

Information Seeking Behaviour of Bangalore University Distance Education Learners: A Study

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***Abstract** - Distance education is a means of education which has become more and more popular as a result of the swift development in the education system. The growth and development in distance education where education is supported, delivered and sustained at the doorsteps of the learner has created new way of serving the learning community creating difficulty in library services. Distance learners and conventional learners are now having right to use to a world of electronic information in the information super highway. Innovative information and communication technologies, and conventional pedagogic methods, need library and information professionals to reconsider the system they collect, develop, handle and convey or disseminate the information resources and their services. Information need is a generally widespread indispensable feature of human beings in day to day activity across the world. A qualitative approach has been used to elucidate the information seeking behaviour of distance education learners, to identify the information needs, and sources used by the distance education learners of Directorate of Correspondence Courses (DCC) & Distance Education (DE), Bangalore University (BU). The survey method was adopted for the research study with a structured questionnaire and stratified random sampling was used as a technique to select the respondents from the total study population of undergraduate and post graduate courses. Descriptive statistical measures such as percentages and frequency distribution were employed for data analysis. The findings of the study shows that 70% of the respondents need information on previous years question papers, 61% needs information on library resources and 55% of the respondents need information to support their current learning. Also, 57.6% of the sample respondents were using the internet as the source of information followed by 50.3% of the distance learners opined that books were frequently used as source of information and 57.6% of the respondents used internet has another major source of information.*

Keywords: Information Seeking Behaviour: Distance Learners: Distance Education: Bangalore University: Information Needs:

Introduction

Learning which has extensively been documented as a significant factor in the process of individual development is having different forms such as formal, informal, and non-formal. To these forms of education distance education has been added, which has been used to bridge the gap of education through print and digital media to thousands of learners who could never get to conventional educational learning system. On the whole distance education essentially involves self-study on the part of the students for which library support is very much essential. Distance education has observed by a number of educators as one of the pioneering approaches to teaching the twenty-first century learner. A Strong and well structured information system, with an association of well organized and equipped libraries all over the country is the most important component in the infrastructure to be provided for the flourishing implementation of distance learning programmes. In India higher education has grown astonishingly since independence and there has been a steady increase in the student enrollment and the demands on education institutions continues without any reduction in strength. Distance learning programs on university campuses grown up and developed by big margin leaving a lot of University libraries not prepared and were not able to fulfill and satisfy the needs of the distance education learners. The development of distance mode of education took on enough significance that the Indian Library Association (ILA) developed a set of Guidelines for Library Services to Distance Learners, stressing among other things that Universities/institutions with a distance learning mode should delegate a member of their personnel particularly to serve up the needs of the growing population

Need for the Study

This is a well-known finding in the field of information science research. The learner can learn to become accustomed to look for information systems, but more prominently exploring method should be adapted by the learners' himself in usual ways of information seeking. Despite the fact that library and information services will be more convenient and ease for regular students, but it would be very difficult for distance learning students. Generally regular conventional students find it very easy in finding and locating the needed information and resources with little guidance and help but it is very difficult to any distance students in search of information until and unless he is educated or oriented about the resources and services offered to him. By giving access to minimum library services endow with modest advantage to the learner who is unacquainted of it. The study is very much relevant because it signifies how a deprived distance learner's student's community interacts with information sources and services in order to keep update on existing information resources, and to make their own efforts to the available resources.

In addition to this, University authorities, and their library community, which are tied up with distance learning programmes might use the study as a supplementary educational informative source for the design and implementation of information systems and services that would augment and facilitate academic activities among the distance learner's.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to explore the information seeking behaviour of distance education learner's of DCC & DE of BU. Precisely the focus is to identify the variety of information sources that are used by the distance learner's, to investigate challenges or the barriers that hamper the information access and retrieval of required information of distance learner's.

Specifically, the following objectives were addressed in the study:

- What is the predominant information required by the students? The information need of distance learners
- What are the major information sources of obtaining academic information to fulfill the need?
- To find out the information seeking behaviour of distance education students

Seeking of information independently and information literacy are important survival skills in this competitive information world which is very vital for distance education students. Basically we need to understand the information needs and seeking behaviour of distance learners in designing the services and systems that best suites their needs. As information specialists it is very much obliging to us and it reflects on our own competence to be competent to really help information seekers. And in this context this study contributes predominantly to distance learners who are geographically distributed in the design and development of information system and services, information literacy programme and education as knowledge building by an information system.

Review of Relevant Literature

Library and information services are the integral part of higher education programmes that add to the significance and quality of learning in spite of the mode of delivery, the information needs of distance learners deserve to be met, irrespective of where they are situated. It is in this respect that this review of literature seeks to examine the information needs of distance learners. It also sneaks a look into the information seeking behaviour. The other aspect of this review is the sources of information through which the information needs of distance learners are met. The intent was to be as comprehensive as possible in identifying the literature specifically with the information behaviour of distance learners.

