

Exploring the role of library managers in supporting female professionals: Perspectives from Punjab Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this study was to explore the role of immediate managers in fostering a congenial workplace environment for female library professionals. This research is based on qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with female library professionals employed in universities recognised by the Higher Education Commission in Punjab, Pakistan. The findings revealed that most managers offer constructive feedback to their subordinates, which the participants noted had a positive impact, enhancing both efficiency and work performance. They also reported that their managers encouraged female employees to share their opinions and introduce new ideas. Furthermore, the study elaborated on the participants' suggestions to help managers improve the congeniality of the workplace environment. These findings are valuable for raising awareness among management and authorities regarding the expectations of subordinates from their managers. Additionally, the results can inform the development of policies aimed at creating a healthy and productive work environment that benefits both employees and the organisation.

Keywords: Female library professionals; Workplace congeniality; Academic libraries; Organisational work environment; Women in librarianship.

INTRODUCTION

Managers, the individuals responsible for controlling departments, organisations, or staff groups, play multifaceted roles within the organisational framework. The literature underscores the essential role of managers as a bridge between subordinates and the organisation, where they facilitate this connection by reporting employee performance to executives and conveying directives or information from executives back to employees. This process not only fosters stronger affective commitment and employee satisfaction but also promotes effective communication throughout the organizational hierarchy (Pawirosumarto et al., 2017; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In addition, managers are expected to support their subordinates by offering guidance and training that enhance employees' problem-solving skills. This support fosters professional development and empowers staff to handle challenges more effectively. This is the responsibility of the manager to ensure that his/her employees are equipped with the required skills, and

resources to achieve the departmental and organisational goals (Adair, 1988; Elangovan & Karakowsky, 1999; Rabey, 2007). Previous literature indicates a healthy relationship between manager's support and employees job commitment, job satisfaction and work performance, productivity, and employee's perception about work environment (Dlamini, Suknunan, & Bhana, 2022; Ismail et al., 2010; Mohamed & Ali, 2016).

A wealth of literature is available where the role of managers is recognised as very important for employee's satisfaction, performance, and overall organisational success. However, there is a noticeable gap in studies specifically focusing on the perceptions and experiences of female professionals. In libraries and information centres, the manager's role in fostering a supportive work environment is vital. Yet, despite this recognition, little attention has been given to understanding how managerial practices affect female employees, particularly in the context of developing countries such as Pakistan. This oversight highlights the need for more nuanced research in this area.

The decision to focus specifically on female professionals stems from the fact that gender significantly shapes workplace experiences and behaviour. Women often face unique social, personal, cultural, and organisational challenges when entering the workforce. Thus, understanding managerial practices within libraries from a female perspective is crucial. Therefore, the primary aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of female library professionals regarding the role of immediate managers in fostering a congenial workplace. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- (a) Explore the manager's behaviour towards the female subordinate's work performance;
- (b) Assess the manager's feedback to female employees and its impact on employees;
- (c) Investigate the manager's role in making a workplace conducive for female library professionals, specifically in the Punjab-Pakistan.

The following research questions (RQ) guided the study:

- RQ1. How does a manager respond to female subordinates' work performance?
- RQ2. What type of feedback does the manager provide to subordinates, and how does it affect female employees?
- RQ3. What is the manager's role in creating a congenial workplace for female library professionals?

The findings will offer valuable insights for authorities, policymakers, and practitioners to develop more supportive policies. Additionally, the results will contribute to advancing knowledge in library management, organisational behaviour, and gender studies, with broader implications for promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workforce.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review explores key themes central to this study, encompassing research that examines the impact of managerial feedback, responsiveness to employee input, managers' influence on employees, and the specific context of supervisors within librarianship. Additionally, it incorporates studies from the Pakistani context to establish relevance and draw connections between the literature and the current study's objectives.

