User Awareness and Utilization of Rural Library Services

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Abstract: *The rural libraries form an important component of local learning and community living, particularly in the developing regions where accessibility of school books and other learning resources is not easy. They assist in reading, academic achievement, locating information and learning among both young and old people. Nevertheless, there are many rural libraries that are not popular and are used by a small number of people. Such issues as lack of outreach efforts, inappropriate facilities, aged or lost books, inadequate technology, and overall economic hardship prevent individuals of utilizing the libraries to their fullest extent.*

This study examined the level of knowledge of the people on the libraries, the level of utilization, the level of satisfaction and how the satisfaction is influenced by various factors. Our survey technique was a survey and 500 individuals were requested to complete survey questionnaires that were well constructed in five rural villages. Then using the simplest statistical tools, we analyzed the data to identify patterns and relationships between age, income, education, and frequency of use of library.

The findings indicated that there is a distinct difference between the awareness of the presence of the library and the actual utilization of the library. The majority of the respondents had heard about rural libraries, but not many of them visited rural libraries to avail themselves of their services. Such issues as inaccessible places, the absence of required books, and time shortages were obstacles of a large scale. The research indicates that they should be more attentive in their clarity of awareness programs, facilities, and services that align to what people desire in order that more people can enjoy rural libraries and make their community grow.

Keywords: Rural libraries, awareness, utilization, information access, community development, library services

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Rural libraries play a significant role in education and information at developing countries such as India. The gaps in the reading skills, digital access, and information availability are still very large.

These libraries are learning facilities acting as community centers. They sell books, newspapers, magazines, digital resources and programs that are community oriented.

Besides assisting in formal education, rural libraries also aid in learning in life, mastering skills, and inclusion of all individuals in the society (IFLA, 2015)[1].

At places where the school and internet connections are weak usually in the rural areas, libraries tend to be the primary means through which people acquire information and learning opportunities (Kumar, 2018)[2].

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[1] International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). (2015). IFLA guidelines for public libraries. IFLA.

[2] Kumar, A. (2018). Rural libraries and community development. Journal of Library Studies, 12(2), 45–58.

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The prosperity of rural libraries highly relies on the level of familiarity that society has with it and the number of community members who are aware of the services and are actively involved in the activities (Sharma & Patel, 2020)[3]

1.2 Need for the Study

Although it has policies that state that libraries are beneficial to the society, no research exists on how the rural population learns about and utilize libraries.

Research studies have revealed that people become less attracted to library services due to the non-availability of buildings and money problems, and insufficient outreach (Rao, 2019)[4].

The information about how people access and utilize libraries is vital to improved service provision, improved financial utilization, and the development of library services to all (UNESCO, 2014)[5].

Research on library patrons and their economic status may assist leaders and managers at libraries to plan and adjust to the needs of the local area (Singh, 2021)[6].

1.3 Objectives

The present study aims to:

- Test the level of awareness of library services among rural population.
- Examine the frequency and usage of libraries by residents.
- Determine the influence of age, gender, income, and other variables on library.
- Make precise recommendations to ensure more individuals use and know about libraries.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Libraries in the rural areas are turning out to be significant locations whereby people are enabled to know how to read, making use of technology and empowering their community. According to Kumar (2018), they work as learning centers, where books, newspapers, and online resources are provided. This is useful in making people practice reading and in formal schools as well as other forms of learning[7]. In less developed regions, there are a few schools and the internet, libraries seal significant gaps and offer lifelong opportunities to learn (IFLA, 2015) [8]. Moreover, rural libraries are perceived as secure, friendly, and conducive to share and interact socially, which enhances closer bonds in the community (Aabo and Audunson, 2012)[9].

Although it is possible to do so a lot, there are numerous barriers to the use of libraries in rural areas. Sharma and Patel (2020) discovered that some of them are not familiar to most individuals and thus, few people join the library or use its services[10]. Other people are also kept away by cultural beliefs that libraries are either student-only or rich-only (Rao, 2019)[11]. Practical limitations also exist: the lack of staff, old books, a short opening time, and poor buildings reduce the

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[3] Sharma, P., & Patel, R. (2020). Awareness and utilization of rural information services. Indian Journal of Information Science, 14(1), 22–31.

