

The Library Scenario and Management Problems in Pakistan Libraries

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The developing South Asian country of Pakistan encompasses many population and economic variables that affect overall library services in several unique ways. Pakistan is a multiethnic, multilingual state. Urdu, the national language, is the language of instructions in secondary schools. English is widely used in commerce and business, and continues to be the official language of Pakistan. The total population is 150 million, which is rapidly increasing at a rate of 2.1 percent per annum. Two-thirds of the population lives in villages, with agriculture as the main source of livelihood. Politically, it is a federation of four provinces (Punjab, Sindh, North-West Frontier Province, and Balochistan), and the Federal Capital Area of Islamabad. There is a parliamentary for democracy similar to the British system.¹

Modern library services in the territories now constituting Pakistan began in 1915 with the arrival of Asa Don Dickinson, an American librarian and a pupil of Melvil Dewey. His goal at the University of the Punjab was “to organize the university library and to teach modern library methods to the librarians of the Punjab.”² This was, in fact, the beginning of library administration along scientific lines, documented in his book *Punjab Library Primer*, which covered various aspects of administration and has been a guide for library administrators for several decades in British India.³ The impact of this school was tremendous on successive library developments throughout the region. It was Dickinson, for example, who introduced the Dewey Decimal Classification and the concept of author entry to this part of the world.

The present library scenario reveals many concerns. The most comprehensive survey on Pakistan libraries was submitted by the students of the MLIS program at the University of Karachi, although these figures have not been updated since 1989. There were 6034 libraries in 1989, with a total collection of 13,354,500 volumes. The types of libraries and the number of volumes are as follows: one national library (80,000); two university libraries (2,098,400); 435 college libraries (3,640,800); 331 special

libraries (2,557,500); 281 public libraries (2,190,800); 4,373 box libraries; 464 school libraries (905,400); and polytechnic and miscellaneous libraries (21,600).⁴

Comparatively, the university libraries are better placed with resources, organization, and staff.⁵ However, there presently exists a climate of stagnation and decline in university libraries, notwithstanding the best efforts on the part of the government and its Higher Education Commission (HEC), formerly known as the University Grants Commission. The main factors for this state of affairs have been shrinking budgets combined with ever-rising inflation, which has obviously affected library growth and services.

There is no organized public library system. The existing public libraries, mostly subscription libraries, are under the charge of municipal and local bodies. The majority of these libraries occupy temporary buildings, and their holdings are mainly fiction and out-of-date books on history and Islam. Few libraries are properly staffed, and are often without a qualified librarian. The services of these libraries are limited, and their main sources of funds are regular grants from the municipal body's annual budget and subscriptions charged to the public. This sad picture of public libraries also could be attributed to the absence of public library legislation.

School library development in Pakistan is still in its embryonic stage. In fact, it has not generally attracted the attention of education authorities and has thus been sporadic. Only a negligible percentage of schools under government control have a library. Even then, the school librarian usually has little or no training in library science, and the books in the collection are often outdated. The defective library education system, lack of children's literature, and library funds are the major constraints in the development of school libraries. On the other hand, there are some excellent school libraries in the private sector.

The majority of special libraries are attached to government departments, institutions, and universities and colleges. A far smaller number of such libraries have been set up in recent years by industries and firms. These libraries are mainly concentrated in the large cities and metropolitan areas. Their collections of books and periodicals are not large; nonprint and audiovisual materials are

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almost nonexistent. With respect to services, these libraries are primarily focused on the collection, organization, and use of material, but have done little by way of analysis and use of data.

Pakistan has been somewhat unfortunate in the establishment of a national library. Until recently, there was not a national library in practical terms, only the Department of Libraries, a subordinate department of the Federal Ministry of Education that carried out a national library's functions on a limited scale. The present national library came into existence in April 1988, with the shifting of a meager collection of 100,000 volumes collected over the years from the Department of Libraries to a newly constructed building, formally opened to the public on August 24, 1993. However, a thorough elucidation of the functions of the national library is still awaited.

