

# The Current State of and Needs for Subject Specialist Librarians in Korea

주제전문사서 현황 및 인식조사 연구

Dong-Jo Noh\*  
In-Ja Ahn\*\*  
Younghee Noh\*\*\*  
Sung-Jin Kim\*\*\*\*

## ABSTRACT

Recently in Korea, the need has increased for the systematization of the qualifications of subject specialist librarians who have both knowledge and work experience on specific subject. The purpose of this study is to analyze the domestic situation of subject special library services as well as the education backgrounds or work experience of current subject librarians in Korea. At the end, the study attempts to suggest an appropriate framework for the qualification system establishment and operation in Korea based on the supply and demand analysis of domestic subject specialist librarians.

## 초 록

대학도서관 서비스의 전문화 추세, 주제 분야별, 직능별 도서관의 본격적인 출범에 따라 해당 분야의 주제전문 지식과 실무를 겸비한 주제전문사서의 교육과 자격에 대한 제도화의 필요성이 본격적으로 제기되고 있는 실정이다. 이에 본 연구에서는 국내 도서관 현장의 주제전문서비스 실태를 조사하고 전담인력의 교육배경 및 직무경력 등 현황분석을 실시하여 주제전문사서의 인력수급 및 수요전망을 분석하며, 나아가 국내실정에 부합하는 자격제도 운영방안을 모색하고자 하였다.

Keywords: subject specialist librarian, education background, work experience, Korea, Korean library service, subject specialized service  
주제전문사서, 주제배경, 교육배경

- 
- \* An Assistant Professor, Department of Library & Information Science, Sangmyung University (djnoh@smu.ac.kr)  
\*\* An Associate Professor, Information Science, Tongwon College (ijahn@tongwon.ac.kr)  
\*\*\* An Associate Professor, Department of Library & Information Science, Konkuk University (corresponding author: irs4u@kku.ac.kr)  
\*\*\*\* A Full-Time Lecturer, Department of Secretary Service, Inha Technical College (sjkim@inhatec.ac.kr)
- Received : 12 May 2009    ▪ Revised : 18 May 2009    ▪ Accepted : 28 May 2009  
▪ Journal of the Korean Society for Information Management, 26(2): 43-63, 2009.  
[DOI:10.3743/KOSIM. 2009.26.2.043]

## 1. Introduction

In recent, there have been increasing needs for subject specialists in Korea, who have relevant knowledge and work experience. Library services, especially, of university libraries have been specialized by subject area. At the same time, many special libraries by subject or by task have been established such as Law Library, Medical Library and Children Library. Korean librarianship has a strong demand for subject specialist librarians and an increasing need to systematize the education and the qualification of them.

In fact, this issue is not a new phenomenon in Korean librarianship. It has been raised continuously as a matter of professional development for librarians. Past studies have argued the need for a subject specialist librarian system temporarily and time to time but they seldom presented practical solutions. They did not analyze detailed status of subject specialized services.

This study aims to examine the current subject services and to analyze educational background and work experience of existing subject specialist librarians in order to forecast the supply and demand in the future. The main body of this study is organized into three parts as follows. First of all, it reviews existing literature on subject specialist librarians and analyzes researches which conducted surveys on demand for subject specialist librarians. Secondly, this study has conducted a survey. The questionnaire of this study includes 1) the status of subject specialized services; 2) qualifications

of subject specialist librarians and the way to operate subject specialized services; and 3) respondents' profiles. The last part of this study provides results and presents a picture on a subject specialized librarian system. The study attempts to identify requirements to be a subject specialist librarian such as qualifications including work experience and education, and to analyze requirements of libraries to operate a subject specialist librarian system.

## 2. Literature Reviews

Martin (1996) researched the situation of the subject specialized service in university libraries and the demand for the subject specialist librarian system in UK. He explored subject specialization trends in 59 British university libraries with the same methodology as his 1982 study. He categorized subject specialization into three models based on the organization structure and the assigned duties of subject specialist librarians: dual, 3-tier, and subject divisional.

In 1981, about 46 percent of libraries operated subject specialization. Due to the financial pressure and the fast advancement of information and communication technologies, he expected unavoidable personnel reduction in libraries so that he questioned whether libraries could afford the subject specialist librarian system. According to his recent study, however, about 77 percent of respondent libraries fell into one of three models. Subject specialization of university libraries in UK has a prog-

ress and subject specialist librarians have been increasingly important in the UK. In line with this, Pinfeild (2001) argues that most of university libraries in the UK operate the subject specialist librarian system and this system will not disappear.

