

**ESSENTIAL COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE INFORMATION SERVICE DELIVERY IN  
NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES**

**BY**

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**Abstract**

The new innovation in university library processes has brought a lot of changes on the roles and expectations of the information professionals. Information professionals are now to be more acquainted with competence of handling new technologies related to collection, processing and dissemination of information. Application of new technologies in the libraries require improvement of different kinds of skills and competencies to enable information professionals catch up with the technological advances and adopt the development to the library work for effective and efficient library and information service delivery. The paper aims to identify types of competencies required by librarians in university libraries and determine how competencies are acquired for effective information service delivery. Survey research method was adopted for this study. One hundred and thirty seven (137) librarians from three (3) university libraries were used as sample size for the study. Questionnaire was used for data collection. The data collected were presented and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study concluded that the vast changing university library environment demands that the librarians in Nigerian University Libraries must be someone with multi-skills to enhance effective and efficient library and information service delivery.

**Introduction**

Most university libraries in Nigeria in the present day are using latest Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools and techniques for performing various house-keeping jobs such as acquisition, processing and serial control and also delivering various computerized services to the users. Increasing creation, availability of electronic resources and the application of technology to library processes has brought a lot of changes not only to library and information services but also on the roles and expectations of the librarians and information professionals. The new innovations have led to the emergence of different libraries and transformed the way information is now selected processed, organized, accessed and disseminated to the user community. This has given rise to huge increase and availability of electronic resources in university libraries thereby bringing technological context and new service delivery model to bear on the work of academic librarians. Halder (2009) reported that with the emergence of Internet and Communication Technology, libraries have been acquiring different approaches of the same and mode of service is changed. This development has brought a fundamental shift from traditional information environment to an e-environment where emphasis is placed more on the acquisition of e-resources, a number of which are available in Nigerian university libraries. Ekoja (2007) postulated that even though few Nigerian University libraries have achieved satisfactory levels of ICT acquisition and usage, the fact, however, remains that they are all generally aspiring to embrace as much ICT as possible within the limit of the resources available to them. These innovations impact the roles, competencies, skills,

and knowledge of Library and Information Science Professionals. As stated by Erlendsdottir (1998),

We are no longer just the guardians of books. We are information providers in an environment that is constantly changing and where the information needs to be gathered quickly and effectively. Today, our mission is to promote services for the ever-increasing amount of information.

The academic libraries that can survive in this environment are those that have the ability to deal effectively and proactively to a broad spectrum of contemporary challenges that focus on speed, cost and quality. In consequence, the librarians working in such libraries need continuous grooming by acquiring core competencies and new skills so that they never become out of date in this fast changing environment. Mahmood, (2003) opined that the changing environment of academic life demands new competencies in academic librarianship. As such, academic librarians are now meant to have redefined responsibilities that require new skill set on top of the core skills of librarianship.

Competencies refer to skills or knowledge that leads to superior performance. According to Business Dictionary, competence indicates sufficiency of knowledge and skills that enable someone to act in a wide variety of situations. Marshall et al (2003) defined competencies as the interplay of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes required to do a job effectively from the point of view of both the performer and the observer. They identified two types of competencies for librarians. The first type

are professional competencies which relate to knowledge in the areas of information resources, information access, technology, management and research and the ability to use these areas of knowledge as a basis for providing library and information services. The other covers personal competencies which represent a set of skills, attitudes and values “that enable librarians to work effectively, be good communicators, be able to focus on continuing learning throughout their careers; demonstrate the value-added nature of their contributions; and survive in the new world of work” (Marshall et.al. 2003). Orme (2008) also categorized skills into generic, personal and professional. The three most regular skills in each category were stated as follows: (a) Generic: i.e. interpersonal/communication; general computing and teamwork; (b) Professional: i.e. professional related experience; customer service; chartered librarian; cataloging, classification and metadata and (c) Personal: i.e. enthusiasm; flexibility, self-motivation. These competencies are essential as librarians in university libraries have to contend with new emerging transformation technologies.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The new innovation that the library and information science profession has experienced in the past have led to the emergence different libraries and transformed the way information is now selected, processed, organized, accessed and disseminated to the user community. This development has brought a fundamental shift from traditional information environment to e-environment. It has been observed that a number of Nigerian university libraries have achieved satisfactory level of ICT acquisition (Ekoja 2007). It follows that university libraries have been moving to adjust to the change from printed era to the digital era. Bronstein (2015) reported that the dramatic changes have affected the skills and competencies required of library and information science professionals working in libraries and information centers. Ferreira et al (2007) also observed from their study of core library professional competencies in contemporary society that there is a gap between the knowledge acquired from library schools and those required by the labour market. This has further been attested by the study conducted by Abbas (2014) who uncovered that librarians lack the requisite expertise to maneuver the ICT facilities and navigate into the wealth of information resources available on the web and many general and specialized databases were never utilized by the librarians to deliver, provide and disseminate information to their clientele. This clearly points to the fact that in addition to the traditional library skills

