

Job Market and competencies required for professional librarians in Pakistan

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Abstract:

Library and Information Science is a broad practical field that gives a flavor of Mathematics, Statistics, Management, Technology, and Educational Policy. The basic responsibility of librarian is to provide the right material to the right reader at the right time and all this is possible when a library is organized systematically and the material is properly classified and catalogued. Professional librarians are hired by different institutions and organizations – both in public and private sector. All the organizations have their objectives and targets to achieve. To run the affairs effectively, they organize themselves systematically and establish a well-stocked library manned with professional staff. They have some expectations from their library and for this purpose, they assign some targets to the library staff. To fulfill all these requirements, they need some qualities and efficiencies in the library professionals. What professional, semi-professional, and administrative skills these organizations expect from their library

staff – this paper will highlight all merits and demerits of a librarian.

Key Words: LIS Professional, Professional Competencies, Job Market, Librarianship

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the competencies of library professionals required by the library employers, to find out the deficiencies of working librarians or the candidates for librarianship, to seek suggestions from the library employers about the inclusion/exclusion of the course(s) in the existing curricula of library schools, and to hunt for recommendations from different library-friendly organizations about their expectations for additional capabilities or proficiencies possessed by a librarian.

Literature Review

Since the topic of this study is “Job Market and competencies required for professional librarians in Pakistan”, so the relevant literature either in printed or electronic form was searched from all possible sources. Browsing of the literature reveals that much has been written locally and internationally on every aspect of qualification and competencies required for library professionals, etc. Suggestions have also been given to improve the abilities and proficiencies of the library professionals and to incorporate these recommendations in the curricula for better production of LIS graduates. This section investigates the literature relevant to the study.

Mustafa and Ansari (2012) studied the educational qualification required for LIS professionals to be hired in Pakistani libraries. The paper suggests that the LIS academicians, library associations and the library professionals must be united to market the new services and prepare to meet the new emerging professional requirements and skills demanded around the globe.

Warrach and Ameen (2011) conducted a study about the job skills of the alumni of Punjab University's library school. The objective of the paper is to seek and study the views of young and senior library and information science (LIS) professionals in Pakistan on LIS curricula and its applicability to market needs to enhance job opportunities. The study discloses very useful information for designing and revising of the LIS curriculum and change in teaching practices in all library schools of Pakistan.

A case study was carried out to investigate the usefulness of library practicum in learning various professional skills through the insight of LIS graduates by Malik and Ameen (2010). The findings reveal that inadequate practicum duration, communication gap among three parties (students, external and internal supervisor), loose supervision and a little focus on professional skills are the problems reported by LIS graduates.

Ullah, Amin, and Bakhtar (2010) look at the current professional activities of medical librarians in Pakistan, the perception of the proficiencies needed of medical librarians, and their training and education needs by qualitative research method. The findings disclose that the medical library professionals were generally involved in conventional kinds of professional activities. They were uninformed about the latest tendencies in medical librarianship. Out of ten competencies mentioned by the respondents "ability to use ICT and integrated library software", "verbal and written communication skills" and "extensive knowledge of Pub Med (a free search engine that provides access chiefly to the MEDLINE database of references and abstracts on life sciences, biomedical and relevant topics) and other medical databases" were ranked first, second and third respectively.

Jabeen (2010) investigates the present-day status of librarians' continuing education/trainings in Pakistan. The study reveals that use of technology is the biggest challenge facing the library

professionals. They cannot use the technology effectively so they are to be trained to use the same efficiently.

Sajjad-ur-Rehman (2008) depicts the advancement of library and information studies/science (LIS) into various stages amid the last century. Scholastic projects and readiness of LIS experts have seen a ceaseless change. These changes, as identified by SLA are due to two types of competencies: Professional and Personal. The professional competencies include managing information organizations, information resources, and information services and applying information tools and technologies. The personal competencies comprise attitudes, skills and values to work effectively. Some other competencies which are needed for professional librarians and should be incorporated in the curricula of library schools include: services to fulfill user needs and help research library mission, understanding students, faculty and researchers needs, knowing the information resources in all aspect.

