

HRD ASPECTS IN THE ICT BASED ENVIRONMENT OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES: A STUDY ON SOME SELECT DISTRICT LIBRARIES OF ASSAM

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Today we are in 21st era in where almost everything is IT based and public libraries cannot remain far from this common concept. RRRLF and Directorate of Public Library services are trying to create an IT based environment in the public libraries of Assam but only installing IT equipment are not sufficient for IT based services; in fact, the library staff /the human resources should be well trained to handle the IT gadgets so that proper IT based services can be provided to the users. The Paper is prepared based on this concept. The researchers surveyed some selected district libraries of Assam (twelve out of twenty-three district libraries under Directorate of Library Services, Assam) and trying to give a picture of the library staff capabilities on IT along with the organizational structure of the selected libraries and services provided by the staff on IT based environment too. The paper elaborately discusses about the training types, training modules etc. received by the staff of the selected libraries. Finally, the paper gives some suggestions to develop the IT skills of the staff of the selected district libraries of Assam so that IT based services could be provided to the users.

Keywords: Assam, District library, ICT, library professionals, public library, training

INTRODUCTION

The concept of library is going through a revolutionary phase due to proliferation of electronic resources. Our methods of producing, organizing, and seeking information have been changed drastically with the application of ICT. In this digital era library is not merely considered as a way of preservation of documents but as the ‘source’ or ‘guide’ for better advancement of knowledge in the field of prosperity. As a result, the library professionals must have to acquire knowledge and skills while implementing ICT in their libraries to automate. But before going to serve ICT based information services to the users the library staff should be well trained and well equipped with the whole automation process specially when the library is a public library. It is because

a public library can be treated as the nucleus of a community's intellectual attainment and the life blood of national heritage. In a public library specially in a district library all kinds of users irrespective of their sex, age, profession, and qualification are found and staff should always be concern while performing library services in an ICT based environment. And to provide better services to the users, the human resource of the so called library should always have good ICT skills. Therefore, the public library staff should always be well trained to cope with the ICT based services. Though the public library system in Assam was introduced during 1950s but the automation process was started only in the year 2012. Therefore, it is essential to find out to what extent the public library staff of Assam are trained up to provide ICT based services to the users as the staff of Assam public library system are accustomed with basically the traditional methods.

PRESENT STATUS OF PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM OF ASSAM

The state Assam is situated in the north-east corner of India along with Brahmaputra and Barak river valleys. The capital of the state is Dispur, Guwahati. As per 2011 census, total population of Assam was 31,169,272. According to the same census, the literacy rate in the state was 73.18%. The male literacy rate was 78.81% and the female literacy rate was 67.27%. The urbanization rate was recorded at 12.9%. At present, Assam has total of 33 districts with 78 numbers of subdivisions. As on April 10, 2020, there are 23 District libraries, 14 sub divisional libraries, 4 branch libraries and 204 numbers of rural libraries are functioning under Directorate of Library Service (DLS), Assam. (Source: DLS, Assam) However, though there is a State Central Library (SCL) in Assam under DLS, but it is only for name –sake; it is totally nonfunctional as of date. Apart

from these, there is also a reference section under DLS of Assam.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Adebayo, Ahmed, & Adeniran, (2018) in the paper “*The role of ICT in provision of library services: a panacea for sustainable development in Nigeria*” attempts to evaluate the key services of information and communication technology (ICT) in the administration and execution of library services. The problems of ICT application in libraries were also discussed in the article. Among other factors, it is advised that libraries should increase their ability and degree of ICT adoption. Ahmed, Barman & Goswami (2019) in their article “*Public Libraries in Assam How far Public? A study of two District Libraries*” describes the present structure of the district libraries of Dibrugarh and Dhuburi district libraries respectively. The use of today’s technology in district libraries is also highlighted in the article.

Alam (2015) in the article “*Social value of public libraries: A case study of ARS Inamdar public library, Pune*” describes the role of a public library as a social institution and what impact public libraries have created on the communities they serve. The author trying to establish the concept that the public libraries are really valuable for the users and public libraries make users keep up to date, make them sure that users will be benefited by using the library resources. Balasubramanian, (2007) in the article “*Public Library as a Human Resource Development Centre*” discusses the establishment of top-notch public libraries that will aid in the growth of human resources. It seeks to demonstrate how a library might serve as a hub for human resource development. Banerjee (2014) in “*Public Libraries in India - Present Scenario*” very firmly provided the statistical data of total number of

public libraries of all over the India with zone wise. He analysed the data and tried to give a clear picture about the whole public library system of India based on the hierarchical structure followed by Indian Public Library System.

