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Future Planning and Development Strategies for Government and Aided College Libraries in the Digital Age

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Abstract: ***The rapid transformation of higher education in the digital age has fundamentally changed the role, structure and expectations of college libraries. Government and aided college libraries, which traditionally functioned primarily as centres for printed books and reading, are increasingly expected to provide electronic resources, online catalogues, digital repositories, remote information services, research support and technology-enabled learning environments. This transformation creates both opportunities and challenges for institutions that often operate under financial, infrastructural, administrative and human-resource limitations. The present article examines future planning and development strategies for government and aided college libraries, with special reference to the emerging situation in Gorakhpur Division of Uttar Pradesh. The analysis is based on secondary evidence, particularly the 2024 study of 33 college libraries in Gorakhpur Division, supported by recent national higher-education statistics and University Grants Commission (UGC) policy documents. The regional evidence demonstrates that basic digital connectivity has expanded considerably: internet facilities were reported in 97.0% of surveyed libraries and Wi-Fi in 93.9%. However, only 45.5% of libraries were reported as automated, indicating a substantial gap between connectivity and meaningful digital transformation. Only six of the 33 libraries had designated librarians, while 27 were managed by library in-charges. Resource shortage was the most frequently reported problem at 17.20%, followed by slow internet at 16.31% and shortage of computer terminals at 14.83%. These findings demonstrate the need for long-term institutional planning rather than isolated modernization projects. The article proposes a strategic framework based on infrastructure development, complete library automation, digital resource expansion, institutional repositories, resource sharing, professional staffing, continuous training, user-centred services, financial planning, accessibility and policy-level coordination. It argues that future college libraries should evolve into integrated physical-digital learning and knowledge centres. Sustainable development will require dedicated library budgets, qualified professionals, technological standards, measurable performance indicators and collaboration among colleges, universities, government agencies and national digital-library initiatives. The article concludes that modernization of government and aided college libraries is not simply a technological requirement but an essential component of quality, equity and inclusive higher education.***

Key words: Government College Libraries, Aided College Libraries, Future Planning, Resource Sharing.

1. Introduction- Libraries have traditionally occupied a central position in higher education by supporting teaching, learning and research. For decades, the college library was primarily understood as a physical space containing textbooks, reference books, journals, newspapers and other printed documents. Students visited the library, consulted printed materials and borrowed books through manual circulation systems. Although this model continues to be important, the nature of information production and use has changed dramatically.

The digital transformation of higher education has created a new information environment. Students and teachers now expect access to e-books, e-journals, online databases, institutional repositories, electronic theses, digital learning materials and web-based information services. The college library is consequently becoming a hybrid institution in which print and digital resources coexist. This transformation is especially important for government and aided colleges. Students studying in such institutions frequently depend on institutional resources because personal access to expensive academic books, databases and specialized digital services may be limited. A strong college library can therefore contribute directly to educational equality.

Gorakhpur Division provides an important regional context for examining this transformation. The division consists of Gorakhpur, Deoria, Kushinagar and Maharajganj. Colleges in these districts serve students from urban, semi-urban and rural backgrounds and operate under different levels of infrastructure and institutional capacity.

A 2024 study by Shesh Mishra examined 33 college libraries in Gorakhpur Division and assessed infrastructure, resources, ICT facilities, automation and operational problems. The study found significant gaps in infrastructure, digital resources, automation and trained personnel, although basic internet connectivity was available in most institutions. The findings are particularly relevant for future planning. The question facing college libraries is no longer whether technology should be introduced, but how libraries

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can develop sustainable systems in which technology, professional staff, collections, infrastructure and user services operate together.

At the national level, the importance of institutional digital development is also reflected in UGC's Guidelines for Institutional Development Plans for Higher Education Institutions. The guidelines identify digital enablers such as internet facilities, institutional websites, online communication and digital libraries, and emphasize developing and updating digital-library facilities. Similarly, the National Informatics Centre's e-Granthalaya platform provides an example of how library automation, digital-library functions, cloud hosting, online public access catalogues and resource sharing can be integrated into a single platform.

