

University Libraries in Assam: Driving Progress on Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education)

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Abstract

In order to create a sustainable future for all people, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. These goals are to protect the environment, ensure excellent health and quality education, end hunger, poverty, and injustice, and advance economic growth. Libraries are hubs for knowledge dissemination and information, making them inclusive places for people of various racial, social, and cultural backgrounds. By facilitating information access and literacy, fostering a learning environment that encourages high-quality education, and offering resources and information, libraries can help accomplish sustainable development target 4. The purpose of this work is to investigate how university libraries of Assam contribute to the attainment of sustainable development goal 4 i.e. Quality education. A structured questionnaire was designed and distributed among 22 University libraries of Assam and out of that 20 libraries were returned the questionnaire. Results of the study revealed that all these 20 libraries are aware about SDG 4 and 75% of libraries have taken initiatives as a part of quality education. The findings support the fact that university libraries of Assam contribute significantly to support quality education by providing access to relevant information, engaging in educational conferences and events, promoting lifelong learning among students, information literacy etc. The study also discussed the problem faced by university libraries to promote quality education.

Keywords: United Nations, sustainable development goal, quality education, university libraries, Assam

1. Introduction

Education is an inherent entitlement that has to be universally available to all individuals, regardless of their gender, race, socioeconomic background, or geographic location. However, access to quality education is vital in order to shape the individual for a better and prosperous future while making them a lifelong learner. Sustainable Development Goal as adopted by the UN acknowledges the importance of quality education as one of the key objectives. With a deadline of 2030 to accomplish all of the goals, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 goals with 169 targets that were adopted by all of the member states of the United Nations in 2015. The main aim of Sustainable Development Goal 4, which pertains to quality education,



is to ensure that education is accessible, equitable, and of high quality for all individuals. Additionally, it seeks to promote the cultivation of lifelong learners among all individuals. Ensuring inclusive education is crucial for achieving sustainable development. Libraries and information centres have a vital role in actively providing access to information to assist the institution's primary goal of promoting high-quality teaching, learning, and research. Hence, the function of libraries in guaranteeing comprehensive access to information is vital in the realm of higher education (Ezeani et al.,2017).

Assam is located in the northeastern region of India where education is provided free of charge up to the secondary level. Government universities and colleges can be found in the state's major cities, such as Guwahati, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Tezpur, and Silchar. The govt. of Assam has acted proactively to embrace SDGs by preparing a comprehensive vision document called "Assam Agenda 2030 : Strategies and Actions for Achieving Sustainable Development Goals" under Transformation and Development Department, Govt of Assam that is in line with the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This paper studies what are steps taken by the university libraries in Assam towards the progress of Sustainable Development Goal 4 and further aims to emphasis how these libraries can enhance the quality education, reaffirming the notion that libraries are not just repositories of books but also play dynamic role in promoting academic advancement and facilitating lifelong learning.

2. Literature Review

Sustainable development is acknowledged to be greatly aided by high-quality education (UNESCO, 2017). It is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, which together provide a roadmap for a better, more sustainable future (United Nations, 2015). The development of necessary skills, attaining gender equity, guaranteeing access to pertinent school infrastructure and educational resources, offering scholarships, and improving the calibre of teaching staff are all included in UNESCO's definition of excellent education as of 2021. Academic libraries must participate in United Nations SDG-4 because it is closely tied to academic institutions. Academic libraries play a crucial role in supporting university academic activities by offering a range of programs, services, and resources. In a study M. M. Mashroofa finds that "access to information" is a fundamental necessity to fulfil all 17 goals. (Mashroofa, 2022). Another study conducted by Benson, Akpom, and Onyam emphasizes that libraries are essential to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and should be ready to contribute significantly to this effort by offering targeted library and information services that are in line with SDG objectives (Benson, Akpom, and Onyam, 2019). IFLA recognizes the essential role of libraries in helping to achieve Sustainable Development Goal number 4 in schools, colleges, and universities across the globe. It highlights that academic libraries, in addition to public libraries, can support lifelong learning outside of their usual scope, even though their primary focus is academia. By extending their services beyond academia, libraries contribute significantly to achieving the SDGs, particularly by promoting widespread education, media and information literacy, and digital literacy skills (United Nations, 2016). It was discovered in a study by Igbinovia (2017) that academic librarians possess substantial knowledge of the SDGs and that this knowledge could potentially contribute to the

