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PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES AND TRAINING NEEDS OF COLLEGE LIBRARIANS IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

Saeed Ullah Jan
saadullahjan2011@gmail.com

Rahim Jan
rahimjanrajjar@gmail.com

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Muhammad Imran, Saeed Ullah Jan and Rahim Jan

Khushal Khan Khattak University, Karak, KP, Pakistan

Abstract

Purpose of study: The core aim of the study is to identify the level of professional activities and training needs of library practitioners serving in Government colleges of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Research Method and Procedure: This study is quantitative, and the survey method is applied to achieve the desired objectives. The public sector college librarians of seven districts of the southern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were the study population.

Data Collection and analysis: A structured questionnaire was distributed among fifty-nine (59) college librarians. Out of total, fifty-five (55) librarians return the filled questionnaire with a response rate of 93%. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21 is used to analyze the collected data.

Major Findings and Recommendations: it was reflected that sixty- four percent of the respondents had not attended any training program in the last five years. The main reason for not attending the training program is the lack of management support with library professionals. Only thirty-six percent of the college librarians had attended conferences, workshops, seminars, and webinars organized by academic libraries, training institutes and universities.

Keywords: Library professionals-Professional activities, College Librarians-Training needs, Library practitioners-KP, Librarian' trainings-Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in libraries also has influenced the role of library professionals and information managers. They also need more efficient and adaptable individuals who can manage rapid changes effectively. Literally, Professional Development (PD) is vital for librarians to keep update themselves, acquire new skills

and maintain the basic competencies. The profession of librarianship is more dynamic and challenging, and to meet these challenges in an effective way, it is highly essential for library professionals to seek out PD opportunities in their profession (Mathew, 2011). The activities related to Professional Development (PD) are specifically designed for the personal and professional growth of librarians, and these activities are typically formal or informal in nature. Pan and Hovde (2010) viewed that professional development is highly crucial for library professionals, which is indeed a lifetime learning process. PD is not limited to any particular library or individual whilst, it is universal need for all librarians to update their selves with the rapid development in the library fields and maintain professionalism.

The lack of professional skills in most of the libraries in Pakistan is one of the key dilemmas, and that is a key rationale for the present depressed position of academic librarian skills (Haider, 2003). Therefore, most Pakistani researchers assessed that the basic reason is the librarian's lack of interest towards the attainment of needed skills (Ramzan, 2004; Ullah et al., 2010; and Mahmood, 2012). Likewise, with the reason of lack of interest, these academic librarians/managers also avoided development programs related to the library sector (Ramzan, 2004). Mahmood (2003) has expounded the librarians to attain up-to-date collection management skills. Similarly, Ullah et al., (2010) stated that librarians in Pakistan are unwilling to take the initiative into skill development. Ultimately, due to the less professional skills and avoiding worth-full training, these librarians are searching for peripheral support in the acquisition of collection management skills. Consequently, such behaviors compel librarians towards reliance on obsolete skills. Hence, this reliance on traditional skills is a threatening factor for librarians' profession and scholarly development (Moropa, 2010). Unequivocally, it is assessed by the researchers related to the Pakistani academic librarians that their behavior towards the acquirement of technological skills is very poor.

However, the present level of their technological skills is not adequate to overcome technological innovations (Mahmood, 2003; Ameen, 2008a). In Pakistan, it has been confirmed by various researchers that the collection management skills of library professional is not very good (Ameen, 2008) and referred professional skills and training (Ameen, 2006; Mahmood, 2012). Currently, it has been observed by copious researchers that some-extent improvements have been viewed in the behavior of young librarians/library managers related to the acquisition of professional skills and high- interest to learn and practice new Information and Communication Technology (ICT) at their institutional libraries (Shaheen, 2010).

