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# Practicing teaching librarian in public higher education: what is lacking in the profession?

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## Abstract

This article aims to promote one of academic librarian's role in higher education and to dig out what is being left out in the librarianship profession, the unacknowledged hero teaching librarian. Placed in the heart of library's main function which is to educate and teach users in information literacy, it is a crucial position in all academic libraries. The article is to highlight issues surrounding this specific practice in librarianship and recommendation that might solved the issue based on academic literature. Academic librarian is a generic term used to represent librarian who works in the library in higher education environment, but they were segmented into roles and function based on management's decision and needs such as automation librarian is an academic librarian who take charge and manages all matters related to information technology in the library. A teaching librarian is an academic librarian who teaches and educates users of the library in information literacy programs or classes.

*Keywords:* Academic librarian; Teaching librarian; Higher education

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## 1. Introduction

Library instruction growth as main attention to academic libraries started in the 1950s (Wang et al., 2021). The idea of reference work is broader than responding straight forward or closed ended reference question especially when internet was booming has started throughout 1900 by researchers and instruction was not 'confine' in the classroom alone (Renirie, 2020). Back in 2001 and 2002, the beginning of teachable memories was at reference desk when replying to student inquiry for information as a chance to teach them on conducting research (Renirie, 2020). Zurkowski was the person who used the term Information literacy in 1974, who recommended the instructively skilful individuals realize how to use data resources to their work (Moin Ud Din et al., 2022). Literature about library instruction was published by the Journal of Reference Services Review since 1973 by Rader, 1974. Before 1996 Information literacy was known as library orientation and instruction and then it changed to library instruction and information literacy to mark a change in the profession to a larger view (Caffrey et al., 2022).

Information professional in particular librarian's roles has been in debate and accessed where they play vital roles to helps their users to pick out the right information from various sources as needed (Lee et al., 2020). Information needed by all either from faculty staff, students or even in working environment to make decision

or as a tool for teaching and research. Librarian and information professional is expert in conducting and managing research literature plus librarian is a great to collaborate with for evidence-based practice and to help support in research method design and reporting (Stellrecht et al., 2022). Traditionally, a librarian is known as a person who works in the library in various departments such as acquisition, cataloguing, reference, circulation, and information technology (IT). Academic librarian is now playing significant role as a gate keeper or source of knowledge which go beyond traditional information provider to empowering users (Nakitare et al., 2020). Today's academic librarian has play challenging roles and activities in academic library, these include consulting individual (analysing, identifying, and fulfilling their information need), creates and deliver in class of information literacy, managing acquisition of library material and other activities (American Library Association, 2016a).

### *1.1. Academic librarian responsibilities*

Over the years, librarian's job description has evolved tremendously to suit the industry needs especially in academic environment and the use of technology is crucial. Regularly, person who works in library with qualification of library science degree is called librarian, but libraries are now free to use any designation that refers to librarian as the profession itself has been transform align with current needs. As mentioned by (Stellrecht et al., 2022), librarian is not always necessarily being call librarian, whereas librarian has been referring as information professional who indicate an individual has same education, expertise, or job description as librarian. Working with academic's environment, collaboration with faculty will not be avoided as it is part library functions.

Responsibilities as an academic librarian has change since 21<sup>st</sup> century with several factors contributed to its change such as the use of technology, academic communication and publication, type of educational delivers and students' preferences in learning (McGuinness, 2021). This is including one of the job descriptions as academic librarian is to teach or also known as teaching librarian by the Association of College and & Research Libraries (2017) to widen and involved than instruction which indicate the significance of teaching and more depth of educational goals held by librarian. The Association of College & Research Libraries has set 7 roles of teaching librarians to describe the nature work of teaching librarian to excel in performing those roles and to suggest creative new ideas for expansion, and the roles are as an advocate, coordinator, instructional designer, leader, lifelong learner, teacher, and teaching partner (Association of College and & Research Libraries, 2017). Thus, teaching librarian will be facing challenges and issues in performing their teaching task where they need to prove the standards in higher education to the management (Rabasa & Abrizah, 2022).

