

# Competency Need Assessment for Academic Teaching Librarians in Higher Learning Institutions

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## ABSTRACT

Academic librarian works in academic library and perform task of developing information literacy and teaches in classes to educate higher learning institution's stakeholder. The article is to assess the need of competency index for teaching librarian especially in academic libraries. This need assessment is a descriptive and exploratory research, was conducted to Chief Librarians and teaching librarians who serves public academic libraries. The objective of this analysis is to identify whether teaching librarian needs specific competencies to validate their practice of pedagogy in academic libraries. A preliminary study through descriptive research which involved sample size of 20 prominent library administrators and 20 teaching librarians from public universities in higher education. A set of 7-10 questions was sent through email to all public academic library's Chief Librarians and teaching librarian. 95% of them responded to the questionnaire. The result shows that, 85% of the Chief Librarians agrees that teaching librarian need specific range of competence index so they can successfully perform the pedagogy practice.

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## INTRODUCTION

People behind the academic library operation are professional information specialists or librarians supported by non-professional staff to help universities achieve goals and objectives. Information professionals in particular librarians, have been in debate and access where they play vital roles in helping their users to pick out the right information from various sources as needed (Lee et al., 2020) as an important entity in higher education, the academic library's establishment is to support achieving the institution's goals and objectives. Due to the change in technology, staff training, variety of resources and users' needs, the academic library has shifted to new perspectives of roles and functions such as supporting teaching and learning which contrasts with years ago (Otiye et al., 2021). McGuinness (2021), stated that the academic library paradigm has significantly changed since the early 21<sup>st</sup> century when technology, academic communication and publication, method of lecture delivery and even students' acceptance of the style of learning involved in the process of shifting. This transition in higher education setting will also impact academic library and librarian's roles and responsibilities. In most articles, the role of an academic

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library is always associated with supporting teaching, learning and research which indicates how big it is responsible to the higher education community. In line with that, academic librarians are required to give lectures and hands-on instruction to help students and faculty develop skills in information literacy which involves research approaches, critical thinking and how understanding information from various academic areas (Peacock, 2022). Same context in Malaysian academic libraries, an academic librarian who works in the information literacy section is responsible for developing and instructional information literacy for undergraduates and postgraduates or even outside of the community to support preserving the standard of teaching, learning and research in achieving institution's vision and mission (Mohd Hanafi & Ismail, 2020). These elements of information literacy, teaching and educating users surrounding academic librarians are called instruction librarians or teaching librarians as defined by Association of College and & Research Libraries (2017), teaching librarian is a librarian who is responsible for teaching and teaching in diverse settings as part of the professional description. While instruction librarian is one of them and refers to librarians who work with classes in tertiary education to develop information literacy (Rath, 2022). These two definitions refer to the same function academic librarian which is to teach information literacy. However, quite a lot of articles, research or formal institutions and librarian associations use teaching librarian as a term for referring librarians who teach in classes.

## **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The highlight of this issue is whether teaching librarians qualify to deliver instructional information literacy in higher education as it has been 30 years of criticism saying academic librarians lack pedagogical knowledge (Saib et al., 2022) and need to develop themselves as instructor or teacher since the teaching roles have been in demand or increase (Houtman, 2021).

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this needs assessment article is to identify the need to have specific competency among teaching librarians who deliver instructional information literacy in academic libraries in higher education.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Academic Librarian**

Over the years, the librarian's job description has evolved tremendously to suit the industry needs especially in an academic environment and the use of technology is crucial. Regularly, a person who works in a library with qualification of library science degree is called a librarian, but libraries are now free to use any designation that refers to librarian as the profession itself has been transformed to align with current needs. As mentioned by (Stellrecht et al., 2022), a librarian is not always necessarily called a librarian, whereas a librarian has been referred to as an information professional who indicates an individual has the same education, expertise, or job description as a librarian. Working in an academic environment, collaboration with faculty will not be avoided as it is part of library functions. Information professionals in particular librarians, have their roles have been debated and accessed where they play vital roles to help their users to pick out the right information from various sources as needed (Lee et al., 2020).

### **Teaching Librarians**

As an academic librarian, teaching is part of the main task in their daily work (Houtman, 2021) and a research Ghana supported roles and responsibilities of an academic librarian fall into 3 main categories and there are research support, teaching and administrative tasks (Donkor et al., 2024). The term can be named as teaching librarian, instruction librarian, academic librarian or even reference librarian. Instruction librarians are one of them which refers to librarians who work with classes at tertiary education to develop

information literacy (Rath, 2022). Instruction librarian is a 'one shot' work with students and limited interaction in class but teaching librarian is a main point to aid the process of critical literacy skills through instructional sessions and community outreach events (Bynoe & Katz, 2018).

