



Collections and services of public libraries in West Bengal, India: An evaluative study against the backdrop of the IFLA guidelines

International Federation of
Library Associations and Institutions
2021, Vol. 47(2) 250–262
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DOI: 10.1177/0340035220958022
journals.sagepub.com/home/ifi



Shamim Aktar Munshi 

Central Library, Ananda Chandra College, West Bengal, India

Mehtab Alam Ansari

Department of Library and Information Science, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the status of district-level public libraries in West Bengal, India. The study focused on staff as well as services against the backdrop of collection development policy. It also investigated the problems faced by librarians and suggested measures to overcome these difficulties. The researchers used a mixed-methods approach – quantitative and qualitative methods – to obtain the data. However, the primary means of data collection was a survey method using a structured questionnaire. Additionally, interviews were carried out with librarians in order to bring more subjectivity to the results. The findings suggest that no selection committees have taken place to recruit new staff in different public libraries; hence, libraries have been suffering from a shortage of staff. Due to severe shortage of library staff, book database has not been completed in Libsys library management software in any surveyed library. Public libraries are established to provide a variety of services to their users. Thus, services are the main product of the public library system. The findings reveal that different kinds of services – such as children's, career guidance and community information services – are provided by the surveyed libraries to benefit their user communities.

Keywords

IFLA, public library service guidelines, library collections, library services, public libraries, West Bengal, India

Submitted: 9 February 2020; Accepted: 31 July 2020.

Introduction

India is a diverse country with the second largest population in the world after China; it is the seventh largest country on the basis of area, with more than 1.2 billion people spread over 29 states and 7 union territories (Office of the Registrar General, 2011). West Bengal is the fourth most populous and culturally diverse state in India. Its total population is more than 91 million and the literacy rate is 77.08% (Chakraborty and Pattrea, 2016).

Public libraries in West Bengal have a long history within the Indian public library movement. The foundation and development of libraries in undivided Bengal started with the efforts of the British and various missionaries (Kumar, 2011: 62). The British

played a pivotal role in inculcating interest and awareness about public libraries in West Bengal (Saha, 1988: 132). Calcutta was considered to be the central place for initiatives, movements and the development of libraries in Bengal (Nair, 2004: 120). In 1690, Job Charnock, an East India Company official, chose to establish a trading post in Calcutta. Following this, several academic institutions and libraries were set up throughout the country (Pradhan and Tripathi, 2010: 31).

Corresponding author:

Shamim Aktar Munshi, Central Library, Ananda Chandra College, College Para, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal 735101, India.
Email: munshishamim14@gmail.com