Assessment of Soft Competencies Strategies Among Information Professionals' in Selected Academic Institutions in South West, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *The library is a service-focused organization. As a result, in addition to having technical expertise, an information professional heading a library needs soft skills to deliver high-quality services to stakeholders and improve performance. This essay is the outcome of research done in academic institutions in South West, Nigeria, to identify the soft skill attributes that information professionals need in order to efficiently and successfully manage libraries, as well as to look at the soft skill attributes in information professionals. Studying the soft skill performance was done with stakeholders including students, non-teaching personnel, and teaching staff in mind. Questionnaires were distributed in the institutions located in six geographical location which University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti. From each institution 5 teaching staff, 5 non-teaching staff and 10 students were identified for the study and were asked to rate soft skill performance of Information professional of their respective institutions. The findings demonstrated that there are no appreciable differences in the soft skill performance of information professionals across the Southwest Nigerian academic institutions. Additionally, the study's conclusion said that there is a positive association between information professionals' performance in soft skills as reported by stakeholders and the soft competencies that all stakeholders from the institutions demand. The authors have provided some recommendations to enhance the performance of information professionals in the institutions with respect to soft skills based on the study's findings.*
KEYWORDS: communication competencies, Nigeria, leadership competencies, information professional's competencies, soft competencies

INTRODUCTION

These days, the most talked about skills are soft skills. People used to believe that soft skills could not be learned. However, it is now included in every subject area within the curriculum. Even though communication skills have a deeper significance than soft skills, they are more frequently incorporated in curricula under the latter label. It goes beyond what one can communicate. It is the most innate ability that, with practice, may change our personalities. Libraries are service-oriented establishments where information specialists provide services to patrons. Thus, the effectiveness of information specialists influences the library's overall effectiveness. Technical competencies and soft competencies are two categories of fundamental skills that have an impact on information professionals' performance levels. Soft skills are the most talked-about talents these days. There was a time when people thought soft talents could not be taught. But now, it's part of the curriculum for every academic area. Though they are more important than soft skills, communication skills are more often included in curricula under the latter heading. It transcends human communication. It is the most natural talent that has the potential to alter our personalities with practice. Libraries are service-oriented businesses where customers receive assistance from information professionals. Thus, the total efficacy of the library is influenced by the effectiveness of its information experts. The performance levels of information professionals are influenced by two groups of essential skills: technical competence and soft competencies.

Hu, Y. et al. (2022) state that personality development in the library profession is facilitated by communication abilities. The soft skills necessary to succeed as a library professional include listening, communication, interpersonal, public relations, customer service, leadership, teamwork, negotiation, writing, project management, presentation, and teaching abilities (Gilli, K., Nippa, M., & Knappstein, M. (2023). Whitehurst (2016) made a connection between personality trait research and soft competence. The author talked about the situation with soft skills when it comes to schools. The study's key finding was that, in terms of schoolchildren, there are chances to improve soft skills while teaching basic academic topics. According to Prabhu, Srinivasaragavan, and Maltesh (2006), modern information professionals should possess the following competencies:

i.   Acceptance of change,
ii. familiarity with how users interact with knowledge resources,
iii. managerial and leadership skills,
iv. expertise in libraries and information services,
v.   eminent communication skills,
vi. teaching and presentation skills,
vii. a dedication to lifelong learning,
viii. interpersonal relations skills,
ix. marketing and promotion skills,
x.   time management skills, and
xi. evaluation and assessment skills are among the competencies that need to be possessed.
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While technical skills and fundamental knowledge in library science cannot be reversed, the aforementioned competences aid in their efficient channelization. A case study by Weber et al. (2011) looked at a five-factor model of soft competences for the hospitality sector. It's interesting to note that while entry-level managers will be trained in accordance with corporate standards, many firms don't frequently care about the technical competence and talents of their managers. These firms will choose candidates who possess the soft skills necessary for success in their workplace and hope that their future managers will possess them as well. Therefore, the primary focus of this case study is on developing a model of soft competencies for leaders in the libraries. The model is then applied to clients/ users within the university, and it is also applied to each student to help them prepare for success in the future.

