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## Role of User Education and Awareness among the Library and Information Centers: A Study

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**Abstract:** The ultimate goal of a librarian and library is to educate users in locating their information needs at the right place, in the right time to the right users to save their time in encouraging and motivating their reading habits. User is the most important component in library or in information system and they are the last links or the recipient of the information in the communication cycle. The paper focus in user education in academic libraries with special reference to school libraries in understanding the library users, how they interact with the systems, facilities and services available in the library in which they are engaged and their patterns of retrieving their required information. User education is broader term than bibliographic instruction. Education is a long life process, there is no end. As far as library activities are concerns, the users are illiterates. They need some sort of user education on how to use library resources, facilities and services. To know how to use and what the service available is etc., they must be assists and guide (Instructions, Initiation and Orientation) in the right path. As a result through user education and library orientation, it facilitates users in locating and accessing their various types of information needs and requirements.

### Keywords

User studies, user education, user awareness, library and information centers.

## 1. Introduction

Education is a lifelong process. User education means to educate users in the use of library resources, activities and services. It means to educate the users or to help them to make the best use of the library. When a user comes to the library for the first time, he or she does not know about different kinds of resources, activities and services of a particular library. User education gives introduction about these to them. In this age of information and computer, libraries are adopting newly emerging technologies and changing their ways of rendering services to the users. In this changing environment, users require a specific training in the use of library services. So user education may be defined as process or programme through which users are motivated to use information resources and different kinds of library services. They need assistance and guidance in form of instruction, initiation and education to know how to use library resources and services as the collection of libraries are very complicated now-a-days. There is an old Chinese proverb: “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” If you train users, how to select, locate and retrieve information, certainly you helped him for a lifetime.

### 1.1 Origin and definitions of User Education:

The origins of library user education can be traced back more than 170 years. The earliest evidence of instruction—a librarian lecturing to undergraduates—was found at Harvard College in the 1820s. Most early academic librarians were professors with part-time library appointments who taught the use of libraries for academic purposes. Library lectures were the chosen form of instruction by such institutions as Harvard, Indiana University, and Columbia. Separate courses were implemented in the late 1800s by Ray Davis at the University of Michigan, Oberlin College, and others. In 1971, the term “bibliographic instruction” originated with the creation of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Ad Hoc Committee on Bibliographic Instruction. This was followed in 1973 with the establishment of the Library Orientation Exchange (LOEX), a clearinghouse for materials used in library instruction. In the mid seventies, the American Library Association’s Library Instruction Round Table (LIRT) came into being. Its mission is “to advocate library instruction as a means for developing competent library and information access skills, along with their use, as a part of lifelong learning.” Unlike ACRL, it represents all types of libraries, academic, public, school, and special. In the last few years a new term has emerged, “information literacy,” and it seems destined to supplant bibliographic instruction as the catchphrase for library instruction.

There are so many definitions of User Education are available.

Some are as follows: Fleming (1990) defines user education “as various programmes of instruction, education and exploration provided by libraries to users to enable them to make more effective, efficient and independent use of information sources and services to which these libraries provide access”. Mews (1972) defines this as instruction given to help the users to make the best use of library.

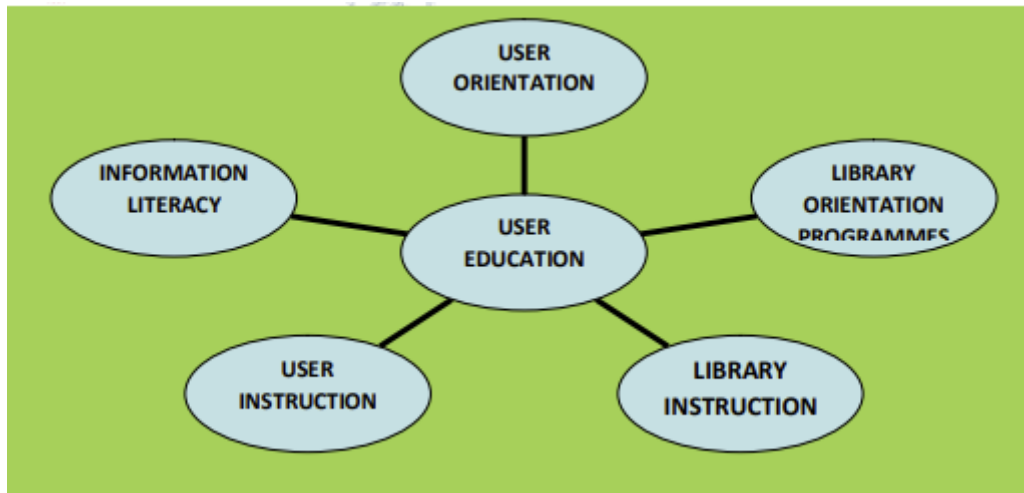
Nancy (1984) defines - "User Education is concerned with the library whole information and communication process and one part of this involves the total user interaction Jacques Tocatline (1978) defined 'user education' to include any effort or programme which will guide and instruct existing and potential users, individually or collectively with the objectives - ÿ the recognition of their own information needs; ÿ the formulation of these needs; ÿ the effective and efficient use of information services; and ÿ assessment of these services. Reitz (2004) has defined User education in Dictionary of Library and Information Science - "all the activities involved in teaching users how to make the best possible use of library resources, services and facilities, including formal and informal instruction delivered by a librarian or other staff member one-on-one- or in a group. Also includes online tutorials, audio visual materials and printed guides and pathfinders. A broader term than 'bibliographic instruction'."