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[7] Kumar, A. (2018). Rural libraries and community development. Journal of Library Studies, 12(2), 45–58.

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quality of service and the level of satisfaction of users (Singh, 2021)[12]. There is also the issue of the digital gap which has been a major setback since bad internet connectivity and low computer illiteracy restrict the utilization of technology services (UNESCO, 2014)[13].

Studies indicate that there is a definite relationship between library use and improved development of the community. Those that frequent the library usually excel in school and read without any difficulties (Lance and Kachel, 2018)[14]. Another role of the rural libraries in building social strength is the implementation of literacy projects, skill classes, and meetings which enhance civic participation and cohesion (Aabo and Audunson, 2012). In brief, literature demonstrates that rural libraries have the potential to transform lives of people, yet it also states that we require additional local research to alleviate issues of awareness, access and facilities.

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Roles and importance of Rural Libraries

Rural libraries enable the community to read, learn online and feel belonging to their community. Kumar (2018) notes that they can offer people access to books, newspapers, and digital resources that can be used to support school and informal learning. Libraries serve to seal the information gaps when infrastructure is low in the vicinity therefore enabling individuals to continue learning in life (IFLA, 2015). It is also a good location to exchange information and discuss with people (Aabo and Audunson, 2012). The rural libraries empower the community by providing all people with the same access to information as well as assisting the community to develop[15].

2. The Developmental Effects and Obstacles of Rural Libraries .

Although they are essential, there exist issues that prevent the usage of rural libraries amongst the population. Not many people are aware of them thus there is low membership and participation (Sharma and Patel, 2020). There are those who are unable to do so due to cultural beliefs (Rao, 2019). Libraries do not have money, clean books, poor structures, and limited opening hours, which reduce the quality of service (Singh, 2021). Internet services are inaccessible as some individuals lack internet (UNESCO, 2014). Nevertheless, frequent visits to libraries not only increase the performance of schools (Lance and Kachel, 2018) but also establish social bonds via community projects (Aabo and Audunson, 2012), which demonstrate why they are worth developing[16].

3.1. Tables for Graphing

Dataset 1: Awareness and Utilization

Category	Value (Count)
Aware	320
Not Aware	180
Used Services	200
Never Used	300

As indicated in the table, 320 individuals were aware of the services provided by rural libraries and 180 individuals were not. Nevertheless, the number of people who utilized the services was only 200 and those who never utilized them

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[12] Singh, M. (2021). Socio-economic determinants of public library use in rural areas. International Journal of Library Management, 9(3), 101–112.

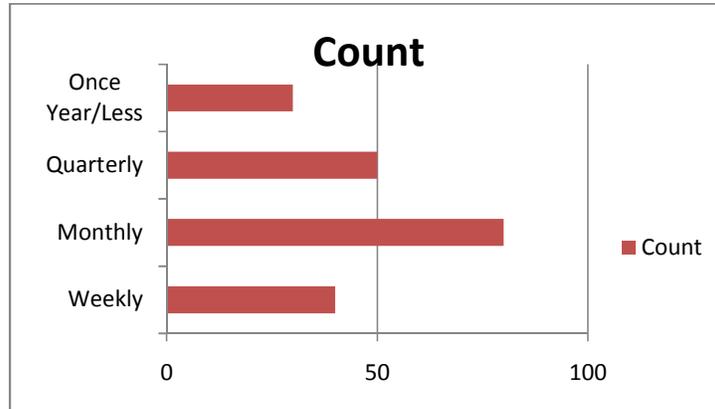[13] UNESCO. (2014). Public library manifesto. UNESCO Publishing.

[14] Lance, K. C., & Kachel, D. E. (2018). Why school librarians matter: What years of research tell us. Phi Delta Kappan, 99(7), 15–20.

