CHAPTER – V

LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES
5.1 Introduction

Information is the product of human brain in action. It may be abstract or concrete. When an individual begins to think, a variety of images and sensations flash across his mind. This makes some information to accumulate in his mind and his memory retains some piece of knowledge. Information is the data which can be transmitted between individuals, and each individual can make use of it.

The library system, public, academic or special comprises three vital ingredients viz., documents, staff and users. The fifth law of library science enunciated by Dr. S.R. Ranganathan is that “Library is a Growing Organism” and this law also states the fact that the library, as an institution, has all the characteristics of growing organism. The growth should be evenly distributed in all three ingredients viz, the documents, the users, and the staff. The degree of interaction between these parts determines the success of the library system. The library is said to be good when the interaction between documents and users is more and poor if interaction is less. This process of document/user interaction is carried to a large extent by the library staff through their professional library and information services. A library can serve its function adequately if it has a supply of good, reliable, up-to-date documents and makes them available at the time the user needs them.

In the age of information explosion, the libraries all over the world are encountering both opportunities and challenges in view of revolutionary changes in their operations, processes and services. The fast growing information, users’ expectations and research have resulted into multiple roles and services. There are a number of factors which have an impact on library
and an information service, one of the most important and pervasive of them is information communication and technology.

5.2 General Library and Information Services

5.2.1 Reference Service

According to Dr. Ranganathan, “reference service is a personal service to each reader in helping him to find the documents and answering his interest at the moment pin pointedly, exhaustively and expeditiously.” (IGNOU; 2005; 264) Providing reference service means making contact between the right user and the right book at the right time and in the right personal way.

5.2.1.1 Digital reference service

In this fast changing technology era, researchers need to find relevant, usable, authentic and verifiable information as quickly as possible. Using ICT technologies, libraries maintain digital collections and also access digital or electronic information sources and provide information in digital/electronic mode. With the emergence of digital libraries and internet, the concept of traditional reference service has changed.

The digital reference service can be broadly categorised into two groups:

1. E-mail reference service

2. Real time digital reference service
1. **E-mail reference service**

   The e-mail reference transaction involves back-and–forth exchange of information, users would not get any immediate answer. But users can ask a question when they want it, at any time. And they do not have to take time to make a special trip to the library. In other words, the users send e-mail to the library with a reference question, asking whatever information they feel necessary. The library sends reply by e-mail, fax, phone or letter as it finds convenient.

2. **Real time digital reference service**

   In real time digital reference service, the exchange of information is live (it takes place in real time) between user and reference librarian. This service is still on experimental stage in developing countries because it requires advanced computer technology, faster and better communication connectivity, interactive audio and video capacity and availability of computers at home and work place.

**5.2.2 Bibliographic services**

   Bibliographic services basically are those which guide the users of the libraries to the documents wherein their required information is likely be available. Hence these provide some bibliographic description of documents for which the users are interested. Information services like CAS, SDI, indexing and abstracting fall under bibliographic services of library.
5.2.2.1 Current Awareness Service (CAS)

According to B. Guha “a current awareness service is the device of an information system through which the users of information can be informed promptly, as soon as possible after the publication but before absorption into comprehensive secondary sources, of current literature on a broad based subject field or on an area in which a group of persons are interested, and presented in a manner, volume, rhythm intended to facilitate or cultivate current approach to information. In the context of a library, the time limit should be after the receipt of the publications but well before the receipt of the secondary publications containing them.” (IGNOU; 2005; 193)

5.2.2.1.1 Characteristics of CAS

Some essential characteristics of CAS are as follows:

- It alerts the user about recent developments in his area of interest
- It does not answer any specific query
- It is a generic browsing tool at a very broad level
- Its contents vary according to institution, customers, resources etc.
- It is an announcement mechanism
- It is aimed at a large group of users and not single person based
- No feedback or correction mechanism of input document selection criteria is present
Speed, currency and ease of use are important

