

Student Participation in College Library Development

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The seminars and discussions on Joy Committee Report and the publication of the report by many professional journals inspired a lot of colleges to modernise their libraries.

This paper is based on the facts derived from such an attempt with student participation successfully conducted in a post graduate college. The assessment of the suggestions given by the students, the evaluation of the state of the library by college authorities, systematisation works undertaken on the basis of the evaluation, and further plans prepared are all in accordance with Joy Committee recommendations.

From the evaluation work done with student participation aspects that required reform were traced out. Considering the suggestions given by students for improvement of the library, and applying scientific methods, activities for vitalization of library and information services were started immediately.

The paper records in the words of students the existing state of the library, the suggestions of users for its vitalization, improvements effected immediately with student's support, further systematisation works planned on the basis of the analysis, and development plans that materialised in a reasonable period. It points out the importance of student participation for giving life to our college libraries and for keeping them live.

1. The Laboratory

The college where we have experienced student participation for library development and obtained the results put forward here is H.H. Maharaja's College for Women, Trivandrum. Established in 1897 it is one of the oldest colleges in the state. With 4300 students and 200 teachers and post graduate courses on most of subjects of study allowed by the Kerala University it is one of the biggest colleges in the state. Library has a collection of 71500 books. Annual budget for the purchase of books in the college comes to an average four lakhs per year from various sources.

Complaints regarding the inefficiency of the library was a continuous affair when Prof. V. Puspa took over charge as the principal. Being a person who relied on libraries continuously as a student and teacher in her academic pursuits she was aware of the role library and information services has to play in education. While she was attempting to reform the college library a new librarian with qualification prescribed by UGC also joined the College. Immediately the Principal started the library development projects. In 1994-95 the Collegiate Education Department also identified this college library as the one to be developed as a model.

To understand the student's impression about existing library situation and to extract their suggestions which may be of help for library development the Principal initiated a student library interaction program during the National Book Week and announced prizes for the students who prepare the best five write ups assessing existing library services and giving suggestions for improvement. 43 students participated in the program. The comments and suggestions of the best five and a summary of the assessment of existing state mainly derived from the write ups of the students are recorded below.

2. System Should be Service Oriented - Praveena Thompson

The college library educates the students in a much wider sense than the classrooms do. It is the spring of knowledge

from where every student can drink his fill at his leisure and convenience.

Beyond the Text books: The formal education provided at colleges are more often than not restricted to a few dry volumes of text books. Moreover only a few selected topics are dealt with. The true student with a thirst for knowledge will not be satisfied with this fare. Students have to depend on libraries if they want to understand their subjects in a wider sense or if they need additional information. And they turn to the college libraries as being the most convenient. Students of literature most particularly find the services of the library invaluable. But we find that the college library is sadly lacking in the services it provides.

A Catalogue to Guide: We expect college library to be student-oriented. An upto date catalogue of all the books available cannot be done without. This should be made accessible to all the students. Many of them unlike more mature readers may only have a vague idea of the books they need and may not be able to ask for them by name. In such instances the catalogue proves invaluable.

Arrangement of books: The system of arrangement of the books turns out to be incomprehensible to many an unwary student. Care should be taken to see that the system adopted should be the simplest logical and one which does not prove to be an obstacle to the students in their search for books.

Attractive Atmosphere: Not only does a college library need to help the students who come seeking books but it should also try to attract other students to partake of the delights inside its doors. This is important because it's clientele is made up almost entirely of students and the reading habit should be instilled in as many of them as possible. This habit will open a treasure trove of knowledge to them which will enrich their lives. College library thus needs to take on the role of benign teacher also. Attractive and thought provoking posters should be put up inside the library so as to tempt the students to find out more about the subjects touched upon is a measure.

Helpful staff: The staff of the library need to wholeheartedly encourage and help any effort of the students for which research becomes necessary. Usually students are left to muddle along on their own and the result is a haphazard and poorly researched project which dampens any desire in their mind to pursue such endeavours in future years. Setting up an information counter might go a long way in helping the students and it will let off the other staff from unwanted disturbances which interrupt their routine duties.

