

Role of Public Library in Making its Services and Resources Accessible to Differently Abled Persons

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ABSTRACT

The motto of writing this article is to elaborate on the role of public libraries in providing information to differently abled individuals and making them live independently in society. In this noble endeavor, how public libraries should make their services and resources accessible to differently abled individuals has been discussed. This article also discusses the problems faced by differently abled persons in day-to-day life.

Keywords: Differently abled persons, Public library, Information access, India, Physical access, Media formats

INTRODUCTION

The irony lies in the fact that some people are still “literally starving” for information in the Age of Information, as Roger Carver continues to assert. Since it enables people to grow as individuals and actively engage in a democratic society, fully exercising their rights and obligations, access to information has already been shown to be one of the most crucial human rights (Jeal *et al.*, 1996a). In India, a developing nation where mobility and social contact remain difficult for people with disabilities, those who are disabled or differently abled are largely underserved when it comes to information services (Jeal *et al.* 1996b). Disability is mostly viewed in India as the result of structural barriers, including poverty, unemployment,

illiteracy, caste, class, and gender barriers, as well as cultural barriers like beliefs and prejudices (Jamoh *et al.*, 2021). A large portion of society’s mainstream activities has been closed off to those with disabilities. In practically all societies, people with disabilities have experienced oppression, marginalization, and stigma. Despite being the most underprivileged and blatantly ignored segment of the population, they make up a sizable portion of it (Dhiman, 2022).

Public libraries are vital in promoting access to information, culture, and leisure for people of all ages, races, castes, genders, religions, nationalities, languages, and social classes. They are traditionally seen as agents of democracy, equal opportunities, and empowerment (Chandrakanth & Reddy, 2019). The public

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library and its information services ought to be open to all users. Libraries should serve marginalized populations, such as those with disabilities, in order to help them overcome isolation and empower them to participate more fully and intelligently in contemporary society (Krishnamurthy & Kumbar, 2008; Krishnamurthy & Awari, 2013).

PUBLIC LIBRARY

According to the 1994 UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, the public library serves as the community's access point to knowledge and offers a foundational framework for independent decision-making, lifelong learning, and the cultural advancement of both individuals and organizations (IFLA/UNESCO, 1994; IFLA, 2001).

At public libraries, our mission is to reduce information inequality and close the knowledge gap between those who have access to information and those who do not. This is why the 1994 UNESCO Public Library Manifesto states that everyone should have equal access to public library services, regardless of their age, ethnicity, sex, religion, nationality, language, or social standing. For users who are unable to utilize the usual services and materials due to a variety of reasons, such as language minority groups, individuals with disabilities, or those incarcerated or in hospitals, special services and materials must be made available (IFLA/UNESCO, 1994; IFLA, 2001).

MISSIONS OF PUBLIC LIBRARY

The following important missions, all related to information, literacy, education, and culture, are listed in the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1994) and ought to constitute the cornerstone of public library services:

1. Fostering and enhancing children's reading habits from an early age
2. Encouraging formal education at all levels as well as self-directed learning
3. Creating opportunities for individual creative growth
4. Fostering children's and teens' inventiveness and imagination
5. Fostering respect for artistic creations, scientific advancements, and cultural legacy
6. Making all performing arts cultural expressions accessible
7. Promoting cultural variety and intercultural interaction
8. Encouraging oral tradition
9. Ensuring public access to a variety of local information
10. Providing local businesses, associations, and interest groups with sufficient information services
11. Promoting the growth of computer and information literacy
12. Encouraging, involving, and instigating literacy programs and activities for all age groups, as needed

Differently Abled Persons

"Disabled people are not only the most deprived human beings in the developing world, they are also the most neglected." Amartya Sen

Another aspect of human diversity is disability. Although it is commonly understood to be a type of physical ailment or deformity, it is much more than that. Millions of people experience one kind of handicap or another. Physical and social constraints frequently impede their ability to fully participate in society, making their lives handicapped. Because disabilities vary so widely, it is very challenging to develop a universal

classification for people who are differently abled or impaired. In general, a disability is any physical or mental condition that limits a person's capacity to utilize their body (to a partial or full extent, and with ease) in order to carry out daily responsibilities. In December 1993, during its 48th session, the UN General Assembly (1994) defined disability as any functional restriction (physical, mental, or sensory) that affects any population, wherever in the world. As per the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, an individual must be certified by a medical authority (any hospital or institution that the relevant government specifies for the purposes of this Act) as having at least 40% of any disability (Mitra *et al.*, 2014).

