
End User Training in Academic Libraries *vis-à-vis* Emerging Technologies

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Abstract

This paper describes the role of library professionals; in creating awareness and guiding the users in locating the required information, through User Education (UE) programmes. Author tries to stress upon the dire need to provide training to the present day end-user to explore the information, which is available in various sources and in different forms, especially in electronic/digital form.

Keywords : User Education, Academic Libraries, Digital Information Services

0. Introduction

The motto of education is to train the mind, but this training would remain incomplete if the students and researchers do not know how to find information, where to locate it and how to use it. Here comes the role of library professionals; in creating awareness and guiding the users in locating the required information, through User Education (UE) programmes.

The LIS professional has to make the user acquaint with the diverse sources of information and expose them to the complexities of the various media and the actual piece of information whenever there is such a demand.

The user communities participate in periodic user education programs. The technology and manpower available in the library and its resources are to be made known to users. Users need specific help in information gathering, necessary sources and techniques. Librarians can advise them about the facilities available in the library. User education programs should include bibliographic instruction and organization of reader services. User studies and user education programs improve the professional competencies of librarians.

Democratic societies recognize the value of user education and its philosophy is derived from the below listed components:

- User awareness
- Library orientation
- Bibliographic instruction
- Interest profiling¹

1. Definitions

UE means educating the users of a library to make use of the library reading materials to the maximum extent possible. Educating the user would introduce the students to the right methods that would enable them for the rest of their lives to use libraries more effectively in education, research and development.²

Fleming (1990) defines user education as “ various programs 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.”³

Tacatlian, Director of UNESCO General Information Program mentioned that “user education is to include any effort or program which will guide and instruct existing and potential users in the recognition and formulation of their information needs, in the effective and efficient use of information services and in their assessment.”⁴

2. Enforcing factors of UE

Traditionally under the umbrella term UE, LIS professionals have been initiating and instructing the end-users in the use of print-based publications. But now a days, in this hybrid information systems environment, balance between the print-based sources and digital/electronic documents will be a basic norm in the near future. In this context, training and retraining the end-users in the use of IT based resources and services, such as email, ftp, telnet, www, browsers, search engines, opacs, databases, systems software, application software, e-journals, mailing lists, newsgroups, websites, CDs and DVDs, etc should become an integral part of a library’s UE and training program.

UE has become the pressing need of the hour. The changing pattern of education and the application of new technology in information retrieval necessitate the urgency for user education. Some such factors are listed below:

- Emerging technologies in the field of library and information science.
- Exponential growth in all kinds of information bearing material.
- Development of several new methods of transfer of information.
- Multi-disciplinary approach to education and research.
- Lack of awareness among users relating to various forms, types, and sources of information.
- Necessity of inculcating the habit of independent study.
- To publicize library sources, resources, and services.
- Provides an opportunity to build and improve the image of a library further.
- Tremendous advancement in computerized storage and improvements in telecommunication facilities.
- Best way to implement Ranganathan’s five laws of library science.⁵

3. Objectives

The objectives of UE in academic libraries are:

1. General orientation about available facilities and resources
2. Teaching of basic research skills and strategies
3. Teaching of the organization of literature in various disciplines as well as the basic reference tools in each discipline
4. To train the user in handling information products like printed forms and electronic forms of material
5. To train the user to use information sources and services available through online, Internet, in-house database, etc.⁶

4. Pre-requisites

There are certain pre-requisites for introducing UE in any academic institution. These may be stated as follows:

- Subject orientation of libraries or subject-librarianship
- Democratic functioning of the institution
- Involvement of the faculty
- Active participation from the users; &
- Technology