attainment of the UN 2030 agenda (Igbinoia, 2017). A study on Ghanaian librarians' roles was carried out by Atta-Obeng and Dadzie with the intention of reaching Goal 4 (Quality Education). The study revealed that librarians engage in various activities to support lifelong learning, including establishing reading rooms, providing training on search strategies, organizing debate programs and reading clubs, and offering training on research publication to foster lifelong learners. Additionally, the study found that librarians conduct Communication and Information Literacy Skills teaching, training programs, and library orientations for new students within educational institutions (Atta-Obeng and Dadzie, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted numerous countries and their educational systems, leading educational institutions to rapidly adopt new methodologies for teaching, learning, research, and information dissemination (Adarkwah, 2021; Dutta, 2020). The quality of education has been negatively impacted by the significant disruption of traditional teaching and learning methods brought about by the global crisis (Agormedah et al., 2020; Elumalai et al., 2021; Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021). Universities and libraries worldwide have responded by implementing virtual and remote information delivery systems and other technologies to ensure the continuity and quality of education during the pandemic (Omelizor et al., 2022; Adarkwah, 2021). Aside from the epidemic, university Librarians encountered several obstacles in achieving Goal 4. Dei and Asante identified these challenges in their study, highlighting issues such as limited funding sources, insufficient space, lack of information literacy materials, inadequate computers, and insufficient internet connectivity as barriers preventing libraries from fully implementing SDG 4 (Dei & Asante, 2022).

3. Objectives

The main objective of the current study is to find out the contribution of University libraries of Assam to promote high-quality education and lifelong learning. The other objectives are listed below:

1. To assess the level of awareness and understanding among academic librarians regarding the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a specific focus on SDG 4.
2. To investigate the manner in which university libraries in Assam support lifelong learning.
3. To find out the provisions and facilities for people with disabilities provided by University libraries in Assam to achieve SDG 4.
4. To understand how university libraries in Assam facilitate access to information during the pandemic to support quality education.
5. To investigate the difficulties university libraries of Assam face in advancing the information and abilities necessary for chances for lifetime learning.

4. Methodology

The current research study has applied quantitative research to collect the data through an online survey. The survey method has been adopted to carry out the present study and questionnaire tool has been used

for data collection. The study targeted all 22 universities in Assam, encompassing 14 state universities, 2 central universities, and 6 private universities listed on the Assam state portal. By keeping in mind the objectives of the study a structured Google questionnaire was prepared and questionnaire link was shared with all of these university libraries, resulting in responses from 20 university libraries. The collected data were then tabulated and analysed using statistical tools. Therefore, the study findings are solely based on the responses provided in the returned questionnaires from the participating libraries.

5. Data Analysis

As per the Assam Government Portal, there are a total of 22 universities. A comprehensive questionnaire was distributed to all 22 institutions through various means such as email, WhatsApp, Facebook, and in-person. Out of these, respondents from 20 universities have provided their responses to the survey. The outcome is exclusively determined by the data provided in the completed questionnaires. Table 1 shows the list of universities from where we received responses.

Table 1: List of Universities Responding to Survey

SI No	Name of the Institutions
1	Gauhati University
2	Cotton University
3	Tezpur University
4	Assam University
5	Dibrugarh University
6	Bhattadev University
7	Birangana Sati Sadhani Rajyik Vishwavidyalaya Golaghat
8	Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskriti and Ancient studies university
9	Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University
10	Madhabdev University
11	Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalay
12	Majuli University of Culture
13	National Law University and Judicial Academy, Assam
14	Assam Agricultural University Assam
15	Assam Science and Technology University
16	Assam Women's University
17	Assam down town University
18	Royal Global University
19	Assam Don Bosco University
20	Assam Kaziranga University

5.1. Familiarity with Sustainable Development Goal 4

Table 2 shows the familiarity with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which pertains to Quality Education. It has been determined that 60% of the respondents are acquainted with the SDG 4, while 40% of the respondents have a moderate level of familiarity with the goal.

