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The Integration of Robotics and Artificial Intelligence in Indian Libraries: Impacts on User Engagement and Operational Efficiency

Gopi Alias Gopal Anand Naik , Ramashanti Anand Naik

[*1] Librarian
Don Bosco College, Panjim, Goa, India
gopinaik@donboscogoa.ac.in
ORCID: https//orcid.org/0009-0000-2361-3123
[2]Assistant Professor
Department of Commerce
Government College of Arts, Science and Commerce, Sanquelim-Goa, India
ramashanti.naik@gcsanquelim.ac.in
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4889-3525

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Abstract

The incorporation of robotics and artificial intelligence (AI) into library services is becoming a transformative force in the way libraries operate globally, particularly within the framework of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This review explores how these cutting-edge technologies can revolutionize libraries in India, enhancing user engagement and operational efficiency while aligning with the NEP's emphasis on technological advancements in education. By examining global trends in AI and robotics applications, as well as contextualizing the unique challenges and potential benefits within the Indian library system, this paper discusses the future trajectory of this technological integration. Although AI and robotics present numerous advantages, their successful adoption in Indian libraries will depend on addressing key challenges.

Keywords: Robotics, Artificial Intelligence, User Engagement, Library Management, National Education Policy.

1. Introduction

The integration of robotics and artificial intelligence (AI) into library systems is revolutionizing the way libraries operate, positioning them at the forefront of digital transformation. Globally, libraries have evolved from traditional repositories of books to sophisticated hubs of information where automation and AI are enhancing operational efficiency and user engagement. Robotics and AI are emerging as key drivers of this change, automating routine tasks, improving information retrieval, and personalizing user experiences. In India, where libraries are deeply intertwined with the education and research sectors, these technologies offer the potential to address operational inefficiencies and provide enhanced services, especially as the nation's educational policies pivot towards embracing digital infrastructure.

Indian libraries, despite their significance in supporting academia and public literacy, face notable challenges, including resource constraints, outdated infrastructure, and the need for modernization. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, with its emphasis on technological advancements in education, provides a timely framework for this transformation. As the demand for digital resources grows, integrating AI and robotics can help Indian libraries streamline their services. AI, for example, can improve search functionalities, automate cataloguing, and deliver personalized resource recommendations, while robotics can handle labour-intensive activities such as shelving and circulation, enabling staff to focus on more value-added roles.

Robotics, already in use in libraries across the world, has proven effective in automating repetitive functions such as book retrieval and resource management. Systems like the Book Bot at North Carolina State University have demonstrated how robotics can minimize human error, reduce operational costs, and speed up resource circulation. In the Indian context, implementing similar robotic systems could transform large academic libraries, particularly those dealing with vast physical collections. However, the cost of implementing robotics remains a key challenge for many Indian libraries, predominantly smaller institutions with restricted budgets.

Artificial intelligence is perhaps even more transformative, with its ability to personalize user interactions and improve access to information. AI-driven systems can analyse user behaviour to provide customized recommendations, enhancing user satisfaction and engagement. In India, where libraries cater to a linguistically and culturally diverse population, AI can be instrumental in providing multilingual support and guaranteeing fair access to information. However, alongside these benefits come challenges related to data privacy, as AI systems often track user interactions to optimize services, raising ethical concerns that must be addressed.

While global trends indicate significant advancements in these technologies, the Indian context poses specific challenges that must be addressed. As India continues to align its libraries with the goals of NEP 2020, these technologies are essential in closing the gap between traditional library services and the evolving digital landscape presents a unique opportunity to enhance user engagement and operational efficiency, ensuring that libraries remain vital, user-centric institutions in the future. By focusing on overcoming infrastructural, financial, and skill-based barriers, Indian libraries can fully leverage the potential of AI and robotics to transform their services.

2. Literature Review

AI technologies are being utilized more frequently in academic libraries to enhance user experiences and streamline operations. Balasubramanian and Tamilselvan (2023) highlight AI's ability to personalize user interactions and improve operational efficiency. They note that AI-powered chatbots provide 24/7 assistance, while algorithms analyze user behaviour to generate tailored recommendations, thereby enhancing resource accessibility. Similarly, Gujral, et al. (2019) discuss various AI applications, including automated cataloguing systems and advanced data analytics. These technologies not only facilitate personalized learning experiences but also allow librarians to focus on more complex tasks, freeing them from routine operations.