5. Barriers

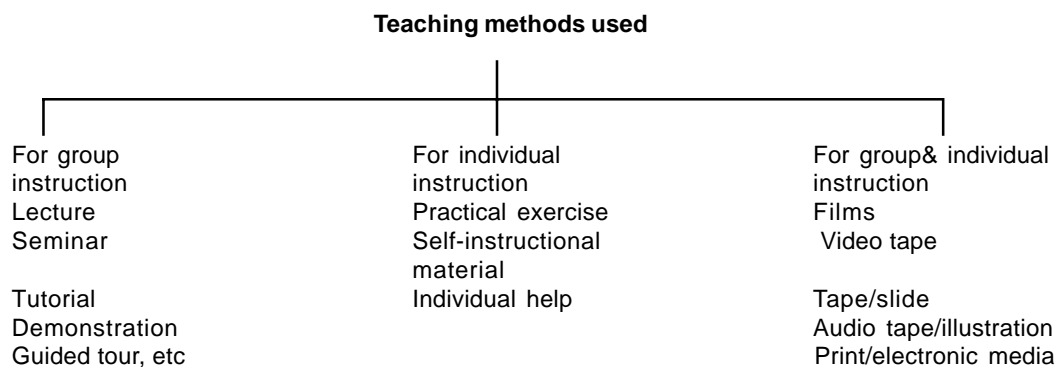
The below stated barriers come in the way of effective conduct of UE program in academic libraries:

- Shortage of professional staff to conduct UE.
- Inadequate time allotment for the program.
- Lack of support form the teaching staff.
- Inhibitions of the library professionals.
- Lack of proper cooperation and coordination at various levels.
- Lack of library oriented education system.
- Mind-set of library professionals.

6. Teaching methods

There are a number of teaching methods suggested by the experts for imparting user education programs. No single method is useful or complete in all aspects. Selection and application of a particular method or methods depends upon the objectives of the program.

Teaching methods can broadly be classified into the following three groups:



7. State of the art

The international scene reveals that many academic libraries, especially university libraries, place high emphasis on users learning to find material on their own. They mainly focus on teaching users how to devise a search strategy, to acquaint them with the many resources of the libraries, to critically evaluate these sources, and to guide them in making effective use of the sources they select.

Few university libraries, which provide UE, are given below:

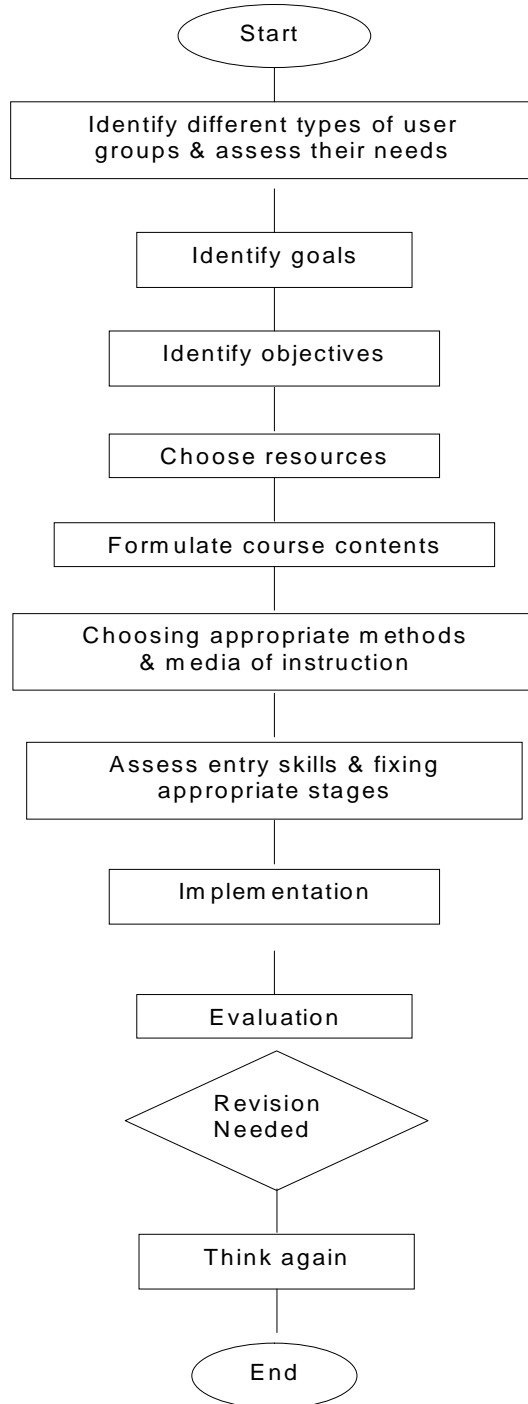
- Temple university libraries are providing UE services, which include: individual help, library guides – like Fact sheets, research guides, and users' guides – library skills work book, course-related library UE, etc. <http://www.library.temple.edu/libinst/li.htm>
- The UE of University of Albany includes information literacy, course-related instruction, support of information literacy courses, general instruction session, tours, printed guides, Internet based instruction, etc. <http://library.albany.edu/>
- The Cambridge University is providing training in the use of the library, its services and resources primarily face-to-face in the form of presentations, seminars, practicals and demonstrations. Some courses are of general interest; others focus on specific subject areas.
<http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/index.htm>
- The University of Edinburgh in its web site 'Library online', placed 'New users' guide' to help the users in finding the library, timings, borrowing facility, resources and sources available, etc.
<http://www.lib.ed.ac.uk/>
- The Stanford University library is offering instruction in a variety of formats; guides to subjects and databases, individualized assistance at reference points, and group tours and workshops.
<http://www-sul.stanford.edu/>
- The Yale University library is offering training through subject guides and online tutorials, research workshops, library orientation and course related research education. <http://www.yale.edu>