The study of Han (1986) can be considered as the first research in the area of domestic subject specialist librarian system. He conducted a survey of demand for librarians to discuss how to improve the information service of university libraries. Han chose samples of university library librarians and surveyed with a questionnaire dealing with their opinions on the subject specialist librarian system adoption, title of the subject specialist librarian, importance of the subject specialist librarian's role, qualifications of subject specialist librarians, educational system for subject specialist librarians and other opinions for the subject specialist librarian system establishment. In his survey, 71.1 percent of respondents assessed that the subject specialist librarian system should be adopted and improved gradually, and 14.5 percent responded that the system was absolutely necessary.

Chung (2005) developed a subject model for efficient information services in university libraries. He surveyed 60 university libraries providing subject services and identified the situation of subject specialization of university libraries, system application procedure and its elements. Noh, Ahn and Hoang (2008) have conducted a survey of demand for librarians inside Korea and abroad in order to develop specialist librarian types and to identify their qualifications. In their study, almost all re-

spondents answered specialist librarians are necessary. They also responded that subject specialist librarians are needed in the case of university libraries, especially in the subjects of Social Science, Art and Culture, Science, Medical Science, Humanities and Law in that order.

Despite the continuing need for information service specification and specialization since the 1980s, the subject specialist librarian system has not been implemented yet. Hence, it is necessary to build up the system in policy and to train subject specialist librarians based on re-emerged discussion on this issue. It is also necessary to conduct research about the subject specialist librarian system in practice.

### 3. Methodology

For the sample selection, this study looked up the list of universities and special libraries in *the Library Yearbook of Korea* (Korean Library Association, 2007). This study selected 279 university libraries and 316 special libraries. We excluded some special libraries which have less than 5,000 collection books, or ambiguous subject specialization, and which do not provide contact numbers such as telephones, faxes, or address. We sent questionnaires with return envelopes via postal mail. Totally 595 questionnaires were distributed, and 171 ones among them were collected. The responding rate is 28.73 percent overall. In each case, 78 questionnaires of the total university libraries

returned (27.96%) and 93 special libraries responded (29.43%). This study analyzed questionnaire data using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS). The sample size is relatively small; hence we use frequency analysis rather than significance analysis.

## 4. Survey Results

### 4.1 Respondent Profiles

#### *Education Background*

Respondents in this study consists of 78 university libraries (45.61%) and 93 special libraries (54.39%). As Table 1 shows, the majority of the respondents (74.85%) have Bachelor's degree in Library and Information Science (LIS). Among

them, the rate of PhDs is considerably high with 15.8 percent and about a quarter have other subject background (25.7%). About forty percent of respondents achieved a Master's degree or higher, which shows the high education level of Korean librarians. This implies that current librarians are sufficiently qualified as a subject specialist librarian.

#### *Library Work Experience*

As shown in Table 2, the highest rate of librarians (39.8%) has worked for more than 10 years and less than 20 years. Librarians with more than 20 years experience are 15.2 percent, and librarians who have experienced for two to four years are 11.7 percent. This data can be referred to when we establish the work experience qualification for subject specialist librarians. However, it is noticeable that there are much less librarians who have

<Table 1> Education Background of Subject Specialist Librarians

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
BA in LIS	30	17.5	12	15.6	17	18.5
BA + MA in LIS	19	11.1	11	14.3	8	8.7
PhD (At least one major among BA, MA and PhD is LIS)	27	15.8	13	16.9	13	14.1
BA in LIS + MA in other subject	10	5.8	5	6.5	5	5.4
BA in other subject + MA in LIS	14	8.2	4	5.2	10	10.9
BA in LIS + BA in other subject	20	11.7	10	13	10	10.9
BA in LIS + 1 Year Course	8	4.7	4	5.2	4	4.3
BA in other subject + 1 Year Course	7	4.1	1	1.3	6	6.5
College + 1 Year Course	6	3.5	2	2.6	4	4.3
College Graduate	20	11.7	9	11.7	11	12
Others	10	5.8	6	7.8	4	4.3
No Responses	10	5.8	0	0	6	7.8
Total	171	100	77	100	92	100

<Table 2> How Long have You been Working at the Library?

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Less than 2 years	15	8.8	4	5.2	11	12
More than 2 years ~ Less than 4 years	20	11.7	7	9.1	13	14.1
More than 4 years ~ Less than 6 years	14	8.2	4	5.2	10	10.9
More than 6 years ~ Less than 8 years	15	8.8	6	7.8	9	9.8
More than 8 years ~ Less than 10 years	13	7.6	5	6.5	8	8.7
More than 10 years ~ Less than 20 years	68	39.8	35	45.5	33	35.9
More than 20 years	26	15.2	16	20.8	8	8.7
Total	171	100	77	100	92	100

worked for longer than twenty years at special libraries than those at university libraries.

*Certificate of Librarians*

As shown in Table 3, 60.8 percent of respondents achieved Professional Librarian Certificates, and 26.3 percent had Advanced Professional Librarian Certificates/Doctoral Librarian Certificates. This proportion holds on in each group of respondents.

