

Introduction

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Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has made tremendous growth all over the world during the last three decades. The growth in number of distance learning institutions, increase in number of programmes / courses, exponential growth in literature on ODL, increasing number of conferences and the growth in number of distance learners – all these have contributed immensely towards the development and maturation of a strong and sustainable system of education. However, equitable access to Library, Information and Documentation (LID) services is far from satisfactory as compared to their availability to learners at conventional education institutions. In this context, the Pre-conference Seminar on “Outreach Library Services for Distance Learners” was organized on February 20, 2002 by the Library and Documentation Division (L&DD) of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) prior to the XV Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) on the theme “Access and Equity: Challenges for Open and Distance Learning” from February 21-23, 2002 at New Delhi. The papers in this volume come from the Pre-Conference Seminar.

The term ‘outreach’ is coined from the verb ‘to reach out’ meaning extending services to a wider section of the society. According to Harrod’s Librarians’ Glossary (Ed. 8: 1995) compiled by Ray Prytherch,

“Outreach is the process whereby a library service investigates the activities of the community it serves and becomes fully involved in supporting community activities, whether or not centred on library premises.”

Outreach library services therefore, refers here to the services rendered to the distance learners at their homes or offices outside the premises of the ODL institution.

The phrase “Outreach library services” in the theme of the pre-conference was selected with great care to get information regarding Library and Information services (LIS) provided to Distance Learners (DLs) at the Open Universities of the Asian Region and / or Distance Teaching institutions in various other developed and developing nations. Primarily the focus and objective of organizing this Seminar was to share experiences of rendering LIS to different categories of distance learners particularly women and those who are physically challenged, socio-economically disadvantaged, remote and geographically distributed and migrating population of defense and other mobile employment sectors.

It is evident from the literature available on the subject that Librarians and Information Scientists of the Open Universities (OUs) and Distance Teaching Institutions (DTIs) were very much concerned to provide the LIS services to their new clientele of distance learners. A number of countries have developed guidelines for library services to distance learners. In USA the Association of College and Research Libraries which is the division of the American Library Association, USA devised the first set of guidelines in 1967 and it has since been revised in

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1982, 1990, 1998 and 2000 keeping pace with the frequent changes in availability of modern innovative multimedia technologies for providing access to the distance learners. In 1993 Canada developed similar guidelines and is now in the process of revising it. Australia prepared guidelines for library services to external students in 1982. Elizabeth Watson (1992) suggested guidelines for developing countries, especially for the Caribbean Islands. However, it has yet to accept any formal acceptance. The latest venture in this area has been by the Sectional Committee on Distance Education of the Indian Library Association (ILA), Delhi, India. The guidelines have been published by the Distance Education Council, Indira Gandhi National Open University in 2001. Though these guidelines exist, they have not been seriously followed in rendering library services to the distance learners in the developing countries due to several infrastructural constraints.

Number of conferences and seminars on the topic has also been organized so far. In USA, the Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant at Missouri started conducting biannual conferences on "Off-Campus Library Services" (OCLS) way back in 1982. Till now, ten OCLS conferences have been successfully organized at St. Louis, Missouri (1st: 1982), Knoxville, Tennessee (2nd: 1985), Reno, Nevada (3rd: 1986), Charleston, South Carolina (4th: 1988), Albuquerque, New Mexico (5th: 1991), Kansas City, Missouri (6th: 1993), San Diego, California (7th: 1995), Providence, Rhode Island (8th: 1998), Portland, Oregon (9th: 2000), Cincinnati, Ohio (10th: 2002) attracting librarians from all over the world to discuss various issues related to the provision of Library Services to Distance Learners and share experiences gained from planning, designing and delivering services to this unique group of learners. The web site of the Off-campus Library Services Conferences at <http://ocls.cmich.edu/ocls2002pubs.htm> provide more information about these conferences and their publications.

