

# Awareness of Pakistani academic librarians towards communication skills: barriers and benefits

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study is to measure the current levels of awareness of communication skills among academic librarians in degree-awarding institutions of Pakistan and to identify barriers that libraries, with the support of organizational stakeholders, could target to enhance adoption and / or improvement of these skills.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Quantitative research design, based on a Web-based survey method, used a questionnaire as the data collection tool for librarians used in degree-awarding institutions in Pakistan. After incorporating feedback from experts in the field, the questionnaire link was shared with a sample population of  $n = 400$  academic librarians in Pakistan, using simple random sampling. The data was coded in Microsoft Excel and exported to SPSS v 26 for analysis.

**Findings** – Overall, the findings underscore a consistent and moderate to high level of awareness by this cohort of basic library communication skills and their associated benefits. The level of agreement as to the principal barriers to these skills aligns with previous research results over the past decade and therefore underlines the need to prioritize the development of appropriate solutions.

**Research limitations/implications** – Further research is indicated to investigate the major factors contributing to the principal barriers identified in the current study.

**Practical implications** – The study recommends that librarians work with relevant stakeholders to identify strategies to enhance their personal and interpersonal communication skills and to address current barriers to upskilling.

**Originality/value** – The study could serve as a foundation for any future research and policy frameworks to enhance employability and communication skills among librarians in Pakistan.

**Keywords** Academic libraries, Interpersonal communication, Soft skills, Librarians, Employability skills, Library education

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Communication skills are important not only for human lives but also for organizational success. Communication originated from the Latin word *commūnicāre*, which means sharing, imparting and contributing (Rahnama *et al.*, 2015). In an organization, communication is the chief source through which individuals influence or reach one another. Communication skills encompass a broad spectrum of competencies important for individual



and organizational effectiveness. They involve imparting information through speech, writing and other means. In their research, O'Connor and Li (2008) explained that communication skills are the capability to speak when facing different situations, such as dealing with employees, clients, colleagues and vendors while performing one's job in the workplace environment. According to Hamid and Younus (2021), developing and honing these skills contribute to an improved workplace, efficient collaboration and professional growth. As such, communication skills have become an integral part of our organizations in the 21st century; with these skills, an organization and an individual can achieve their desired goals (Aghaei *et al.*, 2021).

Librarians are key organizational players; accordingly, their role must be recognized in achieving organizational goals. Researchers and practitioners alike emphasize the need for ongoing training and development for librarians in communication skills to facilitate their adaption within the evolving demands of the modern workplace. For example, Owwoye and Dahunsi (2014) reported that communication skills are useful tools for delivering efficient and effective library services that ultimately impact job effectiveness. Likewise, Kakirman-Yildiz (2017) has emphasized that delivering efficient library services depends on effective communication between library staff and patrons. In their study, Karimi *et al.* (2012) concluded that half of the patron's complaints in organizations are due to weakness in the relationship between librarians and users, and such complaints occurred because of poor communication skills.

In the current study, the researchers have endeavoured to focus on those communication skills that contribute to a strong relationship between patrons and library staff. This study contributes to the knowledge of those library and information science (LIS) stakeholders who wish not only to develop and hone communication skills that are useful for workplace and professional growth in the changing landscape of contemporary services but also to address any potential barriers.

## 2. Literature review

Communication skills have increasingly become a topic of interest over the past few decades. Effective communication skills are indispensable for librarians, regardless of the type of library. As the authors will explore below, numerous studies have highlighted a close relationship between communication skills and library services; moreover, effective communication skills are essential for librarians to achieve service-oriented organizational goals. The current literature review aims to identify and analyse common barriers specifically hindering academic librarians internationally and, more specifically, in Pakistan from developing and practising effective communication skills. Understanding these barriers makes it possible to implement targeted strategies and interventions to enhance communication competence in the academic library profession.

### 2.1 Importance of library communication skills

Communication skills are regarded as one of the most important attributes for academic librarians today. The emphasis on these skills has been discussed extensively in the literature for a considerable time (Choi and Rasmussen, 2009; Kennan *et al.*, 2006; Partridge *et al.*, 2010; Reeves and Hahn, 2010). According to Haddow *et al.* (2012), who conducted a study in Australia, verbal communication and customer service skills were ranked second in a list of knowledge and skills needed for academic reference librarians. Gerolimos *et al.* (2015) used content analysis of job advertisements to develop a profile of contemporary American academic librarians. The study reported the importance of emotional intelligence and communication skills as crucial for all types of librarian positions.

