Enhancing awareness & use of e-resources in academic libraries: Some initiatives at Punjab Agricultural University Library

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Abstract

With the rapid advancement of information and communication technologies libraries are undergoing transformation. The paradigm shift from stand- alone libraries to library and information networks provide seamless access to internet based services. E-resources have emerged as global information highways and are being added to library. These are becoming important because of its fast searching and anytime, anywhere availability even at remote place. Keeping user informed about newly added resources or services result in effective use of the same which is the main goal of any library. This article discusses about various e-resources available in PAU library and policies & programmes adopted for their promotion and effective use.

Keywords: User Education, E-literacy, E-services and User Education, ICT Services.

Introduction

Libraries are service oriented institutions. The main aim is to motivate the user for efficient use of the resources and services. The right information to the right reader at right time is the key to satisfy user. Information is now seen as a product which should be supplied to the desired user with refinement. Libraries like a marketing organization can use their tools to attract the users to utilize their products and services. In library user always come first. User's satisfaction is the most important consideration for the library. So establishing a viable contact between user and library facilities is most important in order to make effective use of library resources. Libraries of today's have modernized structures be it documents, services etc. Developments in computer and communication technologies have radically changed the library and information environment. Gone are the days of stand-alone libraries in which a library was judged less by the quality of its resources and services than by the no. of documents it had. The paradigm shift from stand-alone libraries to library and information networks can provide end-user with a seamless connection to internet based services. Multimedia and internet has further made the job of library and information professional more challenging. The web has brought to the desktop not only the metadata sources like bibliographic databases and table of contents but also full text databases, preprints, online first etc. Libraries are providing access to wide variety of electronic documents like e-journals, e-books, digital repositories, online databases etc. Today we are being challenged by the notion of "Digital Libraries". Dr. Ranganathan's fifth law states that "Library is a growing organism", it has shown its relevance throughout ages. Library and its user's needs all are dynamic and transform with changes in the world. User today need to be aware of the library resources. The basic challenge is to convert traditional users into users of internet based resources and services. Now it has become necessary to develop information technology related competencies among end-users so that user is capable of locating, retrieving and using the information at its own.

User Education & Training

Meaning: User education is a broader term which may cover orientation and bibliographic instructions. Mews (1972) defined "user education as instructions given to help users to make best use of the library". According to Ejallbrant and Malley (1984) "User education is concerned with the whole information and communication process and one part of this involves the total interaction of the user with the library. This should be a continuous process starting with school and public libraries with possibility of extension into academic and specialized libraries". It includes various programs of instruction, education and exploration provided by libraries to users to enable them to make more effective, efficient and independent use of information sources and services to which these libraries provide access." ALA glossary of Library and information science defines user education as "The term which encompasses all type of activities designed to teach user about library services, facilities and organization, library resources and search strategy". It includes instruction in the use of one or more reference sources as a part of reference transactions, library use presentation and bibliographic instructions. But in networked environment user education programme go a step further. It refers to programme specially designed to teach a group of users the skills needed to use e-resources/Services. There can be two aspects one is handling a variety of retrieval software/hardware and second is the formulation of search strategy for retrieval of desired information. In other words it is the programme which embraces the user with skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze and use the information. It aims at developing competencies that

empowers one with the required knowledge about information, its nature and available formats etc. needed for work, study and research.

Need: Following factors necessitated for user education in the networked environment:

- Paradigm shift from Print to electronic resources,
- Information in variety media formats
- Changed user behavior and perception
- Changing education pattern
- Library innovative services
- Library publicity
- Improving the image of library

Librarian's role in networked information environment

Libraries being service institutions, believe in building public relation. The objective is to ensure that user must know everything about what all it possesses & what services it provides to accomplish the mission of organization. Today's librarians should not only limit themselves to traditional library services based on print and AV resources but expand their horizon to manage, retrieve , analyze and serve the networked information to the consumers in an information driven society. Librarians are asked to assist and train users to locate, evaluate and use information effectively as information navigators rather than bibliographic instructors. They should not only act as the intermediaries but further partners with teachers to educate the users. They must enhance themselves to understand and manage the complexities of networked information. They should publicize their library resources and services added from time to time through various communication channels inside & outside the library.

PAU Library & User education

Infrastructure facilities: PAU library is well equipped with latest state of the art infrastructure facilities. It has Digital Library providing access under client server environment. It has

- Internet server: It provides access to internet based services like email, online databases, e-journals, e-books, etc.
- LIBSYS server: Linux based LIBSYS server which houses the bibliographic data of all library documents, membership details, provide access to books, journals, theses, conference proceedings etc.
- Tulsient CDROM hybrid server: This server is installed to provide access CDROM databases.
- Internet connectivity: Lease line connection with speed 20 Mbps
- It has well around 18 desktop clients for providing various electronic services with strong backup facilities. Two flatbed scanners are available for digitization and related work. Apart from digital library, 14 thin clients are provided in the reading hall to have access to various e-resources and services. Reading halls of the library are Wi-Fi

enabled so that readers can use internet facilities and other services of the library through their laptops.