In the United Kingdom, so far four conferences on "Libraries Without Walls: the Delivery of Library Services to Distance Users" (LWW) have been organized by the Centre for Research in Library and Information Management (CERLIM) at Mytilene, Greece (I-1995 & II-1997), Molyvos, Lesvos, Greece (III-1999 & IV-2001). The fifth LWW will be held at Aegean Island of Lesvos, Greece from September 19-33, 2003. The details regarding these conferences can be viewed at the URL <http://www.cerlim.ac.uk/projects/bibdel.html> & <http://www.cerlim.ac.uk/conf/lwwconfer.html> Andrew MacDonald had organized a Seminar on "Library Services to Distance Learners" at the University of Sunderland, Sunderland, U. K. from June 5-9, 2000.

In India, the first National seminar on Distance Education and Library was organized under the joint auspices of the Kerala Library Association and the Quillon Public Library and Research Centre at Quillon from December 2-4, 1988. Later the Indian Distance Education Association (IDEA) had an exclusive session on "Library Support Service in Distance Education" during its IV Annual Conference on "From Learner to Learner – Developing Strategies Towards a Better Student Support Services in Distance Education" from November 22-24, 1996 at the B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad.

The Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) organized the Librarians' Round Table on "Developing Digital Library Resources" in 1998 prior to the XIII Annual Conference of the AAOU at Hong Kong. Later in the subsequent year, the OUHK also organized a meeting of Librarians at the Regional Conference of the International Council of Distance Education (ICDE) in 1999 to debate on this subject.

The Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver organized a virtual conference on Library and Information Services in 1999 as part of the 1st Pan-Commonwealth Forum held at Brunei, Darussalam.

In order to make literature on library services to distance learners visible and accessible to interested Librarians and other scholars, three annotated bibliographies (Latham et al, 1991; Slade and Kascus, 1996, 2000) have been published. The fourth edition of this bibliography is available online at <http://uviclib.uvic.ca/dls/bibliography4.html>

There were in all 24 papers presented at the Pre-Conference Seminar on “Outreach Library Services for Distance Learners”. Of these, this book includes 17 papers that have been revised by the original authors before being edited. The editors have categorized these papers into four parts, viz. Part I: Outreach Library Services to Distance Learners, including three Keynote addresses in the seminar; Part II: Library Services to Distance Learners in India; Part III: Library Services to Distance Learners in other Asian Countries; and Part IV: Library Services to Distance Learners in UK and USA.

In Part I, Andrew McDonald discuss the nature of distance learninga and the need for library services to distance learners in his paper on “Supporting Distance Learners”. Defining the distance learners as “those who are separated by distance or by available time from the institution at which they are registered for a course of study”, McDonald provides a case of successful deployment of library services for distance learners at the University of Sunderland. Harvey R. Gover in the next chapter uses the phrase “To Still Live Our Ideals” as the title to describe the necessity of providing quality library services in transnational distance learning. He provides an overview of transnational distance learning practice in the Europe and elsewhere. He outlines 10 philosophical percepts from the *ACRL Guidelines for Distance learning Library Services* as key to the rights of distance learners, teachers, and librarians. Olugbemiro Jegede in the Chapter 3 discusses the changing environments of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and also the library services due to the impacts of modern information and communications technologies (ICTs). Describing the librarians as the new age ‘Knowledge Managers’ in the context of Knowledge Management in ODL, Jegede outlines the challenges before library professionals to meet the needs of distance learners by adopting new technology. Having discussed various electronic and digital library initiatives, he points us towards greater need of training library professionals on appropriate technologies to develop “Virtual Librarians”.

Part II consists of 4 papers from India. Neela Jagannathan and Uma Kanjilal report the “Outreach Library and Information Services for Distance Learners of IGNOU” in Chapter 4. The IGNOU provides a comprehensive package of library services to distance learners by: providing access to the libraries at Regional Centres and Study Centres; establishing learning resource centres in collaboration with local institutions and libraries; putting previous year question papers in digitized form on the Web and CDs. The Central Library caters to the needs of the faculty providing additional services like access to electronic journal and CD-ROM databases, helping teachers to develop up to date quality course materials. In Chapter 5, Madhukar Shewale describes the activities of Library and Resource Centre (LARC) of the Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, while in the next chapter B. K. Singh reports the initiatives of Kota Open University (*now renamed* as Vardhaman Mahavir Open University). In Chapter six, V. K. Jeevan discusses the threats and opportunities of IT-enabled library services for distance learning.

