

# Evaluating Equity and Inclusion Strategies in Public Library Management

Dr. Shalini Acharya<sup>1\*</sup>, Saksham Sood<sup>2</sup>, Subhi Singh<sup>3</sup>, Susanta Kumar Khuntia<sup>4</sup>,  
Mohammad Gouse Baig<sup>5</sup> and Dr.R. Murugan<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Assistant Professor, School of Management, Presidency University, Bangaluru, Karnataka, India

<sup>2</sup>Centre of Research Impact and Outcome, Chitkara University, Rajpura, Punjab, India

<sup>3</sup>School of Management & Commerce, Dev Bhoomi Uttarakhand University, Dehradun, India

<sup>4</sup>Assistant Librarian, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (Deemed to be University), Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

<sup>5</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Vardhaman College of Engineering, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

<sup>6</sup>Professor, Department of Computer Science and Information Technology, Jain (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

E-mail: <sup>1</sup>shalini@presidencyuniversity.in, <sup>2</sup>saksham.ood.orp@chitkara.edu.in, <sup>3</sup>somc.shubhi@dbuu.ac.in,

<sup>4</sup>susanta106@gmail.com, <sup>5</sup>gousebaig@vardhaman.org, <sup>6</sup>murugan@jainuniversity.ac.in

ORCID: <sup>1</sup><https://orcid.org/0009-0009-7347-3224>, <sup>2</sup><https://orcid.org/0009-0004-4033-0159>,

<sup>3</sup><https://orcid.org/0009-0003-8214-455X>, <sup>4</sup><https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9388-619X>,

<sup>5</sup><https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2757-1797>, <sup>6</sup><https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0903-5982>

(Received 21 October 2025; Revised 21 November 2025, Accepted 04 December 2025; Available online 05 January 2026)

**Abstract** - This research evaluates the impact of equity and inclusion (E&I) initiatives within public librarianship, concentrating on library responses to the varied needs of historically underserved populations. As publicly accountable institutions dedicated to the impartial dissemination of knowledge, libraries bear a collective ethical and civic duty to embed inclusive practices across service design, personnel recruitment, information procurement, and participatory outreach. Utilizing a convergent mixed-methods framework that integrates archival policy records, large-scale patron surveys, structured staff focus groups, and stratified circulation metrics, this study maps the current trajectory of equity and inclusion (E&I) implementation across a stratified cohort of urban and rural library systems. The investigation discloses a reinvigorated commitment to cultivating inclusive service environments: academic libraries document rises in multilingual collections, construct public programming sensitive to cultural contexts, attain compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and integrate repeated implicit-bias education into professional development sequences. Notwithstanding these achievements, the results indicate ongoing impediments: in postsecondary contexts, library executive councils lack proportional representation from historically marginalized populations; economically disadvantaged users confront intermittent access to digital archives; and enterprise-wide equity and inclusion plans display temporal gaps and disjointed evaluative frameworks. In response to these persistent obstacles, the article proposes an adaptive governance architecture that enables ongoing, temporally synchronized, and empirical interrogation of equity-oriented library operations. The architecture is further bolstered by metrics-informed guidelines for policy development and daily practice that harmonize with community-attuned librarianship and with the broader social justice commitments of the discipline.

**Keywords:** Equity, Inclusion, Public Library Management, Diversity, Accessibility, Community Engagement, Inclusive Policy

## I. IMPORTANCE OF EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Public libraries operate as indispensable civic institutions oriented toward the promotion of lifelong education, the unconditional dissemination of information, and the encouragement of civic participation. Positioned as enduring and conspicuous resources within their service areas, they are strategically situated to advance distributive equity, procuring the same opportunities for all individuals while concurrently fostering substantive inclusion, designing spaces and programs that overtly recognize and integrate the full demographic and cultural spectrum of the population into their governance and daily practice (Holland et al., 2021). During the past decade, the scope of library missions has been purposefully enlarged, moving beyond traditional literacy goals to embrace justice-sensitive and self-reflective practice. Guided by this expanded conception, libraries have introduced, among other initiatives, culturally attuned programming, targeted deployment of equitable digital resources, and focused outreach to historically underserved groups, including recent immigrants, older adults, LGBTQ+ populations, and persons with disabilities. Within library walls, divergent identities are honored, and marginalized narratives are decidedly amplified; for this reason, equity and inclusion are now operational imperatives rather than discretionary goals (Sappington et al., 2022). They inform every facet of library management, recruitment, service

architecture, budget prioritization, and community partnership, thus ensuring that all programming is both

reflexively equitable and deliberately inclusive (Mahadevan et al., 2025).