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were 300. This is a clear disconnect between the awareness of the services and utilisation of the library services, and this indicates that barriers restrict the use of libraries.
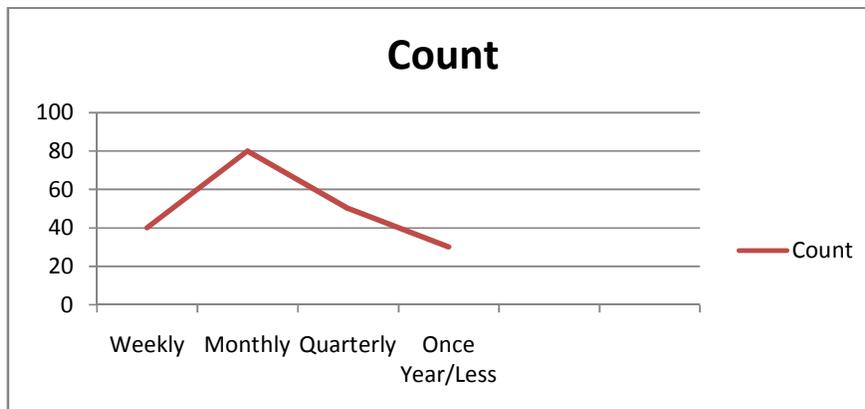

Frequency of Rural Library Visits Among Users

It can be observed that the rural library is most frequently visited either monthly or quarterly by people. The frequency of visits is lower in a weekly basis and very few people visit once a year or less. It implies that the majority of users utilize library services occasionally rather than on a regular basis as they are moderately engaged and have an opportunity to become regular users.

Dataset 2: Sources of Awareness

Source	Count
School/Teacher	110
Friends/Peers	70
Community Meetings	50
Posters/Flyers	40
Radio/Local Media	30
Others	20

As shown in the table, the most popular way through which people get information on rural library services is through schools and the teachers with 110 respondents indicating so. Friends and classmates come in handy afterwards come community meetings and posters. The medium influence is the radio and local media, whereas other channels do not have a significant influence. This demonstrates the strength of the powerful schools and teachers to raise awareness of libraries.
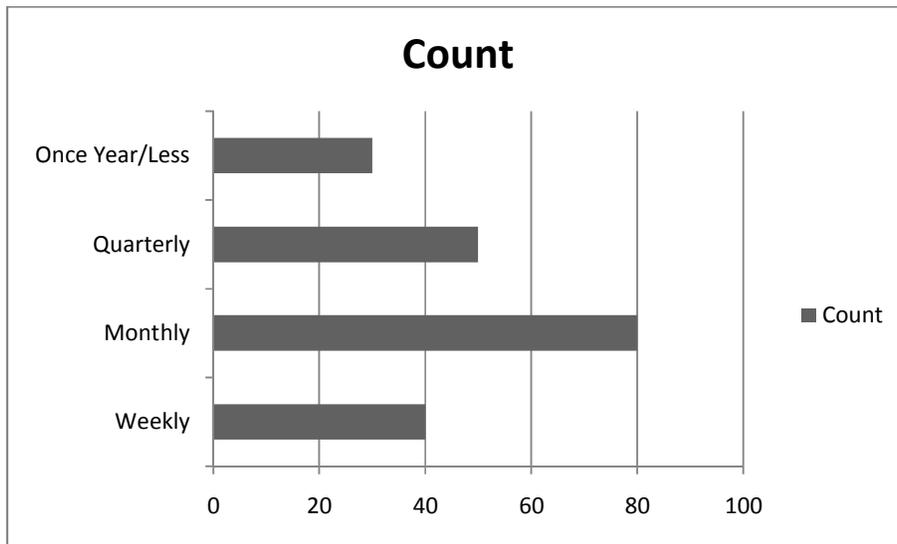
Trend in Frequency of Rural Library Visits

According to the line chart, the highest visits made by people to rural libraries are monthly, which is significantly higher than any other period. Visits per week are mid-range, whereas quarterly visits are less than the monthly one. The least are one-a-year or fewer visits. This trend suggests that the majority of the users approach the library as a monthly schedule meaning that the usage is irregular but regular, and it provides the possibilities of urging the users to visit the library more frequently.

Dataset 3: Frequency of Visits

Frequency	Count
Weekly	40
Monthly	80
Quarterly	50
Once Year/Less	30

As indicated in the table, the rural library has 80 users visiting it each month. The second most frequent is three-month visits and 50 users of the visit. Average number of users per week is forty and less than that are the number of users who visit once in a year or so. The library is used on an irregular basis, but moderately by most people who do not visit it regularly.

Frequency of Rural Library Visits Among Users

The graph indicates that the most frequent ones are visiting the library 80 times a month and visiting 50 times a quarter. The next visiting is 40 times a week and just 30 people visit once a year or less. It indicates that majority of the users visit the library on a moderate, regular, rather than very frequent schedule, meaning that they attend the library regularly but not heavily

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Summary

Demographic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	260	52%
	Female	240	48%

Age Group	15–24	120	24%
	25–34	150	30%
	35–49	140	28%
	50+	90	18%
Education	No formal	50	10%
	Primary	120	24%
	Secondary	200	40%
	Graduate/Above	130	26%

4.2 Awareness of Rural Library Services

Respondents were asked whether they knew about public library services in their panchayat.

Table 2: Awareness Levels

Awareness Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Aware	320	64%
Not Aware	180	36%

The research discovered that, there was an average level of community awareness with 64 percent of the population aware of their local rural library. Nevertheless, 36% stated that they were not aware of the library or the service, which implies that the outreach and communication should be improved to disseminate information and make using the library more inclusive.

V. DISCUSSION

5.1 Awareness and its Determinants

The research demonstrates that a moderate number of individuals are aware of the availability of rural libraries and their services in their villages since 64 percent of the people were aware of their existence. Nonetheless, 36 percent of them remained unaware of the library facilities, and outreach and communication should be made better. It implies that libraries are not accessible and usable by all even though they exist.

It is also realized in the analysis that those that knew about libraries either in schools or in teachers were more enlightened. The fact that schools are effective in sharing information about the public services was noted when students and young adults were more aware of the library resources. The students are especially encouraged by their teachers to learn more and develop using the library.

Conversely, individuals who were not affiliated to formal schools such as the elderly, daily wage earners, and those having inadequate education were less well informed. This demonstrates that school and normal institution learning has a significant influence on awareness. The outcomes are not different than previous research when it is stated that schools contribute to the increase of the awareness and mobilization of people to utilize rural libraries (Kumar, 2018)[17]. Outreach can be improved by collaborating more closely with schools, libraries, and community organizations, more individuals will be exposed to the services, and individuals will find it easier to utilize the library resources.

5.2 Utilization of Rural Library Services

The study results show that there exist a great disparity between the awareness and the real use of the rural library services. Even though 64 percent of the respondents said that they are aware of whether or not their villages had rural libraries, just 40 percent of them had used the services offered by them in the last one year. This means that usage is not ensured by awareness. The decision to visit and make use of library resources is affected by a number of structural, social, and economic factors.

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[17] Kumar, A. (2018). Rural libraries and community development. Journal of Library Studies, 12(2), 45–58.

Limited accessibility was one of the biggest barriers as it was discovered. Mostly the respondents stated that the library was too far on their place of residence and it was not easy to visit it frequently. In the rural areas, transport infrastructure is usually poor and people particularly women and aged individuals may experience difficulties in mobility. There is also the agricultural work which is seasonal and which has a considerable impact on the visitation patterns. Farmers and daily wage workers during the harvesting and sowing seasons are interested in livelihood activities rather than visiting schools to learn or get information.

The perceived relevance of services is considered another parameter that affects utilization. Some of the respondents indicated that the book collections available were either out of date or did not match their urgent requirements e.g. competitive exam preparation, job training or government scheme knowledge. Motivation to visit decreases once users get the feeling that resources are either not useful or not updated. This points at the relevance of demand-based collection development in libraries in rural areas.

