



Date : 02/06/2006

Lifelong Learning for LIS Teachers and Educators through Open and Distance Learning: A Case Study of India

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Meeting:	107 Off-site: Education and Training
Simultaneous Interpretation:	No

WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 72ND IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL

20-24 August 2006, Seoul, Korea

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla72/index.htm>

Abstract

Library and Information Science is recognised as a discipline for a study and research at the postgraduate level in the universities in India. There are about 167 universities and their affiliated colleges/institutes which offer different programmes on library and information science. Of the above some of the institutions offer education through distance mode also. Lifelong learning for LIS professionals in India is available in many ways such as training provided by conventional and non-conventional universities, national organisations, professional associations, academic staff colleges, libraries or librarians, internal departments, reading literature, computer programs, discussion through LIS-forum, etc. In the recent past, the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system in India has come in a big way to provide lifelong learning for LIS teachers and educators in many ways due to the advent of ICT and WWW. This paper examines the various efforts made to provide lifelong learning to library and information science teachers and educators in India through open and distance learning using Information Communication Technologies (ICTs).

1. Introduction

The developing societies like India are undergoing a tremendous change due to various factors. On the one hand the need for information is being felt by all sections of the society, on the other hand, new methods and techniques for accessibility of information and knowledge are developed at a faster rate than ever. The existing knowledge needs to be updated continuously for self-development and also for sustenance in the society. The conventional methods of educational system followed since centuries fall short to meet this necessity. It is recognized now that education is not a one time affair spanning over a period of time. Education is now viewed as a continuous process of teaching-learning in the life of a person. Here comes the importance of lifelong learning.

There are many factors which are responsible for the changing pattern of learning and education. While these are true for many other disciplines, LIS is not an exception. Now, the information plays a vital role and calls for better use of existing information services. The services need continuous innovation to meet the needs of various user groups particularly for those sectors that have economic significance. A striking change is witnessed in the economic aspect of LIS due to recent trend in all round development of the society in industrial productivity with innovations in product. Secondly, developments in ICT and the new media are playing a major role in transfer of information both to the specialist and general user. The need for information to sort a wide range of societal issues – financial, legal, social and personnel problems is well recognised by all. The rapid growth in the emphasis being put on information technology in curricula even at the school level is witnessed in recent years. These are all to facilitate managing and accessing information. Revolutionary changes are also taking place in the higher education system. The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system is gradually taking a firm route in the education system recently. It is felt that ODL system may play an effective role in triggering lifelong learning process. This paper discusses the concept of lifelong learning in general and its existing scenario in the context of LIS teachers and educators in India.

2. Lifelong Learning and LIS

The term 'lifelong learning' is used for combining formal, informal and non-formal education and training, with a reconsideration of professional recognition and quality assurance processes. It is the process of acquiring and expanding knowledge, skills, and dispositions throughout the life to foster well-being.

Lifelong learning is viewed as all-purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence. Such learning contributes to promoting both employability and active citizenship and combating social exclusion.

The philosophy of education system is now changing globally and rapidly towards a continuous learning process. The change in the education system opens up the opportunity of part-time higher education in vocational and non-vocational streams. This is no longer a time bound activity, but an activity spreading over throughout the life. Lifelong learning puts emphasis on the initiative, zeal and motivation of learners

to educate himself/herself according to his/her space, need and time rather than on the educators. Its necessity arises out of quest for knowledge, recognition, needs to solve many of his/her problems and develop capability and competency to survive in society and market place. In a professional discipline, the need for lifelong learning is more to prepare himself/herself for fast changing professional competencies.

Lifelong learning is, thus, a philosophy that makes one to learn throughout the life of an individual either formally or informally. The informal learning process takes place through various ways and means such as observation, experience, environment and the need of individuals. The formal learning process is through well defined, structured method of education. In this context, the continuing professional education plays a catalytic role augmenting the method of lifelong learning.

In a discipline like Library and Information Science the need for lifelong learning assumes a significant importance wherein the new skills have to be acquired to sustain in the market place. Though the principle of the profession/service remains the same, the skills and competencies are changing very fast.

3. The Changing Dimension of LIS

The attitude of the people towards the information is changing due to societal need wherein it is more and more realised that information is a key resource for all round development of the society and also for all types of people – students, workers, professionals and others. Thus, the role of library and information centres has changed manifold in societal, S & T and economic development of a country.

