

# ROLE OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN FOSTERING DISTANCE LEARNERS EDUCATION

**Mahesh G T**

Research Scholar

Department Of Studies in Library & Information Science

University Of Mysore, Mysore

Karnataka, India

Email: [maheshgt@gmail.com](mailto:maheshgt@gmail.com)

**Dr. Adithyakumari H**

Associate Professor

Department Of Studies in Library & Information Science

Yuvaraja's College

University Of Mysore, Mysore

Karnataka, India

Email : [adithyakumarih@gmail.com](mailto:adithyakumarih@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** In higher education, Universities are very significant and are playing a very important role in the teaching and learning process of distance learners. A key aspect in any educational process is the availability, convenience and ease of using library and information resources and its services. The current study investigates the distance learners' information seeking behaviour on the role of the University library services in facilitating their learning and their satisfaction with the sources and services currently provided. Collection of data was done from 1550 randomly selected distance education students in DCC & DE of Bangalore University. The findings of the study shows that the majority of respondents' i. e 789 (54.60%) acknowledged the role of library is important in facilitating distance education, and 583 (40.30%) respondents opined good, followed by 338 (23.40%) respondents opined very good and 153 (10.60%) opined excellent about the role of University libraries in meeting their information needs. Although there are few areas that have to be improved such as extended opening hours for personal visits and access, more library assistance and borrowing facilities in spite of the services for remote access support. It is observed from the study that frequency on use of University libraries on the whole, a majority 786 (54.4%) respondents indicated only during the contact classes they visit the library and 639 (44.20%) distance students are partially satisfied with the University library. The current study findings will be very much helpful to University libraries offering distance learning programmes in providing improved library and information services to distance students for their academics.

**Keywords:** Information Seeking Behaviour, Bangalore University, Distance Learners, Role of University Libraries, Library Facilities

**1.0 Introduction:** In the last two decades, higher education has started giving greater importance and attention towards distance education for those learners who are unable to complete their education in the desired manner and in a conventional set up. Government of India is very keen by developing suitable guidelines offering the facilities by financially assisting and encouraging the University authorities to offer distance education.

Any University library which is offering distance education will have a significant role to play in support of higher education to fulfill its objectives. Distance learning students are to be offered with all the necessary facilities for mastering the subject material, techniques, skills, habits of thought, and methods of work in their chosen field (ILA, 2001). Classroom instructions and activities alone will not provide all the opportunities needed for attaining all these complex educational objectives. It is here that libraries come to help these distance students (Khan amjid, 2014) and this has ignited many researchers making greater demands for access to library and information sources and on the

quality of information provided in University libraries. University libraries have always been identified as information gateways. In line with the changing mode of education, Universities vision and mission has to modify to meet these new challenges.

In meeting these challenges, University libraries need to keep the rapport with academic researchers and develop the functions and linger feasible and competitive in this novel and dynamic information environment so that distance learners could effectively learn and utilize the available information resources and services offered, and at the same time they feel comfort and recognize that University libraries are offering quality information resources for them.

## **2.0 Changing Information Need**

Literally speaking seeking information is administered by the information need of any information seeker. We would like to read the information content that satisfy our information gap. In the last few years, distance learners information need has extremely changed and this alter can also be accredited to the types of information needed. Every now and then we need comprehensive information on one or the other subject, at times we need specific information on a particular topic, sometimes we go for reference only while we also need all the studies carried on the same topic and there exists a wide range of information needs (Rupak, 2013). This diverse and dynamic information need is thus associated and seemingly always together with the distance education learners' information seeking behaviour. Reading is thus the last step in this process of information acquisition. In order to deal with such complex situation, libraries are required to have a heterogeneous collection for the heterogeneous reading community

## **3.0 Literature Review**

Library and information science professionals perceive the library more in terms of the providing and giving access to worth information services than just a material space. Knowledge resources and technology have also altered the way readers recognize libraries.

Bhatti (2008) acknowledged that "Pakistani Universities have to meet global educational standards and instill collective scholastic values and also he identified that on the other hand, these Universities have to respond to the uncharacteristic demands and needs of the reading community.

Singh (2007) explored that research is taking a mounting importance in higher education particularly in Universities and Colleges. These Universities are making bigger allowance for research and developmental activities and the grade of University is based on their research outputs. In order to satisfy their chief stakeholders, the role of libraries in fostering research has to be reexamined. In doing so, libraries could provide more efficient services and supports to their learning population.

Arif and Mahmood (2010) investigated the satisfaction level of central library users with respect to the collection and services at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU), Islamabad, Pakistan. Data was collected with the semi-structured questionnaire distributed to the students of the University. The findings of the study showed that a majority i. e. 52% of the students frequently visited the library, followed by 47% students who occasionally visited the library. Respondents articulated dissatisfaction with the existing collection, electronic databases, virtual reference services, interlibrary loan, photocopying facilities, and journals related to particular subjects. However, they were pleased with the current location and the infrastructural facilities of the library. The study also found that the majority of the respondents used library and information resources for teaching and research. About 54% of the respondents recommended that the library should employ well qualified and knowledgeable library personnel and endow with information literacy programs.