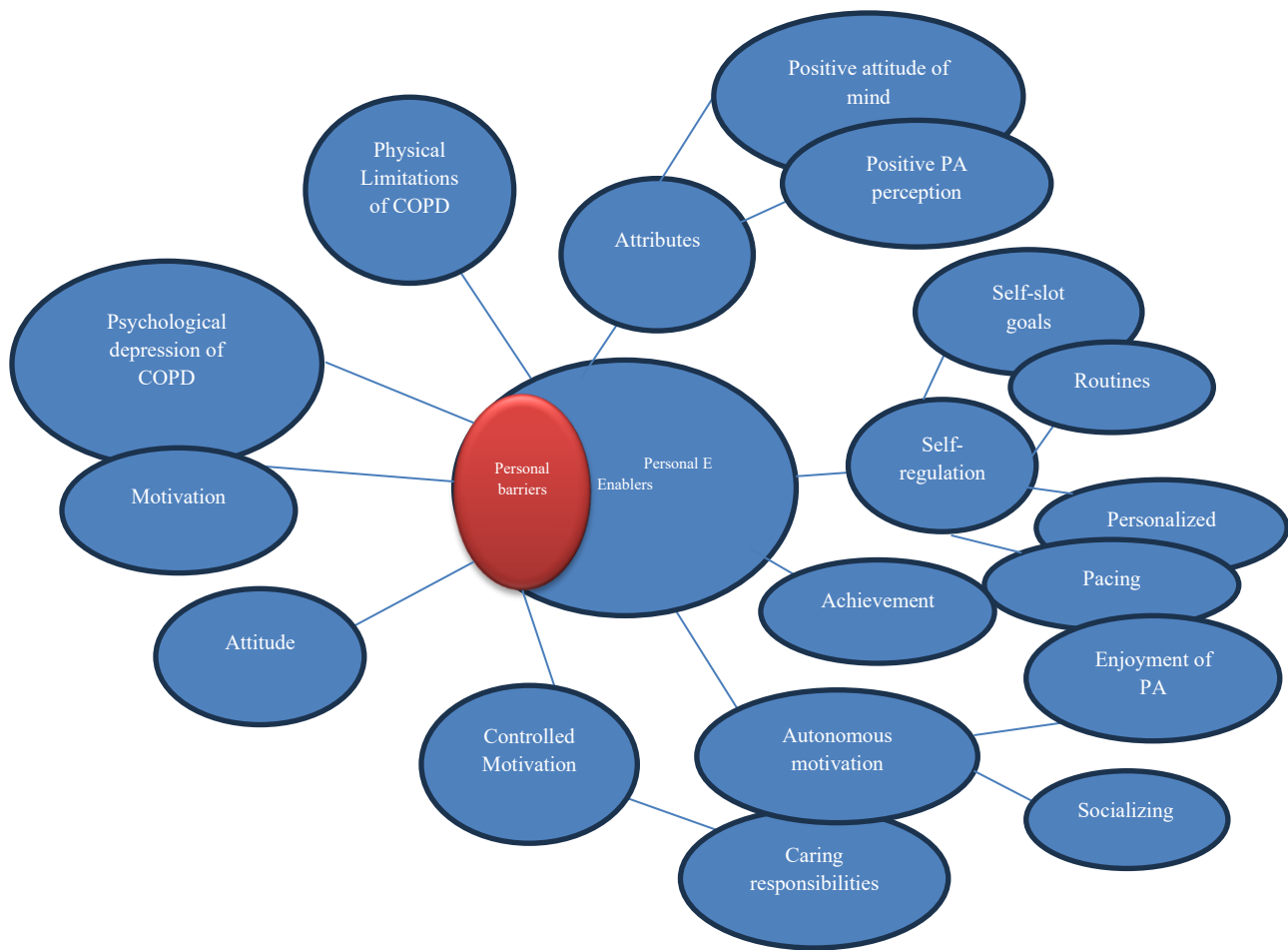


Fig. 1 Framework of Barriers and Enablers in Public Library Equity & Inclusion

Fig 1 represents that this conceptual diagram presents a visual representation of the layering of barriers and enablers that can affect E&I outcomes in public libraries. On the one hand, there are barriers (systemic racism, insufficient funding, digital divide, language barriers, homogeneous staffing, and stall in policy change) and on the other hand there are enablers (inclusive leadership, community partnerships/collaboration, availability of multilingual collections, access technologies, implicit bias training, and participatory programming) (Simon et al., 2021). The arrows between the two components demonstrate that enablers can be used to counteract or lessen some barriers. The diagram places community trust, policy alignment, and a user feedback loop in the center to show that these three components can mediate the relationship between barriers and enablers.

### 1.1 Historical and Systemic Barriers to Access

Despite explicit commitments to democratic equity, libraries have consistently reproduced the structural inequalities produced by racial segregation, income stratification, and social exclusion. Access to bibliographic resources, physical facilities, and informational services has in many jurisdictions throughout history been limited by enforced

categories of race, gender, language, and class (Burrell et al., 2024). Presently, more subtle impediments endure: multilingual holdings are often scant, digital interfaces may lack accessibility features, workforce composition frequently lacks demographic diversity, and cultural programming routinely neglects the full mosaic of community identities. These inequities are compounded by the digital divide, particularly acute in economically disadvantaged or rural areas where broadband availability and digital literacy fluctuate. System-wide impediments, such as chronic underfunding, implicit bias in service delivery, and antiquated regulatory frameworks, further obstruct the aspiration of libraries as fully equitable and inclusive civic spaces (Doniyorov et al., 2024).

