

**ROLE OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS IN PROMOTION
OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

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ABSTRACT

Due to advancements in Information and Communication Technology, slowly steadily a remarkable growth has been acknowledged in Distance Education. It has changed the process of continuing education in the last decades and also changing the face of all levels of learning from Institution-led learning to own-time self-learning at a distance. Distance Learning is a mode of delivering education and instruction, often on an individual basis, to learners who are not physically present in a traditional setting such as a classroom. Most of the distance educational providers profess a belief that libraries and Information professional are key factors in providing quality library services and to support open and distance education. It indicates; need to pay attention to the fundamentals of libraries and librarianship in distance learning. Hence this paper describes the changing trend of distance education, and its characteristics, importance and also this paper explains role of library and information professionals to support distance learners and to promote distance education by providing valuable library sources and services online or at a distance.

KEYWORDS: Distance Education, Distance Library Services, E- Learning. Higher Education, Lifelong Learning

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century education has become significantly different from learning in last decade. It recognized as an individual right. Learning is considered to be learner – centered, a lifelong process and the means to cope with continuous or radical changes. Access to higher education through Distance Learning or Distance Education is provided with no boundaries of space and time. Due to impact Technological advances and the Internet have changed the way people learn, live, and grow. In higher education, libraries have been challenged to look at how to serve people not only locally but at a distance. These changes have revolved around providing resources online equivalent to those available locally, information literacy, and the importance of collaboration. Distance education has widened its scope to include online

education, online courses, virtual courses, virtual library and etc. Learning becomes more self-directed, collaborative, intertwined with personal life and work, and more resource-based, calls for perpetual access and usage of information and learning resources. Distance Education is a road to continuing education and personal development. Furthermore, a higher level of education is a necessary prerequisite for economic growth and employment. In society libraries have become nodes for connecting people with the global resources of information and knowledge. Libraries and librarians must therefore be allowed to play a role of fundamental importance in the further development distance education system.

2. Definition

Distance Education is a mode of delivering education and instruction, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional setting such as a classroom. Distance learning provides access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both.

Distance education is a concept that covers the learning-teaching activities in the cognitive and/or psycho-motor and affective domains of an individual learner and a supporting organization. It is characterized by non-contiguous communication and can be carried out anywhere and at any time, which makes it attractive to adults with professional and social commitments. (Holmberg, 1989 p. 168)

According to 'Desmond Keegan' (1986) there are five main elements central to defining distance education:

- a) Quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the learning process
- b) Influence of an educational organization
- c) Use of technical media
- d) Two-way communication between teacher and learner
- e) Quasi-permanent absence of learning group

3. Characteristics of Distance Education:

The most open institutions providing their sources and services freely to distance learners, irrespective of time, place, person. According to A synthesis of Valentine (2002); Encyclopedia Britannica.com (2012); Galusha (2008); Commonwealth of Learning & ADB (1999) reveal the following features of distance education has some the important characteristics:

1. Spatial and/or temporal separation: separation of teacher and learner in space (Geographic) and time.
2. Institutional Basis: Learning is done in an institution not by unrecognized self study or in non-academic environment. The institutions many not offer traditional classroom-based instruction but they are eligible for accreditation by the same agencies as those using traditional methods.
3. Use of Mixed Media Courseware: these include print, radio, TV, video and audio cassettes, computer-based learning and telecommunications.
4. Interactive Telecommunications especially between teacher and learner. Also between student and students forming learning communities. E-mails, calls etc. are used. Social networking media e.g. Face book, You Tube etc also used.
5. Possibility of Face-to-Face Meetings for tutorials, learner-learner interaction, library study, laboratory/practice sessions/exams etc.
6. Use of Industrialized Process: in large scale ODL operations, division of labour and tasks is used for different aspects of the course.

4. Essence of Distance Education:

Nowadays, anybody can get education without going to school every day, because this can be done via online. Lots of universities and colleges provide this mean for every student. However, this present era DE is getting most popular by filling the education gap. According to 'Wedemeyer' (1981) some of the essence of DE are:

- Assumes greater learner responsibility
- Evaluates student achievement in simple manner
- Frees faculty from custodial-type duties
- Is capable of operation any place
- Learns at own pace
- Meets & enhances individual differences
- Mixes media & methods
- Offers an articulated program
- Offers students more choices
- Uses all appropriate teaching media

5. Different Types of Distance Education:

There are many types of distance learning methods that potential learners can take up. Some of the popular types briefly discussed as below:

5.1. Open Time Online Courses

This option of learning requires students to log on to the course they are taking online. The instructor uses E-mail and bulletin boards to keep the students updated on coursework and due dates. There are deadlines that must be met, but students are allowed to work at their own pace since there isn't a set schedule on attending.

