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Faculty of Education – Bitola
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INNOVATIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN LIBRARY SERVICES – THE ROLE OF LIBRARY STAFF

Elena Stankoska
University "St. Kliment Ohridski" – Bitola, Faculty of Education, Republic of North Macedonia
elenastankoska@hotmail.com

Abstract

Libraries serve as centers of education, knowledge, and culture, playing an essential and responsible role in society. For a library to exist and function effectively, several fundamental elements are required to enable it to operate successfully and achieve its objectives. These elements include library space, equipment, materials, users, and—most importantly—library staff. The role of staff is crucial to the daily operations of libraries, as the quality of library services largely depends on their knowledge and competencies. Therefore, it is vital to pay particular attention to library personnel, who must possess specific expertise, cultural awareness, and professionalism. Research on library users shows that they value knowledgeable librarians who can guide them to the right sources of information, thereby meeting their educational, cultural, and informational needs. Thus, the role of library staff is of great significance in service delivery, and library management should devote considerable attention to staff development, professional growth, and ensuring their motivation.

Keywords: library, library staff, human resources in libraries, human resources development.

Introduction

In contemporary organizational theory, human resources are increasingly recognized as the most valuable and strategic asset of any institution, particularly in knowledge-based and service-oriented sectors such as libraries. Unlike purely technical or production-based organizations, libraries operate within a complex socio-cultural environment where human interaction, professional expertise, and interpretative judgment play a decisive role in delivering high-quality services to diverse user communities (Petrovski, 2007). In this sense, the effectiveness of library services is not determined solely by the availability of collections or technological infrastructure, but primarily by the competencies, motivation, and adaptability of the library staff who mediate access to information and knowledge.

The functioning of libraries is influenced by a dynamic interplay of internal and external factors, including rapid technological developments, changing patterns of information consumption, and evolving user expectations shaped by digital culture. Within such a context, human resource management emerges as a crucial component for ensuring institutional sustainability, innovation, and service quality. Human resources encompass not only the quantitative dimension of staffing but also qualitative aspects such as skills, professional development, creativity, and the capacity for lifelong learning, all of which are essential for responding to contemporary challenges (Velkova, 2018). Consequently, modern libraries must adopt strategic approaches to staff development in order to remain relevant in an increasingly competitive and information-rich environment.

From a historical perspective, the development of librarianship in the Republic of North Macedonia reflects broader socio-political and cultural transformations that have shaped the region. In earlier periods, due to the lack of formally educated library professionals, teachers and educators frequently assumed the role of librarians, which underscores the deep-rooted connection between education and librarianship (Georgievski, 1989). Over time, however, the professionalization of library staff has become a priority, supported by legislative frameworks, institutional reforms, and the establishment of formal educational pathways for librarianship. This transition reflects a broader recognition of the importance of specialized knowledge and competencies in managing library services.

In the contemporary digital age, libraries are undergoing profound transformations driven by digitization, open access initiatives, and the integration of advanced information technologies. These developments significantly expand the scope of library services while simultaneously imposing new demands on library staff. Librarians are now expected to possess not only traditional bibliographic skills but also digital competencies, critical thinking abilities, and communication skills necessary for engaging with users in both physical and virtual environments. As a result, the role of library personnel has evolved into that of information mediators, digital literacy educators, and facilitators of community engagement, highlighting the need for continuous professional development and institutional support.

This paper therefore examines the evolving role of library staff within the context of innovation and transformation in library services, with a particular emphasis on professional development, competencies, and the challenges faced by librarians in North Macedonia.

The Role of Library Staff and Opportunities for Their Professional Development

In the contemporary knowledge society, libraries function as dynamic and multifunctional institutions that support lifelong learning, cultural participation, and equitable access to information. Within this framework, library staff occupy a central and indispensable role as intermediaries between users and information resources. Their responsibilities extend far beyond traditional tasks such as cataloguing and circulation, encompassing advisory services, user education, digital support, and active participation in knowledge dissemination processes (Kotovchevska, 2023). This expanded role reflects the transformation of libraries into interactive learning environments where users seek guidance, not only access to materials.

