

# Best Practices in Academic Libraries in India: A Study

**S.D. Vyas**

Librarian

NALSAR University of Law

Hyderabad, India

sdvyas15@yahoo.com

## Abstract

University Grants Commission and higher education experts are concerned about quality of higher education and they want to develop higher education infrastructure keeping in view the quality as yardstick. The paper provides UGC's data about universities, colleges, teachers and students which have grown over a period of last 58 years. It defines best practices as an application of procedures to yield superior results which means way of doing things in particular organization as guidelines for good practices. Explains NAAC's concern for quality of library practices as well as NAAC's set of best practices in academic libraries. Some features which should have been included in the set meant for improving the services of the college libraries are being proposed here while evaluating the criteria of selection of the best academic libraries. Explaining Peter Brophy's comparison of academic libraries with an automobile industry for the purpose of quality of management with a set of indicators The paper provides a few examples of the best practices experienced in libraries in different situations by Indian library scientists like Dr. S.R. Ranganathan and others. It elaborates upon Prof. Tikekar's comment that blind imitation, false competition, status symbolism will not work and finally submits that best practices of British libraries and American Center Libraries operating in India should have been included for our purpose.

## Introduction

University Grants Commission has been striving for ensuring quality of higher education since its inception, and more so during last two decades. There has been tremendous surge in educational institutions coming up particularly after creation of All India Council of Technical Education AICTE in 1987. The surge is more in private sector which has opened flood gates in private sector institutions. Number of deemed universities and colleges which have come up recently needs assessment by higher education experts. Now a days it has become a fashion to have a college of engineering and medical sciences. Norms have been flouted with impunity and how technical colleges are approved by AICTE is open secret. According to latest

statistics provided by present UGC Chairman the capacity expansion in higher education has increased manifold which is evident from the following figures:

	1950	2008
Universities	25	431
Colleges	700	20,677
Teachers	15000	5.05 Lakhs
Students	1.00 Lakhs	111.6 Lakhs

Source: *Emerging Issues in Higher Education, Approach, Strategy and Action Plan in the 11th Plan. New Delhi, UGC. 2009.*

For such a huge number of academic institutions in India it needs efforts to bring quality in library services immediately. Joseph M. Juran says that 21<sup>st</sup> Century is devoted to 'quality' whereas 20<sup>th</sup> Century was for 'production'. We have to discuss the issue of quality to improve library customers' satisfaction. Higher education experts are much concerned about quality of education provided by the universities and colleges in India. There is apprehension that education received in these institutions is not commensurate with the fees charged from the students. Education experts feel that this is cheating with the people. It is because of this reason Government of India, UGC and NAAC are seriously concerned as to how to improve standards of education and establish best practices in the universities and colleges and their libraries.

## Definition of Best Practices

ODLIS (Online Dictionary of Library and Information Science) describes best practices as follows:

"In the application of theory to real-life situations, procedures that, when properly, applied consistently yield superior results and are therefore used as reference points in evaluation of the effectiveness of alternative methods of accomplishing the same task. Best practices are identified by examining empirical evidence of success."

*Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* describes 'best practices as quality of high standard, excellence, highly improved, outstanding, par excellence service. It means way of doing something that is usual or expected way in a particular organization or situation, guidelines for good practices. In this process of developing best practices we take action rather than good ideas, and we improve our skills.'

What is quality? It is customer satisfaction through product or service. In an academic library student and teachers are the customers who are part of the academic community.

If we look at the history of higher education in India we find that Radhakrishnan (1948) and Kothari (1964) Commission Reports have already recognized the role of libraries in higher education. They had recommended the need of a first class library for the college and universities. Moreover UGC Library Committee Report (1965) headed by Dr. S.R. Ranganathan provided firm base to academic libraries. INFLIBNET since its inception in 1989 has been providing financial support to the academic libraries to automate library operations. Today INFLIBNET claims that it has supported more than 150 universities for library automation. It is hoped that within a decade almost all the universities will have library automation. However our journey towards college libraries is long, and shall take time to cover all the colleges of the country. National Knowledge Commission Report (2007) also realizes the significance or the role of different types of libraries.

