Training Needs Assessment and Competency Enhancement Strategies for Academic Librarians: A Case Study of Beijing Area University Libraries (Postprint)

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] To address issues such as the uneven professional quality of current librarians, difficulties for both new and experienced librarians in meeting job requirements, and a lack of independent research capabilities among some librarians, this study investigates and analyzes the training needs of academic librarians in the Beijing area, aiming to propose targeted training strategies to guide practice. [Method/Process] Based on a questionnaire survey of training needs for academic librarians in the Beijing area and feedback surveys from previous offline training sessions conducted by the BALIS Training Center, this study employs cross-analysis and summarization from two perspectives—content requirements and format requirements of training—to identify the training needs of academic librarians and propose corresponding training improvement strategies. [Results/Conclusion] The following strategies for enhancing librarian competencies are proposed: coordinating training content and developing systematic training programs; segmenting librarian types and conducting tiered training; meticulously crafting training content with attention to multi-competency integration; prioritizing face-to-face training while expanding training channels and ensuring adequate training support.

Full Text

Preamble

Research on Training Needs and Quality Enhancement Strategies for University Library Staff: A Case Study of Training Needs Among University Library Staff in Beijing

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Abstract:
[Purpose/Significance] Aiming to address problems such as uneven professional quality among librarians, difficulties for both new and veteran staff in meeting job requirements, and a lack of independent research capabilities among some librarians, this study investigates and analyzes the training needs of university library staff in the Beijing area to propose targeted training strategies to guide practice. [Method/Process] Based on a questionnaire survey of training needs among Beijing-area university library staff and feedback from previous offline training sessions organized by the BALIS Training Center, this study identifies training needs from two perspectives—content requirements and format preferences—through cross-analysis and synthesis. [Result/Conclusion] The following strategies for enhancing librarian quality are proposed: coordinating training content to develop systematic training plans; segmenting staff categories and conducting layered training; carefully crafting training content with attention to multi-competency integration; and prioritizing face-to-face training while expanding training channels and ensuring adequate support.

Keywords: librarian training; needs analysis; training content; training format; training strategy; questionnaire analysis

Introduction

Libraries constitute a critical element in maintaining universities' academic competitiveness, and librarians are the soul and essential resource of libraries—the core through which library value is realized. The caliber of library services depends to a considerable extent on the quality of its staff. Under current circumstances, characterized by significant changes in user needs and behaviors, explosive growth in knowledge content, personnel shortages across university libraries, and continuous expansion of new services, the quality of librarians has become even more critical. Many librarians themselves feel that their professional skills struggle to meet the demands of library development. Consequently, both from the perspective of library transformation and development and from that of individual career planning, systematic training for librarians is necessary—a consensus gradually reached at both the institutional and individual levels. The BALIS (Beijing Academic Library & Information System) Training Center, dedicated to building learning exchange platforms and enhancing the overall professional level of librarians, has organized training activities in recent years that, despite limiting enrollment, consistently attract participation from over 140 librarians across more than 50 university libraries in Beijing for each session. Since 2018, these trainings have also drawn participants from libraries in Tianjin, Hebei, Shanxi, and Inner Mongolia. Several libraries, includ-

ing those at China University of Mining and Technology (Beijing) and Minzu University of China, have successively proposed customized training programs tailored to their specific needs, demonstrating robust demand for librarian training among university libraries and their staff. How to conduct targeted training centered on librarian needs and competency enhancement has become an urgent issue for both individual university libraries and organizations like the BALIS Training Center.

