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Training Needs Analysis of School Librarians in India

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ABSTRACT

The situation of schools, school libraries and school librarians is in a totally poor condition in India compared to other developed countries in the world. Most of the schools do not have libraries; wherever libraries are available proper trained manpower is not available to manage those libraries. There are many reasons for this problem including budget, space, resources, manpower, lack of national policies and standards. One of the main problems is providing proper training to school librarians which is not available in any Indian Library School. This paper reviewed the need for school libraries, national and international scenarios, School Library Standards & Guidelines, roles and responsibility of school librarians, and impact of school libraries on students and teachers. The initial step in developing a training program is to decide whether training is needed. Training needs assessment (TNA) is certainly useful in saving the time, money and resources used to develop and conduct training which will deliver desired performance-based results. This paper looked into the TNA of school librarians particularly, Indian schools, and prepared a detailed framework to conduct a study with 300+ schools of Pondicherry union territory and come up with a suitable school librarians training programme very soon.

Keywords: School librarians, training needs analysis, Indian school libraries, impact of school libraries

1. INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first-century workforce requires skills in problem-solving, communication, and technology to be creative and innovative, and habits to connect experiences and information from a variety of sources and constantly develop their own knowledge (Stuart & Dahm, 1999; U.S. Department of Commerce, Education, Labor, National Institute of Literacy, and the Small Business Administration, 1999; Members for Democracy, 2005; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2008). The same skills and habits are vital in a democracy that are required by citizens to understand the complex problems of change, make reasoned arguments, and understand different viewpoints. The partnership for 21st century skills is a collaboration of business and educational organisation, declared a propound gap between what students learn in school and the knowledge and skills they need for the 21st century communities (www.21stcenturyskills.org). The world of '*school libraries*' has changed substantially

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due to technological advancements in various fields including printing technology, IT, networks, digital storage, automation, collaborative working, print-to-digital shift, changing educational needs, and multimedia products led to many changes in today's school librarianship. Therefore, school librarians recognize the importance of being instructionally savvy, educational partners who can collaborate with teachers in co-plan, co-teach, and co-evaluate student's work.

Nowadays, due to technological developments in libraries, lot of changes took place in their collections, services, functions. Accordingly the manpower to manage them also got to change. Therefore this study is most essential for effectively running today's and tomorrow's school libraries. In this context, many countries like US, UK, Canada, Australia, etc framed guidelines for school libraries (<http://www.ala.org/aasl/standards-guidelines>) that are intended to help in establishing, maintaining and developing primary, secondary and high school libraries. The guidelines address the library needs of school students; how to embedding the school library in the teaching and learning culture of the whole school. The guidelines also recognize the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as an integral part to every aspect of school library.

2. BACKGROUND

During the Sixth Indian Education Survey (NCERT, 2009), it was found that 96% of children in the age group 6 to 14 in rural India are enrolled in schools. Of this total, 73% of children are enrolled in government schools and the remaining (21.8%) are enrolled in private schools. The average attendance rate in rural India is around 75% however, it is 90% or more for states like Kerala, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Goa, Tamil Nadu and Nagaland. In government schools, 17.1% students take private tuitions, and this percentage rose to 30.8% by the time they reached to 8th standard. In private schools, more than 25% students take private tuitions in their first standard itself.

Out of the 28 states of the Union of India, only 17 states have passed the legislation for the Public Library Act. In India, School libraries are facing lot of problems ranging from inadequate space for keeping books, reading space for students, lack of professionally trained staff to manage them properly (Singh, 2005). Non-availability of regular funds for acquiring reading materials is a major problem faced by most of the school libraries in government and semi-government sectors. These schools have only limited amalgamated funds such as parent-teacher association fund which is used to purchase a small number of approved textbooks. The ad-hoc system existing among school libraries is running throughout the country due to absence of specific guidelines and standards for their sustained growth. Rural schools are lagging much behind to urban schools, in terms of professionally trained library staff and other resources. Therefore, India is badly in need of school librarians, training programme to produce professionally trained school librarians, and at the same time proper guidelines and mechanisms have to be developed to standardize the school libraries both at state and central governments level.