### 1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study investigates the manner in which public libraries conceptualize, evaluate, and iteratively refine their strategies for equity and inclusion (Saidova et al., 2024). Its principal aim is to map both the prevailing strengths and observable gaps in practice among a heterogeneous constellation of library systems. This investigation centers on the recursive interaction between policies designed for inclusivity,

heterogeneous organizational units, joint constituency engagement, and pre-existing accessibility thresholds in generating measurable societal change (Jones et al., 2022). The research examines the ability of interlibrary consortia to translate user-generated feedback, culturally responsive research paradigms, and strategically calibrated outreach into service frameworks that explicitly satisfy the requirements of groups previously underserved by library provision. By synthesizing these discrete but interdependent elements, the analysis aspires to produce empirically verified recommendations that deepen institutional allegiance to equity and inclusion, and it concurrently advances the broadening scholarly and practitioner dialogues on social justice in the stewardship of publicly accountable assets (Son et al., 2024).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Equity and Inclusion Frameworks in Public Institutions

Equity and inclusion (E&I) frameworks, adopted by public institutions, serve to dismantle entrenched systemic inequities and to ensure that every resident enjoys equitable access to services (Davis et al., 2025). Grounded in social justice scholarship and the norms of public governance, such frameworks require agencies to move beyond the equal-treatment principle under which identical resources are assigned irrespective of varying needs by employing an equity lens that adjusts resource allocation in proportion to the diverse conditions and capabilities of individuals and communities (Walsh et al., 2025). Public service fields have increasingly adopted the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) and Targeted Universalism as grounding paradigms for policy invention and fiscal deployment. Both paradigms insist that historical marginalization must be confronted, while simultaneously cultivating practices of participation, representation, and social belonging. When libraries integrate these frameworks, they undertake a critical assessment of service architecture, the demographic reach of their offerings, and the extent to which programme design raises the power and agency of populations that have experienced past neglect (Okechukwu et al., 2024).

### 2.2 DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) Trends in Library Science

As a field, library and information science (LIS) has observed an increasing focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), particularly in response to demands for racial and social justice within public institutions (Zou et al., 2020). Academic and professional associations such as the American Library Association (ALA), as well as IFLA, have developed DEI standards and toolkits calling upon libraries to address systemic biases within the service they provide, and to further develop culturally responsive environments (American Library Association, 2022). Recent professional trends have included inclusive cataloging policies, collection diversifications that reflect marginalized identities, and decolonization of previous classification systems, such as the Dewey Decimal System. Libraries have also begun

examining their recruitment pathways and leadership development to ensure that recruitment reflects the communities that the organization serves. Despite the growth in focus on DEI in libraries, there are also critics of this work, claiming that DEI-focused work may be notional unless strategically built into the foundation of the organization, including policies and practices for evaluation (Alonso-Arévalo & Quinde-Cordero, 2023).

### 2.3 Inclusive Library Design and Programming

In public libraries, inclusive design incorporates both aspects of physical accessibility and cultural responsiveness (Sappington et al., 2022). Libraries are embracing Accessibility and Universal Design principles and have created increasingly barrier-free communities through efforts of building fully accessible environments (e.g., accessible, outward-opening doors for wheelchair access, sensory rooms, assistive technologies for people who are blind or low-vision and hearing-impaired, etc). Nonetheless, inclusivity extends beyond accessibility and is also about culturally-responsive communities and designing welcoming communities through culturally relevant programming, multilingual signage, and inclusive and flexible spaces that accommodate various learning and social needs. Inclusion programming has been demonstrated to increase participation and support intergroup empathy (Jaeger et al., 2013; Hill, 2020). These efforts have included drag queen story times, refugee storytelling circles, and teen LGBTQ+ book clubs (Hall, 2021). While there are multiple advantages to scaling up inclusion programming, libraries still face challenges in achieving scalability across libraries in their branches and in regions where political resistance to narratives of inclusion exists (Jones & Field, 2024).

### 2.4 Staff Training and Bias Mitigation Strategies

Equity and inclusion are not just problems of infrastructure; they are problems of humanity. Public library staff, as facilitators of inclusive library services, are able to affect user experience through their biases (not always consciously) (McCook & Kosmicki, 2019). For this reason, many public libraries have incorporated anti-bias training, cultural competency training, and guidelines around inclusive service for both frontline and managerial staff. These training modules encompass topics such as microaggressions, gender-neutral language, and intercultural approaches. (Gibson & Hughes, 2021) found that libraries with more frequent DEI training practices had a strong staff-user rapport and fewer reported incidents of exclusion. Studies warn that even if a library implements DEI-focused training, but such initiatives are not supported by meaningful institutional oversight, monitoring of staff performance, and reflective practice is not embedded as part of day-to-day work, this one-time training will result in limited organizational change in the longer term.

