

Assessing the Recourses and Services of Public Libraries for Their Conversion Towards Community Learning Centres

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to assess whether government public libraries in Punjab (PLsP) have enough resources and services to take up the role of Community Learning Centres (CLCs) to become proactive organs of the community for lifelong learning.

Design/methodology/approach: This study was conducted through survey method in five public libraries (PLs) of Punjab, Pakistan. A close ended questionnaire was used to collect data from the head librarians about their respective libraries. The collected data were tabulated, analyzed and interpreted manually to reach the conclusion.

Key finding(s): presence of resources and services in PLs support their conversion into CLCs. The public librarians were clear in their perception about CLC and are ready to perform as facilitators in the innovative role. Problems foreseen included scarcity of funds, absence of prior experience of staff, and non-feasibility of inter-departmental co-ordination.

Research limitation(s): Limitation of the study included lack of relevant literature, unskilled man power, poor infrastructure and interrupted power supply

Practical implication(s): There is a pressing need to introduce suggested innovative role of PL as CLC to establish it as an institution enhancing literacy, numeracy, life skills and preserving local language, culture and history through community action.

Contribution to knowledge: CLC concept in the context of Punjab, Pakistan is new one. Being so, the study in the special context will contribute significantly to the existing scarce literature on the topic in LIS.

Paper type: Research.

Keyword(s): Public library; Resources and services; Community learning center; Adult literacy; Lifelong learning.

Introduction

Historical Background of Public Libraries

Public library (PL) is established and maintained by the community mostly through its own funds to provide it services by means of books and other reading material like newspapers and magazines (Weingand, 1984). During the first half of the 19th century, some PLs were established in the Indian subcontinent for the provision of reading pleasure to educated people in their leisure time (Mahmood, 2008). Community Learning Centre (CLC) is a local social institution in a community set up and managed by the members of community to help people learn life skills, promote literacy and introduce new talent in the community by way of providing friendly and flexible learning environment to them. The CLC provides educational, cultural, and recreational activities and services to students and community residents in lifelong mode (Haddad, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

A great need exists for assessing resources and services of PLs for their conversion towards CLCs. In developing county like Pakistan, the concept of CLC is though new yet extremely needed. PLs as CLC can play a vital role for cultural uplift, lifelong learning, adult literacy and family engagement. After paradigm shift, people were expecting that PLs would develop new modes of user's services but it has been observed with concern that PLs could not upgrade their services up to users' expected level. CLC having multi- dimensional role are successfully functioning in the world. So, conversion of PLs from books lending hobs to life skills learning institutions i.e CLCs is a need of the hour. Merging and extending facilities of lending and learning and providing varied life skills

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training opportunities for innovation, talent exhibition and leisure time spending to the people are the standards of CLC.

Objectives of the Study

1. To highlight the literature regarding supportive services (children literacy, adult literacy, information literacy and life-long learning) which qualifies PL for its conversion into CLC.
2. To identify the resources and services available with Govt; PLsP (Pakistan) as pre-requisite for their conversion into CLCs.
3. To explore that how PLsP with available resources can be converted into CLCs to perform a dynamic and vibrant role of lifelong learning institutions.

Literature Review

Public Libraries in Pakistan

During the first half of the 19th century, some public libraries were established in the Indian subcontinent for the provision of reading pleasure to educated people in their leisure time. (Mahmood, 2008). Key (1956) observed very poor position of libraries in early days of Pakistan having no role in enhancing literacy in the society. Anwar (1976) informed that Mr. Key proposed a four years plan of establishing a good number of libraries in the country while disclosing a poor condition of then exiting PLs and their services. Mr. David G. Donovan also proposed a nation-wide information transfer system by establishing libraries from province to down districts, cities, towns and village levels. The Education Policy (1972-80) recommended the establishment of a system of 50,000 people oriented PLs from province to down village level. Taj (1990) noted that Khurshid in 1985 prepared a two phased plan of five years each for the development of a national system of PLs from the province down to tehsil level. Khurshid (1990) observed slow library growth in the Pakistan and disclosed that libraries had somehow increased their role and provided more opportunities to the masses at grass root level for availing facility of books. Rafi et al. (2020) found that working scope of public libraries was much wider and were considered as peoples universities with the noble slogan of education for all. Besides providing educational facilities to general public they were also assigned the obligation of preservation of cultural heritage