Mahmood and Khan (2007) carried out an evaluation survey of continuing education (CE) requirements for ICT skills or techniques the LIS experts need to learn. As today the LIS experts are relied upon to know about, and prepared to do, utilizing and showing developing ICTs. The findings of the research reveal that the arrangement of all the trainings and know-how about ICT should be made by the professional associations, library schools, employers and ICT vendors.

Mahmood (2003) analyses the literature on the capabilities required for academic librarians in the Asia/Pacific region and converses the changing environment of academic librarianship in Pakistan. The study provides a list of skills required for entry-level academic librarians, first prepared based on a literature review and then approved by 70 head and senior librarians of postgraduate colleges and universities from both public and private sector. The paper highlights the major deficiencies in the curricula and their implementation and

recommendations are given to improve the situation.

Mahmood and Sharif (2001) determine the impact of the Certificate in Library Automation (CLA) on librarianship in Pakistan. The results showed that the courses were attended mainly by comparatively young professional librarians, most of who were working in Lahore. The respondents revealed that their computer training was very much helpful for them for switching over to better job positions. Most of them had access to computer facilities in their offices and use them daily, and have participated significantly in automation activities in their libraries. Majority of the respondents revealed that they had also applied their computing knowledge in writing books, articles, delivering lectures and providing consultancy services.

In his paper, Mahmood (1997) investigated that library education in the country does not fulfill the needs of the new information era. This paper gives an account of efforts made to impart education and training of information technology (IT) at six library schools in Pakistan. It provides recommendations for improvement in IT training, discussing factors involved in LIS education, such as curriculum, faculty, teaching methods, hardware and software facilities, continuing education, and documentation. The author also suggests how IT education can be started with low budgets in Pakistani library schools.

As far as the competencies required for professional librarians are concerned, the literature identifies shortcomings which the professionals working in these libraries demonstrate. The solution of these shortcomings is also suggested with a note that if these suggestions are incorporated in the curricula of library schools of Pakistan, very efficient and competent academic librarians can be produced. A lot has been contributed on the significance of information technology and recommendations have been given to include more and more IT-related topics in the curricula.

Research Methodology

The study in hand is a qualitative research and this section depicts the research methods used to achieve the objectives of the study. It covers methods used for literature review, construction of data collection instruments, and data collection and analysis. As the literature on the topic is available in the form of printed and electronic books, articles of journals etc. so to search the relevant material, standard bibliographies and online searching techniques were applied. Various tools for this purpose were used. After searching the literature, all the identified up-to-date material on the topic was consulted and studied thoroughly. Relevant notes and concepts were taken very carefully and proper references were also made.

For collecting information about the competencies of library professionals required by different organizations, in-depth personal interviews of the following personalities were conducted:

1. Mr. Jehangir Aslam, member selection board (technical)
State Bank of Pakistan
2. Mr. Idrees Waqar, administrator Punjab Group of Colleges,
Lahore
3. Mr. Nooruddin Merchant, Chief Librarian, Habib
University, Karachi
4. Syed Ghayour Hussain, Director, National Library of
Pakistan, Islamabad
5. Mr. Manzoor Kaleri, Deputy Director, Culture and Tourism
Department, Government of Sindh, Karachi
6. Prof. Dr. Shakil Baluch, Principal Staff Officer, University
of Baluchistan, Quetta

7. Mr. Izharul Haq, Member Selection Board, Institute of Sindhology, Hyderabad
8. Malik Habibullah Khan, Assistant Director, KPK Public Service Commission, Peshawar
9. Ms Amtus Sajjad, Library Coordinator, Beaconhouse Schools System, Karachi
10. Engineer Mazhar Hussain, NED University of Engineering & Technology, Karachi

The library professionals are hired by different types of organizations whose objectives, activities, functions, products, and services are of different nature. These organizations and institutions are maintaining libraries to meet their needs. To seek the opinions of library employers, personal interviews of the members of selection boards, human resource management, personnel departments, library coordinating bodies, etc. of different organizations and institutions which are responsible to hire/select library professionals were conducted. For this purpose, the responsible incumbents were personally and telephonically interviewed. They were inquired about the competencies of librarians they need, the deficiencies they find in their working librarians, and their opinion about the inclusion of course(s) in the curriculum. The interviews were recorded on voice recorder while notes were also taken during the course of interview.

