Competencies of professional librarians in northern Luzon, Philippines: Basis for building capacities and continuing professional development

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ABSTRACT

As the electronic information era further direct the course of libraries, archives, and information and media center, librarians and information professionals must re-assess their roles and responsibilities completely accepting of the fact that there is a need to realign competencies with the requirements of the electronic age. Consistent with this requirement is the assurance that continuing professional development and training stay as major components of the practice of librarianship. With the aim to gear up Filipino librarians for the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015, the Professional Regulatory Board for Librarians created a competitiveness roadmap. After several dialogues, deliberations, consultative workshops and reviews, a national competency-based standard for librarians was developed in 2013. It intends to define the competencies that characterize and contribute to the better performance of professional librarians.

This paper sought to determine the competencies of professional librarians in northern Luzon, Philippines and what training and development program may be proposed to enhanced their competencies? Specifically, it aimed to attend the following objectives: 1. To establish the profile of professional librarians in terms of such variables as educational qualifications, length of service, nature of work (academic, school, public, and special), and trainings on librarianship attended. 2. To determine the personal and professional competencies of professional librarians and the level at which competencies are possessed.

The findings of the study were the following 1. A typical professional librarian in Pangasinan, La Union and Benguet possesses the minimum educational qualification, (BEED/BSED major in Library Science or Bachelor in Library and Information Science), assigned as academic librarian, has served as librarian for 11 ½ years, and has attended several trainings on Professional Competencies. 2. The respondent professional librarians possess personal competencies at a high level, thereby needing only minimal interceptive assistance
3. The respondents are professionally competent but need some intervention to enable them to gain confidence in demonstrating their competencies. On the basis of the findings arrived at and on the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are advanced: 1. Professional development plans of librarians should include the pursuit of a master’s degree in Library and Information Science and networking or collaboration with other professional librarians. 2. Trainings should be made available to professional librarians along the following areas: a. Conflict Management b. Strategic Planning c. Public Relations/Marketing and Promotions d. Core Web Tools e. Core Application of Information Tools and Technologies 3. A nationwide survey should be conducted to accurately assess and gauge the competencies of librarians throughout the country.

**Keywords:** competencies, standards, capacity building, continuing professional development, Philippines
Introduction

Ongoing change dominates today’s library or information center electronic information era has direct impact on libraries, archives, and information and media centers. In this current environment librarians must be prepared to re-assess their roles and responsibilities because the traditional and old school perceptions of their roles and responsibilities may no longer be appropriate to the needs of the electronic age (Buenrostro, 2009).

The new millennium ushered the continuous and rapid changes that transform information captured in print format to digital format. The digitized text in the electronic library is viewed by many as a liberating phenomenon which facilitates complex retrieval and circumvents if not replaces conventional publishing. It empowers the users and strengthens scholarship through its interactive nature. The emergence of information technology offers a new kind of book and new methods of reading, writing, and computing. The computerization of library operations and the conversion of books and periodicals in digital formats have accelerated connectivity throughout library operations and initiated new communication patterns within libraries. The flooding of library materials in digital formats can no longer be controlled within the traditional library organizational structures. The availability of reference books like encyclopaedias, atlases and handbooks in digital formats enables authors and readers to manipulate the text, extract from it, and derive other versions from it.

The role of the librarian dealing with digital resources should extend beyond the reactive librarian to the proactive consultant and colleague. In the expanded role of librarian as information consultant and colleague, the major value-added contribution is the provision of a more precise and relevant search output desired by the customers. According to Thomas Pasmore (1994), the digital librarian becomes part of a research team as intermediary for information, regularly conferring with team members and serving as vanguard in the new learning organization.

Technological change requires the library to encourage free movement inside by The library without walls, the virtual library, the electronic library or whichever name best describes the networked information environment, is certainly at hand according to Michalak (1994). In the current climate of almost ceaseless change, it is important to note some challenges to libraries posed by the changes. For instance, there is currently a rapid move from the traditional collection-based environment to an information-centered library founded on expanding electronic networks. Yet hard-copy collections are still heavily used and will continue growing. The electronic information environment is rapidly changing expectations about what library information resources will encompass, yet a significant number of customers continue to rely solely on printed material. The preservation role of libraries may not be superseded by the virtual library environment but expanded books but electronic media as well. Librarians had thought that the electronic library would eliminate the need for traditional information
services, but it is clear now that customers need even more assistance from the librarians with their research.

Technological change requires the library to encourage free movement inside by providing open flexible spaces where customers and staff can move easily from computer workstations to book shelves. While the fixed desk in the circulation and reference sections are favourite means of architects to provide a space with identity, librarians and customers may find these counters unnecessary barriers between staff and customers (Buenrostro, 2009).

