INCREASING THE UTILISATION OF PERIODICALS IN COLLEGE LIBRARIES: A CASE STUDY

S. PICHURAMAN
S. GOPALAKRISHNAN
Madras Institute of Technology Library
Anna University
Madras-600 044

Fast diffusion of information contained in periodicals among the faculty and research scholars can enhance the value and relevance of the instructional programmes and research/developmental work. To achieve this a "Quick Glance Service" has been introduced in the library of the Madras Institute of Technology, and it has proved to be an effective tool towards this objective.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is now generally accepted by research scientists, engineers and technologists that scientific and technical communications comprise the lifeblood of research and development. The progress of science and technology is impeded unless new knowledge generated by research flows freely, quickly and timely among the scientific and technical community. The increased rate of scientific discoveries accompanied by their rapid application through technology has added an element of greater urgency in disseminating research results among scientists and engineers. This point is amply driven home by the fact that the world generates new scientific and technical information at the rate of 4,000 articles per day. It is estimated that nearly 60,000 books, 2,00,000 research reports and 30,00,000 articles that appear in periodicals are published in a year [1]. Bernal had succinctly described the present situation by saying that while the amount to be read increases exponentially the time everyone has for reading remains the same [2]. The literature of scientific discoveries, growing at an exponential rate, are normally published as periodical articles since the periodicals are without doubt the best available among the primary communicating media for exchange of scientific research results among scientists and engineers. It is a fact that large number of these articles do not subsequently go into any other form of publications[3].

Almost every library spends a major share of its budget towards subscription to periodicals. Libraries do not mind spending enormous amount on subscription to periodicals but are reluctant to issue these periodicals on loan and restrict the issue even to their members. Storage and preservation of information for future use will no doubt be the best policy but periodical articles can be of much use only for a limited period[4]. The number of persons utilising these periodicals is also usually small. To increase the utility of periodicals and to realise the maximum benefit from the investment in periodicals various approaches have been made by the libraries according to their capacity.

2. LOW UTILISATION - A PAST EXPERIENCE

The library of the Madras Institute of Technology, Anna University, Madras, provides two borrowers cards, to its members irrespective of the category i.e. teaching staff, research scholar, students etc. for borrowing of periodicals for a period of seven days. Current periodicals (after display of 15 days) and back volumes are also made available to the members. The Library at present receives 323 scientific and technical periodicals as shown in Table 1.

However, utilisation of periodicals was very low and not in correspondence with the amount invested on subscriptions. This prompted the Library authorities to explore ways and means to increase the utilisation factor.
TABLE: 1 - Number of periodicals received in the Library.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Foreign</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subscription</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>249</strong></td>
<td><strong>74</strong></td>
<td><strong>323</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. METHODOLOGIES

Supplying contents page of current periodicals in photocopy or in typewritten form and preparing the Documentation or current awareness lists are widely followed in communicating the recent information presented in periodicals. These methods, which require technical manpower, financial assistance and the support of administrative authorities, have both patches of lights and shadows.

Some libraries send the periodicals, every month to the departments after their display in the library for a specified period, for study and return. The departments normally depute a member of the staff to receive these periodicals and then arrange to circulate them among members. It has been seen in many cases that the periodicals sent to departments are not circulated among the faculty members, but are kept locked in cupboards for months together to be returned to the library on receipt of reminders and in some cases losses also occur.

4. METHODOLOGY ADOPTED

41. Quick Glance Service

After examining the various pros and cons of the prevailing methods it was decided in October 1978 to circulate the new periodicals on receipt among all the teaching staff of this Institute, under the scheme of "Quick Glance Service". List of periodicals that are received in the library was circulated among the teaching staff with a request to indicate in the list, such titles that would interest them. On the basis of this a chart was prepared and the names of the staff members to whom the respective periodicals were to be sent on arrival were indicated against each title.

42. Procedure

After registering the new periodicals in the periodical register, the issues are entered in the circulation register against each individual who is covered by the QGS. The issues are sent to the concerned staff before 10.00 A.M. every day and they in turn arrange to return them to the library, the same day by 4.00 P.M. If an issue is required for perusal by more than one staff member of the same department 2 days time is allowed.

As soon as the periodicals come back the entries are cancelled against the staff member and they are displayed in the library for 15 days or till the receipt of the next issues whichever is earlier and the members can borrow these publications against their borrower's cards after their display.

43. New Members to QGS

When a new member joins the Institute, at the time of issuing him borrower's cards he is intimated about the facility of this service and he is asked to mark periodicals of his interest, in the current periodical list. The member's name is marked against the periodicals of his choice, in the chart maintained in the library, and arrangements are made for their circulation as mentioned.

5. SCOPE

The main outcome expected of the QGS services are as follows:

1. To maximize the utilisation of periodicals
2. To inform the teaching staff about the latest developments in their respective field.

6. UTILISATION

Statistics are maintained in the library to ascertain the effectiveness of this service. The number of periodicals issued during the past seven years has been analysed.

Normally, increase in utilisation of periodicals depends on the following factors:

(a) Increase in number of users
Increasing the Utilisation of Periodicals

Increase in number of periodicals that are received in the library.

Kinds of periodicals subscribed.

The first two factors have been taken into consideration to determine the utilisation of periodicals. The ratio has been found out by using a simple mathematical formula:

\[ U = \frac{I}{M \times P} \]

\( U \) = Utility Ratio

\( I \) = Number of periodicals issued

\( M \) = Number of eligible members

\( P \) = Number of periodicals received in the library.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>No. of Members</th>
<th>No. of Periodicals</th>
<th>No. of Periodicals</th>
<th>Utility Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>(P)</td>
<td>(I)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>3,081</td>
<td>0.0361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>3,229</td>
<td>0.0376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>3,239</td>
<td>0.0367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>4,015</td>
<td>0.0406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>4,839</td>
<td>0.0420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>5,909</td>
<td>0.0448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>7,072</td>
<td>0.0506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>7,668</td>
<td>0.0453**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The institute was closed for about 2 months during this year and hence this drop.

