

Open and Distance Learning in Library and Information Sc.: From Marginalization to Mainstream

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Theme: Social Justice

Sub Theme: Scaling up quality education for all

INTRODUCTION

The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) System has emerged as a vibrant and dynamic component of Higher Education Infrastructure in the country. It provides access to quality education to about 25 percent of the total population of learners in Higher Education sector. The ODL System is expected to cater to about 40 percent of learner population in higher education by end of the 11th plan. The system must also be prepared to take substantial responsibility to cater to the likely surge in the number of aspirants for Higher Education as a consequence of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, apart from reaching the un-reached, marginalized, disadvantaged and those hitherto excluded from the reach of educational provisions ⁽¹⁾. There are fourteen Open Universities and 90 distance education institutions in the dual mode (a part of conventional universities) working to provide higher education to the citizens of the country through distance mode. Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University (VMOU), Kota, formerly known, as Kota Open University (KOU), was established in 1987. It aims at spreading knowledge and education in the state of Rajasthan based on distance learning philosophy and techniques and to contribute for better life of the citizen of the state. It's a state run university established by an Act passed in the State Legislative Assembly. The University runs 108 programmes and number of admitted students were 1,23,425 in 2009.

Library and information Science (LIS) education through distance education is offered by more than 30 distance education institutions. The programmes offered in LIS education through distance education have been successful in meeting out the demand of learners. The paper discusses the available opportunities in LIS distance education in the state of Rajasthan and proves that distance education is more attractive and preferred system in the state so far as the LIS education is concerned. The paper analyses the available LIS educational opportunities in the state of Rajasthan vis-à-vis distance education in the state of Rajasthan. It is seen that VMOU is the prominent LIS education provider in Rajasthan state.

LIS DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIA

Library and information science (LIS) education in the country has a history of a century. LIS education in the country can be traced back to 1911 when W A Borden initiated a training programme at Baroda to create a cadre of men to manage the libraries in the state library

system. Thereafter, many associations, institutions/ libraries conducted training programmes for librarians. A regular certificate course was started by Madras Library Association (MALA) in 1929 which was taken up by the University of Madras in 1931 and continued on a regular basis. It was 1937, when at the initiative of S.R.Ranganathan University of Madras started one Post-graduate Diploma Course of one year duration replacing the certificate course. It was the beginning of the library and information science education at the University level. Thereafter, Banaras Hindu University and University of Bombay started Post-graduate Diploma in 1942 and 1943, respectively.

The University of Delhi started P.G. Diploma in Library Science in 1947 which was later upgraded to Master Degree in Library Science in 1949. Thereafter many Universities came forward to start library and information science courses of different level and the number of institutions and number of courses offered increased gradually. Presently about 150 universities/ associations/ institutions/ libraries are offering courses in library and information science of various levels from certificate level to doctoral level.

Upto mid 1980s, LIS education expanded in India in the form of face-to-face stream, but new beginning in the form of correspondence course started taking place in library and information science. Establishment of Andhra Pradesh Open University (APOU) (in 1982) made an important stride forward in offering library and information science with the launch of BLIS course in 1984. Later IGNOU started BLIS in 1989 and MLIS in 1994. VMOU and many other open universities and distance education institutions in the country started courses in library and information science. In 2009⁽²⁾, there were 33 LIS Schools conducting education through distance mode. 33 were running BLIS; 20 MLIS; 01 PGDLAN; 2 M.Phil; and 01 Ph.D.

LIS EDUCATION IN RAJASTHAN

There are 39 universities functioning in the state of Rajasthan that include 14 state universities (6 multi-faculty university, one Open university, two Agricultural Universities, one Law University, One Medical University, one Technical University, one Sanskrit University, one Ayurved University), 18 private universities, and 7 deemed universities. The following universities run library and information science programmes of various levels:

S.N.	Name of the University	Programmes run by the University	Remark
1.	University of Rajasthan, Jaipur	BLIS, MLIS, Ph.D.	
2.	MLS University, Ajmer	BLIS, MLIS, Ph.D.	
3.	M.D.S. University	BLIS	Suspended since 2009
4	Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University, Kota	DLIS, BLIS, MLIS, M.Phil*, Ph.D*.	
5.	Banasthali Vidhyapeeth	Optional course in graduation; Ph.D.	

