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Assessing the Role of Library Associations in Promoting Research Culture in LIS

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Abstract

Library Associations play an important role in the promotion of librarianship as a profession vital to an informed and knowledgeable society. This paper discusses the importance of research in LIS, and considers the role of professional association in recognizing, enabling and promoting a research culture amongst qualified professionals. It shows that if the library profession is to grow and thrive as a true profession, demonstrating not only typical practice, but also considered scholarly approaches to the issues of its day, then its commitment in apt and relevant research practice is indispensable. It addresses the prospects, problems and challenges posed in the changing higher education environment in this Information Age. Throughout the world professional associations put substantial emphasis on the professional development of LIS community through fostering research. The Pakistan Library Association has inadequately realised its active research role in LIS and librarianship profession. As literature shows that it should be dedicated to motivate and facilitate its professional towards research activities. The PLA needs to affirm that research in LIS is fundamental to a growing educated society, culture, education and economy in the country. This paper addresses various contributing factors, problems and solutions for bringing up positive change in the professional culture through research. The study suggests that PLA needs to maintain well-resourced library network and information systems for LIS, well placed to meet the research demands and opportunities for the future. Some examples of library associations' fostering research from the countries with advanced library system are included.

Keywords: library associations, research in LIS, Pakistan Library Association

Introduction

The creation and dissemination of research is central to the growth of any profession. Library and Information Science is no exemption. A considerable amount of emphasis has been placed by many library experts and professionals towards the creation of research culture among LIS community. Glazier and Grover realized the importance of professional growth needed by the field of Library and Information Science by pointing out that, "Our attention must increasingly be devoted to research. We must all raise our expectations and challenges the profession to value and use research."

Hallam (2005) also emphasized that:

“It can be strongly argued that research is critical for the creation of professional knowledge and therefore critical to the survival and growth of the library and information profession. Without a commitment to research, we will not be a profession as such, but merely an occupation that focuses on routine processes” (p. 4).

Hallam further maintains that LIS educators have a responsibility to ensure graduates are equipped not only with the conceptual structures and thinking processes of their discipline, but also with an understanding of and experience in the range of research methodologies that can be applied in practice (p. 4)

One striking feature in the field of librarianship is the conspicuous dearth of literature – whereas educational research activities and investigation depends on the availability of a reliable body of information to users and scholars (Bhatti, 2003 p. 143). In fact, the insufficiency of authoritative sources of on librarianship in Pakistan is without any doubt the major handicap requiring prompt attention. It indicates the need for new research and the possible production of new literature in this most neglected aspect of librarianship in Pakistan. In order to obtain current and valid information in LIS, library schools and library associations would have to work together to actively foster research activities. Research is considered as fundamental to the escalation of any profession, thus, the need for investigating the role of library association for the promotion of research.

Powell (2004) stressed that LIS programmes do not have the entire responsibility for training competent researchers. It is also the responsibility of professional associations and, in some cases, research organisations to provide appropriate continuing education opportunities (p. 10).

Quality of research in LIS has been of greater concern. Unfortunately, the past research records in library and information science are not exemplary. Ennis described library research as “noncumulative, fragmentary, generally weak and relentlessly oriented to immediate practice” (in Grotzinger, 1981, p. 44), but it is not to say that there has not been a substantial amount of good library-related research. In addition, most experts seem to be of opinion that library-related research of last some decades has shown improvement with regard to its rigorosity, sophistication, and incorporation of multiple methods and statistical analysis. Yet they also seem to agree that there continues to be some room for improvement (Powell, p1). According to Sharon (1986) there were some promising signs in LIS research in 1980s. She stated that “a new strain of thought has sprung up in the field of librarianship ... an interest on the part of practising librarians in conducting serious research”.

Why research in LIS?

Research is considered an imperative element in LIS as in other disciplines. For coping with the ever-changing trends in the subject, and for anticipating the issues and problems (that may arise), the need for conducting research becomes crucial for survival. A strong research culture is considered essential to any mature profession, a point made strongly in the literature about professions.

