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## **Job Requirements and Challenges of LIS Graduates in Public Libraries: A literature Review**

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### **Abstract**

*Public libraries require an expanding set of discipline specific, as well as generic knowledge, skills and attitudes from Library and Information Science (LIS) graduates, for their services in this evolving and constantly changing knowledge society. Guided by the core competency theory of Selznick (1957), this paper reviews literature on the competencies required of LIS graduates and the challenges they face in public libraries. Knowledge of cataloguing, collection development, interpersonal relationship, communication, technology, and customer services skills are noted significant in the public library context. Also noted are skills gap: lack of training programmes; drastic changes in the LIS market, which eventually demand curricula revision and re-orientation; and several challenges facing LIS professionals and the public libraries themselves. Identified challenges include: lack of funding, lack of trained/skilled staff, and ICT resources. The reviewed literature is significant for providing theoretical background for the development of research in the following domains: public libraries, LIS curriculum, LIS educators and LIS graduates/professionals.*

**Key words:** *Library, Public library, Job requirements, LIS Graduates, LIS education.*

## **1. Introduction and background**

Public libraries, as a component of the formal sector of the economy, have competency requirements varying from one job title to another. This calls for LIS graduates, as information professionals, to always have corresponding knowledge and skills to stay current in their field. As pointed out by Minish-Majanja (2009: 13) “Traditional employers such as libraries require market-ready professionals, who will “hit the ground running”, meaning that they not only know the ins and outs of information work, but also have excellent knowledge and skills.” Unfortunately, a lack of skilled labour has been identified as today’s greatest problem in most job markets, including public libraries. The Department of Arts and Culture (2009); the Department of Arts and Culture (2014) and; Mphidi (2016) note the shortage of skills from LIS professionals and lack of training programmes in most public libraries. These shortcomings lead to deleterious effect on quality service delivery and difficulty fulfilling the requirements of the Library and Information Services (LIS) charter (2009), which states that, “The information professionals in the evolving knowledge society in the 21st century require both specific and generic knowledge, skills and attitudes for the changing environment and mission of library service.”

It is crucial that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) provide a well-balanced education and practice that will enable students to gain requisite knowledge and skills for the job market. Naros and Simionescu (2019: 75) state that “Education plays an important role in the adaptation of human resources to the dynamic requirements of labour market, providing certain mobility in choosing a better job”. It is said that practice makes perfect; likewise, LIS students require more practical exposure to gain core competencies like communication skills, which will enable them to work competitively in their day to day functions. Unfortunately, the observation by Katuli-Munyoro and Mutula (2016) reveals that Library and Information Science (LIS) education and training programmes were criticised for producing graduates without the requisite skills to perform right away on their first jobs. This may be an indication of a lack of a well-balanced education and training in the curricula of some LIS schools and the fact that content and its delivery mode vary from institution to institution. On the other hand, Ocholla and Shongwe (2013) note some drastic changes in the LIS landscape, which includes emerging job titles that eventually demand curricula revision or re-orientation. The revision of curricula involves changes in some National Qualifications Framework (NQF) levels, admission requirements and the weighting of credits in qualifications; and this cannot be achieved overnight.

The present literature review covers the requirements of the public libraries in terms of qualifications, experience, knowledge, skills and attitudes of LIS graduates in public libraries; the LIS curriculum; and the challenges facing both public libraries and LIS graduates regarding their functions/duties in the workplace.

## **2. Methodology**

This paper reviewed extant literature on the job requirements of public libraries in terms of competencies of LIS graduates (academic qualifications, experience, knowledge, skills and attitudes) and determined the challenges facing LIS graduates in the public library setting. The review covered global literature with respect to the Library and Information Science (LIS) field. Various sources of literature were consulted, including books, research articles, reports, reviews and other print and electronic sources. Related studies were consulted to determine and adopt similar theories that have been used to successfully determine the problems investigated. In this paper, the core competency theory, which was previously used

in Raju (2016) and Raju (2017) in determining the LIS professional competency requirements for the academic sector in South Africa, was adopted.

