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Social Media: A Powerful Tool to Facilitate Self-Directed Learning

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Abstract

Social media is a well-known word in the present era. It has made a significant impact on each and every field of human life. It is continuously contributing to make human life easier, comfortable, interactive, faster, joyful and knowledgeable. The field of education is benefited by social media. Tremendous changes have been done in the field of teaching-learning due to ICT, particularly its special component named social media. The paradigm of whole teaching-learning process is gradually being shifted from teacher centric to student centric. The process of self-directed learning is gradually being important for individuals to be up to date in work place successfully. There are lots of concepts such as hardware, software programs and motivations that have most important role to play in the facilitation of self-directed learning. Among these, Social Media can play its important role to facilitate self-directed learning. A detailed description about the concept of Social Media, its characteristics, its important role in facilitating self-directed learning, is given in this paper.

Introduction

The 21st century will be known for its rapidly changing nature. All the span of human life has been transformed and are in process to be positively changing in the context of comfort, livelihood and sustainable development. ICT has a major credit for it. ICT that stands for Information and Communication Technology, plays a significant role in the field of teaching learning process and in the entire education system. There are drastic changes that have been appeared in the scope, nature and process of education. Now a days, the concept of education is not just limited within the boundary of formally established academic institutions that have their concrete and physical existence but it has big meaning in which it

endorses the systematic Self-directed learning. There are many factors that have the credit to strengthen Self-Directed learning more systematic, effective, motivating, and lively. Among these factors, ICT is one of them that helps with its different types of tools and software. There are lots of concepts, hardware, software, programs and motivations that turn most awaited changes possible in rapid ways. Among these social Media has to play an important role to facilitate self-directed learning.

In this paper author has tried to give a detailed description of the concept of Social Media, its characteristics, concept of self-directed learning and the important role of social media. It also concerns with the challenges in self-directed learning and its initiations, and the tips to use social media as a tool for life-long education.

Concept of Social Media

Social media is an important part of ICT. It becomes the necessity of our routine life. Basically, it stands for websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Social Media encompasses all those forms of digital technologies that allow us to communicate and share information or content with each other using the internet (Poore, 2016, p.3). It is computer-mediated technology that facilitates the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networking. The term 'Social Media' is used to explain the interaction between individuals or groups in which they share, generate, create and sometimes exchange their ideas over the internet in a virtual space. Social media includes everything from blogs, wikis, and podcast, to Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, and flicker, to websites and apps. In facts, many of the digital tools and services that we probably already use in our everyday work, study, and social lives can be described as 'Social Media'(Poore, 2016, p.3).

Characteristics of Social Media

Basically media can be divided in two major categories; first, print media and second, electronic media. Social media is the powerful and latest form of electronic media which is more popular and relatively useful among all other types of media. Social media differs from print media (e.g., magazines, newspapers, journals, and periodicals) or traditional electronic media such as TV in many ways, including quality, availability, frequency, usability, immediacy, and permanence. Social media operates in a dialogic transmission system (many sources to many receivers). Some of the most popular social media websites

are Baidu Tieba, Facebook and its associated Facebook messenger, Gab, Google+, Instagram, LinkedIn, Prientrest, Reddit, Snapchat, Tumblr, Twitter, Viber, WeChat, Weibo, WhatsApp, Wikia, and YouTube (Wikipedia, 2017). These social media websites have more than 100,000,000 registered users. Social media can be best understood as a group of new kinds of online media, which have following characteristics:

1. **Participation is the most important characteristics of Social media.** It encourages contributions and feedback from everyone who wants to link with other one. It creates a virtual platform to be connected and participated with each other.
2. **Openness is the key feature of any social media.** Their services are open to feedback and participation. They encourage like, voting, comments and the sharing of information. There are rarely any barriers to accessing and making use of content. Though the password-protected content facility is also available at social media platform.
3. **Conversation in real time.** Most of all social media are providing calling as well as video calling facility to interact in real time with each other without the bar of geographical barrier.
4. **Form Community:** Social media allows communities to form quickly and communicate effectively. Communities share common interests, such as a love of photography, a political issue, Educational forum or a viewer of favorite TV show.
5. **Connectedness:** Most kinds of social media thrive on their connectedness, making use of links to other sites, resources and people.

