



Roles of libraries in information literacy of rural communities: An overview

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Abstract

Information literacy plays a very important role in this era of information explosion, where most people are exposed to unlimited and borderless information. This paper discusses that rural residents must be information literate to be lifelong learners. It is vital to promote information literacy competency development programs for rural dwellers. Libraries therefore need to conduct information literacy programmes and help educate the local communities with the skills.

Keywords: Information literacy, rural libraries, and rural development

1. Introduction

In the perception of the Indian context, the majority of Indians live in rural areas and engage in agriculture and small-scale industry. Okiy (2003) ^[2] explained that rural development is a foundation for economic development, and information is an important component in the development process. The country's progress also depends on the improvements of the rural masses; hence, the development of the rural masses can be brought about by sorting out the problems of the rural people. In the development of rural areas, libraries play a very important role by offering information dissemination services based upon knowledge for various public groups on social, political, economic, cultural, and other matters. Rural libraries can act as community information centers to improve living conditions and quality of life by fulfilling every information need and assisting individuals in their daily problem-solving.

The UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1994) ^[8] states that constructive participation and the development of democracy depend on satisfactory education and free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture, and information. Ensuring access to citizens to all sorts of community information services and facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills have been included in the missions of the manifesto. Furthermore, Information Literacy is a step toward the

fulfilment of this mission. However, rural communities often face significant barriers to achieving information literacy, hindering their ability to participate fully in the information society. Hence, it is required that rural people must also possess the expertise to know what kind of information is needed, where and how to find the needed information, how to evaluate and determine the relevance of the acquired information, and how to use information effectively and meaningfully in their day-to-day activities.

2. Definition of Information

Information is stimuli that have meaning in some context for its recipient. "Information is not knowledge; it is concepts or ideas which enter a person's field of perception, are evaluated and assimilated reinforcing or changing the individual's concept of reality and/or ability to act (Badke, 2010) ^[5]. When information is stored or entered into a computer, it is called data. When information is compiled or used to understand or do something better, it is called knowledge. So, information can be of different types: facts, data, news, knowledge, advice, evidence, intelligence, and insight.

Information is considered an inevitable tool for the development of any society. It is a fundamental resource for all intellectual activities and society's cultural, social, economic, and political development.

3. Information Literacy

Paul G. Zurkowski coined the term “Information Literacy” in 1974 as the Information Industry Association president. Coonan *et al.* (2018) [6], in CILIP Definition of Information Literacy 2018, stated that information literacy is the ability to think critically and make balanced judgments about any information we find and use.

The definition of information literacy evolved into a description of what it means to be information literate. The expanded definition focused on the attributes of one who is information literate. An information-literate person is one who:

- Recognizes that accurate and complete information is the basis for
- Intelligent decision making
- Recognizes the need for information
- Formulates questions based on information needs
- Identifies potential sources of information
- Develops successful search strategies
- Accesses sources of information, including computer-based and other
- Technologies
- Evaluates information
- Organizes information for practical application
- Integrates new information into an existing body of knowledge
- Uses information in critical thinking and problem-solving.

Information literacy is a vital skill in today’s digital age, enabling individuals to access, evaluate, and effectively use the information to meet their needs and improve their quality of life.

4. Need for information literacy

Due to rapid development and the pandemic, most people worldwide are exposed to unlimited and borderless information. To select and filter the exploded information, literacy skills are needed. According to the American Library Association (ALA), information literacy is one of the survival skills in the Information Age, where information-literate people know how to find, evaluate, and use information effectively to solve a particular problem or make a decision. It is a tool for lifelong learning in the networked environment.

Nerz and Bullard (2006) [18] have pointed out that “finding information is no longer the challenge; rather, it is finding the best information from the best source available.” Information Literacy is essential for individuals to remain competitive in the workforce. To prepare for their future work, students must learn how to extract and use the “best” information through learning experiences such as school projects. Reading, writing, and computing abilities are still important but not enough. Everyone must think critically, use computers and other information technologies competently, work with others productively, and access and use information. Information literacy is a thematic synthesis of individuals' skills to live in the Information Age.

Seifi *et al.* (2020) [26]. (Kennedy & Gruber, 2020) [15] discussed the effectiveness of information literacy instruction on lifelong learning readiness in their studies

5. Rural Communities and Rural Libraries

A rural library is a library or library system that serves a rural community or population that primarily lives on farms and ranches and in remote communities (Reitz, 2004) [22]. Kempson (1986) [14] lists three guidelines for creation and operation that should be considered as a definition of rural libraries: the rural library should not solely be based on the provision of printed materials; the rural library should be rooted in the community and for the most part, facilitated by members of that particular community; and the rural library service should be a channel for transferring information both to and from the local community. According to Dent (2006) [32], there are several general objectives why rural libraries are being developed:

1. To help the rural children and adults maintain knowledge gained from their education;
2. To help a rural community understand the country’s social, political, and economic endeavors and nation-building efforts;
3. To aid in the development of wholesome family life, providing materials about social, economic, and health care development; and
4. To inspire community members to read, use books, information, and knowledge access, and enjoy all library materials for education and recreation.

