

Soft Skill Performance of Librarians' Working in Institutions of Higher Education in Western Vidarbha of Maharashtra State in India

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Abstract: Library is a service oriented institution. Therefore, as a head of library, beside hard skill, Librarian must have a soft skill to provide quality services to its stakeholders and through it to give better performance. This article is a result of study conducted in the institutions of higher education in Western Vidarbha of Maharashtra state in India to determine attributes of soft skills required by the Librarians to manage Libraries effectively and smoothly and also to examine the attributes of the soft skills in Librarians. The soft skill performance was studied in view of stakeholders such as Principal, Teachers and Students. Questionnaires were distributed in the institutions located in five districts which come under Western Vidarbha and affiliated to Sant Gadge Baba Amravati University. From each institute 5 teachers and 10 students were identified for the study and were asked to rate soft skill performance of Librarian of their respective institute. The results showed that there is no significant difference in soft skill performance of Librarians working in Rural and Urban area in Western Vidarbha region. Also the study concluded with a say that there is positive correlation between the soft skill performance of Librarians according to stakeholders and soft skills expectation of all the stakeholders from librarian are same. On the basis of the result come out from this study, at the end, the authors have given some suggestions to improve the soft skill performance of Librarians working in higher education.

Keywords: Communication Skills, India, Leadership Skills, Librarian's Skills, Soft Skills, Western Vidarbha

1. Introduction

Soft skills are most spoken about these days. There was a time when people thought that soft skill cannot be learnt or imbibed. But today it has been included in all the fields in the curriculum itself. More often communication skills are included in curriculum in name of soft skills. But soft skill has deeper meaning. It goes beyond communication skills. It is the most inherited skill which can transform our personality by training.

Library is a service oriented institution where services are offered to the users by Librarians. Hence the performance of Librarians affects the overall performance of Library. Basic skills which affect the performance level of Librarians are

classified as hard skills and soft skills. The present study concentrates exclusively on soft skill performance of Librarians and efforts are taken to measure the soft skill performance of Librarians at their work place. For extending the proper and effective services to his/her user, Librarians have to manage other things of the library such as collection development, housekeeping jobs and administration also. There are numerous studies conducted on soft skill in all the domains. But the literature lacks proper nomenclature and classification of soft skills. Many studies are conducted and many skills/attributes are placed under different umbrella.

Moita [1] emphasized on importance of communication skills for personality development in library profession. Listening skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills,

public relations, customer service, leadership skills and teamwork, negotiation skills, writing skills, project management skills, presentation skills and teaching skills are the soft skills required to become a successful library professional. Whitehurst [2] linked soft skills to the study of personality traits. The author discussed scenario of soft skills as far as Schools are considered. Important outcome of the study was that there are opportunities to enhance soft skills while teaching core academic subjects as far as school students are concerned. Prabhu, Srinivasaragavan, & Maltesh [3] mentioned competencies of contemporary librarian as a) Acceptance of change, b) Knowledge of user interaction with knowledge resources, c) Managerial and leadership skills, d) Library and information service skills, e) Possess excellent communication skills, f) Teaching and presentation skills, g) Commitment to life-long learning, h) Interpersonal relations skills, i) Marketing and promotion skills, j) Time management skills, and k) Evaluation and assessment skills. Technical skills and core library science skills or knowledge cannot be given back step but these above mentioned skills help to channelize these competencies effectively. Weber & others [4] conducted a case study examining a five factor model of soft skills for the hospitality industry. Interestingly, many companies are not often concerned with the technical skills and abilities of their entry-level managers because they will train them according to their company standards. These companies want their future managers to have the soft skills needed to be successful within the environment of their organization and will select from applicants with those soft skills. Therefore this case focuses on the development of a model of soft skills for hospitality leaders, application of the model into human resources within the hospitality industry and application of the model for each student in preparation for future industry success. Ginting [5] took efforts to report development, validity and reliability of a soft skills questionnaire in a university in Indonesia. Fifteen dimensions of soft skills which were set in 4 factors were operationalized into 150 items of a questionnaire which finally contain 133 items. The results indicate that the questionnaire is a reliable and valid instrument to assess soft skill among the university students. The authors argue that this is the first study which establishes the validity and reliability of the soft skill questionnaire in Indonesia among students. The findings can surely minimize the likelihood of poor intervention decision or erroneous research concerning soft skills development and measurement in Indonesia. CASEL [6] identifies five core competencies: soft awareness, social awareness, soft management, responsible decision making and relationship skill. Goldstein [7] attempted to identify the skill, knowledge and competencies of data librarianship working in the research institutions in North America. However, Shakeel [8] studied the core competencies for librarians working in special libraries of the Punjab Province in Pakistan. Lucas [9] studied the interpersonal relationship. He also discussed Emotional Intelligence used in library. While studying the soft skill among the information professionals working in 33 universities of Pakistan Ahmad [10] observed that majority

