The Communication Edge: Unlocking The Excellence In Public Library Services' Delievery

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Abstract
This study aims to evaluate the library services in public libraries of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, from the point of view of communication skills of library professionals. A quantitative research design was employed to collect data from 84 librarians and 170 library users through self-designed structured questionnaire. The findings show that effective communication is much important for good service delivery; particularly written, and other verbal communication skills. Similarly, there is a significant correlation between communication skills like written and active listening with users' satisfaction from library services. However, 45% of the library users were dissatisfied with the library services and therefore the librarian communication skills need to be improved. By implementing the study's recommendations, librarians can enhance their communication skills, adapt to the evolving role of librarianship, and ultimately improve the quality of service in public library settings, where effective communication is crucial.

Keywords: Communication Skills; Effective Services Delivery; Public libraries, User Satisfaction

Introduction
Libraries are important institutions that play a vital role in education, culture, and community development, adapting to serve diverse populations by integrating technology and emphasizing user-centered services (Koontz & Gubbin, 2010). Effective communication is crucial in professional services, including librarianship, where it enables professionals to share ideas clearly, establish trust, and build lasting relationships with clients, coworkers, and stakeholders (Marques, 2013). Research consistently shows that strong verbal, non-verbal, and written communication skills enhance goal-setting and client satisfaction (Robles, 2012), with active listening being a fundamental component that fosters trust and loyalty (Giles et al., 1973).

In the digital age, librarians must develop new competencies beyond traditional practices, including proficiency in digital tools, search strategies, and metadata management to meet the evolving needs of users (Chou & Hsiao, 2017; Zhang & Tang, 2021). Librarians serve as educator and guides, building digital

literacy skills and providing inclusive access to resources (Curtin & Price, 2019; Lee & Kim, 2020). They also play a key role in data management, open access publishing, and copyright advocacy, ensuring that information is properly managed and accessible (Hernon & Altman, 2010). In the same way, effective communication is also essential for librarians to provide high-quality services, requiring skills such as active listening, empathy, clarity, adaptability, and non-verbal communication (Giles et al., 1973; McArthur & Fitzgerald, 2018). Similarly, the written communication has become increasingly important, with librarians needing to craft clear, concise, and professional messages in digital environments (Zhang & Tang, 2021). Librarians must also navigate cultural differences and language barriers, requiring cultural competence and inclusive communication practices (Chou & Hsiao, 2017; Lee & Kim, 2020).

Globally, libraries face common challenges in communication, including limited resources, digital divides, and diverse user needs. However, international collaboration and knowledge sharing have improved communication practices, with libraries adopting innovative strategies to engage users and provide equitable access to information (Curtin & Price, 2019).

This research explores the impact of library professionals' communication skills on the effectiveness of library services, examining the challenges and opportunities in diverse library settings. By understanding the role of communication in librarianship, this study aims to contribute to the development of effective communication strategies that enhance user satisfaction and promote the value of libraries in the digital age.

Literature Review

Effective communication is the backbone of library services, acting as a bridge between information resources and diverse user needs. Librarians play a pivotal role in facilitating user engagement and ensuring the effective delivery of services, with communication skills being crucial in understanding and meeting the needs of their patrons. The significance of communication skills for library professionals has been highlighted in various studies, emphasizing the need for librarians to develop effective communication strategies to cater to the diverse information needs of users (Khan & Ahmad, 2018; Rehman, Asghar, & Khan, 2019; Mahmood, 2013; Ahmad, Ameen &Ullah, 2016).

The verbal communication is a critical aspect of librarianship, requiring librarians to tailor their language to suit users' literacy levels and provide precise terminology for advanced researchers (Fisher et al., 2019). Librarians must be able to communicate effectively with users, providing clear and concise information, and responding to their queries in a timely and efficient manner. Active listening is equally important, with studies showing that users feel more confident in their research when librarians actively engage with their queries (Julien et al., 2021). By actively listening to users, librarians can build trust and rapport, ultimately leading to improved user satisfaction. Ahmad, Ahmad and Ameen (2021) mentioned that university information professionals in Pakistan ranked Communication and Persuasion skills as the most important soft skills that they possess and needed CPD (Continuous Professional Development) programs for its development.

