

PROFICIENCIES AND SOFT SKILLS REQUIRED BY LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS TOWARDS CERTIFYING USER NEEDS IN INFORMATION ERA (A CASE STUDY OF KEBBI STATE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, ALIERO)

Suleiman Ahmad Fingillah

Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero.

Email Id: Sulefingillah84@gmail.com

and

Aliyu Muazu Dakingari

Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero.

Email Id : aliyumuazudakingari@gmail.com

Abstract: The evolution of information and technology has significantly transformed the proficiencies and soft skills required by library professionals to effectively serve and certify user needs in the information era. This paper delves into the imperative competencies and aptitudes essential for library professionals in adapting to the changing landscape of information and technology. The data analysis carried out sheds light on the ICT proficiency of the library staff of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero. The study reveals that, certain sectors, including word processing and presentation software, showed strengths, expertise in database searching techniques, web design, and program design is still necessary. The results indicate that continuous training is essential for improving proficiency, especially with database management software and digital technologies.

Keywords: Library professionals, Soft Skills, competencies, Communication skills, Leadership skills, ICT Proficiency, Information Literacy.

1.0 Introduction

The Proficiencies and soft skills required by library professionals to effectively serve and certify user needs in the information era have evolved significantly with the changing landscape of information and technology.

Libraries have traditionally played a crucial role in the dissemination of information to their users. However, in the digital age, the landscape of information access and management has advanced significantly, presenting new challenges and opportunities for librarians. To effectively meet the changing needs of their user community, library professionals should possess a range of important competencies and soft skills.

Librarians should be familiar with and capable of managing new information transfer channels. These can include e-books, blogs, websites, social media, and information gateways. Librarians play a role in guiding users through these channels and helping them evaluate the credibility and reliability of digital content.

Library Professionals are responsible for safeguarding patron data and ensuring equitable access to information, especially in an era where digital resources can be restricted or monitored.

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 the competition for employment to people of other fields like scientists, engineers, and IT professionals. Thus, LIS professionals must encounter rapidly changing environments that require diverse skills, new thinking and broader perspectives and must be prepared to develop innovative ideas for the capture, process and sharing of knowledge and demonstrate good management practices if they want to remain relevant in the emerging knowledge age (Smythe, 1999). Library and information science (LIS) programs are not adequately addressing soft skills, such as writing, customer service, and flexibility. The survey found that faculty are incorporating soft skills but relying heavily on passive learning, which could impact course and curriculum design (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2022).

Hamid & Younus, (2021) conducted a study and examined the impact of library professionals' communication skills on workplace productivity. A survey was conducted in central libraries of universities and degree-awarding institutions in Pakistan and Pakistan's capital, Islamabad. The results of the study showed a significant relationship between communication skills and work productivity, suggesting that these skills enhance work performance, service provision, and relationship building with patrons and colleagues.

In another study by Pinho et al., (2020) explores the success conditions of electronic libraries in higher education using the Social Learning Theory (SLT). A qualitative case study of a University in Portugal was used, revealing key factors for e-library success: cost minimization, acceptance and use, and staff training. The study highlights the importance of library staff training for improved use and search effectiveness. The findings provide a framework for identifying the most crucial factors for e-libraries' success in Higher Education Institutions. Li, (2020) contributes to the literature on using systems ideas and methodologies for curriculum development in higher education. It explores the future of education, focusing on the concept of 'education supply chain' and the impact of industrial revolutions on educational systems. The research proposes a curriculum structure based on system thinking, focusing on the benefits of global intellectual resource sharing and education joint ventures in Industry 4.0.

Information literacy (IL) and soft skills are crucial for effective information use and planning in various situations. These skills are essential for library professionals and users, especially in the 21st century. They influence interactions, understanding, and utilization of resources, making them essential tools in the ICT era. Understanding and utilizing these skills is vital for efficient resource utilization (Surendran & Kumar, 2020).

Library professionals play a crucial role in the digital landscape, enabling effective access, evaluation, and utilization of digital resources. Digital literacy is essential for navigating the digital landscape, harnessing AI and data analytics, curating digital resources, teaching online information evaluation, and promoting digital inclusion. To achieve self-sufficiency, librarians should invest in continuous training, allocate resources strategically, and implement change management strategies to address resistance to digital transformation and foster innovation (Diseiye et al., 2023)

The library professionals in the 21st century require a well-rounded skill set that goes beyond academic qualifications. These soft skills and competencies are crucial for providing the right information to the right users at the right time and for ensuring the continued relevance and success of libraries in an ever-changing information landscape.