Service has to be quick within reasonable period of delay

Selection has to be made from different types of documents

The service is generic

Currency of information is important

Developing current approach is the main goal of CAS

5.2.2.2 Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI)

It was H. Peter Luhn who first defined SDI in 1961 as: “The Selective Dissemination of Information is that service within an organisation which concerns itself with machine assisted channelling of new items of information, from whatever source, to those points within the organisation where the probability of usefulness, in connection with current work or interest, is high.” (IGNOU; 2005; 204)

5.2.2.2.1 Characteristics of SDI

1. It uses computers which made their appearance in the 1950s and were beginning to be used in handling information.

2. It is concerned with new information or information of recent origin, or that information which is current. Hence, SDI is a form of current awareness service.
3. The sources of new or current information may be both within the organisation and outside it. The fact that there are too many sources of information necessitated such a service in the first instance.

4. SDI ensures that new information which is highly useful should be channelled (i.e., directed or disseminated) to those points (i.e. users, scientists, managers, etc.) within the organisation.

5. The channelling or directing of information to a given user is determined by the nature of his current work or interests.

5.2.2.3 Indexing and Abstracting Service

Indexing and abstracting (I & A) services are the important links in the chain of communication between the originator of information and the ultimate user. The major factors that have contributed to the launching of secondary periodicals like indexing and abstracting services are:

1. enormous growth in published literature

2. diversity of publication

3. language barrier

4. scatter of published information etc.

Indexing and Abstracting services are excellent records of contemporary published literature, analysis of which would provide very useful indicators for planning research and development. These indicators could throw a flood of light on the development of a subject, its rate of
growth, unploughed areas for further research and a number of other quantitative and qualitative data.

Indexing and abstracting services bring together all or significant current publications, that lie scattered in a number of source documents. Indexing and abstracting services may be pertaining to a subject or discipline, irrespective of the country from which a document originates, language or form (journal article, technical reports or thesis). There are also national I & A services, confining themselves to all documents that emanate from a country.

5.2.2.3.1 Basics of Abstracts

The American National Standards Institute defines an abstract as an abbreviated, accurate representation of the contents of a document, preferably prepared by its author for publication with it. (Verma and Verma; 2006; 89)

5.2.2.3.1.1 Functions of an Abstract

Abstracting serves three functions a) dissemination of information; b) selection of information by the end-user; c) retrieval of information, especially in computerized information storage-and-retrieval systems. The advent of the computer has made it possible to use abstracts either for extracting keywords for the storage of information or for comparing the terms they contain with those used in queries during search operations.
5.2.2.3.2 Indexing

Index is “a systematic guide to the text of any reading matter or to the contents of other collected documentary materials, comprising a series of entries, which headings arranged in alphabetical or other chosen order, and with references to show where each item indexed is located.” (Dhiman and Yashoda Rani; 2005; 210) It provides various access points through which a user can identify the document of his interest.

Indexing is a technique or a combination of techniques of preparing an index. It is a method of document representation, the ultimate aim of which is to provide access to the users through the description used. Sometimes it is difficult to represent a document in a single term. In such a case, more than one form has to be used. These index terms are arranged in a more searchable order. This ordering involves a definite syntax, semantics and orthography. Because of these characteristics, indexing is described as a language, more so, an artificial language. The indexing language may be available in a prepared form for adoption in any information retrieval system or the language may have to be specially designed for a system. A scheme of classification is a readymade language. Similarly, a thesaurus is also a ready made indexing language.

5.2.3 Document Delivery Service

Document Delivery Service (DDS) is concerned with supply of documents to the users on demand either in original or its photocopies, irrespective of the location and form of the original documents. Most of the information services such as CAS, indexing and abstracting services,
literature search service, etc. are aimed at guiding the users to the documents where the required information is likely to be available. Document Delivery Service is the last of these services, which actually locates the required document and supplies it to the users either in original or its copy in print or non-print form. Not confined to the supplying of photocopies, modern computers and telecommunication technologies have made it possible to transfer the text of documents electronically to long distances via telecommunication lines or via satellites at extremely fast speed, almost instantly.

