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Developing a Competency Index for Librarians: Benchmark for Capacity Building, LIS Education, and Continuing Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

Competence is always an evolving issue as it needs to adapt to the transformation in society. Library and information professionals are faced with the same societal changes in dealing with information, technology, and services. Knowledge and skills must also be aligned to the needs of the institution served. The development of a competency index has been a major task of library organizations. The American Library Association, Association of College and Research Libraries and Online Computer Library Center have created a competency index that will guide educators and employers on what to expect from information professionals.

However, this may not be a one-size-fits-all considering the uniqueness of libraries based on geography, culture, language and other factors. Hence, this case study of two associations: the Vanuatu Library Association and Southeast Asia Theological Librarians was developed. The research describes how the competencies of two associations were created and explains the steps in developing a competency index that can be applied in a country or a region.

Keywords: Competency index, Competency mapping, Librarian competency, Continuing professional development, LIS education, Pacific Librarians, Theological Librarians

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INTRODUCTION

The demand for the librarian's competence to address the needs of the institution and the growing transformation in society serve as a challenge to continually evaluate the profession. Georgy (2020) laid down the factors that determine the career of an information specialist or librarian of the future:

- the employers: e.g. libraries, enterprises, other institutions;
- the fields of work: e.g. management, indexing, information research; and
- the skills: e.g. pedagogical education, cultural and social skills, language proficiency.

The development competency index has been a major task of library organizations. All over the world, a metric to identify the knowledge and skills needed by librarians that address the needs of the society is developed at either national, regional, or global level. The American Libraries Association (ALA), Association of Colleges and Research Libraries (ACRL) and Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), Chartered Institute of Information Professionals (CILIP), Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) and many other organizations have developed an index that will guide educators and employers on what to expect from information professionals. The Philippines has an established competency index primarily based on ALA, ACRL, and OCLC standards. However, island countries in the Pacific have no such index. Also, a competency index specifically for special libraries like medical, law, or theological libraries is rarely in place. Emphasis on culture and traditional knowledge as among the foundations of the competency index is one of the compelling reasons for some associations to create their own. In the case of Vanuatu, the country is also keen on preserving local traditions. While LIANZA already has this framework, the level of skills and educational background of librarians in Vanuatu are different considering various factors. Applying an advanced competency cannot realistically measure the gaps. On the other hand, theological libraries have special collections that can only be built with basic knowledge of theology as a discipline. They likewise need to acquire unique materials that need metadata and languages with distinct meanings in the field. Adding the intricacy of diversity in language in ASEAN, a different competency index must be made. This research stemmed from the need expressed by librarians in Vanuatu and ASEAN theological libraries when the researchers interacted with them.

This research is initially focused on two organizations: 1) Vanuatu Library Association, for a generic competency index in small countries in the Pacific and 2) ASEAN Theological Libraries, a special library.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY
VANUATU LIBRARIANS

The Vanuatu Library Association (VLA) was established in 1992 and has now reached about 50 members spread across the major islands of Port Vila, Espiritu

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Santo, and Tanna. While there are school libraries in other small islands, the person/s in charge of their library are neither designated as library staff; nor do they have Library and Information Science/ Studies background. The same is true with public, government, and special libraries. Several initiatives to enhance the competencies of librarians and library staff were made by international librarians and local library associations. The earlier thrust even included funding to sponsor members to take library science courses. However, this was halted due to lack of funds. A couple of libraries continued to hold training for VLA members and other library staff in collaboration with the University of the South Pacific-Emalus Campus (USP) and Reserve Bank of Vanuatu (RBV).

The training was usually conducted in Port Vila and Espiritu Santo. For academic libraries, the USP spearheads the training, while, for school libraries, the National Library of Vanuatu conducts the training in remote areas. In 2015, Margaret Terry, a librarian at the Public Library (now the Director of National Library of Vanuatu), participated in the 2nd cohort of the INELI Oceania program which was supported by the Bill & Melinda Foundation. The program ran for three years until it ended in 2018. Considering that Vanuatu emphasizes the preservation of culture and indigenous knowledge as embodied in the country's People's Plan Pillar 4 – Vibrant Cultural Identity, this implies a unique framework with implications on research, knowledge sharing, and preservation.

THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIANS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The development of competency index was brought to a broader scale when the researchers expanded the study to a different group on a regional spectrum– the Theological Librarians in Southeast Asia (TLSA). This initiative was pursued due to a lack of a localized or regionalized framework for assessing the current skills. Theological Libraries (TL) in Southeast Asia have developed diversely. Countries like Hong Kong and Taiwan have integrated better ICT components, and standard library practices are also more established in the Philippines and Thailand while Myanmar is still in the process of developing. Taking the empirical case of Myanmar, in a visit of one of the researchers to three libraries, it has been observed that theological libraries are mostly staffed with one or two librarians, with volunteers from the College/Department of Theology. The collection is mainly donated by Theological schools from the United States and Asian Theological Libraries. Most of them are periodicals and journals. In terms of organizing materials, two theological libraries use the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and one uses the Library of Congress (LC). The librarian/library staff follows the standards for collection as required by accrediting bodies with varied resources. However, since the Association for Theological Education in Southeast Asia (ATESEA) instrument does not quantify the number of resources, not all had the same number of titles and volumes. However, though there are titles that are common among all TLs.

As to library services and programs, the traditional reference desk is the main service provided. Information literacy instructions and online presence are very

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limited. The three schools visited address queries only thru email and social media accounts (primarily Facebook). They also do outreach but mostly because their programs are church-affiliated organizations. The major challenges they share are budget constraints, training, and professional development, exposure to current trends in librarianship, and [managing and/or subscribing to] library databases. However, they happily share that they have well-established document delivery services since most of their users are within the community and they work well with faculty members in terms of acquisition since most of them have a background in theology. They shared that they need to acquire competencies in information literacy instruction. They likewise wanted to have a deeper knowledge of resource sharing/collection management, database management, and systems analysis and design. In most cases, the skills development of librarians is done through library associations and LIS schools. In the case of Myanmar, this is not fully implemented due to certain limitations. However, bigger associations like the ATESEA and American Theological Library Association (ATLA) are the main stirrers for developing competencies.

Competency Index is needed to measure the knowledge and skills of librarians. Many countries including US, UK, Philippines, Thailand, Australia, and New Zealand have existing standards.

Sharing the process on how the competency index has recently been established in selected countries in Asia-Pacific provided insights on how the same can be done by countries where a competency index is not yet available.

Cognizant of these gaps and needs, the researchers embarked on research to develop competency indexes.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This paper describes the methods and processes in developing a competency index in selected countries in Asia-Pacific. Specifically, it aims to:

1. identify common competencies in various standards;
2. determine the level of competence of the librarians as perceived by respondents; and
3. share the processes undergone to develop a competency index.

RELATED LITERATURE

Developing competency models and frameworks are already in various literature. Tanloet & Tuamsuk (2011) worked on developing a core competencies framework for information professionals of Thai academic libraries. They looked into the roles of Thai academic libraries and information professionals in the next decade, and from the said data, developed the core competencies framework by using the Delphi technique. Delphi technique is a predictive method for obtaining consensus among a group of experts often used as a means of problem-solving, decision making, and/ or forecasting (Methods Map - SAGE Research Methods,

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2020). In the above Delphi study, 21 experts with first-hand experience as library and information professionals were the subject of the study. Data were collected in three rounds and then analyzed by using the median, mode, and inter-quartile range.

In the Philippines, the development of the National Competency-based Standard for Filipino Librarians (NCBFL) was described by David (2020) in her recent book chapter on "Continuing Professional Development and the Philippine Qualifications Framework: A Way Forward to Mutual":

> *"Recognition Arrangements was drafted by the Philippine Board for Librarians in 2012 by conducting consultative workshops participated by members of different library associations representing all types of libraries in the country. The output of the said consultation was endorsed by 367 librarian participants during the PLAI Congress and General Assembly in November 2013. These technical standards are provided in PRC-BFL Resolution no. 03, s. 2015 entitled «Prescription, Adoption, and Promulgation of a National Competency-Based Standards for Filipino Librarians." The standards can be used to measure learning of the librarian at the different PQF levels, and as a guide in acquiring the required competencies."*

The standard is divided into two major areas: professional and personal. The personal standards are made up of seven domains and the professional competencies are made up of four domains.

In the study of Noh, Ahn, and Choi (2013), they used the competency needs data in constructing core tasks/knowledge table and skill matrix table from job analysis results for five different library types to derive course content through a systematic curriculum and instructional development deriving course content based on knowledge and skill grouping. Lee et al. (2005) emphasized the need to change the LIS curriculum based on societal change with analysis of LIS curriculum development from many different perspectives (Oh & Chang, 2006). Being cognizant of the competencies is also important to improve the librarians' qualifications (Kwak Dong-cheol, Shim Kyung, & Yoon Jeong-ok, 2009).