Adair (1988) highlighted the pivotal role of supervisors as mentors and guides, emphasising their influence on employee development and problem-solving (Elangovan & Karakowsky,

1999; Rabey, 2007). In contrast, Tepper (2000) explored the detrimental effects of abusive supervision, which can significantly diminish job satisfaction, reduce organisational commitment, and increase psychological distress among employees. In contrast, supervisors offering constructive feedback and acknowledgment foster trust and positive team dynamics (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Additionally, a qualitative study by Kroth, Boverie, and Zondlo (2007) emphasised the role of managers in creating a supportive work environment, while Dike and Madubueze (2019) advocated for democratic leadership to enhance employee participation and outcomes. Similarly, Ismail et al. (2010) and Nadarasa and Thuraisingam (2014) affirmed the positive impact of democratic leadership on employee satisfaction and organisational performance. Supervisors in higher education settings play a crucial role in shaping organisational culture and addressing stressors to improve employee well-being (Tureen, 2021).

Several studies indicated the pivotal role of supervisor support in enhancing job satisfaction (Griffin et al., 2001; Sharma & Jyoti, 2006; Gilbreath & Benson, 2004; Stichler, 2005; Gentry & Shanock, 2008; Ismail et al., 2010). This support also correlates with increased retention and decreased turnover (Stichler, 2005). Positive supervisory relationships positively influence employee job performance (Gentry & Shanock, 2008), aligning tasks with employee interests and capabilities (Ismail et al., 2010). Supervisor support significantly impacts job satisfaction across various industries (Mohamed & Ali, 2016; Winarto & Chalidyanto, 2020). Additionally, it enhances employee attachment to the organisation and improves the quality of work life (Rathi & Lee, 2017). Perceived supervisor support indirectly affects employee turnover intentions (Alkhateri et al., 2018). Positive supervisor behaviour enhances employee performance through increased work engagement and workplace spirituality (De Carlo et al., 2020). Moreover, supervisor influence extends to motivation and performance outcomes (Kaiyom, Rahman, & Wan, 2021). Studies across different sectors corroborate the positive correlation between supervisor support, work autonomy, and employee performance (Msuya & Kumar, 2022; Dlamini, Suknunah, & Bhana, 2022).

A feedback-rich environment, characterized by frequency and quality, emerges as a vital component for fostering employee growth and productivity. Chur-Hansen and McLean (2006) emphasize the importance of "formative feedback," indicating that participants in their study felt supervisors often lack this skill. This suggests the need for managers to develop the ability to provide constructive feedback that facilitates growth and improvement. Farooq and Khan (2011) support this notion, suggesting that feedback and appropriate training can significantly enhance employee performance. Building on this, Zamri (2021) affirms that feedback can yield positive outcomes regarding employee performance when delivered thoughtfully. Furthermore, Martin and Hofaidhllaoui (2023) stress the significance of regular and high-quality feedback from managers, particularly for new employees. Such feedback not only aids in their understanding of the work environment and manager's expectations but also facilitates goal setting and fosters a sense of commitment to the job.

Kremer, Villamor, and Aguinis (2019) and Coelho and Augusto (2010) provide valuable insights into the strategies managers can employ to promote employee creativity and innovative behaviours, directly related to managers' responses to employee opinions and new idea sharing. By implementing practices such as establishing conducive group norms, providing job autonomy, offering feedback, and fostering supportive relationships, managers can create an environment where employees feel empowered to share their opinions and contribute new ideas. Additionally, the findings of Shin and Zhou (2003)

pointed out the importance of supportive leader-subordinate relationships in enhancing employee motivation to participate in idea-sharing initiatives.

Moreover, Adebayo and Udegbe (2004) and Bono et al. (2007) highlight the role of communication dynamics between managers and subordinates in influencing employees' willingness to share ideas. Effective communication, characterized by openness, receptiveness, and positive emotional exchanges, can encourage employees to voice their opinions and suggestions freely. Conversely, as noted by Schneider (1991), poor communication practices can create barriers to idea sharing and contribute to employee stress, ultimately hindering organisational innovation and performance.

Since the 1850s, librarianship has been predominantly associated with women, with the number of female librarians steadily increasing. By 1910, approximately 75% of library workers were female (Rubin, 2017, p.286). Rubin (2017) further explains that the appeal of librarianship to women stemmed from the perception of libraries as environments conducive to cultivation, nurturing, and socially acceptable for female employment (p. 287). Badawi (2006) conducted a study on job satisfaction among 176 female librarians in Nigeria using a questionnaire-based survey. The findings opined that managers should refine their supervisory approaches to enhance employee satisfaction. Meanwhile, Yousaf *et al.* (2013) noted a trend of increasing female participation in librarianship in Pakistan following their academic degrees, yet highlighted a dearth of studies examining the specific challenges female library professionals face. Another study by Jaswasl and Sheikh (2010) shed light on the unique obstacles female librarians face in Pakistan.

