WED BASED LIBRARY SERVICES FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS: A BRIEF REVIEW

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Abstract:

Distance learning is one of the most rapidly growing fields of education and training. The role of libraries is very crucial in the distance learning process. For gaining the quality education, distance education learners needs adequate library services. This paper examines the possible ways of library services more specifically web based library services that fulfil the information needs of the distance education students. It concludes that the librarians should be expert to hold the hands of the users who are moving towards new communication paradigm a shift from face to face human contact to human machine interaction, from paper to electronic delivery, from text centered mode to multimedia and from physical presence to virtual presence. To meet these challenges the librarians may play a leadership role in providing better Web Based library Services facilities to their current techno savvy users.

Key words: *Distance Education, Wed Based Library Services, Library Services*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Today, distance learning is one of the most rapidly growing fields of education and training. Over the past few years, the delivery of open and distance education to students has become a core part of the activity of many academic institutions. Distance education is any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner, with the effect that all or most of the communication between teachers and learners is through an artificial medium, either electronic or print (UNESCO, 2001).

Due to technological development distance education is moving towards more knowledge-intensive, interdependent and internationalized. Internet and World Wide Web has created new challenges and opportunities for the design and

delivery of education. The Web offers a worldwide forum in which to teach courses. Each student has an enormous range of resources available, free from limitations of time and space (Accanoor, 2005).

2. DISTANCE EDUCATION AND LIBRARY SERVICES:

In the traditional distance education, the efforts were made by the academic institutions to ensure that collections of core texts and journals were accessible to registered students through, for example, postal loan services. Otherwise the student was dependent on buying textbooks or using any relevant materials or services provided by alocal library.Even libraries were striving for collection, organization, storing and dissemination of information in print form. Due to the proliferation of information technologylibraries have undergone major changes in terms of their collection, organizations, and services in recent years. Accordingly the traditional concept of libraries is gradually becoming obsolete and new concept of digital library is entering slowly.The role Librarian has also become even more important, because he is the most responsible person for teaching end users who has to work effectively in the gathering of data, to choose the most appropriate resources, and to deploy them within the organization.Web based library services puts the technical control and development of resources right in the hands of the librarian in an unprecedented way. On the other hand, providing information and selective dissemination of information services are something that librarians have been doing for centuries.Some of the higher education institutions like, IGNOU, YCMOU, Nasik are well established open universities in India.

3. LIBRARY SERVICES:

The following are suggested web-based library services for libraries serving distance students

3.1 OPAC: OPAC's - On Line Public Access Catalogues, form an important part of many digital library's collections. It allows users to search for the bibliographic records contained within a library's collections. Now days, some OPAC also

provide access to electronic resources and databases, in addition to the traditional bibliographic records.

3.2 Gateways: A gateway is defined as a facility that allows easier access to network based resources in a given subject area. Gateways provide a simple search facility and a much-enhanced service through a resource database and indexes, which can be searched through a web based interface. Information provided by gateways is catalogued by hand. Gateways cover a wide range of subjects, through some areas, such as music and religious studies, currently lack subject gateways.

3.3 Portals: In the library community, portals may be defined as an amalgamation of services to the users where the amalgamation is achieved through seamless integration of existing services by using binding agents such as customization and authentication services, search protocols such as Z39.50, loan protocols such as ISO10161, and e-commerce. The result is a personalized service which allows the individual to access the rich content of both print-based and electronic systems. Portals are either commercial or free web facilities that offer information services to a specific audience. The facilities include web search to communication to email to news etc.

3.4 Subject Portals: Web Search Engines had been developed initially by computer scientists, by borrowing techniques from information retrieval search such as best match searching and relevance ranking. Information professional are increasing bringing their skills to help organize the growing wealth of Internet resources. A good example of their influence is the development of subject-specific web search engines known as subject portals, where evaluation of material covered is a major concern.

3.5 e-Journals: E-journals form a large part of the collection of a library for providing web based services. Today many journals are available electronically - some are full text and some contain only bibliographic information with abstract. Major advantage of electronic journals is that they are constantly updated and easy

to access but disadvantage is that breaching of copyright law is very easy. They are available as bitmaps, PostScript, PDF, ASCII, SGML and HTML. Library services may be delivering to users on CD- Rom, through email or through web. Some international societies and associations have developed their own digital libraries through which users can get access to all their publications. Services are available to the members of society or associations through subscription.

3.6 Online Databases: An electronic database in which the content is revised and/or augmented, usually on a regular basis,to provide current information or to add recently published sources and also designs to provideinformation about a very specific topic, as opposed to a range of topics, usually for a limited audience.

Most journal databases are updated on a regular basis as new issues are published and indexed.Most databases used in libraries are catalogs, periodical indexes, abstracting services, and full-textreference resources leased annually under licensing agreements that limit access to registeredborrowers and library staff (ODLIS). There are many, many different types of electronic databases inthe world today, including statistical databases, image databases, and others. These databases arebecoming very important these days as they are more up-to-date, and can be accessed anywhere,crossing all geographical boundaries. Such electronic databases are very valuable and useful fortime-saving while conducting R&D activities.

