

# EXAMINING LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS' METHODS OF SOFT SKILLS LEARNING: A CASE OF LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS WORKING IN PRIVATE SECTOR UNIVERSITIES OF PAKISTAN

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research study is to examine the methods of soft skill learning by library professionals working in private sector universities in Pakistan.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The study used quantitative research design based on a questionnaire. The target Population of the study included all 474 library professionals working in the private sector universities in Pakistan. To get relevant data, non-probability convenience sampling technique was used deployed to 340 library professionals out of which 270 useable questionnaires were received back dully filled in. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis using SPSS-21.

**Research limitations:** The study is limited to the responses collected from library professionals working in the private sector university libraries only.

**Originality value:** This is the first study in Pakistan that dealt with the preferred methods of soft skills learning of library professionals by using a large group (N = 474) of university library professionals.

**Key findings:** Findings of the study revealed that library professionals working in private sector universities preferred to learn soft skills from experts and colleagues. Overall results indicated that from library professionals' perspective, soft skills should be taught to them using face-to-face methods.

**Practical implications:** The study will encourage researchers in Pakistan and elsewhere to analyse soft skills of library professionals of various type of libraries and to frame practical training modules for librarians to inculcate in them the modern methods of soft skills to deal with a varied kind of readers.

**Contribution to knowledge:** It is one of the first ever studies on the subject as only a few studies have been conducted in Pakistan measuring the soft skills of library professionals of private sector universities of Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Soft skills, Continuous professional development of librarians, Communication skills, Pakistani LIS professionals, library professionals, university librarians

## Introduction:

The quick and speedy changes in the working conditions require library and information science education to plan novel ways that contain, along with the attainment of essential practical skills (hard skills), also the construction of transversal skills, popularly termed as "soft skills" (Lorio et al 2022 & Osmani et al. 2015). Soft skills are personal traits that boost library professionals' communication, work performance, and career viewpoints. According to Qizi (2020) and Ahmad, Amin & Ullah (2017), "soft skills are the behavioral skills of individuals that help in the application of technical knowledge to successfully accomplish a task". This definition is composed of three major aspects. The first aspect shows that soft skills involve people's skills, the second part emphasizes its complementary role in the accomplishment of a task, while the third aspect indicates that such skills make the accomplishment of an assignment more effective. Soft skills learning methods refer to the process of developing nontechnical skills which guaranties success in the workplace. Such skills include communiqué, leadership, teamwork, creativeness and management. An employee trained in

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soft skills can effectively improve his productivity, customer service, sales, and retention. According to Pachauri and Yadav (2014) soft skills are qualities that reflect societal grace, confidence, language proficiency, elegant conducts, kindness, and positivity to varying degrees. Employers usually look for employees who are equipped with robust soft skills like communication, teamwork, creativity as well as the ability to effectively handle workplace problems. Lamri and Lubart (2023) assert that soft skills include individual, social, and intrapersonal aptitudes that are necessary in the workplace. Such skills are considered vital for steering the intricacies of the workplace and collaborating efficiently with fellow colleagues. A good library professional must have excellent soft skills as he must deal all type of individuals. Being a multifaceted profession, librarianship demands expertise in soft skills to effectively handle daily routines at the workplace. Library is a social institution where library workers are expected to perform routine tasks in an elegant way. Almost all activities that take place in a library involve communal collaboration between the library professionals and readers.

Besides professional knowledge, library professionals must also have delicate abilities which are usually referred to as “soft skills. A good library professional must be devoted to his duties wholeheartedly. He must have the ability to take the initiative. Several studies on the subject have indicated that soft skills are considered essential traits of employees in all professions (Tang, 2018, Pachauri & Yadav, 2014, Tang & Tan, 2015, Lyu & Liu, 2021, Musembi et al. 2018) including library profession (Saunders & Bajjaly (2022). Likewise, several of the previous research studies have confirmed that such skills have positive effects on work performance of individuals at the workplace (Purwanto, 2021, Asbari, et al., 2020a; Asbari, et al. 2020b; Fikri et al., 2020; Hutagalung et al., 2020; Putra et al., 2020; Sopa et al., 2020a, 2020b). Soft skills and hard skills go together. Hard skills without soft skills are useless and an organization cannot achieve its goals if such skills are missing in its workforce (Cimatti 2016 and Qizi, 2020). Citing Benabid (2017), Ibourk and Aynaoui (2023) opined that employers give 60% of the weightage to soft skills than academic certificates or degrees during the interview process for a job. Ameen (2011) and Ameen (2013) reported that library professionals working in various libraries of Pakistan are deficient in interpersonal skills. Similarly, Khan et al. (2015) has also reported that library professionals working in university libraries have insufficient interpersonal skills, team-work and collaborative skills. He recommended that library professionals should get extensive training in such skills.