New books: It is very essential to ensure that the College Library has among its collection the latest books of prominent authors. This is very often not the case and the students who enthusiastically seek these books are turned away disappointed. This lessens the faith of the students in the library and they cease to view it as a dependable source of information. The students are often unaware of the new arrivals in the library. A notice board should be provided where such information is listed. The working hours of the library should be according to the convenience of the students and they should be free to avail themselves of the facilities of the library at any time. The college libraries should be conscious that they are playing a major part to help mould the future citizens of the country and only if they play their part well, can we expect the students to serve the nation well in future.

3. Collection Should be Relevant and Upto Date - Mini. G.

Our college has its own big library. But the question is whether the library functions as to the expectations of the students? The given truth is that our college library does not work properly. As a student who expect too much from the library I have certain suggestions.

There should be a catalogue in the library. In the place of the present system of registering the details of the books in a register, their must be separate cards containing the details of the books - for each book arranged in an alphabetical order according to author's name. Then it will be more easier for the students to find the book.

Librarians not helpful: Another service which I expect from the college library is the co-operation of the librarian concerned. Often I find that the co-operation of the librarians is insufficient. Some-times the librarian concerned will have no idea about the book or subject the student is asking for. If the librarian for a particular subject is familiar with that subject then it will be of great help to the students.

Relevant books: Now-a-days the syllabuses are changing everyday. So there must be a system in the library to collect the details of the new books the students require from time to time. Even though the library has no huge fund to meet all such needs of the students, it can get some new books in the beginning of each academic year. The College library contains only old books The library is not developing according to the growing demands of the students.

Journals: Further service which I except from the college library is in the matter of periodicals. What I am seeing in our college library is that it has no good periodicals, from which the student can get some general knowledge more than from newspapers.

Open access: Another service which the library can very easily do is that it must allow the students to see the books freely. The library must arrange the books openly, so that the student can feel that she is not in an exhibition hall. I expect that the library must be improved, after throwing away the obsolete books with which it has filled most of the shelves.

Reference Section: The library must contain a separate reference section. I think that the library must take great care in getting adequate furniture, adequate lighting etc. Only then the students can use the library properly. In a college where there is a good library, the students would definitely give more attention to their studies. They would also develop mentally. Thus the college library can do a lot in moulding proper citizens for the future. I hope that our college library will emerge as a good example through eradicating its present malfunctionings.

4. Should Serve as a Door to the Wide World - Sindhu, V.

The college library should be a well functioning department to ensure the progress of the student's reading habits. It must be provided with reference books on all fields of knowledge. The books selected and kept in the library should be able to shape the character both mental and physical of the students and make them aware of the world they are living in.

The student must be allowed to choose for herself the books she needs and there must be close co-operation between the library staff and student. A well prepared catalogue will help the students to easily decide upon the books they may have and will save a lot of precious time wasted in book search. Library should maintain correct record of issued books to let us know the availability.

All books should be lent: There must not be any restriction in taking home books from the library. A student can not gather much information through references. It is obvious that one can not buy all the costly books one requires for studies. Elaborate reading is essential to have a grip over matters and this cannot be accomplished through making short references in the library room. The college library must be liberal in this respect. It must trust the students and lend away reference books also. A college library must maintain a serene atmosphere in which students can read in peace without any disturbance or fear. The college library must work in close cooperation with the various departments of the college. Teachers and students should be involved in its working. Only then it can thrive forward free of all inhibitions and prejudices to attain its noble objective.

Insufficient facilities: Certain deficiencies I would like to point out about our library are the inadequate lighting and the insufficiency of space for study. In this college with more than 4000 students library provides reading space for less than fifty. Only those who arrive first can find seats. Most of us get disappointed. We have to retreat. This will result in a negative effect on the minds of the students and may affect their reading

habits. The major requisites of a good and efficiently managed college library are proper ventilation, close co-operation between the staff and students and the ensuring of a calm atmosphere. If these aspects are dealt with properly and with special care it is sure that our college library will succeed in fulfilling its objective.

