

INFORMATION LITERACY INITIATIVES FOR INVITING MASSES TOWARDS THE USE OF E-RESOURCES IN THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN ASSAM

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Abstract:

This paper intends to provide an overall idea regarding Information Literacy Programme conducted and can be conducted by the public libraries in Assam to promote the use of e-resources by the masses. The paper identifies certain possibilities to make awareness programme by the public libraries as well as identifies some agencies that can carry out different Information Literacy programme at different levels, which may enhance the Information Literacy competency of the library users and thus to encourage the use of e-resources. It has given an idea regarding the status of the e-resources available in the public libraries in Assam i.e. collection of e-resources, access to e-resources and the present status of the digitization of rare and copyright free documents available in the public libraries in Assam is being done in collaboration with C-DAC, Kolkata under the project

‘Digital Library for North Eastern States’. The paper also includes a brief concept of the background of the development of the public libraries in Assam since 1903, when a public library was established at shillong by the British Rules to cater the needs of the officials of the Government and the inhabitant of the then capital town of Assam. It emphasizes on the development of the skills of the staffs of the public libraries. This paper tries to influence the authority of the public libraries in Assam to make a visionary plane for Information Literacy Programme for which the recommendations of this paper may be adopted.

Keywords: *Information Literacy Initiative, Information Literacy Programme, ILI, ILP, e-resources, Digital library, Digitization, Public Library, Assam*

Introduction:

Public Library is a people’s university, a significant social institution that is utilized to serve the entire community without any discrimination of caste, creed, sex and status. A well organized and well functioned public library is a prime need for social, political, cultural, economic, scientific and technological development of any country. Therefore, to make the library effective and functional it need to control over the collections and their management, provide easy access to information and the documents. The library

and information professionals need to deal with information available both in traditional printed resources and resources available in digital media. Eventually the digital resources have become the most usable resources today. Application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has made it easy to control over the collections (printed as well as digital) and their management. It does not only facilitate easy and remote access to information and documents but also share the same resource among multiple users at a time. Application of ICT has changed the total scenario of the library services. It got the huge potentiality of expanding a wide range of innovative quality services to be rendered towards user community. However, to avail these services the users need some knowledge how to search, access and get the resources in e-environment. At this juncture the library authority and professionals has some responsibility to initiate certain steps in order to make the users aware how to access and use the e-resources and to avail the services of digital library efficiently, which may be fall under Information Literacy Programme (ILP).

Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of the study are -

- i. To assess the present status of the development of digital library in the public libraries in Assam.

- ii. To find out certain Information Literacy Programme that can be initiated in the public libraries in Assam particularly for the proper use of digital resources.
- iii. To analyze the information literacy Programme currently being initiated by the public library authority in Assam.
- iv. To highlight the prospects of Digital Library in public libraries in Assam.
- v. To suggest some ways and means for Information Literacy Programme, and to identify some agency who can initiate it.

Methodology of the Study:

This study is based on conceptual analysis from standard books and papers, dissertations as well as descriptive analysis of the current information obtained from interview, personal visits and office records of the Directorate of Library Services, Assam. Current information is generated on the basis of personal interviews and interactions made with Director, Library Services, Assam and the library incharge of the digital library section.

A short interview is also taken from about 42 users regarding their awareness of availability of the digitized resources and their uses in the district library, Kamrup (Metro) and Reference Library, Directorate of Library Services, Assam. The collected data are presented and interpreted in the form of table and tried to find out some inferences. The

possible suggestions are forwarded which can be followed by the Public Library authority in Assam.

Public Library Services in Assam:

The concept of public library in modern period in Assam has started in 1903, when a public library was established at Shillong by the British Rules to provide library services to the officials of the Government and the inhabitants of the then capital town of Assam. Seven District Libraries in seven plain district headquarters of Assam, i.e. Dhuburi, Dibrugarh, Guwahati, Jorhat, Nagaon, Silchar and Tezpur were established in order to establish a public library services throughout the state. After independence the National Government of India after assuming power in the centre decided to spend a good amount for the improvement of Library Services in the country. In Assam also the Public Library Services was first organised in 1954 under the educational development scheme – “Improvement of Library Services” sponsored by the Government of India during the 1st Five Year Plan (1952 – 1957).

