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E-LEARNING IN LIS EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Abstract. Traces the history of e-learning to the learning age where knowledge will be freely accessed, profoundly abundant, and offered in cornucopia of formats. Distance learning has been accepted and recognized as a mode of education in LIS. The concept of open and distance learning is discussed. In the changing scenario of the society, the skills required of LIS professionals are also identified. The paper also examines the impact of the Internet on the teacher's role and explores the types of skills and strategies that teachers will need to be effective and efficient in online learning environments. The paper provides an insight into the innovative multi –channel delivery modes adopted by the different universities and their effectiveness for the LIS distance learners. Guidelines for distance learning Library services approved by Association of College and Research Libraries on June 29, 2004 are also discussed. For assessment and accreditation of LIS distance education institutions in India, areas have been identified.

Introduction

At the time of independence, India inherited an education system with glaring disparities between males and females, between upper and lower classes, between economically advantaged and disadvantaged groups and urban and rural population. Consequently, one of the primary responsibilities of the Government of India after independence was to make education available to all her people. This responsibility was sought to be realized through the opening of more and more primary schools, secondary schools and colleges. However the formal education system alone was found to be unable to meet the demand for education. The access to education remained limited. The report of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1993) underlined the fact that only seven percent of the relevant age group is enrolling for higher education in India.

Today even the most affluent countries are convinced that they will not be able to provide adequate education to people as long as they exclusively depend on the formal education stream. There is no doubt that there has been appreciable quantitative expansion in the formal system of education. But the quality of education is abysmally low. The relevance education provided through Universities and colleges has also been called into question. Universities have been referred to as "Ivory Towers".

All these factors underlined the need to develop an alternative to provide access to quality education to all. The result was the expansion of distance education which was seen to hold the potential to achieve universalisation and democratisation of education.

History

Historically, distance education can be traced back to the 18th century, to the beginning of print-based correspondence study in the US. In the mid-19th century correspondence education started to develop and to spread in Europe (Great Britain, France and Germany) and the United States. Isaac Pitman, the English inventor of shorthand, is generally recognized as the first person to use correspondence courses.

By the late 1960's and early 1970's significant changes in distance learning occurred due to development of new media technologies and delivery systems. The Open University (OU) in Great Britain became the first autonomous institution to offer college degrees through distance education. The OU now uses all possible forms of technology to deliver learning to students.

Open and distance learning in India dates back to the 1960s.By the 1980s there were 34 universities offering correspondence education through departments designed for that purpose. The first single

mode Open University was established in Andhra Pradesh in 1982, followed by the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), and subsequently in Bihar, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, West Bengal, and Utter Pradesh (established throughout 1980s and 1990s). The establishment of these single mode distance education universities was stimulated by the government's intention to democratize education and make it lifelong. The initiative did not discourage the expansion at the same time of correspondence programmes in dual mode universities. The year 1995 witnessed the enrollment of 200,000 students in open and distance learning, accounting for 3% of total higher education enrollment.

Most open and distance learning universities in India follow the model of the UK Open University. They co-ordinate communication and collaborate through the Distance Education Council (DEC), founded in 1992. DEC is responsible for the promotion, co-ordination and the maintenance of quality and standards.

A range of factors including emerging ICTs, liberalization, privatization and globalization have amplified the demand for open and distance learning. While the government is responsible for more than 90% of open and distance learning funding, plans are underway to involve the private sectors more closely, especially through permitting the increase of fees.

The LIS education in India through open and distance learning mode was started in 1985 with the offering of Bachelor's in Library and Information Science courses by Andhra Pradesh Open University (now B R Ambedkar Open University), followed by the Bachelor's degree programme started by the Indira Gandhi National Open University(IGNOU). Out of 232 Universities in India LIS education is offered at 22 Universities through distance mode at certificate, bachelor and master degree level. The provision of LIS courses reveal that 17 Distance education Institutes provide Degree courses, 8 provide Masters Degree Courses, 3 provide Diploma Courses, and 6 provide Certificate Level Courses in Library and Information Science.

The following UGC authorized and reputed Universities in Tamil Nadu offer the M.Phill. Degree course through distance mode.

