

RGUHS Standards for the Academic Health Sciences Libraries in Karnataka

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Abstract

The paper provides meaning of standards. It discusses the evolution of library standards and their requirements to become effective measures. It analyses and reviews the RGUHS Standards developed for implementation in the libraries of the colleges affiliated to RGUHS. It is concluded that the RGUHS Standards may not be able to achieve the desired results until the University, the institutional managements and the library managers sincerely aim to improve the library quality and work towards implementation of the Standards.

Keywords : Measurement, Library Standard

1. Introduction

Measuring techniques and quality management approaches have played a major role in improving the quality in profit and non-profit sectors in the 20th century. Standards have existed as measuring and quality control tool since the ancient times. An attempt was made in 1496 to establish a scientifically developed standard when a bronze bar was decreed to be the "imperial yard" to measure length (Subramanyam 1980, 176). The industrial revolution spurred the development of standards in the 19th century. In the 1920s, quality improvement philosophy emerged as a new approach of managing quality in the production sector (Mein 2000, 56).

Setting standards as a method to improve quality of products in the manufacturing sector occupied the attention of the service sector including education. While the production sector was shifting from measuring approaches based on products to quality management methods which focus on the service delivery processes, library managers were in search of a tool that would help them to improve library quality. The method of establishing standards in the industrial sector attracted the librarians to adopt similar model for quality improvement in the libraries. In the 1990s a section of libraries in many countries adopted quality management principles to improve their performance. Quality management methods were increasingly integrated into library services, following their perceived success in manufacturing industries, with particular emphasis on improving service quality (Hsieh, Chang and Lu 2000, 191). Despite the significant level of adoption within service organizations and the public sector, there existed missing link between quality management principles/tools and the implementation of quality management in libraries and information services (Hsieh, Chang and Lu 2000, 192). Profession around the world however, has continued to find the library standards as an easy method for quality improvement. Effort continues around the world to develop new standards, update the existing standards to incorporate new requirements and new criteria. Library standards

developed in the recent years by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and Medical Library Association (MLA) are witness to such efforts.

2. Evolution of Library Standards

Standards are fundamental to many aspects of modern life, including science, technology, industry, commerce, health, and education (Subramanyam 1980, 176). However, library standards differ from industrial and engineering standards, because they usually are regarded as models to be followed rather than as enforceable codes (Lancaster 1987, 288). They are a model set of measures created by the professional experts to measure and evaluate effectiveness of libraries. Library standards are usually based on consensus among those who develop them. They are developed by the collective efforts of the experienced professionals in the field. Library evaluation and performance standards are established by the professional body of librarians, recognizing and accrediting agencies and government bodies in the form of policies, recommendations and requirements. Often they are developed by agencies outside the profession in collaboration with the library profession.

Development of library standards to different libraries has its routes in the USA. Efforts to develop standards of excellence in US college libraries go back to the late 1920s (Hirsch 1975, 49). In the late 1920s library practitioners in many small colleges in the USA desperately needed a clear goal of excellence toward which their institutions could strive. They needed a statement of that goal and the means to achieve it in quantitative terms which they could use with their administrations. Until 1929 the statement of what a college library should ideally be, both in qualitative and quantitative terms, had to be sought in the writings of leading academic librarians (Brown, 1972, p. 204). In that year ALA council unanimously adopted a report by the ALA Committee on Classification of Library Personnel. The College and Reference Section of ALA suggested minimum standards for college libraries in 1930 (Lancaster 1987, 292). In the subsequent years professional associations around the world developed standards, though such activities quite intense in the developed countries like the USA, Western Europe and Australia.

The early work on developing library standards emphasised the issues of measuring important variables pertaining to the size of the library – its physical facility, collections, budgets, and staff (Lynch and Yang 2004, 179). They are known as “inputs.” Traditional standards provided specific and quantitative criteria. Quantitative measures helped the librarians to judge whether or not their libraries were adequate as compared to the standards. Hershfield and Boone state that “although quantitative measures do not equal quality, one can infer levels of quality from them” (1972, 3).

There were experts in the profession who opposed the establishment of quantitative standards. The opposition was based on the belief that no two libraries serving in two different setups and serving different programmes, and at different levels with different objectives could be equated and forced to meet the same quantitative requirements. It was argued that no two libraries are equal. Such

differences in opinion among the professionals led to the development of more descriptive standards and guidelines suggesting resources, services and library practices. However, proponents of the quantitative standards insist that descriptive standards can not be used as a measuring tool since they do not provide specific measures. Due to their descriptive character, the library standards have been described in a variety of adverse ways including "unenforceable guidelines," "debatable terms," "platitudes," and ambiguous generalities." (Lancaster 1987, 288)

In the 1970s performance became the major criterion to judge quality in the profit sector. Libraries too adopted the new approach of measuring the quality based on performance. The profession focused its attention from developing measures of input to search the measures of "output" that would reflect the library performance. Lot of literature was produced in the 1970 and 1980s on the methods and measures of library performance. By the 1990s most quantitative standards efforts in the U.S. and in Western Europe had been put aside as the profession began its search for measures of performance (Lynch and Yang 2004, 179). However very soon it was acknowledged that resources and performance were closely linked and without improving the resources, performance improvement is not possible. While the input measures were assailed as being inadequate, the profession began to acknowledge that good performance requires appropriate resources to ensure quality of services (Lynch and Yang 2004, 180). By the end of the millennium, profession in the U.S. was seeking criteria to measure the outcome of the library service.

