

CURRENT STATUS OF SPECIAL LIBRARIES IN MANIPUR: AN ASSESSMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE, SERVICES, AND DIGITAL READINESS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To assess the status of the special libraries in Manipur in terms of service and facilities, ICT infrastructure, funding, professional skills, awareness about digital resources, and challenges in the field of digital library initiatives.

Methodology: Purposive sampling was used to conduct the structured questionnaire with the library professionals. According to the source study, the data were coded in Microsoft Excel and analyzed in SPSS 26 using frequency and percentage.

Findings: Basic facilities are more widely available than specialized digital services. 94.4% of the libraries surveyed report on stack areas, and 77.8% each report on reference services and reading halls. There are 77.8% of computers, 38.9% of automation software, and 33.3% of ICT-trained staff. Electronic information services are reported by 27.8%, 22.2% use CAS, and 22.2% use SDI. The percentage of computer/IT literacy is 72.2%, while the downloading of web resources is 44.4%. The awareness is highest for important websites (66.7%) and 61.1% for e-resources, databases, search engines, and remote access. The awareness of the Consortium and OPAC are 44.4% each. Lack of trained digitization staff (83.33%) and financial problems (66.67%) are the most common barriers reported.

Contribution: The study brings the reported evidence together in a clear descriptive analysis and uses data-based figures to show the main patterns. It does not create respondent-level data or apply unsupported statistical tests.

KEYWORDS: Special libraries; library services; ICT infrastructure; library automation; digital transformation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Special libraries occupy a distinctive position within the information environment because their collections, services, and professional practices are normally aligned with the specialized functions of the parent organization (Enwerem et al., 2020). They are generally unlike the general public or academic libraries, which are based around a relatively well-defined subject area, institutional mission, and user community. Their value is not only due to the presence of collections but also to their ability to recognize specialized information needs, to be able to arrange the necessary resources, and provide timely information to the users.

The ongoing evolution of information work has also brought about a shift in expectations for the operation of special libraries. The Internet, electronic information resources, library automation, remote access, digital preservation, online discovery, and information literacy are growing elements of today's library practice (Gul & Bano, 2019). These developments are not to undermine the importance of physical collections and traditional services. Instead, they develop a setting where elementary physical infrastructure and digital ability must work hand-in-hand.

The institutional context is important when there is a lack of technological facilities or small budgets in special libraries and small professional staff. This becomes more important for special libraries in the different departments of government, education, technical, legislative, medical, cultural, and other departments in Manipur. The study reveals the problems in the context of the research, including a lack of resources, a lack of old facilities, and a lack of digital access. The restrictions emphasize the importance of research-based reform, modernization of library facilities, and further investment in order to enhance the effectiveness of special library services.

The central question considered in the present study is as follows: How far has the surveyed special library moved from the conventional service delivery model to integrated digital and information services? The question is addressed on six dimensions: services and facilities, ICT infrastructure, financial resources, professional skills, awareness of digital resources, and barriers to digital implementation.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Special libraries offer targeted information for research, administration, professional information, and decision-making. For the groups they help, their situations are of concern. In this study, physical facilities, ICT infrastructure, professional skills, digital awareness, and implementation barriers are gathered. Analyzing these areas collectively provides a better understanding of the success of digital development and areas of weakness. The data also indicates that digital development is not synonymous. A library can be equipped with computers and databases, but not adequately automated, or the staff has learned about the databases but not how to digitize. The results can become the basis for planning development for staff, technology, services, sharing resources, and institutional support. These should not, however, be used as an indicator of the overall library performance or user satisfaction.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Special libraries are designed to serve specialized knowledge, research, and/or organizational functions. Kasabe and Salekar (2022) highlighted their ongoing significance in today's information landscape. Singh (2006) talked about the use of Internet resources, Electronic information, websites, networks, and consortia in Indian Special

libraries. This has implications for the present study due to the fact that low levels of access to ICTs do not equate with high levels of access to advanced digital services. Khan et al. (2019) cited the lack of space, electricity, computers, internet facilities, etc., in the special academic libraries. The current study also finds better physical facilities than specialized digital services.

Lade and Egbunu (2023) discussed the use of ICT in special libraries in Nigeria and revealed that the institutional environment influences technological development. The contribution of subject experts and special librarians in the process of information-literacy development was stressed by Girven (2017). This indicates that computer literacy is not the only aspect of professional capacity. Ard and Livingston (2014) pointed out that special libraries have some concerns in common with other library sectors, but also have unique concerns. They carry out their work in a context-specific way.

