

Library Services to Distance Learners: A Study of Kota Open University

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Introduction

The idea of establishing an Open University in the state of Rajasthan goes back to the UGC Committee set up to study the working of the erstwhile Institute of Correspondence Studies and Continuing Education, University of Rajasthan Jaipur 1985. Also known as Prof. G. Ram Reddy committee, it noted with satisfaction the existing state of the affairs and opined that this could eventually grow into an open university. Thereafter, the state officials and educational experts held a series of preparatory meeting in Rajasthan with the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). The ordinance was subsequently enacted by the state legislature as the Kota Open University Act, 1987. The Kota Open University was established on July 23, 1987 as part of the Open University network in the country (art. 4(iv) of the Kota Open University Act (KOU, 1990:1).

In order to strengthen and achieve better co-ordination of the vast scattered resources of distance education in the state, the Government of Rajasthan decided to merge the assets of the erstwhile Institute of Correspondence Studies and Continuing Education, Jaipur and the College of Correspondence Studies, Udaipur.

The UGC accorded recognition to the University under 12(b) in 1989 and found the University as fit to receive all kinds of assistance / grant including central assistance for instructional development.

Objectives

The objectives of the University are much similar to the objectives of all other major open universities of the world. This University mainly draws its inspirations from Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and the United Kingdom Open University (UKOU).

The broad spectrum of objectives set forth for itself by the University are most aptly summed up by Article 4 of the Act. Article 4, while articulating mechanisms for dissemination of education and knowledge in the state, seeks to emphasise the following functions:

- to provide for instructions and research in such branches of knowledge, technology, vocational and profession as the University may deem necessary or proper;
- to prescribe courses of study for degrees, diplomas, certificates or any other purpose;
- to hold examinations and confer degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic programmes;
- to determine the manner of distance education system so as to organise academic programmes;
- to associate with other universities and institutions of learning especially with the IGNOU in order to have there with inter-locking system in the field of distance education;
- to institute and award fellowships and prizes;
- to establish and maintain Regional Centres and Study Centres;
- to give recognition to examinations, studies and activities conducted by other universities, institutions, academic bodies and organisations; and
- to perform all such functions which are necessary for and incidental to achieving the aims and objects of the University.

Organizational structure

The Governor of Rajasthan is the Chancellor of the University. The Board of Management, Academic Council, Planning Board and Finance Committee are the important University bodies.

The Vice-Chancellor, Directors, Registrar and Finance Officer are the main officers of the University. Competent academics selected from all over the country provide academic services related to programme design, development and implementation. The structure aspires to provide a working arrangement that seeks to establish firm central control of a fully integrated operation.

Programmes offered

Certificate programmes

1. Certificate Course in Food and Nutrition (CFN)
2. Computer Awareness and Training Programme for Beginners (CATPB)

Diploma programmes

3. Diploma in Computer in Office Management (DCO)
4. Diploma in Library and Information Science (DLS)
5. Diploma Course in Culture and Tourism (DCCT)
6. Diploma in Nutrition and Health Education (DNHE)
7. Diploma in Tourism and Hotel Management (DTHM)

P.G. diploma programmes

8. P.G. Diploma in Human Resource Management (PGDHRM)
9. P.G. Diploma in Marketing Management (PGDMM)
10. P.G. Diploma in Financial Management (PGDFM)
11. P.G. Diploma in Labour Laws Industrial Relations and Personnel Management (PGDLL)

Undergraduate degree programmes

12. Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)
13. Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com)
14. Bachelor Degree in Journalism and Mass Communication (BJMC)
15. Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.)

Postgraduate degree programmes

16. Master of Business Administration (MBA)
17. Master Degree in Journalism and Mass Communication (MJMC)
18. M.A. Economics
19. M.A. History
20. M.A. Political Science

Research programme

21. Ph.D.: This facility is available in the disciplines/faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences; Commerce and Management, Science and Technology and Education.

The library system

The University started its Central Library during the year 1987-88, but its actual functioning started in July 1988. The library system of Kota Open University comprises the Central Library at the headquarters; six regional centre libraries and 43 study centre libraries. The library system of KOU is being studied in two parts (a) headquarters' Central Library and (b) libraries at the Regional Centres and the Study Centres. The Central Library caters to the needs of the University's teaching and non-teaching staff, councellors/tutors, research scholars, etc.; whereas libraries at RCs and SCs are to fulfil the needs of distance learners and resident counsellors/tutors.