Though over the period library profession has sought different approaches to measure library by including criteria to measure input, output and outcomes of library services, it is believed that measuring the performance will be meaningful only after development of certain levels of resources. It is also agreed that traditional standards are still relevant for the initial planning and build up of the collection, other resources and library services. It is agreed that in the countries and regions where libraries have not been developed to provide minimum services, traditional standards can be the quite effective and most useful.

3. Requirement of Library Standards as Effective Measuring Tool

Irrespective of the criticisms library standards specifying the levels of resources, services and practices are recognized as one of the effective tool developed by the profession that can guide the librarians in planning and evaluating adequacy of library services. There are also instances of arguments in favor of developing output measurement even before setting levels for resources. However it is argued that quantitative standards are necessary forerunners to a more sophisticated system in order that the necessary development takes place (1986 Ellis, 81)

Library standards are models developed by the experts. Standards development has had little base in research. For most efforts the reliance has been on the opinion of experts who then are able to forge a consensus among the constituents for approval of the statement (Lynch, 1997, p.128). Such

practice has been criticized by Martin (1972, 175) who call such standards the "wisdom of the seers" Examining the practices of the ACRL in developing standards, Lynch states that, the standards based on factual data and analysis can be useful (1997, 125). Martin suggests that the standards based on fresh concepts suited to the conditions emerging at the time of the development of standards can be effective.

Alan D. Covey, as quoted by Williams and O'Connor (2003, 67) has stated that the most useful standards are those that combine quantitative and qualitative criteria; that seek to evaluate the quality and appropriateness of the book collection; that concern themselves with the quality of the library building; and that assess the role and status of the librarian in academic community.

Hirsch, the strong proponent of prescriptive standards for academic libraries at the national level in the 1970s argued - "At this juncture we need clearly defined, carefully reasoned, unequivocal standards for our libraries. This is no time for platitudes and ambiguous generalities" (1972, p.162). Such arguments are supported by many in the profession who think specific standards can do much better in the improvement of library quality. Hirsch observes that new standards must have a clear vision of what they are aiming at. Meder, as quoted by Lancaster (1987, 295) felt that standards should be stated in terms of quality "norms" and a description of excellence. According to him quantitative standards will not in the long run produce good libraries. Lancaster has summarised the requirements for meaningful standards (1987, 290)

- ◆ Research and the compilation of statistics in the areas being standardized. Perhaps the most urgent and basic of all needs in the development of standards
- ◆ Measurability: To provide a basis for evaluation and evaluative judgment. A service or other activity must be measurable in order to determine if the function in question "meets the standard".
- ◆ The standard must be clearly defined and definable so that it conveys the same meaning to all who read it.
- ◆ Appropriateness to be institution or service to be evaluated is essential.
- ◆ Authoritativeness, which bases the standard on practices and research, not on assumptions or prejudices.
- ◆ In order to be effective, the standard must be realistic, otherwise, it will be ignored and result in wasted effort.

4. Implementation Process of Standards

A standard may have all the good features to become an excellent tool for library evaluation. Development of library standards too must have included the opinion of all the stakeholders i.e., the

experts, librarians, managements and users. That may not however guarantee a change in the library after implementation unless all those responsible for the execution of the standards consistently and sincerely work towards improvement of quality of the libraries. Hirsch (1975, 45) has observed "...but the execution of standards depends on the understanding and vigorous cooperation of many people outside the four walls of the library." Library standards provide measures for overall evaluation. Criteria are defined for provision of resources, services and practices. The authorities enforcing the standards, library managements, and their librarians are responsible for the successful implementation of the standards. The standards to be effective in improving the library condition, the library must present itself for close scrutiny while measuring. It must understand the purpose of developing the standards and should be adopted in same spirit (Martin, 1972, p. 173). Librarians are responsible to operate effectively within the resources available at their disposal. However, the college librarian who must discharge his professional responsibilities within the framework of an academic institution is dependent upon the level of support he receives from the college administration for the implementation of the library programs he plans (Brown, 1972, p. 204). The availability of clear and authoritative standards setting forth the specific limits of acceptable library practice and support may mean the difference to the librarian between professional fulfillment and frustration. Librarian's ability to play his role to some extent depends upon the support that he gets from the administration. The implementing process of the standards is a joint collaboration.

