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Rajesh Das

The University of Burdwan, rajeshdas99@gmail.com

Uttam Kumar Hazra

uttamlib@gmail.com

Sinjini Mukherjee

sinjinimukherjee1@gmail.com

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e-Learning Platform in SAARC Countries

Uttam Kumar Hazra, Librarian, Vivekananda Mahavidyalaya, Burdwan, 713103, India

Dr. Rajesh Das, Assistant Professor, Department of Library and Information Science, The University of Burdwan, Burdwan-713104, India

Sinjini Mukherjee, Research Scholar, Department of Library and Information Science, The University of Burdwan, Burdwan-713104, India

Abstract

The present paper deals with the e-Learning platform in SAARC countries. There are eight SAARC countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Srilanka) but among them only 5 countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Srilanka) have their own e-learning platform for their citizens.

Purpose: *To acquire information about each and every e-learning platform which includes name, year of origin, sponsoring authority, aims, subject area covered, learning path, learning quadrant and type of the courses offered by each e-learning platform.*

Methodology: *e-Learning platforms of each SAARC countries have been studied and filled a questionnaire. The collected data are tabulated in three different tables and analyzed in a significant manner.*

Findings: *India and Bangladesh have started education through e-learning platform in the year 2016) where as Afghanistan and Pakistan have started in the year 2018 and Srilanka has the oldest e-learning platform. edX covers the maximum subject areas.*

Keywords: SAARC, e-Learning, MOOC, SWAYAM, DigiSkill, edX, Muktopaath, FOOE

Introduction: The present valuable right of all human being should be the “Right to education” and the slogan should be the “Education for all”. Now the free education made a remarkable impact in the modern society as whole. Learners from the different areas of the world mainly from SAARC Countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Srilanka) face several problems in time of accessing educational services including learning materials. This is a critical issue in the field of education and this critical situation may be dissolved with the integration of ICT and Education. In this situation many Governments and agencies have implemented such type of e-learning platform so that education barriers are

avoided. To get the benefits of e-learning, only basic ICT (Information and Communication Technology) knowledge is necessary. There are many working professionals, dropout students, housewives, etc. who are not able to complete the education in time, they got the chance to complete or to enhance their learning in this platform. There are eight countries in the SAARC. Each country has their own e-learning platform to provide the services to the citizens of the respective country. The present study based on the following e-learning platform:

- i. edX for Afghanistan ;
- ii. Muktopaath for Bangladesh ;
- iii. SWAYAM for India ;
- iv. DigiSkill for Pakistan ;
- v. FOOE (Free and Open Online Education) for Srilanka.

There is no such remarkable e-learning platform in Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal. Though Ericsson, the Bhutan Ministry of Education and Bhutan Telecom started e-learning project through iSchool and COLUM (Centre for Open Learning at the University of Maldives) provides some paid course on Nursing, HRM (Human Resource Management), Management, Judicial Administration, etc. to the students of Maldives National University and Hamroschool in Nepal for school education (Indiatimes, 29.03.2014 ; MNU, n.d ; Hamroschool, n,d). That's why these countries beyond the study.

Objectives: The main aim of this research enquiry is to examine closely the present situation of e-learning platforms in SAARC Countries. The specific objectives are as follows:

- i. To ascertain the available e-learning platforms in the SAARC countries along with their year of origin, sponsoring authority and respective URL ;
- ii. To determine objectives, target audiences, subject area covered and language of learning for each e-learning platform ;
- iii. To know what type of courses are offered in which learning path and how many courses are offered by using what quadrant of learning.

Scope: There are five e-learning platforms in Afghanistan, such as USAID, ANGeL: Afgan's Next Generation e-Learning, Chisimba Discussion Forum, EATEL (European Association of Technology Enhanced Learning) and edX. There are e-Learning platforms in Bangladesh, namely Muktopaath, Shikkhok.com, Ten Minutes School, Amar Pathshala, Eshoshikhi.com, teacher.gov.bd and eshikkha.net. e-learning platforms Chekrs, Coursera, Digital Eklavya, Academic Earth, The Futures Channel, SWAYAM, etc. are available in India. In Pakistan, there are Upskill, Skillgains and DigiSkill named e-larning platforms. There are mainly four e-learning platforms in Srilanka such as AKAZA, FOOE, KIU (Kaatsu International University) and web Patashala: a self learning tool. The selected e-learning platforms offer maximum courses and also provide maximum benefits to the citizens of the respective country.

Methodology: At first e-learning platforms of each SAARC countries have been studied form the web and filled a framed questionnaire. The collected data are tabulated in three different tables and analyzed in a significant manner. Thus this research study is reached to its end.

Definition Analysis:

edX: edX, a MOOC (Massive Open online Course) provider was founded by Scientists for Harvard and MIT in May, 2012. It is an open platform to launch new initiatives to offer various courses (Wiki, n.d.). It was created with the mission to increase the accessibility of high quality education for everyone from every place of the world. The motto was to maximize on campus and online teaching and learning through research. There are about more than 130 global partners which include world's leading universities, non-profits and institutions (**edX, 2012**).

