E-LEARNING AND CHANGING ROLES OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract

This paper attempted to explore changing role of academic libraries in the digital age and era of e-learning with the following objectives, to analyse changing role of academic library, to define and explain concept of e-learning and to analyse challenges of e-learning. The new technology has important role to play in academic libraries. By using this technology, academic libraries are helping users access the vast amount of library resources, evaluate and select the best information for their specific needs. E-learning is adapted readily adapted by teachers and library palys important role in providing them authentic resources. E-learning has numerous benefits and should contribute much more to education. However, there are several challenges in implementing e-learning at academic libraries which includes inadequate fund, lack of technical support, lack of training and support as well as lack of motivation and negligence by institutional management. Hence, it is necessary for academic libraries to provide adequate funds and technological support to provide better e-learning services to their clients.

Key word: Academic Library, E-Learning, Changing role, Challenges

Introduction

Technology will continue to change and libraries and librarians have to use the changing technology to provide the best access and service to their patrons. Electronic information creates challenges for the library community at its very foundation, moving it away from the traditional paper-and-print format to an ethereal world of circuits and connectivity. The library is no longer defined simply as a building or a physical repository that houses information (Kaur, 2015).

With the advent of computers, the nature of libraries has changed dramatically. Computers are being used in libraries to process, store, retrieve and disseminate information. As a result, the traditional concept of library is being redefined from a place to access books to one, which houses the most advanced media including CD-ROM, Internet, and remote access to a wide range of resources. Libraries have now metamorphosed into digital institutions. Gone are the days when a library was judged by its quantitative resources. Today, libraries are surrounded by networked data that is connected to the vast ocean of Internet-based services. Moreover, electronic resources relevant to the professions are developing at an unprecedented pace.

Academic libraries are considered the nerve centres of academic institutions, which support teaching, research, and other academic programmes in various ways. Demographic changes, technological advances and globalization have totally changes the concept of education. The teaching learning is a delicate process, which needs to be standardized throughout the world (Sen, 2009).

The nature of the academic library and the role they play in campus is changing. Libraries are moving towards an information commons model of service, and becoming campus community centers. They invite student and faculty socialization, learning, research, scholarship and instruction. They are most effective when programming, services, and spaces are developed in partnership with others seeking similar educational outcomes. Academic libraries will increasingly provide information and services to their users at right

time as per their requirement. Whatever the changes, the traditional roles of a library in an academic community, especially those communities that aren't changing substantially themselves, will remain valid and important to a successful college or university (Saha, 2009).

Hence, in the backdrop of above information researcher attempted to explore changing role of academic libraries in the digital age and era of e-learning with the following objectives-

Objectives:

1. To analyse changing role of academic library
2. To define and explain concept of e-learning
3. To analyse challenges of e-learning

Changing roles of Academic Libraries

Due to the impact of ICTs, libraries are incapable to fulfil the information needs of users by means of print sources alone. Libraries are forced to acquire, organize and enable access to electronic resources and provide new technology based services. Electronic resources include online catalogues CD-ROM/ DVD databases, multimedia, online full text electronic journals, databases, e-books, digital repositories etc. Libraries have to find strategies for making their resources and services readily available to the faculty and students preferably in the electronic environments; otherwise, their existence will be at stake. Academic Libraries in the e-learning environment have already made some progress by providing access to their catalogues, databases, electronic journals, Internet resources, etc. to the user's community on the Intranet or Internet.

The utilization of innovative technologies by academic libraries to provide access to resources and services in support of learning, teaching, and research has benefited both students and faculty so that they can undertake learning and research without being in the library. The shift to an online environment has thus resulted in a change from the systematic one-to-one information flow of the past to a new model in which the users and the providers of information are able to relate in a dynamic relationship.

Bennett (2003) identifies two major shifts in education. Firstly, he argues that higher education is moving away from a teaching to a learning culture. Secondly, the revolution in information technology is changing delivery of education. He further argues that an academic library should consider these two shifts while planning their services. He also argues that academic libraries should not be seen solely as a traditional storage facility for books, or simply as a technology center, but instead the library should focus on the process of learning that takes place within its space, bringing resources, learners, and experts into easy proximity to facilitate collaborative learning. More recently, Freeman (2005) has referred to libraries as learning laboratories that accommodate learning in a variety of formats.

In recent years, academic libraries have emerged as a portal to the information highway with carefully mapped directions to the desired information (Moyo, 2002). Dinkelman & Stacy-Bates (2007) note that librarians have become innovative and provide dynamic, flexible and user oriented ways for easy navigation through the website.

Concept of E-Learning

E-learning is a means of becoming literate, involving new mechanisms for communication, such as computer networks, multimedia, content portals, search engines, electronic libraries, distance learning, and web-enabled classrooms. Different web based applications such as email, real-time conference; Web Cam, etc. are being used as important tools in the process of e-learning. E-Learning is a catch-all term that covers a wide range of instructional material that can be delivered on CD-ROM or DVD, over a local area network (LAN), or on the Internet. It includes Computer-Based Training (CBT), Web-Based Training (WBT), and Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS), distance or online learning and online tutorials. The major advantage to students is its easy access. So, providing access to online e-journals and e-books through networks will enhance the self-learning knowledge (Kaur, 2015).

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. 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 (Allan, 2002). E-learning can also be considered as a basic concept of educational delivery via technology or as an educational technique (pedagogy) (Catherall, 2005).

E-learning lessons are generally designed to guide students through information or to help students perform in specific tasks. Information based e-Learning content communicates information to the student. Examples include content that distributes the history or facts related to a service, company, or product. In information-based content, there is no specific skill to be learned. In performance-based content, the lessons build off a procedural skill in which the student is expected to increase proficiency.

