

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE MODULE

Subject Name	Library and Information Science
Paper Name	Public Library
Module Name/Title	Functions of Public Library
Module ID	LIS/PL 3
Pre-requisites	Public Library Visit, Public Library Policy, Public Libraries-India,
Objectives	To provide an understanding of public library functions, Explain its role and importance.
Keywords	Public Library, Objectives of Public Library, Functions of Public Library. Role of Public Library.

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2. OBJECTIVES

- To examine views on objectives and functions of public library.
- To describe the functions of public libraries

MAIN CONTENT

3. INTRODUCTION

Public Library, from time immemorial, has been considered as social institution based on the democratic principle of, “for the people, by the people and of the people”. It is the most popular of all types of libraries because of its functions and services across the society. It is regarded as a gateway to knowledge for the community. It is a local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users.

Public library has a wider impact on societal as well as national development. As “People’s University” it plays an important role in bringing all round development in a society and nation. It functions as an intellectual power house, aspiring to meet the intellectual, educational, recreational, informational and cultural requirements of the people. It makes provisions of not only recreational materials for leisure reading but also of economic, social, cultural and political materials to make the public aware of the developments around them. This is the only institution, which caters all categories of users irrespective of age, race, sex, color, creed and religion. Public libraries serve as a catalyst for socio- cultural and educational development by providing access to information and knowledge.

Many individuals and institutions have deliberated on and defined the objectives and functions of the public libraries. In the preceding modules you will find some important deliberations and observations on objectives and functions of public libraries.

According to IFLA/UNESCO guideline for development-2001, the purpose of the public library is to, “provide resources and services in a variety of media to meet the needs of individuals and groups for education, information and personal development including recreation and leisure. They have an important role in the development and maintenance of a democratic society by giving the individual access to a wide and varied range of knowledge, ideas and opinions” (1). Thus public libraries make provisions of a wide and varied collection in different media to meet the varied information needs of the society at large.

The objectives and functions of public library as enumerated by Dr. S.R. Ranganathan are as follows:

- i. Help the life-long self- education of one and all.
- ii. Furnish up-to-date facts and information on all subjects to one and all;
- iii. Distribute in unbiased and balanced way sources of recorded reviews and thoughts to one and all, and serve as a help in the discharge of their political responsibilities in respect of local, national and international affairs.
- iv. Contribute to productive drive by information to management of the latest trends in diverse enterprises **by plugging** back in the minds of researchers, designers and technologists every piece of relevant new thought promptly;

- v. Preserve the literary remains of humanity for posterity as vehicles of culture and source materials for antiquarian research;
- vi. Provide to one and all worthy and elevating use of leisure; and
- vii. In general work for continued social well being as the agency in charge of all **socialized** thought. (2)

The objectives and functions enumerated by Dr. Ranganathan are quite comprehensive. They assimilates all the functions, an ideal public library should perform.

The Public Library Research Group of the London and Home countries branch of the Library Association of United Kingdom set out in 1971 outlines under the heading of education, information, culture and leisure the following objectives for Public Library Services.

Education: to foster and provide means for self-development of the individual or group at whatever stage of education, closing the gap between the individual and recorded knowledge.

Information: to bring to the individual or group accurate information quickly and in depth, particularly on topics of current concern.

Culture: To be one of the principal centers of cultural life and promote a keener participation, enjoyment and appreciation of all arts.

Leisure: To play a part in encouraging the positive use of leisure and providing materials for change and relaxation. (3)

You may consider these objectives as fundamental objectives to set up a public library. These objectives, when translated into action will make a proper public library.

American Library Association, in its publication entitled Public Library Services: A Guide to Evaluation with Minimum Standards, points out the following functions of a public library:

1. To facilitate informal education of all people in the community;
2. To enrich and further develop the subjects on which individuals are taking formal education;
3. To meet the **informational** need of all;
4. To support the educational, civic, and cultural activities of groups and organizations, and
5. To encourage wholesome **recreational** and constructive use of leisure time.(4)

The Public Library Enquiry Committee (U.K.) presents the following three functions of a public library:

1. To gather resources in order to promote an enlightened citizenship and enrich personal life;
2. To provide reliable information to the community; and
3. To provide opportunities for self education to children, young people, men and women.