Libraries and information centers, especially in higher educational institutions, are undergoing technological transformation in physical structure, operational dynamics and services due to the advances in IT and its application to various library routines. Therefore, professionals working in university library setting need to be fully equipped with suitable soft and hard skills in the current rapidly evolving technological setting. To efficiently meet the ever-growing technological challenges in the present age of rapid development, university library professionals need to learn various soft skills to initiate better communication, fellowship and cooperation. Past studies show that there is lack of research on this aspect of library profession. An examination of available literature on the subject indicates that few studies on library professionals’ soft skills have been conducted in Pakistan so far (Ahmad, Ameen & Ullah, 2017). This is because this very aspect has recently got attention of librarians in the country and their knowledge about this important skill and its methods of learning are inadequate. Considering these facts, this study has been conducted to examine and investigate the methods that university library professionals prefer for learning soft skills.

### **Literature review:**

Matherly and Tillman (2015) asserts that in the workplace environment, soft skills are the core skills that help organizations grow successfully. Individuals who possess soft skills along hard skills enjoy greater demand in their field of expertise. The ability to effectively handle and resolve conflicts and collaborate efficiently at the workplace, are highly valued by employers (Cimatti 2016 and Tran, 2017). Soft skills are considered as essential features for success in today's businesses. Whether in hiring, career advancement, corporate development, or any other aspect of professional life, the study of soft skills has received much attention (Gafni et al, 2024). According to Kenton (2023) soft skills are traits and qualities of an employee dictating how he will engage with others and how he will perform in the workplace. These are traits which help employees excel in varied workplaces. These skills help in enhancing an individual’s communication, career viewpoints and to interact effectively with others and succeed in the workplace”.

Previous studies on soft skills mainly focused on the variance that exists between “soft” skills and “hard” skills in information professions. “Soft skills” refer to competencies which help workers to fit in at a workplace, including personal qualities, behavior, effective communication and skill relating to problem solving (Heckman 2012). “Hard” skills, on the other hand, refer to competencies enabling workers to compete in tasks, including skills concerning technical know-how, expertise, and proficiency in the field (Laker (2011). These are technical and measurable abilities that can be learnt through education and training (Lumri and Lubart (2023). While “soft” skills concentrate on capabilities and behavioral features to cooperate with each other; hard skills laid emphasis on teaching capabilities which are concerned with practical work. Workers, who have extensive and profound knowledge and a solid expertise in their field, enjoy success everywhere. However, some researchers have laid more emphases on the role of “soft” skills, not only in individual life, but also in collaborative projects (Marley & Junior, 2015), teams, and organizations (Nickson et al, 2012). Deming (2017) and Ghaith (2024) stated that scarcity in soft skills can be penalizing for access to employment and some soft skills might be extremely cherished by recruiters for some specific jobs. They stated that soft skills are vital for success in the workplace. It is hard to measure and recognize these skills because there are numerous meanings and explanations. They also asserted that collaborative work, and communication skills are the competencies that are essentially required by employers, yet they are hard to discover in potential fresh employees.

In the contemporary labour market where organizations are being resized and jobs are on decrease, it has been observed in many organizations that mere professional expertise are not enough to get employment. Workforces need both hard and soft skills to achieve success in the contemporary competitive and ever-changing commercial settings. That’s why almost all organizations have set high standards for their workers to demonstrate “soft” capabilities such as collaboration, teamwork and the ability to foster productive groups. Employers do not merely look for workers having a particular set of talent, but workers with wide-ranging sets of “soft skills” that they can use immediately (Ghaith 2024).