According to the UNESCO for Asia and the Pacific (2003), "The training is a mode to communicate knowledge, change the behaviors, and develop skills". (p.3). literally, training is a key element for an effective application of IT in the libraries (Halder, 2009). It focuses on the development of three fundamental characteristics: attitude, knowledge, and skills (Swist, 2001). Similarly, training on numerous skills, like leadership collection development and communication, is also suggested by Bhatti and Nadeem (2014). It is highly needed for academic librarians to prepare their-selves for advanced professional skills via regular training to meet the needs of modern libraries in the area of research etc. (Ullah and Mahmood, 2012). From the previous debate, it is realized that even though an advanced level of library professional skills is crucial and has relations with staff organizational behaviors, but yet the present level of collection management skills of Pakistani librarians is very feeble. Moreover, it is realized by researchers that the availability of limited training opportunities for these library professionals is because of the un-availability of Training Needs Assessment (TNA). In addition, libraries are not finance-making institutions; therefore, authorities pay minor attention to the training of librarians (Ameen, 2009).

There are many organizations/agencies organizing various types of training for library professionals. Some international associations are as: (Hamid and Soroya, 2015)

- Int'l Federation of Library Association (IFLA)
- American Library Association (ALA)
- Canadian Library Association (CLA)
- Charted Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP UK)
- Indian Library Association (ILA).

In Pakistan, there are many associations, which are organizing training for library professionals, such as:

- Pakistan Library Association (PLA)
- Pakistan Library Automation Group (PAKLAG)
- Punjab University Library and Information Science Alumni Association (PULISAA)
- Karachi University Library and Information Science Alumni Association (KULISAA)
- Pakistan Library Club (PLC)
- Pakistan Librarians Welfare Organization (PLWO)
- LISolution
- Pakistan Library Cooperation Group (LIBCOOB)
- Punjab Library Foundation
- University of Peshawar Library and Information Science Alumni Association (UPLISAA)
- Punjab Medical Library Association (PMLA) etc.

In Pakistan, the scope of providing costless training is limited as only two government sector organizations National Centre for Rural Development (NCRD) and the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development (PARD) providing opportunities for free training. Thus it requires serious

participation from both national and international fund contributing agencies. The organizations, in turn, must provide opportunities to their staff members to participate in such activities because it would add to their organizational intellectual capital (Khan and Rafiq, 2013).

Technology is the recent era reality that has produced plenty of challenges to the Library Information Sciences (LIS) professionals in Pakistan and around the world. Therefore, training related to the use of technology is highly mandatory for LIS professionals to meet the needs of various public and private sector organizations in Pakistan. Related to the technology area, there are few Pakistani organizations/ institutions which should be noted for this noble cause, i.e., Pakistan Library Association (PLA), the National Centre for Rural Development (NCRD), the Pakistan Library Automation Group (PAKLAG), the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development (PARD), the Pakistan Library Club (PLC), the Pakistan Scientific and Technological Information Centre (PASTIC), etc. However, the results of these organizations are effective in terms of competencies development and professional work (Khan and Rafiq, 2013).

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Training gives everyone a great understanding of the responsibilities, knowledge, and skills they need to do that job. This will enhance their confidence which can also improve their overall performance. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are very crucial for librarians to engage and provide better services to modern library users. It has been noted that Pakistani professionals lack skills in ICTs. This may be due to various factors like insufficient funds and inadequately trained staff, lack of management support and administrative concern, etc. Most of the college libraries in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are not fully fledge in terms of implementing ICT-based applications in their services. To meet the demands for individual and collective information

of the academic community, the constant improvement in the professional performance of information providers is very important.

Hence this study is considered relevant to professional development, their skills and expertise handling with proper training, and the implication on the educational needs of library professionals. The study is also helpful to HED, Library associations, and organizers to organize training according to the needs of college librarians. It will also attempt to help the forthcoming research scholars to pursue the relevant research on the same caption. Moreover, it shall open a way to apply this topic in various academic fields, such as Education, IT, Management Sciences, etc.

