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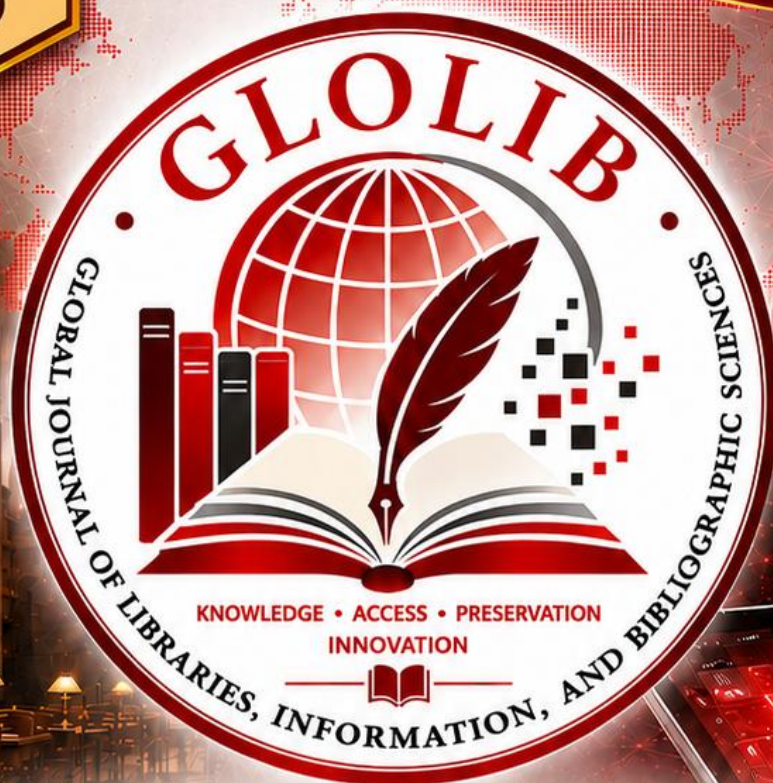
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From libraries to community learning hubs: The lived experiences of librarians

Dr. Maria Nimfa D. Dabu^{1*}, Dr. Richard D. Sanchez²¹ St. Thomas More College–Clark, Angeles City,² John B. Lacson Foundation Maritime University (Arevalo), Inc., Iloilo City*Corresponding Author email: nimfadabu@gmail.com

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Abstract

Aim: This study explored the lived experiences of librarians who have actively participated in transforming their libraries into community learning hubs.

Methods: The study employed a qualitative transcendental phenomenological research design. Using purposive sampling, twelve licensed librarians from public, academic, and community libraries with at least ten years of professional experience participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed following Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological approach.

Results: Six interconnected themes emerged: (1) redefining the purpose of libraries; (2) listening before leading; (3) creating spaces where everyone belongs; (4) embracing innovation while preserving identity; (5) partnerships as catalysts for transformation; and (6) sustaining community-centered libraries through visionary leadership. The findings indicate that successful library transformation extends beyond technological modernization and represents a fundamental shift toward responsive, inclusive, and collaborative institutions. Librarians emerged as educators, facilitators, advocates, innovators, and community builders who significantly contribute to lifelong learning and community development.

Conclusion: Successful library transformation requires adaptive leadership, continuous professional learning, meaningful community engagement, and sustained institutional support. The proposed Community Learning Hub Transformation Framework (CLHTF) offers a practical guide for librarians, administrators, and policymakers seeking to strengthen community-centered library services and promote sustainable library transformation in the digital era.

Keywords: *community engagement, community learning hubs, librarianship, library transformation, lifelong learning, phenomenology, qualitative research*

INTRODUCTION

Libraries have long been recognized as essential institutions that preserve knowledge, promote literacy, support education, and provide equitable access to information (Onunka et al., 2023). Throughout history, they have served as repositories of cultural heritage, centers of scholarship, and spaces where individuals pursue intellectual growth regardless of socioeconomic background. Traditionally, libraries were largely associated with printed collections, quiet reading spaces, reference services, and the organization and preservation of information resources. Although these functions remain fundamental to librarianship, the role of libraries has expanded substantially as societies experience rapid technological, educational, and social change.

The twenty-first century has transformed the ways information is created, accessed, evaluated, shared, and consumed. Digital technologies, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, mobile devices, and online learning platforms have altered information-seeking behaviors and increased expectations for immediate, personalized, interactive, and technology-enabled services. These developments have challenged libraries to reconsider how they create value for their communities and how they remain relevant in environments where information is increasingly available beyond physical library spaces (Meesad & Mingkhwan, 2024). Rather than rendering libraries obsolete, however, technological change has created opportunities for libraries to extend their educational, social, and cultural functions.



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Across different library environments, institutions are increasingly evolving into community-centered learning spaces that provide services beyond conventional book lending. Digital literacy programs, technology training, makerspaces, entrepreneurship activities, career development programs, children's learning activities, cultural initiatives, research support, and collaborative community programs illustrate how libraries can respond to diverse learning and information needs. Such developments reflect a broader understanding of the library as an institution that facilitates lifelong learning, digital inclusion, civic participation, creativity, social interaction, and community development.

This transformation is particularly significant within the broader Asian and Southeast Asian context, where libraries operate amid rapid technological change and diverse social, educational, and economic conditions. The transformation of libraries is not simply a matter of acquiring new technologies; it also involves developing institutional capacities, adapting professional roles, and creating services that respond meaningfully to the communities being served. Harisanty et al. (2026), for example, provide regional insights into the readiness of Southeast Asian librarians for digital transformation and emphasize the importance of institutional capacity-building in addressing knowledge and competency gaps. Their findings highlight the need to strengthen librarians' emerging roles as digital curators, educators, and technology facilitators.

Within the Philippine context, the transformation of libraries is likewise influenced by changing information behaviors, technological development, and increasing expectations for accessible and responsive services. Philippine librarians contend with the continuing incorporation of digital tools and systems into library services, requiring professional adaptation and continuous enhancement of competencies (Wagas et al., 2024). The Philippine setting is particularly relevant to the present inquiry because libraries operate across diverse institutional and community environments, including public libraries, academic libraries, and community-based learning spaces. These settings require librarians to balance traditional responsibilities with emerging demands for digital literacy, community engagement, educational programming, and collaborative service delivery.

At the local level, Central Luzon provides a meaningful context for examining this transformation because libraries in the region serve communities with diverse educational, technological, cultural, and socioeconomic circumstances. The transformation of libraries within such environments requires librarians to interpret community needs, mobilize available resources, develop partnerships, introduce innovative programs, and sustain services despite institutional constraints. Thus, the movement toward community learning hubs is not merely a technological transition but a process of organizational and professional transformation.

Central to this transformation are librarians themselves. Contemporary librarians increasingly function as educators, technology facilitators, research consultants, digital literacy advocates, project managers, community organizers, cultural heritage stewards, and institutional leaders. Rameshwari (2025) observes that librarians in the twenty-first century have moved beyond their traditional role as custodians of books and increasingly serve as digital educators and technology specialists. Libraries now provide internet access, career development opportunities, research support, and other services intended to empower communities. At the same time, librarians must contend with limited budgets, unequal access to technology, and the continuous emergence of new digital tools. These conditions make professional adaptability, collaboration, and institutional support essential to successful transformation.

The broader transformation of libraries can also be understood as a shift in how institutions define their relationship with knowledge and their communities. Modern libraries are increasingly becoming dynamic, multifunctional institutions that contribute to the intellectual, cultural, and social development of communities. They provide platforms for knowledge sharing, research advancement, creative expression, digital literacy, and civic participation. Consequently, library transformation involves not only technological modernization but also a redefinition of institutional purpose, professional identity, leadership, and community relationships.

Transforming a traditional library into a community learning hub is therefore a complex organizational process involving strategic leadership, innovation, technological integration, stakeholder collaboration, resource mobilization, community engagement, and continuous professional development. Existing literature has documented developments in library usage, digital resource adoption, service innovation, and organizational transformation. However, comparatively less attention has been given to how librarians themselves experience these transformations, how they interpret the changes in their professional roles, and how they negotiate the challenges and opportunities associated with becoming community-centered institutions.

