites in English;
- Searching for information in English language databases, Google, and the library catalog;
- Reference and information services in English;
- Interlibrary loan services;
- Cataloging and classification terminology;
- Acquisitions activities;
- Circulation policies and procedures;
- Professional websites in English; and,
- Intercultural communication with English-speaking colleagues.

Surveys were developed using a Google Form for students in the United States and SurveyMonkey for students in Honduras. Students in both programs were asked about their fluency prior to language study, how they used (and anticipated using) foreign language skills in their work, what

the most and least valuable aspects of the language classes were, and how useful the classes were for their professional preparation. Additional open-ended comments were also solicited from both groups of students. The survey instruments differed slightly, reflecting basic differences in the two programs. Students at San José State University were asked which language courses they had taken and when, what country they were from (since many students in the online program came from different countries), graduation date, and why they chose to take a language course or courses (since the language courses were elective). Students at UPNFM were all Honduran, were enrolled in the Master's program as a cohort, and were taking English as a required course. Thus, they were not asked questions about nationality, enrollment or graduation dates, or their choice of language study. Copies of the survey instruments can be found in Appendices A and B.

The SJSU survey was administered online in English, and was open for response for two weeks in October 2015. A total of 261 students enrolled in LIS language classes between Fall 2011 and Spring 2015 were invited to participate in the survey, and 79 (30%) responded. The UPNFM survey was administered online in Spanish, and was open for response for two weeks in July 2015, immediately after the Technical English class ended. Out of a cohort of 21 students, 17 (or 81%) responded to the online survey.

## Results

Analysis of the survey results is presented separately for San José State University and the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán.

### *San José State University Survey Results*

Of the 79 respondents to the SJSU survey, 54 (69%) had taken one foreign language course, while 24 (30%) took two

courses; one person took three courses. Most of the respondents (94%) were from the United States (other countries included Australia, Canada, Mexico, Japan, and Spain), and 70% reported that they were not already fluent in a language other than English when they took the course. Most of the students studied Spanish (both beginning and advanced), with a few taking French or Mandarin classes, Table 1.

The survey was sent to everyone who had completed a language course from Fall 2011 to Spring 2015; while most of the respondents (80%) had graduated, a number of the respondents had not. Eighty-two percent were currently working in the field of Library & Information Science, primarily in the public library sector. About 10% worked in school and academic libraries, respectively, Table 2.

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of different reasons for taking a language course. The top three reasons were:

- To improve my ability to offer services to library users from other cultures (81% rated this as a “very important” reason);
- To improve my basic foreign language skills (77% rated this as “very important”);
- To improve my foreign language skills in the area of librarianship (65% rated this as “very important”).

Table 1. Foreign Language Course(s) Taken as a Part of MLIS Studies at SJSU.

Language Course	Number Who had Taken Course
Spanish (Beginning)	61
Spanish (Intermediate/Advanced)	29
French (Beginning)	8
Mandarin	4
French (Advanced)	3

Table 2. SJSU Respondents' Place of Employment (n = 78).

Setting	Number	Percentage
Public library	38	48.7%
School library	8	10.2%
Academic library	8	10.2%
Corporate setting	4	5.1%
Archive	3	3.9%
Correctional facility	1	1.3%
Nonprofit educational digital library	1	1.3%
Zoo	1	1.3%
Not currently working in the field of Library & Information Science	14	18 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>100%</b>

Other options provided in the survey for why students took a language course (i.e., to improve understanding of other cultures, to improve collection development skills, to improve their ability to communicate with colleagues from other countries, to improve their ability to read the LIS literature in another language) received more mixed responses in terms of their importance, Figure 1. Several survey participants wrote in additional reasons as open responses. These open responses were: to provide better service (seven responses), to take a different or easier class (three responses), to develop language proficiency (two responses), or to meet job requirements (two responses).

