User Education in Academic Libraries: An Overview

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to provide better library services, but there is also a need to educate the users about the proper use of these library services. This paper explains the role of library professionals in creating awareness among the users and guiding them in finding the required information from the library through user education. In the present paper an attempt has been made to describe the concept and overview on user education programs, under which their needs, uses of information technology and multimedia program have been discussed. It highlights components, aims, prerequisites, methods, needs, benefits, problems and barriers to conducting user education programs in academic libraries. It is concluded from the presented paper that the benefits of library resources and services can be extended to the users through user education program.

Keywords

User study; Orientation; Resources; Lectures; Demonstration; Seminar; Audio-visual; Multimedia

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1. INTRODUCTION

ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science (2013) defines "user education as encompassing all relevant activities designed to teach the users about library services, facilities, organization, library resources and search strategy. This includes instruction in the use of one or more reference sources as part of a reference transaction, library use presentation, and bibliographic instruction."

Fleming (1990) defines "user education is in the form of various programs of instruction, learning and exploration that are provided by libraries to users to enable them to make more effective, efficient and independent use of the information sources and services to which these libraries provide access."

Fjallbrant and Malley (1984) defines "user education is concerned with the entire information and communication process and one part of it involves the overall interaction of the user with the library. It should be a continuous process, starting with school and public libraries, with the possibility of extension into educational and specialized libraries."

Mews (1972) defines "user education is in the form of library instructions provided to help the users to make the best use of the library."

The term user education, user orientation, user assistance, user instruction is deemed synonyms. User education in the library is a continuous process of educating the user to make the best/ most effective use of library resources, library activities, reading materials and its services to the maximum extent possible. To acquire library use skills, users should be given user education. It means educating or help the users make the best use of the library. The right information to the right user can provide new directions in research and development. Educating the users will enable them to use the libraries more effectively in education, research and in development for the rest of their lives.

The main objective/ motto of user education is to train the users' mind for the best library use. But this user education training will remain incomplete, if the users do not know how to get the required/ necessary information from the library, how to use it and where to find it. Users are to be made aware of the latest technology and its resources available in the library. Users require specific help in gathering information, necessary sources and techniques. Users should also be aware of the manpower available in the library.

Here, the role of library professionals is to locate the required information, create awareness among the users and guiding them in finding the required information from the library through proper user education programs. A librarian provides appropriate library advices to their users about the proper uses of the available facilities, resources and services. The ultimate aim of user education is to provide better services in the library, but in this regard, the user needs to be educated about the proper use of the services being provided by the respective library. A study that focuses directly or indirectly on the users of a library to understand their information needs, usage behavior and use patterns is commonly known to as user study or user education.

User education program has mainly four (04) major goals:

a) learning power of the users;
b) encourage users' independence;
c) maximize the optimum use of library resources; and
d) familiarizing library staff with their users.

2. COMPONENTS OF USER EDUCATION

User education program in the library should run as a continuous process. Its main purpose is to help the users make the best use of the library's available facilities, resources and services. User education program is presently in the academic library with two major components, namely:

a). Library Orientation; and
b). Library Instruction

In order to make the library orientation and instruction components of user education program successful, they should be organized promptly for the users at various levels and continuously monitored and evaluated. Specifically, user education program in this category is considered as high-level instructional programs in the library, while orientation and other instructional training courses are the initiation types of freshman guidance techniques.

Library orientation and other instructional training courses combined as necessary meets to the needs/ requirements of the library users. Planning of user education program is very important in every academic library.

a) Library Orientation

Library orientation means introducing or getting adjusted the new users with the library. Orientation is concerned with enabling the users to get acquainted with the services available in the library, which will help the users know about the library's general use. Library orientation programs include educating or instructing the new users in topics such as introducing to the libraries, its techniques, uses of its information sources and services. Creating awareness among the new users about the information resources and services or making them aware of various organizational tools available in the library.

b) Library Instruction

Library instruction is primarily concerned with enabling the users to obtain the required information by making full use of the information resources and services available in the library and it is also concerned with solving the problems of information retrieval of the users for a specific purpose. Users are examined whether they have assimilated the library instruction properly. Users in the library should be asked to locate, search for any particular relevant information and also be engaged in other information search tests. It also instructs the users how to index bibliographic tools, abstracts and other library reference materials. This method provides direct instruction to its users to find information resources in their area. Provides specific instructions on using and understanding specific information systems, information sources and tools available in the library.