### *2.5 Gaps in Evaluation Metrics and Assessment Practices*

While DEI has been widely adopted, there is still a significant absence of standard measures for assessing DEI in libraries. Most measures of DEI are surface-level outputs, for example, the count of events conducted, or the demographic breakdown of library cardholders, rather than deeper measures of impact, such as user perceptions of belonging or ease of access to resources for non-dominant groups, or how they were included in decisions (Mäkipää, 2025). Without community-defined success and no ability to track progress over time, meaningful measures are impossible. To add to this, many library systems lack the internal abilities to disaggregate data meaningfully, even to assess equity outcomes by race, language, ability, or income status. Scholars have advocated for an Equity Assessment Framework that includes both qualitative and quantitative measures, developed with the community, and embedded into library performance audits and strategic planning cycles (Crowley, 2025).

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

### *3.1 Research Design: Comparative Case Study and Surveys*

This study utilizes a comparative case study design and structured surveys to evaluate equity and inclusion (E&I) strategies developed by public library systems. The case study approach allows for a comparison of more than one library system in multiple geographic and demographic contexts, as it is possible to show the similarities and differences in the E&I strategic implementation across the library systems (Morgan-Daniel et al., 2021). The case study approach is enhanced by research undertaken on both rural and urban public libraries to collect examples of institutional responses to the diversity of communities, capabilities, and limitations brought on by resources and agency directives. While the case study portion is qualitative-based, it is augmented with quantitative data collected from surveys, and through case study example triangulation from the descriptive reports, user experience, and policy documents. The mixed-methods design offered a comprehensive understanding of how E&I is defined, implemented, and evaluated or measured across a range of library environments (Louisville Free Public Library, 2023).

### *3.2. Sampling: Urban and Rural Libraries*

The sampling approach was purposeful and focused on comparative sampling. The study analyzed six public library systems (three urban public library systems and three rural public library systems) from different, varied geographic regions with characteristics related to population density, socioeconomic status, and diversity of communities. The three urban libraries were selected based on their larger scale of operation, multilingual programming, and substantive DEI departments. Conversely, the three rural libraries offered contrasting situations with, for example, fewer resources but also faced complex community engagement situations (Association of Research Libraries, 2023). The sampling

design facilitated variations in user demographics, facility size, funding models, and digital access capabilities. The research design permits a comparative analysis of the impact and development of equity and inclusion strategies against the backdrop of the context of each individual site, more specifically, how contextual variables affect the capacity of libraries to develop and demonstrate equity and inclusion strategies, particularly in communities where systemically embedded inequities are exacerbated by inherent geographic isolation or urban complexity.

### *3.3. Data Collection: Policy Documents, User Surveys, Staff Interviews*

Data were collected from three principal sources. First, a variety of policy documents, such as mission statements, diversity plans, strategic plans, and annual reports, were reviewed to investigate formal commitments to E&I and how these commitments are enacted within the library's operations. Second, user feedback was collected through structured surveys provided to library users, asking about perceived accessibility, representation, and inclusivity within the library's services, programs, and interactions with staff members. Questions were created with a Likert scale and open-ended questions to allow for both quantitative description and qualitative insight. Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with library staff members (administrators, front-line library staff members, and DEI officers). The interviews focused on institutional barriers, professional development training for library staff, community engagement and relationship building, and participants' internal reflections of their own inclusivity practices. All data sources were coded and cross-referenced for patterns, contradictions, and distinctive practices across libraries involved in the sample.

### *3.4. Analytical Tools: Thematic Coding, Usage Disparity Index*

The study employed thematic coding to identify qualitative data from interviews and open-ended surveys, while also framing the data using a grounded theory approach of continuous themes related to equity gaps, inclusive practices, and what users experienced. Specifically, this created themes that were systemically coded and classified in NVivo and visualized by the themes. The study was able to provide quantitative data using the Usage Disparity Index (UDI) developed by the researcher to represent the discrepancy created when the library community demographic reach in the community is compared to the diversity of users. The UDI calculated demographic factors within a service level comparison of library usage statistics (especially, if available). The UDI also represented disparities and differences in access to service on multiple demographic levels - race, age, gender, income, and ability. Collectively, the two tools provided depth and breadth in analyzing the efficiency and effectiveness of the equity and inclusive practices in the libraries that were included in the study.

### 3.5. Limitations and Ethical Considerations

This study acknowledges a few limitations. First, we acknowledge limited generalizability due to the research being based on only six participating library systems. While this level of case research limits the researchers from making causal claims across the larger population, it allowed for in-depth exploration of a particular 'case' within each individual library system. Second, there are likely inaccuracies in the internal demographic information from library systems that precluded us from accurately creating the Usage Disparity Index (UDI) from some libraries. Thirdly, the fact that the participant feedback was self-reported could lead some of the results to reflect socially desirable responding by the participants. In terms of ethical considerations, all participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary, that they would be informed of the confidentiality protocols, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was also obtained from the participants, and all data processing was compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation

(GDPR) regulations and other national privacy regulations. The research was designed not just to examine the use of library services by marginalized users but also to ethically represent their voices. The data and findings will be shared with the participating librarian systems so they can use them to improve policies and training items for their staff.

