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Internet Plays a Vital Role in Distance Education

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Abstract

Internet stands for Web-based Information Science Education and it is an exciting new development in the field of Library and Information Science through online education. It is a consortium of twelve Universities that have come together, to share classes, students and resources through online.

Since, it is a new concept and exciting development for online education in the field of library and Information Science, this paper made an attempt to highlight/expose the basic concepts, structures and functions of distance education.

Keywords

Internet, Distance Education

1. Introduction

The World Wide Web offers information and data from all over the world. Because so much information is available, and because that information can appear to be fairly "anonymous", it is necessary to develop skills to evaluate what you find. When you use a research or academic library, the books, journals and other resources have already been evaluated by scholars, publishers and librarians. Every resource you find has been evaluated in one way or another before you ever see it. When you are using the World Wide Web, none of this applies. There are no filters. Because anyone can write a Web page, documents of the widest range of quality, written by authors of the widest range of authority, are available on an even playing field. Excellent resources reside along side the most dubious. The Internet epitomizes the concept of *Caveat lector: Let the reader beware*. This document discusses the criteria by which scholars in most fields evaluate print information, and shows how the same criteria can be used to assess information found on the Internet.

2. Distance Education Council Initiatives

The Distance Education Council has taken a number of initiatives under quality assurance schemes to develop norms and standards for various professional programmes offered through distance mode. Library and Information Science is one of them in which the DEC constituted a committee consisting of national experts in the field of library and information science to develop norms / standards for BLIS and MLIS through distance mode.

These norms pertain to course curriculum, annual intake, eligibility, counseling, student support services, faculty requirement and other infrastructural facilities that are very much essential to offer BLIS and MNLIS programmes through distance mode. Quality can only be assured if these norms are properly followed by all open universities and correspondence course institutes.

3. Impact of information Society

The advent of information and communication technologies and its application in library and information centres has changed the role of library professionals to information professionals. Now library and information professional need to be trained I the areas of Library Automation, CD-ROM, Online, online Public Access Catalogue, Multimedia, E-mail, internet etc. The impact of such an information society has compelled the LIS professionals to redesign the LOS programmes so has to provide effective and efficient information services in a rapidly changing technological age.

Developed countries particularly in LIS education through distance learning shall help a lot to the planners, designers and academics associated with these programmes how to make it more innovative, interactive and cost effective in India. Universities in USA, UK, South Africa, etc., have made it more technology-oriented and much has to be done for these programmes in India, particularly at the designing and implementation stages. They are going to be the innovative problem solvers and effective information managers possessing a broad range of capabilities to meet the high demand of libraries and information centres in business and industries.

4. Technologies in Distance Education

Technology can help distribute education from the world's best sources to all the people irrespective of age, sex, creed, religion, socio-economic status, who are in need of education wherever located, thus crossing all geographical and social barriers. New technologies, namely satellite communication fiber optic cable and computers have dramatically enhanced educational capabilities.

By providing communication links, telecommunications can overcome distance barriers that hamper development. Thus through the use of new communication technologies, access to good educational programmes can be greatly extended to large audiences in rural and remote areas with tremendous flexibility in subject matter content and in locations served. Corollary to these technological expansions, the area of education which is considered to be fastest growing today is that of distance education.

Distance education, based on the use of modern communication and multimedia materials, has proved to be the major new movement in human resource development in the current decade. The

ability to cope with rapid changes in the higher education system will become the primary measure if success, of both micro and macro levels, as we approach the 21st century. Changer is occurring faster every day. Many societies have shifted from industrial era to information era, and others are fast moving in that direction.
The volume of information that becomes available, doubles every four to five years.

In fact, education and training are also undergoing a major change. The focus has shifted to learning rather than teaching. Some of the major changes are:

i)   From institutional-based learning to far learning organizations with just inn time know ledged provisions;
ii)   From fixed curricula to personalized curricula;
iii)   From front ended education to lifelong education;
iv)   From teaching to learning.

Education is going to be number one amongst the great world industries, within which will flourish an educational machine technology that will provide tools such as the individually selected and articulated two-way TV and an inter-continentally networked documentary call up system operative on any home two-way set.

- Integration of television, telecommunication and computers, through digitization and compression techniques;
- Reduced costs, and more flexible user applications of telecommunications, through developments such as ISDN / fiber optics/ cellular radios;
- Miniaturization (tiny cameras, microphones, small high resolution display screens);
- Increased portability, through use of radio communication and miniaturization;
- Increased processing power, through new microchip development and advanced software techniques;
- More powerful and user-friendly commands and software, tools, making it much easier for users to create and communicate their own materials.

Due to these developments the learner will be increasingly free to choose what and when he/she can learn from what source.

