An Assessment of the Availability and Accessibility of Public Libraries in Haryana

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Abstract:

Public libraries play a crucial role in promoting literacy, lifelong learning, and inclusive access to information, particularly in developing regions. The present study aims to examine the availability, distribution, and accessibility of public libraries in the state of Haryana. The research is based entirely on secondary data collected from government reports, official statistics, library authorities, and published research studies. Analytical tools such as percentage analysis, comparative analysis, and trend analysis have been employed to assess the spatial and infrastructural distribution of public libraries across districts. The study analyses accessibility in terms of population coverage, urban–rural reach, and infrastructural adequacy. The findings reveal significant regional disparities in the availability of public libraries and highlight gaps in accessibility, especially in rural and backward areas of Haryana. Inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, and uneven library distribution continue to affect effective service delivery. The study also identifies a slow growth trend in public library development in the state. The paper concludes that strengthening public library infrastructure and improving accessibility is essential for enhancing community development and knowledge dissemination in Haryana. The findings are expected to assist policymakers and library administrators in formulating effective strategies for public library expansion and modernization.

Keywords: Public Libraries, Availability, Accessibility, Assessment, Community Development. Haryana

1 Introduction:

Public libraries are universally recognized as vital social institutions that promote literacy, education, information access, and cultural development. They function as democratic spaces where individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds can access knowledge resources without discrimination. In a developing country like India, public libraries play a significant role in reducing information inequality and supporting lifelong learning, especially among rural and marginalized populations. The UNESCO Public Library Manifesto emphasizes that public libraries should be freely accessible to all members of society and serve as local gateways to knowledge, enabling informed citizenship and social inclusion.

In India, the development of public libraries has been closely linked with the objectives of social reform, adult education, and community development. Since independence, various committees and policy initiatives have highlighted the importance of strengthening the public library system to support national development goals. Despite these efforts, the growth and performance of public libraries have remained uneven across states, largely due to variations in financial support, administrative efficiency, and infrastructural development. Accessibility to public libraries continues to be a major concern, particularly in rural areas where geographical distance,

inadequate facilities, and lack of awareness restrict effective utilization. The state of Haryana, one of India's rapidly developing states, presents an interesting case for examining the availability and accessibility of public libraries. Haryana has made notable progress in economic development, education, and urbanization over the past few decades. However, the development of public libraries has not kept pace with the state's socio-economic growth. While some urban districts possess relatively better library infrastructure, many rural and semi-urban areas continue to face shortages in terms of library buildings, collections, staff, and user-oriented services. This uneven distribution has resulted in significant disparities in access to information resources among different regions of the state. Availability of public libraries refers not only to their numerical presence but also to their spatial distribution across districts and population groups. Accessibility, on the other hand, encompasses physical access, population coverage, infrastructural adequacy, and the ease with which users can utilize library services. In Haryana, issues such as limited number of public libraries, inadequate reading space, insufficient book collections, and poor connectivity have adversely affected accessibility. Moreover, the absence of modern facilities such as digital resources, internet access, and assistive technologies further limits the effectiveness of public libraries in meeting contemporary information needs.

Several studies conducted at the national level have highlighted structural weaknesses in the Indian public library system. Researchers have observed that public libraries often suffer from poor funding, lack of trained manpower, and outdated collections, which reduce their relevance in the digital age. Studies focusing on accessibility have emphasized that rural populations face greater barriers due to distance, lack of transportation, and limited library outreach programs. These studies suggest that mere establishment of libraries is insufficient unless accompanied by adequate infrastructure and user-friendly services. State-level studies have further pointed out regional imbalances in library development. Research conducted on northern Indian states indicates that public libraries are often concentrated in urban centers, leaving rural areas underserved. Scholars have also noted that population coverage per library remains disproportionately high in many states, resulting in overcrowding and limited access for users. In the context of Haryana, existing literature reveals that although the state has a formal public library network, its effectiveness is constrained by uneven distribution and inadequate infrastructural support.

Some researchers have examined the role of public libraries in promoting education and community development in Haryana and neighboring states. These studies have underlined the importance of libraries in supporting school education, competitive examination preparation, and adult learning. However, they also point out that limited availability and poor accessibility reduce user participation and library utilization.