This gap is important because institutional transformation is experienced not only through policies, technologies, programs, and organizational structures but also through the everyday experiences of the professionals responsible for implementing and sustaining change. Librarians' lived experiences can reveal the motivations that initiate transformation, the challenges that emerge during implementation, the leadership practices that facilitate



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change, the partnerships that sustain initiatives, and the meanings librarians attach to their evolving professional identities. Understanding these experiences can therefore provide a more human-centered explanation of library transformation than institutional performance indicators alone.

The present study differs from studies that primarily examine library usage, technology adoption, service effectiveness, or organizational outcomes because it focuses specifically on the lived experiences of librarians who have participated in the transformation of traditional libraries into community learning hubs. Using a transcendental phenomenological perspective, the study seeks to understand the meanings participants attribute to their experiences rather than quantify the effectiveness of particular programs or technologies. The study also integrates leadership, innovation, community engagement, professional identity, and collaborative learning in explaining the transformation process and culminates in the development of the Community Learning Hub Transformation Framework (CLHTF).

The study has significance beyond the immediate Philippine setting. Although the investigation is situated in selected libraries in Central Luzon, the experiences of librarians may offer transferable insights for library professionals and administrators working in other environments undergoing similar technological, educational, and organizational changes. The findings may contribute to international discussions on community-centered librarianship by demonstrating how professional judgment, participatory leadership, community partnerships, and institutional learning interact in the transformation of libraries. They may likewise inform evidence-based library leadership, professional development, institutional planning, and policy formulation in contexts where libraries are expected to function increasingly as inclusive learning and community development spaces.

Accordingly, this phenomenological study explores how librarians experience the transition from traditional library services toward community-centered learning environments. It examines their experiences of transformation, motivations, challenges, leadership practices, community partnerships, professional identity, and aspirations for the future of libraries. By giving central attention to librarians' lived experiences, the study contributes to transformational librarianship, community engagement, lifelong learning, professional development, and sustainable library transformation.

Ultimately, the study views libraries not merely in terms of the collections they maintain but in terms of the communities they empower. As learning increasingly occurs across physical and digital environments, libraries can serve as accessible spaces where information, education, technology, culture, collaboration, and community participation converge. Librarians remain central to this process because they translate institutional resources and professional knowledge into responsive services that address the changing needs of their communities.

Review of Related Literature

Libraries in Transition

Libraries have undergone significant transformation as advances in information and communication technologies have reshaped the production, dissemination, and consumption of knowledge (Lee, 2021). Traditional libraries primarily emphasized acquiring, organizing, preserving, and providing access to printed collections. Contemporary libraries, however, increasingly function as multifaceted institutions that combine physical collections with digital resources, technology-enabled services, collaborative learning environments, community programs, and innovative educational initiatives.

Hassans (2025) explains that libraries have evolved from institutions primarily concerned with storing books into environments that provide access to diverse physical and digital information resources. Librarians increasingly guide users through expanding information environments and serve as intermediaries between users and both online and offline resources. Although technology has reduced libraries' exclusive role as information gatekeepers, it has simultaneously increased the demand for specialized information services that can be accessed across different locations and platforms.

Similarly, Jadhav and Ghodke (2025) emphasize that libraries have transitioned from conventional book repositories into hybrid spaces that combine physical collections and digital services. These institutions increasingly function as community hubs and digital learning centers by providing internet access, training, innovative resources, and technology-supported learning opportunities. This transformation has consequently expanded the professional role of librarians from traditional custodians of collections toward educators, technology facilitators, and community-oriented information professionals.

The transition from collection-centered to community-centered librarianship represents a significant conceptual change. Library relevance is increasingly associated not only with the size or use of collections but also with the institution's capacity to contribute to education, social inclusion, digital literacy, community development, and



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lifelong learning. This shift provides an important foundation for understanding why librarians must continually reassess the purpose and functions of their institutions.

Community Learning Hubs

The concept of community learning hubs reflects the expanding educational and social role of contemporary libraries. Community learning hubs provide accessible environments where individuals of different ages and backgrounds can participate in formal, non-formal, and informal learning. These environments may include technology training, literacy programs, collaborative projects, makerspaces, cultural activities, research support, entrepreneurship initiatives, and community partnerships.

The transformation toward community learning hubs also reflects the increasing recognition that learning is not confined to formal educational institutions. Libraries can provide accessible environments in which community members acquire information and skills, interact with others, participate in cultural activities, and respond collectively to local concerns. In this sense, the library becomes both a physical and social infrastructure for lifelong learning.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2026) illustrates this broader societal role through developments in which libraries engage communities in documenting local stories, memories, knowledge, and cultural resources. The Valmiera Region initiative in Latvia, for example, demonstrates how public libraries can support citizen participation in activities that connect information, cultural identity, local knowledge, and community-generated knowledge. Such initiatives illustrate the capacity of libraries to move beyond passive information provision toward active community participation.

In the Philippine context, Balan (2026) describes Barangay Learning Hubs as long-term investments in resilient education systems that mobilize community participation and resources to reduce inequities and provide continuous learning support. Such initiatives highlight the shared responsibility of schools, families, local governments, and organizations in expanding meaningful learning opportunities. They also demonstrate how community-based learning environments can enhance accessibility, engagement, and educational continuity.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that community learning hubs are characterized not merely by the presence of technology or additional services but by their capacity to connect people, knowledge, learning opportunities, and community resources. For libraries, becoming a community learning hub therefore requires a shift from service provision based primarily on institutional assumptions toward services designed around the needs and participation of communities.

Transformational Leadership in Libraries

Organizational transformation requires leadership capable of establishing direction, mobilizing people, supporting innovation, and sustaining institutional change. Within libraries, transformational leadership is particularly relevant because librarians and library administrators must respond to technological developments while preserving the professional values of equitable information access, learning, service, and community engagement.

Tsafe et al. (2022) explain that organizations operating in rapidly changing environments require leaders who can inspire and guide personnel toward adaptability. Transformational leadership is characterized by idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These dimensions can support library personnel by encouraging innovation, empowering staff, strengthening commitment to institutional goals, and fostering problem-solving.

The relevance of transformational leadership becomes more pronounced when libraries attempt to redesign services and institutional functions. Introducing digital services, community programs, collaborative spaces, or new learning initiatives may require changes in organizational culture and staff responsibilities. Leaders must therefore communicate a clear purpose, encourage participation, support professional development, and establish conditions in which innovation can be sustained.

Within community learning hubs, leadership is not limited to formal administrative positions. Librarians who initiate programs, consult communities, coordinate partnerships, advocate for resources, and encourage colleagues to adopt new practices may also exercise transformational leadership. This broader understanding of leadership is particularly relevant to a phenomenological study because participants' experiences can reveal how leadership is actually practiced during transformation.

Community Engagement

Effective community engagement enables libraries to understand local needs and develop services that are responsive to the people they serve. Participatory approaches encourage collaboration with schools, government



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agencies, civil society organizations, businesses, cultural institutions, and community groups. Such relationships can expand available resources, strengthen institutional relevance, and support the sustainability of library programs.

Ashikuzzaman (2024) emphasizes that libraries increasingly place community engagement at the center of their mission by creating spaces for collaboration, inclusion, and shared learning. Through cultural programs, educational workshops, partnerships, and responsive services, libraries can address diverse community needs while strengthening social relationships. Listening to community feedback allows libraries to adjust their services and position communities as active participants rather than passive recipients.

Community engagement is therefore closely connected to the transformation of libraries into learning hubs. The shift requires librarians to identify what communities actually need rather than simply expanding services based on institutional assumptions. Community consultation, dialogue, collaborative planning, and partnership development become important mechanisms through which librarians can understand local priorities and translate them into meaningful services.

Lifelong Learning

Libraries play a significant role in supporting lifelong learning by providing accessible spaces, information resources, programs, and services for people at different stages of life. Subramanya and Manjunath (2023) emphasize that libraries strengthen community engagement by providing inclusive environments in which individuals can learn, connect, and collaborate. Through diverse programs and services, libraries encourage curiosity, promote lifelong learning, and empower individuals to participate actively in their communities.

Lifelong learning has consequently become an important principle of contemporary librarianship. Libraries can support literacy development, digital competency, workforce preparation, health information literacy, financial literacy, cultural enrichment, and continuing education. These functions are especially relevant to community learning hubs because such institutions provide learning opportunities outside conventional classroom settings.

