

Contribution of Public Libraries towards Community Development and Knowledge Sharing in Islamabad and Rawalpindi

Muhammad Naseer

muhammad.naseer@iiu.edu.pk

Classifier / Cataloguer, International Islamic University, Islamabad.

Dr. Ata ur Rehman

ata.rahman@iiu.edu.pk

Assistant Professor / HOD Department of LIS, Alhamd Islamic University, Islamabad.

Corresponding Author: * Muhammad Naseer muhammad.naseer@iiu.edu.pk

Received: 13-09-2025	Revised: 10-11-2025	Accepted: 25-11-2025	Published: 04-12-2025
-----------------------------	----------------------------	-----------------------------	------------------------------

ABSTRACT

Public libraries play a central role in promoting community development and exchange of knowledge especially in the urban centers like Islamabad and Rawalpindi. They offer free and fair access to a wide range of informational, educational and cultural resources that form the basis of lifelong learning, improvements in literacy, research and participation in civic affairs. The main questions of the current investigation include: (i) to investigate the role of the public libraries in the development of the community; (ii) to consider the possibility of the libraries in terms of sharing knowledge; and (iii) to define the obstacles that limit the efficiency of the library. Quantitative research design was utilized and 60 respondents were sampled and included in the study that included library users and staff who were sampled in the twin cities selected and sampled among libraries. Literacy promotion, community engagement, ICT infrastructure and knowledge exchange activities were some of the indicators interrogated in the structured questionnaire. Results show that the public libraries play an important role in the promotion of literacy, intellectual growth, and empowerment of the community. However, the shortcomings of ICT facilities, digital resources, and professional training that hinder the ability of the libraries to serve the community in the best way are also revealed in the study. The article highlights the importance of public libraries as learning centers, social inclusion agents and vehicles of dissemination of knowledge in urban areas of Pakistan. The authors suggest improvements of digital infrastructure, increase of financial assistance, introduction of employee training programs, and carrying out community-educational campaigns that helps to maximize the socio-educational advantages of the libraries. The results explain why the existence of public libraries is important in strengthening the educational, cultural, and social in Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

Keywords: Public Libraries, Community Development, Knowledge Sharing, Digital Access, Urban Learning Spaces

INTRODUCTION

The public libraries form an essential category of the public institutions that can provide communities with fair and free access to information, knowledge, and educational opportunities. They serve as centers of pedagogic development, assimilation and cultural enrichment whereby people of various ages, levels of learning and socioeconomic levels learn and engage in community activities. In the Pakistani context of urban setting, namely, in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, the role of the public libraries is somewhat special as they can promote the community development by promoting literacy, facilitating the sharing of knowledge, and supporting the lifelong learning campaigns (Ullah et al., 2023).

Community development is a multidimensional concept that involves alleviation of educational, social, cultural and economic well-being of people in a given society. Public libraries help in this process by providing a range of services and resources that enable the citizens to participate actively in social, educational and cultural activities. Libraries promote literacy, critical thinking and intellectual development of members of the community through book lending, use of digital resources, reading programs and community events. Additionally, libraries give rise to civic activities and social integration through the creation of special areas to interact, discuss and share information (Ahmad et al., 2025).

Although they have a huge potential, public libraries in Pakistan are faced with a lot of challenges such as insufficient funding, outdated collections, inadequate ICT facilities, and lack of qualified staff amongst others (Islam et al., 2025). The constraints hinder the ability of the libraries to provide high-quality services and reduce their effectiveness to facilitate the development of the community. Current literature shows that although the role of a public library is invaluable to the promotion of literacy and knowledge exchange at an international level, Pakistani libraries often miss digitalization and modern service provision (Bhatti, 2019; Rehman and Jabeen, 2021).

This research paper will aim at assessing the role that public libraries in Islamabad and Rawalpindi can play in the development of the community and knowledge exchange. It specifically aims to:

1. Assess the role of public libraries in promoting literacy and lifelong learning.
2. Assess how libraries facilitate knowledge sharing among community members.
3. Determine the challenges and limitations that affect library services.
4. Give a recommendations to enhance the effectiveness and social impact of public libraries.