The Concept of Information

Information is a vital component and indispensable resource for any individual survival and there is a need for every individual to acquire appropriate and relevant information to attain a knowledge state. In a higher education institution, information becomes more of a one stop client-oriented that personalizes the student's information to the specific needs (Young, 2002). It is evident from the literature that information is very essential for one's endurance and many of

the information scientists agree that, information is requisite in man's daily activities be it for academic or any of the work situation.

Information also refers to the circumstance in which it is sourced, accessed, managed, utilized and normally made available for the use of distance learners in quest of their distance learning programmes. The sources of information may consist of colleagues, friends, mass-media such as radio and television and newspapers, library and electronic mediated devices such as the Internet.

Information Needs

To elucidate on the information needs of distance learners. Neela Jagannathan (1998) categorizes distance students information requirements as:

Need for sources and amenities: Distance learners need different kinds of materials such as reference books, texts books, journals, reports, Self-Instructional Materials (SIMs) etc. They require basic facilities like, library reading room as well as stack room space with proper display of documents.

Need for library and information services such as bibliographic instruction for print and non-print materials, information about distance learning study centres, and support services.

Need for user services: Distance learners also need professional guidance and support from the library professionals about using library resources and facilities provided in the library.

Information Behaviour

Byrne and Bates (2009) examined the information behaviour of distance learning business students in Ireland. The study revealed that while both print and electronic resources were used by the distance students there was a common preference for web resources. Certain group of students acquired information through both formal sources such as books, journals and course materials and informal channels like interaction with lecturers, library staff, work colleagues, and classmates.

Information seeking behaviour

Students information behaviour of different disciplines and level of study has been one of the most studied topics in the field of information behaviour research, providing much experiential data, and signifying new models, see, for example, Wilson (1999) Case (2012), Kuhlthau (2010), Ellis, and Dervin.

Information seeking behaviour of distance learner's

Comparatively modest attention has been given to the behaviour of distance learners specifically, although some of the researchers have written on particular issues affecting them. One of the

examples was the work by Unwin et al. (1997), which looked at the library needs and expectations of 1000 UK-based postgraduate distance learners. Later studies have addressed issues such as information literacy and library skills instruction for distance learners (Kumar & Ochoa, 2012; Gopakumar, 2009; Singh, 2002), the assuring quality in distance education and library services to distance learners.

Boadi and Letsolo (2004) observe that the distance learners depend on easily available sources of information such as colleagues. The researchers however acknowledge that colleagues used as a source of information by distance learners at the Institute of Extra-Mural Studies, Maseru, Lesotho may not necessarily be the best sources of information to meet the learners' information needs.

Most of the literature reviewed here on information seeking behaviour of distance students show an analogous outlook that most of the students' information seeking behaviour is influenced by their education, societal and personal activities and to certain extent the distance and the geographic areas of residence they reside in.

Indian Library Association (2001). Guidelines for Library Services to Distance Learners strongly recommends to ensure the prerequisite of impartial library and information services to distance learners by supplementing the development and improvement of library services for new and existing distance learning programmes. It also suggested providing the infrastructural facilities and library services like adequate space, equipments, communication links, and also distance education council insists to have teaching faculty and support staff to meet the needs of the distance learners.

In spite of this recommendation, where the technology is shifting swiftly and the distance learner importance are the matter of extreme challenge, it is very important that the library understands its patrons and serve to make the necessary attempts to best serve its users. This study attempts to understand the needs of distance education students known to the library and observe what is essential to serve up this distance education population.

Study Population and Sampling Tool

The population of the study consists of distance learning students of DCC & DE of Bangalore University. Respondents were selected from all levels and years of the programme, BA, BBM, B.Com and Master's level like MA, MSc, and M.Com, generally speaking it is very difficult to study the whole population keeping the time, cost and geographical distribution in mind, a sample of about 10% of the total population i.e. 1550 Under Graduate and Post Graduate distance students has been selected by simple stratified random sampling method. The investigator was able to get the 1445 fully completed questionnaire which quantify to 93.2% of the sample population by administering the questionnaire personally to the respondents.

Tool for Data Collection

To collect the research data, survey questionnaire method was adopted trusting the objectives of the study. To a little extent researcher carried out an informal interview with the respondents to overcome the limitation of the questionnaire especially among some students, who could not respond to questionnaire due to dearth of time and it helped in getting additional information among the respondents. In this background, informal interview schedule was engaged to obtain the data from the Students of DCC & DE of the University, as a complement to questionnaire method.