Demand for evolving skills has also been discussed in theological librarianship. Anderson and Smiley (2017) noted that "curating data is a new job skill for theological librarians as theological researchers need to wind up producing data sets, which require description, preservation, and publication plans. Theological librarians can also help faculty and students in preserving their research in data repositories in standard formats with shared identifiers."

Other than the discussion on the need for professionalism of librarians Stuehrenberg's essay (2011) adapted from his keynote address during the Forum of Asian Theological Librarians Conference in 2009 noted the value of library collection:

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There is one whole section in the Standards (3.2.4) on «globalization,» which the document understands as «patterns of instructional and educational practice that contribute to an awareness and appreciation of global interconnectedness and interdependence, particularly as they relate to the mission of the church.» The document goes on to say that the schools' curricula need to «enable knowledge and appreciation of the broader context of the religious tradition, including cross-cultural and global aspects» (4.2.1). Library collections need to «demonstrate sensitivity to issues of diversity, inclusiveness, and globalization.»

Countries in Asia have been developing their standards to ensure that it truly fits to measure the learning of the librarians.

METHODOLOGY

The two separate studies used mixed methods to answer the research objectives which mainly involved documentary analysis, surveys, and focus group discussions (FGD). FGD were conducted both face to face and online.

The investigation for both Ni-Vanuatu and TLSA Competency Index began with a documentary analysis comparing various competency indexes of library associations around the world. Subsequently, the researchers analyzed the standards in the subject countries/ region (if any). Lastly, the draft of the competency index was made based on the established standards with additional input from experts on specific items deemed important to be added. Upon completion of the proposed competency index, it is transformed into a questionnaire that was distributed in a form of survey.

The second phase is a survey answered by librarians in their respective groups. This is a way to determine the respondents' perception of their current skills as well as an avenue to ask for other skills they needed that was not included. Lastly, the responses in the survey were clarified through discussions.

In Vanuatu, the project of developing the competency index for librarians started in October 2018 and finalized in March 2019. A call for participation was sent and the first meeting was set in the last quarter of 2018. The librarians representing the National Library, the academic/ school libraries, and special libraries gathered to discuss the different competency indexes all over the world. From the said meeting, the first draft of the competency index was made. It was summarized, turned into a survey of perceived competencies, and sent to all VLA members through email for comments. A follow-up visit to different libraries was also done to discuss the questionnaire/ competency index to those who were not able to access their emails. After all the feedback was noted in the revised competency index, another call for participation for a focus group discussion was made. Eight librarians participated and agreed on the competency index. As a result, the final draft had 6 key areas with 36 items that correspond to specific skills.

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For TLSA, the research project was conducted in collaboration with the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA) which started in January 2020. It started with a review of various library standards, and subsequently, a questionnaire was drafted by LIS professors. This was content validated by three experts in the field. In April 2020, it was sent via email to all theological librarians in SEA based on the email list by ATESEA office. Feedback from theological librarians were summarized and more online group discussions were scheduled to conducted (instead of focus group discussion in a web conference) for theological librarians in Southeast Asia. This is initially planned to be conducted face to face in April 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the mode of consultation was modified.

FINDINGS

I. Common Competencies in Various Standards

The competency on Core Technology, Application of Information and Communication Technologies, Managing Information Tools and Technologies and Information and Knowledge Systems and Technology are the most common among those identified as the «professional «competency of a librarian. This aligns the profession in the realm of information gateway using various technological tools.

Personal competencies common among the associations are about management skills i.e. managing library resources, services, personnel, and collection. This area of competency has extensive scope in defining the personal and/or essential competencies of a librarian. Common between the Competency Index for the Library Field and that from the NCBSFL is their recognition of personal/interpersonal competencies as an essential trait a librarian should have. These are inclusive of competencies in Communication, Customer Service, and Interpersonal Competencies. Meanwhile, competency in information ethics is an essential part of Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa Bodies of Knowledge (BOK) (2012), NCBSFL, and SLA's Competencies for Information Professionals. This is evident in their pursuit of creating, generating, and providing factual information to library users.