### **Instructional Information Literacy Higher Education**

Information literacy was first used in 1974 by Zurkowski, who suggested that instructively skilful individuals realize how to use data resources in their work (Badke, 2010; Moin Ud Din et al., 2022). Library instruction has been published by the *Journal of Reference Services Review* since 1973 by Rader (1974), and before 1996 it was known as *Library Orientation and Instruction* before the name change to *Library Instruction and Information Literacy* to mark changes in the profession to a larger view (Caffrey et al., 2022). The idea of reference work is wider than answering straight-forward or closed-ended reference questions especially when the internet was booming has been started throughout 1900 by researchers and instruction was not 'confined' in the classroom alone (Renirie, 2020). Back in 2001 and 2002, the beginning of teachable memories was at the reference desk when replying to student inquiries for information as a chance to teach them to conduct research (Beck & Turner, 2001; Elmborg, 2002; Renirie, 2020). Part of the essential duty of an academic librarian duty is to conduct instructional information literacy classes which have evolved from simply a guided tour of library services and facilities to more academically oriented using information ecosystem to display the wider value to the academic setting (Peacock, 2022).

### **Competency**

Competencies can be described as having knowledge, skills or abilities that specify prerequisites to execute a position purpose and to have a set of standards to achieve the goals of that specific task (Peacock, 2022). When performing tasks become multi-perspective employers need employees to have a set of diverse skills and competencies among information professionals (Awan & Ameen, 2020). In line with the demands made by employers, it is important to develop competency for information professionals in the definition of curriculum structures, to develop appropriate training courses, evaluation of education programs and human resource plans (Naveed et al., 2022). Current state where we are on the fast-moving world, library professional is also required to keep up their competencies to align with the new trends (Abbas & Ameen, 2022) in which librarians need to update and enhance themselves in terms of developing new knowledge, being experts on faculty subject areas or even skills in information searching which is beneficial to faculty staff and students (Yousuf Ali & Richardson, 2018).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This is quantitative method research which involves prominent library administrators or Chief Librarians in public academic libraries in Malaysia and teaching librarians. Methods in conducting this needs assessment were divided into two phases. Both phases of data collection were through questionnaires using Microsoft Forms and Excel. The first phase was to identify the current situation in the field surrounding teaching librarian practices. An email with an Excel document consisting of 7 questions was sent to all teaching librarians representing each of the public universities. The second phase involved prominent library administrators or Chief Librarians from public universities with a set of 10 questions to identify the problem and objectives of this research. The questionnaire was distributed through email to all chief librarians in October – December 2023.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

The research population are the head of department of information literacy (reference department) and Chief Librarians in academic libraries from 20 public universities in Malaysia under the Ministry of Higher Education, which the population for this research is 40. As this is small-scale research and a purposive

sampling which respondents selected based on the criteria that suit to this research objective where it focuses on specific issue, population, knowledge and experiences relevant to this study (Ahmed, 2024). It is set that 37 respondents should be sufficient for this data collection based on SurveyMonkey sampling size calculator and although this can consider as small sampling but even with smaller sampling size of 8 – 10 respondents it still can be significant which defy the believe of at least 30 respondents to see the user testing or usability metrics (Tullis & Albert, 2013). As supported in article written by Indrayan & Mishra (2021), small sample like having less than 20 respondents can provide more believable and accurate result. This signifies the minimum recommended size meet the purpose for this research and the response rate for both phases is 38 respondents responded to the survey which is more than small sampling size as mentioned.

## STUDY FINDINGS

### Teaching Librarian

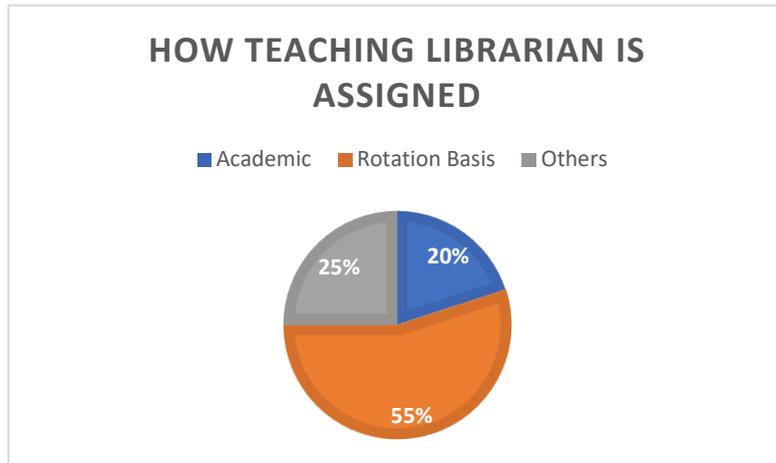
To see what is surrounding the teaching librarian's environment, a simple data collection was held in December 2022, where an email was sent out to reach all teaching librarians through the public university libraries system. A total of 161 teaching librarians serve in 20 academic libraries in public universities and USM has the highest number of teaching librarians with 41 teaching librarians or 25.46% of the overall teaching librarians. This number of teaching librarians is followed by UTM with 24 teaching librarians or 14.9%. The lowest number of teaching librarians among all public universities are from UPSI and UPNM which represent 1 teaching librarian each university. Details results are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Number of Teaching Librarians in 20 Public University Academic Libraries

