

INFORMATION NEEDS OF DISTANCE LEARNERS: A CASE OF WINNEBA STUDY CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA, GHANA

Agatha Gifty LARSON
Library Department
University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

Michael OWUSU-ACHEAW
Library Department
Koforidua Polytechnic, Koforidua, Ghana

ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the information needs of distance learners of the Winneba Study Centre of the University of Education, Winneba. The main objective was to investigate the information needs of this group of students who live far away from their host institution and have minimal interaction with their tutors. The study was a survey and made use of a questionnaire as research instrument. The target population consisted of all distance learners of the Centre; this includes the Diploma and Post Diploma students numbering 1,029 as at 2014/2015 academic year. A sample size of 206 representing 20% of the population was selected through random sampling. The questionnaire was analyzed using frequency tables and percentages. Findings of the study were that distance learners depend solely on the course materials and lecture notes as the only source of information due to their tight schedule. They were also not using libraries to support their learning and other academic activities as they lacked searching and library use skills. Furthermore, it was found that the learners prefer print format to electronic format and lack of time and inability to search for information are some of the hindrances to their information utilization. Based on the findings, it was recommended among other things that, tutors should endeavor to give assignments that would require the use of libraries, efforts should also be made by library management in partnership with distance education administrators to run mobile library services, instruction on library use, negotiate for space in public and school libraries to keep library materials for use by the learners and also provide instruction on how to access and use both print and electronic resources in libraries.

Keywords: Distance education, distance learners, information needs, libraries, information, Winneba study center

INTRODUCTION

The desire for higher education by individuals who could not be admitted into regular universities has brought about the need for part –time and distance education opportunities. The advantage of this mode of learning is that men and women both old and young and working professionals who for some reasons were not able to take up regular programs could be taken care of due to its flexibility. Thus, one could engage in full time job and at the same time attend classes. Distance education could be described as a form of education where learners have minimal physical contact with their tutors. It could also be described as

a form of education in which there is geographical separation between the learner and the learning institution (Mabawonku, 2004). There is minimal physical contact between the learner and the tutor. It is therefore learner - centered because the individual chooses the place of study; learns in a variety of ways and takes control of his learning.

Distance education program has been accepted by institutions in many parts of the world in both the developed and the developing economies largely because it has been seen as a means of extending educational opportunities to millions of people and thereby contributing to the human resource development of a nation (Boadi and Letsolo, 2004). According to Gu (2006) distance education is one of the fastest growing trends in higher education. Arguably it has become a saving grace to millions of people around the world who desire to pursue further studies.

In Ghana, as a way of reducing cost of tertiary education and at the same time increasing access to tertiary education in the country, adopted the distance education program through the Ministry of education after a number of surveys to assess the distance education needs of Ghana. Presently, both public and private universities have embraced the policy and are running various programs for the teeming population across the length and breadth of the country. These institutions have made earning a degree more flexible for the many people across the country that have families and jobs in addition to the desire to further their education. The first institution to pioneer the distance education program was the University of Education, Winneba, with assistance from the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) now known as Department for International Development (DFID). Consequently, the Institute for Educational Development and Extension of University of Education, Winneba was established to run the program for teachers with Certificate 'A' and holders of Diploma in Education to study part- time for a degree so that there would not be disruption to their full time teaching. Thus, the University is helping full-time teachers to earn, Diplomas and degrees in a more flexible way without disruption in their teaching functions.

Information is vital to the development of a society. Thanuskod (2011), identified information as the core for development of knowledge, the basis for innovation, resources for informed citizenry, and as a result becomes a key commodity for the progress of society. Information needs then arises when one realizes that there is a gap in one's knowledge about something. Therefore; the library's information needs arise when one realizes that there is a gap in one's knowledge about something. Libraries play a significant role in meeting the information needs of the various user groups through the provision of resources in both print and electronic format. These libraries see their responsibility as ensuring that the use of information resources and services is maximized to benefit users. Distance learners are expected to use the resources of the library to answer information needs and to prepare for examination and other scholarly needs.

