



SWAYAM: A STEP TOWARDS SELF RELIANCE

N. Shradha Varma

Maitreyi College, Delhi University

Nupur Kataria

Maitreyi College, Delhi University

ABSTRACT

With the Indian government aiming at digitizing India with its 'Digital India' initiative which has a motive of transforming India into a digitally empowered society, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India has embarked on a major initiative called "Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds" (SWAYAM) to provide an integrated domain of online courses with the objective of benefiting a large scale of students who could not be reached by the conventional education system. There is no denial in the fact that this portal provides independency to every learner to make productive decisions with respect to education, as it gives liberty to choose from variety of courses as per one's needs. It also provides an opportunity for all the experts and resource persons to pool in their wisdom and knowledge for the benefit of every learner.

Keywords: Education, self-reliance, digital.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a tool required to improve the standard of living of any individual. It is a necessity for the betterment of the citizens of any society and thus for the economy. In the process of providing education, one needs to take care of the content of knowledge provided to the learners which purely depends on the need of the learners. It is very crucial that learners should have complete say in designing the structure of imparting education. They should have the liberty of gaining all the benefits of the education in any form that suits them. Apart from the liberty, they should have the wider choices to choose the form of knowledge that they prefer to learn according to their career option or according to their employment choice. In short, learners should have the freedom to opt for the form of education, with the availability of resource persons and also the option of learning at their convenience and such incentives have been provided in the form of an initiative taken recently in the education sector which is SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds). This reform in the way of imparting education gives the necessary level of liberty to the learners in the form of choosing the course they like, the availability of the knowledgeable experts to impart the education, wide variety of courses ranging from basic knitting course to technically advanced engineering course. And the most interesting feature of this portal is the convenience of acquiring the knowledge, with the availability of all the courses at just a click of mouse, reason being it is digitally provided anywhere without any physical cost of time, effort and manual labor. It also provides the convenience of acquiring education as per the situation of the learner. The most appealing feature of this initiative is the monetary effort to be put in by the knowledge acquirer is too minimal. The courses provided in this portal are mostly skilled based which helps in getting the required employment opportunities without much delay.

ALL ABOUT SWAYAM

SWAYAM programme, initiated by Government of India, was launched on August 15, 2016 and it was designed to achieve the three cardinal principles of Education Policy viz., access, equity and quality. The objective of this step is to provide the best learning resources and much needed knowledge to all, including the most disadvantaged and neglected population of learners which is to be done through an indigenously developed IT platform that facilitates hosting of all the

courses to be accessed by anyone, anywhere at any time. The start of SWAYAM was initiated with the introduction of NPTEL (National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning), a joint programme of IITs and IISc, which was the first attempt in the country in the field of e-learning and this initiation mainly focused on imparting web courses in Engineering, Science and Humanities streams. NPTEL has developed e-content for 933 Courses, Consortium of Educational Communication (CEC) for Undergraduate subjects in 67 Subjects, University Grants Commission (UGC) in 77 Post Graduate subjects. SWAYAM platform is developed by Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). This program aims at hosting 2000 courses with 80000 hours of learning covering school, under-graduate, post-graduate, engineering, law and other professional courses. All the courses provided here are interactive, prepared by the highly qualified teachers of the country and are available free of cost to the learners. The platform is to provide high quality learning experience using multimedia on anytime, anywhere basis. The vibrant features of this initiative includes the state- of- the- art system that allows easy access of all the learning materials and also involves complete monitoring of the candidates and also the updating of the learning materials, peer group interaction through discussion forum and web conferencing system is integrated in the system to help learners in clarifying doubts. This also has a space for clarifying any doubts regarding the shift of the courses or being a part of different courses. The main purpose of SWAYAM is to cater to the needs of the learners in India especially at the higher level of education and this was thought long back in 2009 with the founding stone laid with the launch of National Mission on Education through ICT (NMEICT). Under the SWAYAM initiative all the contents developed under NMEICT are being repurposed and being made MOOCs compliant. As one of the pillars of the 'Digital India' Initiative of Government of India, SWAYAM seeks to bridge the gap existing for learners who have not been able to join the mainstream of the educational system and have hitherto remained untouched by the digital revolution. In SWAYAM, the main idea is to impart education irrespective of the distance between the learner and the teacher and also independent of the all time availability of the knowledge giver thus focus is on developing MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). MOOCs has brought about a major change in the higher education scenario world over, by providing learning opportunity to anyone, anytime, anywhere having access to Internet. These are in fact seen as Internet equivalent of open and distance learning wherein, thousands of participants can