3. OBJECTIVES OF USER EDUCATION

User education or user study is mainly meant for the assessment of the actual needs of the users in the library and it is also helpful in improving the working knowledge of the library staff. Through user education programs, library staff can provide better services to the users without wasting time in checking the information needs of the users from the resources available in the library. Its main objective is to motivate its users to use the library resources and its services efficiently and effectively. The key to the success of user education program in every library is providing the right information to the right user at the right time. User education program is to teach the reading habits and develop the library understanding amongst the users.

The major aims and objectives of user education in academic libraries are as follows:

i) To provide general orientation about the facilities and resources available;
ii) To promote reading habits;
iii) To identify the levels and kinds of user needs;
iv) To design and develop need-based and user-oriented information systems;
v) To provide teaching of basic research skills and strategies;
vi) To provide teaching of basic reference tools in each discipline as well as the organization of literature in various disciplines;
vii) To provide services to the users for better handling of information products such as printed forms materials and electronic forms;
viii) To provide services to the users to access the information resources and services available in the library through online, internet, and in-house databases etc.;
ix) To contribute to the achievement of the goals of the organization by obtaining necessary print and non-print materials to meet the current and future information needs of the users;
x) To register and store the resources available in the library in such a way as it allows its users to make active use of the resources;
xi) To customize information resources and services of the library to its users as per the needs of the concerned organization; and
xii) To contribute to integrating national and international information resources and services in the library for its users.

4. PRE-REQUISITES OF USER EDUCATION

Every academic institution needs to train its users to make regular and rational use of its library's information resources and services. User education is as essential a part of every library as general education in every academic institution. The ability and skills to use the library provided by the institution are meant to meet users' needs beyond formal education.

Therefore, there are some pre-requisites for introducing a user education program in any academic institution, which are as follows:

i) Basic library skill or library briefing;
ii) Subject/course-related orientation instructions;
iii) Faculty involvement;
iv) Active participation of the users;
v) Online databases searching skills;
vi) Technological advances; and
vii) Web-based instructions

5. NEED OF USER EDUCATION

User education is essential for making the best use of the library collection and its services. So that, the needs and demands of the users can be easily met by the library. Following are the main reasons for the need of user education in the library:

a) **Literature explosion:** Day-by-day new research works are being done on different subjects in the field of information and knowledge, due to which the situation of literature explosion has arisen due to the publication of excessive literature. As a result, the library collection is also increasing with the explosion of literature. That's why user education is needed in the library.

b) **Implementation of five principles of library science:** Father of library science, Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, have been propounded by five principles of library science, which are as follows, Books are for use, every user should get a book, every book should get a user, time of the users should be saved and the library should be a growing organism. User education is useful for implementing these five principles in the library.

c) **Increase in the number of users in libraries:** Over the years, while on one hand there has been an increase in the readership, on the other hand there has been a decrease in the number of staff in the library. As a result, the library users' problems are not being solved at the speed at which it should be done. So, user education is very important in the libraries.

d) **Limited finance:** Presently, every library is passing through a crisis of financial limitation. As a result, there is a continuous decrease in the number of staff in the libraries. Due to this we are not able to provide as much help to the users in the library as they should be provided. Therefore, there is a need for user education so that users can find their study materials in the library independently.

e) **Changes in teaching method to meet the information demand:** With the changing times, there has been a lot of changes in the teaching method such as the preparation of notes, research projects, dissertations, presenting seminars, etc. due to which the use of library has increased to a great extent. Therefore, user education is necessary to meet the information demand of the users.

f) **Use of ICT technology in libraries:** With the emergence of ICT, libraries are using latest technology for classification, cataloguing, collection of e-resources and administration services etc., which are essential for the understanding of the users. That's why user education is needed in the library.

g) **Collection and use of e-resources in the libraries:** Modern libraries constantly add e-resources to their collection, but most users are unfamiliar with them. Which is a problematic task for the users and the staff. That's why there is a need for user education to understand the e-resources in the library.

