

A Study on the Causes of Talent Loss in University Libraries and Countermeasures

Zheng Yahui Zhang Qilin

2026-07-24

ChinaRxiv

View the original and related papers at
<https://chinaxiv.org/items/chinaxiv-202607.00245>

Source: ChinaXiv. Machine translation. Verify with the original.

Abstract

Against the backdrop of streamlining state institutions, university libraries are facing increasingly prominent human resource challenges, and how to retain young talent has become an urgent practical issue. Exploring the motivations behind university librarians' turnover and proposing corresponding strategies is of great significance for ensuring the sustainable development of university libraries. Taking 24 librarians who had worked in university libraries for three years or more and voluntarily resigned as the research subjects, this study employs grounded theory for qualitative analysis and introduces push-pull theory on the basis of three-level coding to construct a model of the drivers of talent loss in university libraries. The study finds that unreasonable organizational operations, weakened job characteristics, and limited career development jointly form the "push" factors for turnover, acting together with the "pull" generated by external opportunities; meanwhile, the relatively insufficient "resistance" of outflow barriers and inflow barriers further intensifies librarians' propensity to leave. In addition, librarians' turnover is mostly the result of the long-term accumulation of push factors and exhibits clear characteristics of low risk preference and path dependence. In the future, the stability and developmental vitality of the talent workforce can be enhanced by optimizing organizational systems, improving the professional ecology, and strengthening process governance.

Full Text

[Professional Affairs · Management]

A Study on the Causes of Talent Loss in University Libraries and Countermeasures

—A Qualitative Exploration Based on Interviews with Resigned Librarians

Zheng Yahui Zhang Qilin

School of Business and Trade, Southwest University, Chongqing, 400715

Abstract Against the background of streamlining state institutions, the human-resource difficulties faced by university libraries have become increasingly prominent, and how to retain young talent has become an urgent practical issue. Exploring the motivations behind university librarians' resignation and proposing countermeasures are of great significance for ensuring the sustainable development of university libraries. This study takes as its research subjects 24 librarians who had worked in university libraries for three years or more and resigned voluntarily. Using grounded theory, it conducts a qualitative analysis and, on the basis of three-level coding, introduces push-pull theory to construct a model of the causes of talent loss in university libraries. The study finds that irrational organizational operation, weakening of job characteristics, and restricted career

development jointly form the “push” factors for resignation, which operate together with the “pull” generated by external opportunities; meanwhile, the “resistance” of outflow barriers and inflow barriers is relatively insufficient, further intensifying librarians’ tendency to leave. In addition, librarians’ resignations are mostly the result of the long-term accumulation of push factors and show clear features of low risk preference and path dependence. In the future, the stability and developmental vitality of talent teams can be enhanced through measures such as optimizing organizational systems, improving the professional ecology, and strengthening process governance.

[**Keywords**] university library; resigned librarians; talent loss; talent management

[**CLC Classification No.**] G251.6 [**Document Code**] A [**Article No.**] 1003-7845(2026)02-0015-08

[**Citation Format**] Zheng Yahui, Zhang Qilin. A Study on the Causes of Talent Loss in University Libraries and Countermeasures—A Qualitative Exploration Based on Interviews with Resigned Librarians[J]. *University Library Work*, 2026(2): 15-22.

Introduction

As an important infrastructure of higher education, university libraries rely on the support of high-level talent teams for the quality of their services. Against the background of streamlining state institutions, staffing quotas in university libraries have become increasingly tight, and “no young people” and “no one to take over the work” have become severe realities faced by many university libraries in China[1]. Public data from the Steering Committee for Library and Information Work in Higher Education Institutions under the Ministry of Education show that the average number of regular staff members in “985” university libraries has fallen from about 130 in 2019 to about 115 in 2023[2]. Staff reductions and breaks in the age structure inevitably affect the service effectiveness and long-term development of university libraries, and how to retain young talent has become an urgent practical issue. However, current empirical research on the resignation of university librarians remains relatively limited, and in particular, analyses of resignation motivations from librarians’ own perspectives are still insufficient. On this basis, this paper takes former university librarians as its research subjects, uses grounded theory, introduces push-pull theory on the basis of three-level coding, deeply examines their motivations for resignation, constructs a model of the causes of talent loss in university libraries, and proposes concrete and targeted countermeasures, with a view to providing reference for university libraries in optimizing talent management and achieving the sustainable development of talent teams.

