Best Practices in Academic Libraries. M RAGHU.docx

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Library occupies an important place in the framework of the academic system. It is not a mere storehouse of books, but is a dynamic instrument of education. Without active support of a library, the whole academic functioning will come to a grinding halt. The primary role of a library is not only to fulfil the “mission” of the academic institute to which it belongs to but also to advance its aims and objectives. It is a central place for study and research. Academic Libraries considered as an integral part of any institute supporting and promoting the institute mission and vision. The academic library provides the needed information that can access to all its stakeholders. The academic libraries which are abundant in resources and have good budget can be role models and help the other institutes which are lacking the basic needs libraries can from the local network and help them by providing certain services to them in transforming the knowledge. This will be one of the best practices for any academic library. Best practices are a powerful and much used tool in today’s trending conditions. There should be a unique service for the service that we are providing to the user. For this, certain conditions apply, like, time, accuracy and gratification. The best practices should be able to prove that they can help in achieving organisational objectives. The present paper looks upon the best library practices in the academic libraries.

Keywords: Academic Libraries, Best Practices, Benchmarking

Introduction

The colleges have a significant role to play in the educational process. In consonance with the accepted dictum that the colleges or institutes are citadels of learning, it should not only cater to the needs of academic excellence but also help indirectly in the prime goal of achieving national development. Academic Libraries considered as an integral part of any institute supporting and promoting the institute
Mission and Vision. It should be noted that merely learning a specific set of skills and storing knowledge without ensuring that these skills and knowledge are not evolving in future, will not ensure the continued success of the aspirant. The academic library provides the needed information that can access to all its stakeholders. In today’s unceasingly changing environment of academic libraries, there is a need to monitor practices of others for revealing the best practices, so that the best of them can be implemented which will result in increasing the number of users and providing the best library services and satisfaction levels of the users. The best library services and the internal library practices can be embattled for meeting the user needs more effectively, by keeping the standard benchmark model in view.

For research work, a library is as much essential especially in the field of Humanities and social sciences as the laboratory occupies in the experimental sciences. The primary objective of the library in the academic system is to function in such a manner as to achieve the aims of academic libraries.

The primary objectives of the academic libraries are to:

1. Preserve and conserve the knowledge.
2. Disseminating the Information needed by the stakeholders.
3. Helping the institute in teaching learning process.
4. They support institutes fulfilling the objectives and spread their goals.

Academic Libraries fundamentally act as a major resource center of any institute. The following functions of academic libraries are:

1. Maintaining the latest collection of Books, Journals, and other print and E-Resources.
2. Collection Development at regular intervals.
3. Instructing and training the student and faculty community about accessing the information resources.
4. Assisting the students in career guidance.
5. Providing innovative services for the users within short and stipulated time frame.
6. Maintain the basic principle of the library such as ambiance, cleanliness and excellent reading environment for the users.

7. Enhancing the library services by adopting the latest Information Technology tools.

8. Providing Internet and Intranet facilities in the library to access the latest information as per the syllabi.

9. Taking measures to protect the documents by preserving them carefully using best methods.

10. Implementing the best practices as on when required.

11. Connecting to different Networks and to be part of the Consortium of academic libraries.

**Information Resources**

The academic library should have an adequate collection of the information resources like books, reference books, general books, textbooks, as per the curriculum of the Institute. Apart from these collections, the competitive exams related books, career guidance books also provided to its users. Maintain, up to date Journals and Magazines and providing latest Information through Internet. Now-a-days, many academic libraries are providing subscribed e-resources such as UGC - INFONET Digital Library Consortium (e-ShodhSindhu), NLIST and INDEST-AICTE Consortium and Open Access Resources (OARs) etc. to the benefit of the users.

**Budget**

Budget is like a blood to the library. The strength of the academic library is only the budget. The allocation of the budget should be well planned and estimated keeping in view of the services, collection development and the monetary benefit (salary) of staff. As per the needs of the users, the library should allocate the budget for the procurement of materials. The Academic Library budget is high compared to the other academic libraries as most of the teaching learning happens on case studies and using e-resources. For this the library has to purchase the case studies and e-resources which are cost effective. On the whole major part of the budget in any Academic is invested on learning resources in the library.

**Library Staff**
There should be enough staff in providing the library services to the patrons. The staff should be well-qualified, trained and skilled in managing the library, to increase the potential of the library. The salaries should be provided without any discrimination and maintain good pay-scale to each employee. They should be given ICT (Information Communication & Technology) training to update their ICT skills in operating with IT enabled library services.

**Infrastructure Facilities**

The design of the library should be well planned before going for the construction. The initial stages of the construction basic amenities should be given space like artificial lighting, maintaining greenery around the library, providing good ventilation for the air flow and made the necessary requirements that create a good learning environment of all the stakeholders of the institute.