## IV. REPRESENTATION OF DIVERSITY IN LIBRARY LEADERSHIP AND STAFFING

An analysis of the demographics of library staff consistently revealed an apparent imbalance between the diversity of the community and the library workforce, particularly for library leaders. In urban front-line library staff, there was an adequate amount of ethnic and linguistic diversity; however, library leadership (i.e., library directors, board members) had a majority racial and socioeconomic identification. The diversity of rural libraries reflected a lack of diversity across the board, made worse by the minimal representation of marginalized groups.

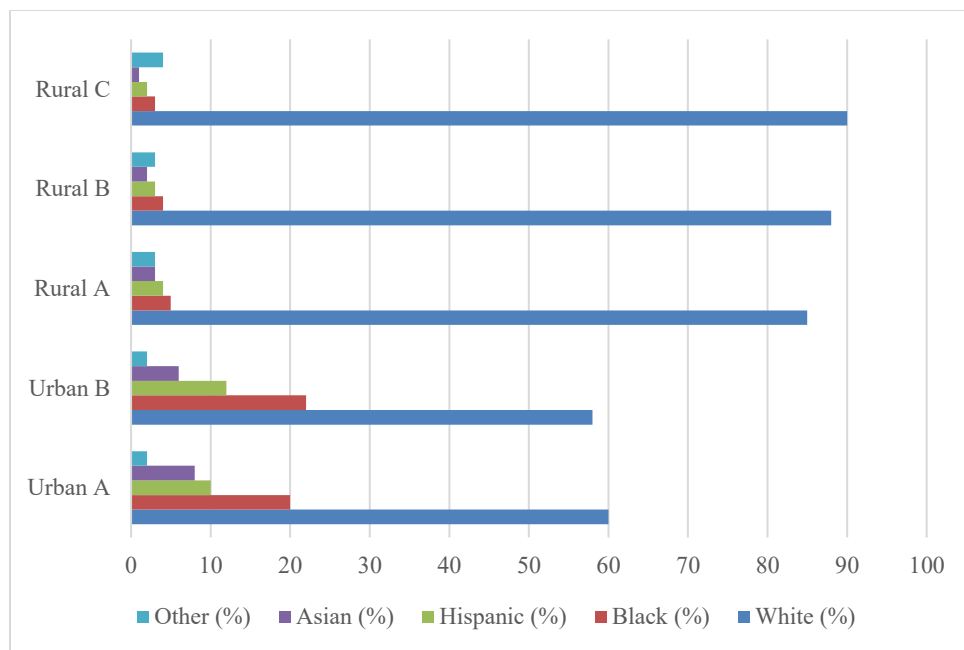


Fig. 2 Visual Icons for Understanding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

Fig 2 illustrates that this infographic simplifies complex DEI concepts into plain, visual icons to explain diversity (who is in the room), equity (who gets what they need to be successful), and inclusion (who feels welcome and valued). It includes symbolic representations (iconography) such as balance scales, multi colored figures, and access indicators. Abstract notions can be concretized and made more accessible to stakeholders, library staff, and community partners. By presenting DEI in easily recognizable terms, the

gains in library policies and library strategic initiatives can better reflect shared understandings of fairness and access.

Interviews with staff confirmed that while diversity hiring was identified as an aim, few libraries had any formal pipeline training programs or retention efforts for marginalized applicants. This under-representation influences how internal policy perspectives are developed, and how inclusive and welcoming a library will feel to a user from an under-represented background.



Graph.1 Ethnic Diversity Representation Across Sample Public Libraries

Graph 1 illustrates the racial composition of library personnel within five sample public libraries, separated as urban (Urban A, Urban B) and rural (Rural A, Rural B, Rural C) contexts. Urban libraries demonstrate a considerably even ratio across each racial group, particularly with the following: higher amounts of Black, Hispanic, and Asian staff members in higher numbers than their rural counterparts. Conversely, the rural libraries have a considerably higher amount of White staff and fewer staff members from any other ethnic group. This data shows structural inequities in relation to recruitment and retention strategies that are exacerbated due to the rural context. The findings also point to an urgent need for either a universal, structural change in staffing policies or movement towards an enhanced community-based improvement in diversity and inclusion.

#### 4.2. Accessibility and Inclusive Facility Design

All six libraries in the study had taken steps to improve physical accessibility, including ramps, elevators, tactile floor maps, and wheelchair-accessible furniture. However, only two libraries had implemented universal design principles beyond minimum ADA compliance. For instance, multilingual wayfinding signs and sensory-friendly reading spaces were largely limited to urban libraries. Digital accessibility also varied, as only half of the libraries had websites with screen reader compatibility or high-contrast modes. Rural libraries lacked dedicated technology for patrons with visual or motor impairments, limiting their participation in digital learning initiatives. These findings underscore that while foundational accessibility is present in most cases, deeper, more inclusive design features remain inconsistently applied and underfunded.

