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PROVIDING THE TECHNICAL COMPETENCY LOCAL ASSESSMENT MODEL IN LIBRARIES OF IRAN

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at identifying the local features of technical competency assessment in libraries of Iran in the form of a local model of competency assessment. This research has Grounded theory (GT) and systematic approach and is conducted at three levels of open coding, and then the axial coding and finally the selective coding in order to achieve the research model. The statistical population of research consists of 28 Knowledge and Information Science professors in Iran. The semi-structured interview to reach the theoretical saturation is the data collection method in this research. The obtained data from the open coding and formation of main categories are provided in the form of a paradigm model during the axial coding and finally the local assessment model of technical skill competency in libraries of Iran are then discussed and theorized in selective coding. The results indicate that the technology plays a special role in assessing the technical competency in libraries of Iran. Furthermore, the organization and maintenance of information resources are among other components of technical competency. In this regard, the basic knowledge and necessary skill for preservation of set is among the other important cases in assessment of competency in libraries. The maintenance of information resources is significantly important in Iran. The electronic publication is another important factor in performing the assessment of competency in libraries of Iran.

Keywords: *Competency Assessment, Competency Assessment Model, Technical Competency*

INTRODUCTION

The information world is rapidly changing and is considered as a big turning point in history of civilization. The libraries as the main sources of information need the knowledge about the consequences of these changes and development of technical skills because this knowledge enables them to effectively use the information and finally provide the good service for users. These changes have also affected the library and information experts' skills and characteristics (Haliza, 2012). On the other hand, the users' expectations of libraries and librarians in the field of providing their information needs have multiplied in new technology environment (Sunders, 2012). The libraries as the service organizations also play the fundamental roles in the process of sustainable development in countries, so that it can be argued that such this achievement is not possible in the absence of accredited libraries and information centers. The main purpose of any library is to meet the audiences' information needs and the evaluation in these centers is necessary to assess their performance (Mirghafoori and Makki, 2007). Since 1960s, the assessment of libraries has been an important issue in the study of information science in the West and different types of libraries including the public, academic, specialized and educational libraries have assessed according to different aspects. The rapid admission and development of competency-based approach and its application in library development programs are more resulted from the benefits which are lain in this approach and the libraries utilize these competencies due to the reasons such as transferring the valuable behavior and organizational culture, effective performance for all employees, emphasis on the individual capacities (rather than their jobs) as a way of gaining the competitive advantage and reinforcing the mutual and teamwork behavior. The competencies of libraries in providing the information resources, information access, management, and the ability to use this area of knowledge are as the bases for provision of library and information services (Special Libraries Association (SLA), 2011). With regard to the raised issues, the researchers decided to assess the competency according to the

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technical dimensions in libraries of Iran, and finally they provided a local model for assessment of technical competency in libraries of Iran.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The grounded theory strategy is a kind of research methodology which is applied for developing or designing the theories and it is extracted from the heart of data by systematical data collection and analysis. Generally, this method converts the obtained data into a set of codes, and also the common codes into the concepts, and the concepts into the categories, and the categories into the theory. (Danaei-Fard and Momeni, 2008) Therefore, the researcher extracts the relevant data from the text by text data and codes and classifies them and finally provides his theory. The statistical population of this study consists of 28 Knowledge and Information Science professors and experienced managers with 15 and above years of experience in a variety of libraries in Iran, and the interviews continue until the data is saturated.

The obtained data of grounded theory is investigated through three stages.

First Stage: Open Coding

At this stage, the primary coding and then the secondary coding are done by the method described below, and then the secondary codes are created from the primary codes. At the next stage, the secondary codes are conceptualized and eventually the categories are created. At the final stage of open coding, we extract the main category resulted from the creation of categories.

Technical Competency Local Assessment Model in Libraries of Iran

The proposed theory in this study suggests the mechanisms through which the local competency assessment model of libraries in Iran is created. The presented model is based on the paradigm model:

1- Category Centralization: Technical Competency Assessment

Since this study investigates the local technical competency assessment model in libraries of Iran, this category is chosen as the axial category.

