

ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA WITH REFERENCE TO CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF ODISHA

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Libraries play a very crucial role in the higher education institutions by providing essential resources, academic support, and intellectual spaces for students, faculty, and researchers. Without a modern library, no academic institution can sustain and its existence is very much inevitable for any educational institution. This research article explores the specific role of libraries in higher education in India, with a special focus on the Central Library of the Central University of Odisha situated at Koraput. It examines the functions, services, and contributions of libraries in supporting academic endeavours, facilitating research and study, promoting information literacy, and fostering a vibrant scholarly community. The article also discusses the challenges and opportunities faced by the libraries in adapting to the digital age and catering to the diverse needs of higher education stakeholders.

Introduction

Libraries have been integral to the educational landscape in India for centuries. In the context of higher education, libraries serve as vital resources that contribute to the academic success and intellectual growth of students, faculty, and researchers. This research article explores the role of libraries in higher education institutions in India, with a specific focus on the Central Library of the Central University of Odisha situated at Koraput. The Central Library of the Central University of Odisha is a well-established and modern library that caters to the information and research needs of students, faculty, and staff. It serves as the primary repository of knowledge and offers a wide range of resources in various formats, including books, journals, e-books, e-journals, theses, dissertations, and multimedia materials. The library's collection includes a diverse range of subjects, covering disciplines such as humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, management, and more. It continuously updates

its collection to ensure it aligns with the evolving academic needs of the university's programs and research areas.

Higher Education in India: A Brief Analysis

The higher education system in India has undergone significant transformations since its independence in 1947. Here is an overview of the key developments and changes in Indian higher education from post-independence to the present day.

Expansion of Universities and Institutions: Following independence, there was a significant push to expand the higher education sector in India. The government established numerous universities, colleges, and institutes to provide access to education for a larger population. This led to a substantial increase in the number of institutions across the country.

Three-Tier University System: India adopted a three-tier university system, comprising central universities, state universities, private universities and deemed universities. Central universities are funded and regulated by the central government, state universities by state governments, private universities are funded by private bodies and

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deemed universities have autonomous status granted by the University Grants Commission (UGC). This structure provides a diverse range of institutions catering to various disciplines and specializations.

Focus on Technical and Professional Education: Recognizing the importance of technical and professional education, India established numerous engineering colleges, management institutes, medical colleges, and specialized institutions in fields like agriculture, pharmacy, architecture, and law. These institutions have played a crucial role in producing skilled professionals to meet the growing demands of the workforce.

University Grants Commission (UGC): The UGC, established in 1956, is the primary regulatory body for higher education in India. It formulates policies, grants recognition to universities, disburses funds, and monitors the quality of education. The UGC plays a significant role in promoting and maintaining standards in higher education institutions.

Expansion of Distance Education: Open and distance learning (ODL) has emerged as a popular mode of education in India. Institutions like Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) have provided flexible learning opportunities to a large number of students who are unable to pursue full-time, on-campus education. Distance education has played a crucial role in widening access to higher education in India.

Reservation Policies: India has implemented various reservation policies to address social and educational inequalities. Affirmative action measures, such as reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC), have been introduced to ensure equitable representation and access to higher education for marginalized communities.

Challenges in Quality and Infrastructure: While there has been significant growth in higher education, quality and infrastructure remain major challenges. Many institutions struggle with inadequate facilities, outdated curriculum, lack of qualified faculty, and limited research opportunities. Efforts are being made to address these issues through accreditation mechanisms, funding reforms, and initiatives to enhance research and innovation.

Emphasis on Research and Innovation: In recent years, there has been a renewed focus on research and innovation in Indian higher education. The government has launched initiatives such as the “Institution of Eminence” and “Atal Innovation Mission” to promote research excellence, entrepreneurship, and innovation in

institutions. There is an increasing emphasis on fostering research collaborations, securing research funding, and enhancing the quality and impact of research outputs.

Internationalization of Higher Education: India has witnessed an increasing trend of internationalization in higher education. Many institutions have forged collaborations with foreign universities, facilitated student and faculty exchanges, and promoted joint research initiatives. International partnerships and collaborations have contributed to knowledge exchange, global exposure, and the overall quality enhancement of higher education in India.

Digital Transformation: The advent of digital technologies has had a transformative impact on Indian higher education. E-learning platforms, online courses, virtual classrooms, and digital libraries have gained prominence, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Educational technology has facilitated remote learning, increased access to educational resources, and provided opportunities for skill development.

