

Guest Editorial

The Web-based information management has facilitated cross-disciplinary approach to learning. Continuous efforts are made for developing tools and methods for searching relevant, precise, and accurate information from the web. Subject gateways, search engines, portals, metadata, ontology are aimed at enhancing accessibility and organisation of information on the web. Topical issues like web content management, e-governance, open source software, digital libraries are advancing their way in mainstream courseware and therefore institutions of higher learning are increasingly moving to introduce various forms of online instructional programmes to enhance classroom teaching and quality research. In this process the emerging technologies such as WiMax, Bluetooth, or Youtube target at tertiary education.

E-learning is an area which is fast gaining momentum in education circles and has gained acceptance among a wide range of stakeholders. It has provided a new platform for education and training and slowly vying for a position of prominence. E-learning refers to the delivery of learning, training, and education programmes by electronic means and devices. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in general and e-learning in particular provide an opportunity to enhance participatory teaching and learning from anywhere, anytime. E-learning facilitates group work, encourages self-study methods, and enables the students to maintain an electronic portfolio of what they have studied, giving them a chance for continuous improvement. It also removes the barrier of non-availability of information resources.

The Special Issue of *DESIDOC Journal of Library and Information Technology (DJLIT)* on e-learning covers seven papers, contributed by experienced library professionals and researchers in the country. The representation is from academic, research, public sector undertakings and corporate sector, thus covering a range of issues pertinent to each field. The focus is on unfolding the various dimensions of e-learning, highlighting the dynamism and threshold of new opportunities. The topic of e-learning is global in nature having bearing on local conditions. Therefore, monitoring its suitability is equally important in the present context.

Gokhale and Chandra in their paper on Web 2.0 and e-learning have examined the features of Web 2.0 in the context of present social systems and tools that are commonly employed for e-learning. Library 2.0 is the immediate offshoot of Web 2.0, which has changed the purview of information management. The wider perspective of e-learning is built on variety of documents wherein role of libraries and librarians is more precise as enablers, besides providing universal learning opportunities. Library schools in India can play a pioneering role in shaping the career of next generation (n-gen) librarians by providing an added dimension to the teaching and learning process, as this is a beginning of a new horizon. In another paper contributed independently by Chandra, the efforts done at national and international level in the field of geosciences have been covered with specific case studies on the subject domain. The efforts in e-learning of the Digital Library of Earth System Education (DLESE) are highlighted, which represent an approach to increase user involvement in the growth of educational digital libraries.

The shift in the learning process and its focus from traditional physical learning environment to the virtual e-learning environment and its impact on teaching methods is the central theme of Patkar's paper. The communicational model under Marshal McLuhan framework has been well presented by him. He remarks that the asynchronous communication, underlying e-learning must be used with caution and the role played by the librarians in the near future will be a crucial one for the profession.

The emerging pedagogical approach of e-learning due to explosion of knowledge has been well illustrated by Pujar and Kamat. Some of the steps taken by libraries in India and different parts of the world in building a roadmap of e-learning have been explored in their paper. Some important issues such as establishing standards for seamless resource discovery, need for collaborative efforts, cost factor, access to electronic resources, content management have been covered while emphasising the need for service-oriented approach.

Creative writing is somewhat an untapped area in the library science profession in India. It is a direct manifestation of an author's or poet's imagination on a variety of literary forms that is convertible in an audio-visual and electronic form. There is no age bar, nor any barrier for creative writing. The dynamism offered by e-learning in the hypertext environment for creative writing has been highlighted by Rajaram with a list of useful websites for the same.

Kumbhar has compared traditional education in LIS with e-learning, pointing to the fact that Management of Change is the key factor, if tools of e-learning are to be successfully employed in LIS education. With the changing workflow, today's librarian is expected to do multi-skilled jobs wherein grasping a new technique within shortest possible time is possible through e-learning. A brief overview of some e-learning initiatives in LIS is a noteworthy feature of his paper.

Date and Walavalkar in their joint paper have presented a case study of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) initiatives at an organisational as well as at library level. Their focus on e-learning is aimed at building up competency among the library-team members to stand in the technology-driven corporate sector. Efforts of corporate Sector for imparting training to employees through e-learning model have cut across through geographical and cultural boundaries and proved to be cost-effective too. Their experience with WebEx tool is worth an example which other libraries can experiment with.

The central focus of all the papers on e-learning clearly points out to the fact that a right combination of approaches with regards to education, e-learning, and development in ICT would probably be needed to handle the complex and heterogeneous educational system in India.

At a global level, the online education market is showing an upward trend since it is learner centered and based on 'anywhere, anytime' model. Time has now matured enough to modify our role from teacher to a facilitator, to guide the students to be more critical and interpretative in their thinking. Social networking systems will play a key role in the future educational environment. It requires educators to develop new models of instructional design and pedagogy. The content of the traditional curricula will have to be suitably modified so as to develop new array of skills, and the classroom teaching will have to be stylised more for e-learning courseware.

However, electronic courseware or e-learning is only one additional tool for training the students in higher order of learning to facilitate conceptual and critical thinking skills. It should not become the primary or central focus of an educator, nor is it aimed to completely replace the existing teaching methods. The current Special Issue of *DJLIT* on e-learning would, therefore, be useful in presenting a snapshot on a topic which is global in its characteristic and would sensitise the stakeholders. The views expressed by the contributors in their articles are entirely their own.

I am grateful to Dr A.L. Moorthy, Director DESIDOC for inviting me to be the Guest Editor of this Special Issue. I am also thankful to all the contributors for their support and cooperation. It is hoped that e-learning movement goes a long way.

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