

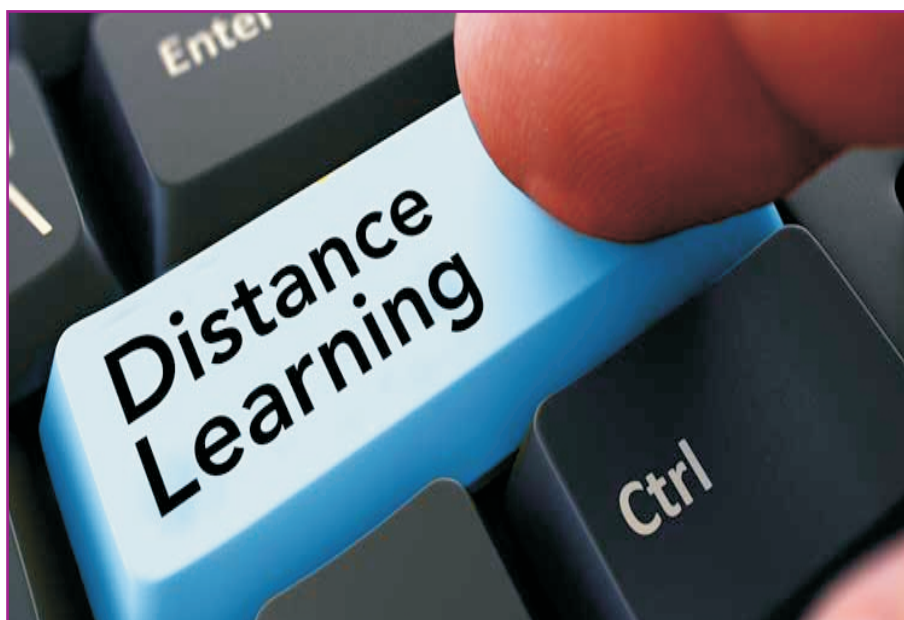


SEEKING INFORMATION UTILISING INTERNET INFORMATION RESOURCES BY THE DISTANCE LEARNERS OF BANGALORE UNIVERSITY: A STUDY

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distance learners are proficient in browsing internet, have the ability to use e-mail and other social networking sites and many of the them (77.5 %) use the internet (at home 49.6%, 25.1% at the institution where they work and about 10.4% in the cyber cafe) daily and about 11.22% of the students use once in a week followed by 2.42% students once in a month. Study revealed that 8.8% of the distance students never used the internet having very poor competence in using it. Majority of the students used Google as their main search engine.

ABSTRACT

The Internet has changed the life of the humankind very rapidly in the 21st century and currently it is playing a very significant role in distance learning meeting the needs and expectations of the distance learners' in a very large size. It is quite challenging to achieve the same using conventional educational system due to its inadequate information communication technology (ICT) resources in distance learning. ICT has a variety of technological tools to convene the requirements of the distance learner at different phases of learning. Due to varied needs and

requirements in distance learning, distance students very much depend on the internet, accessing variety of information resources to meet the their academic and non academic needs. The main objective of the research was to explore the Internet use by distance education learners'. Data was obtained from 1445 (93.2%) undergraduate and postgraduate distance learners out of 1554 students by administering the questionnaire personally during their contact classes. Majority of the distance education students (91.2%) have very good experience in facilitating learning activities on the Internet. More than 64% of the

KEYWORDS: Internet Use: Information Seeking: Distance Learners: Bangalore University: Information Communication Technology.

INTRODUCTION

Distance mode of education has escalated the educational system moving in the new direction in a developing country like India. Many government and private universities have established

commitment towards the development of distance learning offering a wide variety of support and guidance to distance education learners’.

The library services guidelines to distance learners and structural policy framework which was accepted by the council of Indian Library Association (2001) made the horizontal and vertical progression of distance education which is strong indications that them Indian Government is very much dedicated to the stipulation of Distance Education to those who are interested in learning.

Distance Education as a means of providing alternative educational opportunities for those who previously lost such opportunities and are now enthusiastic to take benefit of such alternative to improve that lost opportunity or for those who could not afford regular education through its formal route because they want to study and at the same time keep their employment status says Umoru-Onuka (2001).

Mabawonku (2004) speaking on distance education, it involves the open learning approach and occasionally a minimal interaction with the teacher/instructor. She also believes that the focus is on the educational needs of the distance student and is more learner-centred.