According to Shahi "It is a process of activities involved in making the users of the library conscious about tremendous value of information in day to day life to develop interest among the users to seek information as and when they requires"

According to Mishra and Phadke (1988), User education can be defined as 'educational potential library users , jointly by the library and academic staff in successive stages to help them to make the best use of the library resources (library collection and library personnel) and acquire sophisticated knowledge in its use".

Broadly defined, library user education (also called library instruction) teaches users how to make the most effective use of the library system. At Ohio State University (OSU), user education encompasses all activity undertaken to help students become efficient users of information--i.e., how to identify the information need and then how to find, evaluate, and select the best information to meet that need. Activities to achieve that goal include orientation sessions, workshops, handouts, and course-related and course-integrated instruction.

The term "library user education" has more recently been broadened to include the concept of information literacy. All these definitions focused on strengthening or empower the library user to get his / her required information. The synonyms of user education are user orientation, library orientation programme, library instruction, user instruction, and information literacy are all one and the same. Orientation is a process of familiarizing the library to library users. Library users should have very good knowledge about the library to retrieve the information and making use of the library services and facilities effectively



## 2. Components or levels of User education

There can be three components or levels of User Education, namely :

- Library orientation
- Library instruction
- Bibliographic instruction

### ➤ **Library orientation**

Library orientation means ways of introducing the users to the general methods of usage and services and to the layout such as building and sections of the libraries, stacking arrangement, rules and regulations and facilities available in a particular library. It means to try and create the right kind of environment for effective communication between user and the library staff and to present an image of the library as a pleasant and friendly institution. Orientation makes user confident in the use of the library. After orientation users feel that library staff is competent and is always willing to help.

### ➤ **Library instruction**

Library instruction means to provide specific instruction to how to use and understand specific information sources, information systems, information services and tools. It gives instructions to the users how to select, get and use specific information resources. Library instructions are concerned with learning to make use of the information resources available in a specific library. It includes techniques in using indexes, catalogue, reference materials and bibliographic tools.

### ➤ **Bibliographic Instruction**

These instructions aim to use the bibliographic tools, to provide guidance to understand the features of these tools and their nature of subject coverage. These instructions educate users on how to find materials manually or electronically using online public access catalogues (OPACs) and CD – ROMs. It is concerned with the problems of information retrieval and the techniques of exploiting information resources to the maximum extent.

## 2.1 Aims and Objectives of User Education

Objectives for library instruction were established as early as 1881 when Otis Hall Robinson called for clarification of instructional goals at the American Library Association conference. He wanted purposeful instruction. As relevant today as they were a hundred years ago, three important objectives were cited:

1. Students need to "develop the art of discrimination" to be able to judge the value of books to develop critical judgment;
2. Students need to become independent learners--to teach themselves
3. Students need to continue to read and study--to become lifelong learners. (Tucker, 1979) From these objectives has recently come the idea of information literacy.

The aims and objectives of User Education are as follows:

- To familiar the users with the library and library resources;
- To introduce the general objectives of the library;
- To establish contact between user and staff;
- To instruct the users with the use of library resources and services;
- To bring the awareness or to guide the users about library facilities, collection and services etc.;
- To familiarize the user with the automated library services such as OPAC.
- To identify the users specific information resources as per their information needs;
- To enhance and improve the user's abilities to select appropriate information sources;
- To train the users in the use of information resources;
- To extract the information from information system;
- To train the users to exploit the library resources effectively;
- To encourage the users to get the assistance of library professionals;
- To train and develop the skills in the users for independent specific information searching;
- To acquaint them with various national and international information networks and databases.
- To educate the users in CD – ROM database searching as well as online searching

## 2.2 Need of User Education

With the changes in technology and society, goals of library user education have been changed from library instruction to information literacy and lifelong learning. In present days, libraries have developed and expanded programs to meet the changing needs of library users. Prominent among these is the library user education program. There are several reasons for providing User Education. They are as follows:

Literature explosion and information explosion – There is a tremendous increase in volume and variety of publications so that it is essential to familiar the users with these different kinds of information sources. User Education plays an important role for the same.