Table 2: Familiarity with SDG 4

Familiarity	Respondents	Percentage
Familiar	12	60%
Somewhat Familiar	8	40%
Not familiar at all	0	0

(n=20)

5.2. Initiative taken by library as a part of quality education

Figure 1 depicts the initiative taken by library as a part of quality education. The respondents were queried about whether their libraries have undertaken any initiatives as part of quality education. The findings indicate that 75% of libraries have taken initiatives, whereas 25% of libraries have not taken any initiatives.

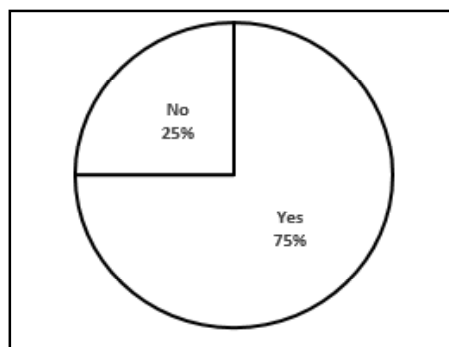


Figure 1: Library Initiatives for Quality Education

5.3. Resources and Services to support Quality Education

University libraries offer various educational resources and services to support quality education. Respondents were given 6 options allowing them to choose multiple options. Fig 2 shows online databases and digital collections are the most frequently offered resources, representing 85% of the choices of the respondents. Study spaces and research carrels, comprising 75% of responses, Scholarly journal article also comprise 75% responses followed by multilingual and multicultural resources with 70% responses, special collection and archives with 40% and other 5%. In addition, the measures taken by Dibrugarh University library, such as incorporating an Information Literacy course into the M.L.I.Sc program and organizing information literacy programmes demonstrate a proactive effort to promote quality education.

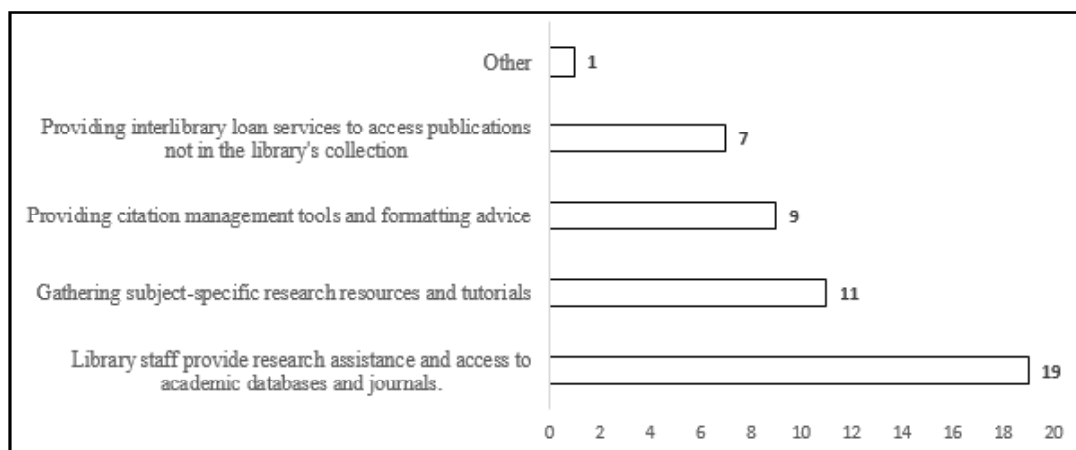


Note: multiple options are permitted (n=20)

Figure 2: Resources and Services to support Quality Education

5.4. Libraries supporting students in their academic endeavors

The respondents were surveyed regarding the ways in which the library aids students in their academic pursuits. The findings as shown in Figure 3 indicate that the library staff offer research assistance and grant access to academic databases and journals. They also provide interlibrary loan services, citation management tools, and formatting advice. Additionally, the Dibrugarh University Library offers a discovery tool for efficient searching, remote access facilities to support students in their academic pursuit.