Infrastructure and exposure to new developments were other challenges identified by Singh (2006). Murray (2013, 2018) talked about organizational and leadership problems of special libraries, especially the small ones. The above themes are applicable to the staffing and management issues reported in the current study. Murray (2015) wrote about the changing professional trends in special libraries. When funding comes into consideration, it becomes relevant to look into the way in which special libraries are proving their worth to their users and to their management (Vilches, 2017). Dupont and Yakel (2013) talked about the importance of special collections. Jain (2019) gave a broader discussion about the digital divide in library services, and Kumar and Singh (2021) discussed library automation and its challenges and future.

Professional development and digital competence are also highlighted in recent work. Kumar and Gupta (2024) have explored the aspects of human-resource development in the digital environment, and Nakaziba and Ngulube (2024) have focused on the connection between continuing professional development and digital transformation. Similarly, Asiri and Finlay (2025) emphasized the need for digital skills for library workers.

The literature gives some background information but fails to provide a summarized empirical picture of the special libraries covered by this survey in the state of Manipur. This study, therefore, provides local descriptive evidence related to services, ICT infrastructure, skills, awareness, funding, and barriers. It is not intended to develop a generic model of the development of a special library, but rather to report the situation and indicate what needs attention.

4. OBJECTIVES

The study addresses the following objectives:

- i) To assess the visited services and facilities of the special libraries.
- ii) To assess the condition of ICT facilities.
- iii) To analyze the financial and budget situation of the libraries.
- iv) To look at the skills reported by the library professionals.
- v) To evaluate the awareness of digital tools and resources amongst the library professionals.
- vi) To know the reported factors affecting the implementation of the Digital Library initiative.

5. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a mixed-methods design to gain an understanding of the operating conditions and operations of special libraries. The survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire aimed at gathering data regarding library facilities, ICT infrastructure, financial resources, digital initiatives, and the skills of the staff. A few open-ended questions were also used to allow the respondent to provide information that may not be captured in the structured questions. Library professionals in the selected special libraries were selected using purposive sampling, and the questionnaire was administered.

The collected data from questionnaires were coded and entered into MS Excel 2019 and then analyzed by SPSS (v.26). The data were primarily presented using frequencies and percentages to make the data clear and comparable. In the present study, the data summarized in the source article were utilized as a framework for organizing and analyzing the various elements of special library services.

The analysis is structured around six areas, namely: services and facilities, ICT infrastructure, financial resources, professional skills, awareness of digital resources, and barriers to digital implementation. These areas serve as the foci for analyzing the current status and progress of the libraries surveyed in this report and their transition to digital and information-based services.

6. FINDINGS AND DATA INTERPRETATION

The results are represented by the dimensions: institutional and staffing context, services and facilities, ICT infrastructure, finance, professional skills, digital awareness, and barriers.

6.1. Institutional Inventory and Staffing Distribution

Table 1 indicates that there are wide differences among the 19 special libraries in staffing. RIMS has the highest staff number (26), followed by JNIMS with 13, MIT, and the Manipur Legislative Assembly with 12 each. On the other side, Imphal Arts College, Government Music and Dance Colleges, and TRI have only one staff member.

Table 1. Special Libraries Under Study and Their Staff in Manipur.

Sl. No.	Special Libraries Under Study	Total Staff
1	Regional Institute of Medical Science (RIMS), Imphal	26
2	Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS), Imphal	13
3	Manipur Institute of Technology (MIT), Imphal	12
4	Manipur Legislative Assembly, Imphal	12
5	Council of Higher Secondary Education Manipur (COHSEM), Imphal	11
6	Manipur High Court, Imphal	10
7	National Institute of Technology (NIT), Imphal	8
8	Manipur Technical University (MTU), Imphal	7
9	Central Agricultural University (CAU), Imphal	5
10	Manipur Secretariat, Imphal	5
11	Government Polytechnic College, Imphal	4
12	Institute of Cooperative Management (ICM), Imphal	3

13	Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy (JNMDA), Imphal	3
14	LMS Law College, Imphal	3
15	National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT), Imphal	2
16	State Academy of Training, Imphal	2
17	Imphal Arts College, Imphal	1
18	Government Music and Dance Colleges, Imphal	1
19	Tribal Research Institute (TRI), Imphal	1

The total number of staff in all the libraries varies from 1 to 26 staff, with significant differences between the libraries. As such, the structure of staffing at the libraries is quite different. The difference is significant for the development of digital services, with the introduction and maintenance of digital systems, electronic resources, and user services, sufficient human resources are needed. Smaller libraries may thus be less able to provide staff to specific technical duties for digital collections and may require help from colleagues or other institutional support to digitize materials on a collaborative basis or through other means. Bigger libraries, however, can typically share duties and responsibilities with staff. The information available, however, does not offer a direct link with the ICT facilities and digital adoption in institutions based on the staff strength. Figure 1 shows the wide variation in staff strength across the 19 listed libraries. The three one-person libraries are clearly separated from institutions with larger teams.

