

Periodical Service in Smt. Hansa Mehta Library, Baroda - A study on Service Evaluation

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Abstract

Periodicals are considered as the most important components in information communication process. Several problems related to space, finance, management, and circulation are faced by the libraries for a good periodical service to the users. The author has made an evaluative study on the quality of the periodical service of Smt. Hansa Mehta Library of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda by taking a sample of 53 respondents with a structured questionnaire. The study is limited to the periodicals in the field of Chemistry. The significant findings are: i) the periodicals are used for research and for guiding research scholars, ii) the degree of the benefits received from the service is low, iii) no significant relationship between the use of a particular periodical with its cost, iv) quality of the periodical service is relatively poor. The author provides few suggestions for the improvement of the periodical service in the library.

Introduction

Among several library functions, periodical service is of utmost importance, because periodicals account for the bulk of the literature used by scientists and technologists. Today, periodicals are considered as the most important components in information communication processes. They form the heart of most specialist collections and hence in many scientific and technical libraries more is spent on periodicals than on books. A strong periodical base, satisfying requirements of the maximum number of users, coupled with proper circulation procedures, therefore is the most sought for aim, particularly of every academic and research libraries.

The following problems relating to periodical service are generally faced by a library. (i) *Space* - Due to increase in the number of periodicals subscribed to, libraries face the problem of accommodating them. (ii) *Finance* - Increasing subscription costs directly affects the budget of the libraries, hence judicious choice of the periodicals become essential.

(iii) *Increase in the number* of periodicals demands greater/effective administrative efforts for proper management. (iv) *Circulation* - Simple subscription and management do not justify the effective utilization of periodicals. With increasing number of periodicals subscribed to, effective circulation becomes much more essential.

Intensive studies on these problems of periodical service in any library is of paramount importance. Periodical studies can make definite contributions in understanding the effectiveness of the service and making it optimally effective.

Objective

With the above understanding, an attempt was made in the present study to evaluate the quality of periodical service of Smt. Hansa Mehta Library of The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. The study intended to determine whether the expenses of providing the service is justified by the benefits derived from it and to suggest alterations in the service, if necessary, to justify the cost involved.

Methodology

The study was largely based on primary data collected through personal investigation. For operational convenience a sample study of only the chemistry periodicals was undertaken. A synthesis of almost all the available measurement techniques was done to pursue the research. A structured questionnaire was administered to respondents. The respondents comprised of the teaching staff members and the research students of the department of chemistry of the university. The estimated number of these members in the department was 53 including 4 professors, 16 readers, 18 lecturers and 15 research scholars. Although, it was intended to cover all these members for the study, it could not be possible due to non-availability and unwillingness of some members to answer the questionnaire. Nevertheless, a significant proportion (66.38%) of these members could be covered.

Findings

With reference to the set objectives of the study, a variety of questions were asked to the respondents through the questionnaire. Major findings of the study may be summarised below.

A significantly high proportion (93.75%) of the respondents use the periodicals subscribed to in the library. However, analysis of the number

of visits made and time spent by the respondents in the periodical section of the library indicates that the periodicals are not used very intensively. This is evident from the fact that a very insignificant proportion (6.67%) frequently visits and only around a quarter (18.66%) of the respondents spend two or more hours in consulting periodicals everytime they visit the periodical unit.

Periodicals are used maximum for the purposes of research and guiding research students, although use for the purposes of teaching and general awareness is not uncommon. Respondents' category-wise use of periodicals vary greatly. Excluding about half the readers, almost all respondents use the periodicals for their personal research. Use for the purposes of guiding research students is common among the professors and readers, while among the lecturers and the research scholars use for the purposes of own research is more common.

While evaluating the degree of benefits received from the use of these periodicals, it was observed that, around two-thirds (60%) of the respondents do not always benefit from the periodicals available in the library. Significantly, higher proportion among the professors, the readers and the research scholars feel that they 'always' get benefited from the periodicals, in the library. But majority of lecturers differ in their opinion to a great extent. On the whole, it was evident that the degree of benefits received from the periodicals subscribed to in the library is low.

The above finding was further substantiated by the lack of any correspondence between cost data and the data pertaining to a few selected variables of benefit, viz. (a) citation analysis, (b) users' ranking of the periodicals and, (c) publication of relevant articles.

To findout the correspondence, the above data were ranked. Ranking of periodicals according to cost was done after working out the per issue price of all the 18 periodicals subscribed to in the library.