#### 4.3. Effectiveness of Inclusive Programming and Outreach

Programming aimed at diverse audiences was present in every library studied, but its scope and impact varied widely. Urban libraries offered targeted events such as multilingual story hours, LGBTQ+ youth workshops, and cultural literacy festivals. Attendance records showed that such programs had high engagement when promoted through community partnerships. Conversely, rural libraries struggled to offer similarly targeted programming due to limited staff, funding, or local resistance. Outreach strategies were primarily passive, posting flyers or website updates rather than involving community liaisons or feedback loops. The absence of ongoing user consultation limited the cultural relevance of these programs, particularly in rural areas with immigrant or Indigenous populations. Libraries that integrated co-design methods with community groups saw stronger participation and greater user satisfaction.

#### 4.4. User Feedback on Belonging and Representation

Survey responses (n=436) and open-ended feedback provided valuable insight into users' perceptions of inclusion. Over 70% of respondents in urban libraries agreed that their library was "welcoming to people like me," citing diverse materials, friendly staff, and visible cultural programming. However, only 43% of rural respondents felt similarly, with some noting language barriers, lack of racial representation in library materials, and discomfort interacting with unfamiliar staff. Common themes from both groups included the desire for more multilingual collections, inclusive signage, and identity-affirming programs. Several users emphasized the need for staff who "look like and understand" the communities they serve, indicating that belonging is as much about representation and relatability as it is about facilities or resources.

TABLE I USER PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSION AND REPRESENTATION ACROSS SAMPLE PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Library	Feels Welcomed (%)	Sees Own Culture Represented (%)	Wants More Inclusive Programs (%)
Urban A	78	68	55
Urban B	74	70	60
Rural A	45	35	75
Rural B	40	30	78
Rural C	42	33	80

Table I conveys survey-based evidence about library users' perceptions regarding inclusion, cultural representation, and responsiveness to programming within urban and rural environments. Data found library users in urban locations (Urban A and Urban B) felt generally more included and were more able to identify their culture reflected through library services. In contrast, rural users had much lower scores on perceptions of inclusion, especially related to cultural representation. Rural users also demonstrated a higher inclination for increased requests for inclusion in programming, signifying perhaps a gap between current programming delivery and community demand. This data demonstrates that libraries, especially in disadvantaged communities, must use stakeholder-informed practice that promotes belonging and inclusion for library users.

#### 4.5. Disparities in Digital Access and Resource Allocation

A significant gap emerged in digital equity across the sampled libraries. Urban libraries offered Wi-Fi hotspots, computer literacy classes, and free tech lending (e.g., tablets or Chromebooks). In contrast, rural libraries frequently lacked broadband infrastructure or funding for digital device lending programs. Digital usage logs showed that lower-income neighborhoods, both urban and rural, had significantly lower engagement with e-resources, not due to lack of interest but due to limited access or awareness. Interviews with rural staff highlighted their challenges in applying for digital grants or sustaining partnerships with technology providers. This digital divide poses a major threat to equitable library service, especially as more resources and interactions shift online. Without targeted investment and support, libraries risk reinforcing existing inequalities rather than mitigating them.

### V. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR E&I EVALUATION

To put equity and inclusion into action in the management of public libraries, this section offers a strategic framework that is structured around three interrelated dimensions of evaluation: Access, Representation, and Participation. These are established as each foundational aspect of performance-based evaluation, which is flexible and capable of being implemented in a variety of libraries. It is intended that the framework will give administrators a direction for the continued monitoring of equity and inclusion progress, capturing both opportunities and gaps, and aligning organizational policies with evolving community needs. Access is a multidimensional construct that encompasses the

physical, digital, and cognitive access to library services for all library user groups.

Access includes the familiar physical structural aspects of access (e.g., ramps and elevators), digital access (e.g., availability of Wi-Fi, available accessible e-resources for users), and linguistic accessibility (e.g., availability of signage, collections in multiple languages);

Representation is about visible identity in areas including staffing, collections, cultural programming, and governing structures; Participation is about meaningfully involving users from minoritized communities in decisions, program co-design, and feedback channels about the extent to which libraries are not only accessible, but more responsive to library user needs; To evaluate these types of dimensions, the Framework outlines a series of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). For Access, the KPIs are the number of multilingual resources, ADA-compliant features, and public access terminals per capita. For Representation, the KPIs are diversity in staffing and leadership, the number/proportion of inclusive events, and the percentage of culturally responsive materials. For Participation, the KPIs are the response rate of user feedback, the presence of community members on advisory boards, and the regularity of public consultation forums.

The expectation is that these metrics are all scalable, yet customizable to each library's demographic and geographic context.