Aims and Objectives
1) To determine and classify the attributes of soft competencies required by the Information professionals to manage Libraries effectively and smoothly.
2) To examine the attributes of the soft competencies in Information professionals in the academic institutions imparting academic institutions in south west, Nigeria

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study focuses on defining the characteristics of soft competences needed by information professionals, classifying these characteristics into groups, and evaluating the performance of information professionals with regard to soft skills. In order to accomplish the first goal, a literature search was done to find the qualities of soft competences that information workers in Southwest Nigerian academic institutions were looking for. Seven categories have been created based on the commonalities between these features. The first six of these seven groups are seen to be good competences that information professionals need to build or acquire, whereas the characteristics in the seventh category are thought to be negative competencies that, if present in information professionals, must be unlearned.

Therefore, a high score in group seven indicates a high degree of negative capabilities. Information professionals should take action to eliminate these negative competences since they may have a detrimental impact on library performance. Surveys and interviews were used to gather data in order to meet the second goal. Three carefully thought-out questionnaires were created to gather information regarding the performance of information professionals in the workplace using soft skills from the library's stakeholders: teaching staff, non-teaching staff, and students. Three distinct questionnaires with varying numbers of questions and qualities were created for stakeholders with the study's second goal in mind in order to gather data.

Scope
The geographical scope of the study is the south west region of Nigeria while the study population is the undergraduate students in public universities within the geographical zone. The universities are; University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti. The undergraduate students were chosen for this study because of their large population

within tertiary institutions which also indicates that they potentially constitute the largest user group in academic libraries.

Hypothesis

Following hypotheses are framed for the study

1. H_0: All the stakeholders have same degree of evaluation with respect to soft skill performance.
2. H_0: There is no significance difference in soft skill performance of Information professionals in south west, Nigeria

Data Analysis

The goal sensible analysis of statistics and observations are given beneath:

To meet the first aim, a thorough examination of the literature is conducted for the soft skills study conducted in the Library Science field. Soft competences are necessary for a career-oriented agency professional working in a library. Given that the majority of the services provided by the library are people-oriented—whether it's through dealing with patrons or coworkers or providing services to users—soft abilities are crucial in determining how pleasant the offers are. The current examination makes the assumption that information specialists have the technical skills necessary to operate the library effectively, therefore its focus is solely on the soft skills related to their line of work—that is, libraries.

Psychologists go through a procedure of bringing all the characteristics under one roof. Through a review of the literature, soft competency attributes for library personnel are determined.

Second, the characteristics of soft competences mentioned above are divided into the following seven groups:

a) Proficiency in Communication and Persuasion
b) Counterproductive Ability
c) Social Skills
d) Organizational/Leadership Capabilities
e) Competencies in performance management
f) Competencies in politics and culture
g) Ability to Manage Oneself

In order to achieve the second goal, the questionnaire was designed with questions pertaining to the traits listed above. Surveys were given out, and the answers were recorded. Excel sheets were used to store the data, and after analysis and presentation, the following observations were made. Group analysis of Soft skill performance of Information professionals as given by stakeholders.

1. From the table the group analysis is given below.
    a. Proficiency in Communication and Persuasion: According to an analysis of the scores that information professionals received in the Communication/Persuasion Competencies, out of 98 information professionals, 12 scored less than 41%, 59 scored between 41 and 61%, 24 scored between 61 and 81%, and only 3 scored 81 and above 81% in the Communication/Persuasion Competencies.

b. Counterproductive Ability: It's encouraging to see that, out of 98 information professionals, 74 scored less than 41%, according to the analysis. Three information professionals scored between 61 and 81%, while 21 information professionals scored between 41 and 61%. It is encouraging that none of the information professionals received more than 81% in the Counterproductive Competencies category. Therefore, table 1 makes it evident that information professionals have relatively little negative competency. The majority of information professionals (74) received a counterproductive competency score of less than 41%, indicating that the majority of library professionals do not possess any negative competences.

c. Social Skills:
Eight of the 98 information professionals received less than 41% of the possible points in social competencies, 65 received between 41 and 60%, 20 received between 61 and 80%, and only five received 81 or more points in social competencies.

d. Organizational/Leadership Capabilities:
According to an analysis of the scores received by information professionals: Leadership/Organization Competencies, of the 98 information professionals, 15 scored less than 41%, 59 scored between 41 and 60%, 21 scored between 61 and 80%, and only 3 scored above 81%.

