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Community Libraries in the Capital of Pakistan: current status, issues, and perspectives

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the status, collection, and challenges of community libraries in the capital of Pakistan. A purposive sampling technique was used for data collection from 12librarians/library in-charges working in these community libraries. This study found that the collection of reading materials in the community libraries was between 4000 to 7000 and offered Web-OPAC, interlibrary loan, books borrow services. These libraries have proper websites, classified books, adequate sitting arrangements, and a heating and cooling system to support the community. Though, these libraries were facing some major challenges such as lack of sufficient funds, lack of training opportunities for LIS, old library building, lack of attention of Government, and non-availability of electronic resources. Similarly, uncomfortable furniture and lack of knowledge about new library trends among librarians were the major obstacles in the effective utilization of community libraries in the capital of Pakistan. Through reliable research work, the findings of this study highlight certain recommendations for developing these community libraries into learning resource centers that could support truly the information needs of the community at large.

Keywords: Community libraries; Department of libraries; Public libraries in Islamabad; Public libraries in Pakistan; Islamabad community libraries.

Introduction and background

Public libraries were founded to protect democracy and to represent and inspire progressive reform and community outreach. Public leaders emphasized the creation of public libraries as vital organizations in an information society. Democratic governments have traditionally maintained public libraries for the common people's education and welfare. According to the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1950), "the Public Library is the local hub of information, making all types of knowledge and information freely available to its users". The public library's services are offered on the premise of equitable access for everyone, regardless of age, race,

gender, religion, country, language, or socioeconomic status". A community library is an extension of a public library. McNicol (2006) considers community libraries to be public libraries as well, and so must be adequately served." Community libraries are critical commodities for individuals to have equal access to information to satisfy their diverse information requirements regularly. They have a major impact on a country's socio-economic growth (Mojapelo, 2017). The community needs information that the community library may be able to meet. A community library is often a small library and a sustainable option for providing reading materials to residents (Dent, 2007). Community libraries particularly in developing nations are not only sites of cultural globalization in emerging nations, but also evidence of the spread of important social institutions from core to periphery countries (Ignatow, 2009).

Currently, six community libraries are working in the capital of Pakistan under the administrative control of the Department of Libraries (DoL). The origins of the Department of Libraries can be traced back to 1949, when the Ministry of Education established the Directorate of Archives and Libraries (DAL) in Karachi to maintain historical records, manuscripts, and other literary material, as well as to establish, manage, and develop libraries. The Directorate was divided into two primary units: i) the archive and ii) the library. In 1973, the Pakistani government split the Directorate into two distinct departments, the Department of Archives in Islamabad, and the Department of Libraries in Karachi. Following that, the DoL relocated to Islamabad (Ahmad, 2008). The DOL has signed an MOU with Capital Development Authority, Islamabad, and established six community libraries in 2008 for the people of Islamabad. Three other libraries including Islamabad Public Library, Quaid Public Library, and Model Children Library are also working under the administration of the DoL. Recently the DoL has established a mobile library for the community living in remote areas of Islamabad.

The DOL has a desire to establish a community library in each sector of Islamabad to promote reading culture. A kids' corner has already been established in I-8 and I-10 community libraries. A state-of-the-art model children's library will be established in Quaid Public Library, F-9 Park, Islamabad, which will be equipped with all the latest reading and playing material for the children. The Department of Libraries also working to establish two other community libraries in the sector F-10 and G-10 with the collaboration of the Capital Development Authority, Islamabad. The DoL also has a plan for street libraries in the various sectors of Islamabad. This concept will be replicated in the other cities of the country with the collaboration of provincial governments. Similarly, parks libraries will also be introduced for the healthy utilization of leisure time of the people in parks and other public places.