### **3. Theoretical support**

The application of a theory to a study is determined by the main research question as well as the relevance of that particular theory. The present study used the core competency theory which is the work of Selznick (1957) who is well known for organisational theory amongst his other theories. Later, Prahalad and Hamel (1990) expanded on the concept of core competency with respect to delivering sustainable competitive advantage in an organisation/company. Prahalad and Hamel are known as business management theorists. Core refers to something fundamental, whereas competence means skill or ability. Prahalad and Hamel (1990) link this theory to business strategy and highlight that core competencies are “the collective learning of an organisation that involves coordinating diverse production skills and integrating multiple streams of technologies”. The two theorists further indicate that core competency is a product of specific set of skills or production practices, which is the product of a group of skills for delivering added value to customers. In this context, a practical example of delivering added value to customers can be linked to a skilled and competent library professional who delivers satisfactory services to library patrons in a public library setting. Agha and Alrubaiee in Gupta (2013) point out that core competency generates competitive advantage and affect the performance of an organisation. Gupta (2013) reports that, “core competency is a very important factor of excellence”.

Although the concept of core competencies according to Selznick (1957) and Prahalad and Hamel (1990) is known to focus on the competitive advantage in a business environment rather than on individual persons, in the context of this review of literature, the concept of core competency is linked to LIS graduates; particularly on the competencies required in the public library workplace. Edgar and Lockwood (2012) and Gupta (2013) note that competencies are always based on skills; hence, an individual gets the advantage of a unique set of skills, knowledge and capabilities to perform duties competitively and satisfactorily in the workplace. Therefore, the application of this theory leads to some implications for LIS graduates, as it will shed light on their employability skills. The theory also has impact on the LIS education and training offered in South African LIS schools, in order to determine if the LIS education and training sector is successfully, and effectively, preparing LIS students for the workplace and at the same time developing relevant curriculum for LIS institutions. This theory was previously used and significantly succeeded in determining the LIS professional competencies in the academic sector in South Africa in related studies; Raju (2016) used it to understand the core competencies in LIS education with focus on professional, generic and personal competencies; and recently, Raju (2017) used the theory to develop the LIS professional competency index for the higher education sector in the country.

### **4. Competency requirements in public libraries**

An insight into the employment requirements, regarding competencies, is crucial in any employment sector, in order to understand the training needs from the education and training sectors. This section discusses some of the employment needs, with respect to the public library. We currently live in a rapidly changing digital society, which calls for current and relevant competencies from LIS graduates/professionals working in public libraries and dealing with diversified clientele. Robles (2012); Yadav and Bankar (2016) and Raju (2017) assert that competencies are a combination of skills, knowledge and attitudes of an individual to perform effectively in his/her job. Therefore, libraries should maintain a well-trained staff

with necessary competencies that will create a vibrant and relevant library. However, having too little or excessive skills and other competencies can be problematic in a working environment. As the World Economic Forum (WEF) (2014: 7) describes the different forms of skills mismatch as: Skill shortage- whereby the demand for a particular type of skill exceeds the supply of people with that skill at balance rates of pay; Qualification mismatch- in which the level of qualification and/or the field of qualification are different from that required to perform the job effectively; Over and/or Under qualification- whereby the level of qualification/education is higher or lower than required to perform the job adequately; Skill gap- which is when the type and level of skills are different from that required to perform a particular job; and Over and/or Under-skillfulness- which is when the level of skill is higher or lower than required to effectively perform the job. With this in mind, one can recognise the significance of having some standards that facilitate competency development for the world of work. This takes us to the Development Policy Research Unit (DPRU) Policy Brief Series (2007: 3) which points out four important documents that facilitate the skills development in South Africa, firstly the Development Act (1998); secondly the Skills Development Levies Act (1999); thirdly the National Skills Development Strategy (2001); and lastly the Human Resources Development Strategy (2001). It is further added by the DPRU Policy Brief Series that our skills development operates under two main principles: a) skills training to economically active individuals (aged 16-64), including the unemployed and extending to highly skilled professionals and b) transferability of skills training once a qualification has been achieved. Unfortunately, the LIS Charter (2014) observes that the national statement of LIS skills and competencies is still a stumbling block in South Africa; however, having a national statement of LIS skills and competencies will ensure the relevant and appropriate educational offerings. This makes it requisite for library staff to have a set of skills and qualities, such as interpersonal relationship, social awareness and teamwork skills.

