

BEST PRACTICES FOR THE UPLIFTMENT OF COLLEGE LIBRARY SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

Best practices leads to the desired results through experience and research and so is the case with college libraries. College libraries provide the link between faculty members and the students and also provide resources beyond the class room. Thus, just like any library, it is the backbone of the colleges. But there should be some checks or guidelines through which the standards of the services being provided by them to their users could be judged and be improved. Best practices are the standards which are expected to be followed by the academic libraries including college libraries. This paper discusses the concept of "best practices" and provides some measures to achieve the standards as per the available guidelines.

KEYWORDS: *Best Practices, Academic Library, HEIs UGC, NAAC.*

Introduction

Best practices are the techniques or methodology that reliably leads to the desired results through experience and research. Concise Oxford English Dictionary describes best practices as the "quality of high standards, excellence, highly improved, outstanding, par excellence services. The implication of best practices is the defined procedure of doing work in an organization guideline for good practices. In this process of developing best practices, we take action rather than good ideas, and we improve our skills" (Soanes and Stevenson, 2007). While as per Online Dictionary of Library and Information Science best practices are described as "in the application of theory to real life situation, any procedure which when properly applied, consistently yields superior result and is therefore used as a reference point in evaluating the effectiveness of alternative methods of accomplishing the same task" (Reitz (2004). Thus, best practices are the "methods or techniques that have consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means, and that is used as a benchmark" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Best_practice).

Library & Information Centres

Library and information centres have been the source of getting information since their inception and they play a crucial role in facilitating the dissemination and creation of new knowledge. But the global changes, particularly in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have impacted the functioning of libraries. There has been transforms from traditional access of information resources to online access to library catalogues, databases etc. from almost last two decades ago. So in this context, it indispensable for library to put up with the online services for users and provide access to digital resources, database searching, electronic reference and also the library should have automated circulation service and information literacy programmes (Sarasvathy et al. 2014). Therefore, libraries face many problems and challenges in the era of information technology, such as the explosive growth of

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information and documents, increased cost of the documents and information materials, increase in users information needs, latest techniques and concepts in handling of information, new electronic information environment and the creation of database and its security, marketing of library and information services etc.

Hence, ICT impact is leading to a new role and greater responsibilities for the librarians where library and information centres are to play a role of learning resource which has taken up increasingly more academic space and time in the life of the users. So it is the right time to identify and adopt the new ways that will lead library and information centre to improve their process and activities, thereby optimizing the resources utilization and delivering high quality, and value added services to their users.

Need for Best Practices in College Libraries

Libraries are in the service business so it has to ensure quality in service. The most important product they have is service. Without service, libraries are indistinguishable from museums or they are a combination of a maze and morgue for books. Service is a pervasive ethic of the profession of librarianship (Gorman, 1999). Further, as Vyas (2009) mentions University Grants Commission and higher education experts are also emphasizing over the quality of higher education and they want to develop higher education infrastructure keeping in view the quality as an important aspect. It is also a fact that to improve the quality of the education, good libraries are needed but as mentioned earlier, today's libraries are facing many challenges for their survival. Thus, some sorts of arrangements are needed to improve or stagnating the present libraries so that they could provide good services to their users.

Colleges which form the integral part of higher education, their libraries are the primary source for learning process. College libraries are the connecting links between teaching and learning as well as the place that supplements its resources beyond the scope of class room. According to Ahmad and Pal (2012), college libraries play important role in the educational set up of both the students as well as the faculty members. They serve the users by providing specific information to the user. But how far the college libraries are successful in implementing their goals into its reality is a big question. So, there must be some agency to have a proper vigilance on the functioning of college libraries and also to suggest certain measures to rectify the emerging needs, and for this kind of purpose NAAC was established for maintaining quality education of the institutions.

General Best Practices in College Libraries

The best practice in the library context may be those services through which the users are able to explore more resources and facilities from the library. If we look back on the history of higher education, it is seen best practices in one or other form existed for a long time. The reports of the Radhakrishnan Commission in 1948 and Kothari Commission in 1964 have already recognized the role of libraries in higher education, where they recommended the need of a first class library for the college and universities. Further, the report of the UGC Library Committee in 1965 that was headed by Dr. S.R. Ranganathan also provided the firm base to academic libraries. This can be said the starting of best practice in library field which was expedited further with the inception of inflibnet in 1989 which has been providing financial support to the academic libraries to automate library operations. Thus, it is also contributing towards best practices by providing guidelines in computerization work of the library that is also one aspect of best practices.

