

A Comparative Assessment of Libraries' Contribution to 21st Century Life Skills in Banaras Hindu University and University of Allahabad

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Abstract

Libraries have evolved beyond their traditional role as repositories of books to become dynamic knowledge hubs that foster digital literacy, research skills, critical thinking, and professional development. This study investigates how libraries contribute to the acquisition of 21st-century life skills among students at Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and the University of Allahabad (AU). Through bibliometric analysis, survey research, and data evaluation, this research explores student engagement with library services, skill acquisition through digital resources, and participation in library-led educational programs. The results indicate that students actively use libraries for academic and career-related learning, with digital literacy, research skills, and critical thinking being the most frequently acquired competencies. However, challenges such as funding limitations, outdated resources, and low awareness of advanced library services restrict the effectiveness of libraries. The study recommends policy interventions, technological advancements, and awareness programs to maximize the impact of libraries in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Library, Learning, Life skills, Banaras Hindu University, University of Allahabad.

1. Introduction

Libraries are integral to educational development, serving as centres for academic research, knowledge dissemination, and skill enhancement. The rapid digital transformation of the 21st century has increased the demand for digital literacy and self-learning skills, making libraries more crucial than ever. Unlike their past role as static repositories of books, modern libraries are active learning spaces, equipping students with tools for academic and professional success.

This study examines how libraries at Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and the University of Allahabad (AU) contribute to 21st-century skills development. These skills include:

- Digital and information literacy – Understanding, evaluating, and utilizing digital information effectively.
- Critical thinking and research skills – Analyzing information sources and applying them to academic work.
- Career development skills – Resume writing, networking, and job search strategies provided by library workshops.

- Collaborative learning and communication – Group study spaces and interactive forums available in libraries.

Despite their evolving role, libraries face significant challenges, including funding constraints, lack of digital resources, and inadequate student awareness of library programs. This research investigates:

- How students engage with library services and resources.
- The role of libraries in skill development.
- Differences in library usage between BHU and AU students.
- Barriers preventing optimal utilization of library resources.

By analyzing student engagement patterns, this study aims to provide data-driven insights into how libraries contribute to academic and professional skill-building in the digital age.

2. Review of Literature

Libraries and the knowledge economy

Libraries have historically been central to education and research, providing access to knowledge and serving as hubs of intellectual activity (National Policy on Education, 1998). However, their role has expanded to include:

- Supporting lifelong learning – Libraries offer digital tools and resources for self-education.
- Providing digital literacy training – Libraries help students evaluate information, detect misinformation, and use research databases effectively (Žemaitaitytė, 2016).
- Bridging the digital divide – Public and academic libraries provide access to e-books, digital databases, and online learning platforms (Atta-Obeng & Dadzie, 2020).

Digital literacy and research skills in libraries

As technology advances, digital literacy has become essential for academic and professional success. Libraries provide:

- Access to digital databases and e-resources – Enabling students to conduct data-driven research (Singh, 2021).
- Workshops on research methodologies – Teaching students how to evaluate sources and use citation management tools (Capdarest-Arest & Navarro, 2021).
- Training in academic writing and publishing – Enhancing students' ability to publish research papers and conference presentations (Ikolo, 2022).

Libraries as career development centres

Libraries are no longer limited to academic support; they also contribute to professional growth:

- Resume-writing and job search workshops – Preparing students for employment (Spurava et al., 2022).
- Networking opportunities – Collaborations with industry leaders and academic mentors.

- Entrepreneurship support – Providing resources on business planning, start-up funding, and leadership skills (Duncan & Kayoro, 2022).

However, studies indicate that many students underutilize these services due to a lack of awareness (Rahme et al., 2020).

Challenges facing libraries in higher education

While libraries play a transformative role, they face major obstacles:

- Funding limitations – Reducing access to new technologies.
- Low engagement – Many students fail to recognize the full potential of library services.
- Digital infrastructure issues – Outdated systems hinder research capabilities (Manisha & Bansode, 2020).

