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## Need of Virtual Learning Environment for Educating Library & Information Science

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### **Abstract**

*We learn things when we study but understood them when we do it practically. Slowly education system understood this need and many of the areas are revamped and new student centric and project based learning are introduced in the existing curriculum. With regard to the other fields, Library and information science (LIS) profession, its curriculum and learning approach should be transformed to new Information and communication technology (ICT) based style of teaching and learning. Virtual learning environment (VLE) is one of the best solutions to get quality out of the education and to produce more gen ready information specialist and not merely librarians. This paper endeavours to discuss the need of VLE in the present LIS education, its pros and cons and also some issues that one will face while implementing it for university, college, or any educational institute.*

**Keywords:** Virtual Learning Environment, VLE, Library and Information Science, Library and Information Science, Open University, Education, Information Specialist

### **1. Introduction**

According to Ministry of Human Resource Development Report of the Union Government of India, India has more than 620 universities. Among these, 178 are privately managed, 7 universities are exclusively for women. In addition to 1 Central and 13 State Open Universities, there are 95 Dual Mode universities, which offer education through open and distance mode. There are 225 affiliating universities and these have 32,974 colleges for various scheme. Out of these there are 118 universities that offer library and information science (LIS) course as a regular course. Apart from the regular universities and colleges, there are number of privately managed and other government universities that offer education through correspondence/distance education mode. There are 161 universities approved by Distance Education Council, and also apart from these, there

are plenty of privately running institutions and learning centres. These centres not only bestowed with discrete courses but also diversified in various subject areas. These universities and institutions are dignified and catering to the needs not only of the teachers, students, but of everyone associated with them.

As far the world scenario, according to ALA report devised by Prof. Tom Wilson, there are about 600 universities that offer Information Science as a course subject. Library science education in India existed since late 19th century. After the establishment of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in 1985, which provide library science education as a distance mode, this field gained momentum and many other colleges and institute initiated this. As on present number of students who pass this course through distance education mode is much higher than them who pass through regular mode. Various studies carried out earlier and available which depict that growth of library and information science education proliferating every year. It seems



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the merger of word information science to earlier library science allured students and they get attracted. Moreover, it opened more job opportunities and other career options for students also.

## 2. LIS Education In India

In India there are 118 universities that offer library and information science (LIS) course as a regular course. Certificate course, Diploma, Bachelor's and Master's Degrees, M.Phil. and Ph.D are the different levels for LIS education in India. The University Grants Commission in India formulates the Model Curriculum of the Subject. Number of committee been appointed by UGC from time to time towards framing the guidelines and syllabus. The Ranganathan committee on Library Education(1960); Kaula Committee on Curriculum Development in LIS Education (1990); and Karisiddappa committee on Curriculum Development (2001) have recommended offering LIS education at two levels- Bachelor's and Master's each of one year duration. The UGC Model curriculum (2001) recommended with option that universities may opt for offering either two year integrated M.L.I.Sc course after Graduation or B.L.I.Sc and M.L.I.Sc each of one year duration. In India, LIS education is imparted through more than 118 universities and institutions. A total of 105 universities provide Bachelor's (B.L.I.Sc) courses, 78 universities provide the Master's (M.L.I.Sc) courses, 21 offer two-year integrated courses, 16 universities provide M.Phil, 46 universities provide Ph.D., 2 universities provide D.Litt Degree. Besides, the National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR), New Delhi and Documentation Research and Training Centre (DRTC), Bangalore provides Associateship courses which are equivalent to M.L.I.Sc degree.

Out of the 14 Open Universities, five are offering LIS courses at Bachelor's and Master's Level. Nalanda Open University Offers LIS course at the Certificate level and Kota Open University, Rajasthan offers LIS education as PG Diploma Course. In addition, IGNOU offers PDLAN – one year PG Diploma course in Library Automation and Networking. Ph.D. is being offered by IGNOU since 1996.

