A CONSORTIUM FOR COLLEGE LIBRARIES IN MEGHALAYA : A PROPOSAL

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Abstract

Paper discusses the present scenario of affiliated College Libraries in Meghalaya and found that some of the libraries have computerized their collection. Moreover all the libraries have similar resources as they follow the same syllabi and also subscribe to some important journals. Due to financial constraints most of the libraries' procurement is limited. This proposal may be considered as a pilot project which could be extended to a greater dimension. It could be a role model which could be implemented initially in the libraries situated in the Capital and extended to other libraries of the State and North-East region as a whole. The proposal follows the same concept as the UGC-INFONET e-journals consortium, but intended for affiliated college libraries.

Keywords: Meghalaya; College libraries; Consortium; INFLIBNET

1.   Introduction

Most of the colleges in Meghalaya have well developed library system with good collection of text and reference books based on the respective subjects being offered in the undergraduate courses. Besides maintaining a manual catalogue, some of the libraries have initiated computerizing and introduce the Online Public Access Catalogue. In a few colleges, around the state capital, libraries have also introduced Internet facilities to augment their services. It was also seen that some of the private colleges have tried to give importance to the proper organization of their libraries by initially building up their collection.

Till March 2005, the total number of colleges affiliated to North-Eastern Hill University is recorded as 55 out of which 14 colleges offered both Arts and Science subjects. While 31 colleges offered only Arts subjects, the rest have other disciplines like Commerce and Education. In the capital city, Shillong, there are altogether 26 colleges offering courses on Arts, Science and Commerce. Out of these, there are only 2 colleges offering only Law and Engineering respectively.

Till date, networking and resource-sharing, among these libraries have not been initiated though it is the need of the hour. Financial constraints may be the main reason for this, since most of the budget of individual libraries gets exhausted on the planned expenditure for procurement of text-books, reference material and subscriptions of journals year after year. Though the main source of financial assistance to all affiliated college libraries in the state is from UGC, all college libraries also generate their library funds through library fees. What is more crucial at this juncture is to realize that with the advent of information technology in the library science world, college libraries will have

to accept the paradigm shift in the organization of its information resources and the manner it renders services to its users. It's on these terms that college administrators together with librarians have to work out to create a balance, look ahead, comprehend and accept the role that modern and well developed libraries can play in uplifting the academic standards of a college. In order to achieve this level and proceed in this direction, colleges have to decide on some vital requirements viz. infrastructure, information resources, budget and manpower. Infrastructure includes computers, local area networks, internet connectivity, uninterrupted power supply, furniture and space in the library so as to create a congenial atmosphere for the users. By information resources what is applicable here are those of the electronic format. College librarians and their supporting staff which constitutes the manpower needs to be trained and familiarized themselves in this new environment. While procurement and sustenance of the above-mentioned requirement relies wholly on the availability of funds it is felt that the affiliated colleges should be aware and approach funding agencies who have this form of initiative as one of their key objectives of functioning. While on this aspect, it is worth mentioning that the College Development Council could play an important role in this regard.

2.   Connectivity

With the success in terms of implementation by UGC and INFLIBNET and usage of the UGC INFONET E-journals consortium by its members whereby 150 universities in the country have access to 4000+ e-journals in various disciplines, it is felt that college libraries in the state should approach INFLIBNET in order to be able to adopt and be benefited with similar concepts. It is also felt that INFLIBNET would be keen to take up such an initiative since it has already on its pipeline to extend these activities to affiliated colleges of the entire country. To kick-start, college libraries should propose and sought for one time grants to establish the IT infrastructure in respective college libraries. This would include procurement and installation of servers/computers, uninterrupted power supply(UPS), printers and choice of Internet connectivity/providers. While servers/computers/UPS of a standard configuration will suffice what is of more concern is the Internet Connectivity. Since full-text access to e-journals/e-books requires fast Internet access, however, it may be worked out, what would be the best option?. Whether connectivity using a VSAT or subscribing for a DSL broadband?. According to the present scenario and options available, it would be highly economical to opt for a broadband connection with a fixed IP address from any provider available in the city which also offers unlimited downloads. However, it is up to each and every respective college to plan on how to meet the Internet charge, it being recurring monthly or annually.

