



Communication Skills of Librarians: A Key to Quality Service Delivery in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Public Libraries

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Abstract

The effective communication skills are very much crucial for the library professionals to provide best-quality library services and to ensure users satisfaction. This research investigates the impact of library professionals' communication skills on the service delivery in all the public libraries of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Quantitative research design was employed, involving 84 library professionals and 170 library users across the public libraries in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The results highlighted that librarians excel in written communication (Mean = 4.23) and verbal communication (Mean = 4.10), but struggle with non-verbal communication (Mean = 3.01) and interpersonal skills (Mean = 2.99). Technology (Mean = 4.1) and language barriers (Mean = 4.0) are significant difficulties to effective communication. The study also shows a positive correlation between librarians' communication skills and user satisfaction, with written communication ($r = 0.75$) and active listening ($r = 0.70$) being highly significant. The results suggest that developing strong communication skills, particularly in non-verbal and interpersonal areas, is essential for librarians to improve user satisfaction and service quality. Recommendations include integrating communication skills training into library professional development programs and promoting awareness about the importance of effective communication in library services.

Keywords: Communication Skills, Library Professionals, Public Libraries, Quality Library services.

Background of the Study

Libraries are vital social and educational institutions that contribute significantly to learning, cultural preservation, and community development. Over time, libraries have evolved from traditional repositories of books into dynamic, user-centered information hubs by integrating digital technologies and innovative service models to meet the changing needs of diverse user populations (Koontz & Gubbin, 2010). In this evolving environment, the effectiveness of library services depends not only on the availability of information resources but also on the ability of library professionals to communicate efficiently with users.

Effective communication is a core professional competency in librarianship, enabling librarians to clearly convey information, understand user needs, establish trust, and foster long-term relationships with patrons and stakeholders (Marques, 2013). Research indicates that strong verbal, non-verbal, and written communication skills significantly enhance service quality, goal achievement, and user satisfaction (Robles, 2012). Among these skills, active



listening plays a crucial role in building trust and loyalty, as it allows librarians to accurately interpret users' information needs and respond appropriately (Giles et al., 1973; Julien et al., 2021).

In the digital age, the role of librarians has expanded beyond traditional reference services. Librarians are now expected to act as educators, facilitators, and guides, supporting users in developing digital literacy skills and ensuring inclusive access to information resources (Curtin & Price, 2019; Lee & Kim, 2020). This shift requires proficiency in digital tools, online search strategies, metadata management, and virtual reference services (Chou & Hsiao, 2017; Zhang & Tang, 2021). Consequently, written and digital communication skills have become increasingly important, as librarians must craft clear, concise, and professional messages in emails, online chats, social media platforms, and digital learning environments (Zhang & Bishop, 2020). Verbal communication remains central to effective library service delivery. Librarians must adapt their language according to users' literacy levels, using simple explanations for novice users while employing precise terminology for advanced researchers (Fisher et al., 2019). Studies show that users feel more confident and satisfied when librarians engage actively with their queries, demonstrating empathy and responsiveness (Julien et al., 2021). In addition, non-verbal communication—such as eye contact, posture, gestures, and facial expressions—strongly influences user comfort and approachability. Positive non-verbal cues foster a welcoming environment, whereas negative signals, such as distracted behavior, may discourage user interaction (Gremmels, 2020; Herson et al., 2023).

The increasingly multicultural nature of library communities further emphasizes the importance of intercultural communication. Librarians must navigate cultural differences, language barriers, and varying communication norms to serve diverse populations effectively (Chowdhury & Burton, 2019). Cultural competence and inclusive communication practices help librarians build trust, promote equity, and enhance user satisfaction, particularly in multilingual and diverse societies (Chou & Hsiao, 2017; Lee & Kim, 2020). Despite its importance, effective communication in libraries faces several challenges. These include language mismatches, digital divides, limited resources, and interpersonal conflicts. Language barriers disproportionately affect non-native speakers, especially in multilingual regions, and can be addressed through multilingual staffing and targeted communication strategies (Rajagopal & Frank, 2022). Similarly, rapid technological advancements have created generational and socioeconomic gaps, requiring librarians to provide patient guidance and digital support to users struggling with technology (Kumar & Ochoa, 2021). Interpersonal conflicts arising from miscommunication can undermine trust and service quality, highlighting the need for conflict management and de-escalation training (Nitecki & Davis, 2022).

