Beyond Digital Adoption: An Analysis of Strategic Gaps in Collaboration, Collection Management, and User Safety in Deemed to be Universities in Karnataka

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ABSTRACT

Academic libraries are integral to the scholarly ecosystem, necessitating robust management frameworks to navigate the complexities of digital transformation, evolving user expectations, and the imperative for secure, accessible knowledge environments. This study presents a comprehensive investigation into the operational paradigms governing library resource management, user access, and evaluation practices within the context of higher education in India. The research focuses specifically on a select group of deemed universities in Karnataka, offering a critical lens through which to examine contemporary administrative approaches. The investigation is centred on core library functions, including methodologies for resource procurement and collection development, mechanisms for assessing user needs and accessibility, and the implementation of policies concerning user privacy, safety, and collaborative resource sharing. Employing a multi-faceted analytical approach, this study synthesises institutional data to benchmark prevailing practices against established principles of library and information science. The objective is to delineate the alignment of these academic libraries with modern service standards and to identify latent vulnerabilities within their operational structures. The analysis reveals a landscape characterised by concerted efforts to formalise policies and adopt digital infrastructures, yet also underscores significant strategic and operational dissonances. The study culminates in a critical discussion of the implications of these disjunctures for the long-term efficacy and resilience of academic library services. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader discourse on library management by proposing a forward-looking framework of recommendations aimed at fortifying strategic planning, enhancing user-centric service delivery, and fostering a more collaborative and secure academic knowledge commons.

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KEYWORDS: Academic Libraries, Collection Management, User Privacy, Library Consortia, Digital Repositories, India, Library Assessment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries serve as the cornerstone of higher education, facilitating learning, research, and the dissemination of knowledge. In an era of rapid digital transformation and escalating user expectations, these institutions are compelled to adopt robust, dynamic policies for resource management, user access, and service evaluation to maintain their pivotal role. This study presents a critical examination of contemporary library management practices within nine deemed universities in Karnataka, India. It focuses specifically on patterns of daily usage, resource procurement strategies, the implementation of collection development and evaluation policies, and adherence to modern standards of user privacy and safety.

The primary aim of this research is to benchmark current practices against established library science principles and identify areas of strength and vulnerability. By analysing operational data, this study seeks to understand the extent to which these institutions have aligned with modern library standards and where strategic improvements are most urgently required. The subsequent sections of this paper include a synthesis of relevant literature, a detailed account of the methodology, a combined presentation and discussion of results organised by thematic areas, and a concluding section that outlines actionable recommendations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing body of literature provides a critical framework for understanding the evolving challenges and best practices in academic librarianship, which directly informs the variables under investigation in this study. Effective collection management is guided by formal policies that dictate acquisition, evaluation, and de-accessioning. Amanulla (2015), in a case study of a college library in Chennai, demonstrated the utility of continuous evaluation based on usage, age, and relevance for informed collection decisions. Similarly, Mishra (2019) affirmed stock verification as a practical tool for collection maintenance. However, Al Qasim (2023) underscores that a comprehensive policy must integrate selection criteria with systematic evaluation, including weeding. This literature sets the context for assessing the evaluation criteria such as usage, condition, and currency, employed by the libraries in the present study.

The shift towards user-centric services necessitates robust mechanisms for needs assessment and data protection. Singh & Brar (2023), in their systematic review, emphasise that libraries must respond to users demands for greater data control and transparency, often facilitated through feedback systems and surveys. However, this enhanced access creates a tension with user privacy. As explored by Pekala (2017), the design of digital discovery tools must balance usability with the ethical imperative to protect user data. This dichotomy is further examined by Fifarek (2002), who argues that the adoption of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) inherently increases risks to patron data, necessitating strong technical controls and staff education, a point echoed by Noh (2014).