3.   Resources

Its on the choice of information resources that proposing such a consortium for colleges of the state could be effectively realized. With publications of journals, be it foreign or Indian increasing at an alarming rate along with their escalating subscription cost, individual libraries are compel to cut down the subscription list, thus denying teachers and students of important information resources. On the other hand a consortium has the capability to subscribe more journals, if not all thus enabling its members to effectively share these resources. The next question we might need to answer is what are the different information resources to decide, select and finally subscribe?. Though the UGC INFONET consortium could extend the accessibility of the 4000+ e-journals already on its list, to colleges, but what is more important is to decide on those titles, including archives that are directly relevant at college level. The inclusion of reference material like encyclopedias etc. would be a boon

to teachers and students in colleges. A list may be work out depending on the different subjects that are being taught in colleges and the type of journals they are currently subscribing. As an example, a list of Arts and Science subjects that are being taught along with the current periodicals subscribed obtained from one of the premier college in Shillong is listed herewith as a ready reference.

■ **List of Arts Subjects**

1. Education
2. Economics
3. Political Science
4. Sociology
5. History
6. Geography
7. Philosophy
8. English

■ **List of Science Subjects**

1. Physics
2. Mathematics
3. Chemistry
4. Botany
5. Zoology
6. Biochemistry

■ **List of Periodicals**

A.   General

1. Down to Earth
2. Nature

B.   Science

1. Current Science
2. Resonance
3. Science Reporter
4. Indian Journal of Chemistry Sec A
5. Chemical & Environmental Research
6. Journal of Chemical Sciences
7. Asian Journal of Microbiology, Biotechnology & Environmental Sciences
8. Panorama : Journal of Physics
9. Proceedings of the INSA Part – A : Physical Sciences
10. Journal of Biosciences
11. Indian Journal of Biochemistry & Biophysics
12. Proceedings : Mathematical Sciences

13. Journal of Genetics
14. Mathematics Newsleter
15. Indian Journal of Chemistry
16. Bio-Science Research Bulletin
17. Journal of Astrophysics and Astronomy

C. Arts

1. Down to Earth
1. Economics & Political Weekly
2. India Quarterly
3. Indian Philosophical Quarterly
4. Philosophy & Social Action
5. Review Journal of Philosophy & Social Science
6. South Asia Economic Journal
7. Indian Philosophical Quarterly
8. Research Journal Philosophy & Social Sciences
9. Man and Society

To simplify the matter, it could be summarize that since all colleges are affiliated to the same university and following the same syllabus at the undergraduate level, information resources required by them would be definitely be identical. It could further be suggested that since all these information resources as discussed above would be available electronically, a central location i.e. a college or the university library should be selected and function as a state or zonal repository. The role of this repository would be to house and maintain the print copies of the subscribed e-journals as obtained from the publishers from time to time.

Having said all this, the next step is how and who will promote this program. No doubt, by conducting awareness programmes, seminars, workshops along with the involvement of publishers and eminent resource persons in the field will definitely push this initiative ahead. However, the real success of this all would heavily rely on the active involvement of college principals, heads of departments, teachers, college librarians and students.

4. Governance

Good governance and keen monitoring are some of the key issues that need to be addressed for the sustenance of any major program. Here with INFLIBNET having the resources, expertise and exposure to a consortia environment, its role here too have to be highlighted. It should spearhead and centrally monitored this program. It should propose to setup committees comprising of members from each and every college along with representative from the university. Here again, the College Development Council would be an ideal platform to address and promote this project. College consortium policy needs to be drafted and enact in order to streamline the functioning of this consortium especially in the areas of consortium membership along with the selection, subscription, usage, promotion and monitoring of these e-resources. The head of departments and college librarians could be involved to assess the availability of the activated e-resources. INFLIBNET would also be the ideal body to

subscribe/renew and activate online access of the e-resources from time to time on behalf of the member colleges as recommended by the approve committees.

To conclude, introduction of such a project in the state would offer the following advantages:

■ It would facilitate further expansion of networking of colleges with others in the region/ country.

■ It would encourage resource sharing.

■ It would enhance the role of College Libraries.

■ College libraries would be able to gain access to literature of international standards.

■ Amount of journals/reference materials accessible would increase manifold.

■ It would improve and standardize college education in the state.

■ It would facilitate better interaction among college libraries.

■ It would enable decision makers to evaluate the usage and impact of these resources on users.

■ The economics of subscription/renewal of resources could be effectively realized.

■ Success of such program would stimulate fund generation and allocations.

Thus it could be said that the introduction of such a project would have a long lasting effect on the intellectual growth of a student which when groomed effectively at the undergraduate level, its repercussions could be seen on his performance at a later stage in the university. Being a proposal to finally cover the entire colleges in the state, initially it may however be decided to first implement it as a pilot project in the state capital where infrastructure, manpower and support are available. Later, if feasible, it could be extended to other colleges in the state or the region as a whole. It would again befitting to remind that sustenance is the key issue which will decide the potential and benefits of such an initiative. We should again not forget that the role of College Librarians in such an environment would be dynamic and significant.

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