*Subject Specialized Service Staff*

Only sixty librarian (35.1%) have worked for subject specialized services, as shown in Table 4. Among them, twenty percent is in charge of the subject, Medical Science, followed by subject areas, Social Science (18.3%) and Science (15%). Considering in each group, however, the percentage of respondents in special libraries who provide subject specialized services in Social Science area is much higher than that of university libraries. Table 5 shows the distribution of subject areas which respondents are responsible for.

*Work Experience of Subject Specialized Service Staff*

Table 6 describes the result of the question for how long a subject specialized service staff has worked in his/her subject. Overall, half the respondents have worked for more than 5 years. This is caused by very high percentage of respondents in special libraries. Next high rate of respondents were responsible for subject services for one to two years. In this case, the proportion of university libraries is higher than that of special libraries. This result explains that librarians in special libraries have more experiences in the subject specialized service than those in university libraries.

*Job Duties of Subject Specialized Service Staff*

We asked what kinds of duties respondents have been charged with, as shown in Table 7. The most respondents (81.7%) have experience in reference service. More than half of librarians are responsible for the jobs in acquisition and cataloging/classi-

<Table 3> What Certificates do You have?

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Advanced Professional Librarian Certificate/Doctoral Librarian Certificate	45	26.3	30	39	13	14.1
Professional Librarian Certificate	104	60.8	40	51.9	64	69.6
Para-Professional Librarian Certificate	14	8.2	5	6.5	9	9.8
Others	5	2.9	1	1.3	4	4.3
No Responses	3	1.8	1	1.3	2	2.2
Total	171	100	77	100	92	100

\* Advanced Professional Librarian Certificate/Doctoral Librarian Certificate: a PhD holder or a Professional Librarian Certificate holder who has experience for more than 6 years

\* Professional Librarian Certificate: a university graduate in LIS

\* Para-Professional Librarian Certificate: a college graduate in LIS

<Table 4> Role in Subject Specialized Service

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	60	35.1	20	26	40	43.5
No	104	60.8	54	70.1	48	52.2
No Responses	7	4.1	3	3.9	4	4.3
Total	171	100	77	100	92	100

<Table 5> Subjects in Subject Specialized Service

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Humanities	5	8.3	3	15	2	5
Social Science	11	18.3	1	5	10	25
Science	9	15	3	15	6	15
Art and Culture	2	3.3	1	5	1	2.5
Law	4	6.7	0	0	4	10
Medical Science	12	20	4	20	8	20
Korean Study	2	3.3	1	5	1	2.5
Others	13	21.7	5	25	8	20
No Responses	2	3.3	2	10	0	0
Total	60	100	20	100	40	100

<Table 6> Work Experience as a Subject Specialized Service Staff

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
More than 1 Year	6	10	2	10	4	10
More than 1 Year ~ Less than 2 years	7	11.7	6	30	1	2.5
More than 2 Years ~ Less than 3 years	5	8.3	3	15	2	5
More than 3 Years ~ Less than 4 years	1	1.7	1	5	0	0
More than 4 Years ~ Less than 5 years	6	10	1	5	5	12.5
More than 5 Years	30	50	6	30	24	60
Others	3	5	0	0	3	7.5
No Responses	2	3.3	1	5	1	2.5
Total	60	100	20	100	40	100

<Table 7> Subject Specialized Service Staff'S Job Duties

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Acquisition(Book Collection)	33	55	4	20	29	72.5
Cataloging/Classification	31	51.7	5	25	26	65
Periodicals	29	48.3	7	35	22	55
Reference Service	49	81.7	14	70	35	87.5
Inter-library loan	29	48.3	8	40	21	52.5
Computer Service	21	35	3	15	18	45
User Education	30	50	9	45	21	52.5
Management & Planning	23	38.3	3	15	20	50
Circulation	24	40	4	20	20	50
Administration	25	41.7	4	20	21	52.5
International Cooperation/PR	23	38.3	5	25	18	45
Others	3	5	2	10	1	2.5

fication and almost half are for the jobs in periodicals, user education, and inter-library loan.

#### 4.2 Subject Specialized Services

##### *Subject Specialized Service Operation*

We asked if the library has operated the subject

specialized service. As in Table 8, almost half answered they did not and had no plan to provide it. However, about twenty percent of libraries have already done and other twenty percent is getting to operate the service soon. This rate means the service will be settled down in the near future, regardless of library type.

〈Table 8〉 Are You Operating the Subject Specialized Service?

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Operating	34	19.9	10	13.0	24	26.1
Planning to operate	30	17.5	19	24.7	10	10.9
No plan for the service	73	42.7	31	40.3	41	44.6
No Responses	34	19.9	17	22.1	17	18.5
Total	171	100	77	100	92	100

#### *Staff Size*

We examined the number of staff working in the subject specialized service part (see table 9). Overall, most libraries have less than five staffs for the service. This result is attributable to the fact that almost all special libraries have relatively small size of staff for the service. In the case of university libraries, forty percent has six to ten librarians for the service and thirty percent eleven to fifteen staffs.