The lifelong-learning orientation also broadens the understanding of library users. Instead of serving primarily students or individuals seeking books, libraries can support children, adults, senior citizens, job seekers, entrepreneurs, researchers, families, and other community groups. This diversity reinforces the need for librarians to understand community needs and design inclusive learning opportunities.

Professional Identity of Librarians

The transformation of library services is accompanied by a transformation of librarians' professional identities. The librarian's role is evolving from that of a neutral keeper of resources toward that of an active catalyst for social change. This development represents more than an expansion of routine responsibilities; it reflects a fundamental transformation in how the profession understands its social and institutional purpose.

Technological and societal developments have likewise broadened librarianship. Michalak et al. (2026) note that although traditional responsibilities such as cataloging, reference, and collection management remain important, librarians increasingly engage in digital scholarship, research support, and user experience. These emerging responsibilities require competencies that extend beyond conventional technical library work.

Zhaylaubaev (2026) further emphasizes that modern libraries are becoming dynamic, multifunctional institutions that contribute to the intellectual, cultural, and social fabric of communities. They serve as platforms for knowledge sharing, research advancement, creative expression, digital literacy, and civic participation. This development consequently places librarians in positions that require them to coordinate multiple institutional and community functions.

The regional dimension is also important. Harisanty et al. (2026) highlight the readiness of Southeast Asian librarians for digital transformation and underscore the importance of institutional capacity-building. Strengthening professional competencies is essential for enabling librarians to assume emerging roles as digital curators, educators, and technology facilitators.

In the Philippines, technological change has similarly reshaped professional practice. Wagas et al. (2024) emphasize the continuing need for librarians to adapt to digital tools and systems and to enhance their professional competencies. Philippine librarians therefore operate at the intersection of traditional professional responsibilities and emerging expectations involving technology, community outreach, education, research support, and innovation.

The changing professional identity of librarians is consequently central to library transformation. Contemporary librarians increasingly balance collection management and information services with digital scholarship, instructional design, research consultation, community outreach, advocacy, project management, partnership development, and



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innovation leadership. This evolution requires continuous professional learning while maintaining the profession's enduring commitment to equitable access to information, intellectual freedom, and public service.

Synthesis of the Literature

The reviewed literature demonstrates a broad transition from collection-centered librarianship toward community-centered and learning-oriented library services. Libraries are increasingly expected to function as spaces for digital inclusion, lifelong learning, community engagement, collaboration, creativity, cultural participation, and knowledge sharing. This transformation is driven by technological change but also requires changes in leadership, organizational culture, professional competencies, and relationships with communities.

The literature further indicates that library transformation involves interconnected dimensions. Technological developments create new possibilities for service delivery; community engagement helps libraries identify relevant needs; transformational leadership provides direction and institutional support; lifelong learning defines an expanded social purpose; and changing professional identities enable librarians to perform emerging roles. These dimensions suggest that transforming a library into a community learning hub is a multidimensional organizational and professional process.

Despite these developments, the literature provides comparatively limited insight into how librarians themselves experience this transformation. Existing discussions tend to emphasize institutional change, technology, services, community programs, or professional competencies. Less attention is directed toward the meanings librarians attach to their experiences, the challenges they encounter, the ways they respond to change, and the ways transformation reshapes their understanding of professional identity and purpose.

The present study addresses this gap by examining librarians' lived experiences through transcendental phenomenology. Rather than measuring the effectiveness of individual programs or comparing library systems, the study seeks to understand the essence of the experience of transforming traditional libraries into community learning hubs. It consequently contributes a human-centered perspective to the literature and provides a basis for developing the Community Learning Hub Transformation Framework (CLHTF).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Etienne Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice (CoP) Theory and John P. Kotter's (1996) Theory of Organizational Change. The two theories were selected because the transformation of traditional libraries into community learning hubs involves both a social learning process and an organizational change process. Communities of Practice Theory explains how librarians and community members learn, exchange knowledge, collaborate, and develop shared practices, while Kotter's Theory of Organizational Change explains how libraries can initiate, implement, sustain, and institutionalize transformational change.

Communities of Practice Theory

Wenger's Communities of Practice Theory views learning as fundamentally social and emphasizes participation in communities where individuals share interests, goals, activities, and practices. Communities of practice are characterized by mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. Through participation, members exchange knowledge, solve problems, develop competencies, and construct shared meanings.

The theory is particularly relevant to community learning hubs because these environments bring together individuals and groups who learn through interaction rather than merely receiving information from the library. Libraries may facilitate literacy programs, makerspaces, research consultations, digital skills workshops, cultural activities, collaborative projects, and civic initiatives in which knowledge is exchanged among participants.

Erickson et al. (2024) emphasize the social nature of learning within communities of practice. Applied to the present study, the theory suggests that the transformation of a library is not solely a process in which librarians introduce services to users. Instead, transformation involves the development of relationships and shared practices among librarians, learners, educators, researchers, entrepreneurs, government agencies, organizations, and community members.

The theory also provides a useful lens for understanding the changing role of librarians. In traditional settings, librarians may primarily be viewed as providers or intermediaries of information. Within community learning hubs, however, librarians increasingly act as facilitators who create conditions for knowledge sharing and collaborative learning. They connect people with information, technologies, learning opportunities, and one another.



Thus, Communities of Practice Theory helps explain the community and learning dimension of library transformation. It directs attention to how librarians create environments where knowledge is co-constructed, relationships are developed, participation is encouraged, and learning extends beyond formal educational institutions.

Kotter's Theory of Organizational Change

Kotter's (1996) Eight-Step Theory of Organizational Change provides a complementary perspective by explaining how institutions navigate significant organizational transformation. The theory emphasizes establishing a sense of urgency, creating a guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, empowering stakeholders, generating short-term wins, sustaining acceleration, and institutionalizing new approaches. Davitkovic and Mihaylov (2024) explain that successful organizational change requires deliberate processes for establishing urgency, developing shared vision, mobilizing stakeholders, communicating change, empowering participants, sustaining momentum, and embedding new practices within organizational culture.

These principles are applicable to library transformation because converting a traditional library into a community learning hub requires more than introducing isolated programs. Libraries may need to redefine their institutional purpose, redesign services, develop new competencies, establish partnerships, modify physical or digital environments, mobilize resources, and develop organizational support for innovation.

Kotter's framework therefore helps explain the organizational dimension of the phenomenon. Librarians may recognize the need for transformation in response to changing information behavior and community expectations. They may then work with colleagues and stakeholders to establish shared goals, implement innovative services, evaluate early successes, address challenges, and sustain practices that contribute to community-centered librarianship.

Within the present study, Kotter's theory provides a lens through which participants' accounts of initiating, implementing, sustaining, and institutionalizing library transformation can be interpreted. It is particularly useful for examining leadership, organizational readiness, stakeholder participation, resistance or challenges, and the sustainability of innovations.

Integration of the Theories

The two theories complement rather than duplicate one another. Communities of Practice Theory explains how people learn and collaborate within the transformed library environment, whereas Kotter's Theory of Organizational Change explains how the institution moves from an existing state toward a new organizational model.

Communities of Practice places emphasis on participation, knowledge sharing, relationships, and collective learning. Kotter's framework places emphasis on urgency, leadership, vision, stakeholder mobilization, implementation, sustainability, and institutionalization. When integrated, these perspectives recognize that successful transformation requires both organizational structures that support change and social environments that enable learning and participation.

Within the present study, the integration of the theories suggests that librarians operate simultaneously as change agents and community learning facilitators. They help their institutions navigate organizational transformation while also creating spaces in which community members learn, collaborate, share knowledge, and participate in the development of library services.

The integrated theoretical perspective therefore supports the central premise of the study: transforming a library into a community learning hub is not simply a technological modernization project. It is an organizational, professional, and social transformation in which leadership, innovation, community engagement, knowledge sharing, and lifelong learning interact.

The theories also provide a foundation for interpreting the participants' lived experiences. Experiences involving changing institutional purposes, community consultation, leadership, partnerships, innovation, professional identity, and sustainability can be understood through the complementary lenses of organizational change and collaborative learning. The integration consequently provides a theoretically grounded basis for developing the Community Learning Hub Transformation Framework (CLHTF).

In this study, these theoretical perspectives served as interpretive lenses rather than deductive coding frameworks. The phenomenological analysis first allowed themes to emerge from participants' lived experiences, after which the theoretical perspectives were used to contextualize and deepen the interpretation of the emergent findings.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study views the transformation of traditional libraries into community learning hubs as a dynamic, iterative, and community-centered process. It recognizes that transformation does not



result from a single intervention but develops through the interaction of contextual conditions, librarians' professional experiences, organizational change processes, community participation, and collaborative learning.