Respondents were also asked an open-ended question about whether they used

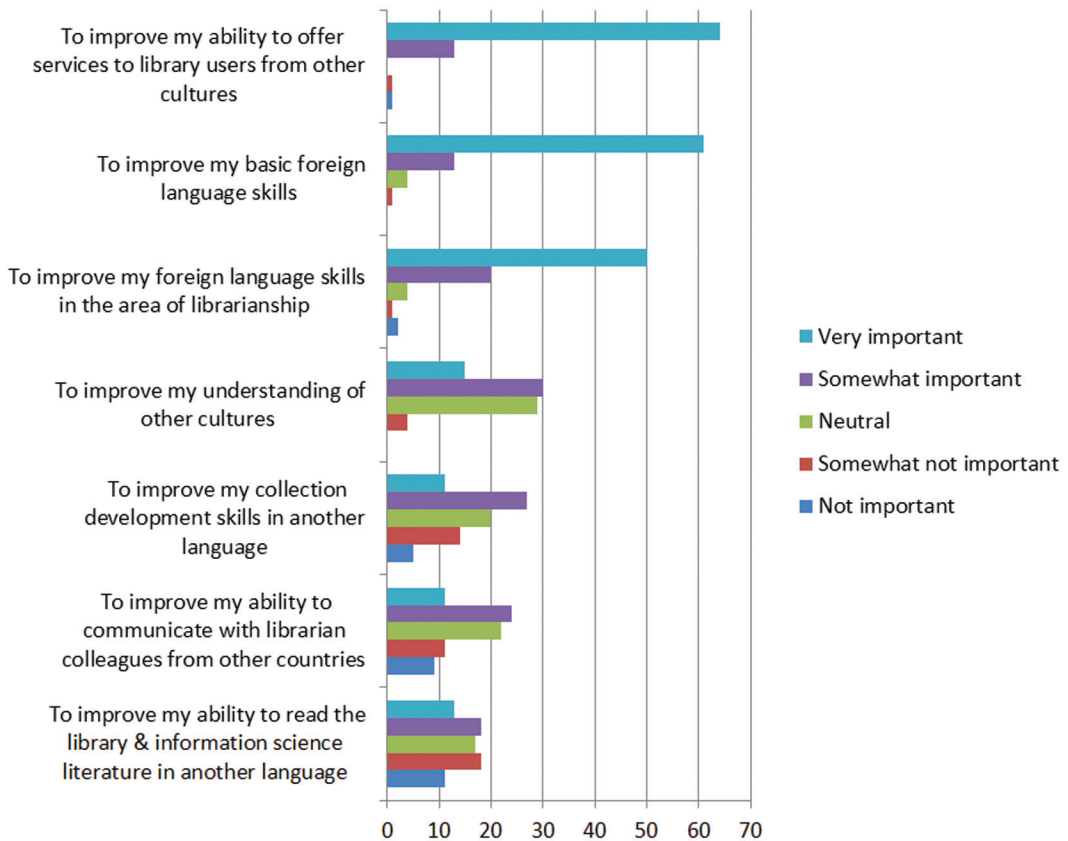


Figure 1. SJSU students' reasons for taking foreign languages (n = 79 for each question).

their language skills in their current work, and if so, what for. Of those who answered the question, 43 (61%) said they were using their skills, and 28 (39%) said they had not used them. The top uses reported by those who said they had used their language skills were for basic conversations (27 responses), story time (5 responses), and collection management (5 responses). Some representative responses from those who reported using their skills were:

“I have Spanish as a first language students and community members who use our school library, and I can now give them basic information on how to use the library and where to find things that I couldn’t do before.”

“I work in an area with many Spanish speakers and it is important that I am able to communicate respectfully and effectively with them.”

When asked how they anticipated using language skills in their future work, most of the respondents to this open-ended question (34 responses) mentioned communicating with community members (i.e., answering questions, sharing information about policies, conversing with them). Eleven respondents mentioned using their foreign language skills in a variety of library services (i.e., story time, outreach, improving the catalog, collection development, cultural programming, and reference), while several others talked about applying their language skills in research (four responses) or international work (four responses). Five respondents said they were not proficient enough to use their language skills. A few typical responses to this question:

“If I move into position that requires more work with the public, I hope to have the ability to communicate better with patrons and perform more effective outreach.”