Non-verbal communication, including eye contact, gestures, and posture, also significantly influences user comfort, with open body language fostering

approachability and negative cues like distracted multitasking alienating patrons (Gremmels, 2020; Hernon et al., 2023). Librarians must be aware of their non-verbal communication and use it to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for users. By being mindful of their non-verbal cues, librarians can create a positive atmosphere that encourages users to approach them with questions and concerns. The digital transformation of libraries has necessitated proficiency in virtual tools, with librarians needing to balance efficiency with empathy in digital communication (Zhang & Bishop, 2020). Librarians must be able to communicate effectively with users through digital channels, providing clear and concise information, and responding to their queries in a timely and efficient manner. By leveraging digital tools, librarians can reach a wider audience and provide services that meet the evolving needs of users.

Intercultural communication is also essential, requiring librarians to be aware of cultural norms and adapt their communication styles to suit diverse user needs (Chowdhury & Burton, 2019). Libraries serve multicultural communities, and librarians must be equipped to communicate effectively with users from diverse backgrounds. By being sensitive to cultural differences, librarians can build trust and rapport with users, ultimately leading to improved user satisfaction.

Despite the importance of effective communication, librarians face various challenges, including language barriers, technological divide, and interpersonal conflicts. Language mismatches disproportionately affect non-native speakers, and libraries in multilingual regions can address this by hiring paraprofessionals fluent in common languages (Rajagopal & Frank, 2022). Technological advancements create generational and socioeconomic divides, and librarians must be proficient in using digital tools and provide assistance to users struggling with technology (Kumar & Ochoa, 2021). Interpersonal conflicts can arise from miscommunication, eroding trust and undermining service quality. Libraries can implement de-escalation training to reduce conflict incidents and improve user satisfaction (Nitecki & Davis, 2022).

In the context of Pakistan, various studies have highlighted the significance of communication skills for library professionals. Khan and Ahmad (2018) revealed that effective communication is crucial for building strong relationships between librarians and users in Pakistani universities. Rehman, Asghar, and Khan (2019) emphasized the need for librarians to develop effective communication strategies to cater to the diverse information needs of users in Pakistani libraries. Mahmood (2013) underlined the importance of developing librarians' communication skills to fit the specific needs of various groups, including students, researchers, and the general public.

The literature highlights the importance of effective communication skills in librarianship, including verbal, non-verbal, digital, and intercultural competencies. By understanding the impact of communication barriers and challenges, librarians can develop strategies to improve service delivery and user satisfaction. This study aims to explore the impact of librarians' communication skills on service delivery in public libraries of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, and contribute to the development of effective communication strategies in librarianship.

DIALOGUE SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW

Research Objective

1. To find out the key communication skills that librarian uses for effective service delivery.
2. To determine the level of library professional's communication skills.
3. To examine the impact of librarian communications barrier (Language Barrier, Technological trends, interpersonal conflict etc) on library service delivery.
4. To find out the challenges associated with developing and enhancing communications skills among librarian.
5. To investigate the relationship between library professional communication skills and user satisfaction with library services.

Methodology

This research has been extracted from one of our previous research projects. It has employed a quantitative research design to enable the researcher to measure and analyze the relationship between communication skills and library service delivery, using statistical data to examine the impact of communication skills on user satisfaction. The study was conducted in 17 public libraries situated in various districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with a population consisting of two groups: library professionals and library users. The library professionals group comprised of 84 professional librarians, and a census-based survey was conducted to include all 84 librarians in the study. For the library users' group, a convenience sample of 10 users from each of the 17 libraries (total N = 170) was used.

Two structured questionnaires were developed to collect data: one for librarians and another for library users. The questionnaires were developed with a review of relevant literature and worked out in consultation with the experienced researchers. The questionnaires were divided into sections to obtain information on key communication skills, barriers to effective communication, and user satisfaction with library services. Before full-scale data collection, both instruments were reviewed with the help of a group of librarians and library users to test their clarity, validity, and relevance.

The data was collected over a period of several weeks, with the researcher distributing questionnaires among librarians personally and making them available online for those who preferred to submit data instruments digitally. Questionnaires designed for users were distributed personally by visiting the targeted public libraries, and in some cases, library staff assisted in collecting data from users. Personal visits enabled the researcher to explain any issues in understanding questions and ensure a high response rate. The collected data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, with descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means, used to summarize the data. Correlation and regression analysis, inferential statistics, were used to find relationships among librarians' communication skills and user satisfaction with library services. Similarly, the Cronbach Alpha test was used to check the reliability of both questionnaires at the early stage of data collection with values of 0.84 and 0.85 indicating good reliability.