In the Pakistani context, several studies have emphasized the critical role of communication skills in academic and public libraries. Khan and Ahmad (2018) found that effective communication is essential for building strong librarian–user relationships in Pakistani universities. Rehman, Asghar, and Khan (2019) highlighted the need for librarians to develop communication strategies tailored to diverse user needs, while Mahmood (2013) stressed the importance of adapting communication styles for students, researchers, and the general public. Furthermore, Ahmad, Ahmad, and Ameen (2021) reported that university library professionals in Pakistan ranked communication and persuasion skills among the most important soft skills, emphasizing the need for



Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs to strengthen these competencies.

Overall, existing literature underscores that effective communication—encompassing verbal, non-verbal, digital, and intercultural dimensions—is fundamental to high-quality library service delivery. Understanding communication challenges and opportunities enables library professionals to design strategies that improve user engagement and satisfaction. Against this backdrop, the present study examines the impact of library professionals' communication skills on service delivery in public libraries of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, with the aim of contributing to the development of effective communication practices that enhance the value and relevance of libraries in the digital era.

Objectives of the Research

- To identify the key communication skills employed by librarians for effective library service delivery.
- To assess the level of communication skills possessed by library professionals.
- To examine the impact of communication barriers—such as language barriers, technological challenges, and interpersonal conflicts—on library service delivery.
- To explore the challenges faced by librarians in developing and enhancing their communication skills.
- To investigate the relationship between library professionals' communication skills and user satisfaction with library services.

Methodology

This study was derived from a previous research project and employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between librarians' communication skills and library service delivery, particularly their impact on user satisfaction. The research was conducted in 17 public libraries across various districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, involving two populations: library professionals and library users. A census approach was used to include all 84 professional librarians, while a convenience sample of 170 users (10 from each library) was selected. Data were collected using two structured questionnaires developed through a review of relevant literature and consultation with experienced researchers. The instruments covered key communication skills, barriers to effective communication, and user satisfaction with library services. Prior to the main survey, both questionnaires were pilot-tested with librarians and users to ensure clarity, validity, and relevance. Data collection was carried out over several weeks through both in-person and online distribution. Librarian questionnaires were administered personally and digitally, while user questionnaires were distributed during visits to the selected libraries with assistance from library staff. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) as well as inferential techniques, including correlation and regression analysis, to determine relationships between communication skills and user satisfaction. The reliability of both instruments was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients of 0.84 and 0.85, indicating strong internal consistency.



The Study Results

The findings were displayed in to two different parts, 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

Demographic of the participants

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that the majority of librarians participating in the study are male (69.4%), while females constitute 30.6%, revealing a notable gender imbalance. This pattern contrasts with global trends in librarianship, which typically report female dominance in the profession. Such disparity may be attributed to regional or institutional recruitment practices, cultural factors, or sampling limitations, and therefore merits further investigation. Regarding educational qualifications, most respondents (83.32%) possess advanced degrees (MS/MPhil or PhD), reflecting a highly qualified professional workforce. In contrast, only 16.66% hold a BS degree, suggesting the need for further academic upgrading and specialization, particularly for roles involving advanced research and academic support. The age distribution shows that the largest group of librarians falls within the 31–40 years category (38.9%), followed by those aged 41 years and above (33.4%). This indicates a healthy presence of mid-career and experienced professionals. However, the comparatively smaller proportion of younger librarians aged 20–30 years (27.7%) may point to challenges related to recruitment or retention at the early career stage. Similarly, analysis of professional experience reveals that more than half of the respondents (55.5%) have 4–7 years of experience, indicating a moderately experienced workforce. Only 16.6% report eight or more years of experience, which may reflect high turnover, recent institutional growth, or limited long-term retention strategies. Additionally, a smaller group of 20 librarians reported less than three years of professional experience, representing early-career professionals within the field.

Table 1: The demographics 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 %

The communication skills of librarians

The librarian's communication skills were analysed 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: The communication Skills Level of the participants

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

Participants' Level of confidence about their communication skills in the provision of library services

The data presented in Table 3 indicate that nearly 70% of the respondents reported being either confident or very confident in their communication skills when providing library services. In contrast, 20% described themselves as moderately confident, while 10% indicated a lack of confidence in their communication abilities. This latter group highlights an area requiring focused attention and targeted improvement initiatives.

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%

The barriers faced in communication

Table 4 presents data on the barriers faced by library professionals in effective communication. The analysis identifies technology as the most significant barrier (Mean = 4.1, Rank 1), reflecting issues such as inadequate digital infrastructure, limited technological proficiency among staff, and reliance on outdated communication platforms. In the context of contemporary libraries, this finding highlights the urgent need for user-friendly technological systems and continuous training to reduce digital gaps.