E-resources and services at PAU library: PAU has automated its library operations like cataloguing services, circulation services etc. using LIBSYS software. Access to most of the e-resources is IP based, available at library page, accessible at www.pau.edu under the head Library. Information about the library and its resources is available just by the click of button. It provide following services

- OPAC and webopac (Online public access catalogue)
- CeRA: Consortia based access to full text journals
- Krishiprabha: Digital repository of theses and provide full text access to Doctoral dissertations and theses submitted to all SAU, ICAR institutes.
- Jgate: Database of journal article ,providing access to millions of journal articles
- CDROM search Service: PAU library started providing CDROM search facility to its user in early nineties. It subscribed to various databases like CAB, Biotechnology abstract, FSTA, AGRICOLA, AGRIS etc. It is very useful search facility for the researcher engaged in the field of agriculture.
- Online database Indiastat.com: Provide statistical data even at the block level covering agriculture and allied area.
- E-books, E-journals, E-standards: PAU library has added e-books, e-journals and standards to its collection. Link has been provided to access to them.

Programs and policies for User education: The main barrier in effective utilization of library resources is lack of awareness. The concept is that user must be made aware about the different format in which the information is available. Awareness about the various resources and services is done through

- Library webpage: Build a transparent library web page where navigation to help tools is easy and direct. Webpage of the PAU library is well designed and easy to understand. Links to the various resources are provided under the appropriate headings. Information related to various library resources is updated regularly.
- Use of Internet: E-announcements in the form of global emails, e-notice is the integral part of publicity. E-mails are sent to the users to keep them aware of added e-resources (eJournals, eBooks etc.) and facilities.
- Seminars: Seminars are being organized on e-resources for users informing them about their availability as well as accessibility.
- Publisher's presentation: Demonstrations of e-resources like on e-books and e- journals from various publishers like T &F, Wiley, CABI, SWETS etc. are beneficial for faculty as well as students. Publisher presentations are organized on regular basis for awareness and use.

- Following methods on the part of library staff further strengthen user education
- Presentation by library staff: Periodic presentations on how to retrieve relevant information from e-resources is organized. This helps the user to know about existing e-resources for their better and effective utilization.
- Hands on training: Librarian must ensure that their users should be technology equipped to use the resources. Training and practice sessions are helping the user in this regard.
- User Manual/Instructions: Database specific user instruction guides have been prepared to use the available resources optimally.
- Alerting service: User can be educated to subscribe to contents alert of e-journals provided free by the publishers so that when a new content appears for their journal of choice, they can go through it. All PG and In-service PhD students are taught as how to create alert for journals of their interest through CeRA.
- Help-line: Putting phone numbers and an email link on library' web page to receive e-mail questions is also option available.
- Technical writing course (PGS 501): Fox (1997) emphasized on role of librarian in assisting users to find information is evolving since collection becomes less important and services including teaching gain significance. Libraries have started giving regular user education courses to PG and UG students in order to make them self-reliant in getting the required information from various sources as well as making effective use of services. IARI library, New Delhi offers one credit compulsory user education course. Stewart (1995) pointed out that National Agricultural Library (NAL) USA conducts user education programme with purpose to enable users to become independent and successful. Credit course for one semester in Technical writing (PGS 501) is offered in PAU & is mandatory for all post graduates and those pursuing PhD. in any discipline. All have to pass this course for successful award of their degree. This course is so designed so all students learn about report writing and various library resources, procedures & services. Teacher librarian interacts with students and they got a chance to have hands on experience during their practical hours and assignments. In this way it is one of the best suggested methods in user education programme.
- Library orientation program: Library orientation program is organized regularly at the start of semester for the fresh students. In this program they get familiar with various procedures, resources and overall functioning of the library. Through this program library staff motivate them to become regular users of the library.

- User education for teachers: New pedagogic methods, new technologies and extended study programmes necessitate the further development of user education. Ideally teachers ought to be much proficient in information retrieval and library orientation than their students, so that they can actively use the library as a resource in their teaching. The fundamental role of teacher librarian and teacher in their cooperative planning and teaching partnership is to work more as information facilitators to effectively identify and facilitate student's requirements at their point of need. It is therefore essential that teachers become effective information users, defining topics and tasks, and manipulating and interpreting information to satisfy their own information needs before they effectively assist their students. Therefore the role of teacher librarian as information skill specialist, to equip their teaching colleagues with repertoire of information skills and strategies to provide their students with the guidance and counseling is of utmost importance. Keeping this in view all faculty members from PAU were invited for this programme. The motive was to make them aware about latest services and e-resources added to the library and how to make effective use of it. If one teacher learns, he further can teach the other teaching fellows about the services and facilities so chain can form resulting in optimal use of resources thus fulfilling the aim of library.

Conclusion

The librarians have to be fully geared to discharge their role, not only as gatekeeper of knowledge, but as manager of it. Electronic resources provide unprecedented opportunities to expand the scope of information available to users. The awareness and education of user to effectively access e-resources is very vital and needs considerable attention. Promotion of e-resources aiming to provide optimal awareness among the users and the necessary training to facilitate retrieval of required information can be considered as one of the critical factors for success of library services. It is strongly felt that user education should be the compulsory part of the curriculum and teacher librarian in collaboration with other teaching faculty through their cooperative planning and teaching partnership can effectively identify and facilitate student's requirements. So libraries should have full-fledged promotional plans to make users informed about various resources followed by effective user education to facilitate the access.

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