
A Comprehensive Evaluation of Accessibility, Learning Programmes, and Community Engagement in Gram Panchayath Libraries of Kampli Taluk

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Abstract

Rural libraries play a crucial role in promoting literacy, education, and cultural awareness in rural communities. By providing access to books, periodicals, and educational materials, these libraries make a significant contribution to the intellectual development of local communities. However, it is essential to evaluate their effectiveness in addressing the specific needs of users and the surrounding communities. Consequently, this research study has been conducted to examine the operations of these libraries. The objective is to gain a comprehensive understanding of various aspects, including administration, available resources, accessibility, funding, user needs, community involvement, and innovative practices. This report summarises the preliminary findings from research conducted in ten Gram Panchayath libraries located in Kampli Taluk, Ballari District.

Keywords

Gram Panchayat libraries; Information literacy;

Community engagement; Karnataka

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Introduction

The establishment of GPLs in Karnataka marked a significant milestone in the evolution of the state's public library system. With 5,766 libraries spread across gram panchayaths, Karnataka became the only state to achieve universal rural library coverage. These libraries are designed to fulfil multiple objectives:

1. **Promoting literacy and reading habits** among rural citizens.
2. **Providing access to educational resources** for students, especially those who lack private study facilities.
3. **Serving as cultural hubs**, hosting literary activities, discussions, and community events.
4. **Disseminating information** related to government schemes, agriculture, employment, and health.
5. **Fostering lifelong learning**, enabling adults to continue education beyond formal schooling.

Initially, GPLs were under the management of the Department of Public Libraries. However, in 2019, administrative control of **5,623 rural libraries** was transferred to the **Department of Rural Development and Panchayath Raj (RDPR)**. This transfer was intended to strengthen local governance, improve resource allocation, and ensure better integration of libraries with rural development programs.

The restructured model emphasised that GPLs were not just repositories of books but **information centres** serving multiple purposes. For many rural citizens, especially students and farmers, the GPL became an accessible “university,” offering reading materials, guidance, and a platform for interaction. These libraries also played a crucial role in bridging the gap between rural and urban educational opportunities.

Gram Panchayath Libraries of Kampli Taluk

Kampli Taluk in Ballari District, Karnataka, has developed from an agrarian settlement into a rural–semi-urban administrative hub shaped by its proximity to the Vijayanagara region and the fertile Tungabhadra basin. The taluk comprises key Gram Panchayats, including Devalapura, Devasamudra, Hampadevanahalli, Metri, Nelludi, No. 10

Muddapura, Ramasagara, Sanapura, Suggenahalli, and Yemmiganur. Each Panchayat maintains a Gram Panchayat Library in accordance with the Karnataka Public Libraries Act, ensuring access to reading materials and public information at the village level. These Panchayaths collectively manage local governance, development activities, welfare schemes, and basic community services.

Demographically, Kampli shows moderate but improving educational indicators. According to the 2011 Census, Kampli town had a population of approximately 39,307, with an almost equal gender ratio. The wider taluk remains predominantly rural, with livelihoods centred on agriculture, labour work, and small trades. The overall literacy rate is around 66 per cent, with male literacy at roughly 73–74 per cent and female literacy at about 57–58 per cent. This gender gap influences patterns of education and access to information across villages.

Review of Literature

EarlyBird (2025) reported that over 500 rural libraries were upgraded into Arivu Kendras—interactive learning spaces equipped with digital tools, educational kits, and child-friendly reading corners. These centres foster digital learning, creativity, and environmental awareness, thereby extending education beyond formal institutions. Similarly, Munshi (2024) found that rural libraries in West Bengal, when provided with internet access and ICT resources, became informal learning centres supporting adult literacy and skill development. However, both studies noted challenges of limited staff capacity, inadequate funding, and lack of structured IL programmes. CRISP (2023) observed that Gram Panchayat libraries in Karnataka have begun to play a developmental role by hosting digital literacy drives, job training, and awareness campaigns in collaboration with schools and government departments. These partnerships helped position libraries as platforms for continuous education and civic engagement. At the policy level, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2023) reaffirmed that community libraries are essential components of lifelong learning ecosystems and recommended integrating them into local governance and development planning.

Gaon Connection (2022) described the Karnataka government's efforts to digitise hundreds of rural libraries with broadband connectivity, computers, and smart TVs. While these upgrades revitalised user

engagement, the report noted that technological access alone cannot sustain library growth without professional librarians and relevant digital content. Similar concerns have been raised globally. Abumandour (2021) argued that in developing countries, libraries bridge digital divides most effectively when librarians act as facilitators of learning rather than custodians of materials. Asem and Balnaves (2019) further suggested that IL initiatives succeed when they are locally relevant and linked to livelihoods, health, and agricultural knowledge. Earlier research laid the conceptual groundwork for this transformation. Rao and Padhi (2016) highlighted how rural libraries contribute to literacy improvement when adequately funded and managed. Chand and Naik (2015) introduced the idea of libraries as “community knowledge centres,” capable of connecting citizens with government schemes and developmental information. These early perspectives anticipated later initiatives that align libraries with social development goals.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The scope of the present study is to examine the role of Gram Panchayat Libraries in promoting information literacy and lifelong learning among rural communities. The study focuses on assessing the activities, services, and programmes offered by these libraries to enhance digital skills, reading habits, and continuous learning among rural users. The study is restricted to Ballari District, and the population of the study comprises Gram Panchayat Libraries located in Kampli Taluk.

