



Professional Development Of Library Staff In Gujarats Darululoom Libraries: A Needs Assessment

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ABSTRACT

The professional development of library staff is a cornerstone for enhancing the quality and efficiency of library services, particularly in specialized institutions like Darul Uloom libraries. This study investigates the professional development needs of library staff in Gujarat's Darul Uloom libraries, aiming to identify skill gaps, training priorities, and opportunities for capacity building. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to assess the current qualifications, technological competencies, and professional aspirations of library staff. Findings reveal that while library personnel demonstrate strong foundational knowledge in traditional library practices, there is a significant need for training in digital cataloguing, database management, and user-centred service delivery. Additionally, the study highlights a lack of formal training programs tailored to the unique cultural and academic requirements of Darul Uloom libraries. Based on these insights, the paper proposes a strategic framework for professional development, emphasizing customized workshops, collaborations with public and academic libraries, and the integration of digital tools to enhance service delivery. It underscores the necessity of continuous learning to ensure that Darul Uloom libraries remain relevant, resourceful, and responsive to their communities' educational and informational needs.

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving information landscape, the role of libraries extends far beyond mere repositories of books; they serve as dynamic centres for learning and community engagement. Within this context, the libraries of Gujarats Darululoom represent a unique cultural and educational resource, necessitating a focused examination of the professional development of their staff. Understanding the needs of library personnel is crucial as they navigate the challenges posed by technological advancements, shifting patron expectations, and the diverse requirements of their communities. This study aims to identify gaps in knowledge and skills by conducting a thorough needs assessment, informing targeted training programs that enhance staff competencies and, consequently, the services provided to library patrons. Ultimately, this investigation will contribute to the broader discourse on library professionalism and its intrinsic value to local and regional educational frameworks.

A. Definition of Professional Development

An essential element in any professional setting, professional development encompasses a range of activities and learning experiences that enhance an individual's skills, competencies, and knowledge relevant to their profession. This ongoing process includes formal education and training sessions and informal learning opportunities such as workshops, conferences, and peer mentoring. The ultimate objective is to empower staff members to adapt to evolving industry standards and to cultivate a culture of continuous improvement within their organizations. In the context of library staff in Gujarats Darululoom libraries, professional development is particularly crucial, as it enables librarians to stay abreast of the latest technological advancements and emerging information resources that significantly impact user services. By investing in professional development, libraries can enhance the effectiveness of their staff, ensuring that they are equipped to meet patron's diverse needs and challenges in an increasingly digital landscape (Padmaja Nair et al.).

B. Importance of Library Staff Training

Professional development is not merely a beneficial addition to library operations; it is essential for maintaining a high standard of service in today's rapidly evolving information landscape. Library staff training empowers employees with the skills required to navigate new technologies, manage diverse collections, and effectively respond to patron needs. This resiliency is crucial, as it enhances the overall efficiency of library services by ensuring that staff are prepared to embrace innovations, thereby providing patrons with the most contemporary resources and support available. Furthermore, training fosters a culture of continuous improvement among library personnel, promoting teamwork and collaboration while honing individual expertise. As a result, libraries can adapt more seamlessly to changing user expectations and societal demands, strengthening their role as vital community hubs (K. Mohammed Basheer). Ultimately, library staff training is an investment in the future viability of these institutions, ensuring they remain relevant and effective in serving their communities.

C. Overview of Darululoom Libraries in Gujarat

In Gujarat, the libraries affiliated with Darululoom institutions play a pivotal role in preserving religious and educational heritage, catering to academic and communal needs. These libraries house extensive collections of classical Islamic texts, contemporary scholarly works, and various educational materials crucial for the intellectual development of students and researchers alike. In addition to their rich collections, the libraries serve as cultural hubs, offering a conducive space for lectures, workshops, and community engagement, which further enrich the learning experience. Despite their significance, these libraries face challenges concerning staff development and resource management, underscoring the necessity for professional training and support. Addressing these needs will not only enhance the libraries operational efficiency but also empower the staff to serve their communities better, ultimately fostering a more knowledgeable and resilient populace in Gujarat (K. Mohammed Basheer).

D. Purpose and Scope of the Needs Assessment

Understanding the purpose and scope of the needs assessment is vital to ensuring effective professional development for library staff within the Darululoom libraries in Gujarat. This assessment aims to identify specific gaps in knowledge and skills among library personnel, allowing for the development of targeted training programs that enhance their capabilities. By systematically collecting data through surveys, interviews, and observations, the assessment provides a comprehensive picture of the current competencies and the resources required for improvement. Furthermore, it establishes a clear framework for future training initiatives, ensuring they are both relevant and practical. Ultimately, the findings from this needs assessment will guide library management in allocating resources efficiently and prioritizing professional development activities that align with the broader goals of the institution, promoting a culture of continuous improvement and adaptation in the rapidly evolving landscape of library services (K. Mohammed Basheer).