1 Literature Review

1.1 Review of Domestic Literature

Reasonable mobility of university library talent helps enhance organizational vitality, but either excessively high or excessively low turnover rates will bring negative effects to organizations to varying degrees[3]. In the 1990s, the issue of talent loss in university libraries began to receive widespread attention. Scholars generally believed that the impact of the market economy[4], low occupational status, difficulty in realizing personal ambitions[5], and an unfavorable working atmosphere[6] were the main motivations. In recent years, related research has gradually shifted toward empirical analysis. Xu Zhengni et al.[7] found that, because universities have a good academic atmosphere and high-level reader groups, librarians' turnover intention is significantly lower than that of public librarians. Guo Quanzhen et al.[8] calculated the turnover rates of young librarians in C9 university libraries and found that the turnover rates of two of these university libraries exceeded 20%, while four were below 5%; none fell within the normal range. Su Shanshan[9] argued that although university librarians generally have a positive psychological state, factors such as monotonous work content, limited promotion channels, and low income levels still lead them to develop strong turnover intentions. Wang Qing[10] found that income is not an important factor in the resignation of librarians in China; issues such as establishment status, room for promotion, and intergenerational differences are more critical. Liu Beibei et al.[11] pointed out that when external employment opportunities increase and the benefits of job switching rise, librarians' intention to leave also increases.

Author profiles: Zheng Yahui, master's student, research direction: information resource management; Zhang Qilin, Ph.D., associate professor, research directions: nationwide reading and basic theories of library science.

Received: 2025-11-10

Responsible editor: Jia Nan

1.2 Review of Foreign Literature

Relevant studies abroad generally adopt mixed research methods and examine the turnover motivations of university librarians from two major levels: the individual and the organization. At the individual level, lack of competitiveness in compensation and benefits, insufficient managerial support, excessive work pressure, and mismatch between job responsibilities and personal expectations all significantly reduce university librarians' willingness to remain in their posts[12]. Among these factors, inequitable pay and stagnant salary growth have an especially pronounced impact on younger librarians[13]. In addition, restricted career development caused by narrow promotion channels and insufficient training opportunities likewise further weakens librarians' willingness to stay[14]. At the organizational level, dysfunctional leadership, a repressive work environ-

ment, and institutional defects often undermine the organizational cohesion of university libraries^[15]. In developing countries, outdated infrastructure also increases librarians' intention to leave^[16].

1.3 Overall Review

Overall, although domestic and international studies have revealed the complex factors influencing turnover among university librarians, existing findings mostly focus on incumbent librarians who have turnover intentions. They lack in-depth analysis of the real psychological state and turnover motivations of contemporary university librarians, and they have not deeply explained the interaction mechanisms among various motivations in the process of leaving. Therefore, this paper adopts the grounded theory method and takes former university librarians as the sample to explore and analyze the driving factors behind the loss of talent in university libraries.

2 Investigation of the Current Situation of Talent Loss in University Libraries

2.1 Survey Sample

The criteria for selecting the survey sample were: “former librarians” who left voluntarily; those who had worked in university libraries for three years or more. In terms of sample suitability, librarians who have already left have experienced the entire process from the emergence of turnover intention, to weighing advantages and disadvantages, and finally to departure. Their oral accounts can cover the complete chain of turnover decision-making and avoid expression bias that may arise because incumbent librarians have concerns. At the same time, only librarians with a certain length of service can be familiar with job content and understand the relevant systems and “hidden rules” of university libraries; their turnover behavior can therefore better reflect real problems. This study began snowball sampling with two former librarians from the Southwest University Library, and gradually expanded the sample through respondents' recommendations of familiar “former librarians.” A total of 24 participants were interviewed. The interviews were conducted from June to September 2025, through both of-line interviews (14 people) and online interviews (10 people). The distribution of the core characteristics of the sample is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Distribution of Characteristics of Interviewees

Item	Category	Number	Proportion/%	Item	Category	Number	Proportion/%
Gender	Male	6	25	Age	30 years old and below	4	17

Item	Category	Number	Proportion/%	Item	Category	Number	Proportion/%
Gender	Female	18	75	Age	31-40 years old	18	75
Education back-ground	Undergraduate	2	8	Age	41-50 years old	2	8
Education back-ground	Graduate	22	92	Disciplinary back-ground	Non-library and information science	16	67
Original uni-ver-sity level	"Double First-Class"	16	67	Disciplinary back-ground	Library and information science	8	33
Original uni-ver-sity level	Non-"Double First-Class"	8	33	Former position	Reader services	8	33
Years working in the library	3 years and below	8	33	Former position	Resource development	5	21
Years working in the library	4-7 years	10	42	Former position	Reference consultation	7	29
Years working in the library	8 years and above	6	25	Former position	General services	4	17
Current industry	Education	12	50	Salary change after changing jobs	Increased	6	25

Item	Category	Number	Proportion/%	Item	Category	Number	Proportion/%
Current industry	Public administration, social security, and social organizations	2	8	Salary change after changing jobs	Basically unchanged	14	58
Current industry	Culture, sports, and entertainment	6	25	Salary change after changing jobs	Decreased	4	17
Current industry	Finance	4	17				

Judging from the distribution of sample characteristics, former librarians show certain group features: women, those aged 31–40, and graduates from non-library and information science majors account for relatively large proportions. Their former positions are distributed relatively evenly, with reader-service posts being slightly more numerous. Approximately two-thirds of the former librarians still moved within industries with relatively strong professional relevance. In terms of salary changes, more than half of the former librarians reported that their income after changing jobs remained basically unchanged, some achieved an increase, and only a few reported a decrease in income.