Note: multiple options are permitted (n=20)

Figure 3: Libraries support to students in academic endeavors

5.5. Frequency of conducting educational programs or workshops

Based on the responses in Table 3, it is found that 15% of libraries organize workshops on a monthly basis, while 80% organize them occasionally and 5% respondent reported that their library never organizes such workshops.

Table 3: Frequency of Educational Programs/Workshops

Frequency	Percentage
Once a month	15%
Occasionally	80%
Never	5%

(n=20)

5.6. Libraries partnership with external organisation

Figure 4 discuss about whether University Libraries of Assam have any partnerships or collaborations with external organizations or stakeholders to enhance educational offerings and initiative. Result shows 90% of respondents chose that their library has formed partnerships with external organizations to expand educational programs, while the remaining 10% have no such partnerships.

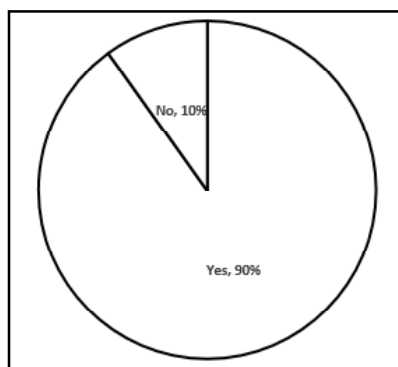


Figure 4: Libraries partnership with external organisation

5.7. Community Outreach and Engagement

Table 4 analysed the libraries effort to make educational resources and programs accessible to marginalized or underserved communities. The survey found that the libraries are serving marginalized communities by offering accessible services for individuals with disabilities (50%). They also collaborate with local organizations (40%) and some libraries provide mobile library service (15%). The library at Majuli University of Culture offers additional services such as providing library membership to the local population. On the other hand, the library at Dibrugarh University has taken on the responsibility of supporting underprivileged rural school libraries and helping marginalized communities, which signifies a positive stride towards providing quality education.

Table 4: Community Outreach and Engagement

Library Initiative	Respondents	Percentage
Implementing accessibility services for people with disabilities	10	50%
Hosting exclusive events for unaffluent patrons	6	30%
Providing mobile library services	3	15%
Collaborating with local organizations	8	40%
Other	4	20%

Note: multiple options are permitted (n=20)

5.8. Provision for People with Disabilities

Participating libraries were asked about the provision of services for people with disabilities and Table 5 displays the result. 9 Universities (45%) revealed that their libraries have provision for people with disabilities. Wheel chairs, ramps, wheel chairs, pwd sticks are available to make resources accessible to such users. Cotton university have divyangjan corner which provides braille collection and softwares and hardwares for PWD. Tezpur university library provides Braille Collection, Library Guide for visually impaired, PC with special software JAWS as well as wheelchairs and ladder for physically challenged patrons. Dibrugarh university library have Ramp for differently abled persons, visually Impaired Section for blind users; Ergonomic PCs; Specialized Scanners, Specialized PC Keyboard; Software for visually impaired users; Braille Printer; portable Audio Recorders; etc. On the other hand 11 universities (55%) libraries don't have provision for PWD.

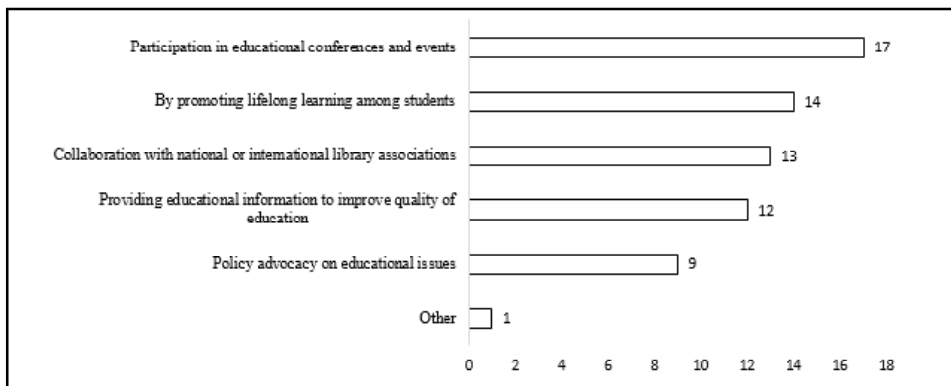
Table 5: Provision for People with Disabilities