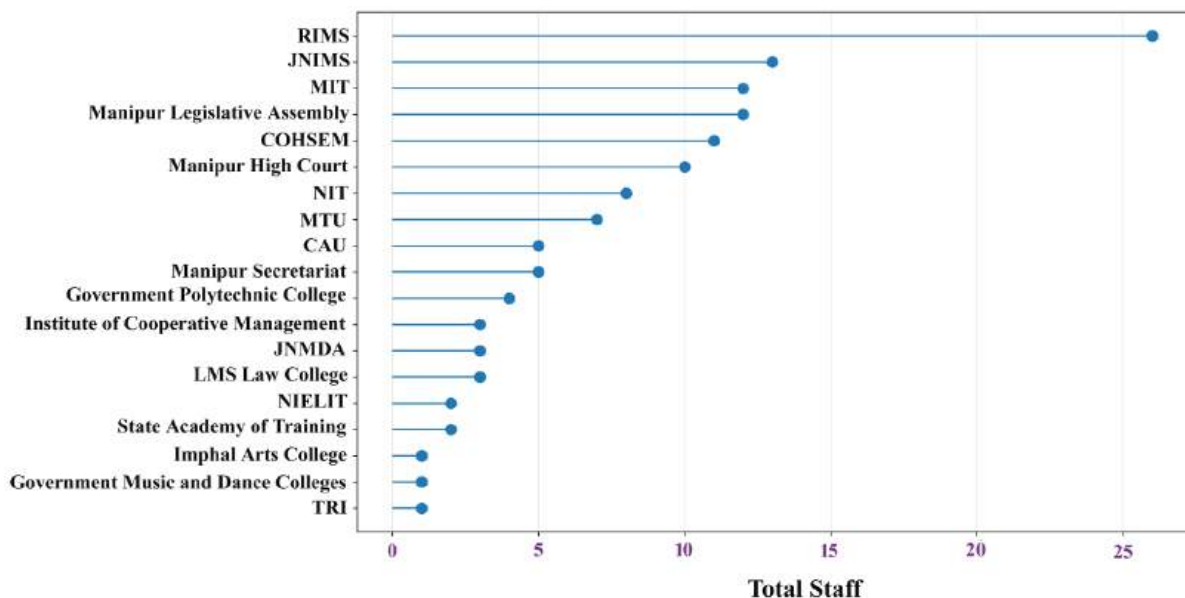


Fig 1. Staffing Pattern in Special Libraries in Manipur.

6.2. Services and Facilities

Table 2 shows that traditional facilities are more common than specialized digital services. Stack areas are available in 17 of 19 libraries (94.4%), while reference services and reading halls are available in 14 each

(77.8%). Circulation services are reported by 12 libraries (66.7%), and periodical services and Wi-Fi/internet by 11 each (61.1%).

Table 2. Services and facilities of special libraries.

Service/Facility	No. of Libraries	Percent (%)
Stack Area	17	94.4
Reference Services	14	77.8
Reading Hall	14	77.8
Circulation Services	12	66.7
Periodical Services	11	61.1
Wi-Fi/Internet	11	61.1
Fire Extinguisher	10	55.6
Reprography Services	9	50.0
Electronic Information	5	27.8
Separate Academic Staff Section (SASS)	5	27.8
Current Awareness Services (CAS)	4	22.2
Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI)	4	22.2

Fire extinguishers are reported by 10 libraries (55.6%), and reprography by 9 (50.0%). Thus, several basic facilities are available in at least half of the surveyed libraries. Electronic information services are reported by 5 libraries (27.8%), and a separate academic staff section by 5 (27.8%). CAS and SDI are each reported by 4 libraries (22.2%). The difference between stack areas (94.4%) and CAS/SDI (22.2%) is 72.2 percentage points. The pattern shows that the main gap is not the absence of all library infrastructure. Rather, specialized, proactive, and electronic services are less common than conventional services. The findings show that there has been a lack of reprography and binding. Table 2, however, shows that reprography is used in 50.0% of libraries and does not include binding

