

**ESSENTIAL SKILL AND COMPETENCY NEEDS FOR EMPLOYMENT AND
MARKETABILITY BY LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE
PROFESSIONALS IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

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Abstract:

The article highlights the skills and competencies needed by LIS professionals in effective marketing for job placement. Developments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have its positive effect on the library landscape. It has transformed the LIS profession bringing in new tools, for accessing, processing and disseminating information and the adoption of new technologies in the discharge of their duties. The need for the development and acquisition of requisite skills and competency abilities, that enables an individual to act effectively in a job is discussed. The concepts of competence and skill were also explained. The paper outlines and discusses the professional skills and technological competencies necessary for LIS professionals and considers how these are acquired and developed to survive in an ever changing technological environment and to meet the future challenges in the 21st century. The need for stakeholders to revisit the curriculum for uniformity and conformity to current needs for job marketability was also discussed, and based on the literature reviewed, recommendations was made.

Keywords: Employment, Marketability, LIS Professionals, Skills and Competencies

Introduction

Employment opportunities do not come with only educational qualifications, but competency and skills are required to prove self worth and value in the market place. This is because employers look out for something more than educational qualifications and experiences in achieving success and progression of career. Employers prefer to employ persons who are resourceful, ethical and self-directed with the possession of competent skills. And this is applicable in all sectors and organization. Therefore, development of Library and

Information Science professionals (LIS) are very important. Sarrafzadeh (2005) asserts that LIS professionals will lose out in the race for jobs to persons from other professions like scientists, engineers, and IT specialists if they don't change their unwillingness to learn new skills. As a result, LIS professionals work in quickly evolving situations that call for a variety of skills, new concepts, and wider views.

The world we live in is constantly changing, and this change has an impact on every aspect of society, including how each person lives their life in terms of education, the economy, society, and politics. And these alterations are a result of the new and developing technologies of the twenty-first century, whose advancements are significantly altering the demands of the labour market. According to Kulkarni (2017), libraries and librarians now serve as learning centres and information managers rather than just being a repository for knowledge. This is because; information can be processed and delivered in different ways to the users. As a result of this change, library professionals also require some of the special skills and competencies apart from the basic skills and practices of librarianship. It is clear that employers in the job market place are on the outlook for skills and prefer candidates who possess specialized training skills, to those with just paper qualification. The importance of developing employability skills has been given new emphasis in all professions and LIS is not an exception. The focus is to be on identifying current and future trends in recruitment and the skills required by the professionals to meet the employer's needs.

Skills and Competency

The term skill means practical ability acquired through training and used to execute a task. On the other hand, competency is the innate capacity to utilized acquired skills. Where Skill is practical ability, Competency is a resource to use the skill in carrying out an action. Competency was described by Mahapatra and Das (2019) as the fundamental quality and

mental aptitude that guide how people interact with one another and the outside world. Individuals who are competent can make great contributions to their organizations and the library profession. They both described skill as an action in the manner a person completes a task, which suggests that competencies are inherent in a person but have an impact on how he uses his skills. Thus, competencies are the skills, technical knowledge and personal attributes that contribute to an individual's success in particular position, whereas skill is the capability acquired by a person through training to successfully function in a job. The term "skill," mean a practical competence obtained via training and applied to the performance of a task.

Competence, on the other hand, is the intrinsic ability to use learned abilities. Competency is a resource to apply the skill in carrying out an action, whereas skill is a practical ability. Competency was described by Mahapatra and Das (2019) as the fundamental quality and mental aptitude that govern how an activity is carried out. According to Agha and Alrubaiee in Gupta (2013), core competencies provide competitive advantage and have an impact on an organization's performance. Since competences are usually built on skills, as noted by Edgar and Lockwood (2012) and Gupta (2013), an individual has the advantage of having a certain set of abilities to carry out tasks in the workplace effectively and efficiently.