2- Causal Conditions:

These conditions create and develop the category centralization or phenomenon, and this research considered the preparation, organization, MARC standards, collection and conservation of resources as the causal conditions.

3- Intervening Conditions:

There are the general conditions which constitute a set of mediator and intermediate variables and affect the strategies. The resource provision intermediaries (agents, publishers), the networks for sharing the library resources, administrative problems, physical and cultural conditions, hardware and software equipment, workshops, technology, information knowledge, records and tools of bibliography, financial resources, basic knowledge of resource conservation, system security, geographical conditions, the level of scientific products, and protocols are the intervening conditions in this research.

4- Strategies

They refer to the purposive behavior, activities and interactions which are resulted from the category-centralization and affected by intervening conditions and the governing context. In this research, the in electronic publication, legal components (Anglo-American plc and RDA), maintenance, protection of digital resources, development of Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and Library of Congress Classification (LCC) are among the strategies.

5- Infrastructure

It refers to the certain conditions which affect the actions and interactions (strategies). The inclusion of course namely the conservation of library headings, market volatility in publishing industry, the written policy of library acquisitions, making decision for purchasing the resources by committee of national resources are among the infrastructural conditions.

6- Consequences

They refer to the results and consequences which arise from adopting the strategies. In this study, weeding, censorship, dissemination of information, service (interlibrary loan and cooperation) and user satisfaction are among the consequences of technical competencies.

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The following figure shows the axial coding of technical competency assessment in libraries of Iran:

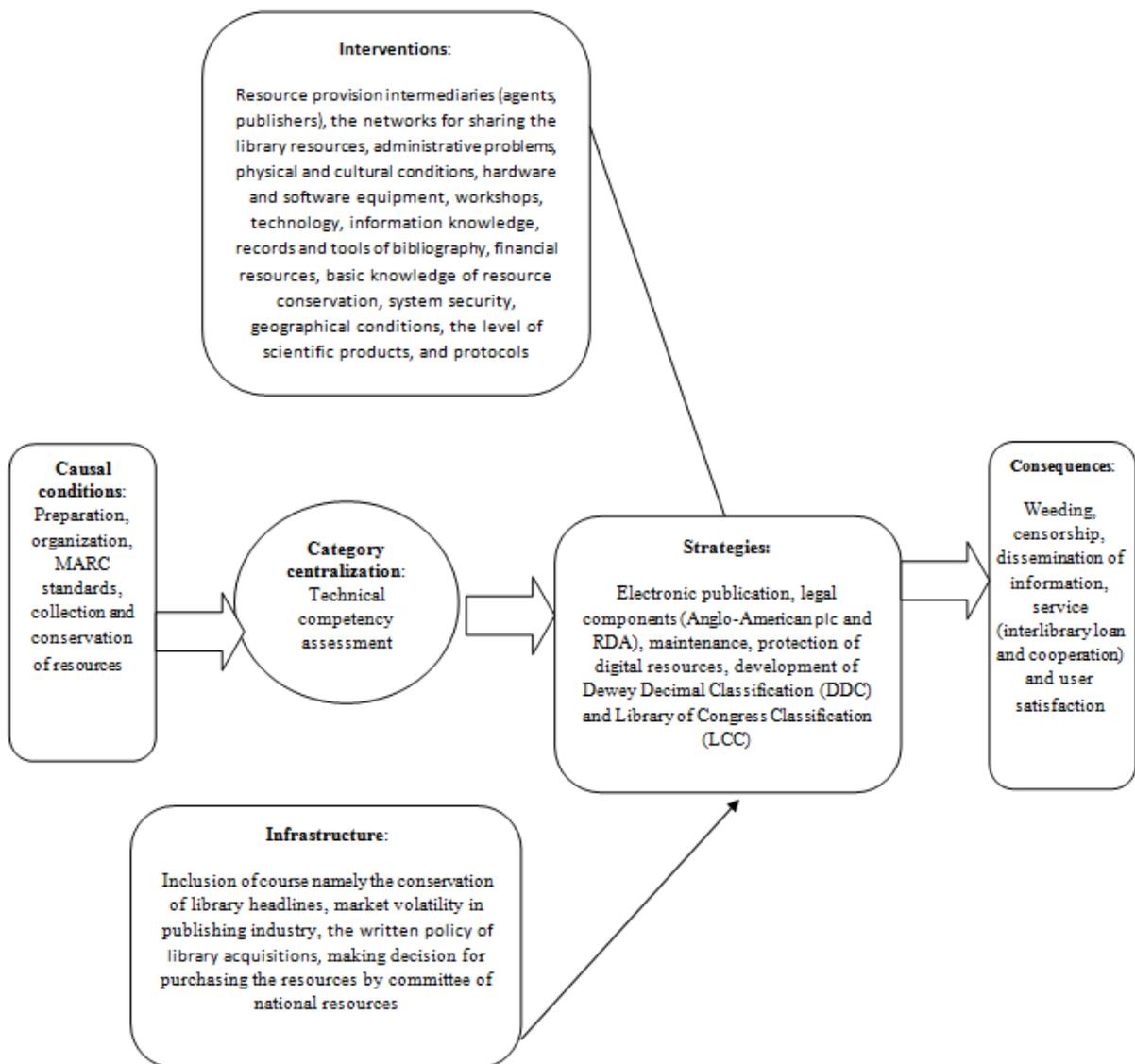


Figure 1-1: Axial coding for technical competency assessment in libraries of Iran

Discussion

In provided model, the technology plays the especial role in competency assessment of libraries and is the main factor in formation of competency assessment in libraries of Iran. According to Peak (2012) the information technology can help us to identify and investigate the correlation between the employees' performance management competencies and personal development plans on the basis of competency. He also believes that the information and communication technology is considered as important infrastructure of competency in libraries. The findings of this research are also consistent with his ideas in these cases. Furthermore, the technology has a significant impact on the management process of set (provision), organization of resources, conservation of resources, creation of electronic publication, and the quality of available information resources for provided service in the library. On the other hand, the libraries require keeping pace with technology. Undoubtedly, it will be effective to identify the economic, legal and social issues about the use of information, legal and ethical use of information, paying attention to free flow of

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information, library staff and users' rich knowledge of computer and specialized knowledge about the library, information literacy, and holding the educational courses in the field of technology. Bianat (2003) emphasizes on the computer literacy skill and it is consistent with the findings of this research. Choi and Rasmussen (2006) and Ferreira *et al.*, (2007) have agreed that the competencies include the knowledge, skills (capabilities) and attitudes. They have also pointed out that the science, knowledge and competency should be obtained through the training and formal education. Their findings in this case are consistent with the results of this study. There are no certain problems in the field of software architecture and equipment in libraries of Iran and the hardware status is the major problem in libraries of Iran because it is essential to develop the hardware standards and librarians' involvement in hardware selection. The importance of information technology in academic libraries, weak information technology in educational libraries, more power of action and the budget for better use of information technology and advanced IT in specialized libraries, the high-quality information technology and information literacy in national library, and improper use of information technology in public libraries of Iran are the cases referred by people. The findings of this study are consistent with the studies by Peak (2012) and Chan (2006) on the use of information and communications technology as the important factor of desirable public library functions and also Saten's research (2011) which emphasizes on the application of new technology skills in reference librarians, and Oki (2013) emphasizing on the hardware equipment in libraries. The acquisition and provision are the next steps in competency assessment in libraries. Dempsey (2012) has expressed that the collection management is considered as the important infrastructure in competency of libraries. The necessary tools in preparation and selection of sources are the important point in this regard. According to the individuals' views in Iran, the internal and external databases are the important sources for providing the information. On the other hand, there are problems in internal resources in the field of providing the domestic resources and neglected non-book resources in acquisitions in Iran. Focused acquisition and non-selection of resources by librarian are the problems of acquisitions in public libraries of Iran. Despite the fact that the resource acquisition in specialized libraries is based on the expertise of parent organization and without problem, there are provision problems in national library. Undoubtedly, we should consider the effective role of publication market in acquisition and management of set. We should not ignore the standards of publication market process and brokers, updated publication market process and brokers of information resources, local electronic publications, the costs of printing and publishing in Iran, direct correlation of libraries with publishers, the role of electronic publications, and the role of libraries in providing the information resources. Adopting the codified acquisitions policies, and updating and implementing them are the significant cases in creating the competencies of collection management. The findings of this study on adopting the acquisitions policy are consistent with Helmick and Soiger (2006) who have emphasized on the new library policies including the development of information resources policy. The acquisitions standards are also among the important cases in achievement of collection competency management. The existence of intelligent and caring staff, the exact purchase of electronic collection including the databases, the role of finance committee in purchasing decisions of data sources, creating a direct method for ordering the books, and the lack of methods for transferring the funds to brokers of printed sources, and updating are among the most important issues in creating the acquisition competency standards in Iran. On the other hand, the stability of policy-making in providing the information resources and the free flow of access to information are among the issue which should be taken into special account. After the acquisition and providing the information resources, the organization of information sources is another issue in competency assessment of libraries. Randall (1940) and the American Library Association (2011) have also considered the organization as an important competency. In this regard, the individuals have argued that the organizational rules are put in the first place in Iran. The lack of necessary facilities of cataloging in libraries of remote areas, the emphasis of cataloging in Iran on the title of work and the necessity for standards of cataloging are among the effective items in creation of information resources competency in libraries of Iran. The local tools of organizing the information resources in Iran are the development of Dewey and Congress Classification in Iran (Islam, history, geography, foreign language, and literature),