Options	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	9	45%
No	11	55%

(n=20)

5.9. Libraries contribution in advancing SDG 4

Libraries serve as dynamic hubs for advancing educational advancement, employing a wide array of approaches to fulfil Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on Quality Education. The questionnaire offers 6 options for respondents to select, allowing them to choose several options. The figure 5 illustrates that the majority of libraries engage in educational conferences and events (85%), followed by promoting lifelong learning among students (70%), collaborating with national or international associations (65%), providing information to enhance the quality of education (60%), advocating for educational policies (45%), and other activities (5%). Dibrugarh University has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for The Jena Declaration, UNESCO Chair on Global Understanding for Sustainability.

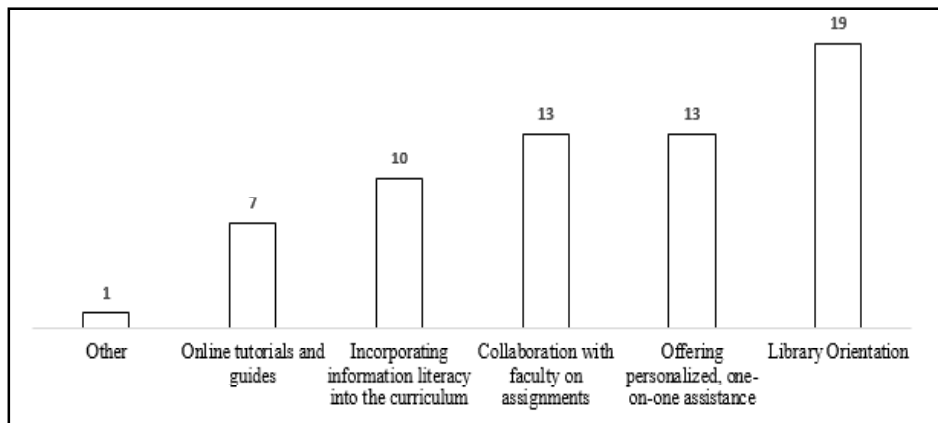


Note: multiple options are permitted (n=20)

Figure 5: Libraries contribution in advancing SDG4

5.10. Ways libraries promote information literacy

Figure 6 revealed that majority of the libraries promote lifelong learning by providing library orientation (95%), collaboration with faculty on assignment (65%), offering one on one assistance (65%), by incorporating information literacy into the curriculum. (50%), online tutorial and guides (35%) and other 2%. It is notable to mention that Dibrugarh University library invites users from the nearby Universities, local Colleges and Schools and provides membership to the young aspirants, senior citizens, to promote lifelong learning.



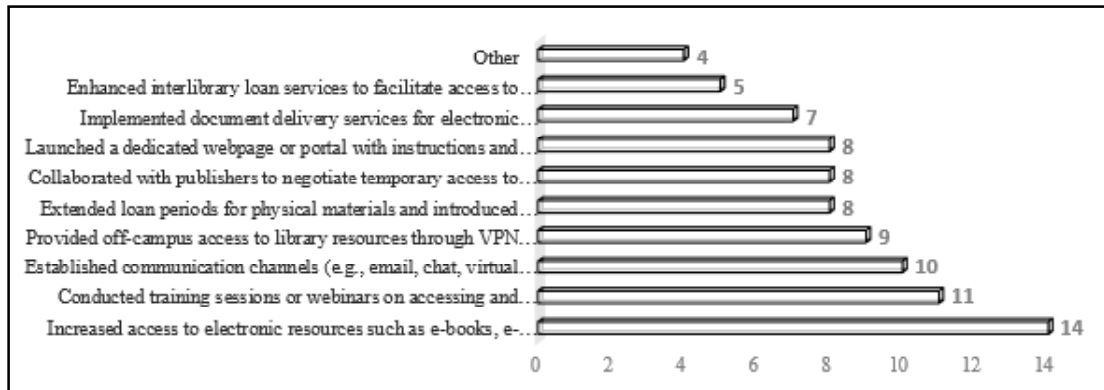
Note: multiple options are permitted (n=20)