Gill et al (2001), in the Public Library Services: IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for Development, highlight some of the qualities required for public library staff, such as: the ability to understand the needs of users; ability to co-operate with individuals and groups in the community; ability to work with others in providing an effective library service; organisational skills, with the flexibility to identify and implement changes; imagination, vision and openness to new ideas and practice; readiness to change methods of working to meet new situations; and knowledge understanding of cultural diversity; knowledge of the material that forms the library's collection and how to access it; knowledge of information and communications technology; and an understanding of, and sympathy with the principles of public service. Nonthacumjane (2011) suggests that LIS professionals should be flexible, creative, and have critical, problem solving, social responsibility and ethical understanding skills. Mentoring, teamwork, and communication skills, which involves good oral, written and presentation, are also marked significant for LIS professionals (Nonthacumjane, 2011). Nonthacumjane further indicates discipline-specific knowledge as collection development, content management, digital archiving and presentation for LIS professionals. Luo (2012) identified a set of competencies covering knowledge and skills in four essential areas highlighting: communication, technology, service policies and procedures, and customer service. Robles (2012) divides skills into three broad categories, namely: foundation skills also called basic skills, necessary for productive functioning of the workforce in the job market and even in personal life; vocational or occupational skills, needed for undertaking tasks and functions for a specific job and core employability skills; non-vocational or non-technical skills are considered employability skills required at work and in the society. Robles (2012) goes on to highlight communication, problem solving and teamwork skills. Lou

(2012) highlights good communication and customer services skills as paramount competencies for a text librarian.

Ocholla and Shongwe (2013: 40) highlight, collection development, cataloguing and classification, electronic resources, library systems, teaching or training, report writing, abstracting and indexing, AACR2, LCSH, MARC21, Dspace, digital asset management system(s), LC rule interpretation, metadata schema, SABINET, OCLC, integrated library systems, USMARC, bibliographic formats, UNICON, SACat, WorldCat, OPAC, RDA, library Web 2.0, millennium system, and INNOPAC as some knowledge and skills required in the library category amongst other categories in the LIS sector. Saunders and Jordan (2013) on their reference services competencies in public and academic libraries found out that interpersonal and customer service skills were rated very important for both contexts; however, these skills were highly emphasised in the public library setting. Saunders and Jordan also found content and technical knowledge; communication skills as well as knowledge and the ability to use both print and electronic sources as significant for both settings. The authors emphasise communication and interpersonal skills in the public library environment as the librarians interact with patrons in their daily basis.

Gutsche and Hough (2014: 3) on their ‘competency index’ point out that “technology skills and strong interpersonal skills are fundamental for everyone who works in a library in any library typology. This competency index divides library competencies into four categories: Library Collection, Library Management Competencies, Public Services Competencies, and Technology Competencies Systems and IT. For library collection competencies, the index outlines cataloguing, preservation, e-resource management, acquisition and processing skills. In terms of library management competencies, the index competencies highlights strategic planning, staff training and development, marketing, library promotions, laws policies and procedures skills and knowledge. For public services, the emphasis are on outreach programmes, readers’ advisory, referencing, library collection, patron training, and public access technology as essential competencies. The technology competencies systems and IT encompasses automation systems, hardware, server administration, web design and development skills and knowledge. Wilkins (2015) highlights flexibility, communication, customer service, interpersonal skills, problem-solving and conflict resolution as essential competencies for public managers. Wilkins (2015) and Hirsch (2017) indicate communication, leadership, problem-solving, initiative and self-regulated as some of the most useful soft skills in a variety of today’s jobs. Recently, Mthembu and Ocholla (2019) explored the competencies required by LIS graduates to be employed in the public library setting and report that knowledge of cataloguing and classification, as well as library promotion and collection development are more significant. Based on skills requirements, the authors highlight computer, cataloguing, classification, conservation and preservation skills as major important competencies. They further note honesty, positivity and flexibility or adaptability as significant personal traits for public library workforce.