The purpose of training needs analysis is to clarify whether training is needed, who needs it, and what content should be covered—issues that determine training direction and constitute important guarantees for achieving expected outcomes. Current research on librarian training needs analysis predominantly employs quantitative methods abroad. For example, I. Ibebgbula and colleagues surveyed the training needs of paraprofessional library staff in southeastern Nigerian universities using questionnaires based on Goldstein's three-level model. S. King et al. examined UK public librarians' views on ICT training within the "People's Network" program. Domestic research, by contrast, has primarily adopted qualitative approaches. Luo Sijia analyzed needs across different professional development stages (new, junior, intermediate, and senior librarians) based on career development theory. Yu Junli and Xu Shuang analyzed training needs from three perspectives—library (organization), task (position), and individual—using Goldstein's model. Su Jie and Fu Hanlei constructed training systems based on job competency models, while Shen Jing discussed foreign librarian training needs assessment systems. In practice, however, most domestic libraries lack systematic training needs analysis, or base discussions on single-institution surveys without broader staff investigation. With 93 higher education institutions in Beijing—including "Double First-Class" universities, former 985/211 institutions, regular undergraduate colleges, specialized colleges, and public and private vocational schools—representing diverse educational levels, the region offers strong representativeness. Building on previous research, this study employs questionnaire surveys to investigate and analyze training needs among Beijing-area university library staff, aiming to propose improvement strategies for training programs that increasingly concern libraries.

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2. Survey Methodology

The survey targeted university library staff in the Beijing area, with data drawn from two sources: (1) post-training effectiveness and needs assessments from BALIS Training Center's face-to-face training sessions between September 2015 and October 2018, yielding 651 valid samples from the needs survey portion; and (2) a specialized needs survey questionnaire administered to BALIS member library staff between December 2017 and January 2018. This second survey targeted staff from 58 libraries that regularly participated in face-to-face training, distributed via Wenjuanxing platform with invitations sent by BALIS Training Center to each library according to specified proportions. Different levels of

staff were invited to complete the questionnaire via email links, resulting in 211 valid samples. The combined sample characteristics are shown in Table 1 . The sample data generally reflect the regional situation and demonstrate strong representativeness. It should be noted that because the "Director Training Workshop" in face-to-face sessions targeted only library leaders, the proportion of director-level respondents is relatively large. However, respondents were instructed to answer from the perspective of their library staff's needs, minimizing impact on the accuracy of identified needs.

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3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Excel 2007 and IBM SPSS Statistics 22 from two perspectives: training content and training format. For multiple-choice ranking questions (marked "multiple choice, rank by importance"), responses were weighted according to selection order, with the most important option assigned a value of 1, the second most important 2, and so on. Descriptive statistics were then used to calculate the mean rank for each option; lower mean ranks indicate higher importance assigned by respondents.

3.1 Training Content Needs Analysis

3.1.1 Overall Analysis

(1) **Selection Frequency:** Regarding "training purposes," respondents primarily selected "broadening horizons," "updating knowledge," and "improving professional competence," while "promotion requirements" and "organizational compliance" were selected significantly less frequently. This indicates that librarians participate in training primarily from intrinsic motivation, with strong willingness for self-improvement. For "abilities needing improvement," respondents chose "scientific research capability," "scientific decision-making ability," and "professional development capability," with three-fifths also selecting "organizational coordination ability." "Official document writing ability" and "political discernment ability" showed demand but were relatively niche. For "training content of interest," respondents primarily selected "industry frontiers," "practical methods," and "professional knowledge."

(2) **Mean Rank Analysis:** Except for "training content of interest," where selection frequency and importance aligned, the other two dimensions showed discrepancies. For "training purposes," although "improving professional competence" was selected more frequently than "improving theoretical level," the mean rank indicates that theoretical improvement was considered more important, suggesting both should receive equal attention in training. Similar discrepancies appeared in "abilities needing improvement," particularly between "professional development capability" and "scientific decision-making ability," with notable divergence likely

influenced by the higher proportion of directors and department heads. However, if scientific decision-making is considered in a broader context, all librarians require such capabilities, particularly in operational decision-making, warranting special attention.

(3) **Integrated Content Analysis:** Training content design should consider all three questions collectively. For instance, while scientific research capability improvement ranked first in both selection frequency and importance among abilities, it ranked fourth in content interest, suggesting librarians prefer research capacity building integrated into industry frontier or practical method training rather than standalone research training.