**Best Practices**

According to ODLIS (Online Dictionary of Library Information Science) Best Practices is defined as the application of theory to real life simulation procedures that, when appropriately applied, unswervingly yield greater results. Hence, they are consequently used as reference points in evaluating the effectiveness of alternative methods of finishing the same task. Best practices are identified by measuring the evidences of success.

**Meaning and Definition of Best Practices**

Best Practices are identified by examining realistic evidence of success. In the application of theory to real life circumstances, actions that when properly applied steadily yield superior results and are therefore used as reference points in evaluating the effectiveness of alternative methods of accomplishing the same task. The term “best practice” grew out of the manufacturing industries attentiveness in and implementation of benchmarking. The process of benchmarking began in deep in the 1970s and become popular in the 1980s. During this time companies became increasingly committed on realizing how they rated amongst their competitors. They also initiated to know why some companies were doing good and how they are successful than others in specific areas.

**Best Practices in Academic Libraries**
The successful achievement of this goal largely depends on the practices adopted by the library managers to deliver the information to the user. Benchmarking is one of the methods leading to best practices. It is a positive pre-emptive process to change operations in a structured manner to achieve superior performance. The best practices are help for improving quality of library services. The best practices adopted in academic institutes should bridge the gap between library collection & user community for maximum utilization of the resources.

This leads to beneficial, high asset utilization that meet customer needs and have a modest advantage. Benchmarking known as one of the important methods of best practices has a greater impact on the operations of the libraries. These include public, academic and special libraries. The constant process of the best practices has gained momentum for the running of the libraries, with the increase in the footfalls into the library. Though the traditional services are in place, many libraries have quickly adopted best practices, and most of them have been successful in implementation with the best outcome. These have shown the librarians what exactly the user community needs. Information technology has played a crucial role in merging with the best practices and make paradigm shift towards digital libraries.

The father of Library Science Dr. S. R. Ranganathan says that “the kind of education given to the library profession is normally reflected in the service given by the profession”. Therefore, it is a great responsibility on the academic library personnel to identify and adopt best and active practices to meet the hassles of the end-users.

When we talk about best practices, what we are referring to is a method or a technique that is generally accepted as better, then alternatives due to the fact that it produces results that are superior to those that might be achieved via other means, and/or practices. Over time, these best practices have become crystalized and turned into standards that are accepted across the industry. Eventually, best practices might even evolve to be absorbed into standard requirements in terms of legal or ethical industry standards.

Best Practices may be used to ensure sustained quality output as an alternative to mandatory legalized standards and may also be based on self-assessment or benchmarking. Best practice is a feature of accredited standards by agencies such as NBA, NAAC, ISO 9000, ISO 14001, etc.
**Importance of Best Library Practices**

It is important to note that regardless of the tried and tested nature of a best practice, it might lead to negative returns if not evaluated and modified sufficiently to fit into the organization, where implementation is desired.

All in all, it might be noted that a best practice will not only adhere to industry mandates/standards, it will also ensure that it exceeds the industry standards wherever possible.

Just as in other industries and organizations, the academic library is also bound by the same concept to follow best practices to improve its ability to disseminate information and provide a safe and comfortable environment to enhance the teaching-learning process.

The ICT have become so ubiquitous (approach) that they have become akin to industry standards. These best practices have reached such a level of standardization, that if a library does not incorporate these best practices, it becomes incredibly difficult for that library to survive. These services are not just turning into industry standards, patrons have started demanding or expecting these technologies and practices to be implemented even before attempting to use their services.

The library best practices can help the other libraries to adopt and practice the same if that model works out well. In this case, a lot of autonomy is required with good budgeting involved in this. It does not mean that only the budget is a constraint for implementing the best practices. The best practises will lead to the benchmarking of the libraries which therefore satisfy and give good scope for getting attributes as required by the accreditation agencies.

**Commencement of Best Practices to Academic Libraries by National Assessment and Accredited Council (NAAC):**

The NAAC has identified indicators to assess the library and information services of academic institutions. These parameters have culminated from developing an understanding the best international practices adopted to suite the Indian market. This is
based on the outcome of a national conference organized by NAAC in 2017. The views of experts and luminaries have been taken in order to ensure that both global practices and local requirements are captured to meet the requirements of the time. The experts include librarian, academician and policy makers.

A set of indicators for university/autonomous college libraries is presented as mentioned below:

**Management of Library and Information Services**

Universities generally have a central library which in turn controls the branch libraries. The funding of the branch libraries is controlled by the central libraries. The universities strive to build a repository of knowledge which can be used by the students anytime and anywhere. The central library supports the general information requirements of the users whereas the department libraries cater to the specific subject needs of the users, both for study and research. The following points that have been listed below will ensure quality in library systems:

1. **Number of Working Days:** The libraries are generally opened on all days of the week and closed on the national holidays.

