INFRASTRUCTURE AND USE OF RESOURCES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION:
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KARNATAKA STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The vital contribution of distance education libraries to social capital and to the education and economic development of communities is recognized across the developed world. The purpose of this study is to conduct a review of the current library infrastructure and use of resources in Karnataka State Open University library to determine a sustainable library infrastructure model that enables Council to service the needs of its community.

Keywords: Infrastructure, Resources, Distance Education, Karnataka State Open University.

Introduction

The vital contribution of distance education libraries to social capital and to the education and economic development of communities is recognized across the developed world. The purpose of this study is to conduct a review of the current library infrastructure and use of resources in Karnataka State Open University library to determine a sustainable library infrastructure model that enables Council to service the needs of its community.

Education can be looked upon as a bridge between the past and the future. The task of the educator is to keep the continuity, to deliver the knowledge and wisdom of the past to the learners and to encourage them to build new knowledge upon that. Young people often do not want to know anything about the past because they see the future as theirs. They want to move on, discover something new regardless of the past. In the strain between these two forces a moderate development can occur. Distance education system highly suits the individual learner studying independently. High level of motivation amongst the learners is important and is a key reason why it is aimed primarily at adults. Nevertheless, distance education provision does exist in some countries for school-age children unable (e.g., for geographical or health reasons) to attend classes. The range of distance education situations and courses is now so diverse that it is impossible to make generalizations about study patterns and strategies adopted by learners. Even different students following the same course in the same institution will adopt and develop different approaches, according to their own
tastes and interests. However, it is fair to say that in a large number of cases, the majority of the learner's time is taken up by individual study of specially prepared printed materials. Students provided with sets of learning objectives and related self-assessment questions and exercises, with model answers, against which they can check their understanding and progress is important.

Tools and Resources of Distance Education

Although the old ways of delivering distance education with correspondence and radio/TV broadcasts are still in practice, computer based technologies are gaining immense popularity between the educators and students. A wide range of options is available to distance educators, including both the traditional as well as the recent technologies. They fall into four major categories:

1. Voice: Instructional audio tools include interactive technologies of telephone and audio-conferencing.

2. Video: Instructional video tools include still images as slides, pre-produced moving images (E.g., film, videotapes), and real-time moving images combined with audio-conferencing (one-way or two-way video with two-way audio)

3. Data: computers send and receive information electronically. For this reason, the term “data” is used to describe this broad category of instructional tools.

4. Print: A foundational element of distance education programs and the basic form which all other delivery systems have evolved. Various print formats are available including: textbooks, study guides, Workbooks, course syllabi and case studies.

Literature Review

Stasch (1994) sought to determine the information sources used by students when campus library in not available. Author has found that students tend to influenced by convenience rather than content and that while undergraduates are inclined to find material in academic libraries, home collections and book stores, graduate students use academic libraries, home collections and workplace libraries. Women are more inclined to rely on their friends as sources of materials then men.

Lists and describes the electronic library services available, including: video library services; database services (library database, commercial databases); selective dissemination of information (SDI); online periodicals access; retrospective database search services; user education programs and professional training courses.

According to Jeevan, V. K. J. (2006) Quality is described in many different ways, something that is unique and of a higher standard than other similar products or services and has to be always aimed at satisfying expectations and demands of user through constant monitoring and continuous improvement. Library is more like a service institution which generates very little money out of its service and often has very poor infrastructure, resources and less number of competent manpower. While other researchers in the area of service quality have focused their qualitative inquiries upon the providers of service. However such serious and continuous studies in estimating service quality in libraries are yet to pickup in our country. In the absence of such studies, at best what we can do is to follow up the tool formulated in LibQUAL to have an empirical estimate of where our libraries stand or how best the existing state of affairs can be improved by resorting to refined practices. Typically for a library in the country, time, cost, availability and extensibility may be vital parameters to ensure and judge quality in services, subject to the limitations on infrastructure in terms of space, collection, computer and manpower. Some strategies to maintain service quality in different sections in a library such as acquisition, processing, circulation, automation, electronic information services are elaborated with a checklist to quantify service quality out of the turn-around time for various operations and services. The study ends by identifying some of the problems in ensuring qualitative services such as funds, support, staff, infrastructure, collection, policy, priority etc.