enroll from anywhere in the world. In India where education sector is grappling with the problem of low enrolment ratio in higher education because of lack of basic educational infrastructure which is basically due to the problem of resource crunch in setting up of physical infrastructure and the issue of accessibility of educational opportunities to the masses, MOOCs cater to the Indian requirements and helps in addressing the issue. These limitations of the ‘brick and mortar’ campuses in ensuring accessibility for different kinds of learners’ needs are pushing ICT enabled education into the limelight. SWAYAM, being the ICT enabled initiative in education sector, attracts students of all ages because of the following reasons: offering low cost learning, flexibility, “anytime, anywhere” learning, individualized learning, just in time teaching, and overcoming the barriers of physical distance, time and socio-economic circumstances. SWAYAM is envisaged as a web and mobile based interactive platform wherein just under one roof, courses ranging from High School to University level are being hosted that too without any cost.



Main page of SWAYAM Website

It has been structured that the courses hosted on SWAYAM will be in 4 quadrants –

(1) Video lecture,

(2) Specially prepared reading material that can be downloaded/printed

(3) Self-assessment tests through tests and quizzes, and

(4) An online discussion forum for clearing the doubts.

The way the courses would be provided on this forum focuses on making all the possible ways of imparting knowledge available to the learner whether it being the video availability or being the availability of handwritten content and also the provision of assessment for self evaluation of the learner in the process of his/her learning. To make one more clear with the topic or the content, discussion forum has also been provided so that he/she can feel free to add on the existing set of knowledge or to improve his/her understanding without being felt as ignored. These steps have been taken to enrich the learning experience and also to enhance the method of pedagogy with the help of technology. To make the processing and functioning of SWAYAM efficient and effective and also to ensure production and delivery of best quality content, seven National Coordinators have been appointed: NPTEL for engineering, UGC for post-graduation education, CEC for under-graduate education, NCERT & NIOS for school education, IGNOU for out of the school students and, for management studies. The detailed understanding of the structure of SWAYAM highlights these features of it:

1. Availability of School level courses for students, who are 14 years or above, who could not continue their studies or those who dropped out of school due to any genuine reason, SWAYAM provides them a plausible platform to continue their education via CBSE and NIOS. It facilitates learning in two forms; either a student can enroll in a regular school and take advantage of courses available on SWAYAM side by side or can be a part of open school education facility provided by CBSE and NIOS.
2. Since SWAYAM takes care of all kinds of learning needs across all streams, it offers a wide range of courses to meet the requirements of every learner of this country. It has almost all types of courses available in the form of certificate courses, diploma courses, undergraduate courses and postgraduate courses.
3. The main idea is to impart education through digital medium and providing the convenience of learning from anywhere and at anytime and also keeping in mind the language barriers which generally exist among the learners thus SWAYAM has been able to provide all its courses in both English and Hindi.

4. The broad range of variety of courses accessible on the portal SWAYAM helps the learner to choose any conventional or unconventional courses including recreational courses like Film appreciation, Carnatic music etc.
5. There are many renowned institutions associated with the process of imparting knowledge across the territory which includes IIT Bombay, IIT Kaharagpur, IIT Madras, IIT Kanpur, IIT Roorkee, IIM Bangalore, Calcutta University, Anna University, Delhi University, Gujarat University, IGNOU, JNU, Jamia Millia Islamia, Kurukshetra University, Jadavpur University, NCERT, Mumbai University, to name a few and even foreign universities have contributed towards developing the courses like University of Derby.
6. There are basically two categories of courses namely, Scheduled courses and Self paced courses. The objective of introducing such broad categories is to provide the learner both opportunities i.e., either be a part of scheduled learning path or to learn according to his/her response and adaptability to the course.
7. Self paced courses include courses like Critical Thinking, Contemporary themes in India's Economic Development and Economic Survey, Environment Natural Resources and Sustainable Development, Cultural studies while Scheduled courses include courses like D.El.Ed, Communication Technologies in Education, Strategy and Sustainable Enterprise, Computer Programming, Introduction to Internet of Things etc.
8. The courses available at the disposal of every learner on this platform are from all fields including Engineering, Arts and Recreation, Education, Humanities, Management, Science, Commerce and General thus providing exciting and involving structure of courses without any specification of streams.
9. The another noted feature of SWAYAM which makes its existence much more viable and reliable is the possibility of rating the courses by the learners, means a learner who has enrolled himself/herself in a particular course can rate that course according to the usefulness of the skills and knowledge learnt in the course and mainly, on the basis of the satisfaction the learner had while learning the course and even after that. This rating procedure can help other potential learners to take the appropriate decision in choosing the course helpful for them or course which is credible in the employment market. This rating component can help in improving the functioning of SWAYAM in the way of