Given that today’s workplace is rapidly changing due to technology, this transforms the nature of the competencies or skills required from employees. Since it cannot be guaranteed that the skills and competencies mentioned above will remain unchanged, it is therefore imperative that the skills and competencies of the LIS professionals are continually assessed. Training becomes paramount as, Naros and Simionescu (2019) emphasise the role of continuous professional training as a way of gaining new knowledge and experience. Training can be formal, informal or continuing education. The effectiveness and relevance of continuing education has been emphasised by LIASA with four specific focus areas: personal

development, information and communication technology and management and leadership development (Ocholla and Bothma, 2007: 12).

Several studies (e.g. Queensland Library Association, 2008; Holt, Sawicki and Sloan, 2010; International Labour Office, 2010; the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), 2012; the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), 2013; LIS Charter, 2014; Mphidi; 2016) also note continuing training of library staff as extremely important as a way of re-skilling already employed staff considering that today's workplaces change constantly and are technology, information and knowledge driven. Gill et al (2001) recognise that training of public library staff is usually provided as a form of mentoring and contacts. ASTD (2012) opines that good skills development system will be able to: anticipate needed skills, engage employers and workers in decision making about training provision, maintain the quality and relevance of training, make training accessible to all sectors of society, ensure viable and equitable financing mechanisms and continuously evaluate 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. It was, however, noted that the training of librarians was still a daunting challenge in South Africa (LIS Charter, 2014: 100). Reddy et al (2016 ; 54) indicate that Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) made the mandate to provide training in the workplace for employees, as well as those without employment, regardless of the field or discipline, in South Africa. Hence, Reddy et al (2016) further recommend for the education and training sector respectively: a) improved education and skills levels of the population; b) education and qualification levels to support highly-skilled occupations; and c) education and qualification levels to support semi-skilled occupations in the country. Griffiths and King's Competency Achievement Model is believed to be potentially useful in incorporating training and education programmes. This model was used in studies by Lou (2007) and Lou (2012) in determining text librarian requisite competencies. This model could be significant in determining competency needs, requirements, education, training requirements, curricula and courses. It can be deduced that determining public library competencies is useful in setting some training and hiring or recruitment standards for library workforce

## **5. LIS Curricula and Qualifications framework**

Qualifications framework plays a major role in developing, classifying and recognising formal learning qualifications. Qualifications frameworks vary from country to country. African and European countries have unique frameworks for higher educational qualifications and education systems. Keevy and Higgs (2010: 690) note that "more than twenty African countries are actively engaged in qualifications framework development, including all Southern African Development Community member states and the SADC region as a whole". The Council on Higher Education (2013: 17) highlights the following characteristics of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF):

- Be sufficiently flexible to accommodate different types of higher education institutions and enable institutions to pursue their own curriculum goals with creativity and innovation;
- Facilitate the education of graduates who will contribute to the social, cultural and economic development of South Africa and participate successfully in the global economy and knowledge society;
- Enhance the development of a vibrant, high quality research system;

- Be compatible with international qualifications frameworks to ensure international recognition and comparability of standards;
- Be suitably flexible to accommodate the development of new qualification types and specialisations as the need arises;
- Be simple, clear, easy to understand and user-friendly for the higher education system and its clients;
- Facilitate qualification articulation across the higher education system and assist learners to identify potential progression routes, particularly in the context of lifelong learning; and
- Articulate with the rest of the NQF.

There are several qualification types falling within the NQF framework, including both undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications (Minishi-Majanja, 2009; the Council on Higher Education, 2013; Library and Information Association of South Africa, 2015). NQF framework touches on the curricula offered by the LIS schools and institutions. It is therefore crucial to have NQF framework, because curricula offered impacts on the employability skills of the graduates, in a sense that it acts as a big determinant of whether or not an individual, after graduation, would have been equipped with the needed competencies for the job market. As recognised by Nkomo (2000) in ‘The National Qualifications Framework and Curriculum Development’, qualifications frameworks have become a global phenomenon because they serve as a common standard for recognising qualifications, skills and competencies of individuals.

