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A Review of Problems and Challenges of Library Professionals in Developing Countries including Pakistan

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Introduction

“A librarian is a person who looks after the storage and retrieval of information. In a workplace, the librarian is usually a professional who is trained and educated to deal with information in a wide variety of formats and settings” (WordiQ, 2010). Librarian helps users to navigate into the voyage of internet and evaluate information efficiently. Librarian offers a helping hand for users to find out the required piece of information and to use it for personal and professional purposes (BLS, 2011). Due to the advent of Internet, World Wide Web and proliferation of online catalogue, the role of librarian has been changed. Now he is more efficient and has new roles as intermediary, facilitator, end-user trainer/educator, web organizer & designer, researcher, interface designer, knowledge manager/professional and sifter of information resources (Rao & Babu, 2001). Librarian should be knowledgeable in a variety of information sources and follow the new trends and advancements in computers, media and publishing (Careeroverview, 2011).

Research Objectives

1. To review the problems faced by librarians in new digital era.
2. To identify the major challenges for librarians to work smoothly in cyber environment.
3. To furnish recommendations to overcome the problems and to tackle the challenges.

Methodology

The study is based on comprehensive review of related literature & informal semi-structured interviews which were conducted by the second author during some international conferences, with library professionals & scholars from developing countries i.e., Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Malaysia, Nepal, and Pakistan with the purpose to explore their perceptions, opinions and observation regarding the problems & challenges confronted by the librarians due to

changing information landscape. Available material on the Internet was also explored.

Studies Conducted to Investigate the Problems/Challenges Confronted by Librarians in Developing Countries in Changing Information Landscape

New tools of information technology have absolutely changed the role & responsibilities of librarians. A number of studies have been conducted to explore the problems faced by librarians. Given section reviews the studies conducted at International level in general and particularly in developing countries to investigate the problems confronted by the librarians.

Ademodi & Adepoju (2009) investigated the computer skill among librarians in academic libraries on Ondo and Ekiti State in Nigeria. It was found the shortage of computers and computer skills among professionals. The study recommended that more attention and funds should be provided for training and procurement of ICT infrastructure in Nigerian University libraries. For computerization purpose, library administration should solicit funds and assistance from foreign agencies and foundations who are interested for the cause.

Adomi & Anie (2006) in their research on computer literacy skills of professionals in Nigerian University libraries concluded that most of the professionals do not possess high level of computer skill and their use of computer and technology is still maturing. They recommended that library management and leaders should organize and offer in-house computer training programmes for librarians and enough computers should be provided in this regard.

Trushina (2004) discussed the issues related to the internet as well as the correlation of professional codes and their implementation in library practice. He stated that libraries depend on ethical principles more than any other institution because library services are essentially human-oriented. He stressed that librarians must follow the intellectual freedom principle and they have a moral responsibility to the patrons.

Hashim & Mokhtar (n.d) studied the trends and issues in preparing new era librarians and information professionals. They reported that the following trends are essential for new era librarians' i. e. a vision towards information and knowledge rich society, globalization of information, integrated and widespread ICT applications, growth of electronic/internet resources, role of digital/electronic/virtual library, access role replace custodial role, strategic alliances, partnership and collaborations, librarians need new management knowledge and skills, specialized knowledge & skills in library and information management, trend to develop digital contents to facilitate access. It was concluded that new era librarian will become a guardian of digital information and digital librarians with newly acquired skills can play a meaningful and leading role in the networked information society of the millennium.

Sreenivasulu (2000) studied the role of a digital librarian in the management of digital information systems. He stressed that the multimedia nature of the next generation of digital libraries requires the digital librarians (DL) to be essentially a type of specialist librarian who has to manage and organize the digital library, handle the specialized tasks of massive digitization, storage, access, digital knowledge mining, digital reference services, electronic information services, search co-ordination, and manage the archive and its access. He should be well-versed in markup languages, cataloguing, metadata, multimedia indexing and database technology, user interface design, programming, and Web technology.

Johnson (2007) viewed library and information science education in developing countries. He concluded that LIS programs in developing countries continue to suffer from lack of financial support by governments.