In conclusion, the higher education sector in India has witnessed significant expansion and diversification since independence. While access to education has improved, challenges remain a big concern related to maintaining quality.

Changing Role of Academic Libraries in India

The role of academic libraries in India has been significantly very proactive and is matching to the best of the western world. Traditionally, academic libraries have been seen as repositories of books and other physical resources, providing a quiet study environment for students and faculty members. However, with the advancement of technology and changes in information-seeking behavior, academic libraries are adapting to meet the evolving needs of their users¹. Here are some key aspects highlighting the changing role of academic libraries in India:

Digital Transformation: Academic libraries in India are embracing digital transformation by expanding their online resources and services. They are digitizing their collections, including books, journals, theses, and other materials, making them accessible to the users remotely. This paradigm shift allows for greater convenience and flexibility in accessing information, particularly for students and faculty who may not be physically present on campus.

Information Literacy and Research Support: Academic libraries are actively involved in promoting information literacy skills among students and faculty

members. They provide training sessions and workshops on effective research techniques, prompt engineering, critical evaluation of information sources, citation management, and academic integrity. Librarians play a crucial role in guiding users through the research process, helping them find relevant and reliable resources for their studies and research.

Collaboration and Partnership: Libraries in academic institutions are increasingly collaborating with various stakeholders, both within and outside the institution. They work closely with faculty members to incorporate information literacy into the curriculum and support research activities. Academic libraries also collaborate with other libraries, both nationally and internationally, to share physical and human resources, exchange best practices, and enhance the range of available materials for their users.

Technology Integration: To keep up with the changing information landscape, academic libraries in India are integrating technology into their services. They provide online catalogues, electronic databases, and digital repositories to facilitate easy access to resources. Many libraries have implemented library management systems and discovery platforms that allow users to search and retrieve information efficiently. Additionally, libraries are exploring emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data analytics to improve services and enhance user experience².

Learning Spaces and Community Engagement: While physical collections remain relevant, academic libraries are transforming their physical spaces to cater to the changing needs of users. They are creating collaborative spaces, group study areas, and multimedia centres equipped with the latest technologies. These spaces serve as hubs for academic and intellectual activities, promoting collaboration, innovation, and knowledge sharing. Libraries also organize events, exhibitions, and author talks to engage the academic community and foster a culture of lifelong learning³.

Open Access and Open Educational Resources (OER): Academic libraries in India are actively advocating for open access publishing and promoting the use of open educational resources. They support initiatives that enable the free and unrestricted access to scholarly research, thereby bridging the gap between researchers and information. Libraries often act as repositories for institutional research outputs and facilitate the dissemination of knowledge within and beyond the academic community⁴.

In summing up, the role of academic libraries in India has expanded beyond being mere repositories of physical resources rather it is now very much pro-active in providing different value added services as per the need of the users.

Functions and Services of Libraries in Higher Education

- **Access to Information:** Libraries provide access to a wide range of resources, including books, journals, databases, and multimedia materials. They serve as repositories of knowledge, enabling users to explore various subjects and stay updated with the latest research and developments.
- **Support for Research and Study:** Libraries offer services to support research and study activities. These services include assistance in locating relevant resources, literature reviews, research consultations, and access to specialized databases and research tools.
- **Learning Spaces:** Libraries provide dedicated spaces for individual and collaborative learning. They offer quiet study areas, computer labs, private study rooms, and discussion areas, fostering an environment conducive to academic activities and scholarly interactions.
- **Digital Resources and Technology:** Libraries have adapted to the digital age by providing access to online databases, e-books, e-journals, and digital archives. They also offer computer facilities, Wi-Fi access, and other technological tools to support research and learning.
- **Information Literacy and Skills Development:** Libraries play a crucial role in promoting information literacy among users. They offer training sessions, workshops, and resources to enhance users' ability to find, evaluate, and effectively use information. These initiatives foster critical thinking, research skills, and lifelong learning capabilities.
- **Specialized Collections:** Libraries often develop specialized collections in various subject areas to cater to the specific needs of academic programs. These collections may include rare books, manuscripts, maps, archives, and other unique materials that contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage and facilitate advanced research.

Vision of Establishing Central Universities under 2009 act of Parliament

The establishment of central universities under the Central Universities Act, 2009, was driven by specific intentions and a vision to enhance the quality of higher education and promote academic excellence in India⁵. Here are the key intentions and vision behind the establishment of central universities under the 2009 Act:

- **Expansion of Higher Education:** One of the primary intentions was to expand access to quality higher education across India. The establishment of central universities aimed to bridge the gap in educational opportunities and ensure that students from various regions of the country have access to higher education institutions of national importance.
- **Promoting Academic Excellence:** The vision behind central universities was to establish institutions that promote academic excellence and provide a high-quality learning environment. These universities were envisioned as centers of excellence in teaching, research, and innovation, fostering intellectual growth and nurturing talent across diverse disciplines.
- **Interdisciplinary Approach:** Central universities were intended to encourage an interdisciplinary approach to education and research. They aimed to break down traditional disciplinary boundaries and promote collaboration among different academic disciplines, fostering a holistic and integrated learning experience.
- **Research and Innovation:** The establishment of central universities aimed to create research-intensive environments where cutting-edge research and innovation can thrive. These universities were envisioned as hubs for research and development, providing state-of-the-art facilities and resources to support faculty and student research in various domains.
- **Regional Development:** Central universities were also intended to contribute to the overall development of the regions in which they are established. By establishing universities in different parts of the country, the aim was to promote regional growth, enhance educational infrastructure, and create opportunities for local communities.

- **Social Inclusion:** Central universities under the 2009 Act were established with a vision of promoting social inclusion and ensuring equitable access to higher education. They aimed to provide educational opportunities for marginalized sections of society, including Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), and economically disadvantaged students.
- **International Collaboration:** The vision behind central universities was to foster international collaboration and engagement. These universities aimed to establish partnerships with reputed international institutions, promoting academic exchange, research collaboration, and global exposure for faculty and students.
- **Autonomy and Innovation:** Central universities were intended to have a certain level of autonomy in their governance and decision-making processes. The aim was to create an environment that encourages innovation, flexibility, and adaptability, allowing these institutions to respond effectively to emerging trends in higher education and contribute to the growth and development of the sector.

In summary, the establishment of central universities under the 2009 Act aimed to expand access to quality higher education, promote academic excellence, foster research and innovation, contribute to regional development, promote social inclusion, encourage interdisciplinary approaches, and facilitate international collaboration⁶. These universities were envisioned as key drivers of educational transformation and development in India.

Central Library, Central University of Odisha: Facilities and Services

In any academic institution, Library plays a vital role in supporting and furthering the academic and research mission. The CUO Library established in 2009 and aims to be a leading academic research library for the region and for the nation. The mission of the library is to share and promote knowledge to its users by effective dissemination of information through cutting edge technologies. It also has the mission to manage its intellectual output for posterity by using suitable latest technologies. The following are the services presently rendered by the Central Library to its patrons⁷.

- **Dedicated Library Website**

The library website typically has a homepage that serves as an entry point for users. It may include a search bar, featured resources or services, news and announcements, and quick links to important sections of the website. It is an online platform that provides access to various resources, services, and information related to a library. It serves as a gateway for users to explore and utilize the library's offerings⁸. Central Library has developed its own website to provide latest information & services to the user. Link: <https://library.cuo.ac.in/>

- **Cyber Library**

The concept of a Cyber Library refers to a digital or virtual library that utilizes technology and the internet to provide access to a wide range of digital resources and services. It leverages digital technologies to store, organize, and deliver information and resources to users remotely. It also offers flexibility, convenience, and a vast array of resources to support research, learning, and information needs in the digital age⁹. The Central Library facilitates a dedicated web portal Cyber Library which includes various lists of useful e-resources such as e-books, e-journals, video lectures, subject gateways, databases etc. The facility can be accessed through: <https://library.cuo.ac.in/cyberlibrary/>

- **Subject Research Guide**

The objective of this Subject/Research guide is to provide subject specific information which are at present available to CUO community. This is not a comprehensive guide, but rather a selective list of resources that are most useful in getting the required information on a particular subject. This guide will help you to access resources such as Books, print Journals & Magazines, e-journals, subscribed databases, Open Access Educational Resources (OERs), Technology Enabled Learning resources (Videos, Lessons, etc.) and library catalogue on a single platform. Central Library has a dedicated platform for each of the department of the University, wherein one can find the departmental information in a nutshell. The facility can be accessed through: <https://libguide.cuo.ac.in/subjects/index.php>

