Research Paper   **Library Science**

Students Perception & Attitude Regarding Library Services towards Distance Education Programs

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ABSTRACT

There is a diverse population of students who will benefit greatly from a convenient, time and place-independent learning environment. Distance education provides this type of environment and addresses the many needs of adult learners and the new generation of online learners. The problem is that this environment differs from a traditional institution of higher learning and continues to bring about questions from educators related to the issue of equivalency between online and traditional degree programs, especially in terms of student support services, such as the library. The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions and attitudes of students regarding traditional and distance library services, determine if the outcomes resulting from the library services provided in the online degree programs were equivalent to those outcomes for on-campus programs and provide information to enhance and improve the effectiveness of online degree programs.

An online survey was conducted focusing on the perceptions and attitudes of students regarding traditional and distance library services. The results of the study indicated that overall the students were satisfied with the library resources and services available to them, therefore, students most likely were familiar with today's library services. However, institutions should remain proactive because distance education students will continue to demand and expect libraries to meet their needs. As these demands and expectations are explored new library services and resources will emerge. Also, institutions of higher learning must have a commitment to providing distance students with the same quality of education and equivalent support services as on-campus students if they expect those outside the educational arena to respect degrees obtained through this means of educational learning.

Keywords : Distance education, Library services, Perception & Attitude.

Foreshadow:

Distance education provides this environment by meeting the demands of adult learners and the new generation of online learners. A distance learning environment allows, "synchronous and asynchronous communication, access to and from geographically isolated communities, multiple participation within activities, and cultural sharing of diversity and recognition of similarities among the people of our world" (Schrum, 1999, p. 12). "Distance learning reverses the social dynamic by bringing education to the student, rather than sending the student to education" (Parke & Tracy-Mumford, 2000, p. 7). However, distance education is not "a panacea for the difficulties and barriers encountered in traditional education settings, but it does provide the potential for greater service to more individuals seeking learning opportunities" (Mielke, 1999, p. 3). A recent survey administered by the National Institute for Literacy revealed that distance learning provides a means for educating and introducing new technology to the adult learner. Distance learning also brings about open access and non-dictated learning times, and requires a new set of expectations about the learning environment (Parke & Tracy-Mumford, 2000). Distance education and educational technology is changing how institutional administrators respond to the needs of students and the educational community.

A few factors that have brought on this change are the increase in distance students, the accreditation standards revised for the new population of distance students, the attention that must be given to the issue of equality and quality of education for distance students in comparison to on-campus students, and the need for instruction and assistance in terms of research and resources available through electronic means (Lebowitz, 1997). Distance education via the Internet is changing the course delivery method in institutions of higher education across the country. Online courses offered over the Internet bring education to those who are unable to get to the institution due to work and family obligations, time constraints, disabilities, or geographic location. Online courses also eliminate many of the barriers and constraints that deter adult learners from enrolling in traditional education programs. Online learners are motivated and challenged by the innovative tools and computer-mediated communication applications used in the online courses.

The following program goals and objectives for the Distance Education Degree Programs (EDEP):

▪ To increase access to higher education for adult Tennesseans, especially those with some college experience;
▪ To provide student access to web-based courses and degree programs;
▪ To maximize the effective use of technology for delivery of college-level instruction;
▪ To encourage and support collaboration among institutions.

EDEP will provide many new choices and opportunities for students, the program will also create an equal number of challenges and issues for administrators and faculty. Among hose issues to be addressed are accreditation, course de-

velopment, curriculum and instruction, faculty, technology, and student issues. The student issues demand attention because in higher education there has been a major shift in the way in which we regard the student. Student issues in an online environment closely resemble those student issues found in the traditional classroom; however, providing services to the students who have different demographic profiles is a problem facing higher education today. A student on a college campus has access to any student support service offered and consultants and advisers are often just a few feet away.

Statement of the Problem - EDEP will place students in a learning environment unfamiliar to many students and faculty. The problem is that this environment differs from a traditional institution of higher learning and continues to bring about questions from educators related to the issue of equivalency between online and traditional degree programs, especially in terms of student support services. The library is no longer a short walk across campus. Students and accrediting agencies expect the library services available in online degree programs equivalent to the library services available in traditional on-campus programs. However, until the perceptions and attitudes of the online student are assessed there is no means for demonstrating equivalency and improving the effectiveness of these programs.

Purpose of the Study - is to determine the perceptions and attitudes of students enrolled in the Programs with regard to available library resources and services. As a result of the assessment of library resources and services available to students enrolled in the Degree Programs data will be collected to determine the perceptions and attitudes of students regarding traditional and distance library services, determine if the outcomes resulting from the library services provided in the distance programs are equivalent to those outcomes for on- campus programs, and provide the information necessary for enhancing and improving the effectiveness of these online degree programs.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE - The purpose of this chapter is to provide relevant reviews of literature and research to support this study. The reviewed literature that documented the most support for this study focused on the need for distance education programs, characteristics of adult learners and distance learners, support services for distance learning students, distance library services, accreditation policies and guidelines regarding distance education, statewide distance library services, and previous related studies/research.

