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Best Practices in the Libraries of Provincialised Degree Colleges of Karimganj District, Assam: A Study

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ABSTRACT:

The paper discusses the best practices adopted by the college libraries of the Karimganj District of the State of Assam in India. The best practices are a set of guidelines or ideas which aims to take the most efficient and effective course of action to fulfill the goals of the library. The present study adopted the best practices guidelines set by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) of India. The researcher adopted the survey method to study the present problem. The questionnaire was used as the principal tool for data collection. However, interview, gathering data from websites of respective colleges and browsing secondary literature like reports was also done. Careful analysis of data collected reveals that some of the colleges of Karimganj district had not been accredited by NAAC. Most of the colleges have best practices adopted in areas of automation, collection development and administration. However, in certain key areas these libraries are lacking in best practices like opening library to extended hours, library websites, Wi-Fi facility and availability of Web OPAC facility. There are several barriers to implement best practices that were identified in the study. The main barriers were lack of fund and insufficient trained staff.

Key Words: College library, Best Practices, NAAC, Library Automation, Karimganj District, Assam, India

1. Introduction

In the present age of information explosion, an academic library plays an important role in teaching and learning process through the application of best possible processes, services and resources. Libraries have been regarded as a place of information storage, Information retrieval and information dissemination. Libraries are the service institutions. User satisfaction is the prime motto of any service institutions. To meet the users demand effectively, libraries and information centre need to adopt best practices. Simply, Best practices are a set of guidelines, ethics or ideas that represent the most efficient or prudent course of action, in a given business situation. Best practices might be set up by authorities, for example, controllers or overseeing bodies, or they might be intrinsic to an organization's management team. According to Wikipedia "A best practice is a method or technique that has been generally accepted as superior to any alternatives because it produces results that are superior to those achieved by other means or because it has become a standard way of doing things"

Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary describes "best practices as quality of high standard, excellence, highly improved, outstanding per excellence service. It means ways of doing something that is usual or expected way in a particular organization or situation, guidelines for good practices. In this process of developing we take action rather than good ideas and we improve our skills."

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is a self-governing body set up by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India to evaluate and authorize establishments of higher education in the country. The essential job of NAAC is to monitor and accredit establishments of higher education in the country. NAAC conducts appraisal and accreditation of higher education establishments, for example, colleges and other institutions of higher learning including private to infer a comprehension of the quality status of the establishments.

Evaluation of a library is an essential part in the accreditation process where learning resources, services, management and use of technology are properly monitored. According to National Board of Accreditation and Assessment Council "Best practices may be innovative and be a philosophy, policy, strategy, program, process or practice that solves a problem or create new opportunities and positively impact on organizations.

Institutional excellence is the aggregate of the best practices followed in different areas of institutional activities."

NAAC has developed a set of best practices for the college and university libraries to enhance the academic information environment. These are as follows:

☐ Computerization of library with standard software.

☐ Inclusion of sufficient information about the library in the college/ university prospectus.

☐ Compiling student/teacher attendance statistics and locating the same on the notice board.

☐ Displaying newspaper clippings on the notice board periodically.

☐ Career/Employment Information/ Services.

☐ Internet Facilities to different user groups.

☐ Information literacy programs.

☐ Suggestion box and timely response.

☐ Displaying new arrivals and circulating a list of those to academic departments.

☐ Conducting book exhibitions on different occasions.

☐ Organizing book talks.

☐ Instituting Annual Best User award for students.

☐ Organizing competitions annually.

☐ Conducting user surveys periodically.

2. Literature Review

Waghmode (2013) in his case study of best practices in Sonubhau Baswant College Library found that that there is computerization of the library using SOUL 2.0 software, good collection development, library services to the external readers, internet facility in the library, Book Bank facility and information about competitive examinations. Naik (2017) describes the best practices adopted in SDM IT learning resource centre viz. book exhibition cum sale by publishers and vendors, library book exhibition in different occasion, display of worthy answer scripts, orientation to fresher (Information Literacy Program), best library user identification. Under its best practices he has identified the goals, the process, the likely outcomes and resources needed to implement them. Kumar

(2018) clearly explains the importance of maintaining the library to fulfill the quality for the NAAC policy. He suggests use of a powerpoint presentation highlighting the last 5 years data relating to library use, collection development, extra library card to topper student, regular book exhibition, best library user award, special corner for the especially able user etc.