#### *Served Subject Areas*

As Table 10 presents, subject areas of which many libraries provide subject specialized services include Social Science, Humanities, Science, Medical Science, and Law in a descending order. Considering by library type, the order is different from but subject range is similar with each other.

However, many respondents expressed their opinion that there should be a more detailed subject categorization. In particular, fifty percent of university librarians and almost thirty percent of special librarians answered like that. Besides our subject scheme, other subjects mentioned by them include

International/Management, Education/Psychology, Theology, Music, Natural/Applied Science, Language, Art and Physical Activity, Nano Life Science, Agriculture, Buddhism, Design, Fashion, Architecture, Technology Science, Civil Engineering, Reunification with North Korea, and Industrial Economy.

#### *Reinforced Service by Subject Specialized Service*

We attempted to look at what kind of other services have been reinforced after providing subject specialized services. As in Table 11, the most libraries mentioned reference service (67.6%) and then research assistance service (61.8%). This order is maintained in each library type. When we look into detailed answers in the 'Others' category, there were services like Web-based reference resource building, a lecture support service, acquisition of subject-related foreign databases by support of National Library, and so on. Also someone answered the faculty-librarian partnership could raise faculty's awareness of librarians' ability.

<Table 9> How Many Staffs are Working for the Service?

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Less than 5	24	70.6	2	20	22	91.7
6 ~ 10	5	14.7	4	40	1	4.2
11 ~ 15	3	8.8	3	30	0	0
More than 16	2	5.9	1	10	1	4.2
Total	34	100	10	100	24	100

<Table 10> Which Subject Areas are You Serving?

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Humanities	12	35.3	9	90	3	12.5
Social Science	17	50.0	9	90	8	33.3
Science	11	32.4	8	80	3	12.5
Art and Culture	3	8.8	2	20	1	4.2
Law	7	20.6	6	60	1	4.2
Medical Science	9	26.5	4	40	5	20.8
Korean Studies	3	8.8	1	10	2	8.3
Regional Studies	1	2.9	0	0	1	4.2
In More Details	12	35.3	5	50	7	29.2

<Table 11> Reinforced Service by Subject Specialized Service

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Department Support Service	5	14.7	5	50	0	0
User Instruction by Subject	9	26.5	4	40	5	20.8
Research Assistance Service	21	61.8	8	80	13	54.2
Response upon Faculty Request	8	23.5	4	40	4	16.7
Reference Service	23	67.6	8	80	15	62.5
Others	4	11.8	3	30	1	4.2

*Impact of the Subject Specialized Service*  
 We surveyed what impact could be anticipated

after implementing the subject specialized service  
 (see Table 12). The majority of respondents are

expecting that both the quality of and the satisfaction to information service would be improved. They also answered that the subject specialized service can bring librarian status improvement (47.1 %), library awareness improvement (44.1 %), and direct impact on user number increase (11.8 %). Almost similar results were drawn by groups. However, it is noteworthy that there was a negative expectation on library budget and the executives support increase.

#### *User Response to Subject Specialized Service*

We provided questions about user responses to the subject specialized service. Table 13 shows that users in 76.5 percent of libraries have changed their attitude very positively or positively after the service. On the other hand, to be surprised, there were no negative responses on the service in both library types.

〈Table 12〉 Subject Specialized Service Impact

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Qualitative Improvement of Information Service	30	88.2	9	90	21	87.5
Librarian Status Improvement	16	47.1	5	50	11	45.8
Library Awareness Improvement	15	44.1	7	70	8	33.3
Direct Impact on User Number Increase	4	11.8	2	20	2	8.3
User Satisfaction Improvement	30	88.2	8	80	22	91.7
Library Budget and the Executives Support Increase	3	8.8	1	10	2	8.3
Others	1	2.9	1	10	0	0

〈Table 13〉 User Response to Subject Specialized Service

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Positive	14	41.2	5	50	9	37.5
Positive	12	35.3	3	30	9	37.5
Somewhat	6	17.6	2	20	4	16.7
Negative	0	0	0	0	0	0
Very Negative	0	0	0	0	0	0
No Responses	2	5.9	0	0	2	8.3
Total	34	100	10	100	24	100

### 4.3 Need for the Subject Specialist Librarian System

The systematization here means the national certificate system of subject specialist librarians based on a certain level of education and work experience. It can be a very unique issue due to its educational environment of LIS. Compared to the US, universities in Korea established LIS undergraduate programs in an initial stage. Hence, most librarians in Korea are educated at undergraduate level. This has led to poor recognition of librarians as professionals and has resulted in a low level of information service. Accordingly, the subject specialist librarian system is required to qualify librarians as professionals.