5.2. Hybrid Distance Education:

This method can be done in a classroom setting, or through an Internet chat-room.

5.3. Laptop/Computer based Distance Education:

This method of distance learning requires students to meet up at a specific time on a weekly basis. The meetings take place in either a classroom setting, or a computer lab. However, all of the learning is done strictly on a computer.

5.4. Fixed Scheduled online courses:

These courses take place strictly online, but students are required to log on for class at a specific time. Many consider this method of distance learning to be the most common.

Now that we are somewhat familiar with the types of distance learning options that are available, let's get into the pros and cons of distance learning.

6. Beneficiaries of Distance Education:



7. Advantages of Distance Education

There are many advantages of Distance Education such as:

- Flexibility. This allows students to work when and where it is more convenient for them without having to squeeze in scheduled classes to an already busy life computer and internet connection.
- Useful to slower learners: This reduces stress of reading and education and increases the satisfaction.
- No commuting. Taking a course online can be one way to cut down on costs or public transportation. Since students can often work from home to complete their class assignments, both time and money are saved in cutting out the trips to and from class.
- Numerous choices for schools. Even if you live in a community with few or no colleges distance learning allows you to choose from a wide variety of schools to complete your education.
- Lowered costs. Prices for online courses are generally cheaper than their on-campus counterparts and you won't have to worry about commuting, moving or getting meal plans on campus, some additional benefits to learning from home.
- Continuing Education: As distance learning can usually be completed on your own schedule, it is much easier to complete distance learning courses while working than more traditional educational programs.

8. Disadvantages of Distance Education:

Distance Education is also not free from the disadvantages such are:

- Lack of social interaction. If the classroom environment is what you love most about learning you may want to take a step back and reconsider distance learning.
- Un-ideal format for all learners. Not everyone is an ideal candidate for online learning.
- Lack of computer literacy.
- Some employers don't accept online degrees. Realize that online degree may not be the ideal tool for some job fields or for future learning.
- Cope-up with new technologies. It's not possible everyone to cope-up with new technologies.

- Not all courses required to complete the degree may be offered online. It makes sense that more practical majors like nursing aren't offered entirely online, after all, part of the degree is learning to work directly with patients.
- Lack of Seriousness; Distance Education tend to be less serious about studies.
- Lack of Motivation; here learner cannot be motivated as attending the classes every day.
- Less opportunity: to develop oral communication skills as comparing to the regular education.
- Technology problem: most of the DE courses completely providing online, Submitting articles assignments can be possible through email sometimes it will create technical problem.

9. ICT Based Library Services for Distance Learners:

Library provides an excellent array of resources aimed at distance education students and faculty. The Web-based instructions will help in finding library materials, search electronic databases and on-line journals, and instruction in the use of the Internet and Library's websites. Some online subject guides listing the most useful resources for different topics, and web based tutorials offered lectures and classes, online short course through Virtual library Classroom.

9.1 Teleconferencing:

Telephone is a real time interactive audio application; continue to play a role in serving remote users. Teleconferencing is the use of audio, video, or computer systems, linked by a communications channel, to allow widely separated individuals to take part in a discussion or meeting. A librarian may demonstrate concepts and provide answers to reference queries in teleconferencing.

9.2 World Wide Web, OPAC and online Databases

WWW is an Internet server that offers multimedia and hypertext links. Many libraries have launched their websites and online public access catalogue (OPAC) accessible via Internet. Database is a shared collection of logically related data, designed to meet the information needs of multiple users at a time. A database is designed to permit retrieval of information to satisfy a wide variety of user needs. The library may create its own database

or subscribe to commercial and may provide its users with online/offline access with/without a password.

9.3 Email and Voice Mail

Written answers may benefit users who can save the answer for review at a later time or print the answer out if it contains instructions or a referral. Since questions are not answered in real time reference staff can if necessary take the time to provide a detailed answer to a question. Email can also be in the form of audio (voicemail) video and multimedia.

9.4 Chating and Instant Messaging

Internet chat is text based real time communication users on one and half a networked computer type message through a computer keyboard and message recipients at the end of another network, users can see the messages on their monitors and respondent kind. Chat is a blending of a telephonic and Email communication which is useful for a library service such as short and ready reference Services.

9.5 Audio and Video Conference:

Is a method used to allow people at remote locations to join in conference and share information all online? A Video Camera speaker phone are linked to a PC at each site and PC is in turn is linked to the network it will be called Audio conference without Video cameras at both ends. This is for a real time collaboration thereby increasing the possibility that the interaction will be successful. A librarian may also communicate with chat and demonstrate concepts with quite board and application hearing.

