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Research Paper

# Perception of Public Libraries as Substantive Knowledge Organizations\*

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## Abstract

In this paper, we examine how public libraries promote development of good reading habits among the users who come to access for information. It explores how far—in this digital age, public and academic libraries are able to meet the information needs of society. By developing a theoretical model of access to and usage of information based on axioms that set forth the role of public libraries in the services of society, we attempt to examine and analyze how PLs promote adult literacy drive that have positive contribution to society. Community public library systems are thus examined and their role model clearly decimated. We find that public libraries have still much relevance in supporting readers and promoting literacy drive. Our thinking is that, public libraries can aptly be considered as institutions of national importance in imparting education and knowledge to patrons which is necessary for the growth of learned society.

**Keywords:** Education, public libraries, literacy drive, user access, knowledge society

**JEL Classification Codes:** O11, D13

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 A Brief History of Ancient Libraries

It was Alexander the Great who believed that in “*order to govern, conquerers must first*

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\*. This paper is a joint-study on the substantive nature of existence of public libraries. All views expressed are personal, and they do not necessarily correspond to the views expressed by any institution or university thereof.

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know whom they govern"<sup>1</sup>. For the purpose of knowing, and for the purpose of setting up a system of royal library that was well destined to become a centre of attraction (and *destruction*) as well as a centre of learning, it was well planned to be a grand repository of wisdom to hold documents in written form. The Macedonian king and student of ARISTOTLE, *Alexander the Great*, therefore, shelled out his ambitious master plan. He chose a site on the western end of the Nile river, and commanded that there be built a city which would prosper in time. He thus willed that the city should house a *Library* after his name—the “ALEXANDRIAN LIBRARY”. Alexander's successors (Macedonian kings, PTOLEMY I and PTOLEMY II) obeyed his command that witnessed the beginning and continuation of the work that was esteemed to be a great epicenter of scholarly activities, and which involved collection of papyrus scrolls and books from regions far and near. It was to form the vast legacy to the intellectual tradition and culture of Europe (See MacLeod, 2004). Incidentally, some of the scholars—including *Zenodotus of Ephesus*, and *Callimachus* (who wrote *Pinakes*) who supposedly worked in this great library were responsible for cataloging as well. *Pinakes* is often considered as the world's first Library Catalogue.

The story of the Great Alexandrian Library, along with its huge collection of papyrus scrolls (which was estimated to be around 40,000-400,000) insofar as it goes with regard to its conception (and its presumed accidental burning, by *Julius Caesar* in 48 BC)<sup>2</sup>, which could be traced from the historical accounts and anecdotal evidences, has become a myth in itself. However, the Alexandrian Library wasn't the first of its kind, as there were others that predate it. For example, author DAVID DIRINGER reports in his book “*The Book Before Printing*” about a few libraries more antediluvian than the ones we have previously mentioned so far (see **Fig. 1** below). The author also writes—in great detail—about many forms of writing materials, from *tabulae*<sup>3</sup>, *pugillares*, *parchments* to *papyrus* that were extensively used for the purpose of writing and inscription.

But the sole purpose for which it was supposedly conceived in most grandest of manner was to study and cultivate a tradition of scholarship aided by collection and translation of books in many languages (MacLeod, 2004). The reasons that worked behind such an initiative were as follows: e.g., usage of the knowledge thus collected in aiding smooth functioning of the government, and to derive political, economic, social, and cultural intelligence. In a nutshell, the whole purpose of having a great library was *substantive*. It was—by and large—built to support and nourish the minds of the ruling noblemen so that they could excel in the matters of governance, political strategy, diplomacy, and trade—as was envisioned by ALEXANDER THE GREAT himself. Below we list some of the oldest libraries of the ancient world that meant so much to the people of those times.

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1. MacLEOD, R. (2004). *The Library of Alexandria. Centre of learning in the ancient world.* New York, Tauris.

2. See Blum, Rudolf. (1991). *Kallimachos; The Alexandrian Library and the Origins of Bibliography.* The University of Wisconsin Press. Evidence suggests that parts of the Great Library may have survived and wasn't completely burnt down by the fire started by Julius Caesar in 48 BC, during the Caesar's Civil War.

