



ROLE OF DIGITAL LEARNING IN EQUALISATION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to analyse the role of digital learning in equalisation of educational opportunities for the learners of different sections of the society. Learning is no longer restricted within the four walls of the classrooms. Technological advancements have given learners the opportunities to learn anywhere and everywhere irrespective of caste, creed and colour. Digital learning has brought revolutionary changes in the world of education throughout the world. It gives chance to a learner to learn according to his or her own pace, place and path. It has changed the traditional way of learning. It helps in connecting people to share their ideas, thoughts and experiences. The need of the hour is to encourage the idea of digital learning for equalisation of educational opportunities. The platform of digital learning has the potential to reach the unreached, explore the unexplored and discover the undiscovered. So, it can play a significant role in the process of universalisation of education as an equalising and democratising force. Digital divide is a major challenge in this process of universalisation. The idea of digital learning in fulfilling the dream of this universalisation can work properly, only if the issue of digital divide is properly addressed.



KEYWORDS : Digital learning, educational opportunities, digital divide, universalisation of education, ICT.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a significant role in the life of an individual. It is an instrument in the hands of an individual to solve the problems of his life as well as society. It influences all the aspects of life. Educational opportunities are needed to get proper education. But it is difficult to get equal opportunities to everyone in the overpopulated world with limited resources. Even in the 21st century there are many disparities in educational opportunities throughout the globe. Each and every individual has the right to get equal educational opportunities. Unfortunately, this is not happening. Providing equal educational opportunities is one of the biggest challenges to the governments. In these circumstances the idea of digital learning gives a hope. Platforms of digital learning play a pivotal role in equalising educational opportunities. These platforms have the potential to reach the unreached and to explore the unexplored. Equality of access to basic digital platforms leads to the equality of educational opportunities. In a vast, diverse and overpopulated country like India, it is not easy to ensure the access to the platform of digital technology to each and every individual.

Technology is transforming each and every aspect of life. Hence, life is changing drastically. The pattern of education, economics and entertainment is getting altered. Learning, unlearning and

relearning have become the need of the hour. Digital learning has emerged as a platform where a learner can interact with the whole world. It is giving opportunities to each and every learner to learn in accordance with his or her convenience, to interact with others and to share his or her own ideas, thoughts and experiences with the entire world. It is evolving as an equalising force in the matter of opportunities. On the other hand, digital divide is emerging as a hindrance in the path of this equalisation process. In these circumstances, the government should take the initiatives to reach the remote regions with the purpose of overcoming the hurdle of digital divide.

IDEA OF DIGITAL LEARNING

The idea of digital learning is growing as an integral part of present education system. It can be defined as a web based learning which effectively makes use of the information technology to impart knowledge to the learners. It is facilitated by technology that gives learners some element of control over pace, path and place (Chauhan, 2007). It is accompanied by instructional practices that make effective, creative and innovative use of technology to enrich a learner's learning experiences. It is the learning facilitated by technology that gives learners autonomy, convenience and flexibility to a great extent. It is concerned with the process of using digital tools and technology to create a better learning experience for the learner. It makes effective, creative and innovative use of technology. The digital environment is transforming the nature, pattern and design of learning.

Digital learning provides abundant educational opportunities to the learners irrespective of caste, creed and colour. It does not confine a student to his classroom, but it takes him to the entire world where he is free to explore according to his needs, interests and desires. It creates a classroom without walls, a school without boundaries and a world without borders. Digital learning helps a learner to get connected with the experts, analysts and thinkers worldwide. It makes the process of learning interesting, innovative and imaginative. It helps in expanding the notion of learning environments and ecosystems more than physical space to provide students with more opportunities for meaningful learning.

DIFFERENT PLATFORMS OF DIGITAL LEARNING

There are a number of digital platforms which can be used as tools in the hands of a learner. YouTube is one of the most popular platforms of digital learning where a learner can watch educational videos in accordance to his or her own interests and convenience. Online databases, web based interactive learning, online courses and resources etc. are popular platforms of digital learning (Higgins, Xiao, & Katsipataki, 2012). Digital learning is such a platform where a learner can share his or her own ideas and experiences, interact with others freely, comment and criticize others' ideas and give constructive feedback. This platform of digital learning has emerged as a tool of innovation in the hands of learners of 21st century. In the present scenario it is difficult to imagine a world without Google. Google has penetrated all the walks of modern lifestyle. In the field of education, Google and YouTube have emerged as vital digital platforms where people can share ideas, exchange knowledge and get connected with each other.

TECHNOLOGY AS AN EQUALISING AND DEMOCRATISING FORCE

Development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is changing all the aspects of human life rapidly and drastically. ICT is acting as an equalising force through reaching the unreached and exploring the unexplored. Because of ICT development a learner of remote region is able to connect to the entire world, access to the global resources and share his or her own ideas with the other parts of the globe. A simple mobile has the potential to empower an individual in a great manner. Technological advancements have broken the barriers of inequality, injustice and discrimination to a great extent. Technology provides equal opportunities to its users without any differentiation (Shinkareva, 2006). For example, Google can be accessed by one and all irrespective of caste, creed and colour and it gives the same information to everybody irrespective of the rank, status and power of an individual. In this way the idea of democracy gets encouraged and technology works as a democratising force to bring

equality in the society. The idea of equality is the hallmark of democracy. In a geographically and culturally diverse country like India, it is the need of the hour to use technology as much as possible to bring equal opportunities to every citizen of the country. Widespread access to the internet has created mass accessibility of knowledge on a scale never seen before. Harnessing the potential and possibilities of digital technologies can help us to address the issue of power imbalances which causes inequalities, disparities and discriminations.

