Chapter 18
Information Technology Skills and Competencies for Academic Library Staff

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ABSTRACT

Academic libraries are now enduring a substantial shift, which is influenced by the advancement of information technology (IT) that has drastically changed the operating system of academic libraries. The changes have impacted significantly on the skills and competencies required of library staff. This chapter shed light on the background of modern academic libraries, the IT tools used by various academic libraries (for both remote clients and library staff) around the world to provide and access information resources and/or library and information services (LIS) to meet the information needs of remote clients. IT is becoming a tool in modern academic libraries designed to facilitate library operations to meet the information needs of academic library clients. In light of this, library staff is obliged to be equipped with IT skills and competencies to assist the institution to achieve its objectives by supporting teaching, learning, and research.

1. INTRODUCTION

IT skills and competencies for the academic library staff is gaining momentum from the industry of LIS as well as in the curricula of higher education (Van Wyk & Jacobs 2019:31). This is due to the emerging technological advancement that requires library staff to be more skilled and competent to be able to provide quality LIS to the library clients. In this technological era that is motivated by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4thIR), online LIS is ideal. Therefore, academic library staff must be equipped with IT skills and competencies that will empower them to render relevant and informed information resources using IT tools such as the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) and email. OPAC can be used as an online request portal for information resources and email to deliver requested information

resources. Email can be used to provide essential features to progress text, data, images, and sound that can be easily sent to remote clients (Ahmat & Hanipath 2018:53). The usage and application of IT tools advance the prevailing operations; and innovation as they entirely change what has been previously done in academic libraries (Adebayo, Ahmed & Adeniran 2018:2). Currently, academic libraries apply new approaches to meeting the information needs of library clients. These innovations have impacted on how LIS should be provided to library clients by academic library staff. This implies that the operations and innovation of academic libraries and the role of library staff influence the new attainable goals, as academic libraries and the library staff provide LIS that were deemed to be impossible to do before by changing and improving the academic library processes and products to accommodate library clients of this knowledge era (Adebayo, Ahmed & Adeniran 2018:2). Consequently, the emergence of IT in academic libraries is debated based on the innovation of services in academic libraries, the influence of IT on the library staff and library clients, and the contemporary settings and/or circumstances.

The dependence on IT to fulfil the information needs of library clients seems to be an excellent initiative by academic libraries (Dube 2016); however, there are challenges encountered by both remote clients and library staff members. It is, therefore, fundamental for the library staff members to be skilled and competent to utilise IT tools to process and/or handle online requests for information resources to meet the information needs of remote clients successfully. Remote clients are also expected to have the necessary skills to interact with the library portal and to request information resources online in an acceptable format. To ascertain quality service from the library staff members, training should be provided as technology is in a state of perpetual flux.

2. OBJECTIVE

This article embarks on an in-debt review of the extant literature on the subject matter of Information Technology skills and competencies for academic library staff.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many problems have been identified in the acceptance and usage of IT resources in an academic library which includes a lack of sufficient skills among staff and patrons, low-level information literacy ability among library users. South Africa is a country that combines both the attribute of First- and Third-World nations. The digital divide which is an indication of unequal dissemination in the access, utilisation, and impact of ICT between considerable population often divided along the racial line, which can also be characterised based on the social and geopolitical spread (Durodolu & Ocholla 2017). The impact of access to information resources alongside this social divide, with an advantaged minority benefiting in having unparalleled access to twenty-first-century equipment, with well-equipped libraries. In distinction to the more significant percentage of the population in rural communities and settlements which are regularly confronting challenges in accessing ICT equipment because of comparatively low-quality infrastructure. Therefore, the challenges posed by the digital divide minimise the possibility of the most citizen to access knowledge through the tools and techniques of ICT, notably among the historically disadvantaged group which still exist today.

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