Public Libraries and Children Literacy

Newman (1996) maintained that PLs are capable of introducing literacy skills, language learning and improving capacities during early stage of schooling. He established that PLs had been charged with the responsibility of providing standard quality books to children to enable them to understand the world in a real sense. It was also explored that children were to motivate to perform better in learning literacy skills offered by PLs to show better performance and school achievement. Celano and Neuman (2001) asserted that library activities such as story hours, summer programs, art and craft and other creative events added significantly to children learning. Chang and Lee (2011) regarded PL the best place for children for engaging them in purposeful learning activities. Krolak (2006) saw that children sections of libraries were ideal places for implanting and promoting reading habits in children. He found that juvenile collection and library story time also encouraged early year literacy.

Public Libraries and Adult Literacy

Monroe (1976) found the public library's role in adult literacy as the "infusion of authentic knowledge into thinking and decision making of the community". Allred and Hay (1979) explored PLs as meeting the educational and learning needs of adults. Krolak (2006) asserted that PLs could play a key role from early year learning to the adult literacy. Apotiade (2002) found that PLs had potential to set up adult literacy centers to eradicate illiteracy. Monroe (1976) pinpointed that library collection, its organization and attractive way of presentation ever motivated the adults to use PL to learn with their own pace and comfort. Akparobore (2011) explored PLs, in Nigeria as active agencies and organizations for promotion of adult education and general literacy.

Public Libraries and Information Literacy

Libraries were found fulfilling their responsibility towards abridging digital divide and promoting information literacy (Harada & Tepe, 1998; Salter & Salter, 1991). Oliver and Harper (2007) discovered that PLs could play an active role in devising an information literacy program of a suitable level as per need of the community to deliver a low cost ICT literacy training to the community members. They maintained that PLs were considered having the potential to play the role of ICT literacy training centres. Public library's traditional role to promote information literacy was recognized to that they have full knowledge about reading behavior, peoples capacities to absorb and reading requirements of the members of the community where they were functioning. To keep pace with the time, the libraries required to develop and harness web- based services for bringing back the information seekers community to a broader scenario of digital environment which were confined to handly devices of web-based services (Khan & Bhatti, 2017).

Community Learning Centre

The concept of community learning centre (CLC) evolved from PLs serving in a particular community by merging and extending facilities of lending and learning, and providing opportunities for talent exhibition and leisure time spending to the people (British Broadcasting Corporation, London). Rogers (2019) informed that Non-Formal Education (NFE) had been reviving internationally. That was considered a unique way of learning far away from the formal education programs. CLCs were found providing the base for functioning of NFE for the sustainable development goals. Middelborg and Duvieusart (2002) defined the CLC as "A community learning centre (CLC) is a local educational institution outside the formal education system, usually set up and managed by local people"

Leowarin (2001) informed that CLCs in Thailand were found involved in imparting adult and children education, life-long learning i.e. general literacy, numeracy and computer learning to meet the varied needs of community learners and improve their ways of life in line with their local perspectives. They had made vibrant the whole community involving maximum community members in the affairs of community learning centres and its management to give them a sense of belonging and ownership. He concluded that CLCs played a vital role in arranging educational and learning programs in the society to promote literacy and lifelong learning. The prime objective of the CLC is to create a learning community which according to Faris (1998) took lifetime learning as its organizing aim and promotes coordination and collaboration of the social institutions. UNESCO (2004) found CLCs as training and resource centres for imparting non-formal and other forms of out of school education and training. CLCs had well designed plans and comprehensive ways for provision of lifelong learning to the people residing in far-flung villages and could not get education from formal schooling. Leowarin (2001) disclosed that in Thai region so many CLCs had been established to play a pivotal role in imparting life-long education and activities based learning for the people of community.

