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Dr. Monika
Mahabir College of Education,
Kurukshetra, Haryana, India

Relevance of e-learning in higher education

Dr. Monika

Abstract

Digital libraries store, preserve, distribute and protect contents in different formats and, at the same time, they allow interaction between the user and the contents. They are always present, they can make works internationally known, increasing referencing and citations. This work addresses some aspects of digital libraries that make them suitable tools to support higher education. Examples are presented. Our society is undergoing a process of rapid change, moving toward what is called the information society, the knowledge society and the network society.

Though a few libraries have made attempts earlier in this direction, the digital library initiative in India is still at budding stage. It is believed that information and knowledge are distinguishing features of this modern society and the main driver of this change is the growing use of information and communication technologies (ICT). In institutions of higher education, the issue of utilizing modern information and communication technologies for teaching and learning is very important.

Keywords: e-learning, information and communication technologies, higher education

Introduction

Over the centuries, libraries have been the keepers and distributors of books, journals, maps and other materials that are used by students in the learning process. They have also been the legal deposit of part of the products of scholarly publications – theses & dissertations, articles, technical reports, etc. In general, students of higher education have been patrons of the libraries of their institutions. In order to make more contents available and thus benefit students and faculty, pools of institutions have engaged in commuting items. Let the different functions of a digital library in the higher education context be examined, Prior to that the concept of e-learning must be understood.

The concept of E-learning

E-learning is literally an abbreviation of the term electronic learning. In simpler terms e-learning is internet-enabled or computer enhanced Learning. It also refers to learning that is facilitated using digital tools and contents. E-learning includes wide set of applications like the use of interactive learning packages, web based learning environments, communication applications like e-mail, discussion rooms, chat, video conferencing etc [3]. In the case of web based training programmes, the learner follows a pre-designed process that includes programmes for practice, assessment and feedback activities. It can also be a blended learning approach where the learner goes through a mixture of face to face and on-learning activities.

Digital libraries and higher education

Over the centuries, libraries have been the keepers and distributors of books, journals, maps and other materials that are used by students in the learning process. They have also been the legal deposit of part of the products of scholarly publications – theses & dissertations, articles, technical reports, etc. In general, students have been patrons of the libraries of their institutions. In order to make more contents available and thus benefit students and faculty, pools of institutions have engaged in commuting items and/or their copies. There is no reason for digital libraries not to have the same functions of traditional libraries, except that they can add functions and value due to their digital and networked nature. Let the different functions of a digital library in the higher education context be examined.

Correspondence
Dr. Monika
Mahabir College of Education,
Kurukshetra, Haryana, India

Relevance of E-learning in higher education

It has been seen that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have brought significant changes in all-round development of the society through transmission of information. Application of information technology to Library and Information Science has provided wider opportunities in archiving and accessing knowledge in the digitized form besides conservation and preservation of the traditional knowledge. Digitization of materials will provide enhanced access to the electronic information sources and the users can access the digital content irrespective of time and space boundaries. The strength of libraries and the library collections depends on the relationships libraries develop and maintain with the creators, publishers, and aggregators of e-resources, as well as with the users, who access and evaluate these resources. Libraries have to redefine their values and services, collaborate with their users, and design their tasks creatively to provide, reference and instructional support to e-learners ^[4]. In institutions of higher education, the issue of utilizing modern information and communication technologies for teaching and learning is very important.

Some of the advantages that the adoption of e learning in education, obtained from review of literature includes the following ^[2]:

- The adoption of e-learning provides the institutions as well as their students or learners the much flexibility of time and place of delivery or receipt of according to learning information ^[1].
- E-learning makes availability of information easy and in vast amount.
- E-learning helps eliminate barriers that have the potential of hindering participation including the fear of talking to other learners.
- E-learning motivates students to interact with other, as well as exchange and respect different point of views.
- E-learning is cost effective in the sense that there is no need for the students or learners to travel. It is also cost effective in the sense that it offers opportunities for learning for maximum number of learners with no need for many buildings.
- E-learning always takes into consideration the individual learners differences. Some learners, for instance prefer to concentrate on certain parts of the course, while others are prepared to review the entire course.
- E-learning helps compensate for scarcities of academic staff, including instructors or teachers as well as facilitators, lab technicians etc.
- The use of e-Learning allows self-pacing. For instance the asynchronous way permits each student to study at his or her own pace and speed whether slow or quick.

Conclusion

Here some major advantages of e-learning and the role of e-learning in particular is discussed. Its adoption in some institutions has increased faculty and learner's access to information and has provided a rich environment for collaboration among students which have improved academic standards. The overall literature which explains the advantages of e-learning suggests the need for its implementation in higher education for faculty, administrators and students to enjoy the full benefits that come with its adoption and implementation.

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