9.6 Regional and Mobile Libraries:

Many distance education institutions have countrywide and even abroad their regional/branch campuses. These branches may also have approachable libraries for the students and resource persons of their jurisdiction. These libraries must be self-sufficient in resources to better serve its community. Mobile library service on train. Bus/train/van and boat can also be provided to remote users with pre-advertised schedule.

9.7 Electronic Book mobiles:

Mobile application of library technology is leading to the development of the electronic bookmobile, which is changing the nature of outreach services in dramatic ways. These include online circulation, optical discs, fax machines, cellular telephones and new hardware.

9.8 Online circulation

It is most rewarding level of service which required a telecommunication medium. Currently libraries are using telephone poles to link the bookmobile microcomputer to the main library computer.

9.9 CD Rom and E Database:

The opportunity to provide reference sources and to test demand is now available on CD-ROM and other space-saving optical disc media. To date, several libraries have employed CD-ROM library catalogues on their bookmobiles with great success. Electronic reference collection, E-databases and E-zines recorded on CD-ROM may also be sent to library user's offline.

8. Role of Library and Information Professionals:

The growth of distance education worldwide is remarkable as technological, educational development. Globalization can bring changes to the educational environment that alters the traditional educational system and structure paving the way for the new environment, new learning strategies and the emerging new learners, new teachers and new librarians. Distance education librarians work to ensure that distance education students and faculty have the same access as on-campus students to essential services including: reference assistance, library materials, bibliographic instruction, interlibrary loan and document delivery, and access to reserve materials. There are duties specific to Librarians as well. And they serve as primary contacts at the library for distance education students and faculty. Librarians may provide technical support or reference service over the phone, using instant messaging, replying to emails and reference service request forms, or through video-conferencing. Librarians also design, maintain, and assess library web-pages and user interfaces for distance learners. These websites generally provide general information to students such as how to obtain a library services. At the same time librarians also create

specialized online tutorials covering topics such as information literacy education and using of remotely accessible library databases, also assist faculty with designing course-specific web-pages and provide copyright advisement.

Librarians have to develop important links with distance education administrators in order to ensure that the necessary policy arrangements are instituted to deliver library services to their distance students. Provider libraries are usually located in centers that are more convenient to the distance learners than the libraries of their teaching institution. Service contracts of this nature are new models for providing library and information services to distance students. Librarians have also had to develop relationships with other service providers who are associated with the delivery of distance education programmes, courses and support services. These include information technology units - particularly when library services are delivered via this modality; telecommunications agencies whose services are used to deliver library services; materials production units whose services are used to develop library related distance education materials and members of academic staff who are involved in the development and delivery of distance education programmes and courses. The library and information skills aspect of all distance education courses are seen to be important aspects of distance programmes from their inception. Librarians therefore have a new and changed relationship with the academic aspect of distance education course and programme development. Hence the libraries and library professionals are plying a crucial role by motivating distance learners by providing number of useful sources and services online or in a distance.

10. Importance of Library Services in Distance Education:

Before looking at the costs faced by different providers and consumers of library services, it is worthwhile considering how these services support learning. This will indicate not just the range of activities that should be cost, but the extent to which libraries other than that of the parent university might meet the needs of distance learners. Services offered by reputable universities include:

- Twenty-four hour, seven days a week access to online library and information resources including library catalogues, citation and other indexes and full-text electronic journals
- Direct access by students to materials contained in general and research collections as well as to resources referred to in reading lists

- Assistance from professional librarians via email, telephone, fax and face-to-face
- Delivery of documents to students, both electronically and via courier or regular postal services
- Training and user education programs and resources via the Web, email, telephone, and face-to-face (including offshore)
- Filtered access to websites via subject and course based virtual libraries
- Facilitated access to the physical collections of other institutions

In short, university, college and institutional libraries play an integral role in a given social and distance learning environment.

11. Conclusion

It is crucial that distance or e-learning platforms are built on friendly, easy to lifelong learning process and motivating for the learners. Distance education supports the information age generation and it improves transfer of acquired knowledge in a distance learning process. This undoubtedly is so for the distance education students who depend so much libraries and information professionals. Given the situation, institutions of distance education must reflect on whether and how they are meeting the needs of today's distance learners. As often as not, students in higher education are commuting to school or taking courses at a distance, challenging the status of the traditional residential student. Libraries and information professionals have much more critical roles to play in promoting the distance education system in the new learning environment.

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