According to Sathe (2015) best practices in the college libraries will not only improve the quality of services of the library but will also improve its image and the image of the library professionals in the society. Wanderkar (2014) in his study mentioned the importance of best practices for the library professionals to improve their skills and provide effective services to the users so that all the resources are extensively used. Sumadevi (2014) in her article discusses importance of introducing best practices in a modern library and information centre to empower it to improve its functioning and processes, upgrade asset use, and undertake excellent quality and valuable services to its clients. According to Badiger, Badiger and Padmamma (2017), the best practices are not one time solution but a continuous process.

Mozumder (2020) in her study presents the current situation of the various library services provided by the undergraduate colleges of Barak valley, Assam. In her study it was found that most of the college libraries are in developing stage in terms of infrastructure and library automation. Ahmed and Pal (2012) in college libraries of Nalbari district, Assam described the pre and post NAAC inspection scenario on library best practices. According to them most of the college libraries have started best practices like providing innovative services, library automation, separate library building post NAAC assessment. In her study it was found that gradually the college libraries of Nalbari district have started to provide more innovative services after NAAC accreditation. Sarma and Sarmah (2016) studied best practices in the college libraries affiliated to Dibrugarh University in Assam and found that majority of the college libraries have started automation, NLIST subscription, library bulletin board, Webpage, suggestion box etc. They also found that a great number of college libraries undertake student participation programme.

3. Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of study are as follows:

➢ To find out how many colleges have undertaken NAAC Accreditation.

➢ To find out areas where best practices are prevalent in college library of Karimganj district.

➢ To find out whether sufficient staff is available to carry out best practices in these library.

➢ To find out the barriers to implement the best practices in college libraries.

4. Research Methodology:

In this study, the researchers used survey method. This method was chosen because it allows of data in a highly economical way. Surveys are used to answer the questions who, what, where, and how much. The data was collected primarily through a questionnaire. Interview technique was also used to obtain further information about the library. In order to clarify data the website of the respective colleges were also visited. In certain cases help of secondary literature like Annual Reports, reports etc. Collected data has been analyzed and presented in tabular as well as graphical form.

5. Colleges of Karimganj District:

There are seven numbers of provincialised degree colleges in different places of Karimganj district of Assam. Most of the colleges of Karimganj district are situated in the rural areas. The seven nos. of provincialised colleges are affiliated to Assam University, Silchar. Karimganj College is the oldest college in Karimganj district which was established before independence in 1946. Nilambazar College, Patherkandi College and Swami Vivekananda College were newly provincialised in the year 2013 by the Director of Higher Education, Govt. of Assam. Besides there are a good number of junior colleges, law colleges, B.Ed. colleges, technical colleges like Karimganj Polytechnic College, Barak Valley Engineering College (BVEC), Pandit Deendayal Upadhayay Model Degree College which has not taken into consideration in this study.

Table 1: Name of the College Library, Year of Establishment & NAAC Grade

Sr. No.	Name of College	Name of Library	Year of Establishment	NAAC Grade
1.	Karimganj College	Karimganj College Library	1946	B(2010)
2.	Nabin Chandra College	Central Library	1969	C(2019)
3.	Nilambazar College	Nilambazar College Library	1994	Not Accredited
4.	Patherkandi College	Patherkandi College Library	1990	Not Accredited
5.	Ramkrishna Nagar College	Shishir Granthagar	1964	B(2004)
6.	Rabindra Sadan Girls College	R.S. Girls College Library	1961	B(2010)
7.	Swami Vivekananda College	Swami Vivekananda College Library	1991	Not Accredited

6. Nature and function of library committee

Based on the powers conferred to function, a library committee can be either executive or advisory. The study clearly shows that all the college library i.e 100% have advisory type of library committee. Further the frequency of meeting of all these library committees is yearly.