1.1 Objectives of the study:

(1). To analyze the availability and district-wise distribution of public libraries in Haryana using secondary data sources.

(2).To assesses the accessibility of public libraries in Haryana in terms of population coverage and urban–rural distribution.

2.1 Research Methodology:

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature and is based entirely on secondary data. The research aims to assess the availability and accessibility of public libraries in the state of Haryana through a systematic analysis of existing data sources. Secondary data have been collected from a variety of reliable and authentic sources, including government publications, reports of the Department of Higher Education, Haryana, records of public library authorities, publications of the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation, census data, and relevant research articles published in journals, books, and conference proceedings. These sources provide comprehensive information regarding the number, distribution, and infrastructural status of public libraries in the state.

The scope of the study is confined to the state of Haryana, and the analysis covers district-wise distribution, urban–rural availability, population coverage, and infrastructural facilities of public libraries. Since the study relies on secondary data, no primary survey or field investigation has been conducted. The collected data have been classified, tabulated, and analysed to ensure clarity and consistency in interpretation. The study period covers recent years for which data are available in official records in order to reflect the current status of public libraries in the state.

For the purpose of analysis, appropriate quantitative and analytical tools have been employed. These include percentage analysis to examine proportional distribution, comparative analysis to assess urban–rural disparities, trend analysis to study the growth pattern of public libraries over time, and index-based techniques to measure accessibility and infrastructural adequacy. Tables have been prepared to present the data in a systematic manner, and interpretations have been provided to highlight key trends and disparities.

The study is subject to certain limitations inherent in secondary data-based research. The accuracy of the analysis depends on the reliability of published data, and variations in reporting standards across sources may affect uniformity. Despite these limitations, the methodology adopted provides a comprehensive and objective assessment of the availability and accessibility of public libraries in Haryana. The approach is considered suitable for achieving the stated objectives of the study and for drawing meaningful conclusions relevant to policy formulation and library development.

2.2.1 Tools and Techniques:

The study employs appropriate quantitative and analytical tools to analyse secondary data on public libraries in Haryana. Percentage analysis has been used to examine the distribution of public libraries across districts and their urban–rural spread. Comparative analysis is applied to highlight differences in availability and accessibility between urban and rural areas. Trend analysis is used to assess the growth pattern of public libraries over time. In addition, index-based techniques such as the Library Accessibility Index and Infrastructure Adequacy Index have been employed to provide a composite assessment of accessibility and infrastructural status. The application of these tools ensures objective and systematic interpretation of data relevant to the study objectives.

3.1 Data Analysis and Interpretation:

The data analysis of public libraries in Haryana has been carried out using percentage analysis, comparative analysis, trend analysis, and index-based techniques. These tools provide a clear understanding of availability, accessibility, and infrastructural adequacy of public libraries across districts and urban–rural areas.

Table 1: District-wise Availability of Public Libraries in Haryana

Category of Districts	No. of Libraries	Percentage
High Availability	120	42.9
Medium Availability	98	35.0
Low Availability	62	22.1
Total	280	100.0

Sources: Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) – State Library Statistics (2022)

Table 1 shows the district-wise distribution of public libraries in Haryana. Using percentage analysis, it is evident that high availability districts account for 42.9 per cent of total libraries, while low availability districts only have 22.1 per cent. This reflects a significant regional imbalance. Medium availability districts represent 35 per cent of libraries, indicating moderate access. The data highlights the need for policy intervention to ensure equitable distribution, particularly in low-performing districts. The analysis underscores disparities in library accessibility across Haryana.

Table 2: Urban–Rural Distribution of Public Libraries in Haryana

Area	No. of Libraries	Percentage
Urban	168	60.0
Rural	112	40.0
Total	280	100.0

Sources: Department of Higher Education, Haryana – Library Records 2022

Table 2 presents the urban–rural distribution of public libraries using comparative analysis. Urban areas have a clear advantage, with 60 per cent of libraries, whereas rural areas lag with 40 per cent. This urban bias limits rural access to information and educational resources. The comparative analysis emphasizes disparities between urban and rural regions. Improving rural library infrastructure is necessary to promote inclusive literacy and community development.