“As a foreign language learner myself, my experience with SJSU will continue to be invaluable as I work with young students

and their caregivers. I was pushed beyond my comfort level in these courses. This is what my clientele experience every day.”

The survey asked open-ended questions about the most and least valuable aspects of the foreign language courses at San José State University. The most valuable aspects mentioned were:

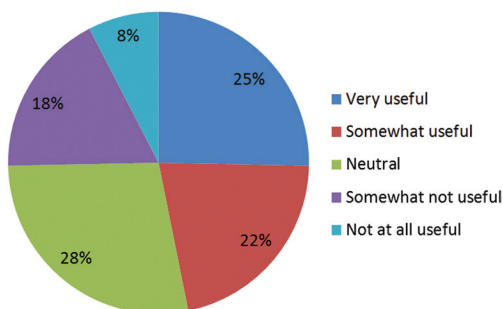
- Learning library-specific terminology (mentioned in 24 of 73 responses, or 33%);
- Learning the vocabulary and pronunciation, and developing/practicing conversation skills (17 responses, or 23%); and,
- Building cultural awareness (seven responses or 10%).

As to the least valuable aspects, nine of 62 responses, or 15%, mentioned the lack of conversation practice in the online environment, while seven (11%) lamented that only one semester of the course was offered. 22 respondents (35%) stated that all aspects of the experience were valuable.

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked, on a scale of 1 to 5, “How useful for your preparation as a librarian or information professional was your foreign language study in the MLIS program?” Interestingly, the responses were quite varied, with 25% finding the language study very useful, 22% somewhat useful, 28% neutral, 18% somewhat not useful, and 8% not at all useful, Figure 2.

Clearly, foreign language study is important to many of the SJSU students. In additional write-in comments, 12 respondents reiterated its importance, eight offered their appreciation for the courses, and six expressed the need for more advanced courses. Graduates have also reported benefiting from gaining the skills needed to compete in a job market that values fluency in other languages and cultures (“SJSU iSchool Students,” 2014). However, not everyone who has taken the foreign language courses has found a position or a context in which to apply their





**Figure 2.** SJSU students' perceived usefulness of foreign language study for preparation as a librarian or information professional, on a scale of 1 to 5 (n = 79).

language skills and some may not feel that they are fluent enough to do so.

**Universidad Pedagógica Nacional  
Francisco Morazán Survey Results**

Like the SJSU survey, the UPNFM survey sought to evaluate the Technical English class and to understand how the Master's students were applying (or envisioned applying) their foreign language skills in the workplace. Since the students were all Honduran and were taking a required course, they were not asked about their country of origin or their motivations for taking the Technical English class. They were asked about the following, with questions (in Spanish) that were similar or identical to the questions asked in the San José State University survey:

- Level of fluency at the start of the foreign language class;
- Whether they were working in the LIS field, and in what setting;
- Use of the foreign language in the workplace (current and future);
- Most and least useful aspects of the language class; and,
- Usefulness of the language class for professional preparation.

Given the newness of this program, there were only 21 students in the cohort of students being surveyed (with 17 responding).

**Table 3.** UPNFM Students' Self-Reported Level of English at the Start of the Class.

Level of English (self-reported)	Number of Students (n = 16)
Beginning	10
Intermediate	5
Advanced	1

Of the 16 students responding to the question about their level of English, ten considered themselves beginners, five intermediate, and one advanced, Table 3. This shows a certain level of modesty among the students; a pretest showed seven advanced students in the class, more than one of whom filled out the survey.

About half of the Honduran students were currently working in libraries, and almost all of those who were working in a library were in an academic setting, Table 4. Of those who were not working in a library, nearly 40% aspired to work in an academic setting. This may explain some of the perceived usefulness of English, since university students and faculty might have a need to access research in English.

Respondents were also asked in an open-ended question whether they used their language skills in their current work, and if so, what for. The most common use of English was for information access and retrieval (six responses), followed by "little or no use at work" (four responses). Other uses included document description, reading articles in English, and helping or

**Table 4.** UPNFM Respondents' Place of Employment (n = 17).

Setting	Number	Percentage
University library	8	47.1%
Archive	1	5.9%
Not working in a library	8	47.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100%</b>

teaching students English (two responses each).