For the framework to be effective over the long term, it will rely on its being explicated with library policies and documents used for strategic planning. Libraries need to operationalize E&I objectives through mission statements, create anti-racism and equity-based hiring and outreach strategies, and adopt clear equity language in budgets reflecting equity intentions. Moreover, E&I metrics are needed in staff evaluation systems and annual reviews for each institution. Without portfolios of practice aligned with policy, no matter how good the evaluation tools may be, they risk being performative or contained.

Ultimately, a strong community-driven feedback and accountability process is critical. Libraries should provide regular town hall meetings, user experience surveys, and participatory design sessions (particularly with underrepresented groups), among other approaches. E&I evaluations should be published in a public-facing report and reviewed and interpreted by community-based advisory

committees for equity and inclusion. The feedback loops should be reflected in real-time adjustments to services, and a formalized grievance process should be provided to reinforce trust and transparency. Libraries can shift their E&I programs from compliance to transformation by embedding and operationalizing accountability and co-creation in the E&I evaluation.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This study offered a critical appraisal of the landscape of equity and inclusion (E&I) practices in public library management through a comparative, multimodal analysis of E&I policies in urban and rural public library contexts. Our findings acknowledged that, while many libraries profess to provide inclusive services, including E&I policies in strategic planning, there is a lack of substantive difference in outcomes from a few years ago. Rugged differences primarily exist regarding staffing for equity, access, and inclusion; digital access, and civic participation in systems of governance; and, ultimately, significant purposeful diversity as seen through the actions of library governing boards and user groups. Urban libraries have greater institutionalized principle-driven action plans that include multilingual services, and to a limited extent, design of inclusive spaces, whereas rural libraries were situated in structures that limit possibilities that result in E&I-focused efforts despite professing to be community-centered.

This research reinforces the need to better align basic Get the Basics policies with performance-based transparency when determining successes or failures when managing E&I within public libraries. In order to prioritize the domain of inclusive service, we must integrate inclusion as a value-based key feature of strategic plan development, job descriptions, facility upgrades, and collection development policies. Additionally, we must be intentional to broaden access as a meaning beyond physical conditions, as we are now beginning to contemplate access in terms of cognitive, linguistic, digital, and cultural forms. Similarly, the performance evaluation and monitoring considerations of basic templates regarding E&I with evaluative frameworks against equity-driven KPI structures presented in this paper provide opportunities for public library leaders to increase the tracking of progress derived from E&I processes, which could lead to specific accountabilities.

A major takeaway from this study is that E&I commitment must become more than symbolic. Library boards and management teams should reflect their communities' diversity, pursue inclusive and representative decisions, and build staff development programs with cultural competency and implicit bias training, along with skills for co-designing services with users. Leadership can help develop an organizational culture that encourages commitment to listening, being transparent, and being responsive to voices that have been marginalized.

Although there are actionable practice learnings, the study does note that there are situational and structural limitations.

Rural libraries struggle with the political and financial capacity to both build upon E&I and rethink library practices. Other library systems may have the political and financial resources and supportive leadership, but still have to work through entrenched institutional cultures combined with an implicit bias to induce change. Additionally, there are often situational tensions at the community level involving dimensions such as language, race, or religion that shape concerns about the implementation/acceptability of the inclusive practice. Equity strategies should be context-sensitive and responsive to local realities, rather than confined to external prescriptions. In the future, emerging technologies will open many doors to improve E&I monitoring and responsiveness. In the library sector, AI-enabled analytics offer the ability to provide real-time user experience monitoring, real-time automated bias detection in collections, and predictive modeling of institutional service gaps based on community demographics. The benefits of these tools would include user engagement tracking, such as emotional recognition and sentiment analysis, and better understanding of user interactions through heat mapping (people in the library interact more with the residents of the service area; people likely to engage with recreational, educational, or health related services will tend to be grouped in certain locations, whereas people actively seeking material resources or seeking social engagement may be in different locations). Other tools, including interactive dashboards and open-data reporting, can improve public accountability and transparency. Each library needs to engage in exploration of how AI tools can ethically promote inclusion, while at the same time avoiding algorithmic bias and respecting user privacy. Consequently, equity and inclusion can be seen as evolving responsibilities (not static goals) in public libraries and record management. The duo of principled leadership in a data-driven framework, together with community-centred feedback loops, will enable public libraries to move away from simply being access points and towards transformative and inclusive civic institutions.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Alonso-Arévalo, J., & Quinde-Cordero, M. (2023). Bibliotecas con un enfoque en la diversidad, equidad e inclusión. *Boletín de la Asociación Andaluza de Bibliotecarios*, (126), 122-131.
- [2] American Library Association. (2022). Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice initiative. *PLA Reports*.
- [3] Association of Research Libraries. (2023). *DEI Institute Framework and Metrics*. Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries. <https://doi.org/10.29242/report.DEIinstitute2023>
- [4] Burress, R., Li, X., & Hebert, H. S. (2024). Addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion in library and information science curriculum: Looking back and to the future. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 09610006241279471.
- [5] Crowley, B. (2025). Library Censorship As a Health and Safety Issue. *The Political Librarian*, 8(2).
- [6] Davis, R. J., Zaragoza, B., & Zuniga, A. V. (2025). From audit to action: A case study on cultivating and sustaining organizational efforts in diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. *The Journal of academic librarianship*, 51(1), 102981.
- [7] Doniyorov, A., Polvonov, J., Jalolova, S., Sattorova, Z., Yakubova, M., Gaybullaev, O., Abdullaev, A., & Abdukarimov, A. (2024). Designing inclusive cities – the role of urban architecture in enhancing accessibility for the visually impaired. *Archives for Technical Sciences*, 2(31), 393–402.