Universities	Numbers of Teaching Librarian	Level of Education			Years of Experience
		BSc	MSc	PhD	
USM	41	13	26	2	7
UM	10	2	6	2	8
UKM	3	-	2	1	10
UPM	9	4	5	-	4
UTM	24	14	9	1	5
UiTM	6	4	2	-	3
UIAM	10	-	9	1	3
UMS	5	4	1		3
UNIMAS	2	1	1		-
UUM	4	2	2	-	5
UPSI	1	-	1	-	3
UTHM	10	6	4	-	5
UTeM	3	1	2	-	1
UNIMAP	2	2	-	-	8
UNISZA	3	1	2	-	5
UMT	6	4	2	-	5
UMP	2	1	1	-	5
USIM	13	7	6	-	5
UMK	6	4	2	-	5
UPNM	1	-	1	-	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>-</b>

(Dzulkpli et al., 2024)

More than half of the total number of teaching librarians or 52.17% hold a master's degree and this statistic is followed by a bachelor's degree with 70 teaching librarians or 43.47%. Teaching librarians with a Doctorate is the smallest population, with 7 teaching librarians or 4.34%. This statistic of teaching librarians with PhD contributed by USM and UM (2 teaching librarians each) and UTM, UKM and UIAM (1 teaching librarian each). Almost half of the respondents have at least 5 years of experience in practising teaching librarian (this data was collected in 2022) with 45% from overall numbers of 9 universities. The longest serving as a teaching librarian is 10 years at UKM and 8 years at UNIMAP.

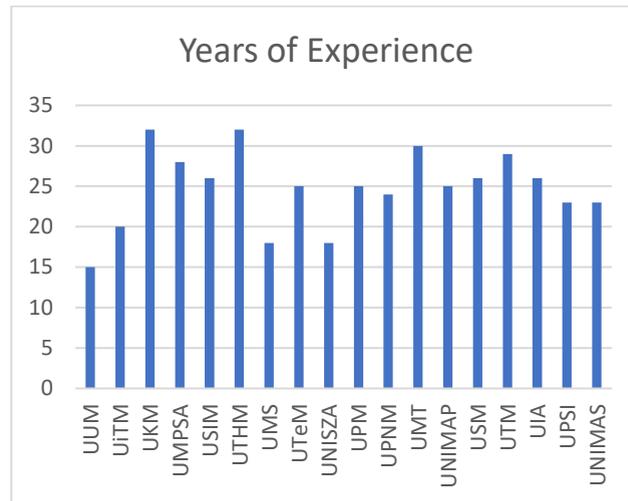


**Figure 1.** Statistic of Selecting Teaching Librarians

Figure 1 shows the percentage of statistics in selecting teaching librarians in 20 academic libraries in public universities. The highest percentage with more than half of the overall numbers with 55% or 11 libraries is based on rotation basis. 25% or 5 libraries are varied in determining in selecting teaching librarians such as top management decision, organization structure, based on module offered and branch and involvement of all librarians in that institution. Selecting teaching librarians based on academics represents 20% of 4 institutions.

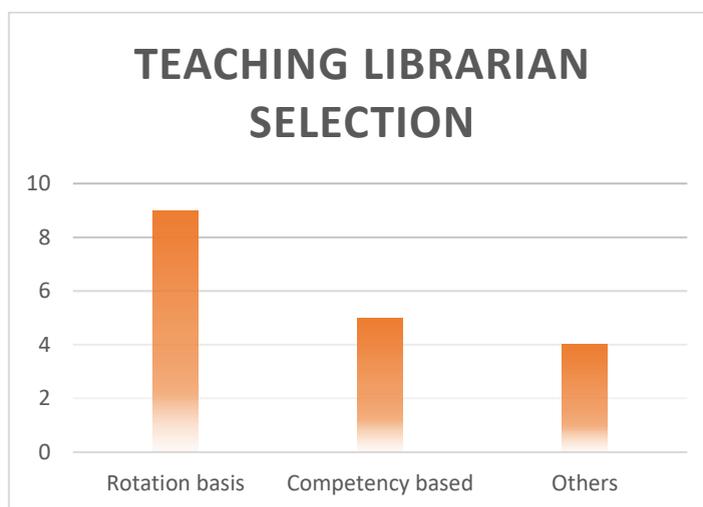
### Prominent Library Administrators

The perspective of a prominent library administrator or Chief Librarian on competency for teaching librarian were the next phase of sampling for this need assessment research. Most Chief Librarians have been in service ranging from 15 to 32 years in academic libraries and experienced all departments within the library's services or scope. This includes references, cataloguing, service, IT or even research and as a teaching librarian. Based on data gathered from the data collection and Figure 2, the longest service is 32 years of experience, and the minimum number of experiences is 15 years in services.



