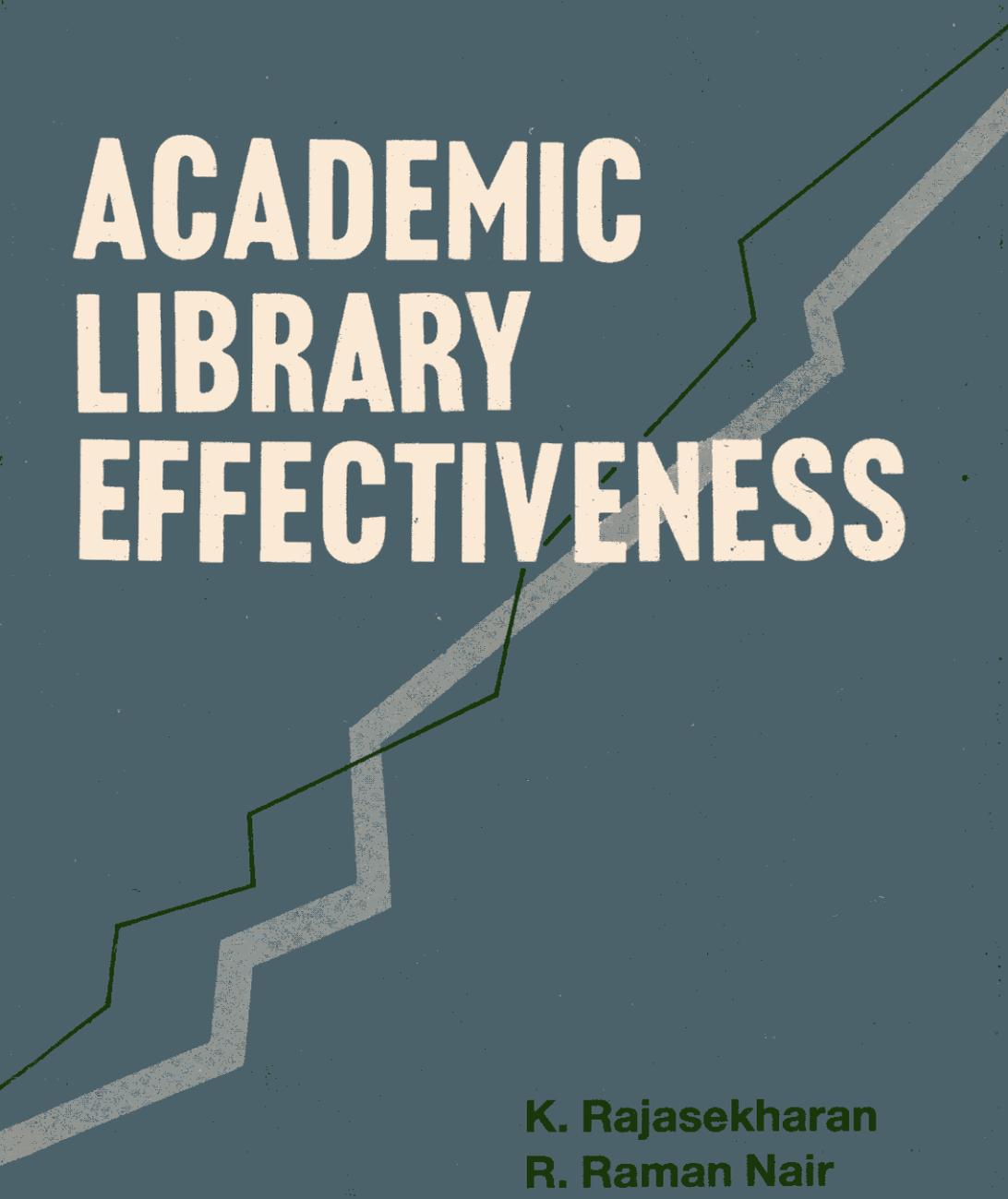


PERSPECTIVES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIANSHIP-2

ACADEMIC LIBRARY EFFECTIVENESS



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USER EDUCATION IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES ; WHAT, WHY AND HOW ?

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1. What

There are many definitions available in the literature on user education now. Some of them are given below just to explain the concept of user education.

According to Jacques Tacatlian, "User education is to include any effort or programme which will guide and instruct existing and potential users in the recognition and formulation of their information needs, in the effective and efficient use of information services and their assessment".

Mews has defined user education as "instruction given to readers to help them to make best use of the library."

Nancy Fjallbrant and Ian Malley said that user education is "concerned with the whole information and communication process and one part of this involves the total interaction of the user with the library. This should be continuous process starting with school and public libraries and with possibilities of extension into academic and specialised libraries."

Obviously, it becomes difficult, rather impossible, to arrive at one single agreed and comprehensive definition of user education. No definition, as is clear from the above given definitions, takes into account all the aspects of user education, and this is inspite of large amount of literature available on the subject.

2. Why

Some of the factors which necessitate the introduction of user education programmes in university libraries are enumerated below.

