Practices of ICT based services in libraries of ODL institution: a study

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Abstract: Open and Distance Learning (ODL) education system is getting popular and importance day by day as the scope and network spreads. The libraries belong to this institutions have been played a vital role regarding fulfillment of its very objective. Libraries are considered indispensable in every part of higher education. With the expansion of ICT, it has faced many challenges to deal with. ICT has changed the traditional concept of libraries and brought it into a new trend which benefited the distance learners a lot and helps them to achieve their goal. Applications of ICT especially introduction of web-based services in the libraries make the distance learning programmes more convenient, time saving as well as enjoyable. Proper and effective utilization of ICT in the libraries of open and distance learning institutions will build a meaningful and successful ODL system throughout the nation.

This paper discusses about the various aspects of usage of ICT in the libraries and web-based services offered by the libraries to their user community belong to open and distance learning institutions (ODL) along with other services they provided, staff strength etc. Because effective library support to distance learners is mandatory for qualitative delivery of teaching and learning.

Keywords: ODL system; ICT; RFID; Social networking

1. Introduction:

Begins in early 60s in India, the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system has performed its great effort in providing the educational opportunities to the masses. With the objective of equality (opportunity) and uniformity, it has gained the acceptance in all over India. More than 42 million students have enrolled in the ODL system to continue their higher studies simultaneously with their occupation. It opens up a great chance to accomplish their goal, perform their ability in a better way and lead them door to the knowledgeable world.

In India, there are about fourteen single mode State Open University, one National Open University i.e., Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) established in 1985 and 200 dual mode distance learning institutions which caters 25 percent of student in higher education. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions in India use technology like multimedia technology, mobile technology, satellite technology and internet based environment. Some dual mode corresponding institutions are using print technology and face to face tutoring.

In Assam, IGNOU has two Regional Centres, one at Guwahati and another newly opened at Jorhat in 2013. Under these two regional centres, it has more than 25 study centres. We have One State Open University i.e. Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) with more than 220 study centres in different colleges of Assam. Also in three jails i.e., Guwahati, Jorhat and Dibrugarh where prisoners can study free of cost. It offers various programmes like post-graduate, graduate, diploma, certificate, vocational course etc. Almost all the state universities (general) including Tezpur Central University have their distance education centres which facilitate quality education to a large number of distance learners. Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL) under Gauhati University witness more than 1 lakh student enrolment and offer 25 different post-graduate, diploma, certificate etc. programmes.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has transformed all aspects of library particularly information dissemination. The development of libraries without walls has definite benefits to distance learners. Developed and developing countries are creating Virtual learning environments and libraries without walls to reach multitudes of learners at various locations.

2. Objective of the study:

Being more affordable day by day, the ranges of services offered by technology also increases in different aspects in the society including educational system. The main objective of this study is to bring out the picture of different aspects of usage of information communication and technology (ICT) in the Libraries of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions for capacity building of the libraries so that the very objective of distance learning institutions can be fulfilled to the fullest extent. Other objectives are to see the
present environment of libraries belong to these institutions, strength of library holdings, professional staff employed, services/facilities provided etc.

The Library and Information Services offered to distance learning community should be designed to meet effectively a wide range of information, bibliographic and use-oriented. The basic need for the library and information services for distance learners are - Access to information resources, such as text, supplementary reading and reference services, Learning how to find the information they need from the information that is available, Developing ways to apply the information gathered and to make sound, information based decisions.

ICT has been playing a very vital role regarding excellent delivery of library services to the distance learners, since these types of users need a straight and clear-cut direction with extra care due to the unconventional way of learning. In today’s digital age, one can access e-resources from any location. Virtual library has changed the very concept of libraries, but we can’t ignore a library within four walls. Learners from different rural and remote places will not have much access to technologies due to several limitations such as, poor financial position, worse network coverage, lack of operational skill etc. Therefore libraries attached to open and distance learning institutions should be well-equipped for both digital and manual environment. The libraries belong to ODL institutions should take utmost care and full utilization of technology to make the users easy and direct access to the right piece of information at the right time. Hence, technology brings the distance learners closer towards the library and helps them to fulfill their goal by making the access easier and affordable. Being as a tool of ODL, ICT provides access to web, library databases, electronic journals, CD-ROM search services and email facilities etc.

3. Area of the study:

The study mainly covers the libraries of three Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions. They are –

3.1. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Regional Centre, Guwahati. Under which there are four study centres - a) Gauhati University, b) Handiqui Girls’ College, c) Govt. Banikanta College of Teacher Education and d) Teachers’ Training College, Silchar. Later two are for B. Ed and M. Ed programmes. All four study centres have libraries, but they are not working properly. This study will not include these libraries.