Need for Competence and Skills among LIS Professionals in the 21st century

Library and Information Professionals (LIS) professionals must be equipped with innovative ideas for the job of an information practitioner, and also demonstrate good managerial skills to remain relevant in the emerging knowledge age. According to Sarrafzadeh (2005), if LIS professionals remain reluctant to gain new skills, they will become irrelevant to their organization and will probably lose out in competition for employment to

people of other fields like scientists, engineers and IT professionals. Consequently, LIS professionals must encounter rapidly changing environments that require diverse skills, new thinking and broader perspectives. Ascroft (2004) stated the need for the skills, roles and characteristics of the LIS professionals to change in order to cope with the change in technology. The library professionals must be able learn new technology, which would be very useful in effective rendering of the services. Raina.(2000), Stated that the following three main reasons as the need for competence and skills among LIS professionals.

- An evolution in the primary method of information storage, retrieval, and distribution from paper to electronic media. This transformation is directly impacted by the incorporation of various media, such as text, graphics, and sound, into multimedia resources;
- A greater focus on responsibility, with an emphasis on performance, quality customer service, measurement, benchmarking, and ongoing improvement. Additionally, this movement is directly impacted by the reduction of financial resources.
- End-user computing, work teams, downsizing, reengineering, outsourcing, and e-learning are examples of new techniques for organizing the workplace.

Additionally, Singh and Pinki (2009) provided a list of skills and competencies that LIS workers must develop, including: the shift from print to electronic media, a new type of organization at the workplace, including end-user computing, users' requirements have changed, to change the way people perceive libraries, the ability to accept new technology is necessary.

Categories of Skills and Competency Needed

The evolving changes occasioned by the revolution in ICT have placed an obligation on the 21st century LIS professionals that certain skills/competency are needed to be relevant and attractive in the ever competitive job market. There are three main categories of skill required by LIS professionals in the 21st century. These skills can be generally categorize into; Professional, technical, and personal skills. Nonthacumjane (2010) in a study revealed that the knowledge and skills that underpin the work of information professionals include analytical, creative and technical competencies. Similarly, Ashcroft (2004) identifies six basic skill categories and those are professional, marketing and promotion, evaluation, communication, negotiation, collaboration, censorship and personal transferable skills.

In a study on a content analysis of 220 job adverts from American university libraries, Lynch and Smith (2001) discovered that oral and written communication abilities were the most crucial. However, the advertising was also mentioning flexibility, innovation, and leadership more frequently. The advertising often highlighted computer technologies and related skills.

In order to research the qualifications as well as the skills necessary of a modern professional librarian, Gerolimas and Konsta (2008) performed their study of 200 job adverts by gathering data from the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and the United States in 2006 and 2007. The results showed that among the top competencies, communication abilities were valued above experience. Furthermore, interpersonal abilities also came up frequently.

In a study that covered the period from 1973 to 1998, O'Connor and Li (2008) examined 138 job postings for academic librarian positions from Australia, America, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Hong Kong between July and November 2007. Following an analysis, the position descriptions were divided into four groups: computing

and technology; interpersonal and intrapersonal; service approaches; and conventional approaches to libraries. Additionally, they discovered that interpersonal, autonomous, imaginative, confident, and judgmental skills were the ones most frequently demonstrated, along with energy and enthusiasm.

Nonthacumjane (2010) examined, from the viewpoints of Norwegian and Thai LIS educators, the fundamental skills required of an information professional working in a digital library setting, internet surveys, in-person interviews, internet interviews, and email interviews were all employed in the comparative study to obtain data. The results of this study showed that analytical, creative, and technical skills were all part of the knowledge and abilities that supported the work of information professionals in both countries. It was discovered that knowledge of metadata, database creation, database management systems, and user needs were the main areas of discipline expertise needed. Communication, critical thinking, information literacy and teamwork were found to be the generic skills needed by information professionals in a digital library environment.

180 job postings from the library industries in the United Kingdom were gathered between June 2006 and May 2007, and 180 were subjected to a content analysis by Orme (2008). The author divided skills into general, individual, and professional categories. The results showed that general skills are the ones that are most frequently needed. Personal qualities and professional qualities are at second and third place, respectively. Each category's top three most often used talents are Generic: collaboration; general computer; interpersonal/communication skills. Professional: experience in a similar field, a history of providing customer service, a chartered librarian, and skills in cataloguing, categorization, and metadata. Personal: zeal, adaptability, and self-motivation.

Furthermore, Ugwu and Ezema (2010) used a questionnaire to conduct a survey in Nigeria with 67 attendees at the 47th Annual Conference/AGM of the Nigerian Library Association. They have established that among the key qualities that librarians need to have in order to be effective are knowledge management skills, cultural skills, leadership skills, strategic skills, and restructuring skills.

