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EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF MUSEUM IN INDIA

Suboohi Nasrin* and Abduraheem K.

Department of Museology, Aligarh Muslim University Aligarh-202002

Abstract

Museums are established as non-profit, enduring institutions committed to serving society through the acquisition, preservation, communication, and exhibition of both tangible and intangible heritage for educational and recreational purposes. The function of museums has expanded beyond the traditional roles of acquisition, preservation, research, and exhibition to include a more comprehensive educational mission. Contemporary museums prioritize the creation of engaging learning experiences, utilizing exhibitions, interactive object handling, and digital technologies to enrich visitor understanding. They provide a range of outreach programs, including resource kits and field trips and design inclusive initiatives for individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, museums are vital in research and publication, sharing knowledge through various forms of literature. As centres of education, museums promote lifelong learning and significantly enhance public awareness and appreciation of cultural and natural heritage. 1JCR

Keywords

Museum, Education, Research, Disabled Person, Heritage, Visitor

Introduction

A museum is defined as a "non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment." This definition was accepted by the International Council of Museums in 1974. Traditionally, the duties of museum professionals were confined to acquisition, preservation, research and exhibition. However, the function of museums has evolved considerably in contemporary society. They now offer a variety of services and roles, shifting from a focus on objects to an emphasis on education. Today's visitors not only observe objects but also gain knowledge from them, ensuring that this information is transmitted to future generations. It is essential for museum personnel to possess a strong educational background, as objects devoid of adequate knowledge and context fail to serve their purpose. Museum education can be understood as the process of learning through experiences that lead to positive changes in human behaviour.

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1988) articulated that museums are institutions that provide educational experiences across a diverse array of variables and in connection with various organizations and institutions. The core of museum education is to create opportunities for learning experiences that encourage visitor engagement and understanding.

The Evolving Function of Museums

Historically, museums were primarily focused on scholarship and were not accessible to the general populace. Access was largely restricted to scholars and members of royal families. However, the aftermath of the American War of Independence in 1776 and the French Revolution's Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen marked a significant shift, leading to the opening of museums to the public and establishing education as a central function.

Educational Role of Museums

Education stands as one of the most vital roles of museums, facilitating significant advancements in knowledge, comprehension, skills and attitudes. Although the educational aspect of museums has existed since their inception, its significance has notably increased since World War II. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1988) asserts that museums provide educational experiences across a diverse array of contexts and in collaboration with various institutions and organizations. Museum education focuses on creating interactive learning environments where visitors can engage directly with objects, thereby deepening their understanding and knowledge.

Approaches to Museum Education

1. Exhibitions

The primary responsibility of museum personnel is to curate objects with appropriate text and labels. Exhibitions are essential to any museum, as they serve to inform and educate visitors. The text and labels accompanying exhibitions should be concise, meaningful and direct. Successful exhibitions incorporate images, photographs, drawings, charts, models and other supplementary materials to enrich the display.

2. Learning through objects

Museum objects that embody cultural and natural heritage are integral to the educational mission. Direct interaction with these objects provides unique, firsthand experiences that are essential for museum education.

3. Museums in Educational Settings

Museums provide learning experiences that contrast with conventional school education. They create environments for self-directed learning, free from assessments or examinations, which encourage open dialogue among visitors from diverse backgrounds.

4. Discovery room

Discovery rooms in museums provide informal areas where children can have hands-on experiences, examine specimens, and participate in educational activities. These rooms allow children to explore and familiarize themselves with a wide range of objects at their own pace in a relaxed atmosphere.

Outreach Initiatives

Museums implement a variety of outreach initiatives aimed at broadening their educational impact beyond their physical locations.

- 1. **Resource Kits:** These are specially curated boxes that contain information on specific subjects, including shells, fossils, food chains, and the solar system. Each kit is equipped with replicas of original objects, charts, models, colour illustrations, and instructional guides for educators.
- 2. Resource Kits for Rural Schools: Educational institutions in rural areas often lack the opportunity to visit museums. Resource kits serve to equip these schools with educational materials, ensuring that students in remote locations receive a museum-quality education.

- 3. Field trips: Museums arrange field trips to enhance understanding and appreciation of nature, ecology, wildlife, flora and fauna, conservation efforts, and biodiversity.
- **4. Summer classes:** In partnership with educational institutions and non-governmental organizations, museums conduct summer workshops focused on painting, crafts, modelling, and environmental studies, thereby enhancing students' skills and awareness of cultural and environmental matters.
- 5. Short-Term Educational Courses: Museums provide short-term educational courses on display techniques, conservation practices, and museology, offering valuable learning opportunities for educators and other participants.
- 6. Educational Programs for Disabled People: Museums develop customized educational programs for individuals with disabilities, which include audio tours, tactile displays, and specialized resource kits. These initiatives promote accessibility and inclusivity, enabling disabled visitors to engage meaningfully with museum exhibits.