When asked in an open-ended question how they anticipated using language skills in their future work, six respondents mentioned using English for information access and retrieval. The next most common responses were for communication with foreigners (three responses), to develop projects or do assignments (three responses), and to help students or teach them English (two responses). Document description, reading articles, and participating in international events were each mentioned once. A few examples of comments regarding future uses of English included:

“It would be an excellent competency for my role as librarian, as most of the quality information is in databases in English, and we provide support to users in retrieving information.”

“To communicate with other people, access databases and to answer questions from students regarding English class.”

“Participation in international events, advocating for the library with countries where that language predominates.”

The survey asked open-ended questions about the most and least valuable aspects of the Technical English course at UPNFM. Technical vocabulary (13 of 17 responses) was overwhelmingly mentioned as the most valuable aspect of the course. There were a few other stand-outs as well:

- Technical vocabulary (77% mentioned this);
- Readings (24%, or 4 mentions);
- Pedagogical methods (24%);
- All aspects (24%).

A few sample comments on the most valuable aspects of the class:

“The teaching of technical vocabulary and the readings, which broadened our vocabulary”

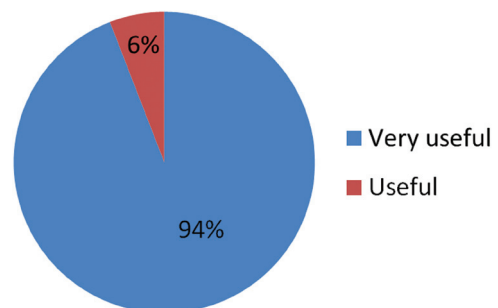
“Readings, specific vocabulary, videos, quick quizzes, and visits to the library and laboratory complemented the pedagogy used in teaching the class.”

“The truth is that almost all aspects we touched on in class are helpful, from the vocabulary to the articles, which helped us a lot with understanding information in that language, the methodology used for the development of the class was very educational and beneficial for our learning.”

The students were very polite with regard to the least valuable aspects of the Technical English course, with 13 of the 17 claiming that “everything” was useful (and only one mentioning the difficulty of working in pairs when their partner had a different proficiency level).

Sixteen of the 17 respondents claimed that the class was “very useful” for their professional preparation, with the remaining respondent stating that it was “useful”, Figure 3.

When asked how the Technical English course could be improved, respondents had some excellent suggestions. The class was very condensed, offered in 10-hour blocks on Friday evenings and Saturdays over the course of a month. The most common suggestion, offered by five respondents, reflected the difficulty in absorbing new vocabulary and grammar in such a short time period; students asked for more time with the material, either by extend-



**Figure 3.** UPNFM students’ perceived usefulness of foreign language study for preparation as a librarian or information professional, on a scale of 1 to 5 (n = 17).

ing class time or offering additional English classes or a review class in the future. Two respondents recommended offering a review or “leveling” class *beforehand*, and one suggested creating two levels of the class (basic and advanced) reflecting some concern about the varying levels of mastery of English within the group. There were various requests for “more”—more videos, more conversation, more writing and reading, more pronunciation practice—and a suggestion to facilitate talking with other librarians in English.

The “additional comments” offered by students at the end of the survey indicated their overall satisfaction with the Technical English course. Nine respondents (53%) praised the class (as “interesting,” “good,” or “important”) or praised the pedagogy employed—for instance:

“I really liked the methodology used, it was very dynamic and there was no time to get bored, and I learned a lot ...”

“It was very interesting and has motivated me to read more in English.”

“I loved the combination of teaching resources used, the management of the (LMS) platform; all the assignments and content of the class were already there, I would have liked to converse more and write more.”

“I like how the class helped us remember the concepts of words in English and how now, at the end of the class, it is much easier to read a document and understand it and be able to listen.”

Two comments reiterated the need for more English classes and one asked for a review of basic grammar rules. Overall, student response to this course was very positive.

