

INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF USERS OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES OF SOUTHERN PUNJAB

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Abstract

Public libraries are the standing testimonies of democracies. They are the social transformers and cultural saviours. They are the storehouses of intellectual heredity of our forefathers. They are the lighthouses fostering creative leisure activities. This study was conducted with the help of structured questionnaires to analyze the information seeking behavior of different types of the users and randomly selected 112 users of three Public Libraries in Southern Punjab. The data was entered and analyzed using simple average and percentage methods.

Keywords : Public Libraries, Information, Behaviour, Users, Punjab

INTRODUCTION :

In a broader sense, public libraries are those service agencies which serve the general public as a whole irrespective of their age, gender, profession and social- economic background. In Punjab, the libraries being run under Department of Higher Education, Punjab at different district headquarters known as District Libraries, libraries under Municipal committees, municipal corporations, village panchayats, rural youth clubs or under any other social organization all come under the purview of public libraries.

UNESCO defines Public Library as "the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of the individual and social groups".

The National Knowledge Commission (NKC), of India which was constituted in June 2005 described libraries as gateways of knowledge and continued that a "Library is not a building stacked with books - it is a repository and source of information

and ideas, a place for learning and enquiry, and for the generation of thought and the creation of new knowledge. Public libraries in particular have the potential to bridge the gap between the 'information poor' and the 'information rich' by ensuring that people from all sectors and settings of society and the community across India have easy access to knowledge seeking".

MISSIONS OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

According to UNESCO Public Library Manifesto the following key missions which relate to information, literacy, education and culture should be at the core of public library services:

- Creating and strengthening reading habits in children at an early age.
- Supporting both individual and self-conducted education as well as formal education at all levels.
- Providing opportunities for personal creative development.
- Stimulating the imagination and creativity of children and young people.
- Promoting awareness of cultural heritage, appreciation of the arts, scientific achievements and innovations.
- Providing access to cultural expressions of all performing arts.
- Fostering inter-cultural dialogue and favouring cultural diversity.
- Supporting the oral tradition.
- Ensuring access for citizens to all sorts of community information.
- Providing adequate information services to local enterprises, associations and interest groups.
- Facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills.
- Supporting and participating in literacy activities and programmes for all age groups, and initiating such activities if necessary.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The public library due to its nature is charged with the responsibility of catering for the diverse and ever-changing information needs of the entire members of its community in which it is situated. However, it is generally believed that public libraries suffer the most neglect in terms of funding. Meanwhile, provision of needed information at the right time and format to its users is central to its existence. This study, however, intends to find out the information needs and characteristics of users of district libraries of southern Punjab. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that this study investigates information needs and characteristics of users of district libraries of southern Punjab, what constitutes the information needs of the library users, what services and resources are available in public libraries for meeting these needs, how do the users meet such needs and what constraints are they faced with? These are the questions to which this study intends to answer.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are:

- To identify the information needs of the users of district libraries of southern Punjab.
- To identify how the library meet the information needs of their users and their Preferred sources of information.
- To identify the characteristics of the users district libraries of southern Punjab.
- To study the current status of automation of public libraries.
- To ascertain the adequacy and relevance of the library resources in meeting users' needs.
- To establish the constraints militating against meeting these needs.

METHODOLOGY

The study has been conducted on district library system in Southern Punjab and primary data has been collected by using the survey instrument. A structured questionnaire was designed to satisfy the objectives of the study which was distributed among the library professionals in district libraries of Sangrur, Mansa and Faridkot. The data has been worked out with statistical tools like percentage and average etc. The collected data was represented in the form of tables.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The public library system in Punjab comprises of state library, district libraries, and libraries under municipalities, panchayats and certain registered social or rural youth clubs. The present study has its scope of investigation limited to the district libraries of southern Punjab..

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Khatra (1992) conducted a study on "User survey of district libraries: Ferozpur and Jalandhar". The study revealed that both the district libraries have shortage of skilled staff, paucity of funds and infrastructure. Author has given historical development of public libraries in Punjab and compared the sources, staff and services of both district libraries.