Self-Directed Learning and Social Media

Social media is not assumed just a communicational tool but it has more potential to provide assistance to be self-directed learner. Defining the meaning of SDL, Ahmed(2011, p.453) said, 'A process in which a person takes responsibility, collaboration with others, for diagnosing his or her own learning needs, planning and engaging in a sequence of learning experiences to attain these objectives and evaluating progress towards these objectives'. In a broader sense self-directed learning can describe as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating learning outcomes" (Knowles 1975, p. 18). The basic characteristics of SDL can be seen as follows:

1. SDL views learners as responsible owners and managers of their own learning process.
2. SDL integrates self-management of the context, including the social setting, resources, and actions with self-monitoring (Garrison, 1997).
3. In SDL, control of learning activity gradually shifts from teachers to learners (Morrow, 1993).
4. SDL recognizes the significant role of motivation and volition in initiating and maintaining learners' efforts. Motivation drives the decision to participate, and volition sustains the will to see a task through to the end so that goals are achieved.
5. SDL is, ironically, highly collaborative. Learners collaborate with teachers and friends (Temple & Rodero, 1995).

Social media and self-directed learning, both are most popular and significant term in 21st century. Self-directed learning is an academic process that is necessary for every individual to be up to date at the workplace and to achieve a successful life. On the other hand social media can be considered as an important tool to promote self-directed learning. Features and facilities of social media are useful in the organization, planning, and running smooth self-directed learning practices. Social media is being utilized by students, parents, teachers, and academic organizations. It is being used in many forms by many different platforms for many reasons. Social media enable individuals to obtain or share knowledge and information by up lode or down lode a message, including sound waves, light waves, pieces of paper, mobile-phone signals and screens.

Use of Social Media to meet the Challenges of Self-Directed Learning

Social media have many benefits in the academic field. It depends on the task and type of media employment. Social media can be used as excellent tools for socialising and sensitizing to students towards important issues into the online world and for teaching them about appropriate communication practices. Social media has a decisive role to play in the promotion of Self-directed learning through meeting the challenges that are appear in the field of Self-directed learning. It has a profound effect on both the content and processes of learning: the move away from learning facts, the need for e-learning skills and attitudes, the importance of student-cantered learning and the opportunities for collaborative and interactive learning. In addition there are significant costs attached to providing equitable access, training and support. The use of social media to meet the challenges of Self-directed learning can be described in following way and points:

1. In meeting the Challenge of Access of Education

The use of social media enables individual to access information, knowledge and current affairs without any cost. There is facility to format group related with common issues or needs. These platforms can be easily accessed by any number of learners from anywhere if their PC/laptops are connected with internet. These platforms have unlimited space to provide chance to access to all willing learners without any restrictions.

These types of groups can provide qualitative learning session according to the need of job market and self-directed learning skill and issues. The required learning sessions can be broadcast in real time with the help of Social media. Learning sessions on different topics can be uploaded in digital forms at internet. Supportive materials can be downloaded from anywhere at any time in any PC if connected with internet. In this way social media is useful to provide a chance to access the educational content without any barrier, and according to their job requirements.

2. To meet the challenge of money and infrastructure shortage

Though, the self-directed learning is self-initiated but the human as well as academic resources are needed to carry out this learning too. It is a kind of ideal to provide face to face learning situation at some nearby place of his/her working or home. To full-fill these requirement, lots of learning centres will be needed to be opened. It is however, not so easy to open so many centres in India in present time due to shortage of money. Then there are two ways to sort out this problem, first a negative way, which is to forget it, and second is a positive way to search an alternative for it. In this context the use of social media is the best option. Through the use of social media, virtual learning group and virtual learning centres can be opened. These types of platforms will be cost effective. There is no need of land, building, and infrastructure to open these types of centres. Just the experts and learning materials are needed to facilitate by government in non-formal mode through internet facility. Experts can form the learning group at social media and provide their knowledge to associated group members. So with the use of Social media we can not only save the money but it would be beneficial for country's economic growth too in long term.