## Discussion

This study evaluated the role of foreign language study within the LIS curriculum in two programs in the United States and

Honduras to understand the significance and usefulness of language courses from the perspective of the students enrolled in these distinct programs. The results suggest that students in graduate LIS programs are interested in learning foreign languages when these courses are targeted to their specific interests and professional needs. This section analyzes the similarities and differences of the student experience in learning foreign languages at San José State University and the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán.

There are some interesting similarities between the experiences of foreign language students at SJSU and UPNFM. In both LIS programs, the language courses were custom-created in order to empower graduates to work as information professionals in a multicultural, multilingual world. Respondents from both universities expressed interest in using the language to communicate with users, although this tendency was much stronger among San José State University respondents. In both programs, the aspect of the foreign language courses that respondents valued the most was learning library-specific terminology or vocabulary—a benefit of taking a course specifically tailored to the needs of LIS students.

At both UPNFM and SJSU, the language courses were greatly appreciated by MLIS students. Respondents in both countries sang the praises of these courses; in each case, the most common response to the open-ended question about the “least valuable aspects” of the courses was “not applicable” or “all aspects were valuable.” Multiple respondents asked that more levels of the foreign languages (English, Spanish, Mandarin, or French) be offered.

The experiences of students of foreign languages in the LIS Master’s programs at San José State University and the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán also differ in some important ways. The students in Honduras were par-

ticipants in a new Spanish-language face-to-face program, taking English as the third course in a required sequence. Most were either working in academic libraries or aspired to do so. The Honduran survey respondents valued English as an essential tool for accessing and retrieving information, reading the literature, and sharing research with international colleagues. This reflects the current state of library and information science as a global enterprise whose *lingua franca* is English.

Meanwhile, their counterparts at San José State University were students or alumni of a well-established online English-language MLIS program, where Spanish, French, and Chinese were offered as elective courses. Most were either working in public libraries or aspired to work in a public library setting, and their most important reason for studying a foreign language was to offer better service to library users from other cultures. This finding reflects the profession's commitment to equitable access and inclusion in a diverse, multicultural society. It also indicates a need for more research on the role of foreign language skills in public libraries. Most of the LIS research studies around language skills and needs are focused on academic library environments, but virtually nothing has been published on the value and impact of librarians' foreign language skills in the public library setting. This is surprising given the professional mandates of public libraries to serve all members of their communities.

Overall, the US respondents found the language courses to be much less useful than the Honduran respondents. While all of the Honduran participants stated that the Technical English course was very useful (94%) or useful (6%), only 47% of the US respondents found their foreign language courses useful or very useful; 28% were neutral and 26% thought they were somewhat not useful or not at all useful. Knowledge of English is truly essential for librarians in Honduras, in order to do their jobs in a world in which informa-

tion retrieval tools, library standards, and the bulk of the library literature is written in English. The Honduran MLIS students seemed to be well aware of this fact (as did the faculty who made the Technical English course a requirement). It is far less important for most librarians in the United States to learn another language. While mastery of a foreign language may be central for certain jobs (such as area studies or cataloging positions, as noted in Zhang, 2008) or in certain locations (such as communities where there are large immigrant populations), not every librarian in the United States finds it useful to know the basics of another language in order to perform their work.

The survey results suggest several considerations for those interested in offering foreign language courses in LIS programs:

- *Student motivations vary widely.* Student needs and motivation for studying foreign languages may be very different, depending on career track, linguistic background, and nationality. The needs and motives of an MLIS student in the United States who is planning a career as an outreach librarian in a multicultural community will be quite different from those of a United States student planning a career as a cataloger in a large university library. The needs of both of these United States students will differ from those of an MLIS student in Honduras with an undergraduate major in English—whose needs, in turn, will be distinct from those of a fellow Honduran student with rudimentary English language skills. It is essential to keep the learners' needs in mind when developing applied language programs (Belcher, 2009); it can also be quite challenging to respond to diversity of needs within a single program.
- *Customization is key.* Using real-life situations and authentic readings and vocabulary is considered essential when teaching languages for specific

purposes (Grosse & Voght, 1991). In this comparative case study, both universities created custom foreign language courses which focused on LIS vocabulary and situations. This approach was appreciated by the students in both the United States and Honduras and helped students with their foreign language acquisition, as this approach built on their existing knowledge of library environments and taught them the vocabulary they needed to know for their work situations. Customization of course content provides an important reason for LIS students to take a language class through their LIS program rather than through a more generic foreign language course. However, it does require close coordination between language instructors and LIS faculty, or identifying instructors who are familiar with both LIS and language teaching techniques.

