Review Article

Use of Library and Information Centres in Higher Education in the 21st Century

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A B S T R A C T

This paper explores the symbiotic relationship between education and libraries, focusing on the historical trajectory of college libraries in India. It examines the transformative initiatives introduced by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and influential reports, highlighting the pivotal role of libraries in higher education. The changing landscape of higher education in the 21st century is analysed, emphasising curriculum evolution, technology integration, and global collaboration. The role of libraries and information centres (LICs) is discussed in response to the digital transformation, technology-based services, and the evolution of distance education. The diverse needs of library users in the 21st century, influenced by technological advancements, are examined, along with the changing infrastructure of LICs.

In the Indian scenario, the paper discusses the well-equipped libraries of universities, varying levels of web-based services, and the impact of the INFLIBNET Centre. The conclusion underscores the challenges faced by LICs in meeting user demands and highlights the importance of manpower, continuous training, and collaboration for success in the dynamic landscape of higher education.

Keywords: Library, Information, Higher Education, University Grants Commission, Century

Introduction

The symbiotic relationship between education and libraries has been a cornerstone of civilisations for centuries. Libraries have played an integral role in educational institutions, particularly in higher education. Historical evidence, such as the illustrious Nalanda and Takshashila Universities in India, as well as the traditional Gurukula system of education, underscores the profound dependence on libraries for the dissemination of knowledge.

In the context of India, the trajectory of higher education has seen significant expansion over the last sixty years. The impetus behind this expansion has predominantly been driven by social and political motivations, rather than purely economic or manpower considerations. A pivotal moment in this journey occurred on December 28, 1953, with the establishment of the University Grants Commission (UGC) in India. The UGC played a crucial role in reforming college education and liberating institutions from the rigid structures of traditional courses.

As part of its Sixth Plan Development proposals, the UGC spearheaded initiatives that led to a notable proliferation of libraries in colleges. Generous funding was allocated for the acquisition of reference books, textbooks, and the construction of library buildings. A well-established

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library, equipped with a high-quality collection suitable for study and research, became indispensable for modern higher education institutions, mirroring the standards set by universities.[1]

Recognising the pivotal role of libraries in higher education reports such as the Radhakrishnan Report (1948) and the Kothari Commission Report (1964) have underscored the importance of their comprehensive development. Notably, Dr CD Deshmukh and Dr SR Ranganathan laid a solid foundation for academic libraries through the 1959 (published in 1965) Report of the Library Committee of the UGC.

Against this backdrop, the evolution of college libraries becomes paramount in achieving the objectives of higher education. College libraries are tasked with reshaping their activities to emerge as significant partners in the conservation of knowledge in the form of information, as emphasised by the UGC in 1965 and further articulated by Naik in 2009.

This paper explores the historical trajectory of the relationship between education and libraries, with a specific focus on the evolution of college libraries in India. It delves into the transformative initiatives introduced by the UGC and the recommendations of influential reports, emphasising the pivotal role that libraries play in the contemporary landscape of higher education.[2]

Changing Role of Higher Education in the 21st Century

The evolving landscape of higher education indeed reflects the dynamic nature of the world we live in. As the world undergoes rapid changes, higher education institutions must adapt to ensure that they effectively prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. Here's a breakdown of the key transformations in various aspects of higher education:

Curriculum Evolution

* Relevance to Real-World Challenges: There is a shift towards curricula that address real-world challenges, integrating practical skills and problem-solving abilities.

* Interdisciplinary Approaches: Breaking down traditional disciplinary silos, there's a growing emphasis on interdisciplinary studies to foster holistic understanding and innovation.[3]

* **Scholarship, Teaching, and Learning**

* Technology Integration: The integration of technology in teaching and learning is becoming more prevalent, with online platforms, virtual classrooms, and digital resources enhancing accessibility and flexibility.

* Active Learning: There's a move away from passive

learning towards more active and participatory teaching methods, encouraging critical thinking and collaboration.

* **Roles and Responsibilities of Staff**

* Facilitators of Learning: Faculty roles are evolving to become more focused on guiding and facilitating learning experiences rather than just imparting information.

* Research and Application: Faculty members are increasingly encouraged to engage in research that has practical applications and contributes to addressing societal challenges.

* **Institutional Structure**

* Flexibility and Adaptability: Institutions are adopting more flexible structures to respond quickly to changes in technology, societal needs, and economic shifts.

* Global Collaboration: Increased emphasis on global collaboration, partnerships, and exchange programs to provide students with a more diverse and international perspective.[4]

* **Mission and Vision**

* Global Citizenship: The mission and vision of institutions are expanding to include the development of globally conscious and socially responsible citizens.

* Lifelong Learning: Recognising the need for continuous learning, institutions are embracing a mission to equip students with lifelong learning and adaptability skills.

In this changing scenario, higher education faces both challenges and exciting opportunities. It requires a commitment to innovation, adaptability, and a willingness to rethink traditional approaches. The goal is to prepare students not only with knowledge but also with the skills and mindset needed to thrive in an ever-evolving global knowledge-based society. Reports highlighting the 'new learning reality' emphasise the urgency of reimagining the entire learning enterprise to ensure success in this dynamic environment.

