Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Education and information are increasingly becoming the core around which our society revolves. Because of this, educational patterns are changing, bringing a demand for more innovative and flexible methods of delivering education. This is changing as an increasing number of students taking third level courses are mature students, part-time students with full-time jobs or other commitments, and graduates requiring up-dating in their field of knowledge. Many of these non-traditional students are considered to be remote from the university at which they are registered, whether by distance or personal circumstances.

Distance Education is relatively a new and innovative educational concept. The Distance Education system has provided the scope of education which may make it free from the clutches of the four walls of a classroom, accessible to all sections of the society. It makes possible for education to reach out to the learner wherever he may be and provides a scope for self-study, which in turn gives self-fulfilment to the students. It is known by different terms in different countries, namely: ‘external system’ in Australia, ‘independent study’ or ‘home study’ in North America and in Europe, ‘Open University’, ‘Correspondence Course’ and the more recent one is ‘Distance Education’. Fred Jevons describes the multitude of terms as “a bewildering nomenclature” (Rajam, 1989).

Distance Education was developed to meet the educational needs of a diverse population who could not come to the traditional campus. Along with this
development there has been the demand for library services for these distance learners. The need for providing a strong infrastructure for the successful operation and implementation of Distance Education programs cannot be over emphasised. As already mentioned, much more than in the case of formal education, the main prop of Distance Education should be provided by adequate library facilities. They give the students just the minimum information, often erroneously and shabbily presented, for passing examinations (Isaac, 1989).

Distance Education as far as in Malaysia is concerned, is said to be in its embryonic stage of development. Thus its curriculum is not so developed and effective as compared to developed countries such as in Europe. Distance Education in Malaysia, as in other parts of the world, is popular with working adults. Economic necessity and the changing nature of work ensures that workers require regular training. For those who cannot afford to quit work, Distance Education is the most viable option. The Malaysian government has set an ambitious target to have 50% of the country's graduates produced via Distance Education in the long run (Sunday Star, April 26, 1998).

Libraries have a long history of providing support to extension education. In 1959, Arthur T. Hamlin (quoted by West, 1992) pointed out that some college and university libraries had been providing support to distance learners since 1916. In the 1950s over thirty universities were providing library extension services (West, 1992). However, literature on Distance Education Library and Information Services in Malaysia up to 1997 is sparse showing that library and information services for Distance Education programs is relatively new and underdeveloped.

Technology can play key roles in many ways for Distance Education Library and Information Services programs. The demand for information followed by the
demand for more and faster information has resulted in major changes in library systems. The automation of many library services and creation of the virtual library have been the ongoing trends for a few decades. With the introduction of technology in libraries, information is much more accessible today than it has ever been in history. No only do academic libraries serve the on-campus community, but they are also challenged to offer increased services to remote constituencies as well (Rodrigues, 1996). Through technological advances and a growing emphasis on information literacy have created an ideal environment in which colleges and universities can make improvements in library and information services to Distance Education programs.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has the following objectives and purposes:

1. To survey the current status and to establish profiles of the role which academic libraries play to support Distance Learning programs;

2. To discuss access and equity considerations as they relate to the teaching and learning process;

3. To identify and determine the problems and opportunities in providing library and information services to Distance Education programs;

4. To suggest, on the basis of the findings, recommendations for good practice of library and information services to distance education and also through Information Technology advances;

5. To study library models for the delivery of support services to Distance Education programs; and
6. To gather information which would be used for the development of a set of proposed guidelines for faculty and libraries providing those services in Malaysia.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The need for adequate, well-developed and accessible library and information services to inter-mural tertiary level students is an entrenched principle. Further, one of the important measures of quality education at the tertiary level is the scope of library and information services available to support such programs. It is found that library and information services to distance learners have generally been neglected and are underdeveloped. The reasons include:

1. Distance learners are external to the main stream of tertiary level education systems. As a result of this separation the information needs of these learners are neglected;

2. The perception that distance learners do not need library services. Implicit in this assumption is that where such needs exist some other agencies will shoulder the responsibility;

3. The view that distance educators can provide - through “packaged” distance teaching materials - all the information needed by such learners;

4. The lack of formal links between the providers of Distance Education and the information providers in the teaching institutions; and finally,
5. The invisible nature of this corps of students facilitates a disregard of their existence by both Distance Education administrators and information providers (Watson, 1992).

Even though students enrolled in Distance Education programs receive the same degree as on-campus students, participants and observers are concerned about the quality of the education received. Critics of Distance Education programs cite instances where students are left to fend for themselves in gaining access to the information and resources needed to complete the assignments. The concern is that students are being spoon-fed and are not rigorously challenged. These concerns are raised most frequently by observers and participants who feel that library usage and academic research are an integral component of the educational process. They are concerned that distance learners who are denied the opportunity of exploring the full range of library resources available to their on-campus counterparts, may not become information literate in the process, so that, while they receive the same degree, they may not have received the same quality of education (Aguilar, Kascus, and Keenan, 1991).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Since the inception of Distance Education in 1971 by Universiti Sains Malaysia, there is a trend showing an increase in the number of Distance Education programs in Malaysia over the last decade. Unfortunately, with the attractive package programs offered to distance learners, matters regarding the learners’ need for literature and
resources have not been looked into. In most Distance Education systems in Malaysia, there is a noticeable lack of library and information services support. Problems regarding the lack of information resources support are major barriers. In the writings on Distance Education, the role of libraries and Distance Education Library and Information Services is seldom seen to be discussed in detail. This is surprising because Distance Education is essentially self-education for which library support is indispensable. Even in formal education the library is important but in Distance Education it is even more so. In publications on various other aspects of Distance Education, the role of the library has not been adequately emphasised in Malaysia. There is not much discussion on Distance Education Library and Information Services to cater for distance learners. Although some local universities have postal and regional library facilities offered for its students, they are not adequate. However, detailed knowledge of the present status of Distance Education Library and Information Services in Malaysia's Distance Education programs did not exist prior to the present study. Since the Distance Education programs in Malaysia has been increasing in recent years, the government and the faculties who are providing the Distance Education programs to the public must have a forward-looking and complete guidelines if they are to fulfil the present and future educational needs in Malaysia. This study represents a first step to address this need.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions have been addressed:

1. What is the current status and role of the library in Distance Education to support distance learners in Malaysia?

2. What is the perspective of the Distance Education Library and Information Services to the faculty?

3. Do the institutions participating in Distance Education programs in Malaysia provide the library and information services for distance learners? If so, what are the types of services available?

4. What are the models and guidelines used for the delivery of library support services to Distance Education programs?

5. Is there a regular budget to provide library and information services for the development of the Distance Education programs?

6. What are the initiatives of the faculty pertaining to the use of new technology to provide library support to Distance Education programs and the significant applications and development of IT approach on library and information services to distance learners?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The potential of Distance Education is immense and the ability to provide library and information services at a distance poses both a challenge and opportunity. It is hoped that this research will contribute in some ways to the heightening of sensitivity to the issues and problems inherent in the delivery of Distance Education Library and
Information Services to support Distance Education programs, and to explore how the information technology (IT) can play a significant role for more effective access to information, delivery of information and communication. The current research is very important for the development of library services for Distance Education planning in Malaysia. We need to identify the problems and characteristics of current library services for Distance Education in Malaysia. Assessing the future demands and developing guidelines and recommendations to meet those needs, would be very helpful to Distance Education planners, educators and other decision-makers in both the private and government sectors. This information should also help in developing alternatives to deal with problem areas and initiate workable projects relevant to Distance Education Library and Information Services development strategies. The report on the existing state of Distance Education should help raise awareness of the problems encountered and this will possibly generate greater support from the government for the Distance Education programs in the country.

In addition, the study will produce baseline data for information pertaining to Distance Education in Malaysia which will be very helpful for future studies in this area.

LIMITATIONS

The tertiary education institutions involved for this study are taken from the list provided by Higher Education Department, Ministry of Education, Malaysia. The private higher education institutions and training centres selected are only those in the Klang Valley. While every effort has been made to survey all tertiary institutions that
offer Distance Education programs, the final sample size for analysis is limited to the institutions that returned questionnaires.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

In the study, the following definitions were used for some key terms:

**Academic Library** “A library forming an integral part of a college, university, or other academic institution for post secondary education, organised and administered to meet the information needs of students, faculty and affiliated staff of the institution” (Young, 1983)

**Distance Education** The tertiary or higher education taking place at a distance where there is a geographical separation between the instructor and the learner. At its most basic level, Distance Education takes place when a teacher and student(s) are separated by physical distance and technology (i.e., voice, video, data, and print) is used to bridge the instructional gap (Willis, 1993). “The educational process where a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone, removed in space or time from the learner; and where programmers use combination of educational media varying from print to audio to TV broadcasts, video recordings and computers and microprocessors. Opportunities for face-to-face study as well as learning from recorded materials are included” (Seet, 1992). Distance Education is also considered as “a planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, special methods of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organisational and administrative arrangements” (Moore, and Kearsley, 1996).
Distance Education Library and Information Services  "Refers to services offered away from the main campus to support the academic courses and programs of the institution responsible for the academic program. These courses may be taught in the traditional way. This definition also includes services to individuals who are involved off campus regardless of where credit is given. The definition does not include non-traditional students pursuing on-campus academic programs." (ACRL guidelines for off-campus library services, 1990)

Distance learners or students  Those enrolled in distance learning in the Distance Education academic environment.

Distance learning  "Many people use the term "distance learning" as a synonym for Distance Education. We understand that this is not strictly accurate, since in education our interest is in learning that is deliberate and planned, and therefore with teaching as well as learning, nevertheless, when we cite authors who use the term "distance learning," we will use it also" (Moore and Kearsley, 1996).

Electronic library/Virtual library  "an information organisation that exploits new technology to carry out its mission, is not so much a place as a concept of service. With the growing availability of information in electronic formats rather than in in-house collection, it will be crucial for patrons to go to the librarian, not just to the library, for their information needs" (Hurt, 1991).

Information technology  This is the group of modern technologies that deal specifically with the processing, communication and storage of information. It is the use of computers and telecommunications to create, manipulate and distribute the information to the end-users.

Distance Education institutions  Those involved in teaching/research in the Distance Education academic environment.
Library resources  Materials, both print and non-print, which are owned by the library for providing information to the distance learners or students.

Open university  Universities which teach distance students using currently available Distance Education techniques and media. Here, the term “open university” does not imply “open access university”.

Parent institution  The institutional entity responsible for the offering of academic courses and off-campus programs.