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Entrepreneurship Opportunities for Library and Information Science Graduates: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

There are more than 12 library schools in Pakistan producing around 1,000 graduates every year. These graduates hold 16-year BS or MLIS professional qualifications. There is no calculated estimate available concerning the number of related jobs and the vacant ones in the country. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the number of LIS graduates required in the country within a particular span. The academic libraries especially in the public sector accommodate most of such graduates. The current job market has become oversaturated as we carefully observe around five candidates against one entry-level position in the public sector on average. Entry-level positions are those where the basic professional qualification (BS or MLIS) is required without any experience, for example, recruitment through public service commissions. In such a scenario where joblessness is increasing owing to fewer job openings and more candidates, one cannot wait for years for a job to earn a livelihood. Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan has designed a new BS curriculum in almost every discipline including LIS, which aims to promote entrepreneurship as well. The researchers of this paper interpret entrepreneurship as an activity for creative individuals to independently secure one's livelihood while creating jobs for others. With a comprehensive literature review, this paper aims to propose a model of entrepreneurship opportunities based on LIS professional qualifications that can be opted by the LIS graduates to become self-reliant. The proposed model is then qualitatively validated by select, senior employers/librarians.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, LIS curriculum, LIS graduates, Entrepreneur librarian, Librapreneur, Job-giver.

Introduction

As a profession, librarianship offers a wide range of employment opportunities. The majority of the LIS professionals choose employment for their career prospects. There are 15 LIS schools in Pakistan both in the public and private sectors producing around 1,000 professional graduates with 16-year BS or MLIS qualifications every year. Though the number of LIS schools and annual graduates does not look abnormal when compared to the

almost 227 million population of the country, the situation of the job market shows the other side of the picture. The researchers observe around five candidates against one entry-level position on average in public sector organizations/institutions recruited through the public service commissions. There were more than 1800 candidates against 441 positions of college librarians, both male and female, advertised by the Punjab Public Service Commission last year. This ratio increases (approximately eight candidates against one position) in the case of open merit seats in the Federal Public Service Commission that deals with recruitment in organizations/institutions under the federal government across Pakistan. Thus, it is evident that the number of opportunities is less than the LIS graduates causing unemployment and this ratio is increasing every year.

The current job market has also affected the LIS professional graduates with another challenge. The professionals of other disciplines (e.g. IT, management, and so on) are also adopting librarianship creating another threat to the LIS professionals and their existence in the job market. This is particularly happening in private sector organizations and institutions.

Guramani (2021) citing a briefing given by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) to the Senate Standing Committee, reported that 24% of educated people having undergraduate or graduate degrees were jobless countrywide; the unemployment rate in the country had reached 16% contrary to the government's claim of 6.5%. Further, at least 1.5 million people including MPhil degree holders applied for a peon's position. He further reported citing to the Economic Survey 2020-21 that COVID lockdowns rendered an estimated 20.71 million workers jobless. The committee was also informed that 40% of educated women were also unemployed countrywide. These situations urge to explore other alternatives to cope with the unemployment issue.

Entrepreneurship can be considered a viable solution by connecting it to the LIS field. As the result, the LIS professionals may be able to start a business/venture utilizing their subject knowledge to become entrepreneurs, also called Librapreneurs. Under their new undergraduate education policy 2020, the Higher Education Commission (2020) Pakistan has devised BS curricula in almost all disciplines including LIS so that the BS graduates could also explore avenues for self-employment rather than looking only for a job. Ahmed, Arshad, and Nawaz (2019) also emphasize the need of developing entrepreneurship in Pakistan through higher education. Chukwuji and Umeji (2019) claim that the absence of entrepreneur courses and ICT training in the LIS curriculum is the main hindrance in the way of making an LIS graduate an entrepreneur. They recommend restructuring the outdated curriculum of LIS.

According to the online Merriam-Webster dictionary (2022), an entrepreneur is "one who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise." According to Amiri and Marimaei (2012), "entrepreneurship involves innovation, development, recognition, seizing opportunities and converting opportunities to marketable ideas, value while bearing the risk of competition" (p. 151). They further add that "entrepreneurs are typically described as individuals who perceive a vision, commit themselves to that vision, and almost single-handedly carry the vision to its successful implementation" (p. 152). Longman Business English dictionary (2000) defines an entrepreneur as "someone who starts a company, arranges business deals, and takes risks in order to make a profit" (p. 533). According to online Investopedia (n.d.), an entrepreneur is "an individual who creates a new business, bearing most of the risks and enjoying most of the rewards. The process of setting up a business is known as entrepreneurship. The entrepreneur is commonly seen as an innovator, a source of new ideas, goods, services, and business/or procedures."