Need for the Study

In this context, the libraries - the reservoirs of knowledge and the centers of learning - have greater responsibility in providing the right information to the right user, at the right time in right form so that the information will be put to maximum use and thereby promoting the use of library resources. To achieve this, the libraries / information centers need to be planned and designed based on the needs and requirements of users of libraries. Library professionals all over the world have agreed to the fact that the students of distance education are eligible for equal library services as that of the campus-based students. Members of the distance learning community are entitled to
library services and resources equivalent to those provided for students and faculty in traditional campus settings. It is therefore, essential to study attitudes of readers towards library resources and services. In this context no study has been conducted so far on Karnataka state open university. The study will be of practical importance to librarians. There is a great need for a comprehensive study of Open University library services. The present research study is proved to be significant in assessing the information resources and library services in Karnataka State Open University (KSOU).

**Objectives**

The purpose of this research study is to bring together all the relevant published and unpublished literature, about the libraries functioning in distance education system in the present electronic environment and to find out the preparedness of the libraries to meet the changing situation as to the new media, their acquisition, organization and put them to effective use. In order to identify them the following objectives of the present study have been enlisted:

1. To assess the nature of all types of learners, their changing needs of information sources and types of services required to satisfy them.
2. To identify if any lacunas in the library facilities, services and other infrastructure facilities.
3. To identify the various types of resources available and information services provide by KSOU library.

**Methodology**

The study adopts a combined methodology of theory and fieldwork in order to examine the trends of developments compatible with the prevailing conditions of university libraries. In this context a survey methodology has been adopted in this study supplemented by some field work in the manner of personally interviewing the learners. Structured questionnaire is designed to collect the basic facts required for gathering the data collection and the possible policies and programmes in the Karnataka State Open University Library of Karnataka state.
Data Analysis:

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1: DISTRIBUTION OF QUESTIONNAIRES AMONG THE STUDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certificate course</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>17.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under graduate</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>33.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduate</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>46.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Scholar</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>02.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A well structured questionnaire with specific questions demanding answers on the different aspects of information seeking pattern of learners in Karnataka State Open University and their demographic details was developed. Most of the questions in the questionnaire were provided with multiple answers for selection of the respondents. The data was collected in a systematic manner. They were approached in the places they were available including the contact classes, library etc. the required number of respondents was selected from them. The data collected was entered in MS-Excel then imported into SPSS (Software Package for Social Sciences) for analysis. Here researcher took the sample size is 960 in that certificate course students are 17.19% (165 students), Under Graduate students are 33.33% (i.e. 320 students), Post graduate student sample is 46.88% (450 students) and the Research Scholars are 2.60% in size (25 scholars) in various subjects overall for the current study sample of the size is 960 respondents (100%).

Preferred Sources of Information

The requirement of information was confirmed by majority of students in the sample which has already been reported in the earlier sections. There are many sources of information. Important among them are libraries, personal collection of books, friends, colleagues and the Internet. But everyone will have a preference of his or her own among these sources according to their liking. Even though libraries are store houses of knowledge and are service oriented, many prefer other sources because of their nearness and easy access.

Data from various reports and articles indicate that while the medium used may have changed, information seekers still do not select libraries or librarians as their primary channel for information. The factors that contribute to this situation need through investigation as a lot of funds are spent for establishing libraries and still they remain underutilized. According
to the literature, the traditional sources of information used by the students especially distance learners are personal collection of Books, Libraries, Internet, Friends and Colleagues and the course coordinator. The respondents were asked to rank these sources according to their preference. The data given to Internet resources as a source of information is analyzed in the form of figure.

**Table 2: PREFERRED SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Information</th>
<th>No. of users</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal collection of books</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>20.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Internet resources</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>46.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>10.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public library</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>13.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The course coordinator</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>09.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 1](image-url)

The Internet resources had been given the first place by 450 (46.88%) students. Similarly 193(20.10%) distance learners had given second place to personal collection of books. Friends and public library, course coordinator was the next option considered as a source of information. Libraries are always a major source of information for students. For 125(13.02%) of distance learners, Public libraries were their first sources of information. The low percentage of students making their decision in favor of libraries is a matter of great concern when the importance of libraries set up is considered. The library and information services in the university are negligible in Karnataka. No considerable steps are being taken to improve this situation. At graduation level also the orientation towards libraries is insignificant. Hence the students are not aware of the potential of libraries. This is the reason for the low data for library as a source of information. The last option in the group of information sources was course coordinator. For each course there is a course coordinator.
appointed by the university which conducts the course. Such course coordinator is a faculty member and a subject expert. During the pilot study, students have specified that they could contact the course coordinator whenever they had some doubts. So this option was included in the questionnaire among the sources of information.