PREVIOUS WORKS/LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of relevant literature is carried out to gain a thorough understanding of the study. Ahmad et al. (2019) analyzed skills and competencies of academic librarians of Pakistan. The study's aim was to examine librarians' perspectives and skills in relation to the implementation of Big Data analytics in Pakistani academic libraries. Aslam (2018) studied leadership skills, trends, and issues of academic libraries. The objective of the paper was to know about the skills and qualities library leaders need to meet the challenges of the 21st century. According to the author, library leaders should improve their leadership skills, pursue personal interests, inspire themselves and others, engage in all aspects of professional practice, and develop meaningful action plans. Ullah et al. (2010) investigate the professional practices, necessary competencies, and education/training requirements of Pakistani medical librarians. Purposive sampling yielded a total of twenty medical librarians. Medical librarians have few resources for advanced education and training. It was suggested that MELAP, CPSP, and library schools implement structured training programs for

medical librarians in Pakistan based on the study's findings. Ameen (2009) investigated the collection management skills of Pakistani university librarians. Pakistani librarians are following the digital trend and providing access to hybrid services, according to the researchers. In six Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Anwar and Al Ansari (2002) examined existing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities and expectations of academic library employers about the skills to be learned in their employees. The survey gave higher marks to writing and research skills related to assessment and evaluation, researching information needs, and report writing. Sharif and Mahmood (2001) looked into the effect of certificates on participants in library automation. The findings revealed that computer expertise aided them in obtaining better work, enhancing their automation-related practices, and assisting them in designing computer-based services for patrons in their libraries. Maesaroh and Genoni (2009) looked at Indonesian academic libraries' continuing professional development activities. The aim of their research was to look into the current and future state of academic library staff education and growth in Indonesia.

The evolving and challenging position of academic librarians in Pakistan is examined by Ashiq et al. (2021). The aim of this study was to look into the current and future challenges that academic libraries in Pakistan face, as well as potential solutions to these problems. Saleem and Ashiq (2020) looked into LIS professionals' continuing professional growth in Pakistan. The aim of this study is to find and synthesize literature on opportunities for Pakistani librarians and information professionals to engage in Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Ahmad, S., Ahmad, S., & Hussain, I. (2019) studied Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of University Librarians in Pakistan. The purpose of study was to assess the CPD aspects of the librarians working in the public and private sector universities of District Peshawar. Khan and Masrek (2017) investigated academic librarians' training needs in terms of collection management skills. The aim

of this paper was to look into the collection management training needs of Pakistani university librarians. Continuing education for LIS practitioners was investigated by Hamid and Soroya (2017). The aim of this study was to see how continuing education programs affected the participants' personal and professional lives and whether they had a positive or negative impact. Khan and Du (2017) investigated the use of social media for professional advancement, as well as the attitudes of Pakistani female librarians toward Professional Development (PD) through social media. According to Rafiq et al. (2017) various types of training provided by LIS colleges, library groups, and organizations do not meet the needs of LIS professionals. In Pakistan, Sharif and Mahmood (2001) investigated the impact of computer training on technical library activities. The aim of the research was to determine which areas of the Pakistan Library Association's Computer Training Center (PLA-CTC) could be improved.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To know the level of professional activities being carried out by college librarians in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

2. To know about the training needs for the improvement of their professional skills and knowledge of modern trends in the college libraries

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The quantitative research approach was used to find out the facts about the research problem. The survey research method was used to collect data. This method was appropriate and suitable for the study because the population was spread over a large geographical area. The public sector college librarians of seven districts of the southern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were the study population. The total numbers of public sector colleges in seven districts of the southern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are 59, of which 38 are male and 21 female colleges. Each college has only

one post of librarian. So, 59 librarians of public sector colleges were the population of the study. As the population was controlled, therefore census-based approach was used.

