



INDIA-EU PROJECT E-QUAL

Enhancing Quality, Access and Governance in Undergraduate Education in India
University of Hyderabad, India
UGSCOLR- Report

Undergraduate Student Conference on Online Resources in Advancing Knowledge and Skills and their Implementation, An E-QUAL Project Conference July 23 and 24, 2015, University of Hyderabad

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The Undergraduate Student Conference on 'Online Resources in Advancing Knowledge and Skills and their Implementation' was held at the University of Hyderabad on the 23rd and 24th of July 2015 under the project 'E-QUAL' (Enhancing Quality, Access and Governance of Undergraduate Education in India). It included participants from all over India (including from partner institutions: Ambedkar University, Jadavpur University, Shiv Nadar University, King's College London and University of Bologna). They presented 27 papers on different themes. The conference was inaugurated by the Vice-Chancellor of University of Hyderabad, Prof. R.P.Sharma and the keynote address was delivered by Dr.V.P.Gulati, Head, Business Domain of TCS. Ms. Sarojini Kaul of European Commission and Ms. Manjula Rao of British Council also highlighted the endeavours of European Union, British Council and Government of India in furthering undergraduate education through E-Learning in India.

There were 7 technical sessions and a round table session, all of them were chaired by students with a rapporteur for each session. Each session was opened by a faculty who is a specialist in the related topic by giving a overview of the subject for about 15 minutes. The technical summary for each of those sessions are given below.





Session 1: Education and e-learning across Disciplines

The broad topic of the 5 papers presented during Session 1 was **‘Education and e-learning across disciplines’**. What was basically discussed was if it is possible to successfully mix technology with different kinds of disciplines (from sciences to literature to music studies) and if it is possible, then how well is it being done?

The 1st paper, titled **‘Musical Pedagogy and Digital Cultures’** was presented by **Dibyokamal Mitra** from Department of English, Jadavpur

University.

The objective of his paper was to explore how the rising digital culture affects both traditional and modern notions of musical education. He talked about MOOCs changing the dynamics between the teacher and his/her students. In MOOCs, there is a certain flexibility of the learning pace. But, this choice regarding the learning pace is not always beneficial, especially if learning how to play an instrument. He concluded by saying that MOOCs have the potential to revolutionize musical pedagogy.

The Next paper, titled **‘Perception, Reception & Accommodation of Online Blended Learning in the teaching-learning of different disciplines of Social Sciences’** was presented by **Somnath Mukherjee** from Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneshwar.

The objective of this paper was to explore if the online-blended learning tool, which has helped in the creation of Global-Techno city, is available in the nook & corners of said global-Techno city. He discussed how online blended learning has become the utmost necessity for social science teaching. Curriculum should be modified, new teaching methods should be adapted, students should open up to taking and solving challenges. Government has to be active, versatile, and responsive towards students who pursue social sciences in at the undergraduate level.

The third paper, titled **‘Reception of online and blended learning in sciences, social sciences, humanities, performing arts, management’** was presented by **Sahithi Vinjamuri**, from Department of Electrical Engineering, Shiv Nadar University. This paper looked into the differences between sciences, humanities, performing arts, management etc. and how these are addressed in the online learning medium, the response of students to the online approach, the pre-existing courses offered online by universities and MOOC platforms in different fields and at different levels, limitations that certain subjects face, grading differences and reasons for unpopularity of some subjects. In most cases, it was concluded that blended courses are an ideal solution to many requirements both of the course and of the student.

The fourth paper of Session 1, titled **‘Experiential Learning and Future of Undergraduate Education’** was presented by **Praveen Punia** from Dept. of Economics, University of Hyderabad. It was written along with K. Ramachandra Rao from the School of Economics. This paper examined the role of industry in undergraduate education. There is a huge mismatch between what is being taught in colleges and universities and the knowledge, skills and behavior that business organizations are looking for, in new recruits. Employability skills are lacking due to inadequate coordination between industry and educational institutes. Collaborations, if any, are inefficient between industry and these institutes. There should be frequent communications between the



university and industry.