The management of a library is the major player in the quality improvement efforts – both as funding authority and administrator of the library. Unless the management of a library itself desires to attain quality, all the efforts may become a waste exercise. However, a strict monitoring mechanism will have certainly positive results towards meeting the requirements of the standards.

5. RGUHS Standards

Rajeev Gandhi University of Health Sciences (RGUHS) was established in Karnataka in the year 1994. The phenomenal increase in the number of institutions and students admitted to various courses of medical and allied health sciences warranted the need to regulate, monitor and standardize the curricula as well as the evaluation system. The university was established through an Act by the Government of Karnataka (RGUHS). 652 colleges conducting undergraduate programmes and 149 colleges running postgraduate and super speciality courses are affiliated to Rajeev Gandhi University. The objective of the University is to upgrade standards of teaching, research, publication and dissemination of knowledge in all branches of health sciences and bring all the health sciences institutions under one umbrella to standardize and upgrade the standards of health science education (RGUHS). Quality, in the context of a higher education institution, is multidimensional. The functioning of a library can said to manifest one such dimension (NAAC 2005).

Most of the colleges affiliated to RGUHS are run by private managements. Though as per the regulations of the government of India, private institutes are established as non-profit set ups, many of the colleges in various programmes are established with profit as the main objective. It has resulted in constrained funding by the managements and extreme variance in the provision of academic facilities including library services.

Recognising the role of health sciences libraries in upgrading the standards of health sciences education, the University decided to upgrade the quality of the libraries in the affiliated colleges. In October 2005, the RGUHS took the initiative to invite the health sciences librarians working in the affiliated colleges to develop measures that could be used to assess the quality of the library provision in the affiliated colleges. A workshop in the University was organized to discuss the library standards for RGUHS affiliated college libraries. A committee of experts prepared a draft statement for consultation prior to the workshop. A survey was conducted through the questionnaire before the draft statement was prepared. It was necessary to know the prevailing situation throughout the state. Standards based on the factual data and solid analysis can be useful (Lynch 1997, 125). The workshop of the health sciences librarians discussed the aspects that needed immediate attention. Revised statement of standards was prepared following the workshop and was sent to the University syndicate for approval. The syndicate in its meeting in January 2006 approved the standards and resolved the ordinance for immediate implementation by the affiliated colleges.

The objective of the University in developing the standards for libraries was to minimise the variance in the resources available and service provision to users in the health sciences libraries and ensure provision of regular funds for the continuous growth of libraries that would meet the changing and new demands of health sciences profession. The library profession equally supported the objectives of the University. The profession however had its own issues to be incorporated in the standards and getting the issues resolved by making the University implement the standards. In general, standards are prepared in most countries have, as their most importance objective, the purpose of persuading their authorities that their libraries are in need of greater support (Lynch, 1997, p. 125). The librarians were more concerned regarding improving work condition, status and benefits as well as stopping the administrative practices detrimental to the library professional.

6. RGUHS Standards – A Brief Review

The RGUHS Standards provide both qualitative and quantitative criteria for inputs. The statement includes both descriptive guidelines and prescriptive norms. Librarians in India continue to work on standards, using the method of gathering library experts together to develop consensus on content of the standards. These efforts reflect the approach used in the USA in the development college library standards (Lynch, 1997, p. 125). The standards are developed on the lines of the MLA Standards for libraries of different programmes. The standards are categorised under five heads – information

resources, library services, infrastructure, budget, manpower requirements and general standards. The standards prescribe the type of information resources that shall be provided in different formats by the health sciences libraries. They emphasize the use of electronic resources and recommend the provision of online access and the necessary infrastructure. The standards statement requires the institutions to update periodically their collection through constituting a committee of subject experts. They specify the minimum services to be provided by the health sciences libraries. It is stated that the libraries shall design and develop and implement programmes to ensure optimal utilization of the available resources. The statement provides a descriptive guideline regarding the building except that "ideally the library should be housed in a separate building planned and designed to house it." The standards prescribe the level of funding during the establishment of the library as well as for the later years. They prescribe minimum staff provision, their qualifications and pay scale for libraries of institutions conducting different programmes. Factors to be considered while calculating the staff size are provided. The standards prescribe practices and library administration requirements that can help to improve over all library performance. Though more prescriptive standards would have made the RGUHS Standards a more effective tool for measuring the quality of libraries, the available statement can no doubt help the health sciences libraries in Karnataka to plan and measure well their libraries than before. The statement has succeeded in providing many quantitative measures and can become a good supplement to the requirements of national and state professional bodies that recognize various programmes. If implemented with right spirit by the college managements and their librarians, the standards could help in improving the library quality. In many areas however it leaves the librarians and their authorities to judge what is minimum or optimum.