Despite of minimum physical contact between the teacher and student, distance education emphasizes much dependence on electronic communications using latest information communication technologies. Technological advances in ICTs have rapidly transformed the socio-economic conditions of distance education across the world which has brought an enormous progress in this education medium. This is by offering new tools and technologies for providing access to information and knowledge dissemination.

The motivation behind running any distance education programmes is that an individual will have the liberty to learn at a chosen location which is far away from the parent institution which is offering the education, thus demanding the use of ICT’s which enables any distane learners to use it’s resources.

Access to abundance amount of electronic resources in university libraries and ICT centres in the universities is especially essential in that it provides variety of information access where as distance students need to achieve their educational goals.

INTERNET AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

The impact of the emerging Global Information and ICT Infrastructure on distance education cannot be evaded. Berge (1995), stressing on the importance of internet on distance education, says access to Internet based technology, exclusively latest advanced technologies and a dependable ICT infrastructure, is very much necessary for implementation of any successful distance education programmes. We are presently in the technology enabled educational system, when anyone, anywhere, any time will be able to choose from the widest possible range of learning opportunities without regard to their geographical location. Berge however believes technology as an encouraging aspect of distance education reaching the unreached with the loads of information. Internet technologies must be considered as simply as the means of transportation in which intellectual transformation communicates between the learners and teachers.

According to Tapscott (1995), Web enabled technologies are facilitating the essential changes that are taking place at universities today. These changes include changes to the delivery of teaching and learning at a distance.

Latest information and communication technologies designed and developed exclusively for educational purposes have greatly improved the expansion and quality of distance education.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Mohammad Sayed Abdallah (2007) internet is very much used in education because it makes smooth the progress of learning, teaching and communication. He discusses on the easiest way of finding information on internet and to do so any time. Specifically commenting on advantages of the Internet for English Language Teaching, he mentions that students can study any topic in English independently online, and they can also find many activities on the Internet to use in order to improve their proficiency.

Tadasad et. all (2003) surveyed the use of internet by undergraduate engineering students at PDA college of Engineering, Gulbarga, they observed that the students used the internet either for general or

recreational purpose, they revealed that the students didn't realized the potentiality of internet in their academics. Only few students were made use of internet. They suggested internet facility to be provided in library and awareness programme on internet usage should be given to students in their findings.

Meena Singhal (1997), observed the advantages of the Internet for the individual student that are highlighted, especially the enormous amount of information that can be found and accessed online at any time: World Wide Web is a virtual library at one's fingertips, it is a easily and readily available world of information for any language learner". She further emphasizes on the advantages of emailing in the process of communication.

Jeremy Harmer (2007) opines that students and teachers can find practically any kind of information they desire on the Internet. They can access newspapers, encyclopedias, film guides, lyrics, and broadcasting associations.

A study conducted by Rowland and Rubbert (2001) studied on the information needs and practices of distance learning students in U.K illustrated that part time distance students were using electronic information sources. Their study resulted that about 12% of students' didn't have Internet access at their home and only 3% of the students not at all used the Internet and about 75% of the students were familiar with search engines.

The use of print and electronic information resources for self study and their learning makes the distance education programme of the same quality like any other conventional degree programmes in the country. Only few studies have been carried out in the past to investigate the use of ICT's and Internet facilities by distance education students. This study was carried out with the aim of understanding the distance students' use and access to updated latest information in their learning environment using internet. In this background researcher felt it was essential to examine the extent to which the distance students of Directorate of Correspondence courses & Distance Education, (DCC & DE) Bangalore University (BU), Bangalore are using the Internet facilities at home, university library, at the institutions they work and in cybercafés for their learning. It is assumed that the results of this study may disclose the extent to which ICT services are engaged in the proceses of teaching and learning in distance learning. The findings might also be used as first hand information in proposing the design and development of the curriculum and its implementation and services to its students in the best way to develop the quality of library and information services to distance learners.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific objectives of the study were

- + To discover the level of access and use of Internet by the students of DCC & DE of Bangalore University.
- + To know the location of access to the Internet facilities.
- + The frequency of their use of the internet.
- + To know which search engine do they use for searching information and
- + To determine for which purposes the internet was being used by the distance students.

