

The need of automation and networking for rural libraries: a review

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Abstract: This paper deals with the need of automation and networking of those libraries, which are in the remote areas, the importance of the information technology in libraries and the problems for automation. It also identifies the information needs of the rural masses and the problems to access to information.

Keywords: Automation, Networking, Rural Libraries, Information, Information Technology.

0. Introduction

We are living in the age of Information where the Information Technology had occupied its place in all areas of life and, even libraries and information centers are not left behind. Therefore the need arise that this field also realized the need and importance to adopt these new information technologies. The information play a very important role to success in life not only in urban but in rural areas as well, people need information from every walks of life in their day to day life.

1. Need of Information Technology in libraries

Library is a system which is meant for information storage and retrieval. The main aim of the library is to satisfy its users by providing them with the information they need, therefore to cope with the changing needs of users in this age of information explosion and due to enormous capacity of data for information storage, processing and retrieval the need arise that libraries also should adopt some kind of new technologies known as information technologies which will enhance its activities and services so that it can achieve its goals and objectives.

As some say, information can create knowledge but knowledge with experience can be called wisdom. To get the information to the required or expected level a lot more has to be done either in urban or rural areas. In India, the National Knowledge Commission was formed in October, 2005 for a three-years-mandate, its aim and objective is to prepare a blue print radical improvement of knowledge access, knowledge creation and application, by and for the Indian people. The major thrust of the commission is information dissemination, access to new technologies and services for information provision and transfer of knowledge. Some key recommendations have been made by the commission for the improvements of the libraries in India are as follows:

- To set up a National commission on libraries;
- To prepare a national census of all libraries;
- To revamp library and information sciences education, training, and research;
- To re-assess staffing of libraries;
- To set up a central library fund;
- To modernize library management;
- To encourage greater community participation in library management;
- To promote information communication technology applications in all libraries;
- To facilitate donation and maintenance of private collection;
- To encourage public private partnerships in LIS development.

2. Automation and networking

Automation is nothing but it is the use of automatic equipment. Therefore library automation is the use of machine or in simple words it is the mechanization of library operations, activities and services. Automation can enhance the library activities in many ways. We know that according to the Laws of Library science the user should get the right book or right information, the book or information should reach its right user, the library services and activities should save the time not only of the users but of the library staff as well. Automation not only that it faster the activities and services of the library which save the time of both users and staff but also it also help the library to be able to provide its users with a timely, valuable and appropriate information i.e right information at the right time and to the right user.

The National development depends on the provision of valuable and timely information to all its citizens right from the urban to the rural populace. And this is possible with the help of the modern technologies like automation and networking. Networking is nothing but it means to link together or to connect to the network to centralize the sources used in the network.

3. Scope of automation and networking

Automation and Networking represent a mechanization and scientific management as being practiced during the last few years. Automation will lead to a higher degree of centralization of information resources and strengthen the activities and services of the library. Automation is not limited only to the urban or big libraries with large collection but it is also meant for the rural or small libraries with small collection.

4. Need of automation and networking for rural libraries:

People living in the rural areas are most probably under the poverty line, consider this in mind we should understand that it is difficult for them to get easily the things they need, including information also. So it is the responsibility of those who are able to reach them to help them in getting what they need and required which is useful and important for them. Information is being recognized as a pillar for overall development of the community and the well being of the people, every one should have the right to get access to information. Library is one of the sources from where the people can get the information in the urban as well as in the rural areas. Libraries in rural areas should take care that they must be able to provide valuable, timely and appropriate information to the rural masses, because it will be a failure to the library and the library staff as a whole if they can not satisfy the users by providing the right information and at the right time.

Therefore Automation and networking is very much needed for the libraries because it helps the library to create efficient service, to satisfy the users, to promote sharing of resources among the libraries, to enable the users to acquire the materials not available in their library from other libraries participating in the network system, to co-ordinate with other national and international networks for exchange of information and documents.

5. Problems of automation for rural libraries

Individuals, for not using the new technology, may have so many reasons. It may be because of "technophobia" which means "fear" or "loathe" of any upcoming technology, lack of knowledge of the new technology or it may be because of the techno-stress which means that sometimes people don't like the physical strains due to flare and glare of electronic operations.

Before the automation of rural libraries first of all the librarians and the library staff should be trained in handling the new technologies so that in turn they will be confident to teach and help the users and give them the direction how to use it. In most cases we find that when we talk about the new technologies or automation both the library staff and users are not aware of and are scare to use it because don't have any idea about it.