Students

Today's college students and their parents have distinct expectations shaped by technology, with a focus on employability and competitive pricing due to heightened competition in higher education. The traditional learning methods no longer satisfy them, as they are keen on integrating electronic tools like smartphones and iPads into their education. Modern students wish to customise their curricula, learn in a way that suits their style, and prioritise personalisation and convenience in their learning environment.[5]

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Teachers

The roles of teachers in higher education align with the evolving conditions of the teaching-learning environment, influenced by the increasing integration of digital tools for pedagogical purposes. Governmental strategic planning emphasises positive expectations for technology's impact on teaching and learning in higher education. The use of digital tools within the higher education context aims to transform teaching conditions and redefine teacher roles.

In terms of academic administration, minor changes are evident, particularly with the introduction of accreditation processes in higher education. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) outlines academic and administration audits as essential components in ensuring institutional excellence. Regular academic audits guide institutions on the path to quality assurance. The Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) coordinates academic audits, addressing concerns such as the lack of paper documentation. The audit team emphasises commendable features related to teaching and learning.[6]

Recent years have witnessed structural changes in the governance and administration of higher education institutions, manifesting in three distinct approaches: new public management, entrepreneurialism, and academic capitalism. New public management extends efficiency principles from the public sector to academic institutions. Entrepreneurialism focuses on autonomy and diversified funding sources for university units. Academic capitalism signifies the transformation of higher education from a social institution to an industry.

Distance Education

Distance Education, a revolutionary shift from traditional classroom teaching, has redefined the dynamics of learning. This innovative approach eliminates the constraints of physical presence, allowing both educators and learners to engage in the educational process without being bound by location or time. The flexibility in teaching modalities and timing, coupled with adaptable admission criteria, ensures that quality education remains paramount.

Open and distance education has proven to be a boon for numerous individuals, offering a plethora of benefits. One of its key advantages lies in providing flexible course options, accommodating individuals who may lack formal qualifications but meet the age requirements and successfully passing a qualifying examination. Open universities play a pivotal role in this setup, providing comprehensive course materials to students, organising contact classes, and conducting examinations.

This model of education not only breaks down barriers for traditional learners but has also proven invaluable for those embarking on lifelong learning journeys. The ability to tailor learning experiences to individual needs fosters a culture of continuous education, empowering individuals to acquire knowledge at their own pace and convenience. Distance education, with its emphasis on accessibility and adaptability, stands as a beacon for a more inclusive and dynamic approach to learning.[7]

Role of Libraries and Information Centres

The role of libraries and information centres (LICs) has indeed evolved significantly in response to the changing landscape of information and technology. Here are some key aspects of this transformation:

Digital Transformation

Libraries have undergone a digital transformation, moving from traditional print resources to a plethora of electronic resources. This includes online catalogues, digital databases, e-books, multimedia content, and more. The shift towards electronic resources has necessitated the acquisition of new skills and technologies by library professionals.

Technology-Based Services

Libraries now provide a range of technology-based services to meet the needs of users in the digital age. These services may include online reference assistance, virtual research support, and digital literacy programmes. Libraries are also involved in digitisation projects to preserve and provide access to rare and valuable materials.[8]

Access to Electronic Resources

Ensuring seamless access to electronic resources is a priority. Libraries employ strategies such as federated search systems, authentication protocols, and user-friendly interfaces to make electronic resources easily accessible to faculty and students. Remote access options have become crucial to support distance learning initiatives.

Web-Based E-Learning

The rise of web-based e-learning has significantly impacted LICs. Libraries are now integral to the e-learning environment, providing access to digital learning materials, collaborating with educators on resource integration, and supporting online research activities. The shift towards online education has necessitated changes in collection development strategies.

Inflibnet And Networking Activities

Organisations like INFLIBNET play a vital role in coordinating the automation and networking activities of libraries and information centres. Networking enables resource sharing, collaborative projects, and the establishment of a collective knowledge base. This facilitates efficient information access and management across different institutions.

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Service Enhancement

Libraries are focusing on enhancing user services to meet the evolving needs of their communities. This includes the development of user-friendly interfaces, the implementation of self-service options, and the integration of advanced search and discovery tools to streamline information retrieval.

Preservation and Archiving

With the increasing reliance on digital content, libraries are actively involved in preservation efforts. Digital repositories are created to ensure electronic resources' long-term access and preservation. Libraries are also developing strategies to address issues related to digital obsolescence and format migration.[9]

Technological Challenges

Libraries face ongoing challenges related to technology, including issues of cybersecurity, data management, and staying abreast of technological advancements. Continuous professional development is crucial for library staff to effectively navigate these challenges.

Communication Modes

Libraries are adopting diverse communication modes to engage with their user communities. This includes social media, virtual events, and online communication platforms. Effective communication is essential for promoting library services, resources, and events.

In summary, the modern library and information centre is a dynamic and technology-driven entity, actively adapting to the evolving needs of users in higher education. The focus is on leveraging technology to enhance access, provide innovative services, and contribute to the digital transformation of learning and research environments.