- *Required and elective courses both present challenges.* In this comparative case study, one program required the foreign language course (UPNFM) and the other did not (SJSU). When the foreign language course is not required, it can be challenging at times to get enough students to register for the course. However, requiring students to take a foreign language may not meet the needs of all students either, especially when there are many other ways for people to develop foreign language skills outside of the LIS program (e.g., the online language learning resource, Mango Languages) and to translate between languages using translation apps and programs (e.g., Google Translate). The decision to require a foreign language course will depend on the nature of the program and the needs of its students. In this study, Honduran students perceived their required language course to be more useful than did the US students who took language courses, despite the fact that the US students had chosen their courses as

electives—perhaps because the students in Honduras knew they were preparing to enter a field in which English is heavily used.

- *Course delivery methods should be monitored and adjusted to support learning.* One of the programs in this study offered the language courses online over a regular 16-week semester (SJSU), while the other offered face-to-face instruction in four intense Friday/Saturday sessions (UPNFM). While student comments indicated that learning had occurred in each of these formats, there were certain weaknesses in each mode. Several online students indicated the need for more conversation practice, which was difficult in the online format. In the intense face-to-face course, nearly a third of the students commented on the need for more time to absorb what they were learning, by extending class time or offering additional classes. Program directors must be cognizant of the strengths and limitations of different modes of delivery and work to maximize the learning experience.

## Conclusion

This comparative case study of foreign language study in LIS graduate programs offers some initial insights into the motivation and experiences of students in two very different countries, with potential implications for LIS educators. Learning another language can be a valuable component of an LIS program—whether it is ultimately used to communicate with patrons, navigate databases, troubleshoot technology, connect with international colleagues, or simply expand our understanding of an increasingly interconnected world. Language classes are clearly appreciated by LIS students, and there is demand for such classes even when they are not a required component of a program. The study findings provide a possible curricular enhancement model that could be

adopted at other universities. Further research is needed to survey a broader set of graduate LIS programs from other countries and to track changes in student perspectives over time.