Wallis (2005) found that information literacy is vital skill set for citizens of information societies. They suggested that the librarian must support learning at all levels. They are needed to pass skill set of technological and media literacies to citizens at all levels of society for economic, social and personal empowerment.

Rahman, Khatun & Islam (2008) reviewed the library education in Bangladesh. The study found that majority of institutions in Bangladesh do not have well-equipped computer labs or sufficient numbers of computers for students. A sufficient number of classification and cataloguing tools (DDC, LC, Sears list of subject headings for practical were not present. Many institutions either have no library or inadequate collection of textbooks. Professional's status was also found very low, low pay scale and limited opportunities for promotion.

In Sri Lanka, Wijyaratne (n.d) probed the challenges encountered by the librarians of developing world in providing library services to support open and distance learning. It was concluded that the attitude of the government towards libraries in Sri Lanka has been changed during the last few years and the government has made several approaches to develop the libraries particularly University libraries. Government also identified the capacity of distance education to accommodate the huge number of A/L completers who cannot gain admission to learn. It was found very important for the OUSL to boost the process of achieving its development goals to upgrade the quality and maintain the

standards of distance education in Sri Lanka.

In Nepal, Siwakoti (2008) found that there was no government agency to control, monitor and evaluate the school libraries activities. There was lack of awareness programs, budgetary constraints, inadequate space, inadequate library materials, lack of trained and skilled manpower and lack of appropriate government policy and lack of information literacy.

In Malaysia Lee, Brown, Mekis & Singh (2003) investigated that there was lack of full-time teacher librarians and selected teachers are asked to take charge of the school resource center as one of their administrative duties. There was no uniform current syllabus for the training of teacher librarians. The biggest problem which was found is that in Malaysian teacher librarians are facing professional isolation.

In Iran Gavvani, Shokraneh & Shiramin (2011) concluded that librarians do not have traditional skills and sufficient background knowledge to meet the changing needs of their customers. They need to be empowered by new skills and information before going to empower their patrons. So there must not be a gap between librarian's professional/technological knowledge and their societies informational need that to be answered by librarians. Need for changing the syllabus of medical library and information science education in Iran was also felt.

In India Jestin & Parameswari (2002) explored the challenges for library professionals in the new millennium. It found that library professionals in India were subjected to various challenges. The introduction of computers and new technology was a challenge to all librarians. It was conclude that librarians should be ready to participate in the process of generating and distributing information and knowledge for quality of life and education for all. Librarians must unite to withstand the revolutions that will occur in the information and communication fields. Similarly, Dasgupta (2009) searched out that in India there is non-existent of norms and standards for the education of librarians. Problems for Indian librarians discovered in his study were emergence of new LIS schools, insufficient faculty strength, lack of accreditation bodies, lack of proper library facilities, inadequate physical facilities, little attention for selection criteria, and lack of apprenticeship programs. Study suggested that the Government of India should play a leading role in promoting LIS education in India, by creating more job opportunities for LIS professionals and removing disparity in pay scales among LIS professionals.

Ali & Bakshi (n.d) explored that LIS profession is facing many challenges such as lack of finance, inadequate infrastructure, lack of knowledge and training, lack of high quality teaching staff, lack of permanent faculty for distant programs, lack of admission policy and evaluation, absence of accreditation body and supporting policy at national level, lack of global perspective and lack of library visits. It was suggested that admission test should be conducted before admission in LIS and practical hours should be increased. Attendance should be made compulsory and syllabus should be up-dated. Availability of high caliber staff should be ensured. Mobile based learning programmes should be adopted for distance learning. For the purpose of imparting practical training, there should be complete infrastructure. It was concluded that to support learning and teaching ICT should be used because e-learning would be the future of education.

Like other developing countries, studies conducted in Pakistan do not show the healthy picture of LIS profession. In Pakistan, even all libraries are not fully automated. Internet service for users is being provided in University libraries but in public and college libraries the provision of Internet service is not encouraging. Haider (2003) found that the present library scenario in Pakistan is not so impressive and is suffering from inadequate funds and lack of bibliographic resources in the country. It was suggested that in order to meet new challenges, library schools are needed to improve the quality of their teaching staff and revise the curricula as well. The amount of research by library professionals into their own discipline is simply inadequate. Mohammad Asghar (1992) listed some main problems as the lack of opportunities for proper training, appropriate guidance, availability and access to information sources, financial assistance and sponsorship, encouragement, publication or dissemination of research findings, and personal interest and initiative. As Khalid, Hafiz (1997) states, the library staff is an area of weakness in Pakistan; there are several causes of this problem in Pakistan such as the faulty system of selection, lack of training, poor librarian's status, etc.