Distance learners live far away from their host institutions and obviously do not have the same opportunities as their counterparts in residence regarding the use of library resources and services though the basic needs are the same as those of conventional students. They have special needs and concerns that differ greatly from those on campus. It is therefore desirable to understand the information needs of this group of students since they are also entitled to library services regardless of their location.

The suggestion by Association of Colleges and Research Libraries in America (ACRL), (2000), underscores the need to survey distance students in order to serve them better. It states that librarians should regularly survey distance learners in order to monitor and assess both the appropriateness of their use of services and resources and the degree to which their needs are being met. Also Dew (2001) recommends that librarians must understand who

their off campus students are and what they want. In addition, each user group or constituencies of academic library possess differing needs and expectations, it is therefore not appropriate to use one group's information needs as the principal guide for determining services offered to all users.

The effort to identify the most effective library services for distance students can be informed by routine surveys of the distance students. Research is lacking about distance learners of the University of Education, Winneba Study Centre use of library and library services. Information is also needed about these distance learners whose population is growing year after year vis-a-vis library services. With these gaps in information in mind, the focus of this study was to investigate the information needs of the distance students of University of Education, Winneba, Winneba Study Centre. The question is, how does this group of students fulfill their information needs? Are they competent in information gathering skills? What hinders them in their information gathering? Do they depend only on their course modules to satisfy their information needs? Adequate knowledge about their information needs would help the Library to re-orient their collections and services for them.

The significance in this study lies in the fact that the findings of this study would be useful to the University of Education, Winneba Library management in line with the strategic plan of the University to develop collection and services appropriate to the information needs of distance learners. Consequently, this study aims at identifying the information needs of this group of users. The study is essential for developing collection and services appropriate to the information needs of distance students of the Winneba Study Centre.

THE PROBLEM

The use of library resources and services is vital for both conventional and distance learners as well. According to Kavulya (2004), an approach to distance education that ignores the role of libraries in the first place, provides a narrow experience for the learners and fails to encourage the expected research led – inquiry of knowledge as well as the development and challenging of knowledge". An examination of long essays of the distance students at the Winneba Study Centre suggests that distance learners have not seen utilizing the libraries to satisfy their information and research needs. Students in tertiary level of education are expected to utilize resources at the library to enhance their studies and support their scholarly needs. It is in this vein that the researchers deem essential to investigate their information needs in order to find solution.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to investigate the information needs of distance students of University of Education, Winneba, Winneba Study Centre.

The specific objectives are to identify the followings:

- Information needs of the respondents
- Library use and computer skills in obtaining information by the respondents
- Types of library and sources used to obtain information by the respondents
- Preferred information formats of respondents
- Challenges in the information acquisition by the respondents.

Research Questions

- The study attempts to address the following questions:
- What are the information needs of the respondents?
- What library use and computer skills do respondents have in obtaining information?

- What types of library and sources of information do respondents use to obtain information?
- What types of information formats do the respondents prefer?
- What problems do the respondents encounter in obtaining information?

Brief Background of the University of Education, Winneba

The University of Education, Winneba (UEW) was established by the University of Education, Winneba Act 672 on May 14, 2004. It was originally established by PNDC Law 322 (1992) as the University College of Winneba (UCEW) through the amalgamation of seven (7) diploma awarding institutions. The University is charged with the responsibility of producing professional educators to spearhead a new national vision of education aimed at redirecting Ghana's efforts along the path of rapid economic and social development. The University is expected to play a leading role in the country's drive to produce scholars whose knowledge would be fully responsive to the realities and exigencies of contemporary Ghana and West Africa sub- region. The University offers fulltime, sandwich and distance learning programs. It has four campuses; the Winneba Campus, the Kumasi Campus, the Mampong Campus and the Ajumako Campus respectively (Joppa, 2002).