At present, seven university library schools provide training facilities at the postgraduate level leading to an MLS. The Ph.D. program is available at the universities of Karachi, Bahawalpur, Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan. Courses of short duration are offered by the regional library associations. Library science is available as a minor at the higher secondary levels. For example, at the universities of Karachi and Punjab, library science also is offered as an elective at the B.A. level. Allama Iqbal Open University offers two programs leading to an MLS.

There is need for broad change to improve Pakistan's library resources. External changes in the environment are having an effect. The proliferation of electronic publishing, automation, and the Internet has had a profound influence on libraries and their work environment. Likewise, the political climate and demographic changes all are affecting libraries—too often, adversely. Essentially, everything in and around libraries is changing, from collections, services, technology, access policies, and so on. The challenge is for Pakistan's library leaders to capitalize upon these as opportunities to create positive change in the profession.

Even in this era of change, stagnation and apathy are common in Pakistani libraries of all categories. Why is this so? What needs to be done? From where could leadership in this regard come? Library management needs a major restructuring based on current and future needs. What needs to be done for competency management? What must be done at library schools to meet international standards of library and information science education? Effective managers depend upon sufficient and reliable funding. Why has Pakistan not found alternate sources of funding?

These are questions that no one person can answer. Instead, the following essay discusses the managerial problems encountered by libraries in selected areas of interest and offers suggestions for their solution. These observations are based on the personal experiences and observations of the author for more than forty-two years, both as a practitioner and teacher of library and information science inside and outside of Pakistan, and on a close association with the Pakistan Library Association (PLA).

The current literature dealing with management issues was also reviewed. The following are some specific areas where change needs to be managed.

Human Resource Management

Within the context of overall changes in Pakistani society, those affecting library and information services have resulted in new demands on human resource management. The existing workforce does not possess the necessary competencies to shoulder the future responsibilities. This is true in respect to all types of library establishments, and perhaps more in the case of library schools.

One of the most pressing problems faced by libraries has been the absence of competent manpower for top managerial positions. The university libraries have suffered the most on this count. The seriousness of these problems can be gauged by the fact that, at present, two-thirds of public sector universities are without a full-time professional librarian. In most cases, the university libraries, including the well-established universities, are headed by deputy librarians or by one of the assistant librarians. In newly established universities, both in the private and public sectors, the libraries are administered by a fresh graduate under the overall guidance of a senior faculty member. Partially, this situation can be attributed to the large-scale immigration of the best of our professional librarians to oil-rich countries of the Middle East and Africa during the mid-1970s for lucrative job opportunities. This immigration had a tremendous impact on library development and services, and as yet Pakistan has not been able to fill this gap, notwithstanding the best efforts of HEC, PLA, and nongovernment organizations (NGOs).

What could be done to meet this challenge? The large libraries, particularly the university libraries, could make use of technical and business managers for those top positions that have been vacant for years for want of competent manpower. The selected candidates could be sent to library schools in the United Kingdom and the United States under a linkage program to receive customized short courses on academic library administration. This step on the part of administrative authorities at the universities would represent a revolutionary change in library and information services. This suggestion is opposed in some professional circles, but others agree that this is the need of the hour in the larger interest of the country in general, and the library profession in particular.

Library schools also suffered because of the immigration of the majority of highly qualified and senior teachers to OPEC countries, primarily to Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and Kuwait. At the moment, all the library schools are suffering in the absence of teachers with research qualifications. This can be ascertained from the fact that there are only four teachers with a Ph.D. degree in the country's eight library schools that offer programs leading to M.A., M.Phil.,

and Ph.D. degrees. At least five Pakistani Ph.D.s from leading library schools of the United States and the United Kingdom have left the country and not returned in almost two decades.