In Afghanistan it is connected with state-run universities with the technical help of USAID in the year 2018. At the first step, four state-run universities in Kabul and universities of Balkh, Heart, Kandahar, khost and Nangarhar had been linked and the next step, it was declared that private universities will also be connected with this programme (**Pajhwok Afgan News, 14.01.2018**).

Muktopaath: In the year 2016, The Prime Minister of Bangladesh inaugurated the open e-Learning platform, "Muktopaath". In this platform any one may participate in any course from anywhere. This platform provides general education, Technical & professional education and there is the opportunities for lifelong learning. Unprivileged group of Bangladesh may also take part in this platform for professional training and meet the self employment. Teachers, students, young adults, working professionals, housewives are beneficiaries of Muktopaath (**Muktopaath, n.d**).

SWAYAM: SWAYAM is an e-learning platform as well as MOOC provider in India. SWAYAM is an acronym which stands for Study Webs of Active-learning for Young Aspiring Minds and its opening was on 15th August, 2016 (Economic Times, 16.08.2016). Its development lies on the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). It was created to achieve the three cardinal principles of education policy, i.e. access, equity and quality. It offers courses from 9th standard to Postgraduate level in four quadrants – (i) Video lecture (ii) Specially prepared downloadable or printable reading materials (iii) Self-assessment tests through tests and quizzes (iv) online discussion forum for clearing doubts. Scheduled course and Self-paced courses are available here. Nine National coordinators, AICTE for Self-paced courses, NPTEL (National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning) for engineering, UGC (University Grants Commission) for post graduate education, CEC (Consortium for Educational Communication) for undergraduate education, NCERT (National Council of Educational Research Training) & NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling) for School Education, IIMB (Indian Institute of Management

Bangalore) for management studies have been appointed to provide quality materials. Any Indian can get the free registration though, candidates have to pay some little fees to get certificate (**SWAYAM, n.d**).

DigiSkills: On July 8, 2018, The Ministry of Information Technology & Telecom, Govt. of Pakistan introduced the Digiskills Programme to train one million people of Pakistan with free of cost. In first phase it offered the course of Freelancing, Digital Marketing, Digital Literacy, e-Commerce Management, Creative Writings, AutoCAD, SEO (Search Engine Optimization), WordPress, Graphics Design, Quick Books, and these courses were started on 01.08.2018. It is the Pakistaa’s first online learning platform. The enrolled candidates get the certificates after completion the course successfully from DigiSkills Training Programme for free. (**The Times of Islamabad, 12.07.2018**)

FOOE: It stands for Free and Open Online Education. The University of Colombo School of Computing, Srilanka with the financial assistance of SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency) which leads to establish the National e-Learning Center in Srilanka through a four year project in the year 2006. The main aim of the project was to promote “Open, Flexible and Distributed e-Learning Environment to provide effective, efficient, scalable, and economical learning opportunities to stakeholder communities in Universities, Schools, the Public Sectors and society at a large”. The motto of this project is “Empowering free and open education through e-learning”. It offers the courses of Bachelor of Information Technology, Foundation of Information Technology, Srilanka Computer Driving License, e-Srilanka Certification, e-Learning Diploma, Entrepreneurship, Online learnings for e-Governance and Introduction to Archaeology (**FOOE, n.d**).

Analysis:

Table – 1: General information about something narrates the basis of that particular thing. The following **Table-1** describes about general information which includes Country,s name, name of e-learning platform and their year of origin, sponsoring authority and URL.

Sl.No.	Country	Name of the e-learning platform	Year of origin	Sponsoring Authority	URL
1	Afghanistan	edX	2012 but 2018 in Afghanistan	MIT & HU	https://www.edx.org/
2	Bangladesh	Muktopaath	2016	Govt. of Bangladesh	https://www.muktopaath.gov.bd

3	Bhutan	NA but Ericsson, The Bhutan Ministry of Education and Bhutan Telecom started e-learning project through iSchool			
4	India	SWAYAM	2016	MHRD, Govt. of India	https://swayam.gov.in
5	Maldives	NA but Centre for Open Learning at the University of Maldives provides e-Learnings to its students			
6	Nepal	NA but HamroSchool provides e-Learnings for school education			
7	Pakistan	DigiSkills	2018	MITT, Govt. of Pakistan	www.digiskills.pk
8	Srilanka	FOOE	2006	University of Colombo with the financial Assistance of SIDA	http://www.e-learning.lk/node/96

Table – 1: General Information

(MIT = Massachusetts Institute of Technology, HU = Harvard University, FOOE= Free and Open Online Education, SIDA = Swedish International Development Agency, MHRD = Ministry of Human Resource Development, MITT = Ministry of Information Technology & Telecom)

From the above **Table – 1**, it is seen that there are 8 SAARC countries and among them 5 countries have their own e-learning platform and most of them are sponsored by the respective government along with their own URL.

Table – 2: The following **Table – 2** describes the Objectives, Target Audiences, Subject Area Covered and languages of e-Learning platforms.

