

E-LEARNING INITIATIVES AT YASHWANTRAO CHAVAN MAHARASHTRA OPEN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract :

In this advanced digital era, educational providers cannot possibly survive if they remain restricted to the traditional chalk and talk method of imparting education. Considering the various technological advances taking place from time to time, the Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) has taken various initiatives to facilitate students of open and distance learning and provide them with academic inputs using e-learning. This paper presents a case study on e-learning at YCMOU, focusing on the innovative practices followed by YCMOU for imparting education to the distance learners and sharing the challenges faced while offering them.

Introduction:

The technology is evolving at a faster rate and each area is to be digitalized to be competent to face the competition. Today we have various electronic devices that can bring Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in some form or other literally to every home. In this advance digital era, the education system is also evolving. The educational providers today cannot be completely dependent on the traditional method of teaching and learning wherein the focus is centred on classroom, teacher and printed material. Today educational providers cannot possibly survive if they remain restricted to the traditional chalk and talk method of imparting education.

The educational providers today are using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for imparting education. Use of ICT in open and distance education has given new dimensions to open and distance learners by providing continuous and convenient learning and support activities. E-learning is the method today adopted for imparting education through ICT.

E-learning means “The delivery of a learning, training or education programme by electronic means. E-learning involves the use of a computer or electronic device (e.g. a mobile

phone) in some way to provide training, educational or learning material.” (Derek Stockley 2003)

Review of Literature:

There are various studies done highlighting the perceptions, co-relation, attitude, and barriers for imparting education through ICT. According to Howland & Moore (2002) Developments in technology in the past decade have had considerable impact on the distribution of content, learning tasks, and assignments in training and distance Education.

In a study on e-learning in a Mega Open University: Faculty attitude, barriers and motivators by Santosh Panda and Sanjaya Mishra(2007) have highlighted Though removal of barriers to e-learning is necessary, it is not sufficient in itself to adopt e-learning and participate in the e-learning enterprise. Their study also revealed ‘personal interest to use technology’ as the top-most motivating factor; followed by ‘intellectual challenge’ that might come up with the use of e-learning. The respondents also indicated that provision and effective development of infrastructure (i.e., both hardware and software) could be another strong motivator (third rank) at the workplace. This is also an item in the barrier list. Similarly, training on e-learning was the fourth ranked motivator indicating high need for continuous training in this area.

E-learning Initiatives at Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU)

The Maharashtra Legislative assembly Act no20/1989 established YCMOU at Nashik, on July 1st, 1989. The university is recognized by UGC under section 12B. Its programmes and activities are geared towards becoming a ‘mass varsity’. In 2004 Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Canada appreciated the efforts made by YCMOU at grass-root level by conferring upon the “Award of Excellence for Institutional Achievement”. The University’s Mission is: Through our technical, vocational, professional and liberal education programme, application of modern communication technologies and adoption of the distance education methodology, we strive towards developing an Innovative, Flexible and Open system of education.

Considering the various technological advances taking place from time to time, the Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) has taken various initiatives to facilitate students of open and distance learning and provide them with academic inputs using e-learning.

E-Learning Initiatives by YCMOU:

Following are the various initiatives in the area of e-learning taken by YCMOU to facilitate

students with latest technology in the era of digitalisation.

I] Mobile Van

YCMOU has taken initiative for providing computer literacy in backward areas. Through mobile van attempt is made by the University to make the people in the remote areas, aware about the technology being used everywhere and equip them with the basic knowledge of computers. The mobile van is equipped with computers and internet facility. The mobile van visits a particular village for a period of 6 months to teach them the basics of computer. The topics mainly taught are Microsoft Office, Internet, Paint and computer fundamentals. Students of the first batch have received opportunities to work on the basis of this course.

II] e-Suvidha account.

The students can get quick access to academic information through the e-services provided by the university's web portal using each student's unique e-Suvidha account. To activate this account the student is required to follow the instructions on web portal of the university to generate user –id and password. Once the account is activated the student has access to the information related to campus services, Gold plus Services and Channels services.