In recent years, the country's library schools have been criticized for not producing the quality manpower to meet the changing needs of present-day libraries. The specific charges leveled against them include:

- low entrance criteria;
- low intellectual content curricula;
- lack of information technology-related courses;
- dominance of theoretical courses without practical application;
- inadequate or ill-prepared faculty;
- use of traditional teaching methods;
- a dearth of teaching material; and
- poor library and laboratory facilities.⁶

The annual 200 to 250 graduates of the country's library schools lack the necessary competency desired by employing agencies.⁷

The country's library schools need to emerge from their limited role so as to bring revolutionary changes. The growing incorporation of a few information technology-related courses in the curriculum must improve to yield tangible results. The library schools should give special attention to the quality of their faculty members, which is inferior in terms of qualifications and publications, research work, and professional commitments. More importantly, there is no culture of research, which is needed to propel the profession into the future.

Financial Management

Pakistani libraries have been faced with severe financial constraints. Since the late 1970s, the intensity of the problem has been more seriously felt, particularly in the absence of some formula for funding. In fact, government funding to libraries is getting tighter because of the poor national economy. Ever-rising inflation and growing material costs have further limited libraries' purchasing power. Obviously, growth and development of libraries suffered, which has manifested itself in cuts to acquisition budgets and failure to adopt newer technology.

Pakistan libraries need to adopt a two-way strategy. First, they need to find alternative sources of funding. Second, they need to manage the available funds following sound principles of financial management. Inadequate efforts have been made in both regards, due to poor training at the library schools. There is a drastic need for modernizing the content of library management courses, preferably taught in cooperation with business schools, as the existing faculty members at the library schools lack expertise.

Owing to the financial crises faced by libraries, there is a need to explore new sources of funding and conserve the available resources with judicious spending. For example, additional revenues could be generated by introducing value-added services: fee-based online searching, e-mail, computer print-out, and database access all offer commercial potential. Other fee-based services that deserve mention are microreproductions, photocopying, translation service, interlibrary lending, bibliography compilation, computer-assisted bibliographic searching, discarded book sales, library publication sales, and borrowing privileges for nonaffiliated persons.

The free-versus-fee controversy is being debated. Both parties have strong points in their favor. Some libraries are already charging for such services as photocopying and interlibrary loan, on the grounds that even libraries in the United Kingdom and the United States charge for certain services. Coffman and Josephine estimated in 1991 that there were two hundred to three hundred libraries in the United States and Canada charging some kind of fee-based information services.⁸ Likewise, a survey of 170 university libraries in the United Kingdom, conducted by Clinton in 1999, revealed that out of 120 libraries, 76 (70 percent) charge for interlibrary loan service.⁹ Proponents of fee-based services use these as examples of precedence for that fiscal model.

Managing Library Automation

Approximately fifteen years have elapsed since library automation began in Pakistan, but the country is still in its infancy in this sector. Only a small number of special libraries, mostly located in capital cities, have ventured into automation, and only selected operations. The concept of a library network and networking is still a dream. Pakistan's level of automation can not yet be compared with libraries in many developing countries, let alone countries of Europe and North America.

The question now arises, why the desired progress has not been made? There are, in fact, several constraints, in particular the absence of systematic planning for automation; constraints encountered in software and hardware selection; nonexistence of standards; financial limitations and uncertainties; and, most important, lack of willing and competent human resources.¹⁰

The last problem deserves somewhat detailed discussion. In addition to the other deficiencies noted in library education, the existing curriculum teaches traditional librarianship skills of building, organizing, and managing a print collection. Information science and information technology content has been underrepresented in these courses. This has resulted in a scarcity of new librarians who can plan, design, program, and implement various technical projects. The vast majority of present-generation librarians likewise lack adequate vision about computers and their potential in

library and information work. Efforts made to redress the situation have had little impact. Four successive curricula revisions under HEC's auspices failed to find support from library schools with regard to incorporation of information science courses into the curriculum. Why? Of the many reasons, three are of particular importance: lack of training; lack of laboratories equipped with adequate information technology equipment; and non-existence of faculty with requisite qualification in information technology. The problems thus must be addressed at the infrastructure level.