In the face of the many changes taking place, librarians are expected to cope by updating their competencies especially on the use and application of various technologies. As stressed by the Canadian Association of Research Libraries, “The 21st century librarians are expected to be technologically-savvy. They are expected to thrive in the digital environment. They are expected to be actively engaged in the exploration and implementation of new technologies on their campuses. By implementing a variety of digital web-based projects, initiatives and infrastructures, librarians preserve, extend, and facilitate access to information and knowledge comprising humankind’s cultural, scientific and intellectual heritage.”(http://www.carl-abrc.ca/project/human_resources)

Apparently, expectations from professional librarians have increased as a result of changes brought about by the electronic world. There is a pressing need for professionals to re-assess themselves and the competencies expected of them. The most disturbing questions that surface include: Have professional librarians been updating themselves over the years? Or have they chosen to remain traditional and continue to embrace the old practices of librarianship?

These foregoing questions and other queries provided the germ of idea for the researcher to look into the competencies of professional librarians in Northern Luzon, Philippines with the end view of proposing a training and development program for this group of professionals.

**Conceptual Framework**

In the field of pre-service education there has been a shift of emphasis to competencies rather than just knowledge and abilities or skills. In line with this trend, efforts were geared towards spelling out the competencies of every profession. Thus, national competency-based standards have been formulated not only for the professions but for skill-based jobs as well. Competency profiles have been used within many professional groups to help chart professional progress and define goals and objectives. National level statements set standards across multiple institutions. Competencies for a profession generally list or group a series of knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors that define and contribute to performance. Competencies can be used to design and develop job postings, position descriptions, training and education programmes and performance evaluation programmes (Federal Librarian Competencies, 2008).

This study on the competencies of professional librarians drew some insights on the four-component model formulated by Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL). According to CARL, the work of the 21st Century librarian continues to be grounded on a solid foundation of professional practice. The successful practitioner develops expertise in specific areas, but builds and maintains a strong, well-rounded understanding of library, the campus, and the larger scholarly communications environment.

**Interpersonal skills** remain as key components of the CARL librarian’s arsenal. Traditional skills, like written and verbal communication, are still important—but increasing emphasis is being placed on the capacity to create and nurture partnerships, to develop innovative new programs and to market the library to the campus community.
Another component in the CARL model is management and leadership. As leaders, academic librarians are expected to influence, motivate and challenge their colleagues and their community to advance library and institutional goals and objectives. Management skills are no longer expected only of those librarians in administrative positions. Rather, all librarians should understand the principles of budget planning, and facilities, staff and project management.

The third component in CARL’s model is research data management and preservation. Libraries are not just in the business of gathering, organizing and providing access to information. They are also actively creating knowledge, and proactively assisting their institutions manage their research outputs as evidenced by the dramatic worldwide growth of institutional repositories. To be successful, librarians must seek out good partners. They must focus their attention on creating robust infrastructure for long-term data archiving, clean work flow tools and policies for describing, managing, sharing, and providing access to the data. Librarians will also be called upon to take an intermediary role in connecting multidisciplinary research communities and providing social software services.

The fourth component in the CARL’s model is technological adaptability. Librarians are expected to be able to cope with changes in technology. They are likewise expected to be able to implement web-based projects and through technology, facilitate access to information and knowledge. While the CARL model provides broad areas of expertise, nonetheless, these areas serve as a springboard for determining the specific competencies expected of professional librarians.

The conceptualization of this paper is reflected in figure 1.

The Problem
This paper focused on answering the major problem: What are the competencies of the professional librarians in Northern Luzon, Philippines and what training and development program may be proposed to enhance their competencies?

Specifically, this paper sought answers to the following sub-problems:

1. What is the profile of professional librarians in Northern Luzon, Philippines in terms of?
   a. educational qualifications
   b. years in library service
   c. nature of work (academic, school, special and public)
   d. trainings on librarianship attended?

2. What are the personal competencies acquired and possessed by the professional librarians and to what extent have they acquired such competencies along the areas of
   a. Communication,
   b. Customer Service,
   c. Leadership,
   d. Lifelong learning and personal growth,
   e. Ethics and Values, and
   f. Interpersonal?

3. What are the professional competencies acquired and possessed by the professional librarians and to what extent have they acquired such competencies along the areas of
   a. Managing Information Resources
   b. Managing Information Services,
   c. Managing Information Tools and Technologies,
   d. Managing Information Organizations?

4. What training and development program may be proposed to enhance the competencies of the professional librarians in Northern Luzon, Philippines?