6. METHODS OF USER EDUCATION

Educating a user is very important and necessary in every library for smooth functioning of any new or complex system. A modern academic library is such a system that demands proper and suitable user education.

The following techniques can be used for conducting user education program in any academic libraries:

a) The lecture method;
b) Seminars, tutorials and demonstrations;
c) The guided tour;
d) Audio-visual methods;
e) Programmed instruction; and
f) Personalized instruction at the reference desk

No one method for providing user education will fit for all situations. However, selecting and applying a particular method depends on the program's objectives. Methods may be broadly appropriate for both individual instruction and program objectives. The choice of methods depends on the subject and the learning status of the users.

a). The lecture method: Lecture method are one of the most common methods of instruction. The orientation lecture method introduces the freshers' users to the library. These methods are used in a library for a large user group to provide user education. The lecture method to teach user orientation-uses uses auditory and visual sensory inputs such as a black-board or overhead projector. The great disadvantages in this method are that the recipient cannot control the speed of delivery of the information and retrieval is impossible without the provision of printed handouts of such a lecture. However, lecture methods provide the users an opportunity to interact personally with them and thus can also get some feedback from the users. Thus, the lecture orientation method may be suitable for the users to provide a general information retrieval introduction.

b). Seminar, tutorials and demonstration: Library professionals organize these methods of conducting user education program for proper guidance of its users towards using the library. These methods provide an opportunity for active participation in the learning process under the guidance of the librarian through greater interaction between the teaching staff and the users. These teaching methods in a library can be a good way to use information retrieval for its users.

c). The guided tour: This method is one of the commonly adopted traditional methods of user education for, orienting the new users towards the library. This method of user education provides physical and mental guidance to its user by the library staff. This type of library orientation makes heavy demands on library staff's time. Proper guidance of the users in exploiting library resources and its services is an essential part of the information function of the user education program. Library guides well brought out guides giving organization, resources and services as also the rules for the use of library from the users' point of view.

d). Audio-visual methods: In this method, we can create a film of the different sections of the library along with audio instructions. They can be used for providing the real education, even to uninitiated users. Instructions through audio-visual methods, particularly to supplement the library's orientation lectures and short-term training courses. All the methods we used until now were being used in isolation, but if we combine them, then it becomes this. This method helps to make user education more effective and conceptual. It helps to know accurate concepts.

e). Programmed instruction: These methods are performed through the use of various sources of media instructions such as printed books, automatic projection of slides, or computer aided instruction. However, these methods are generalized ones. Sometimes individual instructions are also needed as well.

f). Personalized instruction at the reference desk: The best method of library instructions can be provided to the users by providing personalized service at the reference desk. The users are actively involved in this library learning process and are also interested in receiving instruction from a professional staff. The difficulty associated with this type of personalized instruction method of user education is that it may provide immediate relief to its users. Still, it may not necessarily provide the user with the understanding and background knowledge to deal with all similar situations that may arise.

7. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND USER EDUCATION

Now-a-days, Computers are increasingly being used for information-related activities. With the development of today's information society, computer/ information technology has become an important tool in information retrieval. Currently in the age of IT, many e-journals, e-books and e-databases etc. are made available in the library for the higher study purpose of the users. ICT refers to the application of computers and other technologies in library practices to provide various services to its users, such as accessing to OPAC, keeping the library databases up-to-date, automated circulation of library materials, automating the operation of library resources, etc. ICT services enables libraries to provide remote access to their online resources, making it easier to access library information for users from anywhere.

In this era of information technology, it has become necessary to changes in the user education program. It is essential to conduct information technology education for the library user. Many organizations produce databases and computer-based stored information files. The proper use of this method depends on the education of the users and also on the availability information retrieval and proper functioning of the library. There is a growing need for support in the form of training for effectively exploiting online resources and imparting necessary skills to the users. Using these databases and online retrieval one needs good training. The training may be formal where searches have gone through organized training sessions, such as workshops, seminars, training sessions, and courses in library schools. It may be informal where one learns using manual or programmed instruction. In a networked environment, paradigm shifts from print media to electronic resources.