Distance Education in University of Education, Winneba

The University of Education program is in line with the University, s mission to equip teachers with the requisite proficiency and professional competency for teaching at the pre- tertiary level. The program aims at upgrading the academic and professional competency of basic school teachers in the country. The University of Education distance program focuses on teacher education with the same academic and professional components as the on-campus programs. The academic component comprises specific subjects taught in primary, Junior Secondary and Senior High schools such as Mathematics and Social studies. The professional component, on the other hand, consists of the theory of Education, school management and pedagogy. The program has made higher education accessible to teachers without any restrictions. The Institute for Educational Development and Extension (IEDE) through the Centre for Distance Education runs the program. The Centre currently has twenty-four (24) centers including the Winneba Study Centre. Classes are held on weekends. The Winneba Study has a library manned by a professional librarian.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Distance education students just like other user groups have their information needs. A number of studies have been conducted into information needs of distance learners. According to Oladodun (2014) a previous study provided an account of the survey carried out at the Deakin University in Australia showed that majority of external students were frequent users of public libraries, using public libraries more frequently than any other type of library, including the student's own university library. In a survey by Sutherland (2000) on information use among distance learners associated with Western Colorado Graduate Center in the US, she found that majority of the survey participants borrowed materials from local academic and local public libraries. The result also revealed that more than half of the students did not use the main campus that is the distance education provider library. The reasons given for using what they used include: ease of use, location and resources.

In a study conducted by Mabawonku (2004) among some undergraduate distance learners in three Nigerian universities, it was revealed that the students used other libraries much more than the university libraries. However, the study shows that less than half of the respondents used their main university libraries regularly. The study further affirms that the students use some departmental libraries and other libraries outside the campus mainly for reading their personal books. Similarly, Oladokun (2002) carried out a study of the Diploma in Primary

Education (DPE) and Certificate in Adult Education (CAE) students of distance education of the University of Botswana and the role played by the University of Botswana Library. The results of the survey revealed that significant numbers of distance learners nine out of ten indicated a need for materials beyond course readings, almost half (48%) had not used a library, a quarter used the University Library, and a quarter visited a public library (Oladokun, 2002).

The study of Hensley and Robin (2010) on distance learners in University of Illinois concluded that distance learners at the University generally appreciate the library and make use of the services and resources to satisfy their information needs but the scope of library services accessed is limited. On the other hand, Aliakbar et al. (2009) in a study conducted on distance learners in Iran reported that although distance learners had positive perception toward the use of information resources, the University had no formal library services for the students to use during their study.

Bibb (2003) also observes that as a result of poor use of library by distance students in South Missouri State University, the Library made effort to serve the students through innovative techniques and resources to attract usage of resources by the students to satisfy their information needs and these include the Library's links/access to a number of open access online databases. A study conducted by Lui and Yang (2004) reported that distance learners showed preference for information that is easily available. They also found that the learners' fields of study also affected their use of information sources in Texas A & M University which was the study area.

Thanuskodi (2012) reported a study conducted that users lack library skills to enable them acquire the needed information in satisfying their information needs. He reported again that the users also lacked computing skills to enable them utilize information technology – based library sources and facilities. Adesoye and Amusa (2011) observe that due to the flexibility of distance education program both old and young alike irrespective of gender have undertaken the program. Mabawonku (2004) conducted a survey of library use in distance learning in three Nigerian universities. She found that students use of the library resources for information and self-development was inadequate. According to her, the students attributed their low use of the library to their tight schedules which were fully occupied with lectures and interactions with tutors. Adetimirin and Omogbue (2011) also concluded in a study underscored that distance students were not using the libraries because of their tight schedules which were fully occupied with tutorials. Oladokun (2002) found that learners of Open University of Tanzania depended more on the public and private library system to meet their information needs; however he concluded that it was not an adequate solution in the sense that the stock was not relevant to the information needs of the students.

Furthermore, Boadi and Letsolo (2004) investigated the information needs and seeking behavior of distance students at the Extra- Mural Studies in Lesotho. The revelation was that course materials seemed to be popular with the distance students and the expectation of the students was that more course materials would be produced by the Institute. They concluded that however useful these course materials may be as sources of information for the distance students, dependence on them could breed parochialism which could endanger the whole educational processes.

In another study conducted by Adesoye and Amusa (2011), found that though distance students were aware and make use of the institutional libraries to meet their information needs, there were, however, impediments to the students utilization of library and information resources. These impediments among others were inadequate library facilities, lack of time due to the intensive nature of their program and reliance on study materials.