1. Alagappa University, Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu
2. Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu
3. Vinayaga Mission (Deemed University), Salem Tamil Nadu
4. SASTRA University, Vallen, Tamil Nadu

The Concept of Open and Distance Learning

The terms "open and distance education"- represent approaches that focus on opening access to education and training provision, freeing learners from the constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and group of learners. The terms "distance education" and "distance learning" are used to cover any situation when the student and teacher are not in the same place. The openness presupposes the availability of education- **anyone, anyway, anywhere and anytime** without social, physical and geographical restrictions.

Open and distance learning is usually contrasted with 'conventional' or face-to-face' education, which may be described as the form of education which takes place in a classroom or an auditorium. However, both 'distance' and 'face-to-face' education are labels covering a wide range of variations and methods. Education may vary along a continuum from one-to-one tutorials, group activities, seminars and classroom teaching to lectures for large audiences. In each case different educational philosophies may be applied and different methods may be used. 'Face –to-face' education may be supported by a range of media, and may be combined with periods of independent study. In a similar way, distance education has a variety of forms, according to the underlying educational philosophy, organizational approach and choice of technology, and distance educators may incorporate into their programmes an element of face-to-face teaching.

To meet the emerging demands of 'knowledge era' distance learning has been accepted and recognized mode of education.

Professional Skill Development and Distance Education

Library and Information Science (LIS), a skill-oriented professional discipline require adequate skill development amongst the learners, which changes over time depending upon the development of methods and techniques of the concerned professional discipline and requirement of professional competency in the market place. Library and Information Science (LIS), its structure, methods, techniques and philosophy have sea-changed over a period of time since its development as a formal discipline in

the middle of 17th century. The impact of information in all spheres of society coupled with the utilization of IT development for access and utilization of information are dramatically changing the face of the libraries and information institutions. It is said that knowledge based societies are the reality of the near future where information and knowledge will act as a key to the development of a nation. The transition to knowledge based societies will be dependent upon the capability of creation and organization of information and knowledge. In this changing scenario, the custodian roles of library and information professionals are changing to the role of facilitators and distributors. The philosophy has now changed from organization, management and access of books and similar documents to access, organization, retrieval and dissemination of information. The development of ICT and its application has changed its traditional methods acquisition, organization and access of information. The emphasis is now on content development and management. This change is very much visible in case of developed countries where the employment market constitutes different types of information related activities with a combination of traditional skills of library and information science and technological skills. The purpose of LIS education is to provide skills for developing professionals who link the people and information. Basic skills required are the intellectual organization of information (knowledge) and processing, management, retrieval and provision of information to its users. All the skills are centered around users of information. In LIS, which is a service oriented profession, knowing the needs of users, organization and customization of library and information services are the major concern of skill development. While the technologies play a major role, equal importance to know the user and his exact requirements (behavior) is a pre-requisite for efficient service to the users in the new market place.

In the changing scenario of the society, the skills required of LIS professionals may be identified as the following, based on the trend on LIS related employment market:

- Library related activities - Network Administration/Coordination
- Information services and supports - Network service
- Information brokerage - Office automation
- Information systems services - Telecommunication
- End-user training - Information system design
- Information product evaluation - Information Technology planning
- Usability analysis - Data security
- Information Analysis and - Internet Resources
- Consolidation - Internet site architecture
- Online searching

Thus, the LIS schools are facing a new challenge to develop suitable curricula, capable of providing skills required in the market place. The challenges are basically – first, the development of skills for new library and information market and second, the development of new types of curricula with multi-disciplinary approach integrating the disciplines of library and information science, computer technology, communication technology, media technology, management science, statistics, economics, behavioral science, linguistics etc.

Multi-Channel Delivery Modes for the LIS Learners

The following five channels of learning have been identified;

1. Home based learning (Personalized learning)
2. Work-place based learning (Experiential learning)
3. Community based learning (Societal learning)
4. Resource Centre based learning
5. Special Resource Institute based learning

Commensurate with these five learning processes, the following three types of delivery channels are identified:

1. Reaching directly to learners (at home, work and community place) from the Headquarters and Regional Centres.
2. Through Resource Centres, such as Study Centres, Multi-media Learning Centres, Partnership with special institutions/organisations, Local institutions/organisations etc.
3. Through extension activities in partnership with Government, non- Government organisations and local peoples organisations.