3.1.2 Cross-Analysis Table 2 presents overall results without considering age, tenure, rank, academic background, or other factors. In reality, these factors significantly influence training needs.

(1) Temporal Factors: As shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper], demand for improving professional competence strengthens from the first year to 1-3 years of tenure, then gradually declines after four years. Demand for "broadening horizons" is weak in the first year, increases during years 1-3, decreases again during years 4-10, and gradually increases after ten years. Demand for "updating knowledge" shows wave-like changes: strong in the first year, declining in years 1-3, fluctuating slightly during years 4-20, and peaking after 20 years.

Recognizing that some librarians transferred to libraries mid-career rather than entering immediately after graduation, the survey collected data on both graduation time and tenure start date, with Table 1 reflecting this. Table 3 shows that both graduation and tenure start times influence training needs, with this impact diminishing as library work experience increases. For those with over 11 years of experience, the impact is minimal, affecting only the importance ranking of two items. During the 1-10 year period, four items show different importance rankings. Within the first year, the impact is greatest, affecting six items.

(2) Rank Factors: The survey categorized librarians into three ranks: directors, department heads, and general staff. Table 4 presents training needs across training purposes, abilities to improve, and content preferences. Key patterns include: (1) Demand for written/oral expression and official document writing abilities—essential management skills—strengthens as rank decreases, suggesting these abilities are sufficiently exercised during promotion from general staff to department head to director. (2) Demand for broadening horizons, improving scientific decision-making and organizational coordination abilities, and understanding industry frontiers decreases as rank decreases. Directors, as shapers of library development direction, unsurprisingly show stronger demand for industry frontiers and horizon-broadening, as well as for scientific decision-making and organizational coordination abilities. (3) Department heads, serving

as middle management, show unique training needs: lower demand for knowledge updating, political discernment, and management coordination compared to directors and general staff, but higher demand for research improvement, practical methods, and professional knowledge than both other groups.

(3) Gender Factors: Gender significantly influences training needs, as shown in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper] and Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper]. Male librarians assign higher importance to political discernment, scientific decision-making, and organizational coordination abilities, demonstrating greater expectations for developing political thinking, management decision-making, and social skills. Female librarians place greater emphasis on scientific research and professional development capabilities, indicating less interest in "management" and stronger motivation to develop research and operational competencies. Figure 3 shows content preferences: relatively more women than men show interest in industry frontiers, research improvement, cultural cultivation, and physical/mental wellness content. Demand for practical methods and professional knowledge is similar across genders (around 85%), while more men than women show interest in management coordination content, corroborating Figure 2's findings.

(4) Academic Background Factors: Respondents were categorized into three groups: all degrees in library/information science (LIS), some degrees in LIS, and no LIS degrees. Figure 4 [Figure 4: see original paper] shows importance differences in content needs. For industry frontiers and management coordination, all three groups show similar importance levels. The "some LIS degrees" group shows weakest importance for professional knowledge, practical methods, and industry frontiers, but strongest importance for research improvement, physical/mental wellness, and cultural cultivation. The "all LIS degrees" group shows weakest importance for cultural cultivation. Interest in research improvement content ranks from strongest to weakest as: some LIS degrees, all LIS degrees, no LIS degrees.

(5) Job Content Factors: Different positions show varying training purposes, competency needs, and content preferences. Figure 5 [Figure 5: see original paper] illustrates differences in training purposes. Staff in acquisition, cataloging, circulation, and interlibrary loan positions primarily seek knowledge updating. Those in reference, administration, technology, and reading promotion show similar demand for horizon-broadening and knowledge updating. Administrative positions show greater demand for theoretical improvement, while circulation and administrative positions show weaker demand for professional competence improvement.