METHODOLOGY

This is the survey research and adopted descriptive survey research design. The motivation for the choice of this survey design was that it is suitable for descriptive and exploratory studies. The target population for the study consists of all distance students of the Bangalore University study centers. The data collection tool was the questionnaire. The questions were based on the research objectives formulated to guide the study. A sample of 1554 respondents was randomly selected using stratified random sampling method for the study. The research instrument used to draw out information from the target respondents was opened and closed ended questions. The researcher administered the questionnaire personally to the respondents after explaining to them the intention and significance of the study. Their secrecy was also assured. The administration of the questionnaire was carried out in the lecture hall during the contact classes at the study centers and post graduate departments of the university and retrieved from them after the completion, thus the researcher was able to get high response rate. It was observed that few were incomplete and unusable, 1445 copies of the questionnaire returned were considered as usable, resulting a response rate of 93.2%. The data collected from the respondents was analysed using the SPSS package to study the descriptive statistics of frequencies, percentages.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Presentation of the outcome of the study was done based on the planned research questions devised to guide the study of the research. Of the respondents, 829 (57.4%) were male and 616 (42.6%) were female. All the study respondents were distance students of the Bangalore University study center. Data were analyzed into simple percentages and frequencies. Demographic distribution is shown in Table1.

Table: 1. Distribution of Respondents by Gender

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

Table: 2. Distribution of Respondents by Age Groups

Age Group	Frequency	Percent
20-30 Years	1065	73.7%
31-40 Years	276	19.1%
41-50 Years	91	6.3%
More than 50 Years	13	0.9%
Total	1445	100.0%

Table: 3. Distribution of Respondents by Educational Status (Qualification)

Educational Status	Number of Students
Undergraduate Students	570
Postgraduate Students	875

In terms of age, 1065 (73.7%) were between 20-30 years, 276 (19.1%) were between 31-40 years, 91 (6.3%) were between 41-50 years and 13 (0.9%) were above 50 years of age. The above table 2 showing distribution of the students by their age shows the major age to be between 20-30 years. The educational status of the respondents show that 570 (39.4%) were under graduates while 875 (60.6%) were post graduate students. It should be understood that the educational status requested from the students were their current pursuing educational qualifications from the university.

Table 2 revealed that distance students age ranges from 20-50 years. Indicating that there is no age limit to distance mode of education and distance education caters more for elder adults with majority of them belonging to age range between 20-40. The results of the study indicate that the distance learning is being undertaken by both male and female learners. It was observed during the study that majority of them are matured, motivated and working students. The study also reveals that there is no age limit or a boundary for learning, thus both the young and old similarly could admit to the distance education program.

Table: 4. Location of Use of Internet Facilities

Location	Frequency	%age
Institution where I work	363	25.1%
Home	716	49.6%
University Library	88	6.1%
Internet Cafe	151	10.4%
Not Used	127	8.8%
Total	1445	100.0%

It is indicated in Table 4 that, 716 (49.6%) of the respondents have used Internet at home, 363 (25.1%) used these facilities in the institutions where they work, 151 (10.4%) asserted that they have used internet at the cybercafés whereas 88 (6.1%) made use of internet in the University library and 127 (8.8%) responded that they never used the internet. These findings of the study disclosed that more than 80% of the respondents made use of facilities outside the University library. A probable justification for this may be that it was more convenient to access the facilities outside the university library and also lack of information, motivation and support from the library personnel about the ICT infrastructure available. The findings of the study is that many of the students 716 (49.6%) favored using the internet at home when compared to other locations.

Table: 5. Internet Use Competence

Competency	Frequency	%age
Excellent	225	15.6%
Very Good	174	12.0%
Good	531	36.7%
Moderate	305	21.1%
Poor	210	14.5%
Total	1445	100.0%

Above table 4 has shows that 531 (36.7%) of the respondents rate their internet competence as good, 225 (15.6%) rated as excellent while 174 (12%) of the respondents assessed their skill level as very good while 305 (21.1%) of the responded with moderate level of internet proficiency and about 210 (14.5%) students resulted in poor competence of internet skill and assessed their skill level as very low. The above result indicates that about 60% of the Bangalore University students could execute internet search process to fulfill their information needs.

It was found to be logical to the reason that those who responded with poor internet competence (14.5%) in table 5 were the group of students who pointed out that they did not use internet (8.8%) at all in table 4.

Table: 6. Frequency of Computer Use

Frequency	No. of respondents	% of Users
Every day	1121	77.57%
Once a Week	162	11.22%
Twice a Week	35	2.41%
Never	127	8.8%

Table 6 reveals that 1121(77.57%) of the respondents use computer daily, 162 (11.22%) use it once a week, 35 (2.41%) use it twice a week and 127 (8.8%) of the respondents never used internet. It was observed from the above table that majority of the respondents use internet regularly if the initial three stages of frequency of internet usage (everyday, weekly once and twice in a week) were inferred as regular use of internet. The result shows that most of the respondents were regular users of internet. In spite of this lecturers

encouraged and motivated the learners to use Internet for their learning activities. These results indicate that the learning processes in the distance learning environment were predominantly carried out by means of the conventional educational methods and use of minimal conveniences offered to them.

