

Best Practices in Academic Libraries: An Overview

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Abstract

In the changing information environment, the academic libraries are undergoing drastic changes in their internal and external environments. Due to these changes, the role of academic libraries and the impact of ICT on them in the present context. The article focused on the current challenges faced by the academic libraries, and how it can be overcome by using the best practices. Also highlights the broad areas under which the works are classified, along with its list under each category. The process that are adopted in the academic libraries are discussed and concludes that with the adoption of the best practices in academic libraries there will be a continuous improvement and overall performance in the institution / organization.

Keywords: Academic Libraries, Best Practices, ICT, User Education, Library Services

Introduction

The international changes particularly the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have impact on the functioning of academic libraries. The developments in ICT have changed the users' expectation from the academic libraries in different ways. The ways to build collection and services to the end users vary from the recent past practices. To meet the end-users demands effectively, the academic libraries need to identify and adopt good practices and benchmarks. Thus, preparing guidelines in a standardized way based on the best practices employed by libraries is significant which will ultimately enhance the value based services of academic libraries. Library and Information Services of Higher Education institutions play a central role in enhancing the quality of academic and research environment. The National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) strive for quality and excellence in higher education and advocates for enhancing the role of Library and Information Services in improving academic environment. Though, it is institutional accreditation that the NAAC does,

the assessment of a library, a vital sub-unit, is a key step that integrates itself with the overall evaluation. 2. Definition: Best Practice in simple term known as the practices which have the way of enhancing the existing function and help in effective implementation or use of the process. According to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, “Best practices as a quality of high standard, excellence, highly improved outstanding par excellence service. It means way of doing something that is usual or expected way in particular organization or situation, guidelines for good practices. In this process of developing best practices we taken action rather than good ideas & we improve our skills.” According to the online dictionary of Library and Information Science, “ 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 sources” According to National Board of Accreditation and Assessment (NAAC). “Best Practice may be innovative and be a philosophy, policy, strategy, program, process or practice that solve a problem or create new opportunities and positively impact on organizations. Institutional excellence is the aggregate of the best practices followed in different areas of institutional activities.” From above definition, best practice means, it is a method or technique used to improve the current workflow of an organization to obtain its objectives effectively & with predetermined standards

Best Practices

Best practices are the best ways to perform a process, a function, or an activity that leads to a superior performance. These pertain to the processes, practices, and systems identified in public and private organizations that perform exceptionally well and are widely recognized as improving organization's performance and efficiency. Successfully identifying and applying best practices can reduce costs and improve quality. Best Practices are the means by which leading organizations in any field have achieved top performance, and they serve as goals for the other organizations striving for excellence. Australian Best Practice Demonstration Program defines best practice as, “the pursuit of world class performance. It is the way in which the most successful organizations manage and organize their operations. It is a moving target. As the leading organizations continue to improve the „best practice“, goalposts are constantly moving. The concept of continuous improvement is integral to the achievement of best practice” Best Practice is a management idea which asserts that there is a technique, method, process, activity, incentive or reward that is more effective at delivering a particular outcome than any other technique, method, process, etc. these are the most efficient and effective way of accomplishing a task. These are the tools helps for the continuous improvements of the system, process and services and the applications best practices add exceptional value to an institution and are considered as reliable benchmarks or standards of quality.

Role of the Academic Libraries: - The role of the library and information centre in a college is aimed at realizing the educational goals of the college or the parent organization. The college libraries not only provides stimulus to reading by procuring materials for study and research, by introducing open access system, by providing long hours of open, by organizing the library resources in a systematic way, but also feeds the intellect of the student, encourage the researches of the faculty and thus serve the teaching and research needs of the faculty. The college library and information resource centre acts as a vehicle for disseminating information and the related computer technologies through the best practices for utilization by its community of users and also for the exchange of information among its users. 'Best practice' in academic library in simple terms is known as that practice which makes the way for enhancing an existing function or an activity and helps in effective implementation or use of the process thereby leading to a continuous improvement and overall performance of the library NAAC (2006). With this information as background an attempt has been made to highlight the practices that are adopted in the academic libraries. The Best Practices are classified under the following broad areas:

Management and administration of a library: - In-service Programmes, - Observation of other Library practice.- Staff promotional policy.- Maintenance of service area- Special deposit scheme - Resource Generation through external membership.- Resource generation through internet services.- Student participation programme. **Collection and services:** Collection development in different formats, Compact storage of less used collection, Library book exhibition, Extended library opening hours, Extended hours of service **Extent of use of services:** User education, Initiation to fresher"s, Preparatory course for students project.

User orientation, Information aids, Library use statistics, Library best user award, User feedback practice through different formats, Suggestion box and timely response Use of technology in libraries:On-line information retrieval- Internet access, Free browsing unit -Internet access.Broadband internet centre,Library homepage for information dissemination,A strong and dynamic library website,User feedback through library homepage,Access to e-resources,Information retrieval through web OPAC,Campus-wide LAN facility,Database creation using international standard formats,Electronic surveillance system CCTV,The best practices suggested by the NAAC in its quality indicators in Library and Information services to the uttiliated / constituent colleges listed below. 1. Computerization of Library with standard Software.2. Inclusion of Sufficient information about the library in the college prospectus.3. Compiling user statistics.4. Displaying newspaper clipping on the notice board periodically.5. Career/ Employment information services.6. Internet facilities to different user groups.7. Information Literacy programs.8. Suggestion box and timely response.9. Displaying new arrivals and circulating a list of those to academic departments.10. Conducting book exhibitions on different occasions.

Best Practices in Academic Libraries Book Display programme: - To organize exhibitions and book display programme on important dates and important occasion on well-known personalities. This helps and provides an opportunity for users to know the various types of information resources available on a particular aspect in the library and information centre.

Orientation programme: One of the best practices is to create awareness among the students about the library resources, the library services, good reading habits, creative programmes and activities for maximum utilization of the library. In other words enlighten the fresh students at the beginning of each academic year about the importance of the library, thereby exposing the students to its various sections of the library, the library resources and the various library services. **Educating the User:** The academic libraries have a great role and responsibility in creating awareness among its users which will help to make use of the library resources, facilities, services, more effectively and efficiently

Staff Users Meet: The academic libraries should organize various programmes including orientation, lectures on related issues, and topics, workshops, seminars, which focuses the issues useful to the users as well as to the staff. **Developing Virtual Presence:** The libraries can use web 2.0 applications like social networking, blogging, use of RSS feed, audio and video streaming, Wikipedia, etc, and interacting delivery information services **Demonstrations and Exhibitions:** The Libraries should organize demonstrations and exhibitions to create awareness about their collection, services. **Information Brochures:** Information brochures and pamphlets are also one of the important sources for creating awareness about the facilities, services, and the collections of the library, the users can be provided the information brochures at the time of their enrollments as registered members. The Information brochures may be on reprography or Xerox facilities, latest publications, and latest additions to the library **Web Based Services:** The libraries can provide various web based services through its strong Library Website updated with services such as virtual tour, virtual reference desk, ask the librarian, full text article, help desk, lecture notes, electronic announcement, e-Books, digital suggestion box, project reports, frequently asked questions, dissertations, face book etc.

Conclusion

The best practices will help for improving quality of library services. This will create best image of the library & library profession in the society. The best practices adopted should bridge the gap between library & user for maximum utilization of the resources. The web based services are essential for providing upto-date information to all users. The development of any new research is based on the timely & accurate information given to the users, so the libraries must follow best practices. Thus undertaking all above best practices by every college Library creates its own image in the mind of students & society. The nature of the students to look Librarian became as not only the Teacher but as Information finder.

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