Table 2 gives a vivid picture of the increase in utilisation of periodicals. The utility has nearly increased to one and half time within a limited period though the number of members of the library and number of periodicals have increased.

Kind of Periodicals

Let us consider the other factor that influence the increase in utilisation of periodicals. The nature of periodicals subscribed also plays, to a certain extent, a role in utilisation of resources. But this factor has not much influenced the utilisation since most of the periodicals were retained in the subscription list during these years for which study was carried out.

Information on Recent Development

It is part of the duty of a librarian, to bring to the notice of the readers recent developments in the diverse fields, in particular, to the teaching and research staff of the institution for the following reasons:

The teaching staff may not find time to scan the periodicals in their fields due to heavy work load. They may not find time to visit the library. Hence the nascent information should be brought to their attention in order to equip themselves with the latest knowledge,

(a) to communicate the recent developments to student community.

(b) to stimulate the student members in the field of their study.

(c) to equip themselves adequately to answer the question raised by the student/s who acquire the knowledge of recent developments in the respective field.

(d) to pursue and guide research.

Complexity of Abstracting Periodicals

Abstracting periodicals, no doubt bring all the relevant articles pertaining even to microfield, under one shadow, but they do not attract all the readers except research scholars. A member of teaching staff who does not find time even to scan the primary periodicals naturally is not attracted by the secondary periodicals mainly due to their complexity.

Scattering of Periodical Articles

It has been estimated that only 1/3 of the relevant articles are published in the core periodicals of a subject. To be well informed of the latest
information it is necessary to know about the contents of other periodicals also.

The Quick Glance Service enables them to be aware of articles of interest published in different periodicals. For this, the periodicals are scanned by the Librarian on receipt and articles of interest to particular staff member, if found, are marked for circulation to the concerned staff, though they may not have asked for the periodical under this scheme. The Director of this Institute, also peruses most of the periodicals, and marks the important articles to various departments/concerned staff for their study and applications or organizing projects, seminars, short courses etc.

8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has the following limitations:

1. Periodicals that are referred to by users inside the library premises have not been included in the study.
2. Whether the periodicals borrowed by the members are really utilised by them or not is not known.
3. Certain periodicals are meant exclusively for certain specific type of users; and
4. All the periodicals of the same field are not equally attractive to all the readers in the same field.

9 ADVANTAGES

91 Induces the Reading Habit

Feeding the technical personnel with recent information for their teaching and research activities is a part of library services and it must be carefully planned and implemented since these technical personnel appear to be not properly utilising the library services either due to lack of time or being under the impression that they can manage with their old stock of information. R.W. Swanson has aptly pointed out that such individuals seem either be functioning without information or they are not recognizing libraries as a major source of information [5]. As a part of initiation, without irritation, the periodicals are placed on the tables of these technical persons. The periodicals that are placed on the table will certainly attract their attention one time or the other and induce them at least to browse through them.

92 Coordination

Any service ultimately rests on co-ordination among the participants and the serving community. Similarly, the success of this scheme depends very much on such co-ordination. In practice, this service creates a cordial relationship between the library personnel and the teaching community.

93 Finance

Any specialised service requires financial assistance. Shortage of finance at times cuts short useful services. This specialised service does not entail any huge expenditure. The main requirements of this service are:

(a) One hour service of an attendant to deliver the periodicals and
(b) the services of an assistant for half an hour to record the entries in the circulation register.

The total cost involved towards salary of these personnel for the duration indicated is negligible.

94 Useful periodicals in subscription list

Constant review of periodicals by a specialist in a given field helps to avoid inclusion of mediocre periodicals in the subscription list. The costlier periodicals are also reviewed against their utility for inclusion in subscription list.

95 Impact on this service

To ascertain the impact of the service, the Library Committee consisting of Professors and Heads of Departments, was entrusted with the task of periodically reviewing the actual working and suggest suitable modification if need be. The nine members Committee in consultation with the teaching staff of the department strongly pleaded for continuation of this service with the assurance of their co-ordination and help for continuing this service.
INCREASING THE UTILISATION OF PERIODICALS

10 OTHER FEATURES

Besides the QGS service, important articles are announced on the notice boards either with attractive captions or the article itself is displayed. Often, review of an individual periodical consisting of the content, speciality etc., are also brought to the attention of members of the faculty through notice boards as well as through circulars to departments.

11 FUTURE PLANS

Timely availability of relevant and reliable information and data is important for making gainful decisions and triggering of new ideas[6]. Keeping this in view it is proposed to introduce documentation service with the co-operation and help of the teaching staff using the QGS service. On browsing through the periodicals the teaching staff have the opportunity to know the technological developments in the field of their interest and they may indicate such articles of interest, by marking in pencil, that could be indexed by the library and thus help maintain a reliable index file.

12. CONCLUSION

To date, the system has performed well under the existing conditions. Indications are that when its full potentials are realized, it will have a significant impact on the economic as well as the technological aspects.

To-day, though users’ needs cannot be met fully by the libraries, it is believed that Quick Glance type of service will enable them to know their resources, and meet the users’ need to a considerable extent.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors are grateful to Dr. S. Sathikh, Director, M.I.T. for encouragement in writing this paper, reading and improving the manuscript and permitting the publication of this paper.

REFERENCES