The final paper, titled **‘On Bridging the Gap: Integrating the Study of Literature with Technology in the Sphere of Higher Education’** was presented by **Srijan Uzir**, from Department of English, Jadavpur University. This paper explored how one can create a space such that technology has a substantial effect on the teaching of literature. The paper argues that literature is viewed with a certain reductionism. In truth, imaginative literature is not merely text and textuality. We live in age of 'number despotism' where essentially everything that is valuable is that to which we can ascribe a valuation. Literature simply does not fit into this realm of numbers and their supposed superiority. He concluded by saying that albeit distant and in many ways oppositional, the realm of imagination materializing itself in Literature, and the realm of numbers materializing itself in science and technology, are not absolutely alien to each other.

Session 2: Critical Review of online learning

The advent of the age of the ‘World Wide Web’ has been a boon, a very upfront one at that, to all the seekers of knowledge. It provides an easy and free access to various sources of information within seconds, it provides information in ways that are fun and easy for everyone to understand, and has the ability to capture any student’s attention (age no bar).

This session reviews the different modes of teaching that are prevalent in the world, namely: Traditional learning, E-learning and Distance education, their advantages and disadvantages.

The first presenter reviewed the two kinds of approaches followed by teaching institutions: traditional and online. She believes that the online based approach is better suited for teaching as the interactive interface is beneficial for the student’s holistic growth. There are many problems students face at school including peer pressure(s), biased treatment, etc. All of this can be avoided, she says, if a student is allowed to learn at her/his own pace, with the incentive being the joy of learning and not marks/grades.

The next presenter was critically analysing the evaluation approaches and the factors leading to a successful online learning environment. She also spoke about the two kinds of approaches followed by teaching institutions: traditional and developmental. She, then, proceeded to speak about the various ways in which focussing on developmental learning is beneficial for the student AND the society at large. She also explained the various platforms that offer educational information and how can they be used to attain the best results.

The third presenter reviewed the methods of teaching but focussed on the levels of acceptance, in terms of teaching methods. He described three approaches followed for undergrad courses in India: traditional, distance and e-learning. He also spoke about a survey he conducted in his college, with traditional and e-learning being considered preferable approaches (depending on the course and comfort level), with the students being quite averse to distance education. He suggested a few measures to improve or *blend* the education styles, in order to confront the various aspects that students would like to be addressed/covered. He also urged the organisers to conduct a nationwide survey to accurately deduce the preferences of the undergraduate students.

The final presenter speaks about the demand for education in India and the cut-throat competition every student has to go through in order to gain access to the best of resources, for whatever reasons. He praises the advent of the Internet as he feels that it aids in an equal and filterless distribution of resources. In his words, “One must remember that education is not restricted to flamboyant degrees, knowledge is not limited to only books and journals and knowledge rests beyond college lectures and campuses”.



Session 3: Accessibility and Approachability of Learners

The third session of the conference included papers on the “Accessibility and Approachability of learners”, encompassing various topics related to learning abilities, various psychologies of learners, techniques used and how they affect the nature of pedagogy, challenges faced by the differently abled and how to cater to their specific needs and also the need for MOOC (massive online open course) platforms, especially with respect to the Indian context.

The first presenter of the session, Kadambari Chebiyam from St. Francis college for women in Hyderabad, spoke on her paper titled “Accessibility, approachability and psychology of learners of every pace and intellectual dispositions”. Her paper and presentation contained an intricately analyzed method of determining the psychology of learners by observing Freudian slips committed by them. There was also a description of different factors affecting a learner’s grasping power and explanation about different learning paces. She proceeded to compare and contrast the learning environment and experience offered by home-schooling to those of public schooling. She proceeded to discuss and conclude the paper with a list of various technological advancements of the 21st century that revolutionized the classroom environment and also its impact on the psychological setting of learners today who have access to them.

The second presenter, Sadiyah Yacoob Lasania, from St. Francis college for women, Hyderabad, presented a paper titled “Accessibility and effectiveness of online resources for the differently abled”. It’s main focus was addressing the various problems that hinder differently abled students in particular. Listing out the most commonly observed disabilities among students, the paper discussed the various challenges generally faced by them. She suggested various ways in which the technology available can be used efficiently to bridge the gap between these learner groups and the fully-abled learners. The University of Washington and Khan Academy were used to exemplify the efficiency with which such measures can be implemented. The need to ensure that such steps be taken was emphasized upon to aim for no student being left at a disadvantage due to inaccessibility.