and knowledge, librarians are expected to possess additional knowledge and skills to enable them work efficiently within the contemporary library world. To this end, this study has tried to examine the competencies required by librarian in Nigerian University Libraries to face the challenges of the advent of new technologies.

#### **Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the competencies acquired by librarians in the university libraries under study?
2. How do librarians acquire such competencies for service delivery in the university libraries under study?

#### **Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To identify the types of competencies required by librarians in the university libraries under study
2. To determine how the librarians acquire competencies for service delivery in the university libraries under study

#### **Review of Related Literature**

##### **Competency Requirements for University Librarians**

The major single factor which has caused significant changes in library services during this century is undoubtedly information technology (IT). These changes have an impact on university libraries and the information profession. As a result, Sheih (2009) opined that owing to this role transformation, the competencies necessary for librarians in the new information environment differ from those of the past. Burke (2009) aligned with this when he argued that training is crucial to the successful use of electronic resources in the library and itemized technological skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century environment as E-mail management skills; Microsoft word (Word Processing Skills); Microsoft Access (Database management skills); Microsoft Excel (Spreadsheet skills); Power point (presentation software); Use of Portable Document Format (PDF) Software; Web Searching Skills; Searching Library Databases; Using an Integrated Library System (Virtual/Alice for Windows etc); Use of Digital Camera for Digitization; Web navigation skills; Teaching others to use technology; File management/operating system navigation skills; Troubleshooting technology; CD-ROM/DVD Search; Scanners and similar devices; Creating online instructional materials/products; How to cite and evaluate internet resources; Installing

software; Troubleshoot printing problems; Web design; Instant messaging; Computer security knowledge; Connecting patrons laptop to the library wireless; Blogging; Wiki; Installing printer, scanner and computer systems; Graphic Design; Network management; Computer programming and Creating & updating Institutional OPAC. In a similar vein, Tanloet & Tuamsuk (2010) stated that in order to adopt these development to library work and catch up with the technological advances, information professionals must learn to acquire various roles, knowledge, competencies and skills; and the emphasis of their role now is on management, services and cooperation. Chang (2001) divided competencies into "Core Competencies" and "Generic Competencies" and some scholars divide it into professionals' skills and personal skills. Fisher (2003), Partridge and Hallam (2004) and Missingham (2006) opined that both professional and generic skills are important to the library and information professional. Kennan (2006) stated that professional competencies as those associated with the discipline of librarianship and the accepted knowledge over which the profession claims principal expertise and the discipline. Such skills are the core skills traditionally associated with librarians/Information professionals which include information handling skills, training and facilitating skills, evaluation skills and concern for the customer. These skills cover cataloguing, classification, indexing, enquiry work and user education. Generic skills will make librarians more effective managers of networked resources and services. Generic competencies comprise a set of skills, attitudes and values that enable librarians to work efficiently. The Special Library Association (2003), therefore, identified generic competencies as being crucial to the success of anyone working in library profession. Sheih (2006) summed up the various generic competencies that are necessary for librarians to respond to the present challenges, prepare for transformation and revitalize their service contents as follows: Communication/interpersonal competency, leadership competency, management competency, creativity/innovative competency, analytical/critical thinking competency and stress/emotional management competency.

