

Libraries and Their Role in Community Development

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Abstract: The study aimed to identify the role of public libraries in community development in Salah al-Din, applied to a purposive sample from Salah al-Din Governorate. The results of the field study revealed the following:

1. The study showed that the majority of the research sample, consisting of (100) individuals, frequent public libraries, with a rate of 80% for both genders.
2. The study indicated that the research sample prefers reading political books, which accounted for (61/30%), followed by social books at (512/25%), and then cultural books at (26/13%). This preference is primarily attributed to the enlightenment occurring in public opinion.
3. Public libraries play a significant role in community development among the residents of Salah al-Din Governorate.
4. The interaction between the public and the contents of public libraries is linked to the libraries and their staff's understanding of the needs, knowledge, and awareness sought by the local community, including its members.

Keywords: Public Libraries, Community Development, Community Service, Guidance Service.

Introduction:

The functions of public libraries have been developed and their social role has been strengthened. Following the political and industrial revolution in the nineteenth century, old institutions were dismantled, and services began to be provided to the entire society on a solid scientific basis. As a result, libraries were established in Europe, becoming a force that fosters cohesion, solidarity, and interconnectedness as part of the national communication system.

Society plays a significant and vital role in developing public libraries and enabling individuals to utilize them in achieving the cultural benefits they seek, along with fulfilling important tasks and roles. This concept can be implemented in King Fahd Public Library in Jeddah, where donated books can be displayed under the donor's name across bookshelves, walls, or even entire rooms, thereby making all of these books accessible to the public. Furthermore, an ideal mechanism can be designed for the dissemination of audiobooks, enabling people with disabilities particularly the visually impaired to read and benefit through listening. In addition, every publishing house could deposit its printed books in public libraries.

Research Problem:

Public libraries are considered pillars of education and centers of culture and research. Through them, a conscious and educated generation can be formed, one that is capable of assuming its responsibilities and contributing to the development of its society across various fields. Public libraries are among the most important social institutions, as they aim to enhance the cognitive

and cultural skills of different groups within society, refine these skills, and strengthen social bonds among these groups. Furthermore, public reading libraries are regarded as essential public institutions that contribute to the progress and development of any country due to their direct connection with all segments of society. By providing their services, they can, in one way or another, improve the intellectual and cultural level of the community and foster its development an objective that falls under the concept of social development.

From this standpoint, the central question that arises and which constitutes the focus of this study is:

What is the role of public reading libraries in community development? And what are the most important activities and services they provide to activate their role within society?

Research Questions:

Based on this problem, the study seeks to answer the following sub-questions:

1. Do public libraries possess the necessary resources and sufficient human expertise to contribute to community development?
2. Do public reading libraries provide services and activities that effectively contribute to community development?
3. What obstacles hinder the contribution of public libraries to community development?

Significance of the Study:

The significance of this study stems from the importance of the topic it addresses. Undoubtedly, the development of societies depends primarily on their level of culture and awareness, which represents the main objective behind the establishment of libraries of all types particularly public reading libraries that target all members of society. The activities and services provided by these libraries inevitably reflect on individuals, especially given that their roles have become diverse and multifaceted, touching upon various aspects of life. Hence lies the importance of this study: community development is crucial for both individuals and societies, and public reading libraries must play a fundamental and essential role in this process. The importance of this study can be outlined as follows:

1. The study is significant because of the role public reading libraries play in serving society equally without discrimination, and because community development is vital in advancing societies and providing means for quality learning for both current and future generations.
2. The study also highlights the role of public reading libraries as development partners in society by serving their beneficiaries, particularly in communities experiencing rapid change in all areas.

Objective of the Study:

To highlight the role of the main public reading library as a participant in achieving community development goals through the services and activities it provides.

Research Methodology:

This study is based on the documentary method, which relies on the analysis and critique of written scholarly production, in order to draw conclusions that can answer the researcher's questions.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

First: The Public Library

Definition of the Public Library:

- A library that is accessible for use by everyone, not restricted to a particular group of people. It contains general materials and resources that meet the needs of the wider community without discrimination. ()

- The *Oxford Dictionary* defines it as: a building or a room containing a collection of books and intellectual resources intended for use by the general public or by a specific group affiliated with an institution, association, or similar body. ()

Public libraries are cultural, educational, and intellectual institutions established and funded by the state and civil society organizations. Their purpose is to preserve human and intellectual heritage and make it available to readers and citizens of all social and professional classes, regardless of their educational levels, ages, professions, or cultural backgrounds. In this sense, the public library is considered one of the most important institutions contributing to the dissemination of knowledge and the enhancement of artistic and cultural levels within the community.

