

Cultural Competency of ni-Vanuatu Librarians: Vanuatu Libraries Contribution to Vibrant Cultural Identity

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Abstract

Libraries play an important role in promoting cultural and language diversity, preserving knowledge and supporting educational goals. This paper discusses the ni-Vanuatu Librarians cultural competencies and examines the current programs and prospective initiatives that can contribute to a vibrant cultural identity of the nation. To have a baseline data, the inquiry started with a survey based on the American Library Association Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries. This standard was found appropriate as similar concepts are useful in Vanuatu, although some modification for context was required. Overall, the respondents are aware of their competence but recognise that cultural competence has not been integrated into work. Limitations, such as lack of funding, lack of resources making cultural competence not priority were reasons why they have not developed or applied these concepts. The results of this study provides insights on the applicability of this standard for libraries in the Pacific to develop the cultural competence of their staff.

Keywords: Librarianship, cultural competence, multiculturalism, diversity, Vanuatu

Introduction

Vanuatu is a group of islands in the South Pacific Ocean, about three-quarters of the way from Hawaii to Australia (Central Intelligence Agency, [2017]). Many of the islands have been inhabited for thousands of years; the oldest archaeological evidence found dating to 2000 BC. In 1605, the Portuguese explorer Pedro Fernández de Quirós became the first European to reach the islands, believing it to be part of Terra Australis (Luque & Mondragón, 2005). Europeans began settling in the late 18th century, after British explorer James Cook visited the islands on his second voyage, giving the name New Hebrides. In 1906, the French and British agreed to an Anglo-French Condominium on the New Hebrides. More than a decade later, in the 1960s, the ni-Vanuatu people started to press for self-governance and independence which led to both European nations giving full sovereignty on July 30, 1980 (Government of Vanuatu, 2020).

In this island nation, more than 100 local Melanesian languages and dialects are spoken. Bislama, an English-based Melanesian pidgin, is the national language and, along with English and French, is one of three official languages (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019). With the diversity of language and culture, the country gives

emphasis on the promotion and preservation of every unique cultural identity as embodied in the government’s national goals. The Vanuatu’s People’s Plan manifests an expression on the value of a vibrant cultural identity by promoting and protecting indigenous languages, preserving and enhancing cultural and traditional knowledge and integrating culture and heritage into the national curriculum (National Sustainable Development Plan 2016 to 2030 People’s Plan, 2017).

Libraries play an important role in promoting cultural and language diversity, preservation of knowledge and supporting educational goals which address the above National Sustainable Development Plan 2016 to 2030 People’s Plan Society Pillars 1.1, 1.2 and 1.6. However, these value of libraries is not fully realised in the national agenda because:

1. library staff are not fully aware of their role in preserving and promoting cultural identity; hence the lack of advocacy; and
2. there may be existing programs in the library but the impact of such programs are not measured or communicated to the stakeholders, particularly the government.

Background

In Vanuatu there are six (6) government/public libraries, 11 academic libraries and 1453 schools (Early Childhood Education, Primary and Secondary) although very few schools have actual libraries. Where there are school libraries, they are staffed by teacher-librarians (Table 1).

Table 1

Libraries in Vanuatu

Type of Library	N
Government/ Public	6
Academic	
• University	2
• College	9
School	[1453]¹
Special	1

¹ Source of data on schools: Policy and Planning Division Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). (2020). Education statistics.

Government/ Public Libraries***National Library of Vanuatu***

The first public library in the region started only with a small Vanuatu collection, mostly written by international authors and scholars. It was established in the 1950s when Vanuatu (then New Hebrides) was still an Anglo-French colony, that both the French and British government collaborated (for the first time) to build the National Cultural Center building where artefacts and other local custom and cultural knowledge were stored. One part of the building is a place for manuscripts and books about Vanuatu. This started the collection for what is now the Vanuatu National Library (VNL). It took decades before the Public Library was fully established, with staff having a library science degree. More than a decade after its independence (June 30, 1980), the government established a duly recognised National Library. In 1995, when the Vanuatu Cultural Center was moved to a new location, the VNL was also transferred. VNL now shares the space with the Vanuatu National Archives. Libraries are under the Ministry of Justice and VNL oversees four Municipality Libraries, which include: Port Vila, Santo, Malekula and Tanna.

Vanuatu Library Association

The Vanuatu Library Association (VLA) was established in 1992 and has now reached about 50 members spread across the major islands of Efate (where the capital, Port Vila, is located), Espiritu Santo, and Tanna. In 2015, Margaret Terry, who was then the Librarian at the Public Library (now the Director of National Library of Vanuatu), participated in the second cohort of the International Network of Library Innovators (INELI) Oceania program which designed to identify and nurture emerging leaders and foster collaboration and was supported by the Bill & Melinda Foundation. The program ran for 3 years until it ended in 2018.