Distance Education - Distance education programs have existed for many years; however, it was not until the early 1970's that external degrees were thought of as an answer to the educational needs of the people. Early on, Kascus & Guilar insisted that "the failure of faculty to recognize the viability and potential of the off-campus student has contributed to the low status of off-campus programs and has prevented these programs being fully integrated into the higher education mainstream" (Kascus & Aguilar, 1988, p. 30). Wolpert (1998) contends that economic and market needs of higher education are the driving force of distance education.

Distance Library Services - Historically, libraries have provided a variety of services to on-campus students. According to Lebowitz, at a minimum library services for off-campus students must comprise the following services to claim that library services for off-campus students are equivalent to library services available to on-campus students.

1. Instruction in the use of libraries and library resources, either via printed or electronic format, or via telephone;
2. Contact information for requesting assistance from the library by telephone, FAX, e-mail, Web site, or snail mail;
3. Information about requesting material not available at local site libraries;
4. Quick turnaround time for materials requested from the library collection;

5. Quick response to requests for reference assistance and guidance; and

Distance learners also expect to receive guidance and help in using the library from a distance. This guidance or help needed may include logging into the main library site with full access to all resources and services or the learner my need the assistance of a librarian regarding conducting online database searches. The literature continues to reveal the importance of the relationship between distance learner and distance librarians. This relationship or collaboration is key to the success of adult learners and particularly those adult learners involved in graduate work that is research intensive (Niemi et al., 1998). Lebowitz (1997) states that often how to use the library is not incorporated into distance courses. Likely reasons for excluding library use in a distance course are 1) assumptions are made regarding library skills; 2) faculty do not require students to use material other than the assigned textbook for research; 3) faculty have forgotten that instruction in the use of library resources and services was helpful to them; and 4) faculty may think that the Internet has everything the student will ever need. Davis (2000) states that librarians will be asked to provide immediate access to information and specialized services that are often tailored for a particular group or individual. To handle these specialized services many libraries have designated staff to address the needs and services of distance students. Kirk & Bartelstein (1999) assert that librarians who are responsible for distance library services should first educate faculty and administrators on the new needs and demands associated with providing distance library services to distant students. Swain (2001) recognizes the importance of a supportive administration, collection management, acquisitions, cataloging, collection access, reference and instruction, staff training, and developing ways to deliver library instruction to distance learners. A group of researchers identified access to electronic resources, provision of liaison services, and timely delivery of materials as important areas of concern for anyone involved in coordinating or developing of distance learning library services (Adams et al., 1998). Cline (2000) cautions us not to overlook the important elements of scholarly research such as reliability, redundancy, and the ability to replicate results while declaring the Internet revolutionary to information access. Scholarly research scrutinizes and verifies previous work in order to construct new ideas and develop new research. In fields such as business, science, industry, architecture, transportation, and medicine this scrutiny and verification is imperative. It is the research libraries that have the greatest challenge as they continue to provide information for scholarly research amidst the proliferation of information available on the Internet.

Data Analysis: The survey instrument was administered to students enrolled in the Distance Education Programs to assess their perceptions and attitudes regarding library services available to distance education students. A pilot study of the survey instrument was conducted with a similar group of students enrolled in different courses offered from University. The chapter is organized into the following sections:

1) Demographic Characteristics
2) Specific Research Questions
3) Responses to Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to conduct exploratory research utilizing the perceptions and attitudes of students enrolled in the Degree Programs with regard to their experience with library services. The ultimate purpose was to determine if the outcomes resulting from the library services provided in the Degree Programs are equivalent to those outcomes for on-campus programs and to provide information necessary for enhancing and improving the effectiveness of the Programs. Specifically, the relationship between the level of satisfaction with distance library services and traditional library services as well as computer confidence, computer experience, age, gender, academic status, and educational background was analyzed.

Table No. 1 - Table showing gender of the respondents

Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	22	20%
Female	88	80%
Total	110	100%

Source : Primary Data

Interpretation - From the above table, 80% of the respondents are female, and 20% of the respondents are male.

Table No. 2 - Table showing age of the respondent

Age (Yrs.)	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Below 21	18	16.36%
21-30	35	31.82%
30-45	44	40%
Above 45	13	11.82%
Total	110	100%

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation - In the above table out of 110 respondents, 40% are within 30-45 years old, 31.82% are within 21-30 years old, 16.36% of respondents are below 21 age and the remaining 11.82% are above 45.

Table No. 3 - Table showing educational Qualification details

Qualification	No. of Respondents	Percentage
HSC	1	0.91%
Diploma	47	42.73%1
Graduate	44	40%
Post graduate	18	16.36%
Total	110	100%

Source : Primary Data

Interpretation- In the above table out of 110 respondents, 42.73% are Diploma level, 40% are graduates, 16.36% are post graduates and the rest 0.91% of respondents are School level (HSC).

Table No.4 - Table showing 0ccupation of the respondent

Occupation	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Student	24	21.82%
employed	32	29.1%
Home maker	19	17.27%
professional	22	20%
Others	13	11.81%
Total	110	100%

Source : Primary Data

Interpretation - In the above table out of 110 respondents, 29.1% are employed, 21.82% of respondents are student, 20% are professional, 17.27% are home maker and the remaining 11.81% are others.