3.7 Search Engines: Search Engines are huge databases of web page files that have been assembled automatically by machines where as the subject directories are human-compiled and maintained. Search engine indexes every page of a website and subject directories linked only homepages. Search Engine is the popular term for an information retrieval (IR) system. A search engine is computer software that searches a collection of electronic materials to retrieve citations, documents, or information that matches or answers a user's query. The retrieved materials may be text documents, facts that have been extracted from text, images, or sounds. A query is a question phrased so that it can be interpreted properly by

search engine. Depending on the type of software, it may be a collection of commands, a statement in either full or partial sentences, one or more keywords, or in the case of non-text searching, an image or sequence of sounds to be matched.

3.8 Subject Directories: Subject directories differ from search engines in that search engines are populated by robots that finds and index sites whereas humans making editorial decisions that populate subject directories. Subject directories are basically index home pages of sites and can be classified as general, academic, commercial or portal. Among the well known subject directories are the Argus Clearinghouse (www.clearinghouse.net) and Yahoo (www.yahoo.com). Strengths include relevance, effectiveness and relative high quality of content. Weaknesses are that they lack depth in their coverage of the subjects.

4. NEW WEB BASED LIBRARY SERVICES:

Some new web-based library services for libraries serving distance students are suggested as follows:

4.1 Virtual Library Tours: Websites of libraries provides virtual library guide to the physical facilities including collections, services and infrastructure available in the library. The combination of library maps and floor plans, library departments and photographic views are used for the tour. Virtual library tours are also using new technologies such as QuickTime movies etc and are beginning to replace image maps on main campus Web sites (Bakker, 2002).

4.2 Ask-A-Librarian: Ask-A-Librarian services are Internet-based question and answer service that connects users with individuals who possess specialized subject knowledge and skill in conducting precision searches. Most "Ask-a-Librarians" services have a web-based question submission form or an e-mail address or both. Users are invited to submit their queries by using web forms or through e-mail. Once a query is read by a service, it is assigned to an individual expert for answering. An expert responds to the query with factual information and or a list of information resources. The response is either sent to the user's e-mail

account or is posted on the web so that the user can access it after a certain period of time. Many services have informative web sites that include archives of questions and answers and a set of FAQs. Users are usually encouraged to browse archives and FAQs before submitting a question in case sufficient information already exists

4.3 Real Time Services: A new and exciting method of digital reference service that libraries are attempting to provide more and more now is live reference. These are real-time, interactive reference services in which the users can talk to a real, live reference librarian at any time, from anywhere in the world. User and librarian can interact using chat technologies, and unlike with email reference the librarian can perform a reference interview of sorts by asking the users to elaborate or clarify if needed before proceeding to answer the question. The librarian can perform Internet searches and push websites onto the user's browser, and can receive immediate feedback from the users as to whether their question have been answered to satisfaction.

4.4 Bulletin Boards: A bulletin board is an electronic communications forum that hosts posted messages and articles connected to a common subject or theme or interest. It allows users to call in and either leaves or retrieves messages. The messages may be directed to all users of the bulletin board or only to particular users. But all messages can be read by all users. Several libraries are using bulletin boards for their web-based library services. The bulletin board system is also used as an interactive interface to invite suggestions on activities and services of a library. It can also be used as an interface to distribute library services.

4.5 Web-based User Education: Web guides and teaching tools are found everywhere on the Web because they are easily updated, accessed, and printed on demand. The web-based user education provides a high degree of interactivity and flexibility to the users. The library web sites can use web-based user education for imparting training to users in teaching the basic library skills along with glossary

of library terms, using Library OPAC, locating books, magazines, biographical data and other library materials, understanding how to navigate the libraries website and how to select the most relevant database, instructions for searching CD ROM and guidance in locating web-based databases and other electronic resources and instructions on subject searching training, using Boolean operators and searching internet resources through search engines (Arora, 2001).

4.6 Web Forms: Library web sites have some web forms for suggestions and comments on the Library Services. Different types of Web Forms are available on web that may be an Indent form for acquiring some publications, interlibrary loan request form for document delivery, Ask-a-Librarian forms, on line reservation form or user survey form etc

5. CONCLUSION:

The inevitable advances of ICT, convergence of communicationtechnology, costs cutting, competition and globalization will definitely increasethe potential of distance learning. The growing population of distance learners willincreasingly expect library services to be delivered to their desktops.Therefore, there is a need for academics and librarians to venture into distancelearning systems and recognize the special demands and problems of newly emerginggroup of learners. Web-based library services will become more widespread and sophisticated as the web becomes common place throughout the world, and to be successful players in the E-world. The librarians should be expert to hold the hands of the users who are moving towards new communication paradigm a shift from face to face human contact to human machine interaction, from paper to electronic delivery, from text centered mode to multimedia and from physical presence to virtual presence. Despite these changes in communication technology, the reference interview will remain at the heart of the reference transaction. To meet these challenges the librarians may play a leadership role in providing better Web Based library Services facilities to their current techno savvy users.To meet these challenges the

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