

Application of Artificial Intelligence in Library Services: Opportunities, Challenges and Future Prospects

Deepamoni Das

Librarian, Kampur College, Assam

Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as an important technological development with the potential to transform the functioning of libraries and information centres. Libraries are increasingly exploring AI applications in areas such as reference and information services, information retrieval, cataloguing, classification, recommendation systems, digital preservation, user support, collection development, and information literacy. AI-powered chatbots and generative AI tools can provide users with rapid and continuous assistance, while machine learning and natural language processing can support the organisation and discovery of information resources. Recent literature indicates that reference and information services are among the most prominent areas of AI application in academic libraries, while cataloguing and other technical services are also increasingly being supported by AI. At the same time, the implementation of AI creates challenges related to cost, infrastructure, staff competencies, privacy, copyright, algorithmic bias, misinformation, transparency, and professional ethics. This paper discusses the major applications of AI in library services and examines the opportunities and challenges associated with its adoption. It argues that AI should be viewed not as a replacement for librarians but as a technology that can augment professional expertise and improve the efficiency, accessibility, and quality of library services.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Academic Libraries, Generative AI, Chatbots, Information Services, Machine Learning, Library Automation

1. Introduction

Libraries have continuously adopted new technologies to improve the organisation, preservation, retrieval, and dissemination of information. The development of computers, automation, digital libraries, the internet, cloud computing and mobile technologies has significantly changed traditional library operations. Artificial Intelligence is the latest technological development that is creating new possibilities for library and information services.

Artificial Intelligence refers broadly to technologies that enable computer systems to perform tasks associated with human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, language processing, prediction, recognition and decision-making. In libraries, AI can be used to automate repetitive

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activities, understand users' information needs, improve information discovery and provide personalised services.

Recent research shows that AI applications in academic libraries extend across technical services, reference and information services, administration and circulation, collection development, information literacy and professional development. Reference and information services have emerged as one of the most prominent areas of application.

The emergence of generative AI has further expanded the discussion. Tools capable of generating and summarising text, answering questions, assisting with research and interacting through natural language have created both opportunities and concerns for libraries. UNESCO's guidance on generative AI emphasises a human-centred approach and the development of appropriate policies and human capacities.

Therefore, libraries need to understand not only how AI can be applied, but also how it can be implemented responsibly while protecting privacy, intellectual freedom, copyright, information quality and professional values.

2. Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the concept and importance of Artificial Intelligence in library services.
2. To identify the major areas where AI can be applied in libraries.
3. To examine the opportunities offered by AI for improving library services.
4. To identify the major challenges associated with the adoption of AI in libraries.
5. To examine the changing roles and skills of library professionals in the AI environment.
6. To discuss ethical, privacy, copyright and information-quality issues related to AI.
7. To suggest measures for effective and responsible implementation of AI in libraries.

3. Research Methodology

The study is based on a descriptive and qualitative literature-review approach. Relevant literature on Artificial Intelligence, library services, academic libraries, generative AI, chatbots, machine learning and information services was examined.

Published research articles, professional documents and institutional guidance were consulted to identify major applications, opportunities and challenges associated with AI in libraries. Recent systematic reviews have examined AI adoption in academic libraries using sources including Scopus, Web of Science and LISA, while other reviews have examined AI applications across different library services.

The literature was organised under the following themes:

- I. AI applications in library services
- II. Opportunities of AI

- III. Challenges of AI adoption
- IV. Ethical and professional issues
- V. Skills and competencies of librarians
- VI. Future prospects of AI-enabled libraries

4. Artificial Intelligence and Library Services

AI can support both back-end library operations and front-end user services. Its applications range from automated metadata creation to conversational reference assistance.

4.1 Reference and Information Services

AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants can answer frequently asked questions, provide basic information about library resources, guide users to appropriate services and operate beyond normal library opening hours.

AI can also assist users in formulating search queries and locating relevant information. Recent literature identifies reference and information services as one of the leading areas of AI implementation in academic libraries.

4.2 Information Retrieval and Discovery

AI can improve information retrieval by understanding natural-language queries rather than relying only on traditional keyword matching. Machine-learning systems can analyse search behaviour and improve the relevance of search results.

AI can also support semantic searching, recommendation systems and knowledge discovery, enabling users to identify potentially relevant resources more efficiently.

4.3 Cataloguing and Metadata Generation

AI can assist librarians in creating and enhancing bibliographic records, extracting information from documents, generating descriptive metadata and supporting classification.

Recent research indicates that cataloguing is one of the frequently discussed AI applications within technical services.

However, librarian verification remains important because automatically generated metadata may contain errors or inconsistencies.

4.4 Classification and Indexing

AI and machine-learning techniques can support the classification and indexing of information resources. Large collections can be processed more rapidly by automated systems.

Such systems may help identify subjects, keywords and concepts within documents, thereby reducing repetitive manual work.

4.5 Personalised Recommendation Services

AI can analyse users' interactions with library systems to recommend potentially relevant books, articles, databases and other resources.