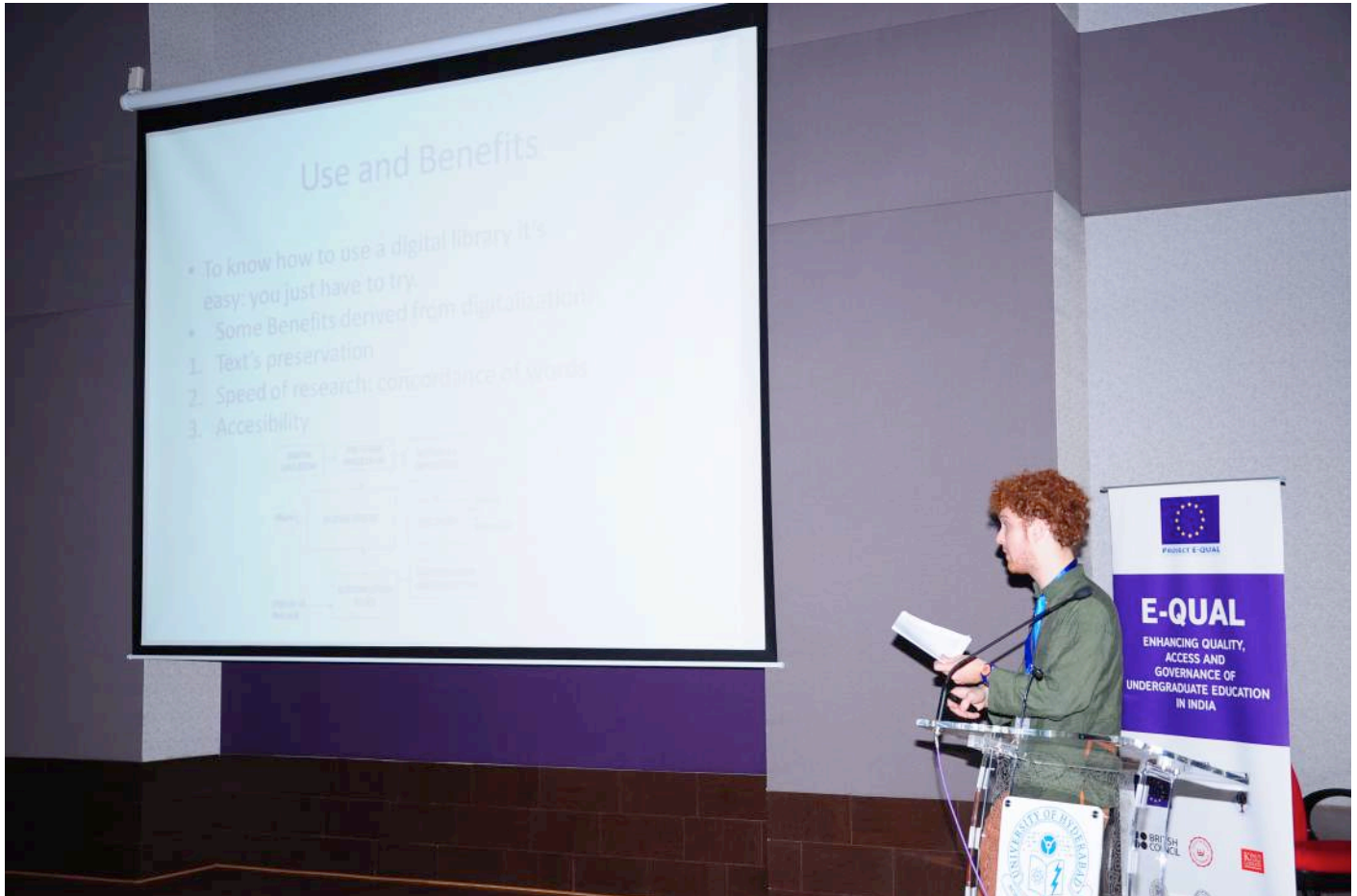
Annabelle Simone Fernandes, also from St Francis college for women in Hyderabad presented her paper, titled “Accessibility, approachability and psychology of learners of every pace and intellectual dispositions” which argues that the method of transmitting information to learners plays an important role in helping build the willingness to learn. She spoke of how different learners possess different intellectual dispositions and the system which caters to only a few types does injustice to the others and creates disparities amongst learners. This paper advocates for a more learner-centric approach to education and describes how MOOCs can be used efficiently to bring about such desired changes in the existing system of education.