#### **Methods of Acquisition of Librarians' Competencies in University Libraries**

Efficiency of a library depends to a large extent on the competency of its staff. It is assumed that to maintain professional competence, the professional must participate in updating activities. Adomi and Famola (2013) stressed that professional development is an important component of ongoing librarian education and is very critical to performance

of their role. The library and information science profession is service oriented and therefore requires continually updated knowledge and skills for effective performance. Professional development for academic librarians fulfills a need for the continuing acquisition of knowledge and competencies that has not been met by either formal education or on-the-job-training. This need is driven by the technological imperative (the rapid technological change that characterized contemporary academic libraries). Elkin (1994) stressed the need for continuing education in the modern information environment, pointing out that education and training must become a continuous lifelong process to keep abreast of change as professional knowledge is becoming increasingly complex and specialized so that individuals need constant updating to keep in touch with their area of specialization. Nyamboga (2004) The author stressed the need for training students, researchers and staff to make appropriate use of resources made available in libraries. Srivastava and Srivastava (2004) revealed that librarians need opportunities for higher education and opportunities for attending conferences. The study further revealed that librarians are mostly ignorant of the developments in information technology. Aina (1993) evaluated the curricula of library schools in Africa to know whether their courses were relevant to the emerging library and information science market based on a standard list of topics ranging from computer technology, information and records management to information repackaging and journalism. He recommended that funding agencies should provide assistance in the training of information professionals in Africa by sponsoring visiting lecturers and scholars to training institutions where these lack skilled workforce to teach certain courses, and make the necessary equipment available. Flatley and Weber (2004) briefed the importance of academic librarians to keep abreast of the profession as it changes rapidly and one of the best ways to do this is by attending professional workshops, lectures seminars etc.

#### **Research Methodology**

The study adopted a survey design and used a sample of the entire 173 librarians from three University Libraries in North Western Nigerian. The total number of questionnaires administered to the respondents were 173 out of which 137(79%) were retrieved duly completed and found usable for the study.

**Result** The result collected from the questionnaires were analyzed and discussed in tables of frequencies

and percentages. Mean were also employed in the analysis of the data collected.

**Analysis and Discussion of Findings**

**Table 1: Distribution of the Response Rate According to their University Libraries**

S/N	University Libraries	No. of question-naire adminis-tered	No. of question-naire retrieved	Per-centage
1.	Abdullahi Fodiyo Library Complex, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, Sokoto State	21	17	81
2.	Bayero University Library, Kano, Kano State	33	26	79
3.	Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Kaduna State	119	94	79
<b>Total</b>		<b>173</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>79</b>

Table 1 shows that Kashim Ibrahim Library (A.B.U) has the highest number of respondents with a score of 94 (79%), followed by the Bayero University Library, ( B.U.K.) with a score of 26 (79%) and Abdullahi Fodiyo Library Complex Sokoto(UDU), with a score of 17 (81%). The clear disparity in staff population of the library studied may be attributed to the size of the libraries studied.

**Table 2: Competencies Acquired by Librarians in the University Libraries**

Professional Competencies	Institution						Total	
	UDU		BUK		ABU		F	%
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Information handling skills	15	88	24	92	85	90	124	91
Training and facilitating skills	13	76	18	69	86	91	117	85
Evaluation skills	8	47	10	38	45	48	63	46
Cataloguing & classification skills	15	88	21	81	84	89	120	88
Indexing and abstracting skills	11	65	15	58	70	74	96	70
Enquiry work	8	47	10	38	30	32	48	35
User education	9	53	17	65	78	83	104	76

Table 2 revealed that information handling skills, cataloguing and classification skills and training and facilitating skills were recorded as the highest professional competencies acquired by librarians in the university libraries studied with the response rate of 124 (91%),120 (88%) and 117 (85%) respectively. It was discovered that enquiry work and evaluation skills were the least professional competencies acquired by librarians in the libraries studied with the response rate of 48 (35%)

and 64 (46%) respectively. This finding implies that the librarians have acquired competencies in the discipline areas of librarianship and they have been providing these services as expected. This is in agreement with Special Libraries Association (2003) who noted that both professional and personal competencies are absolutely essential for the success of every information professional.