3. Wooden tablets: Roman wooden cliptych, See David Diringer (2013). *The Book Before Printing.* Dover Publications, Inc. NY.

| Name of the Library        | Place of Existence | Year of Foundation             |
|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Nalanda University Library | Nalanda, India     | 5 <sup>th</sup> Century CE     |
| Library of Alexandria      | Alexandria, Egypt  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Century BCE    |
| Library of Constantinople  | Istanbul, Turkey   | 4 <sup>th</sup> Century AD     |
| Library of Ashurbanipal    | Nineveh, Iraq      | 7 <sup>th</sup> Century BCE    |
| Library of Ebla            | Ebla, Syria        | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Century BCE    |
| Library of Babylon         | Babylon, Iraq      | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Millennium BCE |
| Library of Hattusa         | Huttusa, Turkey    | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Millennium BCE |
| Library of Celsus          | Ephesus, Turkey    | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Century BCE    |
| Library of Pergamum        | Pergamum, Turkey   | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Century BCE    |
| The Villa of the Papyri    | Herculaneum, Italy | 1 <sup>st</sup> Century BC     |

List of Libraries of the Ancient World

**Figure 1.** List compiled from <https://www.oldest.org/culture/libraries/>

Libraries have always been the center of intellectual activities from the ancient ages. Ancient rulers took pride and pleasure in collecting (*biblion*) scrolls, books, clay tablets, and manuscripts that constituted as one of the prime components of their royal treasuries. These collected documents in written forms, e.g., clay tablets, papyrus scrolls, etc., were stored in (*theke*) depositories. Some of the ancient *atheneums* of the World—including Asia, were:

- i. The Nalanda University Library, established around 5th Century AD
- ii. Sarasvathi Mahal Library, Thanjavur, India, 16th Century AD
- iii. The Imperial Library of China, established around 206 BC-220AD
- iv. The Silk-road Library, founded in 4th Century AD
- v. Theological Library of Caesarea Maritima, Caesura, Israel, late 3rd Century CE
- vi. The Tianyige Library, Zhejiang, China, 1561 AD
- vii. The Malatestiana Library, Cesena, Italy, 1452
- viii. The Hereford Cathedral Library, England, 12th Century AD
- ix. Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, 548-565 AD
- x. The Khizanat al Qarawiyyin, Fez, Morocco, 859 AD
- xi. The Trinity College Library, Dublin Ireland, 1592
- xii. The Bodleian Library, Oxford, England, 1320 AD
- xiii. Ugarit Library, Northern Syria, C.1400-1200 BCE
- xiv. Gyujanggak, the royal library of Korea, founded in 1776

#### xv. The House of Wisdom, Iraq, 9th Century AD

The above mentioned libraries do not constitute an exhaustive list—for there are other ancient and medieval libraries that exist which are not listed herein. Readers are encouraged to consult other experts (See, Blum, 1991; MacLeod, 2004; Diringer 2013) who are specialists on antediluvian subjects that deal with the study of ancient libraries and atheneums.

## 2 The Substantive Role of Public Libraries

The productive and substantive role of libraries (see the list of ancient libraries in **Fig 1** above) have been acknowledge through the ages, and every generation has seen some developments coming through by modernization of operations of the public library system. The need for a fully-functional public library system catering to the requirements of the reading public was given a formal shape by Benjamin Franklin in the year 1813 when he founded the Philadelphia Library Company, which was dubbed as the “*mother of all subscription libraries in America*”<sup>4</sup>. Later, philanthropic donations and endowments from Andrew Carnegie to establish public libraries across the USA and in Great Britain, Mrs. Ryland's benevolent and bold initiatives in establishing the Spencer Library, and foundation of the Bibliographical Society in Great Britain—all have greatly contributed to rapid development of the public library system<sup>5</sup>. These personalities were among the first to have perceived the potential of public libraries as public places of learning and education, as to promote literacy in the widest sense. The sole purpose of establishing public libraries has thus been to educate the people; e.g., foster reading among all social and community members, and act as powerful instrument of learning for the marginalized sections of the society who have little or no access to information resources (Krajina, IFLA, 2011; Akparobore, 2011; Chatterjee, Samanta, & Dey, 2021). Besides, libraries provide empowering and intellectual environments supportive of individual learning and self-development. However, the most important thing which epitomizes the existential functions of PLs is that, they meet the information needs of the society by providing access to national and regional archival which contain valuable knowledge resources embedded in books and in other forms of written documents. Various Public Libraries Acts have since then made it possible for libraries to exist and function for the benefit of the commoners, for in the times past, most libraries were chiefly the treasury of knowledge holdings restricted to nobility, aristocrats, elites, scholars, and theologians. The national libraries that we see today were once the Kings libraries. Across the world, many private libraries too, have turned into public libraries allowing wider access to people from all walks of life. Some larger as well as most wonderful private libraries that have been transformed into public libraries accessible to all are listed as follows<sup>6</sup>:

- i. The London Library, London
- ii. Stuttgart City Library, Germany
- iii. The Morgan Library and Museum, New York
- iv. Bromley House, Nottingham

4. See, for example, *The Library Assistant*, by Theodore W. Koch (1913).

5. See *Essays in Librarianship and Bibliography*, by Richard Garnett (1899).

6. We list a several of them—large Private Libraries that have, insofar, been transformed into Public Libraries for the greater benefit of social and community members, now openly accessible to the general masses. See, for instance, Simons, B., Semic, S., Bell-Davies, C., & Evans, C. O. (2022, May 13). *The world's most wonderful private libraries*. Financial Times. Retrieved April 23, 2023, from <https://www.ft.com/content/42a53119-aea5-4bca-b1ae-4cef45e9384a>

- v. Boston Athenaeum, Boston
- vi. Library of JN Petit Institute, Mumbai
- vii. Girolamini Library, Naples
- viii. Forum Groningen, The Netherlands
- ix. Circolo dei Lettori, Turin
- x. Bibliotheca Alexandria, Egypt
- xi. The American Library, Paris,
- xii. The Portico Library, Manchester,
- xiii. Senate House Library, London
- xiv. New York Society Library, New York

## 2.1 How far Public Libraries are meeting our information needs?

Libraries—whether public, academic, special, or school, they exist to collect, store, disseminate, and preserve knowledge to meet people's information needs in society. In this paper, we perceive public libraries as *substantive* knowledge organizations—meaning that, they are “essential and vital” for the smooth functioning of any knowledge society. A modern society can only develop meaningfully and flourish intellectually when most of its people are educated and literate. This is possible when people from all walks of life have access to information and knowledge resources. Besides, people must of necessity have access to affordable education which is the basic fundamental right of every citizen. In this respect, Public Libraries function as organizations of autonomous learning producing a discernible effect in coordinating education by promoting a culture of reading among the visiting patrons, e.g., students and adults. Public libraries, in addition to this, play a crucial role in complementing the mainstream education system with the knowledge required for such inclusive development. In essence, the main function of public libraries as social organizations relate to literacy promotion among the adults and the underprivileged (Akparobore, 2011).

Knowledge steals upon the ignorance by raising our senses to rectify it with good reasons and rationality. Knowledge is also the source of wisdom as it help develop our intellects. Large libraries—ever since the times ancient, have existed to meet the knowledge needs for they hold the *pearls* of intellectual treasury containing wisdom—both ancient and modern. In such respect, public libraries are open access learning organizations that drive social literacy and promote learning among the citizens. *Public*—because PLs are meant to exist for providing free and categorical access to people from all walks of life without much restrictions whatsoever. Ongoing initiatives, however, have seen the gradual transformation in library systems throughout the country and elsewhere making publicly funded university and institutional academic libraries freely accessible to the general masses to meet their specialized knowledge needs<sup>7</sup>. The success of such initiatives will be best judged by the public for whom it means a lot to gain access to data, information, and collected wisdom, which are the touchstones of modern knowledge economies.

7. See, for instance, Tait, E., Martzoukou, K., & Reid, P. (2016). Libraries for the future: the role of IT utilities in the transformation of academic libraries. *Palgrave Communications*, 2(1), 1-9.