#### *Necessity for the System*

This section deals with the need of the subject specialist librarian system (see Table 14). Almost all libraries (84.8%) emphasized the necessity. Both university and special libraries expressed the need to systematize the way to educate and train subject

specialist librarians. It seems that there is a high market demand for the system even though there are now only about forty percent of libraries which already have or are planning the subject specialized service.

#### *Subject Areas for the System*

We attempted to identify subject areas in which subject specialist librarian system needs to be implemented. As Table 15 demonstrates, almost all subjects were mentioned frequently by more than forty percent of respondents. Among them, however, it was Medical Science (74.9 %) and Law (73.1 %) that urgently needed subject specialist librarians. Also, many respondents answered Science (63.7 %), Old Books (59.6 %), Social Science (52.0 %), Humanities (49.1 %) and Korean Study (44.4 %). There are slightly different orders in preferred subject areas between university and special libraries but no change in the top three subjects, Medical Science, Law, and Science.

<Table 14> Need for Subject Specialist Librarian System

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Much Needed	35	20.5	13	16.9	22	23.9
Somewhat Needed	110	64.3	53	68.8	56	60.9
Not Needed	17	9.9	8	10.4	8	8.7
No Responses	7	4.1	2	2.6	5	5.4
Total	2	1.2	1	1.3	1	1.1
	171	100	77	100	92	100

〈Table 15〉 Subjects Required for Subject Specialist Librarian System

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Humanities	84	49.1	41	53.2	43	46.7
Social Science	89	52.0	41	53.2	48	52.2
Science	109	63.7	47	61.0	61	66.3
Art and Culture	82	48.0	37	48.1	45	48.9
Law	125	73.1	56	72.7	68	73.9
Medical Science	128	74.9	53	68.8	74	80.4
Korean Study	76	44.4	34	44.2	42	45.7
Old Books	102	59.6	41	53.2	60	65.2
Regional Study	69	40.4	29	37.7	40	43.5
Archival Science	70	40.9	27	35.1	43	46.7

#### *Possibility of Implementing the System*

In terms of the possibility of the subject specialist librarian system implementation, 7.6 percent of libraries thought that it was 'very possible' and 48.0 percent answered 'possible' (see Table 16). In total, more than half of the respondents showed positive opinions on the implementation of the subject specialist librarian system. Also there are a quarter who answered for 'Somewhat'. This result implicates that librarianship have very positive possibility of implementing the system. Both library types responded positively about the possibility and slightly higher expectation was shown in special libraries.

#### *Obstacles for the System Implementation*

A big obstacle to starting the subject specialist librarian system was the current undergraduate-level LIS program. As Table 17 summarizes, more than half of respondents most mentioned it and then 42.7 percent of participants answered that the system,

which would require librarians to be more qualified, could be a burden to both current and future librarians. In addition, other obstacles were government's lack of understanding of the system (37.4%), lack of social and cultural awareness of subject specialist librarians (35.1%), and lack of a compensation system on self-development (28.7%). Regardless of library types, the biggest obstacle was same but there is a slightly different percentage for other obstacles; the burden for new system implementation is second highest rank in university libraries and government's lack of understanding of the system is the second in special libraries.

#### *Suggestions for the System*

The most respondents suggested Korean libraries should change their organizational structure for the subject specialist librarian system first of all (see Table 18). Then almost the same number of respondents thought there should be efforts for

<Table 16> Subject Specialist Librarian System Implementation Possibility

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Possible	13	7.6	4	5.2	9	9.8
Possible	82	48.0	36	46.8	46	50.0
Somewhat	42	24.6	27	35.1	15	16.3
Not Possible	23	13.5	7	9.1	14	15.2
Never Possible	9	5.3	2	2.6	7	7.6
No Responses	2	1.2	1	1.3	1	1.1
Total	171	100	77	100	92	100

<Table 17> Obstacles for Subject Specialist Librarian System Implementation

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Lack of Government Understanding of Subject Specialist Librarian System	64	37.4	23	29.9	41	44.6
Lack of Social and Cultural Awareness of Subject Specialist Librarians	60	35.1	28	36.4	32	34.8
Current Undergraduate Level of Librarian Education	100	58.5	51	66.2	48	52.2
Burdens as Implementing New System (additional education and work experience)	73	42.7	38	49.4	33	35.9
Lack of Compensation System on Self-Development	49	28.7	27	35.1	21	22.8
Others	16	9.4	9	11.7	6	6.5

<Table 18> Suggestions for Subject Specialist Librarian System Implementation

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Effort for Systematization	98	57.3	43	55.8	54	58.7
Effort for Library Law Amendment	53	31	23	29.9	30	32.6
Institutional Structure Change to Subject Specialist Librarian System	104	60.8	48	62.3	55	59.8
Preference in Subject-related Experienced Librarians	47	27.5	21	27.3	24	26.1
Others	14	8.2	7	9.1	7	7.6

systematization. Besides, some pointed out the necessity of amendment of Korean Library Law and others emphasized that experienced librarians particularly in subject-related area should be employed for the system.