With such huge data, it can be visualised that there is a boom for LIS education in India and after the merger of information science to the earlier library science, many universities also updated their curriculum and introduced computers literacy at the basic level in diploma courses and at advance level in the Masters courses. One more elevation eventuated in the field of education sector was with the implementation of e-learning and virtual learning portals. At present, many of the universities opted out for virtual learning platform and e-learning portal for its students. Though there is stupendous surge in the number of such institutions, but more aggrandizement has been seen in the number of students that are enrolled for such centres. Most of such centres are using Internet and other electronic revolutionary media also for disbursing education. One of the means of education that has been propagated with internet revolution is e-learning. With e-learning, such learning centre metamorphosed to electronically deliver the content or study material to the students irrespective of their geographical location. E-learning has also given plethora of such other benefits to the users. One more term that hovered with e-learning is virtual learning. Both these terms sometimes also used interchangeably. Virtual learning<sup>4</sup> gave students the amenity of learning from their homes, and also kept the costs associated with travel, buying books, etc. expeditiously,

provides students centric learning, allows students to select courses based on interest and passion, and also endowed to download the course material, apart from several other perks and facilities also.

### 3. What Is Virtual Learning Environment?

Virtual Learning Environment provides a platform to organise online subject and course related material for students, faculties, and other registered members. VLE platforms allow content management, curriculum mapping and planning, assessment and personalization, learner engagement and administration, and resources and tracking of progress and achievement, communication and collaboration. Internet learning, distributed learning, network learning, online learning, tele-learning, e-learning, computer assisted learning, distance learning, web-

based learning, federated learning, are some of the terms that are homonym to the term virtual learning. They are somewhere used interchangeably. The VLE uses internet/intranet to get and provide access to learning material, and to interact with the faculties and the learners/students. The term virtual added to the VLE sometimes give the impression that is the material is pragmatic or conceptual or if it is not really available. It is called virtual learning as the material is available through computers. Figure 1 shows some of the elements of VLE. The list is not exhaustive, but could possibly include many other similar also. VLE is not a new technology, but it is the requirement of present time, that it should be implemented and to be used by everyone for providing as well as to access the material related to the concerned subject.

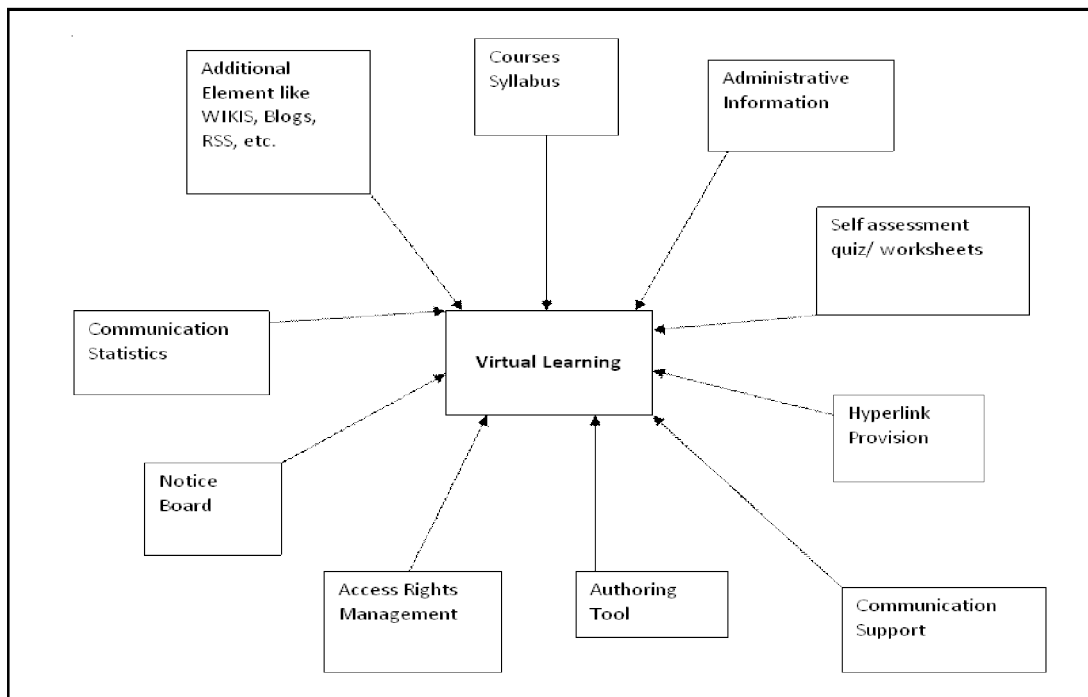


Figure 1: Elements of VLE.

