

LIFELONG LEARNING FOR LIS TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS THROUGH OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF INDIA

Mahendra Kumar

Library and Information Science is recognised as a discipline of study and research at the postgraduate level in the universities in India. There are about 181 universities and their affiliated colleges/institutes which offer different programmes in library and information science. Of the above some of the institutions offer education through distance mode also. Lifelong learning for LIS professionals in India is available in many ways such as training provided by conventional universities, national organisations, professional associations, academic staff colleges, discussion through LIS-forum, etc. In the recent past, the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system in India has come in a big way to provide lifelong learning for LIS teachers and educators in many ways due to the advent of ICT and WWW. This paper examines the various efforts made to provide lifelong learning to library and information science teachers and educators in India through open and distance learning using Information Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Keywords: Lifelong Learning; LIS Education; Open & Distance Learning (ODL); ICT; LIS Professionals

INTRODUCTION

Developing societies like India are undergoing a tremendous change due to various factors. On the one hand the need for information is being felt by all sections of the society, on the other hand, new methods and techniques to access information and knowledge are being developed at a faster rate than ever. The existing knowledge needs to be updated continuously for self-development and also for sustenance in the society. The conventional methods of educational system followed since centuries fall short to meet this necessity. It is recognized now that education is not a onetime affair; it is a continuous process of in the life of a person.

There are many factors which are responsible for the changing pattern of learning and education. These are true for many disciplines; LIS is not an exception. Now, information plays a vital role and calls for better use of existing information services. The services need continuous innovation to meet the needs of various user groups particularly for those sectors that have economic significance. Secondly, developments in ICT and the new media are playing a major role in transfer of information both to the specialist and general user. The need for information to address a wide range of societal issues – financial, legal, social- is well recognized by all. The emphasis being put, in recent years, on information technology in curricula even at the school level is visible. These are all to facilitate managing and accessing information. Revolutionary changes are also taking place in the higher education system. The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system is gradually taking a firm root in the education system [1].

Mahendra Kumar
Department of Library and
Information Science,
Dr. Harisingh Gour
Vishwavidyalaya, Sagar
(MP) INDIA
m.karya@rediffmail.com

LIFELONG LEARNING AND LIS

The term 'lifelong learning' is used for combining formal, informal and non-formal education and training, with a reconsideration of professional recognition and quality assurance processes. It is the process of acquiring and expanding knowledge, skills, and dispositions throughout the life to foster well-being.

Lifelong learning puts emphasis on the initiative, zeal and motivation of learners to educate themselves according to need and time rather than on the educators. Its necessity arises out of quest for knowledge, recognition, need to solve problems and develop capability and competency to survive in society and market place. In a professional discipline, the need for lifelong learning is more to prepare himself/herself for fast changing professional competencies. Lifelong learning is, thus, a philosophy that makes one to learn throughout the life of an individual either formally or informally. The informal learning process takes place through various ways and means such as observation, experience, environment and the need of individuals. The formal learning process is through well defined, structured method of education. In this context, the continuing professional education plays a catalytic role augmenting the method of lifelong learning [2].

In a discipline like Library and Information Science the need for lifelong learning assumes a significant importance wherein new skills have to be acquired to sustain in the market place. Though the basic goal of the profession/service remains the same, the skills and competencies are changing very fast.

THE CHANGING DIMENSION OF LIS

The attitude of the people towards the information is changing due to societal need wherein it is more and more realised that information is a key resource for all round development of the society and also for all types of people – students, workers, professionals and others. Thus, the role of library and information centres has changed.

If we look at the present scenario of LIS institutions, it is apparent that the face of library and information centres is changing very fast and, thus, its services. For example a few of the shifts that have taken place are:

- From document to information.
- Services on demand to services in anticipation.
- Library driven approach to user driven approach.
- Conventional library to Electronic/Digital library.

These impact Library and Information profession and education and training to meet the demand of library and information centres and services. LIS professionals require special training to handle new technologies for assisting in the development of new systems and procedures. LIS professionals have to play a major role in e-publishing, building digital repositories and in many other areas [3].

SKILLS REQUIRED FOR LIS PROFESSIONALS

In general some of the skills required (Fig. 1) of LIS professionals in the changing environment include (but not limited to):

- Library related activities
- Information processing and retrieval
- Network-based services
- Information Technology planning
- Online searching
- Web-based information services
- Internet related activities such as web page development
- Electronic and network publishing, etc. [4].