The public nature of libraries is derived from several characteristics, including:

1. **Generality of Collections:** The holdings of the public library are not specialized in a specific subject area but rather cover a wide range of topics. They represent a comprehensive repository of human knowledge, including literature, language, science, religion, mathematics, technology, history, geography, and more.
2. **Generality of Beneficiaries:** Public libraries are distinguished by their inclusiveness of users. They do not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, or social status. The public library is considered a “people’s university,” offering knowledge freely to all who seek it.
3. **Free Services:** Public libraries generally provide services free of charge to citizens and users. However, some perspectives suggest the necessity of charging small fees for certain services, such as lending, or requiring nominal membership subscriptions.
4. **Voluntary Access:** There is no obligation or compulsion to use public libraries in any of their forms. Access remains entirely voluntary.

Objectives and Roles of Public Libraries

Objectives, Services, and Impacts of the Public Library:

A. Public Library Services: ()

1. Lending Service:

The library exists primarily for use, and therefore lending service plays a central role in encouraging utilization and extending library services beyond its premises. This service is provided free of charge to all categories of users without exception.

2. Reference Guidance Service:

The library’s collection of essential reference materials requires specialized services to help users understand how they are organized and how to retrieve information from them. This necessitates the preparation of an intensive program of reference guidance, either through direct personal interaction or through informational brochures distributed to the public.

3. Reading Guidance Service:

One of the most important services offered by the public library, this service involves directing and guiding readers toward materials that meet their actual needs, aligned with their educational and cultural levels. It also includes continuous follow-up of their future reading habits.

4. Reproduction/Copying Service:

This service allows users to obtain copies of materials that cannot be borrowed outside the library (such as reference works, periodicals, or unique copies) for a nominal fee. It is based on the principle of making all materials accessible to readers.

5. Current Awareness Services:

These services are related to providing information tailored to the interests of various individuals within the community served by the library. They aim to reach a broad audience segment and include the rapid dissemination of information about new library acquisitions, as well as issuing

lists of topics relevant to the community (e.g., agricultural, labor-related, industrial, religious, etc.). Bibliographic services are also considered part of these offerings.

B. Objectives of the Public Library

The public library provides its services free of charge to all segments of society. Therefore, it seeks to achieve several objectives, including: ()

1. **Providing free access** to all available information resources for anyone wishing to consult them.
2. **Reflecting the intellectual needs** of society, both current and future, through its collections.
3. **Offering opportunities for research and self-education** to assist individuals in their cultural growth according to their needs, interests, desires, and abilities.
4. **Providing socially integrated and dynamic services** aimed at disseminating ideas and information within the community.
5. **Supporting the goals of formal school education**, as the library helps broaden students' horizons and solve problems they encounter in their academic studies.
6. **Encouraging and promoting reading among citizens** by offering services and resources that satisfy diverse tastes and both general and specific needs.
7. **Supplying readers with the necessary information** to update their professional work and manage their practical affairs in society.
8. **Contributing to cultural and spiritual development**, and preparing citizens for active participation in the culture of their era and their surrounding community.
9. **Acting as a link between citizens and the outside world**, keeping them informed of contemporary events and developments.

Methods of Community Service Profession

Through these methods, it becomes clear that they are closely related to the services provided by public libraries. ()

1. Casework (Individual Service Method):

This method, considered one of the fundamental approaches in the profession of community service, is based on scientific knowledge and skill to help individuals achieve the highest possible level of adjustment and the ability to face problems that hinder their performance of social functions within the philosophy of the institution. This is precisely what public libraries aim to achieve through their individual services.

2. Group Work Method:

This method, also a fundamental approach in community service, involves the social worker assisting group members within social institutions by implementing various programs aimed at fostering the growth of individuals or the group as a whole, in line with the goals and culture of society. Public libraries support this method of community service through seminars, debates, and discussion circles.

3. Community Organization Method:

This method represents one of the approaches of the community service profession aimed at reinforcing collective efforts at different societal levels to address needs and problems, according to plans for current and future resource allocation within the framework of public policy. In the context of libraries, this is reflected in seminars, methods of organization, and various procedures implemented.

Second: Community Development

Definition of Social Development:

- It refers to the efforts exerted to bring about a series of functional and structural changes necessary for the growth of society, by increasing individuals' capacity to make the best use of available resources in order to achieve the greatest degree of freedom and well-being for them. ()
- In the humanities and social sciences, it refers to achieving harmony among members of society, which includes biological, psychological, and social satisfaction. It is considered a voluntary, conscious, and deliberate process at all levels continuous and renewable with the human being as its ultimate goal and purpose. ()
- The process of social development also involves **human development**, which aims to improve the level of healthcare and education, in addition to enabling communities to participate in making developmental decisions that affect their lives, while also ensuring justice and equality. Development further seeks to support the informal economic sectors and improve educational and healthcare opportunities for women. ()

Importance of Social Development

Social development holds a special and essential significance for both individuals and society, as reflected in the following considerations: ()

1. Fostering a Sense of State Presence:

Individuals experience a genuine sense of the existence of the state under social development and revitalization, as care contributes to achieving the objectives of society or the state. It reinforces a sense of collective consciousness among individuals, since a state attains its true identity when its citizens possess collective awareness, sensitivity, and a degree of freedom. Conversely, societies built on oppression, subjugation, or exclusion lack meaningful existence. This perspective reflects the state's fundamental role, which goes beyond merely ensuring security, order, and protection to include social welfare, freeing citizens from problems, improving living standards, and elevating their thoughts with human values.