The two mechanisms are:

1. Distance Learning Facilitators (DLF) and
2. Multi- Media Learning Centres (MMLC)

The DLF represents a one man study centre functioning as an intermediary and a mentor. The purpose behind the concept of DLF is to outreach students in rural and remote areas. The MMLCs on the other hand are being established to provide learning resource support services to the students. The basic infrastructural facilities to be provided in the MMLCs would include: computers, Internet/Ernet connectivity, e-mail/fax, electronic library, telecounselling and provision of multi-media resources.

Presently, the LIS programmes are being offered through Study Centres and Work Centres. The Work Centre concepts are adopted to facilitate the smooth conduct of practical sessions. The Work Centers are located in different libraries and information centres in the country having basic infrastructural facilities needed for the computer based practical. With the gradual adoption of wide range of information and communication technologies and acquisition of multi-media learning resources, the Work Centres are striving to become the Multi-Media Learning Centres in the near future.

The delivery mechanism followed for the programmes in open universities in India are:

1. Print materials
2. CD-ROM based materials
3. Audio-video tapes
4. Face to face counseling and practicals at study centers
5. Teleconferencing
6. Interactive radio counseling
7. Digital learning through Internet and Web based
8. Contact programme through electronic mail
9. Seminars and Workshops
10. Virtual Campus Initiative
11. Evaluation through assignments and examinations in conventional mode.

Outreach Library Services for Distance Learners

The following steps could prove useful in out-reaching the distance learners:

1. At first instance distance education institution should enlighten its learners about the availability of such devices.
2. Study centres should facilitate the services of the audio-video reading material. The lesson scripts, the print media with the combination of audio-video material would be very useful to the distance learners.
3. Tele-conferencing facility at study centres should be made available.
4. Programmes of teaching should be made keeping in view the language of the area. It should be in their language so that they can easily understand the text/courses offered to them.
5. No single distance education institution can meet the growing demands of distance learners on its own resources. Hence all the distance education agencies should pool their resources to meet the rapidly growing demand of distance learners. Resource sharing and allowing students of other institutions to use the services will definitely improve the student services and facilitate in reaching out to maximum number of distance learners.
6. Panchayati Raj system in India has given opportunity to the rural people to know their duties, responsibilities as well as to gauze their own progress. The distance education institutions should approach the panchayats and rural development agencies where community television sets are provided to allow the distance education learners to watch educational programmes offered by IGNOU and other distance education institutions. This will certainly help in outreach services to the learners.

Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services

Approved by the Board of Directors, Association of College & Research Libraries, June 29, 2004

Facilities

The originating institution should provide facilities, equipment, and communication links sufficient in size, number, scope, accessibility, and timeliness to reach all students and to attain the objectives of the distance learning programs. Arrangements may vary and should be appropriate to programs offered. Examples of suitable arrangements include but are not limited to:

1. access to facilities through agreements with a nonaffiliated library;

2. designated space for consultations, ready reference collections, reserve collections, electronic transmission of information, computerized data base searching and interlibrary loan services, and offices for the library distance learning personnel;
3. a branch or satellite library; and
4. virtual services, such as Web pages, Internet searching, and using technology for electronic connectivity.

Resources

The originating institution is responsible for providing or securing convenient, direct physical and electronic access to library materials for distance learning programs equivalent to those provided in traditional settings and in sufficient quality, depth, number, scope, currentness, and formats to:

1. meet the students' needs in fulfilling course assignments (e.g., required and supplemental readings and research papers) and enrich the academic programs;
2. meet teaching and research needs;
3. facilitate the acquisition of lifelong learning skills; and
4. accommodate other informational needs of the distance learning community as appropriate.

When more than one institution is involved in the provision of a distance learning program, each is responsible for the provision of library materials to students in its own courses, unless an equitable agreement for otherwise providing these materials has been made. Costs, services, and methods for the provision of materials for all courses in the program should be uniform.