National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) and Best Practices

a) University Grants Commission created a higher education body (whose job is to assess the quality of university and college institutions) in 1994 in Bangalore on the recommendation of National Policy of Education (NPE) in 1986. This is National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) which strives for quality and excellence in higher education and advocates for enhancing the role of library and Information Services in improving academic environment. Document prepared by NAAC for "Best Practices in Academic Libraries says : "Best practice may be innovative and be a philosophy, policy, strategy, program, process or practice that solves a problem or create new opportunities and positively impact on organizations. "NAAC developed a set of best practices followed in academic libraries and presented under the following four broad areas:

1. Management and Administration of Library.
2. Collection and Services.
3. Extent of User Services.
4. Use of Technology.

A database of documented practices is available on

NAAC website and they assure that regular updating will be made with consultations on contributing institutions. For college libraries NAAC has developed the following set of best practices for college libraries:

- Computerization of library with standard software.
- Inclusion of sufficient information about the library in the college prospectus.
- Compiling student / teacher statistics
- Displaying newspaper clippings and a clipping file maintained periodically.
- Career/ employment information services
- Internet facility to different user groups
- Information literacy programmes
- Suggestion Box
- Displaying New Arrivals
- Conduct book exhibition on different occasions
- Organizing book talks
- Instituting Annual Best Use Award for students
- Organizing competitions annually
- Conduct user survey periodically

However the above set of best practices for college libraries prepared by NAAC can not be termed as the last word. The following set of practices too should have been included in it.

- Making of a Path Finder to the library
- Keeping the library premises neat and clean
- Compiling a list of Current Serials/ catalogue of journals.
- Updating and maintaining library website
- Maintaining useful statistics regarding the use of the library and displaying them on the library walls
- Compiling checklists on different subject/topics as a part of documentation service
- Library Committee formation
- Distribution of useful handouts

NAAC in its publication *Library and Information Services: Case Presentation* (2006) explained its efforts towards quality. Prof. A.C. Tikekar's comment about the examples of best practices given under four significant areas of LIS "are from a very few and stray and from of the same universities and colleges. Some of them are very peripheral and not of core nature. It is a matter of discussion that the institutions included in the list are the only the best academic libraries. The name of the colleges and universities listed are not well known except few."

It is recommended that NAAC should hold a National Seminar on Best Practices in academic libraries every

year. The participation in the conference should be by paper presentation. Selection of papers for presentation is subject to peer review.

Academic libraries are part of the large academic bodies. Generation, organization and dissemination of information and knowledge are subject to constant change since 1980s. Most academic libraries have the facility of Internet resources which supplement the print collection of the library. These changes are substantial. The problem with us is that many changes we come across, we immediately take it as a part of routine. Internet facility helps in saving time, repetition and redundancy, time lag and delays. We can communicate with information service providers within no time in case of any problem, change or adding new things to existing collection or services. Library management has to become more integrated through software. Librarians will have to study the potential of library software as many features are still not known to us.

Peter Brophy's *The Library in the Twenty-first Century: New Services for the Information Age* has devoted one chapter on "what is a good library" explains how researchers and patrons view 'goodness' in the library. A library in order to survive should acquire resources which are useful to users in present as well as these will be in future too. The question of goodness is not only related to efficiency and effectiveness of the process, but also adaptability and responsiveness of the library to its environment. Different organizations have different set of indicators to judge the quality of the library. And these indicators should have amalgam of both-traditional library operations and ICT base services. It is a subject of further research to find out how a library preference can be measured.

Total Quality Management (TQM) stresses upon continuous improvement in services as core values. Peter Brophy compares libraries with automobile industry for the purpose of quality management. But according to S. Siraj Nissa Begum there is difference. She says "while in manufacturing concern, the customer is remote, where as in service organization like an academic library, producers and consumers meet face to face. Thus the complexity of managing service organizations is typically compounded by the existence of multiple interfaces." Peter Brophy uses the following indicators for comparison: Performance, Features, Conformance, Reliability, Durability, Currency, Serviceability, Aesthetics, Perceived Quality, and Accessibility. Thus a library has to have a catalogue of stock, whether logically organized, is there full space and knowledgeable staff to help, is there any link to document delivery from the online catalogue, personal notification of new acquisitions, is there a coffee shop, libraries are following AACR, MARC, service standards (e.g., average acquisition time) are correct answers given to the queries, books of the library websites working properly, technology is durable despite user base is increasing, library

acquires latest edition of books and journals, today's newspapers available when library opens, current CD-ROM mounted, corrections of errors in document supply, courtesy of staff, receptivity to complaints and suggestions, library building design including finishes, web home page design, library staff helpful and co-operative, OPACS are working well, Braille options is available as well as facilities for deaf. The above points if taken into account seriously which are part of the above attributes, it gives you some insights of 'quality'.