There are a number of positive justifications that can be made for more rigorous research. Williamson pointed out six reasons why research in professional practice is valued:

- to assist in understanding the problems and issues which arise in the workplace
- to add to knowledge in the field and/or provide solutions to problems
- to maintain dynamic and appropriate services
- to meet requirements of accountability
- to maintain and improve professional status
- to provide a body of research findings and theory to inform practitioners (Williamson, 2002, p. 12).

Shaughnessy in Powell (2004) maintained that research is essential in the field of LIS to solve professional problems, develop tools and methods for analysis of organisation, services, and behaviour to determine costs and benefits of services, and most importantly, to establish and to develop a body of theory on which to base our practice (p. 7). LIS students and professionals must not only be able to “read, understand, and value the LIS research literature”, but, “they must also be able to locate it within its cultural context (Hernon, 2001, p. 88). A commitment to understanding and applying research is also essential if the field is to continue to advance (Prudence, 2001, p. 163).

In the professional literature of librarianship many experts have established the importance and the nature of the relationship between research and practice (Bhatti, 2009), Macauley, 2004, Seadle, 2004, Maguire, 1998). Having considered the significance of research for librarianship, Haddow and Klobas noted that:

Research should inform practice and contribute to the development of theory. Practice should benefit from research findings (particularly where those findings go towards improving the product or service provided by practitioners) and raise more questions for research. Effective interaction between research and practice will produce a strong theoretical framework within which a practitioner community can develop and thrive (Haddow and Klobas 2004, p. 30).

It is notably emphasised by Harvey (2002) who indicates that research and professional practice are inextricably linked. Research can and does play a vital role in professional practice in the fields of information management and information systems, in corporate, government, educational and community sectors. The most obvious uses of research in these information environments are for problem solving, for development, evaluation and improvement of services and systems, and to provide information before introducing new systems or services (perhaps through the assessment of user needs) (Harvey, in Williamson, 2002, p. xiii).

Objectives of the Study

- Discuss the role of library associations in promoting research activities;
- Identify the basic issues, challenges and factors causative towards inadequate research in LIS;
And;
- Suggest the possible measures for PLA for advancing research activities in the field of library and information science both at national and international level.

Research Methodology

This study is based on review of literature, observation, opinions, perceptions and comments by faculty and library professionals. Semi-structured interviews with Library science specialists, library staff and educationists were conducted regarding the role of library associations in promoting research activities. Various types of literature; books, journal articles, abstracting services of journal papers (e.g. BUBL, JADE, ERIC), doctoral theses, conference proceedings and public documents, material from the Internet were consulted.

Review of Related Literature

Sacchanand, C. (2008) studied the role of the Thai Library Association in library development, LIS research, services to the society and foreign relations were highlighted. It suggested that the objectives of TLA need to be broadened to cope with changes and reach its goal in the enhancement of research in librarianship in Thailand. It shows that importance of seminars/workshops which are arranged for the dialogue and exchange of knowledge and ideas for specific groups on issues, topics or problems in all areas of librarianship.

Mohseni (2004) and Amir Sheibani (1995) studied the cooperation of members in association activities. They explored the research function of the Iranian Library and Information Science Association. Pakdaman, et al., (2008) examined medical librarians' opinions toward the Iranian Medical Library and Information Science Association. They emphasised for need for improvement of research function of the association by changing the structure of education and seminar committee. In a study conducted by Parameswari (2002) on "Challenges for Library Professionals in India in the New Millennium" indicated that through associations librarians can also contribute to the profession's body of learning by publishing in association journals, newsletters, and monographs and by presenting programs at conferences and continuing education courses. Indian Library Association provides research opportunities for those looking for upward career movement; it supports to develop leadership skills by serving as leaders in committees, interest groups, divisions, and executive councils.

Muswazi (1998) described about a research done in Swaziland, which examined advertising, education, legislation, research, and publication done by the library association. The data consisted of association documents and interviews with association members and indicated the need for a strategic plan, improvements in communication, and increase in membership fees.

Aslan (1995) examined Turkish Library Association's member opinions and expectations about the association's activities. A questionnaire asked questions about the research functions of the association, the level of satisfaction, priorities, and funding options etc. The findings revealed insufficient level of satisfaction with the educational and research activities.

