

## **A STUDY ON THE REQUIREMENTS FOR LAUNCHING E-LEARNING PROGRAMMES TO LIS EDUCATION IN JAPAN: CHALLENGE OF DEPLIS**

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**Introduction.** As the products of DEPLIS (Distance Education Programmes for Library and Information Studies) , explained are requirements for launching e-learning programmes to LIS education in Japan, mentioning to the present situation of distance learning both in Japan and abroad, concepts and definition of the terms about distance learning, and current challenge of developing a prototype e-learning programme.

**Method.** The authors adopts literature searches on universities providing distance education programmes in Japan, and field surveys to library schools in the USA and the UK. And in order for knowing the efficiencies, a prototype e-learning programme would be tested.

**Results.** Through various activities of DEPLIS, requirements for launching e-learning programmes to LIS education in Japan could be found; for example, teaching method, platform and/or network environment, campus programme for orientation to students, support for teachers, communication between teachers and learners, conference system and so on.

**Conclusion.** In this study, the authors show the points of view for recognising distance education in LIS fields, and requirements for launching e-learning programmes to LIS education in Japan. These requirements should be main frameworks of making a guideline for developing e-learning programme in LIS education of Japan..

### **Introduction**

DEPLIS (Distance Education Programmes for Library and Information Studies) have been started since 2006, as one of research groups under LIPER2(Library and Information Professional Education Renewal, Phase II) Project, whose activities are supported and granted by Japan Research Foundation between 2006 and 2009. Main objectives of DEPLIS are below:

- (1) to investigate the present situation of distance learning in the LIS education of Japan.
- (2) to make sure of concepts and definition of the terms about distance learning
- (3) to develop a guideline and prototype of e-learning LIS education programme.

According to these purposes, this study treats the interim results of DEPLIS for these two years; that is, overview and activities of DEPLIS, conceptual relations among a few terms, and on-going empirical/experimental practices using e-learning platform in the classrooms of universities. The final purpose of this study is to show the requirements for launching e-learning programmes to LIS education in Japan.

## **Distance Education in LIS of Japan**

### *Correspondence Programmes of LIS field in Japan*

The authors began to collect prospectus and related materials all universities providing distance education programmes for the qualification of public librarian in Japan. The programmes of eight of nine universities below are correspondence course, that is, traditional distance education by post and intensive school days (class contact).

Bukkyo University  
Kinki University  
Meisei University  
Osaka University of Arts  
Seitoku University  
Tamagawa University  
Teikyo University  
Toyo University

As a result of this survey, the authors found that one of characteristic of correspondence course of LIS in Japan is a blended system of both post and intensive school days. The former is used for lectures, and the latter is used for practices.

### *LIS Programme in Yashima Gakuen University*

Only one university, Yashima Gakuen University, adopts e-learning course using digital network and platform. In fact, this University takes blended teaching using e-learning distance programmes and class contact. In November 2008, the authors visited the University, attended one of the courses, and interviewed toward teachers, mentors, and other staffs.

Before visiting the University, the authors thought that in LIS programme there, class contact is used for teaching library techniques and skills, and online e-learning is provided for the students instead of lecture in the school. However, the authors recognised that this was not. The fact is hybrid style of post and class contact; the former is used for lectures as like as traditional correspondence course, and the latter is used for practices.

Unique point is the way of class contact. The teacher teaches at the same time two types of students; ones in the classroom who attend and ones who live anywhere in Japan regardless of distance. For the second type of students, the classes are provided in synchronus and interactive way. That is the very e-learning. The teacher uses the e-learning platform, which has basic functions containing chat system, group discussion, and so on. In another word, students can choose any of these in same course. When they choose the e-learning, the classes are called "media schooling".

Adding to this case, the authors recognised that Meiji University prepares for providing on-site e-learning digital contents (e-learning on demand) for LIS education. This is not distance education itself, but another type of teaching method using e-learning system. So in the discussion for distance education and e-learning, to make clear the concepts and definition of related terms are much needed.

### ***Necessity of Distance Education Programmes in LIS of Japan***

There are several backgrounds below related to necessity of distance education programmes in LIS of Japan.

- # regional gaps
- # inside needs of universities
- # reflection on traditional distance education
- # problem of one person LIS education
- # expectation to new methods of learning

Among regions, there is difference of the numbers of universities and junior colleges providing LIS program. Compared with metropolitan areas, there is little opportunity of off-the-job training for librarians in suburb and rural areas. As a lot of training programs are assembly styles, so those librarians who lives in suburb and rural areas are very difficult to attend such sort of training sessions.

Many universities have more than two campuses, same courses of LIS programs are held in each campus. According to diverse life styles and demands of students, academic institutions have to prepare multiple chance of studies and learning.

Most of LIS distance education programs are correspondence course; that is, students read textbooks, write reports and send them by post, and ask questions to instructors by mail. This means that there is very few chances for interaction between students and teachers, and also few opportunities of discussing among students.

In Japan, more than half universities and junior colleges which provide LIS programs for qualification of public librarianship employ just one full-time teacher; that is, most of courses are taught by external and part-time lecturer. E-learning programs managed by the consortium and collaboration of a few academic institutions could be important for quality assurance of students.