working towards improving the quality of courses provided or even in the direction of revision of course outline or content to meet the requirement of the learners.

10. It is quite interesting to know that since its introduction and its ongoing establishment process in the education sector, SWAYAM has been a popular portal among students as all the type of courses introduced on SWAYAM platform have received an immense positive response from the learners and it can be seen in the form of large number of students enrolled in all courses thus it can be deduced that the enrolment ratio in SWAYAM is quite high.
11. The last feature that needs a mention is the involvement of highly knowledgeable teachers in the process of developing new courses to meet the changing requirement of the learners and also in creating the course content along with the task of delivering necessary lectures. These experts and considerable best and dedicated faculty have given their contribution towards providing relevant and contemporary reading materials, taking up the doubts of the students, assessing them, taking tutorials on regular basis and also giving necessary credentials to the learner's efforts throughout the course time.

ROLE OF SWAYAM IN EDUCATION SECTOR

In India, education is provided as a fundamental right which is imparted by both public and private sectors with the aim to achieve 100 percent literacy rate in the economy. India has shown a lot efforts in not only expanding the primary education attendance rate but also increasing its literacy to approximately 75 percent of the population in the age group 7–10 years, by 2011(Census of India, 2011). The progress made in development of India's education system has been one among many main contributors to its economic development. In this development of India's education sector, the public sector has played an important role especially in higher education and scientific research. The enrollment in higher education has steadily increased over the past decade and it has achieved a Gross Enrollment Ratio of 25.2% in 2016-17, according to the latest All India Survey on Higher Education. The literacy rate in India was found to be at 74.04 per cent in 2011 as per the Census of India 2011 indicating a rise of 8.66% as compared to the previous census. As per the Economic Survey of India 2016-17, there are 799 universities and 39,071 colleges in India making its education sector the world's largest higher education system with 34.2 million students enrolled in colleges & institutions to pursue higher education

in 2015. Also it stands at the second position in terms of student enrolment in higher education since the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education has been 24.5 per cent in 2016 and 25.2% in 2017. The Government has set a target for Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education to be 30 per cent which is to be achieved by 2020 so that it is able to attract sizeable amount of investments from domestic as well as foreign investors. For this, the Government of India has allowed through the automatic route 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the education sector since 2002. As per the Union Budget of India 2017-18, there has been an overall increase in expenditure on education also. The total expenditure on education has increased from 19,444 crores in 2011-12 which also included expenditure on health, broadcasting, etc. to 67,239 crores in 2015-16 and to 79,686 crores (Budget Estimate) alone on education in 2017-18. The education sector of India provides huge growth potential for the country since approximately 28.2 per cent of India's population lies in the age group of 0-14 years in 2015 (World Bank data). In 2014-15, there have been more than 1.5 million schools with over 260 million students enrolled in I-XII class as given in the report of Department of school education and literacy, New Delhi, 2016. The education industry in India is estimated to reach US\$ 144 billion by 2020 from US\$ 97.8 billion in 2016 due to rapid expansion of the digital learning education and a very high proportion of young population (IBEF paper, 2018). Apart from this, the digital learning market is also projected to reach \$5.7 billion by 2020 as the number of internet users is going up (Rai, 2016). Thus, India does have a significant place in the global sector of education. However, a lot of potential for further development in the education sector still remains. In 2015, India has been the second largest market in the field of e-learning after the United States. The market of distance education is growing at rate of 17% [Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR)] and is projected to reach \$40 Billion by 2018 (Tyagarajan, 2016). The goal of the government to achieve 30 per cent gross enrollment ratio by 2020 will prove to be a booster to the growth of the distance education in India. Many government initiatives have been adopted to encourage the growth of distance education market. The policies have been focusing on new techniques of education such as E-learning and Mobile learning (M-learning). The Central Government has opened up various universities, schools and colleges to support digital education and has also increased educational grants for research scholars in most government institutions to promote higher education. The online modes of education has now become a common need of various educational institutions and therefore the higher education system in India will witness some