It was observed that, the library spends the maximum amount (Rs. 2586.94) on a single issue of *Tetrahedron - Letters* (First rank). For another six periodicals (ranks 2 to 7), namely, *Jr. of Heterocyclic Chemistry* (Rs. 1774.50), *Chemical Reviews* (Rs. 1688.05), *Jr. of Chemical Society* (Rs. 1649.87), *Jr. of Physical Chemistry* (Rs. 1394.58), *Chemical Society Reviews* (Rs. 1208.93) and *Inorganic Chemistry* (Rs. 1115.89), the library spends between 1000 to 2000 rupees per issue. Rest of the periodicals cost less than Rs. 1000 per issue, of which the *Jr. of Indian Chemical Society* (Rs. 41.67), *Proceedings of National Academy of Science* (Rs. 31.25), *Chemical Age of India* (Rs. 20.00) and *Indian Journal of Chemistry* (Rs. 16.67) cost less than Rs. 50/- only per issue.

The ranks obtained by the periodicals on the basis of citation analysis do not correspond with the cost ranks. The costliest periodical, *Tetrahedron Letters*, rank 7.5, while the other six costly periodicals mentioned above rank, 11th, 9th, 2nd, 10th, 13th and 3rd respectively according to citation analysis. The periodical ranking 10th according to cost, ranks 1st according to citation analysis. However, it does not mean that the cheaper periodicals are cited more. For example, the cheapest 4 periodicals mentioned above, rank 6th, 16th, 12th and 5th respectively according to citation analysis indicating no correspondence between the two variables.

Periodicals' rank as per the respondents' ranking by and large conforms to the citation analysis rank and obviously not with the cost rank. The two periodicals ranking 1st and 2nd according to cost i.e., *Tetrahedron Letters* and *Jr. of Heterocyclic Chemistry* rank much below (11.5th and 16th respectively). Rather, the respondents place *Jr. of Chemical Society*, *Inorganic Chemistry* and *Indian Journal of Chemistry* at 1st, 2nd and 3rd ranks which are placed 4th, 7th and 18th in the cost ranking.

Among the 9 periodicals selected for the study of relevant article publication, the costliest ones rank at the lower end while the cheaper ones rank at the upper end, indicating an inverse relationship. For example, *Jr. of Chemical Education*, *Inorganic Chemistry* and *Organic Chemistry* are placed at the top of relevant article publication rank, which rank 14th, 7th and 8th in the cost rank respectively. On the other hand, the costlier periodicals, such as *Jr. of Physical Chemistry*, *Chemical Reviews*, and *Jr. of Heterocyclic Chemistry* are placed at the bottom of the rank.

The conclusion drawn on the basis of the above findings is that, the most costly periodicals are not always the most frequently used or most beneficial ones. However, it fails to indicate how far the respondents are benefited from the use of the periodicals subscribed to in the library.

To assess the benefits received from the periodicals available in the library, the periodicals were ranked on the basis of (a) intensity of utilization, and (b) utility with respect to respondents' specialisation.

On the basis of the intensity of utilisation, 5 periodicals, namely, *Jr. of Chemical Society*, *Jr. of American Chemical Society*, *Indian Jr. of Chemical Society*, *Chemical Review* and *Inorganic Chemistry* were found to be used more intensely, i. e. by more than a third of the respondents. On the other extreme, *Jr. of Heterocyclic Chemistry*, *Chemical Society Reviews*, *Education in Chemistry*, *Proceedings of National Academy of Science*, *Chemical Age of India* are used by less than 10 per cent of the

respondents. The last two being used by none. Secondly, none of the respondents ranked the available periodicals as having excellent utility value and only about a quarter (26.67%) of them considered these having good utility value. Implication of these findings is that most of the users are not optimally benefited from the periodicals subscribed to in Smt. Hansa Mehta Library.

It is also observed that a significant proportion (90.00%) of the respondents use periodicals from sources other than Smt. Hansa Mehta Library. It implies thereby that, on the one hand, some of the most beneficial and required periodicals are not subscribed to in the library causing great inconvenience to the users, while on the other hand, quite a few periodicals under subscription are rarely used indicating wastage of financial resources. It further implies that the periodicals are subscribed to without due consideration to the benefits accruing to the end users.

Besides, other findings, the study suggest that the quality of periodical service is relatively poor in the library. This is indicated with a reference to the respondents' view on the service quality. Majority of the respondents feel that service in the periodical unit is inadequate - reflected in the improper shelving or misplacing of the periodicals. Inefficient and time-taking binding system of the periodicals also affect the service negatively.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, a few relevant suggestions are given below :

- i) The periodicals being used by a very small proportion of the users should be discontinued. However, provision should be made to procure the table of contents of these periodicals regularly and if needed, specific articles through a system of resource sharing. Besides, the library should consider the very costly periodicals under the system of resource sharing rather than subscribing to them.
- ii) A detailed survey of the users' requirements should be conducted from time to time and the subscription list of periodicals be altered accordingly, of course with due consideration to the cost and financial resources in hand.
- iii) An efficient resource sharing network must be established between the different libraries in the city and in its neighbourhood.

Conclusion

Efficiency in the management of the periodical unit is of paramount importance without which utmost levels of benefits cannot be achieved. It is thus, desirable that the periodical unit should be streamlined and managed more efficiently to improve the levels of benefits accruing from the periodical service offered to the users.

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