**Axiom 1.** *Addiction to books is good.*

Great books have the power to influence the readers, and to have the readers in their power. According to *William Shakespeare*, one can seek one's purpose in great books—whose nature, one can nurture one's curiosity.

In one of his most famous plays, *The Tempest*, Shakespeare is seen to have it quoted in his witty yet stylistic manner: **Prospero**: “*Knowing I lov'd my books, he furnish'd me From mine own library with volumes that I prize above my dukedom*”. Prospero was careful, despite tragedy befalling him, not to part with the books which he prized above anything else.

**Axiom 2.** *A book succeeds in inspiring different kinds of readers.*

**Proof.** Libraries provide offline access to books and reading materials. Libraries are great sources of different kinds of books written in different languages that meet the needs of various kinds of readers, i.e., recreational, casual or serious readers. Therefore, libraries serve the purposes of the reading public. □

**Theorem 3.** *We can deduce a proposition from the given fundamental postulates:*

- i. Readers derive inspiration from goods books (vide Axiom 1.)*
- ii. Public libraries are great sources of inspirational books (vide Proof)*
- iii. There are great benefits of developing excellent reading habits (vide Axiom 1.)*

**Proposition 4.** *By becoming confident readers, they can develop zeal for knowledge acquisition.*

**Corollary 5.** *Libraries serve the purposes of the reading public by providing access to best kinds of books to choose for reading which promote adult literacy and support readers in their search for information.*

From Corollary 5 above, we may derive the overall functional existence of public libraries as centres of autonomous learning promoting self-development and adult literacy. Public libraries as community information centres are still the best sources of information resources beyond the Internet and the digital web where readers get the opportunity to search and explore the plethora of knowledge resources at their disposals, more so when such information is made *openly accessible* to the patrons. Informing readers/patrons/visitors of the presence of rare knowledge artifacts, old manuscripts of historical and cultural importance, and social and community literature are few of the motivational approach to readership development activities of a public library. Besides, according to Krolak (2005), libraries help create literate environments since they serve as community learning centers which promote literacy among the users. By provide to knowledge resources at their disposal, libraries traditionally assist users in securing access to books and other informational materials.

It is believed that good books rear great minds, and great minds think alike. For a society to rear great minds or cultivate the fortitude of great leaders, it is necessary that people get access to good information. To nurture intellectual minds, information and knowledge are necessary. Knowledge great is priceless, and wisdom derived from it—i.e., *wit*, never goes unrewarded. Knowledge is not only a resource but it is also a means to achieve some desired ends. By *knowing* humanity develops; by understanding humanity progresses. Public libraries—for that purpose—are the storehouses of *wisdom* and knowledge primarily found in books and written documents. Some books are highly prized for the knowledge and wisdom that they hold. Some books inform the readers and make

them cognizable of certain facts of history and science. And not to deny the fact that some great books are able to influence their readers to a very great extent. All such inspirations are to be found in libraries—public and academic that hold immense intellectual treasure of the times—*past* and *present*.

## 2.2 Public Libraries as Institutions of National Importance

Indeed, public libraries should be considered as organizations of national importance. Public libraries should be perceived as active and dynamic organizations for they exist as institutions of “national importance” helping spread knowledge and disseminate information in society. They have great importance not because they hold traditional knowledge of the indigenous people, but they function as regional and national collection centers by curating, collecting, storing, and preserving national literary products that define a nation's cultural sovereignty. Their positive influence raise the awareness of education among the citizens. Therefore, public libraries play the vital role to fulfill the education needs of the society by providing knowledge and information services beyond the traditional modes of learning at schools and institutions of higher learning. By way of being depository organizations, they provide offline access to inspire people into reading more books (McShane, 2011). In developing countries, if information needs of the society are to be met, then proper functioning of an efficient state-of-the-art public library system adequate enough to meet such needs is mandatory (Vårheim, Steinmo, & Ide, 2008; Krajina, IFLA, 2014; Chatterjee, Samanta, & Dey, 2021). Promotion of literacy is one of the prime reasons for which public libraries exist (McShane, 2011). However, beyond the functional existence of efficient public library systems, the usage of digital gadgetry that are the tools and technologies for modern culture, are also the things “essential” for development of fine thinking as such advanced digital technologies and the Internet provide users with the knowledge that's mostly available for free, and accessible from all corners of the earth.