Furthermore, among the Associations, only the competencies from Competency Index for the Library Field (2015) was able to provide a more comprehensive and detailed competency guide covering four categories while Special Libraries Association identified only one category, and that is the core competencies of a special librarian. In addition, two out of the four associations mentioned a competency on research and data analysis.

The Competency Index for the Library Field (2015) has the most number of competencies enumerated, and listed specifically the need for librarians to be competent in Marketing and Public Relations and Project Management under the Library Management Competencies. Among the four library associations, three required competence in the organization of information. The organization

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of resources and services that goes along with the librarian's core competencies in adapting technology is also essential. The competencies identified for SLA Information Professionals (2016) have the least number of core competencies, yet it is inclusive of similar competencies from other library associations. Compared to other associations, special libraries have lesser requirements but the competencies of librarians working on this type of library must be specified further e.g. Law, Medical, Theological, etc.

Comparing these library association's competencies provided the researchers a baseline data in drafting appropriate competency standards suggestive of the roles and responsibilities of a theological librarian without compromising the uniqueness of the nature of their services and resources.

II. Level of Competence of the Librarians as Perceived by Librarian-Respondents

Based on the above comparison where two competency indexes were drafted, the researchers conducted a survey for three reasons: 1) to test the competency instrument 2) to gather feedback among the librarians on the accuracy of the index and 3) to identify gaps in the current skills of librarians.

Table 1 provides the Ni-Vanuatu Competency Index, reflecting the perceived level of importance of each skill. Twenty-three respondents answered the survey questionnaire. The majority of the participants deemed that competencies are «Important» except for Technology which is «Less Important.» Moreover, the recognition of diversity, multiculturalism, and indigenous knowledge is given "High Importance". Technology was not given much importance as most of the libraries do not have facilities. The respondents also added that they gave a middle rating ("important") for most of the services despite not practicing them (such as acquisition, preservation, management, reference, instruction, etc.).

Table 1 Ni-Vanuatu Librarians Perceived Level of Importance of Specific Competencies

ITEM	Highly Important	Important	Less Important
I. Library Collection Management Competencies			
Acquisition	8.6	78.3	0
Collection development	86.9	1.3	0
E-resources management	52.2	47.8	0
Preservation	8.6	73.9	.43
Cataloging	43.5	34.8	0
II. Library Management Competencies			
Organizational leadership	39.1	52.2	.87
Financial management	8.6	65.2	1.3
Strategic planning	34.8	56.5	.87

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Management of facilities and spaces	73.9	17.4	.87
Laws, policies, and procedures	1.3	78.3	.87
Personnel management	17.4	82.6	0
Public relations	47.8	52.2	0
III. Public Services			
Services Outreach and Programming	30.4	60.9	.87
Readers' Advisory	47.8	39.1	1.3
Reference	26.0	73.9	0
Circulation Services	43.5	56.5	0
Instructions and Training	30.4	65.2	.43
Library/ Information Systems	43.5	52.2	.43
Specialized Skills	8.6	43.5	8
Marketing and Promotions	60.9	30.4	.87
IV. Personal/ Interpersonal Competencies			
Customer Service	30.4	65.2	.43
Ethics and Values	73.9	26.0	0
Learning and Innovation	.87	78.3	1.3
Teamwork/ Collaboration	52.2	39.1	.43
V. V. Technology Competencies			
Online/ electronic communication	.87	34.8	56.5
Hardware understanding and use	.43	43.5	52.2
Internet use	1.3	73.9	13.0
Computer operating system functions	.87	.43	86.9
Software Application	0	1.3	86.9
Web Technologies	.43	.87	86.9
V. VI. Ni-Vanuatu Competency			
Information Environment, Information Policy & Ethics	43.5	52.2	.43
Generating, Communicating & Using Information	47.8	52.2	0
Information Access Process	47.8	52.2	0
Local, Traditional and Cultural Knowledge	95.6	.43	0

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For TLSA, this initiative spawned from the identified needs to revisit the standards for Theological Libraries in Southeast Asia. The project was spearheaded by ATESEA in collaboration with Library and Information Science (LIS) professors from Central Philippine University. This is more inclined towards the standard for special libraries as theological libraries are considered part of the special libraries group (Professional Competencies, Personal Competencies, and Core Technology Competencies).

The online survey drafted by the team of LIS professors was sent by the ATESEA office last May 2020. Fifty-nine (59) respondents replied. The questionnaire mainly probed into the perceived competencies needed to perform the tasks in theological libraries. The competencies in each item have a corresponding description written in italics on examples of specific applications of the knowledge and/ or skill mentioned. All competencies described were perceived to be highly important or important.