Similarly, Khan and Ahmed (2013) surveyed male and female librarians in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, revealing dissatisfaction among LIS professionals with aspects such as job nature, supervision, and cognitive rewards. highlighted the prevalence of physical and psychological harassment experienced by female librarians in Pakistan. Furthermore, Saleem *et al.*, (2021) delved into the workplace environment from the female perspective, finding appreciation for supportive immediate managers in terms of respect, feedback, task allocation, and accessibility. However, the study also identified instances of critical behaviour exhibited by managers in the workplace.

Building on the literature discussed, it becomes evident that there is a noticeable gap in research regarding the role of managers in the workplace, particularly within librarianship. Thus, there is a pressing need for studies that specifically examine the dynamics of managerial influence on the work environment, focusing on the experiences of female professionals. This is especially crucial within the context of developing countries such as Pakistan. Investigating the work environment from a female perspective in libraries can provide valuable insights into women's challenges and opportunities in this profession, ultimately contributing to developing more inclusive and supportive workplaces.

METHOD

Qualitative research method based on semi-structured interviews were selected to conduct this study. A self-developed interview guide was prepared and used as a primary tool for data collection. Interview guides help the researchers to maintain consistency in questioning. After preparing, the guide was sent to experts for their feedback and suggested changes were incorporated into the final draft. Pilot interviews were conducted with six female librarians from sub-campus of different universities in Lahore to check

the reliability of the interview guide. These interviews helped the researcher identify the rapport and sentence structure issues, which were adjusted after the pilot interviews. The revised interview guide (Appendix A) was then used for final data collection.

Female library professionals working in the Higher education Commissions recognized public and private sector universities of Punjab province were selected as sample for the study. Punjab is recognised as a hub for educational activities, boasting 69 universities in both the public and private sectors, according to statistics from the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2019. The researchers compiled a list of female librarians, noting that nearly 90 female librarians are employed across sixty-nine public and private universities in Punjab. An email outlining the study's purpose and procedures was sent to female library professionals, requesting their consent to participate. While twenty individuals initially responded positively, only fourteen were able to proceed with the interviews for unspecified reasons. Once the interview schedules were finalised, the researcher conducted the interviews online using Zoom and mobile calls. Each interview lasted an average of 40-50 minutes and was recorded with the participants' consent. The interviews were transcribed and translated using Microsoft Word. Verbatim responses were carefully preserved for analysis, though filler words such as "ahm" and "well" were omitted to improve readability. To ensure data accuracy and validity, the member-checking technique was employed, where the transcriptions were sent to participants for verification. Once confirmed, the researcher proceeded with data analysis using the verified transcription sheets.

FINDINGS

Participants' Demographic and Professional Characteristics

The demographic details of the 14 participants (see Table 1) show that half were employed in the private sector, while the other half worked in the public sector. Most participants were aged between 26 and 35, with work experience ranging from three to fourteen years. Notably, all 14 participants were affiliated with the central libraries of their respective universities. As shown in Table 1, eight of the library professionals worked under male supervision, while five were supervised by females. One participant mentioned that her manager held an additional responsibility for overseeing the library.

Table 1: Participants' Demographic and Professional Characteristics (N=14)

Code	Age	Academic Qualification	Years of Experience	Organisational Sector	Manager's Gender
P1	32	MPhil	8	Public	Male
P2	24	Masters	3	Private	Female
P3	25	Masters	4	Private	Female
P4	35	MPhil	10	Public	Male
P5	35	Masters	12	Private	Male
P6	28	Masters	5	Private	Male
P7	29	MPhil	7	Private	Female
P8	32	MPhil	9	Public	Female
P9	29	Masters	6	Public	Male (Dean)
P10	32	MPhil	8	Public	Female
P11	27	Masters	5	Private	Male
P12	38	MPhil	14	Public	Male
P13	33	Masters	9	Public	Male
P14	26	Masters	4	Private	Male

Manager's Role at the Workplace

The following themes were identified for further exploration: Managers' responses to employees' work output; managers' reactions to employees' opinions and the sharing of new ideas; feedback from managers to employees and its impacts; and the role of managers in fostering a congenial workplace.