of the information professionals perceived themselves "moderately competent" in soft skill.

2. Objectives

- 1) To determine and classify the attributes of soft skills required by the Librarians to manage Libraries effectively and smoothly.
- 2) To examine the attributes of the soft skills in Librarians working in the academic institutions imparting higher education from Western Vidarbha in Maharashtra state of India.

3. Methodology

The present study focuses on identifying attributes of soft skills required for Librarians, grouping these attributes in clusters, and thereby assessing the soft skill performance of Librarians.

For achieving first objective literature search was conducted to identify the attributes of soft skills required by the Librarians working in the field of higher education from Western Vidarbha region. Total 111 attributes were identified. Based on similarities of attributes these attributes are grouped into seven clusters. Out of these seven clusters first six clusters are considered as positive skills which librarian must acquire or develop, while attributes in seventh cluster (Counterproductive skills) are negative skills which if present in librarian must be unlearned. Hence if the score is high in cluster seven, it displays high level of negative skills and librarian needs to take steps to get rid of these negative skills which can hamper performance at library.

To achieve second objective, survey as well as interview method was adopted for data collection. Three well-structured questionnaire were designed to collect data from the stakeholders of the Library - Principals, Teachers and Students of the institutions to acquire information about the soft skill performance of Librarian at workplace.

Keeping in mind the second objective of the study three separate questionnaires were designed for stakeholders with different no. of questions/attributes for collecting data. Questionnaire for Principals contained total 111 questions comprising of 350 marks, while questionnaire for faculty consisted of 80 questions with 250 marks and finally questionnaire for students consisted of 68 questions with 200 marks on soft skill attributes. Respondents were asked to rate Librarians on 5 point Likert Scale where 1 stands for "does not meet standard at all or poor performance", 2 stands for "partially meets standards/fair performance", 3 stands for "meets standard/average performance", 4 stands for exceeds standard/good performance" and 5 stands for "greatly exceed standard/excellent performance". Respondents needed to put tick (✓) in the boxes provided.

Questions in each questionnaire were arranged in descending order of marks allotted (such as 5, 3, and 2) based on the importance of attributes. For example if question carries 5 marks it was divided into 5 equal parts like 0 for

poor option, 1.25 for fair option, 2.5 for average option and 3.75 for good option and 5 for excellent option. In the same way if question carries 3 marks then 0 marks for poor option, 0.75 marks for fair, 1.5 average option, 2.25 for good option and 3 for excellent option. And if question carries 2 marks then 0 marks for poor option, 0.5 mark for fair option, 1 mark for average option, 1.5 mark for good option and 3 mark for excellent option. Like this scores were calculated for each response given by respondents. It was arranged in excel sheet for final calculations and thereafter percentages were calculated. Further data was represented and analyzed in four parts. First part was Cluster wise analysis of score given by stakeholders, secondly, Stakeholder wise analysis of total soft skill score given to Librarians, thirdly Stakeholder wise overall analysis of soft skill of Librarians and finally Area wise (Urban/Rural) analysis of soft skill of performance of Librarians. Data was presented in excel sheets and analyzed according to the Librarian's code.

In this study it is expected that soft skills would not be present hundred percent in every Librarian. According to UGC Regulations 2010 [11], under Academic Performance Indicators (API) in Category I, it is clearly mentioned that out of 125, Librarian must score minimum 75 marks (60%) in order to become eligible to be promoted under CAS in higher scale/grade. Similarly, Kherde [12] also proposed that in order to get promoted to next higher category under CAS Librarian's score must be at least 60%. Until and unless this score is achieved Librarian must not be promoted to next higher category. With this study and UGC Regulation 2010 at backdrop this study considered that optimum percentage say 60% is agreeable level of soft skill attribute a Librarian must possess. Considering the concept the formulated hypotheses are tested with appropriate statistical tests.