3.1.3 Specific Needs from Open-Ended Questions Both questionnaires included open-ended questions for respondents to articulate specific needs and desired training topics. Analysis reveals that librarians' interest in industry frontiers focuses on cutting-edge services at advanced libraries worldwide, industry trends, emerging technologies and concepts, and innovative services. For

practical operations, they seek workflow experiences, highlights from practical work, new methods and transformations in traditional services, and core business enhancements—particularly successful first-line service cases from domestic and foreign university libraries, such as "current status and development prospects of interlibrary loan and document delivery." They also need methods for data analysis, data mining, information visualization, and literature analysis, such as "Practical Applications of Python and R in Libraries." For research capacity building, librarians desire content on topic selection, research methods, academic writing and submission, and project application, but most urgently want to know "how to transform daily work into academic achievements." Some librarians hope to include hobby and cultivation-related content in training themes, such as photo processing, audio/video editing, and flower arrangement techniques, reflecting diverse learning needs among modern librarians.

3.2 Training Format Needs Analysis

3.2.1 Overall Analysis Table 5 presents staff preferences regarding training formats. For "most effective formats," experience sharing, expert lectures, and discussion exchanges each exceeded 85% selection, followed by study visits (slightly less popular than discussion). Hands-on practice was least selected due to time requirements and environmental constraints. Although experience sharing was most frequently selected, its importance ranking was far lower than expert lectures. For "most convenient formats," face-to-face training was significantly preferred over other options, followed by offline study visits, while live streaming, online learning, and APP-based learning had smaller acceptance ranges. Mean ranks were largely consistent with selection frequencies, except that offline study visits and live streaming were reversed in ranking. For "online training formats," differences in selection frequency among recorded video, downloadable materials, and live streaming were not significant, with recorded courseware selected least frequently. However, mean ranks indicate recorded video as most important and recorded courseware least important, suggesting format selection should be content-specific. For "online learning organization methods," organizing content by practical and theoretical topics was most popular, followed by self-customization and curriculum-based organization, with mean ranks showing consistent patterns.

3.2.2 Cross-Analysis (1) Factors Influencing Format Effectiveness: Cross-analysis reveals that age, graduation time, tenure, education, rank, and institution type have minimal impact on overall effectiveness rankings, which generally follow: expert lectures, discussion exchange, experience sharing, study visits, and hands-on practice. Exceptions include: librarians under 25 rated hands-on practice and study visits as most important; those within one year of graduation prioritized experience sharing and study visits; and those within one year of tenure rated discussion exchange and experience sharing above expert lectures.

(2) Factors Influencing Format Convenience: Across all temporal factors (age, graduation time, tenure), face-to-face training was consistently most preferred. Ranking of other options generally followed: live streaming, offline study visits, online learning, and APP-based learning. Exceptions include: librarians aged 51-60, within 1-3 years of graduation, over 20 years since graduation, within 3 years of tenure, and over 20 years of tenure all rated offline study visits above live streaming. Additionally, those within one year of tenure rated APP-based learning above online learning.

(3) Factors Influencing Online Format Preferences: Age significantly affects preferences for online training formats (Figure 6 [Figure 6: see original paper]). Librarians aged 25-30 prefer live streaming most; those aged 31-40 show lowest acceptance of recorded courseware; those aged 31-50 prefer online browsing and downloading of materials; and acceptance of recorded video increases with age. Institution type also significantly influences preferences: regular undergraduate institutions show no clear preference among the four formats, while vocational colleges most prefer recorded video, followed by downloadable materials, live streaming, and recorded courseware. Gender differences exist as well: both male and female librarians most prefer recorded video, but women rank downloadable materials second while men rank it last.

(4) Factors Influencing Online Learning Organization Preferences: Online learning organization methods include curriculum-based, topic-based (practical/theoretical), and self-customized approaches. Data analysis shows consistent trends across age, graduation time, and tenure: all librarians most prefer topic-based organization. Those with less than 10 years of tenure show minimal difference between the other two options, while those with over 10 years strongly prefer self-customization over curriculum-based organization (Figure 7 [Figure 7: see original paper]). Considering academic background, librarians with LIS training (full or partial) show less demand for curriculum-based organization than those without LIS backgrounds, while librarians with all LIS degrees show significantly higher demand for self-customization.

