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Use of LIS journals in developing countries – a comparative study of Malaysia and Pakistan

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Novera Afaq

International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and

Khalid Mahmood

University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

Abstract

Purpose – The paper analyses the use of library and information science (LIS) journals (electronic and paper) in two developing countries, i.e. Malaysia and Pakistan.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is based on the results of a survey distributed to a population consisting of two sets of LIS journal users. The targeted group includes two sets of graduate students from Departments of Library and Information Science, each in an academic institution from one of the two countries.

Findings – LIS journals have as their objective the provision of guidance in the education and learning process of LIS students and the provision of leadership in the practice of librarianship. The profession needs to have a heightened awareness of LIS journals and requires fast and easy access to this body of literature. For developing countries this objective can only be met through help of developed nations who can provide improved means to access LIS journals more efficiently and more effectively in both paper and electronic format.

Research limitations/implications – The results of this study did not take in a large population of LIS journal users, but they do provide ground for further research in this area.

Practical implications – The results of the survey questionnaire provide a better understanding about the usefulness of LIS journals as an educational tool and their contribution towards development of librarianship in both countries.

Originality/value – There is comparatively little written on the use of LIS journals in developing countries. This paper helps fill that gap. The choice of a comparison between two contrasting developing countries' use of the literature is particularly useful, because the contrast throws into sharper relief the appropriate actions that should be taken to meet user needs.

Keywords Libraries, Information, Malaysia, Pakistan

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Library and information science (LIS) journals are one of the main resources for communication that allow professionals in the field to look at past developments, exchange new ideas and also transmit views on future developments in librarianship. With the recent advances of web technology, more and more LIS journals are appearing in electronic form alongside print, facilitating access for all types of users. The selection and use of journals is dependent on many factors, such as the budget available to the purchasing library, user needs and the technological infrastructure in place.

In developing countries LIS journals play an important role both in LIS education and in the development of librarianship practice. Thus, it is important to know which



journals are being used frequently in developing countries and why they are important to professionals in those particular countries. Journal evaluation is also necessary to improve the quality of journals, while measurement of the extent of use of journals helps to determine the overall significance of journals for researchers and practitioners alike. However, little research is available on the use of LIS journals in developing countries.

Objectives

The main objectives of this study are the following.

- (1) To determine the extent and nature of the use of LIS journals as an educational tool in developing countries.
- (2) To determine the perception of LIS graduate students of the role of LIS journals.
- (3) To find out the problems and obstacles in the use of LIS journals

Research questions

- (1) Which LIS journals are used frequently in developing countries?
- (2) How do LIS students in developing countries perceive the role of LIS journals?
- (3) What are the common problems faced in the use of LIS journals?

Literature review

Song and Zhuang (2003) examined the current trends and major practices in the development of LIS journals in China. They reported that journals are ranked first among all other media of acquiring information. Turner (2002) investigated the perception of information professionals regarding applied LIS research. Her project aimed to discover the amount of research use, motivation for and against consulting the research and the opinion of professionals concerning the relationship between LIS research and practice. The results showed that the amount of research consultation by information professionals increases with the number of years of experience. Resource constraints such as low staffing were considered as a barrier to research production. However, professional meeting attendance was a motivation for research use and information sharing.

Nkereuwem (1997) conducted a comparative evaluation of selected journals in LIS. It was found that journals were rated high due to familiarity and accessibility and rated low due to low visibility and irregular publication. Joswick and Stierman (1995) measured the faculty use and perception of journals to identify the journals most heavily used by Western Illinois University faculty and undergraduate students. They also examined the rankings the teaching faculty assigned to these journals. The result indicated high ranking by faculty of the journals that they published in or cited in their own research as well as those journals that were cited or retrieved by students.

Research methodology

This is a recent user study conducted in two developing countries, i.e. Malaysia and Pakistan. The population for the study consists of graduate students from departments of library and information science in one academic institution in each country. The whole population is taken as the sample due to a small sampling frame. The data were collected using the instrument of a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was

divided into two sections and it measured user's use and perception of LIS journals, the problems faced in the use of LIS journals along with personal demographic information such as gender and age range.