Addressing these issues is crucial to ensuring libraries remain relevant and accessible in the evolving educational landscape.

3. Methodology

Research design

This study employs a mixed-method approach, including:

- Quantitative surveys – Measuring students’ engagement with library services.
- Qualitative interviews – Understanding student perceptions of library-based learning.
- Bibliometric analysis – Evaluating research output supported by library resources.

Sample population

Name of the University	Level	Male	Female
Banaras Hindu University	UG	50	50
Banaras Hindu University	PG	50	50
Allahabad University	UG	50	50
Allahabad University	PG	50	50

A total of 400 students participated, ensuring equal representation across universities, academic levels, and genders.

4. Data Collection Instruments

1. Library Engagement Scale – Measuring student participation in library activities.
2. Perceptions of Skill Development Scale – Assessing the effectiveness of libraries in fostering 21st-century skills.

5. Analysis and Result

The results of this study highlight students’ engagement with library resources, skill development through libraries, and the challenges faced in optimizing library services. The

analysis is based on responses from 400 students across Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and the University of Allahabad (AU), covering undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

5.1 Library engagement patterns among students

Libraries play a crucial role in students' academic success and professional skill-building. The survey results indicate high levels of engagement with library services.

Frequency of library visits

Students at BHU and AU frequently use libraries for research, digital learning, and career-related services.

Frequency of Visit	BHU Students (%)	AU Students (%)
Daily	35%	28%
3-4 times a week	30%	25%
Weekly	20%	22%
Occasionally	10%	15%
Rarely/Never	5%	10%

Key Findings:

- BHU students have a higher daily engagement (35%) compared to AU students (28%), indicating better utilization of resources.
- AU students reported lower weekly and daily engagement, likely due to less awareness or fewer digital resources.

Reasons for library visits

Students utilize libraries for multiple purposes, including digital literacy, career development, and collaborative learning.

Purpose of Library Use	BHU Students (%)	AU Students (%)
Research & Academic Work	72%	65%
Digital Learning & Online Courses	60%	50%
Career Development Workshops	40%	30%
Group Discussions & Collaboration	50%	42%
Leisure Reading	38%	45%

Key Findings:

- Research & Academic Work is the primary reason for visiting libraries (BHU: 72%, AU: 65%).
- BHU students engage more in digital learning (60%) and career workshops (40%) than AU students (50% and 30%), indicating better program awareness.
- Leisure reading is slightly more popular at AU (45%) than BHU (38%), possibly due to different academic cultures.

5.2. Skill development through libraries

Libraries contribute significantly to student skill-building by offering digital literacy programs, research assistance, and career support.

Development of digital literacy skills

The opinion of students about the digital literacy aspects.

Digital Literacy Aspects	BHU Students (%)	AU Students (%)
Accessing Digital Libraries	65%	58%
Using Research Databases	70%	62%
Understanding Copyright & Plagiarism	45%	38%
Online Learning & MOOCs	50%	40%
Social media & Digital Networking	55%	42%

Key Findings:

- Libraries play a crucial role in enhancing digital literacy.
- BHU students show higher engagement across all digital learning aspects, indicating better resources and library-led programs.
- Copyright awareness is relatively low (BHU: 45%, AU: 38%), suggesting a need for plagiarism awareness programs.

Research and critical thinking development

Students reported how libraries contribute to their research skills.

Research Skills	BHU Students (%)	AU Students (%)
Finding Reliable Sources	75%	65%
Citation & Referencing	60%	50%
Critical Analysis of Information	55%	45%
Writing Research Papers	58%	48%
Using Research Software (SPSS, EndNote)	42%	35%

Key Findings:

- 75% of BHU students and 65% of AU students find libraries essential for sourcing reliable information.
- AU students (50%) report lower confidence in citation and referencing compared to BHU students (60%), suggesting a need for training workshops.
- Usage of research software like SPSS and EndNote is low (BHU: 42%, AU: 35%), indicating a demand for library-led training sessions.

