

Digital Education and Assam: A Case Study of KKHSOU

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Abstract

The educational scenario for the last few months has been changed from “face to face” to digital world. India and specially Assam is also of no exception. Due to nationwide lockdown from 23rd March, 2020, all the educational institutions of Assam remains close physically till date whether its higher education institutions/Universities or primary schools. As a result, overnight the educational system has shifted to online mode. Initially, many institutions found it difficult to disseminate education through online mode to its students, but with proper training on the technology with the help of the experts/administration/technicians, they are performing well and learners are also able to learn through online mode. Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) is playing a prodigious role in this pandemic time for digital learning. As the University already has some platform in digital learning, they are providing both synchronous and asynchronous learning to their learners. Deployment of new technologies to make education delivery meaningful are taking place through various mediums like YouTube, Facebook, Mobile App etc. KKHSOU, is not only using the technology based learning to provide education to its learners during this COVID 19 pandemic time but earlier also the university has adopted different multimedia tools like CDs and DVDs of the Self learning materials which were distributed to the learners on regular basis to facilitate them with better understanding about the courses/concepts which were also helpful for learners with special needs. KKHSOU also conducts counselling classes and session through KKHSOU You Tube channel with nearly twenty thousand subscribers. KKHSOU has an official website for its learners and general public from the time of inception. The Website provides all relevant information to its stakeholders. It provides Community Radio Services (Jnan Taranga; 90.4 MHz) to the locality. University has launched an e-learning portal namely E-SLM and all the study materials of the various programmes can be assessed through this portal. To provide easy access to various open access journal across the world, KKHSOU has developed the Open Access Journals Search Engine (OAJSE) which is available for the users from the URL www.kkhsou.in/library/oajse. The university has its own mobile application since 2015 to help the learners to connect 24x7 with the university.

Key words: Digital Learning, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Mobile app, YouTube and Facebook classes.

Introduction

In the midst of the Covid 19 crisis, from primary to higher, education is everywhere segmented and segregated, with public and private institutions serving different needs with immensely divergent resources. The education everywhere has been shifted 100 percent to online mode due to temporary closure of the schools, colleges and universities, due to which there will be a shift of the education system towards online education which is a broader prospect of distance education. In Assam, K K Handiqui State Open University, the first state Open University of Assam has a major role to play in disseminating education in Assam. The key aspect of KKHSOU is to cope up with the pandemic is to ensure that the educational services are being delivered to the full extent.

According to Tony Bates, if we move towards online mode of teaching, students can go and find the information themselves, whether through a digital textbook, video or other resources. The faculty's role then changes from presenting information to learner support and mentorship. As we are talking

about e- learning or online learning, different scholars have defined it differently. S. Naidu (2006) has defined e- learning as intentional use of electronic media and Information and Communication Technologies in teaching and learning process. In general term we can say that, e-learning is the use of networked information and communication technology used in teaching and learning in a very flexible way with one's own time and convenience. The web-based learning environment provides lots of advantages such as quick production, alteration and updating of course materials, location and time independent delivery of course materials etc. But on the other hand, access to computer and internet is a major problem for many. As stated by Goel S. (2012) e-learning can best be defined as the science of learning without using paper printed instructional material.

KKHSOU has already underway to launch its own LMS, various capacity building workshops are being conducted to train the teachers and the counsellors of the distance education to adopt the online mode of disseminating knowledge to its learners. For any project related queries or counselling KKHSOU has made full use of digital platform. However, in case of conventional education, the students are missing the face to face and personal communication with their teachers and guides and they have to make adjustments with online learning through different mediums, in this regard KKHSOU has conducted teachers associated with the conventional mode of teaching.

In this phase of pandemic, as stated in economic times "Digital India vision of the government is emerging as a vital instrument during the present crisis". The lockdown was the only solution to flatten the curve of the accelerating cases of Covid 19 and during this lockdown the adoption of digital technology has fast-tracked. Deployment of new technologies to make education delivery meaningful is taking place through various mediums like YouTube, Facebook, Mobile App etc. KKHSOU as the first state open university of Assam continue in delivering education to its learners through various tools and conducting capacity building workshops for the counsellors and teachers to use the methods of technology-based teaching-learning process during this pandemic.