Findings of the Study

The results are organized according to the research objectives. Findings were

divided into two parts. Part 1st presents the analysis of the data recovered from questionnaire, i.e. filled by library professionals and the 2nd, part presents data received from the library users.

Part 1st (Library Professionals)
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents
The demographic information of the respondents (librarians) was summarized to provide context for the analysis. The data in Table 1, shows that the librarians in this study are predominantly male (69.4%), and the rest 30.6% female, indicating a significant gender disparity. This contrasts with global trends in librarianship, which often report a higher proportion of female professionals. This finding may reflect a regional or institutional hiring practice, cultural norms, or sampling biases that warrant further exploration. The qualification matrix shows that the majority 83.32% hold advanced degrees (MS/MPhil & PhD) reflecting a highly educated workforce. Less number of respondents 16.66% were having BS degrees. These librarian needs to upgrade their qualifications and to get specialized (e.g., in academic research roles).

So, for the age Profile of librarians is concerned, it indicates that the largest cohort aged 31–40 years (38.9%). The substantial representation of librarians aged 41+ (33.4%) suggests a mix of mid-career and experienced professionals, while the smaller proportion of younger librarians (20–30 years, 27.7%) may highlight challenges in attracting younger talent or retention issues in early career stages. Similarly, the experience data of the respondents revealed that over half of the librarians (55.5%) have 4–7 years of experience, indicating a workforce with moderate experience. However, only 16.6% have 8+ years of experience, which may signal high turnover, recent institutional expansion, or a lack of long-term retention strategies. There were only 20 librarians which were less experienced in the field and just have 3 years of experience.

Table 1:   Demographic characteristics of librarians (N=72)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	50	69.4%
Female	22	30.6%
Qualification		
BS	12	16.66%
MS/MPhil	56	77.77%
PHD	4	5.55%
Age		
20-30 years	20	27.7 %
31-40 years	28	38.9 %
41+ years	24	33.4 %
Experience		
1 to 3 years	20	27.7 %
4 to 7 years	40	55.5 %
8+years	12	16.6 %

Communication Skills of Librarians
The librarian's communication skills were analyses through means scores and

presented in table 2. It showed librarians excel in written communication (Mean = 4.23, Rank 1st) and verbal communication (Mean = 4.10, Rank 2nd). This suggests that formal training or institutional priorities may likely emphasize clarity in written materials (e.g., emails, guides) and verbal interactions (e.g., answering queries, giving instructions). These skills are critical for effective information dissemination and user support. Similarly, Active listening (Mean = 3.90, Rank 3rd) is moderately practiced, indicating room for improvement. While librarians may prioritize responding to user needs, this score suggests potential gaps in fully engaging with or understanding users' unspoken concerns, which could affect service quality. On other side the non-verbal communication (Mean = 3.01, Rank 4th) and interpersonal skills (Mean = 2.99, Rank 5th) are the lowest-ranked competencies. These scores highlight a significant gap in body language awareness (e.g., eye contact, gestures) and relationship-building abilities. Poor non-verbal and interpersonal skills may hinder trust, user comfort, and rapport, especially in face-to-face interactions.

Table 2: Level Of Library Professionals' Communication Skills (n=72)

Level of respondents' communication skill	Mean	Rank
Written	4.23	1st
Verbal	4.10	2nd
Active listening	3.90	3rd
Non-verbal	3.01	4th
Inter personal communication	2.99	5th

Professionals' Confidence about their Communication Skills in the Provision of Library Services

The facts in Table 3, showed that about, about 70% of the respondents are either confident or very confident in regarding their communication skills in providing library services. However, 20% stated that are moderately confident in their communication skills and 10% expressed that they are not confident about their communication skills, which need to be focused and improved.

