



BEST PRACTICES AND QUALITATIVE LIBRARY SERVICES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract:

Changing times brought many challenges to the libraries, as those impacted other organisations as well. It has become a necessity for the libraries to meet the users' changing expectations to stay relevant in the present era. The paper throws light on best practices that can be followed in academic libraries for a qualitative library services. The paper also takes into account the role of technology in best practices and maintaining quality services. Conducting orientation programmes, instituting best library users award and good feedback mechanism are some of the best practices that can be followed by academic libraries for enhanced quality library services.

Key Words: *Best practices, Library services, Academic libraries, Library-Qualitative services, Accreditation councils*

Introduction:

Libraries have come a long way from being storage houses of religious books and accessible only to the elite in the society to gatehouses of knowledge to all the sections of society. Over time, library have changed in terms of forms of resources, skill and qualification of the library staff, structure of the building, user needs, tools used in processing of resources, nature of services, the way the information is disseminated and other elements of the library. Libraries have now become library and information centres or just information centres.

Libraries owe their genesis to the need felt by the society to store the literature available at particular time and make it available to the present and future generations. As the forms of storing human knowledge went on changing due to developments in science and technology

over the years, libraries that exist to disseminate this knowledge to the society had to change out of necessity. All the changes in the society had an impact on libraries also.

Any organisation that does not respond and adapt to the changes in the society of which it is a part is bound to suffer extinction. Libraries are no exception. Every entity in the society is to open itself to the changes happening around it. A closed system always grows in a negative direction and cease to exist after certain amount of time. People who once used gramophone records, tape recorders, video cassettes don't use any of those for entertainment. When the world is going towards metaverse, it is difficult for the library not to open itself to the phenomenal changes going around.

Libraries act as a supplementary system in an academic or research setup. Their work is to feed the intellectual activities of their parent institutions. At a time when all the institutions around the world go for QS-THE Higher Education rankings, NIRF, NAAC, NBA, it is in the best interest of library and information centres (LIS) to adopt best practices in their services.

Definition:

Best practices lead to quality enhancement and optimum user satisfaction. That is how NAAC sees best practices. “Best practices may be viewed as one that enhances user satisfaction contributing to the full realisation of one’s academic potential.” NAAC (n.d.) The best practices followed in the LIS today are in synchrony with the five laws of library science enunciated by Dr. S R Ranganathan in 1931.

The paper tries to present the best practices followed in the context of present-day LIS in academic institutions. Though many best practices can be listed, attempt is made to enlist only the best practices that required less investment or no investment. This is an important point since nowadays, spending in LIS has been seeing a declining trend. The authorities are asking more questions about relevance of the library and expecting librarians to work in very demanding situations. Librarians today are facing a tough and challenging situation.

Best Practices:

Automation of Libraries:

Automation of library services is inevitable in the present circumstances. When the payment is done by the use of finger, not automating the library services certainly dents not only quality of the

library services but also the image of the library.

When automation or digitisation of library services is discussed, the following points can be highlighted.

- **Library websites:** Library websites are helpful in marketing library services and resources. WEBOPAC, useful links of e-resources, rules and regulations of the LIS, user guide of the LIS, links of the databases, consortiums the LIS subscribes and other useful links can be included in a library website.
- **Automation of different applications:** The LIS can create QR codes for the applications of borrower’s cards for the users, communication with the librarian, WEBOPAC, etc. (Rahaman, 2016). These can be added as links in the library websites also.
- **Barcoding of print resources:** Barcoding of books and other print resources is useful during the annual stock verification. Using apps like Excelled, one can reduce the time of stock verification significantly. Barcoding can be done downloading and installing free barcoding fonts. Software is not required. This enhances the accuracy of the stock verification process also.
- **Using open source software’s:** Using open source softwares like Koha not only results in better quality of the library services but enhanced image of the librarian also.
- **Creating Library App:** This is the need of the hour. When people are switching over to smart phones from computer and laptops,

creating a library app is a good idea. All the things that can be done using library websites can be done using an App.