According to Kearney, Barnard & Chugh (2024), present day employers seek graduates with robust soft skills, such as the ability to work in teams, dealing with interpersonal conflict, and solving complex problems. Similarly, Sandra et al (2024) asserts that employers, now-a-days, not merely need workers who have excellent hard skills, but also decent soft skills. This is since employers need employees who could adapt to change, able to interact decently, teamwork traits, and the ability to solve problems at the workplace. Such skills, it has been observed, can aid workers adjust to the work setting and attain their career goals. Moreover, workers who possess ample soft skills can comfortably work together, can handle complex situations and make state-of-the-art solutions. Such kind of things can enable employees to enhance their self-esteem and open-up broader job opportunities in the days to come. Klaus (2010) and Mohammed and Ozdamli (2024) has stated that the deficiency of soft skills can destroy the career of a person who has technical proficiency but lacks interactive abilities. Several researchers have asserted that soft skills are more vital than rest of the skills to improve performance in the contemporary information age (Morrell, Eukel, & Santurri, 2020; Munro, 2017; Ng, 2020; Rebele & Pierre, 2019; Sriruecha & Buajan, 2017; Szilárd et al., 2018; Tang, 2018). Apart from possessing technical skills for providing, collecting, managing, and storing the information literacy for the support of teaching and learning in higher educational institutions, the library professionals working in such institutions should also have personal interactive skills because it is wildly accepted as a main component for working in the library. A good relationship skill takes us to understand the library user which turns into the quality development of service to meet users’ demand (Junrat et al, 2013).

Saunders (2020) has suggested that librarians should master soft skills as these are the need of contemporary library environment. He reported than among many skills, library staff should concentrate to learn writing skills, interpersonal skills, and teamwork. To inculcate these skills among the library professionals, LIS faculty can play a significant role by incorporating soft skills courses into LIS curriculum. Stephens (2013) stated that essential soft skill for library professionals include interpersonal communication, sense of responsibility, responsiveness, creativity, and political understanding. He further adds that library and information science schools are supposed to integrate essential soft skills into their curricula. According to Shlevova (2024) professionals in the information, library, and archival fields require a high level of soft skills, as their roles within the

human-information system are inherently unpredictable, often lacking standardized processes or strict algorithms. This demands a capacity for creative problem-solving, effective engagement with diverse users, and proficient management of information flows, making soft skills indispensable for success in these fields. Ahmad et al (2016) conducted a study on the status of soft skills required by university library professionals wherein he stated that soft skills are basic requirements for library professionals to work effectively especially when dealing various kinds of readers. The study recommended that the library professionals should focus more on learning soft skills. Hussain (2017) in his study on continuing professional development of librarians noted that many of the librarians working in university libraries preferred communication skills followed by the skills related to leadership. He also reported that several librarians also concentrated to learn management and team working skills. Khan and Begum (2015) also investigated leadership training requirements of university librarians in Pakistan. The findings of their study indicated that majority of the university librarians were lacking leadership skills and needed training to enhance such skills.

After reviewing previous research studies, it becomes clear that the contents concerning the development of soft skills for library professionals comprised of communication skills, thinking skills, problem solving skills, teamwork, life-long learning, Innovation development, ethics and professionalism, and leadership skills which the library professionals need to develop (Stephens, 2013; Kloppenborg & Lodge, 2010; Hodge & Spoor, 2012; Stephen 2010). Several of the studies have pointed out a gap between the need for soft skills in LIS profession and the aptitudes demonstrated in these areas by fresh library and information science professionals (Chow et al., 2011; Dubey & Tiwari, 2020 and Ma et al., 2020). Most of the research works cited above have addressed the implications of the need for soft skills development for Library and Information Science curricula, while others offered recommendations for the incorporation of such skills in LIS programs. However, little has been done to examine the methods of learning soft skills by library professionals. This study is undertaken with the chief aim to examine the methods that library professionals of private sector universities of Pakistan prefer for learning soft skills.