Library and Information Centres

In today's digital era marked by Web 2.0, Library 2.0, and various online tools, libraries have transformed to meet the evolving needs of higher education. Traditional library visits have shifted to convenient online access, utilising cloud-based OPAC for collection accessibility. Information literacy programmes are implemented for effective source utilisation.

Libraries integrate with Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Web CT and Moodle, enabling a single login for access to course components, e-journals, and online services. Information dissemination occurs through library websites. Digital media now surpasses print, with a focus on nano storage and real-time access.

Libraries offer remote and wireless access, fostering online and distance learning. Consortia models replace standalone libraries, providing broader journal access. Institutions join online services for full-text databases. Collaboration ensures global information access 24x7.

Advanced web-based search strategies replace traditional methods for pinpointed information retrieval. The landscape of 21st-century librarianship reflects a dynamic fusion of technology, education, and global collaboration.

Diversity of Library User

In the 21st century, technological advancements have significantly shaped how library users behave and what they require. Nowadays, users are more independent in managing their information needs and often don't rely on librarians for assistance. Instead, their expectation from the library is mainly centred around providing access licences for paid websites.

The traditional role of librarians in guiding users has diminished, with many individuals opting to use search engines to find information rather than seeking direct help from library staff. According to Oblinger's report in 2007, a mere 2% of college students start their research on the library website, while a substantial 67% discover electronic resources through recommendations from their peers. This shift in user behaviour highlights the evolving dynamics in how people interact with libraries in the digital age.

Infrastructure

The infrastructure of libraries has undergone significant changes in response to the evolving landscape of higher education. The dynamic needs of students and faculty in universities and colleges have prompted the evaluation of both the physical structures of Library and Information Centres (LICs) and the services they offer.

From the earliest universities, where libraries were central, to the most recent ones, the importance of a library at the core remains unchanged. However, libraries are anything but static; they are constantly adapting to the changing needs of students, scholars, and the evolving methods of teaching and research. Modern university libraries are at the forefront of technology, utilising electronic and web-based tools to provide innovative pathways to information and to create new services for learning, teaching, and research.[5]

Libraries and librarians are actively working to bridge the "digital divide," ensuring that everyone has access to resources regardless of their technological capabilities. The shift towards online accessibility has transformed libraries into 'libraries without walls,' allowing users to access holdings from multiple workstations 24/7. In this contemporary age, libraries not only provide close access but also open access services, promoting and facilitating open learning.

The traditional library model has undergone a significant transformation. The once crucial card catalogue, used

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for accessing library collections, has lost its prominence as libraries now digitise their collections and make them available online. This shift marks a departure from the traditional mode of library services towards a more technologically advanced and accessible approach.

Library and Information Centres in Indian Scenario

In India, universities boast well-equipped libraries, with many now offering web-based services to enhance user experiences. While some institutions excel in providing Current Awareness Services (CAS) and Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) through web technology, others lag due to inadequate infrastructure and a shortage of skilled manpower. Notably, IITs, IISc, IISERS, NITs, and IIMs stand out for their comprehensive web-based services. Email is widely employed for notifications regarding new book arrivals, recent print journal additions, updates to the library web page, and new e-resources, showcasing a strong reliance on web-based services.

Web-OPAC, a popular tool in academic institutions, is widely embraced by user communities. The establishment of the INFLIBNET Centre in Ahmedabad by the UGC in the late '80s has played a pivotal role in reshaping the landscape of academic and research libraries in India.

In conclusion, the 21st century has witnessed a rapid transformation of Library and Information Centres (LICs) in higher education due to Information Technologies. The evolving roles of students, administrators, and teachers in the Knowledge Society have prompted the widespread use of ICT in higher education. LICs face the challenge of meeting the diverse needs of users, necessitating the adaptation of collections to different formats. Regular User Education and Information Literacy Programmes are crucial for ensuring effective resource utilisation.

Recognising the vital role of manpower, continuous in-service training is recommended to keep existing staff updated and prepared for daily activities. Embracing new technologies is essential, accompanied by the development of library professionals' skills to effectively manage these advancements. LICs should engage in sharing best practices to ensure that professionals in each area stay informed about the latest developments.[10]

Conclusion

In the 21st century, Information Technologies are rapidly transforming Libraries and Information Centres (LICs) in higher education. This evolution is influenced by the changing roles of students, administrators, and teachers in the Knowledge Society. All stakeholders in higher education are utilising Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for their learning processes.

LICs are encountering significant challenges in meeting the demands of their users. To address this, LICs need to adapt their collections to cater to the diverse needs of users. Regular User Education and Information Literacy Programmes are essential to ensure the effective utilisation of resources and services.

The key to success lies in recognising the importance of manpower. Providing in-service training to existing staff is crucial to keeping them updated and well-prepared for daily activities. Embracing new technologies is a necessity, and library professionals should continually enhance their skills to manage these advancements effectively.

Collaboration and knowledge-sharing among LICs are vital. Developing and disseminating best practices ensures that professionals in each area stay informed about the latest trends and innovations. This collaborative approach enables LICs to stay current and provide optimal services in the dynamic landscape of higher education.

Conflict of Interest: None

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