+ Programmes have been

University of Rajasthan is the oldest university of the state was established in the year 1945. It started Certificate in Library Science Programme and Bachelor of Library Science Programme in 1960 and 1961, respectively. The University started Master degree in Library and Information Sc., and Ph.D. Programme in 1976.⁽³⁾ The certificate course in library science

was transferred from face to face stream to distance mode (with eight months duration in place of four month duration) in 1976. The total intake of students for the Department of Library and Information Sc. for BLIS and MLIS is 80 and 20, respectively. The University also offers Ph.D. programme in Library and Information Sc. Some colleges affiliated to the University of Rajasthan also run BLIS and MLIS Programmes, include: DLIS in Government College, Alwar; and BLIS in LBS College, Jaipur.

Mohan Lal Sukhadia University was established in the year 1964, it started Certificate Course and BLIS in 1975 and MLIS programmes in 1981⁽⁴⁾. Later it started Ph.D. Programme in Library and Information Science. The certificate course in library science was transferred from face to face stream to distance mode in 1982. The total intake of students for the Department of Library and Information Sc. for BLIS and MLIS, is 50 and 30, respectively. The University also offers Ph.D. programme in Library and Information Sc.

MDS University was established in the year 1987, it started BLIS Programme in 2006 and due to non-availability of sufficient candidates for admission, the programme has been suspended since 2009 due to non-availability of minimum students, i.e 10 out of 20.

Banasthali Vidhyapeeth, a deemed university has an optional paper in three year Bachelor Degree and also offers Ph.D. Programme in Library and Information Science. IGNOU Programmes, namely BLIS and MLIS are also run in the state. VMOU offers Diploma Programme, BLIS, MLIS, M.Phil and Ph.D. Programmes in Library and Information Sc. Recently, Jain Vishvabharti Deemed University has also started BLIS Programme through distance mode.

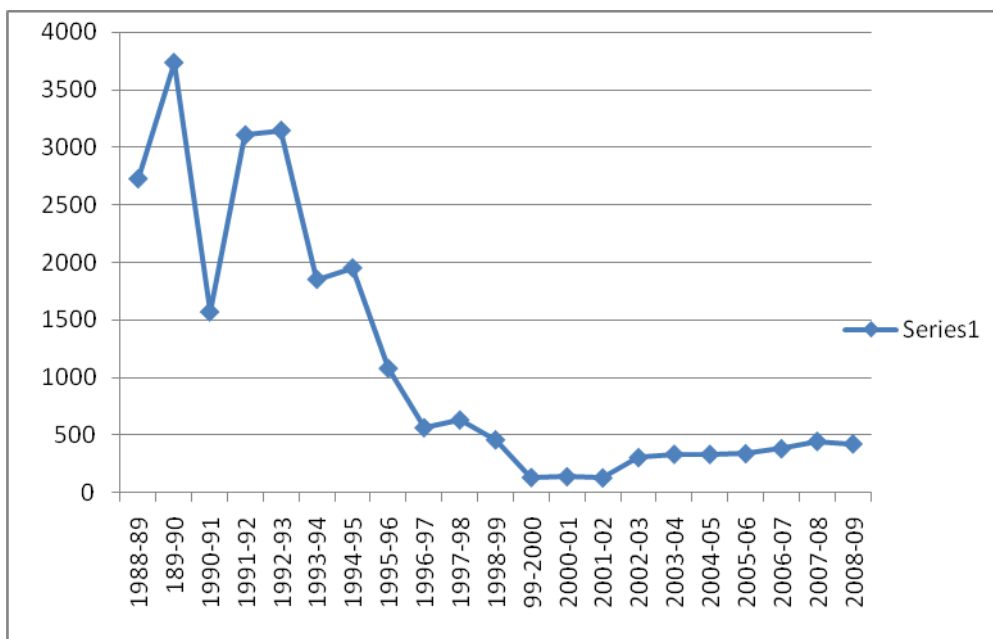
Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University (VMOU), Kota, formerly known as Kota Open University (KOU), established in 1987, is one of the fourteen open universities exist in India. It aims at spreading knowledge and education in the state of Rajasthan based on distance learning philosophy and techniques and to contribute for better life of the citizen of the state. It's a state run University established by an Act passed in the State Legislative Assembly. The University was established with the merger of Institute of Correspondence Studies, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur and Directorate of Distance Education, MLS University, Udaipur. Accordingly, all programmes offered by the erstwhile institutions were transferred to the newly established University.

In regard to LIS education, the certificate courses in library science run by the erstwhile institutions of the University of Rajasthan and MLS University, were transferred to the University with its establishment. The certificate course was retained by the university just for one year, i.e. 1987-88, the number of students admitted were 207. Immediately, in 1988 the University decided to start Diploma Course in Library and Information Science of one year duration in place of old certificate course in library science.