The potential of AI to revolutionize library functions is further emphasized by Adejo and Misau (2021), who propose that expert systems can enhance reference services by acting as virtual librarians. They also advocate for AI's application in cataloguing and indexing, improving both efficiency and accuracy. Fernandez (2016) supports this view, envisioning AI systems that can analyze large datasets to personalize search results and automate various library tasks, including cataloguing and translation of information into formats suited to different learning styles. Cox (2023) emphasizes the importance of adapting librarian skill sets to manage AI-driven systems effectively, advocating for a proactive approach to AI integration that includes continuous professional development and strategic planning.

Despite the promising applications of AI, several challenges hinder its integration into academic libraries. Barsha and Munshi (2023) identify financial constraints, infrastructure limitations, and the need for librarian training as significant barriers. Implementing AI technologies can be expensive, mainly for libraries with restricted budgets, necessitating strategic planning and resource allocation to secure funding through grants and partnerships. The lack of expertise among library staff further complicates AI adoption. Many librarians require specialized training to effectively manage and utilize AI technologies. Investing in staff development is essential for equipping personnel with the necessary competencies to navigate AI's complexities (Echedom & Okuonghae, 2021).

Examining global experiences with AI in libraries provides valuable insights into its applications and challenges. Harada (2017) offers an overview of robotics and AI in Japanese libraries, showcasing examples like the robot "Pepper" for user guidance and IBM's "Watson" for answering inquiries. Huang, et al. (2023) investigate AI integration in academic libraries in the United Kingdom and China, highlighting applications such as chatbots and automated cataloguing while acknowledging challenges like data privacy and staff training needs. The attitudes of library professionals and users towards AI significantly influence its successful implementation. Lund et al. (2020) found a generally positive perception of AI's potential benefits, including heightened efficiency and enhanced user experiences. However, concerns regarding data privacy, algorithmic biases, and job displacement

persist.
The literature underscores the necessity for continuous research and development in AI and libraries. Gasparini and Kautonen (2022) advocate for a user-centered design approach, prioritizing user needs and ethical considerations when integrating AI. This approach can help libraries steer through the complexities of AI adoption and ensure that technologies benefit both staff and patrons. Subaveerapandiyan (2023) emphasizes the importance of ongoing research to examine the longstanding implications of AI on library operations and user behaviors. Collaboration among libraries, research professionals, and technology innovators is essential to create AI solutions that meet diverse patron needs.

3. **Robotics in Libraries**

3.1. Automated Book Retrieval Systems (ABRS): One of the most significant ways robotics is transforming libraries is through Automated Book Retrieval Systems (ABRS). These systems reimagine the traditional, often time-consuming, process of manually locating and retrieving books. ABRS utilize a combination of robotic arms, sophisticated software, and precise mapping systems to navigate the library's stacks. A librarian, or even a patron through a user interface, can request a specific book, and the ABRS will swiftly locate and retrieve it, delivering it to a designated collection point.

3.2 Intelligent Sorting and Shelving: Returning books to their correct locations is another task that can be efficiently handled by robots. Intelligent robots equipped with RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) readers and advanced sorting algorithms are transforming the way libraries manage their collections. These robots can scan returned books, identify their correct shelf locations, and even sort them according to predefined criteria, such as genre or author.

3.3 Inventory Management and Shelf-Reading: Maintaining an accurate and up-to-date inventory is essential for any library, but it can be a intimidating and time-consuming task. This is where robotics, particularly robots equipped with RFID or computer vision technology, are proving invaluable. These robots can autonomously navigate library shelves, scanning books and identifying misplaced items. The data collected is then used to update inventory records in real-time, providing library staff with a constantly updated view of the collection.

The integration of robotics into the library environment is not about replacing the human touch, but about enhancing it. By automating repetitive, time-consuming tasks, libraries are freeing up their staff to focus on what truly matters: connecting with patrons, fostering a love of learning, and ensuring that libraries remain vibrant, engaging, and essential community spaces in the digital age.

4. Artificial intelligence (AI) in Libraries

4.1 AI-Powered Discovery Systems: AI-powered discovery systems help users navigate large digital repositories with precision. These systems leverage natural language processing to interpret complex user queries, delivering the most relevant information quickly. Machine learning further enhances these systems by adapting to user behaviour, offering personalized recommendations based on previous searches. This transforms the traditional catalogue into an interactive tool, guiding users on personalized paths of knowledge discovery.