e. Competencies in performance management:
Out of 98 information professionals, performance management competencies show that 10 scored less than 41%, 63 obtained 41 to 60%, 21 obtained between 61 and 81%, and only 4 scored above 81%.

f. Self-Management Competencies: Of the 98 information professionals, 14 scored below 41%, 56 between 41% and 61%, 24 between 61 and 81%, and only 4 above 81% in Self-Management Competencies.

g. Cultural and Political Competence:
Of the 98 information professionals, 3 obtained a score of less than 41% in Performance Management Competencies, 72 obtained a score between 41% and 61%, 17 obtained a score between 61 and 81%, and only 6 obtained a score exceeding 81% in Political and Cultural Competencies.

Table 1. Group scores obtained by Information professionals as given by stakeholders in percentage.

S/N	Categories	Less than 41%	41% to 61%	61% to 81%	81% and above
1	Proficiency in Persuasion and Communication	12	59	24	3
2	Counterproductive Competencies	74	21	3	--
3	Social Skills	8	65	20	5
4	Organizational and Leadership Skills	15	59	21	3
5	Competencies in Performance Management	10	63	21	4
6	Political and Cultural Competencies	3	72	17	6
7	Management Abilities	14	56	24	4

A. Overall Score obtained by Information professionals

a)   Scores obtained by Information professionals as given by Teaching staff

From table 2, soft skill According to the teaching team, 15 information professionals scored less than 41% on the soft skill test. This is the performance score of information professionals expressed as a percentage. Only eight information professionals received a score of more than 81% in soft skills, out of the 61 information professionals who fell between the 41% and 61% range. However, teaching staff members felt that while 23 information professionals had between 41% and 61% of negative skill, 64 information professionals scored below 41% in counterproductive competence, indicating poor negative competencies. It was discovered that 8 information professionals had counterproductive capabilities in the 61–81% range. Just three information specialists met the 81% threshold for Counterproductive Competencies. This indicates that very few information workers have unfavorable skills.

b)   Scores obtained by Information professionals as given by Non-teaching staff:
Table 2's soft skill performance score for information professionals among non-teaching personnel reveals that 11 information professionals had less than a 41% score for soft skills. Only five information professionals scored higher than 81% in soft skills, compared to 53 who scored between 41 and 61%, 29 who scored between 61 and 81%, and 53 who scored between 61 and 81%. Non-teaching staff members, however, felt that while 22 information professionals had 41 to 61% of negative skill, 75 information professionals scored below 41% in counterproductive competence, indicating poor negative competencies. It was discovered that one information professional had counterproductive capabilities in the 61–81% range. In Counterproductive Competencies, none of the information professionals had a score higher than 81%.
This means that according to Non-teaching staff none of the Information professional possesses Counterproductive competencies more than 81% which is indication of positive soft skill culture.

c)   Scores obtained by Information professionals as given by Students:
Table 2 reflects, Information professionals' soft skill performance score, expressed as a percentage provided by students, reveals that, on average, 21 of them scored worse than 41% in soft skills. Only four information professionals scored higher than 81% in soft skills, compared to 43 who scored between 41 and 61%, 30 who scored between 61 and 81%, and 43 who scored between 41 and 81%. Nonetheless, students believe that while 30 information professionals had between 41 and 61% of negative skill, 64 information professionals scored below 41% in counterproductive competence, indicating that negative competencies are rare among information professionals. It was discovered that four information professionals had counterproductive competencies in the 61–81% range. In Counterproductive Competencies, none of the information professionals had a score higher than 81%.

This means that according to students none of the Information professional possesses Counterproductive competencies more than 81% which is indication of positive soft skill culture.

Table 2. B. Stakeholder overall score obtained by Information professionals

Sr. No.	Stakeholder	No. of Information professionals obtained the score in percentage in							
		Group I-VI				Group VII			
		Less than 41%	41% to 61%	61% to 81%	81% and above 81%	Less than 41%	41% to 61%	61% to 81%	81% and above 81%
1	Teaching	15	61	14	8	64	23	8	3
2	Non-Teaching	11	53	29	5	75	22	1	--
3	Students	21	43	30	4	64	30	4	--

c. Scores obtained by Information professionals as given by Stakeholders collectively in all the Groups in South west, Nigeria