## REFERENCES

- Alaniz, M., & Pradanos, L. (2010). *Spanish for librarians*. Retrieved from <https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/ttu-ir/handle/2346/1488>
- Belcher, D. (Ed.). (2009). *English for specific purposes in theory and practice*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Crary, R. (1982). Foreign languages and the librarian. *Journal of Education for Librarianship*, 23(2), 110–124. doi:10.2307/40322739
- Del Torro, A. (2010). *Spanish for librarians and library staff*. [Anaheim, CA]: Minute Help Press.
- English for librarians and information professionals. (2012). *News & Events*, Embassy of the United States Bratislava, Slovakia. Retrieved from [http://slovakia.usembassy.gov/english\\_for\\_librarians\\_and\\_information\\_professionals.html](http://slovakia.usembassy.gov/english_for_librarians_and_information_professionals.html)
- English for librarians/Inglés para bibliotecarios. (2016). SEDIC Sociedad Española de Documentación e Información Científica. Retrieved from <http://www.sedic.es/english-for-librarians-ingles-bibliotecarios-2/>
- Fontanin, M. (2008). Developing an English course for in-service librarians. *Library Management*, 29(8/9), 777–788. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01435120810917378>
- Grosse, C. U., & Voght, G. M. (1991). The evolution of languages for specific purposes in the United States. *Modern Language Journal*, 75, 181–195. doi: 10.2307/328826
- Haksul Chōngbo Kyoryu Hyōbūihoe. (2004). *Sasōsilmu Yōngō hoehwa = Practical English for librarians*. Sōul-si : Yuro Sōjōk.
- Han, M.-J., & Hswe, P. (2010). The evolving role of the metadata librarian. *Library Resources & Technical Services*, 54(3), 129–141.
- Hardin, K. (2015). An overview of medical Spanish curricula in the United States. *Hispania*, 98(4), 640–661. doi: 10.1353/hpn.2015.0118
- House, J. (2014). English as a global lingua franca: A threat to multilingual communication and translation? *Language Teaching*, 47(3), 363–376. doi: 10.1017/S0261444812000043
- Long, M. K., & Uscinski, I. (2012). Evolution of languages for specific purposes programs in the United States: 1990–2011. *Modern Language Journal*, 96, 173–189. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4781.2012.01303.x
- Mango Languages. (2016). *Spanish for librarians*. Retrieved from <http://info.mangolanguages.com/spanish-for-librarians>
- Maruanen, A., Hynninen, N., & Ranta, E. (2010). English as an academic lingua franca: The ELFA project. *English for Specific Purposes*, 29(3), 183–190. doi: 10.1080/15313200902874946
- Millot, P. (2014). *English for librarians*. Retrieved from [http://www.philippemillot.org/INFODOC\\_M2.html](http://www.philippemillot.org/INFODOC_M2.html)
- Sisneros, J., & Alter, C. F. (2009). Educating social work students to practice in the Latino immigrant community. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 18(1-2), 1–23. doi: 10.1080/15313200902874946
- SJSU iSchool students reap job benefits from customized language and culture class. (2014, October 2). *SJSU School of Information Curriculum News*. Retrieved from <http://ischool.sjsu.edu/about/news/detail/sjsu-ischool-students-reap-job-benefits-customized-language-and-culture-class>
- Staley, L.A. (2012). *Assisting patrons when you don't speak the same language—Spanish speakers*. Retrieved from [http://www.webjunction.org/documents/webjunction/Assisting\\_Patrons\\_When\\_You\\_Don\\_t\\_Speak\\_the\\_Same\\_Language.html](http://www.webjunction.org/documents/webjunction/Assisting_Patrons_When_You_Don_t_Speak_the_Same_Language.html)
- Vetruba, B., & Bischof, L.D. (2010). Foreign languages in academic librarianship: A survey of skills, use, and perceptions. University Libraries Publications. Paper 4. Retrieved from [http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/lib\\_papers/4](http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/lib_papers/4)
- Zhang, L. (2008). Foreign language skills and academic library job announcements: A survey and trends analysis, 1966–2006. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 34(4), 322–331. doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2008.05.005

## Appendix A: Survey of San José State University Students (United States)

### Survey: Language Study for LIS Students

- Which foreign language class(es) did you take as a part of your MLIS studies? [Check all that apply]
  - Spanish (Beginning)
  - Spanish (Intermediate/Advanced)
  - French (Beginning)
  - Chinese
  - French (Advanced)

2. What semester did you take the foreign language class(es)? [Check all that apply]

- Fall 2011
- Spring 2012
- Fall 2012
- Spring 2013
- Fall 2013
- Spring 2014
- Fall 2014
- Spring 2015

3. Were you already fluent in a language other than English before enrolling in the language classes at SJSU?

- No
- Yes

4. What country are you originally from? [Dropdown choices]

5. What semester did you graduate or do you anticipate that you will graduate from the Master's program?

- Fall 2011
- Spring 2012
- Fall 2012
- Spring 2013
- Fall 2013
- Spring 2014
- Fall 2014
- Spring 2015
- Fall 2015
- Spring 2016
- Fall 2016
- Spring 2017
- No longer enrolled
- Unsure

6. Are you currently working in the field of Library & Information Science?

- No, not currently
- Yes, in a public library
- Yes, in a school library
- Yes, in an academic library
- Yes, in a government library
- Yes, in a corporate setting
- Yes, in an archive
- Yes, in another setting

If you are NOT currently working in the field of Library & Information Science what setting do you aspire to work in?