The research survey questionnaire asked the respondents to reply to questions intended to ascertain a variety of relevant factors that have an impact on distance students' information seeking behaviour. The questionnaire is designed in such a way that it included questions that identify the demographic distinctiveness of the survey respondents in terms of gender, age, place of home including distance from the University library, and educational status.

Statistical implication:

The collected data from the distance students' of the study was implicated and interpreted by feeding the independent variables of the research problem in the SPSS software (Statistical Package in Social Sciences). The frequency occurrence and simple percentage table were generated to present the results of the study.

Data Analysis

An effort has been made to examine the study data collected from distance students of DCC & DE of BU and understand the outcome illuminating their information seeking behavior that affords imperative source of information to the Bangalore University and library management in designing and developing an appropriate approach in encouraging the healthy use of expensive information sources including both print and e-resources, consequently mitigating the cost efficiency of library services.

Results and Discussion:

The study results of the respondents provide a valuable explanation of how information seekers use different sources of information, their need, methods of searching information engaged in achieving preferred information and challenges for not using such information resources.

Table I: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	829	57.4
Female	616	42.6
Total	1445	100

The above table shows that the study consisted of more males (57.4%) than females (42.6%). Though there is a little inequality in the number of gender with males being more out of the respondents, there was not much difference among the respondents behaviour being a distance learner.

Table II: Distribution of Respondents by Educational Status

Educational Status	Frequency	Percentage
Under Graduation	570	39.4
Post Graduation	875	60.6
Total	1445	100

It is found from the Table 2 that, most of the students covered in the study are undergoing Post Graduation (60.6 %) However, 39.4% of students represent an Under Graduate student, which is less when as compared to post graduation course, may be because of less scope of and lack of interest to pursue under graduate study by the learners.

Table III: Information Needs of Distance Learning Students

Information Needs		Not at all	Minor extent	Undecided	Moderate extent	Major extent	Total
The need of Information about the library resources and its services such as Books, Magazines, Journals, reports, previous question papers etc.	Frequency	66	114	36	888	341	1445
	Percent	5%	8%	2%	61%	24%	100%
The need of Information to support current learning	Frequency	28	156	37	792	432	1445
	Percent	2%	11%	3%	55%	30%	100%
The need of Information to keep update	Frequency	24	257	70	571	523	1445
	Percent	2%	18%	5%	40%	36%	100%
The need of Information to prepare for the current examination	Frequency	27	114	49	495	760	1445
	Percent	2%	8%	3%	34%	53%	100%
The need of Information to prepare for competitive exams	Frequency	157	395	198	577	118	1445
	Percent	11%	27%	14%	40%	8%	100%
The need of information to continue my education after graduation	Frequency	91	323	124	733	172	1443
	Percent	6%	22%	9%	51%	12%	100%
The need of Information about contact classes and to prepare notes	Frequency	19	322	57	652	395	1445
	Percent	1%	22%	4%	45%	27%	100%
The need of Information about job after graduation	Frequency	66	180	31	533	635	1445
	Percent	5%	12%	2%	37%	44%	100%
The need of information about previous year's question papers	Frequency	49	114	29	243	1010	1445
	Percent	3%	8%	2%	17%	70%	100%

Majority of the distance students (to an extent of 70%) responded with the need of information related to previous years examination question papers which is one of the preferred information need by them. Most of the students responded with moderate to major extent (to an extent of

87%) to the need of information to prepare for their current examination also the same case to the need of information related to library resources like books, journals, magazines and information support to their current learning (moderate to major extent of 85%). About 40% of the respondents need the information to keep update themselves to moderate extent followed by 36% to a major extent. There was below average moderate to major response rate of information need to prepare for competitive examinations. They were not much enthusiastic to take competitive exams.

Table IV: Distance student’s behaviour while seeking information

Information Seeking		Very Often	Often	Rarely	Never	Total
Browse In The University Library	Frequency	271	848	109	217	1445
	Percent	18.8%	58.7%	7.5%	15.0%	100.0%
Consult The Library Staff For Assistance In Seeking Information	Frequency	537	595	196	117	1445
	Percent	37.2%	41.2%	13.6%	8.1%	100.0%
Gather Information Through Social Networks And Browsing Internet	Frequency	593	244	239	369	1445
	Percent	41.0%	16.9%	16.5%	25.5%	100.0%
Consult Friends	Frequency	564	184	338	359	1445
	Percent	39.0%	12.7%	23.4%	24.8%	100.0%
Visit Public Or College Libraries	Frequency	631	368	365	81	1445
	Percent	43.7%	25.5%	25.3%	5.6%	100.0%
Discuss With Lecturer	Frequency	1423	22	0	0	1445
	Percent	98.5%	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Seek Information With Colleagues At Work Place	Frequency	589	344	201	311	1445
	Percent	40.8%	23.8%	13.9%	21.5%	100.0%
Read Newspapers & Magazines	Frequency	548	143	348	406	1445
	Percent	37.9%	9.9%	24.1%	28.1%	100.0%
Use My Own Experience	Frequency	495	248	280	422	1445
	Percent	34.3%	17.2%	19.4%	29.2%	100.0%