1. Tremendous increase in the amount of literature in a variety of forms over the last thirty years.
2. Wide scattering and seepage of information.
3. A large number of researchers are new to research activity and

- have no idea of increasing volume of information.
4. Emphasis on inter-disciplinary research.
 5. Some psychological barriers and other misgivings about the university library and library services.
 6. Change in the system of examination from annual to semester system and thereby emphasis on assignments, self study, etc.
 7. Gradual application of electronic machines in libraries for information storage, retrieval and dissemination.
 8. Absence of proper library guidance at the lower levels, i.e. at the school and college levels which generally lead to ineffective literature search, and resultant waste of precious time.

5. Objectives

It is universally acknowledged that the basic objective of user education is to introduce the user to library techniques, library resources and services, and thus turn the potential user into an actual user. Donald Davinson has enumerated the objectives of user education as follows :

1. Making the user better informed about the facilities the library can offer so that their requirements will become both better informed and better articulated and so that users become more aware of how they might increase their use of the library's services.
2. Providing users with the basic skills of literature searching so that they can undertake more of their own do-it-yourself reference service. Similarly, A.J.Evans and others have also identified the objectives of user education as under :
 1. To enable the individuals to do immediately after the instruction, tasks that they could not do well, if at all prior of instruction.
 2. To secure change in behaviour or attitudes resulting from instruction.
 3. To secure an embodiment of the skills as a fairly permanent feature of work.

If user education is provided with above mentioned objectives in mind the users are then likely to understand the structure of knowledge and know the means of finding and using information for themselves.

It is often noted that in all libraries the users are not really interested in libraries as such, said Ruth Alston, but are interested in them; only as a means to their end purpose of finding out what they are really interested

in, i.e., their subject. This clearly indicates that the users should be taught about 'How to get the information they want'.

4. University Libraries and their Role

In view of the need and objectives of user education as expressed above the role of university libraries increases tremendously. The library personnel in these libraries are probably better placed for undertaking the user education programmes at different levels as given below.

4.1. At Undergraduate Level

This includes such students as enrolled in B.A./B.Sc./B.Com. courses in different subjects. The users at this level be given a general introduction to the geography of the university library, as well as some useful information about the library catalogue, reference sources, etc.

4.2. At Post-graduate Level

This includes students as enrolled in various M.As., MScs., M.Com. M.B.A., etc. In addition to the above information they also need to be told about the classification system followed, bibliographies available, library services offered, etc.

4.3. At Research Scholar Level

The research scholars in different subjects need to be told in detail about the literature search, compilation of bibliographies for their projects, technical writing, giving footnotes, etc.

4.4. At Faculty level

The teachers not only have to teach but also to conduct fruitful research. Hence they need special attention from the library. They may be politely made aware of the steps in literature search, information retrieval, technical writings, interlibrary loans, etc.

These users are to be given effective user education programmes with the active cooperation of the faculty members. Cooperation between the

library personnel and faculty will help to remove the misgivings about the library and library services. It is noted through various studies that even faculty members are often unaware of many library services that are rendered from the university libraries. It is all the more important to give services to the faculty not only for themselves but for the reason that they are the greatest motivating force for the students and the research scholars. While imparting user education programmes to the faculty it should be clear in the minds of the library personnel that the formal overtones are to be avoided. The objective at the faculty level should be to help them to sharpen their knowledge, improve their ability, and develop their skills in the effective use of the reference and information tools, and arouse their interest in the use of the documentation and information services etc.

If all this is discussed with the faculty and the researchers, and also the post graduate students through lectures, library visits and on the spot search through various sources of information, it all will certainly help them a lot in utilising the library resources not only in that subject but in related subjects also.

4.5. Continuous feature

The imparting of user education programmes should not be a once for all activity; it should rather be made regular and continuous feature of the university library. This will keep the users in touch with the library resources and services.

5. Feed back

This is very important in that it will decide whether to continue the programme or to terminate it. The users will evaluate the user education programmes and give the feedback. On the basis of this feedback the programmes can be amended or modified in order to give better results. The other aspect of the feedback and evaluation of this programme is the self-evaluation by the library personnel. This exercise will also help in improving the user education programmes.

6. Conclusion

It can safely be said that user education programmes should be made integral component of the university libraries in India now a days. These

programmes must be done at the beginning of each Semester, and in between also, if possible.

It is suggested that a permanent User Education Department be set up not only at the level of each university library, but also at the level of the university Grants Commission which could coordinate such programmes at the national level. All this will help to enhance the reputation and dignity of the university library in the eyes of the users, and thereby promote the use of library material to the fullest extent and improve further the quality of research at the university level.

Each library therefore, must find the methods most feasible within its own limitations, and also coordinate at the regional and national level. There is now growing realization in India that something must be done to help the library users of the late eighties and the nineties, so that they could be ushered into the new century with more and useful and meaningful awareness about the libraries.

Although we have yet miles to go, but it is here that we do see the silver lining

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