3.1. Scope

The present study was restricted to only those institutions which are located in Western Vidarbha of Maharashtra state in India and affiliated to Sant Gadge Baba Amravati University, Amravati. The University covers five districts in Western Vidarbha namely Amravati, Akola, Buldhana, Yavatmal, and Washim. There are total 383 institutions affiliated to the University out of which 120 belongs to Amravati district, 61 belongs to Akola, 85 belongs to Buldhana, 82 belongs to Yavatmal district and 35 belongs to Washim district. There are 49 aided institutions in Amravati District out of which in 41 institutions approved Librarians are working, in Akola District 24 aided institutions with 20 approved librarians are reported, Buldhana district have 26 aided institutions with 18 approved Librarians, in Yavatmal District 29 aided institutions with 19 approved Librarians are present and finally in Washim district 16 aided institutions are present with 13 institutions are having approved Librarians. It means, in Western Vidarbha total 144 aided institutions are imparting higher education and out of which total 111 institutions are having approved Librarians. Accordingly, questionnaires were distributed to all 111 institutions where approved Librarians are working. Out of it,

stakeholders of 98 institutions were responded.

3.2. Hypothesis

Following hypotheses are framed for the study

- 1) H_0 : All the stakeholders have same degree of evaluation with respect to soft skill performance.
- 2) H_0 : There is no significance difference in soft skill performance of Librarians working in Rural and Urban area in Western Vidarbha region of Maharashtra state in India.

3.3. Analysis

The objective wise analysis of data and observations are given below:

Literature is reviewed scrupulously for the soft skills studies undertaken in Library Science field to fulfill the very first objective. Being a service oriented enterprise professional working in the library requires soft skills. Keeping in mind that most of the services in the library are people oriented whether it is interacting with colleagues or users, or providing services to users, soft skills play a major role in affecting the quality of services. In the present study it is assumed that Librarians possess hard skills (Technical skills) required to run the library effectively and smoothly and hence the focus of this study is only on soft skills at their workplace that i.e. Library. Bringing down all the attributes under one umbrella is a job of psychologists. Therefore studies of Boyatzis; [13] Stevens and Campion; [14] and Kantrowitz [15] were referred and the mentioned attributes are considered as base of the study. 111 attributes of Soft skills for Library professionals are identified through literature review.

Secondly, the above identified 111 attributes of soft skills are classified in following seven clusters:

- a) Communication/Persuasion Skills
- b) Interpersonal Skills
- c) Leadership/Organization Skills
- d) Performance management skills
- e) Self-management Skill
- f) Political/Cultural Skills
- g) Counterproductive Skill

To fulfill the second objective questions for above mentioned list of attributes were framed and included in the questionnaire. Questionnaires were distributed, and the responses were noted. The data was maintained in excel sheets and following observations are made after analyzing the data and displayed.

A. Cluster wise analysis of Soft skill performance of Librarians as given by stakeholders

Cluster wise score obtained by Librarians is given in table 1. From the table the cluster wise analysis is given below.

a. Score obtained by Librarians in Cluster I- Communication/Persuasion Skills:

Analysis of the score obtained by Librarians in Communication/Persuasion Skills shows that out of 98 Librarians 12 Librarians scored less than 41% in

Communication/Persuasion Skills, 59 Librarians obtained in between 41 to 61%, 24 Librarians scored between 61 to 81% and only 3 Librarians scored 81 and above 81% of score in Communication/Persuasion skills.

b. Score obtained by Librarians in Cluster II- Interpersonal Skills:

Analysis of the score obtained by Librarians in Cluster II- Interpersonal skills indicate that out of 98 Librarians 8 Librarians scored less than 41% in Interpersonal Skills, 65 Librarians obtained 41 to 60%, 20 Librarians scored between 61 to 80% and only 5 Librarians scored 81 and above 81% marks in Interpersonal Skills.

c. Score obtained by Librarians in Cluster III- Leadership/Organization Skills:

Analysis of the score obtained by Librarians in Cluster III- Leadership/Organization Skills indicates that out of 98 Librarians 15 Librarians scored less than 41%, 59 Librarians obtained 41 to 60%, 21 Librarians scored between 61 to 80% and only 3 Librarians scored above 81%.

d. Score obtained by Librarians in Cluster IV-Performance Management Skills:

Analysis of the score obtained by Librarians in Cluster IV- Performance Management Skills indicate that out of 98 Librarians 10 Librarians scored less than 41% in Performance Management Skills, 63 Librarians obtained 41 to 60%, 21 Librarians scored between 61 to 81% and only 4 Librarians scored above 81% in Performance Management Skills.

e. Score obtained by Librarians in Cluster V- Self

Management Skills:

Analysis of the score obtained by Librarians in Cluster V- Self Management Skills indicate that out of 98 Librarians 14 Librarians scored less than 41% in Self-Management Skills, 56 Librarians obtained 41% to 61%, 24 Librarians scored between 61 to 81% and only 4 Librarians scored above 81% in Self-Management Skills.

f. Score obtained by Librarians in Cluster VI- Political/Cultural Skill:

Analysis of the score obtained by Librarians in Cluster VI- Political/Cultural Skill indicates that out of 98 Librarians 3 Librarians scored less than 41% in Performance Management Skills, 72 Librarians scored in the range of 41% to 61%, 17 Librarians scored between 61 to 81% and only 6 Librarians scored above 81% in Political/Cultural Skills.

g. Score obtained by Librarians in Cluster VII- Counterproductive Skills

Analysis of the score obtained by Librarians in Cluster VII-Counterproductive Skills indicate that out of 98 Librarians 74 Librarians scored less than 41%, which is a good sign. While 21 Librarians obtained in between 41 to 61%, 3 Librarians scored between 61 to 81% and none of the Librarian scored above 81% marks in Counterproductive Skills which is positive. Hence it is clear from table 1 that negative skills are present to very less extent in Librarians. Most of the Librarians (74) scored less than 41% in counterproductive skills which means absence of negative skills in most of Library Professionals.

Table 1. Cluster wise score obtained by Librarians as given by stakeholders.

Sr. No.	Clusters	No. of Librarians obtained the score in percentage				Total
		Less than 41%	41% to 61%	61% to 81%	81% and above 81%	
1	Communication/Persuasion Skills	12	59	24	3	98
2	Interpersonal Skills	8	65	20	5	98
3	Leadership/Organization Skills	15	59	21	3	98
4	Performance Management Skills	10	63	21	4	98
5	Self Management Skills	14	56	24	4	98
6	Political/Cultural Skill	3	72	17	6	98
7	Counterproductive Skills	74	21	3	--	98

B. Overall Score obtained by Librarians in Cluster I-VI and Cluster VII

a) Scores obtained by Librarians as given by Principals:

From table 2, soft skill performance score of Librarians in percentage given by Principals shows that according to Principals 15 Librarians scored less than 41% in Clusters I to VI of Soft Skill. While 61 Librarians scored in between 41% to 61%, 14 Librarians scored between 61 to 81% and only 8 Librarians scored above 81% in soft skill Cluster I to VI. However, according to Principal's opinion 64 librarians scored below 41% in Counterproductive skills, showing negative skills to be low, while 23 Librarians possessed 41% to 61% of negative skill. 8 Librarians were found to possess Counterproductive skills in the range of 61-81%. Only 3 librarians scored above 81% in Counterproductive Skills. This means very few Librarians possess negative skills.

b) Scores obtained by Librarians as given by Teachers:

As per Faculty/Teachers soft skill performance score of

Librarians from table 2 it shows that according to Teachers 11 Librarians scored less than 41% in Clusters I to VI of Soft Skill. While 53 Librarians scored in between 41 to 61%, 29 Librarians scored between 61 to 81% and only 5 Librarians scored above 81% in soft skill Cluster I to VI. However, according to Faculty/Teachers opinion 75 librarians scored below 41% in Counterproductive skills showing negative skills to be low, while 22 Librarians possessed 41 to 61% of negative skill. 1 Librarian was found to possess Counterproductive skills in the range of 61-81%. None of the Librarian scored above 81% in Counterproductive Skills. This means that according to Faculty/Teachers none of the Librarian possesses Counterproductive skills more than 81% which is indication of positive soft skill culture.