Distance education has attained an important position in imparting library and information science education in the country so as so in the state during last three decades. The attraction of new graduates and working library professionals is on rise over the years. The VMOU programmes have offered opportunities to large number of learners many of them would have not been otherwise taken higher education. It has offered a vast opportunity to undertake quality education for the new graduates, upgrade education level of the working professionals, offered flexible system of learning, inculcate a habit of lifelong learning and exposed learners to the new learning resources.

FROM MARGINALIZATION TO MAIN STREAM

The first programme of the University in LIS was very well received by the learners.. The student strength of the Diploma Program over the years was as below:



The strength of the Diploma Programme in Library and Information Sc.in the first five years was: 1988-89(2729), 1989-90(3738), 1991-92(1572), 1992-93(3109), and 1993-94(1855). Though the number of students intake was very high in early years but thereafter started declining and reaching the lowest in 2000-2001, due to less job opportunities, demand for higher degrees by the employers, availability of distance learning courses in neighboring states, etc. This was a crucial time so far LIS Education in the University, but, thereafter, the University started BLIS Programme in 2002, MLIS Programme in 2007 and M. Phil in 2008. Launch of new programme gave confidence to the applicants and the strength again started moving upward. The University also offers Ph.D. Programme in Library and Information Sc., As such the University offers education from Diploma Programme at the lowest and PhD. Programme at the highest level. Such varied offerings are not available at any other University in the State.

Two of the four programmes, namely MLIS and M. Phil were launched during last three years. Apart from VMOU, IGNOU offers BLIS and MLIS programmes through its Regional Centre, Jaipur. LIS programmes through distance education have attracted good number of students in comparison of the conventional universities. The following table gives number of students admitted in various programmes in distance learning and number of available seats in conventional universities through face-to-face mode:

Year	Through Distance Education						Total		Face-to-Fece Mode (available seats)					Total	
	VMOU				IGNOU		BLIS	MLIS	UOR		MLSU		MD S	BLI S	MLI S
Jan/ July	DLIS	BLIS	MLIS	M. Phil	BLIS	MLIS			BLIS	MLIS	BLIS	MLIS	BLIS		
2007	383	680	457	-	89	22	769	487	80	20	50	20	20	150	40

2008	447	765	260	32	60	05	820	265	80	20	50	20	20	150	40
2009	425	753	315	-	73	07	826	322	80	20	50	20	-	130	40
Total	1255	2198	1032	32	222	34	2415	1074	240	60	150	60	60	430	120

The number of students admission in the distance education during the last three years remained almost static while the number of admissions in the face to face programmes regular have come down. Due to non-availability of sufficient students, the BLIS Programme offered by MDS University has been suspended since 2009. In MLS University also, the number of students admitted during the last three years were less than the available seats and sometimes the number of students enrolled was it has gone below 50%. This is the situation when the base entry qualification for admission in the regular stream is lower than that of distance education. As base qualifications for admission in different university are: 50% (VMOU), 45 % (UOR), 40% (in MLSU and MDSU).

DISCUSSION

VMOU has programmes for different sectors of the society. It offers skill based, professional, technical and academic programmes. The programmes offered include from Science and Technology, Arts and Humanities, Continuing Professional Education, and Management and Commerce. The university intends to reach to every family residing in the state and has adopted the slogan 'We have a programme for everyone' It has diverse base of learners, male and female, young, old-age and adults, employed and unemployed, people having different vocations, housewives, rural and urban and so forth. There is continuous rise in the number of students. The following aspects helped the University to overcome the situation emerged in 2000-2001 and gaining prominence in recent years:

Diverse Learner Base

The learners of the Open University are not restricted to unemployed youth of 18-23 years of age like in their counter parts in face-to-face mode. After having seen the availability of seats and admissions at aggregate level an attempt has been made to look at learners' base in regard to their residential background (urban and rural), Social background (SC/ST/ST and General), gender base (Male/ female).

The number of learners in different programmes according to their social background is mentioned in the following table:

Year	SC			ST			OBC		
	DLIS	BLIS	MLIS	DLIS	BLIS	MLIS	DLIS	BLIS	MLIS
2007	42	55	40	30	16	11	103	184	110
2008	59	76	12	34	27	08	184	237	83
2009	69	62	25	46	41	10	133	195	80
Total	220	193	87	110	84	29	420	616	273

The table reveals that admitted candidates belonged categories SC/ST/OBC and rest general category. If the number of SC/ST/OBC is taken together, the cumulative nos have been presented in the following table:

Year	VMOU							
	DLIS		BLIS		MLIS		M.Phil	
	Total	SC/ST/OBC	Total	SC/ST/OBC	Total	SC/ST/OBC		
2007	383	175 (45.6%)	680	255(37.5%)	457	161(35.2%)	-	
2008	447	277(61.9%)	765	340(44.4%)	260	103(38.6%)	32	
2009	425	248(58.3%)	753	298(39.5%)	315	115(36.5%)	-	
Total	1255	700(55.8%)	2198	893(40.6%)	1032	379(36.7%)		

The above table reveals that the percentage of SC/ST/OBC remained at higher side in DLIS whereas the in MLIS remained lowest. The highest percentage of SC/ST/OBC remained in the year 2008 in DLIS, BLIS and MLIS.