3.2. Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL) under Gauhati University and

3.3. Only State Open University Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU). All of them possess a good library attached to them.

4. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Institutions in Guwahati:

There are good communications to reach all the three institutions. All of three institutions under study offer library facility to their patrons. They possess library from its inception though it was not in a full-fledged form. It seems from above table that IGNOU and IDOL library has completed more than fifteen years, whereas Central Library, KKHSOU has almost completed its tenth years. The following table shows their address, name of the library along with their working hours and is arranged according to the year of establishment –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Institution</th>
<th>Yr. of Estd.</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Name of the Library</th>
<th>Working Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>IGNOU, Regional Centre, Guwahati</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Christian Basti, Guwahati - 5</td>
<td>IGNOU, Regional Centre, Guwahati Library</td>
<td>9.30am-5.30pm (every Mon to Fri)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>IDOL</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>GNB Road, Jalukbari, Guwahati -14</td>
<td>IDOL Library</td>
<td>10am-5pm (all working days)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>KKHSOU</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Patgaon, Rani Gate, Guwahati - 17</td>
<td>Central Library, KKHSOU</td>
<td>10 am-5pm (except every 1st, 3rd Sat &amp; Wed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: 1

Name of the institutions with address, year of establishment, name of the library & their working hours

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) established in 1985 has made remarkable progress in developing library services for distance learners. It has libraries at the regional and study centres and central library at headquarters. It has maintained base library operations through computerization using LibSys. However, IGNOU Regional Centre, Guwahati Library is lagging behind in providing proper services to their users in both physical and digital environment.
Established in 1998, IDOL Library experiences a good number of daily users visited to the library with good reading room section. Users take full utilization of it to prepare their assignments, notes etc. as well as raise their reading habit.

Central Library, KKHSOU, established in 2005 has been gradually increasing their capability and offering different services to their patron. It has focused mainly on digital environment than physical.

5. Collection available:
The size of the collection, both printed and non-printed is not very large in IGNOU and IDOL library. Since Self Learning Material (SLM) has been provided to all students, the documents available are for reference only. IDOL and KKHSOU libraries have subscribed good number of printed magazines and journals in both national and international level. Also access to subscribed e-resources in full text and bibliographic databases and open access e-resources like e-journals repository/search engines, e-books, e-theses & dissertations are made available in IDOL library. Central Library, KKHSOU has managed the Open Journal Access Search Engine (OJASE) where user can search the open access e-journals subject-wise. However magazines and journals in IGNOU library are supplied by the head office, New Delhi. Good numbers of local and national newspapers are available in all the three libraries.

6. Services/facilities offered:
It is not easy for an open and distance learning institute’s library to facilitate issue/return facility due to large quantity of users from variety of courses. Thus, IGNOU Library does not provide issue/return service. But they provide information to any query of the student from their Central Library, Head office, New Delhi. They make available access to the collection of Central Library by helping them to get membership and log in into the library e-resources. IDOL library restricts their lending service only for teaching staff. And Central Library, KKHSOU provides circulation service to teaching, non-teaching and research scholars only. It has the e-search engine link coincide with central library where distance learners can browse open access e-journals in respect to their subject interest via internet.

7. Human Resource:
Human Resource is an important factor for any kind of development, be it an industry, farm, or other organization. So is the case of a library since it is also an organization. Professional skill and expertise of a librarian is the key to the improvement of library services rendered to its users.

The professional manpower engaged in the libraries of Open and Distance Learning institutions are not adequate as per concerned to the distance learners it covers throughout the state and outside the state. The professional qualification is limited into post-graduate degree only in all three institutions library i.e. IGNOU Guwahati centre library, IDOL library and Central library, KKHSOU. However, the librarian i/c of IDOL Library is pursuing his Ph.D. On the other hand, Central Library, KKHSOU has one professional staff qualified UGC NET. All of them have maximum one/two non-professional staff like bearer/helper. With this limited staff, it is not easy to introduce new activities in the library for development of distance learners.

IGNOU Head Office in New Delhi organizes training programmes, workshops from time to time among the library staff working in their different regional centres for strengthen the professional competence so that they can deliver better library services to the distance learners. Central Library, KKHSOU has also been organizing various training programmes, workshops on library website design, library software etc. among professionals working in different parts of the state.