One of the main purposes of the village library is to increase information literacy in society. So, it plays a very dominant role in the welfare of the rural masses. The importance of rural libraries in information literacy to communities has been discussed in a few studies (Cln & David, 2015; Krolak, 2006; Karisiddappa & Rajgoli, 2009) [10, 18, 13]. Someone should be knowledgeable about it by implementing the information literacy process in their life to be information literate. As Harding (2008) [11] puts it, someone should consider learning a lifelong process to be educated. The process never ends even though someone has the highest education level. Rural libraries should do this by spreading the importance of information literacy programs in local communities and helping them increase their life achievement.

The village people are not conscious of the role of information in growth and development (Mansoor & Kamba, 2010) [19]. They have no proper idea about applying information for development (Stone, 1993) [28]. Many rural communities in developing countries have a poor understanding of the value of information for development. It is important to note that they have to be fully conscious of the significance of information to keep pace with the present knowledge-based economy. Ahmed *et al.* (1997) [29] stated that people in rural communities do not realize their demand for information. They also do not know where and how to satisfy their information demand. They suffer from a lack of useful information, low levels of literacy and skill, meager use of technology or ICT, a low level of participation, and a low standard of living.

It is important to ensure that the gap of inequality in literacy between rural and urban communities is not too obvious. Ejedafiru (2015) [9], in her study, discussed the need to mainstream rural communities to enhance equity in information access and gathering and educational

opportunities irrespective of locality. The escalating knowledge gap that exists between rural and urban dwellers needs to be bridged, and literacy should not be a privilege for the few populations living in urban cities. It is pertinent for every citizen, irrespective of locality, to have access to library and information services to improve their literacy level. Rural libraries are one of the channels that can play vital roles in educating local communities with the skills.

A study by Idzwan *et al.* (2011) ^[24] mentioned that to achieve excellent academic performance, students must be equipped with appropriate information literacy competencies such as searching skills, evaluating skills, and referencing skills. This literacy is not only for academic purposes but also for implementation in the lifelong learning process and productive community.

According to the study conducted by Seifi and Habibi (2020) ^[26], it was stated that the positive effect of information literacy instruction on two components of lifelong learning readiness is an indication that training can be effective and that there is a need for libraries to provide and implement information literacy instruction. Therefore, public libraries could enhance information literacy levels by increasing the effectiveness of training and sustainable training or even by using other information literacy instruction models to increase the level of readiness for lifelong learning. Achieving an information literacy society requires the attention of policymakers and stakeholders in implementing and planning information literacy, as well as the cooperation of all organizations in this field.

Abidin (2022) ^[1] noted that information literacy, such as a reading program scheduled periodically and can guide users, especially school students. Rural libraries act as local gateways to information and play an important role, even though they are located in small areas. They provide basic infrastructure and information to serve the locality with reading materials, internet, computers, scanners, and photocopy machines, and they promote reading encouragement programs. Collaboration between rural libraries and schools shows the engagement of social sustainability (Rafie *et al.*, 2021) ^[21]. Hence, information literacy is a sole need for rural residents.

Vashishth's (2007) ^[30] paper explores rural information system initiatives in supporting the public library movement in small towns and villages through the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF), Rajiv Gandhi Foundation (RGF), and NGOs in setting up rural libraries to facilitate education, recreation, and practical information at the door of rural communities.

According to Harrison (1977) ^[31], public libraries are intellectual centers of life for the area they serve, providing a vital link for communities with their past, present, and future and a means of access to the knowledge and information people need.

6. Conclusion

The Information Age provides both opportunities and challenges for the future of education and the future of society. Managing large amounts of information, developing learning strategies to facilitate effective learning, and assuring that all citizens are skillful in applying information is critical. Besides, poor access to and use of information and knowledge are tied to the poor state of the information

literacy level of the rural dwellers. It becomes instructive to note that poverty and illiteracy are the major barriers to rural development. With the growing complexities of present-day society and the increasing demands for information, it is important for more community development-oriented activities to supplement traditional library services in developing nations. Active small and rural public libraries can significantly improve rural communities' quality of life. It is, therefore, vital to promote information literacy competency development programs for rural dwellers. Information literacy programs help a person become knowledgeable, socially responsible, and socially productive and help in personality development. Information literacy competency development programs may be initiated by public libraries to impart necessary information literacy skills and reading skills to rural dwellers in maximizing the utilization of public library resources. Library skills enable learners to teach themselves, thus opening the way to lifelong learning. This should not be privileged to the city dwellers.

7. References

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