The framework integrates the central concepts derived from the literature and the two theoretical foundations. Kotter's Theory of Organizational Change provides the organizational transformation perspective, while Communities of Practice Theory provides the social learning and collaborative participation perspective. Together, these theories inform the interpretation of librarians' experiences and the development of the Community Learning Hub Transformation Framework (CLHTF).

The conceptual framework integrates the study's theoretical foundations, the lived experiences of the participants, and the emergent findings that informed the development of the Community Learning Hub Transformation Framework (CLHTF). Rather than presenting the CLHTF as a separate four-component model, the study conceptualizes it as a five-dimensional framework derived from the participants' experiences: Understanding Community Needs, Transformational Library Leadership, Community-Centered Library Innovations, Collaborative Partnerships, and Sustainable Community Impact. These dimensions are represented visually through a seven-stage process that begins with changing community needs and community needs assessment and culminates in libraries functioning as dynamic community learning hubs.

Community Learning Hub Transformation Framework (CLHTF)

A Five-Dimensional Framework with Seven-Stage Process

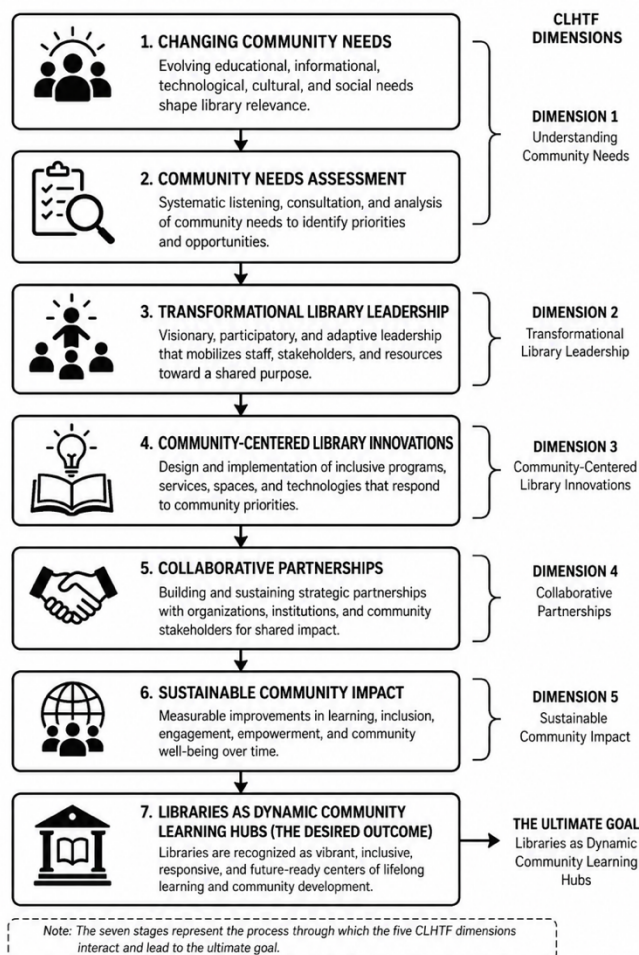


Figure 1. Community Learning Hub Transformation Framework (CLHTF): A Five-Dimensional Framework with Seven-Stage Process



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The conceptual framework illustrates how the changing needs of communities, librarians' lived experiences, organizational transformation, community engagement, innovation, and collaborative learning informed the development of the Community Learning Hub Transformation Framework (CLHTF). The CLHTF is organized into five interconnected dimensions: Understanding Community Needs, Transformational Library Leadership, Community-Centered Library Innovations, Collaborative Partnerships, and Sustainable Community Impact. These dimensions are visually represented through a seven-stage process that progresses from changing community needs and community needs assessment toward libraries functioning as dynamic community learning hubs.

Statement of the Problem

Libraries worldwide continue to evolve from traditional information repositories into dynamic community learning hubs that promote lifelong learning, digital inclusion, innovation, collaboration, and civic engagement. Although numerous libraries have successfully implemented community-centered programs and services, relatively little is known about how librarians themselves experience and navigate this institutional transformation. Understanding these lived experiences is essential because librarians serve as the primary agents responsible for planning, implementing, sustaining, and evaluating transformational initiatives within their communities.

This study sought to explore the lived experiences of librarians in transforming libraries into community learning hubs.

Research Questions

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

Central Research Question: What are the lived experiences of librarians in transforming traditional libraries into community learning hubs?

Sub-questions

1. How do librarians describe their experiences in leading or participating in the transformation of libraries into community learning hubs?
2. What factors motivated or influenced these transformational initiatives?
3. What challenges have librarians encountered during the transformation process?
4. How have librarians addressed the challenges associated with organizational and community change?
5. How do librarians describe the role of community partnerships in sustaining library transformation?
6. What meanings do librarians attach to their evolving professional roles within community learning hubs?
7. What hopes and aspirations do librarians hold regarding the future of community-centered libraries?
8. What is the essence of librarians' lived experiences in transforming libraries into community learning hubs?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using transcendental phenomenology as its research design. Qualitative inquiry is appropriate when the purpose is to understand how individuals interpret, describe, and make meaning of their lived experiences rather than measure variables or test statistical relationships. Transcendental phenomenology, as advanced by Moustakas (1994), was considered appropriate because the study sought to explore the lived experiences of librarians who had participated in transforming traditional libraries into community learning hubs. The design emphasizes understanding the essence of a phenomenon as experienced by individuals and allows participants to describe their experiences in their own words.

Phenomenology enables researchers to move beyond descriptions of events and examine how participants perceive, interpret, and assign meaning to their experiences. In this study, particular attention was given to how librarians experienced organizational transformation, community engagement, innovation, leadership, and professional growth while redefining the role of libraries within their respective communities. Consistent with Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological procedures, the researcher practiced *epoché* or bracketing by consciously setting aside personal assumptions and prior experiences concerning library transformation during data collection and analysis. This helped create an open analytic stance in which participants' accounts could emerge without being prematurely shaped by researcher expectations. Ultimately, the design enabled the study to identify the shared essence of librarians' experiences while recognizing the uniqueness of individual professional journeys.



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Research Locale

The study was conducted among selected public, academic, and community libraries located in Central Luzon, Philippines. The region was selected because of the diversity of its library systems and their engagement in community-based programs, digital literacy initiatives, cultural preservation activities, lifelong learning programs, educational outreach, technology-enabled services, and collaborative community activities. The participating libraries represented different institutional contexts, including local government-operated public libraries, libraries of higher education institutions, and community-managed learning centers.

These libraries had demonstrated efforts to extend their services beyond conventional library functions through educational outreach, literacy campaigns, technology-supported services, community programs, and partnerships with different stakeholders. The research locale therefore provided an appropriate setting for examining varied experiences of librarians involved in organizational and community transformation while retaining sufficient contextual similarities for phenomenological analysis. To protect confidentiality, the names of participating libraries, municipalities, cities, and institutions were withheld and replaced with pseudonyms throughout the study.

Research Participants

The participants consisted of twelve (12) licensed librarians who had actively participated in transforming their libraries into community learning hubs. They were selected because they possessed substantial professional experience and firsthand knowledge of organizational transformation, community engagement, innovative library services, and the changing roles of librarians. Their professional backgrounds enabled them to provide detailed descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation.

Participants were currently employed or recently retired licensed librarians with at least ten (10) years of professional library experience. They had been actively involved in the planning, implementation, management, or evaluation of community-centered library programs and had experience working in public, academic, or community libraries. Participants were also required to participate voluntarily and provide informed consent for audio-recorded interviews. They represented diverse professional positions, including library directors, chief librarians, public librarians, academic librarians, community librarians, and library program coordinators. This diversity provided multiple professional perspectives while maintaining the shared experience necessary for phenomenological inquiry.

Sampling Technique

The study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique appropriate for identifying participants who possess substantial knowledge and firsthand experience of the phenomenon being investigated. The researcher intentionally selected librarians who had directly participated in transforming their libraries into community learning hubs and who could provide rich descriptions of organizational transformation, community engagement, leadership, innovation, and professional development. The purpose of sampling was therefore not statistical representation but the selection of information-rich participants capable of articulating meaningful lived experiences.