Oladokun (2010) reports a survey conducted at the University of Botswana, on their off campus students. The findings of the study revealed that students have preference for print format; only few numbers would have preferred electronic format. He also found that students rely mostly on their lecture notes dictated to them in class and also relied on their colleagues as their major sources of information.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a survey research which focused on the information needs and seeking behavior of the distance learners of Winneba Study Centre at the University of Education, Winneba. The rationale for the choice of the survey design was that it is suitable for descriptive, explanatory and exploratory studies (Babble and Benaquisto, 2002). The target population for the study consists of all distance students of the study center as at 2012/2013 academic year numbering, 1,029. This includes diploma and post diploma students enrolled on the program. The data gathering instrument was the questionnaire. The questions were based on the research questions formulated to guide the study. A sample of 206 respondents representing approximately 20% was randomly selected using a table of random numbers for the study. This random size is supported by Babbie (2005). He is of the opinion that a population of 1000 and above, a sample size of 10 – 20% is acceptable.

The instrument used to elicit information from the respondents was opened and closed ended questions. The researchers with the help of two assistants administered the questionnaire to the respondents after explaining to them the purpose and relevance of the study. Their anonymity was also assured. The administration of the questionnaire was done right in the lecture hall and retrieved from them after the completion; there was therefore a high response rate. After going through them, it was realized that seven were unusable and were discarded giving a response rate of 97% Simple percentages were used to analyze the data collected from the respondents of the study.

FINDINGS

Presentation of the result of the study was done based on the design research questions formulated to guide the study of the study. Of the respondents, 101 (51%) were male, 98 (49%) were female. All the respondents were distance students of the Winneba study center. Data were analyzed into simple percentages and frequencies. Demographic distribution is shown in Table1.

Table: 1
Background characteristics of respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
25-35	87	44
36-45	108	54
47-55	4	2
Total	199	100

Sources: Field Survey, 2015

The analysis of the study showed that 106 (52%) were males and 98 (45%) were females. With regard to the age distribution, Table 1 revealed that it ranges from 25-55 years. Thus, there is no age limit to distance education and distance education caters more for older adults with majority of them belonging to age range 36-45. The findings indicate that the distance education programs are being undertaken by both male and female. Also majority of them are matured students aged between 36-45. There is therefore no age limit, thus both the young and old alike could enroll on the program.

Table: 2
Information needs of the respondents

Information needs	Frequency	Percentage
Information relevant to their program	85	43
Info easily available	79	40
Interested in current information	21	10
Liked information from the internet	8	4
Liked information free without any cost	6	3
Total	199	100

Sources: Field Survey, 2015

Table 2 gives an overview of the information needs of the respondents. The question relating to their information needs was open ended and as such respondents were not restricted to specific answers. This therefore enabled them to describe their information needs in any form they wished so that their actual information needs could be appreciated.

A number of the respondents 85 (43%) indicated that they liked information relevant to their program of study, while 79 (40%) preferred information that is easily available. Also 21(10%) were interested in current information. On the other hand, 8 (4%) indicated they liked information from the Internet while only 6 (3%) indicated that they wanted information that was free without any cost to them whatsoever. The findings revealed that distance students appreciate information that has bearing on the courses they are offering, easily available, information from the Internet and lastly information for free. It could be deduced that few of the respondents who indicated free information might have been spending in their bid to acquire information to satisfy their needs.

Table: 3
Skills in searching for information in print format

Skill level	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	-	-
Very Good	-	-
Good	4	2
Fair	61	31
Poor	134	67
Total	199	100

Sources: Field Survey, 2015

In Table 3, respondents were asked to provide self- assessment of their library use skill. The library use skills can have an impact on how the respondents use materials at the library to acquire the needed information. It is natural that respondents who have the skills were expected to make effective use of the resources better than those with no library use skills. Analysis of the data revealed that a significant number 134 (67%) of respondents rated their searching skills poor, 61 (31%) as fair, only 4 (2%) rated their searching skills as good. It is pertinent to note that none of the respondents rated their skills as excellent and very good." Respondents' low level of library skills could impact greatly on their utilization of information resources in print format.