According to the 7th All India Education Survey, 77.24% secondary schools and 89.59% higher secondary schools are having library facility whereas in 6th Survey, out of total 65,564 secondary schools, the percentages for secondary and higher secondary schools having library facility was 80.65% and 90.21%, respectively. However, there are no trained librarians working in most of Indian schools, although the central government has made libraries as 'centres to raise the literacy rate in the

country' (NCERT, 1993). Their resources in terms of staff and funds are scarce, as these have received the least priority. The school libraries neither have good collection nor sufficient space because of the financial constraints. As a result, the school libraries are unable to inculcate the *reading habits* among the children and help in achieving information literacy. In 1998, the School Library Committee of the Indian Library Association surveyed all school libraries in Delhi and found that most of the government primary schools had no library at all and the existing libraries in secondary schools are substandard. The Committee stressed for the need for school library and it may be made as the hub of the school. For them it is one of the best marketing tools to attract large number of students to their school. After privatization of education in the country, the majority the public (private) schools were able to set-up somewhat better library facilities including staff, collections and services as compared to the government schools.

In today's IT era, School Library takes a key place in the school education. School librarian deals with all subject areas but more closely related to teaching and learning, media resources use and management, IT and Net skills, reading, information seeking skills, information literacy skills, etc. The school librarian should be well versed with (Stanley, 2006): i) incorporation of IT in School Library; ii) getting acquainted with the operations of the electronic media; and iii) familiarity with other subject areas.

The aim of the study is to identify the training requirements of the School Librarians of Puducherry District. The specific objectives are as follows:

- i) To find out how school libraries in the developed countries are contributing to the delivery of quality of instruction to students.
- ii) To identify the existing status of school librarians in Puducherry Dt., such as utilization of manpower, budget allotment, the effective utilization of the funds, and existing policies in relation to staffing in the school libraries.
- iii) To find out the level of usage of learning resources in school libraries.
- iv) To identify the problems in establishing school libraries in the schools.
- v) To find out the gap between the existing and desirable skills of a school librarian through TNA.
- vi) To find out the required collaboration between teachers and school librarians.
- vii) To find out the essentials skills required for a school librarian.
- viii) To find out whether the gender, age group, subject background, qualification of the school librarian and the school level affect the achievement of the students.
- ix) To identify the training requirements for the school librarians of Puducherry District.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The school library is a vital teaching and learning environment in the school community. The school library and its staff are integral part empowering the students to become independent lifelong learners. Student learning outcomes are enhanced through the teacher-librarian's acquisition and organisation of information resources,

the dissemination and circulation of learning materials and collaboratively planned programs to integrate information and digital literacy (American Association of School Libraries, 2009).

The international research shows that the quality of student's learning outcome greatly enhanced by effective school libraries (School Library Association, Republic of Ireland, 2004). All students in European countries are entitled to quality SLMCs and services. In order to achieve this in each country, the European Union adopted and implemented the principles of the IFLA/UNESCO school library manifesto. The schools with well stocked, well-equipped libraries, managed by qualified and motivated professional teacher-librarians working with support staff will create high-quality learning experiences. Standardized scores of the students tend to be 10 to 20% higher than in schools without this investment on school libraries (Lance & Loertscher, 2003). The school library is one of the few factors whose contribution to academic achievement has been documented empirically (Lance, *et al.*, 1993; Lonsdale, 2003; Rodney, *et al.*, 2003). School libraries are now called "*Learning Resource Centers*" and the school librarians as the "*Learning Resource Centre Managers*". The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and Association for Educational Communications and Technology (1998) identified the roles and responsibilities of the School Librarian as School Library Media Specialist (SLMS), as teacher, as instructional partner, as information specialist, and as programme administrator.