E – Resources – Now - a – days information is available in electronic format such as CD – ROM databases, online database, e – journals, e – books etc. and to search the information from these e – resources, it is essential to familiar the users with them.

Automation – No doubt that the information environment in libraries is changing in India. Now – a days libraries are automating their activities and service arrangement and these. Use of ICT is making libraries more advanced. Users feel hesitation when they enter in such libraries. They require someone to help them, to tell the general arrangement and layout of the library.

Variety of Library Services – Modern libraries are providing a variety of services in this age of information such as literature search service, document delivery service, bibliographic services, current awareness service, selective dissemination of information service etc. Users are not aware about the kinds of services provided by the modern libraries. User Education is a mean in this regard.

Multiple Database Searching Techniques – Information is available in CD – ROM databases and online databases in these days. A number of searching techniques are available to retrieve the information from these databases and the organisation and arrangement of information in these databases is so difficult and complicated that a user can not extract their required information from these databases without guidance and proper training. User Education makes familiar the users with these databases and also trains them with the searching techniques to retrieve their required information.

Internet – Internet is a global network of several networks. It is a World Wide Web of interconnected university, business, defense and science networks. It is made up of Local Area Networks (LANs), Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs) and huge wide area networks (WANs) of the whole world. In present days, Internet has become an important tool for researchers, political activists, scientists, journalists, librarians, businessmen etc. for retrieving their required information. Om Shankar Shekhar Singh (2003) has given common facilities provided by the Internet:

- Access to data stored on remote computers;
  - Exchange of electronic mail and other datafiles in a wide area environment;
  - Online real time interaction with other network users;
  - Receipt and delivery of electronic publications;
  - Participation in electronic media mailing lists and conferences; and
  - Access to remote scientific computing equipment such as
- Users are not aware about above facilities provided by Internet and User Education trains the user in the use of Internet.



**3. Information System and Information Networking** – In present days users may get their information existed in remote areas just sitting at one place through networking. There are various information systems. As per Encyclopaedia Britannica “information system, an integrated set of components for collecting, storing, and processing data and for delivering information, knowledge, and digital products. Business firms and other organizations rely on information systems to carry out and manage their operations, interact with their customers and suppliers”. An Information system is a combination of hardware, software, infrastructure and trained personnel organized to facilitate planning, control, coordination, and decision making in an organization. In information technology, a network is a series of points or nodes interconnected by communication paths. Networks can interconnect with other networks and contain subnetworks. Information Network is a supportive system of sharing information and services among individuals and groups having a common interest. User Education is essential to familiar the users with these facilities. Supercomputers, remote sensing equipments, telescopes and graphic processors.

### 3.1 Library User Education Programme

User education programme is the main objectives of the library for the best and maximum used of library target to the users. It can be studied under three main sub-topics.

- **Library Orientation:** It is an introduction to library building, online catalogue (i.e. OPAC) and some basic reference materials. The orientation aims at: 1) Motivation for searching and using the information, 2) Creating awareness about available information resources, 3) Exposing them to various organisational tools of the library. The different methods of orientations are as follows: 1) Lecture method: the formal / informal.
- **Advertising:** (Paper, Journal, Posters, Pamphlets) although limited to a particular small geographical area, but in case of online it requires very wide advertisement through papers, journals, etc.
- **The Workshop:** About the CD-ROM, online services (then gives hands on practice-workshop).
- **Brochures:** It is brought out by each and every industry. It may contain history, use benefits, comparison purchases, addresses in brochures and leaves. Newsletters.
- Demonstration method.
- Book exhibition.
- Display of new arrivals.

### 4. Conclusion:

Information technology plays a unique role in storing, managing and retrieving information effectively. In the age of computer, libraries are changing themselves from traditional to digital. Library resources are changing from traditional print resources to electronic and digital resources. Libraries are changing their ways of rendering services to the users. Networking and multi user environment and multimedia have been important development in the field of IT. Libraries are increasing their efficiency and effectiveness of their operations and services in this

environment. To familiar the users with these technologies, User Education is essential. Library user education programs need to support the concept of educating for a lifetime.

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