5. Should Support Learning Process - Mariam Cheriyan

A college must have all the reading materials which are expected to be searched for by the students. The materials must be up-to-date. The shelves should contain ample material on subjects taught in the college. The college libraries at present have a number of books but most of them are irrelevant and obsolete.

If a useful book is available it never comes back once it is issued. Strict rules must be enforced regarding the circulation. To give us adequate knowledge on national and international events. Standard magazines and journals should be purchased and circulated. this will broaden the student's views and outlook. A college library must consist all the materials that the students who want to attend competitive exams need of.

Quality of books: In the right learning process students are expected to read all books on the topic of study and make notes for themselves and understand and amass whatever facts she can about the topic she learns. For this to become possible college library should furnish the necessary books and material that the student has to make use of. A lot of formalities for getting books should be abandoned with. The student should be free to go over to any cupboard in which she is interested in and should be given the liberty to choose the material she needs. Indexes that tells where the books on a specific topic are to be found must also be available. This can free the student from searching through all the shelves for books on her subject. In a good college library materials should be arranged in a systematic and orderly way. The books should

be free of dust. The pages of the book should be in tact. New books should be acquired from time to time. The books college library chooses must have significant value in respect of its thought content. The student's value based judgment depends on the ideas she is familiar with. And the ideas she has, is nurtured by the books she reads. Will our college library improve itself to provide such books and also to fulfill the functions it is expected to fulfill. It is a question put to the future.

6. There is No Library Atmosphere - Deepa

Library is one of the essential factors in the college. The lectures given at the class and textbooks provides the student only with limited knowledge. These days are witnessing vast pace of development in science, technology, agriculture and all other fields of human activity. The students have to equip themselves amidst these explosive developments, with knowledge about those developments. It is the library which is to help the student to acquire this knowledge. But our college library is not at all relevant or useful.

Worse than a market place: If we ask for a book which the teacher told; is available in the library we get an answer that it is issued. Till we finish our course the book never comes back. One who borrows the books never considers the other readers who may be interested in that book. If we get a book another disappointment waits. Some students are so mischievous that they tear off the important pages in the book. While reading when we reach those page it is a cruel thing to experience. Our interest in the book suddenly disappears. And if we find out a place in the library to sit and read a book which they never permit us to take away; then we have to experience one more thing. Amidst a market place we can get more concentration. Library requires absolute silence if it is to fulfill its objective. There should be separate rooms for serious reading and periodicals and news papers. The serious readers find the ruffing movements of the paper and the chit chat of

those who sit with light reading materials very disturbing. There should be a good reference section in the library with a calm and quiet place to refer the books and take notes. Whenever we go searching for a book; there should be some staff to help us. Here always we have to wait for hours to get a book. Waiting is a psychological torture and a librarian is not expected to treat the students like this. All the books we see in the library are old unattractive and obsolete. They repulse us. Useful current books should be added to the library periodically. Books purchased should be the books we need. The rooms are not properly ventilated. They are dirty stuffy and without sufficient electric lights. Knowledge never comes out of this darkness. Teachers should tell the librarian what should be purchased and kept there to support our learning. Books and periodicals that can help us to prepare for competitive exams should also be made available. Our college libraries have to go a long distance to become useful to us and to fulfill the purposes for which they are maintained.

7. Obsolete and Unrelevant

Most of the students pointed out that shelves, tables and other furniture were guttered, inside the library in a very disorderly manner making movement and use of the library very uncomfortable and difficult. The collection totally lacked books on science subjects. Reference books were obsolete and not at all capable to help students in their information search. The working time of the library is not according to the convenience of the students. Library lacked a catalogue, helpful order for books on shelves and a system for reserving books. The aspect that, most students were not aware of the existence of a library and the services it offers was also pointed out. Many students put forward very interesting and creative suggestions for improving the library, like preparation of a card catalogue, issue system using cards, putting shelf guides, reserving the chairs available in library for serious readers etc. Even publicity techniques like library posters, the college

would never have dreamed off were suggested. It is very unfortunate to note that librarians or college authorities have never before thought on this line. From the comments of the students the following main observations were derived by the college.