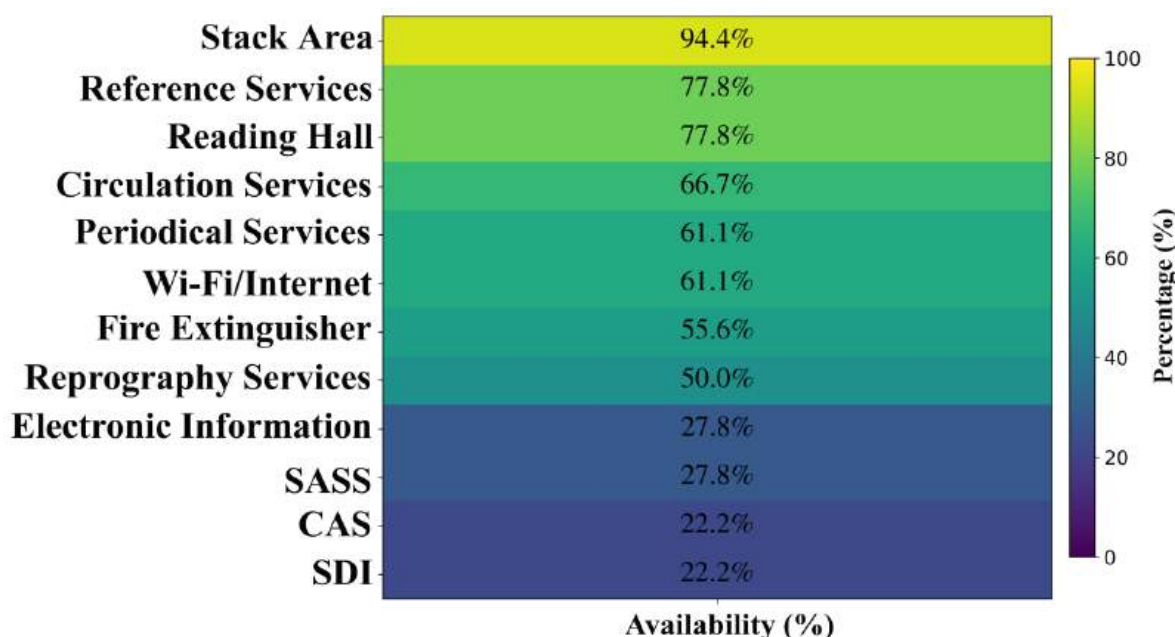


Fig 2. Availability of Services and Facilities.

Figure 2 highlights the strong concentration of higher availability around physical and conventional functions and the lower prevalence of proactive and electronic services.

6.3. ICT Infrastructure

Table 3 presents the ICT infrastructure reported by the 19 surveyed special libraries. Computers are available in 14 libraries (77.8%), while library automation software is reported in 7 libraries (38.9%). Among the 14 libraries with computers, 7 also report having automation software. This indicates that computer availability is considerably more widespread than the use of library automation software.

Table 3. Availability of ICT Infrastructure.

ICT Infrastructure	Response	No. of Libraries	Percent (%)
Computer	No	4	22.2
	Yes	14	77.8
Library Automation Software	No	11	61.1
	Yes	7	38.9
ICT-Trained Staff	No	12	66.7
	Yes	6	33.3
Internet Connection	No	7	38.9
	Yes	11	61.1
LAN	No	8	44.4
	Yes	10	55.6
Total		18	100.0

Internet connectivity is reported by 11 libraries (61.1%), while 10 libraries (55.6%) have a LAN. ICT-trained staff are reported in only 6 libraries (33.3%). There is a difference of 44.5 percentage points between computer availability and ICT-trained staff, and 27.8 percentage points between internet connectivity and ICT-trained staff.

The results show that the availability of basic ICT hardware is higher than the availability of automation software and ICT-trained personnel. The pattern indicates that having access to computers does not necessarily relate to wider digital skills development. Other key elements of digital library services are software, networking, and personnel who have relevant skills in ICT. The results thus suggest that one should take a holistic approach to evaluating the digital capacity of special libraries, investigating hardware, software, connections, and staff skills.