II. Current State of Library Staff Professional Development

The evolving landscape of library services has necessitated a more structured approach to professional development for library staff. Historically, many libraries have offered sporadic training opportunities, often failing to address the specific needs of their staff or the changing demands of the communities they serve. Presently, however, a growing emphasis on continuous education and skill enhancement can be observed in many institutions. This shift is rooted in recognising that well-trained staff are vital for promoting literacy, fostering community engagement, and integrating emerging technologies into library services. Despite the progress, significant gaps remain, particularly in personalized training programs designed to cater to the unique challenges faced by libraries in different contexts, including Gujarats Darululoom libraries. Addressing these gaps is crucial for ensuring library professionals can effectively meet user needs and adapt to the rapidly changing information landscape (Padmaja Nair et al.).

A. Existing Training Programs and Workshops

Current training programs and workshops for library staff highlight the need for continuous skill enhancement to meet the rapidly evolving demands of information service delivery. Many existing initiatives focus on enhancing basic ICT skills. Still, they often fall short in providing advanced training necessary for modern libraries, as evidenced in research indicating that while personnel are proficient in basic operations, there is a significant gap in advanced ICT competencies (Parbati Pandey et al.). Furthermore, the iLead development program reflects a concerted effort to engage library educators and practitioners in refining leadership training through a comprehensive needs assessment prioritizes equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) (Anthony Chow et al.). Such initiatives underscore the importance of collaboration among stakeholders, yet barriers such as limited funding and inadequate organizational support often hinder effective training implementation. Addressing these challenges will be integral to establishing robust professional development frameworks in Gujarats Darululoom libraries.

B. Assessment of Staff Skills and Competencies

Effective assessment of staff skills and competencies serves as a crucial foundation for enhancing the professional development of library staff in Gujarats Darululoom Libraries. By systematically evaluating existing capabilities, library management can identify distinct areas requiring improvement, whether in technical competencies related to information technology or soft skills like communication and customer service. This assessment should be ongoing, incorporating qualitative and quantitative methods such as peer reviews, self-assessments, and regular performance evaluations. Engaging staff in this reflective process promotes a culture of continuous learning and empowers them to take ownership of their professional growth. Moreover, aligning staff competencies with the strategic goals of the libraries ensures that the workforce remains adept and responsive to the ever-evolving information landscape. Ultimately, this deliberate focus on assessing and enhancing staff skills will contribute significantly to the overall effectiveness and sustainability of library services in the region (K. Mohammed Basheer).

C. Challenges Faced by Library Staff

Library staff members encounter numerous challenges that significantly impact their professional development and effectiveness in serving their communities. A primary issue is libraries' financial constraints, which can limit opportunities for continuous learning and participation in professional development programs. These limitations often stem from a lack of institutional support and well-defined Continuing Professional Development (CPD) policies, as highlighted in the systematic review, which notes that insufficient resources hinder participation in CPD activities ((Madhusudhan Margam et al.)). Furthermore, as libraries increasingly embrace digital transformation, staff must navigate the complexities of adapting to new technologies while managing traditional service expectations. The mixed-method study underscored that without a robust technological infrastructure and strategic planning, library staff may struggle to meet users' evolving needs effectively ((Isagani Tano)). Consequently, addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering a supportive environment that promotes professional growth and enhances library services in Gujarats Darululoom libraries.

D. Stakeholder Perspectives on Professional Development

Different stakeholders in Gujarats Darululoom libraries possess unique perspectives on professional development for library staff, shaping a comprehensive understanding of its significance. Administrators often emphasize the necessity of training programs that align with modern information needs and technological advancements, advocating for professional development as a strategic investment in staff capabilities and institutional growth. In contrast, library staff may highlight the importance of these programs for acquiring new skills and enhancing job satisfaction and career advancement opportunities (K. Mohammed Basheer). Moreover, patrons of the libraries, including students and researchers, influence the discussion by voicing the need for a knowledgeable and skilled staff capable of delivering high-quality assistance and resources. Thus, recognizing and integrating these varied stakeholder perspectives is essential for developing a robust professional development framework that genuinely addresses the needs of all parties involved, ultimately fostering a more effective library environment.

