The present article discusses the national quality monitoring agencies which make it mandatory for each Higher Education Institution (HEI) to undergo the process of assessment and accreditation in order to enhance the quality of education in the country. During institutional accreditation the assessment of the library is a key step that integrates itself with the overall evaluation. It mentions the importance of Best Practices as given in the document prepared by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) for “Best Practices in Academic Libraries”. Light has also been thrown on the need of increasing the quality standards in the Indian HEIs in the wake of World Ranking of Higher Education Institutions. Need of the best practices and opportunities for libraries to do its best under Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) are also touched upon in the present study. Some of the best practices followed at St Mira’s College for Girls Library make main part of the article.


INTRODUCTION

Quality of a library can be judged by the type of resources it houses, processes used to acquire, manage, organise, retrieve and disseminate the information, and latest Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools used for managing its various functions, procedures and providing diverse services. Best practices can be adopted looking into the expectations of users and the way (technology) they want to be served. Libraries can identify and take up the best or innovative practices to fulfill institutional goals and satisfy the user needs through innovativeness. These practices would also add to library’s effective and efficient performance. Important components to be taken care are information at the right time & place, need based information, the way information is wanted and cost effectiveness at both the ends.

NAAC AND NBA

NAAC and National Board of Accreditation (NBA) are the two chief statutory bodies instituted in 1994 responsible for monitoring the quality of Higher Education Institutions. These bodies function under University Grants Commission (UGC) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) respectively. As per their guidelines each institute has to undergo the process of assessment and accreditation in order to enhance the quality of education in the country. India needs to adopt more efficient system of ensuring quality at every level so that our institutions could find place among the world’s top 100 higher education institutes/universities.

In the QS World University Rankings 2013 not a single Indian University was among the world’s top 200. Around 11 Indian institutes featured in the top 800 of the global list with the highest ranking went to IIT Delhi, which is placed 222 in the list. This is really a bad news for the Indian education system. It means we are far behind the international standards of education, research, teaching, infrastructure, number of international students, teacher-student ratio and employer reputation. Therefore, there is need of quality education and implementation of innovative practices to meet the international challenges.

Under the guidelines of RUSA it is compulsory for every HEI to get itself rated/certified by State Level Assessment and Accreditation
Council as well as NAAC to improve quality of higher education. In Maharashtra, the Government is considering to establish SAAC on the lines of NAAC for accrediting the colleges providing higher education.

DEFINITION

"Best practices are the best way to perform a business process, or an activity within a process that leads to superior performance within any field of endeavor.”

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.’

Best Practices in Libraries

The core objective of a college library is to support the academic programs offered by the institute. Accordingly the library develops its collection and provides services to meet mainly the curriculum and research requirements of its user community. Besides, the library may design a system to deliver its products and services to attract more users so that they are not attracted by other external sources like internet. Library needs to evaluate its present services and develop new, updated, customized and innovative practices for maximum utilization of library resources. Library can implement such practices which can improve declining reading habits amongst students.

Apart from the curricular needs of the users, library should also possess print and non-print material on various entrance exams, career guidance, scholarships, general knowledge and self-help to prepare them to face the challenges of life ahead. Sufficient e-resources, use of modern ICT, quality infrastructure, exposure of collection and services to users and educating the patrons to equip them with skills to exploit the resources to the optimum could definitely increase the satisfactory level of the members.

To effectively meet the demands of the end users, the academic libraries need to identify and adopt good and best practices and benchmarks which will ultimately enhance the value based services of the libraries in an academic environment. It also becomes necessary for continuous review and improvement of the overall functions of the library and information centers.

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.” 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. Institutional excellence is the aggregate of the best practices followed in different areas of institutional activities. In general, the use of technology and innovative ideas lead to evolve best practices in library and information environment.

NAAC developed a set of best practices followed in academic libraries and presented under the following four broad areas:

- Management and Administration of Library
- Collection and Services
- Extent of User Services
- Use of Technology

LITERATURE REVIEW

Umesh has discussed some best practices adopted by academic library & Information Centres like book display programmes, orientation programme, conducting staff users meet and educating the user through brochures, circulars, pamphlets and handouts, organizing lectures, workshops and seminars, which focuses the issues useful to the users as well as to the staff.

Kamble & Tikam in their article have discussed best practices based on library collection development, collection maintenance, collection promotion and best practices based on library environment. She is of the view that analyzing and revising them at a regular interval will lead to continuous improvement in overall performance of the library and the whole institution.

Kulkarni has suggested some best practices for the college libraries which include preparation of a monthly activities action plan, use of different colour spine labels for books purchased under particular plan, scheme, etc., diversion of students’ unclaimed library deposit to the library development fund, awareness of libraries staff about resources available on internet, employment to students under Earn While Learn scheme.

