

Technology Mediated Media Education: A Case Study of E-Learning Initiatives in India

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Abstract

With several new innovations in Information and Communication Technology and the increasing interaction of the users with the all-pervasive digital world, the need for a change from conventional textbook learning to multimedia e-learning has increased tremendously. Powerful simulation and web-based experimental opportunities need to be explored to enable learners to acquire new knowledge and skills. This paper aims to explore the advantages of e-learning pedagogy over conventional teaching methods. At the same time, the paper also aims to describe the state-of-the-art technology used for media education through e-learning in India.

Keywords: E-learning; Virtual classroom; Blended learning; Multimedia in education; E-simulation; Media education

Introduction

The term e-learning has been defined in various ways in several literatures so as to mean any of the following such as - web-based learning, computer-mediated communication, telematics environments, e-learning, virtual classrooms, online instruction, I-Campus, electronic communication, cyberspace learning environments, computer-driven interactive communication, distributed learning, borderless education, among others. In this paper, all forms of learning/teaching through ICT are referred to as 'e-learning'. It should be kept in mind not to confuse 'distance education' with 'e-learning', as many a times the terms are used interchangeably but they are in no way identical [1]. Simulated learning is not a new pedagogical methodology; this form of teaching also includes group discussions, debates, collaborative projects and internships. Simulations are best considered as those cases in which students are placed "within a reasonable representation of a real environment within which political or social interaction occur" [2]. In this paper, the author mainly focuses on the computer-generated simulation that can help learners to increase their comprehension of complex theoretical concepts in relation to modules that are taught solely with the traditional lecture/seminar format.

Efficiency in the classroom require learners to access information faster and easier – and computers and their associated software can deliver instructional programmes in information fast, covering virtually any area of the curriculum and geared to any age or ability level [3]. The concept of e-learning has been widely accepted by the world-wide community, as evidenced by the widespread implementation of e-learning in educational institutions. The use of multimedia content can motivate the learners since its use in teaching creates fun in learning [4].

It goes without saying that e-learning allows a new student-teacher relationship; it reveals the real commitment between them. A flexible learning environment allows the students and the teachers to explore the scope of non-formal learning by engaging themselves in online discussions and debates. It has helped to create fewer barriers and less distance than before. This paper does not compare online and traditional face-to-face instruction to prove which one is better, but rather tries to highlight some of the possible strengths of e-learning over traditional classroom teaching in this context.

A field experiment carried out by Hui et al. [5] compares the effectiveness and satisfaction associated with technology-assisted

learning with that of face-to-face learning. It showed that technology-assisted learning improves students' acquisition of the kind of knowledge which requires abstract conceptualization and reflective observation, but adversely affects students' ability to obtain knowledge which requires concrete experience. Technology-assisted learning is better for vocabulary learning than face-to-face learning, but it is comparatively less effective in developing listening and comprehension skills.

E-learning in India

The growth of e-learning is perhaps increasing enormously since most of the universities are investing in modern forms of learning. Entrepreneurs in the field of education are interested in developing new forms of e-learning products [6]. Media educators should also venture into this change and explore the advantages of e-learning in media education.

Steps are being taken in India to encourage e-learning by launching e-content in multimedia format in web portals. Over the course of time, real time virtual classrooms and virtual laboratories have also come up with government and private initiatives. Among the e-learning platforms which have been created so far, most of these mostly cater to the needs of learners in the discipline of Science and Technology where creators have developed online/offline computer-simulated laboratories as well. NPTEL (National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning), sponsored by Ministry of Human Resource Development under the Government of India has 129 web courses and 110 video courses under more than 20 projects in the field of science and technology. Each course consists of 40 video lectures of one hour each and text, images, animations and graphics. These projects are basically run by pioneer institutes like IITs (Indian Institute of Technology) and other prominent universities and entities in India.

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However, there is limited e-content available in the field of Humanities and Social Sciences. In India, as result of the projects like 'e-PG pathshala', production of courseware E-content in 77 subjects at post graduate level is to be made available in the open access through the e-PG pathshala website. The content developed under this Programme are curriculum based and interactive. At present, around 10,000 plus modules have been developed in 57 subjects which are available on the website. Post graduate courses in Journalism and Mass Communication are yet to be included in the website. In India, teachers of centrally funded institutes like IITs, IIMs, and central universities offer online courses through "SWAYAM", which is a web based open access online course provider. All the courses provided under this Programme are free of cost, however fees would be levied in case learner requires certificate. It also has the option for credit transfer if any students want to transfer the credits earned into their academic record by taking these courses online. For the learners in Media education few courses under the category of "Arts and Recreation" could be opted which are related to the discipline.