Education through Digital Technologies

Contemporary museums leverage digital media to enrich their educational offerings. Technologies such as film presentations, slide shows, sequential lighting accompanied by commentaries, and interactive computer applications provide engaging educational experiences and enhance comprehension of exhibits. For instance, the Bioscience Computer Room at the National Museum of Natural History in New Delhi offers interactive opportunities for visitors to explore concepts such as DNA, photosynthesis, and other scientific principles.

Educational programmes for disabled people

Disabled people around the world are involved in all spheres of social life and utilize its achievements. Museums can help the physically challenged understand and appreciate the cultural heritage housed within them. Museums organize various educational programs for disabled persons. In modern society, museums act as cultural, scientific, and educational centers, developing and adapting the best educational programs for disabled persons. Museums should have special rooms where a limited number of objects can be shown to enable mentally challenged visitors. For disabled persons, educational programs such as audio tours, tailored tours, museum and art therapy are applied. Disabled persons can receive training using replicas and enlarged photographs, and audio-visual media, preferably in local languages, are effective as they combine two sensory impressions for all the physically challenged, except the visually impaired and to a certain extent the deaf.

Ramps and lifts should be provided to make visits more successful for disabled people. Exhibits should be displayed to allow more space for wheelchairs, and doorways should be easily negotiable. To accommodate deaf and mute visitors, the services of specially trained instructors in sign language are essential. A gallery of touch should be organized for visually impaired visitors, where replicas of selected objects can be displayed along with "Braille labels" so they can understand and differentiate forms, shapes, and identify objects.

Special kit boxes with models of specimens and antiquities will be very useful to the physically challenged, especially the visually impaired, who can get a clear concept of a large animal, a bird, a tree, or other objects. Museums organize various programs in collaboration with other organizations and NGOs for the development and exposure of hidden talents, such as competitions in drawing, painting, clay modeling, etc. In these programs, normal children should also be invited so that physically challenged children get a chance to meet and interact with them.

Museums can send models and photos on loan to institutions dealing with the physically challenged to provide them opportunities to touch and learn. Short-term training courses in art and its appreciation can be organized by museums for teachers working with institutions connected to the physically challenged. Museums can set aside specific days especially for the physically challenged. The educational role of museums will be incomplete if they do not consider and implement schemes for the physically challenged community.

Educational activities through electronic technologies

Contemporary museums are increasingly incorporating electronic media into their educational programs. This includes a variety of techniques such as film presentations, slide displays, sequential lighting accompanied by commentaries, audio guides, and animations. These technological tools significantly enhance thematic and conceptual exhibitions, rendering them more interactive and informative. A notable example is the Bioscience 'Computer Room' at the National Museum of Natural History in New Delhi, which provides engaging experiences aimed at elucidating concepts such as DNA functions and photosynthesis.

Research and publication in museums

Research and publication are main sources of education in museums. Museums can transmit their research to the general public through various forms of publication. There are three primary types of publications:

- 1. Research Publications: These are the outcomes of serious research conducted on specific subjects, published in the form of journals, catalogues, brochures, monographs, or books.
- 2. Informational Publications: These include reports, guidebooks, introductory leaflets, etc., aimed at familiarizing the public with the museum and its activities.
- 3. Special Publications: Issued on the occasion of new galleries, special exhibitions, or anniversaries, these publications are intended to popularize the museum within the community.

Additional types of publications include:

- News Bulletins: These contain information about museum activities, important lectures, current events, notices of special exhibitions, lectures, concerts, and more.
- Handbooks: These provide detailed information about special galleries and collections.
- **Picture-Books:** Collections of photographs of the museum's masterpieces with brief descriptions under colourful backgrounds. Similar educational materials include folders, leaflets, guide maps, broad sheets, picture postcards, and transparencies.
- Basic Science Articles: Popular articles for school education should be published, emphasizing the importance of research-based education in museums.

CONCLUSION

The evolving function of museums emphasizes their crucial role in education and community participation. Modern museums extend beyond the traditional duties of acquisition, preservation, research, and exhibition to foster interactive learning environments that prioritize visitor interaction and understanding. Museums use a variety of teaching methodologies and technologies to offer meaningful experiences that increase understanding and respect for cultural and natural heritage. The inclusive programs for disabled people demonstrate the dedication to accessibility and diversity. Museums, as educational institutions, play an important role in passing on information to future generations, ensuring that tradition and history stay alive and relevant in today's society.

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