The Canadian Library Association (2000) conducted research to evaluate members' opinions about its activities and research role. The study determined the level of member satisfaction with association activities, identifying the most important issues in the profession, the role of each member, and the work priorities of the association. The results found partial satisfaction and determined that informal education and the development of professional knowledge were important activities.

A study on the Japan Special Library Association showed the importance of specifying goals to promoting cooperation for research activities among various libraries, including libraries and information management centers in government offices, local assemblies, private institutions, research institutions, enterprises, universities and colleges, and other organizations, for profitable library activities, and to advance the profession of library and information science. It showed to Promoting research activities to advance information management technology for the special libraries.

Teresa Wang Chang stated that the Library Association of China is dedicated to promoting Chinese culture, to enhancing studies and research in library and information sciences, and expediting the development and advancement of the profession through the joint efforts of library professionals.

Kerry Smith (2006) investigated that if is there a role for professional associations in fostering research? His paper particularly addressed the Australian context, he found out that throughout the world professional associations in librarianship place considerable emphasis on the professional development of their members through research. He noted that:

“This normally means that educational and training courses of study offering a first professional qualification take up much of this activity. Since this first professional qualification does not normally require emphasis on the research process, but rather in obtaining the required skills and knowledge in order to practice librarianship, it is little wonder that the role of research in the profession has not always been openly encouraged by its associations. Nevertheless, there is evidence that some associations are realizing that research and the research process needs to be better recognized, particularly as library professionals are increasingly undertaking higher level qualifications which include a research component (Abstract, p. 1)”.

Role of Library Associations in Promoting Research: International Perspective

Examples of international library associations' measures for supporting research have been included in this study with the purpose to explore their role for fostering research in LIS. It is believed that having studied these examples from countries with developed education and librarianship systems would prove useful in making suggestion for Pakistan Library Association.

International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA)

IFLA is an organization committed to many and various areas of professional interest. IFLA's *Guidelines for Professional Library/Information Educational Programs* (IFLA 2000) include ten core elements, the sixth of which is “Research, Analysis and Interpretation of Information”. It is designed to apply more widely to research into and about the profession. IFLA has established a Section on Library Theory and Research (LTR). Nevertheless LTR is Section 24 of 47 IFLA sections, this is specialized in Education and Training. It shows immense interest and commitment by this organisation for improvement of research activities (IFLA, 2000).

The American Library Association (ALA)

The American Library Association (ALA) is very committed to the education of the profession and has extensive accreditation procedures. Its *Accreditation processes, policies and procedures* (ALA, 2003) pay attention to the research activity of faculty (p. 31), and on the availability of research funds (p. 42).

ALA Accreditation standards 1992 continue to acknowledge “the importance of research to the advancement of the field's knowledge base” (ALA, 1992, p. 3) throughout the document. The first professional qualification in

librarianship in the US is at the Masters level, so perhaps this is why such emphasis on research is pre-sent. Canadian library schools are also accredited by ALA and follow a similar educational pattern to that in the US (Smith, 2006).

UK: CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals)

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) in the United Kingdom adopted a research policy and strategy by undertaking many activities including to:

- act as an authoritative voice on R&D
- influence the broad R&D agenda
- identify and promote appropriate R&D
- maintain dialogue with relevant stakeholders
- disseminate information about R&D activity
- promote the take-up of relevant R&D outcomes
- ensure an adequate skills base for undertaking and applying R&D, and
- nurture a professional culture that embraces R&D and encourage reflective practice generally (2006).

The European Association for Library and Information Research (EUCLID)

The European Association for Library and Information Research (EUCLID) states its mission as;

The Association is an independent European non-governmental and non-profit organisation whose purposes are: to promote cooperation within library and information education and research and to provide a body through which it can be represented in matters of European interest (EUCLID, 2006, p. 1)

The execution of this cooperative intention can be seen in the conferences and meetings the group organizes. EUCLID has been continuously taking steps to concentrate on library education issues and makes little if any mention of the role of research in this process (Smith, 2006).

Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA)

LIANZA is the professional LIS association in New Zealand. Its website states that: LIANZA directly contributes to and participates in the development of the Library and Information profession. It is involved with:

- education of new librarians
- recognition of excellence and innovation
- scholarships and grants
- promotion of job opportunities within the profession (LIANZA, 2005).