If we look at the present scenario of LIS institutions, it is apparent that the face of library and information centres is changing very fast and, thus, its services. The libraries are no longer confined to the boundaries of four walls. In this changing scenario, collection, organisation and giving access to information is gaining more importance. The characteristics of the shift can be identified as follows:

- From document to information.
- Services on demand to services in anticipation.
- Library driven approach to user driven approach.
- Conventional methods of organisation and management of information to automated one.
- Print on paper to electronic media.
- Conventional library to Electronic/Digital library
- New work field of LIS professionals at institutional and individual level.

These factors bear severe impact on Library and Information profession. Obviously, its impact on education and training has also changed to meet the demand of library and information centres and services in the modern days, the LIS professionals require special aptitude in handling new technology or assisting in the development of new systems and procedures. As the nature and number of information sources and resources are changing, the provision of information services is becoming more complex. There has been a marked growth and changes in bibliographic information system particularly due to the development of information technology. Along with

the bibliographic information system, the LIS professionals have to play a major role in the development of e-governance, e-publishing and many others.

4. Skills Required for LIS Professionals

In general some of the skills required (fig.1) of LIS professionals in the changing environment include but not limited to:

- Library related activities
- Information processing and retrieval
- Information services and support
- Information systems services
- Network-based services
- Network administration and coordination
- Office automation, End user training
- Information product evaluation
- Information Technology planning
- Online searching
- Information brokerage
- Content development and organization
- Web-based information services
- Internet related activities such as web page development
- Electronic and network publishing, etc.

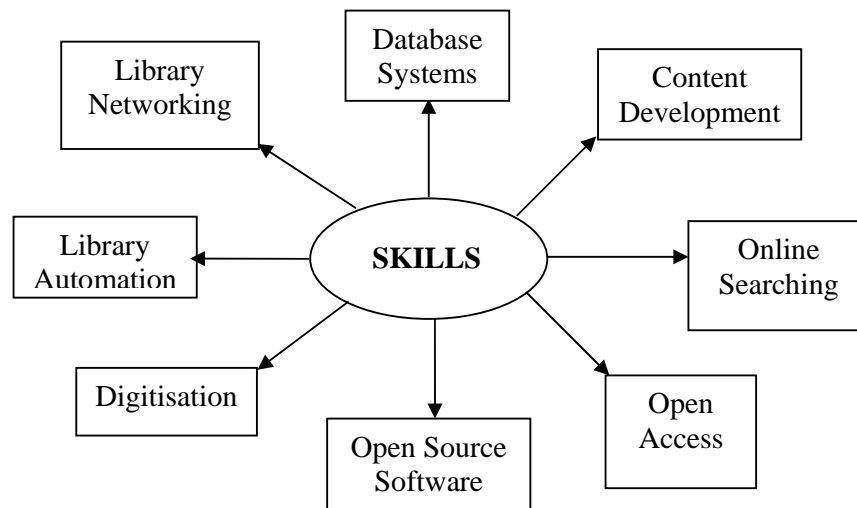


Fig. 1: Skills required for LIS professionals in the present day context

5. Methodologies Available for LIS Education

The credit for starting a formal course in library education in India goes to William Alonson Borden and Asa Don Dickinson who were the students of Melvil Dewey. Borden established a training course at the Central Library, Baroda in 1911, and

Dickinson at the Punjab University, Lahore in 1915. Since then different methods are followed for training the LIS professionals. These methods can be grouped as:

- i) regular/conventional class room method
- ii) continuing education method
- iii) non-conventional education method like tutorial, seminar, conference, etc.
- iv) open and distance education method

In the regular course method, the traditional class room methodology is the predominant one. Though this method is available to acquire the knowledge in a structured and time bound way, as it provides the opportunity to learner at a particular point of time, lifelong education is not the aim of the system.

In the continuous education method various techniques are applied giving the opportunity for the learners to acquire knowledge as and when required. Some of these are holding seminars/workshops on different topics on the latest upcoming areas. Tutorials have also become a regular feature now through this method. Short-term training technique is also adhered to educate the professionals on different aspects. Internship in library and information centres gives enough opportunity to the professionals to acquire new skills. Another important methodology which is noticed in India is work-place education wherein the professionals learn while they work. There are many open sources which are available and adhered to in acquiring different library skills.

The non-conventional methods include the use of mass media like television, development of web-based training modules, etc.