The operating hours were also mentioned as one of the biggest road blocks. Major number of working adults indicated that the library hours were conflicting with their working hours. Rigid timings limit accessibility since rural populations frequently work in the fields, small businesses, or day to day work. The use of flexible hours, such as the opening in the evening or on weekends, would be a major improvement.

Online services are not fully exploited. Very few respondents claimed to use the internet facilities or other digital services that were offered at the library. The causes are bad internet connectivity, inadequate computers and poor digital literacy. This is indicative of the overall digital divide of rural communities. Digital services can never achieve their potential without the right training and infrastructure.

It was also observed that there were gender differences. The utilization rate of male respondents was a little higher than that of the female respondents. Lower participation is due to cultural constraints, family commitments and movement constraints. This implies that there should be inclusive outreach programs and women-oriented programs.

The pattern of utilization in general indicates that the rural libraries have been perceived as the occasional aids facilities as opposed to the frequent learning facilities. The majority of users consider the site on a monthly or quarterly basis as opposed to a weekly one, which shows moderate usage. Although the awareness base is in place, the systematic change in the infrastructure, outreach, service relevance, and digital capacity is needed in order to transform the awareness into regular use.

Barriers were:

- Lack of interest
- Irrelevance of services perceived.
- Limited operating hours

5.3 Frequency of Use

According to the study, the average user of the library does so at least once per month. This will imply that individuals in rural set ups do not visit the library on a weekly basis. A smaller group of them visits weekly, yet most of them come only a month. They tend to visit due to necessity of a book, study or need particular information. Others arrive every few months or as required.

Comparison of Statistical Analysis.

Visit frequency indicates the use of differentiated patterns among demographic and socio-economic groups. Among the respondents who answered that they used the library, 40 respondents (20 percent) use the library on a weekly basis, 80 respondents (40 percent) use the library once in a month, 50 respondents (25 percent) use the library once in a quarter and 30 respondents (15 percent) use the library once in a year or less. The fact that the visits are predominantly monthly means that the involvement is moderate and not deep or regular.

Age-wise Difference

The age factor is important in the frequency of visit. The respondents in the age range of 1524 years showed a relatively better rate of visitation weekly and monthly. This segment comprises of students who are mostly examining thereby demand more textbooks, reference materials as well as study space. On the contrary, patients aged 35–49 and 50+ demonstrated less frequent visitation per week and were more likely to visit every quarter or even few times a year. The aged people visit the library with certain intentions like checking newspapers or information relating to the government and not studying.

This age difference indicates that the younger population perceives the library as a place of academic support and the age category that is older views the library as a supplementary one.

Comparison of students vs Working Adults.

The pattern can further be explained by a comparative analysis of the students and working adults. The largest number of visitors in the week is comprised of students because of the academic needs, preparation of competitive exams, and availability of study resources. The monthly or quarterly category mostly applies to working adults comprising of the farmers, small business owners and daily wage earners. Their regular visiting is hampered by occupational hectic, agricultural periods as well as time.

This is the difference that points to the fact that the frequency of use is highly dependent on the occupational structure. It is now more a part of the lives of students than it is of working adults, making libraries more integrated into their routine.

Effect of Education Level

The frequency of visits is also influenced by the level of education. Respondents who had secondary and graduate level education indicated that they used it more monthly or weekly than those who had no formal education or those with primary school education only. Patients of high education level will be more inclined to see the importance of information resources and be interested in knowledge. On the other hand, the least literate respondents are less confident about the utilization of library services and thus they use less often.

The statistical trend indicates that the educational level is positively correlated with frequent use of the library. This implies that the programs that support literacy should be magnified to attract more uneducated populations.

All in all, although the use of monthly visits prevails in the pattern of usage, the relatively low rate of visits per week indicates that there is a necessity to change rural libraries into more mundane and community-based facilities instead of infrequent resource centers.