Table 2: Nature and function of library committee

Sr. No.	Name of College	Nature	Frequency of Meeting
1.	Karimganj College	Advisory	Yearly
2.	Nabin Chandra College	Advisory	Yearly
3.	Nilambazar College	Advisory	Yearly
4.	Patherkandi College	Advisory	Yearly
5.	Ramkrishna Nagar College	Advisory	Yearly
6.	Rabindra Sadan Girls College	Advisory	Yearly
7.	Swami Vivekananda College	Advisory	Yearly

7. Library Opening Hours:

The best practices principles developed by NAAC prescribes opening of library in holidays and weekends. It also prescribes for opening of library beyond stipulated opening hours. The table below shows that none of the college libraries (0%) are open beyond stipulated opening hours and during holidays and Sundays.

Table 3: Library Opening Hours

Sr. No.	Name of College	Opening Hours	Opening on Holidays/Sundays	Opening beyond stipulated hours
1.	Karimganj College	10.30-5.00	No	No
2.	Nabin Chandra College	10.00-5.00	No	No
3.	Nilambazar College	9.30-4.30	No	No
4.	Patherkandi College	9.30-4.30	No	No
5.	Ramkrishna Nagar College	9.30-4.30	No	No
6.	Rabindra Sadan Girls College	10.00-5.00	No	No
7.	Swami Vivekananda College	10.00-3.00	No	No

8. Collection development of College Libraries:

Most of the college libraries of Karimganj district acquires printed books, journals and magazines, newspapers, CD-DVDs and subscribes the membership of N-LIST-E-Resources from INFLIBNET. The Table 4 shows the total collection of college libraries of Karimganj district. It reveals that Karimaganj College library has the highest collection of books and Swami Vivekananda college library has the lowest collection of Books. Only three college libraries are having CDs and DVDs in their library collection. With regards to E-resources, four college libraries (57%) have subscribed to NLIST services.

Table 4: Collection of different college libraries of Karimganj District

Sr. No.	Name of College	Print	Non Print	
			NLIST E-Resources	Own
1.	Karimganj College	35000	30,06,000	50
2.	Nabin Chandra College	16000	30,06,000	35
3.	Nilambazar College	7100	NA	NA
4.	Patherkandi College	2500	NA	NA
5.	Ramkrishna Nagar College	9800	30,06,000	30
6.	Rabindra Sadan Girls College	18000	30,06,000	NA
7.	Swami Vivekananda College	2300	NA	NA

9. Stock Verification, Weeding and Preservation policy:

Presence of stock verification, weeding of books and their preservation is part of best practices in a college library. It is very encouraging to find in the study that 100% of the college libraries follow stock verification, weeding and preservation of books.

Table 5: Name of the College Library, stock verification, weeding out & preservation

Sr. No.	Name of College	Stock Verification	Weeding out	Preservation
1.	Karimganj College	Yes	Yes	Yes
2.	Nabin Chandra College	Yes	Yes	Yes
3.	Nilambazar College	Yes	Yes	Yes
4.	Patherkandi College	Yes	Yes	Yes
5.	Ramkrishna Nagar College	Yes	Yes	Yes
6.	Rabindra Sadan Girls College	Yes	Yes	Yes
7.	Swami Vivekananda College	Yes	Yes	Yes

10. Services Provided by the College Libraries:

Most of the college libraries providing traditional library services such as circulation and Reference service. Best practices like Current awareness service (CAS), Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) and Internet service to the college community is provided by all (100%) of the college libraries in Karimganj District. However, WI-FI service is provided by only 3 (43%) of the college libraries in Karimganj District. Book Bank Facility is provided by 4 (57%) of the college libraries in Karimganj District. The following table 6 shows the services provided by the college libraries of Karimganj district.

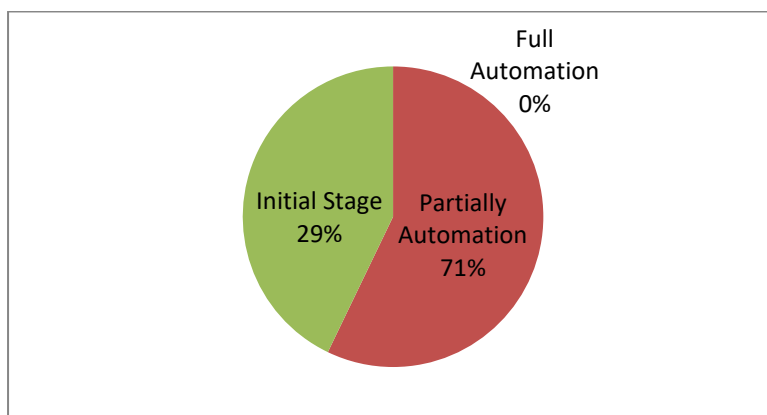Table 6: Services provided by the surveyed college libraries