Both synchronous and asynchronous instruction are possible in e-learning; that is, students-oriented and time-free. Both teacher and students can use interactive communication effectively by using chat and/or e-mail. Collaboration and mutual evaluation to the products of studies among students are possible in networking function.

### **Activities of DEPLIS and Results**

#### ***Disussion about Concepts and Definitions***

There are a lot of people in Japan who recognised that distance education and e-learning are same way of education. But those two are immediately different. Distance education is traditional and there are several method for communication between teachers and learners. Correspondence or post is one of them, and broadcast (radio and TV) is another type.

E-learning is also one of way for distance education. However, e-learning are efficient for both distance learners and on-site learners. For example, on-site learners review a certain class by using e-learning contents in the university. To distinguish “distance e-learning” and “on-site e-learning” is inevitable.

Online education is another term in this field. This term is often felt as the synonym of e-learning in Japan. But accurately, this is the same meaning as “distance e-learning”.

Teaching method is important view for considering the characteristics of e-learning programmes. On-site e-learning is comparatively auxiliary, so the expression “on demand” is attached to this type of learning. Oppositely, distance e-learning programmes are not supplemental but substantial method of education.

It is possible to settle a mixture of distance and on-site e-learning in Japanese universities. For example, Aoyama Gakuin University and Tezukayama University have two campuses. So the same programme is not only distance e-learning for students in another campus but also on-site e-learning for students in the campus.

These situation tells us that for discussion, the concepts of the terms, distance education, e-learning, online education and etc, strongly depend on their contexts.

### ***Surveys of Library Schools in the USA and the UK***

The authors surveyed the a few cases in the USA and the UK. This is for recognition of requirements for successful e-learning programmes as well as characteristics of them. In the USA, more than fifteen universities provide online education programmes of LIS. In the UK, distance education programmes are offered by three universities.

The authors visited two library schools of USA in August 2007, and also two universities of UK in September 2007.

#### **USA**

School of Information Studies, Syracuse University  
Information School, the University of Washington

#### **UK**

Department of Information Studies, the University of Wales (now, Aberystwyth University)  
Aberdeen Business School, the Robert Gordon University.

As a result of these surveys, the authors found that a few points of view and requirements below for launching e-learning programmes to Japanese LIS education.

- (1) Policy and strategy of the university is the matter of selection for distance education. Every university has its own context; history, region, and management.
- (2) Platform and/or network environment is genuinely technical but substantial in e-learning, because the efficiencies of communication of (6) and (7) depend on its function and level.
- (3) Campus programme (school days) is one of important discoveries in this survey. However, the authors also found that this programme is not indispensable to e-learning programme. A few library schools in the USA insist on 100% distance education..
- (4) It is most important to analyse e-learning contents. But a lot of universities adopt hybrid materials; that is, digital and paper, audio-visual, and so on.
- (5) In the USA, technical and academic supports for teachers are considered as important. Especially, in order to make e-learning contents, the role of instructional designers are highly expected.
- (6) Communication between teachers and learners are done by synchronous session and/or asynchronous mode. The former uses chat skills and the latter frequently uses e-mail transaction.
- (7) Communication among learners is another important discovery in the survey. Supported by the function of platform, online conference and discussion board are always used for developing the abilities and competencies for learners.
- (8) Practical placement in library and information services differs among the universities. It is impossible to include placement in e-learning programme itself, but combination programme of e-learning and placement could be quite possible.

### ***Empirical Study***

From April 2008, the authors began the next research stage. This stage is to develop a prototype of e-learning LIS education programme using TIES System: e-learning system of Tezukayama University. The programme is focused on the courses of practices; organisation of materials, answering reference enquiries, and information retrieval. The authors have a plan of trial experiment of launching this programme into the educations in Aoyama Gakuin University and Baika Women's University as well as Tezukayama University.

The authors developed a pilot programme for the course on organisation of materials, and used empirically this in the course of Tezukayama University. Selected themes are "bibliographic hierarchy" and "headings". At first, students are divided into two controlled groups: for one group, instructions are provided by face-to-face session, and for another group, same contents are shown by e-learning materials. Both groups tried the practices of "bibliographic hierarchy". Secondly, each group was switched and tried that of "heading". After instruction, both students are required to answer *quiz* questions, tests for comprehension, and questionnaire about the empirical study itself.

The results of this study are below;

- (1) There is little difference between two groups about efficiencies of understanding the knowledge and skills.
- (2) Students think that, compared with e-learning instruction, face-to-face instruction is much easier to understand.

Through this study, the authors also found a few problems on the contents and expressions of e-learning materials. On the basis of these results, the authors are now trying another programme for the practices of answering reference enquiries.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, the authors show the points of view for recognising distance education in LIS fields, and requirements below for launching e-learning programmes to LIS education in Japan.

- # relationships and combination of teaching Methods including e-learning
- # campus and geography of the university
- # policy and strategy of the university
- # platform and/or network environment
- # campus programme (school days) for orientation to students
- # class contact and the characteristics of the courses
- # e-learning contents and other materials
- # support for teachers; instructional designers and mentors
- # communication between teachers and learners; synchronous and/or a-synchronous
- # communication among learners: online conference, discussion board
- # placement in library and information services

These requirements should be main frameworks of making a guideline for developing e-learning programme in LIS education of Japan..

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