Career development and employability skills

Libraries also play a role in career growth by offering resume-building workshops, job search assistance, and networking events.

Career Services	BHU Students (%)	AU Students (%)
Resume Writing Workshops	50%	42%
Job Search Assistance	48%	38%
Interview Preparation	45%	35%
Networking & Industry Seminars	40%	30%
Career Counseling	55%	45%

Key Findings:

- BHU students engage more in career-related services than AU students.
- Networking events have low participation (BHU: 40%, AU: 30%), suggesting that more promotion and awareness campaigns are needed.

5.3. Challenges faced by the students

While libraries offer extensive resources, students face barriers in fully utilizing them.

Common barriers to library use

The major barriers to library use reported by the students.

Challenges	BHU Students (%)	AU Students (%)
Lack of Awareness of Library Programs	55%	60%
Limited Access to Digital Resources	40%	50%
Outdated Books & Research Material	35%	45%
Insufficient Study Space	30%	35%
Inconvenient Library Timings	25%	28%

Key Findings:

- Lack of awareness is a major issue (BHU: 55%, AU: 60%), indicating a need for better outreach.
- AU students face more issues with outdated materials (45%) compared to BHU (35%).
- Study space shortage affects 30% of BHU students and 35% of AU students, suggesting a need for expanded seating capacity.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence of the evolving role of libraries in fostering 21st-century life skills among students at Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and the University of Allahabad (AU). While both universities offer well-established library services, the study reveals significant differences in engagement levels, skill development, and challenges faced by students. This discussion section analyzes the key findings in relation to existing research, identifying patterns, gaps, and areas for improvement.

Libraries as catalysts for academic success

The results indicate that libraries serve as vital resources for academic success, with 72% of BHU students and 65% of AU students citing academic research and coursework as their primary reason for using library facilities. This finding aligns with studies by Atta-Obeng & Dadzie (2020) and Singh (2021), which highlight the indispensable role of academic libraries in supporting students' research capabilities. Access to digital journals, research databases, and reference materials empowers students to conduct high-quality research, develop critical analysis skills, and engage in scholarly discourse.

However, despite the strong role of libraries in academic success, limitations persist. 40% of AU students and 35% of BHU students reported that outdated books and research materials affected the quality of their academic work. This finding suggests the need for continuous investment in library acquisitions, ensuring that students have access to updated, peer-reviewed sources. Libraries should prioritize digital subscriptions to academic databases, allowing students to access real-time research updates and interdisciplinary knowledge.

Digital Literacy and Information Competency

A key area of modern library engagement is digital literacy, which encompasses navigating digital resources, evaluating online information, and using research software. The results show that 70% of BHU students and 62% of AU students benefit from library training programs in research database usage, confirming that libraries play a crucial role in developing information literacy. However, only 42% of BHU students and 35% of AU students reported familiarity with research software like SPSS and EndNote, suggesting that additional training sessions in research tools and data analysis methods are needed.

The study also highlights a gap in copyright awareness and plagiarism prevention. Only 45% of BHU students and 38% of AU students reported that libraries helped them understand copyright laws and academic integrity standards. This finding aligns with research by Capdarest-Arest & Navarro (2021), which argues that plagiarism remains a persistent issue due to a lack of proper training in citation and referencing skills. Libraries should integrate plagiarism detection workshops, academic writing seminars, and one-on-one mentoring sessions to reinforce ethical research practices.

Career development and employability skills

Libraries have increasingly taken on the role of career development centres, providing students with resume-building workshops, job search databases, and networking opportunities. The study shows that 50% of BHU students and 42% of AU students attended resume-writing workshops, while 48% of BHU students and 38% of AU students utilized job search assistance programs. These findings support the argument made by Ikolo (2022) that modern libraries are shifting beyond academic support to offer career-related services that enhance employability.