The central library

Management: The library is managed / administrated by the Officer In-charge with the assistance of Assistant Librarian and other supporting staff.

As per the statute of the Kota Open University (1987) (15) (I), there is a Library Committee which advises the librarian for smooth functioning and development of the library services. The constitution of the library committee is as under:

1. One Director/Professor to be nominated by the Vice-Chancellor;
2. One Director to be nominated by the Vice-Chancellor;
3. One Director of the Regional Centre to be nominated by the Vice-Chancellor by seniority;
4. One Professor of the University to be nominated by the Vice-Chancellor by seniority;
5. One Associate Professor to be nominated by the Vice-Chancellor by seniority;
6. One Assistant Professor to be nominated by the Vice-Chancellor;
7. One nominee of the Academic Council;
8. Finance Officer (ex-officio);
9. Registrar or his nominee not below the rank of Assistant Registrar; and
10. Librarian - Secretary.

The terms of reference of committee are as under:

- to consider the appropriate nature of the services the library should provide;
- to advise the librarian of user needs and proposed library developments;
- to advise the librarian on the estimates and the allocation of library funds; and
- to approve the librarian's Annual Report to the Vice-Chancellor.

The modes of operation of the committee are as follows:

- the committee shall meet as and when required but not less than two times in a year;
- the senior most member will be nominated as the chairman by the Vice-Chancellor; and
- the term of the nominated members shall be two years.

Library sub-committee

The library committee adopted a procedure of appointing two Sub-Committees, namely (a) Library Sub-Committee for Central Library and (b) Library Sub-Committee for Regional Services. The functions of the Library Sub-Committee are not prescribed as such, but from the decisions taken during various meetings of these committees, the following functions can be drawn:

- to allocate/ re-allocate budget for the purchase of books and journals in various subjects;
- to draw a broad purchase policy for the library system;
- to advise the librarian on matters where there is a need; and
- to work and advise on the matters as referred to by the library committee.

The number of members in these committees is 5-6, but sometimes all subject heads are invited as special members to attend the meetings of this committee, particularly when the budget is distributed among various subjects. There is no fixed schedule for conducting the meeting of this committee. The committee meets as and when there is a need.

Collection development

Acquisition policies are determined by the range of programmes being offered, the level of courses being delivered, financial allocation for stock acquisition, enrollment numbers, etc.

Selection of material is a pre-requisite for the acquisition of materials. Book-selection determines the quality of the collection. Selection of information sources is the most important and

indispensable function of the library. Financial resources play a vital role in selection procedures in KOU. The subject wise allocation of funds is done in the meeting of the library sub-committee and the faculty members select the information sources i.e. books and journals accordingly.

Selection of information sources is the joint responsibility of the faculty members and the library professionals. Selection of information sources includes: publishers catalogue, pre-publication jackets, visits to major book shops, book fairs and exhibitions, etc.

As the books are selected, library staff follow necessary procedure to procure document in the Central Library. Generally the Central Library purchases only one copy of each selected title within the allotted budget in each subject.

The library in general aspires to procure books on all areas, however emphasis is generally on books relevant to the courses being offered or courses under preparation. In addition, the Central Library has a useful collection of books on distance education as a discipline.

As far as the size of collection is concerned, the central library was fortunate to start with a big collection of more than twenty thousand books received from the Institute of Correspondence Studies, Jaipur and College of Correspondence Studies, Udaipur. The library has more than doubled this number since 1987. At present the Central Library has 52,635 books, 255 thesis and dissertations, 1,200 bound volumes previous years journals, 55 video cassettes, 35 audio cassettes. Library subscribes 158 foreign and national journals and magazines.

The Central Library follows Colon Classification 6th edition and Classified Catalogue Code for the purpose of classifying and cataloguing of documents, respectively.

Human resource

The efficiency, usefulness or popularity of a library is measured neither by the size of the building, nor by the large collection, but by the efficiency of library staff which is really the creator and mentor of an efficient and effective library system. At present Central Library has only three professional staff. viz. one Assistant Librarian, one Senior Technical Assistant and one Junior Technical Assistant. Besides four non-technical staff and three peons are working in the library. The position of University Librarian is still vacant.

The library can be defined as understaffed and there is a pressing need for recruiting more trained staff for providing useful services. In the absence of such staff the library is not able to provide the best services. Even the available resources are not optionally used.