(a) Managers' response to employee's work output

Based on the researchers' inquiry into participants' experiences with their managers' reactions to subpar performance, two distinct subthemes emerged: constructive responses and critical responses. Of the 14 participants, nine reported such events where managers displayed understanding and support rather than annoyance when performance fell short of expectations. In these cases, managers offered guidance and suggestions aimed at helping employees improve their performance. For instance, one participant (P4) recounted an incident where a colleague made a significant mistake close to a deadline, prompting the manager to involve the entire team in revising and completing the task on time. The verbatims/ direct quotations are mentioned in Figure 1.

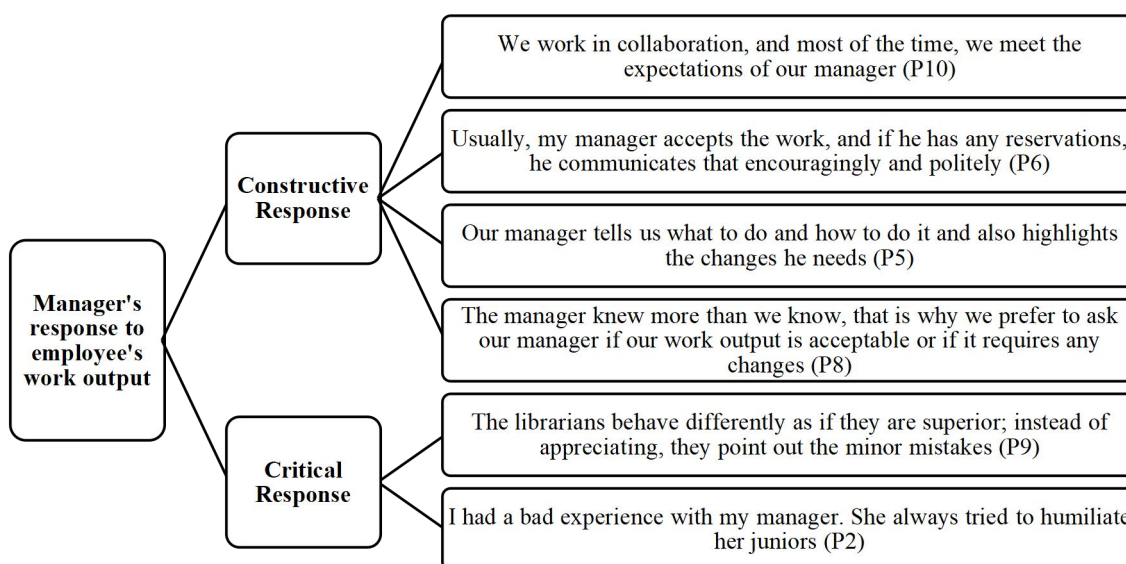


Figure 1: Manager's Responses to Employees

Among the participants, five shared experiences in which their managers criticised employees, with one participant (P11) voicing dissatisfaction regarding their manager's disrespectful behavior. Furthermore, two participants noted instances where their managers delegated research assignments to them because the managers were enrolled in MPhil programs. Rather than showing appreciation or empathy for their efforts, these managers responded angrily to any mistakes made in the assignments. A participant (P3) remarked, "My manager never appreciated the efforts of completing her work. But, in case of any mistake, she responds negatively".

