Libraries in the context of National Education Policy

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The article attempts to determine the role and expectations of Library and information centres in the National Education Policy 2020. Nevertheless, these expectations have not been mentioned explicitly in NEP. However, libraries with a quality collection and digital resources must impart quality education. Lifelong learning, preservation of national heritage, and developing a reading culture are a few areas where NEP has highlighted the importance of libraries. Furthermore, through embedded librarianship, library professionals must explore the additional areas where they can contribute to making higher education more robust and meaningful. Finally, the paper exhorts that the higher education sector libraries must be developed as research support and student support centres and play a role of responsible custodianship.

The Ministry of Education (erstwhile Human Resource Development), Government of India, published National Education Policy 2020[1], and it became a topic of discussion, debate and future planning among the thinkers in the educational field. The policy is divided into four parts: school education, higher education, lifelong learning and other critical focus areas. If the role to be played by academic libraries must be found from the NEP, one may argue that it lacks sufficient coverage, and some more elaborations should have been there to figure out this role more vividly. However, the responsibility to be shouldered by the academic libraries is implicit in NEP, and it can further be explicated with the help of the following points.

Developing reading culture

NEP aims to promote the reading culture across India. For this, the 'National Book Promotion Policy' will be formulated. Nonetheless, it is unclear how this will be framed and executed. Public libraries have been playing a vital role in the promotion of reading. However, NEP insists on building a network of public libraries and additional digital libraries with other establishments. The libraries have formed an integral part of higher education and research. However, we can imagine that school education cannot survive without them. The role of libraries is critical, especially during non-school hours. The book clubs may facilitate additional reading and coordinate public libraries and the public. They are supposed to start with readers' advisory services, reading recommendation services, reading prescription services, or reading consultancy services. NEP also gives much importance to the translated work from Indian languages. Now all these good books can only be available with the initiative of public libraries.

Nevertheless, the condition of public libraries is weak at present. Kaur, P and Walia[2], based on the study of the collection development and management of public libraries in Delhi concluded that public libraries are not making deliberate efforts to reach out to the public in terms of services. They are falling short of many users, human resources, reference sources and ICT infrastructure. The state governments need to strengthen the public library system in every state. The universities and centrally funded organizations can open separate public libraries and provide additional reading support to higher education to develop readers and inculcate reading habits. The central and state governments must look after the availability of quality e-books for all kinds of users across India. Nevertheless, the proper funding, recruitment of skilled employees, and training keep greater importance. In future, how we will manage these factors in the context of NEP will be things to see

Libraries as research support centre

NEP also stressed the importance of research in some universities and institutions. NEP only mentions

that libraries be equipped with all the necessary facilities expected by the users. No doubt, libraries have immense potential to strengthen the research activities of organizations. The grassroot innovators and young entrepreneurs often need support from the public and institutional libraries to create a pool of innovations, and to design environmentally sustainable products and services. Some public and institutional libraries in every district of the country should be developed as research support centres to facilitate research undertaken by the grassroot innovators, young entrepreneurs, and other folks in the creative economy. Having the core knowledge of the subject and desire to go in-depth on any topic, and the longing to make an addition to the subject is the essential quality of being a researcher. Library and information centres can accelerate researchers' passion by providing qualitative resources with a particular focus on e-resources, guidance on reference management and retrieval of information. The specialized librarianship can be highly helpful in this regard.

Research is one of the areas where libraries can take a particular drive. We need a separate research librarian with specialized skills in research methodology, statistical analysis, open-source technology, supportive tools to research, reference management and retrieval techniques. NEP's aim to erect the National Research Foundation (NRF) stresses the eminence of having a research librarian. Along with traditional research funding agencies, NRF will sponsor separate funding and coordinate the country's research activities. As the nodal officer, the research librarian can assist NRF in fulfilling its objectives. Recently, INFLIBNET has developed an IRINS system to showcase and coordinate research activities of the universities and organizations in India. Many librarians, as nodal officers, are doing a great job of updating Vidwan's profile to make IRINS more meaningful.

To support the university to serve as a multi-disciplinary organization

Although undergraduate students cannot do a higher degree of research, the universities are underpinning research activities at this stage. These universities have been called 'Research-intense universities' that will conduct a good deal of research and impart knowledge through regular teaching practices. The library and information centres possess immense potential to convert universities into multidisciplinary organizations. The process for all

the universities is expected to be completed by 2040. The areas in the field of Social Sciences and Humanities must be explored by technical institutes, while Science and Technology should be given due attention by the people from Social Science and Humanities. Here library professionals have to evolve as multidisciplinary characters. It can only be possible when they can cross over the boundaries of the subject domain. Mere procurement of resources and preservation of them cannot be the sole duty of libraries, though these activities consume a great deal of time, money and energy. They must function as organized storehouses of quality textbooks and thought-inducing reference books. The librarian has been called a teacher of teachers as he is supposed to know at least that part of each subject discipline which will help him coordinate to each subject area.

Provide student support

NEP regards well-equipped libraries as an integral part of the optimal learning environment. NEP also stressed the four components of the education system-curriculum, pedagogy, continuous assessment and student support. The qualitative resources and systematic infrastructure to access them give strong student support. Now libraries have to be established as 'research support centres'. It would be the responsibility of the parent institute to establish vital student support centres and make the provision sufficient funding to make them more able and efficient. The procurement of e-resources, easy access to them, remote access, and well-furnished reading rooms are essential to the libraries while rendering support to the students. The teaching-learning activities need additional support with quality resources from the libraries and the help to utilize them. Such activities would help them to develop a scientific temper. Libraries must create an atmosphere suitable and motivating for advanced reading. They should make documents available at the point of need in classrooms and laboratories and to teachers, students, research scholars, and writers. The users must feel that the library is the place where they can seek additional material on the topic of their interest.