2.2 Survey Method

The core logic of qualitative research methods lies in enabling researchers, through communication and interaction with participants in natural settings, to conduct in-depth and detailed observation of the research subjects, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of their behavioral characteristics and internal mechanisms^[17]. This paper adopts grounded theory as a qualitative research method,

Through open coding (extracting original concepts), axial coding (establishing categories), and selective coding (forming the theoretical framework), conclusions with a certain theoretical depth were gradually extracted from the raw interview data. To ensure the reliability and validity of the formal interviews,

the authors first conducted pre-interviews with two interviewees who met the criteria. Combining the analysis of the interview results with expert opinions, the final formal interview outline was developed (see Table 2).

Table 2 Interview Outline

No.	Interview content
1	What positions have you held in university libraries? What experience did you accumulate from them?
2	When did you begin considering resignation, and why?
3	Before deciding to resign, did you try any other solutions? How did you weigh the options and ultimately decide to leave the university library?
4	How do you evaluate your professional experience in the university library?
5	Was your transition process smooth? Does the new job meet your expectations? What are the main differences between this job and being a university librarian?
6	In your view, what positive or negative effects has your work experience in the university library had on your current job?
7	If you had the opportunity to choose again, would you still choose to leave the university library? Why?
8	What suggestions do you have for the development of the talent team in university libraries?

The formal interviews were conducted one-on-one either online or offline. To protect the personal information of the interviewees, they were numbered sequentially as N1-N24. Each interview strictly followed the norms of qualitative interviewing. After fully explaining the interview purpose and theme, the interview duration was controlled at 30-40 minutes. With the interviewees' consent, the interview content was audio-recorded, and the "iFlytek Hear" software

was used to complete audio-to-text transcription and textual proofreading, ultimately producing approximately 53,000 Chinese characters of textual materials. Subsequently, two researchers used NVivo 12 Plus software to independently read, code, and cross-check the texts. Through sufficient discussion, three-level coding and category induction were completed, and a model of the drivers of talent loss in university libraries was ultimately constructed.

2.3 Data Coding

2.3.1 Open Coding In the open coding stage, the authors identified a total of 232 valid reference points from the original interview materials. By analyzing, comparing, and generalizing these contents, semantically similar statements were abstracted into concepts. After removing concepts with fewer than three reference points, 24 initial concepts (b1-b24) were ultimately formed. Subsequently, these initial concepts were further compared and clustered, and 10 basic categories (B1-B10) were summarized. The coding results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Open Coding Results

Basic category	Initial concept	Original statement (excerpt)
B1 Institutional constraints	b1 Unstable governance structure	Most leaders are transferred from other colleges; some people regard the library as a platform for career transition. Their tenure is relatively short, and they pay insufficient attention to the academic development of the library (N3)
B1 Institutional constraints	b2 Staffing restrictions	If we want to evaluate for a senior professional title, we must first wait until someone who already holds a senior title retires, so that a quota becomes available (N15)

Basic category	Initial concept	Original statement (excerpt)
B1 Institutional constraints	b3 Lack of external support	The university' s support for university-library resources is clearly insufficient, and some projects have not been successfully approved (N2)
B2 Salary and benefits	b4 Low salary level	Compared with other industries, the salary level of university librarians is relatively low (N13)
B2 Salary and benefits	b5 Unfair allocation	When work tasks are assigned, they always come to me, but when benefits are distributed, I am often left out (N14)
B2 Salary and benefits	b6 Repetitive work tasks	The work content is highly repetitive and rather limited (N6)
B3 Work content	b7 Weak job professionalism	It is difficult for professional competence to be integrated into work scenarios. When trying to promote informatization management reforms or improve reader services, one feels it is quite strenuous (N7)
B3 Work content	b8 Negative atmosphere	Most colleagues show low work enthusiasm and a tendency to be content with the status quo (N15)

Basic category	Initial concept	Original statement (excerpt)
B4 Work environment	b9 Closed ecosystem	The main reason for the closed nature of university libraries is not the subjective closed-mindedness of staff, but rather the limited external communication inherent in the work they perform (N2)

Table 3 (continued)