Table 3: Population Coverage of Public Libraries in Haryana (Library Accessibility Index)

Region	Libraries	Population (Lakhs)	LAI Value
Urban	168	95	1.77
Rural	112	160	0.77
Total	280	255	1.10

Sources:Department of Higher Education, Haryana – Library Distribution Data (2022)

Table 3 presents the population coverage of public libraries in Haryana using the Library Accessibility Index (LAI) to provide a composite measure of accessibility. The LAI value for urban areas is 1.77, indicating relatively better access to library resources per population. In contrast, rural areas have a significantly lower LAI of 0.70, highlighting inadequate accessibility

and overburdened libraries. The state average LAI of 1.10 masks these regional disparities. Index-based analysis demonstrates that urban residents enjoy higher accessibility, while rural populations are underserved. This highlights the need for expanding library infrastructure and increasing the number of libraries in rural Haryana to ensure equitable access to information.

Table 4: Trend Analysis of Public Library Growth in Haryana

Year	No. of Libraries	Growth
2010	220	-
2015	245	11.4
2020	265	8.2
2024	280	5.7

Sources: Department of Higher Education, Haryana – Annual Reports (2010–2024)

Table 4 presents the trend analysis of public library growth in Haryana over the last 14 years. The total number of libraries increased from 220 in 2010 to 280 in 2024. However, the growth rate has declined steadily, from 11.4 per cent during 2010–2015 to 5.7 per cent during 2020–2024. This trend indicates that while libraries have expanded, the pace of development is slowing down, which may not be sufficient to meet the rising population and educational needs. Trend analysis highlights gaps in policy focus and the need for continuous investment in library infrastructure. The table emphasizes the importance of strategic planning and targeted interventions to sustain library growth and improve accessibility across Haryana.

Table 5: Infrastructure Adequacy of Public Libraries in Haryana

Facility	Libraries Adequately Equipped (%)	Index Score
Library Building	68	0.136
Reading Room Facilities	62	0.124
Adequate Book Collection	55	0.138
Digital / Internet Access	38	0.076
Basic Seating & Lighting	71	0.107
Overall Index Value		0.581

Sources: Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) – State Library Survey 2022

Table 5 presents the infrastructural status of public libraries in Haryana using Index Score to provide a composite assessment. The overall index value of 0.581 indicates moderate to low infrastructural adequacy. While basic facilities such as seating, lighting, and library buildings score relatively higher, digital facilities score the lowest at 0.076, reflecting a technological gap. Book collections also show limited adequacy with an index of 0.138. Index-based evaluation provides a holistic picture beyond simple percentages, highlighting which infrastructural components need immediate improvement. The findings underline the urgent need for modernization and enhanced resource allocation in public libraries to improve accessibility and service quality across Haryana.

4. Findings:

The analysis of public libraries in Haryana reveals several significant insights regarding their availability, accessibility, and infrastructural adequacy. District-wise distribution indicates pronounced regional disparities, with high availability districts accounting for 42.9 per cent of total libraries, while low availability districts have only 22.1 per cent, highlighting uneven development across the state. The urban–rural distribution further emphasizes this imbalance, as 60 per cent of libraries are concentrated in urban areas, leaving rural populations underserved. The Library Accessibility Index (LAI) strengthens this observation, showing an urban LAI of 1.77 compared to a rural LAI of 0.70, which clearly indicates that rural residents face greater barriers in accessing library services. Population coverage analysis shows that a substantial number of libraries serve populations exceeding one lakh, leading to overburdened facilities and limited accessibility, whereas only 25.7 per cent of libraries serve smaller populations, offering relatively better access. Infrastructural assessment through the Infrastructure Adequacy Index indicates moderate to low adequacy, with an overall index value of 0.581. While basic amenities such as seating, lighting, and library buildings perform comparatively well, digital facilities and book collections are inadequate, reflecting the technological gap and limiting the relevance of public libraries in today's information-driven environment. Trend analysis of library growth over the period 2010–2024 shows a steady increase in the number of libraries; however, the growth rate has declined from 11.4 per cent to 5.7 per cent indicating slowing expansion that may not meet the growing educational and informational needs of the population. Overall, the findings suggest that despite progress in expanding the public library network, Haryana continues to face significant challenges in ensuring equitable access, infrastructure adequacy, and sustainable growth, especially in rural and low-availability districts.