#### A few Examples of Experience of Best Practices in Academic and Research Libraries

1. Dr. S. R. Ranganathan writes that he brought to the notice of Sir C.V. Raman about Raman Effect which was published in a foreign journal. This incident happened in Madras University Library in early thirties. Sir C.V. Raman received the Nobel Prize for his work on the scattering of light which is called Raman scattering or Raman Effect.
2. Mr. T.N. Chaturvedi, former Governor of Karnataka narrated the experience about when he approached Prof. D.N. Marshall, Librarian Bombay University for a book from his Library. Prof. Marshall sent him the book immediately without waiting whether his library rules permitted him or not. Mr. T.N. Chaturvedi wrote to many university libraries. He received negative reply from them saying that they have the book in the library but their rules do not permit them to send the book
3. Prof. P.K. Mehta, former Pro Vice-chancellor of IGNOU narrates the incident in 1970 when he wrote to Dr. B. Anderson, Librarian of Bombay University Library that he would like to make use of the library and mentioning his area of research work. Prompt reply came from Dr. B. Anderson. Prof. Mehta went to the library and met the librarian immediately. Dr. B. Anderson gave him three typed papers and told, "This is the list of books available in our library which, I think are relevant to the area of your work" and told him please feel free to contact me if you have any difficulty or need of any assistance. Prof. P.K. Mehta spent few weeks in the library. Prof. P.K. Mehta comments "A library is provision and every provision is judged on the basis of three parameters: *Availability, Accessibility and Utilization*.
4. In 1980s when the author was working as Deputy Librarian at American Studies Research Centre Library, Hyderabad Director, Prof. William Mulder used to ask him for making checklists on different authors of American literature for the outstation scholars. When the Director we told that making a bibliography of books and journal articles is the part of literary research and a job of research scholar himself, he would say, "No, this checklist will motivate him to start research on his topic. So let us send him the checklist immediately".

He would also want the librarians to add a last line in every letter as courtesy "Please feel free to write to me in case if you have any questions." The Director also wanted to see the copy of the every letter that the library sent to outstation scholars and he would correct him in case he found any discrepancy in the letter.

The above examples are just a few, and there might be many more such examples of different libraries experienced by our library professionals. What common thing we found in the above incidents is the promptness as well as the thorough knowledge of the library resources by librarians which the library clients appreciated. Even sending a prompt reply to any letter could be considered as best practices. The clients want how much efforts we have put in providing service to them.

### Conclusion

In the process of achieving best practices in libraries, Prof. A.C. Tikekar warns us "Blind imitation, false competition and status symbolism do not work well. Ad hocism too does not accomplish the desired goal. Ill planned radical change would prove costly and unwieldy. At the same time both resistance and or reluctance to accept the inevitable changes will be harmful to development of libraries."

It is suggested to UGC /NAAC that the best practices followed in British Libraries and American Center Libraries operating in India should have been taken into account. There are areas which we have not been able to find out as best practices. A few examples of

such areas are: index to periodicals, real time reference service, preparation of various statistics of the use of e-resources and many other areas.

### Bibliography

1. Trophy, Peter. *The Library in the Twenty-First Century: New Services for the Information Age*. London, Facet, 2001.
2. Krishan Kumar. *Library Management in Electronic Environment*. Delhi, Har- Anand, 2001.
3. Kulkarni, S.A. Best Practices in College Libraries. *National Seminar on Library and Information Services in Changing Era*, 22-23 January 2009. p. 273-281.
4. Mokashi, R.M. *Best Practices in Librarianship- Services to the readers* : Compilations of Who's Who. National Seminar on Library and Information Services in Changing Era. 22-23 January 2009. p. 285-294.
5. NAAC: *A Profile*. Bangalore, National Assessment and Accreditation Council, 2006. A Brochure
6. NAAC. *Best Practices in Library and Information Services. (Website) Library and Information Services: Case Presentations*. NAAC, 2006.
7. Siraj Nissa Begum, S. Total Quality Management in the Academic Library. *LibraryPhilosophy and Practice*. 5, 2(Spring 2003) 1-3.
8. Tikekar, A.C. *Best Practices in Academic Libraries*. Paper Presented at the Program "Vision Libraries - 2020 organized by North Maharashtra University, Jalgaon on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2009.
9. Tikekar, A.C. *Remembering Professor D. N. Marshall*. A document prepared by Professor Tikekar on the eve of Professor Marshall's Birth Centenary.