Figure 6: Ways libraries promote information literacy

5.11. Library Services provided during pandemic

Libraries helped ensure quality education during the pandemic by adapting to user needs. In the questionnaire respondents were given to choose multiple options and according to their responses in Figure 7, it shows most libraries (70%) extended access to e-books and e-journals, while 45% held webinars. Libraries also

offer email, chat, and virtual help desks to help users use e-resources effectively (50%) and VPN access to library services (45%), additionally loan extensions, document delivery services are provided during pandemic.

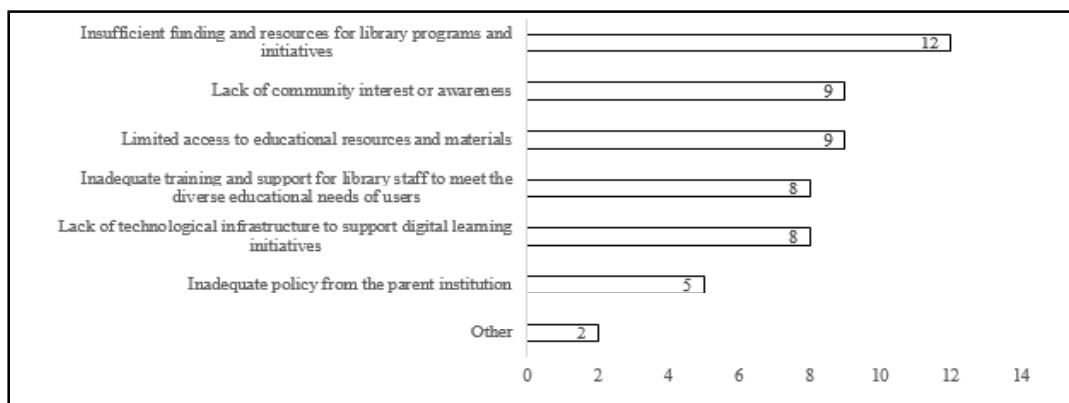


Note: multiple options are permitted (n=20)

Figure 7: Services provided by libraries during pandemic

5.12. Challenges faced by libraries in promoting Quality Education

Participants were asked about the barrier faced by libraries in promoting quality education and according to their responses in Figure 8 majority of the libraries says insufficient funding and resources for library programs and initiatives comprising 60% responses, lack of community interest and awareness and limited access to resources and materials (45%), lack of technological infrastructure to support digital learning initiatives and inadequate training and support for library staff (40%), Inadequate policy from parent institution (25%) and other comprises 2%.



Note: multiple options are permitted (n=20)

Figure 8: Challenges faced by the libraries in promoting quality education

6. Conclusion

Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, which seeks to guarantee equitable and accessible access to education and encourage lifelong learning, is greatly aided by university libraries. The results corroborate the notion that University libraries in Assam play a vital role in sustaining high-quality education by giving students access to pertinent material, organizing educational seminars and activities, encouraging students to pursue lifelong learning, fostering information literacy, etc. The present study identifies a number of obstacles to the promotion of SDG 4, such as a lack of community awareness and funding for library programs, as well as a lack of technological support for digital literacy and inadequate staff training to address a range of educational needs. Thus, the study ends with recommendations for actions to further SDG 4, like including chances for lifelong learning for everyone. Libraries should actively engage in promoting sustainable development goal 4 by regularly organizing educational programs and workshops to enhance academic skill development. Libraries should collaborate with external organizations like public libraries, library associations to improve the efficiency and scope of educational programs, and to cultivate lifelong learning within communities. Libraries should make concerted effort to eliminate physical, technological, and other barriers to inclusive education. All libraries must offer information literacy and digital literacy training to close the digital gap and evaluate reliable sources.

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