

Editorial

The underlying philosophy of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is to increase access to education by providing learning opportunities to all the members of the community by removing barriers in order to empower them. The present issue of the OUSL Journal explores the challenges faced by the OUSL in expanding access and equity to learners by making education more “open”.

The first paper by Hill examines the challenges faced by OUSL learners while they undergo a transition from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred learning situation. She identified three types of factors, namely, psychological, personal and institutional factors. She reports that many OUSL learners have inadequate understanding of ODL, a limited use of effective study strategies, insufficient metacognitive skills. These she lists as psychological factors whereas responsibilities associated with work and family, financial and commuting difficulties are evaluated as personal factors. As institutional factors Hill highlights the issues related to “openness” and reports that some departments at OUSL have taken initiatives to overcome some of the challenges of being “open. Hill believes that these practices could be implemented university-wide enabling greater academic achievement by the OUSL learners.

Ranasinghe et al report on learners’ perceptions of the currently available Student Support Services (SSS) in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS). The findings indicate that there are significant shortfalls and lapses in the services offered by the faculty of HSS in relation to both the academic and the administrative component of the SSS package. Learners have found that the SSS components are critical for their studies and the ranking assigned by the learners show that they attach a high value to these services. However, there is a contradiction between the importance that learners attach to different components of the SSS and their assessment of service quality of each of these SSS components. This inconsistency seems to imply that the University has assigned greater importance to some of the SSS components that are least preferred by the learners.

The paper by Vidanapathirana and Gamini reflect the impact of proficiency in English on the performance of learners following the BA degree in Social Sciences. They found that the level of competence influences the level of success of these learners. As a result they argue that the majority of Sri Lankan learners are excluded from success due to their poor level of proficiency in English. They stress that the policy makers need to re-visit admission policies, regulations and support

services with a view to addressing the issues pertaining to access and equity and to bring social cohesion into OUSL study programmes.

Gunasekera in her study investigates the usage of the borrowing facility by distance learners at the regional centre libraries at Kandy and Matara. She reports that although the OUSL has opened up learning opportunities for learners at the regions, the majority of distance learners do not use the library facilities as anticipated by the university authorities, even though membership fees for students had been reduced. The non-availability of relevant books at the centre libraries, “distance” between the centre and the learner’s residence, inadequate loan period (two weeks), lack of awareness were among the most prominent reasons for failure in library usage. The article concludes with recommendations to expand the services at the regional centre libraries.

This issue also included four convocation addresses made by eminent local and foreign researchers who have made exceptional contributions to ODL, the growth and development of the OUSL and to academia in general.

We hope these papers would interest our readers and stimulate discussion and evaluation of the views expressed by the authors.

We welcome suggestions for the improvement of this Journal. We also look forward to research contributions, in particular on aspects of ODL for this journal for its future issues.

Editor in Chief