E-LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING THROUGH THE BORDERLESS LIBRARY

Kakoli Duarah

Abstract

The application of ICT in the libraries and education has brought a paradigm shift in the structure of the library and education system today. The traditional library has now changed to the automated, digital, electronic, hybrid and at present to the borderless library and the conventional education too is been replaced by e-learning. The borderless library has a huge collection of information resources in electronic form which are accessible through the Internet, intranet and extranet. It reduces the geographical restrictions and makes the process of obtaining education and training easy at a reduced cost and time enabling a vibrant user even from a remote area to obtain education and training in his field of specialization or as to the requirement of his profession from the online institutions and universities available in his own country or outside thus paving a significant way towards the global information network.

Keywords : Information and Communication Technology (ICT), E-learning, Information Resources, Internet

1.   Introduction

Application of ICT in all spheres of human life have brought a great revolution all over the world and its effect can be seen in the developing world as well which has witnessed a rapid growth in mobile telecommunication, internet, web-resources, databases etc.

Today, we can have access to any kind of information by just sitting by the computer at any place be it at home, office, institution etc. The library also has undergone a vast change simultaneously such as from the traditional library to the automated, electronic, digital and now to the borderless library or the library without walls.

2.   Borderless Library

The borderless library or the library without walls is nothing but a scientifically managed collection of information resources and services made available electronically through the internet, intranet or extranet at any time 7 days a week, 24 hours a day crossing all terristorial jurisdiction or geographical restrictions. It is a networked workstation through which one can access and retrieve any kind of information to meet his ever increasing hunt for knowledge. The borderless library is so designed to

provide users with online access to an extensive array of full text documents on a topic of current interest or any other critical concern. It usually appears in the form of a web page with a series of hyperlinks arranged in a hierarchical manner such as to facilitate easy searching.

In 1997, Sherwell have described the characteristic of a Borderless library as 'The characteristics of a true VL or borderless library are that, there is no corresponding physical collection of documents but the documents will be available in electronic format, the documents are not stored in any one location, documents can be accessed from any workstation, documents are retrieved and delivered as and when required and effective search and house facilities are available'. [10]

Thus, at present the Borderless library may be regarded as a web-based archive, which provides access to any kind of information resources. Its resources are better than, those you might find through a regular search engine as they are evaluated before being made accessible to the users. But to get to them, you have to come into the 'virtual library' search research instead of the regular search engines.

The Borderless libraries have today just brought a paradigm shift in the open and distance learning process because.

(a) It is easily accessible
(b) Cost effective
(c) Provides both intensive and extensive information to its users.
(d) Can be updated and expanded as and when required.

3. ICT and Education

ICT have become one of the basic building blocks of the modern society. Today technology have made us to think innovatively and have pushed us to create and share knowledge in a networked world and as a result, the knowledge have grown exponentially and have enhanced the learning opportunities for all. With the application of ICT in education, one can now opt for lifelong learning or continuing education, while their formal education had to be ended within defined segments of education in the earlier days. The different ICT technologies can now provide all the learning opportunities to all people who want or need to continue education after the completion of their formal studies and enhance their skill in their own fields.

The new ICT developments has made the present age as an age of online communications tools such as the chat rooms, email, bulletin boards and home pages which can now cater to shared research efforts among both the academicians and students.

Some of the benefits of ICT on education may be stated as –

i. Helps in the creation of data repositories and networks

(ii).   Helps towards reaching a collaborative curricula development

(iii).   Reduces the cost of procuring the educational materials.

(iv).   Efficient time schedule between the teachers and students

(v).   Students performance individually can be monitored more closely.

3.1   Impact of ICT on library and education system

The application of ICT on library and its services has brought a dramatic change in today's world of information processing and accessing. The library no longer possess only the printed resources of information, but it contains all the resources in digital or electronic form which allows flexible learning environments, open and distance learning and permits online access to information resources to its users.

The library has thus undergone a virtual change from that of the past. The printed book is replaced by the new electronic forms and the libraries have given way to dynamic electronic, digital, hybrid and the borderless libraries where personalized vast amount of multimedia information are available and these provides flexible & efficient ways for locating, organizing and accessing the relevant information. Thus, with the application of different forms of ICTs in the library, you can have access to global information and become a part of the global information network as well.

The ICT application in education system has also brought a dynamic change in the learning process and the conventional educational system is being replaced today to the e-learning.

3.2   What is E-learning ?

E-learning, an instructional process embedded by the electronic technology is a structured and interactive approach to educating and informing the researchers, students, employees and all other stakeholders. To be more specific, e-learning can be referred to the use of internet, intranet or extranet for the enhancement of knowledge and performance of the individual.

E-learning covers a myriad set of applications, and processes such as computer based learning, web-based learning, virtual classrooms etc. What is most significant about the method is that it ensures faster learning at comparatively reduced cost and gives access to more learning resources and thus ensures clear accountability for all participants in the learning process too.

3.3   Purpose of E-learning :

In view of the rapid changes noticeable across the globe and referring over all aspects of human life, it has become necessary to take recourse to the advantages of technology and face the challenges of time. Today, learning has become a totally new experience, bringing the learners, teachers, specialists communities and experts on a single platform, a complete change from the

traditional learning methods. Now sharing of ideas or access to information has been made easier through the application of ICT and the process of learning is becoming interesting and innovative as well.

Resources like the internet, software, CD-DVDs, e-books, e-content, multimedia, web etc. has made the sharing process of ideas easy. The web, which is an incompatible part of the internet may be regarded as a great reference tool by the borderless libraries since it contains all types of information either as metadata or full text, sound and images thus enabling the access to information and the e-learning process to be a great booster in the present times as well as for the coming days.

