

## **User Education in the Modern Context – A Bird’s-Eye View**

**M. Lalithamma**

Non-Teaching Staff

Jawahar Bharati Degree College,  
KAVALI – 524 201, Andhra Pradesh  
e-mail: lalithammamannepalli@gmail.com

***Abstract** - It is not sufficient if the modern library is limited to its traditional functions in view of the mountainous knowledge that is added every year. New techniques of acquisition and dissemination of knowledge have acquired enormous importance. A library should be able to cater to the needs of users in different aspects. It is said that understanding the needs of the users and providing information services to them is equal to winning half the battle.*

**Key words:** User Education, User Orientation, Information Literacy, Academic Library, Web Technology

### **1. Introduction**

The functions of a library have gone beyond the traditional functions of acquisition Classification, cataloguing, storage and dissemination. In modern times, there is what is called ‘Knowledge Explosion’ demanding newer and effective services. The addition of Electronic Resources, Information Technology and Web Technology and others such developments have placed greater responsibility on the libraries. Special efforts have to be made with reference to the output of information amassed in addition to the input aspect. It is in this contest the user education acquires tremendous importance. User Education is concerned with enabling the user to obtain the output material which he requires from the existing library system and network of connected library systems. It is on this aspect that the present paper focuses its attention.

### **2. Meaning and Definition of User Education**

In a library, the users are the last links or recipients of information in the communication cycle. Several other words are used as synonyms to users. Ex: client, member customer, recipient of information etc., Of all these terms, the word ‘User’ is preferred.

1. According to ‘Whittaker’, a user may be defined as a person who uses library services at least once in a year and who uses one or more services of the library.
2. According to ‘Jacques Tacatlian’, user education consists of a programme which will guide and instruct users in the formulation of their information needs and in the efficient use of information acquired.
3. According to ‘Mews’, user education may be defined as the instruction given to users to help them to make the best use of the library.
4. According to ‘Nancy Fjallbrant and Ian Malley’, user education is concerned with the information and communication process. It also includes the interaction of the user with the library. In this regard other factors like school libraries, public libraries and specialized libraries also may be taken into consideration. It should be a continuous process.

Thus it is clear that there is no single comprehensive or universally agreed definition of user education. However, user education takes into account all aspects of education, library services and the total literature available on the subject.

### **3. Objectives**

The basic objective of User Education is to introduce the user to library resources, techniques and services. In short its main aim is to convert the potential user into an actual user. Nancy Fjallbrant and Ian Malley have divided the aims of user education into two categories. They are goals and objectives. They have described 'goals' as the broad and general statement of purpose and 'objective' as the expression of specific short-term aims which should be in agreement with the main goals.

The main aims of the User Education are.

1. Acquainting the user with the facilities available in the library.
2. Imparting the required skills to the user to search and obtain what he needs. In other words, the users should know, "how to get the information they want"
3. To make the user education agrees with the aims and values of education.

### **4. User - types**

Based on the information needs, the users can be classified into 4 groups

1. Potential user (special services)
2. Expected user (Information services)
3. Actual user (casual collection of information)
4. Beneficiary user (collection of information for advantages)

Prof. S.R.Ranganathan has grouped the user community depending upon the regularity of their use of the library.

- Fresh man
- Ordinary reader
- Specialist enquirer

The major activity of a library is to satisfy the information needs of the users. In the context of modern developments and electronic technology, the library users may be regarded as 'illiterate'. Hence the main function of the library is to enrich not only the 'input' aspects but also the 'output' factors. The programme should fulfil the functions of the library and the needs of users. User education is a long life process for which there is no end.

### **5. Need for User Education**

Tremendous increase in the volume of publication and the methods by which literature is organized and disseminated necessitate user education. Rapid changes in the acquisition of information and the methods of teaching have increased the importance of user education by leaps and bounds.

Prof. Sewa Singh has listed out some factors which necessitate the introduction of User Education Programmes of which the following are much important.

1. Tremendous increase in the amount of literature in a variety of forms resulting in knowledge explosion.
2. Large increase in the number of researchers.

3. Emphasis on interdisciplinary approach.
4. Gradual application of Electronic machines in libraries for the storage of information, its retrieval and dissemination.

## **6. User Education – Planning**

User education programmes are very important, particularly in academic research libraries. It demands a careful planning. Some important aspects of this programme are :

- Display of signs and boards
- Introduction to the information services
- Introduction to the techniques

Prof. Kirk has mentioned six skills with reference to the programming and planning of the user education.

- Reference sources
- Indexing
- Abstracting periodicals
- Library catalogue
- Search strategy
- Subject analysis

## **7. User Education – Levels**

The Library Personnel are probably better placed for undertaking the user education programmes. While implementing such programmes they have to pay attention to the level of the users. They are

- School level
- Undergraduate level
- Post-Graduate level
- Research Scholar level
- Faculty level

The user education programme should take the level of the user into consideration. Moreover, it should also pay attention to the short term and long term information needs. Above all, any user education programme becomes successful when it is pursued as a continuous process.

## **8. Information Technology Vs User Education**

As Nancy Fjallbrant and Ian Malley have observed, the developments in information technology have a strong influence on the existing library practice. The influence is so strong that a new chapter is devoted to education in the retrieval of computerized education. In other words, the advent of information technology has caused several changes in the traditional user education. Libraries which are converting themselves from the traditional form to modern form have almost become dependent on information technology. This has gradually led to the development of OPAC system, electronic document delivery system, multimedia applications and internet. As Bauwens has observed, the knowledge of navigating the internet has now become a basic requirement for information professionals.