Barman (2007) in his seminar paper "*Scenario of rural library movement in Assam*" briefly describes the history of rural libraries as well as the public library system of Assam. Later, in the paper it has clearly been mentioned about the structure of Directorate of Library Services, Assam and the role played by various organizations for the development of public libraries specially the rural libraries of Assam. Barman (2011) in "*NASEMPLINER -2011*" included forty seminar papers which are relevant to the concerned topic of the researcher. All the seminar papers included in the post conference proceedings are based on the public library system of Assam. Most of the papers represent the district libraries of Assam with the resources and services of those. And some of the papers are based on the history of Assam public library movement. Basheer and Kaliyaperumal (2018) in the paper "*ICT applications in public libraries with special reference to Vellore district*" The paper describes the importance of ICT and modern technologies through which the public libraries can be made more effective for the users. For this purpose, the article makes a study on some selected public libraries of Vellore District to find out how the staff are well equipped with the advent of ICT based services that are providing by the libraries. It is found from the analysis that the respondents aware about the computer usage and IT related aspects used in the library.

Chakraborty, (2020) in her article "*Survey of district libraries in lower Assam*" explains very briefly the overview of the public library system in Assam. However, the present scenario and the role of human

resources of public libraries of Dhuburi, Kokrajhar and Nalbari districts are distinctly described in this paper. Das and Barman (2019) in the paper "*Need and Importance of training for the library staff to cope up with the ICT based environment of public libraries*" explains the importance of ICT in the modern society and its application in the libraries too. The paper also describes the importance of ICT based training for the public library staff to cope up with this environment. Das and Barman (2020) in the paper "*Public library system of Meghalaya: a study with the district libraries of the state*" describes the status of the library staff in the district libraries of the state Meghalaya. The article also describes the recruitment policies applied for the library staff of the public libraries of the state along with the other facilities provided to them by the Government as well as RRRLF.

Lodrick and Das (2019) in the article "*Assam*" very finely describe the past and present scenario of Assam. Through this article the authors have tried to provide brief details about the environment, economies and cultures of the state and its demography too. Ghosh (2007) in the article "*The public library system in India: Challenges and opportunities*" mentions the history of the public library system in short. Then, the author in later part of the article suggests adopting new technologies in different sectors of the public libraries of India so that users will be much more benefited. The author clearly pointed out various problems facing by the Indian public libraries. Sarmah (2021) in his thesis "*Academic and Public library: a comparative study with special emphasis on public libraries of some selected districts of upper Assam*" describes elaborately the current state of Assam's academic and public libraries. According to the author's comparative analysis of these two types of libraries, public libraries

have suffered ignorance in every area that is required, from the infrastructure to staff training. Furthermore, this paper proposes a partnership between academic and public libraries in Assam for the overall development of both kinds of libraries. Sinha (2015) in the article “*A study on information needs and information seeking pattern of public library users of Barak Valley, south Assam*” gives emphasis on users need and information seeking behaviour of the public library users. The article also discusses the ICT based services that can be provided to the users by the library staff.

SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Out of twenty three numbers of district libraries on date this study is confined only to the thirteen numbers of selected district libraries of Assam and the selection is based on the geographical/area representation (regional division) within Assam i.e. Upper Assam(3 DLs), Central Assam(2 DLs), Lower Assam(4 DLs), North Assam(2 DLs) and Barak valley (2 DLs). However, due to the poor organizational and managerial structure of the sub-divisional and rural libraries of Assam, these libraries are excluded from the study. As the study is confined only to the district libraries of Assam, therefore, the Reference section of Directorate of Library Service (DLS), Assam which is considered as the library of DLS, Assam itself, is also excluded from the study. The nonprofessionals engaged in the select District Libraries (DLs) are excluded from the purview of this study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To find out various HRD aspects and to reach the results of the research study, following objectives have been put forwarded

1. To find out the professional staff strength of the selected libraries
2. To find to what extent professional staff are trained up to cope up with an ICT based environment.
3. To find out what type of training programmes are conducted by the professional staff of the selected libraries.
4. To find out the difficulties faced by the surveyed professional library staff while working under ICT based environment and why they have faced such problems.

