

**“Trends, Challenges, and Management of Public Library
Collections in Gujarat’s Municipal Corporations: A Comparative
Review”**

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Abstract:

Public libraries play a crucial role in fostering knowledge dissemination, literacy development, and social inclusion in urban environments. In Gujarat, municipal corporations have been instrumental in managing and developing public library systems. This conceptual paper examines the trends, challenges, and management practices of public library collections in selected municipal corporations, namely Surat, Rajkot, and Ahmedabad. The study is based on secondary data derived from government reports, scholarly articles, and policy documents published between 2020 and 2025. The findings indicate a significant transition from print-based collections to digital resources, increasing emphasis on user-centric services, and the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT). However, challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of skilled manpower, digital divide, and policy constraints continue to hinder effective library management. The paper concludes with policy recommendations to strengthen municipal public libraries in Gujarat.

1. Introduction:

Public libraries are vital institutions in the knowledge society, serving as gateways to information, education, and cultural development. They promote literacy, lifelong learning, and social inclusion by providing free and equitable access to knowledge resources. In an era characterized by rapid digital transformation, public libraries have expanded their roles beyond traditional book lending to include digital services, community engagement, and information literacy programs. These institutions act as democratic spaces where individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds can access information and enhance their intellectual capabilities.

In the Indian context, municipal corporations play a significant role in the establishment, funding, and management of public libraries, particularly in urban areas. They are responsible for developing infrastructure, allocating budgets, and ensuring the effective delivery of library services to the public. The efficiency of municipal governance directly influences the quality, accessibility, and modernization of library systems. With increasing urbanization, municipal bodies are expected to integrate advanced technologies and user-centric approaches into library management.

Gujarat, one of India's most rapidly developing states, presents a unique context for examining public library systems. Urban centers such as Surat, Rajkot, and Ahmedabad have experienced significant economic and demographic growth, leading to increased demand for accessible and modern library services. These cities differ in terms of scale, infrastructure, and administrative capacity, making them suitable for comparative analysis.

Despite the growing importance of public libraries, there is limited conceptual research focusing on collection development and management practices within municipal corporations in Gujarat. A comparative analysis of selected urban libraries can provide valuable insights into existing trends, operational challenges, and management strategies. Such an analysis is essential for identifying best practices and addressing gaps in policy and implementation.

The primary objectives of this paper are to examine trends in collection development, analyze management practices, identify key challenges, and provide a comparative understanding of public library systems in selected municipal corporations of Gujarat.

2. Objectives of the Study

- To examine trends in collection development
- To analyze management practices using existing literature
- To identify challenges faced by municipal public libraries
- To compare library systems conceptually across selected cities

3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in key principles of Library and Information Science (LIS), particularly the interrelated concepts of collection development, library management, and public library services. These concepts provide the theoretical base for analyzing municipal public libraries in Gujarat within a comparative context.

Collection Development refers to the systematic process of selecting, acquiring, organizing, and evaluating library resources to meet the informational, educational, and recreational needs of users. According to Evans and Saponaro (2012), collection development is a continuous and user-driven activity that involves policy formulation, resource selection, and periodic evaluation. In modern public libraries, this concept has expanded to include digital resources such as e-books, online databases, and open-access materials, reflecting the shift toward hybrid collections. The emphasis is increasingly on relevance, diversity, and accessibility of resources.

Library Management encompasses the planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling of library operations. Koontz and O'Donnell's management theory highlights efficiency and goal-oriented administration, which are essential for effective library functioning. In the context of public libraries, management also involves financial planning, human resource development, and the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT). Modern library management adopts automation systems, digital cataloguing, and performance evaluation mechanisms to enhance service delivery.

Public Library Services are based on the principles of equity, inclusivity, and community engagement. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions defines public libraries as institutions that provide free access to information, support lifelong learning, and promote cultural development. Services have evolved from traditional lending to include digital access, information literacy programs, outreach activities, and specialized services for children, senior citizens, and differently-abled users.

The theoretical foundation of this study is supported by the **user-centered approach**, which prioritizes user needs and satisfaction in designing library services and collections. Additionally, **digital transformation theory** explains the integration of ICT in library systems, enabling remote access, digital resource management, and improved user engagement. These frameworks collectively guide the analysis of trends, challenges, and management practices in municipal public libraries, forming a comprehensive basis for this conceptual study.