[Sutton and Collinge \(2018\)](#) conducted a study which involved analysing US job postings for E-Resources Librarian positions. The study reported that job advertisements for these positions commonly included phrases related to interpersonal skills as well as effective written and oral communication abilities. This corroborates the results of research conducted by [Matteson \*et al.\* \(2016\)](#). From a slightly different perspective, [Radad \(2017\)](#) found that conflict resolution skills, which include effective communication, are necessary in every workplace because conflict is inevitable in any organization; librarians must use interpersonal and problem-solving skills to constructively manage conflicts.

[Klain-Gabbay and Shoham \(2016\)](#) studied scholarly communication and librarians in Israel. The study was a mixed method, and a lengthy survey was distributed among faculty members and 50 librarians. Similarly, an interview was conducted among 20 faculty members and 15 academic librarians. A major finding of this study was a gap between the expectations of faculty members that librarians would be actively involved in scholarly communication and the reality of practical work by librarians in the field. Although a discussion of library support for scholarly communication is outside the scope of the current study, this research does highlight the evolving nature of library services along with the requisite skills expected of academic librarians.

More recently, [Saunders \(2020\)](#) surveyed 4,000 American Library Association graduates in the USA and identified 10 crucial knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) for academic librarianship. The results showed a strong emphasis on interpersonal and communication skills as well as certain domain knowledge. [McTavish and Robertson \(2020\)](#) surveyed Canadian academic librarians to create a competency framework for academic librarians in online environments. Results indicated a need for blended skills, which included traditional skills, such as communication, in addition to new technological and pedagogical competencies. Research by [Yadav \(2022\)](#) has corroborated similar research on the importance placed on soft skills, such as communication, by prospective employers for library and information science positions.

While library scholars in the Global North have published considerable literature on the topic, scholars in the Global South have also contributed to relevant research. For example, In their study, [Gosine-Boodoo and McNish \(2005\)](#) ascertained that effective communication skills were useful for diverse user communities, facilitating information to users and collaboration with colleagues. The need to improve library communication skills is crucial, as exemplified by [Okomanyi \(2016\)](#), whose study indicated that library professionals in Nigerian universities must acquire the relevant skills and expertise to be competent in the digital landscape. The study further elaborated that effective communication is a fundamental competency for librarians so as to be able to engage with patrons to understand their information needs and provide personalized assistance.

Other examples include a relatively recent study by [Afkhami \*et al.\* \(2019\)](#), which concluded that emails, applications, memos, and documentation serve a crucial role in workplace communication, and that it was essential for librarians to enhance these skills. [Aghaei \*et al.\* \(2021\)](#) have postulated that librarians in advanced countries, such as the USA, UK, Canada and France, maintain a higher level of awareness of communication skills. In their research, they conducted a cross-sectional study among 90 university librarians in the Azerbaijan province of Iran. The study revealed that communication skills, job satisfaction and motivation skills among library managers did not significantly impact librarians' motivation but significantly affected their job satisfaction. The study further noted the importance of effective communication skills in helping to underpin high-quality services to both faculty members and students.

Similarly, [Seşen et al. \(2021\)](#) have ascertained that in the evolving technological and information systems, the adaptability of communication skills has a contributing role; this echoes the findings of [Hussain and Jan \(2018\)](#). [Ekeruche and Echedom \(2023\)](#) have reported that communication skills encompass a range of proficiencies, such as effective written communication, which is essential for conveying ideas, instructions and information within organizations.

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## 2.2 *Barriers to effective communication skills*

Concurrently with highlighting the importance of competency in communications skills for academic librarians, researchers have also reported on potential barriers to achieving this goal. In his systematic review of both barriers and facilitators for evidence-based library and information practice (EBLIP), [Booth \(2011\)](#), for example, identified “communication difficulties” as a major theme. A need for improved communication skills was a major concern.

In their case study of a Nigerian university, [Owoeye and Dahunsi \(2014\)](#) reported that low levels of education, poor expression and faulty translations of messages were major barriers to effective communication among the library staff. For his part, [Anyim \(2018\)](#) conducted quantitative research in different university libraries in Nigeria to determine the interpersonal communication skills of students and librarians. The study collected data from a population of 346 librarians and students; the findings revealed that librarians and students face different barriers in interpersonal communication, such as inadequate listening skills among staff, incorrect framing of queries and feelings of inferiority when interacting with certain clients. The study further suggested a few strategies that would help librarians in their interpersonal communication skills, such as providing ongoing user education programs, enhancing listening skills and correctly framing reference queries.

[Zare-Farashbandi et al. \(2019\)](#) conducted a study in Ispahan, Iran, using a literature review of English and articles. A total of 46 articles were reviewed using Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed databases. The study elaborated on a number of barriers that librarians face while using communication skills, including insufficient human resources, the attitude of the medical team, lack of organizational support, lack of proper infrastructure and lack of understanding from the healthcare sector. The findings of this study revealed that librarians in medical colleges should learn three different skills: medicine-related skills, general skills (including effective oral and written communication skills) and professional librarianship skills.