3. To meet the shortage of qualified and trained teachers or subject experts

Teachers are the greatest assets of any society or country. They stand at the interface of the transmission of knowledge, skills and values. Teachers will only be able to full-fill their educational purposes if they are both well prepared for the profession and

able to maintain and improve their contribution to education. Support for their well-being and professional development is an integral and essential part of efforts to raise standards of teaching, learning and achievement. One of the main tasks of all teachers is to inculcate in their students a disposition towards Self-directed learning. They must, therefore, demonstrate their own commitment towards and enthusiasm for Self-directed learning". To do this important task, lots of teachers are required. But our country is struggling just to meet the demand of formal education. How is it possible to make such type of arrangement for non-formal educational settings? In this situation through the use of social media, this arrangement can be made and expertise can be disseminated to unlimited numbers of learners. Through social media, qualitative lecture or training sessions can be transmitted in different parts of the country during same time. These lectures and training programs can be stored in digital form and uploaded at internet too. This facility provides opportunity of Self-directed learner to download and learn as they wish.

4. To meet the geographical challenges- Self-directed learner has no need to go anywhere in the search of knowledge or skill in the age of satellite transmission and internet facility. He/she can easily get the resources material and opportunity to involve in discussion with resource person from their own suitable places. To get this learning opportunity the facility of internet connectivity, PC or cell phone with camera, speaker and microphone are essential. Internet connectivity through satellite, enables an individual to accesses learning resources beyond the barrier of geographical challenges.

5. To meet the pace and time of the learner- basically Self-directed learner are the person who's prime aim is work effectiveness than education for degree or any certificate. They want to learn to sharpen their working skills and knowledge or just for own satisfaction. They have not enough time in regular basis to pay attention towards their learning and cope up with the teachers teaching speed. So, there is always a requirement to provide them learning material and resources according to their own pace and time. Social media can be helpful to meet this challenge. Resource material and lectures in digital forms can be recorded and uploaded at internet. This material can be accessed by learner with their own pace and time. In this way social media enables us to provide a chance to learner help him/her to learn with one's own learning pace and time. Along with these benefits, there are some other facilities available due to social media. They provide motivation and pace for self-directed learning. These are as follows:

1. The social networking sites also facilitate one to procure information on any subject from anywhere.
2. It provides a chance to publicize the learners work.
3. It provides an open environment to learn from each other without the barrier of age, time and place.
4. It is a unique platform to create an online group and to discuss, share, generate as well as modify their ideas.
5. Cross border collaborative study is facilitated by it.
6. Constant flow of information and knowledge to be up to date,
7. Very easy to create or join an educational group.
8. With social networking sites, learners are not bound by any geographical and cultural differences. They get to meet and know a variety of people whose interests are similar to their own. These sites are windows to different cultures and places.

Conclusion

Social media and self-directed learning, both are core component to be up to date in rapidly changing world. Social media has potential to assist and pace self-directed learning practises. In 21st century, teachers are required to teach their students how to learn rather than providing just information. Students must be trained and motivated for self-directed learning. Familiarity with the effective use of social media would be helpful for students in their self-initiated learning activity. But along with the advantages of social media in academic setting, there are some hurdles too. There is a growing evidence that because of their hyperlinked architecture, social media can prove more distracting than focusing on fulfilling academic need or on learning activities (Agaard,2015; Andersson et al.,2014). Therefore, the knowledge and training regarding proper use of social media must be started for students from very beginning of their education. And the ethical concerns about the use of online contents must be understood. Then only our students can be able to effective use of social media to easily get the required information and become successful self-directed learners.

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