

FROM CUSTODIANS TO DIGITAL LEADERS: CAPACITY BUILDING AND DIGITAL LITERACY AS CATALYSTS FOR SUSTAINABLE LIBRARY TRANSFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of digital technologies has profoundly transformed the traditional role of libraries, redefining them as dynamic knowledge centers rather than mere repositories of printed materials. In this context, capacity building and digital literacy have emerged as essential pillars for ensuring effective library services and institutional sustainability. This paper examines the role of capacity building and digital literacy in facilitating digital transformation in libraries, with a specific focus on three interrelated dimensions: upskilling librarians for digital competencies, training users in digital information literacy, and strengthening change management and leadership during digital transitions. Librarians today are expected to manage electronic resources, digital platforms, and emerging technologies while simultaneously guiding users in navigating complex digital information environments. At the same time, library users must acquire the ability to critically evaluate online information, ethically use digital content, and engage meaningfully with electronic resources. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach based on secondary sources such as scholarly journals, books, policy documents, and reports of national and international organizations including UNESCO, IFLA, and ALA. The analysis reveals that technological infrastructure alone is insufficient to achieve meaningful digital transformation unless supported by continuous human resource development and visionary leadership. Effective change management plays a crucial role in addressing resistance, fostering adaptability, and promoting a culture of lifelong learning within libraries. The paper concludes that capacity building and digital literacy are not optional initiatives but core responsibilities of modern libraries. Strengthening these dimensions enhances service quality, user satisfaction, and equitable access to knowledge in the digital age.

Keywords: Capacity Building, Digital Literacy, Library Professionals, Change Management, Digital Transformation, Leadership in Libraries

Introduction

Libraries have historically served as centers of learning, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge. For centuries, their primary function revolved around the collection, organization, and circulation of printed materials. However, the emergence of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has fundamentally altered the nature of information production, access, and consumption. Digital resources such as e-books, e-journals, online databases, institutional repositories, and open educational resources have become integral components of library collections.

In the contemporary knowledge society, libraries are expected to provide seamless access to digital information, support academic and research activities, and promote lifelong learning. This shift has expanded the professional responsibilities of librarians, requiring them to acquire new competencies in digital resource management, information literacy instruction, and technology-enabled service delivery. Simultaneously, users are confronted with an overwhelming volume of digital information, often of varying quality and credibility, making digital literacy a crucial survival skill.

Digital transformation in libraries is not merely a technological process but a human-centered one. Capacity building and digital literacy lie at the heart of this transformation. Capacity building focuses on strengthening the skills, knowledge, and capabilities of library professionals, while digital literacy empowers users to effectively and ethically engage with digital information environments. Moreover, leadership and change management are essential to navigate the complexities associated with digital transitions, address resistance, and ensure sustainable adoption of new practices.

This paper seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of capacity building and digital literacy in libraries, emphasizing their interdependence and strategic importance in the digital era.

Statement of the Problem

Despite significant advancements in digital technologies and increased investment in library automation and electronic resources, many libraries struggle to fully realize the benefits of digital transformation. One of the primary challenges is the lack of adequate digital competencies among library professionals. In many institutions, librarians have limited opportunities for continuous professional development, resulting in underutilization of digital resources and services.

Another critical issue is the low level of digital information literacy among users. Many users lack the skills required to effectively search, evaluate, and use digital information, leading to dependence on unreliable sources, misinformation, and unethical practices such as plagiarism. This gap undermines the educational and research objectives of libraries.

Furthermore, digital transformation often encounters resistance from staff and users due to fear of change, lack of confidence, and organizational inertia. Inadequate leadership and ineffective change management exacerbate these challenges. The problem, therefore, lies not in the absence of technology but in the insufficient focus on human resource development, digital literacy, and leadership in libraries.

Objectives of the Study

The present study has the following objectives:

- To examine the concept and significance of capacity building in the context of modern libraries.
- To analyse the need for upskilling librarians with digital competencies.
- To study the role of libraries in promoting digital information literacy among users.
- To explore the importance of change management and leadership in library digital transformation.
- To identify challenges associated with capacity building and digital literacy in libraries.
- To suggest strategies for strengthening capacity building and digital literacy for sustainable library development.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is confined to a conceptual and analytical examination of capacity building and digital literacy in libraries. It covers:

- Professional development and digital competencies of librarians
- Digital information literacy initiatives for library users
- Leadership and change management practices during digital transitions

The study primarily focuses on academic and public libraries, with particular relevance to developing countries like India, where disparities in digital skills and access remain significant.