A structured questionnaire was developed by reviewing different literature on the topic. The data collection tool was carefully constructed. Moreover, this tool was used because many LIS research scholars have already used questionnaires in such studies. The researchers prepared the draft questionnaire, and then it was revised several times to merge similar questions and reduce their number. The draft was sent to the two eminent library professionals. After reviewing the questionnaire, the suggestions and changes mentioned by the experts were incorporated into the instrument. These changes were incorporated in the questionnaire's content, scale, and language as suggested by the experts. The updated version was sent back for validation to experts and then used for pilot testing. A pilot study was conducted before the start of the original data collection. The instrument was sent to 10 participants for feedback. After gathering data, the reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's alpha test in the SPSS software, which resulted in a score of greater than 0.8, indicating that it was a reliable questionnaire.

The questionnaires were distributed among the respondents of public sector colleges of the southern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through personal visits or postal service. The questionnaire was structured and close-ended type. Altogether 59 questionnaires were distributed. Fifty-Five respondents returned the questionnaires with a response rate of 93%. The responses were collected, categorized, codified in excel, and analyzed through Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21. The measurement scales were nominal, ordinal, and ratio. Descriptive statistics, i.e., frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to measure the variables.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Attendance in Any Training Program in the Last Five Years

Only 36% of respondents had attended any training program in the last five years. 64% of respondents had not attended any training program in the last five years. It reveals that college librarians are not keen on attending any training program.

Reasons for Not Attending the Training

The impeding factors for not attending any training program were analyzed. Out of 64% of respondents who had not attended any training program, 49% of respondents specify lack of management support followed by lack of policy for continuous learning (29%). 20% of respondents specify financial constraints, 17% of respondents specify shortage of leaves. It shows that the main reason for not attending the training program is the lack of management support with a library professional.

Frequency of the Training Attended

The respondents who had attended any training program were asked to mention the frequency of attending any training program. Out of 36% of respondents, 14(70%) respondents attend once in the last five years. 3(15%) respondents attend twice in the last five years, and 3(15%) respondents attend more than three times in the last five years. It shows that library professionals working in college libraries are not regular in attending any training program.

Types of Training Attended

The majority of respondents had attended conferences (55%) followed by workshops (45%) and seminars (30%). 15% of respondents had attended a webinar, 5% of respondents had attended online instruction, 5 % of respondents had attended refresher courses. It reveals that conference is the most popular type of training for library professionals.

Knowing Medium of Training

The most popular medium of knowing opportunities for respondents were co-workers and friends (45%), followed by mailings and brochures (35%) and professional publications (30%). 20% of respondents were known from social media and 15% of respondents were known from a supervisor. It shows that the most popular medium of knowing opportunities is co-worker and friends.

Organizers of Training

Most of the respondents (50%) attended the training organized by academic libraries and Pakistani Universities (45%), followed by PLA 35%. Only 20% of respondents attended the training organized by the Higher education department. It shows that most of the training is organized by academic libraries and universities.

Reasons for Attending the Training

Further, the respondents who had attended any training program were asked to mention the reasons. 55% of respondents attended the training to get trained in the latest technologies and to improve services in the library (50%). 50% of respondents attended the training to acquire new skills. It shows that college librarians want to get trained in the latest technologies to improve services in the library.

Obstacles Faced in Attending Training

The main obstacle to the respondents in attending the training was of lack of financial support (30%) and lack of policy for continuous training (30%). 25% 0f respondents specify the obstacle management support. It shows that the main obstacle in attending training program is lack of financial support and lack of policy for continuous training.

Core Areas in Which Training Is Needed

The opinion about the area in which training is needed by respondents was measured. 78% of the respondents wanted training to be conducted in the area of application of ICTs in the library services, new developments in the LIS field (50%) was the second most preferred LIS core area in which training needed to be conducted. 24% of respondents like managerial skills and competencies, and 22% of respondents like library management as a core area. It reveals that the application of ICTs in library services is the core area in which training is needed.