In India distance education has emerged as a formidable system of higher education. There are at present eight open universities in India and about 50 distance education divisions attached to conventional universities. There is also a National Open School in the country. While one must admit that the conventional education system has played an important role in expanding education, particularly in the urban, areas, over the last 50 years or so, one must accept its limitations as a means of mass education and especially quality education in the rural areas.

The emergence of the information technology including the satellite-based telecommunication system has generated a potential of a sea-change in the education system all over the world. Print, radio, television, audio-video cassettes, tape-recorders, overhead / slide projectors, filmstrips, etc.,

which permit only one-way communication have become old educational-technologies and have lost novelty in the developed world.

The last one decade has seen emergence of a series of new, electronic-based innovations in the field of higher education, which permit vision, sound, data with interactivity. Information highways are high speed data networks used to transport information and link people who want to be connected with others. Teletext and Video-text are the two new information age services that will soon be widespread among home and business users.

5. Open Learning: Medium Education for All

Open education or open learning is an evolutionary modification of the educational approach to the teaching-learning system. While the two are not synonymous, a learner, at a distance, often finds the features and strategies inherent in the open learning system more suitable, and so chooses distance education, rather than face-to-face education, where distance education has incorporated the features of open learning.

The major features of open learning and distance education are given below:
i)   It offers open or flexible entry conditions.
ii)   It provides for accumulation of credits in subjects and thus qualify for certification, or diploma, at one's own pace.
iii)   It offers a great variety of subjects and choice of subjects is left to the students, to suit one's personal needs and requirements.
iv)   It provides bridge courses to assist in learning readiness so as to be able to move to a higher level.
v)   The multimedia and integrated learning packages make learning easier.
vi)   The specially prepared distance education text promotes self-learning, to a great extent, and the rest to be made up through personal contact classes and non-print media support.
vii)   The provision of modules in a subject package and semesterisation add to the degree of flexibility that a student can avail himself of.
viii)   The continuing internal assessment along with external evaluation in preference to only external assessment, is also a standard provision in distance learning system.

Open education is particularly characterized by the removal of restrictions, exclusions and privileges; by the accreditation of students' previous experiences; by the flexibility of the management of the time variable; and by substantial changes in the traditional relationship between the professors and students.

On the other hand, distance education is a modality which permits the delivery of a group of didactic media without the necessary regular class participation, where the individual is responsible for his own learning. The last decade has seen a phenomenal growth in distance education and the integration of this method of education into the standard education provision, in a large number of countries, to such an extent that it is now no longer possible to think solely in the traditional sense of face-to-face contact.

Distance education makes use of many strategies to reduce the gap and to find ways of effectively servicing the students. In this context, what O.Peters said, in 1973, is even more true today:

" Anyone professionally involved in education is obliged to presume the existence of two forms of instruction which are strictly separable: traditional face-to-face teaching, based on interpersonal communication and industrialized teaching, which is based on an objectives, rationalized, technologically produced interaction".

 6. **Chat Room** is also available for conversation with young people from around the world. A message board is available too to post thoughts on journal entry topics.

Further the application solutions available to universities in addressing IDL needs can be summarized as follows;
   1. Internet, 2. Groupware, 3. One way video / video conference, 4. Two-way video conference.

Above said all application points are the uses of Internet.   Here another emerging alternative solution for internet in meeting the universities for interuniversity IDL application is Groupware. Benefits of groupware in addition to internet are, its cost, multiple application, easy to use, secure and provide their buy earn with training and consulting leading providers of multifunctional groupware One way video conferencing and Two way conferencing.

7. Library Education and Quality Assurance

The role of library and information professional have totally been changed in the present day society with the application of information and communication technologies. They are know more library professional, rather they are called information professionals. As on date there are 108 universities / colleges and institutions in India offering library and information science programs. Of these 108, these are 27 open universities and correspondence course institutes (CCIs) offering library and information science programs through distance/correspondence mode. The objectives of offering library and information science (LIS) programs through correspondence / distance mode are mainly due to the fact that it:

- transcends geographical / physical barriers of a learner,
- provides access to higher educational opportunities which is not possible through the conventional mode,
- allows more flexibility in completing the program at the learner's pace of study,
- helps in carrier advancement schemes of the working employs by acquiring a professional qualification,
- enables younger talented group to complete the program from the job point of view,
- improves capabilities in understanding organization and management libraries / information centers and documentation centers ; and
- caters to man power requirement of different types of libraries / information and documentation centers.

The library and information science (LIS) curriculum lays emphasis on the fundamentals of different types of libraries and its management, bibliography and reference service, classification and cataloguing, collection development, information and documentation and some theoretical

background on computer technology.   But in the present day context the entire LIS curriculum need to be technology oriented.