- * The physical environment of the library is unattractive and non functional.
- * The quality of collection is very low. It is insufficient on subject coverage, unrelevant, lacked important reference materials to be kept in a college library and is not efficiently organised.
- * The quality of staff who provided library service is not satisfactory.
- * The atmosphere is not good for reading and study and library lacked reference rooms, periodicals and newspaper reading rooms etc.

8. Need Based Development

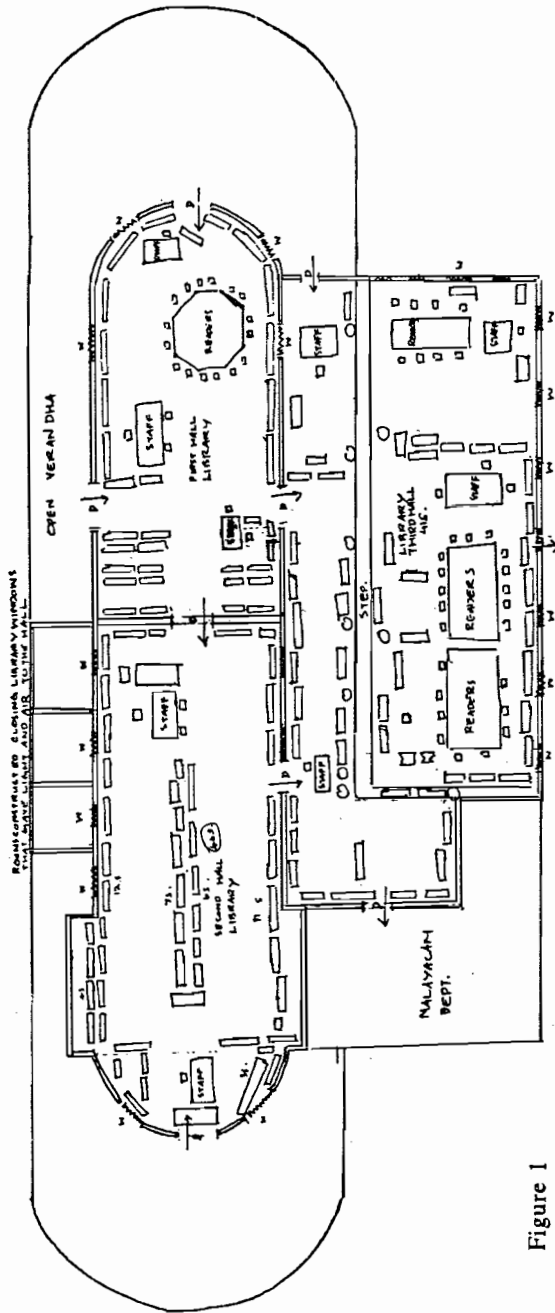
Reforming the suggestions given by students according to accepted scientific methods for library and information services librarian prepared plans for development of the library that can be effected immediately with student participation. With the support of the principal these were effected within a prescribed time limit. Proposals related to the remaining systematisation and development works which required additional staff, finance, equipments and changing of obsolete unscientific procedures that are being followed for decades were submitted to the higher authorities recommended by the principal.

8.1 Physical Environment

All students have expressed their disappointment over the existing physical environment of the library. A sketch of existing interior arrangement was prepared for record and is shown in figure 1. It lacked cross ventilation, natural light, and air. Electricity always failed.

A reason for the existence of such an arrangement was a simple one. Giving more importance to safety of stock than to service; the library used to keep the windows closed with the back of shelves pressed against them for additional security. Considering that library does not require the doors and windows that it permanently kept closed other purpose rooms were built beyond many of these doors and windows and the openings were sealed for ever.

With the participation of students and some parents who have knowledge of designing interiors of buildings librarian prepared the plan as shown in figure 2 for rearrangement. Principal had decided to effect the change within one month. Outside labourers quoted Rs. 10000/- for moving the shelves and other equipments. It was not a big amount for altering a non functional environment that existed for more than half a century preventing full utilization of a collection of books for which Government had already spend more than 40 lakhs. But college could find no provision for quick release of that amount. Parent Teacher Association (PTA) which always complained about library's inefficiency was approached for support but were not prepared to spend more than Rs. 500/- for such library development at that time. Then students and library staff came forward to voluntarily do some part of the manual labour. The Principal spending Rs. 3000/- from her own purse saying that it can be reimbursed by the PTA if it thinks it worth, engaged some outside labourers to move the very heavy items. The shelves were of different sizes and patterns. But were grouped according to similarity and arranged in a way in which uniform size items will come to sight while looking from one point. The library was rearranged as shown in figure 2 utilizing to the maximum the available windows and doors and allowing cross ventilation and easy movement of users and a comfortable reading atmosphere.



