INCREASING THE UTILISATION OF THE COLLEGE LIBRARY – IS IT BEYOND CONTROL?

An ideal library should have schemes which promote self-learning among individuals through effective utilisation to the maximum possible extent the available library facilities, thereby enhancing the utilitarian value of the library and justifying the investment on it. A study of library centred education conducted at Madras Institute of Technology shows that it is an effective means to increase library utilisation.

INTRODUCTION

Continuous scientific research, inventions, innovations and creativity not only lead to information explosion but also pose a challenge to the scientists and technologists in retrieving information. “The information scientists are called upon to build an infrastructure of information transfer with the main objective of providing the right information to the right person at the right time”[1]. New techniques have been developed to access computerised data bases for information through on-line/off-line facilities. The information explosion and the new techniques of retrieval have hardly affected the average college libraries, since conditions in a majority of these institutions have been stagnant over decades.

PRESENT STATE

The less prepared students working for industry, find it difficult to follow their industrial leaders working on contemporary research, design or development problems. Moreover, the importance of a solid foundation is most apparent to a student only after graduation, since a professor is no longer available to provide him guidance.[2]. Colleges, therefore, aim at providing a balanced and broad-based curriculum and opportunity for the development of the potential of students. The library accordingly is expected to support teaching, research and extension programmes of the college in achieving its objective. The library has an important role to play in the development of the potential of the students. “It is a well-known fact that the effectiveness and indeed the usefulness of a library are measured primarily by its reading public”[3].

College libraries continue to be a mere formality or in some cases just an ornament. A library is mostly used as a warehouse of books. The faculty do not utilise the library services to the possible and desirable extent due to lack of time or interest. Many seem to have the impression that they can manage with their old stock of information and knowledge. They have, therefore, not considered the library as a necessary source of information[4,5]. There is no wonder, therefore, if students too have not realized the importance of library. The students and faculty alike have not recognized and valued the potentials of libraries. There is reason to believe that students feel that there is no correlation between the use of library and the grades they obtain[6]. This seems to be the basic reason for the inadequate use of library by students.

INFLUENCING FACTORS

Based on attitudes and use patterns of both students and teachers, it appears that the majority do not use the library because the complex nature of the libraries and unfami-
liarity with the system make them confused and frustrated and finally force them to turn away from the libraries[7]. On the other hand, in many colleges, there are no reading facilities at all for students and in some colleges even though facilities are available, only a very few use the libraries[8]. The real challenge, therefore, is to innovate means and methods to attract more students and teachers to the libraries and to enthuse them to utilize the facilities effectively.

Before considering such means and methods, the factors which influence the utilization of libraries should be identified in order to make the best choice or to use the best method. The conventional closed access system, inadequate space and congestive atmosphere are known as negative factors which hinder utilization. Other main factors which affect utilization are:

1. Library rules,
2. Stagger system,
3. Non-issue of books during the examination period,
4. Ignorance about the resources,
5. Apathy of students,
6. Apathy of teaching staff,

Library rules

Rigid rules framed for the purpose of streamlining the procedures for both the users and the library staff discourage users. Lack of flexibility in library rules sometimes causes frustration among the users and leads to mutilation of books.

Stagger system

Observation shows that most of the college libraries have systematised the issue procedure adopting the stagger system, in which books for a particular class are issued on a particular day. Arrangements are made in such a way that all the classes are covered within a week. Though this system permits the use of less library staff, it keeps away the enthusiastic readers, thus defeating the real purpose of the library. A person has to wait for one week for his next chance. The stagger system in issue procedure is found to be the main reason for low utilisation of libraries.

Non-issue of books during the examination period.

After a great deal of efforts, the students locate and select the books meeting their requirements. In the hope that they can prepare for the university examination using the books thus obtained, the students later realise that their expectation have not materialized. In an attempt to safeguard the college property, the librarian recalls all the books before the examination. The hall tickets of the students are used as the best weapon for this purpose. The librarian gets the satisfaction that he has adhered to the rules, but he fails to recognize that he has kept aside the very basic law of library science “BOOKS ARE FOR USE”. This leads to mutilation of books.