Topics in Which Training Is Needed

The respondent were asked to rate the LIS topics in which they need training. As per ratings, Library Automation was the most preferred LIS topic. The next ten topics preferred by respondents are: Managing a Digital Library, Creating and using Electronic Information resources, Web 2.0 applications, Cataloguing -new developments, Classification-new developments, Leadership skills, User education and information literacy, Information services, Developing content for websites, Open Source Software packages. It shows that library automation is the main topic in which training is needed.

Mode of Training

The views on the preferred mode of training were sought. Most of the respondents want face-to-face Interaction (67%) as a mode of training followed by online courses (29). It shows that librarians preferred face-to-face interaction as a mode of training.

Availability of Training Opportunities by HED/ Library Association

The majority of respondents (84%) stated that adequate training opportunities were not made available by Higher Education Department, whereas only 16% of respondents felt that adequate training opportunities were made available. It shows that appropriate training opportunities are not available to college librarians by HED.

Expectations from HED/Library Associations

The respondents were further asked to give an opinion on the type of work to be done by HED/library associations. Most of the respondents (45%) expected HED/library associations to organize training courses followed by the conference/seminars (35%) and then online courses (27%). Organizing webinars (20%) and organizing certificate programs (13%) followed in decreasing order. It shows that LIS professionals want to organize training courses by HED/Library associations.

CONCLUSION

As stated by (Connor 2009): "An academic library's single most valuable resource is its workforce. Without educated, well-trained, and motivated librarians and library staff, an academic library program is ill-prepared to meet the needs of its clientele or the challenges that face institutions of higher education." The success of any organization greatly depends upon the employees. Their performance depends upon the training provided to them. This is true with libraries and especially academic libraries. If they receive training as per their needs, they will be competent to serve the users effectively. In this context, continuing professional education is no longer an option; it is a prerequisite of professional practice in LIS.

The present study threw light upon the professional activities and training needs of academic librarians in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. College librarians in KP are performing traditional library services and are unaware of the latest trends. To increase awareness among college librarians regarding the latest developments in the field, seminars, conferences, and workshops should be conducted by HED, PLA, library schools and organizations. College librarians should be encouraged to participate in international conferences.Formal education and training programs for college librarians are highly desired to recruit the trained staff for initial professional

positions and to keep them up to date through continuous education. In this regard HED, PLA and library schools should design training programs for college librarians to meet the job market needs.

This study is considered relevant to professional development, their skills and expertise handling with proper training, and the implication on the educational needs of library professionals. Thus it requires serious participation from both national and international fund contributing agencies. The organizations, in turn, must provide opportunities to their staff members to participate in such activities because it would add to their organizational intellectual capital. It is the responsibility of administrators, library associations, and the Higher Education Department to provide opportunities to LIS professionals to update their skills, knowledge, and competencies to keep pace with the rapidly changing environment of academic libraries with the help of training and providing the resources. This will ensure satisfied users, which in turn improve the position of the library in the organization.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

From the conclusion of the study, the following suggestions and recommendations are made.

1. LIS professionals working in academic libraries in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa must be committed to Continuous Education through CEPs. They should keep on updating their knowledge and acquire new skills through achieving higher qualifications and training. In this digital age, the competence of LIS professionals is at stake as the libraries strive to compete in a rapidly changing world. In this context, continuing professional education is no longer an option; it is a prerequisite of professional practice in LIS. This can be accomplished by extending the boundaries of education through informal continuing education.

2. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are very crucial for librarians to engage and provide better services to modern library users. It has been noted that Pakistani professionals lack skills in ICTs. In this regard, the library professionals of these colleges must be equipped with automation and ICTs skills to satisfy modern library users. Various seminars and workshops on automation and ICTs can improve such weak areas of these librarians.