Table: 4
Electronic information searching skills

Skill level	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	-	-
Very good	-	-
Good	22	11
Fair	106	53
Poor	71	36
Total	199	100

Sources: Field Survey, 2015

Respondents were asked to rate their online information searching skills. Users' level of computing can also has an impact on their use of the electronic resources available in the Library. From Table 4, it can be observed that a greater number of respondents assessed their computing skills as fair 106 (53%), while 71 (36%) rated their skills as poor. Only 22 (11%) assessed their skills as good. Again none of the respondents rated their skills as "excellent" and "very good". This implies that respondents will not be able to utilize effectively the electronic resources and facilities available in the library; this obviously would impact negatively on their information acquisition. Most of the information can be found online, but without the skills for searching one cannot fully utilize them to their benefit. The University Library catalogue of University of Education, Winneba is now online and to fully appreciate and use it effectively users must acquire computing skills to explore the catalogue to find materials available in the Library and also to able to utilize the electronic resources.

Table: 5
Types of library used

Type of library	Frequency	Percentage
University Main Library	5	3
Study Centre Library	15	7
Public Library	9	5
School Library	49	25
Special Library	-	-
Never Used Library	121	60
Total	199	100

Sources: Field Survey, 2015

Table 5 captured the types of library respondents' use to support their studies and enhance their information needs. The Table 5 shows a number of respondents, 121 (60%) never use the library to enhance their scholarly endeavors. The reason they assigned was that they did not have much time due to the nature of their program, while 49 (25%) made use of school library. Also 15 (7%) indicated that they used the Study Centre Library, 9 (5%) indicated that they use the public library, only 5 (3%) used the Main University Library of University of Education, Winneba. On the other hand, none of the respondents indicated using any special library. The results show that respondents use all types of library to satisfy their information needs, though the percentage is not significant. It is regrettable to note that a significant majority 121(60%) of the respondents indicated not using library to carry out their learning activities and other academic exercise. Perhaps these students live in areas where there are no libraries in their communities. Those who used the school and public libraries indicated that the materials did not meet their information requirement. Those who used the Study Centre Library also indicated that the materials were relevant but more materials should be acquired on teaching method. The results showed that the distance learners use all types of libraries to access information or conduct other learning activities with exception of special

library. Those who use the public library indicated that the materials did not meet their information requirement, 15(7%) indicated that they use the Centre Library only when they attend tutorials on Saturdays, only 5(3%) indicated that they use the University Main Library. They were of the indication that the materials were helpful and relevant as it helped them to carry out their learning and other academic tasks. They also indicated that the materials at the Study Centre Library were equally relevant; however more materials should be added to the present stock.

Table: 6
Sources used to obtain information

Sources	Frequency	Percentage
Library Resources	3	2
Course material	101	51
Colleagues	11	5
Lecture notes	75	38
Internet	2	1
Personal collection	7	3
Total	199	100

Sources: Field Survey, 2015

The study made an attempt to find sources from which the respondents acquire information to assist them in their scholarly endeavors. From Table 6, the most common sources used to obtain information is the course material 101(51%) followed by those who use lecture notes, 75 (38%) while 11(5%) depend on information from colleagues. Again 7(3%) obtain information from their personal collection. The least sources used by the respondents were library resources, 3 (2%) and the Internet respectively 2(1%). The findings depict that a significant majority (89%) of students depend on course materials and lecture notes. The findings revealed lack of use of library resources by respondents.

Table: 7
Preferred information format

Information format	Frequency	Percentage
Electronic	71	36
Print	128	64
Total	199	100

Sources: Field Survey, 2015

Attempt was made to identify their most preferred information format, the table reveals that a significant number of the respondents were interested in print format 128(64) while the remaining 71 (36%) showed interest in electronic format. This is not surprising because the learners have all their lives been used to print as information format as against the electronic format.