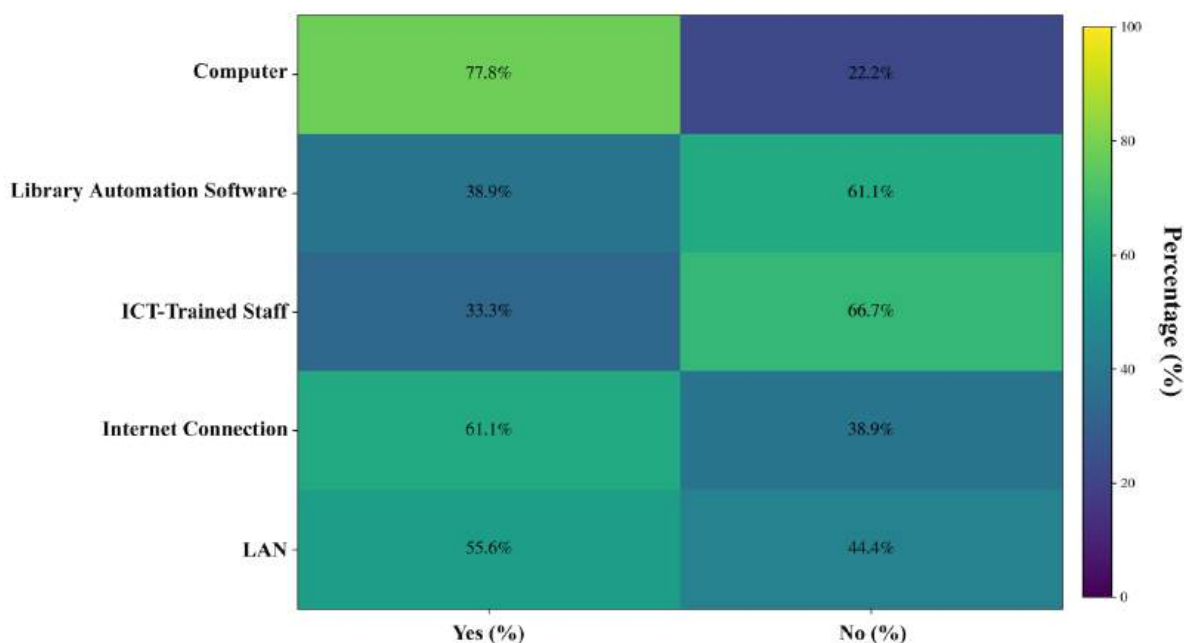


Fig. 3. ICT infrastructure of Special Libraries.

Figure 3 shows the percentages for both ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ answers for the five ICT indicators. It differentiates between computer access and the less highly automated levels, and between the latter and the presence of the ICT-trained staff.

6.3. Financial and Budget Position

Table 4 shows that state funding is the main reported source of financial support for the surveyed libraries. One library (5.6%) defines the state as the funding institution, three libraries (16.7%) each define MHRD and other sources as the funding institution. The figures represent the distribution of reported sources of funding, not the amount of financial support provided to each library.

Things are different in the assessment of budgeting adequacy. Eleven libraries (61.1%) answered that there is not enough money, and six (33.3%) said they could not evaluate the adequacy of their budget and were unable to answer “Cannot Say.” 5.6% of the libraries think that their budget is adequate.

The findings highlight a difference between the source of funding and perceptions of budget adequacy. Although most libraries identify the state as their main funding source, the majority of respondents do not consider their available budget sufficient. The findings therefore point to financial constraints as an important consideration in the planning and development of library services, particularly where additional resources are required for ICT infrastructure and digital services.

Table 4.Financial Position of the Libraries.

		No. of Libraries	Percent (%)
Funding Institution	State Government	12	66.7
	Ministry of Education (MoE)	3	16.7
	Any other	3	16.7
Budget Adequacy	Not Sufficient	11	61.1
	Cannot Say	6	33.3
	Sufficient	1	5.6

6.4. Skills of Library Professionals

Table 5 presents the reported digital and ICT-related skills of library professionals. Computer and IT literacy has the highest reported level at 72.2%, followed by familiarity with library software and internet browsing, both at 66.7%. Online searching is reported by 61.1% of the respondents. Offline searching, website access, and familiarity with digital resources are each reported at 55.6%. Audio-video conferencing is reported by 50.0%, while downloading web resources has the lowest reported level at 44.4%. The difference between the highest and lowest reported skill levels is 27.8 percentage points. The findings indicate that basic computer and internet-related skills are more common than some of the more specialized digital activities.

Table 5. ICT and Digital Skills of Library Professionals.

Skill	No. of Libraries/Professionals	Percent (%)
Computer and IT Literacy	13	72.2
Library Software Familiarity	12	66.7
Internet Browsing	12	66.7
Online Search	11	61.1
Offline Search	10	55.6
Website Access	10	55.6
Digital Resources	10	55.6
Audio-video Conference	9	50.0
Downloading Web Resources	8	44.4

The reported skill levels indicate that basic computer and internet-related skills are more common among library professionals, while skills related to downloading web resources and audio-video conferencing are less widely reported. The findings also point to differences in the level of familiarity with various digital activities among the surveyed professionals.