As it has been pointed out earlier, open and distance education system has taken a firm route in the overall education system of the country. India is a vast country of more than 1000 million people with rich cultural heritage and a unique social conglomeration. Though, since independence, a substantial progress is seen in all direction including education, still the literacy rate could not be achieved beyond 65 per cent. Open and distance learning is seen as a viable alternative to address to the problem. The Indian Government has taken the initiative 'education for all'. The intention of the Government on emphasizing the method of Open and Distance Learning is pronounced in the National Policy of Education, 1986. The establishment of National Open School and the Indira Gandhi National Open University and also the decision to set up open universities in each State of the country are enough evidence of government's determination to boost the educational scenario of the country. The open and distance education system is looked upon as a means to provide lifelong education to its citizen. The library and information science is included in many of the ODL Universities in the country. At present, 6 such Universities are offering various programmes on LIS to develop the skills required.

6. The Role of Various Agencies in Providing Lifelong Learning for LIS Professionals

In India, we find a number of institutions/agencies both at Governmental and Non-governmental level are playing important role in the process of lifelong education.

a) University Grants Commission (UGC)

The UGC is empowered for administration of higher education system in the country including the Library and Information Science education. Library and Information Science (LIS) is recognised as a discipline for a study and research at the postgraduate level in the universities across the country. There are about 167 universities (conventional and non-conventional) and their affiliated colleges/institutes which offer LIS programmes at different levels. At Bachelors degree level, the courses are available at 87 universities/colleges; at Masters level 89 universities/colleges; at PhD level 49 universities (Full time) and 3 universities (Part time); and at Certificate and Diploma levels 14 universities and 18 colleges (AIU Handbook, 2005). The UGC assists the Universities through Academic Staff Colleges in organising orientation programmes/refresher courses, summer schools on various emerging areas of LIS. A study of such courses reveals that most of the programmes which are organised during the recent past are devoted to the various areas of ICT applications in different activities of libraries and information centres.

b) Conventional Universities

The conventional universities normally organise regular programmes on LIS in general. Though these cannot be termed as a means for lifelong learning, but intermittently they organise short-term programmes on different emerging areas of library and information services.

c) Non-conventional Universities

By non-conventional Universities we mean those who offer programmes not through traditional mode of teaching-learning. The Open Universities of the country are the examples of such Universities.

d) Professional Associations

The professional associations play a significant role in lifelong learning of teachers through various conferences/seminars and workshop and also organising training programmes on different aspects of LIS. Some of such associations actively involved in these activities in the country include Indian Library Association (ILA), Indian Association of Special Libraries and Information Centres (IASLIC), Indian Association of Teachers in Library and Information Science (IATLIS), and so on.

e) Other Government Agencies

The Government Agencies are taking sufficient initiative in the continuing education programme either by organising short-term courses or assisting the departments in organising such courses. For example, National Institute of Science, Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR) of the DSIR organises regular short-term programmes not only for the participants from India but also from the SAARC countries. The erstwhile National Information System on Science and Technology (NISSAT) under DSIR assists various organisations in developing and offering short-term courses on various areas. NISCAIR has various departments (Fig. 2) and

different categories of staff and students. It gives the opportunity for all to learn providing education and training in each and every department at the workplace. The Figure 3 illustrates different activities of NISCAIR and workplace learning.

f) Inter-Governmental Organisations

The inter-governmental agencies like UNESCO, UNIDO, offer assistance in organising the short term training programmes in various burning areas of LIS.

The above are a few examples of how a developing country like India is gearing them in providing opportunity for life long learning among LIS professionals in general and teachers and educators in particular.