Kapila and Singh (2004) conduct a study on "computerization of agricultural libraries in India: some practical difficulties". According to them the problems for computerization or automation of the libraries are (1) paucity of funds, that is why without sufficient fund it is not possible for the libraries to start for automation, (2) it is the administrative which will always help to carry on the work and to come out of any problem being faced by the library. Therefore the libraries always seek the cooperation of the authority to complete the job assigned to them so if the administrative is not cooperative with the library then it is difficult to do the automation of the library, (3) lack of man power in the library is another major problem which stand as a stumbling block for the automation of the library, it is due to ban on recruitment and cut on post, (4) irregularity of power supply is a problem to run the computer whereas this has been a perennial problem in the rural areas. Therefore there should be an alternative of power supply for the rural areas libraries to be able to provide efficient services to the users such as generator etc.

6. Review of literature

Cheunwattana (1999) conduct a case study on "Delivering and Promoting Library Services in Rural Thailand". In his study he found that the administrations who were assigned to plan and supervise public libraries in rural areas are usually educators but not trained in library and information. Despite of their commitment and enthusiasm, they lack a professional understanding of planning and management of library systems and services. Therefore librarians and other library

staff feel that they are not appropriately assigned to work according to their professional training. He also could identifies through analysis the information needs in five rural communities in such areas as agriculture, employment, land right, citizenship, education, health, local politics, current news and events and recreations. However, there are many kind of information that rural populations are not aware of such as health education, drug prevention, sex education, parenting information, and environmental conversation. Therefore low use and low demand of library resources and services from public library service providers is caused by lack of information awareness and lack of good reading habits of rural population where as from community perspective is caused by inadequate access to libraries services, unavailability of appropriate reading materials, preference to other media, particularly television, and lack of time because people are struggling for their economic survival. He suggest that provision of appropriate information, application of appropriate information technology, designing innovative approaches in library and information services delivery, raising awareness of the important role of library and information services in the process of rural development and systematic evaluation of rural library and information services.

Naga (2002) in his paper "Information activities and rural Development" argues that the advancements in information and communication technologies have enhanced the value and role of information by facilitating the smooth information flow and access across geographical, political and cultural boundaries. Since information play a very important role such as in education scenario, health care scenario, socio-cultural scenario, political scenario and economic scenario, therefore he stated that reaching the rural masses with valuable and appropriate information is the key to success for any attempt at bringing an all-round National Development.

Veeranjaneyulu and Ramesh (2002) in their paper on "significant effort of public libraries in promoting reading culture among rural youth" discuss about the importance of public libraries and rural information services because these play a very important role in helping the people of rural areas to solve the problems they are facing in their daily life by not having the information regarding agriculture, health and childcare, housing, food and nutrition, family welfare, animal husbandry and dairy development, training programmes for employment, credit and marketing, special assistance programs for socially and economically deprived groups, cottage and village industries etc. They also discuss about the new functions of public

libraries like reading of books for the illiterates, presenting wall pictures and charts representing the new and latest facts and ideas, arranging discussion among the literates and non-literates. The public library especially of rural areas should provide services on local history, commerce and industries, agricultural products and industrial products, funding agencies for housing, agricultural, industries etc., career development, employment opportunities, population, guiding and counseling on all matters such as public health, hygiene, family welfare, legal matters etc.

Kumar (2005) in his study on "Rural Library and Community Resource Centre (RLCRCs) in India with special reference to states having library legislation: problems and prospects" could identify the information needs of the rural communities and also the sources of information required for rural community and assesses the impact of government programmes and policies. The study was conducted in one of the states having library legislation in India i.e. Haryana a village named "Bohar" of Rohtak district. The result of the study were that agriculture is the main source for employment and generation of income in the village, school level education facility is found satisfactory in the village surveyed, majority of the people are in good economic condition they can afford the facility of internet if made available at the village level for the required information and thus they can contribute in the rural development process, the villagers also have Radio, Television sets at home as information sources, therefore among the most popular sources of information in the village are friends/relatives, TV and news papers. In the absence of rural library services, villagers have to rely on knowledge and experience of old age persons, friends/relatives other educated persons etc.

7. Conclusion

Automation and networking is necessary for the libraries especially the rural libraries. There is a need for a strong professional commitment by the library staff in order to satisfy the users to the maximum. It is also necessary to prepare the library staff through appropriate training. If the people in rural areas are not aware of the new technologies the library staff should be aware and willing to help them in using those technologies. The government should take initiative in this case for the development of the rural areas because every one has the right to access the information they need. There should be training programs, workshops, seminars, lectures, exhibitions etc. on information and information technology especially in the rural areas

so that the people will be aware of what kind of information is necessary for them and how to get access to it.

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