Sr. No.	Name of College	Library Services						
		REF	CAS	SDI	Internet	Wi-Fi	Repro	Book Bank
1.	Karimganj College	✓	✓	✓	✓	No	✓	✓
2.	Nabinchandra College	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3.	Nilambazar College	✓	✓	✓	✓	No	✓	No
4.	Patherkandi College	✓	✓	✓	✓	No	✓	No
5.	R.K. Nagar College	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.	R.S. Girls College	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7.	Swami Vivekananda College	✓	✓	✓	✓	No	No	No

11. Status of Library Automation:

Automation is the basic principal of best practices in any library. Library automation refers to the use of computer to automate the typical procedures of libraries.

Library management software packages are required for library automation process. Some packages are proprietary and some are open software. The status of Library automation in the college libraries of Karimganj district has been shown in the following pie diagram.

Figure: 1 Status of Library Automation in Karimganj district

The above pie diagrams shows that no one college library is fully automated while five (71%) college libraries are partially automated and other two (29%) college libraries are in initial stage of automation.

12.   Library Management Software Used:

Out of seven college libraries three libraries (43%) are working with the help of SOUL software, two libraries (28.5%) with open source Koha package and other two libraries (28.5%) are planning to automate their library shortly with open source software due to financial problem.

Table 7: Name of the College Library, Software & Version

Sr. No.	Name of College	Name of Software	Version
1.	Karimganj College	Soul	1.0
2.	Nabin Chandra College	Koha	2.0
3.	Nilambazar College	-	-
4.	Patherkandi College	Koha	-
5.	Ramkrishna Nagar College	Soul	2.0
6.	Rabindra Sadan Girls College	Soul	2.0
7.	Swami Vivekananda College	-	-

13.   Areas of Automation:

Areas of library automation are nothing but the housekeeping operations of a library which includes all operations such as administration, acquisition, cataloguing, circulation, serial control, OPAC etc. Following table depicts the areas of automation performed by the surveyed college libraries in Karimganj district. Five (71.4%) of the college libraries have automated their cataloguing process. Only 2 (28.5%) of the college libraries have automated their circulation process. Only 1 (14%) responded to have automated serial control in the college library. OPAC is implemented in 2 (29%) of the college libraries in Karimganj District. Best practices prescribe implementation of Web OPAC, but no libraries (0%) under the study implemented this.

Table: 8: Areas of Automation in college libraries of Karimganj District

Sr. No.	Name of College	Administration	Acquisition	Cataloging	Circulation	Serial Control	OPAC	WebOPAC
1.	Karimganj College	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
2.	Nabin Chandra College	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
3.	Nilambazar College	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4.	Patherkandi College	Yes	-	Yes	-	-	-	-
5.	Ramkrishna Nagar College	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
6.	Rabindra Sadan Girls College	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
7.	Swami Vivekananda College	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

14.   Availability of Library Webpage

The libraries surveyed in the study (100%) do not have dedicated websites rather all the college libraries in Karimganj district had a part of the college library website to display its content.

Table 9: Name of the College Library & Dedicated webpage

Sr. No.	Name of College	Dedicated Webpage with URL	Part of College Website
1.	Karimganj College	No	Yes
2.	Nabin Chandra College	No	Yes
3.	Nilambazar College	No	Yes
4.	Patherkandi College	No	Yes

5.	Ramkrishna Nagar College	No	Yes
6.	Rabindra Sadan Girls College	No	Yes
7.	Swami Vivekananda College	No	Yes

15. Computer Hardware available:

Minimum hardware such as computer, printer, scanner UPS are the prerequisite for library automation. The following table presents that all seven college libraries (100%) are using computer, printer and UPS facilities for automation process. Only four college libraries (57%) have scanner and two college libraries (29%) are using Barcode Technology for library automation.