Table 2 Theological Librarians Perceived Level of Importance of Specific Competencies

ITEM	Highly Important	Important	Less Important
I. PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE			
Acquisition of resources	62.7	35.6	1.7
Cataloging	81.4	18.6	0
E-resources management	67.8	27.1	5.1
Preservation	52.5	35.1	11.9
Marketing and public relations	49.2	39	11.9
Information Access	72.2	27.1	0.7
Research and Publication	52.6	37.3	10.1
Local and Cultural Knowledge	39.0	52.5	8.5
II. PERSONAL COMPETENCIES			
Collaboration	74.6	22	3.4
Customer service	74.6	23.7	1.7
Ethics and values	52.5	45.8	1.4
Leadership	64.4	33.9	1.7
Communicating with stakeholders	66.1	27.1	6.8

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III. CORE TECHNOLOGY COMPETENCIES			
Email applications	44.1	52.5	3.4
Hardware understanding and use	39.0	54.2	6.8
Internet use	64.4	33.9	1.7
Computer operating system functions	39.0	55.9	5.1
Software application	42.4	50.8	6.8
Web Technologies	54.2	37.3	8.5
Public access technology	52.5	33.9	13.6

III. Insights in Developing Competency Index for Librarians

From the two separate surveys conducted, the researchers were able to produce relevant insights. Both projects have common steps: 1) Use of various standards as a baseline for research 2) An outline of competency was drafted by experts 3) Distribution of the survey as a way to reach out to all members, and that participation of all members is necessary, and 4) Consultation as a key component. Below (Fig. 1) is a simple illustration of the common steps followed in these two studies:
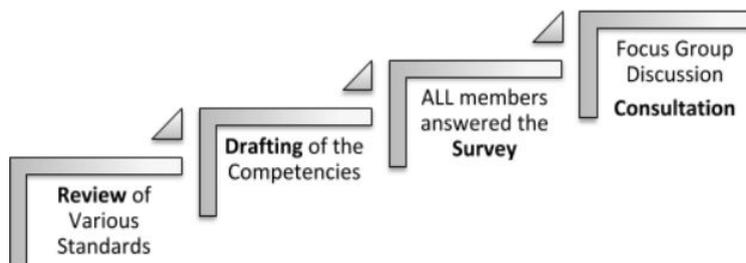

Figure 1. Steps in Developing Competency Index

1. Review of various standards. Before the researchers embarked on creating a list of competencies, various models were looked into. In Vanuatu, even the laws and plans of the country were included in the review to ensure that the instrument is not "too Westernized".

2. Drafting of Competencies. Experts and officers of the association worked together to develop the competencies. In the case of Vanuatu, representatives from various libraries met to discuss. For theological librarians, a group of faculty met, and their draft was submitted to three other experts. The expertise of different librarians/ LIS educators was tapped.

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3. Distribution of the survey. To test the reliability of the instrument, it was run to all the members. Feedback was gathered and new competencies were added as the researchers deemed it important.

4. Consultation. The consultation was a key component in the draft of competencies. All members of the Library Association were given a chance to participate and be heard. Meetings were conducted and other modes of communication were used to reach out.

BENCHMARK FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

The value of the competency index as a point of reference for enhancing the knowledge and skills of library and information professionals was laid down by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) in their Professional Knowledge and Skills Base (PKSB) framework. This framework is the UK version of the competency index being discussed. PKSB outlines the broad range of skills that are required by workers across the library, information, and knowledge profession. CILIP noted that this framework can be used for skills analysis, staff training, and development plans, and to develop ideas for training courses and Continuing Professional Development (CDP) opportunities. It can also be used as a tool to think about personal and professional development (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, 2019). This study is conducted for the purpose of determining the training needs of librarians.
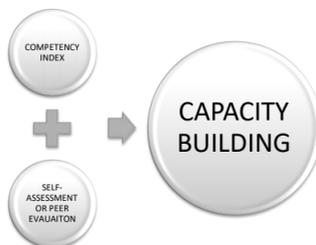

Figure 2. Framework on the Use of Competency Index in Capacity Building

The competency indexes, in this case study, like PKSB, can serve as a reference to identify library staff strengths and help build more effective succession planning. A simple step is proposed to use the competency index for capacity building: The survey should be run twice: 1) the first is a perceptive survey and/ or peer assessment to see the current strength and weaknesses that can be used to design CPD 2) another conducted to see on how things went after CPD developed the knowledge and skills during the process (Fig. 2).