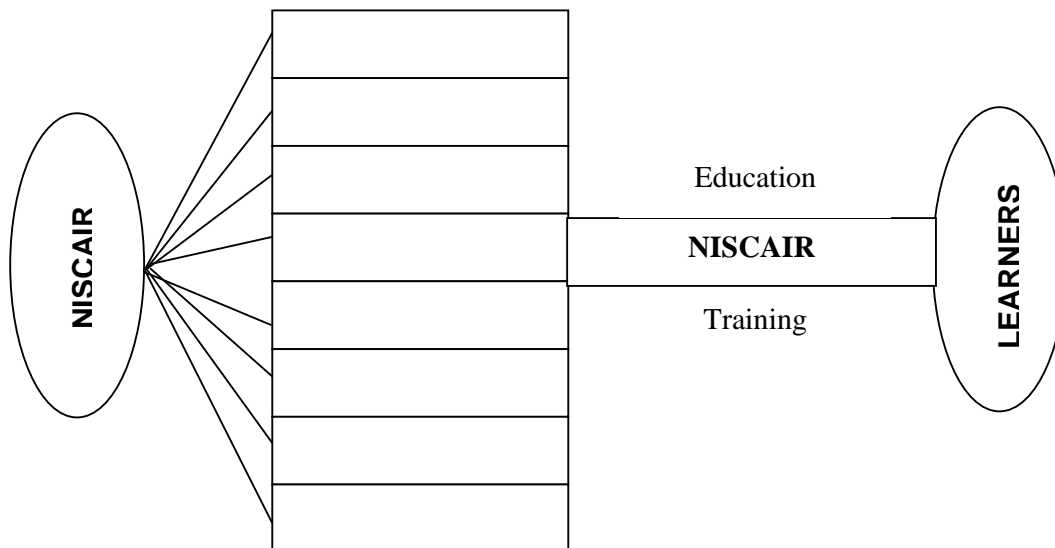


Fig. 2: Process of Workplace Learning

7. Open and Distance Learning

In the present societal scenario education through open and distance learning system is gaining importance and popularity throughout the world. The development in technology is challenging the basic foundation of educational system. There has been a paradigm shift in the teaching learning methods, tools and techniques, the complete dependence on print media is being taken over by the other media – electronic, magnetic, optical, and combination. The high-speed communication technology using satellite and fibre optic links are changing the face of the class room – from four walls to without walls. The convergent technologies are ushering in a new era of educational system from four-wall class room to virtual class room.

Distance Education is not a new concept. It was initiated towards the end of 19th century. The mode of delivery was of course dependent upon the media available at a particular point of time. The open education system is more a philosophy than the method whereas distance education is a method of delivery of education. The learned centerness is a key to the open learning system whereas it need not be necessarily same for the distance learning system. Thus open learning system implies that flexibility in educating the people is available according to one's choice irrespective of space and time. The openness in education system presupposes the availability of education – anyone, anywhere, and anytime without social, physical and geographical restrictions. The success of the ODL system depends upon its capability to:

- develop need based programmes/courses
- develop usable study materials
- lay emphasis on public relations
- provide study materials to learners at regular interval
- develop infrastructure for proper counseling
- develop appropriate link between learners and study centre
- maintain punctuality in examination and result
- offer regular seminar and workshop
- maintain regular contact with traditional institutions
- develop mechanism for curricula revision and updating from time to time.

Thus the philosophy and methods of Open and Distance learning implies that for lifelong learning, this system with the use of ICT can play a significant role.

8. Lifelong Learning through ODL

If we look at the development of ODL we find that it has developed from correspondence model to the flexible learning model through various phases. Since the correspondence models based on combination of different media individually – print, audio, video, computer, lecture through radio and television was developed. The next phase is marked as the tele-learning model wherein the delivery was through interactive audio/video teleconferencing. In the flexible learning model multi-media, internet, computer mediated communication are employed. As it has been mentioned earlier that in a profession like LIS the skills required are changing very fast, basically or primarily, due to the development and application of ICT. For example, in the present day context, the area of content development encompasses meta-data, web-indexing etc. Though, basically the principle of organizing the knowledge is same, but the methods, tools and techniques have changed. There are many more areas where this kind of change is witnessed. As a result the LIS professional has to change themselves according to new requirement and new market opportunities. The major responsibility of developing such professionals lies with the teachers and educators of the profession. It is of paramount importance that they acquire and equip themselves with the latest methods and techniques so that they can play a major role in developing the working LIS professional suitable to meet the changing information market place.

- **IGNOU**

The Indira Gandhi National Open University established in 1985, by the Act of Parliament offers education through Open and Distance mode. In addition to IGNOU, five State Universities are offering LIS programmes through the same mode. The basic methodology of offering the programme is same but differs in the application of ICT aspects. The methodology followed by IGNOU in developing the LIS programmes is through printed study material backed up by direct contact programme, practical at the study centres, audio and video tapes, interactive radio counseling, interactive teleconferencing etc. For the interactive radio counseling a dedicated FM channel called ‘Gyanvani’ is used to discuss the various professional techniques and tools.