#### 4.4 Qualification and Classification for Subject Specialist Librarians

##### *Education*

It is natural to have a sufficient knowledge of related subject areas as well as LIS to be a subject specialist librarian. To analyze qualifications for a subject specialist librarian we asked required education levels of LIS and the other subjects, separately. Regarding LIS education first, Table 19 shows that about half the participants thought LIS undergraduate degree would be the main qualification for the subject specialist librarian position and next many participants answered at least a master's degree in LIS was needed.

Then to be equipped with good subject knowledge, as shown in Table 20, the most respondents (38.6 %) answered that a subject specialist librarian should hold a master's degree in a related subject and 24.0 percent answered for a bachelor's degree.

##### *Experiences*

Table 21 and Table 22 describe opinions about required experience as a subject specialist librarian in library sectors and in subject-related areas, respectively. Most respondents answered they should have relevant library experiences for four to six years (41.5 %) or at least two to four years (32.7 %). For subject-related experience, about forty percent of respondents responded a subject specialist librarian should have at least four to six year work experience in other subject areas and also other forty percent picked up two to four year subject-related experience. The finding implies that subject-related experience from two to six years would be appropriate for the position.

<Table 19> LIS Education for a Subject Specialist Librarian

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Not Necessary	0	0	0	0	0	0
1 Year Course (Librarian Training)	7	4.1	3	3.9	4	4.3
A Minor	6	3.5	3	3.9	3	3.3
Undergraduate Degree	89	52.0	36	46.8	52	56.5
Master Degree	61	35.7	30	39.0	30	32.6
PhD Degree	1	0.6	1	1.3	0	0
Others	2	1.2	1	1.3	1	1.1
No Responses	5	2.9	3	3.9	2	2.2
Total	171	100	77	100	92	100

<Table 20> Education of Other Related Subjects for a Subject Specialist Librarian

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Not Necessary	1	0.6	0	0	1	1.1
1 Year Course (Related Subjects)	24	14.0	8	10.4	16	17.4
A Minor	26	15.2	9	11.7	17	18.5
Undergraduate Degree	41	24.0	17	22.1	24	26.1
Master Degree	66	38.6	36	46.8	28	30.4
PhD Degree	6	3.5	3	3.9	3	3.3
Others	2	1.2	1	1.3	1	1.1
No Responses	5	2.9	3	3.9	2	2.2
Total	171	100	77	100	92	100

<Table 21> Library Experience for a Subject Specialist Librarian

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Less than 2 years	7	4.1	1	1.3	6	6.5
More than 2 years ~ Less than 4 years	56	32.7	23	29.9	33	35.9
More than 4 years ~ Less than 6 years	71	41.5	32	41.6	37	40.2
More than 6 years ~ Less than 8years	15	8.8	10	13	5	5.4
More than 8 years ~ Less than 10 years	4	2.3	3	3.9	1	1.1
More than 10 years	15	8.8	8	10.4	7	7.6
No Responses	3	1.8	0	0	3	3.3
Total	171	100	77	100	92	100

<Table 22> Subject-Related Experience for a Subject Specialist Librarian

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Less than 2 years	17	9.9	5	6.5	12	13
More than 2 years ~ Less than 4 years	69	40.4	32	41.6	36	39.1
More than 4 years ~ Less than 6 years	70	40.9	31	40.3	38	41.3
More than 6 years ~ Less than 8years	5	2.9	4	5.2	1	1.1
More than 8 years ~ Less than 10 years	3	1.8	2	2.6	1	1.1
More than 10 years	6	3.5	2	2.6	4	4.3
No Responses	1	0.6	1	1.3	0	0
Total	171	100	77	100	92	100

*Classification for Subject Specialist Librarians*

Current librarian classification system includes three levels: Para-Professional Librarian, Professional Librarian, and Advanced Professional Librarian/ Doctoral Librarian. We asked how the librarian classification should be altered after implementing a subject specialist librarian system. As in Table 23, almost half of respondents preferred two classification levels which consist of General Librarian and Subject Specialist Librarian. On the other hand, some wanted three levels of librarian classification system, in which the present classification remains as it is but Advanced Professional Librarian/Doctoral Librarian is accepted as a subject specialist librarian. Other suggested four classification levels which add a Subject Specialist Librarian level to the current three levels.

