

Chapter 21

Empowering LIS Professionals and Academic Library Users in a Networked and Digital Environment: A Case Study of Rabindra Library, Assam University, Silchar

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of the modernisation of academic libraries in the ICT era, changing format of the library resources and types of computer-based services being offered by the academic libraries. In view of this, the present chapter discusses various aspects of LIS training and user education, emphasising the need to empower our LIS professionals and library users so that they benefit from the new technologies by using new ICTs for exploring the world of knowledge for their academic pursuit and excellence in higher education and research. The first part of the chapter discusses the recent development in the areas of application of ICT in academic libraries, availability, and usage of electronic resources by the library users, new services provided by the academic libraries to their end users. The second part of the chapter highlights the need for empowering LIS professionals working in academic libraries and their end users in electronic / digital era, enumerates the role of various agencies that are engaged in making library users aware of printed as well as e-resources, and explains the role of Web 2.0/Library 2.0 in making library users more interactive and well informed about the resources, products, and services of the academic libraries to their clientele. The third part of the chapter discusses the user education programme/user awareness programme being organised and offered to the students and research scholars by the Assam University Library (Rabindra Library, Silchar) as a case study. While concluding the chapter, some suggestions and recommendations are also discussed in brief.

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INTRODUCTION

University Libraries are playing an important role in extending support for the teaching-learning process, research and development activities, and other academic endeavours. At present the focus of teaching-learning process has been shifted from the class room teaching to library oriented teaching where users are required to supplement their class room teaching from the library resources available in their departmental library / central library for the examination preparation, assignment, projects and research activities. Therefore it is imperative for library users to know the printed as well as electronic resources available in their departmental library and central library to make optimum utilization of knowledge resources available to give best output to the university in particular and society in general (Sinha, 2011c).

In order to make them fully aware we have to empower our library users to exploit the knowledge resources, which are available with us both in traditional as well as in digital formats. Currently, the electronic / digital resources are available to affordable cost and many university libraries/ Institutions of higher learning have started procuring directly from the publishers as individual client or through consortia mode for extensive usage amongst the members of the consortia at reasonable and affordable cost. In India, many consortia are established and a few of them are functioning well and providing adequate and relevant electronic resources to the academicians and scientists, researchers. Amongst them some are the prominent digital library consortia viz., UGC-INFONET Digital Library Consortium of INFLIBNET Centre, Ahmedabad, INDEST Consortium, FORSA, IIM Consortium, DELCON Consortium, etc. (Sinha, Kumar, & Bhattacharjee, 2006; Sinha, 2008a).

For the full and effective utilisation of the resources, there is a dire need of making the library users aware about the availability of resources, and how to access the resources for their academic

and research activities. Therefore, at present time Library and Information professionals are facing many challenges to cope up the demand of library users for making them available all these knowledge resources effectively in less possible time. Therefore, we need to empower our students, research scholars, scientist faculty members, and staff to utilise the knowledge resources fully and optimally for quality academic and research activities (Sinha, 2011c).

Concept and Need for Empowerment of LIS Professionals and Library Users

Empowerment is a buzzword generally used that either generates enthusiasm or disinterest. Major changes in libraries in recent years have resulted in the need for new or expanded skills and abilities; these changes include the implementation of new technologies such as computer-based cataloguing, automated circulation systems, and online access to machine-readable bibliographic databases, and the development and formalization of personnel policies and procedures (strongly influenced by the university affirmative action/equal opportunity employment plans).

Increased students expectation and demands have also kept all media centre and library staff challenged, and working longer hours. In the past, staff development and in-house training of any type were merely considered luxuries in many libraries. Previously, although library administrators generally agreed that continuing education, staff development and training were essential goals of any organization, but in reality, staff development and training programmes were perceived by both staff and administration as a self-contained unit to separate entity, rather than an integral part of library activities and the development of every individual in the organization.

It is only until the recent decade that staff development and training have received increasing emphasis, as is indicated by the numerous articles,

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