METHODOLOGY

To collect proper and correct information, survey method has been adopted. Questionnaires have been sent through e-mail to the respective librarians of the libraries to collect the data and 100% responses are received. The libraries have been visited personally also to verify the collected data. Out of thirteen selected district libraries from different regions of Assam twenty-three library professionals including Librarian, Librarian (I/C), Assistant Librarian, Library Assistant and Library Assistant (I/C) have been selected for the study.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

To make the study fruitful, the collected data have been tabulated and analyzed through graphical presentation in following orders-

A brief outline of the surveyed district libraries

Table 1 gives generalized information about a few of Assam's district libraries. This table shows that three libraries were established in the 1970s, four libraries in the 1960s, and six libraries in the 1950s. All the selected public libraries are open from 11 AM to 6 PM, and all are closed on the second and fourth Sundays and on every Monday. It is clear from the table that all the selected libraries have a relatively small number of professional staff members.

Table: 1 General information of select district libraries

Sl. No.	Libraries (Assam)	Year of establishment	Working hour	Holidays	No. of Professional staff
1	DL,D	1955	11AM-6PM	2 nd & 4 th Sunday, Every Monday	1
2	DL,G	1955	11AM-6PM		3
3	DL,N	1955	10AM-5PM		2
4	DL,S	1955	10AM-5PM		2
5	DL,T	1956	9.30AM-5PM		2
6	DL,Dh	1956	10AM-5PM		2
7	DL, Go	1968	11AM-6PM		1
8	DL,Si	1968	10AM-5PM		2
9	DL,Goa	1968	10AM-5PM		2
10	DL,K	1968	11AM-6PM		1
11	DL, Na	1970	9.30AM-5PM		2
12	DL,Ma	1970	11 AM-5PM		2
13	DL,M	1977	9.30AM-5PM		1

* DL= District library

D= Dibrugarh, G= Guwahati, N= Nagaon, S= Silchar, T= Tezpur, Dh=Dhuburi, Go= Golaghat, Si= Sivasagar, Goa= Goalpara, K= karimganj, Na= Nalbari, Ma= Mangaldoi, M=Morigaon

Table 2: Professional staff strength

Sl No	Designation	Total No of Professional Staff
1	Librarian	9
2	Librarian(I/C)	4
3	Assistant Librarian	1
4	Library Assistant	8
5	Library Assistant (I/C)	1

Qualification of the selected district libraries

Only two of the twenty-three library professionals are shown in Table 3 to have earned

MPhil and PhD after started their job. Ten numbers of library professionals having only graduation in Library Science while joining the job. Two numbers of Library staff don't have any professional qualification while joining at the time at their duty, but after joining they have completed their bachelor degree course in library science to cope up with the library environment. On the other hand, eleven numbers of professionals having MLISc/MLIB degree at the time of joining. After joining the duty, two

numbers of professionals have acquired Master degree in Library Science.

Table 3: Qualification of Professional Staff

Professional qualification	At the time of joining	After joining
BLISc/ BLIB	10	2
MLISc/MLIB	11	2
Mphil	-	1
PhD	-	1

Practical knowledge on computers

Table 4 clearly shows that out of total twenty-three numbers of respondents, only nineteen numbers have practical knowledge on computers, whereas, the rest four numbers don't have any working knowledge on computers.

Table 4: Practical Knowledge on computers

Practical Knowledge on computers	No. of Respondents
Yes	19
No	4
Total	23

Library automation training received by library professionals

From the Table 5, it can be seen that out of total twenty-three numbers of respondents, fifteen numbers have received library automation training, whereas, the rest of eight numbers don't have received any automation related training. Again, if we analyze the table 5, we will get that out of these eight numbers, four numbers don't want to get this kind of training as it is not related to promotion, two respondents feel unwillingness for automation training, one respondent mentioned permission not granted by higher authority that and the rest one feels that it is difficult to cope up with Library automation process.

Library automation training received by library professionals

From the table 6 it is clear that all the fifteen numbers of respondents out of selected twenty-three numbers of library professionals from the surveyed libraries have received library automation training on basics of ICT, automation awareness and library software installation and its use in the library.

Table 5: Library automation training received by library professionals

Sl. No	Response	Total numbers of Response	Reasons/Remark	Numbers of Response
1	Total response received	23		
2	Numbers of responses on Received Training	15		
3	Numbers of responses on Not Received Training	8	Unwillingness for automation training	2
			Permission not granted by higher authority	1
			Feeling no need as promotion is not related	4
			Difficult to cope up with Library automation process	1

Table 6: No. of respondents as per library training received in various areas

Total no. of Respondents	Trainings on various criteria	No. of respondents	No. of Non respondents
23	Basic ICT	15	8
	Automation Awareness	15	8
	Library Software Installation & Use	15	8

Financial Support from parent organization/ RRRLF for ICT training

It is clear from the table 7 that all the fifteen library professionals out of selected twenty-three numbers have conducted ICT training which is supported financially by the parent organization like Directorate of Library Services (DLS) Assam and Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF). This type of support motivates the library staff to learn new techniques which will be benefited for their libraries.