Basic category	Initial concept	Original statements (excerpt)
B5 Career development	b10 Scarcity of research resources	University libraries actually lack a certain research and scholarly atmosphere; internally, there is no such circle (N4)
B5 Career development	b11 Limited room for promotion	Management in university libraries feels like doing management within the framework of professional technology; the career ceiling and dimensions for development are limited (N2)
B5 Career development	b12 Insufficient development support	Rotation was required when I first joined, but no practical training was provided (N11)
B6 Job fit	b13 Weak professional identification	People generally are not very confident about this discipline, and no one cares about the status of the discipline (N1)

Basic category	Initial concept	Original statements (excerpt)
B6 Job fit	b14 Low professional fit	Our library carried out subject-librarian work, but in the end it was merely formalistic and failed to solve everyone's needs (N13)
B7 Social evaluation	b15 Low social recognition of the profession	At present, society does not rate university libraries highly and commonly regards them as "retirement homes" (N5)
B7 Social evaluation	b16 Lack of external recognition for professional contributions	I often hear questions such as, "Why go to a university library after graduating with a master's degree?" (N1)
B8 External opportunities	b17 Vacancies in external positions	The leader over there told me they were very short of people and asked me to give it a try (N15)
B8 External opportunities	b18 High résumé fit	The work experience I had accumulated at that time was relatively well matched with the requirements of the new position (N4)
B8 External opportunities	b19 High gains from switching	The platform provided by the new organization enabled me to access better resources (N3)
B9 Exit barriers	b20 Resistance from resignation procedures	The leader's attitude is very important; sometimes, if the leader does not approve it, resignation cannot be processed (N1)

Basic category	Initial concept	Original statements (excerpt)
B9 Exit barriers	b21 Comfortable atmosphere	The process of interacting with students is enjoyable, and a lot of work is completed through collaboration (N8)
B9 Exit barriers	b22 Sense of organizational belonging	At that time, we established a student management committee for the library and did a great deal of pioneering and meaningful work...It gave me a strong sense of self-achievement and satisfaction (N2)
B10 Entry barriers	b23 Tense pace in the new position	The work cycle and processes in university libraries are relatively fixed, whereas the new position involved seasonal overtime work (N7)
B10 Entry barriers	b24 Unclear organizational culture	The nature of the position in the new organization was relatively close to my original work, but I actually did not know much about the real working atmosphere there (N8)

2.3.2 Axial coding

At the axial coding stage, on the basis of the basic categories, this study conducted further abstraction and clustering, ultimately extracting five main categories (A1-A5). The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Results of axial coding

Main category	Basic category	Connotation of the basic category
A1 Organizational operation	B1 Institutional constraints	Affected by objective factors such as imperfect institutions, university libraries have unstable governance structures, limited staffing establishment, and insufficient external support
A1 Organizational operation	B2 Salary and benefits	Relatively low salary levels and unreasonable allocation mechanisms affect librarians' occupational satisfaction and willingness to stay
A2 Job characteristics	B3 Work content	Some positions involve highly repetitive tasks and lack sufficient challenge, resulting in limited space for the exercise of professional competence
A2 Job characteristics	B4 Work environment	The internal working atmosphere is relatively negative and lacks communication and interaction with the outside, which to some extent weakens librarians' work motivation
A3 Occupational cognition	B5 Career development	Limited promotion channels, an inadequate development-support system, scarcity of research resources, and other factors jointly constrain librarians' professional growth

Main category	Basic category	Connotation of the basic category
A3 Occupational cognition	B6 Job fit	Librarians who graduated from library and information science majors may have insufficient identification with their current positions, while graduates from non-library-and-information-science majors often face the problem of relatively low job fit
A3 Occupational cognition	B7 Social evaluation	The public has insufficient occupational understanding of librarians, lacks adequate recognition of them, and even shows a tendency to belittle their professional value
A4 External opportunities	B8 External opportunities	The availability of suitable external positions is to some extent contingent, but if their expected returns are higher, they will become an important inducement for librarians to resign
A5 Switching barriers	B9 Exit barriers	Complex resignation procedures and a sense of organizational belonging together constitute resistance to exit, suppressing the occurrence of resignation behavior to a certain extent

Main category	Basic category	Connotation of the basic category
A5 Switching barriers	B10 Entry barriers	Librarians have concerns about adapting to the organizational culture and work pace of new positions, which reduces their willingness to move

2.3.3 Selective Coding

At the selective-coding stage, based on the five main categories refined through axial coding, this study integrated, clustered, and logically verified them, ultimately establishing “talent attrition in university libraries” as the core category. To construct a theoretical model with greater explanatory power, this study draws on push-pull theory and integrates the main categories into three key dimensions: the internal dimension (organizational operations, job characteristics, and professional cognition), the external dimension (external opportunities), and the contextual dimension (switching barriers). The specific coding results are shown in Table 5. Push-pull theory has had an important influence on research on population migration and talent attrition

18–19

. Subsequent scholars, on the basis of push and pull forces, further introduced intermediate obstructive factors such as stickiness (reverse push) and repulsion (reverse pull)

20

. Based on the above coding results, this study constructs a model of the drivers of talent attrition in university libraries, as shown in Figure 1.