Research studies continue to show that an active school library program run by a trained teacher-librarian or resource teacher makes a significant difference on the student's learning outcome. Numerous international studies have demonstrated a link between student achievement and the presence of professionally staffed and accessible school libraries (New York Comprehensive Center, 2011). Studies have shown that impact of SLMC on students Tests Scores (Todd & Kuhlthau, 2004; Todd, 2005); on character built-up (Schroeder & Zarinna, 2007); and on social environment (Jones, 2003).

3.1 Impact of School Library on Teachers and Teaching

Teachers are the pillars of the school education. The library resources add new knowledge to teachers and make them feel refreshed in their subject field. Thus the impact of school library on teachers and teaching is in many folds including the teachers perceptions about SLMS, combined effort of teachers and SLMS (AASL, 2009), and improvement of teacher's IT skills.

Training is given to personnel for getting required knowledge about the work and the working condition. SLMS is trained professional like a teacher to handle the school children and also teaches about the maintenance of the school library. The SLMS is trained in such a way that he / she may be able to handle the electronic media equipment, the students in the classroom or in the library, and also the library activities. Many studies have been conducted to identify the required Qualifications of the School Library Media Specialists in the developed countries (Swartz, 2006), and the Skills of SLMSs (Schroeder & Zarinna, 2007).

3.2 National Scenario

Due to lack of professional training programmes (both degree and diploma level), most of the libraries are looked after by the regular teachers as an additional duty so they cannot do any professional work. Because of that their regular teaching also hampers so there is an urgent need to start professional training programme to train

the school librarians that suits to the requirements of the current needs of Indian schools. To study the existing situation and needs of all types of schools no research work was done in India except the School Libraries Committee of the Indian Library Association (ILA) Survey of all school libraries in Delhi during the year 1998; however, the report is not available for review. Besides this, the following seminars were conducted in India, but most of them did not publish their proceedings: a) Role of school libraries in quality education organized by NCERT, New Delhi during 10-11 February, 2009; b) Manpower in school libraries in India: present position and prospective requirements; c) National seminar on school libraries and education system organized by Kerala Library Association, Trivandrum, 19-20, November, 1998; d) School libraries and reading, an international conference organised by Vidya Bhawan Society, Udaipur, Rajasthan during 3-5 October 2008.

The changing nature of schools and education has brought an increasing demand for a wide range of information resources and for guidance and support in the effective use of these resources within the curriculum. School librarians are meeting that demand by providing effective access to information resources and services, playing a vital role in facilitating the management and use of information within teaching and learning, leading in the development of information literacy, and managing people and resources. The purpose of this study is find out the gap between general library education, and school librarians' training needs in India, both for professionals and for paraprofessionals. Training needs assessment (TNA) is one of the best techniques that can be used to find out the real training requirements of these professionals. By conducting TNA, one can come up the most suitable training programme that meets the needs of Indian school librarians.

4. TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Training needs assessment is a process through which a trainer collects and analyzes information, then creates a training plan. This process determines the need for the training, identifies training needs, and examines the type and scope of resources needed to support training (Sorenson, 2002). Rossett (1987) explains that one conducts a training needs assessment to seek information about: i) optimal performance or knowledge, ii) actual or current performance or knowledge, iii) feelings of trainees and other stakeholders, iv) causes of identified problems, and v) solutions.

4.1. Purpose of Conducting TNA

The purpose of TNA is to identify and analyze the roles, responsibilities and related training needs of school librarians, paraprofessionals who work with school students of all levels. The TNA includes: a) determining the performance gap, b) developing the evaluation outcomes for training, c) determining if training is the most appropriate intervention, and d) working out the costing of such training.

It is to identify performance requirements and the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed by school library professionals to achieve the goals of a school. An effective TNA will help direct resources to areas of greatest demand. The assessment should address resources needed to fulfill organizational mission, improve productivity, and provide quality products and services. A needs assessment is the process of identifying the "gap" between performance required and current performance of the School libraries' staff. When a difference exists, it explores the causes and reasons for the gap and methods for closing or eliminating the gap.