Other examples of categories of Skills required by LIS professionals in the 21st century. (Mahaptra and Das 2019)

S/N	Managerial Skills	Generic Skills	Professional Skills
1	Local and global thinking	Communication skill	Information technology skills
2	Leadership skill	Flexibility	Information literacy
3	Personal skill	Adaptability	Technical professional skills
4	Planning and Organizational skills	Assertiveness	
5	Negotiation skills	Service Attitude	Knowledge management
6	Fund raising	Creativity	Intranet skill
7	Consumer management Skills a. User need analysis b. Information seeking c. Behaviour analysis	Innovation	Networking skills i. On-line search engines ii. On-line databases search j. Desktop publishing k. Content development l. Digitization m. Web based services
8	Team building	Analytical skill	System development
9	Resource management	. Problem solving	Database creation
10	Managing change	Decision making	Intricacies of internet search tools

In addition, Luo (2012) identified a set of competencies that encompass knowledge and abilities in four crucial areas, with a focus on customer service, technology, service policies, and communication. According to Robles (2012), there are three main categories of

skills: foundational skills, also known as basic skills, which are essential for the workforce to function productively in the job market and even in personal life; occupational skills, also known as occupational skills, which are needed to perform tasks and functions for a specific job and core employability skills; and non-vocational or non-technical skills, which are considered employability skills and are needed in the workplace and in society. Robles (2012) emphasizes the importance of teamwork, problem-solving, and communication skills. Lou (2012) asserts that a librarian must possess strong interpersonal and customer service abilities.

Challenges

The professional training program offered as a course at library schools aims to uphold the industry's standards and requirements for employment. To improve their graduates' employability, the curriculum does in fact need to be reviewed on a regular basis. This is done in order to assess how well the curriculum aligns with the information requirements of the modern work market. According to Mthembu (2019), higher institutions should offer a well-balanced education and practice that would help students to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for the labour market.. Education "plays an important role in the adaptation of human resources to the dynamic requirements of the labour market, providing certain mobility in choosing a better job," according to Naros and Simionescu (2019). It's true that practice makes perfect, and LIS students need more hands-on experience to develop fundamental skills like communication that will help them compete in their daily jobs. Unfortunately, Katuli-Munyoro and Mutula's (2016) observation shows that Library and Information Science (LIS) education and training programs have come under fire for graduating students who lack the necessary abilities to perform well in their first jobs. This

might be an indication that some LIS schools' curricula lack a well-rounded education and training, and that the content and the way it is taught differs from one institution to the other. Ocholla and Shongwe (2013), on the other hand, point out some significant shifts in the LIS scene, including newly developing job titles that would eventually necessitate curricula adjustment or reorientation. According to Abubakar (2021), a number of issues are facing the LIS profession in the modern period as a result of the discipline's evolving nature. The challenges these developments points to the fact that LIS schools curriculum in Africa be reviewed and change the contents of the curricula with the aim of equipping their graduates with the knowledge and skills that would enable them succeed in the ever changing world of information.

Furthermore, Saka (2015), posited that dearth of facilities needed for acquisition of ICT skills in library schools in Africa is a major challenge. Lack/inadequate computer laboratories, has led to low level of ICT skills/practices. It is paramount to note that the traditional mode of teaching in library schools in Africa cannot compete with the modern trends in the information world. Computers and other ICT facilities are needed in training the prospective LIS graduates, unfortunately, the number of computers in the ICT laboratories in library schools in Africa cannot cater for the large population of students.

Prospects and Way forward

It is vital that the skills and abilities of the LIS professionals are continuously examined because of the technological shift experienced in the modern workplace, which has also had an impact on employee roles and responsibilities. In agreement with this viewpoint, Naros and Simionescu (2019) emphasize the need of ongoing professional development as a means of acquiring fresh information and experience. Continuous training and retraining

therefore become extremely crucial. Formal, informal, or ongoing educations are all forms of training. According to Ocholla and Bothma (2007), the importance and effectiveness of continuing education is crucial, with a focus on management and leadership development, information and communication technologies, and personal development. Mphidi (2016) emphasizes the value of LIS professionals continuing their education, emphasizing that the workplaces of today are always changing and driven by technology, information, and knowledge. Gill et al. (2001) acknowledge that the majority of LIS practitioners' training is given through contacts and mentoring.