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Persian general and specialized thesauruses (such as ASFA), the list of famous people, and authors, and local headings in Iran. The maintenance of information sources is among the other issues which create the local model of competency assessment in libraries. In this case, it is necessary to have the basic knowledge and skills needed for the preservation of collection as well as strengthening the security systems in the field of maintaining the information resources in Iran. Furthermore, the environmental conditions of libraries and a variety of information sources have considerable impact on the resource maintenance. According to McDermott (2006), the environmental conditions affect the maintenance of information resources such as the heat, coldness, moisture, humidity and air conditioning. The findings of this study are consistent with his views. On the other hand, the inclusion of more courses about the preservation in the headings of library courses, and the need to develop the standards in the field of resource preservation are the main issues which should be taken into account. The National Library of Iran and the specialized libraries in Iran are at the desirable level in terms of strong systems for protecting the resources.

On the other hand, this issue is not more taken into account in public libraries and the books are also consumed in educational libraries. In this regard, the findings of this research are consistent with the approvals of the Association of College & Research Libraries (2008) which emphasize on the librarians' familiarity with the principles of information resources preservation and the role of environmental resources and different types of resources

The available information sources are among the important cases in assessment of library competency. The bibliography tools (general and specialized bibliography in Iran) and the website are among the most important features of competency for the available information sources in Iran. The new and manual systems of access to information are also seen in Iran.

Undoubtedly, the effective role of information literacy should not be ignored in the field of access to resources. Furthermore, the strengthened information literacy in library staff and users will have the important roles in this regard. The consideration of public needs and various users in public libraries, the availability of resources to electronic format in Iran, the lack of need for book resources and limited availability time, making the censored books available for users if necessary, updating the resources in the National Library, the strong availability of information resources in academic libraries, the need for including the way of access and finding the information in educational libraries, introducing the book and motivating the children to study in educational libraries are among the other cases which should be taken into account.

The electronic publication is an important factor in competency assessment of libraries in Iran. Undoubtedly, it requires the existence of hardware and software equipment, the importance of internet publishers, the role of electronic acquisitions, the impact of copyright law, web tools, ways of information dissemination, and the identification and management of protocols. The need for electronic publication in academic libraries, dealing with the academic community for electronic publication in academic libraries, publishing the theses and abstracts as a result of electronic publication in academic libraries, the lack of electronic publication in educational library, the lack of professional librarian and non-compliance with standards in educational libraries, the importance of electronic publication in educational and specialized libraries, and in general the importance of e-publishing application in libraries should be also taken into account. The research findings about the importance of e-publishing in educational libraries are consistent with the findings by Achala (2003).

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