4. Functions of Public Library

Public Library functions as an intellectual powerhouse aspiring to meet the intellectual, educational, recreational, informational and cultural requirements of the people. The various objectives and functions enumerated above by individuals and institutions could easily be summed up in following functions:

- Self Education Centre
- Centre for Life Long Learning
- Community Information Centre
- Recreation Centre
- Cultural Centre for Society
- Centre to Support Economic Development
- Centre for Community Skills Development
- Centre for Strengthening Democratic Sprit.

4.1 Self Education Centre:

Public Library functions as a centre for self education. It is the primary function of a public library to select and organize need based literature and other means of information and education suitable to the requirements of the local community in which the library is located. It fosters and provides means for self development of the individual and group at every stage of education, closing the gap between the individual and recorded knowledge. As a self education centre, the public library supports and promotes all types of education as formal & non-formal education adult & continuing education, and life long education by making provision of adequate stock of books and other reading materials and making them available to all sections of community, irrespective of caste, creed and color.

Public Library is aptly considered as ‘people’s university’ whose main aim is to act as an educational agency for all the people. It supports not only formal learning through schools, colleges and universities but all other modes and methods of learning in which an individual with varied interests would like to seek knowledge at a place or time, which suits his situation. It provides self education suiting one’s interests throughout his life. For example self education may be obtained through a rural public library on topics such as methods of agricultural operation, scientific method of poultry, bee keeping etc. Thus as a self education centre, public library enriches our life to a great extent and mitigates day to day hardships.

4.2 Centre for Life Long Learning

Education is an ongoing process of improving knowledge and skills. It is also an exceptional means of bringing about personal development and building relationships among individuals, groups and nations. It has been recognized as an individual right and a higher general level of education is a necessary prerequisite for economic growth and employment. During the last decades, and particularly during the last decade, the necessity of life long learning has been on the top of plans and policies world wide.

Life Long Learning consists of various forms of education and training, formal and informal, e.g. the school system from primary to tertiary level, the free adult education, informal search and training, individually, in a group setting or within the framework of social movements.

Public Library provides a cost effective infrastructure for lifelong learning and easy access to the required reading and learning materials in its collection. The development of the information and communication technology has already laid the basis for the creation of information networks, giving users even of small local public libraries access to the world wide sources of information.

Public libraries also function as centre of learning for visually disabled by making provisions for reading and learning materials in accessible formats such as braille books, audio books, e-text, etc.

4.3 Community Information Centre:

Public Library functions as community information centre by providing required and essential information to various communities such as rural, linguistic, religious, legal etc. It brings to these communities accurate and up-to-date information quickly and in depth, particularly on socio – economic needs of the society. It supports the growth of communities through the provision of information services designed to meet local needs. It functions as an important tool for reducing disparity between the information rich and the information poor citizen.

A public library also serves as information centre for specialized sources of information. For example a rural public library collects and organizes information for dissemination to the local community in the areas of employment opportunities, public utility services, facilities provided by social welfare agencies, programs of development departments etc. A farmer apprised of the programs and policies of the government is able to acquire agriculture loan from bank, purchase quality seeds, purchase advanced agricultural equipments, etc.

Public libraries are much more than a collection of books. They play a central role in many communities. The local public library functions as an important centre in promoting developmental activities like construction of roads, dams and canals, construction of houses for weaker section, establishment of cottage and village industries, etc. They play significant role in popularization of science and technology and disseminate legal information relating to family laws, property laws, etc. The local public library collection is primarily in local language of the area. They also organize various forms of performing arts. Thus a local public library functions as a community information centre.

4.4 Recreation Centre

Provision of scope for healthy and positive use of leisure time is one of the important functions of public **libraries**. They encourage the positive use of leisure and provide ample material and services for change and relaxation. Books of fiction, drama, poetry, newspapers and popular magazines, etc. facilitate recreational reading. Audio-visual materials such as films, television, radio, cassettes, gramophone records, CDs and DVDs increase the utility of public library as recreation centre. The children's corner invariably found in all public libraries **provides** good material for recreation of children.

