Best Practices to Enhance the Services and Skills   in Academic Libraries: A Study of Reaccredited Colleges in Maharashtra

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Abstract- This paper mentions the importance of best practices for the Library professional to improve their skills and provide effective services to the users, so that all the resources in the library are extensively used. New services in the era of information Technology are discussed and the ways and means to orient the users to bring awareness about the CD and e-resources so that whatever amount is spent on them is used to the maximum extent by the users.

I.INTRODUCTION

Servicing the right information to the right user at the right time is the goal of every library and information centre. The successful achievement of this goal largely depends on the practices adopted by the library managers to deliver the information to the user. According to Dr.S.R.Ranganathan , "the kind of education given to the library profession is normally reflected in the service given by the profession" Though academic libraries are service oriented, the tremendous changes brought about by technological advances in the present information society, have had an impact on their functioning. The recent developments in the field of information, communication and technology have also changed the expectations of the users in many ways. Hence, there is a greater responsibility on the academic library personnel to identify and adopt best and effective practices to meet the demands its end-users.

"A practice qualifies to a Best practice status if it resulted in high value impact on any aspect of educational activity in an institution". A best practice is a value added standard practice. However, a best practice may depend on viewer's perspective, time and context. A best practice may be innovative and be a philosophy, policy, strategy, program, process or practice that solves a problem or create new opportunities and positively impacts on organizations."

A best practice may be innovative and be a philosophy, policy, strategy, program, process or practice that solves a problem or create new opportunities and positively impact the whole organization (NAAC, 2006). If one thinks with an open and creative mind, in almost every aspect of library a range of best practices can be evolved. Collection and library environment are indispensable assets of any library especially in an academic library. These aspects develops image of the library. Almost all the services and outputs of a library are associated with these two aspects. These can be strengthened further with the help of additional best practices. Best practices are nothing but developing tailor made services, reaching beyond with available resources and delighting the customers.

II.PROPOSED RESEARCH

The study was carried out by designing a well planned questionnaire for academic libraries in the Maharashtra. To verify the effectiveness personal interviews has been conducted in certain cases to get clear ideas of Best Practices in Libraries wherever necessary. Also data was collected through websites of colleges, NAAC Peer team reports, annual reports of universities , Further review of related literature was carried out by collecting the information from books and other reference sources and institution that are involved in imparting Best Practices in libraries to get background knowledge on subject and study. Collected data was analyzed and presented in the form of tables and format for case presentation. Conclusion drawn from this analyzed data. From the reaccredited colleges in Maharashtra data collected from 188(75.80%) colleges. There are 103 colleges upgrade their grade in the process of accreditation to reaccreditation out of which 86 (83.49%) college's data collected from traditional universities of Maharashtra.

The areas where best practices can be adopted and implemented in a library and information environment are:
a. Library organization and management
b. Collection development and assessment
c. Usage of library services
d. Automation and use of technology

III. MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION:

Library and Information System Management is the basic and core activity which helps the user community in identifying and accessing knowledge resources in an academic institution. It also comprises the activities performed in relation to the development of vision, mission, goals and policies of the library, working hours, stock verification methods, copyright issues, membership, budgeting and reporting, resource mobilization, technical processing methods, manpower development, basic amenities and facilities as well as collection development management or information resources development, technical services, information services generation, technological, legal and copy right issues, to name a few. It also concerns with strategic planning of LIS in present and future operations. Identifying and internalization of best practices in the management and administrative functions at regular interval would enhance the collection development process, services dissemination and use of the library as a whole. Active participation and periodic meetings of library advisory committee, involvement of librarian in academic activities of the college/university, support from the management, participation of the users, standard facilities with innovative library buildings, regular flow of resource generation, skilled and qualified staff deployment with further training, capacity building in terms of information