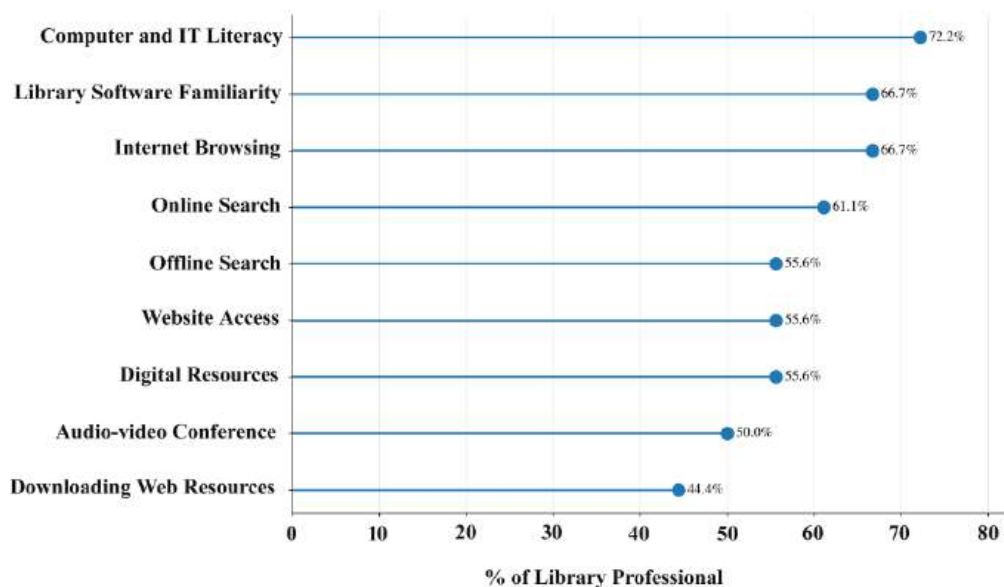


Fig 4. Dynamics of Skill Levels.

6.5. Awareness of Digital Tools and Resources

Table 6 presents the reported awareness of different digital resources and tools among library professionals. Awareness of important websites is the highest at 66.7%. E-resources, databases, search engines, and remote access are each reported at 61.1%. Awareness of consortium services and OPAC is lower, at 44.4% each.

Table 6. Library Professionals and Their Awareness of Digital Resources and Tools.

Digital Resource/Tool	No. of Librarians	Percent (%)
E-Resources	11	61.1
Consortium	8	44.4
Important Websites	12	66.7
Databases	11	61.1
Search Engines	11	61.1
Remote Access	11	61.1
OPAC	8	44.4

Overall, awareness is higher for general digital information resources than for some library-specific and collaborative tools. The difference between awareness of important websites and awareness of OPAC and consortium services is 22.3 percentage points. The findings indicate variation in the level of awareness across different digital tools and resources. Greater attention to library automation, OPAC, consortium services, and electronic resources may help strengthen the digital orientation of library services.