E-learning can provide four major benefits for the organizations and individuals involved-

(i) Access to quality education: The fact that instructors of the highest calibre can share their knowledge across borders allows students to attend courses across physical, political, and social boundaries. Recognized experts have the opportunity of distributing information internationally at minimum costs.

(ii) Affordable education: E-learning can drastically reduce the costs of higher education, making it much more affordable and accessible to the masses. An Internet connection, a computer, and a projector would allow an entire classroom in a Third World university to benefit from the knowledge of a distant instructor.

(iii) Convenience and flexibility to learners: in many contexts, e-learning is self-paced and the learning sessions are available 24x7. Learners are not bound to a specific day/time to physically attend classes. They can also pause learning sessions at their convenience.

(iv) Reducing environmental impact: e-learning allows people to avoid travel, thus reducing the overall carbon output. The fact that it takes place in a virtual environment also allows some reduction of paper usage. With virtual notes instead of paper notes and online assessments instead of paper assessments, eLearning is a more environmentally friendly solution.

By 2006, nearly 3.5 million students were participating in on-line learning at institutions of higher education in the United States. Many institutes of higher education, for-profit institutions, now offer on-line classes. By contrast, only about half of private, nonprofit schools offer them. The Sloan report, based on a poll of academic leaders, says that students generally appear to be at least as satisfied with their on-line classes as they are with traditional ones. Private institutions may become more involved with on-line presentations as the cost of instituting such a system decreases. Properly trained staff must also be hired to work with students on-line. These staff members need to understand the content area, and be highly trained in the use of the computer and Internet. Online education is rapidly increasing, and online doctoral programs have even developed at leading research universities (Saha, 2009).

Challenges and Issues for Libraries in E-Learning

Today e-learning is considered as alternative tools of empowering knowledge and skills. It is also treated as alternative means for classroom teaching. Now with the help of Internet, it is possible to deliver the information with highest degree of precision which is not possible with traditional skills. It has overcome several constraints of traditional learning system, but the development of e-learning has thrown up new problems focused on the copyright and intellectual property rights implications of electronic text. Students, researchers, staff, employees and other end users affiliated with virtual university or digital libraries are to be allowed to print-on-paper excerpts of digitally available works on the same conditions according to which they may make photocopies of print material. The library authorities have to discuss seriously with

publishers on this aspect in order to evolve some mechanism profitable to users, publishers as well as to the authors. Users may be charged for each access, downloading from servers and/or each kind of digital library collection. This would provide a reverse for publishers, authors and libraries. Security aspect is another most pressing challenge of digital affairs. Piracies of database, viral invasions, and parallel satellite networking stress are some other issues for digital libraries, which are confronted as a way of routine. According to Jayaprakash and Venkatramana (2006), major challenges can be enumerated as under:

- There is no mechanism available to establish standards for internet materials, instruction, design and quality of interaction.
- Information providers are more interested in profit than quality services.
- Lack of organization of information on Internet, as not all sites are updated regularly.
- Lack of expertise as not many vendors/experts are available in the country and abroad as well. Overseas vendors charge too much and also reluctant to import techniques/technology, and
- Lack of motivation, because in a classroom instruction the teacher and students interact in discussing and understanding the subject spontaneously, which creates motivation among the students towards learning. Whereas, in e-learning, due to lack of motivation sometimes it may appear dull.

Vatnal, Mathapati and Prakash (2004), have pointed out additional issues, which hinder the development and pose challenges among libraries in e-environment. These are-

Instruction and Training: One of the main problems in e-learning system is the sufficient knowledge and skills of usage of information technology. Web-based education require much training as the e-learning involves different types of multimedia files and learners should have the knowledge of the same. There is also seen lack of awareness in using electronic equipment.

Interaction: The lack of interaction between learner and subject specialist is another problem. It may possible for subject expert availability, but for teacher may be possible to access via e-mail. Sometimes, face-to-face interaction can be made possible through online conferencing. E-learning designers also need to increase the interactivity.

Speed of Network: Internet connectivity is essential to access the information or learning materials. As e-learning involves multimedia file, higher speed of network with sufficient bandwidth is required. Sometimes, low speed and connectivity cause frustration among the learners or the users of Internet. Further, Internet has not reached in remote areas and has limited reach to users, only in urban areas.

Budgetary Support: Considerable infrastructure such as hardware, software and labor require heavy investment. Organizations, which want to start e-learning system, should have enough funding. The lacuna on this part hinders the creation of better and interactive environment.

Quality of the Services: Regular user surveys are needed to test the materials to ensure the higher quality of the services to its users; hence, they should be repackaged on periodical basis.

Copyright: Libraries need to distribute copies of the same information to the distance learners. Therefore, librarians must be familiar with the sufficient rights to acquire intellectual property, especially in digital environment.

Thus, above major problems need the attention of the policy makers and of the librarians to be solved out for creating better e-learning environment.

Conclusion:

The introduction of ITC made substantial upgradation and changes in every area of science and technology. This has also brought reflective changes in academic world. There is emergence of new model of education and learning due to change in technologies. Under these prospective, libraries also adopt new information systems and services, which proved mostly beneficial for improvement in its services. The new technology has important role to play in academic libraries. By using this technology, academic libraries are helping users access the vast amount of library resources,

evaluate and select the best information for their specific needs. E-learning is adapted readily adapted by teachers and library palys important role in providing them authentic resources. E-learning has numerous benefits and should contribute much more to education. However, there are several challenges in implementing e-learning at academic libraries which includes inadequate fund, lack of technical support, lack of training and support as well as lack of motivation and negligence by institutional management. Hence, it is necessary for academic libraries to provide adequate funds and technological support to provide better e-learning services to their clients.

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