

Discussion Forum as an Effective Tool for Knowledge Sharing in Online Learning

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Abstract: Learning process has become sophisticated with the advent of technology. Researches are investigating the options of finding out the most efficient online learning models. One of the most predominant objectives is to provide enhanced peer to peer learning experience to the learners and Discussion forum is the tool to achieve it, where knowledge gets transferred. This paper intends to discuss the role of discussion forum in knowledge sharing process in online learning. Research articles from the sources have been viewed and summaries to the relevance.

Key Words: Online Learning, Discussion Forums, Knowledge Sharing, Peer to Peer Learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern world is witnessing the evolution of learning in a digital phase. According to KPMG's research, the online learning market is likely to elevate from 1.6 million to 9.6 million by 2021. From the traditional learning methods, the educators and institutions have digitally moved their knowledge delivery process to experiential, peer to peer and collocative learning. Numerous courses of distinct arenas have been produced by world-class universities and institutions. The primary motive of this advent is to spread knowledge by providing quality education online. One of the most predominant aspects of the modern learning is, learn and share the knowledge in a structured way. Discussion forum is the most effective tool to achieve the objective of such learning. Discussion forums not only enhance learning but also facilitates social interactions, generate problem-solving methods and develop knowledge base (Qiu & Mcdougall, 2013).

II. ONLINE LEARNING

Online learning in India has become an integral factor for learners across different stages of their career. digitalization in learning has been considered as the most effective way of acquiring knowledge (Ratsoy, 2011). There are several factors which have paved the way for the evolving online learning such as penetration of internet users and smartphone market, initiatives and policies by Government, institutions of national importance, central, state and private universities, increasing demand for modern pedagogy and market expectations etc.

Globally, 730 million people have been predicted to be the internet users by 2020 and India is likely to secure the second place after United States of America. Among the predicted

sample, there is a big size of potential learners for the e-learning market with the educational requirements. The Government of India has also initiated several programmes to emerge the knowledge-based society through "Digital India" and "Skill India" movements. SWAYAM, one of the most vibrant platforms run by the Government where many national importance institutes and universities such as IITs, IIMs, IISc, NCERT, IGNOU, and many central and state universities produce and run their online courses of distinct disciplines.

According to the World Bank Report, 69% of the jobs in India is under alert due to the automation in the sectors. Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence have been the most predominant brunt behind the layoffs. United nations Development Programme has found that Indian economy would face a job dearth in next 3 decades. Also, the programme has found that the unemployment arises at fast pace because of the imbalance between the education and required skillset. Based on all these factors, it is decisive for the students, job seekers, working professionals and educators to enhance and extend their skillset to advanced courses and specializations.

In this context, education has become wider in terms of the emerging new fields of specializations and the expectation of global market on manpower is relatively high and upgraded. To meet the markets expectation, learners of different roles and in distinct stages of career such as students, professionals and entrepreneurs etc., seek education online for sustaining themselves in the competitive setting. On understanding the markets' and learners' expectations, the institutions and educators produce online courses according to their expertise. These courses vary from the basics to advanced conceptual delivery. Governments of countries, with immense understanding of future requirement, initiate platforms and intimate opportunities on providing education online.

III. ADVANTAGES AND FEATURES OF ONLINE LEARNING

Online learning does not only provide knowledge but also serve various purpose and advantages. Some of those are as follows.

- Flexible for time constrained learners
- Global learning access – one national can take up the courses of other country's

- Diverse social connects (networking opportunities)
- Access to experts
- Cost efficiency
- Verified certification and credits
- Helps in career advancement
- Update trends and techniques etc.,

Some universities and institutions mandate their students to take up few online courses for credit transfer and as a part of their course completion. Online learning has many features which traditional learning methods do not possess and those are as follows (Sabari & Naresh, 2018).