### **Objectives of the study**

Following are the objectives of the study:

1. To know about the preferred methods of soft skills learning of library professionals working in the private sector universities in Pakistan
2. To examine and statistically compare library professionals' opinions about their preferred methods of soft skills by different variables

### **Material and method**

The study used quantitative research design based on a questionnaire. The target Population of this study was comprised of all library professionals working in the private sector universities libraries in Pakistan and who had a diploma level (BLIS/DLIS) or above qualification in LIS. At the time of conducting this study were 91 private universities and DAIs in the country including Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan (Hamida, Bashir & Seema 2022). The population of this study includes approximately 474 library professionals working in all private universities of Pakistan. To collect data for this study, non-probability convenient sampling technique was used. The questionnaire was sent to a sample of 340 library professionals out of which 270 useable questionnaires were received back dully filled in with a response rate of 79.41%. Kantrowitz's (2005) measurement tool of soft skills with some modification was adopted with a scale ranging from 1 to 5. Prior to administering the questionnaire to the sampled population, a panel of experts was consulted to thoroughly review the research instrument and give their feedback about its validity and applicability. This panel was consisted of four teaching faculty members from the Department of Statistics and Department LIS at the University of Peshawar. The panel very graciously suggested few minor changes which were incorporated in the final draft of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered by the researchers through email and social media, mainly Whatsapp. Some 50 questionnaire were also administered personally to those respondents who were accessible to the researchers.

To increase the response rate, follow up telephone calls, emails and personal visits were also made to those respondents who could not return the questionnaires within due date. The collected data was entered in SPSS version 21 for analysis. The study applied descriptive statistics for description of

data whereas t-test and ANOVA was used for the identification of variances relating to various demographic variables. For the tests applied, a p-value of 0.05 was considered significant.

### Data Analysis

Table-1 is consisted of two parts. Part-1 depicts demographics of the study participants' experience which were cross-tabulated by gender while part-2 shows respondents designations, cross-tabulated by gender as well. The data indicated that out of the total respondents, 74.81% were males whereas 25.18% were females. The table below also depicts that those who had 6 to 15 years of experience were in majority (33.70%) most of whom were male respondents (22.96%). As far by designation, 66.29% of the respondents were in the category of Assistant Librarian/Library Assistant out which majority were male respondents. Similarly, 13.70% had the designation of Chief librarian (11.11% males and 2.59% were females) whereas 20% were Deputy Librarians (16.29% males and 3.70% females).

*Table-1, Demographic characteristics of the respondents*

Part-1				Part-2			
Experience	Gender			Designation	Gender		
	Male	Female	Total		Male	Female	Total
Less than 5 years	34 (12.59%)	11 (4.07%)	45 (16.66%)	Chief librarian	30 (11.11%)	7 (2.59%)	37 (13.70%)
6-15 years	62 (22.96%)	29 (10.74%)	91 (33.70%)	Deputy librarian	44 (16.29%)	10 (3.70%)	54 (20%)
16-25 years	50 (18.51%)	12 (4.44%)	62 (22.96%)	Assistant Librarian/Library Assistant	128 (47.40%)	51 (18.88%)	179 (66.29%)
26 years or more	56 (20.74%)	16 (5.92%)	72 (26.66%)				
Total	202 (74.81%)	68 (25.18%)	270 (100%)	Total	202 (74.81%)	68 (25.18%)	270

