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Assessing the Role of INFLIBNET in Higher Education in India: A Comprehensive Overview

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Abstract

The modernization of Indian higher education has sparked a knowledge revolution, with libraries and information networks playing a vital role in meeting academic information needs. This paper aims to elaborate on the impact of INFLIBNET (Information and Library Network) in Indian higher education. Established in 1991, INFLIBNET serves as the national network for Indian university libraries, leveraging technology to facilitate knowledge access, academic communication, and ICT infrastructure development. To provide a comprehensive understanding, the paper begins with an overview of the Indian higher education system, highlighting its growth and significance in shaping the nation's intellectual capital. It then delves into the landscape of library and information networks, showcasing their pivotal role in supporting the dissemination of knowledge and research.

INFLIBNET emerges as a leading network in this landscape, driving library automation, resource sharing, and scholarly communication. The study examines INFLIBNET's objectives and activities, shedding light on its notable initiatives such as the development of the Union Catalogue, which consolidates information from various libraries and provides a unified search platform. Additionally, the paper explores INFLIBNET's software development and consultancy programs, which empower libraries to embrace digital technologies and enhance their services. The significance of INFLIBNET's contributions to Indian higher education is emphasized throughout the paper. By fostering collaboration and resource sharing, INFLIBNET has facilitated access to a vast array of academic resources and has played a crucial role in bridging the knowledge gap. The paper acknowledges the potential for future growth and expansion of INFLIBNET, anticipating its continued support for the progress and prosperity of the nation by enabling seamless access to information, promoting academic collaboration, and fostering innovation in Indian higher education.

Keywords: Higher education, INFLIBNET, library and information network

Introduction

Indian higher education is undergoing a transformative phase driven by the Information/Knowledge revolution. Library and Information Networks have emerged as crucial facilitators of resource sharing in response to the growing demand for information and knowledge resources within the academic community. The National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) defines networks as collaborations between libraries and organizations that exchange information for a specific purpose. In India, the Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET) has gained momentum by automating and networking academic libraries, becoming a frontrunner in the field. INFLIBNET utilizes networking infrastructure and provides access to a wide range of information resources, promoting effective resource sharing among academic libraries. This study aims to assess the role of INFLIBNET in the modern Indian higher education landscape, examining its networking capabilities and information access provisions. Understanding INFLIBNET's contributions will provide valuable insights

into the benefits and challenges of Library and Information Networks in India's educational system.

Higher Education in India

Higher education in India is experiencing remarkable growth and expansion. The Indian higher education system encompasses education provided after 10+2, which refers to ten years of primary and secondary education followed by two years of higher secondary education. This structure allows students to pursue specialized knowledge and skills beyond the foundational level.

The landscape of higher education in India is vast, with over 17,000 colleges, 400 universities, 13 institutes of national importance, and numerous vocational institutes. This extensive network of educational institutions positions India's higher education system as one of the largest in the world. It offers diverse opportunities for students to pursue various fields of study and acquire advanced knowledge in their chosen domains.

The presence of a large number of colleges and universities reflects the country's commitment to providing access to

higher education to a wide range of individuals. These institutions serve as centers of learning, research, and innovation, fostering intellectual growth and contributing to the overall development of the nation.

Furthermore, the higher education system in India encompasses not only traditional academic disciplines but also vocational institutes that equip students with practical skills and training for specific industries and professions. This emphasis on vocational education plays a vital role in addressing the demands of the job market and promoting employability among graduates.

As the higher education sector continues to expand, it brings forth new opportunities and challenges. Efforts are being made to enhance the quality of education, promote research and innovation, and foster collaboration between academia and industries. The Indian government, along with educational institutions, is focusing on reforms and initiatives to improve the overall educational experience and outcomes for students.