- Access to standard course contents, materials and readings anytime anywhere
- Flexible on avoiding uninterested contexts and learning at own pace
- Creating virtual study groups for brainstorming
- Assessing the performance through assignments and assessments
- Online forums to enrich knowledge and share the same
- Developing self-discipline by managing time etc.,

There are many institutions which are coming up with blending online and offline learning models. The ultimate advantage of these online courses is creating and adding values and the online discussion forums act as the platform to serve such purposes.

IV. ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUM AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Online discussion forum is “a platform where group of learners from diverse characteristics but with similar interest express their thoughts, views and ideas etc., on certain context”. This is one of the most important features on any online learning as it not only enhances learning but also generates meaningful and expertise knowledge (Majid & Tina, 2009). The primitive characteristic of these forums is its learners who are from different countries and the mix of such population entails different types of information on one context from different perspectives. The features of inserting the photographs, audio files and videos helps the learners to share the information effectively, as pictorial representations are more likely to impact the knowledge acquirement process. It creates equal opportunity to all the learners to participate and acquire knowledge in a structured way and thus, conceives collaborative knowledge-building process (Laurens & Huggins, 2013). It extends the role to mould the learners to think critically, reflect and understand the concepts in a better way than learning alone (Augustsson, 2010). For those who are introverts, it helps them to feel connected with others (Majid, et al., 2010).

Knowledge sharing is the process of exchanging information or understanding between individuals or communities and the transfer of information happens only when there is a receiver who intends to acquire it. Knowledge sharing is more

effective when it is performed in groups as the information reaches to many people. In online learning perspective, discussion forum acts as the phase to perform such knowledge transferring process and helps in effective learning (Hertenstein & Platt, 2010). Some discussion forums are activity based – where learners work in the backend and contribute to the forum, discussion based – where the forum members discuss on scenarios, debate based – where the learners debate on either thoughts and information based – where one asks a question and the one who knows the answer responds to it. However, the discussions are, it creates the knowledge pool for the learners who are enrolled. Many instructors and educators apparently obligate the forums because it facilitates learners to spend more time on peer to peer learning, which is quite impossible in traditional learning methods. Also, the forum helps to deliver the knowledge with organized form of information. This process helps the learners to identify the ultimate thought for the scenarios and incorporate the same on their purpose of taking up the online courses. Moreover, there are online forum moderators or sometimes the experts, who moderate the discussions and respond with higher note on the contexts. Thus, discussion forum not only performs knowledge transfer but also results in effective various growth opportunities among the learners. Some of those are evident and are listed below.

- Evolving forums in online learning are at the process of replacing the traditional education system to the holistic education system (Sulisworo, 2012).
- Online discussion forum elevates socialization, meaningful discussions and self-development (Qiu & Mcdougall, 2013).
- Students who are pursuing the fulltime courses are likely to be more effective in securing marks when they are active on discussion forums (Campbell et al., 2008).
- Online Learners are most likely to perform well in their career endeavours by exposing the updated information. For e.g., online students perform well in exposing and imbibing knowledge (Green et al., 2014).
- Participation by experts in the forum has led to vast array of information and insights (Kim, 2013).

V. CONCLUSION

With growing competition in the global market, advanced e-learning is the lucrative opportunity for the people who are in distinct stages of their career. Online learning and knowledge sharing through discussion forums initiates lifelong learning (Artino, 2010). Modern learning is entrenched into peer to peer learning and the discussion forums promote active learning process and enhance collaborative problem-solving skills. By asking and responding in online forums, not only knowledge is shared but also reflects on upgraded expertise. Despite academic industry, even organizations encourage online learning for their human resources for enhancing their skills and shape up their expertise through acquiring

knowledge from forums. Thus, discussion forum is an effective tool for knowledge sharing process in online learning. It facilitates a holistic approach of learning from experts, peers and others who have similar interest. As the online education market is expected to grow in a larger perspective in next 2 decades, the moderators and other thereof would strategically look on using this effective tool to enhance the learners experience and create meaningful learning opportunities.

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