However, the study also highlights low participation in networking events. Only 40% of BHU students and 30% of AU students attended career fairs or industry networking sessions, suggesting limited awareness or accessibility to such events. Research by Spurava et al. (2022) shows that students who engage in networking opportunities through libraries are more likely to secure internships and job placements. Therefore, libraries should enhance

career outreach programs, collaborate with industry professionals, and actively promote mentorship initiatives to increase student participation in career-building activities.

Collaborative learning and social engagement

Libraries provide an environment that fosters group discussions, knowledge exchange, and teamwork, preparing students for collaborative work settings. The study reveals that 50% of BHU students and 42% of AU students utilize library spaces for group study and project collaboration, reinforcing the notion that libraries function as intellectual hubs for collective learning. These findings are in line with research by Duncan & Kayoro (2022), which highlights that collaborative learning spaces in libraries enhance communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and peer-to-peer mentoring.

However, insufficient study space remains a concern, with 30% of BHU students and 35% of AU students citing overcrowding in libraries as a barrier to effective learning. This suggests the need for expanded seating capacity, designated study zones, and digital collaboration rooms. Additionally, libraries could implement online reservation systems for study areas to optimize space utilization and accommodate students more efficiently.

Barriers to library engagement and recommendations

Despite the many benefits libraries offer, students face several challenges that hinder their full engagement. The most significant issue reported was lack of awareness of library services, with 55% of BHU students and 60% of AU students stating that they were not informed about workshops, digital tools, or research support programs. This finding underscores the need for more effective marketing and outreach efforts. Libraries should implement targeted awareness campaigns using:

- Social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn) to promote events and resources.
- Email newsletters and SMS notifications to update students on upcoming workshops.
- Student ambassador programs where trained students help spread awareness of library services.

Additionally, 40% of AU students and 50% of BHU students reported limited access to digital resources, indicating that libraries need to expand digital subscriptions and remote access services. Investing in AI-based search tools, virtual reference services, and 24/7 digital libraries would significantly enhance student engagement and accessibility.

7. Conclusion

The study highlights the multifaceted role of libraries in supporting students' academic growth, digital literacy, career development, and collaborative learning. Libraries are no longer static institutions but dynamic spaces that equip students with essential 21st-century skills.

1. Libraries are central to academic success – Students rely heavily on research materials, digital databases, and study spaces for coursework and projects.
2. Digital literacy is a core skill developed through library programs – Students benefit from training in database research, citation management, and online learning, though further initiatives in research software training are needed.

3. Career support services are underutilized – While students engage in resume workshops and job search assistance, networking events and mentorship programs require greater visibility and participation.
4. Collaborative learning spaces enhance teamwork skills – However, overcrowding and limited study areas hinder effective group interactions.
5. Barriers such as lack of awareness and limited digital resources need to be addressed – Libraries must implement aggressive marketing strategies, digital expansions, and infrastructure upgrades to maximize their impact.

8. Future Recommendations

To further strengthen the role of libraries, universities should implement the following measures:

1. Increase funding for digital library subscriptions and infrastructure upgrades – Expanding access to e-journals, research databases, and online learning platforms will enhance academic research.
2. Develop structured digital literacy training programs – Offering workshops on SPSS, EndNote, plagiarism detection, and academic writing will improve students' research competency.
3. Enhance career development services – Libraries should partner with companies and alumni networks to organize industry webinars, job fairs, and internship placements.
4. Optimize collaborative learning spaces – Investing in online booking systems, additional study rooms, and digital whiteboards will enhance group interactions.
5. Implement targeted awareness campaigns – Libraries must use social media, email newsletters, and student ambassador programs to ensure students are aware of all available resources.

Libraries are transformational spaces that shape students into critical thinkers, digital learners, and career-ready professionals. While this study highlights successes in skill development, it also reveals areas requiring improvement, particularly in career mentorship, research software training, and digital accessibility. By adopting strategic innovations and student-focused improvements, libraries can continue to be cornerstones of academic and professional success in the 21st century and beyond.

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