

The Importance of Public Libraries in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Public libraries are more than just buildings full of books. They have become a centre to support new technologies and to bring people together. It is imperative that we keep and support public libraries in every community. UNESCO define public library as the local gateway to knowledge which provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making in cultural development and social group. The basic objective of a public library is to provide information to the general public to satisfy their informative, education and recreational needs. The explosive growth of knowledge and the direct relation of information to development in all walks of human life have elevated public libraries as important centres which can undertake the vast and varied functions for development. Libraries are fulfilling the reading requirements of the each and every citizen to the fullest extent without making any discrimination on the basis of membership and thus it is considered as peoples University. It focuses on providing knowledge on all matters including academic and non — academic. Now —a-days Public Libraries are functioning as mobile – channels in providing knowledge to the people of rural and urban areas. Public libraries are constantly serving community functions and are performing various important roles in educational, economic, political, social and cultural development of the country. Information, as the most important instrument that lead to explosive growth of knowledge and the direct relation of information to developments in all walks of human life have elevated the role of Public libraries in our society.

Introduction

“The only thing that you absolutely have to know, is the location of the library.”

Albert Einstein

What are public libraries?

First of all, they are public. Their resources are available to all, and in most cases those resources are free to all users.

Second, they are repositories of books and other materials (magazines, music, and movies, as well as access to newspaper archives, databases and other research tools). All of which can be summed up in one word: knowledge. Public libraries are free, accessible sources of knowledge.

Thirdly, public libraries provide educational and community services. In addition to their shelves full of knowledge, they offer programs and services that range from job application assistance, to story time for toddlers, to exercise classes, all of which help people to live healthy, productive, enriched lives.

Public libraries in the 21st century are as important and relevant as they were in any other period of time. Public libraries have seamlessly adapted to support the format of information's revolution from print to digital. The three "A"s, Accessibility, Accuracy, and Atmosphere, are proof that public libraries have withstood the test of time and remain useful for obtaining information.

Accessibility

The internet has changed the manner by which people gather information, but not everyone has a personal computer. At the public library, people can utilize the latest technology even if they cannot afford a computer. They can have access to free internet and computer usage. Public libraries have online databases that help visitors search for information more efficiently. Many public library databases can be accessed from anywhere. People can search for and reserve books right from the comfort of their own home. Public libraries offer online versions of many books, and now include audio books and movies as part of their online collections. If someone does not have time to visit the library in person, they can utilize the library's resource from home.

Accuracy

We turn to books and websites when we seek answers or want to learn. The internet offers quick access to millions of websites full of information, but not all sources found online are accurate or useful. Books in public libraries are a guaranteed way to get accurate information because they are edited and published under stricter guidelines than websites. It is easier to browse the shelves of a library with published authors rather than sift through thousands of links on Google and guess whether the creator is reputable or reliable.

Atmosphere

Public libraries offer a space that anyone can use. The majority of public libraries have designated quiet areas and study rooms, which can be perfect for a student studying for finals, or a person enthralled in a good book. Public libraries also have more social areas where people can collaborate on projects or chat in a calming environment. They provide a safe environment for children to hang out before or after school. Many public libraries have programs that include special group readings for children and guest speakers for book clubs, and fans. Some libraries even have cafes and snack areas.

Objectives of Public Library:

The basic objective of a public library is to provide information to the general public to satisfy their informative, education and recreational needs. The explosive growth of knowledge and the direct relation of information to development in all walks of human life have elevated public libraries as important centres which can undertake the vast and varied functions for development.

1. Personality Development:

Individuals can become more powerful in their vocations and professions utilizing the information stored in public library. Public library supply the right information to the right reader at the right time for their users keeping pace with the tremendous changes in all walk of life. People need develop their individual knowledge by reading exploring and studying materials on their own choice to base their own thinking as preface and supplement to competent discussion. Here lies the various importance of public libraries in promoting personality development activities.

2. Human Adjustment:

The impact of science and technology is effecting changes in all spheres of human life and assigns to public library role that it only can play. Today the personal life styles are changing, the existing social order, crumbling and in a fantastic new way in day to day life. Public libraries is the only institution which can help to adjust with the current trends to the majority of the population.

3. Spread of education:

Educational role of a library can hardly be over-emphasized, both as complementary in formal education and as the provider of informal education, which are essential for the development of people. Public library service is necessary for the presentation of universal literacy. Public library provides the following method to spread education.