Gokulnath Govindan, from Shiv Nadar University in Noida, the final participant for the session, presented his paper, “The need for an Indian MOOC platform”, and spoke about the potential advantages an online learning platform could offer Indian education and help tackle it’s loopholes. Referring to his own personal experience with both online and classroom learning for the same course, he presented a comparative study of the two modes of learning in question followed by the pros and cons of such a platform’s ability to accommodate massive crowds. Addressing the current state of fervor in the Indian society for courses in engineering and medicine, he discussed how an online learning trend can correct the skewed numbers by presenting other real options for school-going youth to consider. He then proceeded to accentuate the need for a customized online learning platform for India. This was justified by pointing out that the linguistic barriers would remain intact if the regional languages were incorporated for the majority of Indians who are not well-affiliated with English. The paper concludes by asserting that despite the demanding nature of the plan to construct and promote an online learning platform, it is a necessary step whose potential demerits are outweighed by the guaranteed advantages.



Day-2

The day 2 of the conference commenced with the session 4 which dealt extensively with Online Education: Problems and solutions. There were six papers presented during this session, each of them dealing with different issues and perspectives.



Session 4: Online Education: Problems and Solutions

The first speaker spoke on *“Digitalizing knowledge: problems and potentiality.”*

Mr. Iacopo Ghinassi gave an insight on digitalized libraries and the four factors derived from the information area. He has rightly noted how the digitalization has come under the hegemony of a handful of institutions and academicians belonging to small number of wealthier nations. Furthermore, he brings home the point that for sharing of resources to take place in a democratic manner, equality and integrated system of assistance is the need of the hour.

The second presentation by Gayaz Ahmed on *“Emerging Role of Online Education and its Importance”* highlighted the prime concept of MOOCs. He reminded of the advantages of online learning- the most important ones being flexibility, accessibility, collaboration and usage of smart phones for online learning.



The quality of online courses and dropout rates are definitely a cause of concern. However, the author has acknowledged the fact that E- learning has provided students today with superior alternatives to traditional learning.

Amaresh and Rineesha presented their paper titled “*Design of Interactive learner- centric E- learning systems for Indian Universities.*” The authors of this paper have put forward the concept of dashboard based courses by including tools like progress tracker, self – assessment etc. The basic problems that the authors have identified in online courses in India esp. NPTEL are of low video clarity, lack of discussion forums, lack of smart phone apps for the websites etc. For better video clarity, more storage and band width are needed. The authors recommend cloud computing and appropriate encoding mechanisms for the above mentioned problems.

The fourth presenter Nisha Jha in her paper “*Who is The Author – Evaluation politics of authorship and readership in online learning*” brings out an interesting comparison between first world authors and 3rd world authors and also suggests how these differences highlight the need for more participation from third world authors. She also questions why should the power should be concentrated with a few countries if this world is a global village. She makes a commendable effort in trying to dispel the notion that India is not just a spiritual country. With the advent of information technology in the country, it has shown its rationality in adopting new technologies.

Yogesh kumar presented a paper titled “*adequacy of online resources for Undergraduate students*” has conducted a survey in his University and has come up with the conclusion that the student community utilizes online resources to the best of their ability along with using conventional classroom learning simultaneously.

The 6th paper “*Secure utilization of resources via Internet between personal devices*”, authored by Andrew Moses and Emmanuel Johnson, introduces us to a better tool than cloud computing. i.e., Secure Shell scripting. Further, the authors propose a concept to connect all the devices and make it as one in order to make online learning even more accessible and easier.