Table 5. Results of Selective Coding

Path of Influence	Path Relationship	Connotation of Influence
Internal dimension → talent attrition	Push relationship	Organizational-operational problems such as incomplete systems and relatively low salary levels; job-characteristic problems such as repetitive work content and a work environment lacking vitality; and professional-cognition problems such as limited internal promotion channels, an incomplete development-support system, and a low sense of social recognition. These three aspects overlap with one another and jointly constitute the internal push factors for librarians' departure, causing them to develop an inclination toward attrition.
External dimension → talent attrition	Pull relationship	The opportunities and benefits provided by external platforms, together with their high fit with individual traits, jointly constitute attraction, pulling librarians away from their current posts, further strengthening their tendency toward attrition and making it possible for this tendency to be transformed into actual action.

Path of Influence	Path Relationship	Connotation of Influence
Contextual dimension → talent attrition	Resistance relationship	Switching barriers, as a moderating variable, influence librarians' resignation decisions. When the barriers are relatively weak and external pull is greater than internal push, attrition is more likely to occur; conversely, attrition behavior is inhibited.

Figure 1. A model of the drivers of talent attrition in university libraries

Visible labels in the figure include: entry; internal dimension; organizational operations; institutional constraints; salary and benefits; job characteristics; work content; work environment; professional cognition; career development; job fit; social evaluation; push; attrition tendency; external dimension; external opportunities; pull; strengthened attrition tendency; contextual dimension; switching barriers; outflow barriers; inflow barriers; resistance; resignation decision; talent attrition; talent retention.

Talent attrition in university libraries is not driven by a single factor, but is the combined result of internal push, external pull, and contextual resistance. As internal push accumulates over time, it gradually approaches the critical point of an individual's psychological tolerance; at this point, more attractive external career opportunities become the key pull force, triggering librarians' resignation decisions and ultimately leading to attrition. Attrition is also affected by "outflow barriers" and "inflow barriers." Only when individuals possess sufficient resources, confidence, and external support will they seize the opportunity to complete a career transition; otherwise, librarians may choose to stay temporarily. However, such retention is mostly a delay in attrition behavior over time rather than the elimination of the inclination toward attrition. If the original organizational problems are not improved or even worsen further, or if more competitive external opportunities emerge in the future, librarians may restart the resignation-decision process, and the risk of talent attrition will persist.

2.3.4 Test of Theoretical Saturation

This study used the four reserved interview materials to test theoretical saturation. No new concepts or categories were found, and no new logical relationships

needed to be established among the existing categories. It was therefore determined that the coding obtained had reached a state of saturation.

3 Analysis of the Drivers of Talent Attrition in University Libraries

Talent attrition in university libraries is jointly influenced by three major dimensions—internal, external, and contextual—specifically including five core factors: organizational operations, job characteristics, professional cognition, external opportunities, and switching barriers. The logic of action of the three dimensions and five factors is as follows:

- (1) The internal dimension is the driving force behind talent attrition in university libraries, specifically reflected at three levels: organizational operations, job characteristics, and professional cognition. In terms of organizational operations, under the library-director responsibility system, the operational effectiveness of university libraries is constrained to a large extent by the director's personal ability and management style. More than half of the interviewees mentioned that changes in library leadership were relatively frequent, resulting in a lack of continuity and long-term planning in organizational development and making policies difficult to implement continuously. At the same time, universities generally attach relatively low importance to libraries, and some interviewees expressed disappointment with unstable governance structures, such as: "The leader was about to retire and had nowhere to go for the remaining two years, so they were assigned to serve as library director," (N12). In addition, some libraries have a shortage of senior professional-title positions, objectively creating a bottleneck in career development. Some interviewees stated that "promotion not only

one must also consider seniority and whether there is a vacancy" (N2). In addition, the library's overall low salary level and unreasonable distribution mechanism further weaken librarians' organizational identification and willingness to stay, prompting turnover intentions. In terms of job characteristics, interviewees generally reported that their work was highly repetitive and that their professional knowledge was difficult to apply fully, as in "Every day I repeat procedural tasks such as acquisition and classification, with no new challenges" (N5). Under the impact of new technologies, some interviewees worried that their positions might be at risk of being replaced, believing that "many library services can be obtained entirely through other channels" (N16). Moreover, problems such as a negative internal atmosphere and scarce development opportunities within the library put librarians in a predicament of "apparent ease but substantive stagnation." Some interviewees stated that "the overall atmosphere does not make you really want to stay" (N1). In terms of occupational cognition, on the one hand, promotion channels for professional positions are limited, and young librarians face the problem of high requirements for research conditions but insufficient support; frustration is therefore easily generated during the promotion