(b) Managers' response to employee's opinions and new ideas sharing

When participants were prompted to discuss their strategies for communicating disagreements with their managers, 12 out of 14 indicated their managers were receptive to suggestions. However, participants preferred thorough preparation before presenting their suggestions or disagreements. The following quotes highlight the positive attitude of library managers toward suggestions from their subordinates:

My manager appreciates the feedback and ideas from us" (P12)

Communication is essential; my manager listens to the subordinate's concerns related to work (P10)

Our manager usually discusses the official matters with the team before finalizing the decision (P14)

During the inquiry into participants' experiences of sharing new ideas with their managers and the corresponding responses, all participants confirmed that their managers were open to listening to suggestions from subordinates. However, the nature of the responses varied among the participants, indicating differing levels of engagement or support from their managers. P4 commented that *"the manager listens to the idea; if it doesn't sound appealing, he shares the drawbacks or weaknesses of that idea."* P11 said, *"My manager listens but never considers new ideas appealing enough to process."* P7 added, *"My manager is very open to suggestions, but the ideas we share never reach the implementation stage."* Similarly, participant P2 admitted that while her manager aids in implementing ideas, due credit is often not given to the originating employees. These accounts highlight the differing responses from managers toward new ideas proposed by subordinates and shed light on the varying degrees of support and acknowledgment received in the process.

(c) Feedback from the managers

Participants were asked to share their experiences regarding the feedback they received from their managers and its effects. The responses were categorized into two main areas: (i) components of feedback, and (ii) effects of feedback.

Components of feedback

Participants highlighted several key components of the feedback process, such as the context, the tone employed by managers, and the selection of words and language (Figure 2). They emphasised that the way feedback is delivered is critical in influencing its overall effectiveness. Specifically, a positive tone and careful selection of words were highlighted as essential elements in communication (P10, P14). Additionally, participants stressed the importance of learning from the feedback provided by managers. P1 opined that *"feedback given in a suggestive tone is more beneficial for employees than humiliating feedback."* Another participant (P12) also commented, *"Sometimes managers intentionally do not give 100 percent feedback about work probably because there is always room for improvement"*. These insights reinforce the critical role of effective communication in the feedback process and highlight the value of constructive and supportive feedback from managers.

Effects of Feedback on Employees

Most participants emphasised that the feedback provided by their managers was generally positive. They noted that this type of feedback was instrumental in their professional development (see Figure 2), as it contributed to improved efficiency and promoted continuous learning. Two participants (P9, P11) opined that positive feedback by the managers encourages employees to work hard and enhance efficiency. Furthermore, participants highlighted that positive feedback from managers aids in clarifying issues, thereby enhancing learning among employees (P1, P4, P14). It also motivates employees to recognize their mistakes and encourages them to invest more time, interest, and attention in learning or revising their work (P8). P7 further noted that *"feedback from managers helped identify flaws or issues, and employees put more effort into improving their work."* This summarised that constructive and positive feedback have more compelling impact on employee's development and work performance.

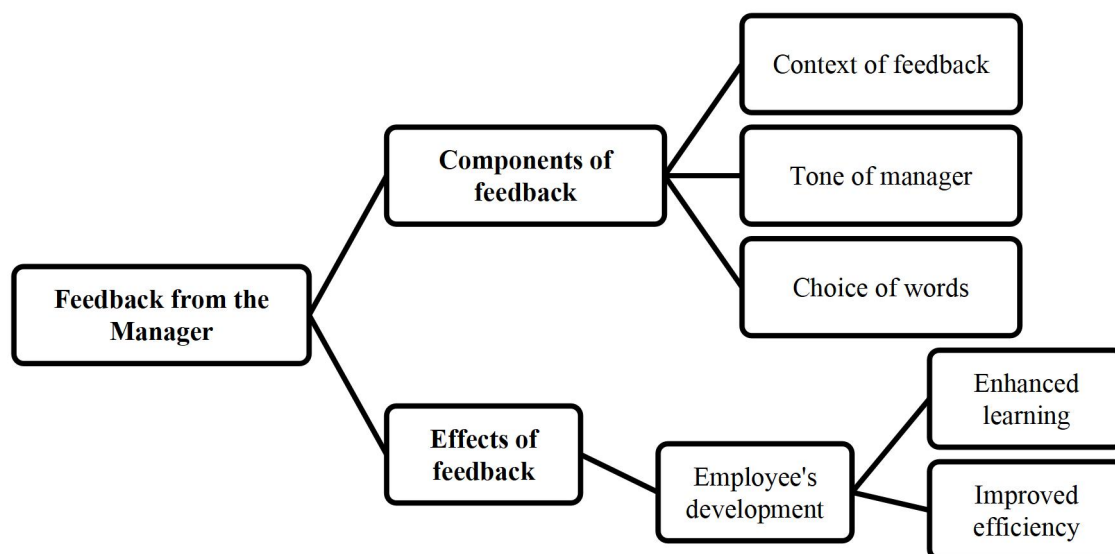


Figure 2: Managers' Feedback to Employees

(d) Managers' role in making a workplace congenial

Participants were asked to share their opinions on areas where managers could focus to foster a more supportive work environment. In general they were of the view that managers can enhance workplace congeniality if they;