Library and Information Networks in India

Library and Information Networks in India play a pivotal role in facilitating the exchange of resources and knowledge among educational institutions and research organizations. These networks are instrumental in harnessing the power of technology to provide seamless access to information and promote collaboration. Here are a few notable examples of Library and Information Networks in India:

i). Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET): INFLIBNET is a vital network that focuses on automation and networking of libraries in Indian higher education institutions. It offers various services like online bibliographic databases, e-resources, and interlibrary loan systems.

ii). DELNET (Developing Library Network): DELNET is an innovative library network that connects libraries in India and neighboring countries. It offers resource-sharing services, interlibrary loan facilities, and access to a wide range of online databases and e-journals. DELNET's Union Catalogue of books provides a consolidated database of library holdings.

iii). Consortium for e-Resources in Agriculture (CeRA): CeRA is a collaborative initiative by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) that aims to provide seamless access to agricultural research resources. It offers a digital library with e-journals, e-books, databases, and other agricultural resources to researchers and academicians across ICAR institutions.

iv). National Digital Library of India (NDLI): NDLI is an ambitious project by the Ministry of Education, Govt. of India, aimed at building a comprehensive digital library. It provides access to a vast collection of digital resources, including books, journals, thesis papers, and educational videos from various sources, enabling users to access them anytime, anywhere.

v). Indian National Digital Library in Engineering Sciences and Technology (INDEST): INDEST is a network of technical libraries in India that focuses on providing access to e-resources in engineering, technology, and allied subjects. It facilitates resource-sharing among member institutions and offers access to online databases, e-journals, and e-books.

These examples represent a fraction of the Library and Information Networks in India. These networks contribute significantly to the growth of education and research by fostering resource sharing, collaboration, and access to a vast array of information. Different Library and Information Networks in India are exhibited in Table-1.

Table 1: Different Library and Information Networks in India (Padhi, 2001)

General Networks	Library Networks (Metropolitan)	Library Networks (Wide Area)	Information Networks (Sectoral)
NICNET (1977) INDONET (1986) I-NET (1991)* RABMN (1991)	CALIBNET (1986) DELNET (1988) PUNET (1992) ADINET (1993) MALIBNET (1993) BONET (1994) MYLIBNET (1995) BALNET (1997)	INFLIBNET (1991)	ERNET (1986) VIDYANET OPNET SIRNET BTISNET DESINET (1986)

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Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET)

In today's digital age, access to information and knowledge is crucial for academic institutions and researchers. The Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET) has emerged as a pioneering entity in India, revolutionizing the way libraries and educational institutions connect, collaborate, and share resources. INFLIBNET is located in Gandhinagar, the capital city of the state of Gujarat in India. It operates from its headquarters situated in Infocity, Gandhinagar, which is a hub for information technology and related activities. This strategic location allows INFLIBNET to collaborate closely with educational institutions, research organizations, and libraries across the country, facilitating effective networking and resource sharing in the field of higher education. This paper explores the significance of INFLIBNET in empowering Indian higher education through its innovative services and contributions to the academic community.

i). Facilitating Resource Sharing: INFLIBNET's primary objective is to automate and network academic libraries across India, enabling seamless resource sharing among institutions. Through its sophisticated infrastructure, INFLIBNET facilitates the exchange of scholarly materials, research papers, e-books, journals, and other valuable resources. This resource sharing plays a vital role in bridging the knowledge gap and promoting collaborative research endeavors among universities and colleges.

ii). Digital Library Initiatives: One of INFLIBNET's flagship initiatives is the creation of digital libraries that provide access to a vast repository of electronic resources. These resources include e-books, e-journals, databases, and multimedia content. With the National Library and Information Services Infrastructure for Scholarly Content (N-LIST) program, INFLIBNET has expanded the accessibility of e-resources to educational

institutions across India. This initiative has greatly enhanced the learning and research capabilities of students, faculty, and researchers, fostering a culture of knowledge dissemination and exploration.