process. For example, “the requirements for research conditions are high, but the support we actually receive is limited” (N13). On the other hand, librarians’ career development paths are relatively fixed and cannot meet some librarians’ expectations for career achievement; for example, “beginning around the sixth year, I gradually felt that my career development was restricted, and within the library there was almost no upward channel like that for finance-related professional positions” (N10). In addition, the gap between some librarians’ career aspirations when they entered the profession and their work practice, together with stereotyped impressions of the occupational image of librarians among the general public and even within universities, leads librarians to lack professional pride.

- (2) The core of the external dimension lies in the pull effect of external opportunities, which is a key factor triggering talent loss in university libraries. Unlike the relatively proactive talent mobility among enterprises, the turnover behavior of university librarians depends more on suitable external opportunities. For example, some interviewees mentioned that “the university personnel system is relatively rigid, and cross-departmental mobility is not easy” (N12). Although librarians’ turnover intentions arise from long-term accumulation, they often need an occasional external opportunity to be triggered, as in “a colleague I knew before came to the library to chat and asked whether I was interested in transferring to another post” (N1). It is worth noting that these external opportunities do not necessarily provide higher returns. One interviewee said, “the new position has a heavy workload and frequent overtime; the income is about the same as in the library, and the stability is not as good as in the library” (N11). Most interviewees ultimately chose new positions that were highly compatible with their own résumés, a phenomenon that also reflects university librarians’ occupational tendency to pursue stability and avoid risk.
- (3) The situational dimension is the key resistance that prevents librarians from transforming turnover intentions into actual loss behavior. Cumbersome resignation procedures, a comfortable working environment, and a long-formed sense of organizational belonging constitute outflow barriers at the personnel and emotional levels. Because the library director has relatively strong authority in personnel management, their attitude has an important influence on librarians’ resignation process; however, only three interviewees explicitly stated that they had encountered procedural resistance from leaders. Inflow barriers are mainly manifested in librarians’ concerns about future uncertainty, as one interviewee stated: “I was afraid I would not be able to adapt to the fast-paced performance assessment in the new unit” (N6). Although some librarians had concerns about adapting to the organizational culture, work pace, and working atmosphere of the new position, the vast majority of interviewees still firmly made the decision to leave, and after leaving did not show obvious feelings of regret.

4 Response Strategies

Based on the above research findings, talent loss in university libraries is the result of the combined effects of internal structural push, external opportunity pull, and situational transition-barrier resistance. Therefore, this paper proposes specific response strategies from three aspects: optimizing organizational systems, improving the professional ecology, and strengthening process governance.

4.1 Optimizing Organizational Systems

First, strengthen system construction and clarify long-term development planning. University libraries should continuously improve internal rules and regulations, ensure the continuity and stability of internal governance structures, avoid the phenomenon of “policies ending when personnel leave” caused by changes in management, and provide librarians with a predictable development environment; they should formulate standardized resignation and position-transfer procedures to reduce personnel uncertainty caused by the personal will of leaders.

Second, reform the talent evaluation system and broaden career promotion channels. University libraries should take the reform of talent evaluation in Chinese universities as an opportunity to explore and establish a classified evaluation and promotion system for librarians, breaking reliance on a single path of professional-title evaluation; for different types of positions, they should scientifically construct assessment standards and promotion systems so as to achieve person-position fit and make full use of talent.

Third, optimize distribution and incentive mechanisms, balancing service innovation and academic innovation. University libraries should break the “egalitarianism” phenomenon as soon as possible, so that motivated and contributing librarians can be rewarded for their work; they should avoid traditional evaluation methods based solely on papers and projects, establish a multidimensional assessment system, and recognize librarians’ outstanding performance in reader services, subject services, academic research, and other areas; through differentiated incentives, they should fully mobilize librarians’ work enthusiasm and creativity.

4.2 Improving the Professional Ecology

First, optimize job design and strengthen the connection between job value and occupational meaning. University libraries can reduce repetitive tasks and enhance the diversity of work content through job rotation, cross-departmental collaboration, and project-based work models; they should encourage librarians to carry out innovative services, enabling their professional strengths to be fully brought into play and thereby enhancing their sense of professional value and achievement.

Second, build a personalized career development support system. University libraries should formulate personalized development plans centered on career growth for newly recruited librarians, implement “one person, one plan,” and clarify phased goals and supporting strategies; through mentoring, professional workshops, special skills training, and other means, they should help librarians achieve substantive growth in professional competence and research capability.