Though the urgency of UE is obvious, it has been a neglected area in the Indian academic library environment. Keeping all the other barriers aside, the initiative of the professionals towards implementing UE program is discouraging. Central University of Hyderabad, for example, has fully automated all its housekeeping operations. OPAC and access to Internet are also provided. Continuous training and guidance is provided to the users at the OPAC terminals and training program were held for Network users. The library could conduct training sessions in small groups with hands-on-experience to all the users (<http://www.uohyd.ernet.in>). College libraries, for example among others, is Koneru Lakshmaiah College of Engineering, Vaddeswarm, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, which is stepping towards digitization, recently started the UE program by organizing a one-day seminar on library orientation and releasing a library brochure. <http://www.klceonline.org>

8. Planning of UE program

Thorough planning is needed to ensure that all activities carried out are towards meeting the institutional goals. Commitment to educate users should be reflected in the mission statement of the library. The below placed flow chart⁷ explains the basic steps of designing a UE program.

User Education Program Flow Chart



9. Enriching factors of UE program

- General instruction session has to be designed to acquaint new and continuing students, staff and faculty with the resources that are available to them through the libraries.
- Library instruction must be continuous and linked to student course work.
- Develop a comprehensive UE and training program at national level. The UGC, NISSAT, NASSDOC, INSDOC, DESIDOC, university libraries, LIS schools, and library associations can play a pivotal role and such a program can be customized at local level to suit one's own needs.
- UE programs are to be taken up regularly and the target groups are to be the freshers who enter into the institutions.
- UE programs can be conducted occasionally, whenever the changes take place in the library.
- Suitable and adequate number of teaching aids required for UE program is to be developed.
- UE program components are to be incorporated in the LIS school curricula.
- Involving the LIS school faculty in the conduct of UE programs.
- Proper coordination and cooperation is to be established at various levels.
- At least one session should be included in the orientation and refresher courses of ASCs (Academic Staff Colleges).
- LIS professionals have to build up good personality with effective communication skills.
- Continuing professional education and training programs for the LIS professionals are to be organized and encouraged.
- Continuous evaluation of the UE program will lead to effective utilization of the library and information sources, resources, and services.

10. Conclusion

It is obvious that there is a tremendous change in the library and information environment. The emerging technologies like OPAC, CD-ROM, web, Internet, etc pose a considerable challenge for LIS professionals. It has now become a compulsory task of the library professionals to teach and assist the end users, who have little exposure to these technologies, in searching literature. It is evident that there is a dire need to provide training to the present day end-user to explore the information, which is available in various sources and in different forms, especially in electronic/digital form.

A time has come to recharge the abilities, efficiencies and skills of the LIS professionals to cope-up with the present day changing information environment.

11. References

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