Statement of the problem

Libraries not only serve as community portals, but also as a location for new immigrants and their families to connect with resources, acquire new skills, and meet new people. Community libraries are globally acknowledged as social institutions capable of bringing about social and economic change in society (Mnkeni-Saurombe & Zimu, 2013).Usually, community libraries are in the hub of the community residency area for easy access of the individuals. Unfortunately, the

concept of community libraries didn't prevail yet in under developing countries such as Pakistan. This study is conducted to examine the current position of community libraries in the capital of Pakistan. Pakistan has an area of 796,096 square kilometers, and its capital (Islamabad) has an area of 906.50 square kilometers (Ahmad, 2008), with a population of 4.1 million people. Further, no study has been conducted to address the status of community libraries in the capital of Islamabad. This study brings demographic information of community libraries, available services in the libraries, and challenges faced by community libraries in the capital of Pakistan. This study fills the gap in the literature and presents a brief picture of community libraries located in the capital of Pakistan.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of this study were to:

- ascertain the demographic information of community libraries in the capital of Pakistan.
- assess the status of resources and services offered by community libraries in the capital of Pakistan.
- identify the challenges faced by community libraries in the capital of Pakistan.

Review of the Literature

The situation of public libraries in Pakistan has been dismal. According to Ahmad (2008), the early library situation in Pakistan was not promising. Due to competing objectives, the newly constituted administration was unable to devote sufficient attention to the library sector. Because of the country's poor economy, as well as significant migration and settlement, there was no library mobility. At the time of partition, all the main libraries in former British India were given to the people of India. Pakistan inherited just two significant libraries, the "Punjab University Library" (1908) and the *"Punjab Public Library"* (1884), both in Lahore. The formation of the "Directorate of Archives and Libraries" was the first significant step toward library growth (Haider, 1998).According to Anwar (1996), the Six-Year *"Federal Program of Educational Development of Pakistan"*(1951–1957) ordered the creation of 522 new libraries. He lamented the feudal mindset of politicians, which enabled just 38 of the 522 libraries to be built in West Pakistan (six of which were in Punjab Province), due to the territory's dominant feudal political culture. Because of the political leadership of people from the lower-middle-income background in East Pakistan, the remaining 484 were in East Pakistan (now known as Bangladesh).Pakistan has a long history of putting ambitions for a comprehensive public library system on hold. These vary from a 1956 paper by an Australian expert, LC Key, through 2001 legislation on local self-government. Many of the instances are summarized here. In 1955, *"the Board for the Advancement of Sindhi Culture"* proposed the establishment of many public libraries. Several international library specialists have been invited to visit Pakistan to draught strategies for the country's construction and growth of public library systems. In 1956, one of these was Australian specialist LC Key. Khurshid (1960) reported that efforts were undertaken in the 1960s to construct a demonstrative public library in Pakistan as a collaborative initiative of the "Government of Pakistan" and "UNESCO".

According to Haider (1998), the Modern Education Policy 1972–1980 was a notable breakthrough in Pakistan's public libraries. This education reform includes a proposal to create and fund 50,000 "People-Oriented Public Libraries" (Pakistan Ministry of Education1972).The program allocated 1% of total municipal expenditures to public libraries since, according to the 1973 constitution; education was a fundamental right of all citizens. An American specialist, David G. Donovan, wrote and submitted two feasibility assessments on public libraries to the Ministry of Local Self-Government and Rural Development in 1974 and 1984, respectively (Mahmood, Hameed, & Haider, 2005).

In 1984, a "*Technical Working Group*" (TWG) and the Ministry of Education carried out a countrywide study of public library facilities. The TWG was made up of educational experts, library information science workers, and researchers. TWG provided to the government a report with realistic proposals to improve the current condition and developed a detailed plan for the construction of a public library system in Pakistan (Pakistan Ministry of Education1984, p. 2). Public library plans did not materialize in the 1960s due to inadequate planning and a lack of enthusiasm on the part of officials (Haider1998). According to Usmani (1996), this *"public library pilot project"* established under the supervision of the Pakistan Library Association was not carried out due to the bureaucratic attitude of the Government officials who ranked public libraries as the lowest priority among different financing demands. The *"Punjab Library Foundation"* (PLF) was founded in 1985 to provide financial assistance to all types of libraries in the state (and Punjab PLF sponsored this current project).