TABLE I BEST PRACTICES FOLLOWED BY COLLEGE LIBRARIES AND THEIR GRADATION
IN UPGRADED COLLEGES IN THE PROCESS OF NAAC

Sr. No.	NAME OF BEST PRACTICE	YES	GRADE		NO	GRADE	
			A	B		A	B
	Displaying newspaper clippings on the notice board periodically.	79	58	21	7	0	7
	Career/Employment Information/ Services	56	49	7	30	9	21
	Internet Facilities to different user groups.	69	58	11	17	0	17
	Information literacy programs	51	39	12	35	19	16
	Suggestion box and timely response	68	53	15	18	5	13
	Organizing book talks	70	58	12	16	0	16
	Instituting Annual Best User award for students	76	52	24	10	6	4
	Organizing competitions annually.	68	51	17	18	7	11
	Conducting user surveys periodically	52	49	3	34	9	25
	Compiling Question Papers of University & College Exams foe Students & Staff	71	54	17	15	4	11
	Communication of current awareness to different user groups	53	52	1	33	6	27
	Development of a website/web page for the library including all the services and necessary information	37	36	1	49	22	27
	Establishing linkage with other libraries and avail free/ nominal fee services	5	5	0	81	53	28
	Development of electronic environment on the campus and encouragement to e-deliveries	29	28	1	57	30	27
	Book Exhibition	73	52	21	13	6	7
	Inclusion of library information in prospectus	70	47	23	16	11	5
	Library have computers and Internet facilities	85	58	27	1	0	1
	library released any issue of the following	74	50	24	12	8	4
	Library Display New Arrivals and Circulating a List of those to Users	73	54	19	13	4	9
	Open study center	69	48	21	17	10	7
	Night library reading room facility	17	7	10	69	51	18
	Generator facility	60	43	17	26	15	11
	Open access	35	30	5	51	28	23
	Web OPAC	12	12	0	74	46	28

and communication technology, information dissemination facilities etc. are a few areas where best practices can be accommodated. Appropriate planning and fore thinking is required in attaining the above mentioned with a detailed analysis of user base, objectives of the affiliating institution and its future strategies. As the management and administration of the library is pivotal in collection development and delivery of information products and services to the end users, adoption of best practices in this area lead to continuous improvement in overall performance.

Library and Information systems management is the basic and core activity which helps the user community in identifying and accessing knowledge resources in an academic institution. It also comprises the activities performed in relation to the development of the vision, the mission, the goals and policies of the library. As the management and administration of the library is pivotal in collection development and delivery of information products and services to the end users, adoption of best practices in this area leads to continuous improvement in overall performances. Following are some of the best practices that can adopted in this area.

A. In Service Training:

The goal of this programme would be to motivate professional staff to enhance their skill and expertise in conventional and e-library associated services and operations by arranging in house and external training programmes.

B. Staff Promotional Policy:

The policy involves designing and implementing a transparent promotion policy with requirements in terms of qualifications, length of service, expertise, regularity etc: - with a time frame for promotion. This practice will motivate the library staff to acquire higher qualifications and experience required to get a promotion to the next higher grade.

C. Orientation Programme:

The programme involves practical training in the different sections of the library to students of library and information science to enable them to get a clear understanding of library organization, management and library functioning.

D. Student Participation Programme:

This programme helps students to involve themselves in the maintenance of the Library. This practice will not only inculcate a sense of responsibility and accountability but also develops a service mind.

IV. COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT AND ASSESSMENT

The function of a school/college/university library is purely academic in nature. The library plays an important role in the instructional programmes of an academic institution/ organization. A good collection of documents in the library always substitutes or supplements the class room teachings. Document collection in an academic library should be directed to meet the standards laid down by the parent body to meet the academic goals of the end users at the same time, must expand to meet new requirements of specialized research and changing fields of knowledge. Best practices in collection development would include a well defined Collection Development/ Management policy that ensures access to peer reviewed journals procured by individual and/or consortia approach as well as networked access to documents of all types available in other academic libraries through inter library loan, and a well thought of weeding policy in the libraries so as to maintain an active balanced collection. In the context of Library and Information Services (LIS), the library should provide appropriate services geared to the different requirements of different user groups' students, teachers, researchers, etc in the academic libraries. In addition, technology will shape users' expectations whose demand will increase. They will want approaches that are user focused and will demand for customization, interactivity and excellent support, interactive and inter connected services will be most valued. Hence collaboration among all types of libraries could lead to new solutions and new services that best address the changing needs of users. Perhaps, a variety of services ranging from reference to electronic information services have to be delivered both, in expectation and on demand. Information analysis and consolidation services, appropriate orientation and information

literacy training programs, service for the un- reached would be the order of the day.

A. Enhancement of Collection in Different Formats

Both with the emergence of modern technology, information in stored both in print and digital formats. Digital formats include CDs/DVDs, floppies, Micro-Fische etc:- The collection should also include the modern storage formats. Subscription to e resources such as e-journals, e-books, online information will enable the users to have access to latest information. Internet facility should also be provided.

B. Library Book Exhibition

This practice involves periodic display of library collection in order to create an awareness among the users regarding the availability of books in their respective subjects. This will not only promote the usage of the collection but also encourage the faculty for active participation in collection development.