Navalani and Katyal (1994) examined the prevailing position of the public libraries in Punjab. Authors expressed in detail the development of Public libraries in Punjab. They described the

poor conditions of Public library network in Punjab State and opined for lots of work to be undertaken for the upliftment of libraries.

Sewa Singh (1996), has surveyed the district libraries in Punjab with an aim to identify the problems and development of these libraries. The survey shows an inadequate infrastructure, shortage of staff and paucity of funds in the district libraries of Punjab.

Mahmood and Burn (2000) focused on the relationships between end user satisfaction and some of the variables such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, user expectations, user attitude towards information systems (IS) in widely divergent settings and the user skills. All library service providers will need strategies to cope up with this diversity. The level of end user satisfaction with information technology (IT) has widely been accepted as an indicator of IT success.

Thelwall et al. (2001) give a new approach for specific information where a website that enables a user to search the individual websites. The study of communication patterns and information seeking behaviour of users working in ICMR institutes is made by Basimalla (2000). Seeking Information from the Internet often starts from a search engine, using either its organized directory structure or its text query facility.

Joinson and Banyard (2002) made two studies on information seeking behaviour on the Internet. Both investigated information seeking on the World Wide Web. It is tentatively argued that there is a tendency for people to access information on internet. Psychological processes of Web browsing behaviours are also discussed.

Majid and Tan (2002) made 'user-study' on engineering undergraduate students. This study investigates the information needs and information seeking behaviour of computer engineering students of Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. This study reveals that the types of information sources used by the students are more in the electronic format. The importance of and reasons for using certain electronic information sources are investigated by the authors.

Bilal (2002) reports the key findings of the information seeking behaviour and success of students in using the web. The students are now very comfortable in using web resources and they want more resources through web enabled technology. The students' behaviour and success were compared in his study. The study reveals that the use of search engine and the level of research skills are directly proportional to their success.

Marcella et al. (2002) investigated the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on the communication of legislative information to the general public or citizen. In general, the Information and Communication Technology has made its presence in every walk of life.

Arabito (2003) has made a case study on user information seeking on library web how the users seek and gather information for their papers and dissertations and how the library web site is becoming more and more stuffed with resources and with instructions on how to use such resources.

GursharanKaur (2008) carried out research for doctorate degree on the topic "District libraries in Punjab and Haryana: A comparative study". She assessed the existing situation and status of district libraries of Punjab and Haryana States. Besides using questionnaires, interviews were also conducted to collect data. Various facets of libraries i.e. library staff, building, collection, membership, budget and library services have been examined. The various studies discussed above which were undertaken in different times and set-ups by different scholars clearly

indicate the insufficient infrastructure, finances, IT support and other attributes which support a strong public library system.

DATA PRESENTATION & ANALYSIS

Out of 150 copies of the questionnaire administered, 112 (74.6%) were completed and returned. Data were presented for analysis using the descriptive statistics which include; frequency count percentages and tables.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage(%) |
|--------|-----------|---------------|
| Male | 86 | 76.78 |
| Female | 26 | 23.21 |
| Total | 112 | 100 |

Table 1 reveals that 86 respondents were males, representing 76.78% of the sample population, while 26 respondents 23.21% were the female library users. This finding indicates that the females are not using the library as much as the males. The disparity in information literacy known to exist between adult male and female population in Nigeria is replicating itself again among the youths.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age

| Age Range (years) | Frequency | Percentage(%) |
|-------------------|-----------|---------------|
| 16-20 | 14 | 12.5 |
| 21-30 | 58 | 51.7 |
| 31-50 | 19 | 16.9 |
| Above 50 | 21 | 18.7 |
| Total | 112 | 100 |

Table 2 shows the age range of respondents. 14 respondents (12.5%) were between the age group of 16-20, 58 respondents (51.7%) were between the age group of 21-30, 19 respondents (16.9%) were between the age group of 31-50, while 21 (18.7%) were 50 or above. This indicates that the majority of the people using the libraries are youths.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status

| Marital Status | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|
| Married | 43 | 20.5 |
| Single | 62 | 73.2 |
| Divorced | 3 | 2.6 |
| Widow | 4 | 3.5 |
| Total | 112 | 100 |