- Public library
- School library
- Academic library
- Government library
- Corporate setting
- Archive
- Other setting

7. We are interested in understanding why you chose to take a foreign language class as a part of your Master's program. Please rank the importance of the following in your decision to take a foreign language class as part of your Master's program, and add others if you wish. [1 = very important; 5 = not at all important]

- To improve my basic foreign language skills
- To improve my foreign language skills in the area of librarianship
- To improve my understanding of other cultures
- To improve my ability to offer services to library users from other cultures
- To improve my collection development skills in another language
- To improve my ability to communicate with librarian colleagues from other countries
- To improve my ability to read the library & information science literature in another language

If you have other reasons why you chose to take a foreign language class as part of your degree program, please add them here.

8. How, if at all, do you use your foreign language skills in your current work?
9. How, if at all, do you anticipate using your foreign language skills in your future work?

10. What were the most valuable aspects of your foreign language class(es) at SJSU?
  - Academic library
  - Public library
  - School library
  - Government library
  - Archive
  - Corporate setting
  - Other setting
  - Undecided
11. What were the least valuable aspects of your foreign language class(es) at SJSU?
12. On a scale of 1 – 5, how useful for your preparation as a librarian or information professional was your foreign language study in the MLIS program at SJSU? [1 = very useful; 5 = not at all useful]
13. Please share any additional comments you have about your foreign language study in the MLIS program at San José State University.

### **Appendix B: Survey of Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán Students (Honduras)**

#### ***Survey: Technical English for Librarians***

1. What was your level of English when you began the Technical English class?
    - Beginning
    - Intermediate
    - Advanced
  2. Are you currently working in the field of Library & Information Science?
    - No, not currently
    - Yes, in an academic library
    - Yes, in a public library
    - Yes, in a school library
    - Yes, in a government library
    - Yes, in an archive
    - Yes, in a corporate setting
    - Yes, in another setting
  3. If you are not currently working in the field of Library & Information Science, what setting do you aspire to work in? (If you are currently working in the field, please skip to question #4).
4. How, if at all, do you use your English language skills in your current work?
  5. How, if at all, do you anticipate using your English language skills in your future work?
  6. What were the most valuable aspects of the Technical English class?
  7. What were the least valuable aspects of the Technical English class?
  8. On a scale of 1 – 5, how useful for your professional preparation was the Technical English class? [1 = Very useful, 5 = not at all useful]
  9. What could be done to improve the Technical English class?
  10. Please share any additional comments you have about the Technical English for Librarians class:

#### ***Encuesta sobre el inglés técnico para bibliotecólogos***

1. ¿Cuál fue su nivel de inglés al comenzar la clase de inglés técnico?
  - Principiante
  - Intermedio
  - Avanzado
2. ¿Está trabajando actualmente en el campo de bibliotecología?
  - No, no en este momento
  - Sí, en una biblioteca universitaria
  - Sí, en una biblioteca pública
  - Sí, en una biblioteca escolar



- Sí, en una biblioteca gubernamental
  - Sí, en un archivo
  - Sí, en la biblioteca de una empresa
  - Sí, en otra clase de biblioteca
3. Si no está trabajando actualmente en el campo de bibliotecología, ¿en qué clase de biblioteca quisiera trabajar en el futuro? (Si está trabajando actualmente en el campo, por favor salte a la pregunta #4)
- Biblioteca universitaria
  - Biblioteca pública
  - Biblioteca escolar
  - Biblioteca gubernamental
  - Archivo
  - Biblioteca de empresa
  - Otra clase de biblioteca
4. ¿Cómo utiliza el inglés en su trabajo actual?
5. ¿Cómo se imagina que utilizará el inglés en su futuro trabajo?
6. ¿Cuáles fueron los aspectos más útiles de la clase de inglés técnico?
7. ¿Cuáles fueron los aspectos menos útiles de la clase de inglés técnico?
8. En una escala de 1 – 5, ¿qué tan útil para su preparación profesional fue la clase de inglés técnico? [1 = Muy útil, 5 = No fue nada útil]
9. ¿Cómo se podría mejorar la clase de inglés técnico?
10. Por favor comparta cualquier otro comentario que tenga sobre la clase de inglés técnico para bibliotecólogos: