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PAGES: 217-225

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/62592>

IMPLEMENTATION IN LIS PROGRAMS IN SULSIT OF THE FINDINGS FROM INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ABOUT REFERENCE SERVICE COMPETENCIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper is divided into two parts focused on research and implementation activities. The first part presents the results of the research, conducted in Bulgaria, as a part of the multi-nation research project on the topic "Core Skills, Competencies and Qualifications for Today's Reference Librarians". The second part focused on the impact of the study summaries on the recent changes in the curriculum and syllabus of the specialty "Library and Information Management" in the State University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Sofia, Bulgaria. And also it is reflection in the new projects of Faculty of Library Studies and Cultural Heritage and Library Management Department.

The paper is designed in the frame of scientific activities of the project named "A Model for Creating of an Informational Environment for Stimulating Scientific Research in the Sphere of Cultural Heritage", Contract № DTK 02/41, 17.12.2009; Annex № 1/DTK 02/41, 15.12.2011, financed by NSF of MEYS.

Keywords: Library and Information Science Education, Reference Librarians, Library Associations, State University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, multi-national research project.

**International research project
"Core Skills, Competencies and Qualifications for Today's Reference Librarians"**

The international research project on the topic "Core Skills, Competencies and Qualifications for Today's Reference Librarians" was design and headed by Laura Saunders, Mary Jordan (USA) and Serap Kurbanoglu (Turkey). The main aim of this research project and the following session, happened in the 4th Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries International Conference, was to encourage a discussion on core competencies needed by today's academic librarians in order for them to perform daily reference tasks successfully and provide reference services adequately in their constantly changing work environment which is impacted mainly by advances in technology, changes in user needs and expectations, and the rapid transition to e-services (QQML 2012). This multi-nation research project had the main aim to determine skills and qualifications most needed by academic reference librarians today and in near future. Results from twelve nation-wide surveys, namely from following countries: Australia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Estonia, France, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Romania, Turkey and USA, were accumulated and evaluated. Issues such as the most important competencies for academic reference librarians, competencies needed to be more developed in new LIS graduates, and its implications for LIS education were discussed. Comparative study, findings and conclusions were made. As a result of this fruitful international collaboration was published research paper in *LIBRI: International journal of libraries and information services*. (Saunders 2013)

Methodology of the Survey in Bulgarian University Libraries

In Bulgaria this survey was based on two approaches – collaboration with members of Association of University Libraries and Bulgarian Library and Information Association (BLIA) and direct connection with university libraries at public funded and private higher institutions in Bulgaria. We used the contact list of AUL to reach more than 20 university libraries. (Association 2011) A list of 25 university libraries members of BLIA was accessed from the organizational web site. (Bulgarian 2011)

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According to the list of accredited higher educational institutions, published in the web site of the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency in Bulgaria has 46 universities and colleges with libraries as a structural unit. (National 2011) There are 37 publicly funded (80,43%) and 9 private universities and colleges (19,57 %). Library web sites of these universities were searched to find out names and e-mail addresses of the library directors and reference librarians.

The invitation for survey participation was spread twice – on 28-29 October 2011 and on 15-16 November 2011. Each librarian received an e-mail message explaining the purpose of the study, the international collaboration and link to a web-based survey. The survey was anonymous, for the purpose of tracking response rates participants were asked to indicate the name of their institutions, however only 28 (66.7%) of the participants replied this question. These participants are from 17 different universities – 15 publicly funded and 2 private high schools. On 17 December 2011, two months after the initial invitation, the survey was closed. During this period 42 librarians answered the survey.

The public, social, economic and technological changes in Bulgaria after 1990 have a vital effect on the functioning, the social role and the whole state of the system of university libraries. These changes had reflected variously in the work of the individual libraries and did not allow their synchronized development. The entering of the new information and communication technologies also exerts great influence on their activity. Nowadays the university libraries in Bulgaria are in a different stage of automation of the library-information processes, in a various stage of technological provision, of completeness and richness of the library funds and resources, in the qualification of the library staff (especially reference librarians) etc. The university libraries with good traditions and professional level of development are members of Association of University Libraries (AUL) and Bulgarian Library and Information Association (BLIA) and they are fairly evenly represented in the survey. (Yankova 2009; Yankova, Iv., Denchev, St. & Todorova, T. (2012)

Because not all 42 respondents completed the whole survey, total number of respondents varies from one question to the other. Close-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequency counts and percentages, while open-ended questions were coded using a content analysis.

Characteristics of respondents

Table 1. Gender of respondents

	%	n
Female	100	41
Male	0	0
Total	100	41

(1 respondent skipped this question)

Table 2. Age range of respondents

	%	n
under 25 years	7.1	3
25 – 30 years	11.9	5
31 – 40 years	31.0	13
41 – 50 years	26.2	11
51 – 60 years	23.8	10
61 – 70 years	0.0	0
71 and over	0.0	0
Total	100	42

Degrees respondents hold: PhD in Library and Information Science (LIS) – 1 (2.6%); MA in LIS – 15 (38.5%); BA in LIS – 12 (30.8%); Specialist LIS – 4 (10.2%); Certificate courses – 7 (17.9%). 3 respondents skipped this question.

Experience of respondents: Less than one year – 2 (4.8%); 1 – 3 years – 4 (9.5%); 4 – 7 years – 11 (26.2%); 8 – 15 years – 10 (23.8%); 16 – 20 years – 2 (4.8%); 21 – 25 years – 5 (11.9%); 26-30 years – 5 (11.9%); More than 30 years – 3 (7.1%). All respondents work on full time in libraries.

Status of the respondents' universities: Only 28 (66.7%) from 42 of the participants replied this question. These participants are from 17 different universities – 15 publicly funded (26 respondents – 92.9 %) and 2 private high schools (2 respondents – 7.1 %).

Status of the respondents: Reference librarian – 23 (58.9%); Head of Reference Section – 4 (10.3%); Head of Library – 1 (2.6%); Librarian – 11 (28.2%). 3 respondents skipped this question.

Results from a Survey in Bulgarian University Libraries

Table 3. Things respondents do in a typical week

	%	n
Answering reference questions	87.5	28
Catalog search	78.1	25
Online reference services	71.8	23
Database search	71.8	23
Giving information about library (collection, services, etc.)	65.6	21
Cataloging	40.6	13
Reference interview	37.5	12
Library orientation	34.4	11
User education	34.4	11
Managing periodicals collection	28.1	9
Promotion and marketing	28.1	9
Collection development and management	25.0	8
Circulation	25.0	8
Keeping statistics	25.0	8
Acquisition	21.8	7
Preparing user guides	21.8	7
ILL	18.7	6
Disseminating library news	18.7	6
Preparing annual performance reports	15.6	5
Reading shelves	15.6	5
Current awareness services	12.5	4
Preparing citation reports	12.5	4
Managing reserve collection	12.5	4
Preparing library e-bulletin	9.3	3
Managing and updating library web site	9.3	3
Managing library's social network sites	3.1	1

32 respondents answered this question and 10 respondents skipped it.

Table 4: Of these things, the three to five most frequent things they do

	%	n
Answering reference questions	71.8	23
Catalog search	34.4	11
Database search	31.2	10
Online reference services	21.9	7
Giving information about library (collection, services, etc.)	18.7	6
User education	15.6	5
ILL	12.5	4
Reading shelves	12.5	4
Managing periodicals collection	12.5	4
Current awareness services	9.38	3
Library orientation	9.38	2
Collection development and management	9.38	2
Preparing citation reports	9.38	2

Preparing user guides	9.38	2
Keeping statistics	9.38	2
Disseminating library news	9.38	2
Reference interview	3.13	1
Promotion and marketing	3.13	1
Preparing annual performance reports	3.13	1

32 respondents answered this question and 10 respondents skipped it.

Table 5. General Qualifications, Competencies and Skills

	%	N
Second Master's degree	3.1	1
Budgeting	28.1	9
Foreign language	93.8	30
Marketing	46.9	15
Supervisory experience	50.0	16
Research/publishing	21.9	7
Knowledge of cataloguing	50.0	16
Assessment and evaluation	56.3	18
Customer service	87.5	28
Familiarity with paper reference sources	87.5	28
Familiarity with online reference sources	90.6	29
Search skills	93.8	30
Negotiating, for instance with vendors	86.6	26
Current events awareness	87.5	28
Traditional reference interviews	50.0	16

32 respondents answered this question and 10 respondents skipped it.

Foreign language is mainly English and Russian.

Table 6. Technology Skills

	%	n
Online searching	90.6	29
Programming	12.5	4
Web design	34.4	11
Web maintenance	56.3	18
Social media (blogging, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace)	68.8	22
Hardware troubleshooting	12.5	4
Software troubleshooting	53.1	17
Chat/IM	50.0	16

32 respondents answered this question and 10 respondents skipped it.