Despite all these recorded attempts, none of these recommendations was carried out or implemented owing to a lack of political will, a feudal attitude, a bureaucratic structure, unrealistic objectives, uncoordinated efforts of LIS professionals, and a lack of library engagement in the education system. Documentation and public library legislation exist in some form or another, but they are neither implemented nor on the agenda of any government or nonprofit group (Warraich, Haq & Ameen, 2016).

Methodology

To achieve the study objectives, qualitative research methodology was used, and the data was collected from 12 library professionals of the department through conducting purposive interviews during May-June 2021. The interviews were conducted with selected participants and recorded accordingly. The data received through interviews were transcribed in English to restore the true sense of the data. Keywords were drawn to present the findings of the study. Excel Sheet was used to know the frequency distribution of the interviewees. A thematic approach was used for analyzing the qualitative data.

Data analysis

Demographics of Community Libraries: There are six community libraries that existed in the capital of Pakistan. These six community libraries are working under the administrative control of the Department of Libraries (DOL).The Department of Libraries established six community

libraries with the collaboration of the Capital Development Authority in 2008. To run these six community libraries, both DOL and CDA signed an MOU that mentioned each department's responsibilities (Table 1).

Table 1
Demographic information of community libraries

Name	Location/Sector
Islamabad Community Library	F-11
Islamabad Community Library	G-7
Islamabad Community Library	G-8
Islamabad Community Library	G-11
Islamabad Community Library	I-8
Islamabad Community Library	I-10

Information Resources in Community Libraries: According to data presented in Figure 1, the Islamabad Community Library located in the I-10 sector has 7320 books, followed by the Islamabad Community Library of G-11 sector 7311 books. The figure indicated that Islamabad Community Library located in the I-8 sector has 5862 books. Moreover, the participants briefed that most of the collection of books consisted of English and Urdu literature and history because the users of the libraries were much interested in these subjects.
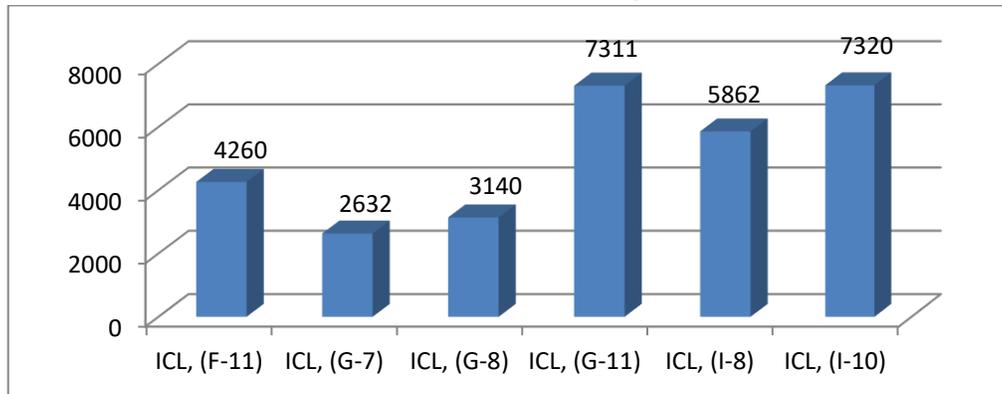

Figure 1 Collection of books

Services in Community Libraries: Respondents were asked about existing services in the community libraries of Islamabad and found that all community libraries were offering almost the same types of services presented in Table 2. The Department of Libraries is using Koha Integrated Library Software for automation. The community libraries have the facility of Web-OPAC of Koha which is a very useful tool to check the status of any book in any community library. The community libraries also offered service of interlibrary loans and book borrowing services for registered members. The website is established by the Department of Libraries where the information about community libraries is being uploaded with time. All the community libraries have classified collections of books and adequate sitting arrangements. Most

of the libraries have the facility of heating and cooling system. Moreover, the book borrows service is available in all community libraries for the registered members; the members without registration can read the books within the library premises. The community libraries of Islamabad were also offering document delivery services through email. Furthermore, English and Urdu newspapers were available in all community libraries in adequate numbers.