LIMITATION

Study is limited to one library only, as best practices suitable to its user community have been included in the present article.

- Best Practices Followed at St Mira’s College for Girls, Library

Value Education

St Mira's College for Girls strives to educate its girl students through the blend of value education. Here, the day starts with a sanctuary period. For supporting this mission of the institute library possesses print and e-resources on Mahabharata, Krishna, Saints, Self-help books and Personality Development. Special collection is maintained on the founder Sadhu T L Vaswani and Dada J P Vaswani- the mentor. Every year college students perform drama based on the life and teachings of Sadhu T L Vaswani and to prepare for this they use above mentioned special collection. Library preserves these drama audio-video files in the digital library software Dspace for future reference by the students and teachers.

Special Collection

Library is in possession of a collection of about 5000 Sindhi books, periodicals and CD/DVDs as this is a Sindhi Minority College. This material is used not only by our user community but also by users from any corner of the society.

Academic Calendar

Each year college prepares its Academic Calendar of various activity scheduled to happen in that year. For this library also plans its activities for the year like - new membership, book exhibitions, library orientation, e-resources usage training, etc. This practice gives anticipatory information to the students apart from increasing efficiency of the library work due to proper pre-planned schedule of the important activities.
• **Library Orientation (LO)**

LO plays a vital role in increasing the usage of the library resources. At the beginning of each academic year this orientation through power point presentation is provided with an aim to introduce fresh students to various types of material, databases, layout of the library and existence of various tools to exploit these resources to the maximum. After orientation they are invited for the library visit to see its various sections.

• **Training to Students under Earn While Learn (EWL) Scheme**

Library provides training to EWL students in areas like shelving, locating the material as well as information in the various resources, structure of bibliographical records while editing the data, maintenance of clipping files, organizing the notice boards, arrangement of current issues and back volumes of journals. This training may help them in organizing their personal collections and provides an idea about various functions of the library which may motivate them to take up Library Science as a career.

• **Internet**

In the current IT environment students prefer internet to search the needed information. Reasons being different valuable resources are available on net. Therefore, here users are provided with free internet surfing facility for academic purpose only under staff supervision. Library staff also assists them for finding the required information efficiently. Seven desktops are devoted for searching the digital resources. Library has also displayed a list of useful sites on employment, career, free e-books, free e-journals, encyclopedias, etc. at the notice boards and website.

• **Digital Library**

Library uses open source software Dspace for maintaining a Digital Library where, user can access to autonomous and university syllabus, student project reports, previous years’ question papers, newspaper clippings, college programme photos and videos of drama-Dada Leela.

• **Database Training**

Library is getting access to INFLIBNET e-resources under NLIST programme since 2014. Library also subscribes to EBSCO’s two databases namely Academic Search Elite and Literary Reference Centre. Library conducts special training sessions for students and faculty aiming its efficient usage. Besides, this ‘Any Time Training’ is also provided to users throughout the year by the library staff.

• **Campus-wide Local Area Network (LAN) Facility**

Through this facility library catalogue and digital library can be accessed anywhere in the campus.

• **Use of e-mail Facility for Alerts and Messages**

Every month library sends a list of ‘new additions to the library collection’ to the faculty. Congratulatory messages are sent to ‘Top Ten Users’ of databases with an aim to motivate and popularize the online resources.

• **Table of Content (TOC) Services**

On monthly basis TOCs of print journals are sent to all faculties to keep them abreast of latest development in their respective fields. This service was appreciated by users as it makes them aware of the latest journal articles and helps in saving their time by making it available at their desktops.

• **The Use of Web 2.0 Application**

Library maintains a blog which is updated regularly with – a list of new additions to the library collection, quote of the month and information on monthly display of books with brief-up of the personalities or theme of display. Announcement if any is also posted on the blog.

• **Manuals**

To use catalogue, brief information on databases and digital library is displayed at prominent places aiming to facilitate its maximum usage.

• **Text Messages**

Free SMS sending service - way2sms is utilized by the library for sending due books reminders and urgent short notices.

• **Enrichment of Library Catalogue**

Key words, summaries, and table of content of the books add value to the bibliographical details. These extra details prove helpful to decide the usefulness of the book to a user. Also, important journal articles are indexed in the library software for easy retrieval of information.

• **Services to Blind and Physically Handicapped**

Library has an audio-cassette unit, where approximately 400 cassettes are housed. Out of this over 200 are specially recorded for visually impaired students. It is equipped with a Tape Recorder and headphone. Readers and writers for their exams are also provided by the library and free braille papers are provided by the college for making notes. We also possess Braille books for visually-impaired students. Physically-handicapped students are attended with their helpers/parents, services are offered on preference basis. Rules are relaxed for them as far as number of books and loan days are concerned.