Table 3 shows that the majority 62(55.35%) of the respondents were found unmarried, implying the predominance of the young singles as constituting majority of the library users. 23 (20.5%) of the respondents were found married while 3 (2.6%) and 4 (3.5%) were divorced and widow respectively.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Occupation

| Occupation | Frequency | Percentage(%) |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Civil Servant | 12 | 10.7 |
| Private company employee | 2 | 1.7 |
| Trader | 4 | 3.5 |
| Businessman | 7 | 6.2 |
| Student | 47 | 41.9 |
| Farmer | 2 | 1.7 |
| Politician | 2 | 1.7 |
| Teacher/lecturer | 7 | 6.2 |
| Retired Persons | 19 | 16.9 |
| Others | 10 | 8.9 |
| Total | 112 | 100 |

Table 4 reveals that 41.96% of the respondents were students, who were in higher institutions of learning and secondary schools. Distantly followed this were Retired Persons, 16.96% ,Civil Servant,10.71% and other category users 8.92%. Other than these categories of users were found very few as indicated in the table above. Teachers/lecturer and Businessman were 6.25% each, Traders were 3.57%, Private company employee, Farmers and Politician were each 1.78%. This indicates that the student category of users formed the majority of the library users

Table 5: Information needs of the respondents in the library

| Information Needs | Frequency | Percentage% |
|---|-----------|-------------|
| General information | 29 | 25.8 |
| Information concerning academics | 46 | 41 |
| Information on sports | 3 | 2.6 |
| Information on personal development | 2 | 1.7 |
| Information on health | 2 | 1.7 |
| Information on politics | 7 | 6.2 |
| Information on security | 5 | 4.6 |
| Information on agriculture | 5 | 4.6 |
| Information on government policies/programmes | 4 | 3.5 |
| Information on international politics | 3 | 2.6 |
| Information on provision of social amenities | 4 | 3.5 |

Table 5 revealed that the information needs relating to respondents' academic programmes 41%, general information 25.8% and politics 6.2%, agriculture and security 4.6% ,sports 2.6%,health 1.7%and personal development 1.7%each. This further indicates that the students who were the majority of the library users needed information to support their academic programmes and to pass their various examinations.

Table 6: Frequency of Library Use by the Respondents

| Use of Library by the Respondents | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Daily | 71 | 63.3 |
| Once in two days | 19 | 16.9 |
| 1-3 times a week | 12 | 10.7 |
| Occasionally | 10 | 8.9 |
| Total | 112 | 100 |

Table 6 shows that for respondents to fulfill their varying information needs, 71% representing the respondents visit the library every day. This could be due to the fact that most of them were students and retired persons. 16.9% visit the library once in two days, 10.7% visit the library about three times in a week and 8.9% visit the library occasionally.

Table 7: Activities undertaken by respondents in the library

| Activities During Library Visit | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Obtaining materials for private study | 47 | 41.9 |
| Studying using own resources (textbooks) | 35 | 31.2 |
| Reading for general knowledge acquisition | 3 | 2.6 |
| Studying in peaceful environment | 16 | 14.2 |
| Relaxation | 5 | 4.4 |
| Reading newspaper | 10 | 8.9 |
| Others | 6 | 5.3 |

According to Table 7, respondents were asked to indicate the activities they undertake when visit the library. The analysis revealed that most respondents (41.9%), (31.2%), (14.2%), (8.9%), (5.3%), (4.4%) and (2.6%), visited the library to obtain materials for private studies, study using own materials, studying in peaceful environment, reading newspaper, for other purpose, reading for relaxation and general knowledge acquisition. This also indicated that most users) while they visited the library. In this regard, the

library provided a conducive environment for reading and studying more than providing for needed materials (information). This explains why majority of the respondents see library as reading centre. The various kinds of resources sought by the respondents were presented in library.

