

HRM

CHANGING FRONTIERS OF DIGITAL LEARNING

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The accelerated developments in information and communication technology have given new definition to digitalization, creating fresh challenges in the digital society and digital economy. In this environment, digital skills and competencies are essential to achieve professional success and the personal development of our formal and informal workforce.



In classrooms digitalization is adopted rapidly, with both teachers and students using technology to aid learning.

Digital learning has had a profound effect on improving students' capacity to self-study. Most students today have experienced online education and the use of various virtual meeting software.

Digitalization has provided students the ability to personalize their learning experience, through creating a choice of learning software, techniques and resources.

The global pandemic which crippled routine life, disrupting the supply of essential goods and services like health, education, transport, banking, etc. transformed these services into a new platform largely through digitalization of services and supply chains.

The frequent pandemic driven lockdowns over the past two years resulted in the total or partial closure of higher education institutions around the globe. Institutions that already had the infrastructure in place or professors/lecturers/educators who systematically made use of digital technology and learning environments in their everyday teaching were able to adapt to this disruptive situation and established a new balance.

With no previous parallel, the lockdowns situations paralyzed educational systems, compelled universities and higher education institutions to adapt to an online model. The pandemic accelerated the process

of digitalising higher education and in addition, highlighted the usefulness of new online or hybrid teaching approaches, such as blended (or mixed-mode) learning and flipped classrooms.

Digitalisation has widened the scope of online learning options from tutorials, degrees to master's degrees, as well as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) NOOCs (Nano Open Online Courses, of short duration that focus on a specific subject), SPOCs (Small Private Online Courses, adapted to the needs of small groups of people), and personalised, modular, continuous and asynchronous training.

"The digitalization of our teaching process began long before the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic and therefore we were able to continue our lectures and examinations, right up to convocations without even a day's delay," Associate Dean of the SLIIT Business School, Professor Nagalingam Nagendrakumar said.

In an interview with BMD he outlined the importance and impact of digitalization on higher education and the transformation of teaching methods and knowledge acquisition in a digital learning landscape, establishing a new educational paradigm through digitalization.

Excerpts from the interview:

Eduscope was introduced as a key element of our ongoing digitalization process and students were using it long before the pandemic driven lockdowns disrupted the physical lectures in the campus.

Q: What is the digital platform used by SLIIT business school (SBS)?

We had smart classrooms even before the outbreak of COVID 19. We used to record and upload lectures to "EDUSCOPE," an online real time platform. Then we upload the lecture recordings to course web. Also, most of the formative assessments were carried out online even before the pandemic.

After the pandemic we adopted our SMART classrooms to cater to hybrid online real time lectures, where students were given the option to attend lectures physically or come to the digital wall. As in the past, hybrid lecture recordings are uploaded to course web which allows the students to re-visit the lecture at their convenience.

Eduscope was introduced as a key element of our ongoing digitalization process and students were using it long before the pandemic driven lockdowns disrupted physical lectures in the campus.

Since we had introduced Eduscope, the Business School was not affected by the frequent lockdowns during the past two years. Lectures were conducted through smart classroom process and convocations were not delayed



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because we were on time with our course schedules as we had already introduced the digital process for our lectures and examinations.

Q: How do you facilitate online examinations?

A: We use "NetExam," an examination platform, to conduct online examinations. This platform, eliminated the need for the physical presence of students in an examination hall to conduct examinations. This site also locks all other browsers to lecture sites automatically when students log into the examination platform. NetExam platform is a complete online programme where even invigilation is carried out online.

Q: What has been the impact of digitalization on learning methods in higher education at SLIIT?

A: Digitalisation has been an ongoing process at our campus, as I have emphasized; and is a continuing process.

Thankfully, we had already

implemented an online digital library. Therefore, we witnessed the impact of our digital library from the students, who were able to access our online library from their homes during the lockdown periods. This online portal added immense value to our online teaching and examination process. Students were able to access all journals and research material relevant for their research and examinations, thereby making the online teaching process 100% effective and meaningful.

All of our students used digital learning methods in their courses and my observations is that while digital knowledge it is not limited from your side, the use of digital options in your learning and teaching process gives the students first hand experience of using the technical/digital knowledge.

Q: Has the Business School transformed into a complete online teaching process?

A: We have introduced a hybrid model, where students can participate at both online lectures and physical lectures simultaneously.

For example, if we have a batch of

500 students in one class, we divide the batch into 10 groups of 50 students in each batch. Physical lectures are held in the campus for these small individual groups in rotation, while the other groups follow lectures online. In this manner, we are able to conduct and offer the experience of physical lectures to our students even when restrictions on crowds prevailed during the pandemic.

After upgrading "Eduscope" platform, we were able to connect with all 500 students on the digital wall at one given time. The operational aspect of connecting with this large group of students was quite "simple." While the lecturer and fifty students are physically in a hall, the balance 450 students were also connected online real time. They could participate in lecture discussions and ask questions real time. This concurrent teaching method gives the online class the same privileges as the physically present students and created an atmosphere of unity and comradeship among students.

We record all lectures and upload to Eduscope once again so that students can have ready access to all lectures through the online portal and course web.



Q: What is the next level of digitalisation for the Business School?

Digitalisation is an ongoing process. We have used the digital platform to reach out to schools when conducting teaching/trainings. For instance, we have incorporated online learning in our annually conducted CSR project "SoftSkills+" which is aimed to educate school students on soft skills. Prior to the pandemic, our lecturers used to visit schools in the nine provinces and conduct trainings on soft skills for advance level students. Along with the pandemic we had to shift these training sessions to an online platform.

We also launched our comprehensive research projects for our MBA and BBA level students online. The 14th research conference was conducted online. Also, we launched our first SLIIT Business Review-a double blind review journal online.

Students conduct the entire research online for their projects using the vast resources of our digital library and developing their own knowledge from various online sources. Their research papers are published in well

Our mission is to transform business education through student-centred learning and digital presence and engage all stakeholders to achieve excellence in research and sustainable business practices.

recognized journals, creating a high societal impact.

We are also in the process of shifting our industrial visits of MBA and BBA students to an online platform, where virtual visits replace actual site visits.

Our complete BBA course curriculum has eight specializations. We are happy to announce, that all modules delivered under each specialization is IT embedded.

Our vision is- To be the leading Business School in South Asia and nurture business leaders to serve the digital age and beyond.

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Our students from A to Z of their stay at SBS engage in digital processes. ^{BMD}