Ghule (2016) has listed many general best practices that may be conducted in any library as a routine practice, such as the regular library advisory committee meeting; binding of books and periodical volumes; displaying new arrivals at regular interval; use of CCTV for library security; providing book bank facility; preservation of manuscripts; large collection of competitive examination; conduction of users feedback by questionnaire method and suggestion box and reprography service etc. Later, UGC has established National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) as an autonomous body in September 1994 for measure the higher educational institutions in the country that along with the universities is assessing colleges throughout the country on the basis of some guidelines and library is one of them. NAAC (www.naac.gov.in/best) has suggested some best practices which are to be followed by a college that can enhance the academic information environment and usability of college libraries. These include the:

- Computerization of library using standard software
- Sufficient information should be include about the library in the prospectus
- Users attendance statistics are to be compiled locating the same on the notice board
- Newspaper clipping are to be displayed on the notice board

- Career/employment information service should be provided by library
- Internet facilities are to be provided to different users
- Suggestion box and timely response need to be provided
- Lists of new arrivals to be displayed and this should be circulated to academic departments
- Information literacy programmes are to be organized
- Book exhibitions and book talks should also be arranged
- Institution of best user awards to attract users in the library, and
- Conduction of users' surveys annually.

But the above set of best practices for college libraries prepared by NAAC cannot be termed as the last word. Therefore, Vyas (2009) has included the following set of practices in best practices:

- Make a path finder to the library
- Keep the library premises neat and clean
- Compile a list of current serials/catalogue of journals
- Update and maintain the library website
- Maintain useful statistics about the use of the library and display them on the library boards
- Compile the checklists on different subject/topics as a part of documentation service
- Form the library committee and
- Distribute useful handouts to the users.

Best Practices to Enhance the Services of College Libraries

The library users, its services, facilities, collection, rules, budget, usage of services, extension activities etc. and at every step students and teachers are the party in complying with the best practice. Sivakumar (2017) mentions that the involvement and support of these elements play a crucial role in the self-study report writing exercise. Hence maintenance of daily record needs serious attention. Library rules and the awareness among the users combined with alertness on the part of the library staff becomes the major requirements.

Further, the libraries are also expected to focus on the users' needs while introducing new services and facilities to them. Sivakumar (2017) mentions that the service introduced as a best practice today may turn in to an essential one. For example, once the internet access in the library was considered as the best practice but today it has become an essential service. Best practices questions may include: the computerization of library with standard digital software, inclusion of sufficient information about the library in the college prospectus, compiling student/teacher attendance statistics and locating These are to be displayed in the notice boards, displaying newspaper clippings on the notice board periodically, career employment information services, internet facilities, information literacy programs, suggestion box, displaying new arrivals, circulating a list of those to academic departments, conducting book exhibitions on different occasions, organizing book talks, instituting annual best user award for students, best intellectual library award, organizing competitions annually and conducting user surveys periodically.

What can be Done?

There is lot of the work that can be done to follow best practices in any library. But Lavate (2017) has given some points which can be kept in mind while developing services and other things in college library for achieving the goal of best practices.

S.No.	Library Activity	Goal Achieved
1	Library Management	Library management can be proceed with the help of computer software for all administrative / routine works, such as the acquisition of reading material, cataloguing, circulation, serial control etc.
2	Collection Development	The main aim of the collection development is to make available all types of reading materials i.e. reference books, textbooks, journals, magazine, reports, non-book materials to support learning, teaching and research pursuits of the reader of the college.
3	Book Exhibition	The library may also organize the book exhibitions and book display programmes on different occasions, such as on the birthday occasion of eminent personality. This will help to provide the opportunity to the users to know various types of information resources, current information available on the particular aspects in the library. This may also helps for collection development in library.
4	Library Orientation	Library may also conduct orientation programme for the new comers in

		every academic year. Here, the librarian explained about the resources, facilities, service. They are taken round the library apart from training them in searching the library database, e-journals and internet browsing etc.
5	Library Usage Statistics	Library is supposed to capture the data through register maintained at all services points. But the main register may be kept at the entrance to capture data on footfalls in the library on daily basis. Internet Service point separate register is maintained to know the use of internet by hours/time. The related data may be analyzed periodically that may be used into the decision making process.
6	Book Bank Facility	The College may provide Book Bank Facility to reserve and economic backward facility.
7	Inter-Library Loan	College library may start inter-library loan facility with the neighbouring colleges for exchange of the reading material.
8	Information about Competitive Exams	The library should also develop their collection for UPSC, MPSC and Bank exams etc. and also subscribe newspapers, latest journals and the magazines for competitive examinations.
9	Web Based Services	The library may provide also web based services through library website such as virtual tour, virtual reference desk, ask the librarian, e-book, FAQ, feedback, etc.

Conclusion

Users are the most important component of library and for their satisfaction; best practices could be adopted to bridge the gap between the library and the users so that effective and maximum utilization of the resources could be achieved. Best practices for library services in a college library may not be the same best practice for other college library rather every library should develop their own best practices and further advance towards perfection. However, there are some guidelines for best practices as discussed above which can be used for any type of the library for their user satisfaction. It is also noteworthy to mention that NAAC policy helps in developing the college libraries to modernize so as to provide good standard service to users. But it would be better if the best practices followed in British Libraries and American Centre Libraries operating in India should have been taken into account, as suggested by Vyas (2009).

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