Table 2

Services in community libraries

S.N.	Services
i	Web-OPAC
ii	Interlibrary loan
iii	Website
iv	Books circulation
v	Classified collection
vi	Wi. Fi
vii	Sitting arrangements
viii	Air conditioner reading rooms
ix	Online documents deliver service
x	Newspapers

Problems of community libraries: The participants were asked about the challenges encountered by community libraries. Table 3 shows that most of the respondents highlighted several problems of community libraries such as lack of funds (100%),lack of training opportunities for LIS (92%), old library building/insufficient physical infrastructure(92%), lack of attention of Government toward improving community libraries(83%), and non-availability of electronic resource (83%). Lack of IT skills among library professionals (75%), uncomfortable furniture (67%), and lack of knowledge about new library trends (67%) were the major challenges/problems of the community libraries at Islamabad.

Table 3

Problems of community libraries

S.no.	Challenges	Frequency	%
1.	Lack of funds	12	100
2.	Lack of training opportunities for LIS	11	92
3.	Old library building	11	92
4.	Non-availability of electronic resource	10	83
5.	Lack of attention of Government	10	83
6.	Lack of IT skills in library professionals	09	75
7.	Un-comfortable furniture	08	67
8.	Lack of knowledge about new library trends	08	67

| 9. | Outdated reading materials | 07 | 58 |
| 10. | Lack of interest from the management | 06 | 50 |

Discussion and conclusion

The core aim of the study was to explore the status, role, and challenges of community libraries in the capital of Pakistan. There are six community libraries existed in the capital of Pakistan. These six community libraries are working under the administrative control of the Department of Libraries. This study found that the collection of reading materials in the community libraries has consisted of books ranging from 4000 to 7000. The services available in the community libraries were Web-OPAC, interlibrary loan, books borrow facility, website, a classified collection of books, adequate sitting arrangements, and heating and cooling system. The major challenges for community libraries included lack of funds, lack of training opportunities for LIS, old library building, lack of attention of Government, and non-availability of an electronic resource, lack of IT skills in library professionals, un-comfortable furniture, and lack of knowledge about new library trends. The Department of the Libraries must go forward and make attempts to build one community library for each sector. However, the Mobile Library initiative is extremely encouraging and compensates for the lack of community libraries in outlying areas of Islamabad. Furthermore, except for the usage of Web-OPAC and Website, the services provided by community libraries in Islamabad were quite traditional. Since Koha library automation is a fully featured open-source software (Asim & Mairaj, 2019), and it's great to see that community libraries are utilizing standardized software. Library professionals should learn about the function of community libraries and offer some cutting-edge, research-oriented services. This research focuses on the problems that community libraries confront, with a shortage of funding being a common concern for all community/public libraries in poor nations (Warraich, Malik, & Ameen, 2018). The administration of community libraries should make every effort to secure enough finances for the enhancement of the library's structure, services, and collection. However, library professionals in charge of community libraries should consider activities and services that do not necessitate a lot of money. The collection of books in the community libraries is out of date. We live in an information age, and individuals are more interested in acquiring necessary information via the internet. The Department of Libraries should pay attention to electronic resource subscriptions since participants reported that no electronic resource has been subscribed to or an own digital library has been established. The involvement of the government is critical in the establishment or upgrading of libraries. In Pakistan, there is an urgent need for the government's attention to creating new and enhancing existing community libraries.

Recommendations

The researchers furnished the following recommendations for the improvement of community libraries.

- The services offered by community libraries are very traditional and there is a need to add more ICT-based library services.

- No computer facility is available in the community libraries; the management should provide computers for the users.
- The Department of Libraries should play the leading role in the library profession in the capital as well as the whole of the country.
- The Department of Libraries should try to enhance the network of more libraries in Islamabad.
- Department of Libraries should take initiative for legislations of public libraries for the whole country's public libraries.
- The Department of Libraries should organize seminars, conferences, and workshops to increase awareness about itself.
- The administration of the department should pay attention to improving the infrastructure of the libraries.

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