Effective practices to enhance skills at the Learning Resource Centers

Dr.K.H.Sunitha
Reader in Library Science
Kasturba Gandhi Degree and PG College for Women
Secunderabad

Abstract

This paper mentions the importance of best practices for the Library professional to improve their skills and provide effective services to the users, so that all the resources in the library are extensively used. New services in the era of information Technology are discussed and the ways and means to orient the users to bring awareness about the CD and e-resources so that whatever amount is spent on them is used to the maximum extent by the users.

0.Introduction:

Servicing the right information to the right user at the right time is the goal of every library and information centre. The successful achievement of this goal largely depends on the practices adopted by the library managers to deliver the information to the need user. According to Dr.S.R.Ranganathan , “the kind of education given to the library profession is normally reflected in the service given by the profession” Though academic libraries are service oriented, the tremendous changes brought about by technological advances in the present information society, have had an impact on their functioning. The recent developments in the field of information, communication and technology have also changed the expectations of the users in many ways. Hence, there is a greater responsibility on the academic library personnel to identify and adopt best and effective practices to meet the demands if end-users.

What is a best practice?

“A practice qualifies to a Best practice status if it resulted in high value impact on any aspect of educational activity in an institution”. A best practice is a value added standard practice. However, a best practice may depend on viewer’s perspective, time and context. A best practice may be innovative and be a philosophy, policy, strategy, program, process
or practice that solves a problem or create new opportunities and positively impacts on organizations.”

The areas where best practices can be adopted and implemented in a library and information environment are:

a. Library organization and management
b. Collection development and assessment
c. Usage of library services
d. Automation and use of technology

**Awareness of multidimensional Services to the users**

1 Library Organization and Management:

Library and Information systems management is the basic and core activity which helps the user community in identifying and accessing knowledge resources in an academic institution. It also comprises the activities performed in relation to the development of the vision, the mission, the goals and policies of the library. As the management and
administration of the library is pivotal in collection development and delivery of information products and services to the end users, adoption of best practices in this area leads to continuous improvement in overall performances. Following are some of the best practices that can adopted in this area.

1.1) **In Service Training:**
   The goal of this programme would be to motivate professional staff to enhance their skill and expertise in conventional and e-library associated services and operations by arranging in house and external training programmes.

1.2) **Staff Promotional Policy:**
The policy involves designing and implementing a transparent promotion policy with requirements in terms of qualifications, length of service, expertise, regularity etc:- with a time frame for promotion. This practice will motivate the library staff to acquire higher qualifications and experience required to get a promotion to the next higher grade.

1.3) **Student Internship Programme:**
The programme involves practical training in the different sections of the library to students of library and information science to enable them to get a clear understanding of library organization, management and library functioning.

1.4) **Student Participation Programme:**
This programme helps students to involve themselves in the maintenance of the Library. This practice will not only inculcate a sense of responsibility and accountability but also develops a service mind.
2. **Collection development and assessment:**

The function of a school/college/university library is purely academic in nature. The library plays an important role in the instructional programmes of an academic institution/organization. A good collection of documents in the library always substitutes or supplements the classroom teachings. Document collection in an academic library should be directed to meet the standards laid down by the parent body to meet the academic goals of the end users at the same time, must expand to meet new requirements of specialized research and changing fields of knowledge.

**2.1) Enhancement of Collection in Different Formats:**

Both with the emergence of modern technology, information is stored both in print and digital formats. Digital formats include CDs/DVDs, floppies, Micro-Fische etc:- The collection should also include the modern storage formats. Subscription to e-resources such as e-journals, e-books, online information will enable the users to have access to latest information. Internet facility should also be provided.

**2.2) Library Book Exhibition:**

This practice involves periodic display of library collection in order to create an awareness among the users regarding the availability of books in their respective subjects. This will not only promote the usage of the collection but also encourage the faculty for active participation in collection development.
2.3) **Compact Storage of Less Used Collection:**

A periodic survey of less used documents will help in removal of outdated books from the shelves to draw the attention of the users towards popular books. This process can be done with the help of circulation data. The less used books should be retained and stored separately for the reference of future generation. This practice saves the time of the user in retrieving the document and also saves space.

2.4) **Extended Hours of Service:**

Extended library opening hours helps the users, especially students during examination time to utilize the services optimally and thereby fulfill the first law of library science i.e documents are for use.

3. **Usage of Information Services:**

Libraries are service oriented organizations. In order to fulfill the first four laws of library science, the library personnel reach the end-users through multiple services viz lending, reference, inter library loan, current awareness service, bibliographic service, abstract and indexing service, reprographic, counseling, internet, OPAC etc:- Information library programmes / user orientation programmes are conducted to initiate a new member in the library to promote optimum usage of information services provided. Some of the best practices that can be identified in measuring and enhancing the use of information services are:

3.1) **Information Literary Programme/ User Orientation:**

The goal of this practice is to orient a newly enrolled member to the facilities and services provided by the library. User orientation or user education will create an awareness among the users regarding library resources and their usage in relation to preparation of assignments, project reports etc. information literacy programme can be imparted through various methods viz. lecture form, library tour, brochures, PPT, information aids etc. Display of new arrivals in the library, instructions on use of internet and web resources is also provided through this programme.
3.2) Library Statistics:

This practice involves maintenance of usage statistics in all sections of the library. Maintenance of visitors register and purpose of visit helps in knowing how many users are visiting and for what purpose. Data gathered from all service points will be analyzed to find the documents which are consulted or borrowed more number of times and also books which are under utilized. The findings will help the library manager to evaluate the collection and helps in reorganizing the system. It also helps in assessing the life cycle of information products or services and enhances the quality of the services like literature search and digital repository.