Services

The library services offered to the distance learning community should be designed to meet effectively a wide range of informational, bibliographic, and user needs. The exact combination of central and site staffing for distance learning library services will differ from institution to institution. The following, though not necessarily exhaustive, are essential:

1. reference assistance;
2. computer-based bibliographic and informational services;
3. reliable, rapid, secure access to institutional and other networks, including the Internet;
4. consultation services;
5. a program of library user instruction designed to instill independent and effective information literacy skills while specifically meeting the learner-support needs of the distance learning community;
6. assistance with and instruction in the use of nonprint media and equipment;
7. reciprocal or contractual borrowing, or interlibrary loan services using broadest application of fair use of copyrighted materials;
8. prompt document delivery, such as a courier system and/or electronic transmission;
9. access to reserve materials in accordance with copyright fair use policies;
10. adequate service hours for optimum access by users; and
11. promotion of library services to the distance learning community, including documented and updated policies, regulations and procedures for systematic development, and management of information resources.

Documentation

To provide records indicating the degree to which the originating institution is meeting these "Guidelines" in providing library services to its distance learning programs, the library, and, when appropriate, the distance learning library units, should have available current copies of at least the following:

1. printed user guides;
2. statements of mission and purpose, policies, regulations, and procedures;
3. statistics on library use;
4. statistics on collections;
5. facilities assessment measures;
6. collections assessment measures;
7. needs and outcomes assessment measures;
8. data on staff and work assignments;
9. institutional and internal organization charts;
10. comprehensive budget(s);

11. professional personnel vitae;
12. position descriptions for all personnel;
13. formal, written agreements;
14. automation statistics;
15. guides to computing services;
16. library evaluation studies or documents;
17. library and other instructional materials and schedules; and
18. evidence of involvement in curriculum development and planning.

Library education

To enable the initiation of an academic professional specialization in distance learning library services, schools of library and information science should include in their curriculum courses and course units in this growing area of specialization within librarianship.

Assessment and Accreditation of Distance Education Institutions

For accrediting an institution, prior formulation of assessment procedures, details on what needs to be scrutinized needs to be defined. It is important that the evaluation is thorough and due consideration is given to the concerned components of the system.

A model for accreditation of distance education institutions should include the following areas for assessment as enablers:

1. The infrastructure facilities
2. Organisational structure
3. Policy of the management, & Governance
4. Leadership, and the processes for
5. Programme Development
6. Student Admissions
7. Student Support Services
8. Delivery of programmes
9. Student Evaluation
10 Quality Control

And the following as results:

11. Study material
12. Quality
13. Use of Multimedia/ Multple media
14. Delivery Channels
15. Learner Satisfaction
16. Learner Performance
17. People (Parents, Employers, and Society) Satisfaction

The model also is based on

(i.) What is expected from the institution?
(ii) What is being done to achieve the same?
(iii) Where it stands now?

Future Prospects for LIS Distance Learner in India

The 'virtual university' mediated across the Internet is already a reality in advanced countries and it is gradually being adopted in developing countries like India. Increasingly, academic activities are taking place in a new educational space created by the local and global networks. The on-line distance education system carries more learning advantages than the print based or face to face learning systems. The advantages of the network based learning systems are that:

1. It facilitates self-learning according to the learners need, at his or her convenient time and pace.
2. Electronic publication of course material is cheaper and faster.
3. It facilitates faster, cheaper and loss free delivery of the learning material.
4. It promotes better peer group and the teacher student interactivity.
5. Faster updating of learning material is possible according to the changing needs of the society.

A flexible distance learning system should facilitate movement of students among the institutions. Transfer of a person from one place of work to another usually results in relocation of fam-

ily. Settling down in a new place takes sometime. Similarly, the studies of a distance learner would be affected if he or she fails to find a study centre near his or her new place of work.

Taking into consideration the mobility of distance learners, the open learning system in future should be redesigned with a lot of flexibility. With this in mind various partners of the distance education system should come together and arrive at an understanding as to how to promote mobility. Some of the ways that facilitate easy movement of learners in the open universities in India are to have a common academic year, initiate credit system in courses of study.

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