

# **Changing Role of Academic Libraries in the E-learning Environment: Issues and Challenges**

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## **Introduction**

The development of computer and network technology is changing the education scenario and transforming the teaching and learning process from the traditional physical environment to the digital environment. It is now possible to access vast amount of information online and enable one to one communication without the confines of place or time. While E-learning and teaching is unlikely to replace face-to-face training and education it is becoming an additional delivery method, providing new learning opportunities to many users. It is also causing an impact on library services as the increased use of ICT and web based learning technologies have paved the way for providing new ICT based services and resources to the users. Online learning has a crucial role in user education, information literacy programmes and in training the library professionals. It can help students become active learners, and libraries will have to play a greater role in this process of transformation. The significance of libraries within an institution has improved due to the fact that academic libraries and information services are now responsible for e-learning within their organization.

## **The concept of E-learning**

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) .

### **Changing role of libraries and information centres**

Due to the impact of ICTs, libraries are unable to satisfy the information needs of users by means of print sources alone. E-learners and traditional learners now have access to a universe of digital information through the information superhighway. 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. An e-learning environment can provide the academic community with seamless access to knowledge, course content, information resources and services, all from integrated service point. 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. For example, in the traditional model, a librarian provides a bridge between learners and information providers by selecting and cataloguing resources and by providing assistance with these resources. In the new model, the library serves as a facilitator by offering continuing support enabling learners to communicate directly with the publishers and vendors of information resources, and to participate in a two-way effort to make available rich collections of online scholarly information resources (Johnson, Trabelsi & Tin, 2008).

Majority of the academic libraries are hybrid libraries, providing virtual access to electronic resources and services or virtual learning environments (VLE's) while maintaining and supporting use of a physical collection housed in a library building. Libraries can play an active role, helping to find and organize resources to complement courses making use of e-learning in order to provide support to students in their assignments (Sen,2009). Learning resources need to be integrated into the learning experience and student's information literacy skills are to be developed to

support these approaches. Information literacy is defined as “a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information.” Incorporating information literacy across curricula, in all programs and services requires the collaborative effort of faculty, librarians, and administrators. Academic librarians have to coordinate the evaluation and selection of intellectual resources for programs and services; organize, and maintain many points of access to information; and provide instruction to students and faculty who seek information. (ACRL, 2000). Libraries should strive towards the establishment of an e-learning support centre, which would undertake training of the academic staff in integrating the educational technology into the curriculum to provide access to the content

Through Library websites librarians have the opportunity to provide e-learners with accurate information and to free them from information overload. A library web site can function as an information gateway, an entry point to a range of online resources linking e-learners to library catalogues, subscribed journal databases, electronic book collections, selected Internet resources, electronic course materials, and tutorials, and to forums for communication and interaction with librarians. Majority of online catalogs incorporate details of electronic books and electronic journals, allowing users to trace digital and physical collections with one search. Libraries can maintain institutional repositories incorporating materials pertaining to the institution such as conference proceedings, thesis, published papers, lecture notes, video or audio clips.

Social networking sites like Orkut and Facebook can be used as a good tool by libraries to get users' feedback, ranking for services, library notices, etc. In the web 2.0 environment, the sites providing social networking are crucial providing improved library services. Librarians have to be aware of web 2.0 tools and decide how they can be used within the library to provide services and instruction to learners.

Library services should be integrated with LMS such as WebCt, Blackboard, DesireLearn, ANGEL or Moodle in such a manner that a single login makes possible access to all course components, direct links to e-journal articles, interlibrary loan, online interactive reference services and content resources to the LMS (CARL e-Learning Working Group, 2005).

All of the information resources that e-learners need are still not available in the electronic format; many of the valuable research materials are still print-based. Such materials have to be acquired from other libraries through interlibrary loan or by participating in resource sharing networks. Librarians continue to work to resolve issues pertaining to distance delivery of resources that are unavailable in digital format.

### **E-learning scenario in libraries and information centres in India**

In India, academic libraries in particular are struggling to cater to the diverse requirements of the e-learners. Libraries in India are not yet equipped with the necessary infrastructure to face the challenges of e-learning in the broader term. Only a few initiatives with library networking and collaboration, Digital library initiatives, Institutional repositories (IR's) and open access publishing are available in the Indian context. Libraries of IIT's, IIM's , IISc Bangalore, NIT Calicut, University of Hyderabad etc have started introducing services in the e-learning environment. However they

are yet to introduce many services such as courseware, training, content management, web 2.0, etc (Pujar & Kamat, 2009). Institutional repositories in the country open the gates of knowledge for academics, researchers and students by providing relevant information through open access and preserve the intellectual assets of an institution. E-prints of the Indian Institute of Science (<http://eprints.iisc.ernet.in>), Indian Statistical Institute, Bangalore ([http:// library.isibang.ac.in:8080/dspace/](http://library.isibang.ac.in:8080/dspace/)), Digital Repository of Cochin University of Science and Technology ( <http://dyuthi.cusat.ac.in/xmlui>), Online thesis repository of Mahatma Gandhi University (<http://www.mgutheses.org/>), Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi (<http://eprint.iitd.ac.in/dspace>) etc are examples of open digital repository initiatives in India. In addition, several open access journals are brought out by the Indian National Science Academy (<http://drtc.isibang.ac.in/insa>), and OpenMED (<http://openmed.nic.in>). (Chandra & Patkar, 2007).

### **Implications for library profession**

E-learning programmes provide opportunities for professional development entirely through e-learning. Membership in professional organizations such as CILIP (Chartered Institute of library and Information professionals) , SLA (Special Libraries Association) enables individuals to develop their knowledge and skills about specific areas and provides opportunities for networking. ALA online continuing education of American Library Association and ACRL, Association of College and Research Libraries, MIT, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (USA) etc and in India, Flexi learn of IGNOU, and NPTEL, National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (India) provide e-learning modules on different subjects. Virtual communication tools like e-mail, mailing lists, chats, social networking etc have helped to accelerate and facilitate opportunities for

information exchange and sharing of ideas within the library and information communities. But in a survey of library professionals in Kerala it was found that only 23.2% have accessed online modules or E-learning modules while a great majority (76.8 %) have not made use of any of the E-learning course modules for their educational or informational needs.

### **Conclusion**

To face the challenges of the emerging technologies librarians have to develop their skills to design and develop new mechanisms such as portals, digital library, courseware, etc. in order to provide access to resources and effective services to users. The strength of libraries and the library collections depends on the relationships libraries develop and maintain with the creators, publishers, and aggregators of e-resources, as well as with the users, who access and evaluate these resources. Libraries have to redefine their values and services, collaborate with their users, and design their tasks creatively to provide, reference and instructional support to e-learners .

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