Participant recruitment continued until sufficient informational depth and richness of description had been achieved and successive interviews provided adequate information to illuminate the phenomenon under investigation. This point of informational sufficiency provided a basis for concluding that the twelve participants had generated sufficient depth and breadth of descriptions for the phenomenological analysis.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they provide sufficient consistency across participants while allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on experiences that were personally significant. The interview guide consisted primarily of open-ended questions designed to encourage detailed narratives, reflections, interpretations, and personal meanings associated with library transformation.

The first section of the interview guide focused on the participants' professional backgrounds and gathered information concerning their age range, gender, highest educational attainment, years of professional experience, present position, and type of library in which they were employed. The second section focused on experiences of library transformation and included questions asking participants to describe how their library began transforming into a community learning hub, the significant changes they had personally experienced during the transformation, and the factors that motivated the implementation of transformational initiatives.



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The third section addressed challenges and leadership experiences. Participants were asked to describe the challenges they encountered during the transformation process, explain how these challenges were addressed, and identify leadership practices that contributed to the implementation of transformation initiatives. The fourth section focused on reflections and aspirations concerning community learning hubs. Participants were invited to explain what being a community learning hub meant to them, describe how transformation influenced their professional identity, share advice for librarians undertaking similar initiatives, and discuss their vision for libraries during the following ten years. Probing questions were used when necessary to encourage participants to elaborate on significant experiences, clarify statements, and provide deeper descriptions of their meanings and reflections.

Validation of the Research Instrument

Before data collection, the semi-structured interview guide underwent expert validation to establish its content validity and suitability for phenomenological inquiry. The instrument was evaluated by three experts consisting of a professor specializing in qualitative research methodology, a senior Library and Information Science educator, and an experienced library administrator actively involved in community engagement programs. The validators examined the interview questions in terms of their alignment with the research objectives, clarity of language, appropriateness of sequencing, comprehensiveness, relevance to phenomenological inquiry, and potential to elicit rich and meaningful descriptions.

Based on the experts' recommendations, selected questions were simplified, transitions between sections were improved, potentially leading statements were reduced, and additional prompts concerning community partnerships and leadership experiences were incorporated. Following these revisions, the interview guide was considered appropriate for implementation. Because the instrument was qualitative and intended to elicit lived experiences rather than generate numerical measurements, methodological rigor was established through expert review, open-ended questioning, probing, member checking, and systematic qualitative analysis rather than through traditional statistical reliability measures such as Cronbach's alpha.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted systematically over approximately eight weeks following institutional approval and the informed consent of participants. Formal letters requesting permission to conduct the study were submitted to the administrators of the participating libraries. After permission was obtained, potential participants were identified with the assistance of library administrators, while ensuring that participation remained voluntary and that administrative assistance did not constitute pressure to participate.

Qualified librarians received invitation letters explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality measures, interview procedures, estimated interview duration, and their rights as participants. Those who agreed to participate signed informed consent forms before the interviews were conducted. Individual in-depth interviews were subsequently conducted either face-to-face or through secure online video conferencing platforms, depending on participant preference and accessibility.

Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription. Field notes were also maintained throughout data collection to document relevant contextual information, nonverbal observations, and emerging methodological reflections. The recordings were transcribed verbatim immediately after each interview. Participants were then provided an opportunity to review their transcripts through a member-checking process to verify the accuracy of the recorded information and clarify or correct statements where necessary. Only transcripts that had undergone this verification process were included in the final analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological method, which emphasizes the systematic examination of lived experiences toward the identification of their essential meaning. The researcher initially practiced *epoche* or bracketing by consciously suspending personal assumptions and prior knowledge concerning library transformation. The interview transcripts were then examined through horizontalization, whereby significant statements were initially treated with equal value rather than being assigned importance solely on the basis of researcher expectations.

The significant statements were subsequently clustered into meaning units representing common experiences and were synthesized into broader thematic clusters. These themes were examined across participants to identify shared patterns while preserving the contextual meanings of individual accounts. Textural descriptions were then



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developed to describe what the participants experienced, drawing on narrative summaries and representative verbatim quotations. Structural descriptions were developed to explain how participants experienced the phenomenon by considering the contexts and conditions that shaped their experiences.

Finally, the textural and structural descriptions were synthesized to articulate the fundamental essence of librarians' lived experiences in transforming traditional libraries into community learning hubs. The analysis was iterative, requiring repeated examination of transcripts, significant statements, meaning units, and emerging themes to ensure that the final interpretations remained grounded in participants' narratives. The theoretical frameworks were not used as deductive coding categories or predetermined themes. Rather, they were applied only after the phenomenological themes had emerged from the participants' narratives to support the interpretation and contextualization of the findings while preserving the phenomenological focus on the participants' lived experiences.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The study adopted the trustworthiness criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria were applied throughout the research process to strengthen the authenticity, consistency, transparency, and integrity of the findings.

Credibility was strengthened through sustained engagement with participants during the 60- to 90-minute interviews, the use of probing and follow-up questions when clarification was necessary, and member checking after transcription. Participants were given opportunities to review their transcripts for accuracy, completeness, and faithful representation of their intended meanings. Peer debriefing was also undertaken with experienced qualitative researchers and Library and Information Science scholars who reviewed portions of the coding process and thematic interpretations. Their feedback helped refine interpretations and identify possible researcher bias.

Transferability was addressed through rich and sufficiently detailed descriptions of the participants, research setting, data collection procedures, contextual conditions, and emergent themes. Because phenomenological research does not seek statistical generalization, these descriptions enable readers and future researchers to assess whether the findings may be meaningful or applicable in comparable institutional and professional contexts. Although the study was conducted among selected public, academic, and community libraries in Central Luzon, the experiences described may offer insights for librarians, administrators, educators, and policymakers working in similar environments undergoing organizational transformation.

Dependability was supported through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting the major stages of the research process, including research planning, participant recruitment, interview schedules, field notes, transcription procedures, coding decisions, theme development, and methodological reflections. The same semi-structured interview guide was used across participants while allowing sufficient flexibility for participants to elaborate on unique experiences. Any modifications to interview prompts were documented together with their rationale. Qualitative research experts also reviewed the methodological procedures to assess consistency among the research questions, data collection methods, analytical procedures, and resulting interpretations.

Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive journaling and continued bracketing throughout data collection and analysis. The researcher documented personal reflections, methodological decisions, emerging interpretations, and potential biases to facilitate critical self-awareness. The use of participants' verbatim quotations provided direct evidence for thematic interpretations and allowed readers to assess the relationship between the participants' accounts and the researcher's conclusions. Collectively, these strategies strengthened the transparency, neutrality, and integrity of the study.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles governing qualitative research involving human participants, particularly respect for persons, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, confidentiality, privacy, and voluntary participation. Before participation, each participant received written information describing the purpose of the study, research procedures, anticipated interview duration, potential benefits and minimal risks, confidentiality measures, and participant rights. Participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that they could decline participation or withdraw at any time without penalty or adverse consequences. Only participants who voluntarily signed the informed consent form were included in the study.

No participant received compensation, incentives, or other inducements that could compromise voluntary participation. Participants retained full autonomy regarding the information they wished to disclose and could decline to answer any question that caused discomfort or concern. To safeguard identities, pseudonyms such as Participant 1 through Participant 12 were used throughout the study. The names of participating libraries, institutions, municipalities,



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and cities were likewise withheld from research documents and publications unless explicit permission was granted. Only the researchers had access to the master list connecting participants' identities with their assigned pseudonyms.

Interviews were conducted in locations or secure virtual environments selected to provide privacy and comfort. Only the participant and researchers were present during each interview unless the participant requested otherwise. Digital audio recordings, transcripts, field notes, and consent forms were stored using password-protected devices and encrypted digital storage, while printed documents were kept in locked storage accessible only to the researchers. Research data will be retained for the period required by applicable institutional research policies and will thereafter be permanently destroyed through secure deletion of electronic files and shredding of printed materials.

The study involved minimal foreseeable risk because participants were asked primarily to reflect on professional experiences rather than sensitive personal matters. Nevertheless, participants were informed that they could pause or terminate an interview whenever they experienced discomfort. The researchers also committed to maintaining honesty, transparency, and academic integrity throughout the investigation. No data were fabricated, altered, omitted, or selectively reported, and findings were presented faithfully according to participants' narratives while acknowledging the limitations inherent in qualitative inquiry. Scholarly works consulted in preparing the manuscript were acknowledged in accordance with APA 7th edition.