Table8:Library resources often used

| Library Resources Often Used | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Newspapers/magazines | 28 | 25 |
| Novels | 24 | 21.4 |
| poems | 13 | 11.6 |
| Reference materials | 17 | 15.1 |
| Textbooks | 15 | 13.3 |
| Government publications | 5 | 4.4 |
| Government reports | 2 | 1.7 |
| Others | 8 | 7.1 |

Table 8 indicates that the most consulted resources in the library were Newspapers/magazines 25%, this was followed distantly by Novels 21.4%, reference materials 15.1%, textbooks 13.3%, several other kinds of resources were 7.1%, Government publication were 4.4% and Government reports 1.7% were the least consulted materials in the library. This further showed that other categories of users were very few in the library such as visually impaired, deaf, handicapped, specialists, farmers, neo-literates, etc who would have preferred other library resources.

Table 9: Relevance of Library Resources to the Respondents' Information Needs

| Library Resources | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Newspaper/magazine | 24 | 21.4 |
| Novels | 10 | 8.9 |
| poems | 13 | 11.6 |
| Reference materials | 17 | 15.1 |
| Textbooks | 25 | 22.32 |
| Government publications | 9 | 8 |
| Government reports | 2 | 1.7 |
| Others | 12 | 10 |
| Total | 112 | 100 |

Table 9 reveals that textbooks 22.32% were the prominent resources used by the majority of the respondents because of the relevancy to the respondents' information needs. 21.4% were newspaper/magazine, 15.1% reference materials, 11.6% poems, other general materials were 10%, government publications 8% and government reports were 1.7%.

The majority of the respondents who indicated textbooks could be as a result of students dominating in the library users following general awareness.

Table 10: Constraints to meeting respondents' information needs

| Constraints | Frequency | Percentage % |
|---|-----------|-----------------|
| Lack of information retrieval tools in the library | 29 | 25.8 |
| Inadequate relevant materials | 27 | 24.1 |
| Inadequate time to seek needed information | 20 | 17.8 |
| Library proximity problem | 16 | 14.2 |
| Ignorance of where and how to obtain needed materials | 12 | 10.7 |
| Hardly conducive state of the library | 6 | 5.3 |
| Uncooperative attitude of the library staff | 2 | 1.7 |

Table 10 indicates that the major constraints that hindered meeting users' information needs include lack of information retrieval tools in the library 25.8% inadequate relevant materials 24.1% the former response may be may be connected with lack of knowledge of available retrieval tools in the library by respondents whereas the latter response against the backdrop of the general state of neglect of public libraries,. Other constraints indicated were: Inadequate time to seek needed information 17.8%, Library proximity problem 14.2%, Ignorance of where to obtain needed materials 10.7%, Hardly conducive state of the library 5.3% and Uncooperative attitude of the library staff 1.7%. Others specified constraints were: erratic power supply, inadequate toilet facilities and internet facility in the library for the users also.

CONCLUSION

Public libraries are expected to provide people-oriented services, aiming at satisfying the general public through the provision of appropriate information resources and services, such as advisory services, strategic leadership, and information on local content that incorporates indigenous knowledge system into it. However, the current state of district libraries of southern Punjab is far from what it should be. Having highlighted the situation of the library, there is need for both the state government to provide all the necessary funds required for the smooth operation and provision of necessary services to the users.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on conclusion drawn above, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- The State Government Authorities must ensure that the minimum standard required for public libraries to provide effective and efficient services as recommended by IFLA/UNESCO, is adhered to. The recommendation cuts across staff, nature of collection, services, structure, equipment's, policy and management.
- The library must as a matter of policy periodically re-assess the information needs of their community. This is even more imperative now that the users have developed sophisticated needs which are constantly changing.
- The State and Local Governments must be committed towards public library development. Adequate and timely release of funds is essential and necessary for the libraries to be comfortable in discharging their responsibilities to the society. Adequate budgetary allocation is needed to stock library building with current and relevant materials and for staff capacity building.
- The Library Management should develop a good public relation and advocacy programmes in order to boost positive image of the library and to attract funds from sources other than government.
- The Library Management should see lobbying and pressurizing as vital tools of attracting more funds into the library.

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