

Chapter 57

Library and Information Services for Open and Distance Learning:

Assessing the Role of Mobile Technologies and Distance Learning in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

For Reason of it tested capabilities Open and Distance Learning Education has been widely accepted and adopted in many institutions across the worlds. Knowing that the practice of Library and information service to the ubiquitous distance learners promises to be a clear departure from the traditional library system, Academic libraries have become new actors in the process of distance learning among other factors of education and research. Libraries are reshaping its services and Mobile learning services is now represents exciting new frontiers in education and pedagogy. With the features of ‘wearable’ computing and multimedia content delivery via mobile technologies, library services and mobile learning becomes feasible and offers new benefits to instructors and learners. The full cost and complexity of providing quality library services to support open and distance education tend to be underestimated.

INTRODUCTION

Human development is the main objective of national development. Education serves as a means to achieve the objective and to create a learning society. Education in developing countries has been challenged by rapid changes in science and technology. Recent developments in information and communication technology offer immense opportunities to all societies and individuals for an alternative, universal and economical way of accessing and disseminating education- distance education.

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Distance education, firmly established in many countries, has been an accepted modality for providing lifelong education and independent and interactive educational access at all levels. It extends the reach of the classroom to a wider audience by using a wide range of technologies to deliver educational services and courses to off-campus sites, workplace, homes and remote villages. Learners can view diverse educational programs in the comfort of their offices and homes as well as across geographical barriers. Thus, distance education is recognized throughout the world as a viable alternative to campus-based education. For developing countries, such as Nigeria, distance education, with possibilities of outreach and economics of scale, appears to be a promising approach in minimizing education in equality.

The provision of quality library services to those who learn at a distance is undoubtedly one of the most exciting and challenging developments that have occurred in contemporary librarianship. Distance education has led to the development of specialised library and information services that can appropriately be called distance librarianship. The genesis of distance librarianship is grounded in the creation of the large-scaled spread of distance education to satisfy personal and national educational goals. Distance education has impacted not only on the discipline of education, but it has also fundamentally affected services and professions that support distance learning and distance education. The impact and significance of distance education is fittingly described by Howard (1995) when she states that “distance education has led to a redefinition of what is common in education”.

Professions, including librarianship, that are associated with distance education have also experienced a redefinition. The effect of distance education on support services has been so profound that the phrase “growth industry” is applied by Cullen (1974) to the changes that have occurred in these activities. Librarianship has grown and changed in many aspects because of the different approaches that have to be taken to provide library and information services to those who learn at a distance. These changes have impacted not only on the delivery of library and information services to those who learn at a distance but also on the delivery of library services to other clients. Thus, these changes have led to the development of new professional paradigms within the field of librarianship. The redefinition of what is common in library services is rooted in the important differences that exist between traditional education and distance education.

Librarians have taken up information literacy as a major component of the educational process. Information literacy can be defined as the ability to identify an information need and the ability to locate, evaluate, and effectively use the information. The Association of College and Research Libraries states, “Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. It enables learners to master control over their own learning” (ACRL, 2000).

According to UNESCO (2001), the term open and distance learning reflects both the fact that all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in time and space from the learner, and that the mission aims to include greater dimensions of openness and flexibility, whether in terms of access, curriculum or other elements of structure. The historical evolution of distance learning systems has been in four main phases. Open and distance learning systems can usually be of a particular system, programmes and curricula, teaching/learning strategies and techniques, learning material and resources, communication and interaction, support and delivery systems, students, tutors, staff and other experts, management, housing and equipment, and evaluation.

As distance education has evolved from a teacher-centric to a much more learner-centric model, the roles and activities of instructors and other learner support providers have changed to being more proactive than reactive. The nature of learner support in distance education has been affected by research

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