More recently, [Lee et al. \(2020\)](#) reported on research conducted at the library of a top-ranking private university in Malaysia, in which they identified key barriers to maintaining the library’s relevance within the parent organization. Along with factors such as inadequacy of library services and facilities and the lack of creative and critical thinking among staff, the researchers noted that competency in soft skills, especially communication, needed to be addressed. [Tabassum et al. \(2020\)](#) have observed that LIS professionals in Bangladesh universities need to acquire a range of competencies, such as IT-based, managerial, generic and customer service-oriented skills. For this to be achieved, the existing curriculum at LIS schools should be updated because of the lack of a requirement for practical skills in management, research and presentation.

## 2.3 *Communication skills in the Pakistani academic library context*

Considerable research has been reported from Pakistan over the past decade on the challenges in trying to ensure that librarians, especially academic librarians, possess adequate levels of competency across a range of skills, but particularly communication. At

the same time, the research has usually discussed any identified barriers to achieving this objective.

In regard to LIS education, [Warraich and Ameen \(2011\)](#) conducted a study among LIS graduates of the University of the Punjab and found that the curriculum was up-to-date and well-designed; however, there was still a need for more employability skills among young graduates. The study also revealed that addressing the shortage of specialized faculty members and incorporating market-oriented skills were highly recommended strategies for enhancing young graduates' communication skills. Furthermore, technological challenges contributed to the lack of optimum proficiency in communication skills among LIS graduates; these included limited access to modern communication technologies, such as online databases, social media platforms and email, all of which hampered librarians' ability to stay connected with users and provide timely information services.

In a subsequent study, [Ameen \(2013\)](#) conducted job interviews with a panel of experts and observed that library professionals in Pakistan needed more communication skills to obtain jobs. She recommended that local schools in Pakistan advance the communication skills of their graduates through formal education by including relevant subjects. In a follow-up study, [Warraich et al. \(2019\)](#) critically analysed the challenges of recruiting LIS professionals in job interviews and found that LIS professionals in both public and private sector universities needed more communication skills, i.e. both oral and written.

[Farooq et al. \(2016\)](#), for their part, conducted a study of Pakistan's public and private sector universities. They found a significant gap between the current and required levels of competency among Pakistani university librarians. The study urged that the communication skills of librarians in Pakistan be improved. The study also indicated that librarians in Pakistan should acquire these skills through workshops, seminars and continuous learning programs. This approach aligns with the study by [Ahmed and Sheikh \(2021\)](#), who reported that librarians in advanced countries attend workshops and conferences to stay abreast of emerging trends.

Similarly, in their discussion of potential barriers, [Khan and Parveen \(2020\)](#) postulated that in a country such as Pakistan, where Urdu, English and other regional languages are prevalent, English is the third language of the people after the regional and Urdu languages, which creates hurdles for librarians in effective communication skills. Therefore, librarians should learn English, as it is commonly used in professional and academic contexts; lack of proficiency inherently leads to difficulties in conveying information clearly and accurately.

In a later study, [Malik and Ameen \(2021\)](#) interviewed 17 faculty members selected from 8 Pakistani LIS schools. They found that the job market is evolving, and librarians need to learn communication and employability skills in the changing market because the old curricula and traditional library services no longer exist in more developed countries. The study further underscored that various communication channels such as social media, outreach programs, newsletters and other initiatives should be launched to enable librarians to showcase the value and relevance of library services. In his study, [Khan \(2022\)](#) asserted that LIS faculty in Pakistan should incorporate validated skills in their lesson plans to empower their students' employability and communication skills. The study explored organizing training programs such as workshops and seminars to impart such skills; in addition, the study attempted to align LIS curricula with job market demands to decrease potential skill mismatches.

Similarly, in their study, [Ali and Richardson \(2018\)](#) conducted quantitative research among 77 librarians in 25 universities in Karachi. Their findings indicated that librarians needed more training in digital literacy and communication technologies; they lacked the necessary skills to leverage technology effectively. Therefore, they recommended that

librarians in Karachi should enhance their skills by joining training workshops and continuing education activities to overcome these barriers. Recent research by [Hussain and Rafiq \(2024\)](#) supports this important issue of inadequate skills, as does that of [Shah et al. \(2023\)](#), who have noted that in terms of information literacy skills, it is crucial for academic librarians to be competent in their presentation skills. To engage their audience effectively, librarians should communicate ideas clearly and use visual aids appropriately.