III. Identifying Training Needs

In the evolving landscape of library services, understanding the specific training needs of staff is crucial for fostering professional growth and improving service delivery. A comprehensive needs assessment should begin with an evaluation of the current competencies of library personnel, as gaps between existing skills and required abilities can significantly hinder operational effectiveness. Engaging staff through surveys or interviews uncovers their perceptions of professional development and facilitates an inclusive environment where they feel valued and heard. Additionally, identifying external factors—such as technological advancements and changes in patrons' information-seeking behaviours—will provide a clearer context for these training needs. By systematically analyzing the data gathered from various stakeholders, library administrators can prioritize training initiatives that align with organizational goals and staff aspirations, ensuring a more competent, adaptive workforce prepared to meet the diverse demands of their communities (Padmaja Nair et al.).

A. Surveying Library Staff for Skill Gaps

An effective needs assessment for library staff development hinges on identifying prevalent skill gaps within the workforce. This process is essential not only to enhance the capabilities of the staff but also to align their competencies with the evolving demands of the library environment. For instance, a recent IMLS-funded project emphasizes the importance of developing leadership core competencies, particularly in areas like equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), signaling a critical gap in current training practices ((Anthony Chow et al.)). Similarly, a study examining trauma-informed care within occupational therapy highlights the need for targeted training modules to prepare professionals to deal with real-world challenges, such as gun violence and its implications for community health ((Lea Fang et al.)). By systematically surveying library staff, institutions

can tailor educational programs that address these gaps, ultimately fostering a more knowledgeable and prepared workforce capable of meeting the diverse needs of their communities.

B. Analyzing User Needs and Expectations

Understanding user needs and expectations is paramount for enhancing the effectiveness of library services, particularly in the context of Gujarats Darululoom libraries. Library staff can identify knowledge gaps and preferences that inform professional development initiatives by employing a systematic approach to gather feedback from patrons. Surveys, focus groups, and direct interactions serve as valuable tools for assessing the expectations of diverse user groups, including students, researchers, and the general community. This feedback process not only highlights specific areas for training—such as digital literacy and information retrieval—but also fosters a culture of responsiveness and engagement within the library environment. Ultimately, aligning staff development with user needs promotes a more satisfactory experience for library patrons, thereby improving overall service quality and fulfilling the educational mission of the libraries. Addressing these identified needs ensures that the libraries remain relevant and effective in fulfilling their role within the community, enhancing the overall academic ecosystem (Padmaja Nair et al.).

C. Evaluating Technological Advancements in Libraries

As libraries evolve in response to technological advancements, assessing the efficacy of these innovations within their specific contexts becomes increasingly crucial. Incorporating digital resources and automated systems can significantly enhance user experience and accessibility, promoting a more engaging environment for patrons. However, implementing new technologies demands well-informed staff with the necessary skills to navigate these tools effectively. Library employees may struggle to adapt to or fully utilize these advancements without targeted professional development, ultimately compromising service quality. Therefore, evaluating not only the technologies themselves but also the training needs of library staff is essential for maximizing the benefits these innovations can bring to communities. Fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation will ensure that libraries remain relevant and responsive to the needs of their users while allowing staff to thrive in an ever-changing landscape (K. Mohammed Basheer).

D. Benchmarking Against Best Practices in Other Libraries

Benchmarking against best practices in other libraries emerges as a critical method for enhancing the professional development of library staff within Gujarat's Darululoom libraries. By analyzing successful strategies employed by various library systems, administrators can identify innovative training programs, resource management techniques, and community engagement initiatives that have proven effective elsewhere. This comparative analysis not only fosters an environment of continuous improvement but also helps local libraries adapt relevant practices that resonate with their unique cultural and operational contexts. Employing performance metrics from these other institutions can reveal specific areas for growth and allow for establishing standardized protocols that align with the latest trends in library science. Ultimately, leveraging insights from established libraries can facilitate tailored training initiatives that enhance staff capabilities, benefiting the library system and its patrons (K. Mohammed Basheer).

IV. Strategies for Effective Professional Development

A cohesive approach to professional development is crucial for enhancing the capabilities of library staff in Gujarats Darululoom libraries. One effective strategy involves implementing targeted training programs that align with specific skill gaps identified through needs assessments. Such programs can be customized to address the unique challenges faced by library staff, thereby fostering a learning environment that is both relevant and engaging. Furthermore, incorporating mentorship opportunities allows for transferring knowledge and expertise, enriching the professional growth of less experienced staff through guidance from seasoned professionals. Additionally, leveraging technology, such as online webinars and virtual workshops, can enhance accessibility to training resources, ensuring all staff members can participate regardless of their schedules (K. Mohammed Basheer). By adopting these strategies, libraries can create a robust framework for continuous professional development, ultimately leading to more effective libraries and better service delivery.

