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Information literacy without walls: Comparative insights from India's implementation and Greece's emerging approaches

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Abstract

In the digital age, the rapid transformation of academic libraries is not merely about adopting new tools and technologies; it represents a shift in responsibility, enabling libraries to extend information literacy (IL) beyond campus boundaries. While public libraries traditionally provide services for underprivileged citizens, this paper examines how academic libraries in India support diverse disadvantaged communities and explores emerging approaches in Greece. By comparing these initiatives, the study highlights potential strategies institutions can adopt to expand their social impact. Today, libraries must move beyond routine operations and engage in social causes. By stepping outside traditional roles, they can meaningfully support marginalised groups, fostering inclusivity and equity. This shift is not only an opportunity but also a responsibility tied to the core values of knowledge access and public service.

In India, academic libraries actively promote IL by educating village farmers and remote school students about grassroots challenges. Programmes such as the Village Adoption Programme and Science Outreach initiatives demonstrate direct engagement with rural communities. These efforts help farmers adopt sustainable practices and enable students to explore scientific advancements while promoting open-access resources for students, teachers, and local institutions. The global significance of these initiatives was recognised when presented at the American Library Association (ALA) Conference in Philadelphia, USA, June 2025.

In Greece, academic libraries can play a crucial role in advancing IL for marginalised groups by strengthening citizens' ability to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively. Economic

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crises and rising living costs have limited access to education and information, creating urgent demand for inclusive IL services. By becoming community hubs, academic libraries can provide free and user-friendly access to vital resources.

Overall, this study underscores the transformative role of academic libraries in bridging the digital divide and advancing inclusive IL through cross-national learning and collaboration.

Keywords
academic libraries; developing countries; digital divide; Greece; higher education; India; information literacy; lifelong learning; open access; outreach

1. Introduction

Information literacy (IL) has traditionally been a focus within academic institutions, particularly in higher education settings. However, the significance of extending the importance of IL beyond campus limitations has grown to be increasingly obvious in current years. This growth is crucial for numerous reasons, which include lifelong learning, workplace readiness, civic engagement, digital citizenship, health data management, monetary literacy, bridging the virtual divide, fostering innovation, international consciousness, preventing fact overload, ethical use of records, and many others. By extending IL beyond campus, we equip individuals with the tools and technologies to navigate the complexities of the cutting-edge information panorama. This extension now not only benefits people in their private and professional lives, but also contributes to a more knowledgeable, vital-questioning society better prepared to deal with the challenges of the 21st century. This paper presents two case studies of IL initiatives targeting underserved groups in India and Greece. The selection of these countries is deliberate. India, with its vast rural population and socio-economic diversity, provides important insights into how academic libraries can bridge deep digital and educational divides. Initiatives such as village adoption programmes and science outreach illustrate how IL can be reimagined as a tool for empowerment—supporting farmers, schoolchildren, and marginalised communities in gaining both knowledge and agency. In contrast, Greece represents a different but equally urgent context. Years of economic crisis, coupled with the challenges of refugee integration and regional inequalities, have created significant barriers to information access. Greek academic libraries are beginning to think of addressing these issues by developing inclusive frameworks not only for students and faculty but for vulnerable groups as well.

By bringing these two contexts together, the paper does not suggest that India and Greece share identical conditions. Rather, it emphasises how their differences, i.e., India's long-standing grassroots outreach practices and Greece's emerging systemic models, reveal the diverse ways in which IL can respond to inequity. Juxtaposing these approaches highlights both tested strategies and evolving practices. This comparative framework underscores how distinct socio-economic and cultural contexts shape the role of academic libraries in advancing IL for underserved communities. It also demonstrates the value of cross-national learning, showing how innovative practices in one country can inspire adaptable models in another. Together, these case studies reaffirm the transformative potential of academic libraries when they extend their mission beyond campus boundaries and position themselves as active agents of social change.

2. Literature review

IL is increasingly recognised as central to equitable access to knowledge, but its application varies across contexts. This review focuses on how IL has been advanced in India and Greece, with particular attention to academic libraries' outreach to underserved groups.
Indian academic libraries have long emphasised IL within higher education but, in recent years, initiatives have expanded into community-orientated and rural engagement. Studies highlight that while infrastructure and resource limitations persist (Husain & Nazim, 2015; Koltay, 2016), libraries are finding innovative ways to support grassroots populations. For example, collaborations between academic libraries and community organisations have extended IL to farmers, schoolchildren, and first-generation learners. Barr-Walker (2016) notes that partnerships with public libraries and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) provide pathways for reaching underserved groups. Specific models, such as the Village Adoption Programme and Science Outreach initiatives, illustrate how IL is adapted to local needs: farmers are trained to critically evaluate agricultural information, while students are equipped to access and assess open scientific resources. These initiatives embody the IL framework of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, 2016; ACRL, 2020) by contextualising information evaluation and use within community development. At the same time, research indicates that many Indian students overestimate their IL skills (Maughan, 2001), reinforcing the need for structured, evidence-based interventions both on campus and in rural communities. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated online IL initiatives, from mini-courses to health IL campaigns (Guo & Huang, 2021; Revez & Corujo, 2021). Together, these studies show that IL in India has gradually moved beyond classrooms to address rural inequality and empower marginalised communities through tailored information access.

In Greece, academic libraries have invested in digital infrastructures—online catalogues, repositories, and HEAL-Link collaborations—but scholars emphasise that IL remains unevenly developed across regions (Kakali & Grammatikou, 2019). While urban institutions have advanced IL programmes, rural and disadvantaged populations face barriers related to funding, infrastructure, and socio-economic instability (Tait et al., 2016). Recent research highlights emerging IL initiatives targeted at migrants, refugees, and economically vulnerable groups. For instance, the Accessible Multi-modal Electronic Library of Greece (AMElib) digital library offers accessible services for people with disabilities, reflecting the push toward inclusive IL practices (Kakali & Grammatikou, 2019). However, gaps remain; disadvantaged groups are rarely integrated into mainstream IL services, and libraries must expand their roles as community hubs offering tailored training in digital and critical information skills. Literature also underscores Greece's unique socio-economic challenges—prolonged austerity, rising living costs, and regional inequalities (Julien, 2005; Revez & Corujo, 2021). These conditions intensify the need for IL as a survival skill: not only for students and researchers but also for ordinary citizens navigating employment, healthcare, and digital citizenship. Proposed models advocate for mobile library services, collaborative workshops with NGOs, and community-driven IL programmes to close the urban-rural divide (Ince et al., 2019).

The reviewed literature reveals that while both countries recognise IL as vital, their approaches differ. India's focus has been on grassroots applications—linking IL to agriculture, science literacy, and rural education—whereas Greece moves towards developing inclusive models for underprivileged groups. In both contexts, libraries are increasingly positioned not just as academic support units but as agents of social transformation.

3. IL beyond boundaries in academic libraries in India: a case study

IL has traditionally been associated with higher education, where structured programmes train students and researchers to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively. However, in countries like India, where stark inequalities limit access to information, IL must extend beyond university campuses. This case study examines how academic libraries in India are reaching underprivileged and underserved communities, embedding IL into grassroots development. Three initiatives refer to the Village Adoption Programme (VAP) of the National Institute of Food Technology and Entrepreneurship Management (NIFTEM), science outreach programmes of the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Berhampur, and the Mobile Library project of Ashoka University. Each initiative illustrates how IL principles can be localised, contextualised, and applied to farmers, school students, and rural children. Collectively, they demonstrate how Indian academic libraries are evolving into engines of social transformation, aligning with the national vision of Viksit Bharat@2047 (India's vision to become a developed country by 2047) and global frameworks such as the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy initiative.

3.1 Village Adoption Programme (NIFTEM)

The Village Adoption Programme (VAP) launched by NIFTEM, established by the Indian Ministry of Food Processing Industries, exemplifies how IL can be embedded into agricultural education and rural development. Under this initiative, groups of students and faculty or librarian mentors adopt villages to work closely with farmers, helping them navigate agricultural challenges and introducing sustainable practices. To date, NIFTEM has adopted over 90 villages across 22 states in India.
While VAP's stated objectives include farmer education and entrepreneurship, IL is integrated in subtle yet impactful ways:

- Access to agricultural information: Farmers are introduced to government agricultural portals, extension services, and open-access repositories that provide information on food processing, crop management, weather, and market trends.
- Evaluation of sources: Training sessions emphasise the importance of distinguishing scientifically validated techniques from misinformation, whether in the form of traditional myths or unreliable online advice.
- Application of knowledge: Farmers receive guidance on applying information to practical decision-making, including crop selection, food preservation, and food processing methods.
- Promoting scientific awareness and open access in education: Simultaneously, efforts are made to raise awareness about the significance of science and the accessibility of open-access resources for farmers in adopted villages.

The NIFTEM Library has played a pivotal role in digitising and preserving traditional recipes and indigenous practices collected from adopted villages. This initiative not only safeguarded valuable local knowledge but also created a bridge between traditional wisdom and modern information systems.
A particularly innovative aspect of the VAP was the reinterpretation of Ranganathan's (1931) *Five Laws of Library Science* in the context of farmers.

- The first law, "Books are for use", was adapted as "Libraries serve farmers". Just as libraries exist to serve readers, they must also actively serve farmers by providing

access to agricultural knowledge, food processing information, indigenous wisdom, and technological innovations that can directly improve their livelihoods.

- The second law, “Every reader his/her book”, became “Every farmer his/her information”. Each farmer has distinct needs related to soil, crops, climate, or market conditions. Libraries and information systems must therefore ensure that the right information reaches the right farmer at the right time.
- The third law, “Every book its reader”, was rephrased as “Every information its farmer”. No piece of information is ever useless; even the most specialised knowledge may prove crucial to a particular farmer. The responsibility of the library is to connect this information with those who need it.
- The fourth law, “Save the time of the reader”, was reframed as “Save the time of the farmer and educate him/her”. Information should be delivered in simple, clear, and timely ways in their local language, whether through mobile alerts, community centres, or demonstrations so that farmers spend less time searching and more time applying knowledge for productivity.
- Finally, the fifth law, “The library is a growing organism”, was reinterpreted as “Farmers are key to growing the nation”. Just as books are essential for the growth of knowledge, farmers form the foundation of food security and national progress. Empowering them with timely and relevant information ensures not only their prosperity but also the overall development of the country.

Through this localised reframing of Ranganathan’s principles, the NIFTEM Library demonstrated how libraries can extend beyond academic and urban contexts to become vital agents of rural transformation, directly contributing to sustainable development. Evidence of impact includes farmers who adopted improved preservation techniques and others who developed small-scale entrepreneurial ventures based on informed choices (see Figure 1, 2 and 3). By empowering farmers to access, evaluate, and apply information, VAP directly addressed information poverty in rural contexts, situating IL as a tool for livelihood and sustainability.

Figure 1: Training programme for farmers during VAP at Lathor Village

Figure 2: Women learning food processing techniques during a VAP training session

Figure 3: VAP team with village students

3.2 Science outreach programmes at IISER Berhampur

Similarly, at IISER Berhampur, numerous science outreach programmes are conducted to engage with the local underprivileged community (see Figure 4). These initiatives include visits to nearby schools and colleges to bring scientific knowledge directly to their doorsteps. Beyond simply sharing scientific concepts, these programmes emphasise the principles of IL by encouraging students and teachers to critically evaluate scientific information, identify credible sources, and make informed use of open-access resources. In this way, science outreach becomes not only a tool for knowledge dissemination but also a means of cultivating information-literate citizens who can actively participate in the knowledge society. In addition to these visits, as an organising secretary, the first author organised two major science outreach seminars titled “Science in the Community: Advancing Science Popularisation in Odisha”. The seminars were dedicated to fostering a passion for science among secondary and higher secondary students, aligning with the Government of India’s *Viksit Bharat@2047 (Developed Country by 2047) programme*. This programme envisions empowering every citizen to drive positive societal change and contribute to a more educated and developed nation. The institute invited more than 300 students and their teachers, including participants from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds in and around Berhampur. Notably, over 50% of the attendees were girls, many belonging to Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Scheduled Caste (SC) communities. The seminars offered an enriching experience, featuring eminent speakers from renowned institutions such as IIT Delhi, IISER Mohali, and IISc Bangalore. Students were engaged in thought-provoking talks, interactive sessions and live demonstrations across various scientific disciplines. Under the theme "EXPLORE, ENGAGE, EXCEL" participants delved into the fascinating worlds of Chemistry, Biology, Computer Science, Material Science, and Physics, fostering innovation and the practical application of scientific knowledge. The interactive sessions and live demonstrations served not only as disciplinary explorations but also as practical exercises in critical thinking, evaluating reliable sources, and linking scientific knowledge to real-life applications (see Figure 5). In this way, the programme effectively blended subject-specific education with IL principles, enabling participants to gain both disciplinary insights and essential information-handling skills. Moreover, these outreach programmes also raised awareness among students and teachers about open-access resources, fake news and misinformation. This outreach initiative also highlighted the efforts of

the Ministry of Education, Government of India, in promoting top-quality science education and research across the country, for which the seven IISERs have been established and supported. Notably, it emphasised that if even a few students from this gathering succeed in reaching such milestones, they, in turn, can inspire thousands more.

The main objectives of the science outreach programmes are as follows:

- To create awareness among school students and teachers about the understanding of scientific concepts and methodologies, their relevance to everyday life, innovation and societal impact (see Figure 6).
- To inspire and encourage young minds' interest in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields, fostering a passion for lifelong learning.
- To bridge the gap between researchers and the public, facilitating direct engagement and dialogue between scientists, researchers, and the broader community.
- To empower underserved communities providing equitable access to scientific resources and opportunities, ensuring that no one is left behind in the pursuit of knowledge.
- To create awareness of open science, fake news and misinformation.

Figure 4: Science outreach seminar held at IISER Berhampur.

Figure 5: Practical demonstration during science outreach seminar at IISER Berhampur.

Figure 6: Science awareness programme conducted at school.

3.3 The Shanghvi Library at Ashoka University

Alternatively, the Shanghvi Library at Ashoka University, a liberal arts private university, has launched an innovative Mobile Library initiative under the leadership of Dr. Rangashri Kishore, while in the role of Director of Library Services. This initiative seeks to bridge the technological and educational divide in rural India, where digitalisation has yet to make significant inroads. The Mobile Library focuses on reaching children whose parents are engaged in agricultural work, offering them opportunities for education and skill development. “In rural settings, building traditional libraries is challenging due to resource constraints. A mobile library, equipped with e-reader technology and physical books, provides a sustainable solution to educate children in a rapidly changing world,” said Dr. Rangashri (Nijhawan, 2021). Sponsored by the Small Steps Foundation (USA), the Mobile Library operates in villages such as Asavapur, Sevli, and Jajal Toki. It engages children through storytelling sessions, educational videos, and interactive learning tools. The library is equipped with a 52" television and tablets provided by World Reader, which bring over 40,000 e-books and high-quality children’s content to underserved communities. The use of these multimedia tools reinforces visual and digital literacy, essential components of IL in the 21st century. Partnerships with organisations like the Society for All Round Development (SARD) further strengthen the programme by training volunteers and empowering teachers, parents, and health workers to access and utilise quality resources. These collaborative efforts not only enhance literacy but also equip rural children with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in an increasingly digital world. Children from agricultural families, many of whom had limited access to books or digital devices, developed reading habits and basic IL skills. Partnerships with NGOs like the Society for All Round Development (SARD) ensured that IL training extended to broader community members, not just students.

3.4 Emerging themes

Across these three cases, several themes emerge:

1. Localisation of IL: IL principles were adapted to specific audiences. Farmers learned to evaluate agricultural data and food processing information. Students learned to spot misinformation, and rural children learned to navigate digital texts.

2. Integration with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Each programme aligned IL with broader social objectives, whether food security, education equity, or digital inclusion.
3. Evidence of Impact: Though not always formally measured, evidence such as entrepreneurial outcomes, student feedback, and increased digital usage indicates IL's tangible benefits.
4. Expanding the Role of Academic Libraries: Rather than being confined to campuses, libraries in these cases acted as community hubs, extending their expertise outward.

4. Greece's emerging approaches

To address Greek academic libraries' need to promote IL, not only for researchers and students but for vulnerable social groups as well, a model is proposed that recognises the crucial role of access to information in today's society and aims at equipping citizens with the necessary tools and skills to pinpoint, evaluate, and use trustworthy sources. The proposed model was developed by drawing on both international IL frameworks (ACRL, 2016; ACRL, 2020; Lau, 2006) and personal experiences within the Greek context. It was further inspired by the "Ωρίων" [Orion] Information Literacy Programme and informed by international case studies, such as mobile library initiatives in India. These served as valuable reference points in shaping a context-sensitive model tailored to Greece's socio-economic conditions and regional inequalities.

4.1 An Inclusive IL Framework

The primary reason for developing such a model is the need to enhance the social responsibility of libraries in Greece, particularly in areas affected by social and economic inequalities. Within this framework, this model focuses on bridging the information gap between urban and rural areas, providing equal access to knowledge for all Greek citizens. The proposed model aims to strengthen IL skills among disadvantaged groups, such as:

- Persons with disabilities: Libraries are essential agents in ensuring persons with disabilities have equitable access to information and critical digital skills. They should include all accessible platforms and services to assist users in fully benefiting from information materials.
- Refugees and immigrants: Refugees and immigrants are special user groups who often face barriers such as cultural differences, language, or legal status that limit their access to educational and informational services. Libraries can play an important role in supporting them by offering multilingual resources, language learning programmes, orientation sessions on navigating information systems, and partnerships with community organisations. Such initiatives not only help them access knowledge more effectively but also foster their inclusion within Greek society.
- Unemployed persons and professionals seeking new career paths: Individuals under a low-income status who may have recently lost their jobs, a long time has passed since their last job or have not had the opportunity to develop new skills and their professional status, need to be assisted by academic libraries to obtain the chance to pinpoint new career opportunities.
- Economically vulnerable individuals or institutions: This category includes all individuals or institutions with limited financial means, which may prevent them from accessing educational resources, the internet, and technology in general. Libraries can help reduce this gap by providing free access to digital resources, internet-enabled workstations,

training in IL, and community outreach programmes. In doing so, they foster resilience and wellbeing within economically challenged communities.

- Elderly individuals: Older-aged persons who lack sufficient knowledge of modern technology systems and are not digitally literate, have difficulty accessing and using digital information, for example, purchasing clothes from an e-shop or performing more complex tasks like e-banking. This digital divide can be bridged through targeted library-led initiatives such as hands-on digital literacy workshops, one-to-one training sessions, and community outreach programmes, thereby encouraging their active participation in the information society.
- Individuals with learning difficulties: People with learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia, tend to need more time and support to learn and develop new competencies, understand complicated information, or even interact with others. Several of them may face difficulties with their daily activities and need to be supported by someone throughout their lives. Academic libraries may help them receive equitable access to information and knowledge.
- Individuals facing regional inequalities: Communities, such as rural and remote populations, are deprived of access to resources like libraries, internet connectivity, and educational facilities. Regional inequalities cause them issues in accessing and retrieving the desired information. Thus, mobile library services can address these challenges.
- Ethnic and cultural minority groups: Groups facing language barriers or systemic discrimination may also deal with the issue of limited access to mainstream resources. Academic libraries can address this by offering culturally relevant materials and organising multicultural events to enhance intercultural understanding and promote inclusivity. In this way, knowledge exchange can be successfully achieved.

4.2 Key Strategies

4.2.1 Customised Educational Material

Libraries should create customised educational material, like instructional videos and educational guides, in languages easily understood by non-native speakers (Greek and English), to cover various literacy levels so that individuals can benefit from the provided resources. Persons with disabilities, such as visual or hearing impairments, must be supported with material integrated with subtitles and audio descriptions. Library websites and digital catalogues should comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) to ensure inclusive access to information resources. Basic library services like using digital databases, bibliographic tools, and even successful navigation to OPACs must be provided to users through educational seminars to conduct research and access the desired information. As already mentioned, particularly rural and economically disadvantaged regions need to be treated equally so that they overcome various barriers to accessing educational resources.

4.2.2 Accessible Infrastructure

Disability-friendly technologies play a vital role in fostering IL in academic libraries. Tools such as text-to-speech software, Braille readers, and high-contrast screens not only provide access to digital and print resources but also enable users with visual impairments to search, evaluate, and use information effectively. Similarly, accessible digital platforms are essential for persons with mobility impairments, ensuring they can navigate online catalogues, databases, and learning systems without barriers. While infrastructure elements such as elevators and ramps remain important, integrating universal design principles in Greek academic libraries will ensure

that all individuals—particularly those in rural regions and small villages—can participate meaningfully in information-seeking, research, and educational activities.

4.2.3 In collaboration with others

Collaboration between academic libraries and other organisations is vital to expand access to information and foster social cohesion. Such collaborations could be created between:

- Academic libraries and schools*:* Partnerships with schools can help students develop IL at an early stage and develop critical thinking in accessing and evaluating information. Libraries could design joint IL workshops embedded into secondary school curricula, for example, teaching students how to identify misinformation online or cite digital resources. Pilot collaborations could start with regional schools in Thessaloniki or Athens, leveraging existing Ministry of Education programmes.
- Academic libraries and local communities*:* Partnerships with local communities will assist academic libraries in expanding their reach beyond university environments. Individuals pursuing career alignment can be assisted through career counselling services to prepare résumés, seek job applications and develop strategies to reach their desired job. Community-focused initiatives can be provided to support citizens in legal rights awareness, and many other areas. Mobile library units can partner with community centres in rural areas to run career counselling sessions and short seminars on digital tools (e.g., creating CVs, e-banking). For example, the Ashoka University mobile library model in India could be adapted to Greek villages and islands.
- Academic libraries and NGOs*:* Partnerships with NGOs may help in areas like refugee support to host programmes or workshops focusing on language learning (preferably Greek and English), social welfare, providing research assistance, training sessions, and access to digital tools, empowering marginalised communities, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities. NGOs such as *SolidarityNow* and *Metadrasi*, already active in refugee education in Greece, could co-host language and digital literacy workshops in library spaces. These would combine access to library resources with NGO teaching expertise, making services more relevant and accessible.
- Academic libraries and the Government*:* For economically disadvantaged individuals and institutions, the Greek Government can play a crucial role in supporting education and professional growth. In India, for instance, the One Nation, One Subscription project provides thousands of journals freely to underfunded institutions. Greece's HEAL-Link consortium already offers a framework for government collaboration to expand access to electronic journals. Building on this model, libraries could advocate for government-funded national access schemes to ensure equitable benefits for smaller and less-resourced institutions.

4.2.4 Digital IL Platform

This model proposes the creation of a common online platform for all Greek academic libraries that will be available 24 hours a day. This tool will provide structured educational resources and basic steps on accessing, searching, and retrieving data, as well as interactive exercises and self-assessment tools to strengthen users' IL competencies. An indicative example of such a tool could be the "Ωρίων" [Orion] Information Literacy Programme which was launched by the International Hellenic University in 2008. This service provides open-access educational content, and although it was initially designed for students, it is also available to the general public and the wider community. In addition, academic librarians may offer online consultation sessions for customised guidance and support to users.

4.2.5 Building IL skills

This model has an essential feature to start with, such as the organisation of educational seminars and workshops presenting strategies to access information while protecting online privacy. In addition, academic libraries can arrange awareness weeks with thematic events targeting specific groups to highlight the need to obtain IL for their everyday life. The proposed model can be further expanded with mentorship programmes, where academic staff or students can be trained to help disadvantaged people acquire basic IL competencies.

4.3 Evaluation and advancement of the model

The assessment and continuous enhancement of the model can be achieved successfully only through systematic data collection and user feedback. Therefore, it is essential to conduct regular surveys and focus groups to measure the effectiveness of the proposed model, check the participants' progress, and find areas for further advancement. Feedback analysis will provide valuable insights into the programme's strengths and weaknesses so that impact and relevance can be further developed. The proposed model can be carefully reviewed by incorporating the feedback from all participants (disadvantaged groups, faculty, and the library's staff). If several drawbacks come to the surface, it can be redesigned by incorporating the users' perspectives to be more effective and adapted to technological or educational trends.

5. Outcomes of IL

The outcomes of the IL programme are notable. The authors were heartened when they uncovered that during the village adoption programme, more than ten farmers became entrepreneurs within three years. The students, especially females, were attracted to taking the science streams after conducting several science outreach programmes for the underprivileged communities. The Ashoka University mobile library service helped several rural children to become literate, but it also equipped them with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in an increasingly digital world. Conversely, implementing the proposed model is expected to lead to educational and societal benefits. Its basic concept is based on enhancing IL skills among disadvantaged groups, ensuring access to information, and assisting them in navigating, evaluating, and using it effectively. This model aims to promote greater independence in professional, academic, and everyday digital interactions by strengthening their competencies. Furthermore, this model targets equal access to knowledge and social inclusion so that all individuals can benefit from academic library material. Academic libraries must expand their role beyond the university, function as support centres for local communities, promote lifelong learning, and create strong relations between society and academic environments. This model needs to work in Greece, as regional inequalities and special socio-economic conditions significantly impact access to information and education. It is essential to bridge the knowledge gap.

6. Conclusion

The comparative study of IL initiatives in India and Greece underscores the transformative potential of academic libraries in bridging societal gaps and fostering inclusive knowledge access. In India, programmes like the Village Adoption Programme (VAP) and Science Outreach demonstrate how libraries can empower rural farmers, students, and underserved

communities through tailored education, open-access resources, and digital literacy. Similarly, Greece's proposed model highlights the urgency of addressing socio-economic disparities—such as regional inequalities, refugee integration, and digital divides—by repositioning academic libraries as community hubs for lifelong learning and social inclusion.
Both contexts reveal shared challenges, including limited resources, infrastructural barriers, and the need for adaptive strategies in a rapidly digitising world. However, they also showcase innovative solutions—mobile libraries, partnerships with NGOs, and culturally responsive programming—that transcend traditional campus boundaries. The success of these initiatives, evidenced by entrepreneurial farmers in India and envisioned societal benefits in Greece, reaffirms libraries' pivotal role in advancing equitable access to information and combatting misinformation.

This article demonstrates strong alignment with the SDGs by promoting quality education and lifelong learning through IL programmes for diverse communities. It addresses reduced inequalities and social inclusion by extending resources and digital literacy beyond campus boundaries to marginalised groups, including rural populations, women, and persons with disabilities. Initiatives like the Village Adoption Programme and mobile libraries contribute to poverty reduction and economic empowerment by educating farmers and fostering entrepreneurship. By encouraging cross-sector partnerships and collaborative models, the article supports global collaboration and sustainable communities. It emphasises combatting misinformation and fostering critical evaluation, advancing SDGs related to innovation, peaceful societies, and equitable access to knowledge.

Ultimately, this paper advocates for a global paradigm shift in which academic libraries embrace their social responsibility, leveraging cross-national insights to design scalable and inclusive IL programmes. By prioritising collaboration, technological adaptation, and community engagement, libraries can become catalysts for sustainable development, empowering marginalised populations to navigate and thrive in the 21st-century information landscape.

Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of such initiatives and expand comparative frameworks to other regions, further enriching the discourse on IL as a tool for equity and empowerment.

Declarations

Ethics approval

Ethical approval was not considered necessary in alignment with the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Berhampur or the General State Archives of Greece's guidance on the conduct of ethical research.

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