4. Review of Literature

The body of literature on public libraries highlights their evolving role in knowledge dissemination, community development, and digital transformation. Both Indian and international studies emphasize the need for modernization, effective collection policies, and improved governance in public library systems.

Indian Studies on Public Libraries

In the Indian context, public libraries have traditionally been recognized as instruments of social education and democratic access to information. Kumar (2022) analyzed the status of public libraries in India and noted that despite a wide network, many libraries face issues related to funding, infrastructure, and outdated collections.

Recent studies have focused on digital transformation. Sharma (2025) observed that India has a vast network of public libraries, but they face challenges such as uneven ICT adoption, shortage of trained staff, and limited digital resources. The study further highlights that nearly 75% of libraries are undergoing some form of digitization, indicating a significant shift toward digital services.

Government initiatives such as the National Mission on Libraries have played a crucial role in strengthening infrastructure and promoting digital access. The initiative aims to create a National Virtual Library of India, enabling multilingual access to digital resources and improving service delivery.

Studies on rural and semi-urban contexts reveal that digital libraries have the potential to bridge educational gaps, but challenges such as poor internet connectivity and low digital literacy persist (Singh, 2024).

International Perspectives

International literature emphasizes the transformation of public libraries into knowledge hubs supported by digital technologies. Rasuli (2023) highlights the importance of improving accessibility to research through simplified communication formats, such as plain language summaries, to enhance user engagement.

Shim and Jhaver (2023) discuss governance challenges in digital library environments, particularly in managing digital content subscriptions. Their study identifies issues such as lack of control over content quality and the need for better policy frameworks in digital collection management.

Mukherjee and Patra (2023) provide insights into digital library initiatives, noting that many libraries lack standardized practices, proper metadata systems, and remote accessibility. This indicates the need for stronger digital infrastructure and professional training.

Studies on Collection Policies

Collection development has been a central theme in LIS research. Studies emphasize that effective collection policies must balance print and digital resources while aligning with user needs. Indian research highlights that collection development is often constrained by budget limitations and lack of formal policies, leading to imbalanced collections.

Internationally, collection policies are increasingly influenced by digital content providers, which raises concerns regarding quality control and relevance. Libraries are required to adopt flexible and adaptive policies to address these challenges.

Digital Shift in Libraries

The transition from traditional to digital libraries is a dominant trend across studies. Research indicates that digital libraries enhance accessibility, enable remote learning, and support knowledge sharing. However, the implementation of digital systems is often hindered by infrastructure limitations and lack of technical expertise.

In India, digitization initiatives have improved access to information, but disparities remain between urban and rural libraries. The digital divide continues to be a major concern, affecting equitable access to information.

Municipal Library Governance

Governance plays a critical role in the functioning of public libraries. Studies indicate that decentralized governance models, such as those involving municipal corporations, can improve service delivery if supported by adequate funding and policy frameworks. However, inconsistencies in administrative practices and lack of coordination between authorities often hinder effective management.

Recent developments in Gujarat suggest increased investment in library infrastructure and expansion of services, particularly to support students and competitive exam aspirants.

Research Gap

The review of literature reveals that while there is substantial research on public libraries in India and digital transformation, limited studies focus specifically on municipal public libraries in Gujarat. Moreover, comparative analyses of collection development and management practices across different urban centers are scarce. Most existing studies are either national-level or focused on academic libraries, leaving a gap in understanding the functioning of municipal public libraries in rapidly developing urban regions.

Therefore, this study addresses the gap by providing a conceptual comparative review of public library collections and management practices in selected municipal corporations of Gujarat.

5. Overview of Public Library Systems in Gujarat

The public library system in Gujarat operates through a **multi-tier structure** involving state-level administration and local governance bodies such as municipal corporations. At the apex, the Directorate of Libraries under the Government of Gujarat supervises policy formulation, coordination, and development initiatives, while local authorities manage day-to-day operations. This decentralized structure enables municipal corporations to tailor library services according to local community needs.

At the urban level, municipal corporations are responsible for establishing and maintaining **public libraries, branch libraries, and reading rooms**. For example, the Surat Municipal Corporation operates a central library along with numerous ward-level reading rooms and community libraries distributed across different zones of the city, reflecting a highly decentralized and accessible model. Similarly, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation manages multiple public libraries and branch units across various localities, including well-known central libraries and community-based reading spaces. These systems are designed to provide equitable access to information resources for urban populations.