Language barriers (Mean = 4.0, Rank 2) and financial constraints (Mean = 3.9, Rank 3) were also found to significantly hinder effective communication. These challenges include difficulties in understanding users' queries and restricted access to paid resources due to insufficient funding for training and technological upgrades. Cultural differences (Mean = 3.8, Rank 4) further indicate communication gaps in multilingual and multicultural environments, often resulting from limited cultural sensitivity or the inability to accommodate diverse linguistic needs. Such barriers may disproportionately affect marginalized users who rely heavily on free library services.

Although socio-economic differences were ranked lowest (Mean = 3.0, Rank 5), they still reflect underlying inequalities in access to communication resources. Users from lower socio-economic backgrounds may face obstacles such as limited internet access or unfamiliarity with formal communication practices, underscoring the need for targeted outreach and inclusive communication strategies within libraries.

Table 4: Barriers faced by respondents in communication

Barrier's respondents face in the effective communication	Mean	Rank
Technology	4.1	1 st
Language	4.0	2 nd
Finances	3.9	3 rd
Culture	3.8	4 th
Socio economic differences	3.0	5 th

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 developing of communication skills

Challenges in developing communication skills	Mean	Ranks
Technological barriers	4.2	1 st
Lack of funding	4.1	2 nd
Language difficulties	3.9	3 rd
Culture factors	3.7	4 th
Inadequate trainings	3.6	5 th
Socio economic issues	3.5	6 th
Uncomfortable environment	3.4	7 th
Personality traits	3.3	8 th
Time constraints	3.2	9 th



Emotional factors	2.7	10 th
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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	5 th
Rarely	7	4 th
Occasionally	10	3 rd
Often	28	1 st
Always	22	2 nd

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

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 dissatisfied 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

Discussion & Conclusions

The results of this study align with previous research indicating that social media has both positive and negative implications for academic performance. While platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook support academic communication and collaboration, excessive use leads to distraction and poor time management. The tendency to multitask between academic activities and social media may undermine deep learning and critical thinking. The findings highlight the importance of purposeful and regulated use of social media in academic contexts. Students who primarily used social media for academic communication reported fewer negative effects compared to those who used it mainly for entertainment. Faculty observations further emphasize the need for institutional policies and student awareness programs to promote responsible use. Given the role of LIS students as future information professionals, developing digital discipline and ethical online behavior is particularly important. Integrating social media



literacy into the LIS curriculum may help students maximize academic benefits while minimizing negative outcomes.

This study examined the impact of social media usage on the academic performance of undergraduate LIS students at SUIT, Pakistan. The findings demonstrate that social media plays a significant role in students' academic and social lives. While it offers valuable opportunities for communication, collaboration, and resource sharing, excessive and unregulated use negatively affects academic performance, concentration, and study habits. The study concludes that social media should not be viewed solely as a distraction but as a tool that requires guided and responsible use. Educational institutions, faculty members, and students must work collaboratively to establish balanced usage practices that support academic success.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to promote responsible and academically productive use of social media among LIS undergraduates at Sarhad University of Science and Information Technology and similar higher education institutions:

1. Social media literacy should be formally incorporated into the LIS undergraduate curriculum to help students understand how to use social media platforms purposefully for academic communication, information sharing, and professional development. This would enable students to balance academic and non-academic use and minimize distractions.
2. The university should organize regular workshops, seminars, and orientation sessions to raise awareness about the potential negative effects of excessive social media use on concentration, time management, and academic performance. These programs should emphasize self-regulation, digital discipline, and ethical online behavior.
3. Faculty members should actively guide students in using social media for academic purposes by creating moderated WhatsApp groups, discussion forums, or learning communities linked to course objectives. Structured academic engagement can help reduce unproductive use while enhancing collaborative learning.
4. The university administration should develop clear guidelines regarding the appropriate use of social media in academic settings, particularly during lectures and study hours. Such policies can help minimize classroom distractions and improve student engagement.
5. Student support services should offer training in time management and study skills, highlighting strategies to limit excessive social media use. Encouraging students to set boundaries for online activity can improve focus and academic outcomes.
6. Students should be encouraged to use social media platforms for academic content creation, such as sharing summaries, academic videos, research discussions, and professional networking. This approach can transform social media into a constructive learning tool rather than a source of distraction.
7. The university should periodically assess students' social media usage patterns and their academic impact. Future research may adopt a mixed-methods or longitudinal approach to explore long-term effects and compare findings across disciplines and institutions.



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