Operational definition: The researchers operationalize entrepreneurship as the capability of BS and MLIS graduates to put the subject knowledge into practice to set up a business or

enterprise for their livelihood while creating jobs for others as their staff. Therefore, an entrepreneur librarian is not only self-employed but also a job creator and giver.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to bring into light all possible entrepreneurial opportunities that the LIS graduates can choose from and utilize to become self-reliant and job givers. These entrepreneurial opportunities are based on the competencies and skills that the LIS curriculum is intended to develop in graduates. Based on a comprehensive, scholarly literature review, hence, this study develops/proposes an entrepreneurial model for the LIS graduates. The proposed model is then to be validated by the senior LIS experts.

Research Questions

The objectives of the study can best be interpreted in the following research questions.

1. How do you view the proposed model?
2. In your opinion, what are the challenges/problems/barriers that may hinder the LIS graduates to become entrepreneurs?

Literature Review

Various studies (e.g. Arafah, 2016; Crumpton & Bird, 2019; Eke-Okpala & Ihejirika, 2012; Robles & Zárraga-Rodríguez, 2015) identify a general skillset for an entrepreneur that includes project management, innovation, learnability, loan management, risk-taking and patience, consistency and commitment, working with technologies, marketing and advocacy, communication, working with diverse populations, problem-solving, service-orientation, fundraising/development, building relationships, and value assessment.

Various experts (e.g. Akanwa, 2014; Alagiri & Visalatchi, 2020; Batthini, 2014; Bell, 2009; Eden, 2018; Issa, Uzuegbu, & Nwosu, 2014; Isaac et al., 2019; Musa & Tsafe, 2019; Onaada, 2012; Singha & Mondal, 2015) suggest different entrepreneurial opportunities for library and information science graduates that can make them self-employed and job giver. Major areas of these opportunities are summarized below alphabetically.

- Archival services in liaison with archival organizations.
- Biographer or biography writer (commercial).
- Computer and internet services, cyber cafe.
- Consultancy (all services to new/old libraries).
- Digitization, scanning, and digital publishing services.
- Documentation services.
- Editing services (books, periodicals, and so on).
- Exhibiter (art, museum exhibitions, book fairs, and so on).
- Information/data brokering.
- Knowledge management (KM) services to organizations.
- Library automation services.
- Library equipment and supplies business.
- Library software/database development, maintenance, troubleshooting services.
- Library training, workshops, coaching/academy, conference/seminar/webinar services.
- Marketing and advertising agency.
- Preservation and Conservation services.
- Printing, publishing, distribution, reprographic business.

- Private library or book club (lending, reading room, makerspace, online/mobile and other services).
- Research services (fee-based legitimate services) including research projects, public surveys (like Gallup), data/text mining and analytics, and so on.
- Services to special users (visually impaired and so on).
- Technical services (acquisition, cataloging, classification, indexing, abstracting, bibliography, directories, translation, and so on).
- Vendor business (books, periodicals, and so on).
- Website developer or web administration and maintenance.

The literature review provides a comprehensive skillset both for entrepreneurship and the LIS. A combination of both makes an LIS graduate an entrepreneur librarian (Figure 1).

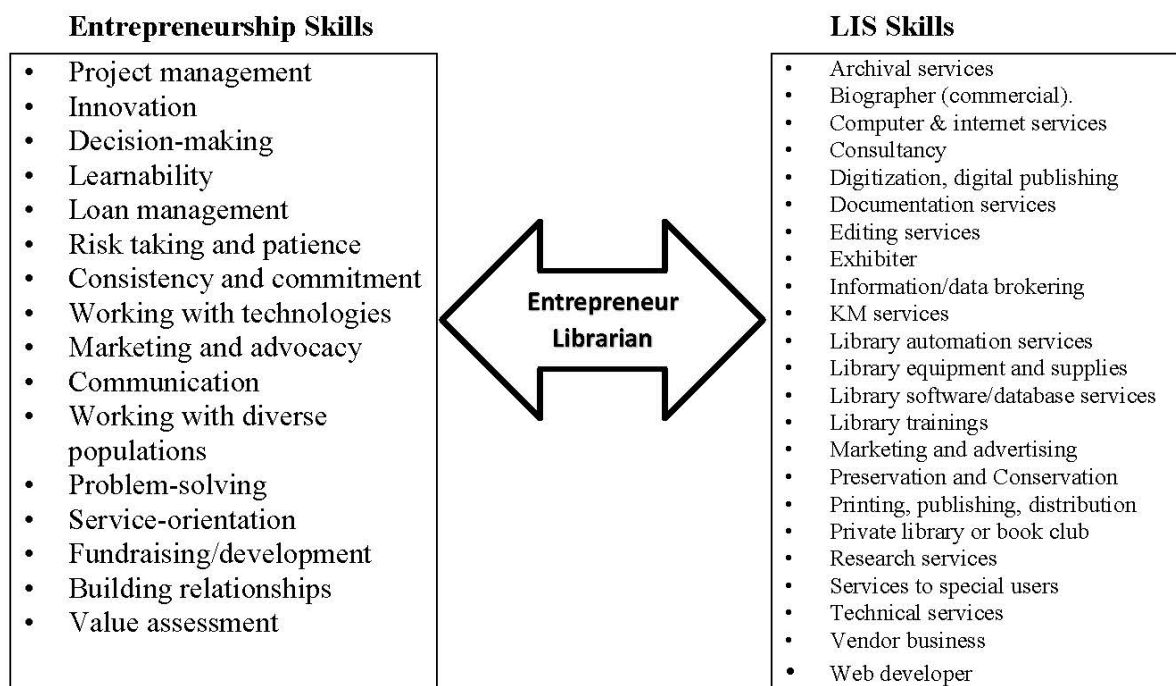


Figure.1. Model/conceptual framework of entrepreneur librarian

Research Methodology and Limitations

The qualitative method was adopted for this research study. Firstly, a review of accessible scholarly literature was conducted to model areas of entrepreneurial opportunities for LIS graduates. Secondly, a purposive sample of three university librarians was drawn for seeking their feedback with their prior consent. However, only two of them responded. Owing to time constraints, the sample was limited to Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. However, the librarians selected were the most senior and experienced ones. Data collected from librarians through open-ended, written interviews via email were analyzed thematically.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data collected from university librarians through interviews are interpreted below against each research question.

RQ 1. How do you view the proposed model?

The experts viewed the model as need of the hour owing to the current unemployment situation in the country. They also exhibited their overall satisfaction in the areas covered in the model. One of them proposed some additional areas of entrepreneurship as information literacy instructor, space manager, reference manager, and statistical analytic. Concerning required skills, one expert emphasized communication, technical knowledge, and coordination as the core skills for the LIS graduates to become self-employed or entrepreneurs. The other expert suggested some more skills: freelancing, desktop publishing, information literacy, data science, big data analytics, and digital content management.

RQ 2: In your opinion, what are the challenges/problems/barriers that may hinder the LIS graduates to become entrepreneurs?

Both experts highlighted certain problems/barriers/challenges that may hinder the LIS graduate to become self-employed or entrepreneurs. They identified the weaker areas of the LIS graduates, which include modern technological skills, negotiation and communication skills, outdated LIS curriculum, fewer training opportunities, website development skills, business skills, consultancy skills, and database management skills. Both experts viewed the financial constraint as the major bottleneck to start a business or enterprise. They also urged that business-mindedness must also be inculcated in the graduates through a revised LIS curriculum focusing more on hands-on practical content than theory.

Conclusion

This study aims to address the unemployment issue in the domain of library and information sciences, especially in Pakistan. Many LIS graduates wait for years for a relevant job and some of them also accept low-ranked/paid irrelevant jobs. Without a proper job, it is very difficult to make both ends meet in this time of high inflation and dearness. This study offers an alternate model of entrepreneurial pathways for the LIS graduates to become self-employed. This model has also been validated by the senior LIS experts. The most important foundation in this regard is the BS and MLIS education. The curriculum should be designed and implemented in such a manner that it should not only prepare the students for the job market but also as successful entrepreneurs. Therefore, both entrepreneurial and LIS skills should be inculcated side by side through state-of-the-art labs and facilities with more focus on practical, hands-on training than theory. An LIS student should have a clear plan in his/her mind what he/she has to do after graduating.

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan has also advised the universities to establish business incubation centers with their support. This center may help provide further advice and training to graduate entrepreneurs.

The Government of Pakistan has recently launched a youth entrepreneurship scheme as “Kamyab Jawan (Successful Youth)” program <<https://kamyabjawan.gov.pk/>>. This scheme promotes entrepreneurship among youth by providing them business loans on simple terms and with less markup through banks. All Pakistani residents, aged between 21 and 45 years with entrepreneurial potential are eligible to apply for the loan. A minimum of 25% of loans is reserved for women. Private sector employees can also apply for loans. Therefore, there is now no financial constraint in becoming an entrepreneur. Under Kamyab Jawan program, Hunarmand (Skilled) Pakistan scheme has also been launched. This scheme provides free skill-oriented technical training to youth in more than 200 trades and courses via more than 500 designated institutions across Pakistan. The LIS schools and the Pakistan Library Association may also offer refresher courses for entrepreneurship. In a nutshell, to cope with the serious issue of unemployment, entrepreneurship offers a viable solution to the LIS graduates.

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