8. Usage of ICT:
According to Blurton (1999) ICTs are a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to create, communicate, disseminate, store, and manage information. The expanded use of ICT in the delivery of library and information services has served to reduce the barriers to library and information services that are occasioned by distance for distance learners. In order to provide library and information services to distance learners, libraries can place their services on line. This is the very convenient way to deal with distance users.

All three libraries have taken almost all essential advantages available through information communication and technology. Photocopying, printing, fax, internet etc. are made easily available inside the libraries for its users.

The following table has showed the best practices of ICTs in the libraries of Open and Distance Learning institution’s in Guwahati. Different technologies have been used by these libraries to serve their user community.
Practice of ICT based services in libraries of ODL institution: a study


Table: 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Practices of ICT</th>
<th>IGNOU Library</th>
<th>IDOL Library</th>
<th>Central Library, KKHSOU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Library Software</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>SOUL 2.0</td>
<td>SOUL 2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Web OPAC</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Barcode</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>RFID</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Internet Access</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>SMS Alert</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>E-mail Alert</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Library Website/Link</td>
<td>No</td>
<td><a href="http://www.idolgu.in/IDOL_library">www.idolgu.in/IDOL_library</a></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Social Networking Page/Group</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Library Blog</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Library Portal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Others (specify)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is seen from the above table that except IGNOU library, IDOL library and Central library, KKHSOU are using SOUL 2.0 library software since 2009 and 2010 respectively. And both have library link in the respective website of their institution. However, Central Library, KKHSOU introduces e-search engine (www.oajse.com) which is coincide with its library link provided free browsing of open access e-journals all over the world according to subject. IDOL Library has web opac, barcode, Internet access to its users, library link, Facebook page, SMS alert service to students etc. and Central Library, KKHSOU have introduced almost all essential services which are based on technology.

Purchased by Facebook in April 2012 for one billion dollars, Instagram, the Social photo sharing apps is being used as a communication tool and to build relationships with users. It has more than 150 million active users. Library uses Instagram in a different way by inviting customers to share Instagram pictures of what and where they were reading and occasionally reposting these images within Instagram. Library Instagram profiles have become a good medium to demonstrate how mobile photo sharing such as promoting events, sharing pictures of staff and highlighting the collection. Most libraries in developed countries promote their library Instagram profiles on their library websites and via other social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter.

9. Future Plan:

Library is a growing organism. There must be a continuous process of development in all around. And for that purpose every library prepares their own future plan how to build up their library as a better one. Following are the future plans of the libraries that are under study -

9.1 IGNOU Library: A proposal has taken to shift the IGNOU Regional Centre, Guwahati in a new site near IITG at North Guwahati where there will be a provision of separate building for library with more resources and better services. Also IGNOU library is going to set up a computer section soon with internet facility for access to e-resources. Recently percentage in the budget of regional centres has increased from 25 to 50 for library books purchasing. Thus library will be made available with rich and vast collection to cater its user’s need.

9.2 IDOL Library: The IDOL library is planning for digital library. Also preparing for library blog for its user community so that the library can approach the distance learners efficiently and effectively.

9.3 Central Library, KKHSOU: The Central Library, KKHSOU is working on Institutional Repository which will be available at website: www.kkhsouknowledgehub.in.

10. Suggestion:

Following are some reasonable suggestions for improving the library services in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions –

10.1 There should be provision of separate building for library in the institutions with all necessary facilities.

10.2 Adequate and skilled manpower should be engaged in both professional and non-professional category.

10.3 Library must open in all week days. Working hours should be extended so that distance learners can steal time from their unconventional schedule to visit the library according to their convenience.

10.4 Library website/link, SMS/E-mail alert, pages/groups in social networking site etc. is very popular and least cost way to keep users update about libraries recent
activities, events, new arrivals, new services introduced etc.

10.5 There should be regular meet, talk, training programmes, workshops etc. among library staff for improve and healthy service.

11. Conclusion:
In the age of ICT and information explosion where in every second new information comes up, the libraries of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions should take good care in rendering the library services to its specific category of users community. They should keep themselves ready for new innovation and technology promotion in the libraries. Good utilization of ICT inside the library must be experienced with skilled professionals. Digital library, free internet access must be implemented to take the advantage of e-resources. A librarian, to function successfully in this digital environment, must be flexible to update his/her skills with ever-changing technology.

Reference:
2. IDOL Library. Retrieved June 3, 2015 from Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL), Gauhati University website: http://www.idolgu.in/IDL_library