LIS EDUCATION AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Librarians' competency index or framework can also be used to assess which academic and vocational qualifications are directly relevant to the profession

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(CILIP. 2019). Figure 3 is a conceptual framework on the relationship of competency index to CPD and LIS education.

In the study of Noh, Ahn, and Choi (2013), they used data constructing core tasks/knowledge table and a skill matrix table from job analysis results for five different library types. This was done in order to derive course content through the systematic curriculum and instructional development referencing course content on knowledge and skill grouping. Emphasis on the need to change the LIS curriculum based on societal change with analysis of LIS curriculum development, one by looking into the skills of practicing librarians and their perception of their current competencies and skills essential in successfully conducting their duties (Lee et al., 2005). Similarly, the Philippine NCSBL also serves the same purpose. The standard is used to measure the learnings of the librarian on different PQF levels, and as a guide in acquiring the required competencies (David, 2018, p.41).
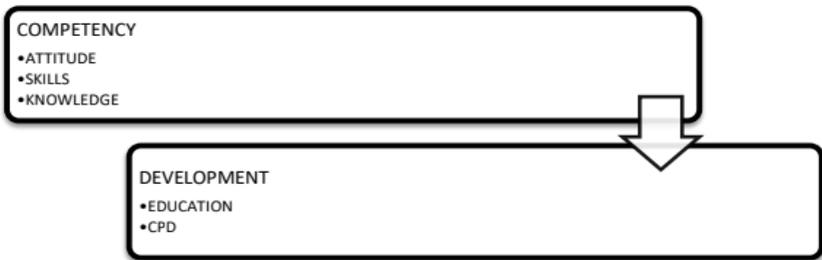

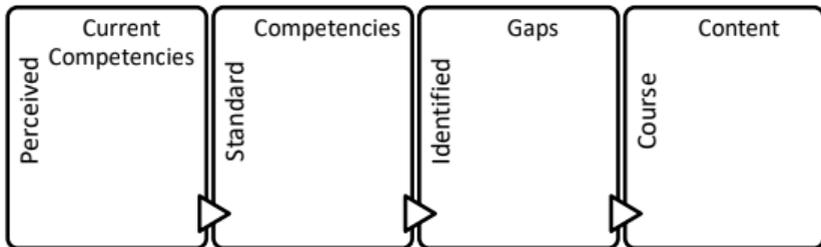Figure 3. A framework on the Relationship of Competency Index to CPD and LIS Education

Figure 4. Proposed Framework for Analysis of LIS Curriculum

LIS curricularists advise that course content should be derived from a systematic process of identifying needs. First-hand data of those who are working in the field is useful to identify the gap between the current status and the competencies required. Figure 4 is a proposed framework for the analysis of LIS curriculum development. By looking into the skills of practicing librarians and their perception of their current competencies the gap is derived. It gives a realistic view of what is needed by librarians rather than «deemed» needs. Those who are in the actual

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job have first-hand experience and knowledge on how to successfully perform their duties.

The competency index can be used as a reference for enhancing LIS programs to have better-prepared professionals. For the employers, it can also be used for in-house training while library associations and other agencies that are responsible for continuing professional development can either look into the gaps or use this index to outline areas where training, courses, seminars, and other CPD can be applied.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The competency indices are different from both groups. While Vanuatu emphasizes local knowledge, this area is given a lower rating by theological librarians. Both countries may have similarities in their needs to develop leadership, professional and personal skills but the intention of this study is not to compare but to take note of the steps undergone to develop the competency standard. The value of a unique competency index is confirmed in both studies. Each wanted their way of measuring their competence. This initiative is in response to the fear of measuring librarians' competence using one common standard that tends to be too Western.

A survey using this competency index can be used to analyze the gap in the curriculum. It can also be utilized to measure the skills and knowledge of librarians and to see which areas need to be given attention in CDP.

Despite the effort to ensure that the competency indices as well developed, it cannot be denied that they do not fit completely in every country. This is still a work in progress and may still be to be modified in other countries or areas. Future studies on how the competency indexes contribute to continuing professional development, upskilling, or rescaling of library professionals is another interesting potential for this study to be used. The researchers are also interested to see how the steps are replicated or applied in other countries.

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