2. Ensuring Social Stability:

The importance of social development is evident in securing society or the state, preventing deviation or tendencies toward destructive principles that could sow discord among members. Ultimately, it contributes to the material and moral unity of the community.

3. Advancing Humanity and Social Cohesion:

Community development is a key factor in elevating humanity and its standards, bridging perspectives among individuals within a state, and even promoting economic and social convergence among the peoples of the world.

4. Cultivating Ethical and Human Values:

From an ethical and idealistic perspective, social development instills noble values in individuals that enhance community awareness, sensitivity, and tastes. Participation in social revitalization programs and contributing to social services and reforms expands individual horizons beyond private life, fostering social emotions and altruism, love for others, and self-sacrifice. These qualities are essential for reinforcing collective consciousness, whereas selfishness and self-centeredness are inconsistent with this communal existence.

5. Strengthening Social Bonds as the Basis of Stability:

The safety and stability of a state do not rely solely on the enforcement of internal laws or international agreements but are founded on the strength of relationships and bonds among

individuals, which unify their thoughts and feelings, integrate their functions, and align their actions toward shared goals.

Objectives of Social Development

The objectives of social development can be summarized as follows:

1. Promoting Social and Economic Progress:

Social development continuously drives individuals and communities toward achieving social and economic advancement.

2. Utilization of Available Resources:

It works to make the best use of available resources and to provide access to them whenever possible.

3. Intentional Fulfillment of Human Needs:

Social development is a deliberate and directed process aimed at satisfying human needs.

4. Social Transformation:

It brings about social change in the structure and functions of society, seeking to establish a new social framework that fulfills the social needs of individuals. ()

5. Empowering Citizens:

Social development aims to invest in and enhance citizens' efforts within society, employing various methods, including training and education, to enable them to perform more effectively and positively. ()

Practical Aspect

Research Procedures:

The researcher used the **survey method** as a tool for collecting data for the field study from a sample of the general public. The questionnaire was designed to address the study's questions and test its hypotheses. Before implementation, the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of experts, and necessary modifications were made. A pilot study was conducted on 5% of the sample size (i.e., 20 individuals), and adjustments were applied based on the results. Subsequently, the researcher administered the questionnaire to the public during January and February 2024. Each completed questionnaire was carefully reviewed to ensure its validity.

Defining the Study Population and Selecting the Sample:

Purposive Sample:

The sample was selected **purposively**, based on specific criteria for choosing participants:

- Age not less than 18 years.
- Users of public libraries.
- Residents of Salah al-Din Governorate.

Sample Size and Distribution:

The survey was administered to a sample of **100 citizens** from Salah al-Din Governorate. After data collection, the researcher reviewed the questionnaires, resulting in the exclusion of **20 incomplete or invalid questionnaires**. The final number of valid questionnaires was **80**.

1. Sample Characteristics:

The following tables illustrate the characteristics of the study sample:

Table 1: Distribution of Sample Individuals by Gender

| Gender | Frequency | % |
|--------|-----------|-------|
| Male | 80 | %80 |
| Female | 20 | %20 |
| Total | 100 | % 100 |

Table 1 above shows the total sample, where males ranked first with a frequency of (80) and a percentage of (80%), while females ranked second with a frequency of (20) and a percentage of (20%).

Table 2. Distribution of sample individuals according to age

| Age Group | Frequency | % |
|--------------------|-----------|------|
| 18–25 years | 68 | %68 |
| 26–30 years | 20 | %20 |
| 31 years and above | 12 | % 12 |
| Total | 100 | %100 |

Table 2 above shows that the age group **18–25 years** had the highest frequency (**68**) with a percentage of **68%**, while the **26–30 years** group ranked second with a frequency of **20** and a percentage of **20%**, and the **31 years and above** group ranked third with a frequency of **12** and a percentage of **12%** for both genders.