Table 3: Library Professionals' Level of Confidence Regarding their Communication Skills in the Provision of Services (N=72)

Level Of Professionals' Communication Skills	Frequency	Percentage
Not Confident	7	10%
Moderately confident	14	20%
Neutral	0	0.0%
Confident	22	30%
Very confident	29	40%
Total	72	100%

Barriers Faced in Communication

Table 4, revealed the data regarding the barriers that library professionals face in the effective communication. Analysis expressed technology as the primary barrier. Technology (Mean = 4.1, Rank 1st) is the most significant barrier to effective communication. This reflects challenges such as inadequate digital infrastructure, lack of technology literacy among staff, or reliance on outdated communication platforms. In the context of modern libraries, this finding

underscores the urgent need to integrate user-friendly technologies and provide training to bridge digital divides. Language barriers (Mean = 4.0, Rank 2nd) and the financial limitations (Mean = 3.9, Rank 3rd) affect library professionals communication (e.g., inability to understand the queries of the users and to access paid resources because of insufficient funding for training or technology). Similarly, the cultural differences (Mean = 3.8, Rank 4th) highlight communication gaps in multilingual or multicultural settings. These may stem from librarians' inability to accommodate diverse linguistic needs or a lack of culturally sensitive communication strategies this barrier may exacerbate disparities in communication access, particularly for marginalized groups who rely on free library services. In addition, the Socio-Economic Differences: While ranked lowest (Mean = 3.0, Rank 5th), still signal inequities in access to communication resources. Users from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may face challenges such as limited internet access or unfamiliarity with formal communication norms, which libraries must address through targeted outreach.

Table 4: Barriers Faced by Respondents in Communication

Barrier's Respondents Face In The Effective Communication	Mean	Rank
Technology	41	1st
Language	4.0	2nd
Finances	3.9	3rd
Culture	3.8	4th
Socio economic differences	3.0	5th

Challenges Faced in Developing and Enhancing Communication Skills

Table 5, identified and ranked ten major challenges in developing communication skills by the librarians' based on their mean scores. The most significant challenge reported was technological barriers (Mean = 4.2), followed closely by lack of funding (Mean = 4.1) and language difficulties (Mean = 3.9). Cultural factors (Mean = 3.7) and inadequate training (Mean = 3.6) also emerged as notable concerns. On the lower end of the scale, challenges such as socioeconomic issues (Mean = 3.5), uncomfortable environments (Mean = 3.4), and personality traits (Mean = 3.3) were identified, but with less impact. The least impactful challenges were time constraints (Mean = 2.8) and emotional factors (Mean = 2.7). These findings highlight that practical and systemic issues such as technology and funding outweigh personal or emotional challenges in this context.

Table 5: Challenges Associated with the Development of Communication Skills

Challenges In Development of Communication Skills	Mean	Ranks
Technological barriers	4.2	1st
Lack of funding	4.1	2nd
Language difficulties	3.9	3rd
Culture factors	3.7	4th
Inadequate trainings	3.6	5th
Socio economic issues	3.5	6th

Uncomfortable environment	3.4	7th
Personality traits	3.3	8th
Time constraints	3.2	9th
Emotional factors	2.7	10th

Feedback Sought From Colleagues In Improvement Of Communication Skills

The results show that a significant number of respondents actively seek feedback from colleagues to improve their communication skills; with 69.4% indicating they do so either often or always. This reflects a positive and collaborative work culture within the library environment, where continuous self-improvement and peer support are valued. Encouraging such practices can further enhance teamwork, service delivery, and overall professional development among library staff.

Table 6: Feedback That The Respondents Seek From Colleagues To Improve The Communication Skills (n=72)

Colleagues feedback to librarians to improve their communication skills	Frequency	Rank
Never	5	5th
Rarely	7	4th
Occasionally	10	3rd
Often	28	1st
Always	22	2nd

Communication Channels Used To Interact With Library Patrons

Based on Table 7 data the following can be inferred, the Phone (38.9%) and In-Person (19.4%) contacts are the most frequently used channels, reflecting a strong preference for real-time, direct interaction. This aligns with librarians' strengths in verbal communication and may indicate user trust in immediate, personalized assistance. Email (16.6%), Chatbot (13.9%), and Social-media (11.1%) are less utilized, suggesting gaps in digital engagement.