Libraries derive several advantages if they shift to information literacy.

- They enjoy access to advanced information technology
- They often encourage research, exploration of new issues and creation of new programmes.

- They can by themselves establish instruction programmes of some kind.

The latest needs have made the librarians play a key role in information literacy programmes with regard to both curricular and non curricular programmes. They provide the knowledge of access to the world of information, not just the resources found in the library.

## **9. WEB Vs User Education**

The introduction of the computers and their application has lead to tremendous changes in the activities of the library like collections, services and access to resources. It leads to an integrated library system. Electronic resources have become so vital to the activities of the library that they are rapidly transforming themselves into digital libraries (E-resources).

The E-resources (Electronic Information Resources) like the Internet and Web are constantly influencing the development of new modes of communication.

Nancy Fjallbrant and Ian Malley have listed out the following points as the objectives of on-line orientation.

- To be aware of computer based online methods for information retrieval.
- To have some knowledge of the type of information available.
- To know the place or places where online searches can be made.
- To be aware of the relationship between computer based information and manual methods of information.

Dr. Velumurugan, C. has listed out several important points after learning user perception of E-resources.

- All information is available in the internet.
- Some of the electronic documents are temporary and transitory.
- Whatever may be the advantages of E-publishing, they are not able make the printed book obsolete.

The uses of E-resources have become very common among the members of the academic community. As a result, educational institutions are trying to provide round the clock access to electronic sources. This will help the researchers, faculties and students to get necessary information at their convenient time. Thus the motivation of the clients to use E-resources gets strengthened and fulfilled.

## **10. How to meet the challenges of User Education**

An effective programme of user education shall pay special attention to the following items. Firstly, it should be organized depending upon the need or possibility in three ways.

- A. Separate unit
- B. Part of reader services
- C. As on external service unit

Secondly, the ideal arrangement for user education is in a class room. It is preferable that it is adjacent to the reference area where teaching can take place in serene conditions.

Thirdly, Library User Education requires adequate financial services. The sources of revenue may be special funds from the college or the government, minimum maintenance charges from the users and private donations from philanthropers.

Fourthly, well educated and if possible well dedicated librarians should be recruited. They should be marked by enthusiasm, ability to communicate, friendliness, patience and well equipped knowledge. The librarian should be able to direct a user to the relevant source of information.

Fifthly, the programme of imparting user education should not be an occasional programme. It should be rather a regular and continuous process.

Lastly, the feedback from the users is very important. It is on the basis of this feedback that we can evaluate the programme, amend it, modify it, continue it or terminate it.

## **11. Conclusion**

User education programmes have attained tremendous importance in modern times. The recent trends in education have increased the need for helping the library user through both instruction and practice. Another factor that should be considered with reference to user education is the growth interdisciplinary courses. Such courses cut across the traditional boundaries of the subjects. Above all, during the recent years there have been tremendous advances in computer storage as well as the improvement in telecommunication methods.

Users should be acquainted with the computer services available in different types of library – academic, specialized and public libraries. Only then a user will be able to take a full and active part in the new ways of learning. The assumption is that in the context of educational change, the user will be capable of finding the material which is relevant to his needs.

In short, the library shall change from a reactive library (providing service to a small group of users) to a proactive library (attracting potential users). In short user, education is central to the whole purpose of the library and the effective utilization of information sources. Thus user education is concerned with the whole information and communication process which should be continuous and updated. As SewaSing observes, we have to go miles in this regard, with however a silver lining on the horizon.

## **References**

1. Fjallbrant, N and Malley, I (1984). *User Education in Libraries*. London: Clive Bingley
2. Murugan, S (2013). *User Education: Academic Libraries. International Journal of Information Technology and Library Science Research*, 1 (1), 1-6.
3. Ravi Kumar, B (2009). *User Education in Libraries. International Journal of Library and Information Science*, 1 (1), 001-005.
4. Ravichandran, M and Thilagavathy, N (2012). *User Satisfaction in Prathyusha Institute of Technology and Management Library, TiruvallureDist, Tamil Nadu: A Case Study*. In. *Proceedings of the National Conference on Emerging Trends in User Expectations for Next Generation Libraries*. Kuppam. (381-385). Vijayawada: APLA.
5. Sewa Singh (1992). *User Education in University Libraries: What, Why and How?* In. Nair, R. R., & Rajasekharan, K. (Eds.). *Academic library effectiveness* (No. 2) (66-70). New Delhi: EssEss Publication

6. Tamilselvi, A (2012). User Education and Information Literacy in Academic Libraries.. In.Proceedings of the National Conference on Emerging Trends in User Expectations for Next Generation Libraries.Kuppam. (386-394). Vijayawada: APLA.
7. Velmurugan, C (2016). Use and User Perception on Electronic Resources in the Academic Community.In. Proceedings of the National Conference on Creativity, Innovation and Transformation in Libraries, Tiruchengode. (154-156). Chennai: SALIS.
8. Vijayalakshmi, B and Thirumagal, A (2016). Student Centered Innovative Library Best Practices: A Case Study. In. Proceedings of the National Conference on Creativity, Innovation and Transformation in Libraries, Tiruchengode. (572-576). Chennai: SALIS.