Table 7: Financial Support for Training

Total no. of Respondents	Financial support from Parent organization/RRRLF	No. of respondents
23	Yes	15
	No	8

ICT skills

If we analyze the Table 8, it is found that no one of the selected library professional is best in applying ICT skills. Five numbers are scored better in computer uses and library automation; only one professional has the knowledge on system software, RFID and Barcode technology, whereas, no professional of the selected libraries have any knowledge on digital libraries.

Again, from the Fig 1 we can easily find out that the selected library professionals are not well equipped with ICT skills. Almost 38% of total responses on ICT skills are poor which means professional staff of the selected libraries is not yet well equipped with the ICT based environment of public libraries.

Table 8: ICT skills of selected Library Professional

Sl. No.	Skills	best	better	good	poor	Extremely poor	Total no. of Respondent
1	Computer Uses	-	5	16	1	1	23
2	System Software Knowledge	-	1	13	8	1	23
3	Office Automation Knowledge	-	2	7	12	2	23
4	Library Automation knowledge	-	5	15	2	1	23
5	Digital Library Knowledge	-	-	2	15	6	23
6	RFID	-	1	4	12	6	23
7	Barcode	-	1	2	12	8	23

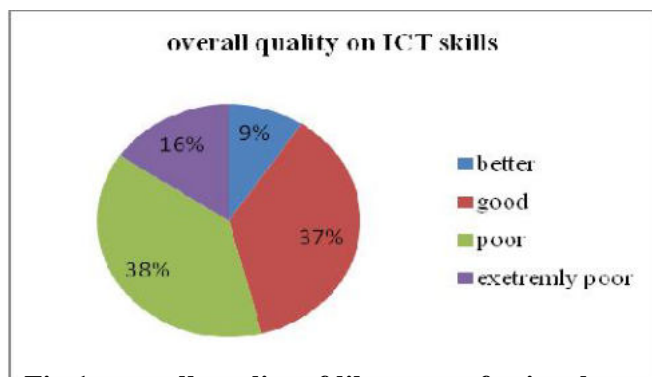


Fig 1: overall quality of library professionals on ICT skills

Knowledge about Koha software

It is found during the survey that all the selected district libraries have installed Koha software for automation in their library. The table 8 shows that out of twenty-three numbers of total respondents, twenty numbers have knowledge on Koha while three numbers don't have any software related knowledge.

Table 8: Knowledge about Koha software

Total no. of Respondents	Selected library professionals' knowledge on Koha software	No. of Respondent
23	Yes	20
	No	3

Academic events attended by library professionals

After due analysis of the Table 9 & Table 9.1 it is clear that out of twenty-three selected library professionals from the surveyed libraries twenty-two have attended various conferences and seminars in where twelve numbers of professionals have attended 1-5 numbers of seminars/conferences; whereas, only one library professional has attended refresher course which is found during the survey. Table 6.1 also shows

that out of total twenty-two professionals who attended workshops, six numbers have attended more than ten conferences which is a good sign for human resource development of public libraries of Assam.

Table 9 : No. of respondents as per academic events attended and not attended

Types of Academic Events	No. of Respondents attended	No. of Respondents not attended	Total No. of Respondents
Workshop	21	2	23
Short term training	15	8	23
Refresher courses	1	22	23
Conferences/Seminars	22	1	23

Table 9.1 : No. of Academic Events attended by Library Professionals

No. of Academic events	No. of respondents attended Workshop	No. of respondents attended short term training	No. of respondents attended Refresher courses	No. of respondents attended Conferences/seminars
1-5	10	13	1	12
6-10	5	2	-	6
11-15	6	-	-	4
Total	21	15	1	22

Professionals' attitudes towards ICT

Table 10 shows a positive attitude of library professionals towards working in ICT based environment. Almost 58% professionals are willing to like use of computers in their job sector, while only 8% strongly disagree to do the same. 75% staff thinks that computers will be helpful to their work, and it improves the quality of service. However, 42% staff have agreed that it becomes difficult for them to cope up with the ICT based environment and it is only because the lack of full knowledge on ICT and having no proper training on computers and automation. 8% professionals also think that ICT makes their work more complicated as they are well equipped with the traditional system.

