

Chapter 3

Librarian Skillsets in the 21st Century: The Changing Role of Librarians in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

The chapter showcases the 21st century skills that are required by librarians. The digital era brought about a lot of changes in the way that librarians interact with their clients. Due to the changing needs of clients, librarians should ensure that they are well equipped to deliver the needed services. The objectives of the chapter are to identify the skills that librarians should possess in the 21st century, examine how librarians acquire those skills, and discuss the challenges that are faced when acquiring those skills. Structured literature review and web content analysis were used to get the LIS skills. It was discovered that librarians should possess professional, technical, and soft skills in order to remain relevant in the 21st century. The findings revealed that librarians can acquire skills through on the job trainings or formal education. The major challenge that is faced by librarians is the issue of lack of funds to support their capacity building endeavours.

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of information communication technologies has led to the millennial or the digital native patron who has knowledge of how to access digital information from an early age (Institute of museum and Library services 2009). Traditional library users were forced to visit the physical library but the 21st century learner has assorted options of accessing information. Initially, libraries were known as storehouses of information sources and librarians used to facilitate the acquisition and storage of print materials (Tulder 2018). Then, library and information professionals were regarded as experts in acquiring, evaluating and disseminating information. The digital era has brought about a lot of changes in the way that librarians offer their services to the digital natives leading to the need to acquire 21st century skills despite where one is working, be it a school, public, special or academic library (Ptak-Danchak 2012). Patrons require information literacy training to ensure that they know how to effectively and efficiently access, use and evaluate information sources in an ethical manner according to Corrao (2016). Chutia (2015) posits that book oriented librarianship had been changed to user centred librarianship leading to the need for new skills to serve the patrons. The evolution in the education system such as open and distance learning, online education venture, virtual campus, flipped classrooms, m-learning and learning management systems has brought about diverse patrons who require different types of information (Chutia 2015).

Zhou (2005) pointed out that a digital librarian must be able to select, preserve and manage digital collections and also work with the technical architecture of digital libraries. This would assist in planning and implementing digital services by putting in place policies and standards that should be adhered to when running the digital library. The protection of digital intellectual property in a networked environment cannot be underestimated in the digital era. The digital librarian should ensure that there is enough security for the information. Farkas (2006) added that there is need for librarians to have basic technical skills such as ability to troubleshoot new technologies, use of online media, and willingness to learn new technologies to embrace the ever changing library technologies. It is against this background that the study was done to unpack the skills that are needed by library and information professionals in the 21st century. The objectives that were addressed by this chapter are:

1. To identify the skills that librarians should possess in the 21st century,
2. To examine how librarians acquire those skills, and
3. To discuss the challenges that are faced when acquiring those skills.

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