- iii). **Collaborative Research and Consortia:** INFLIBNET actively promotes collaborative research by forming consortia and partnerships with national and international organizations. These collaborations allow member institutions to benefit from shared resources, research collaborations, and access to specialized databases and repositories. By joining forces, academic institutions can tackle complex research challenges more effectively and leverage collective expertise for innovative breakthroughs.
- iv). **Capacity Building and Training:** INFLIBNET recognizes the importance of building digital literacy and research skills among librarians, faculty, and students. It conducts various capacity-building programs and workshops on library automation, digital resource management, research methodologies, and emerging technologies. Through these training initiatives, INFLIBNET empowers library professionals to adapt to the evolving information landscape, ensuring efficient and effective library services for the academic community.
- v). **Promoting Open Access:** INFLIBNET actively supports the Open Access movement, which promotes free and unrestricted access to scholarly literature. It encourages researchers and institutions to publish their work in open access journals and repositories. By advocating for open access, INFLIBNET contributes to the democratization of knowledge and enables a wider global audience to benefit from research findings and academic insights.

INFLIBNET has revolutionized the landscape of Indian higher education by harnessing the power of information and library networks. Its services have streamlined resource sharing, expanded access to electronic resources, fostered collaboration, and enhanced research capabilities. INFLIBNET's initiatives have significantly contributed to the growth and advancement of Indian academia, ensuring that students, faculty, and researchers have the necessary tools and resources to excel in their respective fields.

Mission and Vision

With a clear mission and vision (INFLIBNET at a Glance, 2009), INFLIBNET plays a crucial role in transforming the landscape of library and information services in India. It serves as a catalyst for innovation, collaboration, and knowledge dissemination, ensuring that the academic community has the necessary resources and support to thrive in the digital age.

Mission of INFLIBNET

- i). **Facilitating Resource Sharing:** INFLIBNET aims to automate and network academic libraries in India, enabling seamless resource sharing among institutions. Its mission is to ensure that libraries have access to a vast array of scholarly materials, research papers, e-books, journals, and other valuable resources.
- ii). **Enhancing Digital Library Infrastructure:** INFLIBNET is committed to developing and strengthening digital library infrastructure across the country. It aims to create a robust network that provides

easy and equitable access to electronic resources, promoting a culture of continuous learning and research.

- iii). **Empowering Academic Communities:** INFLIBNET strives to empower the academic community, including students, faculty, and researchers, by equipping them with the necessary tools and resources for effective teaching, learning, and research. It focuses on building digital literacy, research skills, and knowledge dissemination capabilities among stakeholders.
- iv). **Promoting Collaboration and Consortia:** INFLIBNET actively promotes collaboration among educational institutions and research organizations. Its mission is to foster partnerships and consortia to facilitate shared resources, joint research initiatives, and access to specialized databases and repositories.
- v). **Supporting Open Access:** INFLIBNET is committed to promoting the principles of open access, which advocate for unrestricted access to scholarly literature. It encourages researchers and institutions to publish their work in open access journals and repositories, ensuring that knowledge are freely available to a global audience.

Vision of INFLIBNET

- i). **Building a Knowledge Society:** INFLIBNET envisions the establishment of a knowledge society in India, where information and resources are readily accessible, shared, and utilized to foster intellectual growth, innovation, and societal development.
- ii). **Seamless Access to Information:** INFLIBNET aims to create an environment where individuals have seamless access to diverse information resources. Its vision is to ensure that users can retrieve and utilize information easily, irrespective of their geographical location or institutional affiliation.
- iii). **Continuous Innovation and Adaptation:** INFLIBNET is committed to embracing emerging technologies and innovation in library and information sciences. It envisions a dynamic ecosystem that adapts to changing needs, technological advancements, and evolving research practices.
- iv). **Empowering Libraries as Knowledge Hubs:** INFLIBNET sees libraries as central knowledge hubs in the digital era. It envisions libraries as catalysts for intellectual growth, facilitating collaborative learning, research, and information dissemination among academic communities.
- v). **Strengthening National and International Collaboration:** INFLIBNET aims to strengthen collaborations with national and international organizations to foster knowledge exchange, research collaborations, and sharing of best practices. Its vision is to enhance global connectivity and cooperation in the field of library and information networks.

By pursuing its mission and working towards its vision, INFLIBNET plays a vital role in transforming the landscape of Indian higher education, promoting research excellence, and enabling access to quality information resources.