Public libraries exist not only as local gateways to knowledge, but also as centers for life-long learning (UNESCO, 1994; Krolak, 2006). Libraries, both academic and public, still remain the most viable and definitive as well as reliable sources of information for the students and the reading public. One could definitely say that public libraries function as autonomous and standalone learning institutions that support independent decision making of its visiting patrons (Krolak, 2006). To support a literate society, a well functional public library system promotes a culture of reading and development of good sense among the literate populace (Krajina, IFLA, 2014). By way of modernization of library operation and practices, public libraries are promoting community education and adult learning as well (Akparobore, 2011). They are also playing a vital role in encouraging students to visit them to access information. It is this theme which this paper takes up that concerns an understanding of the methods of information access followed by users in public libraries, and thus contributes to the existing knowledge of library practice and philosophy. Public libraries not only store information and share wisdom and traditional knowledge (Shannon and Bossaller, 2015), but they are excellent places of social gathering that contributes to the development of social capital. Beyond these, large public libraries are naturally the sources of great curiosity among the curious and searching minds who strive hard to discover knowledge and wisdom that often lay hidden from public purview.

As believed—and backed by evidences (Taylor & Patterson, 2000), libraries do promote critical thinking skills among the students and users who visit them for the purpose of reading, acquiring information, and collecting notes. However, students could effec-



tively use information if they have adequate means of access to it. And more than that, students and users should know how to access library materials more skillfully so that they can derive maximum benefit from browsing reading materials. This paper sheds new light on that direction by being a torch bearer to the darkest corners of a library. Our goal is to analyze and discuss more effective ways by which library patrons could access materials more efficiently. Of course, students and readers also have the choice to browse on-line versions of the texts as modern public libraries are making every possible effort to digitize their contents for allowing seamless access to information via the Internet. However, digital access although may serve the purpose of getting information at hand, it cannot replenish the experience of exploring library materials by means of physical access to stacks.

### 3 Are Public Libraries Essential Organizations?

Public libraries are no less important than other essential organizations, for they provide people with the required knowledge and information that are in much need. People remain ignorant *without* knowing. Education and learning bestow knowledge that gradually lifts the veil of ignorance. Education, for any country, is the most effective method of developing human capital—*aka*—human resources. The quality of human resources depend significantly on the quality of teaching and education that's being provided to the populace. Increase in educational standards improve technical competence of the people in society. Educational standards increase when the quality of education provided to the people improves. It is when teaching becomes more purposeful and reading turns out to be a congruent function that helps to develop human resources through learning. Successful national development is only possible when educational needs of the students and adults are met in the society. Public libraries have a definite role to play in such a nation-building scenario. Public libraries not only function as adjuvant institutions of learning and self-development but they also function as centers of national importance by enabling access to social and scientific information, national literature, and culture.

Knowledge is essential for educational advancement. In the words of Gurudev TAGORE, "...*knowledge grows as it overflows*".<sup>8</sup> RABINDRANATH TAGORE—like most other proponents of positive education—believed that education must strive to develop multiple capabilities in people, must stimulate creative instincts to support productivity, and where he perceived that one's success should depend on one's ability to create something new. Economic growth and productivity of a nation and *intellectual enrichment* of its people are possible when importance is given to education and learning since these are rights reserved (*prerogative*) for every single person on earth. Education is necessary for stimulating productivity among the citizens—and this is much desired in today's fast-paced digital age. Need of knowledge is justified for self-development too and to obtain power as well—for which it is equally imperative to make knowledge universally available to all the people. Public library responds to such needs of the society by being organizations of learning and knowledge dissemination. Public libraries remove the *barriers* that keep knowledge out of easy reach when the cost of procuring information runs high under certain circumstances. Therefore, PLs do a great job in educating the people of every country. Therefore, public libraries stand out to fulfill our national aspiration of educating its people by existing as a broader system of learning beyond the bounds of schools and universities.