2. **Increase the Working Hours of the Library:** For a university library with residential facility it is mandated that the library should be open for long hours. Number of hours would depend on the availability of staff and utilization of library by the owners of the college.

3. **Constituting of Library Advisory Committee:** It is mandated that each library should have a committee to supervise and advise the library on the overall working of the library. This should consist of stakeholders – the students and the staff.

4. **Manpower Enhancement:** The institute should make sure that the eligibility and qualification of library staff should be on par with that of the academic staff and should fulfill the guidelines as mandated by supervising authorities. The library should have personnel trained in guiding individuals on how to use the resources best. Library staff should be encouraged by conducting the training and refreshment programs regularly. This will help in creating the professional environment in the library. The ratio of total qualified and semi-skilled manpower and the ratio between number of users and collection need to be maintained.
5. **Infrastructure and creating spaces:** It is important to make sure that the following points are looked into with regard to infrastructure of the college: Location of the library within the campus, Adequate space to store books, Sufficient IT infrastructure facility and Proper sitting layout in order to avoid disturbances.

6. **IT Infrastructure:** It is imperative for libraries to ensure that they have adequate digital material available online so that e-library service can be provided from remote location. The e-library should cater the needs of the users and licenses for online database should be procured keeping the number of users in mind. It is also important to ensure proper storage space on the clouds. The security on cloud of data stored should be given proper care. The library should have local area networking facility and be a part of institutional Intranet network. The band with Wi-Fi facilities should be decided based on the requirement of the institute.

7. **Library SOP/ Policy:** The library requires a standard operating procedure that focuses on the development of its collection, constant innovation of existing services, fund related support, annual budget increase, procedures for binding, weeding out outdated books, a policy that addresses the loss and damage of books as well as the commitment of the institution to promote library professionals toward higher education.

8. **Budget:** There has to be an increase in annual expenditure that is allocated for the use of the library. The budget required for various kinds of documentation such as books, journals and other resources, as well as ICT infrastructure will have to be defined as a part of the scope of the institution promoting the library. Additional sources of income apart from the expected State, Central and UGC grants should be identified for enhancing the collection as well.

**Library Collection and Services for Patrons**

**Library Collection:** The library should update its resources on a regular basis in order to make sure that the users have access to latest information. These days, libraries are being engaged to have a more varied collection. Furthermore, libraries try and ensure that the books are available to individuals on demand. The institution or organization that is funding the library must have the resources that have been prescribed by the government or other representative organizations such as the UGC/AICTE etc.
Along with this all the library can maintain government documents, book-bank, rare materials, collections for civil service/competitive exams, etc. The library can explore with limited budget, by providing open access sources in the most effective manner.

**Library Services:** Performance evaluation in the form of service audits and quality is important for all libraries. This enables improving the overall quality of libraries. It can involve feedback of stakeholders and analysis of statistics on the performance of the college.

In general, the library speaks about what it holds and what it offers and the range of the users especially for the academic libraries. Keeping this in view there are certain parameters that are given below that will ensure the quality of the library systems in academic libraries are considered as best library practices in general.

i. Library Policy.

ii. Library Brochure.

iii. Displaying the list of new arrivals in library like books, journals and magazines.

iv. To take the feedback from all the Stakeholders, i.e. (Students, Faculty and staff) through precisely designed and analyzed questionnaire.

v. Automation of the entire library Operations.

vi. Searching the books using web-OPAC.

vii. Communication of current awareness to different user groups.

viii. Library Induction programs at the beginning of the academic year with a general presentation and periodically for need based groups.

ix. Teaching library programs.

x. To maintain the Repositories for Articles, Question papers, Course ware etc.

xi. Suggestion box in the library with timely response and problem solving.

xii. Creating the library website to inform about the library collections and services and other necessary information to the users.

xiii. Networking with other libraries and avail services. Example: DELNET
xiv. Expansion of IT enabled environment in the campus and reinforcement to e-deliveries.

xv. Library should be facilitated with computer center to access the e-resources.

xvi. Organizing Book Exhibitions in the library.

xvii. To be a part of the network of college libraries and consortiums.

xviii. Encouraging the students to work in the Library under the EARN WHILE YOU LEARN program.


xx. Introducing the ‘best user award’ for students.