Inter-library collaboration through consortia is a recognised strategy for overcoming budgetary constraints and expanding resource access. Studies on consortia in India, such as those by Bavakutty & Abdul Azeez (2006) and Srivastava (2017), highlight benefits like cost-sharing and improved licensing leverage, while also noting challenges related to sustainability and technical infrastructure. In the realm of electronic resources, Verma & Singh (2021) and Patra (2017) document the specific challenges faced by Indian libraries, including complex licensing agreements and a lack of specialised skills for managing e-resources, making consortium membership even more critical. This literature review establishes a foundation for analysing the study's data on user assessment, privacy measures,

collaborative initiatives, and e-resource management, allowing for a nuanced discussion that connects empirical findings with established scholarly discourse.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To assess the current practices in resource procurement and collection development across selected deemed to be university libraries in Karnataka.
- To evaluate the level of user accessibility, feedback collection, and assessment mechanisms in place.
- To analyse the implementation of safety, security, and privacy policies in academic library environments.
- To identify gaps in inter-library collaboration, data protection, and emergency preparedness.

4. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The scope of this research encompasses an analysis of library operations across nine deemed-to-be universities in the state of Karnataka, India. The investigation focuses on key operational areas, including procurement methods, user access policies, collection development, and the implementation of safety and privacy protocols.

A primary limitation of this study is its confinement to a specific category of universities within a single Indian state, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other regions or types of institutions. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data from the institutions, while valuable, may reflect documented policy rather than real-time operational efficacy or consistent practical application.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey design. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire administered to the librarians-in-charge at nine deemed universities in Karnataka. The instrument, comprising primarily closed-ended questions, gathered empirical data on library management practices. Targeting senior leadership ensured authoritative responses reflecting official policy. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, with results presented as frequencies and percentages.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from the nine universities are analysed and discussed below under thematic headings that align with the study's objectives and the reviewed literature.

6.1 User Access and Engagement Patterns

The analysis of daily footfall, ranging from 150 to 600 visitors (Table 1), indicates a high level of user engagement, particularly at institutions like YENEPOYA and JAIN. This underscores the library's continued relevance as a physical space for academic activity.

Table 1: Library Usage and Access Patterns

University	Avg. Daily Visitors	Visitor Access Policy
BLDE	150	Allowed to All Visitors
IIITB	150	Allowed to All Visitors

IISc	334	Allowed to All Visitors
JAIN	525	Allowed to All Visitors
JSS	420	Case-by-Case Basis
NITTE	155	Accompanied by Staff
SAHE	160	Case-by-Case Basis
SDUAHE	200	Accompanied by Staff
YENEPOYA	600	Case-by-Case Basis

However, divergent access policies reveal different philosophies towards open access. While four libraries permit all visitors, three others restrict access to either a "case-by-case basis" or require them to be "accompanied by staff." These restrictive policies, while potentially addressing security or resource constraints, may inadvertently limit the library's role as a wider community knowledge resource and hinder serendipitous scholarly access.

6.2 Strategic Collection Management

A universally positive finding is that all nine libraries (100%) have a formal Collection Development Policy (Table 2), indicating a structured approach to resource acquisition. Procurement is predominantly conducted through vendors (100%) and publishers (89%), with only 33% utilising donations, suggesting a professional and focused acquisition strategy.

Table 2: Resource Procurement and Collection Development

Parameter	Count of Universities
Procurement Basis	
Budget Only	3
Licensing/Agreement Only	1
Both Budget and Licensing	4
Procurement Sources	
Vendors/Distributors	9
Publishers	8
Donations	3
Policy	
Collection Development Policy Available	9

6.3 Evaluation of Users and Library Collection

A critical gap emerges in collection evaluation practices (Table 3). While 'Usage' is a primary criterion for 89% of libraries, the 'Condition of the Book' is considered by none, and the 'Currency of Material' by only one institution. This over-reliance on usage statistics, as cautioned by Saikia & Barooah, risks maintaining collections that are physically deteriorated and intellectually outdated. A more holistic evaluation framework, as suggested by Amanulla (2015) and Al Qasim (2023), which integrates condition, currency, and relevance, is essential for a vibrant and useful collection.

