

Librarians' ICT Skills and Services Delivery in Private Universities in India

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¹Date of Receiving: 29 October 2023;

Date of Acceptance: 07 December 2023;

Date of Publication: 24 December 2023

ABSTRACT

This article explores the evolving role of librarians in private universities across India, focusing on their Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills and their innovative contributions to service delivery. Librarians have transformed into dynamic information specialists, adept in digital literacy, information retrieval, database management, and technology integration. They play a vital role in e-learning support, virtual reference services, and the creation of digital archives, contributing significantly to the educational landscape. Despite challenges such as budget constraints, librarians actively engage in continuous training and collaborative efforts to overcome obstacles and seize opportunities for innovation. As technology evolves, librarians remain at the forefront, shaping the future of education by harnessing the potential of ICT to enhance library services and facilitate academic and research endeavours in private universities in India.

Keywords: *Librarians; ICT Skills; Private Universities; Service Delivery; Digital Literacy; Information Retrieval*

INTRODUCTION

In the transformative landscape of higher education in India, librarians in private universities have emerged as dynamic contributors to the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into academic and research environments. Traditionally seen as custodians of physical collections, librarians have evolved into digital stewards, equipped with advanced skills to navigate the complexities of the digital age. This article delves into the critical role played by librarians in private universities across India, shedding light on their ICT skills and their innovative approaches to service delivery.

The advent of the digital era has redefined the responsibilities of librarians, demanding proficiency in digital literacy, information retrieval, and database management. Librarians in private universities navigate an intricate web of electronic databases, online catalogues, and digital resources, ensuring that the wealth of information available is not only accessible but also efficiently organized. This shift towards a digital paradigm has empowered librarians to transcend the limitations of physical space, providing a virtual gateway to a plethora of academic materials.

One of the hallmark contributions of librarians in private universities lies in their ability to seamlessly integrate technology into traditional library services. Through the implementation of sophisticated library management systems, online circulation tools, and other technological innovations, librarians optimize resource utilization, streamline operations, and enhance user experience. This integration extends beyond administrative efficiency to encompass the augmentation of academic pursuits, as librarians actively engage in curating digital resources and collaborating with faculty to incorporate technology-enhanced learning into the curriculum.

The role of librarians extends beyond the confines of a physical library, as they become facilitators of e-learning in the digital realm. The rapid evolution of technology, coupled with the global shift towards remote learning, has propelled librarians to curate and disseminate digital resources, ensuring that students and faculty have access to a wealth of educational materials. Librarians, armed with their ICT skills, contribute to the creation and maintenance

¹ *How to cite the article:* Khan T.H., Khayal R. (December 2023); Librarians' ICT Skills and Services Delivery in Private Universities in India; *International Journal of Law, Management and Social Science*, Vol 7, Issue 4, 69-76

of digital archives and institutional repositories, safeguarding the intellectual output of the academic community for posterity.

In addition to these transformative roles, librarians actively engage in providing virtual reference services, breaking down geographical barriers to offer expert assistance through email, chat, and video conferencing. This not only enhances accessibility but also fosters a collaborative and responsive approach to addressing the diverse needs of students and faculty.

As private universities grapple with the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital age, librarians stand as pivotal figures in navigating this landscape. This article aims to unravel the layers of their contributions, from honing advanced ICT skills to redefining service delivery paradigms, showcasing the indispensable role librarians play in shaping the educational journey within private universities in India.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dhanavandan and Murugan (2016) published an article titled "The use ICT Faced by the Difficulties in the Chosen Tirunelveli Area Library Professionals." We are in a digital setting because everything is now linked to the web. Library staff must be proficient in digital environments and have knowledge of technology based on ICT. Using information and communication technologies can be difficult for 82.81 percent of library professionals, according to this research.

Bansode and Viswe (2017) state that college library staff in Maharashtra have an appropriate degree of information and communication technology expertise. There is a noticeable lack of expertise among library professionals when it comes to open source library automation software, digital library software, institutional storehouse software, and other advanced forms of information and communication technology. While most professionals have mastered the basics of these programs, there are still many who could benefit from further training in these areas. A separate study by Kumar (2013) demonstrates that "LIS experts serving in different creating instructive businesses of the Rayalaseema Region of Andhra Pradesh are generally PC proficient and possess critical essential ICT abilities to deal with the library, still do not have sufficient degree to create their inventive ICT abilities as well as execute these skills in the library to give new ICT-based library administrations."