E-learning platform	Objectives	Target Audiences	Subject Area Covered	Language(s) of learning
edX	To offer high quality Course from form the World’s best Universities &	Afgan Teachers & Students	Architecture, Art & Culture, Biology & Life Sciences, Business & Management,	English for Afghanistan but 16 languages available

	Institutions		Chemistry, Communication, Computer Science, Data Analysis & Statistics, Design, Economics & Finance, Education & Teacher Training, Electronics, Energy & Earth Sciences, Engineering, Environmental, Studies, Ethics, Food & Nutrition, Health & Safety, History, Humanities, Language, Law, Literature, Math, Medicine, Music, Philanthropy, Philosophy & Ethics, Physics, Science, Social Sciences	
Muktopaath	To offer general education, technical and professional education and to provide lifelong learning	Teachers, Students, Youths, working professionals and housewives	General Education, Technical and Professional educations and Courses for farmers	Bengali, English
SWAYAM	to achieve the three cardinal principles of education policy, i.e. access, equity and quality	Students, Teachers & working professionals	Education, Science, Engineering, Arts & Recreation, Humanities, Architecture & Planning, General, Library and Information Science, Language, Mathematics, Commerce, Law, Open Design School	English, Hindi, Bengali

DigiSkills	To produce digitally literate population with marketable digital skills	One million people of Pakistan including Unemployed, housewives, students, young professionals and entrepreneurs	Freelancing, Digital Marketing, Digital Literacy, e-Commerce Management, Creative Writings, AutoCAD, SEO (Search Engine Optimization), WordPress, Graphics Design, Quick Books	Urdu & English
FOOE	To provide open, flexible and distributed e-learning environment	Stake holders of Universities, Schools, the Public Sector and society as a whole	Awareness and literacy of ICT, Languages, Entrepreneurship, Secondary School	English, Sinhala and Tamil Language

Table – 2: Objectives, Target Audiences, Subject Area Covered and languages

The above **Table – 2** reflects that every e-Learning platform has their own objectives, motives of which are almost same. It reflects that the natures of Target Audiences are also same. English is the widely used language for providing education and edX covers the maximum subject areas followed by SWAYAM, DigiSkills, Muktopaath and FOOE.

Table - .3 narrates about Learning Path, Type of Courses, upto date completed courses.

E-learning platform	Learning Path	Type of courses	Upto date completed courses	Quadrant used for learning
edX	Introductory to advance level	Self paced & Scheduled	2303	Video lectures, Tutorials and Assignments
Muktopaath	Introductory to advance level	Scheduled	39 courses	Video lectures and learning materials
SWAYAM	Diploma to P. G.	Self paced & Scheduled	1437 as on 11.09.2018	Video lecture, Specially prepared downloadable or

				printable reading materials, Self-assessment tests through tests and quizzes, online discussion forum for clearing doubts
DigiSkills	Not mentioned	Self paced & Scheduled	Yet to be completed	Video lectures and learning materials
FOOE	Secondary and onwards	Scheduled	40 courses	Video lectures and learning materials

Table – 3: Learning Path, Type of Courses, upto date completed courses

Table -3 of the above describes that edX and Muktopaath offer the courses from Introductory Level to Advanced Level of education where as SWAYAM provides the courses from Diploma to Post Graduate (P. G.) and FOOE from Secondary and onwards . There are two types of courses, Self Paced and scheduled in almost every e-Learning platform and maximum completed courses providing platform is edXand it is followed by SWAYAm, FOOe and Muktopaath. SWAYAM uses maximum 4 quadrant for learning.

Findings: After going through the details of each e-learning platform, the outcomes are as follows:

- i. Two neighbor countries India and Bangladesh have started their own e-learning platform almost at the same time(in the year 2016) where as Afghanistan and Pakistan have initiated their own e-learning platform almost at the same time (in the year 2018) too ;
- ii. Srilanka has the oldest e-learning platform ;
- iii. edX is only e-learning platform which covers maximum (31)subject areas and English is the common language used in providing e-learnings ;
- iv. The Learning Path of almost every e-Learning Platform varies from introductory level to advanced level of education ;
- v. Videos are the mostly used quadrant for learning.

Suggestions: For the betterment of the existing e-learning platforms, the following suggestions are drawn:

- i. Maximum best possible courses should be included in e-learning platform ;
- ii. The number of course should be increased in very platform ;
- iii. Four quadrant of learning is very much useful in this context. Therefore each and every e-learning platform should follow 4 quadrants of learnings.

Conclusion: There is no doubt that the e-learning has made a remarkable position in this modern as well as fast world. E-Learning has made the education easy and time saving. In this present research work, it is seen that edX has covered the maximum subject areas. Each e-learning platform provides services to its respective citizens. The expectations of citizens for education are increasing day by day. It is not possible for everyone to acquire the qualification from a formal institution in all the times due to one's engagement in another jobs or being the aged one, he / she is not able to go to formal institution. In this situation this type of e-learning platform is very much helpful as there is no age bar or preliminary education bar.

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