5.2.3.1 Modes of Document Delivery Service

Libraries endeavour to meet the demand for documents through different methods. These include the following:

A) Supply from the library collection itself;

B) By obtaining documents from other libraries on inter-library loan;

C) By joining library consortia for subscription to journals and databases (Particularly full-text databases) and sharing the resources;

D) By procuring copies of documents from other libraries, documentation centres and commercial document supply agencies like publishers, etc.; and

E) By accessing and downloading web-based documents.
5.2.4 Reprographic Service

Reprography is a term used to refer to photocopying as well as duplicating documents whereby one or more copies of the same size or in reduced or enlarged form are produced. The second law of library and information service states that every reader his/her information and the third law says that every information its user. The library and information centre has to provide every bit of knowledge to every seeker as a help in discharging his/her function in local, national and international affairs. To do so he needs a copy of the page/article/chapter or the document for his proper mental exercise. Only through reprographic service he can get the copy at the minimum cost from any source.

5.2.4.1 Importance of Reprographic Service

These can be enumerated as under:

1. It helps in the dissemination of information.
2. It facilitates the work of Inter-library-loan.
3. The documents reproduced in microforms helps in solving the space problem.
4. It acts as a duplicate of the original copy.
5. It helps in saving the original document.
6. It saves the time of the users.
5.3 User point of view on Library and Information Services

5.3.1 Library User

Libraries and Information system are designed and built with the primary objective of meeting the information needs of a group of people who constitute their user. The library exists for its user and everything that is done in the library is geared to the promotion of service to them. In Library and Information field, a number of terms have been used to represent users such as patrons, clients, members, customers, borrowers etc. But the most frequently used term in libraries is user. It represents a person who uses the library for his information needs.

The users of one type of library are different from those of another type. In a public library the users are mainly children, students, housewives, researchers, retired persons, neo-literate etc. In an academic library the users are students, teachers and researchers whereas in a special library the users are mainly researchers or specialists who are specializing in a narrow field of subject. From what is stated above it can be assumed that in public libraries the users are heterogeneous and in the academic and special libraries the users are almost homogeneous in nature.

5.3.2 Information Need

“Maurice B. Line has defined information need as, “what an individual ought to have for his work, his research, his edification, his recreation etc.”” (Laloo ; 2002 ; 13)
5.3.3 User Study

‘User study’ is the means for systematic examination of the characteristics and behaviour of the users of the system and services. The ‘user study’ is directly linked with the effectiveness (performance) of library and information services as they aim at satisfaction of user needs. User studies imply a willingness to relate product or system design to the perceived needs of those for whom the product or system designed is intended.

5.3.3.1 Methods or Techniques of User Studies

The following methods may be used for ascertaining the information regarding users’ needs:

1. General or Conventional Methods
   - Questionnaire
   - Interview method
   - Diary method
   - Observation by self
   - Operations Research Study

2. Indirect Methods
   - Analysis of Library Records
   - Citation Analysis
3. **Special and Unconventional Methods**

- Computer feedback
- Unconventional methods

1. **General or Conventional Methods**

   These are the methods used for social survey but one can also use them for conducting user studies.

   a) **Questionnaire Technique**: A questionnaire is essentially a skillful translation of objectives of a particular study into a set of questions intended to be answered in writing. The questions may request the user for some facts, or his opinion. They may be framed in any one of the three ways: those answered in yes or no; those answered by selecting one of the given answers; and open-ended questions that may be answered in one or more sentences.