major changes and developments in the years to come. However, there still remains an important challenge with the education sector of India which is to increase its tertiary enrollment levels to that of the developed countries in order to utilize its demographic dividend due to a relatively young population. To overcome the challenge, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India undertook a major initiative called ‘Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds’ (SWAYAM) which aims at providing an integrated platform for online courses that only include all higher education courses but also high school and skill sector courses. This initiative is an opportunity to all teachers, guides and experts to pool their expertise, wisdom and resources for the benefit and welfare of each and every learner in India which would not only lead to a reduction in disparities in provision of educational knowledge but would also simultaneously help in the development of the weaker and poor sections of our society especially in rural region. An important feature of SWAYAM is that it is easily available to all the learners free of cost and a minimal fee is charged from those learners who wish to get certificates after successful completion of the course but these learners have to get themselves registered for the specific course and after completing the course successfully then he or she has to go through assessment in the form of examinations on the basis of which marks and grades are awarded to the student which can be transferred to his/her academic records. UGC has already given the guidelines of the Credit Framework for online learning courses through SWAYAM in 2016 through regulations directing various colleges and Universities to look for those courses where credits can be transferred on to the academic record of the students for the courses completed through SWAYAM. This ensures that the students get enough incentives to pursue various specialized courses of their choice and interest which may not available in their institutes in the offline mode, or may not match the expected industry standards (Lidora, 2016). SWAYAM is playing a significant role in creating new avenues for the mass community seeking knowledge in form of MOOCs and it has removed both the time and financial constraints providing incentives to the new learners to participate in the learning process. Thus, it has the potential to achieve inclusive growth in the education sector which will benefit large scale of students who could not be reached by conventional education system. SWAYAM through provision of MOOCs seems to build a linkage and remove the gap between online learning and classroom learning, which will not only help students to build up their skills but will also enhance their knowledge about courses which

they could not study in their institutions. This would augment their career growth and will also promote self- learning and self-betterment. SWAYAM aims to reach up to 3 crores students across India by offering various interactive e-Contents of more than 2.5 lakh hours in various subjects such as management, engineering, social sciences, banking, and other industry-driven fields (Lidora, 2016). Therefore, it seems that SWAYAM has a huge potential for providing a wide network of learning and knowledge to its students which is user-friendly and is at the disposal of the learners creating a high quality experience for the students.

ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF SWAYAM

It is very important to analyze the impact of this new yet significant step in the education sector, SWAYAM, as it not only addresses the issue of lower educational qualifications of Indian population but may also deal with the problem of accessibility and availability of opportunities at higher education level. This effort on the part of government focuses on imparting education to that group of people who are into employment without having complete educational degree because of many financial and other circumstances but wish to pursue higher education and it also cater to the needs of that section of the society which could not afford to have accessibility of physical provision of higher level of education thus, this platform fulfills the requirements of majority class of the learner population in the form of making all kinds of learning materials of different fields being available, no issues related to expenditure in accessing these resources, quality content being available at the disposal of the learner as and when required by him/her, involvement of best faculty and experts of different fields helps the learner to assure the quality of his/her learning without any compromise on the credibility of the course chosen and being pursued by him/her. It is very essential to ensure that such learners shouldn't feel neglected and ignored just because they are not a part of conventional educational system thus regular assessment and discussion forum try to get rid of any doubts regarding the content or regarding the validity of the courses in the market.