Two similar studies have examined the perceptions of university LIS professionals regarding their competencies in selected soft skills. In their study of academic librarians, [Ali et al. \(2023, p. 12\)](#) reported that the results showed that 257 “academic librarians in Pakistan hold a strong perception of their high proficiency in diverse interpersonal competencies, encompassing collaboration, communication, customer service, ethics and values, leadership, and learning and innovation”. [Ahmad et al. \(2021\)](#), on the other hand, appeared to survey a slightly broader population, i.e. university information professionals, although the demographics showed that all 372 respondents were librarians, albeit at varying classification levels. Their findings revealed that:

[...] the majority of the information professionals perceived themselves “moderately competent” in soft skills. Only 14.8% information professionals considered themselves “competent”. The qualitative findings revealed that university library and information professionals generally faced several barriers in the development of their soft skills that included “lack of administrative support”, “lack of personal commitment”, “lack of financial support by the parent organizations”, and so many others, which might have affected their current levels of soft skills.

The current study has endeavoured to update current understanding of the awareness of communication skills among Pakistani academic librarians. It is hoped that, in particular, the investigation of barriers to adopting and utilizing these skills will assist relevant stakeholders, e.g. library management, LIS scholars and practitioners, and policymakers, to develop appropriate strategies to address this.

### 3. Objectives of the study

The primary objectives of this study are as follows:

- to measure the current levels of awareness of communication skills among academic librarians in degree-awarding institutions of Pakistan;
- to identify barriers that academic libraries, with the support of organizational stakeholders, could target to enhance adoption and/or improvement of these skills; and
- to identify potential advantages and opportunities associated with academic librarians possessing strong communication skills in degree-awarding institutions in Pakistan.

#### *Research questions*

The following research questions (RQs) have been designed based on the literature review.

- RQ1. What is the contemporary assessment of academic librarians’ awareness regarding communication skills in degree-awarding institutions in Pakistan?
- RQ2. What impediments and challenges do academic librarians encounter concerning communication skills in degree-awarding institutions in Pakistan?

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RQ3. What are the potential advantages and opportunities associated with academic librarians possessing strong communication skills in degree-awarding institutions in Pakistan?

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#### 4. Research methodology

A quantitative research design using a web-based survey method was conducted to address the objectives of the study. Quantitative surveys help in gathering a large amount of data in a short time and present a numeric or quantitative description of a population's attitudes (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Survey design is considered appropriate in its use of a questionnaire as a data collection instrument for target groups in diverse communities. The use of Web-based surveys offers low cost, easy access, greater anonymity and convenience (Kumar *et al.*, 2013; Vehovar and Manfreda, 2017).

The present study used a questionnaire as the data collection tool for academic librarians employed in degree-awarding institutions in Pakistan. These institutions include both universities and official Degree Awarding Institutions (DAI) which have been accredited by the Higher Education Commission, Pakistan (HEC). A questionnaire, based on analysis of relevant research studies, was designed and discussed with experts in the field before being administered; this was done to ensure content validation. After reviewing and incorporating relevant feedback, the questionnaire was divided into two parts, i.e. sections A and B.

Whereas section A elicited responses about the personal data of respondents, section B provided questions and sub-questions for three different objectives: Pakistani academic librarians' levels of awareness of communication skills, and their thoughts regarding associated barriers and benefits. Two different five-point Likert scales were used to gauge their perceptions: Not at all aware (1) to Extremely Aware (5) (awareness of communication skills), and Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) (barriers; benefits).

The questionnaire was developed using Google Forms and an online tool for data collection. The questionnaire link was shared with a sample population of  $n = 400$  academic librarians, using a simple random sample approach. Three main sources were used to compile a comprehensive list of targeted academic librarians. These included the websites of all HEC-recognized universities and degree awarding institutions. Second, a local directory, *Sada-e-Librarian Directory of Pakistani Professionals* (Shakoori and Altaf, 2017) was consulted as was *Who's Who in Librarianship in Pakistan* (Sabzwari and Usmani, 1969). From these sources, valid email and contact numbers were found for 400 librarians.

The best strategy for achieving a representative sample is to use random methods of sampling (Polit and Beck, 2010); the validity of this technique is based upon the use of an unbiased sample (Drott, 1969). More specifically, according to Rahi (2017, p. 4), "simple random sampling is the most favorable and supportive technique in quantitative studies where individuals get equal opportunities to participate in the study".

