

Status of Library and Resource Centre (LARC) and its Activities Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University

Madhukar Shewale

Introduction

The Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) came into existence in July 1989 through Act XX (1989) of the Maharashtra State Legislature. Established to provide quality education through distance mode it is trying to create a distinct identity in the Indian Open education scenario. With its goal of becoming a 'Mass varsity', its emphasis has been on Vocational, Technical, Professional as well as general education programmes.

Objectives of the university

The major objectives of the University are:

- To make higher, vocational and technical education available to the large section of the population.
- To give special attention to the needs of disadvantaged groups, in particular people in the rural areas and women.
- To relate all courses to the developmental needs of individuals, institutions and the State
- To provide innovative, flexible and open systems of education by using distance teaching methodology and by applying modern communication technologies to education
- To provide continuing adult and extension education. Special attention is to be given to retraining adults in new skills to enable them to adjust to a changing technological environment.
- To provide post-graduate studies and research opportunities in all fields of knowledge, especially in Educational Technology, Distance education, and Development Communication.

YCMOU is responsible to provide educational opportunities at State level through Open and Distance mode. The University is committed to becoming self-sufficient in operational costs, which today seems rather difficult. It develops linkages so as to become instrumental in developmental and transformational process of the society around.

Academic programmes

Academic programmes of YCMOU are broadly classified as general programmes, technical programmes, professional/vocational programmes and research programmes. These programmes are not only knowledge oriented but also skill-oriented. The University has 60 academic programmes and more than 250 courses. YCMOU has introduced some of the programmes in the field of Agriculture Science like Floriculture, Horticulture, Fruit Production, Gardening, Vegetable Production, etc. It is the only Open University offering programmes in Agriculture and Agriculture extension.

Organizational structure

The organizational structure of YCMOU is divided into two important areas viz. Development and Operation. The schools of studies have major role of designing curriculum and developing learning material. The Divisions and other Centres facilitate in distribution of the learning materials and management of Students Services. These services include Admission, Evaluation, Academic Counselling and Library Services.

Regional and study centres

YCMOU has developed a three-tier system having Headquarter, Regional Centres and Study Centres for the delivery of different programmes in the State of Maharashtra. It has a network of 8 Regional Centres and 1451 Study Centres. The Study Centres have not only been a medium of transmission of information and instructional materials to the students, but, have also been an effective means of offering academic counselling to distance learners through the planned contact sessions. These sessions are conducted on Saturday, Sunday or on holidays as per the convenience of students and counsellors. The counsellors are experienced teachers at these institutions or are retired teachers living in and around the town. They provide instructional support, guidance and counselling. There are 4521 counsellors offering their services for about 60 programmes throughout the State of Maharashtra. Apart from this, each Study Centre has a coordinator and administrative staff working on honorarium basis.

Library and Resource Centre (LARC)

The Library and Resource Centre (LARC) is playing an important role in fulfilling the objectives of YCMOU. The functions of LARC are to:

- support academic activities of in-house academics and outside experts by providing information sources for the development of learning material;
- support reference and information needs of post-graduate, Research students and students of job-oriented and Agriculture programmes of YCMOU by creating appropriate facilities at the Headquarters as well as post-graduate and research study centres.
- provide documents and comprehensive reference and information services in the area of Open and Distance Education for other Distance Education Institutes in the State.
- provide assistance to Co-ordinators of Library and Information Science Programmes (B.Lib. and M.Lib.) of the University.