Maximum number of distance students to an extent of 98.5% discusses and interact with lecturers in seeking information very often. Majority of the students consult the library staff often to very often (to an extent of 78.4%) for assistance in search of information. Same is the case in browsing the library themselves often and very often (77.5%) in seeking information. Very often about 41% of the distance learners seek the information through Social networks and browsing the internet. Google was the most preferred and used search engine to search the required information by keying the specific topic of their interest. You tube was another site used more frequently to watch the educational videos and lectures on the specific subject matter. 43.7% seek the information by visiting nearby public and college libraries to full fill their information needs. And other means of seeking information is by consulting friend’s very often

(39%), Colleagues at work place (40.8%), reading newspapers/magazines (37.9%), and finally use their previous knowledge (34.3%).

Table V: Sources of Information

Information Sources		Not Used	Rarely Used	Occasionally Used	Frequently Used	Highly Used	Total
Books	Frequency	0	10	181	727	527	1445
	Percent	0.00%	0.70%	12.50%	50.30%	36.50%	100%
Journals	Frequency	201	746	380	108	10	1445
	Percent	13.90%	51.60%	26.30%	7.50%	0.70%	100%
Internet and Other e-resources	Frequency	131	130	141	832	211	1445
	Percent	9.10%	9.00%	9.80%	57.60%	14.60%	100%
Newspapers and Magazines	Frequency	0	37	638	513	257	1445
	Percent	0.00%	2.60%	44.20%	35.50%	17.80%	100%
e-books and e-journals	Frequency	190	1010	181	34	30	1445
	Percent	13.10%	69.90%	12.50%	2.40%	2.10%	100%
Thesis/Dissertations/Reports	Frequency	1227	171	47	0	0	1445
	Percent	84.90%	11.80%	3.30%	0.00%	0.00%	100%
Course Materials	Frequency	87	319	234	742	63	1445
	Percent	6.00%	22.10%	16.20%	51.30%	4.40%	100%

Books were main information source which are frequently used (50.3%) by the distance education students. Internet and other e-resources were also used frequently (57.6%) as a source of information for fulfilling their information need. Course materials were one of the major sources of information to supplement their reading activity. Journals were rarely used (51.6%), Newspapers and magazines occasionally used (44.2%) and thesis/dissertations were the least used resources among all the information sources.

Findings

The findings of the study provides indepth information on the research objectives, based on the data obtained and analyzed, the following findings were gathered. The population of the distance learners studied in DCC & DE of BU was 1445. They use the internet and rely on books as a source of information to develop knowledge. Distance Learners interact with lecturers more often and often during their contact classes and sought the help of library staff in seeking information to fulfill their information they also preferred internet and relevant e-resources strongly at workplace and home for the academic purpose. The challenges faced by distance learners at time and at the course of seeking information are lack of relevant information, lack of knowledge using the library, geographical location of the library and its working hours and time is still as important as ever.

Recommendations

Exploring the information seeking behaviour distance education learners of Bangalore University, it is suggested that library personnel could spend some time and interact with the distance students in assisting them in a better way. Library management should take care of organizing orientation programmes or information literacy programme in helping distance learners to improve their information seeking skills and activities. Librarians should also encourage and assist users in learning the OPAC, creating awareness about different search engine, sending and receiving e-mail, and data base search techniques of acquiring information. And it is strongly recommended to have a library instruction or information literacy programmes for every distance learner to make him competent in fulfilling his information need.

Conclusion

Information seeking behaviour is a result of a need to satisfy some goals. Any library will be having abundant print and e-resources. This augment in information resources accessibility and availability has exaggerated information seeking behaviour of distance learners. There are different types of information in a variety of formats are all available in one place irrespective of geographic location, in the current diverse services offering for learners to select. In the way of information seeking, distance learner may interact with the physical sources of a library or with the computer base system such as the web/internet/databases which involves personal reasons for seeking information the kind of information they required, and the behavior and sources with which needed information is being sought. Independent seeking of information and information literacy skills is important survival skills in this information civilization, and predominantly very much significant for distance students. In order to design and develop the information services to meet their needs, we should have a sympathetic understanding of their information needs and seeking behavior. It is also supportive, being information specialists replicate on our own information seeking abilities to be able to truly help distance learners.

It was understood from the study that acquaintance of the information needs and seeking behaviour of distance education learners is very much significant for having a very good library collections especially for distance education programme, improvement in the facilities and developing services to efficiently satisfy the needs of learners particularly in a programme like distance education.

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