The numbers of admitted students were also analyzed according to their place of residence, i.e. urban and rural. The following table presents the urban-rural population and percentage of urban population.

Year	Urban			Rural background with % of Urban		
	DLIS	BLIS	MLIS	DLIS	BLIS	MLIS
2007	232	531	381	151(65.8%)	148(27.9%)	76(20%)
2008	316	730	284	225(71.2%)	227(31.1%)	56(19.7%)
2009	237	573	256	188(59.3%)	285(49.7%)	59(23%)
Total	785	1834	921	564(71.8%)	660(36%)	191(20.7%)

The above table reveals that the students of DLIS Programme are more of rural background whereas students of MLIS are of urban background.

Studying the gender of students become important, as the more focus of the government/ universities is on raising female education. Female education leads to more educated families resulting in overall development of the society. As such it becomes important as to what percentage of learner belong to this important group. An attempt has been made to know the male/female learners in various programmes and also ratio of the two. The following table gives a picture of the male/female nos and ratios:

Year	Male			Female		
	DLIS	BLIS	MLIS	DLIS	BLIS	MLIS
2007	198	278	238	185(93.43%)	401(144%)	219(92%)
2008	316	400	135	225(71.2%)	557(139%)	208(154%)
2009	276	325	141	149(54%)	428(131.6%)	174(123.4%)

Total	790	1003	514	559(70.8%)	1386(138.2%)	601(116.9%)
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From the above table, it is quite evident that female students are leading in admission figures in LIS Programmes and taking advantages of the ODL system to a great extent. The nos. of female candidates were higher than the male students in BLIS and MLIS Programmes.

Flexibility in Admission and Evaluation

Open universities offer relaxed qualifications for admission for learners. In conventional universities students are required to have a minimum percentage at the qualifying examination for admission in library and information sc. courses like other ones. But in open universities a greater weightage is given to experience, technical qualifications, higher qualifications as quite clear from the fact that the University offers admission for BLIS to the student who has attained 50 % marks in graduation; or has Master degree qualification; or Graduate degree with DLIS; or Graduate degree with two years experience of working in a library ; has professional degree like LLB,MBBS, etc. Similarly, for DLIS, entry qualifications are exempted for in-service people who have 6 years experience in a library.

In open education, flexibility in requisites has been adhered to enable learners to set their pace of their studies. The duration of completion of a programme varied from one year to four for one year DLIS,BLIS,MLIS, M.Phil Programmes. The examinations held twice a year and whatever the credits the learner earns in a particular examination is transferred to his account. As and when the learner acquires the desired number of credit for the programme, he is declared qualified. Thus, the evaluation in open universities conforms to the progress of the learner in relation to skill and knowledge of the subject that he acquires with the passage of time rather than brand failure for once and for all.

Quality Course Material

Distance education depends on the use of instruction material and other media used to transfer the knowledge to the learners. *Printed texts* provide the conceptual and theoretical learning materials in the course; designed to give the students a 'good read' without requiring to be online; also used to integrate the other course materials by setting up the larger context and directing students to other resources. The material is developed by the University and is of high quality . The course curricula are developed by a committee of prominent LIS professionals and teachers in the subject. Units have been written by the experienced authors and experts and subjects experts edit the units and the courses.

Strong Support services

It is the device which replaces the teacher of the traditional system. The counsellors and tutors provide a link between the print material with the other media so that the object of the course material is achieved with minimum economy and efforts.

The student support service refers to any service other than the actual course material that an institution provides to its students to realize the instructional objectives of the course. This service is the backbone of the Open University System and is used for minimizing the gap between learners and instruction.

CONCLUSION

Distance education is gradually emerging as the most viable method of learning overcoming the problems faced in developing competent human resources to manage libraries and information centers in the fast changing environment. It is no longer looked upon as an alternate system of education meant for repairing the shortcoming of the conventional system at a particular stage of development. Distance education programmes with its quality of flexibility have great potentials to adapt to the changing needs of the information society. Through LIS Programmes, the University has been successful in meeting out its social responsibilities through opening up avenues for backward classes, working professionals, housewives, and rural masses.

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