c) Scores obtained by Librarians as given by Students:

Table 2 reflects, soft skill performance score of Librarians in percentage as given by Students which shows that according to Students 21 Librarians scored less than 41% in Clusters I to VI

of Soft Skill. While 43 Librarians scored in between 41 to 61%, 30 Librarians scored between 61 to 81% and only 4 Librarians scored above 81% in soft skill Cluster I to VI. However, according to Students' opinion, 64 librarians scored below 41% in Counterproductive skills showing negative skills to be low amongst Librarian, while 30 Librarians possessed 41 to 61% of

negative skill. Four Librarians were found to possess Counterproductive skills in the range of 61-81%. None of the Librarian scored above 81% in Counterproductive Skills. This means that according to students none of the Librarian possesses Counterproductive skills more than 81% which is indication of positive soft skill culture.

Table 2. B. Stakeholder wise overall score obtained by Librarians in Cluster I-VI and Cluster VII.

Sr. No.	Stakeholder	No. of Librarians obtained the score in percentage in							
		Cluster I-VI				Cluster VII			
		Less than 41%	41% to 61%	61% to 81%	81% and above 81%	Less than 41%	41% to 61%	61% to 81%	81% and above 81%
1	Principal	15	61	14	8	64	23	8	3
2	Teachers	11	53	29	5	75	22	1	--
3	Students	21	43	30	4	64	30	4	--

C. Scores obtained by Librarians as given by Stakeholders collectively in all the Clusters in Western Vidarbha region

Scores obtained by Librarians as given by Stakeholders collectively in all the Clusters in Western Vidarbha is displayed in table 3. From the table the percentage wise soft skill score given by Stakeholders collectively shows that 7 Librarians scored less than 41% in Clusters I to VI of Soft Skill. While 62 Librarians scored in between 41 to 61%, 25 Librarians scored between 61 to 81% and only 4 Librarians scored above 81% in soft skill Cluster I to VI. However,

according to Stakeholders' opinion 74 librarians scored below 41% in Counterproductive skills showing negative skills to be low, while 21 Librarians possessed 41 to 61% of negative skill. 3 Librarians were found to possess Counterproductive skills in the range of 61-81%. None of the Librarian scored above 81% in Counterproductive Skills. This means that according to stakeholder's opinion none of the Librarian possess Counterproductive skills more than 81% which is indication of positive soft skill culture.

Table 3. Scores obtained by Librarians given by Stakeholders collectively in all the Clusters.

Sr. No.	Clusters	No. of Librarians obtained the score in percentage				Total
		Less than 41%	41% to 61%	61% to 81%	81% and above 81%	
1	Cluster I-VI	7	62	25	4	98
2	Cluster VII	74	21	3	--	98

D. Area wise (Urban/Rural) analysis of soft skill performance of Librarian

a. Scores of Librarians working in Urban Area as given by Stakeholders:

Table 4 shows percentage wise score of Librarians working in Urban Area of Western Vidarbha. The table indicates that in urban area only one Librarian has scored less than 41% in Cluster I to VI. While there are 20 Librarians who have scored in between 41 to 61%, 11 Librarian and scored in 61-81% and none of the Librarian scored above 81% in Cluster I to VI in Urban area of Western Vidarbha region.

When we analyze Cluster VII it shows that 22 Librarians from urban area possess counterproductive skills less than 41%. While 8 Librarians scored in between 41 to 61%, 2 scored in between 61-81% and none of the Librarian scored above 81% in counterproductive skills in urban area. It shows negligible presence of negative skills amongst Librarians

working in urban area.

b. Scores of Librarians working in Rural Area as given by Stakeholders:

Table 4 shows percentage wise score of Librarians working in Rural Area of Western Vidarbha. The table indicates that in rural area six Librarians scored less than 41% in Cluster I to VI. While there are 42 Librarians who have scored in between 41 to 61%, 14 Librarians scored in between 61-81% and only four Librarians scored above 81% in Cluster I to VI in Rural area of Western Vidarbha region.