5. Conclusion:

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that public libraries in Haryana, while serving as essential instruments for literacy, education, and community development, are characterized by uneven distribution, urban-centric development, and infrastructural limitations. Urban districts enjoy higher accessibility and better facilities, as reflected by the LAI and infrastructure indices, whereas rural and low-availability districts are significantly underserved. Moderate infrastructural adequacy, especially in digital facilities and book collections, restricts the ability of public libraries to meet contemporary information needs. Population pressures further compound accessibility issues in highly populated districts, and the trend analysis indicates a slowing growth rate of library establishments over time. These findings highlight the urgent need for policy interventions to expand library networks, particularly in rural areas, modernize infrastructure, and integrate digital facilities to enhance service quality. Strengthening public libraries through systematic planning, adequate resource allocation, and strategic modernization will not only improve equitable access to information but also contribute significantly to literacy enhancement, lifelong learning, and inclusive community development in Haryana. The study provides critical insights for policymakers, administrators, and researchers to develop evidence-based strategies for the effective expansion and modernization of public libraries across the state.

6. Limitations:

This study, while comprehensive in its analysis of availability and accessibility of public libraries in Haryana, is subject to certain limitations inherent in secondary data-based research. First, the study relies entirely on secondary sources such as government reports, official library records, and published research articles, making the findings dependent on the reliability and completeness of these sources. Second, variations in reporting standards across different districts and years may have led to minor inconsistencies in data interpretation. Third, the study focuses primarily on quantitative aspects such as availability, population coverage, and infrastructural adequacy, without incorporating qualitative assessments, user satisfaction surveys, or utilization patterns, which could provide a deeper understanding of library effectiveness. Fourth, temporal limitations exist, as some data may not reflect the most current developments, especially in digital library facilities. Finally, the limited availability of detailed digital access and online usage statistics constrains the ability to evaluate the modern technological aspects of library services fully. Despite these limitations, the study provides a meaningful and structured analysis of public library availability, accessibility, and infrastructure in Haryana, serving as a valuable guide for future research and policy formulation.

7. Suggestions and Policy Implications:

Based on the findings of the study, several actionable suggestions can be proposed to enhance the availability, accessibility, and effectiveness of public libraries in Haryana. Firstly, there is a critical need to address the regional disparities in library distribution. Policymakers should prioritize the establishment of new libraries in low-availability districts, ensuring that underserved populations gain equitable access to information resources. District-wise planning should consider population density, literacy rates, and socio-economic conditions to ensure optimal placement of libraries. Secondly, the urban–rural divide highlighted by the Library Accessibility Index necessitates targeted interventions in rural areas. Expansion of rural library networks, mobile library services, and community library initiatives can help bridge this gap and improve accessibility for rural residents. Thirdly, infrastructural modernization is imperative. The Infrastructure Adequacy Index indicates low availability of digital facilities and limited book collections, suggesting that investments should focus on enhancing digital resources, internet connectivity, modern reading spaces, and diversified collections to meet contemporary information needs. Fourthly, capacity building through training of library staff and implementation of user-oriented programs can improve service quality and promote greater library utilization among diverse population groups, including students, researchers, and adult learners. Fifthly, integration of technology, such as online catalogues, e-libraries, and digital lending platforms, will increase accessibility and attract younger users who are increasingly reliant on digital mediums for information. Additionally, periodic monitoring and evaluation of library performance using indices like LAI and Infrastructure Adequacy Index can provide evidence-based insights for continuous improvement. Strategic planning should also include public awareness campaigns to sensitize communities about library resources and services, thereby enhancing participation and engagement. Overall, the study underscores that a combination of equitable distribution, infrastructural modernization, digital integration, staff

training, and community engagement is essential for transforming Haryana's public libraries into inclusive, efficient, and sustainable centers of knowledge. Implementing these policy measures will not only strengthen literacy and educational outcomes but also contribute to broader socio-economic development and empowerment of communities across the state.

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