Third, expand on-campus and off-campus cooperation platforms and create space for career development. University libraries should actively support librarians in participating in research projects, teaching courses, and activities of professional associations, so that they can obtain opportunities for growth on broader platforms and enhance their sense of professional attainment through multiple channels.

4.3 Strengthening Process Governance

First, identify the risk of turnover as early as possible. University libraries in China may draw on the *ACRL Library Worker Retention Toolkit: Guide* to establish a proactive communication mechanism of “retention interviews.” Through regular in-depth dialogue, they can gain a deeper understanding of librarians’ career demands and development expectations, implement targeted and personalized retention strategies, and gradually form an organizational culture oriented toward actively retaining outstanding talent [21].

Second, build a fair and reasonable internal mobility mechanism. University libraries should provide librarians with channels for cross-departmental job transfers, help them find positions that better match their own characteristics and professional strengths, and weaken the external motivation to resign that arises from restricted professional development.

Third, improve job embeddedness. On the one hand, university libraries should strengthen education in librarians’ professional ethics and organizational identification, and reinforce librarians’ service awareness and professionalism. On the other hand, university libraries should improve their employee-care systems by providing librarians with support services such as psychological counseling, stress relief, and career-development guidance [20], thereby creating a harmonious and warm organizational atmosphere. At the same time, through institutionalized career-development support, clear promotion paths, and predictable room for growth, librarians’ personal development can have goals and pathways, enabling win-win growth for both individuals and the organization.

5 Conclusion

Compared with previous studies, the theoretical contributions of this study are as follows. First, it reveals the nonlinear process of librarians’ turnover as “long-term accumulation—opportunity triggering.” Librarians’ turnover intentions originate from the long-term accumulation of structural push factors rather than

from the direct drive of a single factor, and are ultimately transformed into action under the attraction of external opportunities. Second, it finds that talent loss in university libraries shows a significant tendency toward risk avoidance and path dependence. The targets of career transition are mostly concentrated in stable and similar positions, such as administrative departments within the university, rather than in cross-industry or competitive fields. This indicates that librarians are more attracted by low-risk and low-uncertainty opportunities, rather than simply pursuing higher economic returns, which constitutes an important supplement to the assumption of “pull” in traditional push-pull theory. Third, it identifies weak transition barriers as an important factor in talent loss from university libraries. Most interviewees encountered no significant resistance during mobility, and neither the emotional constraints of the original institution nor the adaptation barriers of the new environment were obvious.

However, this paper still has certain limitations. Owing to limitations in the scope and number of research subjects selected, the universality of the research conclusions still needs to be further verified among more types of universities and a broader range of librarian groups. In the future, the theoretical model constructed in this paper may be tested and optimized by expanding the sample size and conducting quantitative analysis by librarian type.

References

- [1] Shan Feng, Chen Ya. An exploration of evaluation theory for smart libraries in China [J]. *Research on Library Science*, 2022(9): 2-9.
- [2] Steering Committee for Library and Information Work in Higher Education Institutions, Ministry of Education. Statistical data [EB/OL]. [2025-12-07]. <http://scal.edu.cn/tjpg/tjsj>.
- [3] Luo Xiaoping, Luo Zhengchun. Current situation and strategies of library human-capital management: starting from the massive loss of library human resources [J]. *Library Development*, 2002(5): 32-34.
- [4] Li Xiaomei. How university libraries should respond to the impact of the market economy [J]. *University Library Work*, 1995(3): 11-13.
- [5] Zang Xiaorong. Analysis and reflections on the loss of “talent” in university libraries [J]. *University Library Work*, 1995(3): 30-31, 34.
- [6] Li Jian. On talent management in university libraries from the perspective of talent loss [J]. *Library*, 2000(2): 65-66.
- [7] Xu Zhengni, Wang Qian. Analysis of the influence of library type on the professional competence of ordinary library staff [J]. *Research on Library Science*, 2019(11): 53-59.
- [8] Guo Quanzhen, Huang Chen. Discussion on the construction of talent teams in university libraries: also on the career development of millennial librarians [J]. *Library Journal*, 2022(5): 46-55.

