User Education: An Overview

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USER EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW

Kishor C. Satpathy*

INTRODUCTION:

User Education (UE) in recent years has become a subject of great deal of activity and concern. There is a growing realization that the majority of existing scientific and technical information services are used effectively by only a small proportion of potential users. This has prompted the UNESCO & other national information bodies to pay special attention over the past few years to the issue of education & training information user to ensure maximum utilization of various information services & products. Basic to the philosophy of that the final goal of every library & information center is to serve the users of information, These users are the integral part of and the final link in the information transfer chain. The user training programmes, therefore, constitute an important component of the national information policy adopted by various countries.

Knowledge is proliferating in such a rapid rate that it is becoming difficult day by day to find a way amidst confusing array of different and vast sources of information contained in documents and other non-book materials such as video tapes; discs; cassettes, slides etc. T .S. Eliot has rightly visualized the situation in the following lines:

Where is life, we have lost in living?
Where is wisdom, we have lost in knowledge?
Where is that knowledge, we have lost in information?
Derek Langridge further adds, where is information, we are lost in library?

There is an enormous wastage of resources due to non use and misuse in all types of libraries and information centres. This presents a great challenge. Therefore educating the user is the proper solution. With the shrinking budgets, the librarians must encourage user to make maximum use of available resources. In addition, educating the library user improves the quality of use. Further user education aims to provide knowledge and skills necessary for a user to find out his lines in own way.

DEFINITION:

The term, user orientation, user assistance, user instruction are deemed to have synonymous meanings. But in recent years differences are attributed to them, particularly between UE & other

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concepts. The UE programmes especially in this category are considered as higher level of instructional programmes, where as the orientation & other instructional training courses are rather initiation type freshman guidance technique. The definition given below to connote the differences, are self-evident to the fact.

According to Gunjal & Asundi (1984), the UE is used as an umbrella term to encompass both orientation & Bibliographic instruction. The "User orientation" on the other hand is used to mean introducing the user to the layout & services of a particular library

ALA Glossary of library & information science defines UE as "The term which encompasses all type of activities designed to teach users about library services, facilities & organisation, library resources & search strategy. It includes instruction in the use of one or more reference sources as a part of reference transactions, library use presentation & bibliographic instruction".

P.G.I. (UNESCO) defined UE & Training in a generic way to include any effort or programme, which will guide & instruct existing & potential user, individually or collectively, with the objectives of facilitating: (a) the recognition of their own information needs; (b) the formulation of these needs; (c) the effective & efficient use of information services; as well as (d) the assessment of these services.

On the other hand orientation is the first step of library instruction programme. Orientation acquaints user with library facilities, library resources and with personnel available to help them. Library instruction is the second step which include training given to the readers of the library to use resource collection of a particular library. This includes familiarizing readers with library staff, services, including technical resources, arrangements, rules & ethics of library & general technique of library wage, so that existing stock of library is exploited. This is a teaching programme imparted by the library staff to it’s user for acquiring library skills and ability to have quick access to the resources.

**NEED FOR USER EDUCATION:**

Need for UE & training cannot be questioned. User need assistance to use library sources at various levels. The need of such programmes are :

1. To acquaint the user with learning techniques.
2. To increase the academic performance of student community.
3. To provide conducive atmosphere in learning process.
4. To help in quick decision making & problem solving.
5. To make user independent in library wage.
6. To conserve the potentiality of user, their labour can be used in pursuit of knowledge which are otherwise wasted.

7. To get fair return of the investment made making available the library services.

8. Enhancement of use of material so that we can check out under utilization of the library material & services.

OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of UE are:

1. Enabling users to identify their specific information needs in relation to the specific situation encountered.

2. Capacity to evaluate and productive utilization of the obtained information.

3. Competence in preparing information reports for use of others.

ADVANTAGE OF USER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES (UEP):

1. The user orientation programme emphasizes the utilitarian approach. We invest a large sum of amount in library. But if reader don’t came to the library, our investment are in vain. So to see that students make full use of library they need to be introduced to the library both in formal and informal way and encouraged to use the library very frequently.

2. UE helps in cultivating the habit of reading among students.

3. UE converts library into a resource centre for the students as opposed to its remaining a mere collection of books.

4. Reader instruction may enable the students to win a lifetime of good reading.

5. UE enhances the prestige of library staff in the eyes of students.

COMPONENTS OF USER EDUCATION PROGRAMME:

According to Gunjal and Asundi the components of UEP are:

1. User himself.
2. Information.
3. Objectives.
4. Technique.
5. Programme.
METHODS OF USER EDUCATION PROGRAMME:
1. General Lectures.
2. Library tours
3. Follow up session
   - Demonstrations
   - Programmed instruction
   - Teaching machines
   - Individual help
   - Guided tours
   - A. V. method
   - Practical work in library
   - Projects / Learning by doing
   - Self instruction
   - Books / Printed guide

COURSE MATERIALS:
1. Lecture notes
2. Handouts
3. Guides and practical questions.
4. Guide to specific sources e.g. chemical abstract
5. Guide to literature
6. Guide to technique e.g. reference literature.

AIDS REQUIRED FOR USER EDUCATION PROGRAMME:
1. AV Aids like: Video and films
2. Transparencies
3. Photographic Slides
4. Illustrative Material
5. Tapes / slides.
6. Work Book
7. Guide
8. Library Pathfinder
9. Point-of-use of Instructional Aid
POSSIBLE REASON FOR NEGLECTING THIS SERVICE:

If we try to analyze the causes behind neglecting this important service, the following could be the possible reasons:

1. Limited resources.
2. Inadequate staff.
3. Library staff, administration & faculty yet to establish the necessity of this service.
4. Faulty method of teaching, in which students can qualify any exam, without using their own academic library.
5. Student hardly get any motivation from faculty. Some faculty members do not use library as meaningfully as expected.
7. Lack of teaching skills among the librarians.
8. Rural background of the students, where they don’t get opportunity to use lib & books.
9. Lack of teaching aid both written & Audio-Visual one.

CONSTRAINTS IN PLANNING OF UE PROGRAMME:

1. Absence of National Information Policy.
2. Failure of education policy to support library facilities in schools, colleges.
3. Failure to inculcate library use habit.
4. Lack of trained & committed personnel.
5. Financial constraints.

UEP CAN BE SUCCESSFUL THROUGH:

1. Incorporation of UEP in LIS educational programme.
2. Conducting workshops & summer schools to train existing LIS personnel in UEP.
3. Practical experience to user.
4. Developing positive attitude.

VENUE AND DURATION:

The venue of training course should be neither class room nor the library but both. In the context of user in rural areas, the programme need to be carried out on door-to-door basis or organized at market or community centres. The duration of UEP should be from 3 to 7 days depending upon the training.

FEEDBACK & EVALUATION:

Little evaluation has been carried out in the field of UE. Informal feedback and self analysis have been relied upon mostly, often with the aid of a relatively simple questionnaire completed by participants in the course. A detailed guideline for evaluation have been issued by UNESCO.

Evaluation is increasingly seen as essential element of any systematic UEP. It is concerned with the collection and analysis of inf. about the input in terms of educational potential, variable effecting the educational process, and the end product or output. The purpose of evaluation is to collect & analyze information that can be used for rational education decision making. Thus evaluation can be used for decision about whether to continue or terminate a given course, about the modification of an existing programme or about the adoption of an evaluation.

PERSONNEL:

Teaching of library use is becoming increasingly important. It is a specialized area & not every librarian / teacher can do it effectively. It requires training, experience & special aptitude. A person engaged in teaching library use should also posses teaching skill.

AGENCIES PROVIDING UE:

1. Basically library & information centre provide UE.
2. National & International data base like INIS, AGRIS, MEDLARS, DIALOG provide UE.
3. Professional organisation & association like IFLA, ILA, IASLIC, INSDOC. DRDC provides UE.

RECOMMENDATION & SUGGESTION:

In the UGC sponsored workshop on user education in academic libraries at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritswar during 20 July to 1 June, 1989, Prof. Krishan Kumar laid emphasis on network of guides in the libraries. He said that initiation of students in the class room & in the library individually is very important these days. He proposed that librarian may work with such units in colleges as NSS. NCC, Drama, Clubs, Group, Adult Education Classroom etc. to imbibe in them reading interest habits. Involvement & dedication is very important on the part of library professional & librarians should enroll themselves members of state & national professional bodies to keep themselves abreast of the latest development.

CONCLUSION:

The UE day by day is becoming important aspect of information work on the use of information, which itself is becoming more and more complex. With the availability of sophisticated tools like, computers, time lay is reduced between the information generation & use. This can be further reduced by educating the user effectively & efficiently. Thus the underutilized system could be

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fully exploited. Hence with widespread growth of information & application of different tools in the organization, storage & retrieval process, UE has became to stay for long & would become perpetual. Both librarian and educators, now a days generally recognize that user education is necessary if libraries are to be used in an effective manner. It is through UE that there can be greater/better utilization of the limited resources of our libraries. In a country like India, sound user education programme need to be developed which are strong both on techniques & methodology.

Library plays an important role in students education. UE is essential for effective learning. The students should have knowledge of what library can offer to them. For this, librarians are to believe in user education & shall have to make necessary effort & initiative to impart it successfully in all college libraries, enabling students to utilize the collection properly with a minimum mediation.

REFERENCES:


