Digitalising Libraries to Enlighten the Modern Youth

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Wisdom, gained from knowledge, is the light that carries civilisations through the darkness of ignorance. Knowledge on the other hand comes from information. Where does information come from? Throughout history, the prime source of information for people about the world inside and out has been books. Libraries have been built by civilisations across the globe in recognition of the fact, so that citizens in need of knowledge and information could avail them all under one roof.

However, with changing time, how people look for and obtain knowledge has transformed. Today's youth, more tech savvy than any of their predecessors, are used to having access to the world at the tips of their fingers. For getting the information they want, they prefer going online to get precisely what they need instead of surfing through volumes of pages in the library.

Most of us fail to realise that libraries are more than simply a store of knowledge. They are centres which offer people a dedicated environment to conceive, ponder over and discuss ideas - ideas which often become keys to transforming societies. Libraries catalyse a civilisation's progress while preserving its values. But in the age of digitalisation when people interact more online and less face to face, how would libraries cope up to ensure that the collective progress of civilisation do not become stagnant? Sarwat Masuda Reza, who has been leading the Library and Cultural Centre Team of the British Council Bangladesh for over nine years, has an answer.

"The advancement of digital technology, although has instigated replacement of books by e-books, has not made libraries redundant, contrary to what many of us may think. It has simply signalled the need of libraries to digitalise as well. We, at the British Council, in recognition to this reality, have taken steps to accommodate the needs of a modern, global citizen," she says.

She has struck the right chord, and it reflects in the British Council's state-of-the-art Library and Cultural Centre which boasts a collection of over 35,000 books, DVDs and journals as well as a vast array of online academic resources including 4,000 titles of e-magazines. In addition, the Centre conducts regular outreach programmes in partnership with corporations and educational institutions, prominent among which are the Book Reading Competition, the Kids Read and Play Learn Act, Reading Challenge from Reading Agency, and Celebration of World Book Day. The adaptive intent and innovative zeal of the British Council's Library and Cultural Centre has already earned it over 32,000 members till date.

"Over the years, Bangladesh has been catching up with the digitalising world at a rapid pace. The youth, who form a vast majority of the country's population, are already adept at the digital way of life. Their pursuit of knowledge is also highly dependent on digital means. In order to encourage them pursue knowledge, libraries need to adapt to digital means of storing and disseminating the wealth of information that they nurture, so that the youth stay encouraged to visit them and to enrich themselves," says Sarwat.

Libraries possess the soul of a civilisation. The youth of a civilisation are flag bearers of its future. In order to ensure that the youth remain in touch with a civilisation's values and morals while taking it forward, libraries must adapt to the needs of the youth, so that sustained progress of a civilisation is ensured.

For the Special Ones

ALI MASHRAF

InclusionX, a youth-based community service organisation aimed at bridging the gap between people with intellectual disabilities and the rest of the society, organised "InclusionX Cultural Day 2016" to celebrate the diverse talents of children with intellectual disabilities.

Since last year, InclusionX has partnered with EMK MakerLab to engage high school and university students in teaching basic computing skills to children with autism and Down syndrome twice every week. After the conclusion of the second session of the course "Joy of Computing", InclusionX conducted an exam where all the students passed with an average score of more than 80%. This day was arranged to share the success stories of these students with all the guests and volunteers.

The programme started with an introductory speech by Labib Tazwar Rahman, founder of InclusionX, who was thrilled to transform an idea to a sustainable platform for helping students with disabilities acquire life skills and gain exposure.

"For some students with intellectual disabilities it's difficult to grasp and retain lessons but then again, even I find it hard to retain concepts of organic chemistry at times," said Labib, "Since no one is perfect, we need to embrace flaws, and do our part to bring out the best in everyone." The students from SWID (Society for the Welfare of the Intellectually Disabled) School, Dhanmondi then mesmerised everyone with their dance and song performances.

Saraf Nawar, a coordinator of Joy of Computing course and student of TU Delft, expressed her gratitude to InclusionX for giving her this chance to connect with students with special needs and remarked, "The joy of seeing my student finally grasp a lesson was unparalleled. The love they have given me is something I will always treasure."

One of the guardians shared her joy when her son finally learnt how to use a computer. "Intellectual disability is still considered to be a taboo in a lot of spheres of our society, and it is high time we battled this culture of mass ignorance that has contributed to the ostracisation of children so full of hidden potential," said Avoy Datta, a student at Stanford University and coordinator of Joy of Computing.

All 65 participants of the programme and the children of SWID School were presented with goody bags from InclusionX. A video containing messages of support for InclusionX and their activities from seven different countries from four continents around the world was also played in the event.

It was followed by an interactive session where the participants were divided into groups and given hypothetical situations where they had to come up with innovative ideas to help integrate children with intellectual disabilities in different contexts.

The event concluded after certificate distribution to all the students and volunteers of Joy of Computing sessions and the participants of the cultural programme.

For more details about InclusionX, visit the Facebook page: facebook.com/inclusionx