H.H. MAHARAJA'S COLLEGE FOR WOMEN, LIBRARY 1929 - 1941
EXISTING ARRANGEMENT OF SHELVES, READERS TABLES, WORKING SPACE ETC.

Figure 1

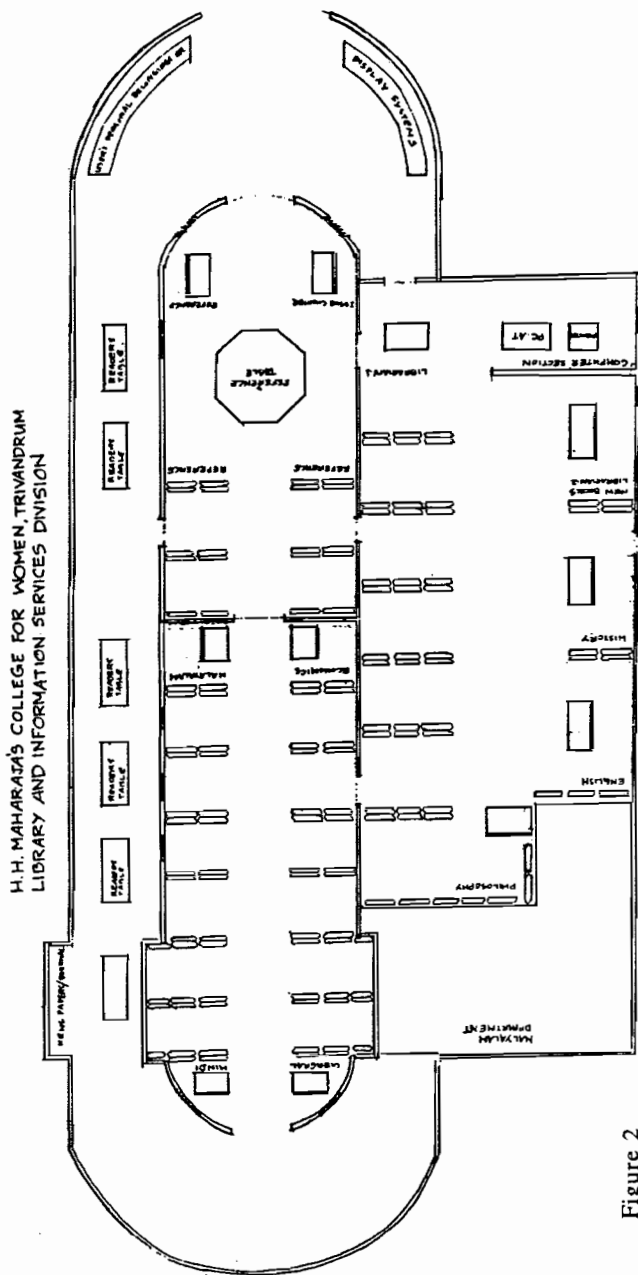


Figure 2

8.2 Quality of Collection

The quality of the collection was found to be low and irrelevant due to the obsolete methods followed for utilization of book fund in the college. All the funds meant for books were divided among the subject departments represented at the college council. Library was never informed of the availability of such book funds or even consulted before the purchase of books for understanding the needs of the library. Science departments used to keep with them the books they purchase from the share of book fund they get and so library never got any science books. Some Arts departments used to leave the books they acquire or books they find to be not of much use in their department at the library. This mainly formed the library's collection. But in 1994 Government issued an order implementing the recommendations on book purchase procedure, non print materials and centralisation of collections. This can give tremendous support to college libraries to improve the quality of their collections and services.