- acknowledge and support employees in addressing their weaknesses and areas for improvement.
- treat all employees fairly and equally, ensuring no one is subjected to favouritism or discrimination.
- provide feedback directly to employees rather than using intermediaries, fostering transparent and open communication channels.
- prioritise staying professionally updated to facilitate the growth and development of their team members.
- remain composed and avoid letting their mood swings impact the work environment, ensuring a stable and positive atmosphere.
- recognise and appreciate employees' engagement in continuing professional development activities, encourage ongoing learning and growth,
- respect the decisions of employees who leave the organisation, and maintain professionalism and dignity in such situations.
- discourage the exchange of gifts for professional advantages, promoting fair and ethical practices in the workplace.

DISCUSSION

The study results indicate that participants were satisfied with their managers' roles in fostering congenial workplaces. Participants reported that their managers provided clear direction regarding work tasks and offered essential guidance when needed. This finding aligns with Zhao and Liu (2019), who observed that managerial coaching positively impacts employees' work performance and well-being in the workplace. It is evident from the

literature that a manager's coaching and guidance helps in clear goal setting and widen the perspective which improves employees work performance, and self-efficacy (Woo, 2017; Ellinger et al., 2011). Most participants also noted that their managers are readily available to address employees' queries and fulfill their informational needs. These findings align with a previous study by Ismail et al. (2010), which highlighted that skilled and knowledgeable managers positively influence employee performance. Additionally, supervisors' support has been shown to correlate with employees' affective commitment and job satisfaction (Mohamed & Ali, 2016).

Feedback from managers also aids employees in improving the quality of their work, ultimately enhancing their overall performance. It is recognised as a form of managerial support (van der Klink et al., 2001) and contributes to improved employee performance (Bushiri, 2014). The qualitative analysis revealed that managers generally maintained a calm demeanor when offering feedback, even when employee performance fell short of expectations. Two key themes emerged from this analysis: constructive responses and critical responses. Most participants reported receiving constructive feedback from their managers, which contributed to their professional growth. These findings align with Saleem and Ameen's (2021) study, where participants similarly noted that their managers provided feedback when necessary. The current study also identified two distinct types of feedback: positive and negative. Menguc et al. (2024) concluded that positive feedback positively influences employees' proactive customer service behavior, as it helps them recognize the importance of achieving their goals. On the other hand, negative feedback instills a sense of accountability, motivating employees to address their shortcomings. Participants emphasised the importance of managers utilising an appropriate tone, language, and choice of words when delivering feedback, as this contributes to employees' understanding of errors and areas for improvement. However, negative or humiliating feedback not only harmed the work environment but also demoralised employees, resulting in decreased motivation and morale. Sultana and Begum (2012) emphasised that supervisors should be trained to deliver constructive praise when deserved, as this can significantly boost employee performance..

Respect is crucial in fostering a congenial work environment, as it enhances employees' productivity and efficiency (Siera, 2019). Additionally, Rogers (2018) highlights that employees who feel respected are more likely to demonstrate gratitude and loyalty toward their organisations. This study revealed some instances where participants experienced disrespectful behaviour from their managers at work. Porath and Pearson (2013) opined that employees tend to think about leaving the organisation to avoid rude and disrespectful behaviours. However, managerial tactics can reduce the turnover rates (Yukl & Falbe, 1990). Udod et al., (2020) suggested that if managers treat employees with respect, and their opinions are heard, it effects their productivity as they feel valued. Therefore, it is imperative to manage a culture of respect in the workplaces.