Maximizing the use of newer technologies by the libraries of Pakistan is its greatest need. Such an undertaking will require the combined efforts on the part of government agencies, the national and regional library associations, the National Library of Pakistan (NLP), library schools, and funding agencies. In this regard, special attention needs to be paid to:

- formulation of an information policy;
- creation of popular awareness with regard to technology in library operations;
- training and development of staff;
- organization of user education programs for students and teachers; and
- emphasis on comprehensive planning by individual libraries to automate the library operations.

Collection Management

Acquisitions offer the widest spectrum of problems because 90 percent of publications required to support instruction and research must be imported. The country lacks adequate infrastructure to support the development of indigenous publishing activities. Pakistan's literacy rate in 1998 was 49 percent; it was estimated to have reached 55 percent in 2004. The book trade is poorly developed, and the volume of publishing is small, ranging between 860 and 1,525 titles per year.¹¹ The country is largely dependent on book imports from the United States and the United Kingdom for advanced texts and science and technology journals. With the exception of textbooks up to grade twelve, all instructional materials are acquired by libraries from the United States and United Kingdom, and, to a lesser degree, from India in recent years.

The acquisitions environment is thus impeded by a weak national infrastructure. Notable among the problems encountered by libraries in this regard are:

- nonexistence of collection development policies;
- no set patterns for book selection;
- absence of book selection aids (including access to Web sites);
- absence of norms for fund allocation to libraries;
- variations regarding methods followed for book procurement;

- uncertain import policy, import restrictions, and trade embargoes;
- fluctuating rate of Pakistani rupee;
- hurdles at customs clearance; and
- a dearth of competent acquisition staff.¹²

It is widely believed in professional circles that most of these problems could be minimized through formulation of a universal collection development policy by the large libraries, particularly the academic ones. Such a policy could be developed in universities with the support and advice of the library committee and academic staff association. However, even with coordination, librarian practitioners must play an active role in this regard.

In recent years, the availability of scientific literature (particularly in electronic formats) has further added to the challenges by collection managers. New questions are being posed; for instance, What percentage of an acquisition budget needs to be appropriated for the material in electronic format versus print? Collection managers also have had to deal with decreasing purchasing power due to shrinking budgets and rising inflation. The problems become more intense in the absence of a resource-sharing culture in the country. Another aspect of the problem is that the majority of users still maintain a strong loyalty to print books.

To maintain a balance between hybrid print and digital resources is indeed a constant problem for the acquisitions managers. The traditional resources are gradually being replaced by newer technology and electronic products, but the process is very slow in the absence of needed finances. Policy-making institutions, aware of this need, supported the establishment of a national digital library of journals under HEC's auspices in 2004. Some university libraries now are providing Internet access to graduate students, research students, and faculty members on subsidized rates. The Internet services need to be introduced on a wider scale, however, even if the users must be charged a modest fee.

Resource Sharing

Compounding these difficulties is the fact that resource sharing is almost nonexistent in Pakistan. In the 1980s, awareness to this effect found expression in the professional writings and finally led to the establishment of a few cooperative projects in the closing years of the decade. Among these were the Lahore Business and Economic Libraries Network (LABELNET), Pakistan Parliamentary Libraries Project (PPLP), and Management of Agriculture Research and Technology (MART) library-strengthening project. But the end result of all three projects has been a source of disappointment for all concerned. Typically, in developing countries such as Pakistan, the nonprovision of funding is the most important obstacle of a resource-sharing program.

