



Original Article

INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE AND THE PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES OF LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS: A SOCIOCULTURAL STUDY OF GOVERNMENT-AIDED COLLEGES IN SOUTHERN MAHARASHTRAT

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ABSTRACT

Institutional culture plays an important role in shaping professional identity, workplace experiences, recognition, motivation, and the sense of belonging of employees within educational institutions. In academic libraries, professional experiences are influenced not only by salary and physical working conditions but also by institutional values, professional hierarchies, recognition practices, career structures, technological environments, and opportunities for collective participation. This study examines the professional experiences of library professionals working in government-aided colleges in Southern Maharashtra through an institutional and sociocultural perspective. The study covers 625 institutions located in Sangli, Satara, Kolhapur, Solapur, and Pune districts. A total of 3,125 questionnaires were distributed, of which 2,387 completed questionnaires were received, representing an overall response rate of 76.38%. Structured questionnaires and personal interviews were used for data collection, while percentage analysis, chi-square tests, correlation analysis, and SPSS were employed for analysis. The findings indicate that 72% of respondents reported overall job satisfaction; however, several institutional conditions significantly influence their professional experiences. Inadequate supporting staff, limited recognition of librarians as teaching professionals, unsuitable promotion mechanisms, slow internet connectivity, employment insecurity, and weak professional associations emerged as major concerns. These conditions are interpreted as expressions of institutional culture because they shape professional status, workplace relationships, access to resources, and opportunities for development. The study concludes that a supportive institutional culture based on professional recognition, equitable advancement, adequate staffing, effective digital infrastructure, and stronger collective representation is essential for improving the professional experiences of academic library personnel.

Keywords: Institutional Culture, Sociocultural Environment, Library Professionals, Professional Identity, Government-Aided Colleges, Southern Maharashtra, Professional Recognition

INTRODUCTION

INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Institutional culture refers to the shared values, practices, expectations, norms, relationships, and organizational traditions that influence how individuals experience their workplace. Within higher educational institutions, culture is reflected through administrative practices, professional hierarchies, recognition systems, communication patterns, opportunities for participation,

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career structures, and relationships among different categories of employees. These elements influence not only how work is organized but also how professionals understand their status and contribution within an institution.

Professional experience is therefore not created solely by formal job descriptions or financial compensation. Employees interpret their positions through everyday interactions with administrators, colleagues, students, institutional policies, and systems of evaluation. Recognition, dignity, autonomy, participation, and opportunities for advancement become important cultural dimensions of institutional life. A supportive institutional culture may strengthen commitment and professional identity, while a culture marked by limited recognition or weak support may create dissatisfaction even when basic working conditions are acceptable.

CHANGING CULTURAL ROLE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Academic libraries occupy an important position in the educational and knowledge culture of colleges. Traditionally, libraries were associated primarily with acquisition, classification, cataloguing, circulation, and preservation of printed documents. The growth of information and communication technology has transformed academic libraries into hybrid knowledge environments where professionals are expected to manage electronic databases, institutional repositories, digital resources, Library Management Systems (LMS), Online Public Access Catalogues (OPAC), electronic journals, and research-support services.

This transformation has also changed the professional identity of librarians. Their responsibilities increasingly include information literacy, digital-resource management, research assistance, scholarly communication, and technology-based user services. However, institutional perceptions of librarians and their professional status may not always develop at the same pace as their changing responsibilities. Examining these tensions offers a useful way to understand the cultural position of library professionals within higher education institutions.

SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT OF GOVERNMENT-AIDED COLLEGES

Government-aided colleges occupy an important position in the higher education system of Maharashtra. Colleges in Sangli, Satara, Kolhapur, Solapur, and Pune serve students from diverse geographical, social, educational, and economic backgrounds, including substantial rural and semi-urban populations. Library professionals working in these institutions operate at the intersection of organizational structures, educational expectations, technological change, professional hierarchies, and local social environments.