Table 7. Personal/Interpersonal Characteristics and Skills

	%	n
Verbal communication	87.5	28
Written communication	75.0	24
Listening	84.4	27
Working in teams	81.3	26
Approachability	75.0	24
Comfort with instruction / teaching	71.9	23
Self-motivated	78.1	25
Stress management	40.6	13
Building relationships with co-workers	68.8	22
Building relationships with other professional colleagues	71.9	23
Conflict management	43.8	14

Adaptability / flexibility	75.0	24
Sense of humour	6.2	2
Organizational awareness	50.0	16

32 respondents answered this question and 10 respondents skipped it.

1 respondents answered that all mentioned Personal/Interpersonal Skills are very important.

Table 8. General Qualifications, Competencies and Skills for the Next Decade

	%	N
Second Master's degree	10.0	3
Budgeting	23.3	7
Foreign language	80.0	24
Marketing	40.0	12
Supervisory experience	46.7	14
Research/publishing	26.7	8
Knowledge of cataloguing	33.3	10
Assessment and evaluation	53.3	16
Customer service	73.3	22
Familiarity with paper reference sources	66.7	20
Familiarity with online reference sources	83.3	25
Search skills	83.3	25
Negotiating, for instance with vendors	80.0	24
Current events awareness	73.3	22
Traditional reference interviews	43.3	13

30 respondents answered this question and 12 respondents skipped it.

Of General Skills, which two or three are the most important for the Next Decade

	%	n
Search skills	56.6	17
Foreign language	50.0	15
Familiarity with online reference sources	46.7	14
Familiarity with paper reference sources	23.3	7
Current events awareness	23.3	7
Customer service	20.0	6
Marketing	20.0	6
Negotiating, for instance with vendors	20.0	6
Supervisory experience	13.3	4
Traditional reference interviews	6.7	2
Assessment and evaluation	6.7	2
Budgeting	6.7	2
Knowledge of cataloguing	3.3	1
Research/publishing	0	0
Second Master's degree	0	0

30 respondents answered this question and 12 respondents skipped it

Table 9. Of Technology Skills, which two or three are the most important for the Next Decade

	%	n
Online searching	100.0	30
Social media (blogging, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace)	30.0	9
Web design	23.3	7
Web maintenance	16.6	5
Software troubleshooting	16.6	5

Chat/IM	16.6	5
Programming	13.3	4
Hardware troubleshooting	0	0

30 respondents answered this question and 12 respondents skipped it.

Table 10. Of Personal/Interpersonal Skills, which two or three are the most important for the Next Decade

	%	n
Verbal communication	53.3	16
Working in teams	40.0	12
Adaptability / flexibility	36.7	11
Comfort with instruction / teaching	33.3	10
Written communication	16.7	5
Listening	16.7	5
Building relationships with co-workers	16.7	5
Building relationships with other professional colleagues	16.7	5
Approachability	10.0	3
Self-motivated	6.7	2
Conflict management	6.7	2
Sense of humour	6.7	2
Organizational awareness	6.7	2
Stress management	3.3	1

30 respondents answered this question and 12 respondents skipped it.

2 respondents answered that all mentioned Personal/Interpersonal Skills are very important.

What skills and knowledge requirements have changed for Reference librarians over the last five to ten years? That is, what do you do differently now than in the past?

Differences between now and past

	%	n
Automated library systems versus manual systems	53.3	16
Familiarity with online reference sources versus familiarity with print sources	40.0	12
Online services versus face to face services	20.0	6
E-collection development versus print collection development	20.0	6
Customized services versus generic services	6.7	2
Use of mobile technologies	3.3	1

(30 respondents answered this question and 12 respondents skipped it.)

Skills and knowledge required more today:

- Search skills
- Technical skills
- E-resources knowledge
- Web site design
- Language skills
- Use of social media
- Presentation and teaching skills
- Statistics (evaluating the use of e-sources, cost analysis, etc.)
- Communication skills
- Hardware and software knowledge and usage skills

What skills or knowledge have you noticed lacking in your new hires?

	%	N
Language skills	26.7	8
Knowledge of e-sources (databases)	26.7	8
Verbal communication skills	20.0	6
Search skills	16.7	5
Knowledge of print sources	16.7	5
Technology skills	10.0	3
Self-motivation	10.0	3
Written communication skills	6.7	2
Current developments awareness (professional)	6.7	2
Patience	6.7	2
Listening	3.3	1
Organizational awareness	3.3	1
Stress management	3.3	1
Working in teams	3.3	1
Marketing	3.3	1
Pedagogic knowledge and skills	3.3	1
Self-learning	3.3	1
Responsibility	3.3	1
Traditional reference interviews	3.3	1
Adaptability	3.3	1

(30 respondents answered this question and 12 respondents skipped it.)