### Methods of soft skills learning

The survey asked all respondents to rate their preferred methods of learning skill through a five-point liker scale. As given in table-2, most of the respondents (59.25%, n=160) chose *Mentoring sessions by experts* as their most favorite method of learning soft skills whereas 32.59 (n= 88) of the library professionals have moderately preferred these methods. Similarly, "*Projects/assignment method*" was found to be the next preferred method of learning soft skills chosen by 57.40% (n=155) of the study participants while it was moderately preferred by 20.74% (n=56) study participants. Other moderately preferred methods of soft skills of the study participants with high percentages comprised of "*Learning from co-workers*" (52.59%, n=142), "*Presentation methods*" (48.14%, n=130), and "*Class lecture method*" chosen by 40.74% (n=110) study participants. Moreover, these methods of learning soft skills were also highly preferred by 32.22%, (n=87), 32.96% (n=89), and 26.66% (n=72) respectively. It is surprising to note that 42.59% (n=115) study participants slightly preferred "*Self-learning via internet*" and 44.44% (n=120) slightly preferred "*Self-learning via books*" whereas 43.70% (n=118) of the library professionals slightly preferred "*Formal online courses*" as their preferred method of learning soft skills. However, the overall highly preferred method of soft skills learning of library professionals was found to be "*Mentoring sessions by experts*" having mean score of 4.38 while "formal online courses" remained least preferred having mean score of 3.20.

Table-2, ranking of soft skills learning methods by mean scores (n=270)

Method of learning	1	2	3	4	5	M/(SD)
Mentoring session by expert	1 (0.37%)	10 (1.11%)	11 (4.07%)	88 (32.59%)	160 (59.25%)	4.38 (0.68)
Learning from co-workers	2 (0.74%)	17 (6.29%)	22 (8.14%)	142 (52.59%)	87 (32.22%)	4.12 (0.79)
Projects/assignment method	8 (2.96%)	28 (10.37%)	23 (8.51%)	56 (20.74%)	155 (57.40%)	3.78 (1.13)
Class lectures method	1 (0.37%)	26 (9.62%)	44 (16.29%)	110 (40.74%)	89 (32.96%)	3.76 (0.96)
Presentations method	7 (2.59%)	36 (13.13%)	25 (9.25%)	130 (48.14%)	72 (26.66%)	3.68 (1.22)
Self-learning via internet	20 (7.40%)	115 (42.59%)	40 (15.55%)	46 (17.03%)	49 (18.14%)	3.52 (1.27)
Self-learning via book reading	22 (8.14%)	120 (44.44%)	48 (17.77%)	48 (17.77%)	32 (11.85%)	3.36 (1.44)
Formal online courses	18 (6.66%)	118 (43.70%)	45 (16.66%)	59 (21.85%)	30 (11.11%)	3.20 (1.38)

### Independent sample t-test results for gender by differences

The study run t-test on preferred methods of learning of respondents to know the differences in opinions of male and female respondents regarding each learning method they preferred for learning soft skills. The criteria 0.05 (significant) were applied in this respect. For each preferred method of learning soft skills by the library professionals, statistical results along with the value of t-test is given in table-3 below. As per the values given for each method of learning, the study found significant differences in the values of only one method that is "Mentoring sessions by experts" between both genders. For male respondents the mean score was 4.38 with SD of 0.862 and for female respondents the mean score was 4.54 with SD of 0.744 while the t-test result was  $t(270)=-2.29$ ,  $p=0.018$ . This it is inferred that female respondents preferred mentoring sessions by experts more than the male respondents. Rest of the t-test results about the preferred method of learning soft skills by library professionals did not show any significant difference.

Table-3, methods of learning based on gender of the respondents (Level of significance  $p \leq 0.05$ )

S. #	Learning method	Gender	M	SD	Significance (2 tailed)
1	Mentoring sessions by experts	Male	4.38	0.862	0.018
		Female	4.54	0.744	
2	Learning with co-workers	Male	4.21	0.962	0.898
		Female	4.18	0.988	
3	Projects/assignment method	Male	3.76	1.124	0.044
		Female	3.52	1.241	
4	Class lectures method	Male	3.65	1.220	0.341
		Female	3.81	0.883	
5	Presentations method	Male	3.62	1.216	0.399
		Female	3.86	0.121	
6	Self-learning via internet	Male	3.38	1.188	0.588
		Female	3.61	1.441	
7	Self-learning via book reading	Male	3.16	1.332	0.088
		Female	3.39	1.283	
8	Formal online courses	Male	3.19		0.074
		Female	3.40	1.409	