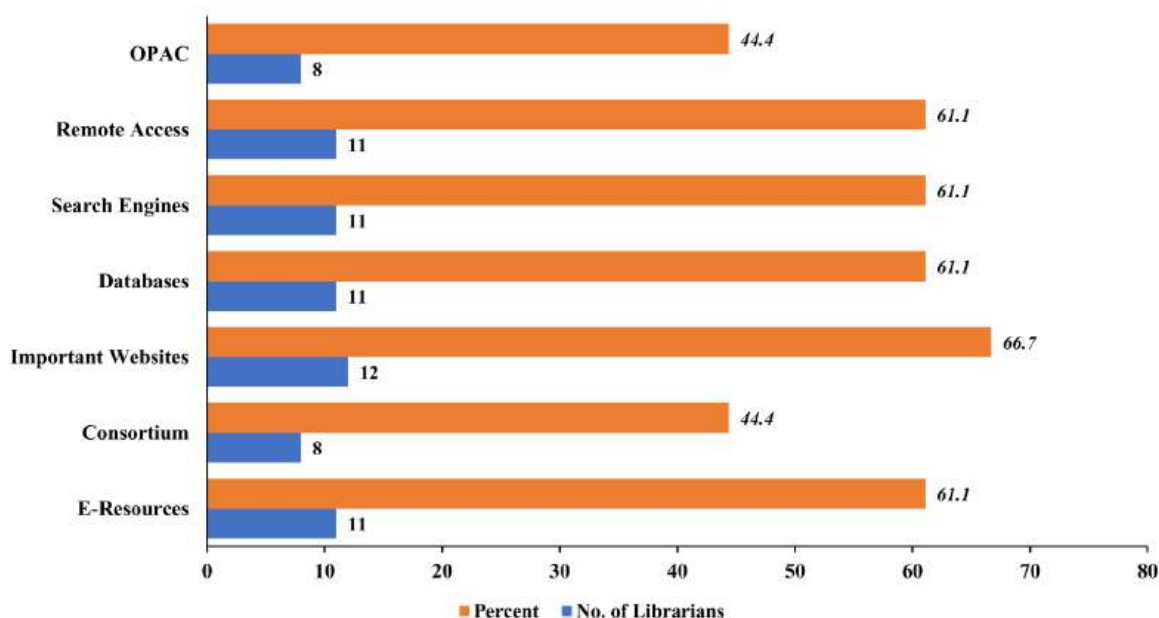


Fig. 5. Awareness Levels of Professionals.

6.6. Digital Library Initiatives: The Constraints

Table 7 presents the major barriers reported in relation to digital library initiatives. Lack of trained digitization staff is the most frequently reported barrier, identified by 15 libraries (83.33%), followed by financial problems, reported by 12 libraries (66.67%). Top-management disinterest and inadequate staffing are each reported by 10 libraries (55.56%). Space-related problems are reported by 7 libraries (38.9%), while preservation problems and problems with constant power supply are each reported by 6 libraries (33.33%). Lack of cooperation from higher authorities is reported by 5 libraries (27.8%).

Table 7. Key Challenges and Barriers to Implementing Digital Library Initiatives.

Constraint	No. of Libraries	Percent (%)
Lack of Trained Digitization Staff	15	83.33
Financial Problems	12	66.67
Top Management Disinterest	10	55.56
Inadequate Staffing	10	55.56
Space	7	38.9
Preservation Problems	6	33.33
Power Supply Problems	6	33.33
Lack of Cooperation from Higher Authorities	5	27.8

The findings indicate that staffing and financial constraints are the most prominent barriers to digital library initiatives. Management-related issues also feature prominently, while space, preservation, power supply, and institutional cooperation are reported less frequently. The range of barriers suggests that the development of digital library services depends on staff capacity, financial support, management involvement, infrastructure, and institutional cooperation.

6.7. Cross-Dimensional Evidence Synthesis

Across the seven tables, the findings indicate uneven development among the surveyed special libraries rather than a complete absence of technology. Stack areas are reported by 94.4% of libraries, while reference services and reading halls are reported by 77.8% each. Circulation services and computer availability are reported by 66.7% and 77.8%, respectively. The figures are lower for several specialized digital areas. Library automation software is reported by 38.9% of libraries, ICT-trained staff by 33.3%, electronic information services by 27.8%, and CAS and SDI services by 22.2% each. Among professional skills, computer and IT literacy is reported at 72.2%, compared with 44.4% for downloading web resources. Awareness of OPAC and consortium services is also 44.4%.

The comparison of indicators further highlights differences across the surveyed libraries. Computer availability is 77.8%, compared with 38.9% for automation software. Internet connectivity is reported at 61.1%, compared with 33.3% for ICT-trained staff. Awareness of e-resources is 61.1%, while electronic information services are reported at 27.8%. Important website awareness is 66.7%, compared with 44.4% for OPAC awareness, while computer and IT literacy are 72.2%, compared with 44.4% for downloading web resources. Lack of trained digitization staff is reported by 83.3% of libraries, while financial problems are reported by 66.7%. In addition, 61.1% report insufficient budgets. These findings place staffing and financial resources among the more prominent concerns affecting digital library development.

The findings present a varied picture across **infrastructure, software, professional skills, digital awareness, services, management, and financial resources**. The development of digital library services, therefore, differs across these areas, with basic infrastructure and general digital skills more widely reported than several specialized digital services and capabilities.

7. DISCUSSION

The results reveal that the digital development is in varying stages in the special libraries in Manipur. Basic services are more prevalent than advanced digital services. It is broadly similar to the previous studies, which have emphasized the changing role of Electronic resources, networking, and Professional expertise in Special libraries (Singh 2006).

Digital services are still affected by infrastructure. The 61.1% of the surveyed libraries and 55.6% of LAN have an Internet connection. Concurrently, 33.3% cited problems with the power supply as a hindrance. This suggests that digital services are not just about computers and software, but also about the availability of secure basic infrastructure. Results also indicate a distinction between general computer skills and more specific digital skills. Computer and IT literacy is reported by 72.2% of the libraries, and 44.4% report downloading web resources, and 50.0% report audio-video conferencing. As such, all library professionals do not necessarily have the same level of practical digital skills. This supports Girven's (2017) focus on specialist expertise and information literacy in library services.