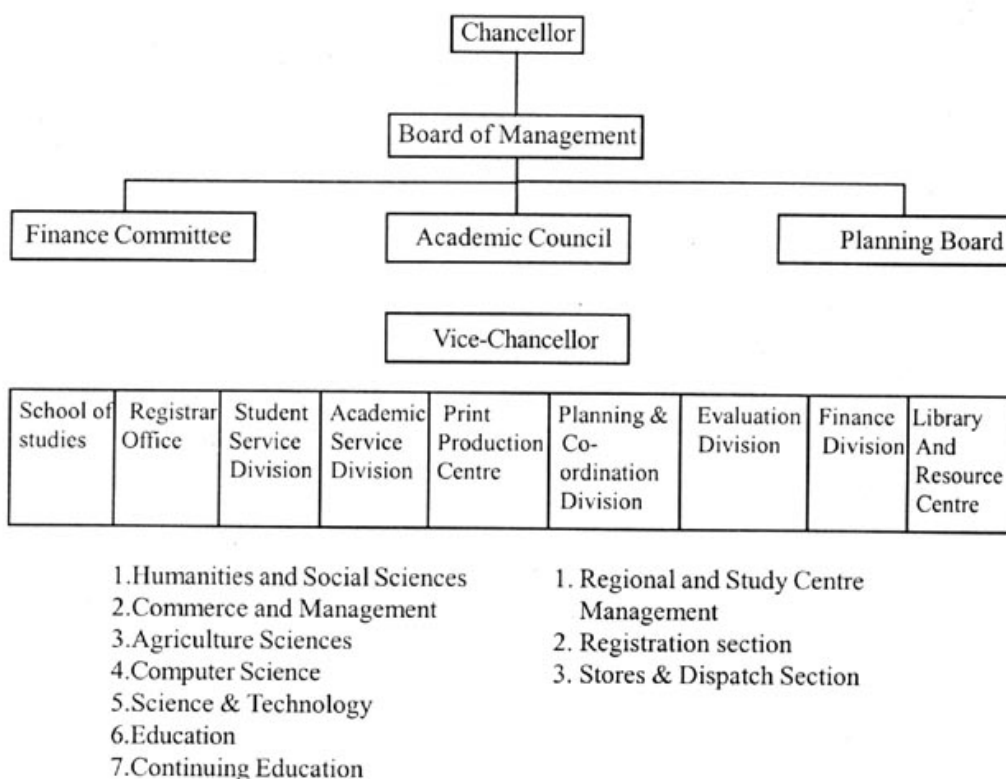


Figure 5.1: The flow chart of organizational structure of the university

LARC resources

In order to fulfil these objectives, the University has developed a collection of printed and non-conventional materials like, Audio, Video, CBTs, CD-ROMs and specially prepared course materials for distance learners (See Table 5.1)

Collection development procedure

The collection development policy for LARC has been introduced in view of programmes offered by the University. The titles required for course development, suggested titles for reading and Distance Education material are the main criteria for collection development.

Academics and the Library personnel share the responsibility for selection of reading material. Many times the titles suggested by outside experts, course writers, scriptwriters and counsellors are taken into consideration. For the purpose of selection, Librarian and the Academics visit bookshops, exhibitions on regular basis. Many times the vendors are asked to hold exhibitions of books in various disciplines at the site. The reading materials are also selected with the help of various bibliographical tools, publishers catalogues, publishers' new arrival announcements, pre-publication jackets, select bibliographies and Book reviews and so on.

Table 5.1: Stock of library materials

Sr. No.	Resource	Number
1.	Printed Books	21,000
2.	Periodicals	250
3.	Audio Cassettes	534
4.	Video Cassettes	537
5.	CBT Packages & CD-ROM	700
6.	Slides	300
7.	Thesis & Project Reports	6000
8.	Photographs	10000
9.	Reports	300
10.	Archival Material	2000

Services offered

At present the Library and Resource Centre of YCMOU offers following services to its users

- Lending services
- Reading services
- User services
- Inter-Library Loan Services
- Reprographic services
- Bibliographic services
- Documentation services
- Current Awareness services
- Selective Dissemination of Information
- Facilities for viewing and listening audio/video and other learning materials

Out of above-mentioned services, the post-graduate and research programmes Study Centres of YCMOU offer Lending and Reading services at their respective places. Post-graduate and research students regularly visit the central library to refer Thesis and Project Reports for their research work. LARC has maintained Newspaper clippings in the area of Education and Distance Education. Also one of the major things added in the syllabus of B.Lib programme of YCMOU is the collection of Newspaper clippings by students. LARC offers their services to student community.

The schools of respective disciplines, Divisions and Centres are connected with LAN. The Current Awareness Service and Selective Dissemination of Information Service offered through LAN by scanning the content page of journals, and putting new arrival list and jacket are provided

to the users. Bibliographies are also prepared on various subjects, which are available to the users in the print format. Recently University has started On-line counselling for few programmes and library is participating in these discussion forums for the related queries. LARC is having section of multi-media resources, which include Audios / Videos, CBTs, CD-ROMs, Slides etc. It has an agreement for viewing such material. The students and staff (users) need professional assistance and support in terms of using equipments and facilities in the library. The students also need guidance regarding suitability of material to support their study, assistance in planning their learning and developing study skills for independent learning. The LARC has institutional membership like Asiatic Society Library, Mumbai, British Council Library, Pune, to cater to the needs of users. It has taken institutional membership of INFLIBNET and DELNET to offer their services to the staff and Distance Learners.

The University publishes the quarterly journal 'Dnyangangotri' to make aware of the current developments in the field of 'Library and Information Science', which includes articles in various disciplines, abstracts from the leading journals, information about useful websites, book-reviews etc. This is another type of library service being provided to the Distance Learners.