Several initiatives to enhance the competencies of librarians and library staff were made by international librarians and the VLA. The earlier thrust included funding to sponsor members to take Librarianship courses. However, this was halted due to lack of funds. International librarians from The University of the South Pacific (USP), Emalus Campus and local librarians from Reserve Bank of Vanuatu (RBV) play an important contribution in capacity-building of librarians and library staff working in libraries but this is not enough.

Training usually occurs in Port Vila and Espiritu Santo. For academic libraries, the USP spearheads the training while for school libraries, the National Library of Vanuatu conducts training in remote areas. Training is also conducted by the VLA, depending on the availability of funds. The last one conducted by the VLA was in November 2018. In the same year, a two-day training on “How to Run a Library” was initiated by Reysa Alenzuela, the former Senior Librarian of the USP-Emalus Campus. This was attended by two college librarians and 12 school library staff. Training and other skills enhancement programs were about managing libraries, organising library resources and developing simple programs. Aside from funding issues, there are a limited number of resource persons who are present in Vanuatu to give training to keep the librarians abreast with the practices in librarianship. As Vanuatu emphasises the preservation of culture and indigenous knowledge as embodied in the country’s *People’s Plan Pillar 4 – Vibrant Cultural Identity*, a need for more training specifically on enhancing cultural competencies is needed. However, as there are no librarians with knowledge of how to conduct this kind of programming this has not been done for a long time. With the funding from the ALA Diversity grant, this project has been materialised.

Research Objectives

This research describes the level of awareness of ni-Vanuatu Librarians and library staff about their cultural competency and at the same explores how the *ALA Diversity Standards* (2012) can be applicable in Vanuatu. Specifically, it addresses the following objectives:

- Analyse the level of cultural awareness of ni-Vanuatu Librarians and library staff working in Libraries with regard to their perception of their:
 - Cultural awareness of self and others
 - Cross-cultural knowledge and skills
 - Organisational and professional values dedicated to culturally competent service
 - Development of collections, programs, and services that addresses the diverse cultural, linguistic and other special needs of the community the library serves.
 - Service delivery that caters to diverse groups
 - Language diversity adaptability

- Cross-cultural leadership
- Compare and analyse the applicability of ALA Diversity Standards in the context of Ni- Vanuatu Cultural competencies index; and
- Identify the gaps in developing cultural competencies of ni-Vanuatu Librarians and library staff working in libraries.

Related Literature

Cultural competence has been given attention as libraries realise the need for enhancing its value in terms of services and resources. If professional development for librarians includes this vital skill, librarians may be able to overcome social constructs, cultural biases, and personal assumptions they have been working under to better understand and serve the multi-ethnic, multilingual, multi-needs population through resources that are acquired, presented, and preserved with their cultural backgrounds in mind (Ramsey, 2013). Examining the literature, diversity in library services has been an ongoing discussion. Allard, Qayyum and Mehra (2007) talked about the importance of intercultural leadership in building awareness and serving a multicultural population. Within the discussion of culture, understanding indigenous knowledge is a central component. Nathan and Perreault (2018) see the need to equip library, archives and information science graduates with skills that will be useful to the Indigenous peoples they work with as a result of the time we are in and the countless initiatives led by Indigenous peoples. Doyle, Shukla, Barkman and Patel (2017) discuss the value of pedagogical spaces that weave indigenous knowledge. Knowledge organisation systems in libraries and librarians' leadership contribute to the creation of research, pedagogy and scholarship (Lawson and Dupont, 2015). Moreover, integrating indigenous knowledge and cultural diversity in library programs (Lilley & Paringatai, 2014) is also important. Although studies have mostly centered in New Zealand and Australia, all point to the demand for cultural competence in dealing with indigenous knowledge. The Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) places indigenous knowledge paradigms as one major area in Bodies of Knowledge (BOK) 11 - Awareness of indigenous (Māori) knowledge paradigms. In the New Zealand context this refers to Maori knowledge systems (LIANZA, 2008) described as "awareness of indigenous knowledge paradigms" (Lilley & Paringatai, 2014). The need for librarians to have a working knowledge of the diversity and structure of Maori knowledge frameworks, the influence that cultural practices and language, the development of Maori knowledge constructs and principles (concepts), and the

importance of local research methodologies in researching the needs of Maori clients (LIANZA 2008), are the key components of this competence.

Overall (2009) proposed a conceptual framework for developing cultural competence for library and information science (LIS) professionals and identifies three domains in which cultural competence is developed: cognitive, interpersonal, and environmental, which must develop through the lens of cultural sensitivity. Intercultural sensitivity involves empathy, flexibility, awareness, language proficiency for a culture different from the one that is familiar to the reader (Deardorff, 2004) or librarian. Cultural competence would likely enhance the practice of librarianship and help librarians better address the social, linguistic, and academic needs of culturally diverse individuals. On cultural knowledge and language diversity, Maghuyop's (2018) study of transformative leadership of library personnel and their cultural competence, revealed that culturally competent library personnel are provide language diversity and information resources appropriate to their library users, and master reference interviewing methods that reflect an understanding of the role of language in the end-users' culture. Cultural competence is also important in library instructions (Foster, 2018) improvement of collections (Ramsey, 2013).