**Figure 2.** Prominent Library Administrator Years of Experience

As for 2<sup>nd</sup> question of whether the Chief Librarian is well versed in what teaching librarians do, almost all chief librarians or 85% of respondents answered they are aware and fully well versed in what teaching librarians are supposed to do except 1 respondent. The next question is similar to the teaching librarian question where they were asked how teaching librarians were assigned in their institution as the result is shown in figure 3. 45% of 9 institutions select or appointed their teaching librarian based on rotation basis while only 25% or 5 institutions assigned teaching librarian on competency-based. 4 institutions or 20% of respondents assigned their teaching librarian because of specific department, experience and technical skill, job placement and interest.



**Figure 3.** Teaching Librarian Selection

65% of the respondents were aware that during academic years faculty did not provide these librarians to become an educator and 25% of the respondents were not aware that librarians have never been taught a pedagogy skill during academic years. The next question is about training before a librarian is assigned as a teaching librarian and where the training is related to being a teaching librarian, both questions share the

same result more than half of the respondents or 60% responded that a librarian is given training before they been assigned to be a teaching librarian. 30% or 6 of the respondents answered there was no training given to librarians before they were assigned as teaching librarians.

90% or 18 respondents agreed that competency is a specific range of knowledge, skills and abilities that qualify teaching librarians to carry out particular responsibilities and form the very foundation of a profession. This question then specified further to teaching librarians whether they should have specific competency so that they can perform successfully the tasks or job, 85% of 17 respondents responded that teaching librarians should have a specific competence index for them to perform the task as teaching librarian, while only 1 respondent believed that teaching librarian need not have specific competence index to successfully perform the tasks.

## **DISCUSSION**

The respondents of this competency need assessment were chosen based on a specific need for this research which is teaching librarians and to get support for the development of specific competency, this research requires the perspectives of prominent library administrators or Chief Librarian. Teaching librarians in Malaysia's academic libraries in public universities where they were assigned based on a rotation basis without proper or formal pedagogy training during academic years. In research done by Wilson et al. (2024), for subject librarians having a master's degree in an assigned subject is important and a PhD is desired despite many feeling that just having a bachelor's degree should be sufficient but with wide-ranging discipline training.

The main problem in this research is to highlight how a teaching librarian is being assigned to perform as a teaching librarian. When assigning academic librarians to perform instructional activities, management should consider competency and qualified with knowledge and often engage in deference behaviour (McCartin & Wright-Mair, 2022). If you do not love what you are doing or being assigned to perform teaching will make the process difficult, teaching librarians should have a passion for educating students or academics and to keep learning about the information literacy subject assigned and that professional development helps to keep fresh and able to perform the tasks in their current position this includes ongoing training and development which provided by the organization (Wilson et al., 2024).

As a gatekeeper to information or first defenders to ethically use information such as using proper citations and giving original author acknowledgement, teaching librarians are responsible for maintaining the integrity of academic writing and play an important role in combating student plagiarism by vigorously giving awareness and educating users about plagiarism (Giannakouli et al., 2023) where it can be performed in information literacy classes. Since the information landscape has been changing, it challenges the teaching librarians to battle the misinformation, refers to inaccurate information with no mischievous intention while disinformation refers the intention to malicious in dissemination of information, by knowing this two misconduct, it will help to safeguard information quality (Adewojo et al., 2024).

This is why it's crucial to develop competency for information professionals in terms of need-based curricula design, to create proper training programs, evaluate current educational programs and a well human resource plan so that they will be sufficient to prepare them for specific work (Naveed et al., 2022). This show that as an academic librarian, teaching is part of the nature and job in academic libraries. This study is important to gain insight view of the current situation of practising teaching librarians in academic libraries where there were no statistical data numbers of teaching librarians in higher education system and managed to be gathered almost prominent library administrators of their view on competence index for teaching librarian. This study implements a very fundamental data collection or descriptive analysis were minimum information or data.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, a teaching librarian is a person who is responsible for educating the higher education community to use ethical information in academic writing. Follow-up research should be done to define and describe the real deal in practising teaching librarians in higher education. Since having competency for certain professions or tasks which is important is a way to measure and place someone in that position, it needs to be done. In future, a depth study could be conducted with better insight into instruments incorporating results or findings of feedback from information literacy sessions done from each academic library within this research population. This would carry the quality of information literacy sessions and a study could be done to measure the instruction sessions given by the teaching librarian and recommendations for improvement could be suggested through academic articles suggestion.

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