Challenges such as inadequate staff strength, limited financial resources, insufficient professional recognition, slow career progression, technological limitations, and expectations to perform duties beyond professional responsibilities can influence how librarians experience their institutions. These issues are not merely administrative; they also reveal underlying institutional values about professional status, role expectations, and the distribution of support and recognition.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES OF LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS

Previous research has demonstrated that the professional experiences of library and information science personnel are shaped by both individual characteristics and organizational conditions. [Kale \(2022\)](#) reported generally favourable levels of job satisfaction among LIS professionals in colleges and highlighted the importance of professional engagement and user interaction. [Sohail \(2019\)](#) found variations in job satisfaction according to demographic characteristics, indicating that professional experiences are influenced by the interaction between personal circumstances and organizational environments.

INSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION AND WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

[Tella et al. \(2007\)](#) examined the relationship between work motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment and established that these dimensions are closely interconnected. [Spector \(1997\)](#) identified appreciation, communication, benefits, promotion opportunities, and supervision as important factors affecting job satisfaction. These dimensions are also relevant to institutional culture because they influence how professionals understand their place within the organization and the extent to which their contributions are acknowledged.

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY, RECOGNITION, AND ADVANCEMENT

Professional identity is strengthened when institutional structures recognize the knowledge, responsibilities, and academic contributions of a professional group. In academic institutions, librarians support teaching,

learning, research, information literacy, access to scholarly resources, and digital knowledge services. Where these contributions are recognized through status, participation, promotion, and career opportunities, professional identity may be strengthened. Conversely, limited recognition or unequal status may contribute to professional marginalization.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory provides a useful interpretive foundation for understanding these experiences. Herzberg (1959) distinguished between hygiene factors, including salary and working conditions, and motivational factors such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, and advancement. In the present context, this distinction helps explain why relatively acceptable salary and infrastructure may coexist with concerns about professional recognition, promotion, and career fulfilment.

INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE AS A SOCIOCULTURAL FRAMEWORK

A sociocultural perspective draws attention to the meanings attached to professional roles, institutional expectations, collective representation, and everyday workplace practices. For library professionals, factors such as recognition as academic contributors, relationships with management, access to promotion, adequacy of support staff, technological resources, and the strength of professional associations contribute to the lived experience of institutional culture. The present study therefore re-examines existing evidence on professional satisfaction as part of a broader institutional and sociocultural environment.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The role of academic libraries has changed considerably with the expansion of higher education and the growth of digital information resources. The effectiveness of these libraries depends not only on the technical competence of professionals but also on the institutional environment in which they work. Recognition, supportive staffing, employment security, equitable promotion, technological access, and professional participation can influence the quality of professional life and the services delivered to students and teachers.

Government-aided colleges may differ from universities, private colleges, and research institutions in staffing patterns, promotion opportunities, institutional regulations, financial resources, and technological infrastructure. A sociocultural examination of library professionals in this setting helps identify how institutional practices shape professional identity, belonging, recognition, and workplace experience. The findings may assist college managements, educational authorities, professional associations, and library professionals in developing more inclusive and supportive institutional cultures.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1) To examine the institutional culture experienced by library professionals working in government-aided colleges of Southern Maharashtra.
- 2) To explore how professional recognition and institutional status shape the professional identity of library professionals.
- 3) To examine the influence of staffing, promotion practices, employment conditions, and technological infrastructure on professional experiences.
- 4) To understand the relationship between institutional practices and the overall satisfaction of library professionals.
- 5) To examine the role of professional associations and collective representation in shaping librarians' professional experiences.
- 6) To interpret the professional experiences of library personnel within the sociocultural context of government-aided higher education.
- 7) To recommend measures for developing a more supportive, participatory, equitable, and professionally inclusive institutional culture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employed descriptive and analytical research methods using a mixed-method approach. Quantitative information was obtained primarily through structured questionnaires, while personal interviews provided additional information concerning professional experiences, organizational conditions, and workplace challenges. The present sociocultural interpretation is based on institutional dimensions already represented in the collected data, including professional recognition, staffing, employment conditions, promotion opportunities, technological resources, and professional representation.

GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE AND SAMPLE

The study covered five districts of Southern Maharashtra: Sangli, Satara, Kolhapur, Solapur, and Pune. A total of 625 institutions were included. From each district, 125 institutions were covered and 625 questionnaires were distributed. Thus, 3,125

questionnaires were distributed across the five districts, of which 2,387 completed questionnaires were received, resulting in an overall response rate of 76.38%.