The interviews were finalized as: a) transcription of data b) deduction of unnecessary words and repetition c) refinement, and d) coding.

Introduction

Nowadays, the career market has become extremely competitive. A large number of career options are available to the youths and a number of institutes and organizations are offering variety of jobs to the candidates to choose the right one. Getting a professional education is important for shaping career to move towards a right direction. Especially in developing countries, professional education is of great importance. Medical, engineering, dentistry, teaching, business management, accounting, librarianship, forestry and nursing are some of the professional careers and the list, by no means, is complete.

With the growing demand of career-oriented education, management education has gained a huge popularity. Library and Information Science (LIS) as a profession, is concerned with the knowledge and skill by which the records of human communication are collected, organized and utilized. According to Shera (1972) "A librarian is a mediator between man and the graphic records that his previous generations had produced; and the goal of the librarian is to maximize the social utility of these records for the benefit of humanity." Librarians have very important role to play in the process of communication of information especially in this era when the information is being generated not only gigantically but also in various forms and types and one cannot have control on it. A library scientist can very easily imagine the tough schedule and engagements of different professionals. A medical professional is busy in curing his patients, attending conferences, seminars, workshops, delivering lectures and also involved in the research to detect a cure for a disease. Will he be able to get enough time to unscramble the tons of information shooting out every second from every part of the world? The library professional can also think of an economist, whose focus, for example, is on the study of effects of the severe "depression period", will he be able to concentrate and study the effects worldwide without being distracted to search the journals

and articles for the issue? The possible answers to these and other similar questions might be “No”. Then how will these and other professionals of different fields be able to get what they require before it becomes outdated? How will they only be able to focus upon their own work without being disturbed by the typical “literature research” burdens?

The library professionals come forward for the rescue and provide the people of every field with the answers to their “time-bound” problems. It is librarians, who know more than everyone about where to find what and how. It is librarians, who interact with all their clientele, maintain proper record of their names, interests, fields of work, topics of research or study, and never forget to send them information accordingly. It is librarians, who are available to answer even a brief or simple question like “is this book available?” or “for how long can I keep the book with me?”. People would be lost in this ocean of information and would not be able to come out of it, but it is library professionals who keep them on their right track, not letting them to deviate from their topic.

The importance of library and library professionals cannot be ignored these days. Gone are the days when libraries were merely store rooms and librarians were custodians to that. Today libraries are Information Centers acting 24/7, exhibiting different features and providing services under various slogans and titles like “Ask a Librarian”, “Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI)”, “Current Awareness Services(CAS)”, “Document Delivery”, “Resource Sharing” etc. And Librarian is not just that traditional custodian of books. Librarians are now the well-informed element of the literate society. They know how to handle competitive intelligence, how to tackle with a burning issue, and they know how to manage the digital libraries. Librarians work in a networked environment so they are playing the role of information navigators or knowledge guides. They use traditional skills as well as technological skills i.e. networking, internet, web designing, multimedia, document imaging, electronic databases, I.T. skills,

evaluating websites, integrated network resources, create search strategies and creating metadata.

Despite the importance and skillfulness of the librarians especially in the field of research, yet in some Asian countries, they are still not given that much importance which they are worthy of. The reason behind this ignorance and lack of acknowledgement and thanklessness may be the lack of demands of information needs by the people of the society. In Pakistan, library professionals are not getting the due status which they deserve because they are not that much active in marketing their profession's value as well as in offering modern services. The libraries and librarianship can get a status and prestige like the ones of developed countries do if there is flexibility in educational systems, more emphasis is given on research, imparting in-service training, equipping the departments with new facilities, employing new and skillful staff, encouraging collaboration among faculty members and departments, diversifying courses and degrees, updating syllabi in an ongoing manner, taking maximum benefit from ICT, and creating and publishing LIS literature in national and native languages.