### *1.2. Research problem.*

The research problem is to explore the loop in current state of practicing teaching librarian and challenges face in teaching information literacy. The biggest challenges faced by librarian in academic library is the rapidly change of higher education environment along with dynamic and often uncertain knowledge ecosystem requires new attention to be focused on basic ideas about the higher education ecosystem (Väljataga et al., 2020). Information literacy required someone to have ability to identify the needed information, how to access it, evaluate the information, synthesize it, and transform to new knowledge then use it in proper manner, thus specific skill is required by individual to function effectively and efficiently in the environment of information (Ikenwe & Anaehobi, 2020).

### *1.3. Research objectives.*

This research objectives are focusing on identifying the issues facing teaching librarian practicing instructional in information literacy program in higher education environment and then to see what the recommendation are to solve the issue suggested on literature review.

### *1.4. Research significant.*

A further investigation with a solution can be done where teaching librarian can have a well-documented or formal guideline in instructional information literacy by having set of competence index dedicated to teaching librarian who teach in higher education. It is also for the profession credibility and career development program in workplace.

## **2. Literature review.**

Librarian in academic library is facing the biggest impact due to the rapidly change in higher education setting with lively environment and frequently ambiguous knowledge in the ecosystem requires fresh care to be focused on basic ideas about the higher education ecosystem (Väljataga et al., 2020). Teaching librarians need to be competence to oversee information literacy class in support to the account of information literacy and competency. All academic libraries, information literacy is part of function provided by the library where it is extremely esteemed service that focuses on skills for locating, accessing and usage of needed information (Moin Ud Din et al., 2022). American Library Association (2021), suggested in its guidelines that librarians must have specialized and advanced knowledge beyond that specified in the Core Competencies of Librarianship. The impact of librarian competency development is to avoid their services is being replaced with support staff and may lead to them to unclear situation (Samah et al., 2021). Without a well-developed and an established set of standard or competency dedicated to teaching librarian, it will hard for teaching librarian to deliver effective teaching and professional development to improve instruction (American Library Association, 2008).

### *2.1. No formal pedagogical skills*

There was a hyped in literature in 2020, where librarian has never been taught how to teach though in the industry librarian requires to teach in information literacy classes (Caffrey et al., 2022). This issue was highlighted out by Peacock (2022), syllabus in academic structure on educating future librarian on how to teach never included or even offered throughout the studies. Then in 2013, Davies-Hoffman (2013) raised this issue, where it has led to 30 years of critic saying that academic librarian is missing pedagogical knowledge but librarians still actively in playing roles as teacher, facilitator, and mediator in online environment and they continue to teach (Saib et al., 2022;). An inadequate knowledge educated in the faculty will be affected on how faculty produce future academic librarian to full fill the need of the industry (Stoffle, 2020). The consequence from this issue is academic librarians need to prepare themselves as an instructor or teacher as teaching responsibility has been increased (Houtman, 2021).

### *2.2. Information overload and explosion*

In the era of potential to information explosion, information is created to available in thousands of bits and librarian are expected to gather, arrange, store, and disseminate the information to be used by users (Okike, 2020). This situation happens when technology take control in providing extensive information and data grow rapidly then it will lead to information explosion if the problem of organizing this large unstructured date is not being solved (Ahmad et al., 2019). Information overload happens when someone is not well-educated in

information literacy, or in other word not being able to utilize information effectively and ethically (Bernard, 2023). The increase usage of social media has affected the quality of information retrieved by users where issue such as fake news or unreliable sources and this situation is proved by several research indicating that information professional has significant role to work on in preventing the issue through structured literacy instruction or information literacy to evaluate the credibility information or resources (Ameen & Naeem, 2021) During pandemic Covid-19, there was a hike of social media users in Malaysia and started to express their thought and idea online due to unable to communicate face to face (Abu et al., 2020). When there is too much information exposed and not valuable to the users will lead to unwise decision making in organization which derived from low quality information (Kashada et al., 2020). Furthermore, search engine such as google and yahoo or even Wikipedia has been used to by students as method of searching (Kight, 2021).