### ANOVA results by designation

The study applied ANOVA test on mean scores of the participants to examine significant difference of the participants' preferred Methods of learning soft skills by designation. Results showed statistically significant difference between groups for various methods of learning soft skills  $F(2, 358) = 3.152$ ,  $p = 0.045$ . Moreover, post-hoc analysis, as given in table-4, exhibited significant difference in views of the respondents about "*Mentoring sessions by expert*" between Chief Librarians and Library assistants ( $p=0.045$ ). The merged means of the study participants having the title of Chief librarian was found to be higher than the mean scores of those who had the designation of Assistant librarian/Library assistant. Thus, it showed that Chief librarians gave more preference to "*mentoring sessions by experts*" than Assistant librarian/Library assistant. However, our results showed no significant differences in the opinion of Chief librarians and Deputy Librarians ( $0.433$ ) vs Assistant librarians/library assistants ( $p=0.481$ )

### One Way ANOVA results by experience

To know about the significant difference of the library professionals about their opinions from one another of their methods of soft skill learning by experience, One-way ANOVA test was applied. Results of ANOVA test exhibited significant differences among groups by experiences for different methods of soft skill learning. As given in table-5, ANOVA test results for "*Project assignment methods*"  $F(3, 372) = 3.72$ ,  $p = 0.024$ , "*Formal online courses*"  $F(3, 372) = 3.41$ ,  $p = 0.031$ , "*Self-learning by book reading*"  $F(3, 372) = 2.88$ ,  $p = 0.048$ , and "*Mentoring sessions by experts*"  $F(3, 372) = 2.92$ ,  $p = 0.041$  depicted significant differences among the views of respondents with various experienced clusters for the methods of learning as a whole. Tukey post-hoc test was run to find out significant difference between pairs. Table-6, give details of multiple post-hoc comparison in all possible pairs wherein statistically significant differences was observed amongst group means by experience. As given in table-6, results of ANOVA exhibited significant differences in opinions about "*Projects assignments method*" and "*Mentoring session by experts*" between the groups i.e. 5 years or less and 26 plus years with  $p=0.220$  and  $p=0.042$  respectively. The merged means of participants having 5 years or less experience was found to be significantly high as compared to the respondents with 26 years or more years of experience. Thus, it can be inferred that young library professionals were more interested in learning soft skills through *project assignment method* as against older library professionals with more experience. Moreover, results also showed no significant difference among the opinions of rest of the groups by experience for *project assignment methods*. On the contrary, the composite mean scores of the study participants with five or less years of experience was less than the composite mean scores of the participants having 26 or more years of experience showed that the young library professionals seldom preferred learning soft skills by "*mentoring sessions by experts*" as against the respondents having more experience. The study found no significant difference in the opinions of rest of the experienced groups of library professionals for "*mentoring sessions by experts*". The results for "*Formal online courses*" and "*Self-learning via books*" were found to be significant between the groups having 5 years or less experience and 16 to 25 years of experience with  $p=0.022$  and  $0.037$  respectively. Composite mean score results of the study participants with 5 or less years of experience was found to be significantly less as compared to the composite mean scores of those who had an experience of 16 to 25 years. This meant that those having less professionals experience were less interested in learning soft skills through "*Formal online courses*" than the study participants who had more years of experience. The study did not find any significant difference among the opinions of rest of the experienced groups for '*Formal online courses*'. In the same way, the composite mean scores of the participants with 5 years or less experience was significantly lower than the composite mean scores of the participants with 16-to-25-year experience. This showed that participants with less years of experience less preferred learning soft skills through "*self-learning via books*" as against those who had more experience. Here too, no significant difference was found in the opinions of rest of the experienced groups of the respondents for "*Self-learning via books*".