The questionnaire was shared through multiple channels, including social media platforms such as Facebook Messenger and LinkedIn; personal email addresses of librarians acquired from their respective university web pages and/or professional email; and WhatsApp groups. The survey remained open from 5 October 2023, to 8 December 2023. After repeated follow-up calls, 365 valid questionnaires were received from a total of 372 responses which gave a response rate of 91.3%. This is similar to the response rate (92.4%) achieved by Ali *et al.* (2023) in their random sample survey of a similar cohort in regard to interpersonal competencies. The data was coded in Microsoft Excel and exported to SPSS v. 26 for analysis. Descriptive statistics, i.e. mean and standard deviations, were used to summarize and describe categorical variables and then presented in the corresponding tables.



4.1 Methodological limitations

While the sample is representative of academic librarians, it is important to acknowledge potential limitations related to the survey distribution method. Because the scale was developed specifically for academic librarians in Pakistan’s universities and DAIs, there may be a limited ability to generalize the results to librarians in other organizations and institutions within the country. Bias may have resulted from flawed self-assessment in that survey respondents tend to overestimate their levels of competency (Dunning *et al.*, 2004). Given the reports on the amount of misinformation promulgated on social media platforms, e.g. WhatsApp (Reis *et al.*, 2020), there may be additional biases among respondents contacted via these channels which would be unknown to the researcher.

5. Findings

5.1 Demographic

Table 1 indicates the demographic information of participants. The result shows that the total number of participants in this study was 365; of these, 227 (62.2%) were men, while 138

Table 1. Demographic information of respondents

Category	Frequency	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	227	62.2
Female	138	37.8
<i>Age group</i>		
Up to 30 years	84	23.0
31–40 years	158	43.3
41–50 years	82	22.5
> 50 years	41	11.2
<i>Organization type</i>		
Public sector	306	83.8
Private sector	59	16.2
<i>Qualification</i>		
BSLIS/IM	76	20.8
MLIS/MIM	185	50.7
MS/MPhil	94	25.8
PhD	10	2.7
<i>Designation</i>		
Chief librarian	74	20.3
Librarian	73	20.0
Assistant librarian	73	20.0
Library assistant	73	20.0
Other	72	19.7
<i>Professional experience in years</i>		
1–5 years	84	23.0
6–10 years	115	31.5
11–15 years	112	30.7
16–20 years	27	7.4
More than 20 years	27	7.4

Source: Authors’ own work



(37.8%) were women. In terms of participants' age, the majority of them ( $n = 158$ ; 43.3%) belong to 31–40 years, followed by up to 30 years with 84 (23.0%) and 41–50 years with 82 (22.5%). There were only 41 (11.2%) participants with more than 50 years of library experience. Analysis of the relevant sectors for the DAIs represented in the survey revealed that 306 (83.8%) participants worked in the public sector and 59 (16.2%) were in the private sector.

The qualification portion indicates that the majority of the respondents ( $n = 185$ ; 50.7%) possess an MLIS/MIM (Master of Library and Information Science/Information Management), followed by MS/MPhil (Master of Science/Master of Philosophy) 94 (25.8%). Participants with a BSLIS/IM (Bachelor of Science in Library and Information Science/Information Management) totalled 76 (20.8%). Only 10 (2.7%) participants hold a PhD degree in Library and Information Science, which is not unexpected, given the statistics reported by [Zareef et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Samdani and Bhatti \(2011\)](#).

Five different library cadre participated in this survey. Results were quite evenly distributed among them: Chief Librarian ( $n = 74$ ; 20.3%), followed by Librarian ( $n = 73$ ; 20.0%), with Assistant Librarian and Library Assistant recording equal results ( $n = 73$ ; 20.0%). The "Other" sub-category includes participants ( $n = 72$ ; 19.7%) with different designations, e.g. library director and information curator.

Respondents' experience in librarianship ranged from 84 (23.0%) responses from early career librarians, i.e. having 5 or less years, to 115 (31.5%) responses from those with increasing career experience, i.e. Between 6 and 10 years. This was followed by 112 (30.7%) responses from librarians with a middle level of experience, i.e. 11–15 years; 27 (7.4%) responses were received from those with senior experience, i.e. from 16 to 20 years, and lastly 27 (7.4%) responses were also received from those at the most senior level, i.e. with more than 20 years of experience.

## 5.2 Awareness of communication skills

[Table 2](#) indicates the descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) related to various communication skills, rated by the respondents as per their level of awareness; a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Not at all aware) to 5 (Extremely aware), was used to record their responses.