5.4 Service Preferences

The findings indicate that the primary use in rural libraries is borrowing books, which constitutes three-quarters of the total use. This demonstrates that the old library services have not been lost and this is particularly so to students examining and to the job seekers. The reading books such as textbooks, reference books, magazines, and other reading materials are considered an important asset, and thus rural libraries still remain one of the most important sources of printed information.

Nonetheless, merely 30 of the population reported using digital services like access to the internet. The reason behind the low usage can be due to bad digital infrastructure, unstable connectivity, lack of devices, or the lack of understanding of digital tools and services. This implies that traditional services are robust, but the digital capability of rural libraries is not developed. Coupled with enhancing technology centers and training about digital abilities, the rural

libraries may become the hybrid centers, which provide both offline and online resources, thus making them more relevant and able to influence the rural communities (Raman, 2020) [18].

5.5 Satisfaction Insights

Rural residents seem to be somewhat content with the library. Approximately 50 per cent rated the library 4 or 5 out of 5. They preferred that there were books and the library had the quiet space where they could study and that the staff were assistive. These advantages demonstrate that basic information and learning requirements of many users are being addressed. Simple printed books and quiet learning atmosphere remains applicable particularly to students and individuals who are going through the competitive exams.

However, it was revealed that a number of respondents were dissatisfied with some of the services. The primary issues were small book collection or old collections, lack of specialized books, and poor digital facilities. Users complained of untrustworthy internet and up to date digital devices that prevent them to access latest information. The results indicate that the simple services do not go wrong; however, the library should have improved collections and technology. According to previous studies, it is observed that modernisation of rural libraries will enhance user satisfaction, repeat visits and promote rural development.

5.6 Factors Influencing Library Use

The paper establishes several socio-economic and structural variables contributing greatly to the use of rural library services.

5.6.1 Socio-Economic Status

The level of income has a direct influence on the accessibility and utilization of library services. Middle-income household respondents showed more usage than low-income households. People of a poorer background usually have some livelihoods to attend to rather than engaging in educational or informational visitations. Moreover, other indirect costs like traveling and opportunity cost of time minimize the frequent use of libraries among the low-income groups.

5.6.2 Education Level

The level of education became one of the most influential factors of using libraries. Respondents who possessed secondary and higher education were more knowledgeable about the available services and used them more often. Education increases information-seeking behavior and confidence in learning how to use library resources. Conversely, the less literate people tend to be timid or feel that the library does not have anything to offer.

5.6.3 Occupation

Occupation plays a major role as far as usage patterns are concerned. Scholars and job hunters are the most frequent users as they have to take academic and competitive examination. The frequency is reduced in farmers and daily wage workers due to time limit and seasonal working cycles. Small business owners and government employees also use in the middle tiers, mostly to visit either newspapers or certain information.

This professional diversity signifies that libraries have to conform services to the community work tendencies.

5.6.4 Digital Literacy

Digital literacy becomes more and more significant in the use of libraries. The respondents with the basic computer knowledge used internet facilities and online resources more. Nevertheless, the use was limited due to limited digital

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[18] *Raman, P. (2020). Digital transformation of rural libraries and information access in developing communities. Journal of Library Development Studies, 12(2), 45–58.*

capabilities and ineffective internet connectivity. Digital divide is still a major challenge towards realization of full potential of rural library services.

5.6.5 Family Support and Social Environment.

The involvement of the family and the social perception has an effect on the library participation, particularly in the female and younger users. Those respondents who indicated that family environments were helpful were disposed to visit more often. However, those with mobility challenges or conservative gender roles expressed a low participation rate. The culture of reading in the household is socially accepted and it has a positive correlation with frequent usage.

Analytical Insight

Those results indicate that the use of libraries is not conditioned by the extent of awareness only but depends on the interaction of socio-economic, educational, occupational, and cultural factors. These determinants need to be resolved using specific interventions. interventions can significantly enhance regular and inclusive library utilization.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Depending on the outcome of the study, a number of strategic suggestions are made in order to enhance the use and efficacy of rural library services. These suggestions aim at increasing awareness as well as structural, technological and socio-cultural barriers that reduce regular use.