Other than the above methods, teleconferencing is one of the major means for interaction of the teachers/learners through an exclusive satellite for education called ‘EDUSAT’. The EDUSAT was launched by Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on September 20, 2004. The main aim of the EDUSAT was to demonstrate the concept of multicasting interactive multimedia for the educational sector and augment distance education capabilities in the country. IGNOU is one of the important organisations in the country using this satellite effectively. IGNOU has about 4 lacs students in different disciplines including Library and Information Science, 58 Regional Centres, 06 Sub-Regional Centres, and 1400 Study Centres all over the country. The live lectures, which can reach all centers, are delivered at IGNOU Head Quarters by teachers/resource persons through teleconferencing mode. The learners from any corner of the country will be able to watch the live programmes and interact with the resource persons (i.e. Teachers). An exclusive TV channel for education is used to telecast the live programmes. Figure 3 illustrates the mechanism of delivering the programmes to the learners.

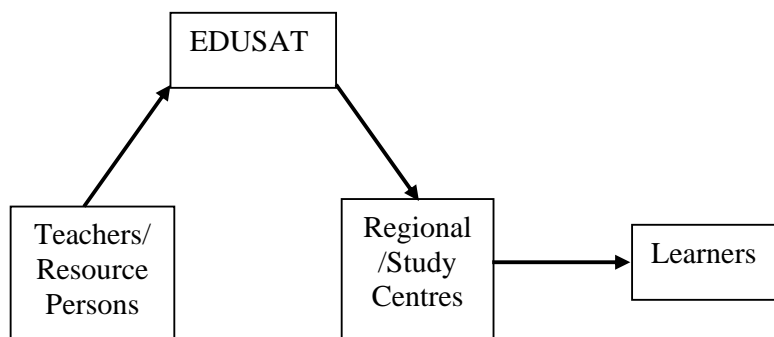


Fig. 3: Mechanism of Teleconferencing through EDUSAT

Apart from the above stated methods, IGNOU started telecasting educational programmes from 1991 for distance learners through the national TV channel called ‘Doordarshan’. Now the educational programmes are telecast for five days a week through the channel.

To meet the objective of lifelong learning the IGNOU, besides the regular courses on Bachelor’s and Master’s degree, is offering Certificate in ICT Applications in Libraries (CICTAL) for the Semi-Professional staff to equip them with the

methodology of handling ICT in their working atmosphere. The curriculum structure of this programme gives ICT based input to the learners from the areas such as Computer Basics and Context, Database Management Systems, Library Automation and Digitisation, and Network based Information Services. Similarly, for the qualified library professionals the Post-Graduate Diploma in Library Automation and Networking (PGDLAN) is offered to enable them to be conversant with the latest methods and skills in handling ICT based improved services in library and information centres in the country. The curriculum structure of this programme comprises: Introduction to Computers, Library Automation, Database Systems and Management, Networking and Internet Technology, Internet Resources, Content Development, and Programming Languages like Java, C++, etc.

- **BRAOU**

Dr.B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU) located in the city of Hyderabad was established through an act of Andhra Pradesh State Legislature in 1982. It has a wide network of 152 study centers spread throughout the state of Andhra Pradesh. 'To serve as a source of continuing education, consultancy and to provide equal access to knowledge and higher education' is one of its primary objectives (www.braou.ac.in/).

The University adopts a multimedia approach for instruction, i.e., printed Programs material, radio lessons, audio and video lessons, contact - cum - counseling classes, winter and summer schools for intensive coaching by experts. The Programs materials, including radio and video lessons in each subject, are selected and prepared by a team of Programs writers, editors and translators in collaboration with specialists in various disciplines from different Universities. Besides regular broadcast of lessons through All India Radio. From 1999, the University started Telecast of Video lessons through Doordarshan Regional Channel.

The above two are the examples of ODL methods at the national and state level. The other Open Universities also use the same methodology, predominantly to deliver education in the respective regional languages.

