

ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES: INFORMATION LITERACY IN AN INFORMATION SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Inform plays a very important role in the Economic & Social development of a nation. Access to information facilitates all round development of individuals. Therefore the citizens' capability to use the available information in an effective manner to attain their goals is a key factor and assumes great significance in a developing country like India. This article discusses the role of public libraries in implementing the information literacy programs, initiated by Government of India, constraints faced by public libraries in implementing the IL programs, and marketing and promotion of IL programs. Suggestions are made for offering effective IL programs by the public libraries

KEYWORDS: Literacy Programs, Implementing the IL Programs

INTRODUCTION

Public Libraries arose worldwide along with growth in education, literacy & publications. Every country has its own public library history with influential leaders. UNESCO in its public Library Manifesto (1994) has described public libraries as a democratic institution for the education, culture and information. Public libraries primarily on popular materials such as popular fiction and movies, as well as educational and notification materials of interest to the general public; and internet access are also often offered.

In addition to print books and periodicals, most public libraries today have a wide array of other media including audio tapes, CDs, cassettes, videotapes, DVDs & video games, as well as facilities to access the Internet and inter library loans.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN INDIA

Public libraries in India are spread all over the country, consisting of state central libraries in every state, district libraries, urban public libraries at the cities and rural public libraries at the village. Public libraries are mainly supported by State Government & Local Authorities & some times by the Central Government, developed agencies, non government organizations & private trust. Raja Rammohan Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) is the nodal agency of the Government of India to support public library services and promote public library movement in the country. RRRLF provides financial and technical assistance to public libraries & organizations engaged in the promotion of public library development through its different schemes

MISSION OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

The public libraries having the following key missions

- Supporting both individual and self conducted education as well as formal education at all levels
- Providing adequate information services to local enterprises, associations & interest groups
- Creating & strengthening reading habits in children from early age
- Facilitating the development of information literacy skills

SERVICES PROVIDED BY PUBLIC LIBRARIES

- Inter Library Loan
- Online Public Access Catalogue
- Photocopying
- Community Information Services
- Document Delivery including Electronic document delivery
- Training users in information literacy

CENER PUBLIC LIBRARY AS COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE

Public libraries are a living force for popular education, culture, information and development of the masses. The advances in ICT have changed the pattern of acquisition & dissemination of information. The accessibility of the world wide information through internet & such other similar developments has not only changed the role of public libraries but also their shape & nomenclature. Modern Public libraries thus can't afford to restrict their scope of activity within four walls and wait for users to come, but have to go beyond, to reach the mass and act themselves as community knowledge centers

INFORMATION LITERACY IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

It is over 30 years since the term 'information literacy' was coined by Paul Zurkwsh nearly 20 years since the concept came to forefront of the library & information profession. Libraries of all types have been charged with taking an active role in fostering an information literate society. Public libraries have been proposed as the obvious & well equipped agencies for imparting critical information skills to the wider community

DIVERSE CUSTOMERS

Public Libraries serve the community irrespective of race, region, caste, color, sex, language, educational attainment. The clientele to be served would cover a wide spectrum. It may include students, teachers, research scholars, businessmen, professionals, housewives, retired persons and neo literates. The need of information Literacy in India

- To make the common people part of IT revolution
- To develop information literacy skills of the learners
- To provide knowledge and motivate people to acquire IT ability
- To become independent learners

ROLE OF INFORMATION LITERACY IN INDIA

In the recent decades India has tried to increase the literate population and educated citizens through organizing different programmes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) District Primary Education Programs (DPEP) National Literacy Mission & established the community information centers & village knowledge centers are recent additions to this effort that would transform India into an information society where information & knowledge resources are considered as critical ingredients for development.

PUBLIC LIBRARY CONSTRAINTS

Public libraries have myriad strengths to play a role in information literacy development. The literature also reveals a number of factors limiting their efforts

- Lack of resources to conduct information literacy programs
- Poor public perception of the library's function
- Librarian's reluctance to assume a non-traditional role
- Attitudes & beliefs of the librarians & library professionals towards information literacy concept

MARKETING & PROMOTION OF IL PROGRAMS

Public Libraries may use marketing techniques to enable them to understand the information literacy needs of their users & to plan effectively IL programs to meet those identified needs. They may also promote their IL programs to the target groups to improve their information skills. Marketing & promotion plan may include the following activities:

- Making use of print, electronic & communication media to popularize the IL program
- Public libraries may facilitate formation of 'Friends of Library Groups' to help the libraries in offering IL
- Creation of Library Website to propagate information online about IL programs
- Organizing & making IL programs appropriately with the celebrations of important events & days like Independence Day, Human Rights Day, International Women's Day, Population Day etc., to attract more number of participants

SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are made for offering effective IL programs by the public libraries

ILCOMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIANS & LIBRARY USERS

Information Literacy (IL) competency development programs for public librarians would be a kind of training course for the trainers. The public librarians would impart training to the end users of public libraries. The aims of the information literacy competency development programs for public librarians can be:

- Confidence in using, and satisfaction in carrying out information searching
- The ability to apply the principles of scholarly communication to the problems of information handling
- Confidence in communicating, instructing & educating the users

ENHANCING THE USER BASE

The literacy rate is astonishingly low so the existing public libraries or community libraries should make provision to attract all other traditional players of the society towards it. For this purpose the community librarian can read out the newspapers and other daily, weekly or monthly periodicals every day at a specific time in front of illiterate people. By this way the listeners will acquire a habit of daily visiting to the libraries & help the librarian to enhance the user base of the library

INSTITUTING PRIZES, AWARDS

The Public Libraries can institute Prizes/ Awards for the user who have issued highest number of documents & frequently visited the library in a particular year

PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH

As a young persons in the society represent a dynamic section of population the public libraries may organize IL programs in the following areas like Educational Opportunities, Employment Opportunities, IT Skills, AIDS awareness Programs, Guidance for appearing in Competitive Examinations, Indian Heritage & Culture. Use of multimedia information sources, Environmental Protection & Personal Health, Self Employment Schemes & Government Schemes to youth to improve the information capabilities of youth

USE OF INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Use of computers & Networking Technologies facilitates effective teaching & learning of information literacy Skills Use of Cable TV Network, FM Radio & All India Radio (AIR). The public libraries can utilize the services of Cable TV Network, FM Radio, and All India Radio to reach out its users at their doorsteps for teaching information literacy skills. An IL program combined with entertainment provides variety & opportunities to motivate citizens.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion we can say that to deliver information to all the user communities is not the focus of information literacy. However, where the literacy rate is so low & availability of information resources are also quite poor, public

libraries cannot stop at just informing where information is available but has also totake a proactive role in making some important information resources available to the users.Now the librarian need to teach the users the basic skills so that they can educate and re-educate themselves to survive & be the lifelong learners.These libraries are also providing current awareness programs to make them acquainted with the sources of information, their utility & use.Alsothey are playing the pro-activerole of supporting the learning process by storing materials & providing facilities for developing healthy atmosphere of quality education.To translate the basic concept of information literacy in to reality for the entire population, public libraries can also collaborate with the Government Departments, NGO's and schools in specific information literacy programs & project for children, women, adults & indigenious people & visually challenged

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