Under Campus services a student is able to get information and make online requests related to

- i) Examinations: - Exam Time Table, Exam Schedule, Syllabus & Previous Question Papers.
- ii) Student Profile: - Reservation Profile, Personal Profile, Previous Qualification Profile, Current Academic Profile and Examination Profile.
- iii) Applications for : - Photocopy of Answer book, Revaluation, Duplicate Statement of Marks, Exemption Cancellation, Ordinance Cancellation, Paper Change, Migration and Convocation Verification
- iv) Profile Correction: - Add Profile Correction Request, Update Contact Details and View Request Status

Under Gold Plus Services, a student is able to get information and easy access to the various services by clicking on the link .The links are as follows: -

- i) EASY- For employment search.
- ii) Application for Passport
- iii) Bank Web Site- State Bank Of India.
- iv) Sakaal ePaper
- v) Nashik News- nashik.co.in

- vi) Nashik Telephone Directory
- vii) EBSCO- Online Library.
- viii) National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning- E-learning through online Web and Video courses in Engineering, Science and humanities streams
- ix) Techpedia- A portal of technology projects by students to link the needs of the industry and grassroots innovators with young minds and to promote collaborative research.
- x) Sakshat (The National Mission on Education through ICT)
- xi) Wikipedia
- xii) Open Learn
- xiii) Open Courseware

Under Channels Services, a student is able to get online learning experience by clicking on the link. The links are as follows: -

1) Learning Services

- i) Self Assessment
- ii) Library Facilitation
- iii) Links to Open Courseware
- iv) Learning Management System
- v) On-line Evaluation for Formative purposes
- vi) Access to Distributed Classrooms
- vii) Book Releases, Reviews
- viii) E-Learning Content Releases, Reviews
- ix) Share Content

2) Participative Services

- i) Your opinion
- ii) Thematic e-Communities
- iii) Threaded discussions
- iv) Express views

3) Infotainment Services

- i) Cultural
- ii) Competitions and Awards
- iii) Timelines / Schedules
- iv) Jobs

- v) Technology

III] Discussion forum

The University also gives academic guidance to students and study centres through web based discussion forums. Questions can be posted related to two fields: -

1) Programme Implementation

- i) Programme Publicity and Advertisement
- ii) Direct Admission, Course Exemptions or Credit Transfers (DACECT)
- iii) Admission and Student Registration
- iv) Learning Resource Distribution
- v) Face-To-Face Counselling at recognized Study Centers
- vi) Student Evaluation: Continuous Assessment
- vii) Student Evaluation: End Examination
- viii) Convocation

2) Programme Development

- i) Curriculum and Syllabus
- ii) Study Centre Network
- iii) Resource Expert Data
- iv) Learning Resource
- v) Question-Bank

IV] Multimedia based E-Learning Material:

There are various Virtual Classroom Modules developed by the University to enhance the knowledge of the students. The contents are delivered through the protected CD-ROMs. Learner Management System hosted on computers at study centres enables students to select e-learning content suitable to their pace and style of learning.

V] Virtual Learning Centres: Real Time Learning through Satellite based Virtual Classrooms:

In collaboration with the Indian Space Research Organization(ISRO), the university has established a state wide network of Virtual Learning Centres(VLC) also called Virtual Classrooms. The Resource Persons deliver the lectures at the YCMOU's Yashbharti Studio at Nashik, and/or sub-studio at Pune or Mumbai and these 'live' lectures are transmitted to all the participating 'interactive 'Virtual Learning Centres across the State. The audio/video lectures of these resource persons are up-linked to the EDUSAT, a specially designed satellite for education, from where the

signal is down linked to the Virtual Learning Centres. The audio/video lectures received via satellite are displayed using LCD projectors on the big screen for the benefit of the learners present at the VLC. These sessions are interactive and the queries by the students are answered immediately with the help of this innovative two-way-video VLC technology.

VII] Online Library

Online access to various e-journals for students interested in research and knowledge updating has also been provided. The students can access online journals through e-Suvidha account. It provides Reference databases, subscription management, online journals, books, linking services and A-to-Z solutions.

Challenges Faced:

1. Some students need help in understanding the learning material presented in a course.
2. Many students need external motivation to take admission and complete a course of study so there is comparatively less enrollment.
3. Teachers and students need to become familiar with the tools.
4. There is time dependency for Live Sessions as attending virtual classroom training is restricted to a certain scheduled time.
5. Infrastructure for the participants has to be maintained for successful completion of the session.
6. The latest technologies and gadgets are still not available in rural areas so providing e-learning in the interior villages is difficult.

Probable Methods to Overcome these Challenges:

1. Counselors should provide in-time guidance and regular feedback to the queries.
2. The use of Discussion forums should be enhanced and collaborative learning is to be used.
3. Preparatory courses in e-learning should be offered.

Conclusions:

At YCMOU blended learning is imparted to facilitate students of open and distance learning and provide them with academic inputs using E-learning. YCMOU has taken steps like providing IT literacy in remote areas through the Mobile van. The students have quick access to academic information through e-suvidha account and discussion forums. E-learning is imparted through Virtual Learning Centres and Multimedia Based Learning Material to enhance the knowledge of the students. Thus at YCMOU, focusing on the innovative practices are followed for imparting education to the open and distance learners there are few challenges faced which will be overcome by the passage of time.

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