Therefore, future planning for government and aided college libraries must move beyond conventional collection development and consider the library as an essential component of the digital academic ecosystem.

2. Objectives of the Study- The major objectives of the article are:

1. To examine the future requirements of government and aided college libraries in the digital age.
2. To analyse available evidence concerning the current level of modernization in college libraries of Gorakhpur Division.
3. To identify strategic areas for digital transformation and infrastructure development.
4. To suggest future planning strategies for library resources, technology and services.
5. To examine the role of qualified library professionals and continuous training in future library development.
6. To propose policy recommendations for government and aided college libraries.
7. To develop a practical framework for transforming traditional college libraries into modern learning and knowledge centres.

3. Methodology and Scope- The article adopts a descriptive and analytical methodology based primarily on secondary sources. The principal regional evidence is derived from the study Current Status and Future Prospects of College Libraries in Gorakhpur Division: A Study, published in 2024. The study covered 33 college libraries and examined infrastructure, resources, ICT facilities, automation, user satisfaction and operational problems. The study provides an important empirical basis for planning because it combines questionnaire responses, interviews and observations. Its findings are used here to identify developmental priorities rather than to reproduce the earlier study's entire analysis.

National-level evidence is drawn from the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), UGC policy and regulatory documents, and the National Informatics Centre's e-Granthalaya initiative. AISHE is the Government of India's principal statistical system for higher education and collects information concerning enrolment, teachers, infrastructure, finance and other institutional indicators. The Ministry of Education released the AISHE 2022–23 and 2023–24 reports in July 2026. The analysis focuses on four broad future-planning areas: modernization of infrastructure, digital transformation, professional and administrative development, and policy-level planning.

4. Present Situation and the Need for Future Planning- The future of college libraries must be planned according to their existing conditions. The evidence from Gorakhpur Division demonstrates both progress and significant gaps. The study of 33 libraries reported internet availability in 97.0% of institutions and Wi-Fi in 93.9%. These figures indicate that basic digital connectivity has become widespread. However, only 45.5% of libraries were reported to be automated. This difference is important. Internet access by itself does not constitute a digital library. A modern library requires an integrated system for acquisition, cataloguing, circulation, serial management, searching, digital resources and user services. The regional study also identified resource shortages as the largest reported problem, accounting for 17.20% of responses. Slow internet accounted for 16.31%, shortage of computer terminals for 14.83%, shortage of power supply for 11.64% and lack of IT skills for 10.82%. These figures demonstrate that future planning must address both physical and digital infrastructure.

Another important finding concerns professional staffing. Only six of the 33 surveyed libraries had designated librarians, while 27 were managed by library in-charges. This has direct implications for future development because digital transformation requires professionals who understand both traditional library science and information technology. The need for systematic planning is also evident at the national level. AISHE 2022–23 recorded 46,624 colleges on the AISHE portal, of which 20.8% were government colleges and 13.1% private aided colleges. The large scale of the college sector means that library modernization cannot depend entirely on individual institutional initiatives. Coordinated policy, funding and resource-sharing mechanisms are necessary.

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5. Vision for the Future College Library- The future college library should be conceived as an Integrated Academic Knowledge and Learning Centre. Its functions should include: printed book and reference services, electronic books and journals, online catalogue and automated circulation, institutional repository, digital preservation, research-support services, information, literacy education, academic database access, online reference services, learning and collaborative study spaces, assistive and accessible technologies, remote access to authorized resources, academic content creation and dissemination. The library should therefore become simultaneously a physical place, a digital platform and a professional academic service. A future-oriented library should also be designed around users rather than collections alone. The primary measure of success should not be the number of books held but the extent to which students and teachers can discover, access, understand and use information effectively.

6. Strategic Planning for Library Modernization- 6.1 Development of Physical Infrastructure: Physical infrastructure will remain important even in the digital age. Students require quiet reading spaces, reference areas, group-study facilities, computer areas and accessible spaces.