3.2.3 Specific Needs from Open-Ended Questions Feedback from previous trainings also included numerous suggestions on training formats. Analysis reveals that librarians value systematic, continuous, and complete content design and desire diversified formats, such as combining online, live streaming, and WeChat/APP options with thematic seminars and practical visits. Some suggested simultaneous online broadcasting of face-to-face training to accommodate absent staff. Librarians expressed strong demand for enhanced peer exchange through increased on-site interaction, inter-library exchange platforms, and WeChat groups. They also recommended strengthening construction and sharing of online learning resources, providing training materials and audio/video resources before and after sessions, increasing training frequency, and extending time for particularly challenging topics.

4. Training Strategies for Enhancing University Library Staff Quality

4.1 Coordinate Training Content and Develop Systematic Training Plans

Carefully designed training programs are prerequisites for successful implementation, enabling macro-level training management rather than "training for training's sake." Based on the survey analysis, training program design should follow five principles: (1) **Targeted**—closely aligned with actual staff needs; (2) **Layered**—segmenting staff categories for more targeted training; (3) **Systematic**—comprehensively addressing all staff needs; (4) **Practical**—avoiding formalism and empty rhetoric; and (5) **Cost-effective**—optimizing training cost-benefit ratios. When considering staff needs, training should encompass not only professional competence but also research capacity, management skills, and for certain positions, written expression and political discernment. Content design should prioritize industry frontiers, professional knowledge, practical methods, and research improvement—topics of universal interest—while also addressing cultural cultivation and physical/mental wellness. Analysis of 651 training evaluation forms indicates that sessions with international experts presenting novel content or domestic experts from prestigious university libraries discussing practical cases in depth (with detailed examples) receive higher satisfaction ratings, demonstrating that novelty and practicality are crucial factors in content design. Training formats should be designed according to content, including academic lectures, discussion seminars, study visits, and hands-on practice or computer operations. Programs must also incorporate support measures covering equipment, venues, and funding. To ensure continuous improvement, training effectiveness evaluation and feedback mechanisms should be established to identify and address issues promptly.

4.2 Segment Staff Categories and Conduct Layered Training

As the survey analysis demonstrates, training needs vary considerably by age, graduation time, tenure, rank, gender, academic background, and job content. To achieve ideal training outcomes, both specialized training institutions and individual libraries must conduct detailed staff segmentation and layering for more targeted training. For example, training for librarians over 50 should focus more on modern service concepts, new service models, and new resources; training for those aged 30-40 should emphasize practical operations and research improvement; and training for new librarians should cover library fundamentals and basic position skills. At different rank levels, specialized training can be conducted for directors and department heads. For different academic backgrounds and institution types, libraries can increase research training for LIS-trained staff at regular undergraduate institutions, while strengthening professional theory and practice training for non-LIS staff and vocational college librarians. For male librarians, training should focus more on scientific decision-making, organizational coordination, and political discernment, while female librarians

should receive more research and professional competence training. Additionally, position-specific training should be organized according to different job requirements. Training formats should also be adjusted based on different target groups and their needs. Special attention should be paid to librarians aged 31-40, who show vigorous demand across all training areas and require intensified training efforts. The survey also reveals a noticeable training fatigue period during years 4-10 of tenure, with weakened training demand and suboptimal effectiveness. Since the survey did not break down results by individual years, the actual fatigue period may be longer or shorter and requires further cross-analysis with age and other factors. Of course, segmentation and layering must consider training costs, with the appropriate level of stratification determined by specific training purposes and target populations.

4.3 Carefully Design Training Content with Multi-Competency Integration

The survey reveals strong intrinsic motivation among librarians to track frontier developments and enhance professional and research skills, with particularly strong demand for professional competence and research capacity improvement. Open-ended responses indicate that librarians' interest in frontier developments concentrates on cutting-edge services at advanced libraries worldwide, industry trends, emerging technologies and concepts, and innovative services. Professional skills demand focuses on highlights and experiences from practical work. Research capacity training involves topic selection, research methods in library and information science, writing techniques, personal reference management software, and project application, though the most urgent need is learning "how to transform daily work into academic achievements." Knowledge and skills are also high-demand topics, covering library and information science fundamentals, resource retrieval theory and techniques, and basic knowledge and appreciation of ancient books. As previously discussed, integrated analysis of training purposes, desired competency improvements, and content preferences reveals that librarians have higher expectations for training content, hoping for multi-competency integration. For instance, many librarians prefer research capacity building integrated into industry frontier and practical method training, with basic theory incorporating practical methods and experimental cases containing fundamental concepts and theories. Such integrated content better enables trainees to draw analogies and genuinely improve training effectiveness.

4.4 Prioritize Face-to-Face Training While Expanding Channels and Ensuring Support

Despite numerous convenient training channels available in the current information environment, face-to-face training through expert lectures, discussion exchanges, site visits, and scenario simulations remains the most popular and effective format among librarians. According to subjective feedback, in today's fast-paced life, offline training creates dedicated time for concentrated learning

that, while appearing more "time-consuming" than fragmented training, ensures learning time and effectiveness. However, this does not mean face-to-face training alone suffices. Online training, live streaming, recorded video training, recorded course training, APP and WeChat-based training remain important supplementary formats to accommodate staff unable to attend training while meeting diverse format needs across age groups and ranks identified in the earlier analysis. Moreover, organized construction and sharing of training content facilitates secondary learning. To improve training effectiveness, support mechanisms are essential. Over one-quarter of respondents explicitly stated they were unaware of relevant training opportunities—a situation also occurring in individual library training programs. Therefore, strengthening training promotion and establishing relevant publicity mechanisms is crucial. Libraries should also institutionally incentivize or require staff participation, establishing systems that guarantee training time and funding, ideally positioning training according to position needs. Staff with urgent professional training needs should not face funding or frequency restrictions. Systems linking training to promotion and performance evaluation should also be established. Additionally, training content feedback and assessment mechanisms should be created to communicate staff opinions and suggestions to trainers promptly, replace unsuitable instructors, improve content, and enhance effectiveness.

According to Goldstein's three-level model, librarian training needs can be analyzed at three levels—organization, position (task), and individual—enabling more comprehensive and scientific analysis. Organizational analysis determines which employees and departments need training based on overall library development strategy; task analysis clarifies required training content according to specific job responsibilities; and individual analysis examines performance gaps between current and ideal states. This study used questionnaires to address only task and individual analysis from librarians' subjective perspectives, without examining training needs from the perspective of overall library development. Subsequent surveys will address these additional levels.

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Author Contributions

Li Shuning: Questionnaire design, distribution, and collection; topic selection and framework determination; final manuscript revision.
Lü Yuxuan: Questionnaire data analysis; initial manuscript drafting.

English Abstract and Title (Preserved)

Research on the Training Needs and Strategies of University Library Staff ———Taking the Investigation of the Training Needs of University Library Staff in Beijing as an Example

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Abstract: [Purpose/significance] Aiming at the problems of uneven professional quality levels of librarians, difficulties for new and old librarians to meet post requirements, and lack of independent scientific research ability of some librarians, this paper makes an investigation and analysis of the training needs of librarians in Beijing area, with a view to putting forward targeted training strategies to guide practice. [Method/process] Based on the questionnaire survey of "Survey on the Training Needs of Librarians of University Libraries in Beijing Area" and feedback questionnaires of previous offline training of BALIS Training Center, the training needs of librarians of university libraries, including two aspects of training content and form requirements, were obtained through cross-analysis

method and inductive method, and the improvement strategies of current training were put forward accordingly. [Result/conclusion] The paper puts forward the improvement strategies, including developing a systematic training plan, dividing the types of librarians and layering the training of librarians, carefully designing training content and paying attention to the multi-ability integration of training content, focusing on face-to-face training, expanding training channels, providing training support, and explaining the specific connotation and measures.

Keywords: librarian training; requirement analysis; training content; training form; training strategy; questionnaire analysis

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.