Ignorance about the resources

The college libraries are seldom utilized to the desired level, because the users do not have the opportunity to realize their potentialities. In one study it was found that “Prospective teachers were not capable of using library materials satisfactorily and their knowledge of available library resources was limited”[9]. There is very little utilisation of books other than the textbooks, even though these books provide simple and more useful material than the prescribed textbooks.

Apathy of Students

Much of the literature is made available to students. But studies reveal that only a few students use the libraries sufficiently for the purpose of general reading. Sometimes formalities keep the students away from the library. The student generally does not like to approach the library staff for assistance.

Apathy of teaching staff

Increasing the utilization of libraries in colleges is more the responsibility of teaching community rather than that of librarians. Following only
one textbook not only limits the scope of the students to acquire knowledge, but also keeps the students away from the libraries. In practice, it is noticed that the members of the teaching community not only stick to one textbook but also give the exact pagination to be referred to by the students. This ultimately leads to the craze for particular books and also to a certain extent tearing of the required pages from the book. Quite often, if a student raises intricate questions or requests the teaching staff for textbooks, the student gets the advise:

“If you are taking down the notes given by me in the classroom, a good second division is certain. Why do you bother about the book? This is the beginning and also the end of reading performance by many students in many of the colleges”[10].

Financial problems

The libraries are conventionally treated as accessories[11]. A second place, is, therefore, given to the budgets of the libraries. Library budget is the one that is pruned whenever there is shortage of funds. Usually inadequate attention is paid to the needs of the libraries. As the basic needs are not met, the aims of increasing the utilization of libraries and their development are rarely fulfilled.

INCREASING THE UTILIZATION

Motivation

“Educational psychologists, supported by well-established empirical evidence, are quick to point out that the straight lecture method without opportunity for discussion is one of the least effective methods of instruction”[12]. Accelerating the utilization of libraries, like increasing the production in industries, cannot be achieved all of a sudden. Students should be encouraged to read books in the library outside the textbooks prescribed. The University Grants Commission in its revised guidelines for restructuring of the courses at the degree level has said “The existing teaching methods, which are largely based on rote memory, lectures and reproduction, should be replaced by new teaching methods which can awaken curiosity of students, encourage self-study habits and promote problem-solving skill in them. There must be some component in the curriculum which requires every student to use the library for reference work. Once such a component is introduced, this should be taken into account in strengthening the library for reading and reference materials, including journals”[13].

Use of library by students, as stated, depends on faculty motivation. Dr. S. Sathikhi points out four levels of teaching:

1. Giving facts and figures
2. Explaining/relating the facts
3. Demonstrating/proving the facts
4. Inspiring/motivating to search for themselves.

These are given in the increasing order of motivation. Motivation should be of the kind that will inspire students to work independently with the help of library material, of course, with adequate instruction regarding the use of library and the bibliographic tools. Educational institutions may also allocate certain percentage of marks in their internal assessment for library usage by students. The library staff also must play a complementary role to increase the effectiveness of teaching.

User education

P.S. Kawattra stresses the need to educate the members of the institutions on the use of library and search for information in order to increase the effective utilization of library. He quotes Prof. Holloway. “Library resources are the major insurance against narrow syllabus, dogmatic teaching and simple out-of-dateness. At a time of flexible conditions and growing independence for students as to the planning of their work, the library, not the lecture room, forms the heart of the enterprise”[14]. Mrs. Ruth Alston, Librarian, Cambridge University, has recorded the observations of a British research scholar made after a seven week research tour in India, studying user education in Indian academic and research institute libraries. “Virtually everyone I interviewed thought that the
stock of Indian libraries was significantly under-used because of user ignorance, and many thought that the information profession had not, on the whole, succeeded in projecting a good image of its capabilities.” Quoting this, R. Saradha emphasizes that our institutions of higher learning should initiate appropriate steps for user education to bridge the gap between potential and achievement[15]. The library should serve as a laboratory for the implementation of effective teaching. The library should be made an integral and functional part of teaching in the classroom.

