Guidelines for Library Services to Distance Learners

Prepared by
Sectional Committee on Distance Education
Indian Library Association, New Delhi

Indian Library Association
(Sectional Committee on Distance Education)
Guidelines for Library Services to Distance Learners

(Approved by the Council of Indian Library Association on its meeting held on 28th July, 2001)

Introduction

Distance Education has become very popular in the Indian sub-continent. At present there are nine state open universities, one national Open University, and about sixty-four Correspondence Course Institutes/Distance Education Directorates operating in regular universities of the country. The range of courses/programmes on offer varies from academic to professional and vocational to technical in nature. All disciplines including science, technology, agriculture, medicine, nursing etc. have distance education programmes. The learners are also heterogeneous as the diversity of the programmes on offer. More and more individuals are joining these programmes, as distance learning provides flexibility in terms of time, place and pace of learning. In other words, it facilitates learning while earning. Mostly the learners receive packets of printed learning materials presumably self sufficient in nature for self study and learn. These learning materials, though many a times designed very carefully by a team of experts in the field/subject, can't be termed sufficient for effective learning equitable to face-to-face teaching and learning. In face-to-face teaching and learning systems, the learners after having attended the classroom teaching undergo a variety of learning tasks including consultation and use of library materials. In distance education, the print materials have just replaced the classroom teacher allowing the learners to be independent self-learners. Therefore, for a complete learning experience, the distance learners need to make use of resources other than printed materials provided by the educational institution. The situation calls for a critical reflection on the place of library in distance education. Various scholars have emphasized that:

- The library has a prominent role to play in facilitating learning.
- Libraries in Open and Distance Learning Institutions have hierarchical systems: Central library at the Headquarters and Regional and /or Study center libraries at the grass-root level.
- There are different formats of resources available for the use of the learners.

- Users need material, facilities and information services.
- All kinds of libraries, public, academic and special, have to make combined efforts to meet the diverse requirements of the widespread learners.
- The use of modern technology has a special role in providing effective library services.

In order for effective use of library resources and development of information literacy skills to play a significant role in student learning, distance education programme designers must consider and give special place to library services at the course/programme design stage itself. Therefore, the "Guidelines" call for a paradigm shift in provision of course materials as "sufficient" to "basic minimum" for distance learning.

Mission
To ensure the provision of equitable library services to distance learners by assisting in the development and improvement of library services for new and existing distance learning programmes.

Scope
The guidelines are generic in nature and are applicable to Open Universities, Correspondence Course Institutes/Distance Education Directorates, Open Schools, and other Private Distance Education Providers using print, multimedia, teleconference, and web-based or any other course delivery methods. These are applicable to all credit and non-credit based certificate, diploma, degree, post-graduate degree, postgraduate diploma, and research degree programmes.

Target Groups
The guidelines are aimed at administrators of distance learning providers, distance learning programme coordinators/managers, library professionals in charge of managing distance learning services and other support staff responsible for effective implementation of the distance learning programme. As a secondary target group, the guidelines may also benefit various accreditation bodies in the country.

Definitions
Chief Professional Librarian: A professionally qualified librarian, who has been designated by the Distance Education Provider to look after the library system.

Distance Learners: Students enrolled in a distance learning programme.

Distance Learning Programme Coordinator: An academic in charge of conceptualization, organization, preparation and delivery of a distance learning programme.

Distance Learning Provider: The organization usually responsible for offering and funding courses and programmes through distance mode.

Professionally Qualified Librarian: A person holding at least a Bachelor's degree in Library and Information Science from a recognized institution.

1. Philosophy

1.1 Access to library resources is essential for quality education regardless of where the learner and programmes are located.

1.2 All registered distance learners and course tutors are entitled to library services equitable to those provided for learners in face-to-face educational institutions.

1.3 With distance learners being disadvantaged in terms of library access, special services need to be designed for them. In other words, traditional library service designed for on-campus users will not meet the requirements of distance learners.

1.4 Effective library support requires advance planning by the distance learning programme coordinator in consultation with the library professionals of the institutions. In other words, the programme/course design committees should have at least one library professional.

1.5 Since resources are scarce, partnerships, networking, and resource sharing are essential ingredients of effective library resources for distance learners. For this the distance education provider may use MOU with local institutions and/or technology based networking systems.

1.6 It is for the Library and Information Science professionals to create awareness and demand for library and information services in the distance learning mode.

2. Management

2.1 The head of the distance education provider should ensure through a designated Chief Professional Librarian, the adherence of national and international standards in library services, and provide for appropriate fund, staff, and other resources as may be required.

2.2   The Chief Professional librarian should demonstrate leadership in developing relationships and methodologies (including partnerships, networking and access to remote databases) to address the library needs of the institution's distance learning programmes.

2.3   The distance learners being geographically dispersed, access structures of the libraries should be in accordance with the institutional support structure (e.g. IGNOU has a three tier structure with Headquarters at New Delhi, Regional Centres, and Study Centres across the country).

2.4   The library services should be planned and monitored by a Library Committee in the institution. The Committee should include amongst other members, representative of partner institutions, regional and local libraries, and learners.

2.5   The Chief Professional Librarian should prepare all such reports required for decision-making by the Library Committee.

3.   Finance

3.1   The distance learning provider should make available adequate funding to ensure that its distance learners receive quality library services.

3.2   The library budget should take into consideration the following factors:

- The number of programmes on offer;
- The size of the distance learning programmes in terms of number of learners and access centers activated for the programme;
- The type and number of library service planned for the programme.