Despite NQF frameworks, radical technological trends are shaping the LIS landscape and the impact on the curricula being offered. Ocholla and Shongwe (2013: 35) report 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. The LIS Charter (2014: 101) points out that, “ICTs have changed the LIS landscape”. Shongwe (2014: 2) reveals that the introduction of IT has changed the LIS job market and the way libraries operate. Raju (2016) postulates the change of landscape in the job market, which she believes requires certain necessary skills and knowledge from LIS professionals, which in turn demands that the content of the LIS curriculum and its delivery should be in line with what is required in the job market. This makes it mandatory to have a uniform standard for all South Africa LIS schools’ curriculum. Changes in the LIS landscape was also noted a decade back by Minishi-Majanja (2009: 148); the author remarks that the LIS landscape is continually changing and shaped by technology, economic and other changes.

Similarly, the study in Uganda on the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and multicultural issues in LIS curriculum conducted by Tumuhairwe (2013) also reflects curricula changes in LIS schools and institutions. Raju (2014) and the State of Libraries in South Africa (2015) noted an infusion of ICT related subjects into LIS curricula in South African LIS schools, in the bid to meet the technological developments in the LIS professional domain. Raju (2014) reveals that some SA LIS schools have introduced new curriculum themes and relevant technology skills in keeping with the changing information profile, such as: Research Librarianship, Digital Curation, Research Data Management, Content Management Systems and Repositories, Open Scholarship Movement (open access, open content e.g. OERs, open data, etc.), HTML and XML, RDA and Dublin Core, Online AACR2 and Online Dewey, and Virtual Reference. Technological development and changes demand re-orientation and revision of the offered curricula which is indeed a process that cannot be easily achieved in a short period of time. Raju (2015: 168) observes that there is an increase in the integration of

technology into the curricula. Raju (2015: 21) recommends that the curricula content and delivery need to be in line with the required competencies to match the changing LIS landscape. The State of Libraries in South Africa (2015: 43) also recognises that some South African LIS schools have added ICT related modules/subjects to their curricula content in response to technological developments in LIS setting. The study on 'library and information science (LIS) education and training in Kenya: emergence, evolution, challenges and opportunities' by Rukwaro and Bii (2016) reveals that there are some changes in the curricula content as a result of meeting the needs of the job market. Raju (2017: 4) recently worked on 'LIS professional competency index for the higher education sector in South Africa' and is of the view that the index is pivotal in developing the curriculum offered and helping LIS researchers.

As earlier mentioned, technological growth impacts on the curricula, leading to LIS curricula sometimes not meeting the demands of the employment market. Pamsipamire (2014) study reveals the problem of curricula mismatch with labour requirements. Appropriately, the LIS Charter (2014: 32) reveals that "LIS curricula do not always meet the needs of the contemporary profession and its constituencies." Katuli-Munyoro and Mutula (2016) report that Library and Information Science (LIS) education and training programmes were criticised for producing graduates without the requisite skills to perform right away on their first jobs in Zimbabwe. This suggests that the issue about the curriculum is still problematic in most LIS schools and institutions in the country, and even globally. It can, therefore, be deduced that LIS schools need to offer competencies that will be fruitful to the LIS students or professionals in their future places of work. Moreover, as the LIS landscape changes rapidly, reflecting curricula gaps due to technological developments, public library employers should work closely with LIS schools to be aware of the curriculum or course contents offered.