INNOVATION

Objective

Considering these views, a new scheme was planned at the Madras Institute of Technology with the following main objectives:

(i) to develop creative thinking and self-learning among students,
(ii) to complement the classroom lectures,
(iii) to encourage students to develop means for making better utilization of their leisure time,
(iv) to assist students in developing better values and higher standards in their profession,
(v) to help students to develop research techniques for use both during and after student years.
(vi) to expand the scope of education for a more complex world,
(vii) to help the members in retrieval of information of maximum usefulness in dealing with practical problems and situations,
(viii) to expose the students to the latest information and to ensure that the knowledge acquired is both meaningful and relevant.

Initial experiment

Routine learning of certain materials and reproducing them in examinations has become an out-moded way of education, since the real knowledge is lost sight of in this method. Keeping in view the fact that a library is not just a reservoir of books, but an educational agency, the library of the Madras Institute of Technology, Anna University, Madras, has provided 3 hours for undergraduate classes and 6 hours for postgraduate classes in the timetable, as library period with the aim that this would enable the students to do their design assignments and seminar preparations effectively. However, it was found that the library period was not fully utilized by the students till December 1982, due to lack of adequate reading room and other facilities and proper motivating factors.

Improved method

The fundamental aim of any educational programme should include means for generating dynamism and inculcating the spirit of search, research and self-reliance in learning latent in every individual. With this in view, the Institute introduced a “Library Centred Education Scheme” towards the end of the academic year 1982-83, i.e. February 1983, not only to increase the utilization of the library, but also to encourage the use of the library as a laboratory for effective teaching. Library Centred Education includes learning by students on their own in the quite corner of the library under the guidance of the faculty members in respect of the topics and with active bibliographic assistance provided by the library staff.

To attract readers and to encourage study habit, the library should have a conducive atmosphere in the form of spacious and well-equipped reading room, etc. Lack of such atmosphere was initially a hindrance in carrying out this scheme. The Director of the Institute realized this lack of facility and he urged the provision of the necessary facilities in the library. The space was trebled; reading room furniture and display racks were quadrupled, new books and periodicals of current interest were added and displayed; and publicity was given through notice/bill boards. These measures have facilitated implementation of this scheme in an effective manner.
Table 1: Number of visitors before implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month &amp; Year</th>
<th>No. of working Days</th>
<th>No. of visitors</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 1982</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2,946</td>
<td>105.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1982</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3,200</td>
<td>118.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1982</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2,614</td>
<td>90.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1982</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1,020</td>
<td>72.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1982</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3,691</td>
<td>136.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1982</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3,155</td>
<td>116.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1983</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2,533</td>
<td>105.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1983</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3,286</td>
<td>117.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Classes were not fully held during the months of July and August due to water shortage. May-June was summer vacation.*

Table 2: Number of Visitors After Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month &amp; Year</th>
<th>No. of working Days</th>
<th>No. of Visitors</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 1983</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3,735</td>
<td>124.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1983</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3,257</td>
<td>125.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1983*</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1,699</td>
<td>121.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1983*</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1,827</td>
<td>165.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1983</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4,428</td>
<td>164.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1983</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4,464</td>
<td>171.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Library centred education

The scheme does not mean mere conduct of classes in the library. It is a kind of tutorial in search of required materials by individuals. The departments assign interested and motivated members of the faculty to organize the library classes in their respective branches of study for all classes both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The faculty members intimate the topic they would discuss in the library, a day in advance. The library collects and keeps ready the selected material available, such as journal articles, books, textbooks, reference books, etc. in the library, for reference. During these hours, the students are taught about the usage of reference materials and information searching techniques and are also asked to cite some of the references on the prescribed topics. It is relevant to point out here that the material collected by the library staff, for the above purpose, fully met the requirements of the topic.
### Table 3: Number of Volumes issued before implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month &amp; Year</th>
<th>No. of working days (D)</th>
<th>No. of Members (M)</th>
<th>No. of Volumes issued (I)</th>
<th>Ratio (R)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 1982</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>2,364</td>
<td>0.1611</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 1982</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>2,488</td>
<td>0.1758</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 1982</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>2,298</td>
<td>0.1512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1982</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>735</td>
<td>0.1002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1982</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>3,117</td>
<td>0.1680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1982</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>3,011</td>
<td>0.1623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1983</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>2,802</td>
<td>0.1699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1983</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>3,002</td>
<td>0.1561</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Number of volumes issued after implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month &amp; Year</th>
<th>No. of working days (D)</th>
<th>No. of Members (M)</th>
<th>No. of Volumes issued (I)</th>
<th>Ratio (R)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 1983</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>4,206</td>
<td>0.2040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1983</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>3,601</td>
<td>0.2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1983</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>1,510</td>
<td>0.2051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1983</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>1,902</td>
<td>0.3287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1983</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>4,591</td>
<td>0.3232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1983</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>4,494</td>
<td>0.3286</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A marked increase in the value of the utility ratio ‘R’ on implementation of this programme is evident from the data given in Table 3 and 4. Under discussion; this was appreciated by the faculty. Thus, the library has proved that it can contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of the teaching programme.