Second: Results of Respondents' Answers Regarding Visits to Public Libraries

Table 3 illustrates the continuity of visits to public libraries.

| S | Responses | Males and Females | | Males | | Females | |
|---|-----------|-------------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| 1 | Always | 60 | %60 | 45 | %45 | 15 | %15 |
| 2 | Sometimes | 25 | %25 | 15 | %15 | 10 | %10 |
| 3 | Rarely | 15 | %15 | 10 | %10 | 5 | %5 |
| 5 | Total | 100 | %100 | 70 | %70 | 30 | %30 |

Table 3 above shows that, according to respondents' answers, the “**Always**” category had a frequency of **60** and a percentage of **60%** for both genders, with **45%** males and **15%** females. The “**Sometimes**” category ranked second, with **15%** males and **10%** females, while the “**Rarely**” category ranked third, with **10%** males and **5%** females.

Table 4 illustrates the types of books preferred by the sample members and their respective percentages.

| S | The variable: Gender | Males and Females | | Males | | Females | |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| 1 | Political | 30 | %30/61 | 25 | %33/33 | 5 | %21/73 |
| 2 | Social | 25 | %25/51 | 15 | %20 | 10 | %43/47 |
| 3 | Cultural | 13 | %13/26 | 9 | %12 | 4 | %17/39 |
| 5 | Sports | 10 | %10/20 | 10 | %13/33 | ----- | ----- |
| | Recreational | 10 | %10/20 | 9 | %12 | 1 | %4/34 |
| | Health | 5 | %5/10 | 2 | %2/66 | 3 | %13/34 |
| | Religious | 5 | %5/10 | 5 | %2/66 | ----- | ----- |
| | Total | 98 | %100 | 75 | %100 | 23 | %100 |

The statistical indicators in Table (4) above show that **33 males (33%)** and **73 females (21%)** prefer reading political books, which ranked first with **30 occurrences**. The social category came second with **25 occurrences**, representing **20% of males** and **47 females (43%)**. The cultural category recorded **13 occurrences**, with **12% of males** and **39 females (17%)**. The sports category ranked fourth with **10 occurrences**, accounting for **12% of males only**. The recreational category, which ranked fifth, had **10 occurrences**, representing **12% of males** and **34 females (4%)**. Finally, the health and religious categories each had **5 occurrences**: the health

category accounted for **66 males (2%)** and **04 females (13%)**, while the religious category included **66 males (6%) only**.

Scale Description:

This scale was originally developed by **Qutb and Atris (2007)** to measure the role of libraries in community development. The scale consists of **30 items**, and to obtain the total score, three response options were specified for the items of the *Public Libraries' Role in Community Development in Salah Al-Din Governorate, Iraq: A Model Study*: **Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral**. The weights of the options (1–3) were assigned according to the nature of the item as positive or negative. For positive items, the weights are **3–2–1**, respectively, while for negative items, the weights are **1–2–3**, respectively. Therefore, the **highest possible score** of the scale is **100**, the **lowest is 15**, with a hypothetical mean of **25**.

Study Results:

Based on the questionnaire conducted on **100 citizens** from Salah Al-Din Governorate regarding the role of public libraries in community development, the results were as follows:

- **Total respondents:** 100
- **Always agree:** $60 \times 3 = 180$
- **Rarely:** $2 \times 15 = 30$
- **Sometimes:** $1 \times 25 + 25$

From the calculations:

- **Sometimes:** $25/100 = 25\%$
- **Rarely:** 15%
- **Always:** 60%

From the table above, the "Always" category had the **highest percentage, reaching 60%**. In terms of weights (**out of 235 points**):

- **Always:** 60 respondents, **76.5%**
- **Sometimes:** 12.7%
- **Rarely:** 10.6%

Based on the questionnaire results, **76.5% of the sample believe that public libraries have a positive impact on community development in Salah Al-Din**, indicating that the sample values and agrees on the importance of public libraries as an effective means of conveying beneficial messages and building a positive understanding of community development.

This result may reflect the **effectiveness of public libraries as a positive tool in community development** in Salah Al-Din. This information can be used to **improve public library strategies** and align them with citizens' expectations and needs. Additionally, further analysis of the results can help understand **which aspects of public libraries had a positive impact** and the factors that may influence their effectiveness.

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the role of public libraries in community development in Salah Al-Din, based on a purposive sample from the governorate. The results of the field study are as follows:

Results:

1. The study revealed that most of the **100 respondents** visit public libraries, accounting for **80% of both genders**.

2. The study indicated that the sample prefers reading **political books (30/61%)**, followed by **social books (25/512%)**, then **cultural books (13/26%)**, primarily due to the enlightenment and awareness present in public opinion.
3. Public libraries have a **significant positive role** in community development among the residents of Salah Al-Din.
4. The interaction between the public and library content reflects the **understanding by libraries and their staff of the desires, knowledge, and awareness sought by the local community.**

Recommendations:

1. Local governments should **prioritize public libraries** due to their role in promoting community development.
2. Libraries should be **equipped with the latest publications, technologies, and resources** to enhance their effectiveness in community development.
3. There should be **at least one public library in each administrative unit** of the governorate.

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