6.1 Enhancing Awareness and Outreach Programs.

In spite of the moderate awareness level, the major part of rural population is not aware of existing services. Libraries must work more closely with schools, panchayats, self-help groups and community leaders in promoting services. Visibility can be increased by regular awareness drives, reading campaigns, village meetings and attending local events. Newly enrolled students and community members can also be introduced to library resources and facilities using special orientation sessions. The outreach programs should be consistent as opposed to periodic to sustain the interest.

6.2 Collection Development based on the users.

The research points out that the old or unimportant book collections would decrease the desire to use libraries. Consequently, the library in the rural areas ought to be on a demand basis in their choice of materials. The kind of books and resources needed can be seen by conducting regular user surveys to determine what is needed e.g. competition examination, information on agriculture, government schemes, vocational skills manuals and local language books. Regular updates of collections will be useful and will boost visitations.

6.3 Digital Infrastructure Growth and Training.

The services provided digitally have not been fully harnessed because of poor infrastructure and lack of digital literacy. It is necessary to enhance internet connectivity in libraries, offer working computers, and initiate simple training programs on basic digital literacy. Libraries can become relevant in the modern technology-driven world by conducting workshops on online job applications, e-government services and online payments. The increase in digital access will also enable closing the rural digital divide as well as information access measures that are not limited to printed materials.

6.4 Relaxed and Prolonged Operating Hours.

The number of operating hours is limited so that working adults, farmers and daily wage earners are denied access. The libraries should also think of the possibility of extending the hours to evening or weekend to cater to various occupational groups. The flexible schedule will facilitate more inclusive participation and motivate people to visit regularly. Accessibility could also be enhanced by seasonal adjustments during the high season in agriculture.

6.5 Mobile Library and outreach services.

The problem of distance and transportation barriers could be solved by introducing the services of mobile libraries. Mobile vans or book delivery services in isolated hamlets can make sure that those that are not close to the main library building are not deprived of resources. Membership and new user promotion can also be done by making periodic outreach visits.

6.6 Community-based and Gender-Inclusive Programs.

According to the study, the level of participation is less among women owing to social and mobility limitations. The libraries are supposed to arrange women-oriented reading, skill training and awareness programs in liaison with the local women self-help groups. This will provide a friendly and secure atmosphere that will spur more female participation. In the same way, community involvement can be enhanced through youth clubs and reading circles of senior citizens.

6.7 Frequent Monitoring and Evaluation.

The services should be assessed continuously to be effective. Libraries are expected to keep a record of their use, and do yearly feedback surveys, and gauge the level of satisfaction among users. Decision-making that is based on data can assist in the enhancement of services in a systematic way and resourceful distribution.

6.8 General Strategic Implication.

The recommendations underline that rural libraries need to change their status of passive book-lending centers to active community learning facilities. Through the focus on the accessibility, relevance, digital inclusion, and community engagement, rural libraries can increase the level of utilization and become the source of educational and social development to a considerable degree.

VII. CONCLUSION

The research indicates that there is a huge gap between awareness of rural libraries and their utilization. Most of the respondents indicated that they knew that there were library facilities in their villages, however very few of the people visited libraries. This gap demonstrates that even knowing that a library exists does not mean that people will visit it. It is easy to get to the library, people have more or less money, other conditions of their everyday life all this is important. The education, type of job, income and skills of people on computers also affect their frequency of visiting libraries. Other issues in libraries are limited buildings, outdated collections of books, limited working hours and lack of online material. Such issues are similar to other studies which indicate that rural libraries require constant support and community-based initiatives to remain useful. Unless libraries continue to adapt to the needs of the locals, they will go underutilized.

Some actions are required to bridge the gap between awareness and use. These may involve outreach, school partnerships, greater digital service, mobile libraries and books that reflect local interests. Engaging the community in the planning and evaluation process makes the individuals feel like they own the library and utilize its services more. According to UNESCO, the public libraries are the key to equal access to information and lifelong learning. Thus, intelligent investments and open policies are required to transform rural libraries into an active community center contributing to social and education growth.

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