C. Compact Storage of Less Used Collection

A periodic survey of less used documents will help in removal of outdated books from the shelves to draw the attention of the users towards popular books. This process can be done with the help of circulation data. The less used books should be retained and stored separately for the reference of future generation. This practice saves the time of the user in retrieving the document and also saves space.

D. Extended Hours of Service

Extended library opening hours helps the users, especially students during examination time to utilize the services optimally and thereby fulfill the first law of library science i.e documents are for use.

V.EXTENT OF THE USE OF SERVICES

The flow of information sources and information explosion requires the libraries to play increasingly significant role in evaluating resources and educating the user. New skills and approaches are required for assessing the user's specific requirements. Satisfying with the existing services would not promote the standards and quality of information services. Hence continuous user promotion and information literacy programs have to be launched with novel ideas to enhance the use of services. Besides the traditional user education and feed back of the users, there are a few user education and use measurement practices which are essential for academic libraries.

Libraries are service oriented organizations. In order to fulfill the first four laws of library science, the library personnel reach the end- users through multiple services viz lending, reference, inter library loan, current awareness service, bibliographic service, abstract and indexing service, reprographic, counseling, internet, OPAC etc:- Information library programmes / user orientation programmes are conducted to initiate a new member in the library to promote optimum usage of information services provided. Some of the

best practices that can be identified in measuring and enhancing the use of information services are:

A. Information Literary Programme/ User Orientation

The goal of this practice is to orient a newly enrolled member to the facilities and services provided by the library. User orientation or user education will create an awareness among the users regarding library resources and their usage in relation to preparation of assignments, project reports etc. information literacy programme can be imparted through various methods viz. lecture form, library tour, brochures, PPT, information aids etc. Display of new arrivals in the library, instructions on use of internet and web resources is also provided through this programme.

B. Library Statistics

This practice involves maintenance of usage statistics in all sections of the library. Maintenance of visitors register and purpose of visit helps in knowing how many users are visiting and for what purpose. Data gathered from all service points will be analyzed to find the documents which are consulted or borrowed more number of times and also books which are underutilized. The findings will help the library manager to evaluate the collection and helps in reorganizing the system. It also helps in assessing the life cycle of information products or services and enhances the quality of the services like literature search and digital repository.

C. E-Training Programme

Publishers demonstrate and organize training sessions to launch the new databases which are to be attended by the library personnel to orient themselves about their usage and to instruct the users on how to navigate and locate journal articles efficiently and effectively. They are also taught on how to write and publish their research articles in journals.

D. User Study

User studies are conducted to know the information needs, seeking behavior and use patterns of information by the users. It reveals the bottlenecks that hinder the free flow of information in the system. It enables the managers of the information system to improve on the services, to strengthen the collections and helps in fulfilling the objectives of the institution it serves.

E. Suggestion Boxes

A suggestion box, maintained near the circulation counter, would help to get user feedback on various services provided by the library. The main objective of any library is to support the teaching, learning and research needs of the user. Apart from providing regular services, it is necessary to provide new and improved services as and when needed. In order to evaluate the regular and new services, it is required to get feedback from the users. Feedback in the form of suggestions, opinions, complaints from the users should be addressed and implemented positively to suit the requirements of the end users. This will increase the user satisfaction levels and will help in the optimum usage of library services.

VI. USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN LIBRARIES

The impact of Information Technology (IT) is enormous and global in its magnitude. IT has become an integral part of all aspects of the library. IT has profoundly affected library operations, information resources, services, staff skills requirements and users expectations. IT has virtually unlimited potential for variety of useful applications in libraries as it significantly contributes to improved quality, increased productivity, more efficient operations, better resource sharing and more effective services to the users. The proper exploitation of new technologies in library is no longer a matter of choice but a matter of survival in an era of rapidly changing technology and global knowledge society. Today, the success of a modern library is increasingly dependent on the most effective utilization and strategic management of new technologies in libraries. It is believed that the versatility and power of Information Technology which include accommodation of increase workload, achievement of greater efficiency in improving existing services, ability for generation of new services, facilitating cooperation and in providing for an integrated approach without regard to format, location or medium through which it is served, which can light heartedly be called "one stop information shopping" can stand in good stead in the quest for quality and productivity in information services and products.

Library Services need to reach to the user desktops with the use of Technology. Some of the University and College Libraries that are using technology in their libraries spelt out their best practices with specific goals and objectives, the process they adopted, the impact of the practice on the end user and the resources and skills that required using technology etc. These are some practical examples for the libraries, who wish to adopt in their libraries with suitable modification based on their requirements. These best practices need to be constantly updated as the implementation of Information Technology Tools are used in Libraries with the changes that are taking place in the Information Technology applications. Libraries are encouraged to help in adding value to the existing practices or add new practices that they are adopting for the end user benefit in providing new and improved services.

A. Automation of Library Services

The goal of this practice is to automate all the housekeeping operations viz. acquisition of books and other material, creating maintenance of its catalogued database, circulation of its holdings etc, to give service more quickly, efficiently and effectively and thereby meet the fourth law of library science that is save the time of the user. Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) facilitates the users to search for information by author, subject, title, ISBN, keywords etc and helps to reserve item on loan, view special collections, cancel reservations, request renewal of loan, to see list of new arrivals, request addition of new publication, define SDI profile.

B. Internet Facility

The goal of this practice is to provide online access to information generated globally, web resources, open access resources, e-resources, institutional repositories etc. the users should be educated in the systematic approach to collecting the current information to support their projects, assignments, research work and other academic pursuits.

C. Library Homepage

The goal is to disseminate current information on various subjects to the users. The process involves regular display of information about the latest additions and other current information like job opportunities, fellowships, training, workshops, seminars, conferences, placements on the library website. This practice will facilitate the users to have access to timely and latest information pertaining to their academic and research interests.

D. Access to Digital Repositories

The goal is to create the digital centre of the faculty publications, research outputs, project reports, thesis and dissertations and university publications and locate the same on the website of the university library. This will facilitate the users to have timely access to the information on institutional developments, create an awareness of the institutional needs, individuals responsibilities and privileges. The process involves installation of digital repository software, internet and intranet connectivity.

E. CDNET Server Facility

The goal of this practice is to provide network access (Intranet) to the CD resources received regularly in the library to enable the users to access them at their desktops. The users need not deal with the individual CDs & DVDs. The information will be made available for access with remote access on the intranet. This involves installing a CDNET server like TULSINET where all the CD's can be dumped and users can access with various options, download and save the files.

F. Digitization of Manuscripts

The goal of this practice is to preserve and conserve rare documents and archive material for progeny. All the old and rare documents are digitized and stored for future access by the potential users.

G. Local Area Network Facility in the Campus

The goal of this practice is to network the information resources of the library with the entire academic and research activities on the university / college campus and to evolve a user friendly environment by using the information and communication technology tools to provide quality and quick retrieval of the information sources along with resources available in other libraries at their desktops.

E. International Standard Formats

The goal is to record the bibliographic description of the document on an international standard format to globally enable the user to retrieve information easily and accurately. This involves entering bibliographic records using software which supports MARC 21 format to enter bibliographic records thereby facilitating downloading of records from Library of Congress or OCLC to avoid duplication of entries. This helps to achieve, uniformity, accuracy and standardization. Some of the other practices that can be observed by the libraries are

a. Observation of other libraries
b. Maintenance of service areas
c. Library science as optional course /paper at undergraduate level
d. Resource generation through external membership and internet services

F. NLIST

UGC INFLIBNET provide an access to E-journal and E-books to college library through NLIST this facility provide wide access to collection and information sources which satisfy users demand and so it is very effective service, In Maharashtra from reaccredited colleges 50% college provide this facility to their users and 60% college libraries from upgraded colleges provide this facility to users and users are also use this facility. NLIST on its website display a list of Top ten users of NLIST from the list it has been found that 6 colleges out of 10 are from Maharashtra and all colleges are upgraded in the process of accreditation to reaccreditation.

VII.CONCLUSION

A best practice is a practice which paves the way for enhancing an existing function and helps in effective implementation or use of the process. Use of technology in designing and delivering the information products and services in a library has always yielded good results. Automation of all in-house operations in academic libraries with bar-coding, user identity and web OPAC facilities is a best practice in totality of library services. Effective implementation of user education/ awareness programs with the new techniques and tools will also be a best practice in extent of use of library services. Developing digital repositories with subject content, open sources and institutional information and customizing it to internal requirements with remote access is one of the globally adopted best practices in the university libraries. In the present era of IT, the academic libraries need to re-orient to the highly qualitative information collection and services. Colleges implemented Best Practices in Libraries enhance their grade in the process of Accreditation to reaccreditation, Users attract towards library, increases effectiveness and efficiency of Library.

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