Malaysia

For the purpose of this study, the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) was selected, from six institutions in the country that offer degrees in library and information science. It is considered as one of the most developed institutions in Malaysia. IIUM operates under the direction of a Board of Governors with representatives from the eight sponsoring governments and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). It maintains links with governments and institutions all over the world, such as the League of Islamic Universities, the International Association of Universities and the Association of Commonwealth Universities. IIUM offers a wide range of academic programs including Masters and PhD programmes in Library and Information Science. The Department of Library and Information Science (DLIS) was established in 1992, by first offering Masters degree programmes in Library and Information Science (MLIS) to both full time and part time students. It was initially affiliated with the Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Science (IRKHS). In 2002, a separate Faculty of Information and Communication Technology was formed, and DLIS is one of its three initial departments.

Pakistan

The University of the Punjab, Lahore was selected for this study among seven universities offering LIS programs. This institution is the pioneer in offering library education in the country. Asa Don Dickinson, a student of Melvil Dewey started library training here in 1915. The Masters degree programme was started in 1974. The Department of Library and Information Science now offers a two-year Masters degree program under a semester system. Fresh graduates in full-time education are enrolled in the morning programme while an evening programme is offered to those in employment.

Survey results

The questionnaire was distributed among Masters students in the LIS departments in both institutions. The response rate from IIUM (Malaysia) was 72 percent (i.e. 35 out of 48 students responded). The response rate from PU (Pakistan) was 69 percent (48 out of 70).

The response from Malaysia showed that only three (9 percent) students reported a positive response to subscribing to (or receive complimentary copies) of any journals, and the majority, that is, 32 out of 35 (91 percent) replied negatively to this question on journal subscriptions. In Pakistan, no respondent reported subscribing to LIS journals (Table I).

In response to question on the medium used by participants, in IIUM, 26 (74 percent) reported using both paper and electronic formats of LIS journals, whereas 6 (17 percent) reported using electronic form only and 3 (9 percent) as using paper form only. In the case of Pakistan, 27 (56 percent) reported using both electronic and paper formats of LIS journals, followed by 20 (42 percent) that used paper only and one (2 percent) electronic only (Table II).

The preferred medium to access LIS journals in the Malaysian scenario was reported as the electronic medium by 24 respondents (69 percent) and 11 (31 percent) preferred print format. In Pakistan, the preferred medium was print by 26 (54 percent) respondents while 22 (46 percent) preferred electronic (Table III).

In Malaysia, the majority (91 percent) reported having access to the internet in the library. In Pakistan only 50 percent reported having access to internet.

Table IV indicates the frequency of browsing LIS journals on the internet among respondents at both institutions. A high percentage browsed journals once a week (69 percent) whereas some respondents browse daily (6 percent) or once a month (9 percent). The other (17 percent) indicated browsing journals as needed. In Pakistan

	Malaysia		Pakistan	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Gender				
Male	15	41	14	29
Female	20	56	34	71
Age				
20-29	22	63	44	92
30-39	7	20	3	6
40-49	5	14	1	2
≥50	1	2	0	0

Table I.
Summary of participants' demographic data

	Malaysia		Pakistan	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Paper form only	3	9	20	42
Electronic form only	6	17	1	2
Both paper and electronic form	26	74	27	56

Table II.
Medium of use of journals

	Malaysia		Pakistan	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Print	11	31	26	54
Electronic	24	69	22	46

Table III.
Preferred medium to access journals

	Malaysia		Pakistan	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Daily	2	6	1	2
Weekly	24	69	19	40
Monthly	3	9	19	40
As needed	6	17	4	8
No use	0	0	5	10

Table IV.
Use of internet for browsing LIS journals

a high percentage browsed LIS journals weekly and monthly (40 percent each), followed by using journals as needed (8 percent).