In 1965, the Public Library of Shillong, Government of Assam was amalgamated with the newly established State Central Library. During 1967 – 68, five District Libraries in five hill districts were established at Aijawal, Diphu, Halflong, Jowai and Tura. However, except Halflong and Diphu, the other three District Libraries are no

longer in Assam after creation of Maghalaya and Mizoram. During this period five Sub-divisional Libraries were also established to extend the library services at sub-divisional level. Some Deposit Centres were established in some villages to extend the public library services to the rural areas. Books of these deposit centres were replaced at regular interval through three Book Mobile Vans. But, these deposit centres and Book Mobile Vans were not last long. However, in response to the increasing demand from public five more Sub-divisional Libraries were established during 1969-70.

The State Central Library established at Shillong was shifted to Guwahati consequent upon the shifting of the capital of Assam from Shillong in the year 1973 and was accommodated in the District Library building at Guwahati. A Research and Reference Section had set up at the State Central Library in 1975 for providing facilities to the research scholars as well as other readers. A Branch Library had also been set up at Dispur in 1976 to meet the reading inhabitants of the capital complex and its adjoining areas.

In 1984, the Government of Assam has upgraded the State Central Library to the Directorate of Library Services considering the increased workload and expansion programme. At present 23 District Libraries, 14 Sub-divisional Libraries, 204 Rural Libraries and 4 Branch Libraries are functioning under the Directorate of Library Services, Assam. Among the 4 Branch Libraries, one full fledged Children Library at Bishnu Nirmala Bhawan was set up in 1987 to cater the need of the children of the Guwahati city, a Reading Hall at

Karmabir Nabin Chandra Bordoloi Hall at Guwahati was established in 1991, one Reference Library i.e. attached to the District Library, Guwahati and the Branch Library at Dispur are now functioning under the Directorate of Library services, Assam. Now the Directorate of Library services is functioning under the Cultural Affairs Department, Government of Assam.

Digital Library Project for Public Libraries in Assam:

The Digital Library Project in Assam was introduced in April 2012 under the ‘Digital Library for North Eastern States, Assam Part’, which is a part of the Project i.e. Digital Library of India. The project is executed by the Directorate of Public Library Services in Assam in collaboration with Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Kolkata, Govt. of India under the project funded by DeitY, Govt. of India. Under this project the rare and copyright free documents available in the public libraries in Assam are digitized, organized and make available for browsing and access full text of these documents. The documents include Rare and copy right free books, Journals, Magazine, Proceeding, Gazetteers, and Bibliography. The digitized documents are organized and make available through an inhouse software developed by the C-DAC, Kolkata for this purpose. The resources so far digitized are also stored in 64 numbers of DVD. The books digitized cover generally those which are published in or before 1930.

Table 4.1: The Type wise summary of the collection Digitized

Sl. No.	Types of Documents	Numbers of Documents
1	Rare & Copyright Free Books	3453
2	Journals	16
3	Magazines	9
4	Proceedings	4
5	Gazetteers	18
6	Bibliography	9
Total		3,509

The table 4.1 shows the number of documents of various types digitized. From the personal observation it is found that these documents include some very rare and precious books, the first copy of some journals and magazines pre independent India as well as four significant proceedings. It also includes some gazetteers of British Rule.

Table 4.2: The Language wise summary of the Books Digitized

Sl. No.	Language	Numbers of Documents	Numbers of Pages
1	Assamese	2148	517609
2	Bengali	93	35206
3	English	1135	537964
4	French	8	4389
5	Hindi	15	8890
6	Italian	2	1064
7	Manipuri	2	72
8	Mongolian	2	352
9	Sanskrit	37	19433
10	Tibetan	10	2622
11	Others	1	528
Total		3,453	11,28,129

The table 4.2 shows that the rare and copy right free books of almost eleven languages are digitized. In addition to the principal language of Assam i.e. Assamese and the most popular language of the world i.e. English, there are some books on foreign languages such as French, Tibetan, Mongolian and Italian.

Presently these digitized resources are available in a LAN (Local Area Network) environment in the District Library of Kamrup (Metro), Guwahati and Reference Library of Directorate of Library Service. The Director of Library Service as well as the technical person from C-DAC, Kolkata reported that in the recent future the whole collection will be up loaded in the web.