Table 3: User Assessment and Collection Evaluation Criteria

Parameter	No. of Universities
User Assessment through	
User Survey	5
Interactions	4
Feedback	6
Subject Expert Suggestions	6
Collection Evaluation Criteria	
Usage	8
Currency of Material	1

6.4 Collaboration and Resource Sharing

The data reveals a significant area for improvement in collaborative efforts. As shown in Table 4, only a third (33%) of the libraries are members of a consortium, and a mere 11% engage in cooperative collection development (Table 4). This indicates a highly siloed approach to resource building, missing the cost-saving and resource-expanding benefits of consortia extensively documented in the Indian context by Bavakutty & Abdul Azeez (2006). While Inter-Library Loan (ILL) facilities are widely available (89%), the low consortium membership suggests that these efforts are likely ad-hoc rather than part of a strategic, systemic partnership.

Table 4: Infrastructure, Digital Access, and Technical Facilities

Facility/Service	Yes	No
Library Consortium Membership	3	6
Centralised/Cooperative Cataloguing	3	6
Digital Repository	8	1
Institutional Repository	4	5
Inter-Library Loan (ILL) Facility	8	1
Resource Sharing Initiatives	5	4
Web OPAC Facility	9	-
Dedicated OPAC Computers	9	-

6.5 The Privacy-Security Paradox

A stark contradiction is evident in the implementation of privacy and security measures. On paper, policies are strong: 89% have a privacy policy, and 100% have a process to revoke user access for policy violations (Table 5). However, the technical implementation is weak, with only 44% encrypting patron data. This creates a critical vulnerability where policies are rendered ineffective against potential data breaches. This finding resonates with Fifarek's (2002) early warnings about the risks introduced by technology without corresponding technical controls. Furthermore, while 100% of libraries report providing user education on privacy/security, the nature and effectiveness of this education are called into question by the lack of fundamental technical safeguards like encryption.

Table 5: Library Governance, Safety, and Privacy Policies

Policy/Practice	Yes	No
Library Committee	9	0
Cooperative Collection Development	1	8
Weed-out Policy	6	3
Periodic Collection Evaluation	6	3
Privacy Policy for Students and Staff	8	1
Process to Revoke User Access	9	0
User Education on Privacy/Security	9	0
Encryption of Patron Data	4	5
Video Surveillance System	8	1
Emergency Exits & Signage	8	1
Library Staff Trained in First Aid	4	5

6.6 Infrastructure versus Safety Preparedness

The libraries demonstrate strong adoption of digital infrastructure, with universal Web OPAC access and a high prevalence of digital repositories (89%). This indicates a successful transition towards providing digital services. However, this technological advancement is not matched by a corresponding focus on user well-being and safety. A mere 44% of libraries have staff trained in first aid. This gap highlights a potential prioritisation of digital and information services over immediate physical user safety, representing a significant liability and an area requiring urgent attention.

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Resource Sharing Initiatives	5	4
Web OPAC Facility	9	-
Dedicated OPAC Computers	9	-
Maintains International Price Proof	9	-
Uses Signboards to Assist Users	9	-

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides a snapshot of the current state of library management in a select group of deemed-to-be universities in Karnataka, revealing a landscape of contrasts. There is clear evidence of progress in digitisation and policy formulation, as seen in the widespread adoption of digital repositories, web OPACs, and formal collection

development and privacy policies. However, this progress is undermined by critical operational deficiencies. The most pressing concerns lie in three areas, the privacy-security paradox, where policies are not backed by technical enforcement like data encryption, the neglect of user safety, evidenced by the lack of first-aid trained staff, and the insufficient collaborative spirit, reflected in low consortium membership and cooperative collection development. To bridge these gaps and foster more resilient, user-centric, and collaborative libraries, the following recommendations are proposed,

- Suggested to Librarians or the concerned department to move beyond policy documents to implement robust technical safeguards. Mandatory encryption of all patron data should be an immediate priority to align practice with policy and build user trust.

- Comprehensive first-aid and emergency response training should be made mandatory for all front-line library staff. This is a fundamental duty of care that is currently overlooked.

- Recommended libraries to adopt multi-faceted evaluation criteria that balance usage statistics with assessments of physical condition and intellectual currency to ensure collections remain relevant and usable.

- University administrations and library committees can actively incentivise and fund participation in national and regional library consortia. This is a proven strategy for maximising resource access while optimising limited budgets.

By addressing these identified vulnerabilities, the libraries can evolve from being mere repositories of information to becoming truly robust, secure, and collaborative hubs that effectively support the academic and research missions of their parent institutions.

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