The Gorakhpur study reported that only 18 of the 33 surveyed colleges, or 54.5%, had separate library buildings. Fifteen colleges, or 45.5%, did not have separate buildings. Future planning should therefore include dedicated library buildings or appropriately designed library spaces. New or renovated libraries should provide: adequate seating, natural and artificial lighting, ventilation, computer workstations, high-speed Wi-Fi, charging facilities, accessible entrances and furniture, group discussion rooms, digital-learning zones, secure storage, preservation facilities.

Library buildings should be planned for flexibility. As digital resources expand, space previously used exclusively for shelving may increasingly be converted into learning and collaboration areas. 6.2 Complete Library Automation: Automation should be a fundamental priority. The finding that only 45.5% of surveyed libraries were automated indicates considerable room for development. A fully automated library should have:

1. computerized acquisition;
2. cataloguing and classification;
3. circulation and membership management;
4. serial-control systems;
5. online public access catalogue;
6. barcode or RFID-based circulation where appropriate;
7. automated overdue notifications;
8. statistical reporting;
9. digital-resource management;
10. integration with institutional websites.

The objective should not merely be to purchase library software. The complete workflow of the library should be redesigned around automation. The National Informatics Centre's e-Granthalaya platform demonstrates an integrated approach to library automation and networking, including library-management software, a digital-library module, cloud hosting and OPAC facilities. Government and aided colleges should examine appropriate national or state-supported platforms before purchasing separate systems independently.

7. Digital Transformation and Digital Resources- 7.1 Development of Digital Libraries: The digital library should become a permanent component of college library planning. Digital resources may include: e-books, e-journals, scholarly databases, electronic theses and dissertations, question papers, institutional publications, open educational resources, government publications, digitized rare documents, faculty publications.

UGC's Institutional Development Plan guidelines explicitly identify digital libraries as an important digital enabler and recommend development and updating of digital-library facilities. The future library should therefore provide a single discovery environment through which students can search both printed and electronic collections.

7.2 Institutional Repositories: Every college should gradually develop an institutional repository containing legally shareable academic output such as: faculty publications, conference papers, dissertations where permitted, project reports, institutional newsletters, annual reports, question papers, locally produced educational materials. An institutional repository increases the visibility of academic work and preserves institutional memory.

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7.3 Mobile and Remote Library Services: Students increasingly use smartphones and laptops for learning. Libraries should therefore provide mobile-friendly catalogues and websites. Where licensing permits, remote access should be developed for authorized electronic resources. Library communication can also use email, messaging systems and institutional applications to provide: due-date reminders, new-arrival alerts, database announcements, orientation programmes, research-support information.

8. Resource Sharing and Networking- Resource sharing should become one of the most important strategies for financially constrained colleges. A small college cannot independently purchase every book, journal and database required by its students. However, a network of libraries can collectively provide much broader access. A divisional college-library network could support: union catalogues, inter-library loan, document delivery, shared e-resource subscriptions, cooperative collection development, staff training, technical support, shared digitization projects. The e-Granthalaya initiative explicitly includes networking for resource sharing as part of its purpose. For Gorakhpur Division, a phased Gorakhpur Division College Library Network could be developed involving government and aided colleges. Such a network would reduce duplication, improve access and strengthen smaller institutions.

9. Financial Planning and Sustainable Investment- Digital transformation cannot be achieved without sustainable financial planning. The traditional approach of allocating money mainly for books is no longer sufficient. Future library budgets should have separate components for: print resources, e-resources, hardware, software, internet connectivity, maintenance, digitization, staff training, accessibility, cybersecurity, furniture and infrastructure. A multi-year library development plan should be prepared rather than depending entirely on annual emergency expenditure. Institutions should also conduct cost-benefit assessments before purchasing technology. Equipment should not be purchased without considering maintenance, replacement cycles, staff capacity and actual usage. Government and university authorities should explore centralized procurement and consortium-based subscriptions. Collective purchasing can improve bargaining power and reduce duplication.

10. Human Resource Development- Technology cannot replace professional library staff. Instead, digital transformation increases the need for competent professionals. The regional evidence shows a major staffing gap: only six of 33 libraries had designated librarians. Future policy should therefore prioritize appointment of qualified librarians in government and aided colleges. The professional role should expand from traditional circulation and cataloguing to: digital-resource management, information literacy, research assistance, metadata creation, repository management, database searching, copyright awareness, digital preservation, data and research support, technology coordination.