Session 5: Higher Education and Pedagogy

The following report contains the gist of the papers that were presented in the session that was themed “Higher Education and Pedagogy”. The underlying current noticed in all the 3 papers presented was that the gap which should have been bridged by online education has just grown wider than ever.

The 1st paper was titled “Advancing Rural Education System through E-Learning: Challenges and Solutions” and was presented by Sindhuja K. from Vignan Institute of Technology and Management, Odisha. In this paper, she spoke about the current state of rural education where restrictive social mindsets, lack of proper facilities and other basic problems have led to schools being unattended and education becoming stagnant. On an online education basis, the challenges faced were remoteness, lack of access, cultural and linguistic diversity, bandwidth limitations etc. The suggestions presented for developing villages were a trained instructor, interactive e- learning designs, kiosks at village centres etc. The potential solutions presented were universal access to phones, producing the technology for imparting education within India to reduce the costs, providing access to online courseware district-wise through district networks and certain other points. Finally, she also suggested using Post Offices in rural areas to implement Public Internet Access programmes, as they can be set up as well as are mostly present in different parts of the country.

The 2nd paper titled “Intellectual Hegemony of the dominant centres of Knowledge Production” was presented by Indraja Kanaparathi and Ridhima Kolla from St. Francis College for Women, Hyderabad. They spoke about



how there is an increased demand for college graduates; and thus more people are opting for higher education. They also pointed out how a hegemonic gap continues to prevail within the intellectual domain, with dominant centres of knowledge production having a monopoly over the imparting of education. This also spills over into the use and acceptance of online resources and education. Finally, they suggested that State Grants programmes can be designed in such a way so that they appear interesting and relevant to students and family members, and also financially help them.

The 3rd paper titled “Online education: A discussion into disparity at the demise of democracy” was presented by Ankush Goutam Ghosh from Jadavpur University, Kolkata. The main point that could be carried away from this paper would be that of how even though online education and courses seek to bridge the gap between the urban and rural areas and rich and poor, they instead increase the gap.

As the presenter pointed out, there are double standards in online education where the urban people gravitate towards anything that’s urban and refuse to accommodate or ignore anything “not urban” according to their perceptions. The presenter also spoke about how the traditional mode of education is so entrenched in people’s minds that online education is not given much importance and also looked down upon. Finally, he mentioned a few redeeming qualities of online resources and amongst them was the example of PARI or People’s Archive of Rural India; an organisation maintaining an archive of cultural and linguistic resources.

Session 6: Round Table



This session started with a warming lecture of Ms. Manjula Rao, who checked with history to understand the need for online education and how it was evolved. She also mentioned the plans to enhance higher education using MOOCs. She focused on institutional consciousness. She also focused on needs of establishment of online education like infrastructure, content specification and importance of assessment.

The members who participated in Round Table are

1. Amaresh Mohaparta, VITAM, Odisha
2. Shankar, UoH
3. Sadiyah Y Lasania, St. Francis College for Women
4. Tianne, KCL, London
5. Iacopo Ghinassi, UoB, Italy
6. Shaina Sihgal, UoH
7. Supraja, UoH



Amaresh started the discussion with the issue of lack of adequate syllabus that satisfy all. He mentioned the factor that online learning is free from culture, gender and ethnicity. He also proposed to make e-learning intranet based due to bandwidth issue.

Shankar discussed on the benefits of e-learning like student can choose his own required data from the entire material, technology raises with mindset.

Sadiyah discussed on Digital India programme and its lack of awareness. She also raised the issue of urban and rural awareness.

Yacopo discussed on anthropology aspects of e-learning .

Shaina Sihgal mentioned some points as follows:

- i. Student can learn at his own pace.
- ii. Helps in making career decision.
- iii. Technology that is geographically specific.
- iv. Culture is fluid as we keep adapting as we keep going.

Supraja focused on cultural perspective where she shared that online education does not help in culture adaption as there is no physical interaction with teacher and student.

During this there was an interaction with audience which gave following points:

Difference between available online information and knowledge.

Expression recognition system, gesture recognition system to simulate the conventional teaching method.

Continuous feedback system to enhance quality.