Automation of the library services has its merits:

- It satisfies the fourth law of the library science, i.e., Save the time of the staff/users. As explained in the preceding paragraphs, it saves the time of the staff in stock verification.
- It reduces the time gap between requisition of any demand for information and its delivery considerably. In many cases, instant delivery of information will be the case. Thus, saving the time of the users.
- Automation helps in better compilation of library data. This is a major advantage. For augmenting quality in library services, research is always a vital element. “Research can help to improve services to the users, lead to better utilisation of documents, etc.” (Kumar, 2019). Research always requires data. Lack of data hampers research process. Without adequate data, quality research cannot take place, thus being an obstacle in the process of quality enhancement of the library services.
- Proper maintenance of statistics is important from the point of view of inspection and accreditation committees also.
- Automation helps in uninterrupted library services during the period of pandemics like Covid-19. The libraries that automate and digitise the services can exhibit their relevance in the changed

circumstances also. Be it living beings or an organisation, that does not adapt to the changes in the surrounding environment are bound to be extinct. So, automation is a very concept from the point of view of best practices, quality services and also for the survival of the LIS in the ever-changing world.

- Students and the teachers in colleges and schools nowadays like to study at the comfort of their homes, hostels, etc. This is resulting in the reduced library visits. Technology has changed the concept of study and learning. Nowadays not visiting the library should not lead to conclusion that LIS are becoming irrelevant. Here, usage must be the focal point, not the place. Library need not and is not a place where all the information-seekers must come and collect the material. The notion of libraries without walls as conceptualised by Lancaster in 1978 is becoming a reality now. Dissemination of information “anywhere, anytime” must be the priority for the modern-day LIS.

When automation is talked about, thought of large investment should not come to a Librarian’s mind. Using applications like MS Excel greatly serves the purpose of a Librarian. Learning formulae for different calculations, formatting help an enthusiastic Librarian a lot.

Orientation Programmes:

This is another important element not only from the point of view of quality services but also from the point of view of Librarianship as a profession. Having abundant resources in any library does not

facilitate their usage. Unawareness is major barrier in using any resources. Librarian should take a lead in training the users not only in the utilisation of library as done in the beginning of every academic year but training them in the usage of consortia like VTU consortium, HELINET consortium or INFLIBNET-NLIST, DELNET, etc. Conducting successful orientation programmes regularly on different topics by the Librarian will strengthen the voice of a Librarian in asserting the case of considering the librarians as teaching staff.

User Guide:

Abundant resources and application of ICT in library won't have any effect unless the users are trained in the usage of the library resources. An aware user utilises the library resources in better manner. This is substantiated by many studies in the past. Tunde Idris Yusuf (2012), Raising, Gaddimani and Yadav (2021) discuss about the unawareness, inaccessibility and ignorance of the users about the resources as barriers in properly utilising the library resources.

Apart from orientation programmes, user guides help the users know the rules and regulations, procedures of applying for borrower's cards, use of OPAC/WEBOPAC, different library services, details about library website, App and other useful links.

Displaying Statistics on the Notice Board:

Displaying statistics like average physical visits by the students of different programmes and the faculty members of all the departments in the form of tables always helps in enhancing the library usage. Physical usage can be extended to the usage of library resources using library

websites, OPAC/WEBOPAC or usage of different consortium as enlisted in the preceding paragraphs. In the case of usage of consortiums, top five users' names may be displayed on the notice board/website. Rajesh (2020) described in detail how the statistics displayed on the noticeboards was helpful in increasing the physical visits and total library usage gradually.

Best Library User Award:

This is one of the best practices that must be followed by all the libraries. The best user can be selected on different criteria like most library visits, most books borrowed and timely return of books, etc. These criteria must be customised based on the local conditions. Giving cash award and displaying the best user's name and photographs with other details in the notice boards and website is a very good practice. This will act as an incentive for using the library.

Regular Feedback from the Users:

As customer is king in a business establishment, user is always a focal point in a library as per the first law of library science. The first four laws advise the Librarians to keep the users in mind while developing library, resources and services. With changing times, users' needs, information-seeking behaviours and expectations from the LIS are undergoing rapid changes. To keep the LIS in tune with the users' expectations, collecting feedback, its analysis and bringing changes as per the feedback response has become a necessity not only for maintaining quality services but keep the relevance of LIS in changing times.

Conclusion:

As explained in the preceding paragraphs, librarians are in a position to

prove their relevance with the scarce resources. But automation, in particular open source software's, open educational resources, open access resources and so many open resources came to the help of a Librarian. Instead of bogged down by the negativity about the profession, librarians must seize the opportunity by using the open resources available to serve user community in a better way. Certainly, technology is both a challenge and an opportunity. Instead of asking too much from the authorities, the librarians must prove their worth by bringing in best practices in their libraries and thus enhance the image of the profession.

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