The practical skills of the distance learners should be improved so as to handle these libraries/information centers/documentation centers. Much emphasis is to be given on collecting, organizing, processing and disseminating information with the help of modern computer and communication technologies.   Application of information technologies in the libraries and information centers shall enable the learners to develop his or her computer skills for its effective organization. These include:

a) library automation or computerization of in house operations,

b) database design and searching using readily available software packages,

c) searching of CD-ROM bibliographic databases,

d) preparation of online search strategies and searches of databases,

e) multimedia application in libraries, and

f) Organizing information resources available on Internet etc.

All these will help those who are already employed inn different libraries and information centers for their professional development and betterment of employment opportunities.
ix)   text promotes self-learning, to a great extent, and the rest to be made up through personal contact classes and non-print media support.
x)   The provision of modules in a subject package and semesterisation add to the degree of flexibility that a student can avail himself of.
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8. Distance education text

Distance education text, is written specially for the distant learner, sometimes referred to as a teacher in print. It has, therefore, to proceed in large measure as a good teacher would proceed in a normal class, setting learning outcomes for a limited topic of study, asking (intext) questions, summarizing, highlighting major or structural concepts, and reviewing the lesson, through a set of questions. Special end-of-despatch questions are also put, and feedback provision made, by giving, the answers on a separate page.

A well-prepared print medium accounts for 80-90 percent or more of the actual learning. However, use of visual media would have a critical or signficicant contribution to enhance the quality of learning. For example, in subjects like history, to show a rare document or a monument etc., in geography and the physical and biological sciences, to show special processes and phenomena, rare species, living or extinct, but of replicas kept in museums or to show a dynamic process or movement etc., or in engineering or for acquisition of practical skills etc. Where the medium also carries a message, awareness cation can be greatly enhanced through the visual medium.

9. Computerization

Hence distance education has to make use of the available computer services, for all major aspects: registration and admission of students and creating a student data base; registration of students for internal an d external-examinations: computer-marking of some internal assessment tests, correspondence with students, using mailmerge facilities of the computer for personalizing correspondence with individual students; print out of mark sheets, certificates and identity cards.

Apart from tis, the large volume of data on examiners, moderation of examination results, for purposes of scaling and grading, can also optimally use the computer programmes.

10. Publishing medium

As it was stated earlier, the Internet is the first global library that any client can add to its collection. For the first time in the history of education, students' written assignments, term papers, and multimedia products such as a Power Point presentations can be published to be potentially read and viewed by any member of the Internet community. Having access to the Internet through Internet providers, Individuals can develop their own personal web pages. Personal homepages range from the simple to the sophisticated.

Publishing on the Internet has unique values for both the author and the reader. Their values are summarized in the following;

   a) Through the use of e-mail, the author can receive his/her readers' feedback. A dialogue can ensue between the readers and the author. This type of feedback c an be helpful to the author to edit his/her publication for better readership and clearer communication.

   b) Internet publication can integrate graphs, pictures, clipart, video, and audio. The non text component of the published material cannot only enrich the published articles, but also can provide a vehicle through which paintings, sound recordings, experimental video, etc. get published on the internet.

c) Internet publications can also employ hypertext coding. Hypertext coding facilitates the non linear retrieval of information. The user can search for related information by using search options. A publisher might provide a search form within the published article for the reader to locate certain information by typing keywords.

d) Publication on the internet can provide access to some of the references cited in the publication. Many times a reader becomes interested in a reference cited by an article. If that reference is available on online, the author can establish a link between the title of the reference and the internet location of that reference.

e) A published article on the internet could be updated more readily than a printed article. Whenever new information is made available, the author can retrieve his or her published article to update and to report it. The same can happen if feedback from readers requires editing the article for better readability.

f) The reader or an internet publication is not only empowered to decide the non sequential order of items he or she selects for reading, but also how to save all or some sections of a publication for a future reference.

11. Conclusion

Web-based online education on LIS plays a vital role in the twenty first century. Every body thrust to know about the current information to develop their knowledge. If the educational institution does not offer a class or a program that students in the local district need or want at the time that is convenient for them, then the students can get online and find it elsewhere. If that institution does not offer interactive, expansive opportunities for its students to learn according to their own needs and preferences, if it does not provide teachers who are willing to facilitate rather than stand and deliver, those students can get online and find those things elsewhere.

The successful implementation of LIS education in online teaching and learning require the same management commitment as conventional teaching and learning. The proposed methodological framework is a guiding principle for continuously improving online teaching and learning in higher education. The quality framework provides ways of measuring and enhancing the quality of online higher education in terms of pedagogy, technology and administration. However, as every university has its own distinct features and specific situation, it is advisable that each university designs its own detailed online quality measures on the basis of the framework.

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