Table-4, mentoring sessions by experts: designation-based Posthoc comparison

Multiple comparisons (I) Designation (J) Designation		Mean diff. ( I-J)	Significance
Chief Librarian	Assistant Librarian/Library Asst.	0.313	0.045
Deputy librarian	Deputy librarian	-0.223	0.433
Asst. Librarian/Library Asst.	Asst.Librarian/Librarian Asst.	-0.223	0.481

Table-5, methods of soft skills learning (ANOVA results for experience group)

Method	F-value (3, 372)	Significance
Projects/assignment methods	3.72	0.024
Online courses	3.41	0.031
Self-learning via book readings	2.88	0.048
Mentoring sessions by experts	2.92	0.041

Table 6, methods of soft skill learnings, multiple posthoc comparison for different groups

Multi comparison				
Learning Method	(I) Experience	(J) Experience	Mean diff. (I and J)	Sig
Projects/assignment method	5 years or less	26 years or more	0.553	0.020
	5 years or less	6-15 years	0.322	0.135
	5 years or less	16-25 years	0.052	0.761
	6-15 years	16-25 years	-0.262	0.744
	16-25 years	26 years or more	0.413	0.056
	6-15 years	26 years or more	-0.341	0.262
Formal online courses Readings	5 years or less	26 years or more	-0.281	0.322
	5 years or less	26 years or more	-0.352	0.091
	5 years or less	16-25 years	0.622	0.022
	6-15 years	16-25 years	-0.236	0.761
	16-25 years	26 years or more	0.327	0.643
	6-15 years	26 years or more	0.053	0.836
Self-learning via book	5 years or less	26 years or more	-0.241	0.236
	5 years or less	6-15 years	-0.347	0.447
	5 years or less	16-25 years	-0.631	0.037
	6-15 years	16-25 years	-0.215	0.346
	16-25 years	26 years or more	0.326	0.613
	6-15 years	26 years or more	-0.052	0.741



Mentoring sessions by experts	5 years or less	26 years or more	-263	0.042
	5 years or less	6-15 years	-036	0.837
	5 years or less	16-25 years	-0.226	0.432
	6-15 years	16-25 years	-0.241	0.611
	15-25 years	26 years or more	-0.215	0.696
	6-15 years	26 years or more	-0.341	0.072

### Discussions:

The study assessed the preferred methods of soft skill learning of library professionals working in the private universities of Pakistan. Findings indicated that “*mentoring sessions by experts*” was highly preferred by library professionals. Similar findings were also reported by Farmer and Campbell (1998) who found that mentoring method of soft skills were considered highly important to the library professionals. Their study revealed that in mentoring process various learning sets are formed wherein each learning set comprised of learner and a mentor. The mentor is considered highly skilled in all fields of soft skills as compared to the learner. The skills of the mentor are based on his extensive study and long experience in the field. In the mentoring process, meetings between the learner and the mentor are held with regular intervals. The main purposes of such meetups were to let pairs examine self- skills relating to their profession. In these meetings, each pair identifies gaps in their core skills and compares these skills with the skills of mentor. After the gaps are identified, the mentors try to impart the required skill sets to the learners. Similarly, Simatti (2016) also stated that to gain soft skills, it is essential to get support of the more experienced professionals who have already demonstrated professional competence in the field. He further stated that mentoring method in respect to learning soft skills bears greater importance. Mentors generally can personally take care of the individuals’ professional development and learning.

Mentoring sessions by experts are deemed more effective in the development of transversal competencies of the students. A teacher not only give support to his students to be successful in the examinations, but may also help to understand his attitude, to develop his skills then to find his way in his professional life. The findings put forth by Ameen (2011), partially confirmed results of this study who reported that the librarians seldom try to learn new skills relating to librarianship after they practically enter the professions. To learn new skills, she recommended that library professionals should read books and articles relating to self-development. Contrary to the findings of Ameen (2011), Junrat, et.al. (2014) reported that those professionals who work in big libraries such as universities and large public libraries and information centers learn soft skills with great zeal. The major sources of learning soft skills are professional trainings, workshops, seminars and self-experience. The study further stated that librarians considered themselves well-versed in management skills, inter-personal skills, leadership and organizational skills.

The findings of the current study corroborate findings of Makasiranond et al. (2011) who found that more than 90% of the Information technology professionals liked to acquire soft skills with the help of assignment-based methods followed by classroom method and presentation method. Similarly, our findings are also in line with the study results of Gonzaliz et al (2013), Cimatti (2016) and Klegers (2021) wherein they recommended several methodologies for the teaching and learning of such skills. These methods include lecture method, teamwork method, project-based method and mix method of soft skill learning. Similarly, Saunders and Bajjaly (2022) also found that Discussions, lecture, and readings are among the most popular methods of learning soft skills. Discussions were ranked in the top two strategies for learning soft skills. Their study also indicated that readings were also preferred by many the library professionals for learning soft skills. Other popular methods include writing assignments, group projects, and presentations.