Table 10: Selected library professionals' attitudes towards ICT

Question	Total	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)	Total (%)
I would like to use computer	23	0%	58%	25%	8%	8%	100%
I would enjoy learning about the basics of computer and their abilities.	23	0%	58%	25%	8%	8%	100%
Computer would be helpful for my library work.	23	0%	75%	17%	0%	8%	100%
The use of computers is highly limited in my library	23	33%	0%	58%	8%	0%	100%
The use of IT goes against the interest of the employees and should not be encouraged.	23	25%	8%	25%	33%	8%	100%
ICT application improves quality of library Services	23	0%	75%	8%	0%	17%	100%
Difficult to cope up with ICT jargon	23	8%	42%	42%	8%	0%	100%
Not like to work in ICT environment due to lack of interest	12	0%	33%	50%	8%	8%	100%
The use of IT in my library has made my routine job more motivating	23	0%	42%	33%	0%	25%	100%
ICT makes my work more complicated	23	8%	25%	50%	8%	8%	100%

Constraints in acquiring ICT skills-

Table 12 shows that 50% professionals have disagreed on Inadequate training in ICT applications while 33% agree with this point. While asking about the infrastructure and network facility of the surveyed libraries 33% professionals support that they don't have sufficient infrastructure for automation, while 42% strongly disagree with this point. 33% strongly agree that they don't receive any strong support from the authority to implement ICT in their libraries neither they are supported to conduct any training on ICT, 42% professionals

also support this point while 17% disagree with this point and 8% cannot decide what to do. Most of the Library professionals from the surveyed libraries agree that they have budget for ICT implementation and training on ICT, but this is not implemented properly. Non availability of consultation service is regarded also a major constraints by the 50% staff. 75% professionals accept that due to lack of sufficient electricity they are not willing to work in computers neither they can make an automated working environment in their libraries.

Table 11: Constraints in acquiring ICT skills

Question	Total	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)	Total
Inadequate training in ICT applications	23	0%	33%	50%	17%	0%	100%
Lack of infrastructure & network facility	23	33%	8%	42%	8%	8%	100%
Lack of support from authorities for implementing ICT application in library	23	33%	42%	17%	0%	8%	100%
Lack of budget for ICT	23	25%	17%	33%	0%	25%	100%
Lack of co-ordination among library staff	23	8%	0%	92%	0%	0%	100%
Non availability of consultation services	23	17%	50%	25%	0%	8%	100%
Lack of updating ICT strategy	12	25%	17%	42%	8%	8%	100%
Fear for using ICT applications	23	0%	33%	50%	8%	8%	100%
Lack of interest for Library professionals in learning ICT applications	23	0%	33%	50%	17%	0%	100%
Overload of working hours	23	0%	17%	67%	17%	0%	100%
Insufficient power supply	23	75%	8%	17%	0%	0%	100%

SUGGESTIONS

In view of the above discussion the following suggestions have been given

1. It is seen during the survey that quite numbers of libraries are being managed by a librarian (I/C). Directorate of Library Services, (DLS) Assam should appoint full time librarian with appropriate qualification in all the vacant positions as early as possible to run the library smoothly. Again, the promotion to higher post should be based on suitability and seniority but never on the basis of only seniority.
2. Sufficient fund should be made available by the higher authority for the development of HRD as well as for the development of ICT infrastructure, digital resource development and ICT enabled services in district libraries.
3. Installing the software in the libraries is not sufficient to automate a library. RRRLF should take feedback from the library professionals whether they are using the software in actual sense and if it is using to what extent the library is automated.
4. It is found during the study that some of the library professionals are not interested to attend training programs on ICTs due to the fear to ICT enabled services. DLS, Assam should take initiative to conduct in service training program frequently on ICT for the library professionals and should also organize lectures to motivate the professionals for automation.

5. Even though most library professionals have participated in conferences, workshops, and training courses, these experiences have been completely useless because they haven't helped the libraries, they work for grow. Since the competent authority fully covers the cost of attendance at such programmes, the authority should investigate whether a standard of performance for library professionals has been established.

CONCLUSION

Success is derived from many factors and these factors are indispensable for achieving continuing education goals. LIS professionals should have their own urge to attain new knowledge in their respective field. In view of the changed context public library professionals generally deal with the common people who may be a farmer, a home maker, an engineer, a doctor, a scientist or may be a student or a teacher irrespective of the age, qualification, and sex. Therefore, public library professional should be efficient to deal with his/her users of the library. ICT makes the world in a global village. Well-equipped knowledge on ICT makes confident the public library professionals to cope with ICT based environment. Proper and timely training with adequate qualification will not only make the public library staff user friendly but also makes the libraries well prepared to serve the community.

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