Problems faced

Recently library has shifted to the new premises having ample space to store print as well as non-print materials. The work of interior fittings is in progress and will include Circulation Counter, Periodical display, Special corner of Distance Education publications, and Yashwantrao Chavan Special collection, Librarian's office, Technical section, Multi-media learning center, Reading room and so on. Most of the research and post-graduate students visit the library for research work, for their urgent requirements. Due to lack of appropriate furniture, it becomes difficult to provide effective services to the users.

Library services provided by LARC of YCMOU are certainly very cost effective for providing information resources to student in ODL, but they often lack proper funding. It is felt that while planning resources, Library services may be given a priority.

Another important factor is inadequate staff. While providing effective library services, there is an urgent need of professionally qualified and service minded staff to satisfy the users' demand.

Library automation

LARC started its automation programme in 1992. In order to computerise the functions of library the DOS based in-house software was developed to maintain its database. It was somewhat operational for acquisitions, cataloguing, circulation, serials control and housekeeping and not useful for supported network.

Recently 'SOUL' software developed by INFLIBNET Centre of University Grants Commission (UGC) has been installed and data stored in old software has been transported to it. The SOUL software is very user friendly and it satisfies the need of both the staff and users. The 'SOUL' software is also provided free of cost to all the MLIS Study Centres as a part of syllabus for IT component.

Future plans

Taking into consideration requirements of the programmes developed by the YCMOU and the network of study Centre, following are the future plans.

- Development of YCMOU Library website.
- Participation in various discussion forums as some of the schools already started on-line counselling for their programmes.
- Providing students an access to textbooks developed in electronic format by YCMOU.
- Providing access to the Abstracts of Thesis/Dissertations in electronic format to students.
- Participation in various networks and make available its services to distance learners.
- Development of multi-media learning Centre with well equipped resources and instruments.
- Rendering Reference and Information Services through various communication mediums.
- Development and maintenance of libraries at the Regional Centres of YCMOU.
- Establishment of YCMOU corner in all public and college libraries in the State of Maharashtra.
- Making agreement with the institutions in which the YCMOU Study Centres are operational, regarding provision of lending and other library service with some financial assistance and provision of books from the Central library.
- Developing of 'Information Package' for Study Centre counsellors, which is supportive and useful for their contact session.
- Creating 'Information Packages' for job-oriented programmes like Agriculture and technical programmes of the Continuing Education School.

Conclusion

The Open University Central Library has a big responsibility of providing academic support to academics of the Open University as well as to Study Centres also. It has to act as a Resource Centre having important functions of receiving literature, storing and supplying to the needy persons. Many times it happens that the Study Centre Counsellors do not get relevant literature for upgrading their information level. In that case the LARC can play an important role of supplying such literature to Study Centres. It may be done through postal services, Internet or through agencies as and when needed. For this purpose, the YCMOU has to take necessary steps for managing finance and manpower, skilled enough for accepting this big responsibility.

Acknowledgement

I am extremely grateful to Professor Ashok Pradhan, Vice Chancellor, YCMOU for encouraging and allowing me to present this paper for the AAOU Pre-Conference Seminar. I also thank Prof. Manoj Killedar and Dr. Satish Rastogi who have given valuable inputs to this paper.

References

- Jolliffe, Alan., Ritter, Jonathan, and Stevens, David. (2001). *The On-Line learning Handbook: Developing and using web-Based Learning*. London: Kogan Page.
- Peter Brophy, Shelagh Fisher and Zoe Clarke (eds.) (2000) *Libraries without walls 3: The delivery of library services to distant users*. London: Library Association Publishing.

68 Shewale

- Elizabeth F. Watson and Neela Jagannathan, (eds) (1996) *Library services to distance learners in the commonwealth: A reader*. Vancouver: The Commonwealth of Learning.
- G. Ram Reddy, (ed) (1998) *Open universities: The ivory towers thrown open*. Bangalore. Sterling Publishers Private Limited.
- Perry, Walter.(1976). *Open University: a personal account by the First Vice-Chancellor*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Simpson, Ormond.(2000). *Supporting students in Open and Distance Learning*. London: Kogan Page.
- Keegan, D.(ed) (1993). *Theoretical principles of distance education*, London, Routledge.
- YCMOU (1998), *Study Centre Management Booklet*. Nashik: YCMOU
- YCMOU (1999), *Annual Report*. Nashik: YCMOU.
- YCMOU (1999), *About YCMOU*. Nashik: YCMOU.
- YCMOU (1999), *Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University: Handbook 1998-99*. Nashik: YCMOU.