7. Execution of RGUHS Standards – Bottlenecks

A library exists as an interface between a particular user population and the universe of bibliographic resources. The objective of the library is to maximise the accessibility to these resources to the user or to maximise the exposure of users to the resources (Lancaster 1987, 8). Standards guide the profession towards the accessibility and exposure objectives by setting goals and demanding libraries to meet them.

Many organizations have attempted to use standards as a method to assure quality services. Often standards have failed the attempts by not providing precise criteria to measure library effectiveness. More often lack of individual commitment of the part of those adopt and implement them have failed the standards. Regional standards, in cases where they are issued by accrediting agencies, carry built-in implementation. Mandated state standards also have this characteristic, as do related state regulations involving qualifications for federal and state financial assistance (Henne 1972, 245). However the success more depends on the reward that implementation of standards brings.

The RGUHS Standards are mandatory on the part of the affiliated colleges to implement them. However the repercussions of not implementing them are based on the report of the Local Inspection Committees of the University regarding implementing of the standards. The copy of the University notification sent to the University Deputy Registrar, Affiliation, states "...for record and necessary action during LIC inspection for implementation in all the affiliated colleges." Two years after the implementation of the standards, the method of evaluation and assessment of library performance in health sciences colleges by the LIC teams has not found changes. Attempts have not been made by the LIC teams to compare the libraries to the RGUHS newly developed standards.

The development exercise of the library standards did not involve the managements of the colleges, who are ultimately the people responsible for implementing the standards. Martin (1972, 171) observed, "Public library standard exist, as we have seen, without governmental sanction. The money for libraries comes from the public purse; the prescriptions for service come from professional groups. Whatever effect public library standards have must therefore come from persuasion." Scenario though is a bit different in the case of RGUHS standards since it is the University that got the standards developed. Money in this case has to come from the purse of the private college managements, since most of the health sciences colleges affiliated are run by private managements. Persuasion at institutional level of individual college managements by their librarians has so far has not yielded any result. Developing of the Standards was an effort of collective persuasion. Implementing the standards would require more fund allocation to the libraries. Lack of constant monitoring by the University teams regarding the implementation of standards has not made the managements to show interest towards improving library facilities. One of the efforts of the librarians in developing the standards and getting them implemented was to improve the status of the profession. The failure to implement standards has left them where they were before the development of standards. Staff is the most important factor for library quality improvement. Low morale in the profession may not contribute to improve the library quality.

8. MCI Standards – A Model to Follow in Implementation

Health sciences librarians earlier had succeeded to some extent in their efforts by recommending a set of measures for quality improvement in the health sciences libraries. In a three day workshop conducted in 1983, health sciences librarians came out with a set of recommendations to the national bodies recognizing health sciences programmes in India. The Medical Council of India (MCI), a powerful body that recognizes medical programmes (allopathy) and one of the co-sponsors of the workshop had then partly accepted the recommendations (Bhatt, Anand and Dhir 1983) by including some quantitative standards in its minimum requirements for library resources to start a medical college. It put efforts to strictly implement them. It has resulted in the improved levels of resources and staff in medical college libraries in India, though the status and benefits of librarians remained

unattended. The librarians felt happy for being able to improve the quality of the libraries through recommending measures that could improve the quality of health sciences libraries. The quantitative criteria and the strict implementation efforts by MCI has proved that similar models can be adopted by others for improving quality.

9. Conclusion

It is clear from the literature, and past experience that mere establishing standards will not work. It needs an effective monitoring mechanism that would ensure the implementation. It demands all the stakeholders to library quality to work closely with the intention of improving the library services. Standards would have been a magic wand if their mere establishment could change the face of libraries. Works of standards in the USA had their basis in the accreditation standards. Standards have done very well in the countries where accreditation bodies existed and where accreditation status was linked to funding. The reward for respecting and not respecting standards make a difference in their success.

Librarians continue to fight all around the world for the resources, their status and benefits. However making the funding authorities accept and implement the standards still depends on those who thrust them upon the institutions to which the libraries are attached. More often it is felt that libraries too are thrust upon academic institutions by the government and its bodies in the developing countries. They often exist as a 'requirement' for obtaining recognition. The role of the library as a contributing factor to the academic performance is too far from recognition in developing countries, especially where the education is commercialised. In Karnataka most of the colleges are run by private managements and the libraries often exist as one of "recognition requirements". Their further improvement all depends upon the need to do so. Development of the standards was an effort by the profession to improve library quality. It is still possible for the librarians to carry on with their efforts to see that the standards are implemented. It is possible that the professionals collect evidence of the progress made by the health sciences libraries since the implementation of RGUHS standards and work closely with the University authorities. It is possible that someday such efforts will yield results.

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