



Do Services Matter: A Case of Innovations in Pakistani Public Libraries

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Abstract

The current study identifies and highlights some of the cutting-edge new services offered by Pakistani libraries. To get the desired results, a qualitative methodology of research was adopted and data were collected through interview technique. Furthermore, the websites and social media accounts of these public libraries have been reviewed. The study's sample included each of Lahore's public libraries. The outcomes indicated there are many innovations in the services of public libraries introduced during the last two decades. The purpose of this research was to present the innovations in public libraries that will be helpful for new library users and build a positive image of these libraries in society. Additionally, the results can draw the attention of decision-makers from other nearby developing nations to enhance services, image, and the professional development of their staff.

Keywords: *Public Libraries; Innovation; Public library Services; Lahore; Developing countries,*

Background

In today's world, public libraries are essential as vibrant, welcoming spaces that benefit local communities in many different ways. These priceless organizations provide an extensive variety of services and resources that are crucial for education, information access, and community participation in addition to their conventional function as book repositories. Public libraries are essential to forming the fabric of our society because they nurture literacy, encourage lifelong learning, close the digital gap, and promote cultural enrichment (Blewitt & Gambles, 2010). The following paper will address the value of public libraries and how they have a positive impact on individuals, groups, and society as a whole. We may fully appreciate the significant relevance of public libraries in creating an informed, inclusive, and empowered society when we are aware of their many facets and the priceless services they offer.



For a person's ideas to be used by thousands of people throughout his generation as well as in future generations, his thoughts, experiences, and observations are saved in the form of books and kept in a library. In the lives of nations, these three things—school, school, and school—are of utmost importance. Every type of development's doors can be opened with a key. The fundamental methods for learning and education are these three (Ahmad et al., 2019). The development of a country is measured not by its high-rise buildings, its glittering restaurants, but by its schools, libraries and the cultural institutions found there (Islam et al., 2022; Rafi et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2019). The importance of libraries in national development has been recognized in every era. Public libraries are a mirror of a country's culture. Libraries have been essential to the development of human thought and intellect throughout history. We see that the nation that pays as much attention to libraries has the same success. People with visual impairments include prisoners, the elderly, nursing mothers, and government officials. Public libraries' function is to collect printed and audiovisual material, manage the material for easy use, provide services related to information, and advise individuals on how to use resources will encourage readers' non-formal education. Thus, a public library is a specific type of place that is open to the public and provides free use of a variety of products and facilities. These materials may include books, magazines, newspapers, audiobooks, e-books, DVDs, and other media formats. Usually, public libraries have a large selection of subjects and genres to serve the diverse interests and needs of their communities (Bashir et al., 2018). In the opinion of Bessant et al., creative thinking is the process of maximizing the potential advantages of a novel concept (2005). In these remarks, two themes are mentioned: first, the concept of creating value, and, second, get behind a fresh perspective. It's important to embrace these wonderful ideas and see them through to completion as well as to just generate good ideas.

Aims and Objectives

The present research study's purpose was to portray a realistic picture of Lahore's public libraries in terms of the innovative services they offer to meet society's varied informational and recreational demands.

Significance of the Study

For several reasons, this study on public library services in Pakistan is of utmost importance. The core objective of this research study was to paint the clear picture of public



libraries. This is the research area which was less addressed by the researchers in the past. Being the first study to explore the unique and different library services it is anticipated that the results of this study will be helpful for the scholars working in the same area. Moreover, the results of this specific study will be interesting and helpful for the current and future library users as well as the library service providers.

Review of Relevant Literature

The objective behind the establishment of public libraries was to fulfil the information needs of the people. Historically these libraries always tried to do something different and unique for their users. Initially, public libraries focused on the building and collecting as more resources as possible. However, with the passage of time the focus turned towards the services. The concept of huge collection building turned towards the selective collection with wider and innovative services to make their users satisfied. We have seen a dramatic change in the 20th century regarding the services and infrastructure of public library system all over the world. In 21st century this change turned into the solely aim of the public libraries and that was to fulfill the information needs of their users by adopting new technologies. Numerous studies explored and explain the historical development of public libraries. In previous centuries the collections of these libraries was made up of codices, papyrus rolls, and clay tablets that were expertly constructed and stored in a room close to a temple in the past to gather, catalog, and conserve the content. She went on to remark that building, maintaining, and creating collections has always been a crucial part of libraries' mission. Over time, however, the idea that guides the creation and maintenance of collections has changed. Since most libraries lack the requisite ICT skills, Emojorho (2011) claims that most continue to manage their holdings using outdated methods. Public libraries, he claims, desperately require enough funding.

Libraries are necessary to support education, promote intellectual curiosity, and facilitate access to information, according to Rafi et al. (2020). Because they store a vast array of digital materials in addition to traditional physical book collections, libraries are now more vital than ever in the digital age. Digital resources have enabled learners worldwide to have equal access to a wide variety of knowledge, scholarly papers, e-books, and multimedia products (Rafi et al., 2020). University libraries help research, democratize knowledge, and promote academic activities, claim Ahmad et al. (2020). Given that many organizations employ technology to improve services and



outreach, the state of libraries today is a strong sign of the dynamic march toward digitization that is occurring. Public libraries have a specific responsibility to meet the requirements of their communities. They are essential to the development and maintenance of democratic societies because they supply them with a wide range of knowledge, opinions, and ideas. However, public libraries find it very challenging to meet all of these goals due to financial limitations, space, and organizational boundaries (Bakti et al., 2013 & Weinstein et al., 2016). Bashir et al., (2015) mentioned that in a developing economy like Pakistan, it can be difficult to maintain a collection. Iwhiwhu and Okorodudu (2012) also stated that a library's goal is to "offer relevant and current content with a view to satisfying users' information demands. Public libraries serve a diverse group of users and have an extensive list of objectives. Giving its customers the materials, they need to the most of their leisure time is the ultimate objective of a public library (Maurois, 1961). The fact that public libraries are also in charge of their administrations, budgets, and shelf space makes it very difficult for them to provide everything that patrons expect from libraries. In a developing country like Pakistan, maintaining a collection at public libraries is also very difficult. Libraries have a long history of providing their customers with top-notch services. However, even high-quality services are inadequate today. By comprehending what it truly means to provide good value, libraries may enhance the user experience (Joy & Idowu, 2014, Mahindra & Kumar, 2015).

Methodology

To achieve the objectives qualitative methodology of research was adopted and data were collected through the interview technique. The study utilized a qualitative research methodology to comprehend the subject in greater depth at hand. According to Patton (2002), qualitative research differs from quantitative research in terms of its goals and methods. Its objectives, research strategies, methods for gathering data, and methods for presenting the findings are all very different from those of other types of study. It uses textual information rather than numerical statistics to convey thoughts. For this study, a purposive sample approach was adopted with the help of interviews. Researcher visited these included libraries for data collection. Data were collected from the library staff of these public libraries. Besides, the observation technique was also used to verify the provided information. To provide the meaningful results data analysis was done to extract the important data. Additionally, this study uses the websites and social media pages of the included libraries to get more information about the services and infrastructure and



resources of these libraries (Annex A). To conduct this research study, only the major public libraries of Lahore were included as research sample (Annex B).

Findings and Discussion

Due to the diversity of its visitors, public libraries have a wide range of aims. The establishment of public libraries was done to cater to the specific needs of the local communities. They must provide the public with all the information they need to make the most of their time. The fact that these libraries are also in charge of their administrations, budgets, and shelf space makes it very difficult for them to provide everything that patrons expect from libraries. Additionally, maintaining a collection in public libraries is exceedingly difficult in a developing economy like Pakistan. The tradition of libraries offering their patrons high-quality services is long-standing. But nowadays, even good services are frequently insufficient. By comprehending what it means to provide excellent value, libraries can enhance the user experience.

Services matter a great deal in public libraries across the world. Public libraries are not just repositories of books; they are community spaces that offer a variety of tools and amenities to serve the needs and preferences of the public at large. The data analysis of this present study extracted these public library services offered to the diverse community in the historic city of Lahore:

Information resources: The initial task and core objective of any public library was to provide the information resources. Like every public library around the world, public libraries in Lahore provide the material with enhanced timings and comprehensive location as well.

Reference and referral and research: The ultimate objective of public libraries is to provide the guidelines to get the desired material. Library professional have the specific training and skills related to research. They offer time to time trainings and hand on workshops to enhanced the library user research abilities.

Services for children: Public libraries have the wide range of library users. To fulfill the information needs and attract the youngsters of the society, these libraries introduced variety of services. In Lahore these libraries introduced and offer time to time different programs, summer camps, trainings, story time, talks, etc.



Trainings: Public library users are diverse in terms of educational level, technical skills, age, background, religious beliefs, social status etc. The aim of the public library is to design their activities so the everyone can get the benefits from these libraries. Moreover, these libraries arrange training sessions for their users' time to time.

Work as community center: Public libraries aimed to work as community center where the local community can engage and participate in different programs. This is the way where they can build the relations with libraries as well as the other library users. Public libraries designed different programs and offer their space to for the engagement of local community. Which will ultimately, build the positive image of public library in society.

Learning center: Public libraries collect and build their collections according to the local community needs. These libraries are always interested to provide lifelong relations with the customers. These libraries offered different courses to enhance the skills of the library users. Moreover, they provided learning resources related to the emerging technologies as well.

Specialized services: Depending on the needs of the community, public libraries may provide specific services. Senior citizen initiatives, help with job searches, tools for entrepreneurship, assistance for individuals with impairments, and availability of assistive technologies are a few examples. By tailoring their services to specific populations, libraries ensure inclusivity and equal access. Overall, their support is vital for fostering education, literacy, community engagement, and personal growth. They are essential to facilitating information access towards promoting lifelong learning in the communities they serve.

Unique library services

According to Lam et al. (2005), an organization can boost its growth by gaining a competitive advantage through creativity. Adopting innovations is the only way for businesses to remain viable in the marketplace (Damanpour and Aravind, 2006). There are a variety of unique library services that exist to meet the needs of different communities and patrons. Some examples of unique library services include:

Seed libraries: Some libraries have started offering seed libraries, where patrons can "borrow" seeds for gardening and growing their food. These libraries often provide educational resources on gardening and seed saving. **Library of Things:** Libraries have begun stretching their holdings outside documents to a wide range of objects that patrons can borrow, such as tools, musical



instruments, board games, and even baking pans. **Mobile libraries:** Mobile libraries, or bookmobiles, bring library materials and services directly to underserved communities, such as rural or remote areas, or areas without access to a physical library building. **Library maker spaces:** Some libraries have maker spaces, which are creative spaces with equipment like 3D printers, laser cutters, and sewing machines, where patrons can learn new skills and create things. **Library therapy dogs:** Some libraries offer programs where patrons can read to therapy dogs, which can help boost reading skills and provide comfort for patrons. **Human libraries:** Human libraries provide patrons the opportunity to "borrow" a person, such as someone from a marginalized group, to have a conversation and learn about their experiences and perspectives. These are just a few examples of the numerous special offerings available to cater to library users' various requirements.

Innovations in Public Libraries of Pakistan

In Pakistan, the general impression is that in modern times, with the advent of the internet, computer, and mobile, libraries are not much needed, but the fact is that libraries are no substitute. There is a need to innovate in the facilities of libraries keeping in view the requirements of modern times. Pakistan's public libraries, with their limited resources, are striving to make a significant contribution to this race for development. Lahore, the heart of Pakistan, is called the city of libraries, it would not be out of place. One of the first public libraries established in Pakistan was the PPL (Punjab Public Library) located in Lahore. The Quaid-e-Azam Library Lahore was established as a modern public library after the formation of Pakistan. The Model Town Public Library, Chughtai Public Library, Defense Public Library, and Children's Library Complex are some of the best examples. It is impossible to cover all the offerings provided by these libraries in a few paragraphs. Here we take a look at the most up-to-date services provided by Lahore Public Libraries.

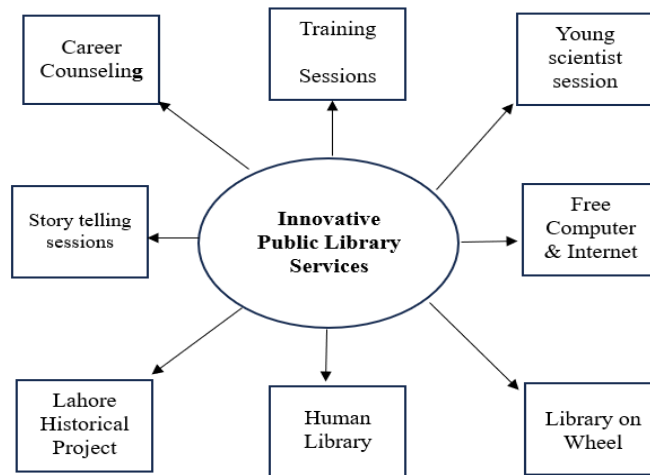


Figure 1

Library on Wheel

The primary duty of these libraries is to encourage reading in any nation. To achieve this goal and for the convenience and convenience of the people, these libraries of the city take the library to the doorstep of the people through this facility. Any educational institution can benefit from this free service. This feature allows you to access your favorite books. Membership in this library is free. And readers can issue any book of their choice for one week with their membership card. And after a week you can return to the same place or the relevant library.

Human Library

The first concept of a human library was started in 2000 in Denmark. This new concept in Pakistan has been started by Chughtai Public Library and it was inaugurated on Saturday, January 1, 2022. This Human Library is a unique and interesting library of its kind, in which, instead of books made of paper, only walking, living human beings will be the books.

The project aims to unite people divided into groups, overcome prejudice and stereotypes, and change negative attitudes. These human books in this human library are divided into two categories. In the first category, talented people of society, people of knowledge and grace, and personalities with innumerable experiences have been included as human books.

The second type includes those human books that have been subjected to some kind of prejudice and stereotypes of society, society is not accepting them and discourages them but they fight with



great courage, patience, and success. In this Human Library, readers can choose their favorite human book ask their questions, and benefit from their feelings and experiences.

Lahore Historical Project

History honors those nations who know how to preserve their historical capital. To preserve the history of Lahore and to keep the young generation acquainted with it, this facility has been arranged by the Chughtai Public Library of Lahore. Videos have been created and saved and are also available online for the convenience of the public. **Partition Stories 1947:** This is an important step taken by the Chughtai Public Library to make the younger generation aware of the sacrifices made during the Partition of India. Through this facility, eyewitness and visual recordings of various refugees of Taksim Hind have been made available online. Has been saved for the readers by recording them orally.

Free Computer & Internet Services

In the present era when there is a flood of bibliographic and non-bibliographic material libraries also aim to provide for people's needs in terms of enjoyment and learning. To this end, Lahore's public libraries provide free internet, computers, and tablets to their readers.

Storytelling sessions

An important feature of public libraries is that from time to time children's storytelling and book reading sessions are organized. The purpose of this facility is to promote reading habits in children.

Young scientist session

Special science workshops for children are conducted in public libraries in which interesting secrets and facts related to forensic science and CID are told as well as wonderful and amazing experiments are done. This is very important and wonderful for children. There is a workshop through which their hidden talents can be revealed.

Training Sessions

Conducting volunteer and expert training sessions on various topics and research methods and techniques is also an important service provided by public libraries.

Career Counseling



The process of career counseling aids in your understanding of both the working environment and yourself. Career counseling is provided to young people in public libraries by professionals so that they can find the right guidance for their future.

Conclusion

These libraries' role in developing society is seen in quite different ways now than it was in its past glory. Public libraries are not well-known in Pakistani society, which leads to disinformation and misunderstanding. Since modern libraries still prioritize physical services, several questions about their existence in society have been posed as a result of globalization and technological innovation. More has to be done to increase these libraries' beneficial contributions to society.

Public libraries had a long history in Pakistan. Before the partition there were a developed public library system. However, due to the newly established country in 1947 these libraries development was neglected. Previous literature shows that the public libraries in Pakistan always focused to provide better resources with the limited budget and staff. Pakistan is a low economy country, and always faced the financial issues associated with the development of public library sector. However, these libraries have clear intensions regarding the library services. These libraries always faced the pressure to justify their presence in the Pakistani society. However, these libraries took the challenge as opportunity and adopted the different initiatives with the involvement of less financial resources. The results of this study shows that the public libraries in Lahore are providing some unique services to their community with the help of digital advancement. However, there is still need to build the positive image of these public libraries in society. Furthermore, government should take interest in establishment and re build the infrastructure of these public libraries to meet the challenges caused by the technology.

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