Researcher Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity was incorporated throughout the study because phenomenological inquiry recognizes that researchers bring professional knowledge, prior experiences, and assumptions to the research process. The researcher acknowledged a professional interest in the continuing transformation of libraries and an appreciation of community-centered librarianship as an emerging direction within Library and Information Science. Such perspectives could potentially influence data collection, interpretation, and thematic development if they remained unexamined.

To minimize this influence, the researcher practiced *epoché* or bracketing before and throughout the investigation by consciously setting aside personal beliefs and assumptions regarding successful library transformation. Reflexive journals were maintained to document evolving assumptions, methodological decisions, emotional responses, and interpretive reflections encountered throughout the research process. The researcher also remained attentive to participants' own meanings rather than imposing predetermined interpretations.

Throughout analysis, transcripts were revisited repeatedly to ensure that emerging themes remained grounded in participants' actual narratives rather than researcher expectations. Regular peer consultations with qualitative research scholars provided opportunities to critically examine coding decisions, thematic interpretations, and methodological consistency. Through continuous self-reflection, bracketing, peer consultation, and methodological transparency, the researcher sought to represent the lived experiences of librarians faithfully while preserving the authenticity, credibility, and integrity of the phenomenological inquiry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological method, the analysis of the twelve interview transcripts yielded six interrelated themes that collectively describe the lived experiences of librarians in transforming traditional libraries into community learning hubs. These themes capture participants' motivations, challenges, leadership practices, collaborative efforts, and aspirations as they redefined the role of libraries in response to evolving community needs.

Prior to presenting the thematic findings, a brief profile of the participants is provided to contextualize their experiences. The subsequent sections present each emergent theme, supported by representative verbatim quotations and interpretive discussions, culminating in a composite description and the essence of the phenomenon.

Profile of the Participants

The study involved twelve (12) licensed librarians purposively selected from public, academic, and community libraries in Central Luzon, Philippines. Participants possessed between 10 and 35 years of professional experience, enabling them to provide rich narratives regarding organizational transformation, community engagement, and innovative library practices.

The participants represented diverse leadership and professional positions, including library directors, chief librarians, university librarians, public librarians, community librarians, and library program coordinators. Several had supervised digital transformation initiatives, while others had spearheaded literacy programs, community outreach



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projects, makerspaces, digital inclusion campaigns, and partnerships with schools, local government units, and non-government organizations.

To ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned pseudonyms (Participant 1 through Participant 12) throughout the presentation of findings.

Although participants worked in different institutional settings, they shared a common experience of leading or actively participating in transforming their libraries from traditional information centers into dynamic community learning hubs.

The six emergent themes collectively addressed the eight research questions. Theme 1 captured participants' experiences of redefining library purpose, while Theme 2 addressed motivations and community needs. Themes 3 and 4 reflected responses to changing community expectations, inclusive practices, innovation, and evolving professional roles. Theme 5 addressed the role of community partnerships, while Theme 6 captured sustainability, leadership, and future aspirations. The composite descriptions and essence subsequently synthesized these findings to address the overarching meaning of the librarians' lived experiences.

Theme 1

Redefining the Purpose of Libraries

One of the most prominent themes emerging from the interviews was librarians' evolving understanding of the purpose of libraries. Participants consistently described a shift from viewing libraries primarily as repositories of books toward recognizing them as vibrant learning environments that respond to the changing educational, technological, and social needs of their communities.

Participants explained that declining circulation of printed books did not signify the diminishing importance of libraries. Rather, it challenged librarians to rethink how libraries could remain relevant in people's everyday lives. Participant 4 reflected:

"There was a time when we measured success by how many books we acquired. Today, we ask ourselves how many lives we have touched."

Participant 8 similarly shared:

"The library is no longer simply a place where people borrow books. It has become a place where people learn new skills, meet others, exchange ideas, and grow together."

Several participants emphasized that the transformation required changing long-held assumptions about library services. Instead of waiting for patrons to visit, librarians began designing programs that actively engaged different sectors of the community.

Participant 2 explained:

"Our mindset changed. Instead of asking how people could use the library, we started asking how the library could serve people where they are."

Many participants described this realization as the turning point that fundamentally reshaped their professional practice.

The findings suggest that librarians perceive organizational transformation as beginning with a transformation in professional philosophy rather than physical infrastructure. Participants no longer defined libraries by collections, shelving systems, or circulation statistics. Instead, they viewed libraries as institutions that facilitate learning, collaboration, creativity, inclusion, and community empowerment.

This evolving perspective demonstrates that successful transformation requires librarians to redefine institutional purpose before implementing new services or technologies.

This finding is consistent with the literature describing the evolving role of libraries from traditional repositories of information toward more dynamic, community-centered learning environments. Onunka et al. (2023) emphasized that contemporary libraries increasingly extend their functions beyond collection management by supporting learning, collaboration, community engagement, and social development. The present finding reinforces this perspective by showing that, from the participants' lived experiences, transformation begins with a fundamental redefinition of what the library is for before changes in services, technologies, and facilities can become meaningful.

Theme 2

Listening Before Leading

Participants consistently emphasized that successful transformation did not begin with ambitious projects or expensive technologies but with understanding the genuine needs of their communities.



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Rather than assuming what patrons wanted, librarians intentionally sought community input through consultations, surveys, informal conversations, focus group discussions, and collaborative planning sessions.

Participant 6 shared:

"We realized that we could not transform the library without first listening to the people we wanted to serve."

Participant 11 recalled:

"When we asked residents what they needed, many did not ask for more books. They asked for computer classes, internet access, job-seeking assistance, and spaces where children could study safely after school."

Participants described community engagement as an ongoing dialogue rather than a one-time activity. Programs evolved continuously based on changing community needs.

One participant explained:

"Every program we introduced came from listening. The community became our greatest teacher." (Participant 5)

These narratives reveal that librarians increasingly embrace participatory leadership approaches characterized by collaboration, responsiveness, and shared decision-making. Community needs assessments became essential foundations for innovation, enabling libraries to develop relevant and sustainable services.

The findings further demonstrate that librarians increasingly regard communities not merely as library users but as active partners in shaping library services.

The emphasis on listening to communities before designing or implementing programs is consistent with scholarship that positions community engagement and participatory approaches as important foundations of responsive library services. Hernández-Pérez et al. (2022) argued that understanding users' needs and involving community stakeholders can help libraries develop services that are more relevant, inclusive, and sustainable. The present findings extend this perspective by showing that participants regarded listening not simply as a service-development technique but as an ongoing leadership practice through which communities become active partners in shaping library programs and priorities.

Theme 3

Creating Spaces Where Everyone Belongs

Participants repeatedly described libraries as inclusive environments where individuals from diverse backgrounds could access learning opportunities without discrimination.

Several participants emphasized that community learning hubs intentionally welcomed children, students, senior citizens, unemployed adults, persons with disabilities, entrepreneurs, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized sectors.

Participant 1 explained:

"Our goal was not simply to invite people into the building. Our goal was to make everyone feel that they truly belonged."

Participant 9 reflected:

"Some visitors came to borrow books. Others came because they needed internet access. Some simply wanted a quiet and safe place where someone cared enough to help them."

Participants highlighted a wide range of inclusive programs implemented by their libraries, including digital literacy workshops, storytelling sessions, financial literacy seminars, livelihood training, research consultations, makerspaces, assistive technology services, senior citizen learning circles, and youth leadership activities.

These initiatives significantly expanded the role of libraries within their communities.

The findings demonstrate that inclusivity has become a defining characteristic of community learning hubs. Libraries increasingly function as social institutions that reduce educational inequities, strengthen social cohesion, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for diverse populations.

Participants consistently viewed accessibility not merely as physical access but also as ensuring that every individual feels respected, supported, and empowered to learn.

The finding is aligned with literature emphasizing the role of libraries in promoting equitable access, social inclusion, lifelong learning, and community participation. Gupta et al. (2024) noted that contemporary libraries increasingly function as inclusive learning and social spaces that respond to the needs of diverse and underserved populations. The participants' experiences support this perspective by demonstrating that inclusion involves more than providing physical access to library facilities; it also involves creating environments in which individuals feel welcomed, respected, supported, and empowered to participate in learning and community life.