As library has failed to build up a need based reference collection till now, librarian submitted a proposal for building up basic collection as recommended by Joy Committee with source books very essential for day to day reference service. The estimated costs was Rs. 2.5 lakh. After examining the library's existing collection principal immediately sought funds from Directorate of Collegiate Education which sanctioned the funds in the next years allotments for library expansion plan scheme. With the support of the Government order based on Joy Committee recommendation on non print documents the college purchased twelve multimedia libraries in CD-ROM. Of this one was the complete collection on mammalian biology of Nottingham University.

8.3 Organization of collection

More than 30 students have commented on the lack of a catalogue and a classified order for books on shelves. Most of them have asked for the preparation of a card catalogue imme-

diately to make the collection useful. Last fifty years cataloguing and classification work remained pending. The completion of this work require huge amount, additional staff and stationeries and it will be difficult for the library to get funds for that. Too many other technical works also remained pending or unscientifically done; the completion and rectification of which are essential for making the library efficient.

8.4 Library Automation

Automatising the library was the only solution to complete all these pending works and continue the current works simultaneously and in a cost effective way. First the PTA was approached for support to computerisation. But it turned down the proposal. Then the Principal submitted to the Department; librarians' proposal for acquiring a multimedia computer system the total cost of which came to Rs. 2.50 lakhs. The Department sanctioned the amount and a computer system was immediately installed. The college became first Institution in India to install a Multimedia Compatible Library Automation System. Preparation of computerised catalogue was started using CDS/ISIS. Issue and return system also will be computerised. Information services and circulation work are expected to become speedy and efficient after automation.

8.5 Quality of Staff

Students have commented about the staff also. For providing library and information services to more than 4000 users college has only one professional staff and one semi professional staff. Others are attenders who do not have even SSLC as qualification. This is the patten allowed as per existing Government rules. Unless UGC or universities insist for sufficient number of staff with necessary qualification this aspect will not improve. Joy Committees recommendation in this regard are under the consideration of Government and if they are implemented situation will improve a lot.

Students have commented that those who come to use light reading materials always occupied the few readers tables available in the library. Library lacked separate newspaper and periodical reading rooms. So as suggested by students newspapers and magazines meant for light reading were transferred to a waiting room hall which could seat 200 students. The 25 seats available inside library stack room were exclusively reserved for serious reading and reference. Considering the suggestions by students library has decided to limit number of books to be issued to a user and period of loan.

9. Conclusion

All Library and information systems exist to satisfy the requirement of users it is expected to serve. This experiment in user participation brought into notice some very important aspects related to college library development.

- * The students are primary factors in planning and implementation of college library systems. So colleges should always have a feed back system which brings to the library the comments and suggestions of students. This can enable the library to build up its resources and initiate new services according to students requirements.
- * Student participation can force the libraries to change. In the interaction students become aware of their right to services and librarians of their deficiencies.
- * Students can influence the decisions of authorities; and sanction of funds for minimum facilities at least will become easily possible.
- * The present experiment also brought to light that the Principal's interest and awareness of the role the library has to play in teaching learning process; only can help the libraries. Libraries need the support of the Principals against the hostile attitude of the community who used to divert the resources meant for college

libraries according to their will and pleasure. Only a Principal with strong determination can support the scientific development of the library. In this experiment with a Principal who has interest in library development and a librarian with required qualification and experience a library that remained inefficient and unimportant for more than five decades became live and efficient within a very short period.

- * If a document like the recent Joy Committee Report which is only recommendations to Government can support and initiate library vitalization projects in many parts of India a manual or guide like that with recommendations published by the Directorate of Collegiate Education, State Government or UGC can surely initiate and improve our college library situations to a great extent.

The experiment proved that student reactions and comments and student participation can help the development of college libraries tremendously. While implementing Joy Committee Recommendations some provisions can also be added in it to involve students in college library development. Skillfully making use of student participation with initiative and sincerity it is possible for a college librarian to make the library and information system in college live and effective and surely he can always send back a student from the library with a smile. Thousands of college libraries that remain inactive can use students participation without any extra effort and money to make library services live and effective.

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