Table 1

Table 1 Sample Distribution			
District	Institutions	Questionnaires Sent	Responses Received
Sangli	125	625	478 (76.48%)
Satara	125	625	476 (76.16%)
Kolhapur	125	625	480 (76.80%)
Solapur	125	625	475 (76.00%)
Pune	125	625	478 (76.48%)
Total	625	3,125	2,387 (76.38%)

The district-wise response rates are highly consistent, ranging from 76.00% in Solapur to 76.80% in Kolhapur. This balanced response pattern provides reasonably even representation from all five districts and supports a broader interpretation of the institutional experiences of library professionals across the study area.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Structured questionnaires and personal interviews were used as the principal data-collection tools. The questionnaire collected information relating to demographic characteristics, employment conditions, educational and professional qualifications, work experience, satisfaction with library-related facilities, professional recognition, staffing, technology, promotional opportunities, and other employment-related issues. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software with percentage analysis, chi-square tests, and correlation analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS AND SOCIOCULTURAL INTERPRETATION DEMOGRAPHIC AND PROFESSIONAL PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Table 2

Table 2 Demographic Profile		
Demographic Variable	Category	Percentage
Educational Qualification	UG + PG	50%
Professional Qualification	NET/SET/Ph.D.	85%
Experience	7+ Years	72%
Employment Nature	Permanent	50%
Living Location	Rural	54

The demographic profile indicates that the respondents constitute a highly qualified and experienced professional group. Eighty-five percent possess NET, SET, or Ph.D. qualifications, while 72% have more than seven years of professional experience. This suggests that most respondents are familiar with institutional systems, changing technologies, user requirements, and long-term professional responsibilities.

Only 50% of respondents reported permanent employment, while 54% live in rural areas. Employment status is especially important from a sociocultural perspective because security and continuity can influence an individual's sense of belonging, professional status, and long-term relationship with an institution. Rural location may also shape access to high-speed internet, technical support, professional development programmes, and networking opportunities.

INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES AND EVERYDAY PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Table 3

Table 3 Satisfaction with Selected Institutional Conditions	
Satisfaction Parameter	Satisfied (%)
Book Collection	82%
Salary	78%
LMS Functioning	75%
OPAC Usability	77%
Overall Job Satisfaction	72%

The highest satisfaction level was reported for book collections, with 82% of respondents expressing satisfaction. Salary satisfaction stood at 78%, while 75% were satisfied with LMS functioning and 77% with OPAC usability. These findings suggest that many institutions provide reasonably acceptable basic resources and automation facilities.

Overall job satisfaction was reported by 72% of respondents. However, the broader findings indicate that only 32% reported strong satisfaction. This distinction is important for understanding institutional culture. Employees may consider basic conditions acceptable while still experiencing limited professional fulfilment because recognition, advancement, participation, and status remain inadequate. In this sense, institutional culture is expressed not only through tangible resources but also through symbolic and professional forms of acknowledgement.

PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION AND INSTITUTIONAL STATUS

A major cultural dimension of the findings concerns professional recognition. Fifty-eight percent of respondents reported dissatisfaction with the lack of teaching-status recognition. Academic librarians contribute to teaching, learning, research support, information literacy, and scholarly resource access. When these contributions are not adequately recognized in institutional status structures, professionals may experience a gap between the actual academic value of their work and the formal position assigned to them.

This issue is closely connected with professional identity. Recognition communicates institutional respect and determines whether professionals feel included in the academic community. Limited recognition can therefore affect motivation, participation, and the sense of professional belonging even when other aspects of employment remain satisfactory.

PROMOTION CULTURE AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Seventy-one percent of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the API system or its suitability for promotion. Career progression is not merely an administrative matter; it reflects how an institution evaluates professional contribution and defines merit. For highly qualified and experienced library professionals, inadequate promotion mechanisms may create a perception that their academic, technological, research, and service contributions are not fully valued.

A transparent and profession-sensitive promotion culture is therefore central to an inclusive institutional environment. When advancement systems do not correspond with actual responsibilities, professional development may be discouraged and long-term institutional commitment can weaken.