Library services to the users of the central library

The prime objective of collection, storage, and organisation of information in the library is to facilitate the academic community to exploit and harness the resources of the library fully. Effective library services make a library more functional to deliver document or furnish information at the right time and in the right manner to the right user.

Central Library is providing the following routine services to the users.

- reading services;
- lending services;

- reprographic services;
- viewing and listening to audio-visual material; and
- reference and information services.

There is a great demand from users to provide the following services as well:

- newspaper clipping services;
- indexing and abstracting services;
- current awareness services;
- selective dissemination of information; and
- bibliographic and documentation services.

The above mentioned specialised service will be provided when the library is shifted from current residential flats to the new library building which is under construction. The new library building will provide the space to arrange the entire collection in helpful sequence.

Problems faced by the central library

There are some problems to the successful development of library services to users faced by the Central Library; these include (among others):

- The University has no separate library building and the library is presently housed in residential flats of the University which does not fulfill the requirement of a good functional building of the university library. Due to lack of space, the growth, the use as well as the functions of the library are adversely affected.
- The library budget is inadequate compared to the demands for documents by users. In addition, the prices of documents are increasing and therefore the ability of the budget to meet the growing demands is shrinking.
- The professional staff plays a vital role in smooth functioning of library but the university has inadequate level of professional staff. The small team of committed and dedicated staff is hard pressed to satisfy user demands. Workload on staff is increasing day by day. As a result, library staff is unable to function effectively and efficiently.

Libraries at the regional centres (RCs) and study centres (SCs)

Libraries at the RCs and SCs have a major role in student support services. As mentioned above the Kota Open University has three types of libraries, namely, at the headquarters. The Central Library, libraries at the RCs; and libraries at the SCs. Libraries at RCs and SCs are housed in the premises allocated for the Regional/Study Centre purposes.

Organisation and management

The Central Library has the responsibility of providing library and information services to distance learners through its libraries at RCs and SCs. There is a Library Sub-Committee known as Library Sub-Committee for Regional Services for the management of these libraries.

The composition of the Library Sub-Committee for Regional Services is as under:

- | | |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Director (Regional Services) | - Convenor |
| 2. Two Regional Directors | - Member |
| 3. One Asst. Professor | - Member |
| 4. One Coordinator of the study centre | - Member |
| 5. Librarian | - Member-Secretary |

There is no fixed schedule to conduct the meeting of this Sub-Committee. Meeting of the same takes place as and when the need arises.

Collection management

There are two ways through which Regional Centres' libraries acquire documents.

- the Central Library procures the documents and sends to RCs
- and SCs as recommended by the faculty members.

The Regional Directors also procure documents as suggested by the faculty members and the tutors and counsellors.

Technical processing (i.e. accessioning, classification, and cataloguing) is done by the Regional Centres themselves. The library staff of the Regional Centre may seek guidance from the professional staff of the Central Library if considered necessary. The part-time librarian at the Study Centre maintains proper record of the library services.

Library and information services to the users of the RCs and SCs

At present the libraries of RCs and SCs provide the following services to the distance learners:

- reading services;
- reference and information services;
- listening to audio materials; and
- viewing to visual materials.

The Regional Centres are well equipped with modern electronic and communication equipments such as telephone, fax, E-mail, computers, television, photocopiers and so on. With the help of these facilities they provide effective library and information services.

Regional Centres' libraries remain open during the office hours, whereas Study Centres' libraries works on week end and remain open during counselling/tutoring sessions.

The libraries of RCs and SCs are housed mainly with study materials, textbooks, audio visual cassettes etc. Some study centres also have a TV set, a VCP and audio cassette players, etc.

An agenda for action

The role of the library is central in all types of education, conventional mode as well as distance

mode. Hence, it is necessary to provide a good deal of planning and organisation of library and information services from the headquarters level at the top to the study centre level at the grass root level in an Open University. It is the responsibility of the LIS professionals to provide right library and information services to right user at the appropriate time. Library system of the Kota Open University should seriously consider the following agenda for action for the development of library and information services.

Information technology

Today we are living in the age of Information Society and the role of IT is pivotal in providing library and information services. But at Kota Open University use of IT in library is at its embryonic state. Recently Distance Education Council (DEC) has provided Rs.5,00,000/- or 5.00 lacs for library computerisation and we are planning to computerise our library services in the newly constructed library building.