Part III has seven papers with case studies from Hong Kong, China, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Annie Chan in Chapter seven describes the e-library initiatives of Open University of Hong Kong. It also provides special services to people with disabilities, which include text to speech technologies, printed scripts for videos, Braille books,

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online magnifies, etc. There are initiatives on the way to implement the 'web content accessibility guidelines' of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). Findings of his research on the Library resources and services of Chinese Television University have been discussed in Chapter eight by Anthony W. Ferguson. In Chapter nine, Andrey G. Andey reports the efforts of UP Open University Library towards increasing access to learning resources. Apart from the traditional services, they use the web extensively to provide online reference materials to distance learners. Boonta Wissawapaisal in Chapter ten provides an overview of Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University's (STOU) library and information services. STOU library services are organized in three levels: central, regional and provincial. Library cooperation and networking have been highlighted as important means to provide efficient library services to distance learners. In Chapter eleven, Effendi Wahyono discusses the Universitas Terbuka's efforts in making library services more accessible by transforming it into an e-library. K.H. Sellathurai in Chapter twelve describes the library system and services of Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL). The needs of the students are taken care of by the fully automated central library, with the support of study centres. However, the demands of the learners for library services are reported to be high, and the usage of books increased after lending facilities were offered to students. There are also plans to provide more user education to develop independent and creative library users. In the last chapter of this Part, Muhammad Saadat Ali describes the role of information resource centre of Bangladesh Open University in providing quality education and lifelong learning.

Part IV has 3 papers discussing three case studies in outreach library services in the UK and USA. In Chapter fifteen, Mou Chakraborty and Johanna Tunon discuss the issue of how to provide international overseas students with quality library services. With a case of Nova Southeastern University, USA, the authors suggest that technology can play a major role in document delivery. Also arrangements with local libraries could prove to be very useful. They also indicate that cultural and political sensibilities are important issues that should be considered while developing collaborative library services. In Chapter sixteen, Nazira Ismail-Kaye describes the initiatives of International Centre for Distance Learning (ICDL) to provide services to distance learners. Though primarily a web-based service, open to all, the ICDL is used to provide document delivery services to the students of the Institute of Educational Technology (IET) of UKOU. In the last chapter of this book, Gill Needham provides us a vivid account of how the Open University (UK) supports its students through the library. UKOU uses the power of network technologies to metamorphose from a 'teacher only' library access to 'student too' library services. Using the need-based research approach, the services are designed within five strategic objectives, with focus on developing information literacy skills amongst learners.

The present collections of seventeen papers illustrate the range of library services possible and available to distance learners. In order to provide equitable library access to distance learners as that of their counterparts in the face-to-face institutions, the case studies in the book utilized some of the following approaches and services depending on the need, suitability and context:

- Document delivery
- Collaboration with local universities and libraries
- Joining networks of libraries
- Web access to library catalogue and services
- Lending facilities of books

- Access to e-journals
- Online CD-ROM databases
- Access to previous year question papers
- Bibliographic instructions or developing information literacy skills
- Facilities for information access to people with disabilities

The above analysis also reflects that the nature of outreach library services to distance learners is not uniform though the experiences of learners are similar around the world. It also shows the growing concerns of educators and library professionals to provide better services to the increasing population of distance learners. This book is a testimony to this effect and adds substantially to the body of literature on this topic. There are national standards and guidelines for library services to distance learners in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and India. It is high time that professional bodies like the AAOU and ICDE take up this important task to develop consensus in the Asian region and all over the world to provide improved quality library services to distance learners. Collaboration with international library professional association like the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and several Library Associations of the developed and developing countries should be undertaken to frame suitable guidelines and standards.

The main objective of this book is to share experiences of the librarians of the ODL institutions of developed and developing countries — IT rich and IT poor countries. This book will be useful for all those who are interested in the library support to distance learners, including administrators and planners, librarians and library and information science teachers, researchers and technologists, students of Library and Information Science and Distance Education programmes as well as Directors and Coordinators of the Regional and Study Centres of Open and Distance Teaching Institutions who are directly responsible in serving the counselors and students.

References

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