Table: 8
Barriers to information acquisition

Impediment barrier	Frequency	Percentage
Reliance on study material and lecture notes	94	47
Lack of time	77	39
Lack of library searching skills	13	6
Inadequate library facilities	15	8
Total	199	100

Sources: Field Survey, 2015

The respondents were then asked to indicate impediments to their utilization of library and information sources in (Table 7). Table 7 shows that over reliance on study material and lecture notes 94(47%) was top among the barriers to impediment to their utilization of information resources. Other barriers include lack of time 77(39%), library and information searching skills 13(6%) and 15(8%) as inadequate library facilities. Oladokun (2010) remarked that it does not sound desirable for the tertiary level students to depend on lecture notes in order to write assignment, test and examination or obtain the needed information.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study revealed that the distance education program is undertaken by both male and female and there is no age limit. Also both the young and old could be enrolled on the program. These findings are in line with Adesoye and Amusa's (2011) study which found that in Nigeria the distance program is also undertaken by male and female as well as the young and older adults. On the other hand, Boadi and Letsolo (2004) in a study conducted in Botswana found that majority of the students were female because of the flexibility of the program. The study also revealed that a significant number of respondents 79 (40%) preferred information that is available. This finding confirms an earlier study by Boadi and Letsolo (2004) who found that distance students in Botswana preferred information that is easily available. The implication is that information should always be available for the distance students due to the nature of the program.

It is obvious from the study that majority of the distance students lack the ability to search for information electronically and also lack basic library skills to retrieve information manually. This was evidenced by 53% and 36% rating by the respondents that their library skills and searching for information electronically are poor. The study further established that the students do not have the skills for searching for information in the library. This implies that students might not be able to utilize the resources in the library more effectively to enhance their studies due to their inability to search for information. This finding is similar to the findings of Thanuskodi (2012) who found that users rated their library skills and computing skills as "poor". It further came to light that respondents lack basic library skills so that they could easily retrieve information for their academic work. The implication is that respondents who did not have the skills would not make effective use of the resources in any library they find themselves. Again their lack of searching skills could hinder their retrieval of useful information to enable them conduct research and other academic activities demanding the use of information resources and again to satisfy a need or a requirement. This result corroborates Thanuskodi's (2012) study conducted. His study revealed that respondents rated their searching skills not satisfactory. This implies that the majority of students would depend mainly on print information from their prescribed textbooks which may not be current as compared to the electronic resources.

It is also obvious that majority of the students do not use libraries to support their studies and other academic activities. This was evidenced by 60% indicating that they never used libraries to support their studies. A possible explanation for this may be that the lecturers or the instructors do not give them assignments that require the use of information resources in the libraries. It is noteworthy to mention that the university education is expected to equip the students with skills of inquiry and critical thinking and the libraries therefore enhance this. The use of information resources for independent study and learning makes the distance education program of the same standard and quality like the regular program. This finding supports a study conducted by Adetimirin and Omogbue (2002) who found that distance students were not using library because of their tight schedules which were fully occupied with lectures. This finding is, however, at variance with earlier studies by Oladokun, (2014),

Boadi and Letsolo, (2004), Sutherland (2000) and Mabawonku (2004). They all reported usage of various types of libraries by distance learners to support their studies.

The study also brought to light that the students do not use library materials to obtain information to enhance their studies. This finding depicts lack of use of library resources by respondents. It is regrettably to mention that only 2% of the respondents use library resources to obtain information. It is evident that majority of the students depend on their prescribed textbooks and lecture notes as their major sources for information. This implies that most distance students of University of Education, Winneba Study Centre go through the walls of the university without stepping foot in a library. Distance education has to be all embracing and comprehensive. It should be noted that acquiring learning experience through independent use of information resources are an integral part of the program. This is because the instructor and learner are separated in time or space; therefore, the use of library resources is unavoidable. The library promotes the acquisition of reading, inquiry and independent thinking through the provision of resources to support learning activities. The resources in the library are not meant for regular students alone but distance students as well. Again the resources in the library widen the scope of what the textbooks have provided. In the words of Kavulya (2004) "a degree without an in depth knowledge of the subject through investigative learning is questionable". The finding is in agreement with the findings of studies conducted by Boadi and Letsolo (2004) and Mabawonku (2004). The countries studied by these authors were U.S, Botswana, and Nigeria. This finding of distance students not utilizing the library resources to their full potential is not different from what is happening in other countries, particularly in Africa. This finding however is contrary to a study conducted by Rowland and Rubbert (2001) and Khasseh et al. (2009). They found that distance students use information resources apart from the prescribed text supplied to them by the institutions.