The Computerisation and Networking plan of KOU's library system will include the following:

- To enter data of entire library collection in appropriate library software packages.
- To connect Regional Centre's libraries located at Ajmer, Bikaner, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Kota, and Udaipur with the headquarter's Centre Library through networking
- To connect Study Centre's libraries located at different colleges with the headquarters' Central Library and libraries of the Regional Centres.
- To link the library system with the Internet and suitable existing system and Networks in the Country, Such as INFLIBNET, NICNET, DELNET, the proposed OPENET; etc.

Satellite collection

Some of the distance teaching institutions have an arrangement with public libraries for the establishment of Library Corners for Distance Learners (LCDL) in their libraries. These collections are based on the needs of distance students who can go to these public libraries and use their collections. Some time in future KOU Library can also introduce such type of facilities with the collaboration of public libraries located in different parts of Rajasthan.

Multimedia

The KOU's library system mainly consists of printed books and inadequate systematic efforts have been made to develop non-print materials in the collection. The apparatuses like TV, VCP, microfilm reader are available in the library, but due to lack of audio visual cassettes, they are not frequently used. Now we are in the process of procuring a considerable amount of audio visual cassettes from several agencies. We are also planning to develop a well-equipped multimedia collection in various physical formats such as compact discs, video discs, CD-ROMs, computer databases, microforms, films, film strips, slides and so on.

Interlibrary cooperation

The use of the resources of one library to satisfy the information needs of another is the fundamental principle of Inter-library loan. Distance education forces institutions to examine other aspects of inter-library cooperation with a view to satisfying student information needs. This service is possible through the resource sharing arrangements with the other kinds of libraries, namely public libraries, academic libraries, special libraries and information centres. The KOU's library system has to consider to provide these facilities to distance learners in future.

Information literacy

Learning depends not only on classroom instruction and dialogue but also on the student's ability to search and analyse information.

During the past few years there has been a strong focus on the need for a flexible learning for students to develop information literacy skills. Information literacy is generally understood to include... the ability to locate, evaluate, manage and use information from a range of sources for problem solving, decision making and research (Bruce and Candy 1995: 245).

The ultimate goal of the KOU's library system is to enhance student's ability to retrieve required information. Knowing this reality we are planning to implement this programme in future through the following ways:

- preparing and disseminating printed guides, help sheets and handbooks;
- introducing a special information literacy unit as an integral part in each and every programme;
- and
- organising special information literacy workshops.

Finance

Financial resources form an essential input for service planning and execution of any library.

Various committees and commissions have recommended that the library should receive six percent of the University's total budget, which in an Open University is urgently required due to the nature of services needed to be rendered to users at various levels. The KOU library system has not followed the norm for many preceding years. Thus budgetary allocation to the library services should be enhanced to the extent of 6 percent of the total budget of the University and in the same ratio at the SCs and the RCs level.

Training of manpower

Introduction of new technologies in library will demand learning of skills by the staff to handle these gadgets. Besides this our system provides multiple services to different strata of readers viz. core faculty, part-time faculty, distance learners etc. To cater to these diverse clientele our staff needs to be informed about the resources and trained in handling such information. The staff we hire at the study centres are not trained to provide adequate services to different types of users. Keeping this in view a series of training programmers should be organised for the staff

of library system by the STRIDE of this University. The content of this training programme may cover use and handling of IT as well as distance librarianship.

Personnel

Implementation of the above change will largely depend upon the professional staff of the library. It is strongly suggested that vacant post of the University librarian should be filled up at the earliest and some new posts viz., Dy. Librarian, Documentation Officer, Information Scientist, Programmer and other supporting technical staff should be created and duly filled up. At least one post of library professional staff may also be created for each RC.

Conclusion

Library support is an integral part of quality education and a vital service that should be available to all distance learners. While many institutions throughout the world which are offering distance education programmes attempt to provide pertinent library services, students in developing countries are often hampered by the unavailability of such basics as electricity in their homes, poor telecommunications and postal services and inadequately funded and limited library services. Nevertheless, it remains the responsibility of the home institution to provide, for the library needs of its students with best of its capabilities.

It is essential for Distance librarians to find new and innovative methods to provide the enumerated services. They need to exhibit more dynamism, be more responsive to their clients, needs and become more involved at many levels for actively pursuing the institutional objectives.

Future developments involve the assessment and implementation of appropriate and widely accepted technologies, the extenuation of remote access to information services and the encouragement of the electronic highway as an essential tool for all students.

The general requirements of library services for distance learners are discussed in guidelines produced by several national library bodies. KOU must adopt the guidelines issued by Indian Library Association for effective library services.

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