Mathew (2011) in his study examined the impact of information and communication technologies on the learning and professional development needs of library staff in universities in Kerala. This study encompassed the knowledge workers employed by seven Kerala institutions' libraries. The study's author examined modern university library infrastructure in Kerala, librarians' professional development, their familiarity with and skill with information and communication technologies, and the effects on librarians' training needs. Only full-time staff members of the Institutions' main campus departmental and central libraries were asked to participate in the survey. The majority of library professionals expressed optimism over the utilization of information and communication technology-based services in libraries.

Kavulya (2007) assessed the training resources & curriculum of Kenya's LIS training institutes, as well as the job availability for LIS professionals. The study's overarching goal was to identify the most pressing information technology (IT) skill gaps among LIS professionals, considering current employment trends and performance expectations. According to the research, the level of demand in the country's job market at the time was not met by the country's LIS boot camps. They were relevant to the working world, lacked digital content, and were taught in classrooms without adequate LIS tools.

Raju, (2014) in his evaluation points out that "bookkeeper should have information on digitization, metadata creation, & the board, conservation of digital data, and PC abilities, which are important to work in online information conditions" . Looking at the "level of ICT expertise amongst library professionals in Kerala University Library framework," **Seema and Pillai (2014)** assessed the situation. The research found that the librarians at Kerala University Library are around average when it comes to using various forms of information and communication technology in the library. The experts all spoke with such positive attitudes about libraries' use of technology.

Batool (2010) While every librarian at Punjab University in India was an expert in word processing, an examination of their technological competence revealed that they knew very little about hardware and could only use the most basic features of the Internet. Learning technology was found to be mostly hindered by a lack of training workshops, training programs, and a rich curriculum, according to the researchers.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study's overarching goal is to look at how librarians at private universities in India use information and communication technologies to provide library services.

- i. To identify the kinds of services that librarians at private universities in India utilize their information and communication technology (ICT) skills for;
- ii. To assess the extent to which librarians at these universities use the ICT skills they've learned to provide service; and third, to draw conclusions about the state of the art in this area.
- iii. Find out where librarians in private universities in India get their information and communication technology abilities.

ICT SKILLS OF LIBRARIANS

In the ever-evolving landscape of information and education, librarians in private universities in India have become adept at navigating the digital frontier through a comprehensive array of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills. These skills are pivotal in not only managing the vast digital repositories of information but also in ensuring that students and faculty have seamless access to a wealth of resources. The following delineation provides a deeper insight into the ICT skills that librarians have cultivated to meet the demands of the digital age.

First and foremost, librarians have embraced a profound level of digital literacy. This encompasses the ability to navigate electronic databases, online catalogs, and other digital platforms with finesse. Librarians must be well-versed in the intricacies of various digital interfaces, ensuring that they can proficiently guide users through the expansive world of digital resources. As gatekeepers of knowledge, librarians are equipped with the skills to not only access but also critically evaluate and curate digital content, ensuring the relevance and reliability of the information they provide.

Information retrieval skills form the backbone of a librarian's ICT proficiency. In a world inundated with information, librarians must be adept at utilizing search engines, online databases, and digital tools to retrieve pertinent and up-to-date information. This skill is particularly crucial in aiding students and faculty in their academic and research endeavors. The ability to sift through vast amounts of data efficiently and provide targeted, relevant information sets librarians apart as invaluable assets in the digital information age.

Database management is another critical ICT skill that librarians have honed to perfection. As custodians of digital repositories, librarians must ensure that these databases are not only well-organized but also secure. This involves expertise in cataloging, metadata creation, and maintaining the integrity of electronic resources. Through meticulous database management, librarians ensure that the vast reservoir of digital information is easily accessible and efficiently structured for optimal retrieval.

Tech integration is a multifaceted ICT skill that librarians employ to enhance the overall user experience. This involves the seamless integration of technology into traditional library services. From implementing cutting-edge library management systems to employing online circulation tools, librarians leverage technology to streamline operations, optimize resource utilization, and enhance user engagement. This integration extends to collaborating with faculty to incorporate digital resources into the curriculum, fostering a technologically enriched academic environment.