The American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T)

Another US LIS association with a strong research emphasis is the American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T). Formed in 1937, ASIS& T has been the society for information professionals leading the search for new and better theories, techniques, and technologies to improve access to information. ASIS&T brings together diverse streams of knowledge, focusing what might be disparate approaches into novel solutions to common problems. ASIS&T bridges the gaps not only between disciplines but also between the research that drives and the practices that sustain new developments (ASIS&T, 2006, p. 1).

Role of Pakistan Library Association (PLA) in promoting research culture in LIS

Today we are in the time of evolution, with educational, technological, economical and social demands changing every day. LIS profession is not exceptional. Keeping in considerations these demands and advancements, Pakistan Library Association would have to reexamine its policies and procedures to keep pace with the change. It appears that it should continue with its effort to change into a striking organisation that actively plans and develops programmes to meet the challenges of this information age.

Having critically reviewed the related literature the study identifies some roles for PLA to be performed in order to successfully foster research in LIS.

Establishment of Research and Development Section

The study identifies a need to establish a Research and Development Section to support research in LIS and to bring value to the profession. This Research and Development Section and other sections should as a matter of priority encourage and support research in the area of library and information science through its continuing profession development programmes. This section should aim to facilitate research by all means; by educating through formal course on research and providing up-to-date materials. The study proposes that the section should make arrangements to publish a biannual publication "PLA Journal of Research in Library and Information Science". Through this journal the LIS community (professionals, academics, researchers and students) may be actively and positively motivated to submit their research publications.

PLA Annual Conference

Annual conference provides tremendous opportunities for PLA members and other community to become informed and educated about research. It encourages new research and application that advance the field of library and information science. On such a platform, experts from national and international backgrounds share their valuable academic and research experiences, knowledge and vision. This is a significant source of exchanging ideas and thought regarding the contemporary trends, issues and prospects in LIS. These conferences must be organised on regular basis, as these organised by PLA have already proved to be useful in fostering research culture in LIS. The PLA annual library conferences have become of prime interest to members, librarians and those in the library profession. Its objective is to provide an opportunity for librarians and those interested in the library profession to meet each other; to exchange knowledge, ideas and experiences; and to help solve professional problems. The topics and themes of conferences should be relevant to needs and interests of the librarians and to the current situation of the library profession and society as a whole. It should make efforts to get recognition and sponsorship by both the government and private sector to persuade the library professionals.

Training Courses on Research in LIS

Training courses on research must be emphasised and organized by PLA to equip LIS community with the practical knowledge and skills in research process. These courses should offer detailed guidance on research methodologies, literature review, data analysis techniques and other related issue.

Identification of Research Training needs

There is a need to identify the exact research training needs of various groups among LIS community. PLA can conduct questionnaire survey in different library schools with the purpose to explore their research demands; on what contents, methods and modes of training, suitable timings and their preferred places for receiving such training. It should continuously carry out extensive training programme and short courses well matched to research and publications needs of its professionals.

Identifying the Areas of Research

The Research and Development Section should conduct continuous research to identify the areas needs attention by the professionals. This could also be helpful in avoiding duplication in research topics and saves time and efforts by the LIS researchers. It should indicate and recommend specialized, new, and challenging topics for the research at all levels.

Assessing the Information Needs and Information-Seeking Behaviour of the LIS Community

Assessing the information needs and seeking behaviour of library and information users is an area that is gaining attention of researchers increasingly day by day. No attempt has been made to identify and assess the educational, information and research needs of LIS community.

Maintenance of PLA Digital Library in LIS

A digital library containing the all types of information and documents in LIS (national and international) is desirable. LIS professional, academics, students and researchers all can benefit from such a resource in digital form. PLA could assign a user ID and password to its members. This could be helpful in coping with dearth of literature in LIS in Pakistan.