### 2.3. Adaptation to technology and online environment.

When Covid-19 hits the globe, face-to-face instructional is limited and all classes were held through online platform (Peacock, 2022) and the pandemic put education system on stop, where the use of technology requires skill of handling online environment which considered as competency (Paliwal & Singh, 2021). This situation has led to the problem of librarians' readiness to make use of the technology in teaching such as online teaching through online platform (Ramos Eclevia, 2022) where students are more dependent to use social media to search for information and librarian cannot overlook the point that there is increased usage of technology in delivering information literacy instruction (Harrison & Deans, 2021).

### 2.4. Teaching librarian in Malaysian context

Librarian responsibilities seem relevant as advisor or mediator to help users in finding accurate information and librarian is not only as curator and cataloguer of knowledge who are expert in metadata or matric task but also as the active creator of knowledge though resources nowadays can be accessed through online (Abdul Karim, 2022). The term teaching librarian itself is not publicise in context of Malaysian librarianship where teaching librarian's role were placed in reference department/division, and they were called reference librarian. Respondents in research done by Adnan (2001), shows that instruction librarian or teaching librarian (in this research) working in the reference department in seven universities and known as reference librarian. The statement supported in Osman et al. (2019), the roles of librarian are librarian as reference, librarian as instructor and librarian as consultant. In Malaysia context, teaching librarian are responsible of teaching and learning in finding information, course enrolment, evaluation, assignments assessment and answering question within their institution's undergraduates and postgraduates or even outside clients (Mohd Hanafi & Ismail, 2020). A simple preliminary data was done in the end of December 2022 where to gather the numbers of teaching librarian within 20 Malaysia's higher education's academic libraries system and a total of 161 teaching librarian reported. The spread-out details of teaching librarians are shown in Table 1 below. Data shows numbers of teaching librarians in each public universities with level of education and years of experiences. This statistical data is important for future research to support the development of competence index for teaching librarian.

Table 1.Number 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 (Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka)	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>	161	70	84	7	-

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 public universities libraries system. A total of 161 teaching librarians serves in 20 academic libraries in public universities and USM is the highest numbers of teaching librarians with 41 teaching librarians or 25.46% from the overall teaching librarian. 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 (Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris) and UPNM which represent 1 teaching librarian each university.

More than half of total numbers of teaching librarian or 52.17% hold a master's degree and this statistic follow by bachelor's degree with 70 teaching librarian or 43.47%. Teaching librarian with Doctorate is the smallest population among others with 7 teaching librarians or 4.34%. This statistic of teaching librarian with PhD contributed by USM and UM (University Malaya) (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 practicing teaching librarian (this data was collected in 2022) with 45% from overall numbers or 9 universities. The longest serving as teaching librarian is 10 years from UKM and 8 years from UNIMAP (Universiti Malaysia Perlis).

### 3. Research methodology

This research implemented literature review studies to identify problems and discussion. There are few steps in search strategy to scoop down literature related to this research. This is how articles and literature were searched and picked to specific need of this research.

### 3.1. Boolean operators

This analysis of literature was done by searching through online databases and with specific keywords so the result would be specific to what is needed. Search strategy such as using Boolean operator, AND, NOT, OR asterisk \*, quoting marks “”, and parentheses (). Research done and proved that high number of strongly agreed and agreed to use OPAC, Boolean operators and etc (Selvi et al., 2022; Momanyi et al., 2018). Boolean operator used as follows: -

- I. Teaching Librarian AND Competency
- II. Teaching librarian issues
- II. Teaching Librarian Competency AND Malaysia
- III. “Teaching Librarian”
- IV. Librarian\*
- V. Teaching Librarian OR Instructional Librarian

### 3.2. Keyword

The analysis is related to teaching librarian and their competency. Terms used in the search for literature review are ‘Teaching Librarian’, ‘teaching librarian issues’, ‘Instructional Librarian’, ‘Librarian’ ‘Competency’, ‘Competencies’, ‘Academic Library’, ‘Academic Librarian’, ‘Information Literacy’, ‘Library Instruction’. Searching for articles, thesis and dissertation has been constructed string of keywords through several strategies so that findings is relevant and accurate for this purpose of research, this process is to controlled usage of vocabulary and keywords and pull-out unrelated keywords (Johnson-Barlow & Lehnen, 2021).