**Definition of Terms**

To have a clearer understanding of the contents of this paper, the following terms are defined:

**Competencies.** This is a list or group of a series of knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors that define and contribute to performance (CARL 2009).

**Competency standard.** In this study, it refers to the specific knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors expected to be performed by a professional librarian.

**Personal competencies.** This pertains to a set of attitudes, skills and values that enable practitioners to work effectively and contribute positively to their organizations, clients and profession (Abels et al, 2003).

**Professional competencies.** These relate to the practitioner’s knowledge of information resources, access, technology and management, and the ability to use this knowledge as a basis for providing the highest quality information services (Abels et al., 2003)

**Professional Librarian.** In this study, refers to a registered librarian who is working either in academic, school, special and public library. The professional librarian is also called information professional.

**Training and Development Program.** This is the output of the study, which provides a list of programs and projects designed to enhance the competencies of the professional librarians who served as respondents in this study.
Methodology

This study employed the descriptive-developmental method of research, with the questionnaire as its data-gathering instrument. The instrument consisted of a listing of personal and professional competencies of librarians, which was formulated by the members of the Board of Librarians of the Philippine Regulation Commission.

To determine the level at which the respondents have acquired and possessed such competencies, the respondent-librarians were asked to indicate such extent/level by checking one of the choices, namely: Very High (5), High (4), Undecided (neither high nor low—3), Low (2), and Very Low (1). Their perceptions on the extent of their competencies were statistically treated using the weighted mean. On the other hand, the description of their profile was analyzed using percentage.

The study resorted to complete enumeration of respondents’ data since the researcher reached out to all professional/licensed librarians in Northern Luzon, Philippines.

Findings

Analysis of data disclosed the following findings:

A. On the Profile of the Respondents

1. Majority of the respondent-librarians were graduates of Bachelor of Science in Education (99 or 55%); a few were graduates of Bachelor of Library and Information Science (22 or 16%); a few others were graduates of Bachelor of Arts with 18 units in Library Science; some were graduates of Bachelor in Elementary Education but managed to take 18 units of Library Science; and about 6 more availed of the so-called “grandfather’s clause.

2. At the time of the study, some respondents (32 or 23%) were already holders of a master’s degree. Around 77% (108) of the respondents have yet to update their qualifications.

3. In terms of years of service, the larger bulk of the respondents was at intervals 6-10 years (24.3%) and 11-15 years (17.1%). On the whole, the average length of service of the surveyed group is 11.5 years.

4. On the nature of work of the librarians, it was found that academic librarians outnumbered the three other types, with a frequency of 98 or 70 percent. Public librarians ranked second with 23 representing 16.4 percent of the total respondents. School librarians came third in the list with 15 or 10.7 percent while special librarians ranked last with only 4 representing 2.9 percent of the total.

5. The most attended trainings were along the areas of professional competencies, such as Managing Information Organizations (ranked 1); Managing Information Resources (ranked 2); and Managing Information Services (ranked 3). One area under professional competencies – Managing Information Tools and Technologies (ranked 6) – was not well-attended by the subject-librarians. Worthy of note is the fact that two of the training areas obtained bottom ranks – Interpersonal (ranked 9) and Communication (ranked 10).

B. On Personal Competencies of Professional Librarians

1. The respondents claimed to have acquired the competencies in Communication as evidenced by the area weighted mean of 3.97, equivalent to high. The foremost communication competency of the respondents is their ability to “communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and individuals of diverse backgrounds and culture” (4.04 or high), followed by their ability to “communicate effectively using a variety of methods” (4.02 or high),
2. As to specific competencies, the respondents rated themselves highest for the following items in Communication: “actively listens, considers, before giving a response” (4.15) and “requests feedback and uses them for self-improvement” (4.15). However, for this area they registered the lowest item mean of 3.37 or “undecided” (neither high nor low) for the item—“selects appropriate communication strategies to resolve conflicts constructively.”

3. The respondent-librarians are highly competent in the area of customer service as shown by the area weighted mean of 4.14, described as high. They are most skilled in “applying effective techniques to address difficult situations with use (4.36). They are likewise skilled in the three other major competencies under this area since the weighted means for such competencies ranged from 3.92 to 4.20, all described as “high”. The lowest weighted mean of 3.92 was noted for the competency—“developing and evaluating standards and practices for the delivery of quality customer service.”

4. In terms of specific competencies, the respondents registered the highest weighted mean of 4.36 for the item—“deals with user concerns without bias” while the lowest weighted mean of 3.83 was noted for the item “creates a Customer Service Plan.” This least weighted mean was closely followed by 3.86, the weighted mean obtained for the item, “develops a practical and effective marketing plan for the library.”