- **Electronic Thesis and Dissertations (ETDs)**

Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) refer to the digital versions of research papers submitted by graduate students as a requirement for their academic degrees, typically at the master's or doctoral level. Instead of submitting a traditional print copy, ETDs are submitted and stored electronically. Central Library is hosting all its awarded electronic thesis and dissertations in a repository. The facility can be accessed through: <https://library.cuo.ac.in/etds/.html>

- **Remote Access Facility of E-Resources**

Remote access facility of e-resources refers to the ability of users to access electronic resources such as e-books, e-journals, databases, and other digital materials remotely, from anywhere with an internet connection. It allows users to access these resources outside the physical premises of a library or educational institution¹⁰. Central Library, CUO also provides remote access facility to the subscribed e-resources through the INFED (INDIAN Access Management Federation) facility which can be accessible anywhere at any time 24×7. The facility can be accessed through: <https://idp.cuo.ac.in/>

- **Institutional Digital Repository (IDR)**

An Institutional Digital Repository (IDR) is a digital platform or repository that serves as a centralized online space for storing, organizing, and providing access to digital content produced by an institution. It is typically managed by academic and research institutions, including universities, colleges, research organizations, and libraries. A repository of intellectual output of the Central University of Odisha has been created using DSpace software. The facility can be accessed through: <https://library.cuo.ac.in/services/institutional-digital-repository.html>

- **Online Public Access Catalogue**

An Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) is an online database or catalogue that provides access to the library's collection of resources, allowing users to search, browse, and locate materials. It serves as an electronic version of a traditional card catalogue or cataloguing system. Central Library has developed its own OPAC and Web-OPAC which is accessible over the internet. This facility can be accessed through: <https://opac.cuo.ac.in/>

- **New Arrivals Service**

The New Arrivals Service in a library is a feature or service that highlights recently acquired materials or resources that have been added to the library's collection. It helps library users stay updated on the latest additions to the library and facilitates easy discovery of new and relevant resources. All the newly added books are kept in separately for display in the new arrivals section as well as also can be accessed online at <https://library.cuo.ac.in/services/new-arrival-services.html>

- **Talking Library**

A Talking Library for visually impaired individuals is a specialized library that provides access to books, magazines, and other reading materials in formats specifically designed for individuals with visual impairments. Central Library utilizes technologies and resources to convert printed materials into accessible formats, enabling visually impaired individuals to access and enjoy literature and educational content. At Central Library, Central University of Odisha, a dedicated talking library facility is available.

- **E-Resource Access Facilities**

E-resources in a university library refer to electronic resources or digital materials that are available to students, faculty, and staff through the library's online platforms. These resources complement and enhance the traditional print collection, providing access to a wide range of scholarly information. The e resources comprise of E-books, E-journals, Databases, Online Reference tools and Multimedia resources etc. Link: <https://library.cuo.ac.in/resources/a-to-z-resources.html>

- **CUO's IRINS**

The Indian Research Information Network System (IRINS) is an initiative by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) to create a comprehensive research information network in India. It aims to develop a digital platform that facilitates the exchange, dissemination, and discovery of research outputs and scholarly information. IRINS is an important initiative in India's research landscape, aimed at promoting research collaboration, open access, and the effective dissemination of scholarly information. For better visibility of academic and research

activities by the CUO's users' community the Central Library also provides the facility of Indian Research Information Network System (IRINS) in which can be accessed at <https://cuo.irins.org/>

- **Institutional Collaborations**

Institutional collaboration with university libraries not only enhances access to resources and services but also promotes a culture of collaboration, innovation, and collective problem-solving. It leverages the strengths of individual libraries to collectively advance the mission of supporting teaching, learning, and research in the academic community. Central Library, CUO has put its effort to join hand with reputed institutions like INFLIBNET, DELNET etc. to enhance the user experience by offering seamless access to resources.

Conclusion

The role of libraries in higher education in India, exemplified by the Central Library at the Central University of Odisha, is crucial for supporting academic pursuits, providing access to information, promoting research, and fostering a vibrant scholarly community. The Central Library's initiatives, collaborations, and partnerships with other institutions and organizations are amplifying the contributions to the scholarly community and the overall higher education ecosystem. Libraries continue to evolve in response to digital advancements and changing user expectations, ensuring their relevance and effectiveness in the modern higher education landscape. Libraries need to align their services and resources with the evolving needs and expectations of higher education stakeholders. □

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