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8. See, for instance, The Calcutta Review, Volume LXII, 1937, Convocation address of Rabindranath Tagore, *Present System of Education*.

People of every nation need education and knowledge that enable them to fulfill their socio-economic objectives. Any advancement in learning isn't possible without the presence and active involvement of a well functional public library system supporting the core educational system. For economic growth and social development, education is a must. Public libraries being the storehouses of knowledge capital support national education drives through promotion of learning. This makes large public libraries (PLs) the institutions of national importance. Since literacy and higher education are vital for national development and economic growth, it cannot be denied that the presence of a strong public library system grounded on advanced and up-to-date technologies does some real good to the society. Indeed, it is so; public libraries complement schools and higher educational institutes by assisting readers and adult learners who have no longer access to institutional resources or academic libraries (Chatterjee, Samanta and Dey, 2021). PLs help reduce the *digital gap* between the people with or without access to relevant knowledge resources (Krajina, IFLA, 2011). In other words, PLs promote learning and support self-development of those adult individuals in need of knowledge and information who are either outside the formal school system, lack digital tech gadgets or have no access to the Internet. It shall be born in mind that not everyone has uniform access to the Internet, whereas certain reports claim that global Internet penetration is around 69%—which means, as of 2022 around 69% of the world population actively use Internet<sup>9</sup>. This figure may vary widely but a close approximation could be derived from a study conducted by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) cohort group (2021) that place this figure at or around 63%. The rest—37% of the global population do not actively use nor have access to the Internet. However, it might be pointless to presume correctly whether they actively use public library services as well.

On this frontier, it may be rational to assume that a small fraction of nonusers of digital technology might be sparingly visiting their local public libraries or academic libraries in search of information. But this is just our assumption—for we refrain from giving an opinion based upon presumption only. Nevertheless, public libraries connect people with information and knowledge resources. Libraries not only support family literacy, but through promotion of reading culture they are the access points that support community-based literacy programs (Krolak, 2005). It is pertinent that policy makers and educationists pay heed to community demands for more literacy promotion activities and require governments to spend a certain percentage of the educational budget on libraries (Krolak, 2005). This would address the burning issue of lack of funds to support public libraries.

The main functions of public libraries are informative and educational; i.e., they support visitors who are either recreational readers or adult learners, or students and scholars, teachers and journalists, news columnists, authors, content writers, editors, curious seekers of knowledge, entrepreneurs, etc. Of course, public libraries are great community learning as well as meeting places for patrons who enjoy leisure and recreational reading too (Black and Muddiman, 1997). Reading is a pastime for many adults and senior citizens of society. Children, too, find books and other multimedia materials exciting and to inspire reading among them, public libraries go far beyond lending books to help them develop good reading habits (Ramos and Villa, 2015). Such readers frequently visit libraries to absorb themselves in books and other reading materials. Besides, to achieve academic and professional distinction and competency, usage and appreciation of library resources are necessary too.

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9. See, Internet Users by Country 2023, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/internet-users-by-country>

Beyond these, the public library system exists to support anybody who comes to its door. It helps visitors get hold of learning materials which are to be found in books, manuscripts, periodicals, journals, magazines, microfilm, microfiche, videotapes, and digital multimedia files including Compact Discs (CDs) and Digital Video Discs (DVDs), among a multitude of other materials having facts on file. PLs are, therefore, essential organizations that support a flourishing modern society by allowing access to information resources. They also function as community learning and information management centers. It is this latter role that public libraries play, which is our prime topic of interest, and, which concerns the primary theme of this research.

Public libraries support the expansion of knowledge through learning and research by providing information which arouse curiosity in the minds of the information seekers. It is often said that *a good librarian is the best judge of books*<sup>10</sup>. Users are encouraged take help of capable librarians and library assistants in their search for relevant information while conducting scholarly investigation and analysis. However, most of the users visiting libraries today are better informed than what they were in the past. Hence, patrons likely possess a broader perspective of what they come to search for in the libraries. Nevertheless, the deployment and use of modern automated kiosks and Library automation tools have greatly enhanced the power of search mechanisms in most public and academic libraries—thereby aiding the users in their search for information. The role of library personnel, nevertheless, is still one of the desired factors in research success.