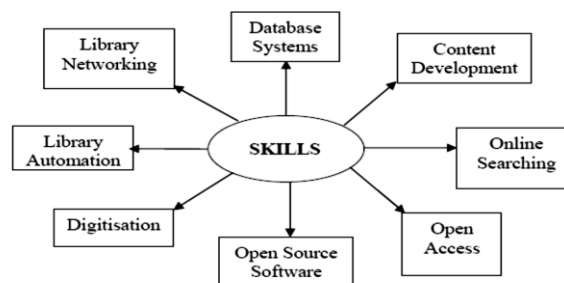


Fig. 1: Skills required for LIS professionals in the present day context

METHODOLOGIES AVAILABLE FOR LIS EDUCATION

The credit for starting a formal course in library education in India goes to William Alonson

Borden and Asa Don Dickinson who were students of Melville Dewey. Borden established a training course at the Central Library, Baroda in 1911, and Dickinson at the Punjab University, Lahore in 1915. Since then different methods are followed for training the LIS professionals. These methods can be grouped as:

- i) regular/conventional class room method
- ii) non-conventional methods like tutorial, seminar, conference, etc.
- iii) open and distance education method

The traditional class room methodology is the predominant one. Though this method is available to acquire the knowledge in a structured and time bound way, as it provides the opportunity to learner at a particular point of time; lifelong education is not the aim of the system.

Internship in library and information centres gives opportunity to the professionals to acquire new skills. Another important methodology which is noticed in India is work-place education wherein the professionals learn while they work. The non-conventional methods include the use of mass media like television, development of web-based training modules, etc.

As has been pointed out earlier, open and distance education system has taken a firm root in the overall education system of the country. India is a vast country of more than 1000 million people with rich cultural heritage and a unique social conglomeration. Though, since independence, a substantial progress is seen in many areas including education, still the literacy rate is only 65 per cent. Open and distance learning is seen as a viable alternative to address the problem. The Indian Government has taken the initiative, 'education for all'. The intention of the Government to emphasize the method of Open and Distance Learning is pronounced in the National Policy of Education, 1986. The establishment of National Open School and the Indira Gandhi National Open University and also the decision to set up open universities in each state of the country are enough evidence of government's determination to boost the educational scenario of the country. The open and distance education system is looked upon as a means to provide

lifelong education to its citizens. The library and information science is included in many of the ODL Universities in the country. At present, 6 such Universities are offering various programmes on LIS to develop the skills required [5].

ROLE OF VARIOUS AGENCIES IN PROVIDING LIFELONG LEARNING FOR LIS PROFESSIONALS

In India, we find a number of institutions/agencies both at Governmental and Nongovernmental level playing important role in the process of lifelong education. The objectives of the present study are to:

University Grants Commission (UGC)

The UGC is empowered for administration of higher education system in the country including Library and Information Science education. Library and Information Science (LIS) is recognised as a discipline for a study and research at the post graduate level in the universities across the country. There are about 181 universities (conventional and non-conventional) and their affiliated colleges/institutes which offer LIS programmes at different levels. At Bachelors degree level, the courses are available in 87 universities/colleges; at Masters level in 89 universities/colleges; at PhD level 49 universities (Full time) and 3 universities (Part time); and at Certificate and Diploma levels 14 universities and 18 colleges (AIU Handbook [2]). The UGC assists the Universities through Academic Staff Colleges in organising orientation programmes/refresher courses, summer schools on various emerging areas of LIS [6].

Conventional Universities

The conventional universities normally organise short-term programmes on different emerging areas of library and information services subject areas (i) Social Science, (ii) Business Management, and (iii) Others were excluded. The results were analyzed.

Non-conventional Universities

The Open Universities of the country are the examples of such Universities.

Professional Associations

The professional associations such as ILA, IASLIC, IATLIS play a significant role in lifelong learning of teachers through various conferences/seminars and workshops and also organizing training programmes on different aspects of LIS.

Other Government Agencies

The Government Agencies are taking sufficient initiative in the continuing education programme either by organising short-term courses or assisting the departments in organising such courses. For example, National Institute of Science, Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR) of the CSIR organizes regular short-term programmes not only for the participants from India but also from the SAARC countries. The Figure 3 illustrates different activities of NISCAIR and workplace learning.

Inter-Governmental Organisations

The inter-governmental agencies like UNESCO, UNIDO, offer assistance in organizing short term training programmes in various burning areas of LIS.