The mean values indicate a consistent pattern of moderate to high awareness of the major competencies which comprise library communication skills. Respondents reported a mean score of 3.45 for written communication, presentation skills and conflict resolution, suggesting a substantial awareness. Similarly, the mean scores of 3.42 (non-verbal communication; adaptability), 3.40 (assertiveness), 3.39 (interpersonal communication; cross-cultural communication; feedback skills; information literacy communication) and 3.38 (listening; negotiation; team communication) indicate a notable level of awareness. Awareness of other competencies is also recognized, with mean ratings ranging from 3.36 (digital communication) to 3.35 (emotional intelligence) to 3.28 (verbal communication). The "Valid N (listwise)" shows that 362 cases were valid, i.e. had non-missing values. It Indicates that some respondents have provided ratings for only some constructs, thus leading to lower counts in some cases.

The standard deviations (SD), which range from 1.34–1.40, indicate a moderate level of variability in responses, suggesting that while there is a general trend of awareness, actual individual awareness may vary slightly. Overall, the findings underscore a consistent and moderate to high level of awareness of basic library communication skills by this cohort.

**Table 2.** Awareness of library communication skills

Library communication skills	N	Mean	SD
Written communication: (emails, applications, memos, documentation)	365	3.45	1.39
Presentation skills: (deliver information to others)	364	3.45	1.37
Conflict resolution: (managing and resolving conflicts constructively)	365	3.45	1.34
Non-verbal communication: (body, gestures, facial expression)	365	3.42	1.38
Adaptability: (communication style to suit different situations, audiences or environments)	365	3.42	1.35
Assertiveness: (expressing feelings confidently and respectfully)	364	3.40	1.39
Interpersonal communication: (maintaining relationships with others: (verbal and non-verbal))	365	3.39	1.37
Cross-Cultural communication:(communicating with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds)	365	3.39	1.36
Feedback skills: (providing and receiving constructive feedback)	365	3.39	1.36
Information literacy communication: (communicating complex information concepts to others)	365	3.39	1.35
Listening skills: (receiving and interpreting information from others)	364	3.38	1.36
Negotiation skills: (active listening, persuasion and finding common ground)	365	3.38	1.36
Team communication: (includes sharing ideas, providing feedback and coordinating efforts)	365	3.38	1.37
Empathy: (understanding and sharing the feelings of others)	365	3.36	1.38
Digital communication: (proficiency in using digital platforms, including email, social media and online collaboration tools)	365	3.36	1.36
Emotional intelligence: (understanding and managing one's own emotions and recognizing and responding to the emotions of others)	365	3.35	1.37
Verbal communication: (speaking words)	365	3.28	1.40
Valid N (listwise)	362		

**Notes:** Scale: 1 = not at all aware; 2 = slightly aware; 3 = somewhat aware; 4 = moderately aware; 5 = extremely aware

**Source:** Authors' own work

5.3 Barriers

Table 3 provides an insight into perceived barriers faced by librarians in Pakistan and the level of agreement regarding these challenges.

A total of 12 examples were presented to respondents to gauge their opinions. Most of the librarians perceived limited training opportunities for LIS professionals in Pakistan as the main hurdle, with Mean = 3.46. This was followed closely by technological barriers with Mean = 3.42, thus indicating substantial agreement among respondents as to the top challenges.

Similarly, there was noticeable agreement as to the next tier of barriers, with mean ratings ranging from 3.38 (workload pressures; inadequate communication policies) to 3.37 (limited interdisciplinary collaboration; lack of recognition; poor curricula in LIS schools) to 3.36 (hierarchy and organizational culture; resource constraints; insufficient feedback mechanisms) to 3.35 (resistance to change). Language and cultural barriers were ranked least challenging with Mean = 3.32.

The standard deviations (SD), which range from 1.27 to 1.32, indicate a moderate level of variability in responses. As in the previous table, overall, the findings underscore a consistent and moderate to high level of agreement by this cohort on the principal barriers to developing effective communication skills. Moreover, Table 3 identifies obstacles which relevant organizational stakeholders could target.

**Table 3.** Barriers to library communication skills

Barriers	N	Mean	SD
Limited training opportunities for LIS professionals	364	3.46	1.30
Technological barriers	365	3.42	1.31
Workload pressures	365	3.38	1.27
Inadequate communication policies	365	3.38	1.30
Limited interdisciplinary collaboration	364	3.37	1.30
Lack of recognition	365	3.37	1.30
Poor curricula in LIS schools	364	3.37	1.30
Hierarchy and organizational culture	365	3.36	1.31
Resource constraints	365	3.36	1.31
Insufficient feedback mechanisms	364	3.36	1.32
Resistance to change	365	3.35	1.29
Language and cultural barriers	365	3.32	1.30
Valid N (listwise)	361		

**Notes:** Scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree

**Source:** Authors' own work

#### 5.4 Benefits of communication skills

Table 4 highlights the importance of strong communication skills in an organization; a total of 10 statements were put forth to library professionals to assess their agreement and disagreement on each one. A five-point Likert scale was used to gauge their opinions regarding the role of communication skills and their potential benefits in various organizations.

