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The public libraries in West Bengal: A study

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Abstract

Public libraries play a vital role in education, literacy, and community development. This extensive article explores the present condition of public libraries in West Bengal, India, utilizing a meticulous methodology that integrates literature review, surveys, interviews, and observational studies. Through a thorough examination of existing research and empirical data, this study aims to provide a holistic understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and future prospects of public libraries in West Bengal. Additionally, adherence to APA citation style ensures the credibility and integrity of the research findings presented here.

Keywords: Library, lifelong learning, community development, public library

Introduction

Public libraries serve as pillars of knowledge dissemination and community engagement, promoting literacy and lifelong learning. In West Bengal, public libraries boast a rich heritage, yet they face numerous challenges in today's landscape. This introduction outlines the objectives, methodology, and significance of the study, setting the stage for an in-depth exploration of public libraries in West Bengal. For the purpose, surveys and interviews can be conducted with library stakeholders, including administrators, librarians, patrons, and community members. Structured questionnaires and interview protocols can be designed to gather data on library usage, satisfaction levels, and perceptions of library services. Observational studies should be carried out to evaluate the physical infrastructure, facilities, and resources available in selected public libraries across different districts of West Bengal. It is important to document observations regarding library layout, collection size, technology access, and user engagement activities. Quantitative data from surveys have to be analyzed using statistical software such as SPSS. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, can be computed to summarize survey responses and identify patterns in library usage and satisfaction levels. Qualitative data from interviews and observational studies can be thematically analyzed using coding and thematic analysis techniques. Transcripts and field notes should be coded based on recurring themes, and thematic maps that can be developed to visualize relationships between different themes.

Methodology

A comprehensive review was conducted to identify scholarly articles, government reports, and relevant sources related to public libraries in West Bengal. Keywords such as "public libraries," "West Bengal," and "library services" were used to search academic databases and online repositories. Secondary data were collected from the Department of Mass Education, Extension and Library Services, Government of West Bengal & Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF), Government of India for this purpose.

Results and Discussion

Historical Development of Public Libraries in West Bengal

Public libraries in West Bengal have roots tracing back to colonial times, with significant contributions from social reformers and philanthropists (Mukherjee, 2017) [6].

Government initiatives have been instrumental in expanding the public library network and enhancing access to educational resources across the state (Chatterjee and Sengupta, 2020) [1].

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Statistics of West Bengal Public Libraries

Currently, West Bengal comprises of 23 districts libraries, which include recently established ones such as Jhargram, Alipurduar, Kalimpong, and Paschim Bardhaman. Public libraries in West Bengal play a crucial role in societal development and empowerment. The state boasts a total of 2480 public libraries that was presented clearly in this paper (Table 1-2 and Figure 1). It was revealed from the Table 2 and Figure 2 that North 24 Parganas district was the only

district with more than 200 libraries. This district having the highest number of Libraries (225) followed by Hooghly and Murshidabad (159), South 24 Parganas (156), Purba Burdwan (151), Howrah (137), Bankura (130), Birbhum (124), Pruba Midnapore (122), Purulia (118), Paschim Midnapore (115), Nadia (111), Coochbehar (110), Maldah (105) and Kolkata (101). All other districts have less than 100 libraries, which is very lesser in number.

Table 1: Type of Public Libraries in West Bengal, India

Sl. No.	Types of Library	Number
1	Government Libraries	13
2	Government Sponsored Libraries-District Library	19
3	Government Sponsored Libraries-Town /Sub-divisional / Upgraded Town Library	232
4	Government Sponsored Libraries-Rural / Primary Unit / Area Library	2209
5	Government Aided Libraries	07
Total Libraries		2480

Source: Details of Library Services | MEELS | India (wb.gov.in)

Table 2: District-wise of Govt., Govt. Sponsored District, Town/ Sub-divisional, Upgraded Town, Primary Unit/Rural/Area, Aided Libraries recorded as on 07.01.2021 in West Bengal

Sl. No.	Name of the District	Govt. Libraries	Govt. Sponsored Libraries-Dist. Library	Govt. Sponsored Libraries-Town/Sub-divisional/ Upgraded Town Library	Govt. Sponsored Libraries-Rural/Primary Unit / Area Library	Govt. Aided Libraries	Total (Libraries)
1	Alipurduar		1	2	34		37
2	Bankura		1	7	122		130
3	Birbhum		1	10	113		124
4	Paschim Burdwan		2	6	53		61
5	Purba Burdwan		1	15	135		151
6	Coochbehar	1		7	102		110
7	Dakshin Dinajpur		1	4	52		57
8	Darjeeling – GTA	1		4	66		71
9	Kalimpong	1		2	27		30
10	Darjeeling – SMPA	1	1	4	23		29
11	Hooghly	1	1	22	135		159
12	Howrah		1	12	123	1	137
13	Jalpaiguri		1	7	65		73
14	Kolkata	2		8	88	3	101
15	Maldah		1	9	95		105
16	Murshidabad		1	12	146		159
17	Nadia		1	10	99	1	111
18	North 24 Parganas	3	1	38	182	1	225
19	Paschim Medinipur		1	13	101		115
20	Jhargram			2	41		43
21	Purba Midnapur	1	1	10	110		122
22	Purulia	1	1	5	111		118
23	South 24 Parganas		1	19	136		156
24	Uttar Dinajpur	1		4	50	1	56
Total		13	19	232	2209	7	2480