Rasul and Singh (2010) studied postgraduate students' observation on the role of University library and information services in facilitating their academics with the available resources. Data was collected randomly from four Malaysian public universities. The findings of the study showed that the majority (90%) of the respondents agreed the role of University libraries in facilitating research. And 72% of the respondents were satisfied with the existing library and information services. Very few respondents recommended that library functioning hours have to be increased for effectual use of its library resources and services.

#### **4.0 Problem Statement**

It is evident from the literature that there is dearth research literature on Indian distance learning Universities and its libraries, and there is a much required need to carry out such research studies on a regular basis to review distance learners satisfaction with University library resources and its services including physical infrastructure.

#### **5.0 Objectives of the study**

1. Identify the Information needs of the distance learners of Bangalore University
2. Discover the frequency and purpose of distance learners visiting the University Library
3. Identify the adequacy of University Library's Collections in meeting distance learners information needs
4. To identify distance learners perceptions regarding the performance of the librarians in meeting their information needs
5. To identify the overall satisfaction level towards University library

#### **6.0 Research Methodology**

To study the role of University libraries in fostering distance learners' education at Bangalore University a survey research method was used to collect the data using open and close ended questionnaire from the respondents in order to accomplish the objectives of the research study. The research survey instrument was designed in such a way so as to collect the data among the total population of distance learners. A sample of 1550 distance students was drawn out of the total population using simple stratified random sampling technique and distributed the questionnaire copies among the students, 1445 students completely responded to the research survey tool with a good response rate of 93.22%. The sample study population includes all undergraduate and post-graduate students, studying in the Arts, Science and Commerce streams of the DCC & DE in Bangalore University.

#### **7.0 Major Findings of the Study**

**7.1 Distance Learners Background Information:** Out of 1445 respondents considered for study, 829 (57.4%) were male respondents and remaining 616 (42.6%) were female respondents. Among these respondents, 875 (60.60%) were postgraduate students and 570 (39.40%) were undergraduate students.

The respondents were asked that how frequent they access the University library. Majority of the distance students (786, 54.40%) indicated they access the library during contact classes followed by 297 (20.60%) students visit occasionally, 243 (16.80%) visit weekly, 90 (6.20%) visit monthly and remaining 29 (2%) personally visit the library fortnightly. It is found from the study that 809 (56.00%) respondents spent less than one hour in the University library.

When students were asked to respond for the purpose of visiting the University library, 444 (30.70%) students opined often to refer books, 336 (23.30%) responded very often, and when they asked for the purpose of visiting the library for reading reference materials it is 548 (37.90%) distance students often visited, 240 (16.60%) very often, 62 (4.30%) always visit the University library for reading and using reference materials. But it was very disappointing that they hardly ever used the journals for the reading or reference purpose.

Photocopying of the reading materials accessible in the library was one of the major purposes of visiting the University library by the distance students, and it is found from the study that 553 (38.30%) respondents visited the library very often, 275 (19%) often and 135 (9.3%) always for photocopying the materials.

**7.2 Distance Learners Information Needs:** It is found from the study that distance learners need information about the library resources and its services such as books, magazines, journals and newspapers, it is 888 (61.50%) of the respondents needed to moderate extent and 341 (23.60%) of the respondents need it for major extent. There are 792 (54.80%) respondents who needed information to support their current learning to a moderate extent and 432 (29.90%) need it to major extent.

With respect to the need of information to keep up-to-date 571 (39.50%) respondents moderately needed information to keep update, 523 (36.20%) need it to a major extent. Supplementing to this 760 (52.60%) students need information to a major extent to prepare for the examination and a moderate extent of 577 (39.90%) respondents needs information to prepare for the competitive examinations

A greater part of the distance students' i. e. 1010 (69.90%) respondents needed information on previous year's examination question papers

### **7.3 Sufficiency of University Library's Collections in Meeting Distance Learners Information Need**

As far as the adequacy of University library's Collections in terms of books, 543 (37.60%) distance learners opined somewhat adequate and 241 (16.7%) opined adequate, for journals and magazines, 625 (43.30%) responded adequate, 457 (31.6%) responded somewhat adequate, e- resources 495 (34.30%) respondents felt somewhat adequate, 515 (35.60%) respondents replied somewhat adequate for newspapers, and 536 (37.10%) responded adequate for thesis/dissertations and reports and lastly for the collection of dictionaries & encyclopedias 715 (49.50%) respondents responded somewhat adequate.