Anything else you would like to add about Reference librarian work.

1 respondent concluded that reference librarians done high quality work for very low payment. 10 respondents added comments about the importance of:

- New information and communication technologies in reference librarian work
- Information literacy
- Lifelong learning programmes for librarians
- Intercultural dialogue
- Ethic issues
- Interlibrary collaboration
- e-resource sharing; consortiums
- Remote access
- Marketing and PR

Implementation in LIS programs in SULSIT of the findings from the international research

A study of research skills and qualifications most needed by academic reference librarians today and in near future has not been done until now in Bulgaria. The invitation to join in this international study was received into an important stage in the development of the State University in Library Studies and Information Technologies as it is in a period of program and institutional accreditation.

The ongoing process of updating the curriculum and methodology of teaching strengthens the cooperation between academic education, library associations and the practice.

Depth analysis of the findings from international research about Reference Service Competencies allowed us to reach conclusions which helped to update the curricula and programs, enriched teaching methods and improved the quality of education.

We are working on two groups of activities.

First, some actualizations in curricula of Bachelor Programme 'Library and Information Management' were implemented. Two separate disciplines 'Library and Information Service' and 'Information Literacy – programs and models' were established.

Second, we start to realize new scientific and applied projects as follows:

- Project "Information Literacy - training models and best practices" (May 2012-December 2012). We accomplished successfully: Survey of Information Literacy training models and best practices; Scientific Seminar with international participation with keynote speaker Serap Kurbanoglu (Turkey); publishing and promotion of 'Integrating the information literacy logo: A marketing manual' by Jesús Lau y Jesús Cortés, translated in Bulgarian; actualizations in academic programs and learning content; publishing of Proceeding from scientific seminar. The project, headed by Dr. Tania Todorova, was successfully evaluated by Scientific Fund of the State University of Library Studies and Information Technology in Sofia.

- Research project "Analysis of the common practices in the use of products of Intellectual Property in University Information Environment", (DMU 03/3), headed by Dr. Tereza Trencheva. The project aims to explore the mind and culture of behavior among young people in Bulgaria, particularly students, to protect intellectual property on the Internet. This survey has been conducted among the students in nine Bulgarian universities accredited in the educational and professional field "Public Communication and Information Science".

- Project "New Policies for Stimulating the Reading. Research of the Bookcrossing Practices in Bulgaria", (DMU 03/49), headed by Dr. Lubomira Parijkova. The project aims to offer options for policy development of reading and its recovery as a resource for spiritual revival of the Bulgarian society. It is focused on exploring a contemporary phenomenon which expresses the love for books in Bulgaria – "bookcrossing", sites and blogs about books, book-cafes, etc. With our initiatives we try to help students recognize the role of the book as a factor in personal success and to do recommendations for new strategies and policies to promote reading.

- Research project "Copyright Policies of libraries and other cultural institutions", financed by NSF of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, № DFNI-K01/0002-21.11.2012, headed by Dr. Tania Todorova. The main objective is to examine the copyright policy of the library and cultural institutions in Bulgaria, Croatia, Turkey and others, and through comparisons and analyzes to reach: new research products and educational content in academic programs and continuing education; proposals for updating the copyright legislation in these countries; preparation of practical and applied models of copyright policy for library, educational and cultural institutions responsible for the modern information environment.

- Project "Distance Education in Library and Information Science, Print Communications and Sciences for Cultural Heritage" (Contract № BG051PO0001-4.3.04-0039), headed by Prof. DSC Ivanka Yankova – Dean of Faculty of Library Studies and Cultural Heritage in SULSIT. The project is accomplished with the financial support of "Human Resources Development" Operational Programme (OP HRD), Scheme grants BG051PO0001-4.3.04 "Development of Electronic Forms of Distance Learning in Higher Education", co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) of the European Union. The goals and objectives set by the project team provide an opportunity to develop distance education training programs for Master level students in the system of higher education in Bulgaria as answer to the actual needs of professionals for library information, book publishing and cultural spheres and according to the EU and world standards.

Conclusions

Findings of this paper allow us to put the accent of the importance of library education and library associations for the preparation of librarians and information specialists on basic requirements for modern library operations. Application of new forms of building skills and continuing education, as well as exchange of ideas and creative collaboration between library education and library practice on national and international level is a key point in reinventing the new core of competencies of the academic reference librarians in accordance with changes in the new information environment.

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