Similarly, as mentioned in Table V, a high percentage in Malaysia (54 percent) reported visiting the library every week to consult LIS journals, whereas 17 percent reported once a month and 20 percent reported visiting the library daily for this purpose. The other 9 percent visited the library when needed. In Pakistan, 42 percent of students visited the library daily to use LIS journals, followed by 35 percent who visited weekly. The remaining 11 percent of students went to the library when needed.

Table VI outlines the most important use of LIS journals as indicated by respondents in both countries. A large majority of the Malaysian students are of the view that LIS journals are important for research purpose (69 percent), followed by information about recent trends in library and information science (20 percent) and for other purposes (11 percent). Most of the respondents mentioned “teaching” under other purposes. In Pakistan LIS journals were considered important for research by 27 respondents (56 percent) whereas 21 (44 percent) respondents perceived LIS journals to be important for information about recent LIS trends.

Malaysian students indicated internet as the most frequent (94.3 percent) source used both to identify a journal and to obtain a journal article (82.9 percent). In Pakistan, 79.2 percent of respondents used the internet as the main source to identify a journal article as well as to obtain a journal article (77.1 percent). The other electronic means acknowledged to identify or obtain journal article included CD-ROM, e-mail to gain the help of library staff, or use of subscription databases provided in the university library.

In response to questioning on how journals assist in research, a high percentage in both countries reported journals as providing an important contribution to ongoing research, followed by the importance of their role for finding topics for future research.

At IIUM the problems faced in access to LIS journals in paper format were ranked in terms of significance, from lack of photocopying services as the most important problem followed by lack of journal access and journal availability, to time constraints as the least important. Using journals in electronic format the respondents reported time constraints as the most important problem followed by lack of journal availability and access, and lastly printing service as the lowest ranked problem to access

Table V.
Visiting library for
browsing LIS journals

	Malaysia		Pakistan	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Daily	7	20	0	0
Weekly	19	54	17	35
Monthly	6	17	20	42
As needed	3	9	11	23

Table VI.
Most important use of
LIS journals

	Malaysia		Pakistan	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
For information about recent LIS trends	7	20	21	44
For research purposes	24	69	27	56
Other	4	11	0	0

LIS journals in electronic format. In Pakistan, the problems faced in access to LIS journals in paper format were also ranked, from lack of photocopy service as most important followed by lack of journal availability and journal access and lastly time constraints. With regards to using journals in electronic format, the respondents reported time constraints as the most important problem, followed by lack of journal availability and printing service and journal access respectively.

The data showed that the majority of participants in Malaysia used the current issue on display (23.3 percent) and references found in another publication (22.6 percent) to identify a needed journal or journal article. This is followed by using current contents service (16.7 percent) and indexing /abstracting service (13.3 percent), newsletter (6.5 percent) and personal contact (5.7 percent). For obtaining a journal article, the most popular means reported was the internet (42.4 percent), followed by the university library (41.9 percent), personal contact (20.7 percent), subject network (17.9 percent) and purchase (16.7 percent). In Pakistan the most important source used to identify a journal or journal article was indexing/abstracting service (41.7 percent) followed by newsletter and reference in another publication (25.0 percent), current contents service (16.7 percent) and current issue on display (12.5 percent). To obtain a journal article the most used method reported was purchase (52.1 percent), followed by subject network (25.0 percent), personal contact (12.5 percent) and lastly the internet (2.1 percent) and library (2.1 percent).

Participants were asked to rate their perception about importance of LIS journals in research, teaching and practical work. A high rating was given to research followed by practical work in Malaysian setting. The paper format was also considered as a more important medium to access LIS journals as compared to electronic format. In Pakistani, LIS journals were perceived to be more important for practical work, followed by research use. The paper format of LIS journals was considered equally important as the electronic format.

Among journals available the most frequently consulted LIS journals in Malaysian setting included *Library Hi Tech*, *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, *LISA*, *Library Resources and Technical Services*, *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly*, *Library Review* and *Malaysian Journal of Library & Information Science* (Table VII).