In conclusion, the ICT skills of librarians in private universities in India have evolved to encompass a holistic suite of capabilities. From digital literacy and information retrieval to database management and tech integration, librarians play a pivotal role in navigating the complex digital landscape. These skills not only empower librarians to manage the vast repositories of digital information but also contribute significantly to the overall educational experience of students and faculty in private universities across India.

METHODOLOGY

This investigation made use of a survey research strategy. The method is deemed appropriate due to its utilization in collecting comprehensive and objective replies from participants. The study's demographic includes 41 private universities in India's librarians. The private universities had a total of 181 librarians. The study used total enumeration sampling because all of the librarians who made up the population took part in the research. The data collection tool utilized was a questionnaire. Over the course of five months, the researcher and five research assistants individually handed out and collected questionnaires from each of the participating universities. Results were displayed in charts, percentages, mean scores, standard deviation, and frequency counts after analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 2.1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Majority of the librarians in the private universities in India were from the south-west zone. This is followed by the south-south zone which has eight private universities and 33 librarians respectively. This result implies that more private universities are located in South-West India than other geographical zones in India.

Indian Zone	Number of university	Number of librarians and the number of questionnaires administered	Number of copies returned
west	6	24	23
North	8	32	31
South-East	27	124	118
Total	41	180	172 (95.56%)

Table 1: Librarians in private institutions in India disseminated surveys and tracked response rates.

As shown in Table 1, a total of 172 (or 95.56 % of the total) questionnaires sent out to librarians at the 41 private universities were returned and deemed relevant for study. Table 1 displays the percentage of distributed questionnaires that were returned.

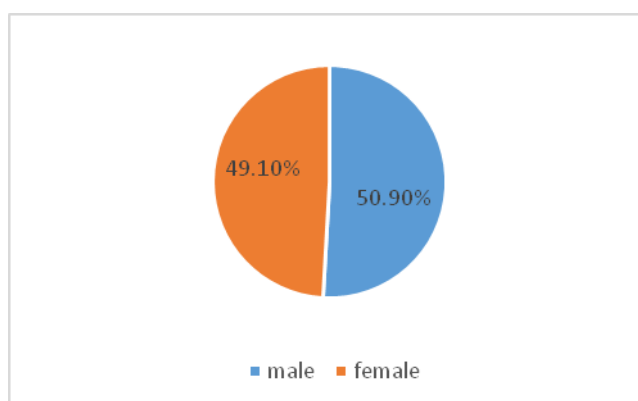


Figure 1: Gender breakdown of respondents

Figure 1 shows the percent of respondents who identified as male or female. Men were underrepresented compared to the number of female participants. This finding suggests that private universities in India employ more female librarians than male librarians. This suggests that there is a growing number of female librarians working in India's academic libraries.

Background information	Categories	Librarians n=172	%
Marital status	Married	132	76.7
	Single	35	20.3
	Widow	4	2.3
	Widower	1	0.6
Age	25 – 35	66	38.3
	36 – 45	64	37.2
	46 – 55	31	18
	56 – 65	12	6.9
Status	Deputy University	4	2.3

	Librarian Principal	8	4.6
	Librarian Senior	17	9.9
	Librarian I Librarian II	41	23.8
	Assistant Librarian	48	27.9
	Graduate Assistant	53	30.8
		1	0.6
Position	Acquisition Librarian	16	9.3
	Circulation Librarian	32	18.6
	Serials Librarian Systems	19	11
	Librarian Reference	15	8.7
	Librarian Readers'	11	6.4
	Services Librarian	24	13.9
	E-resources Librarian Institutional	6	3.5
	Repository-Librarian		
	Faculty Librarian	3	1.7
	Digital Librarian	7	4.1
	Cataloguer	4	2.3
		35	20.3
Qualification	PhD	7	4.1
	MLS	114	66.2
	M.Inf.	13	7.5
	M.Phil.	2	1.2
	PGD	36	20.9
Years of work experience	1 – 5 years	56	32.5
	6 – 10 years	75	43.6
	11 – 15 years	26	15.1
	16 – 20 years	6	3.5
	21 – 25 years	3	1.7
	26 – 30 years	0	0.0
	31 – 35 years	6	3.5