Public Libraries Convergence Towards Community Learning Centres

Ranganathan (1931) informed that library was a living organism to that it had the potential for extension. Lee and Kim (2016) said, "In a period of globalization and rapid change, skill requirements for jobs and opportunities for learning are changing. Meeting basic needs is no longer enough to adequately serve the community. It is essential to adopt the demands of lifelong learning." Allred (1997) explored that introducing of learning centers are successfully contributing to the independent learning exhibiting potential for materializing the concept of CLC in PLs. Aguolu (2000) explored that PLs endeavored their best to satisfy the myriad information needs of their patrons by providing them various print, non-print and electronic information resources. According to Lemke (2002), in the modern era, necessary skills and requirements to settle the complex problems of life had also changed. Islam and Mezbah-ul-Islam (2010) claimed that PLs had sufficient potential to assume the extended role of CLCs. They recommended that Public librarians should make their best efforts to promote library services to the people down to grass root level. It was further disclosed that the Department of Non- Formal Education of Thailand, in 1995, was so much keen in the issue that it transformed all kinds of PLs into CLCs. Khan and Bhatti (2012) found that librarians had common problems in developing countries like Pakistan. The problems were noted as deficiency of technical and advance

searching skills, untrained staff, lack of digital collection, scarcity of funds in libraries and librarians' poor service structure & status.

Community Learning Centres' Functioning in the World

Leowarin (2001) disclosed that in Thai region so many community learning centres had been established to play a pivotal role in imparting life-long education and activities based learning for the people of community. Mr. Koji Tawara, first Secretary at the Embassy of Japan in Thailand informed that as much as 15,000 community learning centre were functioning in Japan with the facilities of reading rooms for public, in-door and safe out-door games and play-lands for children, meeting and festivity place for local people, celebration and cultural exhibition centre for the community. Ms. Churairat Sangboonnum, Deputy Permanent Secretary-General of the Thai National Commission for UNESCO informed that Thailand was successful enough to run more than 8000 model CLCs. UNESCO (2011) pointed out functioning of a large number of community learning centres in Thai region which were found engaged in promotion of literacy in the community, imparting life skills to the residents, and working on social uplift agendas of varied natures. It was further disclosed that more than 170,000 CLCs were established in 24 countries of the region. Kenneally (2003) revealed that local community had started raising funds and seeking collaboration of other social agencies to re-develop the Poland Public Library to make it as information as well as attractive and exciting community centre.

Methodology

Creswell (2003) asserted that quantitative way is the method by which objective theories are measured by way of evaluating the relationship among variables. So, survey method was adopted for assessing presence of resources and availability of services in PLs for their conversion towards CLCs. Babbie (1995), and Ary and Razavieh (1996) informed that the survey method is commonly used in social science research and that the survey method depends on a questionnaire instrument. So, a close ended questionnaire was constructed keeping in view the literature review. The questionnaires were personally handed over to the head librarians during personal visits of the author to PLs. The questionnaires were explained to head librarians and got filled in. The data about presence of resources and availability of services in the PLsP provided by the head librarians regarding their respective libraries were witnessed and verified by the author. Due to personal visits, the response rate was 100%. The data collected from all the five PLs were tabulated, analyzed and interpreted manually. The librarians were also asked about their perception of CLC and their readiness to serve as facilitators in the suggested CLC. For functioning of CLC, the possibility of cooperation among the departments with similar objectives was also examined. Tentative problems in the way as foreseen were also noted in the study.

Population of the Study

According to Best and Kahn (2006) "population is any group of individuals who have one or more trait in common that are of interest to researcher". Population selected for this study was five (05) below given Government public libraries designated by alphabet shown against each:

Table 1. List of Libraries (n=5)

#	Name of Library	Notation
1	Govt. Punjab Public Library, Lahore	A
2	Govt. Central Public Library, Bahawalpur	B
3	Govt. Model Town Public Library, Lahore	C
4	Govt. Jinnah Public Library, Sahiwal	D
5	Govt. Public Library, Garh Maharaja, Jhang	E

Data Analysis

Data collected about all the five government public libraries of province of Punjab, Pakistan has been tabulated in the below given tables.

Table 2. Library Collection in Participating Libraries

Library	Printed books			Newspapers		Periodicals		Manuscripts	Ebooks
	General	Children	Out of print / rare	Fresh subscribed	Old stock / archives	Fresh subscribed	Old stock / archives		
A	100 K+	5 K	20 K	50	5 K files	50	19 K copies	1500	400
B	100 K+	15 K	10 K	50	9 K files	50	18 K copies	550	300
C	50 K	5 K	Nil	23	Nil	62	Nil	Nil	200
D	40 K	2,500	Nil	25	Nil	26	Nil	Nil	150
E	15 K	100	Nil	06	Nil	20	Nil	Nil	Nil

