

Public Library Management Diploma: training to improve the library, formal education to transform it.

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Abstract:

In the last two decades Chile has made a tremendous improvement in public libraries, which included development of an extensive training program for library staff. However an assessment made by the Public Libraries National System showed urgent need to bring more than just training: people in charge of public libraries in Chile, like in whole Latin America, were lacking academic degrees: only 15 percent had university and 40 percent - high school degrees. This was negatively impacting libraries' management and staff salaries. We have identified the need to put emphasis on librarianship and public library management skills, since these, as studies show, are central to human development in the communities they operate.

To address the issue in 2013 Public Libraries National System of Chile and Alberto Hurtado University created and implemented formal education program on Public Library Management, which is delivered via e-learning and gives academic Diploma. The studies are completely free and take 178 hours. The content covered is: Library and Community, Library Services, Customer Service and Users Training, Heritage, Culture and Memory, Reading Promotion and Advocacy. This first version of this program not only reached library staff in Chile but also people from various countries: Costa Rica, Colombia, Mexico and Brazil.

The results of first course showed that 74.3% participant successfully completed the course, which means that 330 people across the country already have skills and abilities to support local management and better position public libraries in their communities. This program has been so successful that during 2014 we are expanding it to several Latin American countries through a project that has been funded by Iberbibliotecas, Iberoamerican Program for Public Libraries, whose members are Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador, Spain, Mexico, the cities of Bogota and Medellin (Colombia) and the State of Ceará (Brazil).

Keywords: Public Libraries, Training, Formal Education, Diploma, Chile, Latin America, e-learning.

1. Introduction

Chilean public libraries work every day to be open spaces of information, education and reading to the community they live in. Each of them tries to be a cultural centre that emphasizes reading and integrating new means of transmitting knowledge. These abilities play a key role in today's society and are highly valued by the communities they serve.

For over twenty years, the National System of Public Libraries in Chile [www.bibliotecaspublicas.cl] has been systematically working with Chilean libraries in insure that they follow a mission, led by IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, in order to contribute to the integral development of community members and their own identity, with the active participation of its members, acting as a bridge between the accumulated culture and free access of the community to information, knowledge and recreation.

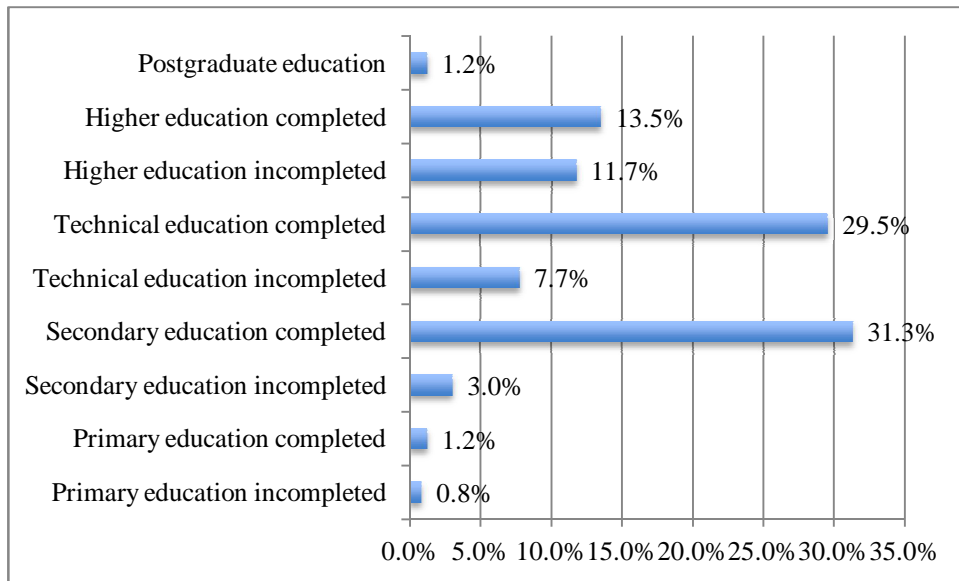
In recent decades, public libraries have evolved and started to increasingly adapt a participatory management model to improve their services and increase their budgets. The centre of this model is an integration of the community and authorities. At the same time appear mobile libraries, children's corners, book selection committees, libraries in prisons and hospitals, different programs services using boats, bicycles, postmen, suitcases or donkeys to carry books to the community; programs with indigenous communities, and lending points in unconventional spaces such as community centres, open air markets or in the subway with the internationally recognized Bibliometro [www.bibliometro.cl].

Similarly, there have been substantial changes in the field of new technologies: today almost all libraries have computers connected to the Internet where access and free training is provided to the community and a creation of local content in each locality is promoted. The infrastructure has been substantially improved, creating model libraries with international standards and regional libraries that are serving as an example for their communities. In just the last decade, the budget for the purchase of library materials has increased by over 300 per cent, in addition to other country level sources of tender based funding or private cultural donations. In October 2013 a new technological service is opened to all users of Chilean libraries: the Digital Public Library [www.bpdigital.cl] with national coverage. This library today has one of highest rates of loans nationwide.