**Table 3: Competencies Level in Information Technology**

IT Competencies	Level of Competencies										Mean
	Highly Compt.		Compt.		Undecided		Not Compt.		Somewhat Compt.		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	
Programming Language	17	12.4	20	14.6	12	8.8	73	53.3	15	10.9	2.6423
Networking	8	5.8	23	16.8	22	16.1	63	45.9	21	15.3	2.5183
Web development	9	6.6	15	10.9	13	9.5	77	56.2	23	16.8	2.3431
System development	14	10.2	27	19.7	12	8.8	64	46.7	20	14.6	2.6423
System application	17	12.4	26	18.9	13	9.5	54	39.4	27	19.7	2.6496
e-mail management skills	27	19.7	60	43.8	12	8.8	20	14.6	18	13.1	3.4234
Microsoft word (words processing skills)	43	31.2	40	29.2	15	10.9	13	9.5	26	18.9	3.4453
Microsoft access (database management skills)	10	7.3	55	40.1	15	10.9	24	17.5	33	24.1	2.8905
Microsoft excel (spreadsheet skills)	11	8.0	47	34.3	22	16.1	27	19.7	30	21.9	2.8686
Power point (presentation skills)	15	10.9	47	34.3	19	13.9	27	19.7	29	21.2	2.9416
Use of portable document format (PDF) software	22	16.1	48	35.0	18	13.1	20	14.6	29	21.2	3.1022
Web searching skills	19	13.9	60	43.8	21	15.3	16	11.7	21	15.3	3.2919
Searching library database	18	13.1	68	49.6	11	8.0	15	10.9	25	18.2	3.2847
Using an integrated library system (virtual/alice windows)	22	16.1	58	42.3	19	13.9	18	13.1	20	14.6	3.3212
Use of digital camera for digitization	4	2.9	38	27.7	27	19.7	34	24.8	34	24.8	2.8686
Web navigating skills	11	8.0	30	21.9	21	15.3	37	27.0	38	27.7	2.5547
Teaching others to use technology	11	8.0	46	33.6	30	21.9	25	18.2	25	18.2	2.9489
File management/ operating systems navigation skills	24	17.5	32	23.4	20	14.6	35	25.5	26	18.9	2.9489
Troubleshooting technology	5	3.6	22	16.1	20	14.6	55	40.1	35	25.5	2.3212
CD-Rom/DVD search	24	17.5	56	40.9	15	10.9	20	14.6	22	16.1	3.2919
Scanners & similar devices	11	8.0	33	24.1	25	18.2	38	27.7	30	21.9	2.6861
Creating online instructional materials/products	15	10.9	29	21.2	18	13.1	42	30.7	33	24.1	2.6423
How to cite & evaluate internet resources	20	14.6	59	43.1	14	10.2	14	10.2	33	24.1	3.2044
Installing software	25	18.2	28	20.4	13	9.5	43	31.4	28	20.4	2.8467
Troubleshooting printing problems	12	8.8	22	16.1	18	13.1	45	32.8	40	29.2	2.4234
Web design	12	8.8	16	11.7	27	19.7	63	45.9	19	13.9	2.5475
Instant messaging	25	18.2	45	32.8	20	16.4	27	19.7	20	14.6	3.2044
Computer security knowledge	25	18.2	20	14.6	26	18.9	42	30.7	24	17.5	2.8540
Connecting patrons laptop to the library wireless	21	15.3	39	28.5	16	11.7	30	21.9	31	22.6	2.9197
Blogging	8	5.8	21	15.3	20	14.6	53	38.7	35	25.5	2.3723
Wiki	20	14.6	19	13.9	15	10.9	57	41.6	26	18.9	2.6350
Installing printer, scanner & computer systems	19	13.9	34	24.8	13	9.5	47	34.3	24	17.5	2.8321
Graphic design	13	9.5	14	10.2	30	21.9	49	35.8	31	22.6	2.4817
Network management	16	11.7	20	14.6	29	21.2	45	32.8	27	19.7	2.6569
Computer programming	14	10.2	25	18.2	17	12.4	50	36.5	31	22.6	2.5693
Creating & updating institutional OPAC	26	18.9	28	20.4	18	13.1	36	26.3	29	21.2	2.8978

Table 3 shows the competencies level of the librarians in information technology for the provision of library and information service delivery. It indicates that the respondents were competent in Microsoft word (words processing skills) with a mean score of 3.4453, e-mail management skills with a mean score of 3.4234 and using an integrated library system (virtual/Alice for windows) have the third highest mean score of 3.3212. The least of the competencies level of the librarians in information technology in the libraries studied were troubleshooting

technology with a mean score of 2.3212, web development with a mean score of 2.3431 and blogging with a mean score of 2.3723. In overall, it could be said that the respondents are not competent in information technology sampling because majority of the information technology competencies options, respondents were found not to be competent. This implies that they have not been providing library and information service delivery as being expected by their patrons especially in this technological era. It is not surprising because of the

dynamic nature of technology which is constantly creating the need for new skills. This is in agreement with Tanloet and Twamsuk (2010) who noted that in order to adopt these developments to library work and catch up with the technological advances, information professionals must learn to acquire various roles, knowledge, competencies and skills. Also, Batiandila (2010) noted that the development of professional competencies enable us to

work efficiently and survive in the world of libraries and information services. Accordingly, training and retraining of library staff is very essential for effective and efficient library and information service delivery in the North Western Nigerian University Libraries.