4. Distance and Open Learning in the Context of the Borderless Libraries :

The rapid strides made in the field of information and communication technology has led to a paradigm shift in education and training today and the Borderless libraries here play a great role. Now days, distance education had become the new buzzard in the academic field, with the application of ICT. More & more individuals are taking recourse to distance education to relish their dreams. To cater to this large segment of learners, as number of institutions including the virtual institutions have started offering a wide range of courses on the web called as web-based education tutorials or online courses. The web collects & creates knowledge resources in a structured & systematic form, which are accessible from a distance, and is not restricted to any fixed date or time. Thus it can well act as a collaborator between the creators and users of knowledge and become a part of the global knowledge network. Now distance learning with innovative applications of ICT has become a boon to those people who had previously to curb their aspirations on account of geographical restrictions as well as those entailed by time, profession or money.

Distance education with web-based learning can be more effective than the classroom learning where the space, seating, teaching aids could be inadequate. It can also be a great advantage for ones who due to certain obstacles could not get admitted to a regular course in academic institutions, can now get a degree just by sitting by the computer & clicking the mouse. Recently highly specialized web sites are coming up in various disciplines providing on-line courses and training, composing all kinds of information resources in electronic format.

Some of the sites providing online courses and training are.

       (i)   The Australian correspondence school
                http:ll www.acs.edu.au
       (ii)   California virtual university
                http:ll www. California.edu/catalogs.html
       (iii)   Belford university
                http:ll www. Belford university.org

(iv)   www.velsoft.com

(v)   Online study for U.K.

         http:ll www.ebam.ac.uk

(vi)   e learning training

         http:ll www.outstart.com

Open university and institutes of distance education

(i)   IGNOU

         http:ll www.ignou.edu

(ii)   Open university of South Africa

         http:ll www.unisa.ac.en

(iii)   Bangladesh Open University

         http:ll www.crtuv. edu.en

(iv)   National Open school

         http:ll www.nos.org

(v)   United states Open University

         http:ll www.open.edu

4.1   Status of Online Education and Training in India :

According to a news report published in 'The Times of India' dated March 29th, 2007, the Distance Education Council (DEC) of India, have decided to allow all the premier institutes in the country to offer online courses. Thus a hope evolves for all those who aspire to join the IITs or IIM's but could not make through due to the grade. The Vice Chancellor of IGNOU, Sri V.N. Rajasek-Haran Pillai, have encouraged these premier institutes to design online courses and set up virtual campuses to reach out to a wider section of students, as they have both the infrastructure and technology in place. The Distance Education Council (DEC) have now allowed the distance education institutes to set up study centers and offer programmes beyond their state. No geographical jurisdiction rules can become an obstacle in allowing online education. So this initiative can be seen as a major boost to distance education and open learning and may resolve the cases wherein some of the courses and institutes have been derecognised due to the flexible curriculum or territorial jurisdiction violations.

The recommendations as envisaged by the five-member committee of experts on open and distance learning (ODL) and information and compunction technology set up by the DEC chairman are –

(a)   No geographical restrictions will curb the objectives of any ODL programme. Learners should be enabled to opt for or undergo any study programme at any institute of their choice and

(b)   The DEC will only ensure the institutes which meet the required infrastructure and system requirements such as right technology, trained teachers so as to be able to prepare self-instructional materials and student support services.

The Indian Institute of science already runs an online course in collaboration with a foreign institute. At present, 7 IITs and IISc are working on enhancing learning of engineering education on the basis of technology by developing curriculum based video and web courses.

Some of the Indian institutions providing online education and training in the field of Information technology mention can be made of the Net varsity promoted by the NIIT, Apetch online Varsity and smart Plant a division of ZD Net. These institutions provide real life university experience on the world wide web through the e mails, on line tutorials, mediated and unmediated web based training.

These online education and training courses would result into –

(a)   skilled manpower generation
(b)   technology and content development for global market and
(c)   provide online learning support services

5.   Role of Borderless Libraries in the E-learning Environment :

The library is an integral part of any educational institution and plays a significant role in the process of learning. It stores all the resources of knowledge and information to cater to the needs of all the bonafied individuals of the institution as well as outsiders. And the transition of the library to the borderless library today, have not changed the prime duty of providing information as has been functioning from the past to the present time while only the working principle of providing information has been changed now.

Now the Borderless libraries will have to act as an open library which is put on the Internet and freely accessible by creating the blogs, information portals, podcasts, wikis etc in the present time and the coming years. Though there is no physical space yet you can scroll a huge no. of information resources to enhance your knowledge & skill through it. You will be able to buy, borrow or download any book or information just by sitting at one place. Thus the borderless libraries can bring a great change in the world of education and training today with the incorporation of different ICTs and apart from enhancing the manpower skill and knowledge, it will make the individuals more efficient in their field of interest.

6.   Conclusion

The borderless libraries today thus have to play a great role in the collection, organization and dissemination of information resources so as to supplement and complement the new teaching and

learning process such as the e-learning, online courses, training etc. It is only by going through the borderless libraries that students from each and every corner of the world can now get a degree, online and enhance their skill through the online courses and training just at the click of the mouse. No geographical restrictions can now become an obstacle in accessing the information resources or obtaining the required education and training through the online courses available in the web of the borderless libraries.

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ABOUT AUTHOR

M/s Kakoli Duarah is presently working as Library Assistant at LNB Library, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh – 786004. She holds her B.Sc. (BOT) from Dibrugarh University and MLISc degree from Gauhati University. She is a member of Dibrugarh Library Association.
E.mail – kakoliduarah@gmail.com