2. The source of the program – development of competences

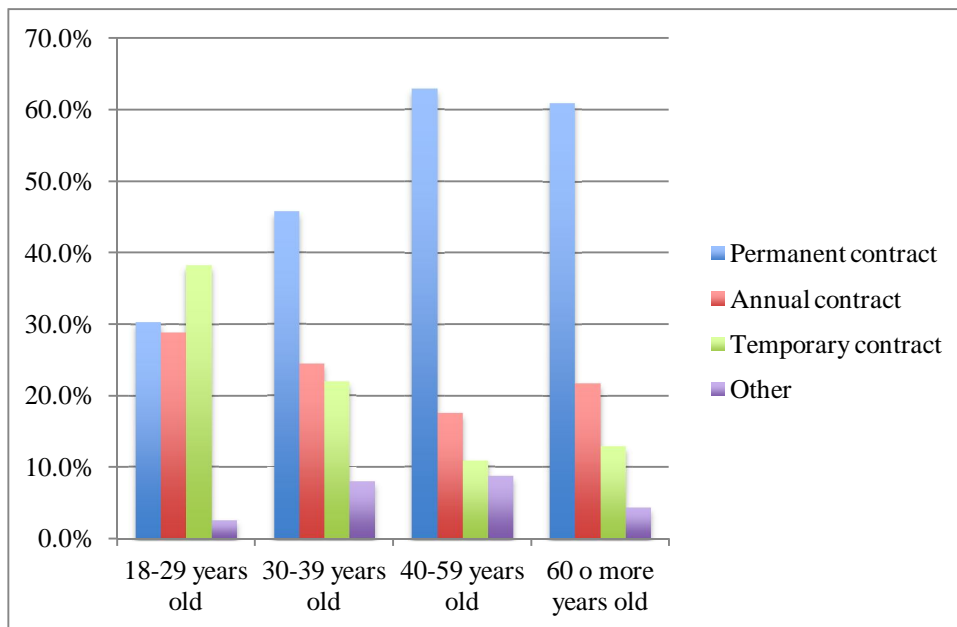
Although in recent decades significant development of public libraries was reached, a gap of basic skills and library education among people working in libraries remained very big. An evaluation of human resources in 2012 showed that 35 per cent of library staff only has school level studies and less than 15 per cent has completed college. Throughout the years and with the implementation of various programs and projects, this gap was address through on-going training through workshops, lectures and seminars. However, there were no continues formal education programs for library staff.

The diagram below shows the level of education of Chilean public library staff:



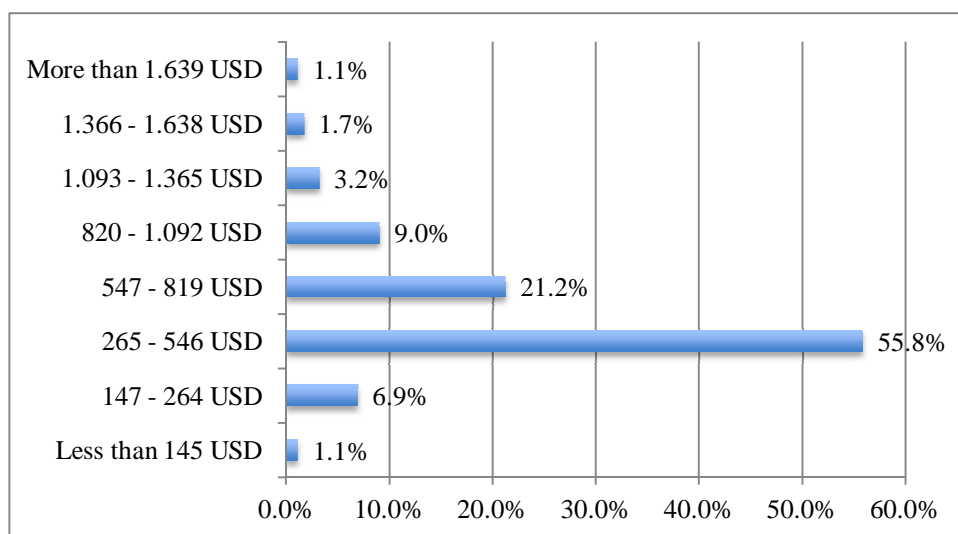
This causes negative effects on libraries: high staff mobility, low wages, and job instability. The contractual status of staff, especially young people aged 18 to 29 years, is precarious and unprofitable. However, they are the ones that finally promote library work in the local level.

The diagram below shows the contractual status of Chilean public library staff:



Also, the salaries of libraries mostly vary between 265 and 545 USD a month. Taking all this into account they not only require improving their competences but also their formal education level to enhance their salary possibilities.

