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The Role of Services and Functions of Public Libraries in Economic Development: Perspectives from Librarians and Managers

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aimed to explore the role of services and functions provided by public libraries in the economic development of society, as perceived by librarians and library managers.

Methodology: A quantitative research design employing a survey approach was conducted. The statistical population consisted of experienced managers and librarians from public libraries across the centers of Iranian provinces. The estimated population size was 1900 individuals, with a sample size of 319 participants selected using Cochran's sampling formula. Data was collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire. Content validity and Cronbach's alpha were used to establish validity and reliability, respectively. The overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient for both the questionnaire and its components surpassed 0.80, indicating acceptable reliability. Data analysis was performed using SPSS statistical software and PLS Smart structural equations.

Findings: The results revealed that the services and functions of public libraries, including education and research, information dissemination and alerting, providing recreational activities, hosting exhibitions and conferences, and promoting study and personal growth, have an effective and positive impact on economic development indicators, with more than 40% of respondents acknowledging their importance. Furthermore, the structural model of the research exhibited good validity in terms of Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, convergent validity, predictive accuracy (R²), predictive power (Q²), and goodness of fit index (GOF).

Conclusion: The findings indicate that the characteristics and functions of public libraries in Iran possess the capacity and capability to play a significant and influential role in economic development, as demonstrated in developed countries. However, the study also revealed that public libraries in Iran have been neglected in economic discussions compared to the emphasis on culture and societal development. The lack of attention to and utilization of the economic potential of public libraries is a contributing factor to their limited role in economic development.

Value: This research provides an innovative approach to examining the role of services and functions provided by public libraries in socioeconomic development.

Keywords: *Public Libraries, Economic Development, Structural Model, Services of Public Libraries, Functions of Public Libraries.*

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Extended Abstract

Purpose: The development process necessitates a moral framework to ensure responsibility and justice regarding human needs and rights, and to utilize science and technology across all social and economic sectors, with the aim of safeguarding human life. This development perspective adopts a humanitarian stance, supporting vulnerable populations and advocating for social participation and sustainable development. Consequently, it not only emphasizes economic growth but also underscores social equality and the critical role of the environment, while encompassing broader goals such as growth, justice, democracy, and political stability. Identifying and harnessing the potential within different segments of society represents a key strategy for achieving development in various domains, including economic, cultural, social, and political. Education plays a significant role in the economic development of countries, and one institution that can contribute to human resource education and development is the public library, often regarded as the "University of the People." Therefore, exploring the services and functions of public libraries and their role in the economic development of society offers promising solutions. Public libraries effectively uncover lesser-known features and potentials that are available within their libraries.

Methodology: This study employed a quantitative research design in the form of a survey. The statistical population included managers and librarians from public libraries in the central areas of the province who possessed sufficient experience and expertise in the field of public libraries. The estimated population size was 1900 individuals, with a sample of 319 people selected using Cochran's sampling formula. Data collection was conducted through a researcher-designed questionnaire. To establish validity and reliability, content validity and Cronbach's alpha method were employed. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all constituents and the entire questionnaire exceeded 0.80, indicating acceptable questionnaire reliability. Data analysis was performed using SPSS statistical software and PLS Smart structural equations.

Findings: The findings of this study suggest that public library services and functions, such as education and research, information dissemination, curation, exhibitions, conferences, and study encouragement, have an effective and positive impact of over 40% on economic development indicators.

Conclusion: Public library services can contribute to income generation and economic growth at the individual and societal levels. By utilizing public library services to meet information and internet needs, families indirectly benefit their economic situation, especially considering the rising costs of paper, publishing, and internet usage. Furthermore, planning and implementing entrepreneurship and skill training courses, catering to individuals eager to learn, can contribute to economic development within society. In many rural areas, the lack of awareness among residents regarding local resources and environmental conditions prevents them from utilizing and benefiting from these capacities to improve their living conditions and generate income. Public libraries, serving as repositories and distributors of accurate information tailored to regional needs, can indirectly enhance economic development in these areas. For example, public libraries in



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rural economic development sectors could offer courses on agriculture, crop production, livestock and poultry breeding, considering the specific water, air, and soil conditions within each region. This approach would enhance yield and improve the quality of agricultural products. Disseminating the necessary information through different means in urban and rural areas plays a crucial role in advancing their development. Information is a form of wealth, and when evenly distributed among all members of society, it leads to enhanced quality of life and development across various economic, cultural, and social domains. Ultimately, economic development, facilitated by knowledge and information, transforms both individual and social life, resulting in improved living standards and reduced inequalities. This endeavor aims to promote economic development, eradicate poverty, and empower communities by leveraging knowledge, education, and skills, thereby fostering lasting peace and continuous life enhancement. Achieving economic development through public libraries represents a monumental and time-consuming objective, requiring unwavering dedication from all managers, planners, and specialists in the field of public libraries. In Iran, attention to economic development, which seeks to improve the quality of life for all members of society, has hitherto been overlooked at the level of public library capabilities. The results of this research can serve to illuminate the path toward integrating public libraries into the country's development program, providing a blueprint for programmatic plans.

Value: This research offers an innovative approach in examining the role of public library services and functions in the economic development of society. To date, only a limited number of studies have explored the economic impact of public libraries at the community level, utilizing structural equations. Through investigating this effect, numerous variables relating to the economic impact of public libraries have been examined.

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