2.0 Objective

1. To ascertain the proficiency of ICT skills among the library professionals
2. To find out the areas in which library professionals need to acquire ICT skills.
3. To provide the necessary skills required by library professionals.

3.0 Understanding User Information Need

Understanding user needs is a fundamental aspect of being a successful library professional. Here are some key points to consider when it comes to understanding and meeting the needs of library users:

1. **Active Listening:** Take the time to actively listen to library users. When they ask for help or have questions, be patient and attentive to their needs. Understanding their inquiries and concerns is the first step in meeting them.
2. **Ask Question:** Sometimes, users may not be able to clearly articulate their needs. Be prepared to ask clarifying questions to get a better sense of what they are looking for or what their problem is.
3. **Assessment:** Understand that different users have different needs. Assess the individual or group's specific requirements. For instance, a student may have research needs, while a senior citizen may be looking for leisure reading.
4. **Familiarity with Resources:** Be well-versed in the library's resources. Understand the library's catalog, databases, and services so that you can effectively guide users to the materials and information they need.

5. **Personalized Assistance:** Provide personalized assistance. Not all users will require the same level of help. Some may need detailed assistance, while others may just need a quick pointer in the right direction.
6. **Accessibility:** Ensure that your library is accessible to all users, including those with disabilities. This may involve having assistive technologies, accessible formats, or accommodating special requests.
7. **Anticipate Needs:** Proactively anticipate user needs. For example, if you notice a high demand for a particular genre of books, you can increase the collection in that area.
8. **Feedback:** Encourage users to provide feedback. Constructive feedback can help improve services, and it also shows users that their needs and opinions are valued.
9. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Be culturally sensitive and aware of the diverse needs of your community. This may include offering materials in different languages or organizing cultural events.
10. **Digital Literacy:** Recognize that many users have varying levels of digital literacy. Provide training or support to help them navigate digital resources and tools effectively.
11. **Community Involvement:** Engage with your community to better understand their needs. Attend local events, partner with schools, and establish relationships with community organizations to stay in tune with what's important to your users.
12. **Stay Informed:** Stay informed about trends in library science and the broader information landscape. This will help you adapt to changing user needs.
13. **Flexible Services:** Be adaptable and willing to change or expand services as user needs evolve. For instance, the rise of e-books and digital content has changed how libraries deliver materials to their users.

4.0 Competencies And Skills

Competencies are defined as the descriptions of skills; know-how, abilities, and personal qualities acquired through deliberate, systematic, and sustained efforts to smoothly and adaptively perform a particular role and carry out complex activities or job functions successfully (Todd and Southon, 2001). For today's librarians having professional degrees in library and information science is not sufficient unlike in the past. There is a demand for librarians who have multidimensional aptitude in the areas of technical work, administrative work, and providing user-oriented services along with soft skills. Like any other profession, soft skills are required in day-to-day work to carry out routine jobs more effectively. Some of the soft skills and competencies are required by library professionals to fulfill the core objective of the library and information centers.

Library professionals play a crucial role in maintaining and facilitating access to information resources, supporting research and education, and helping patrons navigate the world of knowledge. Here are some key competencies and skills required for individuals working in the field of library and information science:

1. **Information Organization and Cataloging:**
 - Proficiency in using library classification systems (e.g., Dewey Decimal, Library of Congress).
 - Ability to create accurate and detailed bibliographic records.
2. **Reference and Research Assistance:**
 - Strong research skills to assist patrons in finding information.
 - Knowledge of reference resources, databases, and search strategies.
3. **Collection Development:**
 - Selection and evaluation of materials to build and maintain a library's collection.
 - Awareness of copyright and licensing issues.
4. **Information Technology:**
 - Proficiency in library management systems (e.g., Integrated Library Systems).
 - Knowledge of digital resources, e-books, and online databases.
5. **Customer Service:**
 - Excellent interpersonal and communication skills.
 - The ability to assist and interact with diverse patrons.
6. **Information Literacy:**
 - Teaching patrons how to find, evaluate, and use information effectively.
 - Developing and conducting information literacy programs.