The most frequently used LIS journals in Pakistan included *Library Trends*, *Pakistan Library Bulletin*, *Library Journal*, *Library Quarterly* and *LIBRI*. (Table VIII)

Journal	Format
<i>Library Hi Tech</i>	Online/print
<i>Journal of Academic Librarianship</i>	Print
<i>LISA</i>	Online/print
<i>Library Resources and Technical Services</i>	Online
<i>Cataloging and Classification Quarterly</i>	Online/print
<i>Library Review</i>	Print
<i>Malaysian Journal of Library & Information Science</i>	Print

Table VII.
Most frequently used
journals (Malaysia)

Discussion and conclusion

An overview of the two countries is necessary before making a comparison with regard to the extent of use of LIS journals, the perception of LIS journals and the problems faced in the access of LIS journals.

Malaysia is a middle-income country where 88.9 percent population is literate. Malaysia intends to be fully developed by the year 2020, implementing numerous information technology (IT) projects like the “Smart School” that involves a major transformation of the Malaysian school system. On the other side, Pakistan is an under developed country with only 46 percent literacy rate. In Pakistan the regional and political tensions have weakened prospective long-term development in the country.

From the results it is found that in Malaysia respondents use both electronic and paper format of LIS journals and the majority prefer the electronic over the paper medium, while in Pakistan the respondents showed a belief that both media had equal standing, but preferred the print over the electronic format. The internet was reported as the main source to identify and obtain journal articles in Malaysia whereas in Pakistan only half the respondents reported using the internet. The main source to identify or obtain journal article was through indexing/abstracting services and purchase. A difference in the frequency of browsing LIS journals was also noted: Malaysian students used LIS journals at least once a week whereas in Pakistan participants browsed LIS journals weekly or monthly. However, similarities were found in the kind of problems faced in getting access to LIS journals, including lack of photocopying services in paper format to time constraints in accessing LIS journals in electronic format. These problems suggest that although Malaysia is taking the lead in the development of librarianship, with almost all academic institutions having automated systems and users being provided with internet access, patrons are still faced with very common problems like the lack of photocopying services. The time constraints faced in accessing LIS journals can be due to a variety of reasons, like slow internet speed, lack of computer skills and user searching behavior.

Financial constraints also hinder the use of LIS journals in developing countries. The escalating price of journals leads to cut backs in journal subscriptions in many developing nations. The other problems include lack of technological infrastructure and the time to make journals available on the web.

Various improvements in the use of LIS journals in developing countries have been made through projects like Bioline conversion project of Third World scientific journals to HTML as well as indexing and abstracting of their articles and making them available over the web (www.bioline.org.br, accessed 17 December 2004). This helps to remove the burden of converting and distributing poorly funded non-profit scholarly journals. International Network for the Availability of Scientific

Journal	Format
<i>Library Trends</i>	Print
<i>Library Journal</i>	Print
<i>Library Resources and Technical Services</i>	Print
<i>Libri</i>	Print
<i>Library Quarterly</i>	Print
<i>Pakistan Library Bulletin</i>	Print

Table VIII.
Most frequently used
journals (Pakistan)

Publications (INSAP) is also helping African nations to provide better access and availability of journals to users.

However, more efforts are needed from developed countries to provide developing nations with access to worldwide LIS research and publications.

Some suggestions made by the respondents for more effective use of LIS journals are as follows:

- resource sharing between institutions in developing countries;
- reduced cost of LIS journals for institutions in developing countries; and
- encouragement from teachers to help students make use of LIS journals and realize their importance in research and practical work.

In conclusion, although the results of this study may not have taken in a large population of LIS journal users, it builds a ground for further research in this area. LIS journals have as their objective the provision of guidance in the education and learning process and the provision of leadership in the practice of librarianship. The important point is to develop an awareness of LIS journals and provide fast and easy access to end-users. For developing countries this objective can only be met through help of developed nations who can provide improved means to access LIS journals more efficiently and more effectively in both paper and electronic format.

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