Theme 4

Embracing Innovation While Preserving Identity

Participants acknowledged that digital technologies have transformed nearly every aspect of library operations. Nevertheless, they consistently emphasized that innovation should strengthen—not replace—the fundamental values of librarianship.

Many participants described introducing online catalogs, institutional repositories, digital collections, virtual reference services, artificial intelligence applications, makerspaces, and online learning platforms.

Participant 7 observed:

"Technology changed our tools, but it never changed our purpose."

Participant 3 added:

"People sometimes believe technology will replace librarians. We see technology as helping us reach more learners while continuing to provide human guidance."

Several participants discussed initial uncertainty when implementing technological innovations. However, they explained that continuous professional development and organizational support gradually increased their confidence.

Participant 10 reflected:

"Learning never stopped. Every new technology became another opportunity to serve our community better."

Participants perceived innovation as a means of expanding educational access rather than replacing traditional library values. Their narratives illustrate that successful transformation requires balancing technological advancement with ethical service, professional expertise, and meaningful human interaction.

Innovation, therefore, was viewed as a process of enhancing—not abandoning—the profession's enduring commitment to equitable access to knowledge.

This finding supports literature suggesting that technological innovation in libraries should be understood as a means of extending access and improving services rather than as a replacement for the professional and human dimensions of librarianship. Diseiye et al. (2024) reported that digital technologies can expand the reach and capabilities of libraries while requiring librarians to develop new competencies and adapt their professional roles. Consistent with this perspective, the participants viewed technology as an enabling resource while maintaining the importance of professional expertise, ethical service, equitable access, and meaningful human interaction.

Theme 5

Partnerships as Catalysts for Transformation

Participants unanimously described partnerships as indispensable to the successful transformation of libraries into community learning hubs. They emphasized that limited budgets, staffing constraints, and increasing community demands encouraged librarians to establish collaborative relationships with various organizations. These partnerships included local government units, public and private schools, colleges and universities, non-government organizations, cultural institutions, literacy advocates, local businesses, volunteer organizations, and community associations.

Participant 12 shared:

"Our biggest innovation was realizing that we did not have to work alone."

Participant 8 explained:

"Every partnership expanded what the library could offer. Together, we created opportunities that would have been impossible if we worked independently."

Collaborative initiatives included mobile libraries, reading festivals, digital literacy campaigns, environmental education programs, research workshops, entrepreneurship seminars, health information sessions, and heritage preservation projects.

These findings indicate that organizational transformation is strengthened through collaborative leadership and shared responsibility. Libraries increasingly function as community conveners that bring together diverse stakeholders to address educational and social needs.

Participants regarded partnerships not simply as resource-sharing arrangements but as long-term relationships built upon mutual trust, shared vision, and collective commitment to community development.

The importance of partnerships identified in this study is consistent with literature emphasizing collaboration as a mechanism through which libraries can expand resources, expertise, services, and community reach. Tikkinen and Korkeamäki (2023) found that partnerships with educational institutions, government agencies, community organizations, and other stakeholders can strengthen the capacity of libraries to respond to complex community needs. The present findings add a lived-experience perspective by showing that participants understood partnerships not



merely as arrangements for sharing resources but as sustained relationships built on mutual trust, shared vision, and collective responsibility for community development.

Theme 6

Sustaining Community-Centered Libraries Through Visionary Leadership

The final theme captures participants' reflections on sustaining transformation over time. While launching innovative programs was important, participants emphasized that maintaining momentum required visionary leadership, continuous learning, institutional commitment, and adaptability.

Participant 6 reflected:

"Transformation is not a project with an ending date. It becomes part of the library's identity."

Participant 5 explained:

"Every year our community changes. If libraries stop learning, they stop serving."

Participants emphasized several qualities as essential for sustaining community-centered libraries. These included visionary leadership, lifelong professional learning, adaptability, evidence-based planning, staff empowerment, continuous community engagement, and organizational resilience. Collectively, these qualities were viewed as critical in enabling libraries to respond effectively to changing community needs while maintaining the long-term success of their programs and services.

Many participants likewise stressed the importance of mentoring younger librarians who would continue leading future innovations.

Participant 2 concluded:

"Our greatest achievement is not the programs we created but the future librarians who will continue improving them."

The findings demonstrate that sustainable transformation depends upon institutional culture rather than isolated projects. Participants consistently viewed leadership as a continuous process of inspiring innovation, nurturing collaboration, and maintaining responsiveness to changing community needs.

Rather than viewing transformation as complete, librarians perceived community learning hubs as continuously evolving institutions committed to lifelong learning, inclusivity, and public service.

The finding is consistent with literature emphasizing adaptive and transformational leadership as important to sustaining organizational change. Aslam (2022) explained that successful transformation requires leadership that can maintain momentum, support professional learning, empower personnel, and embed new practices within organizational culture. The participants' experiences reinforce this perspective by showing that sustainable library transformation depends not on isolated projects but on a continuing institutional culture of learning, innovation, collaboration, mentoring, and responsiveness to changing community needs.

These six themes collectively illustrate that transforming libraries into community learning hubs is a multidimensional process involving shifts in professional identity, participatory leadership, inclusive programming, technological innovation, collaborative partnerships, and sustainable leadership practices.

Composite Textural Description (What the Participants Experienced)

The participants described their experiences as a continuous journey of transformation in which libraries gradually evolved from traditional repositories of books into vibrant centers of learning, collaboration, and community engagement. Throughout this journey, they experienced changing community expectations, technological advancements, organizational restructuring, resource limitations, and shifting professional responsibilities.

Many participants recalled that the earliest stages of transformation began with a realization that traditional library services were no longer sufficient to address the increasingly diverse needs of their communities. Declining visits for conventional library services prompted them to rethink their roles and actively seek new ways of engaging learners of all ages. Rather than remaining passive providers of information, participants became planners, educators, facilitators, advocates, and collaborators.

Participants recounted organizing literacy campaigns, digital skills workshops, makerspaces, research consultations, storytelling sessions, financial literacy seminars, cultural heritage programs, entrepreneurship training, and outreach services that extended library resources beyond the physical building. They described the satisfaction of witnessing children discover the joy of reading, adults acquire new digital competencies, students receive academic support, and marginalized community members gain access to educational opportunities previously unavailable to them.



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Although participants acknowledged numerous challenges—including limited funding, inadequate staffing, resistance to organizational change, rapidly evolving technologies, and increasing community expectations—they consistently viewed these obstacles as opportunities for creativity, collaboration, and professional growth. Partnerships with schools, government agencies, universities, non-government organizations, businesses, and volunteers became essential in expanding services and sustaining innovative programs.

Across all interviews, participants expressed deep pride in witnessing their libraries become welcoming, inclusive spaces where individuals from different ages, backgrounds, and abilities could learn, interact, and grow together. For many participants, the most rewarding aspect of their work was not managing collections but observing the positive impact that library programs had on people's lives and communities.

Composite Structural Description (How the Participants Experienced the Phenomenon)

Participants experienced the transformation of libraries through an ongoing process of adaptation, reflection, collaboration, and leadership. This transformation did not occur through isolated projects or technological upgrades alone but emerged gradually as librarians responded to changing societal needs and embraced broader conceptions of their professional roles.

The process typically began with careful observation of declining traditional library usage and increasing community demands for more diverse educational and technological services. Rather than interpreting these developments as threats, participants viewed them as invitations to reimagine the library's purpose.

Transformation was facilitated through continuous dialogue with community members, strategic planning, collaborative partnerships, and ongoing professional development. Participants emphasized that meaningful innovation required understanding local needs before introducing new programs or technologies. Listening became an essential leadership practice that guided decision-making throughout the transformation process.

Technological innovations—including integrated library systems, digital repositories, virtual reference services, online learning platforms, and makerspaces—were experienced not as replacements for librarians but as tools that enhanced access to knowledge and expanded educational opportunities. Participants consistently balanced innovation with the enduring professional values of librarianship, including equitable access to information, intellectual freedom, lifelong learning, and public service.

Participants also described organizational transformation as a collective endeavor requiring trust, shared leadership, institutional support, and sustained collaboration among staff members and external partners. Through these experiences, librarians gradually developed stronger professional identities characterized by adaptability, resilience, innovation, and community leadership.