Information Literacy Programme:

Paul G. Zurkowski (1974. p.6) first used the term information literacy to describe *“the techniques and skills necessary to be able to utilize a wide range of information tools as well as primary sources, and to measure information value, to mold information to needs and to create solutions to problems”*. Since Zurkowski’s coining of the concept of IL, a wide range of definitions of IL have been forwarded by the researchers around the world to explore and expand the concept. *IL is a tool that facilitates lifelong learning. It is a set of abilities requiring individuals to “recognize when information is needed and have ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information”* (American Library Association, 1989). Information literacy is one basic existence skill, which forms the basis of lifelong learning (Abid, 2008). By going through various definitions we are in a position to understand that the purpose of IL is to achieve competencies i.e. knowledge, skills and attitudes in computing and communicating that

would enable after identifying and recognizing the information needs to locate, select, retrieve, organize, evaluate, produce, share and disseminate information in an efficient and effective way.

In this study an interview of about 42 users found in the District library and Reference Library was taken. The result of the interview is presented in the table 5.

Table 5: The responses to some Questions asked to the users

Sl No.	Questions	Positive Response in Nos.	Positive Response in %age
1	Do you have experience of using Internet ?	32	76%
2	Do you have experience of using e-resources?	29	69%
3	Do you feel comfort in the use of e-resources?	18	43%
4	Do you have e-mail account ?	32	76%
5	Do you aware about the availability of digitized resources in this library ?	20	48%
6	Have you used the digital resources available in this library ?	7	17%

From the above table 5 it is found that only 48% users of the library are aware about the availability of the digitized resources in the library, and only 17% users use these resources, though 69% of the users have experience of using e-resources and 76% have experience of using Internet. This result indicates that there is a need to conduct Information

Literacy Programme, which should include some awareness programme too. However, it is a matter of concern that no such Information Literacy (IL) programme has been conducted by the Directorate of Library Service. Only a news was published regarding inauguration of the digital library and availability of e-resources in the District library and the reference library, Directorate of Library Service, Assam. The professional staff of the district library, Kamrup (Metro) and the Reference Library of Directorate of Library Service, Assam have learnt how to search and access the e-resources from the Digital Library database of the Public Library, Assam. It is found that there is no IL initiative so far been taken by the public library authority to promote the use of e-resources available with them.

In cash of Public Libraries there may be two categories of IL initiatives. Some are for awareness and the others are for inculcating IL competency. At this juncture the District Library authority and Reference Library authority may take some initiatives as a part of IL Programme. In addition the library associations like Assam Library Association, Assam College Librarians’ Association, Nabin Bordoloi Hall Readers’ Society, Public Library Service Association also may take some responsibility in this regard under their activities of Social responsibility.

Suggestions:

Awareness programme:

As an initiative of awareness of the users of the public library the following may be considered

- i. Notification regarding availability of e-resources and how to use in the form of flow chart along with attractive picture should be displayed in a prominent size Hording at the entrance of the library.
- ii. Banners and posters should be displayed at different public place, public vehicles like city bus, auto rickshaw, at the road side, etc.
- iii. The members of the library associations may write article on the Digital Library Project on Public Library in Assam and may publish the same in Newspapers, and local magazines.
- iv. Leaflet may be published and distributed among the users and the peoples in the society

Information Literacy competency programme:

- i. Proper guide line and step wise instructions regarding how to search, browse and access the e-resources should be displayed in front of each computer terminal.

- ii. User manual should be prepared and distributed among the users as handout.
- iii. The library Association may organize symposium or workshop on the use of e resources in public libraries in collaboration with Directorate of Library Service, Assam or other organizations. In this regard the C-DAC, Kolkata may also be involved.
- iv. Hands on practice session may also be organized for the regular visitors of the District Library, Kamrup(Metro), and Reference Library.
- v. Priorities should be given to inculcate positive attitude in the minds of existing library staffs towards service of digital library and the use of e-resources. The staff should be motivated for assisting the users in anticipation.

Conclusion:

The public libraries, the gateway of knowledge, are a prerequisite for life long learning, independent decision making and cultural development for individuals as well as groups of citizens. Tomorrow's public library system will provide the framework for an information rich society. The public library will be the centre of integrated sources providing its users with the means of identifying, selecting and finding their right information. The days have come to take the responsibility by the public library to provide door to door

information with the use of Information and Communication Technology. The local library associations also should collaborate to the public library authority in this regard. If the peoples of the society do not aware about the availability of the digitized resources and could not use these resources available in the digital library then the soul objective of the digital library project will be failed. Thus it is the responsibility of the public library authority to make their users information literate by initiating all possible steps.

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