A good skills development system, according to ASTD (2012), will be able to: anticipate the need for new skills, involve employers and employees in decisions about training delivery, maintain the quality and relevance of training, make training accessible to all facets of society, ensure viable and equitable financing mechanisms, and continuously assess the economic and social outcomes of training. Ezeani, Eke and Ugwu (2012) emphasised on continuing professional development since modern libraries are advancing and upgrading technologically. Ezeani, Eke and Ugwu (2012) also prefer that the introduction of technology or ICTs require improvement in skills and knowledge in the LIS profession. Ocholla and Shongwe (2013) stated that there is a growth in new job titles and job functions in the 21st century LIS market in which information technology (IT) has become an essential skill to be possessed by the LIS professionals. ICTs have impacted the LIS landscape, as stated in the LIS Charter (2014). According to Shongwe (2014), the advent of IT has influenced both the LIS employment market and library operations. According to Raju (2016), the job market has changed and now needs specific knowledge and abilities from LIS professionals. As a result, the content of the LIS curriculum and how it is delivered must

reflect these changes in the job market. And this is why it is imperative to have uniformity in the curriculum for all LIS schools.

In a bid to address the issue of curriculum uniformity in Nigeria, the Librarian Registration Council (LRCN) hosted a summit on Library School Curriculum Review and Development of Benchmarks in Lokoja, Kogi State, in 2015. The principal objective was to align Nigeria's library school curricula with international standards for a long-term library sustainability. At the summit, it was crucial to discuss lingering issues related to accreditation, facilities, nomenclature, staffing, the location of LIS programs, the process of implementing benchmarks, and course material for LIS institutions in Nigeria. As a result of that summit LRCN is currently developing a unified curriculum for LIS schools in Nigeria and considerable progress has been made. Gbaje and Ukachi (2011) asserted categorically that the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) had consistently promoted the need to realign library and information services with technological advancements through conference and workshop themes. Over the years, LRCN participated in ICT skill development workshops where professional discourses focused on finding appropriate, relevant academic and professional programs that should be available in library schools' curricula in order to prepare graduates of these schools for society's information needs as they arise.

Specific Recommendations

Based on the critical review of literatures, the study recommends the following:

1. Professional development and continuing education should be encouraged as competencies and skills can be gained from training.

2. The study also suggest that the LIS curriculum should be revised on a regular basis, to produce well equipped, highly competent and job ready LIS professionals, in order to keep up with job market trends and demands.
3. The existing ICT laboratories in all library schools in Nigeria should be well equipped, while the library schools without laboratories should be encouraged to establish one by training efficient manpower to manage and coordinate the established libraries in Nigeria.
4. The availability of adequate laboratories would improve the delivery of adequate and successful practical instruction and the learning of LIS skills.
5. The parent institutions in Nigeria which offer LIS courses (universities, polytechnics, monotronics, and colleges of education) should provide enough resources to purchase amenities for ICT labs and other amenities to improve LIS skill acquisition. This will make it easier to set up practical classes for computer instruction in addition to demonstration/workshop setup.

Conclusion

Since the development of ICT, it has become more crucial than ever for LIS professionals to improve their skills and expertise in order to be employable. It is important to note that technical and interpersonal abilities, as well as knowledge of cataloguing, collection building, interpersonal relationships, communication, technology, and customer services, are highly valued as professional traits for LIS practitioners. However, it seems that there are issues with human resources in the global job sectors, such as a shortage of properly skilled people and training programs. The emergence of new professions in the LIS market and the subsequent need for curriculum revision and reorientation have caused a drastic change in the

LIS landscape. In order to create a competitive force in a world that is becoming more and more high-tech, teaching and developing ICT skills must be a top priority. In fact, all professional education and practice calls for diversity, academic self-sufficiency, and adaptation to local needs and aspirations, and its credibility lies in its openness and flexibility to change. It is high time for LIS schools to respond to the needs of the information society. The swift technical trends and advances are evident from the LIS landscape's quick transformation. The fact that LIS curricula frequently fall short of the needs of the labour market and its stakeholders is a significant issue that requires immediate attention.

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