**Table 4: Level of generic competencies**

Generic Competencies	Level of Generic Competencies										Mean
	Highly Compt.		Compt.		Undecided		Not Compt.		Somewhat Compt.		
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Communication/interpersonal competency	43	31.4	74	54.0	9	6.6	1	0.7	10	7.3	4.0072
Leadership competency	62	45.3	38	27.7	23	16.8	8	5.8	6	4.4	4.0364
Management competency	53	38.7	54	39.4	13	9.5	6	4.4	11	8.0	3.9197
Creativity/innovative Competency	9	6.6	38	27.7	14	10.2	42	30.7	34	24.8	2.6058
Analytical/critical thinking competency	13	9.5	39	28.5	16	11.7	39	28.5	30	21.9	2.7372
Stress/emotional management competency	21	15.3	58	42.3	14	10.2	14	10.2	30	21.9	3.1897
Information literacy Competency	45	32.8	46	33.6	19	13.9	12	8.8	15	10.9	3.6861
Teamwork	56	40.9	48	35.0	16	11.7	4	2.9	13	9.5	3.9489
Ethics and social responsibility	10	7.3	38	27.7	21	15.3	34	24.8	34	24.8	2.6788

Table 4 indicates the level of respondents in generic competencies for the provision of library and information service delivery in the libraries studied. It shows that majority of respondents were competent in leadership competency with a mean score of 4.0364, followed by communication/interpersonal competency with a mean score of 4.0072 and teamwork with a mean score of 3.9489. However, the least of the generic competencies level of the librarians were creativity/innovative competency with a mean score of 2.6058, ethics and social responsibility with a mean score of 2.6788 and analytical/critical thinking competency with a mean score of 2.7372. This finding implies that they are competent in

generic competencies which could enable them to be effective and efficient in providing library and information service delivery in this age. This is consistent with Orme (2008) and Special Library Association (2003) who noted generic competencies as being crucial to the success of anyone working in library profession. In agreement with this position, Chan (2006) also noted that librarians who possess generic competency skills can be effective communicators, outstanding informational added-value workers and life time learners.

**Table 5: Acquisition of Competencies for Service Delivery**

Methods of Acquisition	University Libraries						Total	
	UDU		BUK		ABU			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Professional workshop	14	67	20	76	88	94	122	89
Seminars	15	88	24	92	92	98	131	96
Lectures	11	65	15	58	74	79	100	73
Training by library bodies	11	65	15	58	69	73	95	73
Formal education	14	82	19	73	88	94	121	88
Distance learning	2	12	3	12	11	12	16	12

Table 5 shows that 122 (89%) of librarians were of the opinion that they acquire competencies for effective service delivery through professional workshop. As for seminars, the frequency count were 131(96%), lectures had a count of 100 (73%) while 95 (69%) of the respondents said that they acquire competency through training by library bodies. However, the response rate for formal education was 121 (88%) while distance learning recorded the lowest score with 16 (12%) which shows that it is not an effective method. These findings are in line with Flatley and Weber (2004) who noted on the importance of academic librarians to keep abreast of the profession as it changes rapidly and emphasized that one of the best ways to do this is by attending professional workshops, lectures and seminars

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the vast changing environment demands that information professionals must be someone with multi-skills to enhance effective and efficient library and information service delivery. Consequently, for the library to survive and maintain its status and position in the modern competitive environment, every information professional have to render quality and adequate services to the concerned end users. This will enable them to provide a better library and information service delivery in this 21<sup>st</sup> century and remain relevant to their stakeholders and users.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings and conclusion of this study:

1. To respond to the occupational trend, the traditional librarians' skills must be improved upon. Hence, librarians need to develop technological competency in the area of troubleshooting technology, web development, blogging and system application etc as well as generic competencies in the area of creativity/innovative competency, analytical/critical thinking competency, ethics and social responsibility which will enable them to make effective use of information, deliver service that is needed and thereby be proficient in the current trends of technology.

In the light of the above, continuing education of technology and generic related courses for librarians who are already in the field is highly recommended. Competent librarians should seek out learning opportunities and have professional development plans such as conference attendance in

order to strengthen their personal advantages, cope with changes caused by challenges at work and achieve the goals of university libraries.

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