A VLE provides package of learning tools under a common interface and share the data between tools. Though VLE offers variety of features, but all in all they function similarly. VLE carry three functionality dimensions to impersonate disparate interface and audience.

### 3.1 Advantages of Virtual Learning Environment

Virtual learning environment offers various advantages over the traditional learning and also offers number of characteristics through which it facilitates users. Some of its advantages are:

- ▶▶ Administrative information, viz. prerequisites, credits, registration, payments, physical sessions, and contact information can be provided on VLE.
- ▶▶ It provides a bulletin board service where one can get current information about the ongoing course, and also anything which is to be mass notified.
- ▶▶ It provides copies of lecture in the form of text, audio, or video presentations, and the supporting visual presentations
- ▶▶ It offers learning as per the convenient time and place
- ▶▶ It provides faster and cheaper delivery of material.
- ▶▶ With VLE, faculties and students can have better interaction.
- ▶▶ The material can be updated any time.
- ▶▶ Sometimes additional elements like Wiki, blogs, RSS, & 3D virtual learning are also available etc.
- ▶▶ Access rights can be designated profile-wise, i.e. different for administrator, faculty, students, etc.

- ▶▶ It also provides authoring tools for creating recovery document.
- ▶▶ Hyper linking to same presentation can also be implemented.
- ▶▶ For student, supplementary reading can be provided as an adjacent resource.
- ▶▶ Various software platform provides varying features but discussion group, self-assessment quiz, etc. are widely and commonly used.
- ▶▶ It provides various communication media to interact, viz. e-mail, threaded discussions, chat rooms, Twitter, etc.
- ▶▶ Students can register online also.
- ▶▶ With VLE, faculty can manage attendance also.
- ▶▶ The same material can be reused for many courses at the same time.

### 3.2 Disadvantages of Virtual learning environment

Apart from offering number of advantages, VLE carry several disadvantages also. Some of them are:

- ▶▶ It lacks the physical presence of faculty so sometimes students may get demotivated.
- ▶▶ Hands on lab activities would also be difficult to simulate in a virtual class.
- ▶▶ Students who have poor computer skills may not find the complexities attached to the virtual learning attractive and would not appreciate to use.
- ▶▶ Last but not the least one should be connected to the Internet. Some lectures needs downloading also to view, so slow speed of Internet may cause students to irritate and he/she may lose concentration, attention, and ultimately interest.

#### 4. VLE as E-Learning Portal

Many large educational institutes are using Virtual learning environment (VLE) software and e-learning modules for knowledge management, training and assessing their employees or students. Virtual learning software features help organizations and educational institutions in monitoring the efficiency of the institute's training and education system<sup>5</sup>. There are numbers of software available through which such type of e-learning or virtual learning ambience can be created. These software/educational resources are available on Internet also. Some of them are proprietary. But many open access VLEs and e-learning software are also available through which an educational institute can create tutorial and classroom type atmosphere. Open access available educational resources provide much of the benefits that proprietary or commercial software are providing. Though Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (i.e. MOODLE, one of the open access virtual learning software) and its latest versions already got its place in the education industry, but there are many other such open access software available which are equally facilitated and full of many other utilities. Some of the open access VLE or educational resources available on Internet are:

- ▶▶ ATutor
- ▶▶ Dokeos
- ▶▶ ILIAS
- ▶▶ Sakai
- ▶▶ EFront
- ▶▶ Claroline
- ▶▶ Chamilo
- ▶▶ OpenSIS
- ▶▶ DotLRN
- ▶▶ Opigno

Many of these open access educational resources are also Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM) compliant. SCORM is an aggregate of standards and specifications that provides uniformity for web-based e-learning and provides a common platform to incorporate content from different demography and geographical areas. These resources are fully equipped with benevolent features and make the onus easier for students as well as for faculties.

#### 5. VLE for LIS

It has already been discussed that LIS field got boom since last few years. Many fresh students are being enrolled for this and many are taking for professional up gradation. To improve the quality of LIS education and to make gen next ready for future, there is need to introduce more ICT based chapters at all levels of LIS education. To get students more handy with computers, VLE should be imparted in LIS colleges, universities, and all LIS education centres.