- To help the lifelong education on and all to furnish up to date facts and information to one and all.
- To distribute in an unbiased and balanced way all shades of recorded views and thoughts to one and as a help in the discharge of their political functions in respect of Local, National and International affairs.
- To contribute the productivity by informing top management about the latest trends in diverse enterprises by pleasing back the minds of researchers, scientists and technicians.
- To preserve the literacy remains of humanity for posterity, as vehicles of culture and as a source material for research to work for all the continued social well being as the agency in charge of all socialised recorded thoughts.
- To assist people to contribute to the growth of knowledge that such use of knowledge as will promote personal and social well-being.
- To develop their creative and spiritual capabilities to make them more capable in their daily occupations to discharge political and social obligations and to become better members of home and community.
- To keep pace with progress in all fields of knowledge and education.

4. Self development:

Public Library provides the information to the common people quickly and in-depth. This information can help the present day world where invention and discoveries are flooding every day impelling them to have continues education for professional maturity. Public library has an most important role to play in social education and to prepare people for social adjustment.

5. Economic development:

Public library has to offer materials and services to the people to understand social phenomenon and thus live successful social life avoiding social evils. It provides opportunities to the people to understand social evils and methods to control them. (Kaliya Perumal and Baskaran, 2010).

6. Science and Technology:

Economic growth is depended on the application of science and technological advances and the spectrum of skill required at each stage of production. Public library make the domestic and International trade successful by supplying the manufacturer with information regarding the sources and nature of raw-material, means of transport, methods of management, costs of production market and agent distribution.

7. Culture and leisure:

Public Library helps cultural development in more than one way. It can promote a keener participation, enjoyment and appreciation of arts. It can act as cultural centre in collecting and preserving the cultural heritage of the locality and make it readily available to the people to enrich their cultural awareness.

Role of public libraries

Public library plays an important role in people's lives as a source of accessing information and a place for knowledge creation. It has shown that public libraries are important informational, educational, cultural, and social institutions.

Public library and Education

One of the public libraries' significant and fundamental roles is education. Public libraries provide books and other materials for people to read and use. These materials are educational and lead to self-improvement and develop basic literacy skills.

Public Libraries have always seen as an educational resource for all people. The educative role of public libraries has expanded to include supporting both formal and informal education.

Public library and literacy

Literacy is the ability to read and write. In libraries culture, this concept is expanded to include the knowledge or education in one or several fields required to develop individual and , communities' skills.

The public library is the local centre for providing a wealth of information through learning facilities and materials to support literacy to the general public. Literacy is also achieved by providing literacy programs and activities for different groups and ages.

Public libraries continue to play a major role in fostering literacy in communities and societies, particularly among those groups of the populations that need special assistance in developing literacy skills, such as preschool and elementary school children.

Public library and Non-formal Education

Non-formal education is an unsystematic form of learning and educational activity that occurs outside of traditional organization or institution. Unlike the formal education, non-

formal education is non-structured educational system. Examples of non-formal education include after-school programs, community-based organizations, museums, libraries, or at home. The aims of both formal and non-formal education are similar but they are different in approach. (Abraham, 2010). Both learning focus on gaining knowledge and skills however, the way of gaining learning is different.

Public library and Life long learning

Lifelong learning is the process of continues and on going learning throughout person life in order to enhance continuous development and improvement of the individual's knowledge and skills. Life long learning cannot be achieved without literacy because reading and writing is essential for learning. Due to the complex and rapid change environment, people need to acquire a variety of skills and knowledge irrespective of their age, social, political or economic status.

Conclusion

Public libraries play fundamental roles in the society. They are educational institutions. They provide educational programs, such as children's and adult literacy programs, to improve the literacy levels of users. They also support life long learning education. Public libraries also play a role in providing business resources and collections in their institutions in order to respond to the world economic challenges. They are also essential to the functioning of a democratic society by providing free and equal access to high-quality information.

Despite of all these critical roles for public libraries in society, these roles are not recognized in Indian society. Public libraries in Indian focus only on supporting formal education. The library still remains visited by students who perform research on assignments and projects.

It is recommended that public libraries expand their roles to more significant one as discussed in the literature review. That required more efforts in providing and diversity in the resources, collections, technology facilities, activities and educational programs in the libraries, which can support different roles. Also it is recommended increasing the awareness of public library roles among users.

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