

Information Service in E-learning Environments Based On the Faculty-Librarian Cooperation

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Abstract—The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the relationship between library information service and E-learning Environment with the cooperation between librarians and faculties. The paper presents that librarians play a key role in E-learning, including linking library resources and services seamlessly in E-learning, affording information literacy education for students and affording training for faculties.

Keywords—*Information Service; E-learning; Faculty-librarian Cooperation*

I. INTRODUCTION

The booming of E-learning, in which education is provided and delivered through computer networks, has posed new chances and challenges for library information services. The primary value of libraries lies not only in providing collections, but also in their contributions to education. The potentialities of information technology, together with common concerns to improve the information literacy of learners, have been forcing librarians and faculties to work together toward a sustainable future.

It is highly expected that the library should take further steps to seek ways of providing resources and information services integrated in the E-learning environments of students. This paper will discuss and examine library practices and technologies being applied to E-learning environments with a good cooperation with faculties. Challenges and key factors of successful information service projects in E-learning environment will also be discussed.

II. THE DEFINITION AND BENEFITS OF E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

A. E-learning definition

While the idea of E-learning is becoming more prevalent, the question, “what is E-learning?” should be answered. Various terminologies, including “online learning”, “internet learning”, “networked learning”, “web-based learning”, “virtual learning”, and “computer-assisted learning”, have been used for E-learning. That’s why it is difficult to develop a generic definition of E-

learning. This paper will use the term “E-learning” throughout.

There are many definitions of E-learning in the literature, reflecting its different aspect. The following are definitions given by different people and organizations:

Waller and Wilson define e-learning as the effective learning process created by combining electronically delivered content with (learning) support and services [1].

The Australian National Training Authority (2003) proposes that e-learning is a broader concept [than online learning], encompassing a wide set of applications and processes which use all available electronic media to deliver vocational education and training more flexibly [...] the general intent to support a broad range of electronic media (internet, intranets, extranets, satellite broadcast, audio/video tape, interactive TV and CD-ROM) to make vocational learning more flexible for clients [2].

Generally speaking, all these definitions imply that in the E-learning environment, learners could use the internet to access learning materials, interact with the contents, instructor and other learners, and obtain support during the learning process in order to acquire knowledge and benefit a lot from the learning experience [3].

B. Benefits of E-learning

E-learning is flowering in many areas and places. Therefore, there must be a perception that using E-learning provides important benefits. Both students and faculties can benefit a lot in E-learning environments.

For students, they can study at any time, any place. Location and distance are no longer an issue. Besides, E-learning provides abundant learning materials such as courseware, self-test paper, reference resources. At the same time, E-learning affords the chance of communicating for learners. They can communicate with experts and other learners in the field in which they are learning. As a whole, E-learning can foster students’ self-paced learning and encourage students to take responsibility [4].

For faculties, E-learning provides various teaching functions and tools, which is helpful for instructors to save their time. For example, faculties could use E-learning space to make announcements, assign homework, and answer questions from learners. Besides, through quality

student participation in the E-learning environments, it would generate more personal gratification for faculties.

It can be concluded that E-learning offers a number of significant benefits in terms of increasing access to education in a relatively cost effective way.

III. THE ROLES OF LIBRARIANS IN E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Traditionally, librarians are expected to teach students information literacy, including how to access and locate relevant materials and how to surf the internet. E-learning offers librarians new roles to help students to improve information literacy.

The roles that librarians play in support of E-learning are described as follows:

- Afford educational resources;
- Make these resources easy to access and available over time for students and faculties;
- Design special online information literacy modules in the E-learning;
- Integrating library information service;
- Integrating plagiarism software to assess reliability of contents and encourage academic morality;
- Cataloging the learning objects and building repositories;
- Participate in teaching and learning;
- Afford faculty training about the usage of E-learning platform;

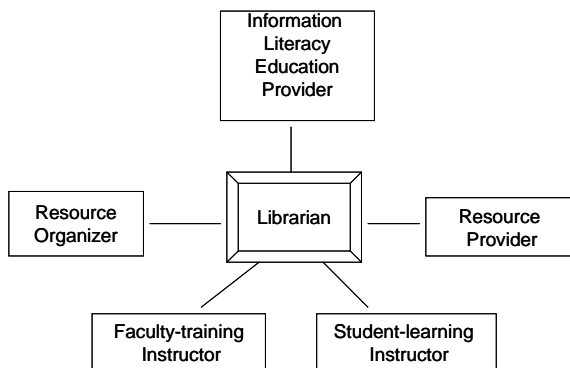


Figure 1. Librarian's role in E-learning environments

As shown in Figure 1, librarians ought to be a viable and productive community player in the application of E-learning. This paper focuses on the information service provided by librarians in the E-learning environments, including linking library resources seamlessly, integrating library information service, affording information literacy education and affording training for faculties.

IV. INFORMATION SERVICE IN E-LEARNING

A. Linking library resources seamlessly

Reading List, as a type of course learning resources, plays an important role either in traditional teaching or in E-learning environments. An investigation about undergraduates' usage of e-journals showed that lectures' web sites or virtual learning environments seem the most obvious place for students to look materials that is directly related to their assigned work [5]. Students tend to access resources through E-learning directly instead of visiting databases listed in the library web site. Therefore it seems sensible to integrate course-related library resources into E-learning platform to satisfy students' needs.