Table 7: Communication Channels Used In Interaction With Library Patrons (n=72)

Communication channels	Frequency	Percentage
In-person	14	19.4%
Phone	28	38.9%
Email	12	16.65%
Chatbot	10	13.10%
Social media	8	11.13%

Part 2nd (Library Users)
Demographic Characteristics of Library Users

The data in table 8 expressed that among the public libraries users the males constitute 62.5% of the respondents, whereas, a higher proportion of females (37.5%) were among the users. In the same way, users exhibit greater variation in qualifications. Users with BS qualification were 25%, whereas,

majority of the respondents 50% were MS/Phil qualification while, there were only 9.37% highly qualified users with PhD degrees. It revealed that users with various qualifications use public libraries in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Table 8: Demographic Characteristics of Library Users

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gende		
Male	100	62.5%
Female	60	37.5%
Qualification		
Bachelor	40	25%
MS/Master/MPhil	80	50%
PHD	15	9.37%

Library Users' Satisfaction With The Overall Library Services
The findings from the survey in Table 9, specify that a majority of respondents expressed high levels of satisfaction with overall library services. Specifically, 43.75% (n = 70) of users reported being *very satisfied*, making it the most frequent response. This was followed by 28.13% (n = 45) who indicated they were *satisfied*, suggesting that over 70% of users had a positive perception of the library services. On the other hand, 15.63% (n = 25) of respondents reported being *dissatisfied*, and 9.38% (n = 15) were *very dissatisfied*, which points to some areas where service delivery may be improved. Interestingly, only 3.13% (n = 5) of users chose *neutral*, suggesting that most users had a clear opinion, either positive or negative, about the services they received. The data highlight a generally favorable perception of library services, with a small but notable portion of users experiencing dissatisfaction. This suggests that while the library is meeting the needs of many users, targeted improvements could further enhance satisfaction levels particularly by addressing the concerns of dis-satisfied users and continue to strengthen service areas that lead to high satisfaction.

Table 9: Library Users Satisfaction With The Overall Library Services

Users' Satisfaction with overall library services	Frequency	Percentage
Very Dissatisfied	15	9.8%
Dissatisfied	25	15.63%
Neutral	5	3.13%
Satisfied	45	28.13%
Very Satisfied	70	43.75%

Library Users' Opinion About The Effectiveness Of Library Staff Communication Skills
Data in table 10, revealed that, a significant majority of users rate library staff communication as" Very Good" (43.75%) or" Excellent" (25%), totaling 68.75% highly positive responses. When including "Good" (15.6%), 84.35% of users perceive communication as effective or better. This underscores librarians' proficiency in core communication tasks, aligning with their strengths in verbal and written skills as shown in Table 2, 15.62% of users rate communication as"

Poor" (6.25%) or" Fair" (9.37%), indicating persistent gaps for certain groups.

Table 10: Library Users' Opinion About The Effectiveness Of Library Staff Communication Skills (n=160)

Users' satisfaction with staff communication	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	10	6.25%
Fair	15	9.37%
Good	25	15.6%
Very Good	70	43.75^%
Excellent	40	25%

The Correlation Between Librarians' Communication Skills And User Satisfaction With The Library Services

The data in the Table 11 shows the results about the correlation between communication skills of the librarians and the satisfaction level of the library users from the services provided. The results revealed that two of the key communication skills - Written as well as the Active Listening - had a highly significant correlation with the level of user satisfaction from the library services provided to them (p-value < 0.01). These findings suggest that the effectiveness of both written communications and active listening, such as communication through informational materials, guides, or online resources, plays a crucial role in enhancing user satisfaction level. In the same way, librarians' skills to actively listen to users' needs and queries significantly contribute to a positive experience. These findings underscore the importance of developing strong written communication and active listening skills among library staff to improve overall user satisfaction and service quality.

Table 11: Correlation Between Librarians' Communication Skills And User Satisfaction

Correlation between Communication skills of Library professionals and Satisfaction with library services	Correlation Coefficient ®	Significance
Written	0.75	0.000*
Verbal	0.68	0.010
Non-Verbal	0.65	0.100
Active listening	0.70	0.000*
Interpersonal communication	0.60	0.002

Implication of the Study

The following are few important implications for library management:
- ➢ Librarians should enhance the key Communication skills (Written, verbal, Non-verbal, Active Listening) through practical training methods such as workshop, role playing exercises, and structured feedback session.
- ➢ Training programs should also focus on the development of communication skills specifically active listening, written communication, as these significantly influence user satisfaction with library services.
- ➢ The librarians can overcome the challenges in developing their communication skills through; the acquisition of multilingual resources,

hiring staff with diverse language proficiencies, providing cultural competence training for all library employees.
- ➢ Implement digital tools (e.g. automated chat system) to handle routine queries efficiently and provide training how to use latest technologies in libraries by library staff.

Librarians should place greater emphasis on communication skills, ensuring they are a core component of both academic and professional training.

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