Table 3. IT and Electronic Apparatus in Participating Libraries

Library	Computer	LCD / LED	CD ROM	CD writer	Printer	Scanner	Multi-media projector	Digital camera	CC camera	Photo-copier	Fax
A	24	24	18	24	07	01	Nil	01	Nil	02	01
B	20	12	14	12	04	01	01	01	05	01	01
C	14	12	10	10	02	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	01	01
D	08	08	08	08	02	01	Nil	Nil	Nil	01	01
E	02	02	01	01	01	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

Table 4. Learning Material for Children in Participating Libraries

Library	Audio CD	Video CD / DVD	Toys for kids	TV	Children physical games/ exercise apparatus
A	1,000	2,000	1,000	3	Sufficient holding
B	1,000	1,000	5,000	3	Sufficient holding
C	500	400	1,000	1	Sufficient holding
D	400	300	1,000	1	Sufficient holding
E	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

Table 5. Physical Facilities in Participating Libraries

Library	Physical facilities available in the public libraries
A	(i) Meeting room and scholar room (ii) Literary activities / exhibition hall / auditorium (iii) Canteen and stationary shop (vi) Washrooms (v) Parking area.
B	(i) Meeting room and scholars rooms (ii) Hall for literary activities /auditorium/ exhibition etc. (iii) Washrooms (iv) Parking area.
C	(i) Meeting room (ii) Literary activities hall (iii) Washrooms (iv) Parking area.
D	(i) Meeting room (ii) Literary activities hall (iii) Washrooms (vi) Parking area.
E	(i) Washrooms (ii) Parking area.

Table 6. Annual Budget Allocation to Participating Libraries in Last Five Financial Years

Library	Budget 2019-20 in PKR	Budget 2018-19 in PKR	Budget 2017-18 in PKR	Budget 2016-17 in PKR	Budget 2015-16 in PKR
A	53,595,000	51,098,000	49,690,000	45,080,000	42,550,000.
B	32,399,000	32,669,000	26,183,000	25,984,500	23,584,000
C	30,150,000	30,090,000	29,990,000	29,090,000	22,980,000
D	29,070,000	27,520,000	26,570,000	21,560,000	21,090,000
E	7,580,000	6,570,000	6,098,000	5,969,000	5,812,000

Tentative problems foreseen in the way of materializing the concept of community learning centre: Public librarians are found agreed that following problems would likely to be hurdle in the way of PLs towards their conversion as CLCs. PLs have no ample financial resources to maintain the CLC services, library staff has no prior experience for delivery of multi-dimensional services, librarians' version of already performing CLC like functions would add to passiveness and the split functions of CLC would be difficult to bring under one umbrella.

Findings Related to Objectives of the Study

A- To highlight the literature regarding supportive services (children literacy, adult literacy, information literacy, education and life-long learning) which emphasize public libraries for their conversion towards community learning centres: The literature fully endorses the conversion public libraries towards community learning centres. In this regard public libraries are found having enough resources, services, friendly environment and manager's readiness for playing their due role in connection with functioning of community learning centres.

B- To identify the resources and services available with Govt. public libraries in Punjab as pre-requisite for their conversion into community learning centres: Krolak (2006) maintains that public libraries are fully resourceful in provision of print, non-print reading material and learning/supportive electronic apparatus to meet the educational needs of the learners. He further states that public libraries have ample space to arrange and accommodate the adult literacy program in their premises. Locations of public libraries, their calm and safe environment, flexible service hours, credible and friendly staff are all ideally suited the noble cause of creating the literate environment through providing and sharing books and other reading and learning material with people free or on very low charges.

Data collected from head librarians endorses that Govt; PLs in Punjab are being supported by regular budgets for smooth functioning. PLs have sufficient material resources. It has been explored through this study that existing government public libraries in Punjab are financially stable public sector institutions. These PLs have their own buildings mostly attached with vast open areas. PLs possess manpower and other material resources to introduce new functions. Presence of facilities for promotion of literacy in adults, children's learning, provision of opportunities for independent learning and information literacy have also been partially noted over there. Hence, this study confirms the findings of earlier studies in the field to that PLs are in the best position to be converted into CLCs on account of having the presence of resources and availability of services for enhancing their role as per need of the time.