Table No.5 - Table showing Income of the respondents per annum

Income per annum in (Rs.)	No. of Respondents	Percentage
50,0000	20	18.18%
50,000-1,00,000	33	30%
1,00,000-1,50,000	37	33.64%
Above 2,00,000	20	18.18%
Total	110	100%

Source : Primary Data

Interpretation - It is identified from the table, 33.64% of the respondents are 1,00,000-1,50,000 income, 30% of the respondents are above 50,000-1,00,000, 18.18% have the income of below 50,000 and the remaining 18.18% of the respondents have the income of above 2,00,000

Table No.6 – Method of Access to your University Library Websites

opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Click Library link on home website	54	49.1%
Click on your course site	22	20%
Click on your general search	15	13.63%
Click on your course material	11	10%
Others	8	7.27%
Total	110	100%

Source : Primary Data

Interpretation - In the above table out of 110 respondents, Majority of 49.1% of respondents, click library link on home website.

Table No.7 – Location access to University Library Websites

opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage
University Websites Library	34	31%
University Computer Lab	52	47.27%
Virtual Library	18	16.36%
Department Library	6	5.45%
Total	110	100%

Source : Primary Data

Interpretation - In the above table out of 110 respondents, Majority of 47.27% of respondents, University Computer Lab.

Table No.8 – Usage and Level of satisfaction / services available through DEP

opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Quick Reference	9	8.12%
Library Catalog	20	18.18%
e- Database	55	50%

opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Document Manual	26	23.63%
Total	110	100%

Source : Primary Data

Interpretation - Here shows that the responding of usage towards the services available through DEP is reasonable. Some respondents are responded the e- database is relatively high (50%) because they are very much quality conscious.

Table No.9 – Usage of Computer Proficiency

opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage
e-mail	50	45.45%
Posting into a portal	14	12.72%
Using internet access	11	10%
Using internet access at Home	25	22.72%
Total	110	100%

Source : Primary Data

Interpretation - In this observation out of 110 customers, majority (45.45%) of the respondents e-mail, 22.72% source of influence to Using internet access at Home, 12.72% from Posting into a portal**.**

Table No.10 – Usage of resources and services available through DLS and TLS

Resource / Services	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Access to library catalogue	18	16.36%
Access to Articles	26	23.63%
Access to e-database	16	14.54%
Access to e-books	32	29.1%
Inter library Loan	18	16.36%
Total	110	100%

Interpretation - From the above table, 29% of the respondents quality conscious in access to e-books, 23.63% respondents are attracted in access to Articles.

Table No.11- Relationship between Academic status of the students with DLS & TLS

Resource / Services	Level of Satisfaction towards		Total
	DLS	TLS	
Access to library catalogue	15	5	20
Access to Articles	28	5	33
Access to e-database / e-books	31	6	37
Inter library Loan	15	5	20
Total	89	21	110

Result
Chi-Square Value: 1.4337; Table Value: 7.815

Degree of Freedom: 3; Significance: Not Significant

The result of the chi-square test reveals that the calculated chi-square value (1.433) is less than the table chi-square value (7.815) at 5 per cent level of significance and the null hypothesis is accepted.

Major findings revealed from the following study:
No significant difference between age of students and level of satisfaction with distance library services or traditional library services.

No significant difference between gender of students and level of satisfaction with distance library services or traditional library services.

No significant difference between occupational status of students and level of satisfaction with distance library services or traditional library services.

No significant difference between educational level of students and level of satisfaction with distance library services or traditional library services.

No significant difference between academic status of students and level of satisfaction with traditional library services; however, there was a marginal significant difference revealed when looking at academic status of students and level of satisfaction with distance library services.

Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research
The following recommendations have been developed as a result of analyzing the data collected for this study:

1. Continue to assess the perceptions of students enrolled in the Degree Programs regarding library resources and services and take continued feedback is necessary to understanding the needs of the students.
2. Identify faculty who have a desire to teach in an online environment. Next, educate those faculties on the needs and expectations of distance students.
4. Encourage faculty to develop courses that include a research requirement.
5. Establish a partnership between faculty (course developers) and librarians in order to provide guidance and meet the new challenges of the distant learners.
6. Develop an online library orientation for students enrolled in the Degree Programs.

Hind Shadow: Distance education students demand and expect libraries to meet their needs. As these demands and expectations are explored new library services and resources will emerge to meet the needs of these users. The literature revealed that institutions / universities are proactive in that they are improving and modifying library resources and services for distance education students before the request is made. Evidence must be provided for accrediting agencies to give their stamp of approval of these distance education programs. This is not too much to ask of institutions and statewide distance education programs because neither diplomas nor resumes are stamped on-campus or off-campus education. Therefore, "the reputation and integrity of an institution is brought into question when it does not require the same rigor, including that of library research, from distance education/ off- campus students as it does from on-campus students". Institutions of higher learning must have a commitment to providing distance students with the same quality of education and equivalent support services as on-campus students if they expect those outside the educational arena to respect degrees obtained through this means of educational learning.

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