Table 2: Demographic data of librarians working at private Indian universities

Married status was indicated by the majority of respondents (76.7%) in Table 2. Participants' ages ranged from 25 to 45 for the most part. What this means is that private university librarians tend to be younger and more responsible. With 30.8% being Assistant Librarians, 27.9% being Librarian IIs, and 23.8% being Librarian Is, the majority of study participants belonged to the lower echelons of the profession. Furthermore, the results showed that the majority of respondents were either circulation librarians (18.5%) or cataloguers (20.3%), with the institutional repository librarian cadre having the lowest number of responses (1.7%). While 4.1% of the respondents held a doctorate degree, the majority of respondents held a master's degree. Ojedokun and Okafor (2015) found that a higher percentage of library and information science professionals have a master's degree, which is consistent with our results. In addition, a large portion of the sample of respondents had worked for the company for six to ten years. Since there is frequent redeployment within the library system, this suggests that they have enough opportunity to learn new skills on the job and improve their service delivery abilities throughout their tenure. The study's findings support those of Bajpai and Margam (2019), who found that most respondents had been in the field for at least ten years.

The services that librarians provide	N=172	
	N	%
Library materials recommendation	112	65.1
Library registration	102	59.3
Inter library loan	57	33.1
Selective dissemination of information	109	63.4
Document delivery	66	38.4
Reference service	120	69.8
Outreach service	26	15.1
Prompt notification of library development	58	33.7
Notification of OPAC additions	63	36.6
Notification of Institutional Repository update	47	27.3
Notification of new library resources arrivals	98	56.9
Images/photos service	24	13.9
Library orientation	119	69.2
Library education	107	62.2
Charging and Discharging of library materials	103	59.9
Translation services	15	8.7

Table 3: Library services provided by private institutions in India

Library orientation (69.2%), reference service (69.8%), suggestion of library materials (65.1%), and selective transmission of information (63.4%) ranked highest and lowest, respectively, among the services provided by librarians, according to Table 3. The findings of Aina (2014), Quadri and Garaba (2019), and Agbo and Eyinnah (2022) are supported by these data, which indicate that librarians provide a variety of services to their consumers connected to information and communication technology. Husain and Nazim (2015) echoed this sentiment, stating that librarians utilize their knowledge of information and communication technologies to offer services including reference assistance, electronic resource delivery, database searches (both online and offline), and current awareness programs. The participants were active in providing patrons with varied quality library services, according to Adamuet al. (2021). Findings like these suggest that librarians will be in demand for the foreseeable future as they hone their information and communication technology (ICT) abilities to better serve the library needs of institutions like universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education.

Source	Private Universities N=172			
	Agreement score		Disagreement score	
	N	%	N	%
Self-learning	159	92.4	13	7.6
Through In-house training	140	81.4	32	18.6
Through national conferences and workshops	132	76.7	40	23.3
Through professional online networks	107	62.2	65	37.8
Through international conferences and workshops	99	57.6		42.4

Table 4: Response distribution broken down by where people learned ICT skills

Table 4 displays the results of the investigation on the sources of librarians' information and communication technology acquisition.

Table 4 shows that the majority of the librarians surveyed (92.4%) learned about information and communication technologies (ICT) on their own. These findings support those of Gbaje and Ukachi (2011), Mommoh and Saka (2016), Manzo (2020), Mbagwu (2020), and Adamu et al. (2021), who found that most respondents learned information and communication technology (ICT) via self-study and in-house training. Librarians from private Indian universities who attended foreign conferences and workshops to improve their information and communication technology abilities scored the lowest. Since private colleges rely heavily on the distribution of funds by their parent institutions, this could be due to insufficient financing.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From time to time, librarians are compelled to acquire ICT skills due to changes in the way library operations and functions are handled and the evolving growth of service delivery. This improvement has made it easier to provide users with tandem services at any time and from any place. With their exposure to modern information and communication technology abilities, librarians are able to provide library services in a world-class manner. Information professionals receive the necessary ICT skills through self-study and in-house training to provide successful service delivery in their libraries, according to this study that examined the degree of ICT capabilities among librarians in private institutions in India. In order to ensure that patrons of academic libraries receive high-quality services, it is essential that librarians engage in ongoing professional development.

The paper suggests the following changes:

- More international workshops, conferences, and exchange programs should be established to help librarians acquire up-to-date skills, particularly in the area of information and communication technology applications;
- University and library administration should consistently assist librarians in acquiring these skills;
- In order to improve librarians' efficiency and ability to compete with their global contemporaries in the area of library service delivery to their users, there has to be an increase in institutional budgets for staff training and development. This will allow for a reasonable size of staff to develop their information and communication technology skills on a national and international level.

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