ICT in education at educational institutes is expected to help in realizing the efforts to improve the quality of education [7]. The significant shortfalls in the number of teachers and declining student-teacher ratio and lack of learning materials can be addressed by infusing information and communication technology into the learning process [8]. As per a study done in the USA, it is seen that public universities are turning to e-learning altogether; it is because online instruction appears to provide a simple and ideologically-flexible solution to the internal contradiction that haunts public education today - the requirement to do more with less [9].

Software can be classified into three genres; enabling software, entertainment software, and educational software [10]. Educational software can be used with certain hardware components if needed to create e-learning content and user accessibility. MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) is a common platform from which numerous academic and professional courses are delivered by universities and entities across the world and it can accommodate unlimited participants through web technologies. Apart from their e-learning materials in the form of filmed lectures, reading and problem sets they also provide interactive user forums to support community interaction among students, professors and teaching assistants. Several courses in Journalism are also available through this platform and according to some studies it has emerged as a popular mode of learning since 2012. MOODLE (modular object-oriented dynamic learning environment) which is also a free and open-source software learning management system provides a platform which can be used for blended learning, distance education and e-learning projects in schools, universities, workplaces and other sectors. With customizable management features, it is used to create private websites with online courses for educators and trainers to achieve learning goals (Wikipedia).

Apart from the Government initiatives there are also lot of private companies in India who offer a range of products and services including e-learning courses, custom, instructional design, LMS (Learning Management System) solutions and mobile application development. Companies such as McGraw-Hill, Digital Think, SkillSoft, and Mentergy are setting up operations in India which is a positive sign for the e-learning segment.

Media education through e-learning

Since the inception of Media Education and the rise of media industry in India, there has been a numerous growth in the number

of media institutes, both governmental and private. Because of this, the number of Media Educators and Learners both in Education and industry sector has also increased which indeed demands more content in learning platforms for blended learning pedagogy. At present, there are more than 300 media or journalism schools in the university and non-university systems. All these journalism and media schools offer courses at bachelors, masters and post graduate diploma and diploma levels encompassing all media including print, broadcast and internet. Only courses that fall under the University system are under the purview of the UGC (University Grants Commission) and or State Governments who both fund Universities and lay guidelines on curriculum and systems (including faculty recruitment). Private Universities that have emerged in the last few years in India are also mandated to follow certain systems and procedures set by the MHRD. Other non-university institutes or courses do not fall under any legal authority or need to follow any set standards [11].

Open School of Journalism which is an independent and international journalism school which has branches in Berlin and New York City is a good initiative of a flexible online course that leads to a certificate in Journalism according to ISED-4 (International Standard Classification of Education). Open School of Journalism is also a member of the AEJMC (Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication) and the journalism program is authorized by the ZFU (Staatliche Zentralstelle Fur Fernunterricht) a German State agency for distance education.

Journalism and Communications schools around the globe are coping with massive technological change, because of which some innovative pedagogical methodology include the creation of Digital Newsroom Simulation labs, which is an online lab which creates the real-time experience of what it is like to work with fellow reporters and an editor in the process of conceiving, pitching, reporting, writing, editing and publishing his/her work in a distinctive news format. There are very few examples of digital games being used for journalism skill development particularly since 2010 [12]. But games and e-simulation have limited value to journalism education pedagogically. They might be valuable in developing very basic reporting and news writing skills; however, e-simulation cannot, for example, teach the core journalistic craft of interviewing. In some studies, it was found that e-simulation, when measured against authentic task criteria fail to provide "genuine productivity" [13].

In India, as an initiative to generate e-content for learners in media education, CEC (Consortium for Education Communication), New Delhi and IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University) have uploaded video lectures by eminent professionals in media education sector and Media Industry sector in India by using the social media platform, i.e., YouTube. CEC has perhaps the largest repository of educational programmes being produced by its Media Centers, numbering more than 20,000 content in various disciplines. These video lectures are available in Hindi and English languages through DTH (Direct-to-Home) platform of DD (Doordarshan, a public broadcaster in India) Direct Plus, Dish TV, Cable operators, CEC-Edusat Network and online mode. Major contributors of these video lectures are the Faculty members and Media Professionals from IIMC, New Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi University, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University and IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University).