Table 10: Hardware available in the college libraries

Sr. No.	Name of College	Computer	Printer	UPS	Scanner	Any Other
1.	Karimganj College	06	01	06	01	-
2.	Nabin Chandra College	11	02	11	01	Barcode
3.	Nilambazar College	01	01	01	-	-
4.	Patherkandi College	01	01	01	-	-
5.	Ramkrishna Nagar College	02	01	02	01	-
6.	Rabindra Sadan Girls College	03	01	01	01	Barcode
7.	Swami Vivekananda College	01	01	01	-	-

16. Some other best practices criteria:

Some other best practices criteria set by NAAC in India includes availability of information literacy programme, Career /Employment Information Service, Display News Paper clippings, Student/Teacher Attendance Statistics, Best User Award, Users Survey, Book Exhibition, Book Talk Programme, Suggestion Box and Annual Competitions. Table below shows the percentage wise distribution of the availability of these practices in the college libraries of Karimganj District. It is observed that Information Literacy programme and maintenance of Student/Teacher Attendance statistics is available in more than half (57%) of the libraries. However, none of the libraries (0%) has User survey, Book Exhibition, Book Talk and annual Competitions as best practices.

Table 11: Some other best practices criteria

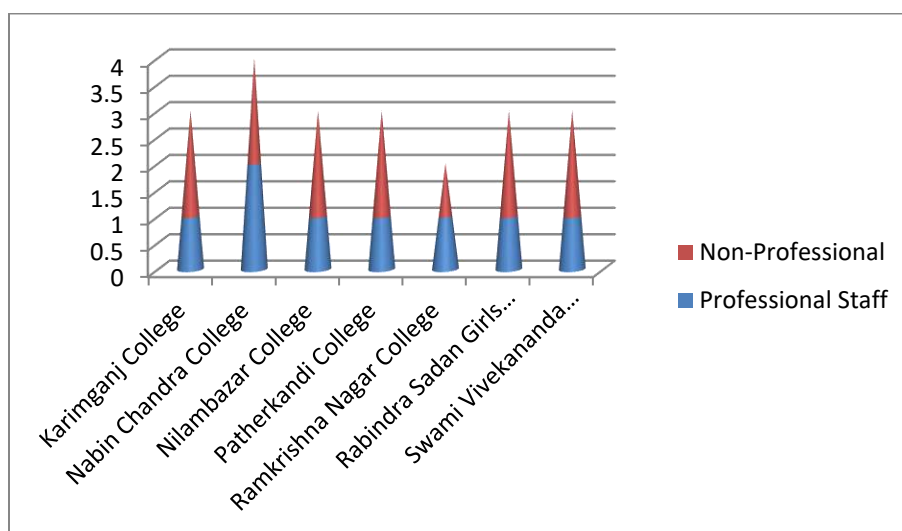| SL. No	Use of NAAC Best Practices	No. of Libraries (*N=7*)	Percentages
1.	Information Literacy	4	57
2.	Career /Employment Information Service	2	29
3.	Display News Paper Clippings	3	43
4.	Student/Teacher Attendance Statistics	4	57
5.	Best User Award	3	43
6.	Users Survey	0	0
7.	Book Exhibition	0	0
8.	Book Talk Programme	0	0
9.	Suggestion Box	3	43
10.	Annual Competitions	0	0

17.   Staff available to implement best practices:

The best practices criteria can be adopted in a college library under the guidance of a leadership i.e. the librarian. However, in the present study it was found that in four college libraries (57%) the librarian post is vacant. The ratio of professional to non professional staff is 1:2.