Ethical mooring of the students

Nowadays, information literacy is a popular program since libraries have started executing it vigorously. The fifth standard of information literacy[3] that 'The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding

the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally' is highly relevant concerning ethical mooring of the students by the library professionals. Libraries must make students understand many of the ethical, legal, and socio-economic issues surrounding information and information technology. They must design the mechanism to imbibe the significance of this standard among the students. They must highlight the institutional plagiarism policy on the portal. They must take the initiative to formulate a policy on plagiarism where there is no such policy in existence and collaborate with the administration to implement the same. They should have excellent knowledge of information ethics to percolate it to all kinds of stakeholders. A subscription to qualitative e-resources and, in addition, a strong association with the students, researchers and faculty members is highly required to help them access the information required by following the academic etiquette. The users are also to teach the scientific tradition of reference management. 'Academic ethics' and Publication ethics are some of the areas where library professionals must break silos that lead to the propagation of academic dishonesty and address the ethical concern through systematic and collaborative efforts[4].

Libraries as centres for lifelong learning

Institutions can provide only formal education. After completing the proper education, when one must explore himself or develop beyond the traditional boundaries, libraries prove to be effective. Libraries would never deny membership based on caste, creed, or sex, or it will not consider whether someone is a regular student or not. The libraries possess the study material to help an individual advance his study. On the contrary, classroom teaching is limited to a specific time duration and age. Hence, libraries have been very influential in lifelong learning. Work, experience, passion, and personal ambition influence the desire for lifelong learning[5].

Nevertheless, informal learning becomes a process[6] when it is considered a process. Lifelong learning is the basic for forming a knowledge-driven society. However, we must be wise enough to distinguish between adult education and lifelong learning[7]. The concept of lifelong learning first appeared in the late 1960s. The report of the International Commission on the Development of Education to UNESCO in 1972 called 'Learning to be-The World of Education Today and Tomorrow' could be considered as epoch-making further in development of lifelong learning concept[8]. The public libraries must be given due attention and importance in that they can start many innovative services by forming collaboration with regional academic libraries. For example, Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA) in Egypt, besides giving traditional services, provides many research services and conducts scientific and community events[9]. The European Parliament and the Council have mentioned eight lifelong learning competencies reflected in NEP[8] long before.

- Communication in the mother tongue;
- Communication in the foreign languages;
- Mathematical competence and basic competence in science and technology
- Digital competence;
- Learning to learn;
- Social and civil competence;
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;
- Cultural awareness and expression.

Preservers of national and cultural heritage

Libraries have worked as a storehouse of cultural heritage for a long time. They should preserve India's glorious history, culture, traditional knowledge, arts, languages, and tradition. It is an act of 'responsible custody[10]. It will be in the form of documents that will connect the present civilization to the past one. Now libraries are considered the centres for cultural expression and heritage. The famous library historian Wayne Weigand thought libraries are essential as institutions and physical places central to promoting culture, social culture, the higher aspirations of human beings, and the building and interaction of social capital[11]. IFLA considers libraries as a preserver of cultural heritage and must connect the community in a meaningful way, thus adding value to the society[12] (IFLA). They must increase the value of digitization, especially at the regional level. Libraries must conduct large-scale digitization to convert books and serials to digital form, thus facilitating enhanced search and retrieval. The four things, e.g., selection of documents for digitization, content creation, technical infrastructure and organizational infrastructure, are of greater significance for the digitization work of cultural heritage in the form of paper documents[10]. Michael Gorman has rightly said[11] that libraries must work with cultural institutions by forming a bilateral and multilateral structure and agreement which are natural allies for the advancement of knowledge and preservation of cultural heritage. In addition, libraries

should have programs and services to transmit cultural heritage[13].

Increasing the cognitive abilities of students

Higher education is the backbone of the country's development. NEP aims to develop 'good, thoughtful, well rounded, and creative individuals'. The policy points out some of the challenges faced by the education system of India. Here are some areas where librarians can do something to reinforce the education system. NEP has stressed that less importance is given to increasing cognitive abilities. In 1986, Bandura published the book 'Social Foundation of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory'. He asserted that cognition plays a significant role in social behaviour, which is the ultimate result of personal, behavioural and environmental influence[14]. The fact is that the education system must have a forceful programme and dedication to implement the same to increase cognitive abilities. Library and information centres in higher education extend additional reading on various topics. All these are tremendous attempts to increase the cognitive abilities of the students. However, librarians need to possess essential abilities to influence the cognitive abilities of stakeholders through their services. Hence, they must understand their need, which needs to be thoughtfully addressed. Cognitive ability is central to critical thinking, reflective thinking and emotional intelligence. It is also a vital part of the core leadership competency of library professionals[15]. Convincing about the importance of reading can be a fruitful effort to increase cognitive abilities.

Conclusion

Although libraries' traditional role is quite visible and highlighted in NEP, the specific expectations from academic libraries have not been mentioned, barring a few exceptions. However, these expectations are implicit and to be understood. To some extent, the importance of public libraries has been highlighted. Nevertheless, the librarians must identify their roles in the context of NEP. Since much emphasis has been given to the research, libraries in higher education centres must establish themselves as research support and student support centres. A new role for a research librarian can accelerate the research activities. The specialized librarianship can further deepen it. Apart from playing a traditional role, libraries of all kinds should strive to develop cognitive abilities, increase students' self-efficacy, and make them capable of becoming lifelong learners.

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