3.3   Funding for library services should generally come from the institute's operating budget. However, specific library services may be offered as fee-based services. In addition, a specific percentage of student fee collected should be given to the library budget. As such there should be three major sources of finance for the libraries as suggested under:

    (i)   6-10 % of the institute's operating budget;
    (ii)   2% of the fee collected from the learners; and
    (iii)   Fee collected from specific services.

4. Personnel

4.1   Personnel involved in providing library services to distance learners should be professionally qualified.

4.2   The distance learning provider should designate a Chief Professional Librarian for coordination of the different library access points and for the overall management of the system to work under the advice of the Library Committee.

4.3   Each library access point should have professionally qualified personnel as full-time or part-time staff in accordance with the institutional policy of staffing support services to support the Chief professional Librarian for achieving the goals and objectives of the institute.

4.4   As distance library services require specialized skills, personnel with specialized skills in non-print media, networking and online services (including databases handling) should be recruited and/or specialized training be provided to the employees on a regular basis.

5. Facilities

5.1   The distance learning provider should provide adequate space, equipments and communication links to enable the designated staff to operate effectively as service units. Examples of suitable arrangements include but are not limited to:

- Space for reading room(s);
- Space for holding library materials;
- Space for office staff;
- File storage cabinets;
- Dedicated telephone line for learner queries;
- Access to fax, Internet, Photocopier;
- Access to packaging and mailing services;
- Access to audio, video, and multimedia equipments;
- Access to appropriate computer facilities.

6. Resources

6.1   Library resources should include materials in all kinds of formats (Physical and electronic). However, they all should meet the requirements of learners, faculty, and other support staff.

6.2   Multiple copies of specific library items should be made available.

6.3   Master copy of all non-print media should be preserved carefully.

7.   Services

7.1   In order to meet the information needs of the distance learners, faculty and other support staff, a wide range of services may be necessary. The kinds of services that may include, but are not limited to:

- Reference service either in person, by telephone, or fax, or through e-mail;
- Bibliographic services (Manual and/or computerized) to faculty;
- Borrowing of copies of library materials;
- Obtaining specific copies of articles for course work in compliance with copyright regulations;
- Preparation of "Readings of Articles" in print and/or online on specific topics after copyright clearance;
- Access, from remote locations, to the Website and OPAC of the library and other library networks (eg. DELNET, INFLIBNET);
- Access to online journals, databases located at different serves through student password;
- Access to interlibrary loan services;
- Mobile library services for remote areas;
- Access to Book Bank or recommended "Set of Books";
- Access to reading rooms; and
- Establishment of Learning Resource Centres at Public and Private Libraries through MOUs.

7.2   Some of the library service may be fee-based as per the institutional policy.

7.3   The services should be available during all working hours for optimum access by the users. Efforts should be made for providing services during holidays.

8.   Documentation and Research

8.1   Library policies should be printed and made available to all patrons.

8.2   Library statistics (including use of the services and about collection) should be prepared regularly.

8.3   User guides, membership forms, and other user related documents should be made available easily.

8.4 All the addresses of the key library professionals along with their duties and responsibilities should be printed in the user guide/manual.

8.5 Evaluative research studies should be conducted at regular intervals to measure the effectiveness of existing library services and design new library services. Internal staff may do the evaluation or external agencies specialized for such activities may be asked to do the job on turnkey basis.

9. Publicity

9.1 Access to library facilities, resources, and services should be clearly advertised and promoted in the programme guide.

9.2 Library timings should be clearly mentioned in the signboards and other documents of the institution.

10. Library Education

10.1 To enable the initiation of an academic professional specialization in distance learning library services, Universities should include in their Master's curriculum, an optional special paper on Distance Librarianship.

10.2 Continuing professional development programmes of short duration on all areas of Distance Librarianship should be conducted at regular intervals by professional associations and library schools.

Implementation

To implement the guidelines in its spirit at the national level, the Indian Library Association may consider entering into Memorandum of Understanding with the Distance Education Council, which is the national body for coordination and monitoring of Distance Education in India.

Members of the Committee

Dr. Neela Jagannathan Librarian & Information Officer Indira Gandhi National Open University, Maidan Garhi New Delhi 110 068	Chairperson
Dr. Ashu Shokeen Reader in Library and Information Science Kurukshetra University Kurukshetra 136119	Member
Dr. Uma Knajilal Reader in Library and Information Science Indira Gandhi National Open University, Maidan Garhi New Delhi 110 068	Member
Dr. Dinesh K. Gupta Lecturer in Library and Information Science Kota Open University Rawatbhata Road, Akhelgarh Kota 324 010	Member
Dr. G. Sujata Deputy Librarian Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Prof. G. Ram Reddy Marg Road no. 46. Jubilee Hills Hyderabad 500 033	Member
Ms. Sushma Paudwal Deputy Librarian SNDT Women's University Branch Library Sir Vithaldas Vidya Vihar Juhu Road, Santacruz (West) Mumbai 400 049	Member
Dr. Sanjaya Mishra Senior Lecturer in Distance Education Indira Gandhi National Open University, Maidan Garhi New Delhi 110 068	Convener

Distance Education Council

Distance Education Council (DEC) is established under Statute 28 of IGNOU, under Section 25 of IGNOU Act, 1985. The DEC became operational in 1992. Its mandate is to function as an apex body of distance education in India for the promotion, maintenance of standards and coordination of open and distance education in India. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) and the Programme of Action (POA, 1992) also give stress to the role of the DEC.

Objectives

The specific objectives of DEC are to:

- Promote the Open and Distance Education system in the country;
- Coordinate the Open and Distance Education system in the country; and
- Ensure the maintenance of standards in the education provisions made by the Open and Distance Education.

Contact Address
The **DIRECTOR**
Distance Education Council
Indira Gandhi National Open University
Maidan Garhi,
New Delhi-110068
India