When we analyze Cluster VII it shows that 52 Librarians from rural area possess Counterproductive skills less than 41%. While 13 Librarians scored in between 41 to 61%, 1 Librarian scored in between 61-81% and none of the Librarian scored above 81% in counterproductive skills in urban area. This shows negligible presence of negative skills amongst librarians working in rural area as well.

Table 4. Area wise soft skill performance of Librarian.

Sr. No.	Stakeholder	No. of Librarians obtained the score in percentage in									
		Cluster I-VI					Cluster VII				
		Less than 41%	41% to 61%	61% to 81%	81% and above 81%	Total	Less than 41%	41% to 61%	61% to 81%	81% and above 81%	Total
1	Urban	1	20	11	--	32	22	8	2	--	32
2	Rural	6	42	14	4	66	52	13	1	--	66
Total		7	62	25	4	98	74	21	3	--	98

3.4. Hypothesis Testing

The first set hypothesis is 'all the stakeholders have same degree of evaluation with respect to soft skill performance'.

To test this hypothesis rank correlation method is used. Rank of the Librarian is found out depending on the score given by stakeholders of Library i.e. Principal, Teachers, and Students.

It is observed that all the Stakeholders have same degree of evaluation as far as soft skill performance is considered. In other words there is positive correlation between the soft skill performances of Librarians according to stakeholders and soft skills expectation of all the stakeholders from librarian are same.

The second set hypothesis is 'there is no significance difference in soft skill performance of Librarians working in Rural and Urban area in Western Vidarbha region of Maharashtra state in India'.

As mentioned earlier minimum accepted value of soft skill performance is 60% which is indicated in the literature also. The hypothesis was tested by applying z test to the values obtained for no. of Librarians who scored more than 60% and no. of Librarians who scored less than 60%. z test is applied where Level of significance is 5%. z value is calculated as 0.686 which is less than the table value of z i.e. 1.96. Therefore null hypothesis is accepted. Hence we can say that there is no significant difference in soft skill performance of Librarians working in Rural and Urban area in Western Vidarbha region.

3.5. Suggestions

The following suggestions are made from the study with respect to soft skill performance of Librarians working in higher education institutions in Western Vidarbha region.

- 1) Soft skills training should start from college level and incorporated in the syllabus of Library Science courses itself. It will help budding Library professionals to know that mere technical skills are not enough and they have to work on their soft skill also which in long term is going to enhance their performance resulting in satisfied stakeholders and changing the way look at Library through our soft skills.
- 2) This study shows that maximum Librarians have scored below 60% as far as soft skills performance is concerned, Librarians working in institutions of Western Vidarbha region require training in soft skills.
- 3) In-service Training on soft skills is recommended to improve soft skills performance of Librarians who are working. For this many options are available. Online training courses by SWAYAM, edx, Udemy are conducting training on soft skills which is now considered for Career Advancement Scheme for Librarians working in higher education as well. Many Human Resource Development Centers at Universities also conduct soft skill training. Besides this there are Freelancers who conduct soft skill training.

- 4) Learning soft skill is a lifelong process. Hence, regular soft skill trainings must be conducted for Librarians. This will surely bring favorable changes in performance of Librarians at their workplace.
- 5) Five days or Eight days duration training program on soft skills must be made compulsory to attend every year.
- 6) Library services are also rendered by library staff to the stakeholders. Therefore library staff should also be provided with soft skill training on related soft skill attributes
- 7) Frequent online training courses must be included in Learning Management System (LMS) so that librarians can attend it at their location also.

4. Conclusion

The importance of soft skill in professional and personal life cannot be ignored. Creative thinking, have stronger leadership, better problem solving skills and become better at managing team. Soft skills can bring overall personality change in Librarian. Librarian will become more confident person and hence facilitate in providing better library services to the users. The achievement of goals of library depends on the ability to render services by library staff to their stakeholders. If library stakeholders are satisfied with library services, library usage will improve. Library can provide more advanced services to the users by making use of technology and user awareness on resources, databases etc. "Knowledge and skill becomes obsolete and depreciation" as developments are taking place at faster rate and new knowledge being added to the existing one. Librarian must be able to apply skills and abilities to cope up with change. And this is done through soft skills. Improving soft skill of librarian will certainly improve status of librarians.

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