• **Scholar Card Facility**

Each year students scoring first five ranks in their final exams from each class are given Scholar Card Facility. Under which they are entitled to borrow four books as against two books issued to other students. This practice is followed with an aim to reward them and to encourage other students.

• **Relaxation of Rules**

Rules are relaxed for students participating in various competitions. They are issued up to five books at a time. News papers, magazine and CD/DVDs are also issued under such circumstances. This practice develops interest among students for using more and more library resources.

• **Personal Assistance**

In the library, staff is ever-ready for providing personal assistance to students and faculty members. Especially during assignments and projects library staff provides personal assistance for the required information. They retrieve the information from books, periodical, news papers, newspaper clippings and internet for the users.

• **Top Ten Students with Maximum Borrowings**

With an aim to motivate the users to make optimum usage of library resources, library extends congratulatory messages to first
ten students with maximum issuing transactions and also a list is displayed at the notice boards. This practice has received positive feedback as everyone wants to see their names on the notice board. Library has also distributed bookmarks to them as a token of appreciation.

- **Demand Register**

To make students part of the acquisition process a demand register is maintained to register their demands for the books to be acquired.

- **Regular Display of Information**

To cater to the various needs of users, information on current additions, job opportunities, career, scholarship, academic news, general information and personalities of Pune city is displayed on different notice boards in the library premises.

- **Economic Way of Collection Development**

Library follows the practice of purchasing required books from exhibitions organized by Govt. Bodies in the city. We have purchased various books of National Library Kolkata, National Book Trust, Lokayukta (NGO), Directorate of Languages, and Government of Maharashtra. It is a wise and cost-effective way of collection development.

- **International Books**

Library also accepts books purchased by our faculty during their visits to foreign countries.

- **Active and Passive Collection**

Reserved copies of old text books and other less used collections have been kept in separate sections so that more space can be created for the active collection in the frequently visited areas. This removes barrier to users in locating the required document.

Periodically shifting of passive collection and accommodating books as per the introduction of newer topics in syllabus is a desired practice for its increased visibility.

- **Different Coloured Spine Labels**

Library is receiving grants from UGC under heads - Five Year Plans, College with Potential for Excellence, and Autonomy Grant. Recently we have started putting different coloured labels on spines of the books for these grants. This makes easy to show these collections to the audit parties.

- **Periodical Rectification of Shelves**

The said practice is undertaken to ensure proper place of the books for their easy location by the user.

- **Separate Arrangement of Books Acquired in the Current Year**

Looking into the needs of user who wishes to know and use recently acquired books; library shelf them in separate book cases under the signage- ‘Books Acquired in the Current Year.’

Also, new arrivals rack is regularly updated with newly added books which are kept at the entrance to catch users’ attention.

- **Issuing of Paraphernalia for the Publication of College Magazine**

Library provides necessary information, scanning facility, retrieval of photos of various programmes held in the college throughout the year for publication of College Magazine.

- **Collection Promotion**

Each month books on important days like Republic Day, Independence Day, Environment Day, Women Day and Earth Day are displayed in the library. Also, collection is put up for display on famous personalities from diverse fields and on topics of various college events as an effort to improve the library use and reduce unused collection. It also contributes in advertising library collection and services.

- **Proper Signage and Shelf Guides**

Section wise signage, signage for different units of the library, shelf guides along with location helps making library user friendly.

- **Newspaper Clippings**

Newspaper Clippings in print and e-form are maintained by the library on current topics by keeping in view users’ requirement. Topics include education, women, and personalities of city, college news, parent body news and advertisements of the college.

- **Wise Use of Withdrawn Books**

Whenever library has to withdraw old and obsolete books, these are displayed for faculty and students to take away free of cost rather than selling as scrap.

- **Creativity Corner**

To encourage students towards creativity and increase library awareness amongst users library provides a reserved bulletin board called ‘Creativity Corner’ to display best posters, charts, greeting cards prepared by students during various competitions.

**Recommendations**

Innovative/best practices of other libraries can be the further scope of study for wider understanding of the varied practices being followed for emulation by any library to enhance their standard of quality.

**Conclusion**

To meet the demand of college user community academic libraries need to be equipped with need based hybrid resources. In the information society implementation of new ICT tools for its functioning and providing services are the compulsory practices. Adoption of innovative and customized services, along with friendly, ever ready, enthusiastic and skilled staff always proves the quality enhancing factors in libraries. Developing best practices, analyzing and revising them at a regular interval will lead to continuous improvement in overall performance of the library and the whole institution.

**References**