Although the *ALA Diversity Standards* are North American in context, they are used in this study, as they have also been successfully adopted in studies conducted outside the U.S. For example, Maghuyop (2018) uses the same standard in developing the cultural competency questionnaire on cultural competence of librarians from different types of libraries in the Mindanao region of the Philippines. Kandiuk (2014) also used the *ALA Diversity Standards* as the basis for a discussion promoting racial and ethnic diversity among Canadian academic librarians. as did Maestro and colleagues (2018) for teaching diversity in ASEAN setting.

The scarcity in the professional library literature about Pacific countries such as Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Tonga, New Caledonia, Marshall Islands, Guam, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Niue, Micronesia, Cook Islands, Nauru and Tonga is due to the fact that there are very few staff working in the library who have formal training or education in Librarianship. While Vanuatu had an established association as early as the 1990s with one person having a Bachelor's degree and several with certificate or diploma. Resources (book donations) are available through various organisations and even individuals but training is very limited.

Methodology and Research Design

This study employed a mixed method of research combining quantitative method, through survey questionnaire, and qualitative method, to expand and elaborate on quantitative findings (Creswell, et al. 2006). To provide a broad understanding, the inquiry started with a survey and subsequently interviews, discussion and observations were conducted. Data analysis mainly employed an inductive approach to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data (Thomas, 2006) from the interview and focus group discussion. Although the data was mainly gathered through a survey, to protect the respondent's confidentiality, respondents were anonymous. For culturally sensitive questions, a one-on-one discussion was scheduled. The qualitative data from the interviews were used to supplement the survey information. The interviews probed into 1) the reasons why the cultural competence of Librarians is not developed; 2) the reasons why libraries do not develop Cultural Programs; and 3) the cultural programs they plan to conduct that will be beneficial to the library users. Some of the possible reasons were provided in the survey, so respondents only tick the options. Deeper understanding was sought in the interviews and through group discussions which formed part of the narratives in this study.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire was developed based on *ALA's Diversity Standards*. Using a Three-Point Likert Scale, the questionnaire inquired about the respondents' perceived level of cultural awareness and the programs they have conducted.

The ten areas in ALA standards were reduced to seven, as the author was aware of the current practices and level of understanding of the participants. The areas that were retained were:

- a) Cultural awareness of self and others
- b) Cross-cultural knowledge and skills
- c) Organisational and professional values dedicated to culturally competent service
- d) Development of collections, programs, and services that addresses the diverse cultural, linguistic and other special needs of the community the library serves.
- e) Service delivery that caters to diverse groups
- f) Language diversity adaptability (preservation and promotion)

g) Cross-cultural leadership

The response scale has the following designated descriptive value:

Responses	Description
3 - High	: the respondent has an in-depth understanding and is capable of fully integrating into the work.
2 - Average	: the respondent is aware and recognises the significance of the idea but has not integrated into work.
1 - Low	: the respondent has never encountered the idea.

Language diversity preservation and promotion was suggested to be changed to language adaptability as preservation and promotion of the language is not yet an essential component of the library's function which will be described further in the discussion. To further probe critical gaps, a semi structured interview guide was developed.

Validation

The questionnaire and the interview guide were examined for face validity by one local librarian, one local non-librarian who is the Coordinator for Student Affairs Services with extensive knowledge of the ni-Vanuatu context of languages and one junior librarian (research assistant). Upon approval of the questionnaire, the survey was administered in a workshop. There were attempts to have the questionnaire translated by a language translator from English to Bislama (the local dialect); however, the translator explained the risk of translation to be inaccurate since Bislama, which is a pidgin English, does not have adequate vocabulary. To resolve the language barrier, the survey was conducted face-to-face where several local librarians who were also the content validators were present to explain every item in Bislama and French.

Data gathering

The data gathering was in two phases:

Phase 1 – Introductory Workshop on Understanding Cultural Competency. A workshop was conducted to explain the concept of cultural competency and to present various cultural competency standards. Ni-Vanuatu

culture would prefer to work as a group and then subsequently work independently (Alenzuela, et al., 2019). Taking from learning paradigms, Pacific Islander students hold strong beliefs in the notion of communal sharing (Phan, 2010). This input is necessary to ensure that participants understand the concept presented and that they are comfortable to discuss it.

Phase 2 – Survey on Understanding Perceptions of Cultural Competency. A questionnaire based on the *ALA Diversity Standards*, was distributed during the workshop. The researcher read aloud each item and explained it. Clarifications were sought from respondents and local librarians helped explain every item. The data gathering focused on Port Vila, the capital of Vanuatu. While VLA has approximately 40 members across the five provinces in different islands, the main respondents were only 14 from Efate where the capital is situated.