3.3) E-Training Programme:

Publishers demonstrate and organize training sessions to launch the new databases which are to be attended by the library personnel to orient themselves about their usage and to instruct the users on how to navigate and locate journal articles efficiently and effectively. They are also taught on how to write and publish their research articles in journals.

3.4) User Study:

User studies are conducted to know the information needs, seeking behavior and use patterns of information by the users. It reveals the bottlenecks that hinder the free flow of information in the system. It enables the managers of the information system to improve on the services, to strengthen the collections and helps in fulfilling the objectives of the institution it serves.

3.5) Suggestion Boxes:

A suggestion box, maintained near the circulation counter, would help to get user feedback on various services provided by the library. The main objective of any library is to support the teaching, learning and research needs of the user. Apart from providing regular services, it is necessary to provide new and improved services as and when needed. In order to evaluate the regular and new services, it is required to
get feedback from the users. Feedback in the form of suggestions, opinions, complaints from the users should be addressed and implemented positively to suit the requirements of the end users. This will increase the user satisfaction levels and will help in the optimum usage of library services.

4. Use of Information Technology in Libraries

4.1) Automation of Library Services:
The goal of this practice is to automate all the house keeping operations viz. acquisition of books and other material, creating maintenance of its catalogued database, circulation of its holdings etc, to give service more quickly, efficiently and effectively and thereby meet the fourth law of library science i.e save the time of the user. Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) facilitates the users to search for information by author, subject, title, ISBN, keywords etc and helps to reserve item on loan, view special collections, cancel reservations, request renewal of loan, to see list of new arrivals, request addition of new publication, define SDI profile.

4.2) Internet Facility:
The goal of this practice is to provide online access to information generated globally, web resources, open access resources, e-resources, institutional repositories etc. the users should be educated in the systematic approach to collecting the current information to support their projects, assignments, research work and other academic pursuits.

4.3) Library Homepage:
The goal is to disseminate current information on various subjects to the users. The process involves regular display of information about the latest additions and other current information like job opportunities, fellowships, training, workshops, seminars, conferences, placements on the library website. This practice will facilitate the users to have access to timely and latest information pertaining to their academic and research interests.
4.4) **Access to Digital Repositories:**

The goal is to create the digital centre of the faculty publications, research outputs, project reports, thesis and dissertations and university publications and locate the same on the website of the university library. This will facilitate the users to have timely access to the information on institutional developments, create an awareness of the institutional needs, individuals responsibilities and privileges. The process involves installation of digital repository software, internet and intranet connectivity.

4.5) **CDNET Server Facility:**

The goal of this practice is to provide network access (Intranet) to the CD resources received regularly in the library to enable the users to access them at their desktops. The users need not deal with the individual CDs & DVDs. The information will be made available for access with remote access on the intranet. This involves installing a CDNET server like TULSINET where all the CD’s can be dumped and users can access with various options, download and save the files.

4.6) **Digitization of Manuscripts:**

The goal of this practice is to preserve and conserve rare documents and archaic material for progeny. All the old and rare documents are digitized and stored for future access by the potential users.

4.7) **Local Area Network Facility in the Campus:**

The goal of this practice is to network the information resources of the library with the entire academic and research activities on the university / college campus and to evolve a user friendly environment by using the information and communication technology tools to provide quality and quick retrieval of the information sources along with resources available in other libraries at their desktops.
4.8) International Standard Formats:

The goal is to record the bibliographic description of the document on an international standard format to globally enable the user to retrieve information easily and accurately. This involves entering bibliographic records using software which supports MARC 21 format to enter bibliographic records thereby facilitating downloading of records from Library of Congress or OCLC to avoid duplication of entries. This helps to achieve, uniformity, accuracy and standardization.

Some of the other practices that can be observed by the libraries are

- Observation of other libraries
- Maintenance of service areas
- Library science as optional course /paper at undergraduate level
- Resource generation through external membership and internet services

5. Conclusion:

A best practice is a practice which paves the way for enhancing an existing function and helps in effective implementation or use of the process. Use of technology in designing and delivering the information products and services in a library has always yielded good results. Automation of all in-house operations in academic libraries with bar-coding, user identity and web OPAC facilities is a best practice in totality of library services. Effective implementation of user education/ awareness programs with the new techniques and tools will also be a best practice in extent of use of library services. Developing digital repositories with subject content, open sources and institutional information and customizing it to internal requirements with remote access is one of the globally adopted best practices in the university libraries. In the present era of IT, the academic libraries need to re-orient to the highly qualitative information collection and services.
References;


3. NAAC : Library and Informations Services,2006.

About the Author
Dr. K.H. Sunitha is Reader in Library Science at Kasturba Gandhi College For Women, Marredpally, Secunderabad. She has over 30 years experience in teaching and librarianship. She is doctorate in Library Science on the topic “Use pattern of university libraries in Andhra Pradesh with reference to Osmania University and University of Hyderabad”. Her area of research interest is user studies. She has published papers in research journals and conference proceedings.