But in reality, there had never been a critical financial problem in the case of these projects. The equally contributing factors that have prevented progress are:

- absence of proper planning;
- lack of competent human resources;
- limited application of computer technology by libraries;
- nonavailability of standards for technical processing, cataloging, and classification;
- nonexistence of bibliographic apparatus; and
- absence of leadership.¹³

For the success of any future program of library cooperation in the country, the author suggests an active role for NLP and PLA. These are the only organizations that can produce standards and cooperative tools, such as a union catalog and union list of serials.¹⁴

Managing Physical Facilities

Almost all of the library buildings constructed since independence suffer from functional deficiencies that have been systematically repeated. For example, the architectural emphasis on monumentality has created libraries with high ceilings and rotundas embellishing the reading halls, but nonprovision of vertical expansion and an absence of judicious use of natural light and fresh air. Inconveniences such as unsatisfactory lavatory facilities, absence of lifts, and unusable basements are other byproducts. Some of the major reasons underlying these deficiencies are a tendency to ignore the librarian in the overall planning and designing of physical facilities; a lack of cooperation and coordination between the architect, librarian, and library building committee; a failure to anticipate the future growth of the library; and buildings designed by architects with no experience of this kind of work.¹⁵

At present, all of the major libraries are in need of new buildings or extensions. Each proposal in this regard should be vetted by a special committee to be set up by HEC. The proposed committee would be comprised of an architect, preferably with experience in this kind of work, and the country's senior librarians. Also, there is a need to develop standards and principles for designing library buildings, fittings, and furniture.

Conclusion

The libraries and information centers in Pakistan need to resolve deficiencies in order to anticipate, identify, and meet current information needs described in this survey. But this is not going to be easy. The present information managers have special responsibility in this regard. They need to take leadership and change their thinking to

establish a new focus on creating and using intellectual assets. But a number of questions could be raised. Are they willing for a meaningful change in traditional managerial practices? Are they even capable of doing so?

I guess "NO." But why? In fact, they lack the necessary combination of skills that allows them to acquire, manage, share, and use information and knowledge. Library schools have fallen far short of what is needed to provide necessary leadership. The absence of highly qualified, research-oriented faculty deserves special mention. It is a shame that there are only four Ph.D. teachers in the country's eight library schools. Whereas it is now mandatory to have a Ph.D. for the post of an associate professor or to be appointed as a chairperson of a teaching department (plus eight research papers in journals of international repute), at the moment only two LIS departments are headed by a professor or associate professor of library science, while six others are supervised by another dean. Under such circumstances, what one can expect of the future of LIS education in this country? Honestly speaking, the existing faculty members are not in a position, either academically and professionally, to handle the future challenges. There is an urgent need for some drastic remedial measures on HEC's part of to save this discipline from total devastation.

This author would suggest a two-point strategy to face this problem. First, at least two faculty members for each LIS department need to be sent to the United Kingdom or the United States for higher education in information management and related fields leading to a Ph.D. degree. New graduates with strong backgrounds in information technology should be preferred in the selection of prospective candidates. Secondly, the existing faculty members should be given a timeframe within which to complete their Ph.D. in Pakistan. They should be provided all the facilities in this regard that would enable them to succeed. Failing that, they should be terminated.

What could be done immediately to redress the present situation? What should be the objectives of long-range planning? In fact, there is a need for an organizational change on the part of large and medium-sized libraries. But the execution of a meaningful organizational change needs to pass through a process of unfreezing, change, and refreezing. The unfreezing, which involves planning for change and setting goals, could be most uncomfortable for the majority of employees. So a tough attitude on the part of management is essential, and all efforts should be directed to identifying those who can get the job done. Following the process of unfreezing comes the "change phase," which calls for a positive approach. Here, the libraries need to implement the new procedures, plans, technologies, and services. But does Pakistan have library leaders who are up to the task? In the absence of competent persons, the services of business and technical managers from other sectors are recommended, but all such appointments should be on a tenure basis.

Pakistani libraries are in a crisis. These ideas may not be liked by some librarians, but this is a must for the survival of the library profession in the country.

References and Notes

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