3. It is highly desirable for libraries and their parent institutions to have a continuing professional development plan for the library professional as part of the library Development plan. Library professionals may be encouraged to participate in training activities through incentives such as salary increases or credits for promotion and increased freedom and empowerment. Specific campaigns or strategic policies may also be framed for raising their participation in training activities.

4. LIS schools, organizations, and vendors are representatives of continuing professional education providers in the marketplace. In order to ensure quality programs, organizers should organize the programs based on the learning needs of participants. This will help to maximize the attendance of CEPs.

5. The professionals strongly opined that Higher Education Department should take initiatives to provide more training opportunities. Professionals expected library associations and national organizations to take active participation in providing training opportunities for professionals.

6. It is essential for organizers to take feedback from the trainees after the program and evaluate their reaction, learning, behavior, and results of the program. The parent departments should also follow the same SOP for follow-up measures. A questionnaire or

survey may be conducted by the training agency after the training. Email service can also be used in this regard.

7. In order to improve the quality of the program, The Organizers should take the initiative in imparting CE through an e-learning platform. So that LIS professionals can take part at their convenience.

8. The universities and library associations should take the lead in providing more CE opportunities. The library associations should conduct CEPs in the form of training courses and conferences. The organizers should conduct CEPs of minimum one-week duration for professionals as it will be useful for CAS benefits. The university library staff performing specialized work, i.e., acquisition, cataloging, reference, etc., need special training to perform better.

9. National organizations like PLA, PARD, NCRD, PAKLAG, PULISAA, KULISAA, PLC, PLWO, LIBCOOB, UPLISAA, etc., should collaborate with academic libraries and organize short-term training programs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These organizers should organize more training programs in public sector colleges of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa so that the professionals, who could not implement learning due to lack of technical expertise, will get the chance to update their knowledge.

10. CPD remains an irregular activity in Pakistan. There is an immediate need to offer CPD opportunities in which professionals greatly lack, including communication skills, library leadership, information/digital literacy skills and subject/domain knowledge, etc. A communication skill is a very weak area among library professionals that should be addressed immediately by offering course and training workshops.

11. There is no permanent platform or body of a professional association to work purely for CPD initiatives. Many recent studies have highlighted the need for CPD of library professionals jointly ventured by professional library associations and LIS schools would be a good moving-forward initiative. A separate entity for CPD initiatives under the PLA platform linked with LIS schools would be worthwhile to organize and create equal learning opportunities throughout the country.

12. Generic training on the key research databases should be offered, together with department-related training. Critical appraisal, IT, and search techniques skills often need to be addressed, and a variety of training styles should be adopted to create a broad and responsive program that will help create newly qualified and skilled library professionals.

13. The students should have separate training sessions arranged periodically by the respective school of LIS to acquaint them with current knowledge and practice. This will add to the existing knowledge and education planned in the curriculum and imparted as part and parcel of the syllabi.

14. Training agencies are required to prepare a schedule calendar for the whole academic year so that if a trainee misses training, he/she should be able to track the next coming training and prepare him/herself well in time for enrollment.

15. The training agencies should ensure gender-balanced participation of trainees so as to give equal opportunities to female participants also.

16. An evaluation report must be prepared in order to gauge the participant learning and outcome of each training. These reports should be shared with all participants to make them aware of the increase/decrease in the level of understanding concepts and ideas.

17. LIS training agencies are working in their own capacity and way. A close link between all training agencies is strongly suggested so as to streamline the training courses, trainer's requirements, contents and structure of training. In this context, an initiative could be taken to develop a website which enlists all LIS training/workshops/seminars and upcoming events for general awareness of LIS professionals. The website should contain information about scheduled dates, duration, course contents, speakers, and logistics.

18. Public Libraries and College Libraries should be encouraged to come forward to take part in the professional development of their personnel.

19. The management and principals should support the librarians by encouraging them to attend the available training programs.

20. Adequate staff in libraries will enable the librarian to attend the available training programs in Pakistan.

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