Aims and Objectives

The objectives, as per the Memorandum of Association (MOA), are as follows (NCLIS, USA, 1975 and Satyanarayan, 2005):

- i). **Resource Sharing:** INFLIBNET aims to facilitate resource sharing among academic libraries and

institutions in India. Its objective is to create a networked environment where libraries can seamlessly exchange scholarly materials, research papers, e-books, journals, and other valuable resources, thereby enhancing access to information for the academic community.

- ii). Automation and Networking:** INFLIBNET is committed to automating and networking libraries across the country. Its objective is to leverage technology to streamline library operations, enhance efficiency, and provide seamless access to digital resources. By creating a robust network infrastructure, INFLIBNET aims to connect libraries and enable efficient resource management and sharing.
- iii). Digital Library Development:** INFLIBNET focuses on developing and strengthening digital libraries in India. Its objective is to build comprehensive digital repositories that offer a wide range of electronic resources, including e-books, e-journals, databases, and multimedia content. By expanding digital library infrastructure, INFLIBNET aims to promote digital literacy and support research and learning in the digital age.
- iv). Collaboration and Consortia:** INFLIBNET promotes collaboration and partnerships among academic institutions, libraries, and research organizations. Its objective is to foster consortia and joint initiatives that facilitate shared resources, collaborative research, and access to specialized databases and repositories.
- v). Capacity Building:** INFLIBNET recognizes the importance of building the capacity of librarians, faculty, and students in utilizing digital resources and research tools effectively. Its objective is to conduct training programs, workshops, and seminars to enhance digital literacy, research skills, and knowledge dissemination capabilities.
- vi). Open Access Advocacy:** INFLIBNET actively supports and advocates for open access initiatives. By promoting open access, INFLIBNET aims to increase the visibility and impact of Indian research and contribute to the global knowledge community.

Through its aims and objectives, INFLIBNET plays a crucial role in transforming library and information services in India. It strives to enhance resource sharing, promote digital libraries, foster collaboration, build capacity, and advocate for open access.

Activities and Services

'IndCat'

'IndCat' is the Indian National Bibliographic Database maintained by INFLIBNET, serving as a centralized catalog of Indian publications. It offers access to information about books, periodicals, theses, and more across various disciplines. The database includes both print and electronic resources, allowing users to explore and retrieve information from diverse sources. Users can search for bibliographic records, author information, subject headings, and other details of Indian publications. 'IndCat' also provides information on the availability of publications in libraries across India. It contributes to the preservation of Indian knowledge and culture by indexing publications, promoting research, and enhancing the visibility of Indian research and literature. The user-friendly interface and multiple search options facilitate easy navigation. 'IndCat' benefits researchers, students, librarians, and academicians, supporting resource discovery and knowledge dissemination. It continues

to expand, enriching the research landscape in India. With its comprehensive coverage and contribution to the Indian information ecosystem, 'IndCat' is an invaluable resource for accessing and engaging with Indian publications. Current Status (as on 31st March, 2023) of 'IndCat' is given in Table-2.

Table 2: Current Status of 'IndCat' (as on 31st March, 2023)

Name of Database	No. of Records	No. of Universities
Books	1,47,60,856(Unique Records) and 2,12,33,069(holdings)	234
Theses	4,45,353	457
Serials	37,015	238

Source: INFLIBNET Centre, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India

Activities of INFLIBNET Other than 'Indcat'

Apart from maintaining the 'IndCat' bibliographic database, INFLIBNET engages in various other activities to support the library and information services in India. Some of these activities include:

- i). Developing and Managing Digital Library Infrastructure:** INFLIBNET focuses on building and managing digital library infrastructure in India. It develops software tools and platforms that enable libraries to create, maintain, and disseminate digital collections.
- ii). National Digital Library of India (NDLI):** INFLIBNET is involved in the development and management of the National Digital Library of India (NDLI). NDLI is a digital repository that provides access to a wide range of digital educational resources including books, journals, manuscripts, audiovisual material, and more.
- iii). Training and Capacity Building:** INFLIBNET conducts training programs and workshops for librarians, library professionals, and researchers. These initiatives aim to enhance their knowledge and skills in areas such as information technology, digital library management, research data management, and open access publishing.
- iv). Research Support Services:** INFLIBNET offers research support services to academic institutions and researchers. This includes providing access to research databases, assisting with research data management, and offering bibliometric analysis to measure the impact of research outputs.
- v). Consortia Development:** INFLIBNET encourages the formation of consortia among libraries and institutions to leverage collective resources and negotiate favorable terms for access to electronic resources. It facilitates the establishment and management of consortia at both national and regional levels, enabling libraries to collaborate and share resources effectively.
- vi). Open Access Initiatives:** INFLIBNET actively promotes open access initiatives in India. It supports the creation of institutional repositories and advocates for the adoption of open access publishing models. INFLIBNET also collaborates with publishers and institutions to negotiate open access publishing agreements and raise awareness about the benefits of open access.
- vii). Networking and Collaboration:** INFLIBNET fosters networking and collaboration among libraries and information centers in India. It organizes conferences, seminars, and workshops to facilitate knowledge sharing and exchange of best practices. INFLIBNET also

collaborates with national and international organizations to promote research collaboration and enhance access to global information resources.

These activities highlight the diverse range of services and initiatives undertaken by INFLIBNET to strengthen library and information services in India. By providing technological infrastructure, training opportunities, research support, and fostering collaboration, INFLIBNET plays a vital role in supporting the academic community.

Publications

The Centre regularly publishes the following publications:

- i). **INFLIBNET Newsletter (Quarterly):** This newsletter provides updates on the activities, initiatives, and achievements of INFLIBNET. It serves as a platform to disseminate information about new services, collaborations, and advancements in library and information science.
- ii). **Guidelines for Data Capturing: A Manual:** This publication offers guidance on the process of data capturing, ensuring standardized and efficient data collection for various projects and databases managed by INFLIBNET. It provides instructions, best practices, and protocols to ensure accurate and reliable data capture.
- iii). **Proceedings of CALIBER & PLANNER:** CALIBER (Convention on Automation of Libraries in Education and Research Institutions) and PLANNER (Planning for National Library and Information Systems) are conferences organized by INFLIBNET. The proceedings publication documents the papers, presentations, and discussions held during these conferences, capturing the latest trends and developments in library automation and planning.
- iv). **Information Brochures on INFLIBNET:** These brochures provide comprehensive information about INFLIBNET, its activities, services, and resources. They serve as a handy reference for individuals and institutions seeking to understand the scope and benefits of engaging with INFLIBNET.
- v). **Course Materials on Workshops and Training Programs:** INFLIBNET conducts various workshops and training programs on topics such as digital library management, research data management, and information retrieval. Course materials are published to provide participants with learning resources, including presentations, handouts, and reference materials.
- vi). **Annual Reports:** INFLIBNET publishes annual reports that summarize its achievements, projects, and activities over the course of a year. These reports offer insights into the growth and progress of INFLIBNET, showcasing its contributions to the library and information landscape in India.
- vii). **INFLIBNET Diary with Directory of Indian Universities:** This publication serves as a diary and directory of Indian universities. It provides contact information, addresses, and important details of universities across India, facilitating communication and collaboration within the academic community.
- viii). **NUCSSAL:** National Union Catalogue of Serials in Academic Libraries: NUCSSAL is a publication that compiles and catalogues serials (journals, magazines, periodicals) available in academic libraries across India. It serves as a valuable resource for librarians and

researchers, helping them locate and access relevant serial publications.

These publications play a crucial role in disseminating information, sharing knowledge, and documenting the activities and achievements of INFLIBNET. They contribute to the professional development of library and information professionals and provide valuable resources for the academic community in India.

Conclusion

The INFLIBNET Centre has emerged as a significant asset for the Indian higher education system, effectively meeting its information needs. With its ongoing efforts and contributions, it is anticipated that the INFLIBNET Centre will continue to expand its activities and services in the future, further enhancing the progress and prosperity of the country. Its role in facilitating resource sharing, promoting digital libraries, offering research support, and advocating open access initiatives has positioned it as a vital entity in the Indian academic landscape. The INFLIBNET Centre's dedication to continuous improvement and innovation ensures that it will remain a valuable resource for the academic community, empowering education, research, and knowledge dissemination in India.

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