Table 12: Availability of staff

Sr. No.	Name of College	Professional		Non Professional	
		Librarian	Assistant Librarian	Library Assistant	Grade IV
1.	Karimganj College	-	01(Contractual)	01(Permanent)	01(Permanent)
2.	Nabin Chandra College	01(Permanent)	-	01(Contractual)	02(Permanent)
3.	Nilambazar College	-	01(Permanent)	01(Permanent)	01(Permanent)
4.	Patherkandi College	-	01(Permanent)	01(Permanent)	01(Permanent)
5.	Ramkrishna Nagar College	01(Permanent)	-	-	01(Permanent)
6.	Rabindra Sadan Girls College	01(Permanent)	-	01(Permanent)	01(Permanent)
7.	Swami Vivekananda College	-	01(Permanent)	01(Permanent)	01(Permanent)

Figure: 2 Staff working in the surveyed college libraries

18. Barriers to implement best practices:

There may be certain barriers in the college libraries of Karimganj district for implementing best practices (Table 13). Out of 7 college libraries, 6 (85.71%) college libraries are facing financial problem, all (100%) libraries lack trained staff, 5 (71.42%) libraries are facing infrastructure problem, 4 (57.14%) college libraries reported lack of training opportunities and 5 (71.42%) college libraries are getting less support from the authority. Overall in this table clearly shows that majority of the college libraries are facing multiple barriers/problems for implementing best practices.

Table 13: Problems faced by the college libraries

Problems	Frequency (N=7)	Percentage (%)
Lack of Fund	6	85.71%%
Lack of trained staff	7	100%
Lack of Infrastructure	5	71.42%
Lack of Training	4	57.14%
Lack of support from Authority	5	71.42%

19. Findings of the Study:

Following findings are identified during study:

▪ All the college library i.e 100% has advisory type of library committee. Further the frequency of meeting of all these library committees is yearly

- None of the college libraries (0%) are open beyond stipulated opening hours and during holidays and Sundays.

- In order to give access to e-books and e-journals, four college libraries (57%) have subscribed to NLIST services.

- It is very encouraging to find in the study that 100% of the college libraries follow stock verification, weeding and preservation of books.

- Best practices like Current awareness service (CAS), Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) and Internet service to the college community is provided by all (100%) of the college libraries in Karimganj District. However, WI-FI service is provided by only 3 (43%) of the college libraries in Karimganj District. Book Bank Facility is provided by 4 (57%) of the college libraries in Karimganj District.

- It is observed that out of seven college libraries, No (0%) library is fully automated while five (71%) college libraries are partially automated and other two (29%) college libraries are in initial stage of automation. This indicates that the college libraries in Karimganj District are implementing library automation as a best practice. Five (71.4%) of the college libraries have automated their cataloguing process

- The libraries surveyed in the study (100%) do not have dedicated websites.

- All seven college libraries (100%) are using computer, printer and UPS facilities for automation process. Only four college libraries (57%) have scanner and two college libraries (29%) are using Barcode Technology for library automation.

- It is observed that Information Literacy programme and maintenance of Student/Teacher Attendance statistics is available in more than half (57%) of the libraries. However, none of the libraries (0%) has User survey, Book Exhibition, Book Talk and Annual Competitions as best practices.

- Some of the barriers to implement best practices identified under the study were financial problem (85.71%), lack trained staff (100%), lack of infrastructure (71.42%), lack of training opportunities (57.14%) and lack of support from the authority (71.42%).

20.   Suggestions:

The following suggestions may be made for implementation of best practices in College libraries of Karimganj district:

- College administration needs to provide basic ICT infrastructure to the college libraries so that library can start automation process easily.

- IQAC Cell of the respective colleges may be given higher priority for library automation for NAAC accreditation purpose.

- College Librarian must be appointed in all the vacant posts.

- The newly provincialised college libraries may install free or open source software (Koha or e-Granthalaya) in their college libraries as soon as possible.

- LIS background staff may be engaged in the library instead of general office staff.

- Government may provide special grant to these colleges to upgrade their resources and services.

- Assam College Library Association (ICT Cell) may support in automation works in the college libraries of Karimganj District.

- Hand on training, workshops regarding best practices may be organised in the college libraries.

- Colleges may implement RFID system which allows for flexibility in manpower requirement and library opening hours.

21.   Conclusion:

One of the main pillars of best practices is library automation. Library automation brings great changes in the functioning of the library and providing effective and efficient services. Through use of RFID systems library can be opened for longer time with less staff. Implementing best practices can be expensive, complex and continuous process involving various problems. Lack of fund, lack of ICT infrastructure, lack of sufficient staff and lack of initiative from the college authority are found responsible for non implementation of best practices.

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