The most crucial aspect of SWAYAM is to provide the liberty to each and every learner to be a part of the learning system at his own will and the way he/she likes to be, actually as per the convenience of the candidate. The self-reliance is the main characteristic of this new platform provided by the government, as it doesn't restrict the capacity of the learner which can arise on

the basis of the lack of physical availability of the infrastructure, or because of the non-accessibility of any course because of its high cost in many institutions or may be because of his/her personal complications that he/she is unable to pursue higher education even if he/she wishes to do so. The online availability of the course content with the “anywhere, anytime” feature gives the necessary freedom to the group of learners who couldn’t be benefitted by the existing education system; freedom to learn at no cost, freedom to enhance knowledge irrespective of physical, social, political or personal limitations, freedom to improve livelihood, freedom to be a part of skilled population, freedom to be a part of knowledgeable experts contributing to the development of the society. The independency of choosing any one type of course or more than one type of course provide a kind of blessing to the learner and that too which have been developed by the experts of the subjects and the dedicated faculty teaching in reputed institutes with wide experience is the highlighting feature of SWAYAM. In the way of providing the access to quality education with the provision of availability of required course content at the disposal without incurring any cost for that helps in getting rid of the issue of rising cost of educational courses including professional courses.

FUTURE OF SWAYAM

The creation of e-contents in form of MOOCs provided through SWAYAM in the educational sector is in fact a positive and a welcome step towards the development of the country as it encourage the working of intellect, technology, and experience together. The innovative teaching-learning methods with the help of online video lectures, self-assessments in form of questions and quizzes, interactive sessions, online discussions, and student’s assessments would provide a good platform to the students to gain new knowledge and wisdom. The online video interaction of learners and experts is an advantageous medium for all participants enhancing their intellectual abilities in a closed environment. The features and benefits of MOOCs provided by SWAYAM are used in such a way that it is not only suitable to learner’s needs but also goes hand in hand with the conventional education system/ methods so that it is able to create an environment where the country’s overall level of education reaches its highest point. But it should also be noted that, the aim of achieving inclusive education through the medium of internet and mobile based applications is in fact a very difficult task. This is because of the poor infrastructure to support such services especially in rural areas and

the lack of internet connectivity which may delay the implementation of SWAYAM on a large scale in the country. Apart from these hurdles, there may be shortage of trained teachers to be a part of such services and impart a high quality teaching through online medium. Also, the medium of language used in SWAYAM may be a binding constraint to many learners in the country. These may be few points which government needs to consider if it is aiming towards achieving inclusive education through online medium. However, it can be stated clearly that the government, universities, colleges and schools are putting in a lot of efforts to achieve the goal of creating an exemplary education system for the overall development of our country.

CONCLUSION

There is no denial to the fact that SWAYAM has emerged as a tool to improve the condition of education sector existing with many problems like low enrolment ratio or lack of physical infrastructure for higher education. This portal has walked into this sector as a much technically advanced and digitally operated model to reach out to the most neglected and deprived section of the learner population. It has its features which addresses all the relevant issues and also provide a good platform for many to enhance their knowledge with certified courses which can, in turn, help them to improve their livelihood by increasing the market opportunities. Undoubtedly, SWAYAM has widened the scope of learning in India's education system and also helped the deprived but dedicated lot of learners to be a part of learning system. With few limitations associated with its functioning and its implementation via digital route, SWAYAM stills stands out as the effective step taken in the direction of providing education to all including the disadvantaged part of the society. And it seems to have a bright future to fulfill all its objectives and also to provide wider horizon for spreading knowledge without any physical and social limitations.

REFERENCES

1. Union Budget of India, Government of India, 2017-18.
2. Economic Survey of India, Government of India, 2016-17.
3. Rai, Joseph. (2016). India's education market to nearly double to \$180 Billion by 2020. *VCCircle, Newscorp*,
4. Census of India, Government of India, 2011.

5. World Bank Data.
6. India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF). January 2018. Education and Training.
7. Department of school education and literacy (2016), *Educational statistics at a glance*, MHRD, Government of India, New Delhi.
8. Tyagarajan S. (2016). ELearning Market in India – Challenges & Opportunities. <http://www.iamwire.com/2016/10/elearning-market-in-india-challenges-opportunities/120567>.
9. Lidora, S. (2016). Importance and aspects of SWAYAM', *IIFL*.
10. All India Survey on Higher Education 2014-15.
11. SWAYAM Portal www.swayam.gov.in
12. Kanjilal, U. and Kaul, P. (2016). The Journey of SWAYAM: India MOOCs Initiative. *Oasis, Common wealth of Learning*.