### **8.0 University Library Staff Performance**

**Table 1: Library Staff Performance**

Responses	Gender		Area		Course		Total
	Male	Female	Urban	Rural	UG	PG	
Cannot say	119	100	177	42	163	56	219
	14.40%	16.20%	15.20%	15.10%	28.60%	6.40%	15.20%
Poor	71	74	116	29	46	99	145
	8.60%	12.00%	9.90%	10.40%	8.10%	11.30%	10.00%
Fair	258	178	365	71	141	295	436
	31.10%	28.90%	31.30%	25.40%	24.70%	33.70%	30.20%
Good	381	264	508	137	220	425	645
	46.00%	42.90%	43.60%	49.10%	38.60%	48.60%	44.60%
Total	829	616	1166	279	570	875	1445
	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Test Statistics	CV=.066; p=.096		CV=.054; p=.246		CV=.303; p=.000		X <sup>2</sup> =423.808; p=.000

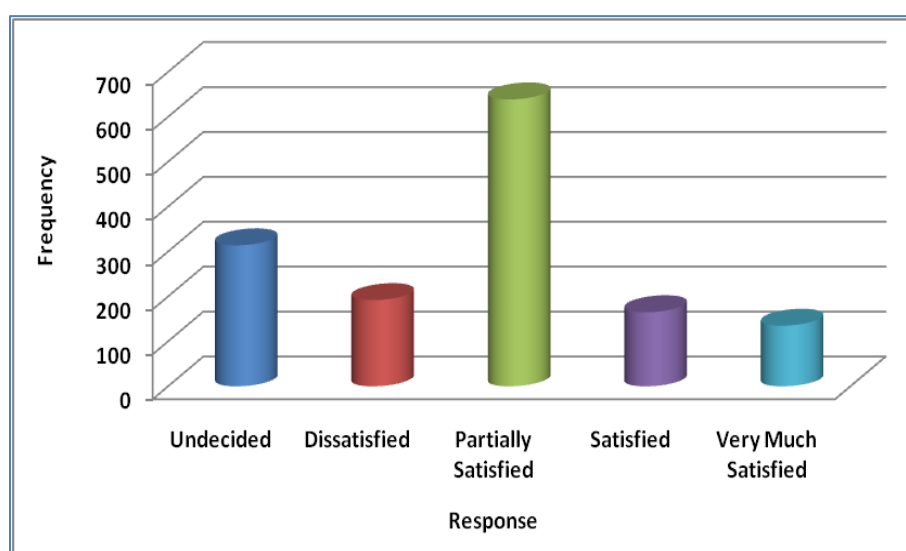
The above table 1 reported the performance of the library personnel and it is seen that 645 (44.60%) respondents opined good followed by 436 (30.20%) opined fair and only 145 (10%) replied poor remaining 219 (15.20%) couldn't say anything.

### **9.0 Satisfaction towards University Library**

**Table 2: Satisfaction towards University Library**

Responses	Gender		Area		Course		Total
	Male	Female	Urban	Rural	UG	PG	
Undecided	191	123	261	53	117	197	314

	23.00%	20.00%	22.40%	19.00%	20.50%	22.50%	<b>21.70%</b>
<b>Dissatisfied</b>	119	73	162	30	87	105	<b>192</b>
	14.40%	11.90%	13.90%	10.80%	15.30%	12.00%	<b>13.30%</b>
<b>Partially Satisfied</b>	355	284	507	132	265	374	<b>639</b>
	42.80%	46.10%	43.50%	47.30%	46.50%	42.70%	<b>44.20%</b>
<b>Satisfied</b>	87	78	123	42	61	104	<b>165</b>
	10.50%	12.70%	10.50%	15.10%	10.70%	11.90%	<b>11.40%</b>
<b>Very Much Satisfied</b>	77	58	113	22	40	95	<b>135</b>
	9.30%	9.40%	9.70%	7.90%	7.00%	10.90%	<b>9.30%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>829</b>	<b>616</b>	<b>1166</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>570</b>	<b>875</b>	<b>1445</b>
	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Test</b>	<b>CV=.062; p=.238</b>		<b>CV=.076; p=.078</b>		<b>CV=.085; p=.035</b>		<b>X<sup>2</sup>=593.862;</b>

**Figure 1: Satisfaction towards the University Library**

The above table 2 and figure 1 highlights the respondents' levels of satisfaction towards the University library, 639 (44.20%) respondents were partially satisfied, 165 (11.40%) were satisfied, 135 (9.30%) were very much satisfied, 192 (13.30%) were dissatisfied and remaining 314 (21.70%) were undecided.

## 10.0 Conclusion

This study was carried out with the objective to examine the perceptions of distance education learners on the role of University libraries in facilitating their education. It is found from the study that majority of students usually visit the library to consult course books, reference materials, newspapers and photocopy the study related materials while only a little percentage of them visit to borrow books and refer periodicals. The use of nonbook materials and e-resources is also very low. The study findings indicate that University libraries are underutilized but assisting in a little extent in their education. The results show that most of the students were partially satisfied with the University library.

And this tendency implies University library authorities have to constantly get better their information resources with the collection development policy so as to meet the information needs of distance education learners. There was a strong demand from the students that library should have the instruction programme for better usage and access.

At the concluding outset of the study findings it would help the libraries of distance education Universities to re-examine their library and information resources for better educational activities. And these findings could assist all libraries not just to get better their information services and initiate next level of services so as to evade anxiety and complexity among the distance learners. Factually speaking information environment is very much impulsive and dynamic, libraries have to sustain their responsibility as significant associates in educational system by perceptive anticipation and understanding the challenges in varied learning environment. And certainly, these open up the potential for libraries in humanizing the excellence of accessible information resources and services to distance learners more efficiently and effectively.

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