7. **Archiving and Preservation:**
 - Skills in preserving and conserving rare or fragile materials.
 - Knowledge of archival and preservation standards.
8. **Management and Administration:**
 - Library management, including budgeting, strategic planning, and personnel management.
 - Project management skills for library initiatives.
9. **Collection Access and Circulation:**
 - Efficient management of check-out and return of library materials.
 - Knowledge of interlibrary loan systems.
10. **Technical Services:**
 - Acquisitions, cataloging, and processing of library materials.
 - Metadata creation and management.
11. **Digital Literacy:**
 - Staying up to date with emerging technologies and trends in the library field.
 - Helping patrons with digital tools and resources.
12. **Communication and Outreach:**
 - Promoting library services and resources through outreach programs.
 - Collaborating with community organizations and educational institutions.
13. **Legal and Ethical Knowledge:**
 - Understanding copyright laws and intellectual property rights.
 - Adherence to the American Library Association's Code of Ethics.
14. **Adaptability and Lifelong Learning:**
 - The ability to adapt to evolving technology and library trends.
 - A commitment to continuous professional development.
15. **Problem Solving:**
 - Effective troubleshooting and finding solutions to library-related issues.
 - Handling patron inquiries and complaints.
16. **Cultural Competence:**
 - Sensitivity to and understanding of diverse cultures and communities.
 - Providing inclusive and equitable library services.
17. **Teamwork:**
 - Collaboration with colleagues to achieve library goals.
 - Supporting a positive work environment.
18. **Project Management:**
 - Planning and executing library projects efficiently.
 - Managing timelines, resources, and stakeholders.
19. **Time Management:**
 - Prioritizing tasks and managing workloads effectively.
 - Meeting deadlines for library projects and services.
20. **Professional Ethics:**
 - Upholding professional standards of confidentiality and privacy.
 - Maintaining the integrity and reputation of the library profession.

5.0 Data Analysis

A Google Form was used to design a questionnaire for data collection. The entire staff of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero's University Library was the target population. Three main goals guided the data collection process: identifying the ICT proficiency of library professionals, identifying the areas in which library professionals need to improve their ICT proficiency, and recommending the skills that library professionals need. SPSS, a statistical analysis software program, was used to examine the data. The variables were measured using descriptive statistics.

5.1. Gender of Respondents

All respondents were librarians working at the university library of KSUSTA. The gender distribution of the respondents is 20 male (59.4%) and 14 (40.6%) female of the 34 respondents.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	20	59.4
Female	14	40.6
Total	34	100

5.2. Proficiency in Using Computer Software

Table 2. Mean Distribution of Computer Software Skills

Variable	VH	H	M	L	VL	Mean	SD
System Software	5	6	10	11	2	3.03	1.167
Application Software	4	9	9	7	5	3.00	1.255

Notes: VH=Very High; H=High; M=Moderate; L=Low; VL=Very Low

The respondents were asked to rate their proficiency in software skills. Table 2 shows that the respondents have application software skills more than system software, with 9 (26.5%) responses each on the high and moderate, and 4 (11.8%) respondents assessed themselves very highly in using application software. Their mean values are 3.03 (system software) and 3.00 (application software).

5.3 Proficiency in Using Computer Hardware

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents by Computer Hardware Skills

Variable	VH	H	M	L	VL	Mean	SD
Printer	12	7	1	3	1	3.76	1.130
Photocopier	10	9	1	3	3	3.65	1.178
Scanner	12	7	7	6	2	3.62	1.303
Multimedia	9	9	9	4	3	3.50	1.261
Barcode Reader	9	5	8	6	6	3.15	1.459
Digital Camera	10	6	10	3	4	3.50	1.354
Smart Devices	9	8	6	6	5	3.29	1.426

Notes: VH=Very High; H=High; M=Moderate; L=Low; VL=Very Low

A list of hardware devices used in the library (i.e., printer, photocopier, scanner, multimedia, barcode reader, digital cameras, and smart devices) was provided to the participants for them to assess their level of proficiency using a five-point scale. Table 3 shows that most respondents are very high or high in their proficiency in using various types of hardware listed.

5.4 Proficiency in System maintenance

Table 4. Distribution of Respondents by System Maintenance Skills

Variable	VH	H	M	L	VL	Mean	SD
Windows Installation	7	7	7	7	13	3.24	1.182
Software Installation	5	5	13	9	2	3.06	1.127
Drivers Installation	4	6	11	9	4	2.91	1.190
Network Troubleshooting	5	6	7	12	4	2.88	1.274

Notes: VH=Very High; H=High; M=Moderate; L=Low; VL=Very Low

System maintenance is an integral part of the ICT skills needed by library professionals. It includes the installation of Windows OS, and software drivers as well as formatting computers and network troubleshooting. The respondents were asked to assess their proficiency in system maintenance. Table 4

shows that Windows installation is the function in which respondents are highly proficient with a mean value of 3.24, followed by software installation (mean=3.06).