**Table 4.** Benefits of library communication skills

Benefits	N	Mean	SD
Strong communication skills help librarians navigate digital platforms	362	3.46	1.30
Strong interpersonal and communication skills are critical for building positive relationships with patrons	364	3.44	1.29
Strong communication skills are important for remote work and virtual services in libraries	364	3.44	1.32
Strong communication skills help librarians effectively promote information literacy	364	3.43	1.33
Communication skills are crucial for librarians working in collaborative and interdisciplinary environments	365	3.41	1.31
Effective communication skills facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences among librarians	364	3.41	1.33
Effective communication is key for community outreach initiatives	364	3.40	1.31
Librarians need strong communication skills to convey data literacy and data-driven insights to various stakeholders	364	3.40	1.32
Strong communication skills in librarians help them to convey visions, goals, and strategies to their teams and stakeholders	364	3.40	1.31
Strong communication skills play a crucial role in helping librarians to advocate for library funding and resources	364	3.40	1.32
Valid N (listwise)	357		

**Notes:** Scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree

**Source:** Authors' own work

Most of the librarians identified navigating digital platforms as the main benefit, with Mean = 3.46. This was followed closely by building meaningful relationships with patrons and importance in remote work and virtual services, both with Mean = 3.44, thus indicating substantial agreement among respondents as to the primary benefits.

There was measurable agreement as to the next tier of perceived benefits, with mean ratings ranging from 3.43 (promote information literacy) to 3.41 (work in collaborative and interdisciplinary environments; exchange knowledge and experience) to 3.40 (community outreach initiatives; convey data literacy and data-driven insights; convey visions, goals and strategies; advocate for library funding and resources).

The standard deviations (SD), which range from 1.29 to 1.33, indicate a moderate level of variability in responses. Overall, the findings underscore a consistent and moderate to high level of agreement by this cohort on the principal benefits of possessing strong communication skills. In addition, Table 4 shows that communication skills are a crucial aspect of librarianship, and their importance cannot be overstated.

## 6. Discussion

The study aimed to measure the current levels of awareness of communication skills among librarians in universities and degree-awarding institutions of Pakistan and to identify any existing barriers. Research objectives helped inform the design of a quantitative survey instrument, which used a questionnaire. Regarding the first research objective, the findings revealed a consistent and moderate to high level of awareness of basic library communication skills by this cohort. These results may counter the assertion by [Aghaei et al. \(2021\)](#) that librarians in developed countries maintain a higher level of awareness regarding communication skills. While further comparative research would need to be undertaken to address this, it is important to not confuse awareness of a skill with competency in its application.

The second objective of the current study was to identify barriers to effective communication skills among academic librarians in Pakistan. The findings ranked limited training opportunities for LIS professionals in Pakistan and technological barriers as the top challenges. Their importance is consistent with both international studies ([Booth, 2011](#); [Lee et al., 2020](#); [Tabassum et al., 2020](#)) and Pakistani research ([Ahmad et al., 2021](#); [Ali and Richardson, 2018](#); [Farooq et al., 2016](#); [Hussain, 2020](#); [Hussain and Rafiq, 2024](#)).

The next tier of barriers included workload pressures and inadequate communication policies; these were followed by limited interdisciplinary collaboration, lack of recognition and poor curricula in LIS schools. Hierarchy and organizational culture, resource constraints and insufficient feedback mechanisms comprised the fourth tier, followed by resistance to change. Language and cultural barriers were ranked least challenging. This latter result does not support the assertion by [Khan and Parveen \(2020\)](#) that English being the third language of the Pakistani people after the regional and Urdu languages creates hurdles for librarians in effective communication skills.

However, the current study does corroborate the research by [Tabassum et al. \(2020\)](#) regarding the need for improved LIS curricula in Bangladesh. The current findings are further reinforced by [Ameen \(2013\)](#), who postulated that the cause of poor communication skills among librarians was the lack of appropriate LIS curricula, workshops, and continuous learning programs. More recently, studies by [Malik and Ameen \(2021\)](#), [Khan \(2022\)](#) have reiterated these same points. Importantly, the level of agreement in the current study findings regarding the inability of current curricula in Pakistani LIS schools to meet the needs of graduates entering the workforce aligns with previous research results over the past decade.

This suggests a lack of concerted focus on this challenge and underlines the need to prioritize the development of appropriate solutions.