The results also indicated that managers valued the exchange of ideas shared by female subordinates and encouraged them to voice their work-related concerns. These findings align with the studies by Samson et al. (2015) and Arnold et al. (2007), where employees expressed that their managers respected their opinions and fostered positive working relationships. Additionally, Tangirala and Ramanujam (2012) suggested that managers should actively engage in discussions with employees about workplace concerns and ideas to promote open dialogue at work.

When asked for suggestions to improve workplace congeniality, participants in this study recommended that managers assign duties and responsibilities based on employees' abilities. Similarly, Pechová, Volfová, and Jírová (2023) emphasized the importance of task delegation by managers, noting that it significantly impacts work quality and performance. They suggested that managers should carefully consider various factors when assigning tasks, such as desired outcomes, time constraints, and the distribution of responsibilities among team members. Participants in the current study also proposed that managers conduct internal staff trainings to enhance employees' skills and boost their confidence. Som, Tan, and Norng (2024) also suggested that leaders should invest their time in training and development activities at higher education institutes, as trainings and development enhance employee job satisfaction and improve their work performances. The study participants emphasised that direct communication between managers and subordinates is more effective as it facilitates a deeper understanding of work, concerns, and individual capabilities. Kroth, Boverie, and Zondlo (2007) stressed that to establish a healthy work environment, managers should foster good communication, which includes sharing necessary information through various methods such as emails, memos, and meetings, while promoting an open-door policy and encouraging open communication. Participants also expressed that managers should adopt a proactive approach, demonstrating strong leadership qualities. They should avoid mood swings, discriminatory actions, and humiliating behavior, especially in the presence of other colleagues. Therefore, it is crucial for managers to recognise their role as the backbone of the workplace and to conduct themselves accordingly.

The findings suggest that, overall, managers are effectively contributing to creating a conducive workplace for their subordinates. Participants expressed satisfaction with their managers' roles but also shared some concerns and offered suggestions for further improvement. Key factors such as feedback, respect, availability, and guidance from managers were identified as crucial for enhancing employee morale and performance. Participants emphasized that managers should focus on treating all employees fairly and discourage the practice of offering gifts for professional favors. These insights underscore the significant role managers play in fostering a positive and supportive work environment, while also highlighting areas where improvements can further enhance workplace congeniality.

There are several limitations to this study that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the data was collected exclusively from the Punjab province, which may not fully capture the broader context or variations in workplace dynamics across other regions, thereby limiting the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, participants may have concealed or exaggerated their perceptions of their managers due to personal biases, which could influence the accuracy and sincerity of their responses. This introduces the potential for response bias, which might affect the reliability and overall validity of the study's conclusions..

CONCLUSIONS

This study has explored the perceptions of female library professionals regarding the role of immediate managers in fostering conducive and congenial workspaces. Overall, the female library professionals expressed appreciation for the supportive role of their managers and supervisors; however, they identified several areas for improvement. They suggested that, to cultivate a more congenial work environment, managers should ensure

fair and equal treatment of all employees and engage in direct communication with them. By implementing these recommendations, managers can significantly enhance workplace congeniality and productivity, ultimately fostering a more positive and supportive atmosphere for all staff members.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no competing interests, including no conflicts of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: [K.Ameen], Methodology: [both authors, Formal analysis and investigation: [Q.U.A. Saleem], Writing - original draft preparation: [Qurat Ul Ain Saleem]; Writing - review and editing: [both authors]

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**Congeniality of Workplace Environment for Female Library and Information Professionals
in the Higher Education Sector**

Interview Guide

Demographics

Name _____
Date of Interview _____
Age _____
Organisation Name & Sector _____
Designation _____
Contact Details _____
Experience _____
Gender of the Manager _____

Interview Questions

- Managers sometimes are unsatisfied with how subordinates do certain things or complete specific projects. Have you experienced any situation, and how did your manager communicate to you in that case(s)?
- According to you, how valuable is the feedback from the manager, and how does it affect you?
- What kind of feedback does your manager usually give?
- What do you think, how can your boss react in a situation where you disagree with him/her?
- How do you communicate your disagreement?
- Is it easy to communicate with your boss if you have a new idea or way of doing something?
- Will your boss consider your opinion and suggestion?
- How can a manager/boss make the workplace congenial and non-congenial? Share your point of view.