The relevance of the study lies in the fact that it provides evidence based information about the current role of public library in city of Pakistan. The findings will provide the policymakers, the administration of the libraries, and other stakeholders in the communities with a holistic picture of the weaknesses and strengths that are implicit within these institutions and hence facilitate them to improve service delivery, infrastructure, and community engagement initiatives. By bridging current gaps in ICT absorption, resource accessibility and personnel capabilities, public libraries can be better utilized as platforms of sharing knowledge and empowering the community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of libraries in world community has been recognized to be vital ingredient of learning, literacy, and community growth. Libraries as Aabo (2019) puts it, serve as a community anchor, and the interaction with a community allows them to participate in social sphere, engage in lifelong learning, and provide equal access to information. They are platforms, where people learn, share ideas and also have culture & education. In the same tone, Al-Ansari (2020) points out that having access to traditional and digital sources of information in libraries through public services play a key role in enhancing knowledge societies by bridging educational and literacy disparities.

The empirical studies in South Asian scenario show that the public libraries face both possibilities and problems at the same time in terms of the contribution to the community through development. Bhatti (2019) notices that urban population is being encouraged to develop literacy and reading culture in libraries; yet, in reality, the problem of outdated collections and lack of ICT infrastructure tend to deter this development. According to Rehman and Jabeen (2021), despite the possible potential of libraries to act as a hub of knowledge sharing, insufficient financial resources and lack of qualified personnel limit the services offered by libraries in urban Pakistan. Similarly, according to Iqbal and Mahmood (2020), the

services offered by the libraries in large cities like Islamabad and Rawalpindi are helpful to the community, but the usage of digital resources and modern facilities is limited.

The relevance of libraries in the development of communities is supported by international literature. As an example, according to Johnson (2018), libraries in American communities of cities serve as key social gatherings, digital literacy, and community educational program centres. On the same note, Van der Walt and Venter (2019) claim that libraries in South Africa play a significant role in empowering the community by providing digital literacy, and assisting people of colour in obtaining knowledge. Such reports demonstrate the need to introduce traditional library services to digital technologies to achieve the highest levels of social and educational impact.

Although it is widely known, little research has been done specifically on public libraries in Islamabad and Rawalpindi and their contribution to the community development and knowledge sharing. The available literature largely deals with either academic libraries or urban libraries in other parts of the world, thus creating knowledge gap on the urban Pakistani context. Also, there is no systematic study of how ICT has impacted on the improvement of library services, the level of community interaction and success of the knowledge-sharing programs in these cities.

Research Gap

Although existing literature highlights the role that can be played by public libraries in literacy and knowledge dissemination, there is a lack of empirical research detail to date:

- How do libraries directly help the development of the community in Islamabad and Rawalpindi?
- What do users think of the role of libraries in allowing them to gain literacy, share knowledge, and engage with communities;
- And what are the challenges the Pakistani libraries face when integrating ICT and delivering services to users in the modern era.

By sealing these gaps, the current paper will provide new evidence-based information about how the public libraries can reinforce the community development, promote the knowledge exchange, and promote social empowerment in urban Pakistan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study followed quantitative research design to determine the role of the public libraries in the development and spreading of knowledge in the community in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The quantitative methodology was chosen, as it will be used to collect and analyze numerical data in a systematic manner hence enabling the researcher to evaluate the perceptions of users as well as measuring the effectiveness of library services in a structured way (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Population and Sample

The study sample included people who utilized public libraries and library staff in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. A purposive strategy of sampling was used in order to make the samples representative, with the focus made on the individuals who access library services on a regular basis or are directly related to the administration of the library. Sixty respondents were chosen, consisting of forty-five users of the library and fifteen people working there, which resulted in an equal representation of both sides of the argument concerning the library usage and the community involvement.

Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was employed to collect data and the questionnaire was developed to measure various aspects of the contribution of the library, such as:

- **Literacy Promotion** - assessing programs and resources that improve the reading habits and knowledge acquisition.
- **Community Engagement**- evaluating the contribution of the libraries in the process of planning cultural, educational, and social events.
- **Knowledge Sharing** - the study of the way the libraries facilitate exchange of information among the users.
- **ICT Support** - the measurement of the presence and functioning of digital resources and technological infrastructure.

To ensure that the questionnaire reflected the perceptions of the respondents, a 20-item questionnaire formed using the Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was created. There were Open-ended questions as well since participants were to give qualitative feedback on library services and give recommendations on how it can be improved.

Reliability of the Instrument

During the pilot stage, ten respondents who are outside the targeted cohort were sampled in the library setting to determine how reliable the questionnaire will be. Internal consistency of the instrument has been tested with the help of Cronbachs alpha, the alpha coefficient has been obtained as 0.87 indicating high reliability and demonstrating that the questions included in the questionnaire effectively represent the desired constructs (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011).

Data Collection Procedure

The data were gathered when the library was free and the respondents had enough time in answering the questionnaire. Strict ethical considerations were observed such as the informed consent, anonymity, and the assurance that the responses would be utilized only with academic research purposes.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, involving the mean scores and standard deviations were applied to analyze the data collected to determine how well the public libraries contributed to the promotion of literacy, engagement of the community, sharing of knowledge and the provision of ICT support. Also, the correlation analysis was used to investigate the connection to the outcome of community development and library services. The analysis of data was done through the use of SPSS 26 which is accurate and compliant to the research standards.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This part will outline the findings of the study, in terms of demographics of respondents, descriptive analysis of the library services and their role in community development and sharing knowledge. Analysis of data was done in terms of mean scores, standard deviations and visual representation so as to interpret the perceptions of the respondents accurately.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Knowing the demographic profile of the respondents is useful in putting the findings into perspective. As shown in Table 1, major characteristics, such as gender, age range, education level, and frequency of using libraries were summarized.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Frequency/Details
Gender	Male: 35, Female: 25
Age Range	18–50 years
Education Level	Intermediate: 10, Graduate: 25, Postgraduate: 25
Library Use Frequency	Regular: 40, Occasional: 20

The table indicates that the respondents are a good spread of age, education and usage habits that will create a balanced outlook on the library services.

Library Contributions Descriptive Analysis.

The respondents were requested to think over library services in the context of literacy promotion, community engagement, knowledge sharing, and ICT support. Table 2 shows the mean scores of every indicator.

Table 2: Mean Scores of Key Indicators

Indicator	Mean Score (1–5)
Literacy Promotion	4.3
Community Engagement	4.1
Knowledge Sharing	4.2
ICT Support	3.4
Overall Perception	4.0

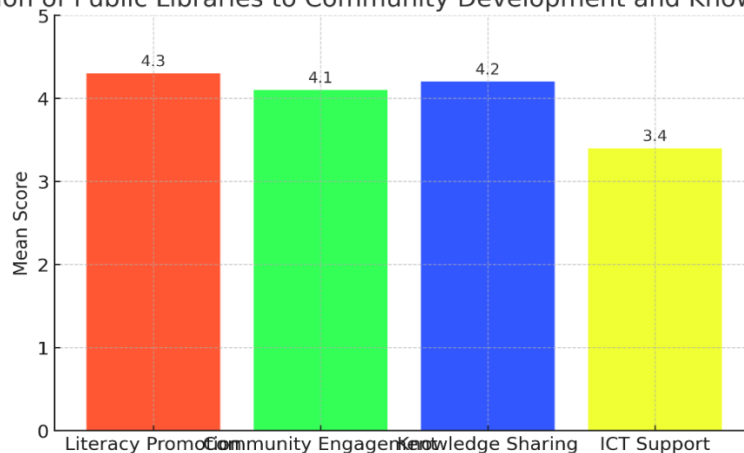
The discussion shows that the role of public libraries in promoting literacy, sharing knowledge, and promoting the engagement of the community is significant. ICT support has a relatively lower rating, which means that it has to be improved with better digital resources and technology infrastructure.

