Distance Education Delivery through Information Technology Applications: Online Learning is no more a dream with NODES

by
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the challenges and opportunities that arise when attempting to transform the tertiary and vocational education in Sri Lanka from traditional forms into modern form of delivery based on latest technology.

In all aspects of learning, technology can make a big impact. Technology, when used appropriately, can be very effective in terms of interactivity and content delivery among learners and between learners, between learners and teachers, especially in contrast to print-based traditional distance education. Learners, teachers and educational institutions all would gain and be empowered using new technology and most difficulties that arise due to constraints of scale, time and space can be effectively addressed using the same. Opportunities created in such a context for a country like Sri Lanka are enormous. At the same time, there are several challenges to be addressed when moving into this new way of learning. A major national initiative in Sri Lanka, the National Online Distance Education Service (NODES) is discussed in this context.

KEY WORDS

Latest Technology, Content Delivery, Interactivity, opportunities, challenges

INTRODUCTION

According to the statistics of the University Grants Commission, every year there are about 100,000 G.C.E. (A/L) qualified students who fall into the category of "higher education opportunity less" due to the simple fact that conventional university system does not have the capacity to accommodate them. Similarly, there is a large number of professionals scattered around the country who seek higher education opportunities as well as continuing professional development for which no opportunities are found in their respective areas. In addition, most of the employers operating outside Western Province need to train their employees in various disciplines which also need to be addressed in the same domain. All these issues with regard to opportunities for continuing education have limitations or constraints in terms of accessibility to content.

TRADITIONAL SOLUTIONS

From ancient "Disapamok" era to traditional "Gurugedara" to present day modern International schools, education has been primarily "teacher centred".

Another major challenge is the complexity and difficulty in development of good quality, interactive content for online DE delivery. This is an acute problem in Sri Lanka due to lack of trained/skilled staff, insufficient experience in developing online content, lack of motivation and commitment, lack of support from the top management, and most importantly difficulty in dedicating staff time amidst other commitments.

CONCLUSIONS

Sri Lankan DE system has been moving around the traditional way of delivering print-based content to students. Programmes of the OUSL and external degree programmes of conventional universities have been experiencing high non-completion rates.

One promising solution for the above situation had been identified as the application of technology to create and deliver content. This can help to overcome time-space constraints of learners and provide a flexible and high quality learning experience. This also opens up immense opportunities to education providers and others.

However, there are several challenges to overcome when transforming into technology-based DE. Readiness of stakeholders and institutions is a must. Developing high quality interactive content is another challenge.

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