Librarians must prepare to understand and manage library networked information services complexities and present it to the user. They should publicize basic information related to the library resources and its services through various media communication channels that may be added occasionally. Librarians are called upon to assist and train the users in locating, evaluating and effectively using information navigators rather than as bibliographic instructors. ICT allows academic libraries for their users to deliver information literacy instruction effectively.

8. MULTIMEDIA AND USER EDUCATION

Multimedia integrates text, audio, video, graphic, images and animation film. A wide array media is being used to communicate, including spoken language, gestures and images. Here, the availability of multimedia output would be a valuable feature in the libraries for several key applications such as analysis of information retrieval, training, decision support etc., and now-a-days it is being used for developing various user education programs. Multimedia provides maximum interactive programs. Hence, it is quite easy for the users to understand and implement it for optimum utilization of library resources.

Multimedia-based user education program will educate or instruct the users more efficiently and effectively about the library information, library techniques, library resources and different types of services provided by the library. Multimedia helps the users in the library to access information from various media sources in one platform.

The multimedia package is one of the most effective tools in library user education, which helps the user not only know about the library activities but also helps identify the staff and consult them. They are easier to handle and efficient in the learning process as it involves user interaction, facilitating effective transmission of learning experiences to teachers and students. There are several multimedia applications

like CD-ROMs that cover a wide range of information that can be used to serve as user guides, giving dramatic presentations and other references that can be used to initiate the user.

An ideal multimedia-based user education program:

i) Facilitates in self-learning to the users without intervention from professional staff of the library;
ii) Program is interactive; hence the user can choose his own way of navigating through this program, i.e., to start anywhere; and to end anywhere;
iii) Users can refer to this user education whenever required for ready-to-use at any point of time; and
iv) Also, it helps to provide better visualization service for easy understanding by using animation, images, sound and video.

9. BENEFITS OF USER EDUCATION

The following are the major benefits for conducting of user education program in academic libraries:

i) Helping the users to keep updated information related to the library;
ii) Helpful in facilitating the use of library collection and its various services;
iii) Helpful to enable the users to get the desired information as per their requirements;
iv) Helpful to the libraries to understand and meet the needs of the users;
v) Helpful in evidence-based decision-making;
vi) Helpful in fulfilling al the five principles of the library;
vii) Helpful in saving valuable time of the users;
viii) Helpful in solving the library related problems of the users; and
ix) Helpful in achieving the major goals of the university.

10. BARRIERS OF USER EDUCATION

The following are the major barriers in the effective conduct of user education programs in any academic libraries:

i) Shortage of professional staff in the library to handle large number of users for conducting user education program;
ii) Insufficient time allocation for the user education program;
iii) Lack of support/cooperation between the library staff and the faculty for conducting user education;
iv) Prohibition of the library professionals to provide user education;
v) Lack of proper co-operation and co-ordination at various levels from supporting staff of the library;
vi) Lack of a library-oriented education system to provide user education; and
vii) Lack of mindset of library professionals towards providing user education.

11. CONCLUSION

The main objective of every library is to make effective and efficient use of the collection of library resources and its services for its users. In this context, user education is very important because information about the available resources and services is provided to the users. To accomplish this, the users must be educated/ aware of the use of the library. Thus, the main objective of user education is to educate the users or help them to make the best use of the library. Every library should adopt user education.

User education is becoming more relevant day by day, especially in the present context when new sources of information are being created. Now-a-days a library user wants more and more information and that too in a matter of within seconds, so he has to be educated not only about the use of different sources of information but also about the various complexities involved. Suppose the user education program in a library is not properly organized. In that case, the library is not likely to achieve its objective of helping its users become efficient and competent in using the library.

The success of the library's user education program in will depend on properly planning the respective users' psychological knowledge and the librarian's proper reference instructions. Proper user education helps the library users save their precious time; the users can utilize the saved time for their other intellectual activities.

In this scenario, library has to be made more and more user-friendly and the staff should always be ready to help, not only when they are providing the orientation and education, and only then will the

purpose of conducting user study be completed. Finally, each librarian must work together with efficient strategies to ensure an efficient user education program in the library.

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