The third objective of the current study was to identify potential advantages and opportunities associated with academic librarians possessing strong communication skills. Overall, the findings underscored a consistent and moderate to high level of agreement by this cohort on the principal benefits of possessing strong communication skills. Most of the respondents identified navigating digital platforms as the main benefit, followed closely by building meaningful relationships with patrons and importance in remote work and virtual services. Other perceived benefits included promoting information literacy, working in collaborative and interdisciplinary environments and exchanging knowledge and experience.

These results from the present study align with those from earlier research studies, particularly regarding the evolving landscape of library services. For example, [Gosine-Boodoo and McNish \(2005\)](#) ascertained that effective communication skills were useful for diverse user communities, facilitating information to users, and collaboration with colleagues. Additionally, [Okomanyi \(2016\)](#) reported that librarians should acquire skills relevant to the digital landscape, because of its importance in providing a quality service. Improving these skills will connect librarians with patrons and engage them in personalized assistance.

A study by [Hussain \(2020\)](#) has further emphasized the use of IT and modern technologies, such as social networking, to meet the market demands of patrons. The current findings reinforce the assertion by [Malik and Ameen \(2021\)](#) that various communication channels such as social media, outreach programs, newsletters and other initiatives should be launched to enable librarians to showcase the value and relevance of library services. The current research also corroborates the study of [Ekeruche and Echedom \(2023\)](#), who reported that communication skills are useful for librarians, particularly for conveying ideas and information within an organization.

In considering the potential implications of the current research, one needs to look at the broadest possible level of academic librarianship, in which communication skills underpin the extent to which librarians can actively participate in supporting learning, teaching, and research. The concept of academic librarians as “active participants” is not new, whether it is [West et al. \(2018\)](#) discussing librarians as “open education leaders” or [Hackman et al. \(2020\)](#) promoting them as facilitators in active learning or [Hoffmann et al. \(2017\)](#) reporting on the success of academic librarians as researchers.

At a more fundamental level, the cohort reported on in the current study could focus on applying improved communication skills to enhancing important library outcomes. In the evolving landscape of library services and information access, effective communication skills contribute significantly to strategic library objectives. For example, given the increased emphasis on information literacy, especially AI literacy ([Heck et al., 2021](#)), librarians are at risk of not being able to effectively serve their users if they do not possess the requisite supporting competencies. Likewise, [Nzomo and Fehrmann \(2020, p. 57\)](#) have suggested that “advocacy work is increasingly becoming an important component of the role that libraries and LIS professionals play in society”. Their research reports on the integral role that IL skills, which include communication, play in advocacy work.

Improved communication skills also have the potential to favourably impact upon employability prospects among current Pakistani academic librarians; these have generally been described as poor ([Malik and Ameen, 2021](#)). According to their research, librarians need to acquire employability skills, which include communication, in a rapidly changing job market. The increased importance for library employees of soft skills such as communication is further supported by recent international research (Yadav; 2022;

Decker, 2020). Furthermore, in his research, Nguyen (2024) has linked digital literacy, as mentioned above, to enhanced employability; although the study is focused on university students, the same principles would apply to current LIS employees.

The findings of the current study highlight the importance of both formal and informal library training. As discussed previously, Ameen (2013) identified one cause of poor communication skills among Pakistani librarians as the lack of appropriate curricula within LIS schools. While acknowledging the need for LIS departments to prioritize competing demands (topics), the authors would suggest that, in the ensuing decade, communication skills have continued to grow even more in importance. Therefore, there is an opportunity to review LIS curricula to ensure optimum integration of these skills. This might take the form of more practical-based learning so as to reinforce skills development. At the same time, academic librarians who have a leadership role within any of the major Pakistani library associations could explore the potential for offering relevant skills-based workshops. Additionally, the findings may be useful to the Pakistan Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training in implementing curriculum advancement more broadly.

## 7. Recommendations

The findings of this study contribute to knowledge of the topic not only specifically in Pakistan but also the Global South more broadly. The data suggests areas where academic librarians may require more training or support to enhance their competencies in communication skills. It is recommended that they work with relevant stakeholders to identify strategies to enhance their personal and interpersonal communication skills. This could take the form of workshops, seminars and training programs.

## 8. Conclusion

The present study contributes significant results to understanding Pakistani academic librarians' current levels of awareness of communication skills as well as their perceptions regarding associated barriers and benefits. As such, it underscores the critical role of effective communication in librarianship. The study also offers suggested solutions to enhancing communication skills, e.g. through continuous learning, updated LIS curricula and training programs. It is intended to increase an understanding of communication knowledge and skills requirements to inform future education and training provided by employers, trainers and educators. The study may be useful to both academia and the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training in implementing curriculum advancement. Finally, this study could serve as a foundation for any future research and policy frameworks to enhance employability and communication skills among librarians in Pakistan.

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