Scores obtained by Information professionals as given by Stakeholders collectively in all the Groups in South west, Nigeria is displayed in table 3. Seven information professionals had a combined soft skill score of less than 41% in Groups I through VI, according to the table displaying the proportion of soft skill scores provided by stakeholders. Of the information professionals in Soft Skill Group I through VI, 62 obtained scores between 41 and 61%, 25 had scores between 61 and 81%, and only 4 obtained scores over 81%. Stakeholders, however, believe that while 21 information professionals had 41 to 61% of negative skill, 74 information professionals scored below 41% in counterproductive competencies, indicating low negative competence. It was discovered that three information professionals had counterproductive competencies in the 61–81% range. In Counterproductive Competencies, none of the information professionals had a score higher than 81%.

This means that according to stakeholder's opinion none of the Information professional possess Counterproductive competencies more than 81% which is indication of positive soft skill culture.

Table 3. Scores obtained by Information professionals given by Stakeholders collectively in all the Groups.

Sr. No.	Groups	No. of Information professionals obtained the score in percentage			
		< 41%	>41% - 61%	>61% - 81%	>81% - above 81%
1	Group I-VI	7	62	25	4
2	Group VII	74	21	3	--

Hypothesis Testing
i. "All the stakeholders have the same degree of evaluation with respect to soft skill performance" is the first set of hypotheses. Using the rank correlation approach, this hypothesis is tested. The information professional's rank is determined by the scores provided by the library's stakeholders, which include teaching staff, non-teaching staff, and students.
ii. It has been noted that, when it comes to the performance of soft skills, all stakeholders are evaluated to the same extent. That is to say, there is a positive relationship between information professionals'

soft skill performances as reported by stakeholders and the soft competences that stakeholders anticipate from information professionals.

iii.   Additionally, it was shown that the performance of information professionals in soft skills across all academic institutions in the southwest region of Nigeria does not significantly differ. The research also indicates that the least acceptable value of soft skill performance is 60%, as was previously established. By using the z test on the numbers obtained for the number of information professionals who scored more than 60% and the number of information professionals who scored less than 60%, the hypothesis was evaluated. When the level of significance is 5%, the z test is used. The computed value is 0.686, which is less than the 1.96 table value of z.

Therefore, null hypothesis is accepted. Hence we can say that there is no significant difference in soft skill performance of Information professionals in all the academic institutions in southwest, Nigeria.

Recommendations
The following recommendations are made from the study with respect to soft skill performance of Information professionals in academic institutions in Southwest, Nigeria:

1. Training in soft skills ought to begin in high school and be included into the Library Science degree curriculum. It will assist aspiring library professionals in understanding that developing their soft skills is just as important as honing their technical ones. By doing so, they will be able to improve their performance over time, satisfy stakeholders, and alter how the public views libraries.

2. According to this survey, the majority of information professionals performed below 60% when it came to soft competences. As a result, information professionals in Southwest Nigerian academic institutions need training in these areas.

3. within-service It is advised that information professionals receive soft competency training to enhance their performance in these areas.

4. Acquiring soft skills is an ongoing endeavor. Therefore, it is imperative that information workers receive frequent training in soft skills. Information professionals' performance at work will undoubtedly improve as a result of this.

5. Library employees also provide the stakeholders with library services. For this reason, soft skill training on associated soft skill traits should be given to library workers as well.

6. The Learning Management System (LMS) has to offer regular online training sessions so that information professionals may attend them at their location as well.

CONCLUSION

It is impossible to overlook the value of soft skills in both personal and professional contexts. Possess innovative ideas, exhibit more leadership qualities, improve problem-solving skills, and advance in team management. Information professionals may experience a complete personality shift as a result of soft competences. Information workers will grow more self-assured, which will enable them to help patrons receive better library services. The capacity of library employees to provide services to its

stakeholders is essential to the library's goals being met. Library utilization will increase if stakeholders are happy with the services provided.

By utilizing technology and increasing user awareness of resources, databases, etc., libraries may offer their patrons more sophisticated services. Because new knowledge is added to the current body of knowledge at a quicker pace, "knowledge and skill becomes obsolete and depreciation." To adapt to change, information professionals need to be able to use their talents and abilities. And soft competencies are used to achieve this. Information professionals will undoubtedly rise in prestige if their soft skills improve.

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