The modern librarian is expected to possess a broad and interdisciplinary set of competencies that enable effective performance in a rapidly evolving information landscape. These competencies include information literacy, technological proficiency, communication and interpersonal skills, as well as intercultural awareness. Such a skill set allows librarians to respond to the diverse needs of users, who increasingly rely on libraries for navigating complex information ecosystems. Moreover, librarians must demonstrate the ability to critically evaluate information sources and guide users toward credible and relevant content, particularly in an era characterized by misinformation, digital overload, and the proliferation of unverified online resources (Trajanova, 2019).

Professional development is therefore not an optional aspect but a fundamental requirement of modern librarianship. Continuous education enables librarians to adapt to technological innovations, enhance their professional competencies, and improve the overall quality of library services. Opportunities for professional development are diverse and include formal education, specialized training programs, workshops, conferences, and seminars. In addition, digital technologies have significantly expanded access to professional learning through online courses, webinars, and virtual professional communities, allowing librarians to engage in lifelong learning regardless of geographical limitations (Hajdarpašić et al., 2021).

Furthermore, there is a strong correlation between staff development and organizational performance. Libraries that invest in the continuous education and motivation of their employees are more capable of implementing innovative services and responding effectively to changing user expectations. Well-trained and motivated staff contribute to the creation of a positive organizational culture, increased efficiency, and higher levels of user satisfaction, thereby enhancing the overall impact of library services within the community (Velkova, 2018).

Another critical dimension of the librarian's role is adaptability to technological change. Rapid advancements in information and communication technologies require librarians to continuously update their knowledge and acquire new digital skills. This includes familiarity with digital libraries, databases, information retrieval systems, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and data analytics. In this context, librarians increasingly assume the role of "knowledge navigators," guiding users through complex digital environments and facilitating access to relevant information resources.

In addition to technical and professional competencies, ethical responsibility constitutes a core principle of librarianship. Librarians are expected to uphold values such as intellectual freedom, equal

access to information, and the protection of user privacy. These ethical standards are essential for maintaining public trust and ensuring that libraries function as inclusive and democratic institutions.

Collaboration and teamwork also represent essential components of modern library practice. Librarians frequently engage in multidisciplinary cooperation with educators, researchers, cultural institutions, and international organizations. Such collaboration enhances knowledge exchange, fosters innovation, and contributes to the development of new services that address the evolving needs of users.

In the specific context of North Macedonia, continuous professional development of library staff is of particular importance due to ongoing transformations in the library sector. Librarians are expected to align with international standards while simultaneously addressing local cultural and educational needs. This requires a strategic and systematic approach to human resource development, supported by institutional policies, national frameworks, and international cooperation initiatives.

Conclusion

Libraries continue to play a fundamental role in the development of knowledge, literacy, and cultural identity in contemporary society. As institutions that promote education and access to information, they contribute significantly to intellectual growth, social inclusion, and the strengthening of democratic values. Within this framework, library staff represent the key driving force behind the successful functioning and ongoing transformation of library services.

The findings of this analysis indicate that the role of librarians has undergone significant transformation in response to technological advancements and societal changes. Modern librarians are no longer passive custodians of collections but active facilitators of knowledge, educators, and community-oriented professionals. Their ability to adapt to new challenges, integrate digital tools, and continuously develop their competencies is essential for maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of libraries in the digital age.

However, despite their crucial role, library staff in North Macedonia face numerous challenges, including limited financial resources, outdated infrastructure, and insufficient opportunities for continuous professional development. Addressing these challenges requires a strategic approach that prioritizes investment in human resources, technological infrastructure, and organizational capacity building.

International cooperation, particularly with organizations such as UNESCO and European institutions, provides valuable opportunities for knowledge exchange, training, and the adoption of best practices. These collaborations enable libraries to access global expertise and innovative solutions, thereby enhancing the quality and diversity of their services.

Ultimately, investing in the professional development of library staff represents a long-term investment in the sustainability and advancement of libraries as institutions. Through continuous learning, innovation, and collaboration, library professionals can continue to serve as catalysts for cultural, educational, and social development within their communities.

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