The study further revealed that distance students preferred print format to electronic format. It is discernible that the respondents were more interested in print sources than the latter even though they were exposed to information communication technologies. Perhaps this could be attributed to the fact throughout their lives they have been used to mostly print as an information format. Moreover print format is easily accessible wherever one finds oneself whether there is electricity or not. The present finding corroborates the findings by Oladokun (2010). He found that off –campus students at the University of Botswana preferred print format to other format. The finding of this study is, however, contrary to the study conducted by Adesoye, 2011. He found that their information preference showed that they preferred both print and electronic format. The study finally revealed that reliance on study materials and lecture notes, coupled with lack of time hampered their information utilization.

CONCLUSION

The paper examines the information needs of distance learners. The result of the study revealed that distance learners of the study centre do not use the library to complement the prescribed textbooks given to them by the institution. According to them it is as a result of lack of time, they therefore depend heavily on the modules and their lecture notes as their only sources of information. In addition, the study revealed that the learners lack both library use and searching skills to enable them search for information in the library and again they prefer information in print format. The study further revealed that lack of time, dependence on study materials and lack of searching skills are the challenges hampering their information acquisition. This is a matter of concern, and therefore there is the necessity for library management as a matter of urgency, to ensure that these groups of students are given the necessary bibliographic instruction so that they would be able to search for information efficiently and effectively wherever they find themselves.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the above conclusion, the following recommendations are worth considering:

- Intensive efforts should be made by the library management of the University to provide bibliographic instruction on how to use the library and how to access and use electronic resources to enhance learning. This should be an annual affair just like how library orientation is organized for fresh students on the regular program.
- Tutors should also be encouraged to give assignments that would require the use of information sources in both print and electronic. This would indirectly encourage the students to consult reference sources in addition to their modules to complete their assignments. By so doing their skills could be developed.
- Library management in partnership with the Centre for Distance Education in the University should adopt a strategy to provide library services to distance learners comparable to the services it provides to the regular students. Thus, application of information technology in the delivery of services to distance should be a priority since distance students also have to access a range of library materials to accomplish their learning and research goals.
- The University Library, in collaboration with the distance education administrators, should negotiate for space in the public and school libraries to keep some reference and other library materials for the use of the learners. Currently, tutorials are held in hired premises in Secondary and Teacher education schools in the country, perhaps arrangements could also be made by the University Library in conjunction with the Head of the institutions also arrange so that some of the library materials could also be kept there for use by the learners.
- Efforts should be made by stakeholders, distance education administrators, and the library to run mobile library that would visit the study centers regularly. This could also be done with the support of the public library.
- The Library management in collaboration with distance education administrators to ensure that there are functional libraries in all the centers. These libraries should also be stocked with current materials relevant to the needs of the students.
- The University Library management could also collaborate with other public universities in the country, so that distance education students who are closer to the institutions could use the facilities at these institutions. For instance distance learners of Winneba study Centre who are closer to the University of Cape Coast and its environs could visit the library and use the resources to meet their information needs. Perhaps a place could be designated for the exclusive use of these learners could be established in all the public institutions.

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of the AUTHORS



Agatha Gifty LARSON is a Senior Assistant Librarian in IEDE Library in University of Education, Winneba. She has been working there for the past thirteen years and worked as the head of Reader Service for ten years. She has attended a number of International Conferences both Home and Abroad. She is Fellow of the Mortenson Centre for International Programs at Urbana Champaign, USA. She holds MA in Library and Information Studies from the University of Ghana.

Agatha Gifty LARSON
University of Education, Winneba, Ghana.
Library Department
Tel: +233 0240276167 / +233 0208150109
Email: agaift2003@yahoo.com



Michael OWUSU-ACHEAW is the head of the Koforidua Polytechnic Library and has been working with the Institution since 2000. He holds MA in Library and Information studies at the University of Ghana and an Adjunct Senior tutor at the University of Cape Coast Distance Education Program. He is a council member of the Ghana Library Association.

Michael OWUSU-ACHEAW
Koforidua Polytechnic,
Koforidua, Ghana
Library Department
Tel: +233 0208474482 / +233 0541394581
Email: oamicky2004@yahoo.com

REFERENCES

- Adesoye, A and Amusa, O. I. (2011). Investigating the information needs of sandwich and part-time students of two public universities in Ogun State, Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice*, (Accessed on 15th March, 2013.) from: <http://unlib.unl.edu/LPP>
- ACRL (2000). Guidelines for distance learning library services, (Accessed on 12th February, 2013.) from: www.ala.org/acrl
- Adetimirin, A and Omogbue, G. (2011). Library habits of the university of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice*, (Accessed on 23rd June, 2013.) from: <http://unlib.unl.edu/LPP>
- Aliakbar, K., Hadi, S. and Jowkar, A . (2009). Distance education and the role of library services in Iran: a case study of Shiraz University distance learners. *Library Hi Tech News*, (7), 11-14.
- Babbie, E. (2005), *The Basics of Social Research*. 3rd ed, Belmont: Thompson Wadsworth pp. 265, 274.
- Babbie, E. and Benaquisto, L. (2002). *Fundamentals of social research, Scarborough: Thomson and Nelson Ltd.* 5-15.
- Bibb, D. D (2003). Distance centre students deserve main campus resources. *Collection Building*, 22 (2), 5-9.
- Boadi, B. V and Letsolo, P. (2004). Information needs and information seeking behavior of distant Learners at the Extra- Mural studies in Lesotho. *Information Development*, 20 (3), 189-199.
- Dew, S.H. (2001). Knowing your users and what they want: surveying off campus students about library services. *Journal of Library Administration*, 31 (3-4), 177-179.
- Gu, F. (2006). The role of media services in the University distance distributed education. *Library Management*, 27(6-7), 979-386.

- Hensley, M.E. and Robin, E. M. (2010). Listening from a distance: a survey of university of Illinois distance learners and its Implications for meaningful instructions. *Journal of Library Administration*, 50, 670-683.
- UEW (2002) Breaking new ground in education. Compiled and edited by Joppa, I.
- Kavulya, J. M. (2004). Challenges in the provision of library services for distance education: a case of selected universities in Kenya. *African Journal of Library and Archives and Information Science*, 14 (1), 15-28.
- Liu, Z and Yang, Z. V. (2004). Factors influencing distance education graduate students use of Information resources: a user study. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 30 (1), 14-35.
- Mabawonku, I. (2004). Library use in distance learning: a survey of undergraduates in three Nigerian universities. *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science*. 14(1), 151-166.
- Oladokun, O. S. (2002). The practice of distance librarianship in Africa. *Library Review*, 516, 38-45.
- Oladokun, O. S and Aina, L.O. (2009). Library and information needs and barriers to the use of information resources by continuing education students at the University of Botswana. *Information Development*, 25 (4), 15-25
- Oladokun, O. (2010). Information seeking behavior of the off-campus students at the University of Botswana: a case of two satellite centers. *Journal of Library Administration*, 50, 883-898.
- Oladokun, O. (2014). The Information Environment of Distance Learners: A Literature Review. *CreativeEducation*, 5,303-317. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ce.2014.55040> accessed 9/12/15
- Rowland, F. and Rubbert, I. (2001). An evaluation of the information needs and practices of part-time and distance educational and social change through life long learning. *Journal of Documentation*, 57 (6), 746-62.
- Sutherland, J.(2000) Distance education :library use among adult distance learners : its implications for local public and academic libraries. A Capstone Project, MLIS thesis University of Denver .
- Thanuskod, S. (2012). The information needs and seeking behaviour of the Tamil Nadu Dr Ambedkar Law University faculty members. *International Journal of Information Science*. 2 (4), 42-46.