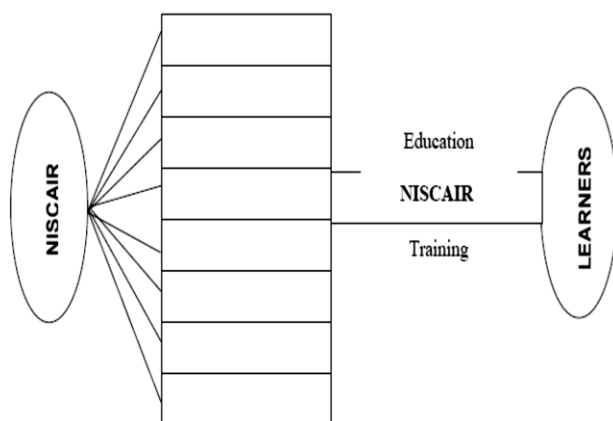


Fig. 2: Process of Workplace Learning

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

In the present scenario education through open and distance learning system is gaining importance and popularity throughout the world. The developments in technology is challenging the

basic foundation of educational system. The new technologies are ushering in a new era of virtual class rooms.

Distance Education is not a new concept. It was initiated towards the end of 19th century. The mode of delivery was of course dependent upon the media available at a particular point of time. Thus open learning system implies that flexibility in educating the people is available according to one's choice irrespective of space and time. The openness in education system presupposes the availability of education – to anyone, anywhere, and anytime without social, physical and geographical restrictions. The success of the ODL system depends upon its capability to:

- develop need based programmes/courses
- provide study materials to learners at regular intervals
- develop infrastructure for proper counseling
- offer regular seminars and workshops
- develop mechanisms for curricula revision and updating from time to time.

Thus the philosophy and methods of Open and Distance learning implies that for lifelong learning, this system with the use of ICT can play a significant role [7].

LIFELONG LEARNING THROUGH ODL

If we look at the development of ODL we find that it has developed from correspondence model to a flexible learning model through various phases. The correspondence model based on combination of different media individually –print, audio, video, computer, lecture through radio and television was developed. For example, in the present day context, the area of content development encompasses meta-data, web indexing, etc. Though, basically the principle of organizing the knowledge is same, but the methods, tools and techniques have changed. There are many more areas where this kind of change is witnessed.

• IGNOU

The Indira Gandhi National Open University, established in 1985 by an Act of Parliament, offers education through Open and Distance mode. In

addition to IGNOU, five State Universities are offering LIS programmes through the same mode. The basic methodology of offering the programme is same but differs in the application of ICT aspects. The methodology followed by IGNOU in developing the LIS programmes is through printed study material supplemented by direct contact programme, practical at the study centres, audio and video tapes, interactive radio counseling, interactive teleconferencing, etc. For the interactive radio counseling a dedicated FM channel called 'Gyanvani' is used.

The EDUSAT was launched by Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on September 20, 2004. The main aim of the EDUSAT was to demonstrate the concept of multicasting interactive multimedia for the educational sector and augment distance education capabilities in the country. IGNOU has about 4 lac students in different disciplines including Library and Information Science, 58 Regional Centres, 06 Sub-Regional Centres, and 1400 Study Centres all over the country. The learners from any corner of the country will be able to watch the live programmes and interact with the resource persons (i.e. Teachers). An exclusive TV channel for education is used to telecast the live programmes. Fig. 3 illustrates the mechanism of delivering the programmes to the learners [8].

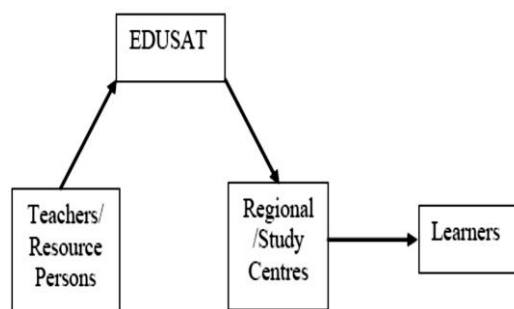


Fig. 3: Mechanism of Teleconferencing through EDUSAT

Apart from the above stated methods, IGNOU started telecasting educational programmes from 1991 for distance learners through the national TV channel called 'Doordarshan'. Now the educational programmes are telecast for five days a week through the channel.

To meet the objective of lifelong learning the IGNOU, besides the regular courses on Bachelor's

and Master's degree, is offering Certificate in ICT Applications in Libraries (CICTAL) for the Semi-Professional staff to equip them with the methodology of handling ICT in their work environments. The curriculum structure of this programme gives ICT based input to the learners from the areas such as Computer Basics and Context, Database Management Systems, Library Automation and Digitization, and Network based Information Services. Similarly, for the qualified library professionals the Post-Graduate Diploma in Library Automation and Networking (PGDLAN) is offered to enable them to be conversant with the latest methods and skills in handling ICT based services in library and information centres in the country. The curriculum structure of this programme comprises: Introduction to Computers, Library Automation, Database Systems and Management, Networking and Internet Technology, Internet Resources, Content Development, and Programming Languages like Java, C++, etc. [9].