Table: 6. Purpose of Using Internet Resources in information seeking process

Internet Use		No Idea	Ineffective	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Total
Online resources	Frequency	121	295	811	218	1445
	Percent	8.40%	20.40%	56.10%	15.10%	100.00%
E-books & E-journals	Frequency	205	398	650	192	1445
	Percent	14.20%	27.50%	45.00%	13.30%	100.00%
E-mail & Chatting	Frequency	364	241	684	156	1445
	Percent	25.20%	16.70%	47.30%	10.80%	100.00%
Education & Job Opportunities	Frequency	426	189	558	272	1445
	Percent	29.50%	13.10%	38.60%	18.80%	100.00%
Entertainment	Frequency	258	161	756	270	1445
	Percent	17.90%	11.10%	52.30%	18.70%	100.00%

The students were inquired to detail the purpose of using internet in seeking information. The effectiveness of online information sources for academic and general purpose is analyzed based on the opinion of distance students. 811 (56.10%) of the students felt it somewhat effective followed by 218 (15.10%) effective in satisfying the information need whereas 295 (20.40%) responded with ineffectiveness of internet resources and 121 (8.4%) students replied having no idea about internet and its resources.

For e-books and e-journals 650 (45%) resulted in somewhat effective response trailed by 192 (13.3%) with effective response, 398 (27.50%) felt it ineffective and 205 (14.2%) having no idea. Students' response about e-mail, chatting and social networking sites that, 684 (47.30%) opined somewhat effective followed by 156 (10.80%) saying it effective, 364 (25.20%) students having no idea and it was not effective for 241 (16.70%) students. Education & Job Opportunities resulted in 558 (38.60%) somewhat effective response rate followed by 271 (18.80%) effective reply, and 189 (13.10%) didn't feel it effective and 426 (29.50%) having no idea. About 270 (18.70%) of the distance students felt it effective and used it for entertainment purpose followed by 756 (52.30%) somewhat effective and for 161 (11.10%) students it was ineffective but for 258 (17.90%) students were not having any idea about the internet entertainment resources. Search engines are the chief means of finding information on internet that helps you find particular information. We can find thousands of web search engines on the Internet but the biggest and the most popular are Google, the study also revealed the same result as majority of the distance students use the google (81.45 %) as their main search engine followed by yahoo (14.68%) and rediff (3.87%). Currently Google is the most admired and considered by many people the most comprehensive search engine.

CONCLUSION

The study has revealed the actuality of distance learners that conventionality of distance learning programme using the print and broadcasting media, distance learners tend to use the latest ICT's and internet in particular for their academic purpose. Majority of the students surveyed in this study revealed that they use the internet facilities because they lacked the sufficient print based information resources in support of their study. The findings of the study also revealed that use of internet was to access online resources, e-books and e-journals, for blogging, to share and access information via social networking sites like youtube, facebook, twitter, they also used it for entertainment purpose. Many of the students used it for e-mail and chatting with peer classmates, seniors and also with the lecturers. Some of the students also utilized it for the purpose of employment opportunities. This entails that the distance students didn't depend mainly on supplied print information instead they also relied on internet resources for current information. This signifies the current trend of information explosion where distance learners mainly depend on latest available and accessible

information which is extensively easy to get it on the web. One more imperative findings from the study is that the teachers have been very supportive and encouraging the learners to use Internet for latest and reliable information resources. This implies that distance education basically carried out under conventional ambience with slight emphasis and exploiting electronic resources.

The researcher also observed that most of the distance learners were using internet at their home and at the institutions they work, pointing out, the University library did not offered sufficient services to the facilities in a system and determine suitable and acceptable to the students when compared with what they obtain somewhere else demanding the university library management to extend its full service and support to distance students in terms of facilities and services as compared to regular on campus students.

Conventionally speaking distance education consisted of using flaccid print media and broad casting media, teaching-learning methods that frequently gained low prospectus for interaction. In this context of conventional distance education environment, interaction takes place generally through asynchronous communication between the students and the teacher or a lecturer using printed self study materials. With the dawn of the web enabled especially Internet based technologies, nevertheless, distance education learners' currently have the information at their finger tips that let them to amplify and very much augment the knowledge level and thus improving the quality of distance education, sustaining innovative methods of communication, and association between distance students, teachers and the universities offering distance education programmes.

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