**Some Initial Inferences**

It is observed that a few students and faculty members could also be assigned the responsibility of aiding the library staff on the previous day in assembling the required material. Student involvement will automatically familiarise them with the system.

**UTILITY**

To measure the effectiveness of this programme, if its utility has been reviewed over a period of five months before and after its implementation (Tables 1 and 2). The ratio of the number of visitors to the number of working days has been taken to pro-
vide a measure of the extent of utilization. Comparison of the data in Tables 1 and 2 gives a vivid picture of the increased utilization of the library. The utilization has increased by 50%. This scheme has been actively implemented from July 1983.

Increase in the number of visitors alone cannot be a pointer to the increased utilization of the library, since the purpose of the visit may not necessarily be to utilize the library resources. Hence, taking the number of volumes issued during this period into account, a new evaluation was worked out. Normally, the number of volumes issued depends on the following factors:

(i) Number of members of the library
(ii) Number of working days.

Taking these factors also into consideration, a utility ratio has been computed as follows:

\[
\frac{I}{R} = \frac{M \times D}{I}
\]

Where

- \( R \) = Utility Ratio
- \( I \) = No. of volumes issued
- \( M \) = No. of members
- \( D \) = No. of working days.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Limitations

The limitations of this study are:

(i) All the members are not utilizing the library.
(ii) The number of volumes consulted inside the library premises has not been included in this study.

This programme is not without problems. This type of programme may not fit the general taste of college students and perhaps some faculty, since it introduces certain elements of compulsion.

Advantages

Knowing the resources of the library

This counselling technique adopted under the Library Centred Education Scheme brings into light the hidden treasures in the quiet corners of the library and also exhibits the resources and potential of the library to its members. The library staff actively collect the material by consulting various sources about the availability of which many of the readers may not be aware.

Educating the library staff

It is a fact that all the staff working in libraries are not in a position to retrieve the information required by the reader. This programme educates the library staff in respect of the techniques of finding material and information from various sources.

Stimulating reading habit

The students have not only an opportunity but also an element of compulsion to scan through the material available to them.

Meeting the Career Requirement

Many of the needs of students are best met by working with them in groups. The student is encouraged to learn by himself for his present and future needs and to make use of the library to his own benefit. Library Centred Education helps the student to grow in maturity and self-understanding so as to be able to acquire knowledge in general as also specifically relevant to the career which he contemplates to adopt. It also helps him to overcome the feeling of helplessness when he needs information in his professional career, since this type of teaching equips him with the ability to explore ways of finding information individually. This unquestionably is the need of the day.

CONCLUSION

Effective and efficient library service plays an important role in the process of education. The authorities of the college/institution and the librarian can create interest among the readers
either by extending to them all the facilities needed or through a subtle method, instead of keeping the library a sterile vacuum.

A college library operates under two main climates:

1. the climate of the library itself, and
2. the immediate operating environment of the organization of which the library is a subsystem.

These two should be conducive to the successful working of the system in respect of the facilities required by the users as well as the working conditions needed for the staff. The Library Centred Education Scheme implemented by M.I.T. is found to be an inexpensive way of providing these two climates. Its planning and implementation do not require the services of specialists. What is needed is a group of readers (staff and students) who believe in usefulness of this programme. The first year, particularly the first few months, of the student’s life in the college is the time that brings about the maximum change in his attitude. Hence, students should be helped to make intensive use of libraries during this period. Inculcation of the habit of self-study is equally important.

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REFERENCES