The **governance and funding pattern** of public libraries in Gujarat is a combination of state support and local funding. The Gujarat Public Libraries Act, 2001 provides for the establishment of a State Library Development Fund, which includes grants from the state government, central assistance, and public contributions for modernization and development activities. Additionally, municipal corporations allocate budgetary resources for infrastructure, staffing, and maintenance. Recent policy initiatives indicate increased government investment in library infrastructure and digital transformation, with substantial funding directed toward expanding digital libraries and modern facilities.

A brief conceptual comparison of major urban centers reveals distinct characteristics. Surat demonstrates a **well-distributed network of libraries and reading rooms**, emphasizing accessibility at the ward level. Ahmedabad, being a metropolitan city, exhibits a **more advanced and structured library system** with greater integration of centralized and branch libraries. In contrast, Rajkot represents a **developing model**, where library services are expanding gradually with increasing focus on modernization and user-oriented services.

Overall, Gujarat's public library system reflects a **decentralized yet evolving framework**, supported by government initiatives and municipal governance, aiming to enhance accessibility, digital integration, and community engagement in urban areas.

Trends in Collection Development

Collection development in public libraries has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, particularly with the integration of digital technologies and changing user expectations. In the context of Gujarat's municipal libraries, several key trends can be identified based on recent reports, policy initiatives, and scholarly literature.

One of the most prominent trends is the **shift from print to digital resources**. Traditionally, public libraries relied heavily on printed books, journals, and newspapers. However, with the rapid growth of information technology, there has been a noticeable transition toward digital collections, including e-books, e-journals, and online databases. This shift is driven by factors such as ease of access, space constraints, and the growing preference of users—especially students and young professionals—for digital content. Municipal libraries in urban centers like Ahmedabad and Surat have increasingly adopted hybrid models that combine both print and digital resources to cater to diverse user needs.

Another important trend is the growing adoption of **e-resources and library automation**. Libraries are implementing integrated library management systems (ILMS) to automate key functions such as cataloguing, circulation, and user management. Automation not only

improves operational efficiency but also enhances user experience by enabling online catalog access (OPAC), digital membership systems, and remote access to resources. The integration of ICT tools has facilitated better organization and retrieval of information, making libraries more responsive and efficient.

The development of **community-oriented collections** is also gaining prominence. Public libraries are increasingly focusing on curating collections that reflect the specific needs and interests of their local communities. This includes materials for competitive examinations, skill development, children's education, and regional language literature. In cities like Rajkot, libraries are gradually aligning their collections with local cultural and educational requirements, thereby enhancing their relevance and usage.

Furthermore, the increasing use of **open access resources** has significantly influenced collection development practices. Libraries are leveraging freely available digital content, such as open-access journals, institutional repositories, and government publications, to expand their collections without incurring high costs. This trend is particularly beneficial in addressing budget constraints while ensuring wider access to knowledge. Open access initiatives also support academic and research communities by providing unrestricted access to scholarly information.

Overall, these trends indicate a paradigm shift in collection development from ownership to access, from static collections to dynamic and user-driven resources, and from traditional practices to technologically integrated systems. This transformation reflects the evolving role of public libraries as modern information centers in the digital age.

6. Management Practices in Municipal Libraries

Management practices in municipal public libraries have evolved in response to changing information needs, technological advancements, and administrative reforms. In Gujarat's urban context, libraries in cities such as Surat, Rajkot, and Ahmedabad demonstrate varying approaches to organizational structure, use of information and communication technology (ICT), human resource management, and policy implementation.

The **organizational structure** of municipal libraries is typically hierarchical and operates under the administrative control of the respective municipal corporation. At the top level, a library committee or designated municipal authority oversees policy decisions, budgeting, and strategic planning. The operational structure generally includes a chief librarian or library officer, supported by professional librarians, assistants, and technical staff. Larger cities like Ahmedabad tend to have more structured systems with multiple branch libraries and

specialized sections, whereas cities like Rajkot may have relatively simpler organizational frameworks with limited staff and infrastructure.

The **use of ICT** has become a central component of modern library management. Municipal libraries are increasingly adopting integrated library management systems (ILMS) to automate core functions such as cataloguing, circulation, acquisition, and serial control. Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs) allow users to search for resources remotely, enhancing accessibility and user convenience. Digitization initiatives, including the scanning of rare books and archival materials, are also being undertaken to preserve cultural heritage and expand digital collections. Cities like Ahmedabad and Surat have made notable progress in implementing ICT-based services, reflecting a shift toward more efficient and user-friendly systems.

Human resource management remains a critical factor influencing the effectiveness of library services. The availability of qualified and trained library professionals is essential for managing both traditional and digital resources. However, many municipal libraries face challenges related to staff shortages, limited training opportunities, and lack of expertise in emerging technologies. Continuous professional development programs, workshops, and training in digital librarianship are necessary to enhance staff competencies and ensure effective service delivery.

Policy frameworks play a vital role in guiding library operations and ensuring consistency in collection development and management practices. The Gujarat Public Libraries Act, 2001 provides a legal foundation for the establishment and development of public libraries in the state. Municipal libraries also develop internal policies related to collection development, user services, and resource management. However, the implementation of these policies often varies across cities due to differences in administrative capacity, funding, and priorities.

Overall, management practices in municipal libraries in Gujarat reflect a transition toward modernization and efficiency. While significant progress has been made in adopting ICT and improving organizational structures, challenges related to human resources and policy implementation continue to affect the overall effectiveness of library systems.

7. Challenges in Public Library Systems

Despite ongoing efforts to modernize and expand public library services, municipal libraries in Gujarat continue to face several structural and operational challenges. These challenges significantly affect the efficiency of collection development, service delivery, and overall library management in cities such as Surat, Rajkot, and Ahmedabad.

One of the most critical issues is financial constraints. Public libraries largely depend on government funding and municipal budgets, which are often limited and subject to competing priorities such as infrastructure, health, and sanitation. Insufficient funding restricts the acquisition of updated resources, technological upgrades, and maintenance of library infrastructure. As a result, many libraries struggle to maintain balanced and up-to-date collections, particularly in rapidly evolving fields.

Another major challenge is the presence of technological gaps. While there has been progress in adopting ICT, the level of technological integration varies significantly across municipal libraries. Larger cities like Ahmedabad may have relatively advanced systems, but smaller or developing cities such as Rajkot often face limitations in implementing automation, digitization, and online services. Inadequate internet connectivity, lack of digital infrastructure, and limited access to e-resources further widen the digital divide, restricting users' ability to benefit from modern library services.

The lack of trained professionals is also a significant concern. Effective management of modern libraries requires skilled personnel with expertise in digital librarianship, information technology, and user services. However, many municipal libraries operate with insufficient staff or personnel lacking specialized training. This not only affects service quality but also limits the adoption of innovative practices such as digital resource management and user engagement programs.

Low user engagement presents another challenge. With the increasing availability of information through the internet and mobile devices, traditional library usage has declined. Many users prefer online sources over physical library visits, leading to reduced footfall in public libraries. Additionally, limited awareness of available library services and lack of outreach initiatives contribute to underutilization. Libraries need to adopt proactive strategies to attract and retain users, particularly younger generations.

Finally, policy and governance issues hinder the effective functioning of public libraries. Although frameworks such as the Gujarat Public Libraries Act, 2001 provide a legal basis, inconsistencies in policy implementation and coordination between state and municipal authorities often create administrative inefficiencies. Differences in priorities, lack of standardized procedures, and bureaucratic delays can impede decision-making and resource allocation.

In conclusion, while municipal public libraries in Gujarat are progressing toward modernization, addressing these challenges is essential to ensure their sustainability and relevance in the digital age. A comprehensive approach involving increased funding,

technological investment, professional training, user engagement strategies, and effective governance is necessary for strengthening public library systems.

8. Comparative Discussion

A conceptual comparison of municipal public libraries in Surat, Rajkot, and Ahmedabad reveals both converging trends and distinct developmental patterns shaped by urban scale, administrative capacity, and resource allocation.

In terms of similarities, all three cities reflect a gradual transition toward hybrid collection models, combining print and digital resources. There is a common emphasis on supporting educational needs—particularly competitive examinations, student learning, and general reading. Each municipal system also demonstrates an increasing awareness of the importance of ICT integration, user-oriented services, and community engagement. Furthermore, governance across all three cities operates within a similar statutory and administrative framework, influenced by state-level policies and municipal oversight.

However, notable differences emerge when examining infrastructure, services, and levels of modernization. Ahmedabad, being a metropolitan city, exhibits comparatively advanced infrastructure, including a wider network of libraries, better-equipped reading spaces, and more consistent availability of digital services. Its scale allows for greater investment in technology and diversified services, such as digitized catalogues and broader access to e-resources.

Surat presents a well-distributed and accessible model, with a strong network of ward-level libraries and reading rooms. While its technological adoption is progressing, the city's strength lies in accessibility and community reach. The focus is more on decentralization and ensuring that library services are physically available across different urban zones.

In contrast, Rajkot represents a developing stage of library modernization. Infrastructure and services are comparatively limited, and efforts are ongoing to expand facilities and integrate digital systems. While the intent toward modernization is evident, constraints related to funding, staffing, and technological resources influence the pace of development.

From an analytical perspective, these differences can be attributed to variations in economic capacity, administrative priorities, and urban complexity. Larger cities like Ahmedabad benefit from greater financial and institutional support, enabling faster adoption of modern practices. Surat's model reflects a balanced approach emphasizing accessibility, while Rajkot highlights the challenges faced by mid-sized cities in achieving comparable levels of development.

Overall, the comparative analysis suggests that while the direction of growth is similar across all three cities, the extent and pace of modernization vary significantly. This underscores

the need for context-specific strategies to strengthen municipal public library systems in Gujarat.

9. Suggestions and Policy Implications

To strengthen municipal public library systems in Gujarat, a comprehensive and forward-looking policy approach is required, focusing on digital transformation, sustainable funding, human resource development, public engagement, and integration with urban development initiatives.

Firstly, there is a need for strengthening digital libraries. Municipal corporations should invest in robust digital infrastructure, including high-speed internet, integrated library management systems (ILMS), and access to e-resources such as e-books and online journals. Developing centralized digital platforms can enable remote access to library services, thereby increasing reach and usability, especially for students and working professionals.

Secondly, better funding models must be adopted to ensure sustainability. In addition to traditional government grants, municipal libraries can explore public-private partnerships (PPP), corporate social responsibility (CSR) funding, and community-based contributions. Dedicated library development funds should be utilized efficiently for modernization, resource acquisition, and infrastructure improvement.

Thirdly, capacity building is essential for improving service quality. Regular training programs, workshops, and professional development initiatives should be organized to enhance the skills of library staff, particularly in digital librarianship and user service management. Collaboration with academic institutions and professional bodies can further support skill enhancement.

Another important aspect is public awareness and user engagement. Libraries should actively promote their services through outreach programs, social media platforms, and community events. Organizing reading campaigns, workshops, and educational programs can help attract diverse user groups and increase library usage.

Finally, integrating libraries into Smart City initiatives can significantly enhance their relevance and functionality. In cities like Ahmedabad and Surat, libraries can be developed as smart knowledge hubs equipped with digital services, Wi-Fi access, and collaborative learning spaces. Such integration can transform public libraries into dynamic centers of innovation and community development.

In conclusion, a coordinated strategy involving technological advancement, financial innovation, human resource development, and community engagement is essential for strengthening public library systems in Gujarat.

10. Conclusion

This conceptual study has examined the trends, challenges, and management practices of public library collections within municipal corporations in Gujarat, with a comparative focus on Surat, Rajkot, and Ahmedabad. The analysis highlights a clear transition in collection development from traditional print-based systems to hybrid and increasingly digital models. Municipal libraries are gradually adopting user-centered approaches, integrating ICT tools, and expanding access through e-resources and community-oriented services. At the same time, persistent challenges such as financial limitations, technological disparities, shortage of trained professionals, and governance inefficiencies continue to influence their effectiveness.

The study underscores the critical importance of modernization in ensuring the relevance and sustainability of public libraries in the digital age. Libraries are no longer merely repositories of books but dynamic knowledge centers that support education, digital literacy, and community engagement. The pace of modernization, however, varies across cities, reflecting differences in infrastructure, administrative capacity, and resource allocation.

Looking ahead, the future of public libraries in Gujarat depends on a balanced integration of technology, policy support, and community participation. Strengthening digital infrastructure, promoting inclusive access, and enhancing professional competencies will be key to transforming libraries into smart, user-centric spaces. Moreover, aligning library development with broader urban initiatives can further enhance their role in knowledge-based societies. Overall, municipal public libraries have the potential to become vital engines of learning and innovation, provided that strategic efforts are made to address existing gaps and leverage emerging opportunities.

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