### 3.3. Search engine.

Furthermore, most researcher agreed that to retrieved information from multiple sources, using several search techniques and capable to search online databases which related to the research (Selvi et al., 2022). As this research is fundamentally a social science research then, all articles, previous thesis or dissertation were all retrieved from subscribed databases from Universities. Articles were retrieved from Emerald, Science Direct, Scopus, ACM Digital, Bernama Library and Infolink Service and ProQuest: Dissertation and Thesis.

## 4. Discussion

Teaching librarian is crucial position in academic library in higher education, but little attention has been highlighted in mainstream of librarianship. It is particularly important for information professional to enrich their skill in information literacy align with current technologies and to offer their library services based on their users’ need (Moin Ud Din et al., 2022). So, the development of competencies is especially important to information professional or librarian in designing need-based curriculum, create specific training program, evaluate current education program and improved human resource planning so they are prepared for specific work (Naveed et al., 2022).

### 4.1. A well-structured information literacy program and documented pedagogy practices.

Information literacy is significant in higher education setting where it keeps users to build ability and perspective to get access to the information effectively, efficiently, and ethically (Bernard, 2023). Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education is a guideline to reengineer information literacy program which

to cater from beginner to higher level of courses and it encourage librarian to work with faculty, syllabus committees and others to create information programs in a holistic way (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015). Lots of librarians recognize pedagogical inspired by the ACRL's framework despite there is concern how the framework portrays to the students in terms of language (Jarson & Hamelers, 2022). More librarians recognized the workable and pedagogical motivation offered by the framework (Jarson & Hamelers, 2022). A huge confirmation on librarians have used the framework as basis to their teaching style (Jarson & Hamelers, 2022; Latham et al, 2019) and to strengthen the culture of teaching and learning at the institution (Jarson & Hamelers, 2022). Pedagogical practices will be more efficient, and student get wide understanding of their needs by combining the rhetorical theory and current information literacy theory where with greater impact (Clements & Bracke, 2020). As academic library is growing and the role of instruction and information literacy become focus, librarian are in need to develop more specific set of skills to teach successfully in library instruction programs or information literacy programs (American Library Association, 2008).

#### *4.2. Competence index for teaching librarian*

To perform task in library and information science done functionally, knowledge and skills are requiring diverse number of competencies (Khan & Parveen, 2020). With the current situation where we are on the fast-moving world, library professional is also required to keep up their competencies to align with the current trends (Abbas & Ameen, 2022). In the area of strategic management, research has found out that, how organization can develop competency cannot copy by other, be ahead and this is called dynamic capabilities which identify micro foundation including functions, activities, and competency to develop capabilities for academic libraries (Jadhav & Shenoy, 2022).

Organization is emphasis to get the top quality of work through individuals and managers play vital role and they always face with circumstances that make decision making tough in completing task or in process of work (Nayebpour, 2023). A limitless viewpoint on career, recommended that career competencies are crucial for workforces who wants to progress in their career in the environment full of challenges and ambiguity (Jo et al., 2023), and the idea of career competency is transcribes as knowledge, skills, and abilities (Jo et al., 2023).

Align with definition defined by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2022), competency is defined as how to achieve in behavioural aspect or how do they perform a certain task while competence is skills and level of performance have reached as set by organization or what individuals can perform (McBreen et al., 2022). The development of competency model or in this research competence index requires an insight and a clear picture of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristic to fulfil certain position and translate organizational policy into visible behaviour among employees (Campion et al., 2020). With specific competence index developed within the organization, allows organization to plan effective human resources where some knowledge, skills, ability, and other attributes needed are in the organization while other knowledge, skills and ability are retrieved from external sources (Nayebpour, 2023). To get required outcomes intelligently in the specialised and job-related areas from individual, a blend of complete attributes of knowledge, skills and ability or attitude needs competency (Jiang et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2021; Leung et al., 2016).

#### *4.3. Future research*

This analysis identifies issues and problem faced by teaching librarian in practicing as an educator in academic libraries. This analysis should follow up with in depth research on how to develop teaching librarian competence index and creating a standardise syllabus/content for information literacy program to be used through academic libraries in higher learning institution system.

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