- [8] Hall, T. D. (2021). Information Redlining and the role of libraries in closing the digital divide. *Journal of Library Administration*, 61(4), 484–492. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2021.1906559>
- [9] Holland, A., Jocz, J., Vierow-Fields, S., Stier, Z., & Gypin, L. (2021). Community dialogues to enhance inclusion and equity in public libraries. *Journal of Library Outreach and Engagement*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.21900/j.jloe.v1i2.856>
- [10] Jones, A., & Field, M. (2024). DEIA evaluation of an academic library's policies. *Radical Librarianship Journal*, 9(1), 133–149.
- [11] Jones, E. P., Mani, N. S., Carlson, R. B., Welker, C. G., Cawley, M., & Yu, F. (2022). Analysis of anti-racism, equity, inclusion and social justice initiatives in library and information science literature. *Reference Services Review*, 50(1), 81–101. <https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-07-2021-0032>
- [12] Louisville Free Public Library. (2023). *Equity Audit Report: Deep-dive into staffing, collections, and community equity*. Louisville Free Public Library Equity Report.
- [13] Mahadevan, P., Alabdeli, H. M., Sapaev, I. B., Berejnov, I., Madrakhimova, D., & Udayakumar, R. (2025). Dual connectivity management in 5G mobile internet infrastructures. *Journal of Internet Services and Information Security*, 15(2), 256–270. <https://doi.org/10.58346/JISIS.2025.I2.018>
- [14] Mäkipää, J. P., Dang, D., & Pasanen, T. (2025). How participants are integrated into community-driven research for accessibility: A systematic review. *First Monday*. <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v30i9.14291>
- [15] McCook, K. D. L. P., & Kosmicki, L. R. (2019). Equal access as social equity: Programming and services in public libraries. *Progressive Librarian*, 47, 51–80.
- [16] Morgan-Daniel, J., Adkins, L. E., Tennant, M. R., Norton, H. F., Hough, C., Edwards, M. E., ... & Rethlefsen, M. L. (2021). *Piloting a diversity, equity, and inclusion needs assessment to explore patron perceptions at a university health science library. Hypothesis*; 33(1). <https://doi.org/10.18060/25262>
- [17] Okechukwu, N. N., Charity, O. K., & Jacinta, C. C. (2024). Integrating Cultural Diversity and Inclusion in the Acquisition of Library Resources and Services for Sustainable Development of Public Libraries. *The Progress: A Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 5(2), 34–47. <https://doi.org/10.71016/tp/zcyd6h22>
- [18] Saidova, K., Muydinova, Y., Turakulov, R., Jumanazarov, U., Khudoykulov, A., Kholmurodova, O., Zokirov, K., & Odilov, B. (2024). Investigating the role of community-based conservation in promoting sustainable wildlife management. *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Environmental Studies*, 4(S1), 95–100. <https://doi.org/10.70102/IJARES/V4S1/16>
- [19] Sappington, J., Medina De León, E., Schumacher, S., Vardeman, K. K., & Callender, D. (2022). A Mixed-Methods approach to assessing diversity, equity, and inclusion in library collections: Educating and empowering a diverse student body. In *Proceedings of the 2022 Library Assessment Conference: Building Effective, Sustainable, Practical Assessment*.
- [20] Simon, M. A., O'Brian, C. A., Nava, M., Dahdouh, R., Wafford, Q. E., Mack, S., & Holmes, K. L. (2021). Public libraries as key partners for advancing health equity. *American journal of public health*, 111(1), 40–42. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.306004>
- [21] Son, D., Park, Y., Kim, B., & You, I. (2024). A Study on the Implementation of a Network Function for Real-time False Base Station Detection for the Next Generation Mobile Communication Environment. *Journal of Wireless Mobile Networks, Ubiquitous Computing, and Dependable Applications*, 15(1), 184–201. <https://doi.org/10.58346/JOWUA.2024.I1.013>
- [22] Walsh, M., Rey, C. F., Ge, C., Nowak, T., & Tomkins, S. (2025, June). Algorithms in the Stacks: Investigating automated, for-profit diversity audits in public libraries. In *Proceedings of the 2025 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency* (pp. 2071–2086). <https://doi.org/10.1145/3715275.3732140>
- [23] Zou, H., Chen, H. M., & Dey, S. (2020). Engaging users through social media in public libraries. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2003.04204*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2003.04204>