Rationale for using the *ALA Diversity Standards* (2012)

While the standards are too complex and detailed to describe in detail they are presented below in summary. There is a strong relationship between the standards and essential library resources and services in Vanuatu libraries, just as with any other library around the world. Some of the standard practices that are applied in Vanuatu are:

- Standard 1: Cultural awareness of self and others. This aspect is explicitly understood by participants and spontaneously ingrained in everyday life. Ni-Vanuatu librarians are fully aware that even if they deal with their fellow ni-Vanuatu, the user behavior may differ. Some groups are timid, some are vocal, some library clients may speak Bislama and French or Bislama and English.
- Standard 2: Cross-cultural knowledge and skills. This standard is important considering that the country has a very diverse cultural background coming from different islands. Specialised knowledge and understanding about history, traditions, values, artistic expressions, even social hierarchies is important to properly organise resources or disseminate information in diverse communities. One example is how tribal knowledge is classified, for example as: 1) sacred and 2) not sacred. Those which are not sacred can be shared, but those that are sacred cannot be disseminated unless rituals are performed. This classification is not an approved nomenclature but for purposes of this discussion, awareness of the type of tribal knowledge is very important that must be known by librarians. Knowledge about how to disseminate and preserve information is a

complicated topic when it relates to culture as there are specific cultural authorities. For example, knowledge is power that's gained through social hierarchy, like tribal chieftains acquire knowledge, stories, secrets more than inherit it. And copyright is often secretive, like carving a tam-tam in specific design belongs to an individual with specific stature. These kinds of information are not within the authority of libraries but librarians need to understand this and the implications for copyright, exhibits, etc. Moreover, customs or “kastom” also play an indispensable role in the lives of ni-Vanuatu people.

- Standard 3. Organisational and professional values. As the standard suggests, cultural competence is a critical component of user-focused service. Librarians and library staff, ideally, must develop and support organisational and professional values dedicated to culturally competent service. While library infrastructure is not totally in place and models and frameworks are not fully established, the participant librarians have been working with a set of core values and principles demonstrating a multifaceted commitment to diversity-minded service. Cross-cultural knowledge and professional values are closely connected. Creating and providing services responsive to people of varying ethnic, racial, religious, or social backgrounds is important as explained above.
- Standard 4: Development of collections, programs, and services. It is safe to say that the elements of this standard are common to all libraries, as the importance of inclusivity in providing the information needs of every person in the community being served, particularly in developing the collection. Resources written in Bislama are available but very few written resources are in local dialects. Hence, the librarians must be fully aware that they need to provide culturally competent services to better meet the culturally unique needs of every client, wherever they are from. Particularly in programming, librarians in all types of libraries try to act inclusively. For example, a cultural night or slow food fest that are commonly conducted as part of Vanuatu library programs, big libraries try to have representation from each island. This is one example when inclusivity is adopted. Librarians must be competent to provide a similar platform or least be aware of the importance of sensitivity to exclusion.

- Standard 5. Service delivery. This is similar to Standard 4 with emphasis on services. Culturally competent librarians and library staff are aware of the dynamics that result from cultural differences and similarities between and among librarians, library staff and clientele. As such, they enhance their understanding on how they can put this into policies and procedures that help ensure access to services and resources that accommodate varying cultural perspectives. At present, there is still a need for ni-Vanuatu librarians to enhance their knowledge on developing policies.
- Standard 6. Language diversity. This is interpreted from ALA's point of view that linguistic restrictions and prohibitions, such as the English-only concept, have been used throughout American history as the dominant culture's method of dealing with perceived threats to linguistics and cultural homogeneity. In Vanuatu, the idea to avoid linguistic homogeneity has already been a discussion within the group. Three main languages are dominant in Vanuatu: English, French and Bislama. However, the role of language in the client's culture and way of seeking information has been realized by the researcher to be indispensable. Aside from the public service, the way materials are organised need to be revisited in order for the resources not to be too Westernised. It is hoped that one of the outcomes of this research can be an offshoot of deeper cultural competence is the recognition of a unique system of classification that speaks of the uniqueness of ni-Vanuatu and Pacific culture.
- Standard 8. Organisational dynamics. In the ALA context, organisational dynamics is described as both the components of an organisation such as its structure, culture, strategies, change, and other processes, policies, and practice, and also the organisation's pattern of activity, change, and growth as it responds to both internal and external forces. Organisational dynamics also shape and influence individual and group behaviour and attitudes. Librarians as an essential part of the organisation can contribute to shaping organisational culture. Some librarians in Vanuatu, especially those who are known to take part in significant initiatives, are already taking major roles. Thus, this standard needs to be transformed into competency that ni-Vanuatu librarians must understand.