London School of Economics Library (LSEL) sets us a good example in linking library resources seamlessly with E-learning in two ways. Firstly, LSEL adopted Sentient DISCOVER, a type of common software of book list management, to upload reading list data into the E-learning environment. Students can access reading list in real time easily in E-learning. Secondly, LSEL and Sentient Company launched WebCT Powerlink, which enables course designers to add a variety of library resources directly into their WebCT course [6].

It is also important to examine what kind of library resources should be included in the E-learning. We should take the needs of learners and instructors into consideration and afford them course-related learning resources, both in library databases and in free web resources.

B. Integrating library information service

In digital age, the visits of physical library become less and less. Instead, users tend to access resources in the internet with mouse clicking. It becomes important for a library to integrate its resource and information services into users' study and research environment. E-learning offers the library a chance to make that happen.

In E-learning environment, the library could integrate some typical information services such as virtual reference service, resource retrieval and document delivery into the learning platform of students.

University of Ulster Library affords the Library Service Point (LSP) in the E-learning platform WebCT. LSP is a means of passing on user and module information between systems. Person and Module data passed from WebCT is manipulated by the LSP to generate person-, module-, school- and faculty-specific links to various library services, including subject guide, my library account, new resources, and library catalogue [7].

C. Affording information literacy education

With knowledge expanding at an incredible speed, the contents of information literacy education provided by a library become updated and more complicated day by day. Learners need to acquire a large amount of knowledge not only about traditional library collections but also about the usage and search skills of electronic databases, free internet resources and related management tools.

Therefore, it seems impossible for students to master all the knowledge in a limited course teaching. They need to learn and practice step by step all by themselves after classes without the limit of time and location. E-learning knows no boundary of time and place. It is just the appropriate tool to help learners to improve their information literacy outside of the normal classes. With the help of E-learning, librarians could offer guide and help for students any time, any where.

Coventry University Library delivered information skills training through VLE-based platform WebCT. Tutorials including the usage of library catalogue, an Internet search engine, ABI inform and Inspec are uploaded in the WebCT. Each tutorial has a self test associated with it, which allows the students to monitor their own progress and gives the opportunity for a little formative feedback. Besides, hyperlinks to the databases are given to the students at the end of each tutorial [8]

D. *Affording training for faculties*

E-learning application and practice in universities need faculties' great contribution and participation. Uneven level of computer skills among faculties may affect the application of E-learning. The implementation of E-learning without significant investment in developing staff will almost certainly not produce good results. And librarians have built a very positive reputation on campus for training staff and students in the effective use of information resources. So it is librarians' responsibility to train faculties about the usage of E-learning software.

Waterford Institute of Technology Libraries developed E-learning based training program for faculties. It consisted of two half-day hands-on training sessions. One was about creating course content in WebCT introducing staff to the basics of uploading materials into E-learning courses and a variety of communication tool. The other one was about student management & assessment covering the principles of self-tests quizzes and grading. At the conclusion of each training session, teaching staff were encouraged to contact librarians to arrange a meeting at their convenience. Besides, librarians also afford training in response to staff needs, such as using WebCT for content delivery and file type converting [9].

V. CHALLENGES AND KEY FACTORS OF IMPLEMENTING INFORMATION SERVICES IN E-LEARNING

While implementing information services in E-learning environment, relevant issues and challenges that may arise need to be identified and discussed. Those issues relate to:

A. *Cooperation between librarians and faculties*

The importance of good partnership working and integrated planning between librarians and faculties becomes clear during the whole stage of the implementation of information services in E-learning environment. Without faculties' respect and support, it's hard to imagine to implement a successful project aiming at linking library information service and E-learning.

At first stage, it may need librarians' insistence, courage and patience in communicating with instructors. Finally faculties will realize the fact that librarians do have a teaching role and do help a lot in E-learning environment.

B. *Technical issues*

Libraries have already carried out some information services such as document delivery in a special and alone platform. Linking such kind of platform with E-learning system may face some technical issues such as compatibility. It may need extra development and consideration of E-learning to solve the problem.

Another technical issue we need to take into consideration is that some people may have a fear of technology and as a result are not attracted to E-learning. They may be scared away without even first trying to attempt it [10]. Therefore, it will need more popularization about E-learning environment

C. *Time issues*

Much time is required in developing and maintaining E-learning environment. Libraries usually assume other daily tasks of information services. It will be challenging for them to spend substantial time and effort to integrate information services into E-learning courses. Moreover, because E-learning has the function of real-time communication, it will need instructors and librarians to spend additional time to communicate with students.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper presents some current key areas of necessary interaction between E-learning and library information services. Library information services are an essential component of a quality E-learning platform. As the use of E-learning systems is growing fast, it may be the time for the library to incorporate this evolving environment into its strategic plan and move the focus in information services. Collaborating with faculties, librarians could provide ongoing resources linkage, reference and instructional support to students.

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