9. LIS Discussion Forums

In addition to the above, there are some Forums in the country devoted exclusively for library and information science professionals to interact among themselves through e-mail. These forums help the professionals to share their views, ideas, latest developments and issues in the profession, getting response to queries regarding the difficulties at workplace, announcement of recent conferences, seminars, etc. As a result, the process of learning goes on throughout the life informally. The following are some of the important forums effectively utilised by LIS professionals in India:

- **LIS-Forum**

LIS-Forum is an e-mail based discussion forum for Library and Information professionals in India. It is operated and maintained by NCSI, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. It was established in 1995 with support from NISSAT, DSIR,

Government of India. The submissions can be posted at lis-forum@ncsi.iisc.ernet.in and list is at <http://ncsi.iisc.ernet.in/mailman/listinfo/lis-forum>

- **IATLIS - Forum**

This is a national level discussion forum developed by yahoo groups for Library and Information Science Teachers in India. This group is meant for having better communication among the professionals regarding the professional related activities. The submissions can be posted at iatlis@yahoogroups.com and list is at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/iatlis/>

- **Corporatelibrns**

This is a forum developed by yahoo groups for corporate librarians to discuss their agonies, achievements, problems, creative solutions, tools and technologies, issues and literature with fellow professionals. Notifications about events and resources can also be posted. The submissions can be posted at corporatelibrns@yahoogroups.com and the list is at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/corporatelibrns/>

- **Digital Libraries: India**

This digilib_india group is an initiative to create awareness about issues relating to Digital Libraries, Library Automation and Management viz. creation, maintenance, standards, architectures, software, how to start etc. Specifically concentrating on issues related to Indian Library/Institution and community. The submissions can be posted at digilib_india@yahoogroups.com and the list is at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/digilib_india/

- **NMLIS - New Millennium LIS Professionals**

It is a mailing list for library and information science professionals to exchange their views, ideas and opinions relating to their profession. This is basically to develop inter-relationship and help this professional group in getting updated. This group is also interested in sharing the knowledge and experience among the information professionals between developing and developed countries. The submissions can be posted at nmlis@yahoogroups.com and the list is at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nmlis/>

- **INDIA-LIS**

It is a mailing list developed by IFLA for library and information science professionals in India to exchange their views, ideas and opinions relating to their profession. The submissions can be posted at india-lis@infoserv.inist.fr and the list is at <http://infoserv.inist.fr/wwsympa.fcgi/info/india-lis>.

- **LIBTECH**

LIBTECH is an open special discussion forum for interaction among library professionals in India. The topics for discussion through this forum include: Analyzing, planning, management and use of innovative technology in library operations and networking. Among the library operations computer technology, networking and in Systems analysis: acquisitions, cataloguing, circulation, serials processing, reference, collection development, interlibrary communication and library management, databases and publicity ideas, etc.

10. E – Learning as a Method of Lifelong Learning

E-learning is defined as an interactive learning in which the learning content is available on-line and provides automatic feedback to the learners learning activities. E-learning covers a wide set of applications and processes, such as, web-based learning, computer based learning, virtual class rooms, and digital collaboration. The contents can be made available through Internet, intranet/extranet, satellite broadcast, interactive Television, CD-ROM, DVD, audio and videotape, etc.

E-learning is a new technology in the field of education especially for distance learners. It will suit a country like India, which is spread over a vast geographical area. The requirements for having access to E-learning are – having a telephone line, a modem, an Internet connection and a computer. In the context of lifelong learning, the conferences, seminars, workshops, etc. organized conventionally can be done through online by e-learning method. For example,

- The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has started developing a web-based learning modules. In this process, it has already developed an e-learning module for WINISIS software. This module helps the learner to learn the operations of this package at his/her own space and time.
- Document Research Training Centre (DRTC), since its inception, has been organizing conferences, seminars, workshops, refresher courses, and so on for LIS professionals in the country through conventional mode. Now, DRTC has developed a continuing education portal through virtual classroom. The refresher courses can be conducted through this portal which supports digital learning from distance. Making a better use of the ICT, this Classroom is an effort to share our professional knowledge and experience with the whole community in India.

11. Conclusion

In the new age learning environments there will be merging of responsibilities and roles, requiring major changes in the way we think about libraries and learning spaces as well as in the roles of students, educators and librarians. It is therefore inevitable for the LIS professionals and educators to keep up with the changes in order to be an integral part of this new and exciting phase of the knowledge society. Better results can be achieved if professional associations, Academic Staff Colleges and other training organisations like NISCAR, DRTC, etc. can supplement the present models for lifelong learning programmes using ICT-based instructions through open and

distance learning due to the availability of Internet and WWW. However it is to be concluded that the success of lifelong learning depends upon the initiatives taken by individual learners.

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