

Effective Inter-Library Network for promoting e-Learning of Undergraduate and Postgraduate students in Sri Lankan Universities

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Introduction:

University system in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) established in 1932 as the University College of Ceylon as an affiliate to the London University, UK. Three years later first full-fledged university of the country was born under the name “University of Ceylon” in the upcountry town of Peradeniya (100km from Colombo) as a well-planned Residential Campus. Its founder Vice-Chancellor was a renowned British elite named Sir Ivor Jennings. A branch of the University remained in Colombo as the Colombo Campus.

In 1959, then Century years old well pronounced two seats of Religious and Oriental studies for Monks named Vidyodaya Pirivena and Vidyalankara Pirivena were elevated to the University status and renamed Vidyodaya University of Sri Lanka and Vidyalankara University of Sri Lanka respectively. The Higher Technical College in Katubedda, Moratuwa was also elevated to the University of Moratuwa. Vidyodaya and Vidyalankara Universities were renamed in 1977 to University of Sri Jayewardenapura and University of Kelaniya respectively. In 1985 a special University aimed to promote Buddhism and Pali Language was established under the name “ The Buddhist & Pali University of Sri Lanka. Later years, in order to make avenues for rural folks for higher education Universities was established in several Provinces and now the total number of Sri Lankan Universities exceeds fifteen (15). There are number of Post-Graduate Institutes and Campuses under some of the major Universities. Each university has its own Library and Branch Libraries. In Dec. 2006 total number of University Libraries and its Branch Libraries stood at 24. Hence, in the university system we can claim for an organised Library System in Sri Lanka. During the last decade number of serious attempts have been taken to formulate a well-organised University Library Network of Sri Lanka.

Networking in Sri Lanka:

Internet came into being in 1960s, but until three decades passed there was no any serious attempts have been taken to introduce this technology to Sri Lanka. University of Moratuwa under the able leadership of Prof. Induruwa pioneered to link Sri Lankan Academics to the Cyberspace introducing LEARN (Lanka Educational Academic & Research Network) Network. The LEARN Interconnected most of the University Academics and Research Community and Institutions in the country by providing first ever e-mail facilities. The Lanka Internet Ltd. became the first commercial Internet Service Provider in 1995. Sri Lanka Telecom Ltd (a Semi-Government Firm) started their ISP services two years later. At the beginning of the Second Millennium, number of ISP were increased dramatically providing more and more facilities for connecting to the Global Networks. Intranets, LANs, WANs have been established in Universities and Industrial and Research Institutions in order to enhance their information exchange and consolidation activities.

Development of Library Networks in Sri Lankan Universities:

With the early commencement of Library Automation in the Universities in Sri Lanka, concept on initiation of library networking has originated. For library automation, it was decided to use CDS/ISIS package developed by the Unesco along with the MIBIS Data structure designed by the IDRC. Within a single library of a University a primordial type of Network consist of 04 or 05 Computers were used to enter catalogue data for the database. Next step was to incorporate all catalogue data thus input to form an Union catalogue. Master files of all the catalogues were in ISO 2709 as well as ANSI 39.50 format. Exchange of the data occurred via e-mail as simple attachments. Hence it became the very first function of a Library Network. That Union Catalogue paved the way to an OPAC (On-Line Public Access Catalogue). Another variation of CDS/ISIS was developed to run under the WINDOWS OS named WINISIS, which has an inbuilt networking capability. Further development of the Library software package introduced WEBISIS and GENISIS, which catered to convert OPACs to WebOPACs. Any reader from any corner of the Globe could have accessed the Library database by utilising the features of WebOPACs through the Internet. For e-Learning activities search for books available in a library is necessary. In recent years, in Sri Lankan Universities almost all the Libraries were inter connected through the Websites. Hence it contributed to a stream of electronic materials via global network.

Promotion of e-Learning via Library Network:

Electronic Library materials such as e-books, e-Journals, e-Newspapers, e-Prints, e-theses etc is of paramount importance for undergraduates and Postgraduate students for their day-to-day information needs. Creation of CD-ROM Clusters also necessary for them through network to be accessed and utilised when ever needed. To accomplish this yeoman task, faster speed of data/information flow through wire or wireless connectivity has to be maintained. At present, Dial-up connectivity, ADSL, CDMA, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth technologies are in varied use amongst University Libraries. Bandwidths of some of the Academic networks are not sufficient to maintain a fast access for the clientele. The backbones of network structure are also not sound enough to make the connectivity viable. Use of fibre-optic cables can be a workable solution for this situation. Per unit cost of the materials may hinder the solution.

Some of the ISP providers like Suntel and Lanka Bell now use CDMA technology for their services. For inter connecting distance Branch Libraries or Provincial Branch Libraries of Universities in this environment can be on CDMA for their exchanging, sharing e-resources and building up databases.

Another cost effective way of linking University libraries is ADSL technology. It is more advantageous for both readers as well as managers due to the fact that transmission of data, sound, multimedia and voice transmission could be made possible.

As some of the large Universities such as University of Peradeniya, Sabaragamuwa University where Branch Libraries are located distantly have to be connected through Wi-Fi technology for easy access to e-resources by the Graduates and Postgraduates.