5.5 Proficiency in Using MS Office Applications

Table 5. Distribution of Respondents by Using MS Office Applications

Variable	VH	H	M	L	VL	Mean	SD
MS Word	9	5	10	10	10	3.38	1.181
MS Excel	5	10	9	6	4	3.18	1.242
MS PowerPoint	5	6	11	8	4	3.00	1.231
MS Access	4	6	6	11	7	2.68	1.316

Notes: VH=Very High; H=High; M=Moderate; L=Low; VL=Very Low

The respondents were asked to assess their proficiency in using MS Office applications. Table 5 shows that MS Word is the application in which respondents are highly proficient with a mean value of 3.38, followed by MS Excel (mean=3.18).

5.6 Proficiency in Word Processing

Table 6. Mean Distribution of MS Word Processing Proficiency

Variable	VH	H	M	L	VL	Mean	SD
Creating Document	14	7	6	6	1	3.79	1.250
Formatting Document	13	5	8	6	2	3.62	1.326
Saving Document	13	7	7	4	3	3.68	1.342
Printing Document	13	6	6	6	3	3.59	1.395
Opening Document	13	7	5	6	3	3.62	1.393

Notes: VH=Very High; H=High; M=Moderate; L=Low; VL=Very Low

The respondents were asked to rate their proficiency in MS Word processing. Table 6 shows that all respondents assessed themselves high in Word processing skills. Their mean values are 3.79 (Creating documents), 3.68 (Saving documents), 3.62 (Formatting documents and Opening documents) and 3.59 (Printing documents) respectively.

5.7 Proficiency in Spread Sheet

Table 7. Mean Distribution of Spread Sheet Proficiency

Variable	VH	H	M	L	VL	Mean	SD
Using Formula	8	5	8	11	2	3.18	1.290
Formatting Document	9	6	7	7	5	3.12	1.431
Producing Graphs	5	6	7	10	6	2.82	1.336
Creating a Workbook	5	7	5	12	4	2.91	1.308
Printing Worksheet	7	8	4	9	6	3.03	1.446

Notes: VH=Very High; H=High; M=Moderate; L=Low; VL=Very Low

Table 7 shows that the respondents assessed their proficiency as low in all most all the aspects of Using formula with a mean value (3.18), Formatting document (mean=3.12), Printing worksheet (mean=3.03), Creating a workbook (mean=2.91) and Producing graphs with a mean value of 2.82. This shows that, there lack of proficiency in using Ms. excel.

5.8 Proficiency in Presentation Software

Table 8. Mean Distribution of Presentation Software Proficiency

Variable	VH	H	M	L	VL	Mean	SD
Creating Slides	4	6	10	8	6	2.82	1.267
Formatting Slides	3	9	6	9	7	2.76	1.304
Creating Presentation	4	8	5	8	9	2.71	1.404

Notes: VH=Very High; H=High; M=Moderate; L=Low; VL=Very Low

Table 8 shows that the respondents assessed themselves moderately proficient in all options of presentation software with the mean values of 2.82, 2.76, and 2.71 respectively.

5.9 Proficiency in Database Management System

Table 9. Frequency Distribution of Database Management System

Variable	VH	H	M	L	VL	Mean	SD
MS Access	2	4	11	7	10	2.44	1.211
Oracle	1	1	12	10	10	2.21	1.008
MySQL	2	2	9	11	10	2.26	1.136
WinISIS	0	2	9	8	15	1.94	0.983

Notes: VH=Very High; H=High; M=Moderate; L=Low; VL=Very Low

Database management software skills are very essential in the aspect of Librarianship. The library staff of KSUSTA were asked to assess their proficiency from the list of the application provided. Table 9 shows that the majority of the respondents has very low proficiency in database management applications with mean value of 2.44 for MS Access, MySQL (mean=2.26), Oracle with a mean value of 2.21 and WinISIS (mean=1.94).

5.10 Proficiency in Web-Base Functions

Table 10. Mean Distribution of Web-Base Functions Proficiency

Variable	VH	H	M	L	VL	Mean	SD
Sending and receiving e-mail	18	2	6	5	3	3.79	1.452
Browse Internet	18	3	5	5	3	3.82	1.445
Charting in web discussion group	15	6	1	7	5	3.56	1.580
Access and download e-information services	15	4	5	5	5	3.56	1.541
Use search engines to find information	11	6	5	6	6	3.29	1.528
Using video conference application	11	3	4	10	6	3.09	1.564
Web searching skills	7	6	4	11	6	2.91	1.443

Notes: VH=Very High; H=High; M=Moderate; L=Low; VL=Very Low

Table 10 shows that the respondents are highly proficient in all web-based functions except web searching skills with a mean value of 2.91. The respondents' proficiency on Internet Browsing is very high with a mean value of 3.82, followed by emailing with 3.79, Accessing and downloading e-information services and chatting in web discussion groups with a mean value of 3.56 each. Using search engines has a mean value of 3.29, using video conference applications (mean=3.09) and web search skills with a mean value of 2.91.