- Standard 11. Research. Research that involves traditional knowledge includes: agricultural knowledge; scientific knowledge; technical knowledge; ecological knowledge; medicinal knowledge, including related medicines and remedies; biodiversity-related knowledge; “expressions of folklore” in the form of music, dance, song, handicrafts, designs, stories and artwork; elements of languages, such as names, geographical indications and symbols; and, movable cultural properties (ALA Traditional Cultural Expression Taskforce 2010). These are present in many collections in libraries in Vanuatu. The Reserve Bank of Vanuatu has agricultural knowledge, scientific knowledge and collections of handicrafts; VNL has local ecological, medicinal knowledge as well as expressions of folklore. Given the rich traditional information which is only known to a few librarians who have solid knowledge about Librarianship, this competence must be taught and shared in training and other continuing professional development programs.

Although the *ALA Diversity Standards* are specifically developed for academic libraries, the seven areas explained above, can be relevant in all types of libraries, and in particular, to the library setting in Vanuatu.

Findings

Respondents Profile

The survey and workshop included 14 librarians/ library staff (Table 2) from the Province of Shefa, mostly from the capital city of Port Vila. All types of libraries were represented – academic, school, public and special libraries. Due to distance and the cost of travel, librarians from other provinces were not able to participate.

Table 2

Participants of the workshop and respondents

Type of Library	N
Government/ Public	
○ National Library	2
○ Supreme Court	1
○ City Public Library	3
○ Academic	

○ University	1
○ College	2
School	4
Special	1
TOTAL	14

Moreover, Table 3 shows the position held by respondents. Note that only a small number are librarians, the rest are teachers in school libraries who also took the role in organising the library. One of the participants is a clerk, others who are designated as Library Assistants also perform administrative duties or records management tasks. The real Librarian and Library Assistant roles are mostly in bigger institutions such as the Reserve Bank of Vanuatu, National Library and the Judiciary Library.

Table 3

Position of respondents in the institution

Description	N
Librarian	3
Library Assistant	5
Teacher Librarian/ Library Assistant	5
Clerk	1
TOTAL	14

As Table 4 demonstrates none of the participants hold a formal LIS degree although two are taking a Diploma in Library Science from the University of the South Pacific which is delivered in online mode and two started but did not complete an LIS degree.

Table 4

Educational background of respondents

Educational Background	N
Taking Diploma in Library Science	2
With units in Library Science but discontinued	2
No Library Science Education	10
TOTAL	14

Cultural awareness of ni-Vanuatu Librarians and Library staff

The questionnaire asked respondents how they perceived their own cultural competence. Overall, as shown in Table 5, the participants have rated their cultural competencies with an average of 2.27 which means that the respondents are aware and they recognised the significance of the idea but have not integrated it into work. They recognise their need to have a deeper understanding of cultural competencies to be able to promote their Library programs and services show their willingness to learn more.

The respondents scored themselves highest in “Cross-cultural knowledge/ skills”; specifically, on their ability to work with a wide range of people who are culturally different and their capability to establish avenues for learning about the cultures of my colleagues, co-workers, and clientele (M=2.86). However, they rated themselves lowest in “Organisational and professional values.” They felt that they do not have adequate knowledge and skills in creating or providing education and training programs to promote cultural competency within the organisation (M=0.78).

Table 5

Cultural competence of ni-Vanuatu librarians and library staff as perceived by respondents

Cultural Competencies	Response (Mean)	Rank
Cultural awareness of self and others		
Awareness of personal assumptions, values, biases, and prejudices as it influences interactions clienteles, colleagues, and co-workers	2.50	6
The ability to recognise some behaviour in one context may not be understood or valued in another context.	2.43	7
A level of awareness that various social groups influence worldview, what privileges one is afforded, and the potential to be a target of discriminatory attitudes and behaviours.	2.36	8
Cross-cultural knowledge and skills		
The competence to work with a wide range of people who are culturally different and establish avenues for learning about the cultures of my colleagues, co-workers, and clientele.	2.86	1
The ability to facilitate open discussion of differences and respond to culturally biased cues.	2.78	2

An understanding to deal with stereotypes, and myths held by individuals and groups.	2.14	11
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Organisational and professional values

The knowledge and skills to deliver library services/ programs considering socio-cultural trends and diversity that affects library users.	2.28	9
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The ability to help create a workplace climate gives a feeling of openness to cultural diversity.	2.71	3
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Working knowledge to assist in creating or providing education and training programs to promote cultural competency within the organisation.	0.78	14
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Skills to help/ provide services responsive to library users from different ethnic, racial, religious, or social backgrounds.	2.64	4
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Development of collections, programs, and services

The ability to develop programs and services that are reflective of the cultural heritage, cultural backgrounds, and social identities of the library clientele.	2.14	11
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In-depth knowledge to identify the materials that will cater the needs of historically oppressed, underrepresented, and underserved groups in the selection of materials	1.86	13
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Service delivery

