

E-learning – exploring its potential in Nepal

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Objective:

This paper aims to explore effectiveness of e-learning in Nepal by analyzing its benefits to the country and hurdles in its implementation

1. Introduction to the condition of e-learning in Nepal:

E-learning includes all learning (be it formal or informal) carried through electronic delivery. The use of web-based teaching materials, multi-media CD-ROMs, e-mail, educational animation etc. have all been used and being used extensively in developed countries for the learning purpose. However, the concept is somewhat new to the developing country like Nepal. Nepal's education system relies mostly on the traditional approach to learning, though in recent years e-learning is being adopted in Nepalese cities.

It has not been long since the Government of Nepal realized the importance of ICT and placed "Development of ICT" in its priority list. Nepal is a very young player in the field of ICT. E-learning, thus, is still at infancy. Nepal wants to exploit e-learning for the development of competitive human resource and for building knowledge-based society. It sees e-learning as a tool to bridge the gap between the education level of city-dwellers and that of people living in rural areas.

2. Benefits of e-learning to Nepal:

80% of the total population of Nepal lives in rural areas where the number of educational institutes is very low and those too overcrowded. Shortage of teachers and lack of effective teaching methods complicate the problem. E-learning appears to be an effective solution to this. With the use of e-learning, any number of individuals can access learning materials from any place. It will not only solve the above mentioned problems but also reduce the migration of villagers, seeking good education, to already over-crowded cities. Consequently, there will be enough competent manpower in villages that can work for uplifting rural areas of Nepal. Through e-learning, we can literate and educate those people who do not prefer traditional teaching-learning style.

E-learning will also benefit people living in urban areas. When utilized effectively, e-learning can enhance an individual's knowledge and skills. Many people in cities want to study further while continuing their job. However, they are inhibited from doing so because almost all universities in Nepal do not provide part-time education or any other form of education for working people. E-learning can cater to the needs of such people enabling them to pursue higher education and training at their own pace, sidelining the hazards of responsibilities and other commitments on their education.

3. Hurdles in implementation of E-learning in Nepal:

Implementation of e-learning will not be an easy task in Nepal. One reason for this is- lack of basic infrastructure like telecommunications and electricity in most parts. Only 45% of total Village Development Committees (VDCs) have access to telecommunication facilities. Electricity supply is limited to about 18% of the total population (in case of rural population, it is only about 5%) Other reason is- 38% of the total population of Nepal is below poverty line. Since the income-level of rural people is low, they can not afford equipments, like computers, that facilitate e-learning. Another barrier is - concentration of ISPs in major cities. Next one is – literacy rate of Nepal: 58% of male population and 22.8% of female population. Huge population is still illiterate, or lacking in good knowledge of English, or lacking in the skill of accessing and using e-medias (like computers). Since e-learning entails all these and since there is a shortage of relevant materials in local languages, a barrier is created between e-learning and most of the Nepalese people. Another hurdle is – adverse geographic condition of Nepal. It is very difficult to connect villages and rural areas of Nepal because of geographical obstacles.

4. Recommendations for implementing e-learning in Nepal:

- All the barriers, like lack of electricity, telecommunications and internet facilities, that hinder the growth of e-learning should be gradually eliminated.
- The Government of Nepal should formulate new policies and amend the policies that are curbing the growth of ICT.
- E-learning should be encouraged by incorporating its use in all educational courses and organizations.
- Different technology should be used in different areas of Nepal since the diverse geographic conditions form a hindrance in the process of connecting rural areas and villages.
- Government should provide free access to the internet services and computers in several locations of rural areas so that they can benefit from e-learning.

5. Conclusion:

Cost involved in the implementation of e-learning (cost of infrastructure development, connection, training people etc.) seems very high. Nevertheless, in the long run, the benefits of e-learning will certainly outweigh the costs involved in its implementation, Nepal should utilize e-learning gradually to all parts of the country for its overall development.