Staffing and management are also significant issues. There are two issues that are reported by 55.6% of the libraries, which are inadequate staff and a lack of management interest. These results indicate that digital

development is not only a technical issue. Staff availability and institutional support also influence the capacity of libraries to initiate and sustain digital services.

Another limitation is the financial situation. Approximately 61.1% of the libraries reported that the budgets were not adequate. The finding is relevant to the discussion Vilches (2017) has presented about the importance of special libraries to prove their worth in their parent organizations. If a library has limited resources, use of the service and contribution to the institution can be useful in discussions for future support. There is a distinct lack of congruence between the availability of computers and the automation of the library. 77.8% of the libraries surveyed have computers, and 38.9% report library automation software. Computers are not necessarily a sign of automation of core library operations.

The same gap between awareness and the actual service provision is also observed. 61.1% of the libraries report their awareness of e-resources, while only 27.8% report electronic information facilities. This indicates that the provision of digital services does not always accompany knowledge of digital resources. There are still a lot of traditional library services. 94.4% of the libraries have stack areas, and 77.8% have reference services and reading halls. Therefore, digital development should be based on the existing services and not on the idea of digital systems as a replacement for the traditional library.

The libraries are also quite different in terms of their staffing and institutional contexts. There are some staff who have rather large staff complements, and others have only 1 or 2 staff members. Smaller libraries will be more likely to experience challenges when offering specialized digital services and may be able to receive assistance in cataloging, training, digitization, and technical support from other libraries in a cooperative arrangement. However, direct comparison between the Library size and digital performance is not possible from the present data. The results indicate that the following are key areas to address: infrastructure, staffing, skills, finance, and management support. The study does not determine the relative influence of the barriers or the causality between the barriers and the digital gaps. The findings are thus to be seen as a description of the current situation and as a foundation for planning further development.

8. PRACTICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings suggest several practical actions.

- i) Staff development should be continuous and task-based. Training can cover automation, OPAC management, digital-resource access, digitization, metadata, preservation, and electronic services.
- ii) ICT investment should include software, networking, maintenance, technical support, and staff capacity, not only computers.
- iii) Digital services should reflect the needs of specialized users. CAS and SDI are each reported by only 22.2%, so future planning should consider user needs before selecting services.
- iv) Cooperative mechanisms also deserve attention. Awareness of consortia and OPAC is 44.4% each. Future work should examine whether this reflects limited access, training, or institutional participation.
- v) Financial planning should record actual allocations and expenditures for technology, subscriptions, training, maintenance, and staffing. This would provide stronger evidence than perceived budget adequacy alone.

- vi) Management support is also important. With 55.56% reporting top-management disinterest, digital initiatives need institutional support and clear implementation plans.
- vii) Preservation and reliable infrastructure should remain part of digital planning. One-third of libraries report preservation problems and constant power-supply issues.

9. LIMITATIONS

There are a number of limitations of this study. Aggregate data from the source article is used for analysis since raw data in Excel/SPSS format is not available. Respondent-level analysis was therefore not feasible. The methodology also notes an open-ended part, but the source article does not outline a systematic qualitative analysis. No qualitative inferences have been made, therefore. The data reported are descriptive and do not demonstrate causality between staffing, budget, skills, and digital implementation. The study does not measure quality, frequency of use, user satisfaction, or service impact; it only measures reported availability/awareness. Financial adequacy is subjective, and one-third of respondents chose 'Cannot say' as opposed to budget numbers being audited.

10. CONCLUSION

This study is a descriptive study of the survey results of the special libraries in Manipur. Basic physical facilities, computer access, automation, ICT-trained staff, electronic information services, CAS, and SDI are relatively common, and less common, respectively. The use of basic digital skills and awareness is also more prevalent than some of the more specialized services. The computer and IT literacy rate is 72.2, awareness of important websites is 66.7, and awareness of e-resources, databases, search engines, and remote access is 61.1 each. 44.4% aware of the OPAC, 44.4% aware of the consortium. 44.4% downloaded the web resources, 44.4% aware of the consortium, 44.4% aware of the OPAC. The two most common obstacles are that they do not have enough trained digitization staff, and they have financial issues, or top management is not interested, or they do not have enough staff to digitize. The results indicate that digital development is a process that requires the support of people, systems, finance, and management. Balancing the traditional service with increased automation, electronic resources, staff training, resource sharing, and user-friendly electronic services is required. Small libraries may find cooperative solutions to be especially beneficial. No single score of readiness or causal model is offered. It is useful for illustrating the reported distribution of capabilities and constraints along various dimensions.

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