5.11 Areas of ICT Skills Where Training Is Required

Table 11. Required ICT Skills Training

Areas of iSkill	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Software design	5	15%
Software installation/operations	6	18%
All areas of iskills	9	26%
Web design	1	3%
Digitization and imaging technology	0	0%
Online cataloguing (MARC)	2	6%
Online classification (NLM)	1	3%
System analysis and design	2	6%
Networking	3	9%
MS Office	4	12%
Database searching technique	1	3%
Transformation of data	0	0%
OCR Devices	0	0%

ICT skills cover a wide range of abilities. Respondents were asked about their training needs for efficient job performance. According to Table 11, respondents exhibit varying levels of proficiency in ICT skills. Specifically, 9 respondents (26%) require training across all ICT skill areas. Additionally, 6 (18%) need training in software installation and operations, 5 (15%) in software design, 4 (12%) in MS Office, 3 (9%) in networking, and 2 (6%) in online cataloging (MARC), system analysis, and design each. Furthermore, 1 respondent (3%) expressed a need for training in web design, online classification (NLM), and database searching techniques each.

5.12 Composite Mean and Standard Deviation of ICT Skills Proficiency

Table 12. Composite Mean and Standard Deviation of ICT Skills Proficiency

Variable	Mean	Level of Proficiency
Computer Software	3.015	Moderate
Computer Hardware	2.995	Moderate
System Maintenance	3.0225	Moderate
Office Applications	3.06	Moderate
Using Word Processing Software	3.66	Very High
Using Spreadsheet Software	3.014	High
Using Presentation Software	2.76	Low
Using Database Management Software	2.2125	Low
Web-based functions	3.4314	Very High

According to Table 12, respondents demonstrate high proficiency in two skills - Word processing and Web-based functions, and they excel in using Spreadsheet Software. They show moderate proficiency in four skills - Computer Software, Computer Hardware, System Maintenance, and Office Applications. However, the respondents exhibit low proficiency levels in using Database Management Software and Presentation Software.

6.0 Conclusion

The research highlights the evolving role of library professionals in the digital age and the diverse skill set required to effectively serve user needs. The study emphasizes the importance of proficiency in various areas, including information organization, technology, customer service, and cultural competence. The need for continuous training and development is underscored to adapt to the changing information landscape.

The data analysis from the Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero's University Library staff provides insights into the ICT proficiency of library professionals. While strengths were observed in certain areas, such as word processing and presentation software, there is a need for training in software design, web design, and database searching techniques. The findings suggest that ongoing training is crucial to enhance proficiency levels, particularly in database management software and digitization technology.

7.0 Recommendations

1. To keep the librarians up-to-date and be well aware of the new trends in the profession, continuing education and development programs (CEDP) should be started by Library Associations and LIS Departments/Units.
2. LIS Departments/Units should play their role by organizing refresher courses to keep the librarian abreast of new trends in the profession.
3. LIS curriculum must be re-structured keeping in view the new technological trends in the profession and demand of the job market in a digital era.
4. Professionals' standards and norms must be developed for the quality of services in libraries and information centres.
5. Internship programs should be offered to the newly qualified BLISc and MLIS students.
6. Library and Information Science Education Act should be established and Professional accreditations must be developed for providing quality of LIS education.
7. Adequate "Technical Facilities" such as a well-furnished Internet Laboratory equipped with modern tools for providing digital services to the users must be provided in every LIS Departments/Units.
8. Appointment of IT tutors having specialization in computer science should be made in each LIS Departments/Units for developing IT skills among the students in real sense.
9. LIS professionals are required to embrace the change and develop new policies and trends in the profession as Parry (2008) stressed that we should embrace the change and future because it is our obligation to guide the future of libraries by guiding our own professions through evolution and transformation.
10. LIS departments should establish their policy to concentrate on the quality of their product instead of quantity.
11. LIS curricula should be revised in general to incorporate all new technical skills that are required by the librarians to navigate smoothly into the voyage of digital information. It should be revised after every two years according to the new trends in the profession.

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