Thus, our findings suggest that many of the methods of learning soft skills, as given in table-3 above, can be effectively used for supporting soft skill requirements of the library professionals as the significant difference based on gender was found only in “mentoring sessions by experts”. When ANOVA test was applied on respondents’ designation, it showed no statistically significant difference

in the opinions between group means for different methods of learning soft skills. Thus, we can say that most of the soft skills listed in this study can be utilized to meet the soft skills requirements of the library professionals. Our study found that “mentoring sessions by experts” could be used more effectively and efficiently by university library professionals. This finding, though, is partially in conflict with the study results of Edward and Hinchliffe (2009), who reported that mentoring might be effectively applied for improving the soft skills of new entrants to the library profession only and senior library fellows cannot take proper benefit out of this method. Furthermore, the ANOVA test applied to various groups of library professionals, revealed significant differences in the opinions of librarians about various methods of soft skill learning.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations:**

It is, now a days, prerequisite for the graduates of higher education to learn not only hard skills relating to their profession, but also various soft skills. To be successful in their profession, they need to be able to communicate well, coordinate effectively with fellow colleagues, work under pressure, and solve problems. It has been reported by several studies, as indicated in the literature review section given above, that merely hard skills are not enough to be successful in present day distributed and complex workplaces. Recruiters and workers have begun to understand the significance of soft skills. Library professionals need proper qualities to organize and manage complex situations to handle the queries arising from multiple disciplines. Librarianship is a service-oriented profession, and librarians are the service providers. Therefore, a service provider must have a smile on his face, good behavior, and a positive attitude towards users. The information professional interacts with library users on regular basis therefore he must try his best to uphold his professional competencies by maintaining the high quality of soft skills. Literature avowed that soft skills are indispensable for librarians, especially young library professionals to thrive and to compete with other workforces with similar skills and proficiencies. It is therefore suggested that LIS schools should incorporate the conceptions pertaining to soft skills in Library Science syllabus continually. Our findings showed that from university library professionals’ perspective, it is more appropriate to teach soft skills using face-to-face techniques. It has been proved by several researchers that Mentoring is the most effective teaching approach that ought to be utilized to nurture soft skills of librarians. Furthermore, our study also showed that library professionals’ experience in libraries and information centers is a significant facet of mastering soft skills. Without this kind of experience, the library professionals won’t be able to realize the significance of soft skills acquisition, though these kinds of skills might be generally entrenched in LIS course contents to certain extent. Though doing internship in a reputed organization may help in learning some aspects of soft skills, but it is not the standard in LIS education in Pakistan. Training sessions can be planned by the LIS schools of various universities to help library professionals in acquiring soft skills by adopting suitable methods for their teaching. Professional organizations can also provide development opportunities for library professionals to work on soft skills through lectures, workshops, seminars and conferences. Government organizations and institutions such as Higher Education Department, Archives and libraries departments etc should also organize more learning activities and trainings for librarians and people related to the library profession to make them more proficient to tackle the ongoing challenges and for the smooth running of libraries, archives and information centers. Senior professionals, such as principal librarians, should start in-service training sessions for fresh professionals entering the field of librarianship as per the findings of this study. The world is quickly transitioning into a digital era, marked by the emergence of transformative technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning, and chatbots, which hold the potential to bring significant changes to the field of library and information sciences. However, even with these advancements, the human side of librarianship will remain indispensable. Hence, focusing on nurturing library professionals’ soft skills is crucial, as they form the bedrock of effective information dissemination. By adapting educational approaches to leverage the strengths of the younger generation and their familiarity with technology, institutions can equip LIS students with the soft skills needed to navigate the complexities and changes in the field of LIS. Emphasizing the development of communication, leadership, interpersonal skills, teamwork, and emotional intelligence will prepare future library managers to succeed in this evolving environment.

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