Among 960 students 97(10.10%) learners consider friends as their first sources of information. But 95(9.90%) students depend with their course coordinator as main sources of information. On the basis of this it can be generalized that the coordinator has very little role to play as a source of information to the students of distance learning. The students can meet them during their contact classes which are conducted only for a very limited period of time during an academic year. Later on only those distance learners who are residing very near to the distance learning centers could go and meet the coordinator.

Data for all the five sources given by the 960 respondents are polled together on a graph and is provided as figure 1. This graph provides a clear comparison.

Study Center in the Residing Area

The Karnataka State Open University conduct distance courses are organizing contact classes in study centers. Personal contact programmes play a very important role in open and distance education. The students are informed and guided about the provision of contact classes at the study center for the programmes for which they have registered in the university. Contact programmes form the base to provide face-to-face tutorial support to the students. They provide a unique opportunity to meet fellow students and the academic counselors. It is here when they attend contact classes they know each other, they socialize, form study groups, exchange notes, discuss difficult topics, share information and learn together. For this reason only open and distance learning system provides contact classes to bring scattered and isolated students together. The role of a teacher in open university setup is different when they perform or acts as a counselor. Here the teacher “must withdraw from the scene as prime performer, focus on learner needs, bring immense patience and tact, provide global overview of the course, restrain from teaching in order to allow learning to take place, counsel rather than teach”. These study centers are either affiliated colleges or other academic institutions.

This section of the study reveals the access to a study center in the residing area of the student and the distance to it. A study center situated at a distance place which requires several hours of journey does not suit a distance learner at all. No specific definition can be
given to residing area but the respondents were asked to consider it as an area around their residence where they can travel in minimum time. Table 20 provides the availability of a study center in their residing area where the contact classes are held.

Table 3: STUDY CENTER IN THE AREA OF RESIDENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>60.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>39.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The numbers of students who had access to a study center in their residing area and who did not have it were slightly equal. Out of 960 respondents 375(39.06%) were having study centers in their residing area. As remaining 585(60.94%) students did not have a study center in their residing. The students have also provided the distance to the study center and the time required for reaching the study center.

**Availability of a Library at the Study Center.**

Whether the students are already getting library and information services at the study centers was ascertained through a question. The data is provided as table 23. The table reveals the disappointing state of affairs in the case of library services to distance learners at the study centers.

Table 4: AVAILABILITY OF A LIBRARY AT THE STUDY CENTER.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>71.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>28.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 275 (28.65%) students out of the sample of 960 said that they were getting library services at the study center. The majority 685(71.35%) students out of 960 are not getting the library services at the study centers. The reason for this opinion is that libraries in the study centers are having less number of collections of resources and services.
Comfortable Reading Room

A calm and quiet place to read and to do research work is essential in any library. The students of regular courses in colleges can go and make use of the reading rooms in their college’s library. But the distance learners have to depend on facilities they may get at the study center or other local libraries. The next facility studied was reading room. The ranking provided by the students was analyzed in figure 2.

Figure 2

The analysis shows that 412(42.9%) percent of the respondents expressed that they needed a calm and quiet place in the library for their reading and research work. The main reason could be that they were not in a position to go frequently to the university and make use of this facility. The value of rank correlation coefficient calculated for this variable taking as a grouping of variable.