4.2. Why to Conduct a Training Needs Assessment?

A training needs assessment often reveals the need for well-targeted training (McArdle, 1998). Conducting an effective assessment ensures that training is an appropriate solution to a performance deficiency. Training needs assessment can help in determining the current performance or knowledge levels related to a specific activity, as well as indicate the optimal performance or knowledge level needed. To make TNA to be effective, its trainer must clearly understand the problem and consider all solutions, not just training alone, before determining the best solution and presenting findings to management. Costly mistakes can arise when an organization fails to conduct TNA or conducts one ineffectively.

4.3 How to Conduct TNA?

TNA is a review of learning and development needs for library staff, paraprofessionals and management within in any school. It considers the skills, knowledge and behaviours that library professionals need, and how to develop them effectively. Organizational TNA should ideally be undertaken at three levels: a) school level, b) Principal/Head master level, and c) librarian level.

These three levels are interlinked, and using this structure will help ensure a balanced analysis that takes into account the big picture as well as the specific needs of librarians. Methods that can be used to identify learning needs include:

- i) Analysis of existing strategies and plan to identify what skills are needed for quality education
- ii) Questionnaires – paper based or online
- iii) One-to-one interviews
- iv) Focus groups - facilitates small group of experts discussing the problems and identifying the suitable training.

The outcome of TNA should be a healthy learning and development plan, based on research connected at organisational, team and individual levels.

4.4 The Models of TNA

The process of conducting a TNA is systematic based on specific information-gathering techniques. TNA proceeds in stages, with the findings of one stage affecting and helping to shape the next one. There is no easy or short-cut formula for carrying out this process. Each particular situation requires its own mix of observing, probing, analyzing and deducting. There are more than twenty TNA models reported in the literature developed to meet the needs of various professionals training requirements (McGehee & Thayer, 1961; Mager & Pipe, 1984; Rossett, 1987; Rummler & Brache, 1995; Taylor, *et al.* 1998; Leigh, *et al.* 2000). The McGehee and Thayer's three-level (Organisation-Task-Person) conception of needs assessment is considered the core framework for needs assessment in the academic environment and most of the models developed since have been based on this three-level framework (Holton, *et al.* 2000). Also the O-T-P model integrated macro through to micro analyses, arising from an investigation of training needs to meet organizational needs, task or job needs, through to the particular needs of an individual or person.

McClelland (1993) discusses an open-systems model for conducting TNA; it involves an 11-step approach. Barbazette (2006) suggests that TNA should answer questions such as why, who, how, what and when. McGehee & Thayer's (1961) three-tiered approach to conducting needs assessment continues to serve as a fundamental

framework. It encompasses three levels of analysis: organization, operations and individual. It is one of the popularly used TNA model in the literature.

4.5. Who Conducts TNA and Why?

A trainer or a program coordinator performs a needs analysis to collect and document information concerning any of the following issues: a) performance problems, b) anticipated introduction of new program, course, task or technology, c) a desire by the schools or institutes, training program organizers to benefit from a perceived opportunity, d) the intention to adjust a training program to the needs of the judges and prosecutors

A needs analysis often reveals the need for well-targeted training area. Those conducting the needs analysis must get a clear idea of the problem or specific interest, look at all possible remedies and report on their findings to the management before deciding on the best solution. When properly done, a needs analysis is a wise investment for a training institution or organization. It saves time, money and effort by working on the right problems. Organizations that fail to support needs analysis most often make costly mistakes; they use too much or too little training, or they use training but fail to follow up on it. A well-performed analysis provides the data that can lead to solutions that focus on the areas of greatest need.

5. CONCLUSION

A well-orchestrated TNA can deliver many positive outcomes. According to Warshawer (1988), important outcomes of TNA include i) increasing the commitment of management and potential participants to training and development, ii) increasing the visibility of the training function, iii) clarifying crucial organizational issues, iv) providing a framework for the best use of limited resources, v) providing program and design ideas, and vi) formulating strategies for how to proceed with training effort. This paper provides a basic framework for conducting TNA of school library training programme which the researchers are going to conduct with over 300 schools of Pondicherry Union Territory.

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