We next surveyed opinions on the qualification criteria with each levels of librarian classification (see Table 24). As for Para-Professional Librarians and Professional Librarians, the most respondents

thought that they all have been well qualified in a present system and other many part of respondents suggested the introduction of qualifying examination. But, here, it is noteworthy that there were considerably many opinions (15.2%) about the abolition of Para-Professional Librarian position. The main qualification criterion for Advanced Professional Librarians/ Doctoral Librarians was work experience (23.4%) even though many respondents satisfied the current qualification system. As for a Subject Specialist Librarian position, the most people asserted the position should be approved by qualifying examination or bachelor's degree and then the next most ones emphasized the importance of work experience.

*Professional Development Strategies for Subject Specialist Librarians*

In order to maintain and strengthen professionalism for a subject specialist, the most librarians suggested a recertification should be regularly processed on the basis of work experience

<Table 23> How to Classify Librarians including Subject Specialist Librarians

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Two levels of librarian classification: General Librarian and Subject Specialist Librarian	79	46.2	31	40.3	47	51.1
Maintain the current three levels of librarian classification, and accept Advanced Professional Librarians/Doctoral Librarians as Subject Specialist Librarians	54	31.6	26	33.8	26	28.3
Four levels of librarian classification: the current three levels of librarian classification, plus Subject Specialist Librarian level	46	26.9	19	24.7	27	29.3
Others	11	6.4	5	6.5	6	6.5

<Table 24> Evaluation Criteria of Qualification for Each Level of Librarians

	Para-Professional Librarian		Professional Librarian		Doctoral Librarian/Advanced Professional Librarian		Subject Specialist Librarian	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Remove from Librarian Criteria	26	15.2	5	2.9	4	2.3	0	0
As at Present	39	22.8	57	33.3	36	21.1	0	0
Qualifying Examination	30	17.5	43	25.1	24	14.0	39	22.8
Work Experience Assessment	21	12.3	20	11.7	40	23.4	37	21.6
Education Level Assessment	3	1.8	10	5.8	5	2.9	7	4.1
Research Ability Assessment	0	0	4	2.3	12	7.0	14	8.2
College Degree	18	10.5	9	5.3	19	11.1	39	22.8
No Responses	34	19.9	23	13.5	31	18.1	35	20.5

in subject related areas (see Table 25). Also, whether librarians complete some training programs or not seems another somewhat effective way to keep up professionalism as a subject specialist librarian. Regarding the recertification cycle, as shown in Table 26, it is most desirable to be required every five years (43.3%) and next a recertification every three years was suggested by many respondents.

*The Way for the System to Settle down*

We asked a question about which policies should be drawn for a successful early settlement of the subject specialist librarian system. Table 27 presents that legal act establishment such as revision of the current Library Act is most necessary for the system's settlement. Other respondents also mentioned that the staff ratio of subject specialist

<Table 25> Strategy for Professional Development of Subject Specialist Librarians

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Regular Renewal of Specialist Librarian Certificate with Continuing Training	57	33.3	27	35.1	30	32.6
Regular Renewal of Specialist Librarian Certificate with Subject-related Work Experience	74	43.3	28	36.4	45	48.9
Regular Renewal of Specialist Librarian Certificate with Subject-related Research and Publications	22	12.9	11	14.3	11	12
Permanent Recognition upon Achievement of Specialist Librarian Certificate	10	5.8	6	7.8	4	4.3
Others	3	1.8	1	1.3	2	2.2
No Responses	5	2.9	4	5.2	0	0
Total	171	100	77	100	92	100

〈Table 26〉 Recertification Cycle for Subject Specialist Librarians

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Not Necessary	11	6.4	5	6.5	6	6.5
Every 1 year	5	2.9	3	3.9	2	2.2
Every 2 years	15	8.8	7	9.1	8	8.7
Every 3 years	43	25.1	20	26	21	22.8
Every 4 years	5	2.9	4	5.2	1	1.1
Every 5 years	74	43.3	28	36.4	46	50
Every 7 years	2	1.2	1	1.3	1	1.1
Every 10 years	9	5.3	2	2.6	7	7.6
Others	1	0.6	1	1.3	0	0
No Responses	6	3.5	6	7.8	0	0
Total	171	100	77	100	92	100

〈Table 27〉 Policy Directives for Subject Specialist Librarian System Settlement

	Total		Library Types			
			University		Special	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Include the staff ratio of Subject Specialist Librarian as one of Institution Evaluation Criteria	42	24.6	20	26	21	22.8
Legal Act Establishment (i.e., Library Act Revision)	73	42.7	36	46.8	37	40.2
Include the terms of employment of Subject Specialist Librarian in Library Incorporation Approval Standards	31	18.1	8	10.4	22	23.9
Others	9	5.3	4	5.2	5	5.4
No Responses	16	9.4	9	11.7	7	7.6
Total	171	100	77	100	92	100

librarians would be added into current institution evaluation criteria.