The diagram below shows monthly salaries of Chilean public library staff:



All this, plus the fact that in Chile has no legislation to protect libraries and their workers, a plan was urgently needed to address this situation.

3. Implementation of formal education model

In 2013 the National System of Public Libraries in Chile suggests to develop a formal program of library staff training, called a "Diploma in Public Libraries Management". Soon public tender is organized to select a university who could give students of this program a formal diploma. Due to the geographical difficulties of the country and the shortage of resources for municipal officials who work in libraries, but considering that all these libraries have free access to computers and the Internet, distance-learning form is chosen for program's implementation.

To establish what should be contents of the training program, various skills needed for library staff for their performance are evaluated. As a result of this evaluation, the list of transversal institutional and technical competences is build:

Transversal Institutional Competencies	Transversal Technical Competencies
Job skills related to external library work with the community.	Job skills inside the library to improve its management, access and user interest in the services it delivers to the community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Library and community ✓ Cultural heritage and memory ✓ Reading and writing promotion ✓ Gender focus ✓ Library services ✓ Customer service and users Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Collections development ✓ Sources of information and Information Literacy ✓ Optimisation of public library technical resources ✓ Basic descriptive statistics and evaluation

General objective of the program is:

- Install and strengthen competencies and skills of public libraries staff to manage their libraries in line with the vision of the National Public Library System, so as to allow them to position better their services and improve access to culture to their communities.

Specific objectives of the program are:

- Develop transversal skills aimed at public library officials across all country.
- Deliver high quality service, tutoring and specialized distance education platform.
- Suggest concrete tools that public libraries could use to establishing relationships of cooperation, understanding and improving quality of service to the communities where they operate.
- Certify skills with an accredited University of Chile to improve staff of public libraries.

4. Methodology and implementation

The Public Library Management Diploma program has started in September 2013. The whole training course was developed in virtual learning environment and consisted of 6 modules of 24 hours long, each lasting 4 weeks and giving total of 178 hours to be studied in 6 months. The 6 modules of the program were the following

- 1) Library and Community
- 2) Cultural Heritage and Memory
- 3) Reading and writing promotion
- 4) Library services
- 5) Customer Service and Users Training
- 6) Management and Advocacy

One of important principles of the program implementation was a personalized tutoring by staff that is able to answer questions and manage groups through distance education platforms. This was done in order to build confidence of students that are often reluctant to innovative ways of learning. Participants were also constantly accompanied by the training team of Biblioredes that is specialized and has experience in distance education of public libraries in Chile. Lastly very important principle of the course is to end it up by University Certification done by the Library School of Alberto Hurtado University.

The implementation of the program started with promotion of this course among potential students. They were registered to e-learning platform and given passwords to connect. After that they had to learn how to use virtual learning space and could proceed to studying the program. At the end of the program they had to pass certification process. Last stage of the program's implementation was monitoring and evaluation of program results.

The program was promoted by leader of library community through email lists and personally, also through social networks with an aim to reach libraries that for some reason does not read emails. The program was also disseminated through national, regional and local mass media to show the scope and impact of such initiatives to the general public.

The implementation of the program required e-learning platform and tutors, who were tutoring max of 50 students, divided into separate learning spaces with discussion forums and individual access.

5. Results

Of the 444 students who originally signed up for participation in the program, a total of 335 people passed final evaluation, which means that this number of people now possess the skills and abilities that allow to support local management and better position libraries in their communities.

Module	Passed	%	Did not passed	%
1	401	90,3	43	9,7
2	391	88,1	53	11,9
3	375	84,5	69	15,5
4	363	81,8	81	18,2
5	360	81,1	85	19,1
6	349	78,6	98	22,1

The table below shows total number of participants who completed the program successfully:

Number of Participants	All 6 Modules completed	%
444	335	75,5

6. Conclusions

So far the results of this program were very positive and therefore its implementation in Chile will definitely continue. Taken into account that quite big number of public library staff already took part of the program, after some period of time it would be worth implementing an impact study to see what are the impacts that arise from this program in terms of improved management, services and outreach as well as improved working conditions of librarians.

Given the fact that whole Latin America shares the same language and skills and needs of librarians are quite similar it was decided to expand the program through Iberbibliotecas¹ [www.iberbibliotecas.org] to all its countries-members. First implementation of this extension will start in June 2014 and will bring together staff of public libraries from Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador, Spain and Mexico.

The success of this program allows to conclude that it could be also replicated in other regionals that have a need and are aiming at raising skills and working conditions of their library staff. Of course the program should be adapted to local or regional conditions and situation, but it proves to be an effective strategy to reach deep transformations in public library community.

¹ The program of Iberoamerican Public Libraries, Iberbibliotecas, is a network of cooperation that aims to contribute to the consolidation of culture in IberoAmerica and confirm a social function of public libraries.