Objectives

1. To examine whether existing library hours adequately meet the access needs of primary users, especially school-going children, in Gram Panchayat Libraries.
2. To study the awareness of information literacy and lifelong learning programmes among librarians of Gram Panchayat Libraries.
3. To examine the accessibility and implementation of information literacy and lifelong learning programmes in rural library settings.
4. To assess the participation and response of rural communities towards such programmes.
5. To identify the challenges faced by librarians in promoting and sustaining information literacy and lifelong learning initiatives.

Methodology

Librarians constitute the target population for the present study. The census survey method has been employed, and a questionnaire tool was used to collect data, supplemented with the interview method. The author distributed a questionnaire to all the Gram Panchayath Librarians of Kampli Taluk, Ballari District. The data collected through questionnaires were fed into MS-Excel, and a simple frequency calculation was used to analyse the collected data.

A total of 10 questionnaires were distributed among the Gram Panchayath Librarians and 9 duly filled in questionnaires were received, thus resulting into response rate of 90%.

Analysis

Library Timings and User Accessibility

The study reveals a notable misalignment between the prescribed library operating hours and the actual availability of users, particularly children. Although departmental guidelines outline specific weekday and weekend schedules, most Gram Panchayat libraries function on reduced hours and close by 5:00 p.m. Given that school-going children typically return home only after 4:00 p.m., their opportunity to access the library on weekdays is severely limited, resulting in reliance on weekend visits. Adult usage during existing hours also remains minimal, contributing to the broader underutilization of library resources. Overall, the findings indicate that the current operational schedule does not adequately accommodate the needs of the primary user group. Assessing the feasibility of extending library hours to 6:30 p.m. may enhance accessibility and promote more consistent engagement with library services.

Awareness of Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning Programmes

The study found that although most Gram Panchayat library supervisors have long years of service, their awareness of contemporary information literacy and lifelong learning programmes is limited. Despite their operational experience, many supervisors reported a lack of familiarity with digital tools and modern educational initiatives. This gap highlights the need for systematic training to enhance their capacity to

support and implement information literacy and lifelong learning activities in rural libraries.

Upskilling of Library Supervisors

The study reveals that rural Gram Panchayat libraries heavily rely on long-serving supervisors, many of whom have remained in their roles for fifteen to twenty years or more. While their tenure contributes valuable institutional memory, it also limits their readiness to take on the expanded responsibilities now expected in rural libraries, including interactive programmes for children and digitally supported services.

During field visits and interviews, several supervisors reported difficulties in adapting to these new requirements and emphasized the need for stronger training in computer use and digital tools. These observations indicate that ongoing professional development is essential to ensure that supervisors are equipped to manage modern library functions and support the evolving expectations of their communities.

Opinion on the challenges faced by librarians in promoting and sustaining information literacy and lifelong learning initiatives.

A question was posed to the librarians on the problems they faced while promoting and implementing information literacy and lifelong learning initiatives. The data reveals that only 6 librarians opined that they face problems such as a lack of manpower, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funds, and lack of support from the authorities when implementing programs, while the remaining librarians did not face any problems.

Conclusion

The assessment of Gram Panchayat Libraries in Kampli Taluk demonstrates their foundational importance in advancing literacy, information access, and lifelong learning within rural communities. Although each of the ten Panchayats maintains a functional library, the study reveals that several institutional and operational factors restrict their capacity to meet evolving community needs. The existing library schedules, which typically conclude by early evening, do not adequately align with the availability of school-going children or working adults, thereby limiting the effective use of library

services. Patterns of user engagement indicate that more flexible and extended operating hours may considerably enhance library accessibility.

The study also highlights significant gaps in the professional preparedness of library supervisors. While most supervisors possess extensive experience, their awareness of contemporary information literacy frameworks, digital tools, and emerging lifelong learning practices remains limited. This underscores the need for structured, ongoing training to support the transition of rural libraries into dynamic learning environments that can respond to educational, informational, and developmental needs.

Furthermore, issues related to staffing, infrastructure, funding, and administrative support continue to impede the successful implementation of information literacy and lifelong learning initiatives. Nevertheless, despite these constraints, Gram Panchayat Libraries remain indispensable institutions at the village level. Their presence ensures equitable access to reading materials, community information, and informal learning opportunities.

The findings reaffirm the strategic value of strengthening Gram Panchayat Libraries as grassroots knowledge centres. Enhancing human resources, updating learning resources, integrating digital tools, and improving institutional support mechanisms can significantly broaden their contribution to rural development. With targeted interventions and sustained support, these libraries have the potential to evolve into vibrant, inclusive, and community-oriented learning spaces that foster holistic development across Kampli Taluk.

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