UGC's professional framework recognizes library management, automation, organizational skills and digital-library services as important areas of professional competence. Continuous professional development should consequently become compulsory. Training programmes should be organized at least annually, covering automation software, digital databases, institutional repositories, emerging technologies, cybersecurity and information-literacy instruction.

11. Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies- The next stage of digital transformation will increasingly involve artificial intelligence. AI can support libraries through: - intelligent search, recommendation systems, automated metadata assistance, chatbot-based reference services, text summarization, translation assistance, research discovery, digitized-document processing.

However, AI should be introduced carefully. Libraries must develop policies concerning accuracy, copyright, privacy, academic integrity and responsible use. Librarians should become information-literacy instructors who teach students how to evaluate AI-generated information rather than simply providing access to AI tools. Future library planning should therefore include AI-readiness as part of digital literacy.

12. User-Centred Services- Future library planning must be based on actual student and faculty requirements. The Gorakhpur study found strong demand for better facilities. For example, 79% of respondents wanted faster Wi-Fi and 74% supported increased seating capacity. This suggests that library development should not be based exclusively on administrative assumptions. Regular user surveys should examine: resource requirements, preferred study hours, digital-resource use, internet quality, computer availability, seating requirements, accessibility, satisfaction with staff services. Student representatives and faculty members may be included in library advisory committees.

13. Information Literacy and Research Support- Information literacy is the ability to identify, find, evaluate, use, and communicate information effectively. It is an important skill for students, researchers, and professionals because there is a huge amount of information available through books, websites, journals, databases, and social media. An information-literate person can recognize what

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information is needed and select reliable and relevant sources. Research support refers to the guidance and resources provided to help individuals conduct research successfully. Libraries, librarians, teachers, research institutions, and online databases play an important role in providing research support. They help users develop research questions, locate scholarly information, evaluate sources, use databases, organize references, and follow proper citation methods.

Information literacy and research support are closely connected. Good information literacy helps researchers avoid false, outdated, biased, or misleading information. It also encourages critical thinking and responsible use of information. Research support services make the research process easier by providing access to academic resources and expert assistance. In the digital age, these skills are especially important because information can be created and shared quickly. Therefore, developing information literacy and using research support effectively can improve the quality, accuracy, and credibility of academic research and help individuals make informed decisions.

Conclusion- The digital age has brought significant changes to the functioning and development of government and aided college libraries. Libraries are no longer limited to the collection, preservation, and circulation of printed books. They are increasingly becoming digital learning and research centres that provide access to e-books, e-journals, online databases, institutional repositories, digital libraries, and other electronic resources. Therefore, future planning is essential for ensuring that these libraries remain relevant and effective.

Government and aided college libraries should develop clear and practical strategies based on the needs of students, teachers, researchers, and the institution. Investment in modern ICT infrastructure, high-speed internet, library automation, digital resources, cybersecurity, and regular maintenance should be given priority. Libraries should also focus on staff development by providing librarians and support staff with regular training in digital technologies, information literacy, research support, and emerging tools such as artificial intelligence. Another important strategy is collaboration. Libraries can share resources through library networks, consortia, inter-library loan services, and institutional partnerships. Such cooperation can reduce costs while increasing access to quality information resources. Special attention should also be given to digital preservation and the creation of institutional repositories to preserve and provide access to the intellectual output of colleges.

Government funding and institutional support are crucial for the sustainable development of these libraries. At the same time, library administrators should regularly evaluate services through user feedback, usage statistics, and performance assessment. Inclusive and user-friendly services should be developed so that all learners can benefit from digital resources. In conclusion, the future of government and aided college libraries depends on effective planning, adequate funding, technological development, skilled human resources, collaboration, and continuous innovation. By adopting these strategies, college libraries can transform themselves into dynamic knowledge and learning centres capable of supporting education, research, and lifelong learning in the digital age.

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