## 5. Conclusions

In Korea, the need has been noted for the education and qualification system of subject specialist

librarians due to the increasing specialized university library services and the emerging subject special libraries. Based on this background, this study carried out a survey on the status of the subject specialist librarian system. It attempted to analyze demand for subject specialist librarians and supply expectations, and further to provide suggestions for certificate programs and manage-

ment strategy for the subject specialist librarian system.

We examined the following categories from the questionnaire in order to suggest subject specialist librarian system appropriate to current librarianship: qualifications as a subject specialist librarian, conformity of current librarians to the qualifications, demand on the subject specialist librarian system, and the system's impact on library services.

Based on major findings, subject specialist librarians need to be qualified with not only a bachelor's or master's degree in LIS but also a bachelor's or master's degree in related subject fields. It is also desirable for them to have four to six year work experience in librarianship and other subject area, respectively. Many respondents suggested that they should be separately evaluated with different qualification criteria from ones of general librarians. For certification of their qualification, the current process is contented on the whole but the introduction of a qualifying examination was relatively frequently mentioned.

When looking into the profile of current librarians, the findings show a high education level and sufficient work experience in both libraries and specific subject areas. More than half of librarians hold MAs or higher in LIS and a quarter have subject-related background knowledge. Seventy percent of librarians have worked in libraries for more than 6 years. About 35 percent of librarians have had a role in the subject specialized service, and among them more than 80 percent have worked in subject-related areas. These

profiles imply that subject specialist librarians would be supplied without difficulty when the system is implemented. Further research however, needs to be done on how to qualify experienced librarians as subject specialist librarians.

Now only about forty percent of libraries have started or are planning to provide subject specialized services. But when we examined the need of the service, as many as 85 percent of respondents emphasized its necessity and expressed a strong demand on that. They considered the existence of subject specialist librarian would have a good influence on library services such as reference service, research assistant service, curriculum support service, and so on. Also, their partnership with faculty could promote the value of librarians. According to the survey, it was expected that library user's satisfaction on the information service would be improved when providing the subject specialized service. At the same time, the most libraries looked forward to a positive change of user attitudes.

However, librarianship has a lot of problems to be solved for successful systemization and settlement of the services by subject specialist librarians. We should find the best way to educate and employ adequately qualified subject specialist librarians after full consideration of current education and certification system. We should make some wise plans to cope with the rejection of current librarians to the new system because of increasing burdens with more education and experience, to change the system of human resource management and administration in libraries, and to expand budget.

Also, the strategies should be developed to maintain and strengthen professionalism of subject specialist

librarians such as training programs and re-certification process.

## References

- American Library Association (ALA). 2003. Library and Information Studies Education and Human Resource Utilization: A Statement of Policy. [cited 2008.6.11]. <<http://lita.org/ala/hrdr/educprofdev/lepu.pdf>>.
- Bastiampillai, M. A. and P. Harvard-Williams. 1987. "Subject Specialization Reexamined." *Libri*, 37(3): 196-210.
- Bischof, L. D., and T. Lindquist. 2005. "Improving library-related subject skills and performance in German Studies librarianship: an analysis of the impact of the WESS Study Tour on new German Studies librarians." *Collection Management*, 30(2): 19-43.
- Chung, Jae-Young. 2005. A Study on the Development of Subject - Divisional Plan Model for the Efficient Reference Service of University Library (in Korean). *J. of the Korean Society for Information Management*, 22(3): 327-350.
- Crossely, C. A. 1974. "The subject specialist librarian in an academic library: His role and place." *Alsib Proceedings*, 26(6): 236-249.
- Han, Sang-Wan. 1986. A Study on Functions and Present Situation of Subject Specialists for Information Services in Korean College and University Libraries (in Korean). *J. of the Korean Society for Information Management*, 3(2): 42-74.
- Hay, F. J. 1990. "The subject specialist in the academic library: A review article." *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 16(1): 11-17.
- Noh, Younghee, In-Ja Ahn and Gum-Sook Hoang. 2008. A Study on Analyzing Demands for Professional Librarians in Domestic and Foreign Countries (in Korean). *J. of the Korean Society for Library and Information Science*, 42(2): 189-208.
- Martin, J. V. 1996. "Subject specialization in British university libraries: a second survey." *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 28(3): 159-169.
- McAbee, S. L. and J.-B. Graham. 2005. "Expectations, realities, and perceptions of subject specialist librarians' duties in medium-sized academic libraries." *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 31(1): 19-28.
- Otto, M. 1982. "The academic librarian of the 21st century: Public service and library education in the year 2000." *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 8(2): 85-88.
- Pinfield, S. 2001. "The changing role of subject li-

- brarians in academic libraries." *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 33(1): 32-38.
- White, G. W. 1999. "Academic subject specialist positions in the United States: A content analysis of announcements from 1990 through 1998." *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 25(5): 372-382.