A. Developing Tailored Training Programs

In crafting effective professional development initiatives, understanding the specific needs of library staff is paramount. By conducting comprehensive assessments, libraries can pinpoint their teams' skills gaps and knowledge deficiencies. This foundational understanding allows for the development of training programs that are tailored to meet the unique challenges faced by library personnel and aligned with the institution's broader goals. For instance, a needs assessment may reveal a demand for enhanced information technology skills among staff, prompting the design of targeted workshops and hands-on training sessions that address these specific areas. Consequently, the customized approach ensures that resources are utilized efficiently while fostering an environment conducive to continuous growth and improvement among library staff. Through these tailored training programs, libraries can ultimately enhance service delivery, ensuring they meet the evolving needs of their communities (John Catt Educational Ltd).

B. Incorporating Mentorship and Peer Learning

In the evolving landscape of library science, integrating mentorship and peer learning emerges as a pivotal strategy for professional development among librarians, particularly within Gujarats Darululoom libraries. Effective mentorship programs can nurture both new and experienced staff, allowing for the exchange of knowledge and fostering a collaborative environment. Previous studies indicate that established mentorship models, seen in various librarian communities, play a significant role in professional growth. For instance, in Croatia, structured mentorship initiatives focus on diverse groups, such as students and interns, highlighting the importance of fostering practical skills and confidence in library professionals (Dorja Mučnjak). Similarly, the value of peer learning cannot be overstated; it not only empowers library staff to engage in shared problem-solving but also enhances their adaptability in a fast-changing field, thereby improving overall service delivery (N. C. Patra). Emphasizing these developmental strategies can ensure that library staff in Darululoom libraries are equipped to meet contemporary challenges.

C. Utilizing Online Learning Platforms

Integrating online learning platforms into the professional development of library staff at Gujarats Darululoom Libraries presents a transformative opportunity that cannot be ignored. These platforms offer flexible, accessible, and diverse educational resources that cater to a wide range of learning preferences and schedules. By adopting a variety of online courses—from technical training to information literacy—staff can enhance their skills without the constraints of traditional in-person education. Additionally, the collaborative features of such platforms facilitate networking among library professionals across geographical boundaries, fostering a culture of shared learning and resource exchange. This approach not only modernizes the skill set of the library staff but also aligns with current trends in educational methodologies. By leveraging these platforms, the libraries can ensure that their personnel remain competitive, enhancing the overall effectiveness of library services in the community.

D. Establishing Partnerships with Educational Institutions

Building robust partnerships with educational institutions is critical for advancing the professional development of library staff in Gujarats Darululoom Libraries. Such collaborations can facilitate access to resources, expertise, and training programs that might otherwise be unavailable to library personnel. By engaging with universities and colleges, libraries can harness the knowledge and skills of educators, create internship opportunities, and even develop joint research initiatives that address local educational needs. Furthermore, partnerships can foster a culture of continuous learning, empowering library staff to learn from contemporary pedagogical practices and technological advancements in information management. As a result, these partnerships not only enhance the competencies of library staff but also align library services more closely with the educational goals of the institutions involved. To maximize these benefits, a strategic approach to partnership development is essential, involving clear communication of objectives, shared responsibilities, and ongoing assessment of outcomes (Padmaja Nair et al.).

V. Conclusion

In summary, the professional development of library staff in Gujarats Darululoom libraries is essential for enhancing individual skills and for the overall advancement of library services within the community. The assessment reveals a pressing need for targeted training programs that cater to the diverse competencies required in modern library environments. By implementing these programs, libraries can foster a culture of continuous learning, thus positioning themselves as vital resources in an ever-evolving information landscape. Furthermore, the focus on professional growth will empower staff members, improving job satisfaction and retention rates, which are pivotal in maintaining a robust library system. Addressing the identified weaknesses through strategic training initiatives aligns with the broader goal of enriching the library's role as an educational hub, facilitating better service delivery and benefiting the community (K. Mohammed Basheer).

