

Chapter 7

Learning Ecosystem for Open and Distance Learning

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ABSTRACT

Open and distance learning (ODL) has attained paradigm shift in the recent years as the system serves to the educational aspirations of millions of learners. The digital innovations and growing trends of skill enhancement around the globe attracts the learners into ODL system to increase their knowledge through lifelong learning opportunities extended by such institutions. On the other hand, the conventional mode of higher educational institutions are keen in developing massive open online courses (MOOC) for the knowledge empowerment of the society in various disciplines of study which is a raising trend of educational opportunities to cater the needs of aspiring peoples. In the competitive edge of educational domain with more private educational institutions, the demand for open and distance learning is still continuing rapidly in the most populated countries like China, India, and Pakistan. Hence, the competitive ecosystem development with the digital tools for learning is absolute necessary.

INTRODUCTION

The impact of digital sharing practices makes knowledge dissemination faster in the society as most people prefer to make use of social media for increased access to information. The increase in the usage of information and communication technologies (ICT) in open and distance learning system extend avenues of support services to reach the doorstep of the learners and moreover many learners expect the on time supporting services from such institutions of higher learning due to the fact that management of work pressure, family situations, less time to study individually, isolation from peer group of learners and lack of access to internet in rural/remote areas. The learning ecosystem in the digital era has certainly changed the structure of the ODL system from traditional printed study materials to online educational resources, counselling and tutoring into online interaction, online student support services through e-mails, Whatsapp, SMS etc. Reaching the unreached through technological intervention is made possible

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with the creative pedagogies, online deal with teachers, radio based interactive counselling and internet based social domains like Face book, LinkedIn and twitter etc. The emergence of smart mobile based applications and proliferation of mobile internet users in the 21st century has altered the mind-set of educational practitioners and administrators around the world to innovate new teaching methods to suit to the needs of the population as there is a growing demand for such innovative teaching and learning methods in the future. The Open University of Malaysia has completely made its all activities digital to enhance the opportunities and to curtail the expenditure on traditional paper based activities. Many people prefer to learn while earn policy to manage their expenses on the educational fees. Several educational institutions extend the educational activities for the workplace based learning to cover massive group of learners into distance education. On the other hand the infrastructure developments, salaries to teachers, increasing revenue from fees of students are major challenge to the conventional higher educational institutions due to various facts. Globalisation, increasing modernisation and rapid increase in population explores opportunities for the ODL institutions to review its traditional practice into ICT mediated approach to keep the learners as well in the futuristic sustainable developments.

Learning at distance is still mega challenge even though there are several innovations and technological approaches due to the adult learners are incapable to use the technological avenues including internet resources. The learning ecosystem be enriched with potential opportunities; scalable reach and use of techno-pedagogy, learning facilities at rural areas with low cast internet technologies and access are the prime need in the developing countries. Orienting the adult learners towards the use of technology in the ODL needs a lot of effort from the host institution and the teaching facilitator or academic counselors/tutors need to help them in many ways for effective use. Further revision of syllabus in the Open and Distance Learning system poses mega challenge as the cost involvement in printing large quantum of self-learning materials, storage and postal expenses. The technological advancement permeate the host institutions to prepare open educational resources with fair copy right policies for the users which certainly address the real need of the learners to study at distance. Many poor learners lack with access devices to do internet based studies and use of OERs for their study, hence in such situations, the host institutions need to take proactive role for establishment of digital study centres in the proximity of learners place with all the facilities including internet for encouraging the poor learners.

Due to diverse nature of the system and mass of learners, the Open and Distance Learning lacks with quality in many areas thus discourages the learners and moreover many learners forcefully enrolled into the system leaves without getting certificates/degree due to lack of communication facilities and improper student support services to discuss their real needs. Learner Management System (LMS) for every ODL institution is greater challenge as the LMS needs several technological advantages to continually check the progress of the learners otherwise most learners with lack of facilities and communication channels automatically lose their chances. In order to mainstream the rural and remote based learners into the technologically advanced supportive service of the institution, lot of efforts needed at the base level to drop such barriers. Evaluation is one of the key areas where the learners need the information on their progress in study which needs strenuous efforts without divulging the existing modular practice with infusion of technologies. Host institution shall conduct feedback study periodically from the learners and other stakeholders to discuss the real problems and infuse technologies to eradicate the problems. Hence, sustainable technological innovations meet pace through specific observations and long-term need based approach at the systemic level. Learning indicators are the key in measuring the success of ODL system and the learners before enrolling into the system needs pre-counselling on the modules of distance learning practices and the use of media and other internet based access for their successful

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