The ability to create, implement, and evaluate services that are relevant and appropriate to the targeted library customers.	2.5	6
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Knowledge and skills to develop teaching materials and resources that consider diversity of learning styles, language abilities, developmental skills, and cultural views.	2.21	10
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Competence to employ effective strategies for confronting librarian and library staff remarks, attitudes, and behaviours that may offend library users or their culture.	2.5	6
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Language diversity adaptability

The knowledge and skills to be able to conduct reference interviews considering clients' language diversity .	2.00	12
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In depth understanding of language diversity to address the needs of customers with speech impediments and communication problems.	2.57	5
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A deep understanding of library resources in print or electronic formats are to ensure availability to support the academic curricula reflecting all diversity issues.	2.21	10
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Cross-cultural leadership

Ability to promote sensitivity, openness, and a spirit of inquiry to other world views and cultural orientations.	2.43	7
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An attitude that encourages and seeks out leadership qualities among colleagues from a variety of cultural backgrounds and supports their development and retention in the profession.	2.36	8
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Over-All Mean	2.27	
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Cultural Awareness of Self and Others

Cultural competence requires that librarians and library staff examine their own cultural backgrounds and identities to increase awareness of personal assumptions, values, and biases. From the results, it can be inferred that the respondents have an average to high level of awareness of their own cultural identities and the distinct cultural background and values of their colleagues. The workshop started with an activity called “Two Truths and a Lie” where participants shared three things related to their unique cultural identities. While most of the participants are working in Port Vila, they usually come from other provinces or islands. The said activity confirmed that they are aware of the facts about cultural practices and identities of the group.

This awareness of personal values, beliefs, and biases are relevant in library instruction (Foster, 2018), influences collection development (Ramsey, 2013), cataloguing practices, and any program development as will be explained further in the succeeding paragraphs.

Cross-cultural knowledge and skills

Cultural competency enhances the practice of librarianship and helps people better address the social, linguistic, and academic needs of culturally diverse individuals (Mi & Zhang, 2017).

More than just on the awareness level, librarians and library staff need to take every opportunity to expand their cultural knowledge and expertise by expanding their understanding of the specific areas mentioned in *ALA Diversity Standards*: 1) the impact of culture on behaviour, attitudes, and values; 2) the help-seeking behaviours of diverse colleagues, co-workers, and constituent groups; 3) the role of language, speech patterns, and communication styles of colleagues, co-workers, and various constituent groups in the communities served; and 4) the resources (agencies, people, informal helping networks, and research) that can be used on behalf of diverse colleagues, co-workers, and constituent groups.

Self-awareness is an important part of the process of cultural identity formation towards achieving cultural competence. This high level of cross-cultural awareness of ni-Vanuatu librarians is very helpful in dealing with a wide range of people without stereotyping. Although it was revealed in the discussion that the participants do not encounter stereotyping; hence, they also scored lower, compared to other items under “Cross-cultural knowledge and skills,” in the item on dealing with stereotypes, and myths held by individuals and groups.

Organisational and professional values

Establishing organisational and professional values that reflect cultural competence is an essential step in putting those values into practice (ALA, 2012). The utilisation of cultural competencies by other service-related professions and disciplines is intended to improve the organisational climate and culture in a variety of settings, including delivering culturally relevant services for diverse communities (Rivera, 2013).

While library services and workplace climate scored high in three items (4,5,7), the respondents admit that they lack the skills for transferring, or they never had been exposed how to transfer, knowledge and awareness on cultural competence of the organisation (item 6) which means that the respondents need to know how to incorporate policy making, administration, and managerial practice to promote cultural values.

Development of collections, programs, and services

The development of collections, programs, and services, widespread changes in the linguistic and cultural fabric of library populations, coupled with the increasing sophistication of information technology, both require and make possible new approaches to the development of library collections and the provision of inclusive community-wide services. Moreover, commitment to cultural competence requires ensuring equitable access to collections and library services. Librarians and library staff need to ensure that no one feels excluded from service opportunities. Furthermore, they need to foster policies and procedures that help ensure access to collections that reflect varying cultural beliefs.

In the discussion on access to information as part of development of the collection (Item 11), it is interesting to note another perspective in the context of what cannot be accessed or shared. Taking into consideration that they have information in the form of artefacts and other cultural resources that may be for limited access, participants are fully aware of this restriction as this is widely practiced in this country. Their ability to integrate their cultural heritage and cultural background in identifying what materials they can put in their collection which is not offensive in their culture is something that has not been part of the questionnaire.