It was pointed out by Ministry of Education in National Education Policy, 1998; p.113 that:

College libraries, which are the largest group of libraries in the country, have also been facing the problem of poor services, outdated collection of reading materials, financial constraints and inadequate professional staff.

Interview Responses

Results of interview responses indicated that library profession is revolutionizing significantly in many aspects. The emergence of new information and communication technology, internet, World Wide Web pose new challenges for

library professionals, therefore, it requires librarian to become positively energetic, equipped with greater skills and capabilities to survive and thrive in this new digital environment. The major challenges pointed out by respondents are a clear gap between theoretical and practical aspects of librarianship in curricula of most library schools, budgetary constrains, inadequate IT infrastructure in libraries, ineffective leadership, low professional status and pay scale, poor information literacy skills and digital literacy, inadequately trained and skilled manpower, limited library resources, insufficient communication skills, lack of accreditation, lack of incentives and inactive role of LIS professional associations. It was also pointed out that low information literacy rate among LIS professionals and users, lack of awareness about e-resources, and inadequate promotional activities are the major challenges faced by LIS professionals in developing countries.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is evident from the literature that information technology has affected the skills and responsibilities of the librarians & academicians as well. Technology has changed not only the face of information but also the information seeking behavior of the users. Technology demands high level of technical skill set from library professionals in order to make maximum use of new technological tools for providing effective and better services to the users. Study concludes that due to changing scenario of information, the librarians working in developing countries are facing common problems such as inadequate technical skills, advance searching skills, inadequate trained and skilled manpower, use of digital sources of information, different library soft-wares, poor fiscal condition of libraries, inadequate infrastructure, inadequate trainings, low rate of information literacy and professional status. Following recommendations/suggestions are made to bring positive change.

Recommendations

1. Librarians should acquire technical skills, IT skills, managerial skills and communication skills to work in digital environment.
2. To keep the librarians up-to-date and well aware of the new trends in the profession, continuing education and development programs (CEDP) should be started by Library Associations and LIS Schools.
3. It is recommended that Library Associations working in the country should organize useful training courses, seminars and conferences which may help in preparing well versed librarians in the country.
4. LIS Schools should play their role by organizing refresher courses to keep the librarian abreast of new trends in the profession.
5. All issues related to librarian's scale, promotion and salary must be resolved on priority basis so that the librarians may get mental satisfaction and work with devotion.
6. Scholarships, fellowship and awards should be offered to promote professional competition among the professionals.
7. LIS curriculum must be re-structured keeping in view the new technological trends in the profession and demand of job market in digital era.
8. Professionals' standards, norms must be developed for quality of services in libraries and information centres.
9. Apprenticeship programs should be offered to the newly qualified BLISc and MLIS students.
10. Library and Information Science Education Act should be established and Professional accreditations must be developed for providing quality of LIS education in Library Schools.
11. Adequate "Technical Facilities" such as well furnished Internet Laboratory equipped with modern tools for providing digital services to the users must be provided in every LIS Schools/Departments.
12. Appointment of IT teacher having specialization in computer science must be made in each LIS Schools/Departments for developing IT skills among the students in real sense.
13. LIS professionals and Schools are required to embrace the change and by developing new policies and trends in the profession as Parry (2008) stressed that we should embrace the change and future because it is our obligation to guide the future of libraries by guiding our own professions through evolution and transformation.

14. LIS Schools must establish their policy to concentrate on the quality of their product instead of quantity.
15. There should be a National Policy to control the demand and supply of LIS professionals in the country.
16. LIS curricula must be revised in developing countries in general and particular in Pakistan to incorporate all new technical skills which are required by the librarians to navigate smoothly into the voyage of digital information. It should be revised after every two years according to the new trends in the profession.
17. HEC (Higher Education Commission) in Pakistan should help libraries in acquiring modern infrastructure for providing variety of resources to the clients.

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