The International Accreditations like AACSB, EUMS and National Accreditations like NAAC & NBA and the latest National Institute of Rankings Framework (NIRF) parameters are also playing vital role in adopting the ICT for providing IT enabled library services. The decrease of the users in the academic library is a very important fact that cannot be ignored as one of the reasons why we have to adopt the major change in the information communication technology Infrastructure for providing information services to the users within the stipulated time.

**Benefits of Best Practices:**

1. **Improves Library Performance:** The idea behind best practices is to help to improve the library and services. Basically, making it superior than what it was to encounter the requirements of the users and to make it perform commendably. Through identifying the specific practices that work better than others on a comparative note, the library can take full advantage. It also helps the library to identify and incorporate new products that it had not considered or invested in before.

2. **Increase in User Satisfaction:** Applying best practices will have an impact on the users. This shows that the library performs way more efficiently. With efficiency and effectiveness, comes customer satisfaction.

3. **Advantage/Improves Upper Management Support:** It can be used to improve support from top management. Library best practices make everyone pre-emptive and help the library to resolve its own problems that may very likely result in resource accomplishment.
4. Build Professional Relationships and Learning Culture: The library best practices leverage to project or create a sense of professionalism between the different contributors that tends to be helpful over the long term. This will have a positive impact and play an important role in the development of library and the culture of learning.

5. Substantiates Library’s Value: To sum it all up, the best practices of a library will help to prove the value of the libraries resources as also, the supporting administration and staff of the organization. Universities and Autonomous institutes have self sufficient funds and larger manpower where these standards and practices originally evolved.

Role of Librarian in implementing the Best Library Practices:

The foremost important aspect of today’s librarian is compared with the speed of Google world. Being human is the first aspect for any one. But, when it comes to speed it is technology that is dominating today’s world. The predominance of change in providing the information services is very tough for today’s librarian/ knowledge Officer/ knowledge Manager. The old traditional librarian is nowhere seen in the academic institutes at the present scenario.

The technology has made librarian to be on his toes and run on parallel with the existing system and think beyond artificial intelligence adopting new methods of information transformation to the users in different ways. The virtual libraries are giving the librarian more scope for his learning. The librarian should keep in mind that implementing the ICT is a process of continuous learning and implementations.

The librarian should be able to increase his efficiency. He should be able to guide the users in using the technologies through different ways and enhance the infrastructure available as per the changes.

Communicating the Best Library Practices by Marketing the Services:

Information centres and libraries have begun to realize that marketing of information products and services is an important factor and integral part of the best practices of the library by demonstrating the services and products that are available in the library. The major crunch responsible for encouraging the library to develop a marketing approach in its operations and services are due to the three main factors, namely, the information explosion, the technology revaluation, and escalating library
costs. The information service managers feel that marketing is ill-disposed to the nature of their activities. The increased competition in the world of information technology, marketing is a factor for survival.

Basically, library is considered as a service sector according to the core marketing language. The main aim of the library is to keep the user happy and make him informed about his information. Parallel to this context, there is a common misapprehension that advertising activities alone constitute marketing.

The traditional way of providing the library services is an outdated concept and does let the librarians to be in the right path. The marketing of the library services has a huge impact on the users and that’s going to remain for many years. The information provided to the user within the time using different modes of communication defines the way we do the marketing of the library services. This process involves technology, machinery and the manpower. The technology does not dictate everything to the librarians to serve the users. It is only a medium which supports the best practices. The only thing we do is to process the best practices and implement and see the outcome of the best practices. Every academic library implements its best practices in its own way using different models. The IIMs are in the front run in doing such practices followed by IITs and NIT and other autonomous institutes.

Conclusion:

The Implementation of Best Library Practices, notably increases the footfalls to the library further, it also increases in the usage of print and e-resources. The impact of best library practices leads to ease and convinces to the users resulting in increasing usage and foot falls. The digitization of a library does not necessarily mean that footfalls in a physical form will be reduced. Best Practices will increase in the use of the library and its knowledge resources, and also steady increase in physical footfalls since the introduction of digital services by adopting the innovative best library practices.

Suggestions:

1. The academic libraries should adopt Best Library practices and share the practices among the other academic libraries.
2. The regulator bodies like UGC/AICTE and other accreditation agencies should make it mandatory implementing the best library practices in all the academic libraries.

3. Sufficient budget should be allotted accordingly by the managements or governing bodies of the Academic libraries to maintain the e-resources and IT enabled services to all the stake holders. Which in return will help in increasing the footfall of the library.

4. The academic libraries should adopt new Information Technology initiatives and provide latest IT infrastructure for the academic libraries under various schemes and research funds from the Government or local bodies.

5. Marketing of the Best libraries should be done by the academic libraries using various innovative interaction programs and information literacy programs in the academic Institutions.

6. Social media can be used extensively to market the best practices implemented in the academic libraries.

References:
