Summer July, 2002

User Education Programme in academic Libraries

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Taming the Information and Communication Technology for Teacher Education

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The world has entered into an information and communication age. Developments in information and communication technology is going to open up new and cost-effective approaches for expanding the reach of education to children, youth as well as to those who need continuing education to meet the demands of explosion of information, fast-changing nature of occupations and life-long education. The consensus of opinion among social scientists and business planners is that information and communication technology is a growing area in the foreseeable future and can create vast opportunities in almost all areas of life.

The convergence between information technology and communication technology has opened new vistas for social and economic development of reach and every country on the globe. It is estimated that the contribution of knowledge led business due to the development in information and communication technology will double the global GDP in next ten years and would account for two-third of the growth in global GDP. After having missed the industrial revolution, our country is well poised to take full advantage of the information and communication technology revolution. Being one of the largest producers of scientific and professional manpower, India has already established its comparative advantage in knowledge led information and communication technology business. In this context, education would be playing a significant role both as a producer of world-class manpower as well as in using information and communication technology for its own transformation and reaching the unreached to ensure minimum levels of educational attainment by all citizens. Information and communication technology offers enormous potential for improving the delivery of information and knowledge based services in all sectors of life including all forms of education.

Introduction of computer education in schools is a major step in the direction of information and communication technology in preparing the next generation workers. A number of innovations, including the ‘smart schools’, are underway for popularising the use of information and communication technology in education and training. As a result of the recent initiatives of the Government of India, a policy framework on information technology action plan has been prepared for the long-term human development. Information and communication technology will succeed in achieving these long term plans and objectives only if the administration is positive and is adequately equipped to handle these technologies. Therefore, a number of management development activities are also being initiated for the administrators in general and for educational administrators in particular.

Information and communication technology is the most significant challenge now confronting teachers, schools and teacher education. Any change in the educational system has a direct impact on the teachers and the teacher education system. The introduction and the development of information and communication technology in schools depend only on the quality and ability of the teachers handling the
User Education Programme in Academic Libraries
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User Education means educating the users of a library to make use of the library reading materials in their greatest extent. Educating the users would introduce them to the right methods that would enable them to use libraries more effectively in education, research and development. User education is mainly concerned with providing guidance and instruction to the user in the proper use of library collection, individually or collectively. Such programmes are organised to ascertain the users’ information needs to help them in the expression of their requirements and to enable them to use the library effectively and efficiently.

Knowledge is proliferating with such a rapid growth 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 visualised 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 Langride further adds,
Where is information, we have lost in the library?

Majority of the library users are unable to use the library collection effectively. Library staff concentrates more on codifying knowledge and more staff members are engaged in technical services, to which the user remains unknown. ‘A library is rather like a laboratory where books are the apparatuses. Just as in a laboratory, it is difficult to use the apparatuses without instruction’ (University of Bradford, 1972).

Even in the traditional type of libraries students face difficulty in consulting catalogues, locating the exact document required by them or using the relevant reference tools available in the library. In automated libraries even teachers may face some internal difficulty in information search. To overcome this difficulty college libraries should provide orientation to the users.

Definition
Teaching the use of library is called ‘user orientation’ or ‘library orientation’. In fact the word ‘orientation’ simply means familiarisation or adjustment with a particular situation. In this context this familiarisation and adjustment is with the use of the college library. Library orientation programme in colleges uses methods that could help the students to have full knowledge of the college library and its resources. User orientation is more important in colleges located away from cities where students are without any prior knowledge of library and they rely solely upon the documents available there for studies.

The terms user education, user orientation, user assistance, user instruction are deemed synonymous. But in recent years differences are attributed to them, particularly between user education and other concepts. The user education programmes especially in this category are considered as higher level of instructional programmes, whereas the orientation and other instructional training courses are rather initiation type freshman guidance technique. The definition given below to connote the differences are self-evident.

In the words of Gunjal and Asund (1984) the user education is used as an umbrella term to encompass both orientation and Bibliographic instruction. The ‘user orientation’ on the other hand is used to mean introducing the user to the layout and services of a particular library.

ALA Glossary of LIS defines user education as ‘the term which encompasses all types of activities
Aims and Objectives of User Education Programme

It is difficult to lay down the aims, objectives and purpose of user education. In practice, very often librarians lay down goals, aims and objectives on a user education programme on the basis of the concept of user needs.

The general aim of user education as stated in UNISIST proposals, should be to reach a situation at each stage in the progress of science and in the development of information technology, when most if not all scientists recognise their information needs clearly and can assess the strength and weakness of existing and experimental service.

According to Jefferson and Burnet the objectives of instruction programme in a college library are as follows:

- To make students aware of the availability and scope of library resources and services in the context of their studies.
- To ensure that students are aware of and can effectively use information sources and retrieval techniques which can assist in their learning and future careers.
- To contribute for the personal and intellectual development of students including the ability to continuous learning outside the formal education.

The general objectives of user education programme is to equip the actual user of information to find out with minimum of effort the relevant information from the available sources of information in the face of the growing complexities of information handling tools and other general objectives of user education programme are:

- Enabling users to identify their specific information needs in relation to the specific situation encountered.
- Capacity to evaluate and productively utilise obtained information.
- Competence in preparing information reports for the use of others.
- A general orientation to the available facilities and resources.
- Teaching of basic research skills and strategies.
- Teaching of the organisation of literature in various disciplines, as well as the basic reference tools in each discipline.
- To train the user in handling information products like printed forms and electronic forms.

Need of User Education Programme

The exponential growth of literature in various fields of human endeavour, new methods of bibliographic control, the introduction of new media of communication, the increasing emphasis on individual duty and the widespread adoption of the Library of Congress classification system require the users of libraries especially academic libraries to have a systematic rather than haphazard approach to their use. These factors confuse and bewilder many students to the point where they avoid the library, totally unaware of the wealth of materials which could be of use and interest to them. The factors have rendered the traditional library orientation programmes inadequate and ineffective. The need for a systematic approach to library use is being increasingly appreciated the world over. The library is the organ that enriches the teaching, study and research activities of its parent organisation. These college library collections, especially the special libraries, are usually large and complex, needing effective user education programme to help patrons make proper use of them in order to maximise their benefits. Suffice it to remind ourselves that user education is designed primarily to promote the spirit of motivation and self-reliance in the research, acquisition and utilisation of information for lifelong self-education in a world constantly bombarded by changes. The need for instructing students in the proper exploitation of library resources and services is a continuous one. Thus the need for user education and training cannot be questioned. Users need assistance to use library sources at various levels. The need of such programmes are:

- To acquaint the user with learning techniques.
- To increase the academic performance of student community.
- To provide conducive atmosphere in the learning process.
- To help in quick decision making and problem solving.
- To make user independence in library use.
• To conserve the potentiality of the user and their labour and time saved can be used in pursuit of knowledge which are otherwise wasted.

• To get a fair return to the investment made, making available the library services.

• Enhancement of the use of material so that the under-utilisation of the library material and services can be checked.

• The philosophy of librarianship given by Dr S.R. Ranganathan in his ‘Five laws of Library Science’ cannot be put into practice unless the users know their library very well.

**Designing a Programme**

The process of learning in higher education is mainly the ability to know the library and utilising it effectively. It feeds the intellect of the student, encourages the research efficiency and acts as laboratory in education. Urquhart has very aptly described the situation of a student in connection with the use of the libraries by tracing the genesis of the library user. Orientation programme is a bridge to meet two ends, at one side the college library resources and services, and on the other side the students’ needs. For one who knows the library resources and the services and students’ expectations from the library, it is not difficult to design an orientation programme. Orientation programme should be designed and run very carefully to make sure of its full success.

**Strategy to plan UEP**

To achieve the objectives of the user education programme, a college library may adopt the following strategies:

• Creating awareness of information and user education.

• Involvement of or integration of library and information service with the education and learning process.

• Aim at imparting user education to different types of users.

• Programmes may be designed for layman.

• Collect information about finance, personnel, standard, methodology, users, etc, and visit the libraries in which the user education programmes have been introduced.

• Allot at least 3% of the total budget of the library of user education programme and should adopt zero base budgeting system for it.

• Identify potential library personnel and train them for the said purpose through short term courses/seminars/conferences, etc, either in or outside the library.

• Assess the library aid, teaching methods and communication technology and various information needs of the users through various parameters.

• Establish user education division/section under the charge of the librarian and assisted by subordinate staff as per need.

• Prepare a schedule of user education programme to meet various types of users at least once a year to communicate various aspects of the programme.

• Introduce an annual user education bulletin for popularising the programme.

• Bring out a pamphlet containing information about collection, services and facilities provided by the library and distribute it to the members of the library at the beginning of academic sessions.

• Start user education programme from library orientation to bibliographic instructions, and literature search training in selected area at the initial stage.

• Request the university authorities to introduce a compulsory paper entitled user education from graduation level to research level.

• Maintain complete statistics of all aspects of user education including the valuable suggestions of the users for the feedback of the programme.

• Evaluate the user education programme in the context of its objectives.

**Course Content and Its Stages**

The course content of user education programme may be framed at three stages:

**Library Orientation**

Information about location and layout of the library building, rules and regulations, timing, various types of collection, services and facilities provided by the library, catalogue code, classification scheme, arrangement of documents adopted by it, and introduction of staff members with users may be included. Library orientation is very useful for users particularly the new members.
Subject Oriented Instructions

At this level, instructions about search of general literature, location of textbooks, selection and use of reference books, techniques of writing projects/dissertation should be included in a systematic way. This type of information may be useful particularly for postgraduate students.

Literature Search Training

In the planning of course content at this level, information about search training in all types of literature—primary, secondary and tertiary sources of information—selection of research topics, method of citing references, style of writing of dissertations/projects/theses, and selection of books may be included. This type of training will be very useful for research scholars and faculty members.

Constraints in Planning of User Education Programme

Some of the constraints in the planning of user education programme are:

- Absence of National Information Policy.
- Failure of education policy to support library facilities in schools, colleges.
- Failure to inculcate library use habit.
- Lack of trained and committed personnel.
- Financial constraints.

Possible Reasons for neglecting this Service

If we try to know the causes behind neglecting this important service in a college library, the following could be the possible reasons:

- Limited resources.
- Inadequate staff.
- Library staff, administration and faculty yet to establish the necessity of this service.
- Faculty method of teaching, in which students can qualify any exam, without using their own academic library.
- Students hardly get any motivation from the faculty. Some faculty members do not use library as meaningfully as expected.
- Lack of time table for instruction programme.
- Lack of teaching skills among the librarians.
- Rural background of the students where they don’t get opportunity to use library and books.

- Lack of both written and audio-visual teaching aids.

Successful User Education Programme

- Through incorporation of user education programme in library and information science educational programme.
- Conducting workshops and summer schools to train existing library and information personnel in user education programme.
- Practical experience to users.
- Developing a positive attitude.

Venue

The venue of training course should be either classroom or the library or both. In the context of users in the rural areas the programme need to be carried out on a door to door basis or organised at some market or community centres.

Duration

The duration of user education programme should be of four to eight days depending upon the training. The duration of user education programme may not be fixed, it depends upon various stages of the programme, nature of teaching methods and communication technology, level of users, etc. Therefore, planning of duration of user education programme may be decided keeping in view the above factors. The planning of duration may be two types: (i) Short duration planning and (ii) Long duration planning.

New Technology

The explosive growth of recorded knowledge, has made library orientation programme a significant activity in every college library in recent times. Due to the complexity and intricacy involved in locating the available information, it has become very essential to educate and train the students to know about the existing information sources and services for a more effective and efficient utilisation of the library. The technological developments and the new approaches in information handling and the use of computers and other sophisticated equipment like microfiche, audio-visual materials and CD ROMs has added a new dimension to the problem for user education and training in the Western countries. But the developing countries are still far from this situation. Students and teachers of underdeveloped and developing countries are to a large extent ignorant of the methods of using the
current medium in which information is stored, the nature and type of services available and also the existence of information sources that may be of relevance to their search—the situation that is an anathema to the massive induction of the latest technologies for storage, retrieval and dissemination of information in libraries. So a user orientation programme in college library should try its utmost to minimise the gap between the student and his information by explaining everything in a way in which the student can grasp them and use them.

Feedback and Evaluation

Little evaluation has been carried out in the field of user education. 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. Very detailed guidelines for evaluation of user education has been issued by UNESCO.

Evaluation is increasingly seen as an essential element of any systematic user education programme. It is concerned with the collection and analysis of information about the input in terms of educational potential, variable affecting the educational process and the end product. The purpose of evaluation is to collect and analyse information that can be used for rational education and 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. The user education evaluation can be formative type evaluation (during course) or summative type evaluations (final). The methods of evaluation include:

- **Psychometric:** Based on tests of knowledge to provide objective information which could be used in assessing the efficiency of a given educational programme or of teachers.
- **Sociological:** Used in the study of changes in the structure of an organisation or the roles of the participants in an educational programme for a specific institution.
- **Illuminative or Responsive:** Emphasises participant observation and interviews on a mean of an overall view of the educational programme.

Recommendations and Suggestions

In the UGC sponsored workshop in 1988 user education in academic libraries at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar during 20th July 1988 to 1st June 1999, Prof. Krishan Kumar laid emphasis on the network of guides in the libraries. He said that initiation of students individually in the classroom and in the library was very important these days. He proposed that the librarian may work with such units in the college as NSS, NCC, Drama Clubs, Groups, Adult education classroom, etc. to inculcate reading habit in them. Involvement and dedication is very important on the part of the library professionals, and librarians should enrol themselves as members of State and national professional bodies to keep themselves abreast of the latest developments.

Conclusion

User education is day by day becoming an 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, microprocessors and minicomputers, the gap is reduced between the information generation and use. This can be further reduced by educating the user effectively and efficiently. Thus the underutilised system could be fully exploited. Hence with the widespread growth of information and application of different tools in the organisation, storage and retrieval process, user education has come to stay for long and would become perpetual.

The success of an orientation programme would depend upon the proper planning, knowledge of the psychology of the users, and the investment of a reference librarian. The explosive growth of recorded knowledge, has made library orientation programme a significant activity in every college library in recent times. Due to the complexity and intricacy involved in locating the available information, it has become very essential to educate and train the students to know about the existing information sources and services for a more effective and efficient utilisation of the library. The technological developments and new approaches in information handling and the use of computer, and other sophisticated equipment have added a new dimension to the problem of user education and training. Many of the users are to a large extent ignorant of the methods of using the current medium in which information is stored, the nature and type of services available, and also the existence of information sources that may be of relevance. So user orientation programme in college library should try its utmost to minimise the gap between the student and his information by explaining everything in a way in which students can grasp.