4.2 Chatbots and Virtual Assistants: Chatbots and virtual assistants driven by AI extend the availability of library services beyond physical hours. These intelligent agents can provide real-time support for frequently asked questions, assist with research tasks, and guide users through digital resources. By automating routine queries, librarians can focus on specialized roles, enhancing the depth and quality of human interaction in more complex areas like research consultation or digital literacy training.

4.3 Data Analytics for Decision-Making: AI also empowers libraries to utilize data-driven insights for strategic decision-making. By analysing patterns in user behaviour, program participation, and resource usage, AI helps libraries identify trends, anticipate future demands, and optimize resource allocation. This ensures that libraries

remain responsive to their users' evolving needs, fostering an environment of continuous improvement based on real-time data.

AI is transforming libraries from static repositories into dynamic, personalized environments. By enhancing both access to information and operational efficiency, AI enables libraries to provide richer, more tailored experiences for every user, making them indispensable in the pursuit of lifelong learning.

5. **Navigating the Challenges and Ethical Considerations**

5.1. Financial and Technological Barriers: The significant expense of implementing AI and robotics, including installation, maintenance, and upgrades, is a major challenge for libraries, particularly those situated in rural areas of India. Restricted access to essential infrastructure, such as high-speed internet and modern computing systems, further complicates adoption. Addressing these financial and technological constraints requires government support, public-private partnerships, and phased implementation strategies to gradually introduce these technologies into resource-constrained environments.

5.2. Human Resource and Skill Development: A significant skill gap among library staff is another challenge, as most are not trained to operate and maintain AI and robotic systems. However, this presents an opportunity to upskill librarians, empowering them to prioritize crucial responsibilities such as aiding in research endeavours, digital literacy, and community engagement. Continuous training and professional development programs, facilitated by collaborations with educational institutions and technology providers, will be essential in preparing staff for these evolving roles.

5.3. Ethical Concerns: Job Displacement, Data Privacy, and Bias: The amalgamation of AI and robotics raises apprehensions about job displacement, data privacy, and algorithmic bias. While automation may replace routine tasks, librarians can transition into more strategic roles through upskilling. Ensuring data privacy is critical, requiring robust protection measures and compliance with regulations. Additionally, addressing algorithmic bias by using diverse datasets and maintaining transparency in AI development will help ensure fair and unbiased democratization of information access for all users.

6. The Future of Intelligent Libraries

6.1 Technological Modernization with Robotics and AI: The addition of robotics and AI in libraries can significantly transform both operational efficiency and user experience. AI systems will enhance information retrieval and personalization, while robotics can automate tasks like shelving, cataloguing, and inventory management. This modernization will free librarians to focus on more strategic roles, such as digital curation and research support, creating a more efficient and responsive library environment.

6.2. Ethical Considerations and Capacity Building: As AI and robotics are adopted, addressing ethical concerns around job displacement and data privacy is essential. Libraries should focus on upskilling staff to handle advanced technologies, ensuring AI augments rather than replaces human expertise. Strong data protection measures and the elimination of algorithmic bias will be critical for maintaining user trust and equitable access to information.

6.3 Collaboration and Policy Support: Successful implementation of AI and robotics in Indian libraries requires collaboration between government, technology providers, and educational institutions. The NEP 2020 provides a supportive framework for this transformation. Strategic partnerships can help libraries overcome financial and infrastructural challenges, enabling the development of cost-effective, tailored solutions that position libraries as modern, tech-driven hubs of learning and community engagement.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the synthesis of robotics and AI into Indian libraries demonstrates a transformative opportunity to modernize services and enhance user experiences while bolstering the objectives delineated in India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. These technologies promise significant improvements in operational efficiency, but their successful adoption is contingent upon addressing critical challenges such as cost barriers, technical expertise, and ethical dilemmas surrounding data privacy. As India continues to align its libraries with the goals

of the NEP, these technologies will serve a pivotal function in closing the divide between traditional library services and evolving educational needs. By fostering collaboration among stakeholders including government bodies, technology providers, and library professionals' Indian libraries can evolve into dynamic centers for learning and community engagement, ensuring their relevance in an increasingly digital landscape.

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