DIGITAL LEARNING AND UNIVERSALISATION OF EDUCATION

India is diverse country with a high population. In such a large country ensuring equalisation of educational opportunities is one of the greatest challenges for any government. In this situation there is a ray of hope because of global technological advancements. The platform of digital learning may help to achieve the goal of universalisation of education to a great extent, if access to ICT is made available to the general masses of the society and the issue of digital divide is properly addressed. The idea of universalisation of education is based on the principle of education for one and all without any discrimination.

Universalisation of education ensures the right to education and plays a significant role in the development of a nation. In the journey of converting this idea of universalisation into reality the platform of digital learning may prove as a milestone. Different platforms of digital learning have the potential to reach the unreached, to see the unseen and to explore the unexplored. Technological advancements have turned the world into a global village. ICT development and social media has empowered each and every user. In this process the scope of digital learning has widened. The idea of digital learning has provided various opportunities and platforms to learn from each other in a cooperative and collaborative manner (Higgins, Xiao, & Katsipataki, 2012).

DIGITAL LEARNING AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Usually, quality education is beyond the reach of the downtrodden, marginalized and unprivileged sections of the society. But the idea of digital learning can ensure quality education within the reach of this section of the society as well, if the issue of digital divide is properly addressed. Equalisation of educational opportunities is concerned with the idea of enabling every individual in the society to realise his or her right to quality education. This dream of equalisation in terms of quality education can be transformed into reality by the platform of digital learning. The platform of digital learning not only plays a significant role in the equalisation of educational opportunities, but also ensures quality education to the learners without any discrimination (Shinkareva, 2006).

The platform of digital learning empowers a learner of remote region to go through the lectures of renowned personalities of top most global educational institutions in the audio-visual format. It provides interactive learning content and communication channels to learners and also offers tools to analyze the learning performance. It allows the learners to reach their fullest potential and become successful and responsible citizens, transforming both their lives and their communities. Quality of education must be ensured to fulfill the real purpose of education. It helps in the all round development of the personality of learners and further decides the destiny of the nation.

DIGITAL LEARNING AS AN OPPORTUNITY OF SELF-LEARNING

Digital learning plays a significant role in the process of self-learning. It provides the opportunity to a learner for learning himself or herself in accordance to his or her own pace, path and place. Opportunities of self-learning promote the idea of equalisation of educational opportunities. Self-learning is a voluntary, ongoing and self-motivated process of acquiring knowledge either for personal or professional reasons. The future is looking forward to proactive people, who can take ownership for their own capability to learn, unlearn and relearn in rapidly changing world (Toffler, 1971). Self-learning is concerned with the process in which individuals themselves take the initiative, with or without the assistance of others, in diagnosing their learning needs and formulating learning goals; and identify human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning

ways and evaluating learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975). Self-learning can be perceived as students' self-awareness of their own learning and readiness to direct and engage themselves in their own learning activities (Loyens, et al., 2008).

Students, who perceive themselves as active self-learners rather than passive receivers of facts and figures, become more committed, sincere and effective as self-learners (Leary, 2012). In the present scenario educators are challenged to engage learners in their own process of learning with the efficient and effective use of different strategies and technologies. Self-directed learners need to be capable of self-assessing their own learning needs which may change in accordance with the time and situation. Moreover, nothing is permanent except change in this world. The present world around us is full of uncertainties. Rapid technological advancements are making the world more uncertain. To cope up with this situation, the strategy of self-learning can be used as a potential weapon. And the idea of digital learning can be an integral part of this strategy.

DIGITAL DIVIDE AS A HINDRANCE IN EQUALISATION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The revolution of digital learning has created the excitement in the hearts and minds of the learners regarding the possibilities of comprehensive and free access to educational resources. The platform of digital learning is promoting the idea of equalisation of educational opportunities through internet access. It is reaching to the unreached in the remote region of the country. It is giving equal opportunities to access the online resources irrespective of caste, creed and colour. On the other hand, the harsh reality of digital divide is one of the biggest hurdles in the journey of equalisation of educational opportunities through the idea of digital learning. Digital divide refers to the inequality in access to technology that exists amongst the people because of socio-economic, regional and demographic differences (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014). It is the gap between the internet users and non-users. This digital divide restricts the role of digital learning in universalisation of education. Approximately half of the world population still lacks internet access according to a United Nations report (Downs, 2017).

The idea of digital learning can only work, if access to basic educational technology like mobile, computer, internet etc. is ensured to the general masses of the society. The inequality to in access to technology may be because of poverty, poor infrastructure and lack of awareness. The massive digital divide in the field of education means a great hurdle to the development of the underdeveloped world. This Digital divide must be overcome as much as possible to equalize educational opportunities. The government and NGOs should take initiatives to bridge the digital divide and technology would have to reach the unreached. Unless and until the issue of digital divide is addressed properly, equalisation of educational opportunities would be only a dream.

CONCLUSION

The platform of digital learning plays a significant role in equalisation of educational opportunities through the process of reaching the unreached and exploring the unexplored. It helps in learning in accordance with the interests, convenience and consciousness of the learner. It connects a learner with the world without limitations. Digital learning is the need of the hour. It acts as an equalising and democratising force with certain limitations. It helps in ensuring the quality of education which is essential for the all-round development of the personality. It gives the opportunities of self-learning which may help in transforming the idea of universalization of education into reality. But the idea of digital learning in fulfilling the dream of this universalisation can work properly, only if the issue of digital divide is properly addressed. The world is changing drastically. The nature of learning, designs of teaching and patterns of interaction has changed a lot. Learning experiences are not confined to the four walls of the classroom. These experiences are beyond barriers, borders and boundaries.

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