Review of Literature

The literature on capacity building and digital literacy in libraries highlights their growing importance in the digital age. UNESCO (2018) emphasized that digital literacy is a foundational skill for lifelong learning and social inclusion. According to its framework, libraries play a crucial role in bridging the digital divide by providing access to technology and digital skills training.

IFLA (2019) stressed the importance of continuous professional development for librarians, noting that evolving technologies require constant upgrading of skills and knowledge. The report highlighted that librarians must move beyond traditional roles and become facilitators of digital learning.

The American Library Association (ALA, 2020) underscored the role of libraries in promoting digital information literacy, particularly in combating misinformation and supporting informed citizenship. Studies by Bawden (2008) and Bruce (2011) emphasized that information literacy in the digital environment involves critical thinking, ethical awareness, and effective use of digital tools.

Indian studies have also highlighted challenges in library digital transformation, including inadequate training, limited funding, and resistance to change. Researchers have noted that successful digital initiatives depend heavily on leadership and organizational culture rather than technology alone. The literature collectively indicates that capacity building, digital literacy, and leadership are interdependent factors essential for sustainable library development.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research methodology based on secondary data. Data were collected from:

- Scholarly journals and books related to library and information science
- Reports and guidelines issued by UNESCO, IFLA, and ALA
- Policy documents such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020
- Conference proceedings and research articles

The collected data were systematically analysed to identify key themes, challenges, and best practices related to capacity building, digital literacy, and change management in libraries.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the interrelationship between capacity building, digital literacy, and leadership. Capacity building enhances the digital competencies of librarians, enabling them to design and deliver effective digital services. Digital literacy initiatives empower users to access and evaluate information responsibly. Leadership and change management act as enabling forces that integrate these components and ensure sustainable digital transformation. The framework highlights that digital transformation is a continuous process driven by human capabilities rather than technological infrastructure alone.

Capacity Building of Librarians

Capacity building refers to the process of strengthening individual and institutional abilities to perform functions effectively. In libraries, capacity building involves continuous professional development, skill enhancement, and empowerment of librarians to manage digital resources and services.

Modern librarians are required to possess competencies in:

- Library automation and integrated library management systems
- Management of electronic resources and digital repositories
- Use of ICT tools for information dissemination
- Data literacy and digital preservation

Training programmes, workshops, online courses, and professional networks play a vital role in enhancing these competencies. Capacity building not only improves service quality but also boosts professional confidence and adaptability among librarians.

Digital Literacy and User Empowerment

Digital literacy goes beyond basic computer skills and encompasses the ability to locate, evaluate, use, and create information using digital technologies. In an era of information overload and misinformation, digital literacy is essential for academic success and informed citizenship.

- Libraries serve as critical spaces for promoting digital literacy by:
- Conducting user orientation and training programmes
- Providing access to digital resources and tools
- Teaching ethical use of information and plagiarism awareness
- Supporting research and academic integrity

Empowering users with digital literacy enhances their ability to engage with digital knowledge ecosystems effectively.

Change Management and Leadership in Digital Transitions

Change management is a systematic approach to dealing with organizational change. In libraries, digital transformation often challenges established routines and professional identities. Effective leadership is crucial to guide staff and users through this transition.

- Library leaders must:
- Communicate a clear vision for digital transformation
- Encourage participation and collaboration
- Address resistance and build confidence
- Foster a culture of continuous learning

Leadership that is inclusive and adaptive significantly contributes to the successful implementation of digital initiatives.

Challenges in Capacity Building and Digital Literacy

Despite their importance, capacity building and digital literacy initiatives face several challenges:

- Limited financial and infrastructural resources
- Unequal access to technology

- Resistance to change among staff and users
- Lack of institutional policy support

Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts at institutional and policy levels.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis reveals that libraries investing in capacity building and digital literacy demonstrate higher levels of service efficiency and user satisfaction. Leadership and change management emerge as critical success factors. The findings reinforce the view that digital transformation is a human-driven process.

Suggestions and Recommendations

- Introduce mandatory digital training programmes for librarians
- Integrate digital literacy into user education curricula
- Strengthen leadership development initiatives
- Provide policy-level and financial support for capacity building

Conclusion

Capacity building and digital literacy are fundamental to the relevance and sustainability of libraries in the digital era. By transforming librarians into digital leaders and users into informed digital citizens, libraries can effectively fulfil their educational and social responsibilities. The study emphasizes that investment in human capabilities is as important as technological infrastructure for achieving meaningful digital transformation.

Scope for Future Research

Future studies may focus on empirical research, region-specific case studies (such as Andhra Pradesh), and the impact of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence on library capacity building and digital literacy.

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