### 3.1 Role of Public Libraries in Supporting Researchers

Some large public libraries—including the National and State Public Libraries possess huge collections of books and written materials that are often hard to find elsewhere. Researchers and scholars flock to these libraries in search of specialized information that are often missing from academic libraries. In essence, while conducting any research, any good and efficient researcher must have the necessary means of *access* to relevant data and information to built up knowledge and expertise on the topic he or she is investigating. Researchers bring unique capabilities with them while they also gain experience and new knowledge from conducting research. Research, literally, means the discovery or invention of new information through persistent and *methodological* search processes; i.e., searching again and again using tools of reasoning and logic, and aided by technology and resources until and unless one finds the *truth* that is sought. By meticulous search processes, a researcher is able to uncover hidden knowledge in order to solve specific problems. The findings from research also adds to the existing knowledge pool, stored, and used for further learning and improvement of the intellect. Indeed, according to Meadows (1998), research publications are considered as communication channels through which a whole range of information derived from studies and investigations in diverse domains are shared. Now, three things have greatest import while conducting any research:

- i. Materials included in undertaking the research,
- ii. The methods and procedures adopted by the researcher in conducting the research,
- iii. Usage of tools and technologies involved in doing the research,

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10. See, for instance, the remarks on James Logan in Theodore W. Koch's (1913) book, *The Library Assistant Manual*.

- iv. The role of information organizations, i.e., libraries (*atheneums*) in promoting learning and provisioning research materials, and
- v. How proficiently the research has been conducted by the researcher(s)

The effectiveness of a research and its success depends mainly on several other *endogenous* and *exogenous* factors like skills and abilities of the researchers, core competencies, research environment, expert guidance, and institutional factors like sponsorship and funding, among others. The availability of free access to relevant data and information is one of the prime factors that determine successful outcomes.

However, given all these, the role of libraries is supreme in supplying the investigators with the required knowledge of the past and contemporary findings that are essential for conducting a research more efficiently. The dynamic presence of an well-equipped and well-stocked library adds to the effectiveness of a research project. Libraries as essential organizations thus play an important part in providing users with the necessary knowledge and amplifying new knowledge created from research. It is to be acknowledged that our modern society is drawing its power and energy from knowledge resources where libraries function as models for facilitating the dynamic creation of organizational knowledge (Nonaka, 1994; Townley, 2001). Hence, we should acknowledge the *advantages* of visiting libraries as they not only help nurture good reading habits, but they help knit the threads of thought which bridge laboratories with libraries, organizations with their employees, and users with the library staff. In public libraries, all races and people irrespective of their abilities, educational backgrounds, intellects and socio-economic status are equally entitled to avail themselves of the benefits of free access to knowledge resources that they hold. The gates of every public library are ever wide open for people of diverse race and culture, competence, and place of origin. Public libraries—therefore, still matter today since they help create national social capital (Vårheim, Steinmo, and Ide, 2008), and constitute as one of the touchstones of national literary culture and tradition. In essence, public libraries are essentially substantive organizations that function for the greater benefit of societal wellbeing and educational welfare.

## 4 Conclusion

In this paper, we stressed the substantive importance of public libraries, which exist as essential organisations of knowledge dissemination and storage. Like other essential organisations, public libraries play a crucial role in driving community literacy and promoting learning and education among their users. They are vital organisations that define national identity and culture. The important role that public libraries play in our lives cannot be undermined, for they function as authentic depositories of social, cultural, traditional, and scientific wisdom of the past and present. For the smooth functioning of a knowledge society, access to information is a necessity. Public libraries allow access to their knowledge resources that is affordable (most PLs provide *free* access) for the general public and meets the knowledge needs and demands of the users. They not only function as key centers of autonomous and independent learning but also promote the development of a learned society. In that respect, public libraries could be aptly termed *substantive organizations*—organizations that are “essential” for the continuous progress and evolution of modern society.

□

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