C- To explore that how PLPs with available resources can be converted into CLCs to perform a dynamic and vibrant role of lifelong learning institutions: UNESCO (2011) recommended that the CLCs should select programs and activities that could be supported and managed by the resources available to them. PLs obviously have the potential to enhance their role as CLCs as Islam and Mezbah-ul-Islam (2010) maintains that PLs have potential to easily assume the extended role of CLCs. They claim that libraries have always been considered the providers of training and learning to the community members. They pinpoint that PLs have got recognized their positive role in dissemination of information, knowledge, enrichment of personal as well as social life and eradication of illiteracy in the community. It has been asserted that the contribution of PLs to educational training and learning of community have always been appreciated. Mahmood (2008) explores that some public libraries in Pakistan have started providing computer internet services to their users and this innovation has given boost to their service level and they are now successful enough to develop their images for their survival in the modern world.

Data collected from head librarians of PLs shows that the Govt; PLs have allocation of a sufficient amount in their annual budgets for arranging book fairs and books exhibitions around the year. Holding of seminars on current affairs and conducting workshops on information literacy etc. are the regular features with PLsP. By virtue of its good repute in the society, various social service providing departments are found willing to coordinate and cooperate with these libraries to enhance their role. Tentative problems in the way as foreseen were identified as scarcity of funds, no prior relevant experience of the library staff, non-feasibility of co-ordination and co-operation up to the expected level among the departments bearing similar objectives. Foregoing in view, the findings of this research endorses the objective of the study that PLPs with available resources can be converted

into CLCs to perform a dynamic and vibrant role of lifelong learning institutions while confirming the earlier studies made on the topic regarding identifying and assessing resources and services available with PLs and are pre-requisite for their conversion towards CLCs.

Conclusion

Following conclusion can be drawn on the basis of above stated findings:

1. Government public libraries have their own buildings with attached vast open areas which can be utilized for further extensions in future and are mostly located in populated areas which show their potential to easily assume the extended role of CLC.
2. Pre-requisites for conversion of PLs into CLC are present with PLs. They possess immense collection of reading material, a sufficient ICT apparatus, internet connections and e-resources, permanent assets and regular financial support from the Government of the Punjab. PLs have qualified heads of institutions with significant professional experiences and also have enough manpower and other material resources.
3. Resources presence show that tasks like promotion of literacy in adults, provision of opportunities for independent learning, children learning and senior citizen engagement in information literacy can be performed if PLs take up the extended approach / role of CLC.
4. The librarians are clear about their perception of CLC and showed their readiness to serve as facilitators in the suggested CLC.
5. For functioning of CLC, the possibility of cooperation among the departments with similar objectives is present.
6. It has been concluded that public library can actively participate in community action to enhance its role as CLC by way of activating its various passive and dormant organs, introducing innovative learning character and providing due opportunities for children, adults, and parents to spend their leisure time interestingly and purposefully while promoting and exhibiting their talent in the community.
7. The conclusion of this research supports the PLs to enhance their role as CLCs for delivering affordable community-based reading, learning and training services to people

Recommendations

1. That financial/ income resources availability and consistency, indigenous as well as foreign sponsorship should be sought and ensured to enhance the suggested role of public libraries as CLC in Punjab, Pakistan.
2. That the CLC should take up only such functions of which need to cover really exists in the community. In the beginning, it should assume a clear cut minimum possible role of lending, learning and training.
3. That duplication of services should be avoided while coordinating with other departments.
4. That conflict resolution strategy should be formulated and present if there is confrontation with other departments bearing similar functions/ objectives.
5. That the qualified subject specialists should be engaged with proper arrangements for their in service training/ refresher courses to update their knowledge and skills. Foreign experts of the field may also be consulted from time to time in this regard
6. PL is a community institution, so its affairs should be shifted to local concerned authorities (municipalities) for better functioning to promote and preserve local language, culture, literature and folk lore to the entire satisfaction of the local community.
7. A comprehensive study should also be carried out on attitudes of public librarians for updating them with latest skills in the field and also to highlight their serious problems and apprehensions which discourage and deter them to deliver standard and innovative services required for lifelong learning of the community.
8. This study was carried out to explore the potential of Government public libraries in Punjab, Pakistan. Its Results of the study can be generalized to the extent of other public libraries as Platt (1988) claimed that generalizing of results from case studies is accepted in the literature as valid.

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