Another important result of the study is that the respondents and participants did not think much of the concept of cultural competence in the context of oppressed and underserved. A simple observation of social inclusion – ni-Vanuatu culture doesn't seem to consider regionalism where, for example, Tanna people are inferior

to people from Port Vila. While we see this distinction and exclusion in other countries, this doesn't seem apparent in the ni-Vanuatu culture. Taking the example, they gave about non-superiority when I inquired about the Small Nambas and Big Nambas, these are two tribal groups in the island of Malekula. They explained that, "*The former doesn't mean to be a minority nor the latter a majority.*" Thus, the concept of oppressed and underserved is not clear to them. The group, who were respondents of this study, do not see the underrepresented or historically oppressed. There is no serious tension between provinces and island groups which can be a result of inter-marriage. Other factors are not delved deeper into the discussion as this observation is for the purpose of proving the concept of oppressed.

Service delivery

There is a rating in service delivery for all the participants which is average (2). While the services are very basic – circulation and technical, they believe that they are aware of how to deal with clients. While they are not generally a confrontational culture, they expressed that they know the strategies to communicate with other library staff. One participant mentioned, "I used my facial expression like raising brows to agree. In the same way, I understand when the client comes closer, they feel comfortable." When a student keeps quiet, I need to ask more questions." Some said, "*they are working alone*"; hence, they have no first-hand experience.

Participants may not have policies and procedures to ensure access to services to accommodate varying cultural beliefs but their narratives show that they feel there is no issue of exclusion. One limitation in finding evidence in this competence in Vanuatu is the fact that programs are limited and resources are mainly dependent on donations.

Language diversity adaptability

Considering that there are 113 surviving indigenous languages spoken in Vanuatu (Tryons 1997, in 1998), promotion of certain languages may cause prejudices to other languages. Preservation of languages is deemed part of the diversity strategy of "development of collections, programs, and services that addresses the diverse cultural, linguistic and other special needs of the community the library serves." Language as a means of communication encompasses all languages spoken by librarians, library staff and constituents, and also includes the needs of the disabled (for example sign language) and those with speech and/or hearing difficulties.

The respondents did not score themselves highly in this category, compared with other items in “Language diversity adaptability” in reference interviews as this is not fully embedded or they are not aware that they are adaptable. Also they do not have much participation in curriculum development as their main problem is the resources.

Cross-cultural leadership

Items on cross-cultural leadership probed into the ability of ni-Vanuatu librarians to promote sensitivity, openness, and a spirit of inquiry to other world views and cultural orientations. It explores their attitudes that encourage and seek out leadership qualities among colleagues from a variety of cultural backgrounds and how they support their colleagues' development and retention in the profession. In these two items, the respondents scored themselves to have average competence (2.43, 2.36, respectively). While it is difficult to confirm how they foster diversity within their community and they have limited to zero opportunities to manifest these skills, they are aware of the importance of such skills.

Applying ALA Diversity Standards in ni-Vanuatu Context

Standards add value to practices as they provide an established reference regarding how cultural competence may be gauged. Standards when applied can have an impact on the work environment, the group dynamics and the quality of service delivered. The researcher has been immersed within the culture and daily tasks of major libraries in various islands of Vanuatu. Her active participation in the discussions and work of the VLA has also provided her deeper understanding of current status and work dynamics. This research has added to her practical knowledge of the similarities, differences and connections with the practices mentioned in the ALA Diversity Standards.

Table 6 shows the standards and the areas which this research shows may be applied to a ni-Vanuatu Librarians Cultural Competency Index.

Table 6

ALA Diversity Standards on Cultural Competency and ni-Vanuatu Librarians Cultural Competency Index

Diversity Standards for Cultural Competency	ni-Vanuatu Librarians Cultural Competency
Standard 1. Cultural awareness of self and others	Cultural awareness of self and others
Standard 2. Cross-cultural knowledge and skills	Cross-cultural knowledge and skills
Standard 3. Organisational and professional values	Organisational and professional values
Standard 4. Development of collections, programs, and services	Development of collections, programs, and services
Standard 5. Service delivery	Service delivery
Standard 6. Language diversity	Language diversity

Standard 7. Workforce diversity	<i>Not Applicable</i>
Standard 8. Organisational dynamics	<i>Not Applicable</i>
Standard 9. Cross-cultural leadership	Cross-cultural leadership
Standard 10. Professional education and continuous learning	Professional education and continuous learning
Standard 11. Research	<i>Not Applicable</i>

These standards were interpreted into competencies that librarians should to acquire where possible and tested through various processes; survey, documentary analysis, expert opinion and group discussions. It turned out that the ALA *Diversity Standards* which are intended to apply to libraries supporting academic programs at institutions of higher education are also applicable in this study as it is broad and generic; but the all areas were not totally adopted in the questionnaire. Upon review of the author and the content validators the items provided in the competency standards were reduced. The descriptions were also shortened to suit the level of understanding of the group.

