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**Internet competencies of the distance learners;
a case study at Open University of Sri Lanka**

Ms. Damayanthi Gunasekara

Senior Asst. Librarian,

Open University of Sri Lanka

Internet has become a main source of information in the world of teaching and learning in the modern e-information society. In order to utilize the Internet effectively, learners have to acquire different skills.

Stacey (2004) states that, "Internet is not particularly user-friendly as it is undergoing rapid changes and surfing the internet might waste time and money". Therefore, it is necessary to develop skills in terms of computer literacy and network literacy in order to locate necessary information with minimum time. Lacey (1999) mentions a set of skills that scholars must develop to achieve their learning goals;

- Strategies to search for relevant materials
- Skills in evaluating the quality of documents found,
- Knowledge of web design,
- Skills in using discussions forums and chat rooms
- A basic understanding of how to send e-mail attachments (Lacey, 1999)

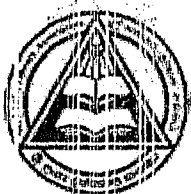
The Open University has recognized the necessities of Internet access to all; students, researchers and faculty members. Open University has provided computer laboratories and a Virtual Resource Centre to facilitate internet access and improve computer and Internet literacy to its student community.

Internet access competencies plays a very critical role in the self learning process in the OU education system

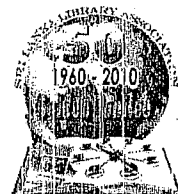
Therefore, this study was done to find out computer and internet competences OUSL learners and barriers on usage Internet with the objective of improving the service quality.

Objectives of the study are

- To investigate the preliminary computer literacy of the engineering students of the OUSL.
- To examine the basic network literacy of the engineering students of the OUSL.
- To achieve the above objectives a questionnaire, based survey was conducted in June 2010. The questionnaire was prepared to identify all the important parameters associated with internet skills to achieve above objectives. The five parameters measured are;
- Computer and Internet availability



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- Competencies in computer and internet use
- Experience on the use of internet
- Computer and network literacy skills and its application
- Barriers to effective use of the Internet.

The population of the study was distance learners who follow Diploma in Technology Programme. 20 users were chosen on purposive sampling technique.

Key findings are

- 78% of them were competent to use computers. Further findings revealed that 48 respondents had experience of using computers before come to the OUSL library. 12% of them have followed a basic computer course and 65% of respondents had personal computers at homes.
- 64% of respondent have using the internet through OUSL facilities while 27% of them have internet access facilities at homes. 9% of them have internet access to facility at workplace.
- 54% of respondents stated that their internet browsing skill that 'average' level while 16% of them are 'good' It was also found that 30% of them were in 'poor' level.
- Main barriers identified are technical barriers, institutional policy barriers, personnel barriers, information barriers when they access to Internet.

References

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**Information - seeking behaviour among Open University academic staff: survey done
at the Department of Social Studies**

Damayanthi Gunasekera
Senior Assistant Librarian
Open University of Sri Lanka
Nawala, Nugegoda

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the information seeking behaviour of Social Scientist academics at the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL). The questionnaire and interview were used as the research instruments on this survey to collect data. The response rate was 100% due to less number of samples. The study reveals that OUSL academic staff has to play multiple roles as a teacher since the teaching and learning system is done in distance mode. Academic staff depends heavily on Internet, text books and subject journals as their major sources of information. They use OUSL main library to write and to revise course materials. Outside special libraries are their first choice when it comes to the research purposes. Main obstacle that they face is non availability of relevant materials at the library for their specialized subject areas. Therefore, both printed and electronic collection of the OUSL library must be strengthened to meet the specific research needs of the academic staff members.

Key words: Library support services, Teaching - higher education, Distance education system.