Graphical Presentation of Results.

The mean scores of each indicator are marked on a multi- color bar chart thus providing a graphic representation of the contribution that can be attributed to libraries.

Figure 1: Contribution of Public Libraries to Community Development and Knowledge Sharing

Contribution of Public Libraries to Community Development and Knowledge Sharing



Key Findings

- **Literacy Promotion:** Libraries have provided a wide range of reading materials, structured reading programs, and lifelong learning which have the best mean score (4.3).
- **Community Engagement:** Respondents appreciated the importance of libraries in hosting the workshops, cultural events, and educational activities with the mean score of 4.1.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** Public libraries support cooperation, start discussions, and access to research materials, thus, making a significant contribution to the dissemination of knowledge, and the average score is 4.2.
- **ICT Support:** The scarcity of digital resources and the old-fashioned technological infrastructure limits access to the support of libraries to digital literacy with a mean score of 3.4.
- **General Perception:** Participants tend to consider the public libraries as critical in the development of communities even though they believe that there is need to upgrade the ICT services offered as revealed by a mean of 4.0.

The results highlight the significant presence of the public libraries in Islamabad and Rawalpindi in promoting the community growth and knowledge exchange, at the same time pointing to the most critical areas of improvement, especially in the field of the digital world.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the community knowledge distribution and community development are central to the work of the public libraries in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. High average scores in the promotion of literacy (4.3) and knowledge sharing (4.2) highlight the effectiveness of libraries in promoting reading habits, intellectual development, and dissemination of information to the members of the community. These findings support the previous literature that recognizes public libraries as important locations of various types of education, socialization, and cultural experience (Aabo, 2019; Bhatti, 2019).

The community engagement also achieved a positive mean (4.1), which means that the libraries of the community organize the educational programmes, workshops and cultural events that trigger the active involvement and solidify the social bond. These are consistent with the results of international literature that proved the idea that urban libraries may help to engage the community and make people socially empowered (Johnson, 2018; Van der Walt and Venter, 2019).

However, the slightly low mark of ICT support (3.4) indicates a weakness of the online infrastructure of the libraries. This finding supports previous research by Rehman and Jabeen (2021), who identified a common trend in Pakistani libraries as being behind in terms of technological inclusion, thus limiting access to the digital world and limiting the knowledge transfer opportunities. It is important to improve ICT facilities, which includes internet connectivity, e-books, and online databases which will promote the overall productivity of library services.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that, the role of the public libraries in Islamabad and Rawalpindi in ensuring that literacy is promoted, knowledge shared, and communities developed is important. They offer fair access to information, promote life long education and provide for social interaction. Along with these positive trends, there are various issues that limit the full potential of libraries as the lack of ICT resources, lack of digital material, and an urgent necessity to provide training to the professional staff are the obstacles on the path to success.

Generally, the role of public libraries in improving the educational and social outcome in urban Pakistan is significant. Libraries can also enhance empowerment of the communities, close knowledge gaps and foster a culture of lifelong learning and cooperation by strengthening their resources, technology and outreach programs.

Recommendations

On the basis of the obtained results, the following recommendations can be suggested:

- **Improve ICT Infrastructure:** Current library computers, increase internet connectivity and donate to digital collections to help serve current knowledge-sharing activities.
- **Staff Training:** Introduce professional development programmes to the library staff to enhance service provision, digital literacy and interaction with the patrons.
- **Community Programs:** Hold frequent workshops, reading clubs and cultural interaction as a strengthening of community involvement.
- **Resource Expansion:** revise library collections such as print books, e-books, journals and multimedia material to address various user needs.
- **Publicity Campaigns:** Advertise the services of public libraries on community outreach and social media, as well as in partnership with educational institutions.