Methodology

Telephonic interview and secondary data have been the source of information presented in the study. The KKHSOU has more than 300 study centres across the state. To enhance the capacity of the counsellors of these study centres, various capacity building workshop on online learning are conducted by the University and prepare them for online counselling classes. For this study, we have randomly selected 200 study centres and conduct telephonic interview and WhatsApp messages to collect the information about the online activities of the study centres. Data related to the activities of the University were collected from the website of the University and University newsletter "Horizon".

Impact of COVID-19 in assam and the educational scenario

With the nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID 19, (from March 23rd 2020) all the educational institutions of Assam remained closed physically till date. Efforts to stop the viral outbreak included working from homes, or closing many institutions where people could infect one another with COVID19 (Bozkurt, Sharma, 2020). Because of this situation all the educational institutions of Assam started to operate online. The first case of COVID 19 pandemic in Assam was reported on 31st March 2020 and as of 30th May 2020, total positive case is 1057 and as of now in July 2020 the number has become more than 14000. As the situation is worsening day by day, all the educational institutions ranging from primary to higher educational institutions have started operating online with variations of pace and durations by applying both synchronous and asynchronous mode.

Use of online educational tool by KKHSOU

KKHSOU uses the following instructional instruments to disseminate knowledge to its learners during and post COVID 19 pandemic time-

- In addition to SLMs in print form, KKHSOU has developed audio-visual materials related to all the courses from its inception. Earlier the CDs and DVDs were sent to the learners for facilitating better understanding about the concepts among the learners. At present numerous videos are being produced by the university and are being uploaded in the KKHSOU YouTube channel. KKHSOU delivers counselling classes and sessions through KKHSOU you

tube channel with 18.1K subscribers. Most of the Audio-Video programmes are also made available online through YouTube.

- During this period of pandemic, the faculty members of the university are using Facebook as a platform to conduct live counselling sessions for its learners. The social-networking site i.e. Facebook (KKHSOU FB Official Group) is also used for interaction among the learners, faculty members and stakeholders.
- The University has a full-fledged official website www.kkhsou.in for its learners and general public from the time of its inception. In this website, it provides all necessary information to the learners. The Website works as a link between the University and the learners. The website also includes the customised study centre-search facility based on district or programme.
- During this pandemic time as regular counselling classes have been stopped, WhatsApp has been used to interact with the learners of different programmes and to provide important information about the course, assignments etc to them.
- KKHSOU has developed a mobile application “KKHSOU” to help the learners to connect 24x7 with the university. The app has been installed by more than 10,000+ users.
- Jnan Taranga (90.4 MHz) of KKHSOU is the first Community Radio of the North Eastern part of the country. The Community Radio, being a platform for the community for taking up community issues, is also a platform to broadcast several educational programmes that includes debates, discussions, and talk shows.
- With the help of Prasar Bharati, our University has launched a special educational programme namely Ekalavya. It is aired every Saturday from 8.00 PM to 8.30 PM through All India Radio, Guwahati and Dibrugarh. University also offers one-hour live phone-in counselling programme through AIR, Guwahati and Dibrugarh where officers and experts from this University clarify queries of listeners/learners via telephone. The phone in programme is aired every Thursday from 09.15 AM to 10.15 AM.
- To provide easy access to various open access journal across the world, KKHSOU has developed the Open Access Journals Search Engine (OAJSE) which is available for the users.
- University has initiated an SMS and e-mail alert facility for learners regarding any news, events and learner-related information of the university.
- Learners can write emails to any officials/faculty members in university’s general mail ID. Queries raised through to this mail ids are readdressed by concerned official/faculty members of the university. Every discipline of the University has separate email id for redressing the learner’s queries.