Maintenance of Information System for LIS Community

The study proposes for the maintenance of information system for LIS community to promote research and develop the professional competencies of library professionals and staff, those who practice library services profession and other interested group. S. L. Verma conducted a study on the need for maintaining National Information System in Education: A Comparative Study, 1996. The present researcher suggested to follow the similar type of examples in order to develop information system for LIS community and other communities as well. This e-book is available at:

- http://books.google.com.pk/books?id=P5dlZbCoe_MC&pg=PA22&lpg=PA22&dq=development+of+information+systems+for+educationists&source=bl&ots=RG6nD1TfiC&sig=7sYCjle49yYrc2pw4kVWn6xX-Gc&hl=en&sa=X&ei=f3nvTqOPNcfxggeew4GICQ&sqi=2&ved=0CCkQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=development%20of%20information%20systems%20for%20educationists&f=false

Resource Sharing

PLA must accentuate its vision to promote cooperation and network between members, library and information professionals and institutions at national and international levels. Sharing of resources, reading materials, technology and sharing of ideas must be promoted for research purposes. It must activate international communication and exchange among LIS professionals at all levels.

PLA can coordinate with library associations and institutions outside the country and participates in international programmes. It should make instantaneous arrangements to become the member of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

Workshops and Seminars

Seminars/workshops should be organised for the discussion and exchange of knowledge and ideas for specific groups on issues, topics or problems in all areas of librarianship. This is to enhance the knowledge of library personnel. Recommendations from the seminars serve as guidelines for the improvement of librarianship as a whole.

Publication Section

PLA should maintain a publication section that should motivate scholarly output by LIS profession. Various kinds of publications may be introduced possibly annually to begin with; later the frequency may be bi-annual or quarterly with the positive response of professionals.

- PLA Bulletin (bi-annual)
- PLA Newsletter (Quarterly)
- PLA Journal of Research in Library and Information Science

PLA may publish books in library and information science for research and study purposes, manuals for practicing librarians and other relevant publications through its publications section or through cooperation with private and government publishers.

Exchange Programme

As the literature indicated that maturity in a profession means that it must move beyond the limits of practice. In the current climate, steps need to be taken to establish exchange programmes. These programmes must focus on marinating links internationally among the library associations and library schools, with the purpose to bring together diverse streams of knowledge and distinct approaches into novel solutions to common problems. It may help in bridging the gaps and inducing to continue new advancements.

The most obvious uses of research in these information environments are for problem solving, for development, evaluation and improvement of services and systems, and to provide information before introducing new systems or services. It would enable them to reach and maintain the highest professional standards and enriching them in the delivery and promotion of high library and information services responsive to the needs of the users.

Working Together

This study stressed the need for maintaining the active and positive working relationship towards promoting research culture and activities amongst LIS community in Pakistan. All the stakeholders have the equal interest and responsibility for addressing the issues for the growth and maturity of LIS field. The current situation demands for collaboration with each other to further the cause of research and development in LIS. Particular importance must be given the creation of new knowledge, by understanding the problems and issues into local, national and international context.

Conclusion

A profession is not mature until it demonstrates a substantial body of research contemplation and literature. The profession grows through academic and scholarly thought and attention to its issues of the day (Smith, 2004). This study has practical implications for the managers of PLA, librarians, faculty and information specialists for developing constructive research programmes. It can be useful for improving the value and meaningfulness of research projects in LIS.

The literature review and examples of library associations from the countries with developed education and librarianship system proven to be useful in determining the role and tasks for PLA to foster research culture. The key points emerge that library associations have a key role for making the LIS community true research oriented. It shows that Pakistani Library Association still has a long way to go for improving their goals, policies and procedures in order to synchronize all the stake-holders for bringing innovation and changing the research paradigm in LIS. PLA is in the time of transition with new management having new plans on meeting the goals enthusiastically. LIS education in Pakistani universities could be seen to be under threat given the new research emphasis of the major funding bodies: the Ministry of Education and the Higher Education Commission. It needs to ensure that it formulates strategies to increase the profile and influence the direction of library research and expands a structure that would help in developing continuous programmes to meet the research demands of the age. Here, the role of library associations becomes very crucial to take vital and relevant steps in order to promote research activities. The library associations serve as the primary voice for the profession of librarianship as it the only platform that leads towards development, promotion, and improvement of library services for supporting research at any level.

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