Areas in the cultural competency standard about the importance of workforce diversity, librarians' role in organisational dynamics and research were removed as the ni-Vanuatu librarians do not work with these practices. Based on the initial assessment of the status of libraries and library services, they cannot apply the items on "importance of workforce diversity" being mostly one-person librarians. Moreover, due to language limitations and lack of observed practice in this area, "librarians' role in organisational dynamics" was eliminated. Finally, given the academic background of Librarians (most have not reached a certificate or diploma degree in any course) research in any context is not part of their work role.

The validation of the instrument by ni-Vanuatu librarians themselves is a strong point. While the researcher may have a different point of view as to the standards that were applicable in the initial mapping, the process of content validation also eliminated some areas that are deemed unnecessary or complicated in context for the understanding of ni-Vanuatu librarians. The result of the survey has also confirmed how the instrument is related to the *ALA Diversity Standards*. This instrument, which can be the basis of ni-Vanuatu Librarian cultural competence may not be as detailed as the *ALA Diversity Standards* but the value of having this index provides a picture of what a culturally competent ni-Vanuatu librarian should be.

Critical gaps in developing the cultural competency of ni-Vanuatu librarians and library staff

Developing a cohesive program to promote cultural competence is crucial in the development of libraries. While the librarians' knowledge and skills are central, other factors must also be considered. To be able to recommend appropriate strategies to address the multifaceted reasons that hinder the development of the cultural competencies of ni-Vanuatu Librarians, respondents were also asked for the reasons why cultural competence of librarians are not developed.

In addition to the survey, the respondents were asked the primary reasons they felt they could not develop their skills in this important aspect, the following reasons were given:

- **Lack of resources.** Although they wanted to focus on promoting culture, most of the respondents said that they do not have enough information on this topic. There are no librarians who are specifically trained on cultural diversity and competency who could introduce the value of integrating cultural programs in their library activities.
- **Lack of funding.** Lack of budget for training as well as for programs was also identified as the reason why they do not have training and why they have few activities that promote culture. Some of them do however, integrate their programs to bigger events such as the University week or College day to get funding.
- **There are other priorities.** Other librarians explained that they would rather focus on building the collection and attending to user needs as their priorities. However, some have realized that the way they deal with clients actually involves dealing with culture and are keen to learn more.
- **There is no need to develop cultural competencies.** One interesting set of responses is that they don't see the need to develop cultural competence. They consider their main duty is to provide resources. The workshop was an eye-opener for them that even their work with their colleagues within the library and other offices also involve cultural competence. Some of them noted that they even struggle to understand the technical work in the library since they have no library background.

When asked about the reasons why libraries do not develop cultural programs despite their knowledge on cultural programing, almost similar answers were given:

- **Lack of awareness.** One respondent expressed, “I did not know that cultural programming is part of library services.” Libraries in Vanuatu are still working in the usual mode - processing books and providing resources to users. There are no marketing and outreach programs. Another respondents’ concept of the library is even all about print materials: “we only have books”. When asked whether they consider “audio visual materials and artefacts as a form of information, they said, “no.” [some information needs to be introduced by the researcher as participants have limited ideas of library practices].
- **“I do not know how to do it”.** Another major problem is that the majority were never exposed to the idea of cultural competence. They are aware that in some activities especially with international visitors they showcase their foods and present some of their cultural activities like sandroing (Bislama for sand drawing). They are also aware of the origin of mat weaving patterns but they did not know how to organise exhibits around these activities. Aside from the bigger and well established libraries, exhibits are still slowly introduced as programs.
- **“I do not have funds.”** Aside from the Reserve Bank of Vanuatu, the USP and NLV, there are very limited resources about culture as most of the libraries depend on donations; hence, it is even more a challenge to ask for funding to develop programs.
- **Not a priority.** Several respondents confessed that their priority is the development of resources. They emphasised that, “we first need to build our collection.”

Conclusion

At present, the VLA President has submitted to the Law Reform Commission a proposal to have a Library Services Act. The Law Reform Commission is the national governing body in Vanuatu that determines the necessity to have a legal framework on certain concerns.

The *ALA Diversity Standards* can be a useful reference in developing competencies. This project will be very useful to see how the diversity component can be integrated in the standards and in the legislation. The adoption of the index based on *ALA Diversity Standards* proves that this standard is applicable in ni-Vanuatu context. A systematic methodology was adopted including validation from experts, first-hand observation of the researcher and the responses of the participants in this survey. Further research is important to expound this study and other case studies in Vanuatu are needed to develop the framework for cultural competence in this country.

In the long run, this project foresees the possibility that it can provide some baseline data about whether the *ALA Diversity Standards* could be applicable in the Pacific. It further deduces distinct competencies and standards for librarians in Vanuatu which could potentially be applied in other Pacific countries. Further studies are needed on diversity and structure of knowledge paradigms in Vanuatu and other Pacific nations, the influence that cultural practices and language assumes in the development and sharing of information and knowledge, and how the *ALA Diversity Standards* may be relevant or adapted for the context of Pacific island nations practice of librarianship.

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