5. The three indicated major competencies under the area of Leadership have almost equal weighted means all of which are depicted as “high”. Ranked 1 is the item—“demonstrates an aptitude for leadership” (4.12), followed by the item—“anticipates and adapts to change and challenges effectively” (4, 11), and then by the item—“aligns efforts with the vision and direction of the organization” (4.10). The obtained area weighted mean of 4.11, equivalent to high, indicates that the concerned professional librarians are capable of demonstrating leadership in their respective workplaces.

6. The weighted mean obtained for the area of Lifelong Learning is 4.10 or high, meaning, the respondents are able to demonstrate the competency but are not quite confident that they can do it with the desired proficiency. As regards the specific competencies, the highest weighted mean for this area was obtained for the item—“understands the importance of lifelong learning for all levels of library work and actively pursues personal and professional growth through continuing education” (4.24) while the least weighted mean of 4.03 was noted for the item—“recognizes the value of networking and actively participates in professional associations” (4.03).

7. Among the seven specific competencies enumerated under the area of Ethics and Values, the item which stood out in terms of weighted mean was the item—“recognizes, respects and addresses the diverse nature of the library’s users and community” (4.28).

8. of the three major competencies under the area of Interpersonal Competencies, the leading one with the highest weighted mean is the item—“works effectively in teams with strong team-building skills and attitudes” (4.16), followed by the competency—“develops and maintains effective relationships with others to achieve common goals” (4.09). Last in the list with a weighted mean of 4.04 is the item—“applies effective strategies to manage organizational politics, conflict and difficult co-worker behaviors.”

B. On Professional Competencies of Professional Librarians

1. The respondents registered the highest weighted mean of 4.07 for the competency, Cataloging, and the lowest weighted mean for the competency, E-Resources Management
As regards the specific competencies of the area, Managing Information Resources, the two lowest weighted means were obtained for the items—“evaluates, configures, and maintains services for restricting access to e-sources applicable within the institutional context (e.g., proxy services, single sign-on, etc.)” (3.49) and “interprets usage data for electronic journal subscriptions and recommends adjustments to allocation of resources or renegotiation of license agreements.” (3.44). The highest weighted mean of 4.01 was obtained for the domain, Reference/Information, followed by Readers’ Advisory with a weighted mean of 3.98. All the other domains obtained mean ratings ranging from 3.65 to 3.92—all described as high, except the domain, Children’s Services which registered the lowest weighted mean of 3.47, equivalent to “Undecided” which means that the respondents ‘have a working knowledge on the competency but they are not sure of their ability to demonstrate it.’

2. On the area of Managing Information Tools and Technologies, it was found that the domain, Core Operating Systems ranked first with a weighted mean of 4.10, followed by Core Hardware which ranked second with a weighted mean of 4.09. It is interesting to note that the rest of the domains obtained weighted means equivalent to high, since they ranged from 3.61 to 4.08. Thus, this area obtained a general weighted mean of 3.92.

3. In regard to the weighted means of specific competencies under this area, two competencies with lowest means were noted under the domain of Core Web Tools, namely: “locates and reads blogs and listens to podcasts; demonstrates familiarity with microblogging (Twitter) (3.48)” and “uses web-conferencing programs for synchronous, on-line meetings or learning (3.34)”, both of which are described as “undecided.”

4. Under the competency area, Managing of Information Organizations, the domain, Facilities Management, obtained the highest weighted mean of 4.05, described as “high.” This is followed by the domain, Strategic Planning/Policy Formulation, with a weighted mean of 3.90, also as “high.” The rest of the domains fell under the category of “high” with weighted means ranging from 3.69 to 3.75.

**Conclusions**

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were formulated:

1. A typical professional librarian in Northern Luzon, Philippines possesses the minimum educational qualification, (BEED/BSED major in Library Science or Bachelor in Library and Information Science), assigned as academic librarian, has served as librarian for 11½ years, and has attended several trainings on Professional Competencies.

2. The respondent professional librarians possess personal competencies at a high level, thereby needing only minimal interceptive assistance.

3. The subject-professional librarians are professionally competent but need some intervention to enable them to gain confidence in demonstrating their competencies.

**10 Recommendations**

On the basis of the findings arrived at and on the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are advanced:
1. Professional development plans of librarians should include the pursuit of a master’s degree in Library and Information Science and networking or collaboration with other professional librarians.

2. Trainings should be made available to professional librarians along the following areas:
   a. Conflict Management
   b. Strategic Planning
   c. Public Relations/Marketing and Promotions
   d. Core Web Tools
   e. Core Application of Information Tools and Technologies

3. A nationwide survey should be conducted to accurately assess and gauge the competencies of librarians throughout the country.

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