Photocopying Service

A Library cannot hold copies of costly and reference books required for all the students attached to that university, student of distance learning are not in a position to visit the library frequently for reference and reading. The reserve materials recommended by the faculty and reference volumes of the library are not issued out to the students for use at home. All these circumstances force the students to take photocopy of the material they need. Hence photocopying facility becomes a desirable amenity at a library. If photocopying facility is available at the library, a distance learner can make use of their limited time, the learner spends at the library for exhaustive and comprehensive research. The student can take copies of the relevant materials for leisurely reading. The result of analysis is provided in figure 3.
Among 960 respondents 383 (39.9%) respondents wanted this facility in the library. The percentage of need of photocopying services was more. The reason may be that they can not travel frequently to the central library.

The ranking for photocopying facility was then analyzed and the result is presented as figure 3. Among the 960 students 230 (24%) felt that more required the photocopying service at the central library. They were only 145 (15%) out of total 960 students felt less requirement of photocopying service.

Usage of Public Library by Karnataka State Open University Users

The Public library system in Karnataka was developed as part of the renaissance occurred during the period of national struggle for independence. The system has a democratic set up and is controlled by a statute of the state entitled Karnataka Public Libraries Act.

Even though there are number of rural public libraries all over the state, the support of those libraries can assure for higher education is very low. The libraries in the rural areas are usually equipped with recreational books and newspapers aimed at leisure reading and few reference books. The district city central libraries are well equipped with academic materials. Almost majority of the city central libraries have Internet browsing facility too. The distance learners approach these public libraries too in search of information as they have easy access to them.

The access to a public library in the hometown of a distance learner is investigated in this section. The analysis has shown that 459 (47.8%) of the respondents had access to a public library within their home town.
Table 5: USAGE OF PUBLIC LIBRARY.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>52.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>47.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The remaining 52.19(501) percentage respondents are not access the public library with in the hometown. All the public libraries are not equipped with information sources that can propup academic interests. They can vary from place to place. Public libraries in the rural areas particularly cannot help academic community in a significant way. The resources of the rural libraries are very limited. The city central libraries in Karnataka state are in a better position.

Timing Preference to Use the Library

At present none of the university libraries in Karnataka work twenty four hours a day. But to support students, researchers and faculty they serve 12 hours a day from 8 am to 8 pm being a service institution, the working hours of the library should suit the needs of its clientele. This is more important in case of distance learners, who do not have frequent chances to visit their library. If the library has to setup a separate section or counter for distance learners, the working hours of that section has to be fixed to suit the needs of distance learners.

The question regarding favorable working hours of the library was asked to the respondent. The three options were given the three time slots of four hours each, staring form 8 am in the morning and ending with 8pm in the evening. The responses received were tabulated and is provide in table 6.

Table 6: TIMINGS PREFERE FOR THE USE OF LIBRARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>51.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>20.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>28.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data tabulated reveals that the preferred timing for 491 (51.14%) respondents is the morning. Just next to it is the afternoon, which is sought by 199 (20.72%) respondents. The
evening secession was preferred only 270 (28.12%) respondents. Majority of the respondents opt the morning time.

Findings

1. The distance learner’s most preferred accessing information resources from the Internet. Personal collection of books occupying the second position.

2. Among the distance learners of the Karnataka State Open University, the majority (46.88%) of users use the internet resources. As much as 20.10 percentages of the distance learners possess personal collection of books.

3. Only 39.06 percentages of distance learners in the Karnataka State Open University had access to a study center in their home town.

4. The library and information services available at the study centers of the distance learners in the Karnataka State Open University are negligible.

5. Majority (71.35%) of distance learners in the Karnataka State Open University demand library and information services at the study centers.

6. Among the distance learners 42.90 percentages are most required a comfortable reading room facility at the Karnataka State Open University library.

7. The majority 39.90 percentage of the distance learner opinion that photocopying facility is a desirable amenity at the Karnataka State Open University library.

8. Among the total sample 459 (47.81%) have access to a public library within their home town.

9. The distance learners irrespective of their gender and the course of study prefer to use the university libraries during the morning hours.

Conclusion

Libraries these days are involved in a wide range of infrastructures and resources, and the librarian is compelled to be aware of the emerging resources. In fact the library of the recent, past was not like the library of today, and obviously the library of the future will be quite different from what it is today. In the information society, Information has been considered as one of the key factors of production. A library is the main source of information. The purpose of this study is to highlight the infrastructure and use of resources in the distance education system, and it is to think seriously about this information resources and its optimum use for the promotion of education and learning in the distance education system.
References