Source: Details of Library Services | MEELS | India (wb.gov.in)

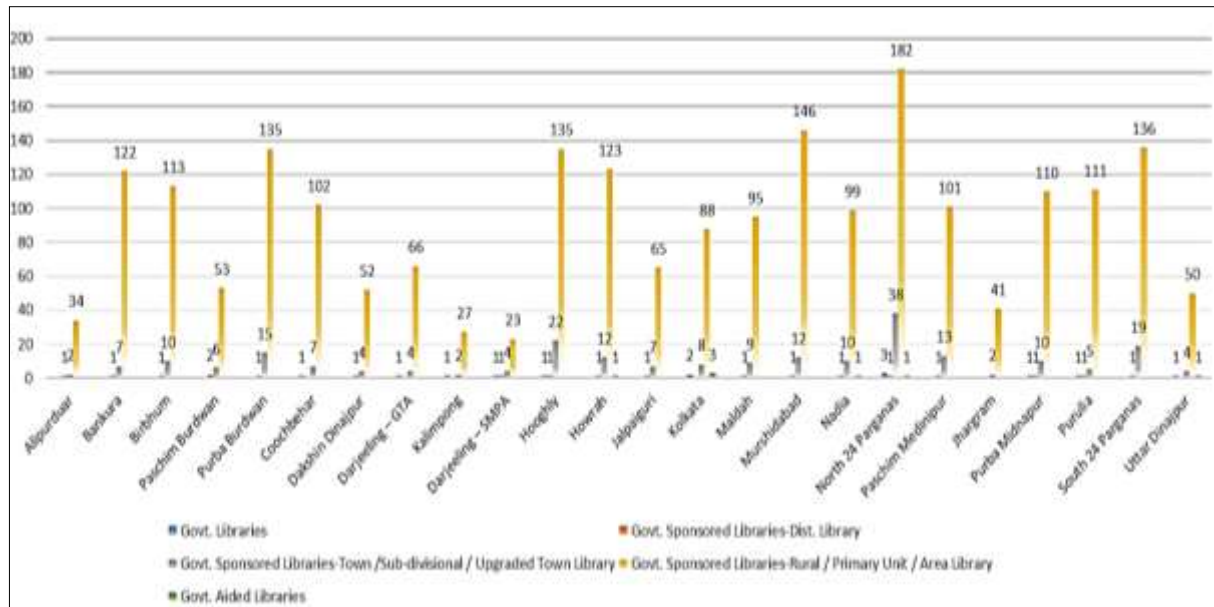


Fig 1: District wise distribution of different types of libraries in West Bengal

Challenges Facing by the Public Libraries in West Bengal

Inadequate funding and resource allocation present significant hurdles to the sustainability and effectiveness of public library services in West Bengal (Saha and Das, 2019) [7].

Infrastructure deficiencies, such as outdated facilities and limited technology access, impede the ability of public libraries to meet the evolving needs of their patrons (Ghosh and Chakraborty, 2018) [4].

Digital Divide and Access to Information

Disparities in digital access contribute to the digital divide in West Bengal, exacerbating inequalities in information access and literacy (Dasgupta and Datta, 2021) [2].

Efforts to bridge the digital divide through initiatives like mobile libraries and community outreach programs underscore the importance of equitable access to information resources (Majumdar and Banerjee, 2020) [5].

Role of Public Libraries in Promoting Literacy and Education

Public libraries serve as essential hubs for promoting literacy and education, offering access to books, educational materials, and skill development programs (Ghatak and Bose, 2018) [3].

Collaborative partnerships between public libraries, educational institutions, and government agencies have fostered innovative literacy initiatives and community outreach efforts (Sen and Kundu, 2019) [8].

Conclusion

Despite facing numerous challenges, public libraries in West Bengal remain indispensable resources for promoting literacy, education, and community development. Addressing funding constraints, improving infrastructure, and leveraging technology can ensure the continued relevance and effectiveness of public library services in West Bengal. It is the high time to give more impetus on digitalization of all the libraries in West Bengal to reach more numbers of readers not only in city areas but also in rural and urban areas for bringing sustainability. Wherever

possible, there should be some facilities like AutoCAD, ArcGIS, ArcView for modernization of the library system.

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