Ultimately, participants experienced transformation as a continuing journey rather than a destination. Each successful initiative generated new opportunities for learning, partnership, and community engagement, reinforcing their commitment to responsive and sustainable library services.

Essence of the Phenomenon

The essence of the lived experiences of librarians in transforming libraries into community learning hubs is characterized by purposeful transformation grounded in service, collaboration, and lifelong learning.

For the participants, transforming libraries was never merely about modernizing facilities, acquiring digital technologies, or introducing new programs. Rather, it represented a profound redefinition of librarianship itself—from managing collections to empowering communities. They came to understand that the true strength of libraries lies not in the resources they possess but in the meaningful opportunities they create for individuals to learn, connect, innovate, and thrive.

Participants consistently viewed themselves as catalysts for positive community change. Through adaptive leadership, collaborative partnerships, inclusive programming, and continuous professional learning, they transformed libraries into welcoming environments where knowledge, creativity, and social engagement flourish. Their experiences reveal that successful transformation depends less on technological sophistication than on a steadfast commitment to understanding and responding to the evolving needs of the people they serve.

Ultimately, the phenomenon is best understood as a journey of professional and institutional renewal. Libraries become community learning hubs when librarians embrace change with vision, compassion, and innovation while remaining faithful to the enduring values of librarianship. In doing so, they ensure that libraries continue to serve as accessible, inclusive, and empowering spaces that enrich lives and strengthen communities across generations.



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Conclusions

The findings of this phenomenological study demonstrate that the transformation of libraries into community learning hubs is a multidimensional process that extends beyond physical renovation or technological modernization. At its core, the transformation reflects a shift in philosophy—from viewing libraries primarily as repositories of information to recognizing them as dynamic institutions that foster lifelong learning, social inclusion, collaboration, and community empowerment.

The participants' lived experiences revealed that meaningful transformation begins with a redefinition of the library's purpose. Librarians recognized that changing community needs, advances in technology, and evolving patterns of information use required innovative and responsive services. By actively listening to their communities, they developed programs and initiatives that addressed local educational, cultural, technological, and social needs.

The study further highlights that successful transformation is sustained through participatory leadership, strategic partnerships, and a commitment to continuous professional learning. Participants consistently emphasized that collaboration with schools, government agencies, community organizations, and other stakeholders enabled libraries to extend their reach and maximize their impact despite limited resources.

Another significant finding is that technological innovation was viewed as an enabler rather than a replacement for librarianship. Participants embraced digital tools and emerging technologies while preserving the profession's enduring values of equitable access to information, intellectual freedom, ethical stewardship, and personalized service. Moreover, the participants' narratives illustrate the evolving professional identity of librarians. They increasingly perceived themselves as educators, facilitators, innovators, advocates, mentors, and community leaders who contribute directly to individual and societal development. This expanded role reinforces the importance of adaptive leadership and lifelong learning in ensuring the continued relevance of libraries.

Overall, the study concludes that libraries successfully become community learning hubs when they cultivate inclusive environments, prioritize community engagement, foster collaborative partnerships, embrace innovation responsibly, and remain firmly grounded in the human-centered values that have long defined the profession.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, librarians may strengthen competencies in community engagement, digital literacy, program development, partnership building, and transformational leadership through continuous professional development. Library administrators may prioritize community-responsive planning, inclusive programming, staff development, collaborative initiatives, and evidence-based service improvement, while LIS programs may integrate community-centered librarianship, participatory leadership, partnership development, digital innovation, and experiential learning into their curricula. Government agencies and community organizations may strengthen support for library modernization, digital infrastructure, outreach, professional capacity-building, and collaborative educational, cultural, technological, and social programs. Future researchers may examine the perspectives of library users, community partners, and other stakeholders and employ comparative or longitudinal approaches to further understand sustainable library transformation.

Implications of the Study

The findings have implications for Library and Information Science, particularly in strengthening libraries as community learning hubs. Libraries may increasingly assess their effectiveness through responsiveness to community needs, inclusive educational services, meaningful partnerships, and innovative learning opportunities rather than through collections and circulation alone. This requires continuous community needs assessment, participatory planning, program evaluation, and the development of librarians as educators, facilitators, innovators, and community leaders. Library administrators may foster participatory and visionary leadership, while LIS programs may strengthen preparation in community engagement, digital literacy, program and project management, partnership development, leadership, advocacy, emerging technologies, and artificial intelligence. Government agencies may likewise strengthen policies and investments in library infrastructure, connectivity, professional development, outreach, and collaborative programs to support lifelong learning, digital inclusion, literacy, cultural preservation, and community development.

The study further suggests that libraries can function as important community assets by providing accessible spaces for lifelong learning, digital inclusion, civic engagement, entrepreneurship, cultural activities, and collaborative problem-solving. Future research may examine the experiences of library users and community partners, compare transformation across different library settings, investigate organizational cultures and digital inclusion initiatives, and explore the implications of artificial intelligence for community library services. Quantitative and longitudinal studies



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may also validate, refine, and examine the applicability and sustainability of the Community Learning Hub Transformation Framework (CLHTF) across diverse library contexts.

Proposed Framework

Community Learning Hub Transformation Framework (CLHTF)

Based on the lived experiences of the participants, this study proposes the Community Learning Hub Transformation Framework (CLHTF). The framework synthesizes the essential elements that enable libraries to evolve into responsive, inclusive, and sustainable community learning hubs.

The framework is composed of five interconnected dimensions, each representing a critical component of successful transformation.

Dimension 1. Understanding Community Needs

Transformation begins with developing a deep understanding of the community being served. This dimension emphasizes the importance of community consultations, stakeholder engagement, needs assessment, environmental scanning, and evidence-based planning. Rather than assuming community needs, librarians actively listen, observe, and collaborate with community members to gain meaningful insights before designing and implementing appropriate services and programs.

Guiding Principle:

"Communities should shape libraries—not the other way around."

Dimension 2. Transformational Library Leadership

Effective transformation requires visionary leadership that is capable of inspiring innovation while preserving the enduring values of the library profession. Key leadership competencies include strategic planning, participatory leadership, innovation management, adaptive decision-making, staff empowerment, and continuous improvement. In this context, the librarian serves not only as an information professional but also as a community leader and change agent who guides organizational transformation and fosters meaningful engagement with the communities served.

Dimension 3. Community-Centered Library Innovations

Guided by community needs and effective leadership, libraries implement diverse learning opportunities designed to address the evolving requirements of their communities. These initiatives include digital literacy programs, makerspaces, reading promotion initiatives, research support services, entrepreneurship training, financial literacy education, cultural heritage programs, lifelong learning workshops, technology access services, and programs for youth and senior citizens. Innovation in libraries remains responsive to local priorities and community contexts rather than being driven solely by emerging technological trends.

Dimension 4. Collaborative Partnerships

Transformation becomes sustainable through the establishment of strong partnerships among various stakeholders, including schools, higher education institutions, local government units, cultural organizations, non-government organizations, businesses, volunteers, community leaders, and professional associations. These partnerships facilitate resource sharing, broaden access to expertise, expand community reach, and contribute to the long-term sustainability of library initiatives and services.

Dimension 5. Sustainable Community Impact

Successful library transformation ultimately produces a range of positive outcomes, including increased participation in lifelong learning, improved digital literacy, stronger community engagement, equitable access to information, inclusive educational opportunities, strengthened social cohesion, and the development of resilient and future-ready libraries. These outcomes reinforce the continuing relevance and importance of libraries as essential community institutions within rapidly changing societies.

Theoretical Proposition

Libraries become sustainable community learning hubs when librarians intentionally understand and respond to changing community needs through transformational leadership, community-centered innovation, collaborative partnerships, and sustained commitment to lifelong learning and community impact. Organizational transformation is



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sustained not by technology alone but by meaningful relationships, adaptive leadership, and an enduring commitment to community empowerment.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to twelve purposively selected librarians from selected public, academic, and community libraries in Central Luzon. Consequently, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization to all librarians or library systems. The study also relied primarily on participants' retrospective self-reports, which may be influenced by memory and personal interpretation. As a phenomenological inquiry, the analysis necessarily involved researcher interpretation despite the use of bracketing, reflexive journaling, peer consultation, and member checking. The proposed CLHTF should therefore be considered a contextually grounded framework that requires further examination across other library settings.

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