   b) **Interview**: This involves face to face interaction between the researcher and the respondent. It is a formal or informal meeting or conversation with a person to obtain information. Interviews are of two types: Structured and Unstructured. In structured interview, a previously prepared set of questions is asked in the same order, while in unstructured interview there is no prepared set of questions, only the topic is decided in advance. Answer to one question may be used as the basis for the next question. It has a great degree of flexibility and may look like a discussion.
c) **Diary Method**: This involves giving a diary (notebook) to the respondents or asking the respondents to keep a record of their activities. They are to note down the information needs that may have arisen in the course of their daily work, the problems involved, how the need were satisfied, or problem solved. Consideration will of course have to be made regarding the full cooperation of the respondent. People tend to take such matters casually. The investigator will have to make sure that the dairy is returned on the agreed date. Such a method can be used on small groups.

d) **Observation (by self)**: It is a modification of the diary method. A selected sample of participants is asked to record the information activity at different points of time. It is generally conducted within one building or floor with a facility to inform each participant, when he has to record his activity. In this method, demand on the participants’ time is reduced to a great extent. Moreover, they have to record only the activity they are performing at that point of time. A number of such observations are recorded and later analyzed to reach on some definite conclusions on information behaviour of the participants.

e) **Observation (by others)**: This involves the observation of the respondent by the investigator. In this method, a selected group of participants is observed at random times during working hours and time spent by them on various information activities is recorded. Later these observations are analysed and time spent by them on information activities, like perusing literature, looking up for references, actual reading, talking or listening to a colleague and so on, is calculated. A
number of such studies have reveals that scientists generally spend almost half of their working hours in some form of communication and out of this only half the time is spent in actual reading, while rest half is exhausted in searching for information. Now, the problem of the information system is to design such services that reduce the searching time and provide more time for reading.

2. **Indirect Methods:**

The above mentioned five techniques were general and used in conducting all types of social surveys. Besides them, there are some indirect methods used mainly for information need surveys.

a) **Analysis of Library Records:** Every library maintains a number of records regarding its functioning. Records of reference and circulation sections are very important. Number of queries on different subject fields received and answered, time taken in answering the queries, sources used for this purpose, number of books issued on different subjects, are valuable records that help in understanding the reading habits and ascertaining information needs of the users.

b) **Citation Analysis:** Citation analysis is another indirect method of identifying literature use pattern of users. It is based on the premise that people refer relevant earlier studies they consulted while writing a particular paper. The bibliographical references appended to every scientific communication can reveal a number of facts about the information use pattern of authors of the documents. An analysis of these citations reveal the relative use of different categories of
documents, age of documents used, most frequently used periodicals, literature preference with regard to country, language, etc. Although findings of citation studies are objective in nature but they do not reveal the whole picture. Citation studies do not reveal use of secondary services like indexing/abstracting services, and use of different channels of communication. Moreover, citation practice varies with individual authors. Some cite very selectively while others are too liberal in this respect, still others prefer self-citations. All these practices limit the usefulness of citation analysis.

3. Special and Unconventional Methods

These methods either have special areas of application or are used rarely.

a) Computer Feedback: This technique is used in computerized information services. The producers of computerized databases analyze the search statements of users and if a particular pattern is visible, they make use of this information for enhancing the usefulness of their database. With the expansion of Internet based services this technique is increasingly being used.

b) Unconventional Methods: In addition to the above direct and indirect methods of conducting user surveys there are some unconventional methods that can also be used for this purpose. One such technique may include asking the authors of contributions in a conference about use of various channels and sources in writing their contributions. In a different situation, reading of biography of a renowned scientist or
social scientist may give vital clues regarding their information-seeking behaviour. Thus, the information needs of various users are ascertained.

5.4 Conclusion

Library is a growing organism. Library users, staff, collection and services grow. The sphere of knowledge is also expanding very rapidly, and there is a consequent increase of library documents. As a result of all these, the needs of the library users have become very urgent and complex. Delivering services to the users is not sufficient but LIS professionals are supposed to deliver quality services. To bring quality in the services we have to use modern techniques and Information Communication Technology (ICT). A good service adds value to library resources by enabling the customers to use those resources effectively. Libraries need to understand their customers, the learners, and their requirement and expectations. A strategic focus on customer service can act as an effective tool in helping libraries to accomplish their mission of serving users or customers in an improved way.
References