• BRAOU

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU) located in the city of Hyderabad was established through an act of Andhra Pradesh State Legislature in 1982. It has a wide network of 152 study centers spread throughout the state of Andhra Pradesh. 'To serve as a source of continuing education, consultancy and to provide equal access to knowledge and higher education' are its primary objectives (www.braou.ac.in/). The University adopts a multimedia approach for instruction, i.e., printed programs material, radio lessons, audio and video lessons, contact - cum - counseling classes, winter and summer schools for intensive coaching by experts. The programs materials, including radio and video lessons in each subject, are selected and prepared by a team of writers, editors and translators in collaboration with specialists in various disciplines from different Universities. Besides regular broadcast of lessons through All India Radio, from 1999, the University started Telecast of Video lessons through Doordarshan Regional Channel.

LIS DISCUSSION FORUMS

In addition to the above, there are some Forums in the country devoted exclusively for library and information science professionals to

interact among themselves through email. These forums help the professionals to share their views, ideas, latest developments and issues in the profession, getting response to queries regarding the difficulties at workplace, announcement of recent conferences, seminars, etc. [10].

- **LIS – Forum**

LIS-Forum is an e-mail based discussion forum for Library and Information professionals in India. It is operated and maintained by NCSI, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. It was established in 1995 with support from NISSAT, DSIR, Government of India. The submissions can be posted at lis-forum@ncsi.iisc.ernet.in and list is at <http://ncsi.iisc.ernet.in/mailman/listinfo/lis-forum>

- **IATLIS – Forum**

This is a national level discussion forum developed by yahoo groups for Library and Information Science Teachers in India. This group is meant for having better communication among the professionals regarding professional activities. The submissions can be posted at iatlis@yahoogroups.com and list is at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/iatlis/>

- **Corporatelibrns**

This is a forum developed by yahoo groups for corporate librarians to discuss their achievements, problems, creative solutions, tools and technologies, issues and literature with fellow professionals. Notifications about events and resources can also be posted. The submissions can be posted at corporatelibrns@yahoogroups.com and the list is at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/corporatelibrns/>

- **Digital Libraries: India**

This digilibindia group is an initiative to create awareness about issues relating to Digital Libraries, Library Automation and Management viz. creation, maintenance, standards, architectures, software, how to start etc. Specifically concentrating on issues related to Indian Library/Institution and community. The submissions can be posted at digilib_india@yahoogroups.com and the list is at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/digilib_india/ [11].

- **NMLIS - New Millennium LIS Professionals**

It is a mailing list for library and information science professionals to exchange their views, ideas and opinions relating to their profession. The submissions can be posted at nmlis@yahoogroups.com and the list is at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nmlis/>

- **INDIA – LIS**

It is a mailing list developed by IFLA for library and information science professionals in India to exchange their views, ideas and opinions relating to their profession. The submissions can be posted at india-lis@infoserv.inist.fr and the list is at <http://infoserv.inist.fr/wwwsympa.fcgi/info/india-lis>.

- **LIBTECH**

LIBTECH is an open special discussion forum for interaction among library professionals in India. The topics for discussion include: Analyzing, planning, management and use of innovative technology in library operations and networking.

E – LEARNING AS A METHOD OF LIFELONG LEARNING

E-learning is defined as an interactive learning in which the learning content is available on-line and provides automatic feedback to the learners learning activities. E-learning covers a wide set of applications and processes, such as, web-based learning, computer based learning, virtual class rooms, and digital collaboration. The contents can be made available through Internet, intranet/extranet, satellite broadcast, interactive Television, CD-ROM, DVD, audio and videotape, etc. E-learning is a new technology in the field of education especially for distance learners. It will suit a country like India, which is spread over a vast geographical area [12].

- The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has started developing web-based learning modules. In this process, it has already developed an e-learning module for WINISIS software.
- Documentation Research and Training Centre (DRTC), since its inception, has been organizing conferences, seminars, workshops, refresher courses for LIS professionals in the country through conventional mode. Now, DRTC has

developed a continuing education portal through virtual classroom.

CONCLUSION

In the new age there will be major changes in the way we think about libraries and learning spaces as well as in the roles of students, educators and librarians. It is therefore inevitable for the LIS professionals and educators to keep up with the changes in order to be an integral part of this new and exciting phase of the knowledge society. Better results can be achieved if professional associations, Academic Staff Colleges and other training organisations like NISCAIR, DRTC, etc. can supplement the present models for lifelong learning programmes using ICT-based instructions through open and distance learning. However the success of lifelong learning depends upon the initiatives taken by individual learners.

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