In India, there are more than 30 universities including central, state and autonomous universities who also provide Journalism and Mass Communication courses through distance education. Most of

these courses are diploma courses and second highest are bachelor degrees and a few of them also provide Post-graduate degree. Among all these institutes, mainly Amity University and IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University) are using e-learning tools for conducting distance education courses. The other institutes still follow the conventional method by providing printed self-learning materials and arranging personal contact programmes in their designated study centers which are usually situated in district headquarters of the state where the university is situated. They follow traditional examination methods instead of online examination even though it is a distance education course. They are yet to adopt the potentialities of e-learning to foster distance education courses in Media education. The government of India under Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology has launched the 'Digital India Programme' with the vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. The purpose of implementing E-learning assisted Distance Education in India is to take education to the doorsteps of the rural poor, the disadvantaged and marginalized people of the society. The people should be given the opportunity to master the skills to use technology to their advantage without feeling threatened, so as to build a better tomorrow. The use of e-learning in distance education have benefits like, training facilities at off-hours or from home and less academic stress. It also enables people to have proficiency in using technology, strong academic skills by enhancing learning and it can moreover also be cost effective.

In India, the School of Journalism and New Media under IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University) are exploring new media technologies apart from the Traditional media tools to impart media education in India for learners placed across varied geographical locations. Web conferencing software services like Adobe Connect allows them to organize virtual classrooms for the learners and the trainers.

Indian Science Communication Society (ISCOS) has also started an online diploma course which exclusively focuses on Science Journalism. Practicing Science Journalists/Communicators from print/broadcast media and highly experienced faculty engage themselves with the learners through online mode and these e-learners are evaluated through online examinations.

With increasing demand of the digital marketing course, a few media institutes are also incorporating such topics into their course curriculum. Many independent and private institutes in India have come up with certificate courses in Digital Marketing since their demand is increasing in the current media industry. Institutes like MICA (Mudra Institute of Communication) have started a diploma course in Digital Marketing. Some institutes like Xavier Institute of Communications and Annapurna International school of Film and Media have incorporated it into their post graduate course curriculum. The course in digital marketing is also available through online mode which is provided by many private institutes in India as well as abroad.

It is seen that not only the learners but the trainers in Media Education and Media Industries can also gain both practical and theoretical knowledge by sharing each other's knowledge in a systematic and consistent manner in a common platform. If we take the example of western media institutes, we can see that e-learning through New Media is a successful initiative to create the platform for training and knowledge sharing for the benefit of Media learners and educators. This paper encourages further research in the field of Media education through e-learning to explore the full potential of ICT in Education to benefit the learners and educators in the field of media education.

Challenges in adapting e-learning in media education

It has become a challenge for many Media institutes to deal with the dynamic new media tools. According to some media professional most institutes/faculty will have to unlearn a lot about the 'traditional media' to fully accept the new media. Hence, this seems to be the main challenge for the media educators to join the bandwagon of e-learning in media education in India. In India, e-learning is only considered as supplementary to the conventional class room learning [14]. ICT in education can bring major changes in various factors of education like location, methodology, support, evaluation and timing of education delivery. Adaptation of the complete potential of ICT will require a substantial shift in Human resources policies including recruitment, contacts, training and development and innovative payment systems. Besides, governments across the world are keen to explore ways in which they can reduce their contribution to the funding of universities by encouraging commercial investment, academic partnership and economies of scale [15]. In such a scenario, it is very essential that Media education and educators/trainers and media learners also adapt to the change brought by the technology on learning.

Conclusion

We have seen that in the discipline of science and technology, several institutes have created virtual laboratories which give the learners computer-simulated experience of various practical concepts without the use of actual physical equipments.

Due to dearth of funding, media institutes in India are not able to provide state-of-the-art Media Technologies to the learners. In such a scenario, creating virtual production studios with the help of computer simulation, both 2D and 3D, can help the learners to virtually experience production tools and techniques. A computer-simulated newsroom which has been experimented with in some media institutes has been found successful and has seen to yield results by improving journalistic and writing skills among the media students.

Video lectures on various topics related to the media have given the learners the opportunity to pick a topic, time and place for himself/herself to attend a class in the discipline. Moreover, in media education, the online courses have helped the learners overcome the geographical barriers and the repository of digital documentation of lectures and literature has created an exhaustive knowledge bank. However, it still lacks computer-simulated experiences to enhance the practical learning experiences of the students.

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