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Lack of Professional Librarians in Gilgit-Baltistan: Challenges and Opportunities in the Digital Era

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Libraries play a crucial role in education, research, and cultural preservation. Their effectiveness depends not only on infrastructure but also on the presence of trained professionals. In Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), the Shortage of professional librarians has historically constrained the development of libraries. This paper analyzes the key factors contributing to this gap, such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient financial support, and the scarcity of locally trained Library and Information Science (LIS) graduates. It also highlights recent positive trends, including the increasing number of GB students pursuing LIS degrees, with many graduates from GB now working in libraries across Pakistan. These developments suggest that with sustained support and strategic policies, libraries in GB can evolve into modern knowledge centers capable of meeting the educational and cultural needs of the region in the digital era.

Keywords: Gilgit-Baltistan, Professional Librarians, Library Development, Digital Era, Library Services.

Introduction

Libraries have always been recognized as the backbone of knowledge sharing, intellectual development, and cultural preservation. Across the world, libraries are no longer limited to storing books; instead, they have evolved into modern knowledge hubs by adopting digital technologies and by engaging qualified professionals to provide quality services (IFLA, 2021). Unfortunately, the situation in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) is quite different. Although the region has a rich cultural and intellectual background, it still faces a shortage of professional librarians. Because of this gap, people have limited access to reliable information services, and libraries remain unable to fully support education, research, and community development in the digital era (Haider, 2009; Anwar, 2017).

This paper explores the challenges faced by GB libraries, recent developments in professional training, and potential strategies to enhance library services in the digital era.

Literature Review

Global research emphasizes the vital role of professional librarians in shaping modern information environments. According to the International Federation of Library Associations

and Institutions (IFLA, 2021), librarians are essential for managing digital resources, teaching information literacy, and ensuring equitable access to knowledge.

In Pakistan, Haider (2009) observed that LIS education has significantly developed professional capacity, though its benefits remain concentrated in urban centers. Similarly, Anwar (2017) noted challenges in library development, highlighting those peripheral regions, including GB, remain underserved. Although little direct research exists on GB libraries, anecdotal evidence and regional reports confirm the shortage of professional staff and modern infrastructure.

Challenges in Gilgit-Baltistan Libraries

1. **Lack of Professional Education Programs:** No local universities in GB offer LIS degrees, forcing aspiring professionals to migrate to other cities, which discourages many (Haider, 2009).
2. **Limited Government Policies and Funding:** Libraries are not prioritized in regional development plans. Funding is often inadequate for hiring trained staff or modernizing collections (Anwar, 2017).
3. **Absence of Professional Librarians:** Most libraries in schools, colleges, and even universities are managed by non-professionals with little or no formal training.
4. **Digital Divide:** While the world is rapidly digitizing, GB libraries lag behind due to poor ICT infrastructure, limited internet connectivity, and lack of digital resources (IFLA, 2021).
5. **Cultural and Geographical Barriers:** The mountainous terrain and remote locations of many communities further restrict access to modern library services and professional training opportunities.

Suggestions for Improvement

I. Establish LIS Programs in GB Universities: Karakoram International University (KIU), University of Baltistan (UoB) and other institutions should introduce LIS degree programs to produce local professionals.

II. Policy and Government Support: The regional government should allocate dedicated budgets for library development and professional recruitment.

III. Capacity Building and Training: Short courses, workshops, and online training programs should be offered to existing library staff.

IV. Digital Library Initiatives: Partnerships with HEC's digital library program and international open-access initiatives can help bridge the digital divide.

V. Community and NGO Involvement: NGOs and community organizations should be engaged to support literacy and library initiatives in remote areas.

Solutions and Recent Developments

In the past, Gilgit-Baltistan had almost no trained professionals in LIS, which severely limited the growth of libraries. However, the situation has begun to change. An increasing number of students from GB are now pursuing LIS degrees in universities across Pakistan, and many have secured employment in universities, colleges, and other institutions nationwide. This gradual professionalization indicates that the shortage of librarians may not remain a permanent challenge.

In fact, many students from GB have already completed their LIS education and are successfully working in different academic libraries across the country. This positive trend suggests that the region now has a pool of qualified professionals who can contribute effectively to library development. Therefore, it is essential for universities and colleges in GB to prioritize the recruitment of professional librarians. Doing so will not only strengthen their library services but also ensure that local institutions benefit from the expertise of their own graduates.

With continued support, proper training opportunities, and effective recruitment policies, GB libraries can soon be managed by qualified staff. Such developments will improve library services, encourage digital initiatives, and facilitate the integration of modern technologies for better access to knowledge. However, until professional librarians are formally recruited, the libraries in GB will continue to face developmental challenges. Since libraries are the true hubs of knowledge, their growth and effectiveness depend largely on the presence of skilled professionals.

Conclusion

The absence of professional librarians in Gilgit-Baltistan has long constrained the potential of libraries in the region. However, the recent rise of LIS-trained professionals and students from GB presents a promising path forward. By establishing local LIS programs, providing professional training opportunities, and integrating digital resources, libraries in GB can transform into modern knowledge hubs. Such efforts will not only enhance access to information but also strengthen education, research, and cultural preservation. Ultimately, the development of professional library services is essential for enabling GB communities to fully participate in the digital era.

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