## **6. Challenges facing public libraries**

Institutions of learning and students need to thrive and be prepared to overcome the challenges that are faced by today's societies and, most likely, future ones. There are some common challenges facing all library types in the country. The common challenges include lack of funding, poorly trained staff or lack of staff and the use and management of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as indicated by several studies (Kansas Library Association (KLA) 2004; Witbooi, 2007; the LIS Charter 2009; Ocholla and Shongwe 2013; the LIS Charter 2014; the National Library of South Africa 2014; Morris et al, 2014; Library and Information Association of South Africa, 2015; Mphidi (2016). The LIS Charter (2014: 14) revealed that challenges facing public libraries originate from a number of events, ranging from the period of apartheid to that of funding neglect in the early years of democracy in South Africa. The Charter further notes that most challenges relate to infrastructural deficits, operational difficulties and human resources, which were also noted by Witbooi (2007). It is also indicated in the Charter that there was an unequal resourcing of public libraries in the suburbs, townships and rural areas. The Charter goes on to report that library working hours are not supportive, for example, South African public libraries open for only forty (40) hours per week, due to insufficient staff in many public libraries. Bearing in mind the insufficient library working hours, it is obvious that the number of staff members is not enough in most of the SA public libraries. On the other hand, the shortage of staff in most public libraries may be as a result of lack of qualified and skilled individuals, as indicated by the LIS Charter (2014) that, "there are many examples where inadequately or inappropriately trained people are appointed to positions for which they are not equipped." This supports the observations in the LIS Charter (2009). The changes bring about countless challenges in the library environment. Morris et al (2014: 4) are of the view that it is impossible to predict

challenges that might affect public libraries in 2050 but it is no doubt that technological advances, increased competition, demographic transformations and financial constraints will shape the future of public libraries. Mphidi and Fourie (2016: iv) observe that budget cuts, insufficient fund, shortage of staff, lack of using ICTs, insufficient literacy programmes and inadequate physical space for users are still stumbling blocks in public libraries. A decade back, Witbooi (2007) highlighted that the challenges affecting SA public libraries stemmed from those facing the entire LIS market in the country since 1994. Witbooi (2007) included departmental alignment, governance, funding and human resources as part of the challenges affecting the LIS sector. With regards to public libraries in the country, Witbooi (2007) cited budget problems, very limited resources, increased demands, as well as low membership profile, as challenges.

## **7. Conclusions, recommendations and implications**

This review has significantly provided the foundation for the research work on the job requirements and challenges of LIS graduates in the public library environment. It is worth noting knowledge of cataloguing, collection development, interpersonal relationship, communication, technology, and customer services are highly emphasised as skills to be possessed by LIS graduates. However, it appears that global employment sectors, including the South African public libraries, normally experience problems with regards to human resources, such as: lack of appropriately skilled individuals, training programmes and staff shortage. Also discovered from the review is the change in the LIS landscape, which can be linked to new emerging professions within the LIS market and the eventual demand for curriculum revision and re-orientation. Unfortunately, curriculum revision and re-orientation is a process on its own and requires time. The rapid change in the LIS landscape points at the speedy technological trends and developments. Another shortfall is the fact that the LIS curricula do not always meet the demands of the job market and its constituencies. There are several challenges facing public libraries and LIS graduates/professionals; including lack of well-trained staff, staff shortage, lack of training programmes, lack of funding, and the major concern being the use and management of ICTs.

The study recommends job training, professional development and continuing education, which can significantly play crucial roles in equipping already employed individuals; as new competencies and re-skilling can be gained from training. The study also recommends 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. Again, stakeholders involved in public libraries like LIASA, SALGA, DAC, local municipalities and LIS educators should collaborate on the education and training needs of information professionals (LIS graduates), in line with the requirements of their great employment sector (public library). Overall, there should be a national strategic plan informing the development, expansion and association of public library services.

This study is likely to have impact on the LIS field through research development. This study also has an implication with regards to shedding light on the required competencies from LIS professionals. It is also hoped to help the LIS curriculum developers, LIS educators as well as public libraries themselves. As we presently live in an information/knowledge era in which information and technology are rapidly changing and shaping everyday work environments therefore, public library, as an accountable institution at the heart of the community, should be run by qualified staff with the set of skills required to operate at greater capacity in order to advance the goals of a modern service, equipped with the technologies needed by citizens for their own individual development, and for building a healthy society

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