Problems of Differently Abled Persons

The issues faced by people with disabilities are complex and multifaceted. One problem's presence serves as the primary cause of another problem. The truth is that stereotypes in society are a bigger challenge for them to overcome than illness or mental health issues. As individuals attempt to participate in the social environment and sense a desire to accomplish some of their objectives as social creatures, their challenges and troubles become more serious (Patil & Kumbar, 2021). The general attitude of society toward people with disabilities has been quite hostile and unpleasant. Because of their limited mobility, limitations, or loss of locomotor abilities, people with disabilities cope with a lot of uncertainty. The biggest actual disability loss is the loss of movement. In terms of both fact and feeling, it exacerbates the other biggest loss, which is social inadequacy (Yadav & Singh, 2022). One technique that helps people with disabilities overcome their limitations is education. The best chance of their getting over their disabilities is in it. However, these individuals have the lowest levels of education due to a lack of access to

education, mobility issues, and communication and reading difficulties. Employment is one of the main issues facing people with disabilities. These individuals have extremely low rates of employment everywhere in the world, whether in developed or developing nations. Because of their jobs, the majority of disabled people are poor and deal with numerous health problems.

Making an Accessible Public Library for DA Persons

Public libraries need to think differently and realize that there is more to do than just operate out of an outdated structure with a staff of old guards and the same services in order to guarantee equitable access. Public libraries need to consider the building's physical state as well as its resources and services from the perspective of these users (Twaambo *et al.*, 2022).

Physical Access

Making the sensible decision to visit the library building is the first step toward gaining physical access. In order to ensure this, public libraries must be crucial. Enough parking spaces must be provided, and directions must be obvious and simple. There should be a parking space near the library's entrance and an easily accessible path leading there. There should be an accessible entryway with a phone, a ramp, and an automated door opener (Patil & Kumbar, 2021; Twaambo *et al.*, 2022).

The steps, elevators, restrooms, and seating assistance throughout the library should be easily accessible to those with a variety of disabilities. Wheelchair users should be able to access all areas, and people who are blind or visually impaired should be able to navigate the area with a guide dog or cane and not run into any impediments. Staff members at libraries should be able to converse with deaf patrons. It should

be simple for someone with an intellectual disability to locate books and other materials.

Individuals and groups of people with special needs should be able to take guided tours of the library. It's possible that many of these users will find it challenging to read library information. It is important for the public library's collection to be well organized and easily accessible so that those with disabilities can browse it without difficulty on their own (Dhiman, 2022).

Information Resources and Services

The user will likely desire to use library materials once they are comfortable with the library's surroundings. To help people with varying disabilities access information, public libraries should purchase several media types, such as talking books, e-books, Braille books, large print books, picture books, adaptable computers, and other assistive technology (Patil & Kumbar, 2020).

- How to provide information to differently abled patrons
- Suitable for visually challenged individuals
- Large-print information
- Audio, CD/DVD, or DAISY format information
- Braille information
- Access to the library's website
- For those who are deaf or have hearing loss
- Videos with sign language or subtitles that provide information
- Details sent by email or text message on phones
- Information on the accessible library website (text versions of audio content should be provided as well)

- Text that is simple for customers who were born deaf or who became deaf before learning to speak
- For those who have trouble reading
- Information in a text that is easy to read
- Information in Daisy format, on CD/DVD, or on audio/video cassette
- Details on the webpage that are available for the library.
- For people who are physically disabled
- Data on audio/video cassette, CD/DVD, or DAISY format
- Information on a website that is accessible
- For those who are cognitively handicapped
- Information presented in an understandable manner
- Data in DAISY format, on CD/DVD, or on audio/video tape
- Details on the webpage that are accessible for the library
- Special services
- Home delivery service to persons who are homebound.
- Outreach services to persons in institutions and care facilities.
- Reading service for patrons with reading difficulties.
- Separate section for visually challenged patrons.

Library Personnel

Although all of the technical and other solutions are fantastic, they won't be of much service if the library staff aren't dedicated to helping its impaired patrons (Lamani *et al.*, 2014). Without

someone ready to teach the user how to utilize it, all the technology in the world is worthless. The mindset of the employees is the most crucial component of establishing an accessible environment (Patil & Kumbar, 2020). Employees at libraries must understand that people with disabilities are people, not just people with disabilities. The employees of the public library should receive comprehensive training in this endeavor, including how to assist a disabled user, communicate, and offer information (Talawar *et al.*, 2022a; Talawar *et al.*, 2022b). It is important for library employees to remember that people with disabilities must overcome both psychological and physical hurdles in order to visit the library and express their needs.

CONCLUSION

Access to public libraries for the use of people with disabilities is not presently available and is not anticipated to be in the near future in many nations worldwide, for a variety of reasons, including political, social, psychological, and economic factors. Likewise, India is hardly an exception. Public library development and upkeep are the key concerns, despite the fact that India's public library sector has seen enormous expansion since independence. The least attention is given to delivering the best services. But over the past ten or so years, the paradigm has gradually changed to guarantee that everyone in society has access to public libraries. It is now a political problem, especially in advanced countries.

In order to make public libraries in India more accessible to people with disabilities, the state and federal governments should step up and provide additional funding and other resources. Additionally, it ought to be stipulated in the Public Library Act that all public libraries must offer their patrons with disabilities the bare minimum of services. Furthermore, a plethora of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

operating in this field can greatly assist the cause.

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