In the present times, the importance of libraries and librarians has assumed high priority. In the West, the opportunity in business community, suggest a boost in professional status of Library and Information Science. Separate distinct positions of library professionals in corporate and business libraries are created under some attractive titles like Information Manager, Chief Information Officer or Knowledge Officer. However the success of the information depends upon the analysis and selection of information to meet the needs of the organization. Here the effectiveness of Library and Information Science could play its important role. The skills of the librarians can help the employees save valuable time on activities, such as Internet surfing, information access and acquisition of previous information on the subject. Realizing the value of Library & Information Science, many universities in almost every country are offering it as a part of their curricula.

The world of information institutions including the book and media publishing industry, as well as, the information sector involved in the development, management, processing and selling of information is very diverse. Currently, the information industry offers positions to LIS graduates thus giving much promise to rescuing the prestige of the profession and increasing the social status of librarians. Now the LIS professional have a definite part to play in preparing subject-specific, commercial and public web services.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Various organizations and institutions in both public and private sectors hire qualified library professionals. What are their requirements and what competencies they want from the incumbents they are going to hire, were probed during the sessions of personal interviews by the researchers. A variety of organizations were identified who hire library professionals so that interviews of the competent authorities or their representatives may be arranged. In all 10 interviewees were selected for the purpose. It was made possible to cover delegates of all the provinces and federal capital.

Key Findings

Needed Competencies:

- Management of academic, public, and special libraries
- Knowledge of computerization, digitization, and automation
- Designing library software
- Information literacy
- Creativity, innovation, team work, and adaptation
- Computer and IT literacy
- Strong communication skills
- Knowledge about office rules and procedures
- Administrative qualities

- Knowledge of compiling, editing, composing and publishing national bibliography
- Leadership skills
- Supervisory qualities
- Frequent shelf reading
- Thorough command on the foundation of librarianship
- Knowledge management
- Library marketing
- Information filtration
- Capability of arranging events especially academic
- Knowledge of latest literature
- Storytelling techniques
- Maintaining liaison with all elements of book world
- Understanding psychology of the reader
- Identifying need of the reader
- Good knowledge of archiving and filing information

Deficiencies found in library professionals:

- Weakness of drafting, noting, and report writing
- Hesitant of taking any major responsibility
- Plagiarize in report writing without making references
- Weakness of verbal and written English communication
- Unable to design a power point presentation
- Hesitant to use modern technology
- Unawareness about library software
- Non-inclination towards research
- Not good reader
- Not interested in increasing knowledge
- Passive attitude instead of active one
- Avoid taking initiative to help readers
- Hesitant to face challenges
- No knowledge of Knowledge Management, Library Marketing, Information Literacy, Digitization, Information Filtration

- Hesitant to explore new concepts of libraries
- Lack of confidence in dealing with clients or others
- Unawareness about 21st century library spaces
- Lack of interpersonal relations

Recommended courses:

- Writing skills
- Presentation skills
- Disaster management
- ICT skills
- Library software
- Collection development and acquisition in a connected world
- Library budgeting
- Knowledge management
- Management of serial publications
- Information literacy
- User's education
- Interpersonal communication
- Leadership skills
- Verbal and written communication skills
- Managerial competencies
- Personality grooming
- Procurement of foreign library material
- Filtration of e-Information
- Marketing of library services
- Readers' psychology

Other qualities:

- Team work
- Interpersonal communication
- Conducting seminars
- Lifelong learning skills
- Knowledge about contemporary authors and publishers

- Commitment with the profession
- Inter-professional relations
- Knowledge about latest literature and best sellers
- Interviewing skills
- Administrative qualities
- Ability to face challenges and address problems

Discussion

Needed Competencies:

The employers and the members of selection committees and boards, who are responsible to hire the library professionals, during the course of interviews, enumerated a number of competencies and qualities which they seek in the professional to be hired. Much of these capabilities are, definitely, concerned with the library profession and qualification but some of the qualities are related to administration, management, personal behaviour, interaction and dealing with clients, information and communication technology, leadership role, etc. The authorities and management of any organization endeavour to uplift the excellence of their organizations and they do not want to compromise on standard and quality of their services and products. To meet these requirements, they would not take any risk of hiring/employing incompetent or inefficient workers. So during the course of selection, they thoroughly evaluate the competency and capability of the candidate and no doubt, it is their right to hire the most suitable candidate having all required competencies. In case of selecting a library professional, the employers expect that the prospective candidate would efficiently manage and run the routines of the library. They want that the candidate, to be selected, should have sufficient knowledge of modern information technology, have good relations with all elements of book world like authors, publishers, booksellers, book suppliers, and other libraries and he/she should also be fond of reading books. Besides professional and semi-professional traits, they also require some other qualities like personality, attitude, responsible approach,

controlling power, decision making, handling untoward and unpleasant situations, etc. The demands of the employers which were emerged as the major competencies expected from the prospective library professional, besides the core library proficiencies, are knowledge of computer and information and communication technology, and written and verbal communication skills.

Deficiencies found in library professionals:

The employers, on the basis of their experience and observations, have pointed out a number of inefficiencies and inabilities in the prospective candidates. Most of the identified inefficiencies are non- or semi-professional traits. The employers had complained that although the candidates are professionally qualified and competent but they are lack in managerial and administrative abilities and are reluctant to take major responsibilities, use modern communication technology, face challenges, increase knowledge, etc. They are either unable or weak in drafting and other routine correspondence and the reason is poor verbal and written communication in any language. Although the majority of the professionals especially the young ones and fresh graduates are comfortable with information and communication technology but those who had been graduated some two to three decades ago, are indisposed to use computers and related technology. The authorities and employers of library professionals need competent and efficient incumbents who not only perform their professional responsibilities but also the relevant errands and tasks and other routine activities of an organization. The management wants an appointee having command on professional and non-professional pursuits, having leadership qualities, having ability to assign the justified tasks to the subordinates, having good communication skills etc. The management does not want to have any loophole in the performance of the library especially and the organization generally so it needs an efficient library professional, who should be free from all inefficiencies. To meet the objectives, the

employers identify the inabilities and avoid selecting such candidates.

Recommended courses:

They recommended a number of courses or contents of courses to be included / incorporated in the existing syllabus. Although they had proposed some attractive titles of courses or contents of courses but due to their unawareness or lack of information, they had named such titles which are either already part of existing curricula or not related to the field of librarianship. Some of the employers had professional experience of library and information science but some others did not have any know-how of libraries and related field. Those employers whose background was library and information science, had recommended the core and specialized courses whereas non-professional employers who had administrative and executive experience, recommended the contents like communication and writing skills, disaster management, personality grooming, managerial skills, leadership skills, etc. All the employers proposed the courses of their own ability and approach.

Other qualities of Library Professionals:

The employers suggested some other qualities of the incumbents which can distinguish them from those who do not possess these skills. Although these capabilities are not of the library professionals but can give them an edge over those missing the qualities. A librarian is expected to perform his/her professional activities as well as the supervisory and administrative ones. Very thought-provoking and attractive suggestions were received against this question and no doubt, a librarian should possess all or some of them. The recommended additional qualities include lifelong learning skills, interpersonal communication, interviewing skills etc. It is expected that these course contents would not only enhance the performance but also the prestige of the library professionals.

Conclusion:

Although the employers seek both professional and personal capabilities and qualities in the incumbent but their main focus is on personal talents and behaviors. They need a man full of various traits and characters. A person - who is punctual, dedicated, sincere, team leader, and devoted to his profession and organization and incumbent, should have the quality of assigning justified responsibilities to the right person among all the subordinates. What professional competencies the employers want from the incumbent most are appropriate use of technology, communication skills, report writing, and professional correspondence. According to the employers, the library professionals lack in these competencies. All these weakness indicate lack of motivation and enthusiasm in the professionals which is an alarming situation. To overcome this problem, contents of personality development, team work, and leadership skills should be made part of curricula of library schools.

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