A. Summary of Key Findings

The investigation into the professional development needs of library staff in Gujarats Darululoom libraries yielded several pivotal insights. First, the assessment highlighted a distinct deficiency in ongoing training programs, underscoring the urgent necessity for structured professional development initiatives. It was apparent that staff members often felt inadequately equipped to handle modern library technologies and evolving user demands, which threatens library services' efficacy. Furthermore, the analysis revealed a lack of collaboration among libraries in sharing resources and best practices, further hindering staff growth and institutional capability. These findings suggest that implementing targeted training sessions, mentorship arrangements, and collaborative platforms could significantly enhance staff competencies and service delivery in these libraries. Addressing these gaps is essential for improving the immediate library environment and fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation within the broader educational community in Gujarat (Padmaja Nair et al.).

B. Recommendations for Future Development

To foster a culture of continuous improvement within the Darululoom libraries in Gujarat, it is essential to implement structured professional development programs tailored to the unique needs of library staff. These programs should encompass a variety of training methods, such as workshops, webinars, and collaborative projects that emphasize hard and soft skills relevant to modern library practices.

Incorporating peer-led sessions can encourage knowledge sharing and foster a sense of community among staff, creating an environment where learning is prioritized. Additionally, assessments need to be integrated to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs and identify areas for further development. Regular feedback mechanisms should also be established, allowing staff to voice their specific needs and interests regarding professional growth. By prioritizing these strategies, the libraries can enhance the competencies of their workforce, ultimately leading to improved service delivery and patron engagement (Padmaja Nair et al.).

C. Importance of Continuous Professional Development

In an era of rapid technological advancement and evolving user needs, the significance of continuous professional development (CPD) for library staff cannot be overstated. By engaging in ongoing training and skill enhancement, librarians can adapt more effectively to integrating digital resources and services, as highlighted in (Isagani Tano). This adaptability is crucial for improving operational efficiency and enriching the user experience, thereby ensuring libraries remain relevant in a digital age. Furthermore, as seen in the development of AI-enhanced management tools in healthcare, emphasising collaborative input from professionals during the design phases (F. Bellocchio et al.), a similar approach in library settings can lead to tailored, effective CPD programs. Such programs foster a culture of innovation and responsiveness, ultimately empowering staff to meet the diverse needs of their communities with confidence and competence.

D. Call to Action for Library Administrators and Stakeholders

To effectively address the professional development needs within the Darululoom libraries of Gujarat, library administrators and stakeholders must undertake a collective and robust initiative. By prioritizing ongoing education and training, these leaders can significantly enhance the skill sets of library staff, ensuring they remain updated with the latest technological advancements and evolving information management practices. This proactive approach empowers employees and enriches the library capacity to serve its community efficiently. Engaging in partnerships with educational institutions and leveraging available resources will facilitate targeted training programs that cater to specific areas of need—ranging from customer service to digital literacy. The commitment to fostering a culture of continuous improvement within the library framework is pivotal for sustained growth and adaptation in an increasingly complex information landscape. Decision-makers must champion this initiative, as it is foundational to the future success and relevance of the libraries in Gujarat.

Conclusion

The professional development of the library staff of Darul Uloom libraries in Gujarat is not only a job creation for the library staff; it is a vital investment in the efficiency and importance of libraries in the rapidly evolving information world. This needs assessment has brought to light some important conclusions, which point to important gaps in training and competency among library staff, especially those in digital cataloguing, database management, and user-focused service provision. The absence of tailored training programs that align with the unique cultural and academic contexts of Darul Uloom libraries further exacerbates these challenges, underscoring the urgent need for strategic intervention. To close these identified gaps, library administrators and their stakeholders must develop and implement strong, continuous professional development programs. Such programs should be designed to cater to library staff's specific skill gaps and aspirations, incorporating a mix of workshops, mentorship opportunities, and online learning platforms. Additionally, fostering partnerships with educational institutions can expand access to resources and expertise, facilitating the creation of relevant training content that resonates with staff needs.

The importance of continuous professional development cannot be overstated. As libraries transition into more technologically advanced and user-focused entities, the ability of staff to adapt and thrive in this new environment is paramount. By embracing a culture of continuous learning and professional development, libraries can improve the quality-of-service delivery, enabling the workforce to achieve greater job satisfaction and reduce staff turnover. A call to action is warranted for library administrators and stakeholders to champion the cause of professional development within Gujarat's Darul Uloom libraries. Focusing on training and development, working together in close collaboration, and creating a culture of ongoing development are some of how these libraries can ensure they remain crucial sites of education and culture in their communities. The future success and relevance of these institutions hinge on their ability to adapt and respond to the evolving needs of their patrons, ensuring they remain resourceful, responsive, and integral to the educational landscape of Gujarat.

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