The public library as a community information centre serves a good platform for fruitful utilization of leisure for recreation. As a dynamic institution, it reaches out to the people at their homes and place of work, through branches, book mobiles and deposit stations at prisons, hospitals, and at elders' homes. The Delhi Public Library (DPL) consisting of a Central Library, a Zonal Library, 3 Branch libraries, 24 Sub-Branch Libraries, 3 Community Libraries, 12 Resettlement Colonies Libraries, One Braille Library, 70 Mobile Service Points and 22 Deposit Stations, is a good example. Thus, public library serves as recreation centre to all segments of the society.

4.5 Cultural Centre for Society

Public library also functions as a cultural centre for the society. It identifies and collects cultural materials of importance, such as work of art and sculpture, paintings, musical instruments, literary documents etc. available in its area.

The collected materials are organized and put to the public use. Thus it links the people of the locality with its cultural past. The public library has also penetrated deep into the life of the community by turning itself into a cultural centre by organizing activities such as lectures, book discussions, film shows, musical concerts, plays, art exhibitions and story telling for children.

With the implementation of ICT in public libraries, the archive of local reminiscence materials are being digitized. Such digital resources are networked or mounted on the web and are made accessible from a PC located in the reference library and also through web.

4.6 Centre to Support Economic Development

Public library functions as an information provider for businesses and industries, through the provision of information services designed to meet specific needs. For example compilation of city business directory, information alert service for business, city guide, job and career information guide, topical book list for a particular business or small industry, advice services for business etc. Such services of the public libraries positively contribute to the economic development of the community. The amount and exact nature of the services provided to contribute towards the community's economic development vary depending on the community itself and the library.

4.7 Centre for Community Skills Development.

We all know that information is directly related to knowledge and skills which influence socio-economic development. Libraries are the most important information **centers** involved in collecting, processing, organizing and disseminating information and knowledge. Modern Information and communication Technologies (ICT) have fruitfully contributed in all walks of human life and the libraries and information **centers** have embraced the ICT more profoundly than any other field.

ICT has revolutionized the entire gamut of library activities and services and has eased the availability of information and knowledge. The changed information environment using ICT and available in electronic format calls for a new kind of user awareness and user education programs, particularly by public libraries, called information literacy.

The public libraries are required to offer guidance and training through Information Literacy Program in information search and quality rating of information sources. In this regard many public libraries have established an in-house Information Literacy team to provide a tailor-made, flexible training to the user community. Online tutorials and quizzes have also been developed and uploaded on websites by many public libraries.

4.8 Center for Strengthening Democratic Spirit

Democracy will be impossible unless the citizens have free access to quality information and all points of view on a given topic. Public library is the only impartial agency which places before one and all a truly balanced information store on all points of view, all lines of approach, and all schools of thought. It provides a wide range of reading material in order to broaden citizen's outlook, knowledge and ideas. This helps the citizens to know, defend and enjoy their rights and

realize and discharge their duties in a democracy. Thus Public Libraries help to increase quality of life and democratic possibilities for citizens by providing free and equal access to quality information.

Public Library brings together different segments of the society on a single platform through its socio-cultural activities and develops a sense of amity, sense of respect and appreciation for other groups, languages, religion, customs and cultures. The success of the democracy really depends upon the educated and en-lighted citizenry irrespective of their age, race, sex, cast, color, creed, language, religion and social status.

Thus Public Libraries strengthen democratic spirit among the citizen by their activities and services.

5. Summary

Public library is a social institution based on the principle of democracy, 'for the people, by the people and of the people'. It is a local centre of information and gateway to knowledge. It is regarded as, 'people's university' because it supports self-education and lifelong learning. It functions as an intellectual power house and meets the intellectual, educational, recreational, informational and cultural requirements of the people. It serves across the society irrespective of age, race, sex, color, creed and religion.

Many individuals and institutions have deliberated on and defined the objectives and functions of the public libraries. Its functions as:

- Self Education Centre
- Centre for Life Long Learning
- Community Information Centre
- Recreation Centre
- Cultural Centre for Society
- Centre to support Economic Development
- Centre for Community Skills Development
- Centre for Strengthening Democratic Spirit.

Thus public libraries have a wider impact on societal as well as national development.