

## **The present status of public libraries in the state of Kuwait: librarians' perspectives**

Research – Results

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to explore librarians' perspectives regarding the present status of public libraries and their activities to serve the community in Kuwait. To achieve the objectives of the study, the descriptive analytical method was used. A random sample of 262 librarians was chosen to answer 42 questions in a questionnaire that was

divided into five dimensions: the role of public libraries (9 questions), the availability of information services (6 questions), using information technology (6 questions), library environment (7 questions), the administration and financial level (6 questions) and awareness of whole library activities (8 questions). The data were analysed using SPSS Statistics to calculate the estimate of the librarians' responses and the significant statistical differences in their responses using General linear model. The study found a low level for all axes of the study, with statistically significant differences in the librarians' estimates due to the variable gender, age, educational qualification and number of years of experience. The study recommended the need to support libraries for users, especially with regard to providing advanced materials to meet a wide range of print and digital needs and providing the appropriate environment with a focus on awareness of library activities. The value of this study lies in exploring and understanding the perspectives of librarians, which is indispensable for improving services and resources offered by public libraries.

## Keywords

public library; librarians' perspectives; library status, Kuwait

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## Discussion and conclusion

According to the findings of Table 3 concerning the Role of public libraries, most librarians disagreed on the positive role of public libraries towards society. So, at most, they thought that the internet is an effective alternate for libraries. This may be due to the fact that the information available on libraries is available for any users on the internet and accessible and can be easily obtained without public libraries which means that they are not essential for society especially with the rapid social and cultural changes in life. In deed. This is reflected on their opinion that libraries are not that useful and that they are not of no difference than book stores which means for them that Public libraries will not exist in the future. In fact, this is very clear, as according to librarians, public library offers less services and sources through social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and blogs where the level of information services available in public libraries is no good. This is in addition to the fact that there are enough copies of books in the public library for external borrowing and the lesser and updated electronic information provided for visitors

This is not in line with Kinney (2010), who indicates that libraries remain important and have an effective role regarding Internet provision, so librarians in public libraries can act as guides to the Internet, and they are more than the Internet, nor in line with McClure and Jaeger (2009) stated that librarians are Internet access providers, teachers and trainers and provide information services, such as financial information, health care information, job seeking and so on.

Therefore, libraries must provide external and internal improvements and activities for society as stated by Hallberg and Sipos-Zackrisson (2016), external activities are very important for the library, for example, maintaining contact with non-users through online services and connecting with the community. However, as stated by Salarelli (2014) and Al and Akilli (2016), public libraries must solve the reduction of financial support so they can survive, and this can be by the cooperation of local governments and the information management departments of universities and professional associations.

With regards to the environment of public libraries. From the librarians' point of view, the design of the public library building is not suitable enough for future technological developments as public library has no less enough hall designed for learning and group lessons when needed by visitors. In addition, for librarians, the library entrances, exits, elevators, car parks and furniture seem not to be suitable enough for providing information services for people with special needs. This included air-conditioning level and lighting level. These findings are in line with what Sufar, Talib and Hambali (2012) mentioned when they stated that a well-considered space planning, selection of furniture, lighting, material and finishes create an attractive physical interior environment.

In addition, using information technology in public libraries seems to be not suitable as most librarians opined that public computers and programs for visitors for the purpose of searching and printing provided by libraries are not enough. This is in addition to that public library has no professional social media account for staying in touch with visitors and the poor services offered by library website and the poor automatic management system as stated by librarians and the absences or poor Internet access services for visitors and the tools for people with special needs (deaf devices, projectors, magnification devices and audible devices). This finding supports the study by Ghuloum and Alyacoub (2016), which found that public libraries do not pay sufficient attention to people with special needs.

In terms of administration and financial level, most librarians stated that there are current or future (short- or long-term) plans to develop the public library where the annual budget for the public library is not suitable. However, according

to librarians, the upper management of the public library is not fully aware of the role of libraries as a cultural centre in society, which could be the reason from their point of view that the higher management of the public library does not provide a suitable and satisfactory work environment to its employees, nor encourages its employees by giving them bonuses and incentives when they offer various cultural activities to the society. In addition, this could be the reason why the administration of the public library does not meet the professional requirements of its employees

More importantly, most librarians stated that public libraries have not enough suitable signage to help visitors use the facilities easily and that visitors cannot contact the public library through social media, email and chats and that the website of the public library has no guide booklets or electronic guide services and advertisements brochures outside the library to announce its lectures, cultural seminars and meeting to attract visitors. Moreover, schools of the Ministry of Education do not encourage their students to use the public libraries. Further, they stated that public library do not offer activities for the public, including children. It plays a cultural role by showing patriotic and documentary films and hosting exhibitions. These finding aligns with the results of other studies, such as those conducted by Ayre (2016), Godin (2016) and Ayre and Craner (2017), which argued that libraries must adopt a new role as a place where the community finds new ideas, inspiration and others on similar journeys. Improving such applications and services can strengthen the community. Nevertheless, public libraries should recognise and understand the importance of identifying community needs, designing impact measures to demonstrate how libraries can help address those needs and the variety of ways that the evidence of such impacts can be used to effectively support public libraries

## **Recommendations**

The study recommended that librarians' perspectives towards public libraries should be taken into consideration in order to improve public libraries and that the obstacles and difficulties encountering public libraries to help decision makers improve public libraries in the future. In addition, the country should support public libraries so that they can provide users with advanced materials for any print and digital needs. More importantly, the researchers recommended that public libraries need to provide facilities that help users with special needs..

## **Suggested Future Studies**

- This research suggest further studies that focuses on the users of the public library as this study was limited to the perspectives of the librarians

- This research suggest further studies that focus why and how can libraries make a difference in our communities