

Unisa Ethiopian Regional Learning Centre

**Technological opportunities
and challenges of Akaki
Branch Library**

INTRODUCTION

- The Unisa library has amplified opportunity to enhance its services, enlarge its resources and ensure access to all students wherever they are. Even though we are in East Africa, Ethiopia, based on the strategic plan of Unisa, we are not distant because of technological advancements. This substantiate that Unisa is one of the paramount ODL institutions.
- As the library focused on ensuring equal access to library resources and services to all clients regardless of their location, we can see our regional learning centre library benefit from the service.
- As we are in the era of technology it is good to go with the technological innovation and use the available resources.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. The branch has good band width connection (Vsat) directly from South Africa.
 - The connection in Internet cafes and else where is usually slow for our students to use the online library resources. So our branch library gives relatively a better opportunity to access the online library because of the direct Vsat connection from South Africa.
2. Very rich online library resources, where digital libraries were not that much in number in the country.
 - Our students are from all region of Ethiopia, it is very important to have the online resources, which play a vital role especially in the research process

OPPORTUNITIES Cont'd

3. Good workstation together with the library for clients
 - Even if we have very old computers from Technikon South Africa, we have around 14 computers for students, all of which have internet connections.
4. The availability access to the Millennium system circulation makes our work user-friendly.
 - Using Millennium primarily for circulation makes the library check-in, check-out and renewals very convenient process of the services. The online catalogue make search of materials very easy by giving statistical data of screening its status and availability.

OPPORTUNITIES Cont'd

5. Accessing Unisa library and also borrowing materials from South Africa while the user is living in Ethiopia.
 - Courier service helps our students to make as rival as other Unisa students who have physical access to the library. It is also very useful to get some extracted chapters from the book or any other resources according to the request.
6. For the staff and students good opportunity to have meetings and trainings through video conference.
 - VC facilities give opportunity to our students and staff to be part of different presentations and seminars organised in South Africa.

OPPORTUNITIES Cont'd

7. Library Training

- Training was conducted informally while students visit the library and also scheduled formal trainings were given to clients.
- The training mainly is on Keyboard & mouse, basic library skills and advanced library skills. This in detail have how to access library material, library catalogue, how to single sign on, subject database search, how to search course material, how to retrieve and download full text information from e-resources and Information on courier services procedures have been provided to clients.
- After the training has been conducted survey monkey online evaluation is a good mechanism to get the feedbacks of clients.

Challenges

While we are using all the opportunities to serve our clients there are also challenges which have an effect on the proper flow of the service.

1. Very old Pc's which take time and very slow

- This needs to be changed and budget already approved but for procurement the agreement between Ethiopian government and Unisa needs to be renewed and it is in process.

2. Power fluctuation

- We experience a continuous power fluctuation which needs to be sustained by generator. Again budget approved and waits for the agreement to be finalized for procurement.

3. Not having printing facility

- Students need printing facility according to the regulations, but for the time being we don't have printer for students. Budget for printer is also approved and wait for the agreement to be finalized.

Challenges Cont'd

4. Information and computer illiteracy

- There are students who are computer illiterate and there is a need to have special arrangement of literacy program.

5. Not having special needs service

- Even though Unisa library has a service to all students regardless of any challenges in terms of abilities to support students with special needs, in our branch there is no equipment which can be used to facilitate this service. We have a plan to implement the service in the future.

6. Difficulties of tracing the item when requested items are in shipment

- Even though courier service is to get the requested material through the requestor's address, the postal system is not that much good. Accordingly we prefer that if the requested items arrive centrally to our region through Skynet so that we can disseminate to students, even if this is an additional task for us it helps to secure our books not to be lost.

Challenges Cont'd

7. Relative “newness” of ODL system and technology
 - In our country technology based distance education is not widely used. So it might be the first experience for our students to be in such type of learning system, which somehow challenges them.
8. Most of our students were scattered all over the regions of Ethiopia and has complained the difficulty to make the most of our services.
 - This is mainly because our regional centre is located 25 kilometres away from the city. It is not in public transport line, this makes it difficult for our students to come and access our resources regularly.

Solutions

For the above mentioned challenges proposed solutions are;

1. To change the old Pc's
2. To have high capacity generator which can assist all computers and VC session
3. To have printer to be used for students printing requests
4. To have information and computer literacy instruction program for students in addition to the library training
5. To have the facility for special needs students
6. All request books to be sent though Akaki branch library
7. Awareness creation of ODL system

Solutions Cont'd

8. To have mobile library or make accessibility of our library
 - The mobile library service is an excellent way of enhanced learner support in an ODL institution and incorporates the principles of student centeredness. As I mentioned earlier, our branch physical locations is out of the city and most of our students are employees and there is no public transport to the Regional Learning Centre, So mobile library would have been of great help.

Events

- There was a Tree planting event in July 2012 at Bole High School by Unisa-Ethiopia Regional Learning Centre staff and students. This was highly appreciated by the city making green organization. It also gives us good opportunity to show Unisa's contributing to the green policy.
- Some pictures for tree planting are attached here and also library pictures.

Library Picture



Library Picture Cont'd



Library Picture Cont'd



Library Picture Cont'd



Library Picture Cont'd



Tree Planting Picture



Tree Planting Picture Cont'd



Tree Planting Picture Cont'd



Thank You!!!

Mrs.Yemesrach T/Mariam Tassew

Head of Akaki Branch Library

Unisa-Ethiopia