Strategies for e- Learning implementation by KKHSOU (during and post COVID 19 situation)

The University has taken utmost care to continue their educational support towards the society. All the admission of the University for the year 20-21 have been in online mode. The study materials for existing learners, their home assignments, e- marksheet, are provided to learners through online mode. Other than this, different strategic measures were taken by the University towards e- learning implementation is discussed as follows:

Capacity building training for faculty members: There was series of webinars and workshop conducted by the University to train up the faculty members of the University with digital era. Topic included in this training program is the use of open educational resources, blended learning, and technology enabled learning etc. to name a few. They have trained the faculty members on a variety of tools which can be used in the classroom to support student learning, ranging from traditional to high-tech options. Examples include Google collaboration tools, Open educational resources, and wikis etc. Depending on course learning goals and outcomes, how instructor can choose to use one or several of these tools to augment the teaching and learning environment in their classroom were also explained.

Training on LMS: The University has conducted a workshop to prepare the faculty members for “Learning Management System” through MOODLE platform. Moodle is the world's most popular learning management system (LMS) also known as course management system (CMS), used by many schools, colleges, universities, not-for-profit organisations and companies etc. to respond to their

education and training needs. KKHSOU has their own LMS named as “e-bidya” and to fulfil the four quadrants of learning, the University is creating the LMS with the help of faculty members and technical support team. Faculty members have started linking various OER materials to the course. These Open educational resources (OER) include textbooks, classroom modules, lesson plans, video content, and other media that are freely accessible, openly licensed, and adaptable for instructional use. “OER” signals, in addition to resources, wider dissemination of educational content that prompts new approaches to teaching.

Online MBA entrance exam: The University plans to conduct online entrance examination for MBA programme for the first time. Because of the pandemic situation, the learners are unable to physically present in the examination, so this step have been considered for the greater benefit of the society.

Open Book Exam: For the first time in the history of this University, the open book exam has been started for various master degree programme. The response from the students are also overwhelming in this regard.

Training on Counselling the counsellors: Two online training workshops have been conducted for counsellors of KKHSOU. They have given training on how to use different online resources for teaching and learning, how to conduct classes using technology etc. to name a few.

Discussions on Mental health of people during pandemic: There was a talk organized by the University “COVID 19 & Mental Health” on dated 11thJuly, two local renowned psychologists to discuss the mental health of the people during this pandemic time and how we can improve our mental health.

Another very important webinar in this time is the International Webinar on “Prevention and Cure of Disease Through Ayurveda in the Time of Crisis” on 21st July 2020. As the domestic violence cases are rising during this period, University has also conducted webinar on gender issues. University has also conducted webinar on migrant’s laborer’s problem, opportunities for skill development and did brainstorming on improvement of society during this pandemic time.

International Workshop on “Design, Develop and Implement Online Teaching”: A three-day international workshop has been conducted where few teacher/counsellors participated from the Asian commonwealth countries. Various issues related to online pedagogy, theories of learning and the online environment, designing effective Instructional strategies for online learning, synchronous and asynchronous communication tools, online learner learning assessment and course evaluation strategies has been discussed.

Conclusion

This paper primarily focuses on using online and mobile based learning (both synchronous and asynchronous learning) before, during and after this COVID 19 pandemic situation by K.K Handiqui State Open University so that the educational cycle keeps on moving without any disruption. K.K Handiqui State Open University has been using online mode of teaching-learning process through e-SLMs, Facebook live classes, Pre-recorded classes, YouTube videos, Mobile app (KKHSOU) and email etc. prior to the pandemic and during this time also and has extended its services in online mode during and post pandemic period. During this pandemic time University initiated WhatsApp messaging system for learners. It will be worth mentioning here that, education through television has again taking its position in disseminating knowledge to the learners. The University is concentrating on creating its own Learning Management System for learners. They have developed many videos and audios to support printed study materials. The counsellors and faculty members were trained to take up online classes and to monitor the online activities of the learners.

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