Personalised recommendation can improve the discovery of resources and provide users with more relevant information. However, libraries must carefully consider privacy before collecting or analysing user behaviour.

4.6 Digital Libraries and Preservation

AI can support digital libraries through automated classification, image and text recognition, digitisation workflows, metadata creation and identification of digital objects.

AI can also assist in analysing large digital collections and identifying relationships between documents.

4.7 Collection Development

AI-based analytical tools can assist librarians in analysing usage patterns, subject trends and user requirements. Such information can support collection-development decisions.

However, AI-generated recommendations should complement rather than replace professional judgement.

4.8 User Education and Information Literacy

Libraries can use AI tools to provide personalised learning support, explain research concepts, assist with search strategies and help users understand emerging information technologies.

IFLA has specifically highlighted the importance of AI literacy and related competencies for both library professionals and users.

4.9 Administrative and Circulation Services

AI can assist with routine administrative activities such as answering service-related queries, managing frequently asked questions, analysing usage patterns and supporting circulation workflows.

Automation of routine tasks can allow librarians to devote more time to complex research and user-support activities.

5. Opportunities of Artificial Intelligence in Library Services

5.1 Improved Efficiency

AI can automate repetitive and time-consuming tasks. Activities such as metadata creation, classification, frequently asked questions and routine information support can be partially automated.

This can reduce the workload of library staff and allow them to focus on more complex professional activities.

5.2 24/7 User Assistance

Unlike traditional service desks that operate according to library hours, AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants can potentially provide assistance at any time.

This is particularly useful for students and researchers who require information outside normal working hours.

5.3 Personalised Services

AI can help libraries provide services according to individual information needs. Recommendation systems can suggest potentially relevant resources based on users' search behaviour or stated interests.

5.4 Faster Information Discovery

AI can process large quantities of information quickly. Natural-language processing and semantic search can make it easier for users to discover relevant information.

5.5 Support for Research

AI tools can assist researchers with activities such as information discovery, summarisation, organisation of information and identification of research themes.

Libraries can play an important role in teaching users how to use these tools critically and responsibly.

5.6 Improved Accessibility

AI-based interfaces can potentially make information services easier to access for users with different needs. Natural-language interaction may make library systems more approachable for users who find traditional search interfaces difficult.

5.7 Better Decision-Making

AI-based analytics can provide information about resource usage, user behaviour and service demand. Such information can support evidence-based library management.

5.8 Development of Smart Libraries

The integration of AI with other technologies such as the Internet of Things, robotics, cloud computing and digital library systems can contribute to the development of smart library environments.

6. Challenges of Artificial Intelligence in Library Services

Despite its potential, AI adoption is associated with significant challenges.

6.1 High Cost

AI implementation may require investment in software, hardware, cloud services, data infrastructure, cybersecurity and technical support.

A recent systematic review found **funding to be the most frequently reported institutional challenge**, with 14 of 29 reviewed studies identifying funding as a major barrier.

6.2 Lack of Technical Skills

Many librarians may not have sufficient knowledge of AI, machine learning, natural language processing or data analytics.

Continuous professional development and training are therefore necessary.

6.3 Infrastructure Limitations

AI systems require appropriate computing infrastructure, reliable internet connectivity, quality data and compatible library-management systems.

Libraries with limited technological infrastructure may face difficulties in adopting advanced AI applications.

6.4 Privacy and Data Protection

AI systems may require access to user data to provide personalised services. The collection and processing of such data can create serious privacy concerns.

Libraries traditionally protect the confidentiality of users' information. Therefore, AI implementation must be consistent with privacy principles and institutional policies.

6.5 Algorithmic Bias

AI systems may reproduce biases present in their training data or design. This can affect search results, recommendations, classification and other library services.

Librarians must therefore critically evaluate AI systems rather than assuming that their outputs are neutral.

6.6 Accuracy and Misinformation

Generative AI systems can produce incorrect, incomplete or misleading information. Therefore, AI-generated answers should not automatically be treated as authoritative.

Human verification is particularly important in academic and research contexts.

6.7 Copyright and Intellectual Property

The use of copyrighted materials with AI systems creates complex legal and ethical questions. IFLA's recent statement on copyright and AI highlights the importance of copyright considerations in both AI development and use.

Libraries therefore need clear policies concerning copyrighted content, AI-generated materials and responsible use of information resources.

6.8 Job Displacement Concerns

Automation can create anxiety among library professionals about the future of their jobs.

However, AI is more appropriately viewed as a tool that can augment librarians' work rather than simply replace librarians. Professional judgement, research consultation, ethical decision-making, information-literacy education and human interaction remain important.

6.9 Lack of Clear Policies

Many institutions may not yet have comprehensive policies governing the use of generative AI and other AI technologies.

Libraries need policies covering privacy, data security, copyright, accuracy, acceptable use, transparency and accountability.

6.10 Dependence on Technology

Excessive dependence on AI may reduce users' critical-thinking abilities or create overreliance on automated recommendations.