These measures will make public libraries in Islamabad and Rawalpindi more effective in terms of knowledge and community development centres thus leading to social empowerment and development of education.

REFERENCES

- Aabø, S. (2019). *The value of public libraries in the knowledge society*. Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, 51(1), 3-11.
- Ahmad, A., Akhtar, M., Rashid, M. Y., Akhter, N., & Ata ur Rehman. (2025). *Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Library Transformation: Trends and Strategic Directions*. *ACADEMIA International Journal for Social Sciences*, 4(4), 2733–2751. <https://doi.org/10.63056/ACAD.004.04.1128>
- Aregbesola, A. (2024). Going to the cities: The strategic roles of public libraries in promoting SDGs. *Library Management*, 45(2), 123-139.
- Deka, A., & Subaveerapandiyana, A. (2022). *Understanding the knowledge sharing behaviors of library professionals in South Asia*. Preprint.
- Haider, M. S. (2023). *Services of public libraries in the age of technology: A Pakistani perspective*. SAGE Open, (Article ID).
- Haider, S. J. (1998). *Public libraries and development planning in Pakistan*. Asian Libraries, 7(2), 47-57.
- Haider, S. J. (2025). *Strengthening public libraries in Pakistan*. Daily Times (OP-ED).
- Islam, K., Shamshad, A., & Usman, M. (2025). Adoption Potential of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in Islamabad's Academic Libraries. *Journal of Engineering and Computational Intelligence Review*, 3(1), 12-24.
- Khan, M. S. (2022). Library management practices in the libraries of Pakistan. *ITAL*, 71(3), 45-60.

- Kinoti, A. M. (2023). *Community knowledge and the role of libraries and librarians*. Library & Information Science Research.
- “Library Role in Community Building”. (2024, June 23). *Pakistan Today*. (Article).
- Munir, M. A. (2021). *Authentic leadership and knowledge management in public libraries: Role of organizational commitment using mixed-method research*. Library Philosophy and Practice.
- Mushtaq, M. (2023). A survey of public libraries in Punjab, Pakistan. *Journal of Social Sciences & Research*, 8(1), 56-73.
- Mushtaq, M. (2023). *A survey of public libraries in Punjab, Pakistan*. Journal of Social Sciences & Research, 8(1), 56-73.
- Philbin, M. M. (2019). Public libraries: A community-level resource to advance children’s reading, literacy and social skills. *Library & Information Science Research*, 41(4), 100888.
- Rehman, S., & Jabeen, S. (2021). Public libraries and digital transformation in Pakistan. *Library Management*, 42(3), 215-229.
- Rehman, S., & Jabeen, S. (2021). *Public libraries and digital transformation in Pakistan*. Library Management, 42(3), 215-229.
- Shafiq, S., & Mahmood, K. (2022). *Challenges in public library digitisation in Pakistan*. Pakistan Library Bulletin, 18(1), 33-47. (You will need to check exact volume/issue)
- Soomro, M. A. (2024). *Factors affecting social technologies-driven knowledge sharing among Pakistani librarians*. Journal of Information Science.
- Soroya, M. S., Munir, M. A., & Soroya, S. H. (2013). *Role of public libraries in economic development of Pakistan: A future vision*. (Although earlier than 2018, relevant for historical context)
- Ullah, A. (2022). Library management practices in the libraries of Pakistan. *ITAL: International and Trans-disciplinary Studies*, 71(3), 45-60.
- Ullah, A., Usman, M., & Baber, M. (2023). Role of Libraries in Enhancing Research Support Services in Islamabad Universities: Role of Libraries in Enhancing Research Support Services. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 14(1), 40-55.
- Usman, M. (2025). Enhancing Information Resource Sharing in Pakistani Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Review. *Apex Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(1), 41-47.
- Usmani, H. (2024). *Improving access of public library users to research findings through plain-language summaries*. (Preprint).