As the fact of today, librarians are no more librarians in the present era. If they have not metamorphosed themselves as information specialist, then they may be losing their existence. Librarians have to think above only librarianship and have to absorb computers not only at the basic level, but also at advance level in their education. The syllabus should be revamped, get makeover and must integrate computers with library. VLE should be implemented and students should be motivated to adopt it. VLE can further benefit LIS students. Some of its for LIS are:

- ▶▶ To meet demands of future
- ▶▶ To increase the quality of LIS education and ultimately good output of LIS students

- ▶▶ It may create more job opportunities as they are well equipped as information specialist
- ▶▶ VLE may strengthen their choice to use e-publishing and e-reading, the favourite of today
- ▶▶ With VLE, students would be ready to face challenges
- ▶▶ Use of VLE in LIS will not only create impact on students, but would transform their outlook of looking this profession more above just the issuing and returning of books
- ▶▶ With VLE, more web-based courses could be integrated with the present syllabus
- ▶▶ Certainly VLE is far above the traditional learning so it may attract more and student enrollment.
- ▶▶ With VLE, students can get more online information skill
- ▶▶ With VLE students can have more practical exposure to knowledge organization, management, delivery, retrieval, etc.
- ▶▶ With VLE, students can get better exposure to managerial activities of libraries and knowledge centres also
- ▶▶ Any new workshop/conference/seminars/lectures' presentation related to LIS can be uploaded on VLE students' site so they can have better learning of subject
- ▶▶ VLE provides more project based learning and computer assisted education which is the need of the hour for LIS students
- ▶▶ With VLE, students can personalize their environment and can have more student centric approach, as VLE carry more of the practical learning approach

## 6. VLE for LIS: Choice for Future

At present, the LIS education curriculum is unable to cater the needs future era for the LIS professionals. For this, VLE may appear as one solution. However to make VLE an ultimate choice for web based LIS education, some issues and challenges need to be overcome. Some of them are:

- ▶▶ Faculty and students have to think beyond the blackboard and chalk style of teaching and learning
- ▶▶ The administrator should give effective training to the faculty as they can handle and manage the VLE of their own
- ▶▶ Before migrating to VLE approach of teaching and learning, the attitude of faculty and students should be changed in this direction
- ▶▶ Training programme and workshops should be conducted for faculty so they can self-handle and manage the questionnaire and confidential report of the students
- ▶▶ The administrator and faculty should be comfortable of using web page designing, multimedia courseware production, HTML document preparation, etc.
- ▶▶ VLE is not just putting the material online, but interest of students and their online presence need to be tracked so up gradation and improvement carried at every step
- ▶▶ VLE is not just uploading of material, but only relevant material to be provided to students
- ▶▶ The server side should be checked constantly
- ▶▶ The feedback of the students should be taken regularly and action should be taken promptly as they are the ultimate users

- ▶▶ Their should always be someone to answers their query, as it would be new to students and they may face difficulty at any time
- ▶▶ Though there are number of VLE software available, both proprietary and open source, so a choice should be made sensibly
- ▶▶ Sometimes an online and live interaction should be conducted between faculty and students
- ▶▶ The VLE platform should be customize keeping student centric approach, i.e. attractive, course related, user friendly, and of course 24X7 active
- ▶▶ An all in all, LIS students may not feel comfortable to use at initial stage, but they should be positively motivated to adopt it for self-learning

## 7. Conclusions

While addressing thousands of teachers and students on the occasion of Teachers' day, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi said, the importance of teaching profession is dwindling in the eyes of youth and the value of teacher and its sheen need to be found out. He always stressed on globalization, ICT and technology. This is the right time for LIS education and its curriculum to be more globalized, ICT based and mote technology oriented. Many of the universities and other higher educational institute adopted it for its various other courses. But as on date no LIS institute apperceived its need and has come forward to implement it in its education curricula. The e-gyankosh initiative taken up by IGNOU vowed a good signal but it just limited with its course syllabus in the e way. Now, more such initiative need to be undertaken in this direction. With this paper, authors conclude that use of new ICT and VLE approach based learning to be implemented by the Indian LIS Schools and students and faculties should be encouraged to produce professionals who can

manage knowledge resources well, act as more of the information specialist and able to stood against any of the possible requirements of the gen next.

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