STAFFING PRACTICES AND PROFESSIONAL ROLE EXPECTATIONS

Table 4

Table 4 Institutional Factors Associated with Dissatisfaction	
Factor	Dissatisfied (%)
Inadequate Staff Support	71%
Slow Internet Speed	60%
No Teaching Recognition	58%
API Not Proper for Promotion	71%
Weak Professional Associations	86%

Inadequate staff support was reported by 71% of respondents. Academic libraries involve acquisition, cataloguing, classification, circulation, shelving, stock verification, database management, user assistance,

digital services, and maintenance of records. When support staff are insufficient, qualified librarians may be required to perform routine clerical functions in addition to professional responsibilities.

This pattern has a cultural implication because it influences how the institution defines and uses professional expertise. When highly qualified professionals spend substantial time on tasks that could be delegated to supporting staff, their specialized competencies are underutilized. The allocation of work therefore becomes an indicator of institutional perceptions of professional roles and status.

TECHNOLOGY, GEOGRAPHY, AND INSTITUTIONAL ACCESS

The findings regarding technology present a mixed picture. Satisfaction with LMS and OPAC systems was comparatively high, yet 60% of respondents reported dissatisfaction with slow internet connectivity. Modern academic libraries depend on stable internet access for electronic journals, databases, e-books, institutional repositories, communication, and research support.

The fact that 54% of respondents live in rural areas may also be relevant to variations in digital access and professional development opportunities. From a sociocultural viewpoint, technological infrastructure affects participation in the wider academic and professional community. Limited connectivity can therefore produce not only operational difficulties but also unequal access to knowledge networks and continuing professional development.

COLLECTIVE REPRESENTATION AND PROFESSIONAL CULTURE

The strongest dissatisfaction factor in the study relates to professional unions or associations, with 86% of respondents perceiving them as weak. Professional associations can support advocacy, professional standards, networking, continuing education, policy representation, and communication with educational authorities.

Weak collective representation may contribute to a sense that professional concerns are individualized rather than institutionally or collectively addressed. From a sociocultural perspective, professional associations help create shared occupational identity and collective voice. Strengthening such organizations may therefore improve not only policy advocacy but also professional solidarity and cultural recognition.

DISCUSSION

INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE AND PROFESSIONAL FULFILMENT

The findings reveal a significant contrast in the professional experiences of library professionals working in government-aided colleges of Southern Maharashtra. Respondents are highly qualified and experienced, yet substantial concerns persist regarding professional recognition, staffing, promotion, technology, employment security, and collective representation. This contrast suggests that professional fulfilment depends on institutional culture as much as on individual qualifications or technical competence.

The 72% overall satisfaction figure indicates that a majority view their employment positively at a general level. However, the finding that only 32% reported strong satisfaction demonstrates that acceptable conditions do not necessarily translate into deep professional fulfilment. Institutional culture becomes particularly visible in the gap between having functional resources and feeling adequately recognized, represented, and able to progress professionally.

RECOGNITION AS A CULTURAL PRACTICE

Recognition operates as an important cultural practice because it communicates which forms of work an institution considers valuable. The reported lack of teaching-status recognition among librarians indicates a potential mismatch between their actual contribution to teaching and research support and their formal

institutional position. Such a mismatch can influence professional identity and reinforce distinctions between occupational groups within colleges.

CAREER STRUCTURES AND INSTITUTIONAL VALUES

Promotion mechanisms similarly express institutional values. When career assessment systems fail to reflect the research, technological, academic, and service contributions of library professionals, employees may perceive institutional structures as inequitable. Career progression therefore needs to be understood as part of institutional culture rather than simply as an administrative process.

MATERIAL AND SYMBOLIC DIMENSIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

The findings demonstrate that institutional culture has both material and symbolic dimensions. Book collections, LMS functioning, OPAC usability, staffing, and internet connectivity represent material conditions. Professional status, recognition, promotion, occupational identity, and collective representation represent symbolic and relational conditions. A strong institutional culture requires attention to both dimensions because adequate infrastructure cannot fully compensate for weak professional recognition, while recognition alone cannot overcome serious operational limitations.

SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT AND PROFESSIONAL PARTICIPATION

The rural and semi-urban context of many institutions also has relevance. Access to digital infrastructure, training, professional networks, and academic opportunities may vary geographically. These conditions can influence how easily professionals participate in wider scholarly and professional communities. Institutional support is therefore particularly important in ensuring that geographical location does not become a barrier to professional development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) **Strengthen Professional Recognition:** College managements should formally acknowledge the academic contribution of library professionals to teaching, learning, research support, information literacy, and scholarly communication. Appropriate recognition can strengthen professional identity and institutional belonging.
- 2) **Develop Profession-Sensitive Promotion Systems:** Promotion and assessment mechanisms should reflect the actual responsibilities of academic librarians, including research support, technology management, digital services, professional development, and academic contributions.
- 3) **Provide Adequate Supporting Staff:** Government-aided colleges should ensure sufficient support staff so that qualified library professionals can concentrate on specialized and academic functions rather than excessive routine clerical work.
- 4) **Promote Employment Security:** Wherever possible and in accordance with applicable regulations, greater employment stability should be provided. Employment security can support long-term commitment, professional confidence, and stronger institutional attachment.
- 5) **Improve Digital Infrastructure:** Reliable high-speed internet and appropriate technical support should be treated as essential academic infrastructure, particularly in rural and semi-urban colleges.
- 6) **Encourage Continuous Professional Development:** Regular training should be organized in library automation, digital libraries, electronic resource management, institutional repositories, research databases, information literacy, and related areas.
- 7) **Strengthen Professional Associations:** Library associations should enhance advocacy, professional networking, continuing education, policy representation, and communication with educational authorities.
- 8) **Build Participatory Institutional Cultures:** Library professionals should be meaningfully included in relevant academic and administrative discussions where library services, research support, digital resources, and institutional knowledge systems are concerned.
- 9) **Conduct Periodic Institutional Culture Assessments:** Colleges should periodically assess not only job satisfaction but also professional recognition, participation, communication, career opportunity, workload, and institutional belonging among library professionals.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The study is geographically limited to government-aided colleges situated in Sangli, Satara, Kolhapur, Solapur, and Pune districts of Southern Maharashtra. Therefore, the findings primarily represent the experiences of library professionals working within the selected geographical and institutional context.

The original data collection focused substantially on job satisfaction and employment-related conditions. The sociocultural interpretation in the present study is therefore based on variables that reflect institutional culture indirectly, such as professional recognition, promotion, staffing, technology, employment status, and professional representation. Future research may employ dedicated instruments for measuring institutional culture, professional identity, belonging, participation, leadership culture, workplace communication, and occupational status.

Further comparative research may examine government-aided colleges alongside private colleges, autonomous colleges, universities, and other higher educational institutions. Studies comparing rural and urban institutions may also provide useful evidence regarding the relationship between geography, infrastructure, institutional culture, and professional opportunity.

CONCLUSION

The study presents the professional experiences of library professionals in government-aided colleges of Southern Maharashtra as part of a broader institutional and sociocultural environment. Respondents are highly qualified and experienced, with 85% possessing NET, SET, or Ph.D. qualifications and 72% having more than seven years of professional experience. Overall job satisfaction of 72% indicates that many professionals view important aspects of their employment positively, particularly book collections, salary, LMS functioning, and OPAC usability.

At the same time, the findings reveal significant cultural and institutional concerns. Inadequate supporting staff, limited teaching-status recognition, unsuitable promotion mechanisms, slow internet connectivity, employment insecurity, and weak professional associations influence professional identity and the quality of workplace experience. These conditions demonstrate that institutional culture is shaped not only by formal policies but also by the everyday distribution of recognition, resources, responsibility, opportunity, and collective voice.

A supportive institutional culture should therefore combine material resources with professional dignity and participation. Adequate staffing, transparent career structures, stronger recognition, secure employment, continuous training, reliable digital infrastructure, and effective professional associations can collectively improve the professional experiences of library personnel. Strengthening the institutional culture surrounding academic libraries can also contribute to better library services and stronger support for teaching, learning, and research in government-aided colleges.

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