Therefore, AI should complement professional and human-centred library services rather than replace them.

7. Changing Role of the Librarian in the AI Era

AI is changing the responsibilities and competencies expected of library professionals.

The librarian of the AI era will increasingly act as:

- I. Information professional
- II. AI literacy educator
- III. Research-support specialist
- IV. Information-quality evaluator
- V. Digital curator
- VI. Data and technology facilitator
- VII. Ethical advisor
- VIII. AI-service manager

Librarians will need competencies in:

1. AI literacy
2. Information literacy
3. Data literacy
4. Digital literacy
5. Prompt formulation and evaluation
6. Information verification
7. Copyright awareness
8. Privacy and data protection
9. Ethical use of AI

10. Critical evaluation of AI-generated information

Recent research specifically points to the need for librarians to develop new competencies for AI-enhanced communication tools, including chatbot integration and prompt engineering.

8. Ethical Considerations

AI adoption in libraries should be guided by the fundamental values of librarianship.

Important ethical principles include:

Privacy

Users' personal and information-seeking data should be protected.

Transparency

Users should know when they are interacting with an AI system.

Accountability

Libraries should establish responsibility for errors or harmful AI-generated information.

Fairness

AI systems should not discriminate against particular groups or users.

Intellectual Freedom

AI implementation should support users' freedom to access diverse information.

Human Oversight

Important decisions should not be delegated entirely to automated systems.

IFLA's Entry Point for Libraries and AI emphasise that AI offers significant potential for libraries but also raises ethical and societal concerns, and encourages libraries to evaluate AI through principles such as privacy, openness, accountability and freedom of expression. ([IFLA](#))

9. Strategies for Effective AI Adoption in Libraries

Libraries can adopt the following strategies:

1. Develop an institutional AI policy covering ethical and responsible use.
2. Provide regular training for librarians and other staff.
3. Promote AI literacy among library users.
4. Start with small pilot projects before large-scale implementation.
5. Evaluate AI tools carefully for accuracy, bias and usefulness.
6. Protect user privacy and minimise unnecessary data collection.
7. Ensure human oversight of AI-generated outputs.

8. Allocate adequate funding for technology and staff development.
9. Collaborate with IT departments and academic departments.
10. Regularly review AI systems because AI technologies are developing rapidly.

IFLA's strategic guidance similarly encourages libraries to consider potential benefits, risks, user needs, AI literacy and organisational readiness when developing an institutional response to AI.

10. Future Prospects

The future of AI in libraries is likely to involve greater integration of generative AI, machine learning, natural-language interfaces, recommendation systems and intelligent discovery tools.

AI may increasingly support:

- I. Conversational library search
- II. Intelligent virtual reference
- III. Automated metadata creation
- IV. Personalised information services
- V. Research assistance
- VI. AI-supported information-literacy instruction
- VII. Digital preservation
- VIII. Knowledge discovery
- IX. Predictive library analytics
- X. Multilingual information services

Recent research on public libraries indicates that AI applications are particularly focused on user services and resource management, while continuing challenges include infrastructure inequality, staff training, technical maturity and ethical governance.

Thus, the future library is unlikely to be simply an automated library. Rather, it is likely to be a human-centred, AI-supported library in which technology performs appropriate tasks while librarians retain responsibility for professional judgement, ethics, information quality and user support.

11. Findings of the Study

Based on the literature reviewed, the following major findings can be identified:

1. AI has considerable potential to improve the efficiency of library services.
2. Reference and information services are among the leading areas of AI application.

3. Technical services such as cataloguing and metadata generation are also increasingly being supported by AI.
4. AI can provide continuous and personalised user assistance.
5. Generative AI has created new possibilities for research support and information literacy.
6. Lack of funding and infrastructure can significantly restrict AI adoption.
7. Librarians require new technical, digital and AI-related competencies.
8. Privacy, copyright, bias, misinformation and transparency are major concerns.
9. AI should not be implemented without appropriate human oversight.
10. Successful AI adoption requires institutional policy, staff training and ethical governance.

12. Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence has the potential to transform library and information services by improving efficiency, accessibility, information discovery, personalisation and user support. AI can assist in a wide range of activities, including reference services, information retrieval, cataloguing, classification, recommendation, digital preservation, collection development and information literacy.

However, technological adoption alone cannot guarantee better library services. Financial limitations, inadequate infrastructure, lack of professional skills, privacy concerns, copyright issues, algorithmic bias, misinformation and ethical challenges must be carefully addressed. Recent systematic evidence shows that these barriers remain significant, particularly at institutional and technical levels.

The role of librarians is therefore not becoming less important; instead, it is changing. Librarians will increasingly need to act as AI-literate information professionals, educators, evaluators and ethical intermediaries. Libraries should adopt AI through a human-centred approach that protects privacy, intellectual freedom, information quality and professional values. The most effective model is therefore not “AI replacing librarians”, but “AI working with librarians to provide better library services.”

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