- [9] Su Shanshan. A study on the relationship among psychological capital, job burnout, and turnover intention of university librarians [J]. *New Century Library*, 2019(3): 42–47.
- [10] Wang Qing. An empirical study on the turnover intention of librarians in China [J]. *Library Research and Work*, 2021(2): 60–66.
- [11] Liu Beibei, Li Runbin, Liu Jing, et al. Influencing factors and countermeasures of talent loss in university libraries in the context of smart libraries [J]. *Information Research*, 2021(7): 114–121.
- [12] Huynh T T. Library staff recruitment and retention for managerial positions in Vietnam [J]. *Information and Learning Science*, 2017(7–8): 354–363.
- [13] Heady C, Fyn A F, Foster-Kaufman A, et al. Contributory factors to academic librarian turnover: a mixed-methods study [J]. *Journal of Library Administration*, 2020(6): 579–599.
- [14] Kyumana V. An investigation of job satisfaction among library staff in selected academic libraries in Tanzania [D]. Dar es Salaam: University of Dar es Salaam, 2018.
- [15] Omotunde O I, Alegbeleye G O. Talent management practices and job performance of librarians in university libraries in Nigeria [J]. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 2021(2): 102319.
- [16] Omeluzor S U, Nwosu C C, Molokwu U E. Effects of library infrastructure on turnover intentions of librarians: a study of university libraries in South-South and South-East of Nigeria [J]. *Library Philosophy and Practice*, 2018: 1967.
- [17] Chen Xiangming. *Qualitative research methods and social science research* [M]. Beijing: Educational Science Publishing House, 2000: 12.
- [18] Shi Lin, Yang Jing, Li Enji. The impact of artificial intelligence development on the settlement intentions of young floating populations [J/OL]. *Economy and Management*, 1–14 [2026-01-21]. <https://link.cnki.net/urlid/13.1032.F.20260120.1133.002>.
- [19] Lin Songyue, Yu Yitian, Liu Jin. The mobility patterns of academic talent in Chinese universities: native-place effects and regional differences [J]. *Chongqing Higher Education Research*, 2025(6): 54–68.
- [20] Li Zhifeng, Wei Di. The micro decision-making mechanism of university teacher mobility: an interpretation based on the “four-forces model” [J]. *Higher Education Research*, 2018(7): 39–45.
- [21] ACRL. ACRL Library worker retention toolkit: guide [EB/OL]. [2025-12-07]. <https://www.ala.org/acrl/initiatives/retention-toolkit>.

Research on the Causes of Talent Loss and Coping Strategies in University Libraries: A Qualitative Exploration Based on Interviews with Former Librarians

Zheng Yahui Zhang Qilin

Business College of Southwest University, Chongqing, 400715

Abstract Against the backdrop of national institutional streamlining reforms, university libraries are facing increasingly severe human resource challenges, and retaining young talent has become an urgent practical issue to be addressed. Investigating the factors that drive librarians to resign and proposing corresponding strategies is essential for ensuring the sustainable development of university libraries. This study focuses on 24 librarians who had worked in university libraries for three years or more and voluntarily resigned, employing grounded theory to conduct qualitative analysis. Based on three-level coding, the push-pull theory is incorporated to construct a model of talent loss in university libraries. The findings reveal that unreasonable organizational operations, weakened job characteristics, and limited career development jointly constitute the “push” forces, which interact with the “pull” forces of external opportunities. Meanwhile, the “resistance” forces from outflow and inflow barriers are relatively insufficient, further exacerbating the turnover tendency. In addition, librarian turnover is largely the result of the long-term accumulation of push factors and exhibits clear characteristics of low-risk preference and path dependence. The study recommends that university libraries optimize organizational systems, improve the professional ecosystem, and strengthen process-oriented governance to enhance the stability and vitality of their talent workforce.

Keywords University libraries; Former librarians; Talent loss; Talent management

(Continued from page 6)

School-Based Reading Promotion: Background, Definition, Practice, and Experience

Wang Bo¹ Li Lufang² Tian Rong²

1. Peking University Library, Beijing, 100871

2. Zhejiang Chinese Medical University Library, Hangzhou, 310000

Abstract This paper introduces the new concept of “school-based reading promotion,” defined as an umbrella term for reading promotion activities that

are closely integrated with the distinctive characteristics of a particular university. This concept is intended to facilitate professional exchange and academic communication among such initiatives. Taking Zhejiang Chinese Medical University Library as a case study, this paper systematically presents a series of school-based reading promotion activities implemented there. On this basis, it distills key practical experiences in conducting school-based reading promotion: adhering to the overarching principle of “for the university, within the university, and based on the university,” centering on literature recommendation, responding closely to the needs of young students, emphasizing the continuity of creative ideas, integrating the “Five Domains of Education” into reading promotion, and aligning with the broader agenda of developing the New Medical Sciences and New Liberal Arts. This paper argues that school-based reading promotion is both replicable and scalable, is particularly well-suited to universities with clearly defined disciplinary strengths, and can contribute to deepening and advancing nationwide reading initiatives.

Keywords School-based reading promotion; Academic libraries; Distinctive reading promotion; Nationwide reading

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

Source: ChinaXiv. Machine translation. Verify with the original.