Session 7: Multiculturalism and Multilingualism in Online Education

The last session was on Multiculturalism and Multilingualism in online Education and the introductory speech was given by Dr.Aravind Susarla. He gave the two important point of online education in terms of Multiculturalism and Multilingualism. It deals about the traditional education which is a cultural idea and involves lot of complexity. He also talked about the interaction of people among other things and how it became so challenging by this new education system.

Then the first session paper was given by Usman Shafeek: A global paradigm of information society beyond cultural and linguistic barriers.

This paper is to understand why online learning is happening, who is involved and what the most important characteristics are.

An important aspect of learning is through global exchange of data through online resources and reducing the importance of geographical distance as a barrier .

E-learning is becoming part of the mainstream of educational programmes. It became a strategy to tackle the challenges of access, quality and equality in the system.



DEVELOPING A LEARNER– INITIATED KNOWLEDGE

Through the application of online learning, a learner recognizes himself that he is one among knowledge generators for community. The notable feature of the system is the facilitation by educators and learners to move from traditional passive lecture based learning environment to the appropriate dynamically-evolved online community where learners become knowledge generators. Learners are more motivated and able to interact through linguistic and cultural barriers.

Growing of multiculturalism

Standardisation has become the trend of unprecedented growth in online learning community beyond cultural boundaries based on online resources. It contributes to the globalisation of higher education field which leads to the phenomena of growing multiculturalism. It increases competition between institutions by making teaching content and process within the individual institutions visible to a potentially worldwide audience. It also supports the process of the multi culturalism. Online educational resources are likely to make changes in the traditional teaching roles. It can also lead to the evolution of the multicultural society based on effectiveness of more independent learners. Facing the problem of language in online resources:

In the online resources, there is a language barrier and cultural differences and the role of the consumers of the online resources rather than contributors to the expansion of knowledge economy.

The problem of linguistics diversity is not only relevant for the OER discussion, but English has become the modern lingua franca.

Towards multi lingualism in online educational resources:

Online resources that use much animation and illustration might travel well across countries within multi cultural spheres.

Initiatives of such kind of education can bridge the gap between non-formal, informal and formal learning methods.

Valedictory:

The valedictory address was delivered by Dr. R.S.Sharma, Director of Commonwealth of Learning (India), New Delhi. He stressed on different efforts that are being made in the arena of online education by the CoL, Government of India as well as by many educational institutions and private business enterprises. The uniqueness of this international conference is that it is completely organised and executed by the undergraduate students (Integrated Masters) of the University of Hyderabad. The key people behind this whole experiment are members of the Student Committee Mr.Syed Yaseen Ahmed, Ms.V.Mounika Prashanthi, Ms.T.Sai Seethal, Mr.P.Sai Charan and Ms.Aiswarya Suresh. . The management of the conference was provided by the core committee members Prof.. J. Prabhakar Rao, Prof. R. Siva Prasad, Prof. K.C James Raju, Prof. Rajeev Wankar and Dr. Alok Pandey, along with the project staff Mr. Kumar Jagannmaya Jagajeet and Mr.Naresh Gogikar.

The conference deliberated on issues relating to online learning, especially at the undergraduate level. The problems as well as solutions in relation to online education and e-learning were brought out in a lucid manner. There was a cultural programme showcasing the talents of the students of University of Hyderabad and partner institutions that depicted the cultural diversity of the participants and hosts.

Conclusion:

The two days conference has concluded with following issues concerning usage of enhanced technology in



undergraduate education and some of their solutions.

- General issues concerning choreography of technology with different disciplines and their present status.
- Critical review of different modes of teaching including online and their advantages and disadvantages.
- Issues related to learning abilities and psychology of the learners, especially in Indian context, and development of MOOC platforms keeping in view UG students of India.
- Advantages of cloud computing for Interactive Learner-centric E-learning systems, contribution of these systems to accessibility and rationality in adopting new technologies.
- Pedagogical aspects of higher education in India in the context of linguistic and cultural diversity.
- Freedom of online learning from culture, gender and ethnicity, Digital India program and online courses , cultural adaptation of online courses.
- Standardization of e-content in view of multi-linguality and multi-culturality.

