Virtual Universities: A step towards globalization

(Experiences of India and Iran)

By

Mehdi Mehri Shahabadi

Research scholar, Department of Education and Extension, University of Pune, India

Abstract

The main purpose of this paper was to study Virtual Universities as a step towards universal and globalization of higher education in India and Iran. These Universities purposefully extending some new services and general courses in-university to the students and have been presenting e-services. In fact, this new phenomena has produced to develop ICT and this epidemic is natural respond of universal higher education to the globalization. Although Traditional learning are in versus developing virtual Universities due to novelty services and facilities, new phenomena confront Traditional learning especially in developing countries such as India and Iran. Virtual Universities are strong rivals according to their situation in distributing social, economical, geographical area, which can suppose a silent rivalry of technical, cultural, scientific aspects between them. Despite of different types of virtual Universities and difficulty in recognizing it there are different models of classification of virtual Universities on the basis of object, cost and services etc. There are several reasons for having challenges in Virtual Universities in every country of higher education. India and Iran are two low speed countries (developing countries) that aren't exception to this rule. This paper discusses the issues and current challenges, types and process which are rebounding and transiting towards the second revolution in Virtual Universities of India and Iran, as compare to international successful Virtual Universities

Key words: *Virtual Universities, globalization, E-learning, higher education, ICT*

1. Introduction

E-learning is an innovative development in education. Universities and institutes, in particular, are interested in adopting this innovation to break both the limitations of time and the place of classroom sessions. One of the best advantages of E-learning is its flexibility. This character has a lot of effects in expansion of E-learning in India and Iran. E-learning in India and Iran has based on distance education and many centers and institutes, especially Universities are trying to present a suitable plan for learning based on cultural structures of Iran and India in E-learning field. Developing E-learning in different countries is depending on the rate of developing sub constructs of ICT. The determinant factors of E-learning are better in Iran but problems of E-learning in higher education of them are same like the problems in India. Increasing requests for learning, especially for higher education at University levels is one of the challenges towards globalization. Therefore, if existence purposes of Virtual Universities are defined, their causes expansion of such Universities, will be clear, especially Virtual Universities in India and Iran. Globalization is a process by which the people of the world are unified in to a single society and function together. (Bris, 2009) Globalization has so many aspects such as economic, culture, politic, social, IT, ICT, etc. Virtual Universities are ICT aspect of globalization which is the vastest aspect of globalization.

### 2. Virtual Universities: short history with long mission.

The idea of a Virtual University as an institution that used computers and telecommunications instead of buildings and transport to bring students and teachers together for university courses was first published in works like "De-Schooling Society" by Ivan Illich that introduced the concept of the use of computer networks as switchboards for learning, in 1970.(Tiffin, 2003)

Experts first heard it used in national programmes and strategic documents from the European Commission. In June 1996, the term virtual campus emerged at an early workshop on this topic, at

the EdMedia/EdTelecom conference in Boston, Massachusetts, organized at short notice by Robin Mason and Paul Bacsich (both then at the UK Open University).

The actual term virtual campus made its first appearance in Europe around the mid-1990s. (Paul Bacsich, 2007). The world's first virtual campus was founded in Catalonia via Open University of Catalonia (OUC) north eastern of Spain. Hibernia College was set up in 2000 as Ireland's first private online college; (Warden, 1995)

Virtual University Models are developing quickly and measure applying of ICT into teaching and learning processes causing the creation of new forms of Virtual educational institution models, though Farrell further notes, "these models are not mutually exclusive and undoubtedly others will develop quickly.(AL-SHEHRI, 2005)
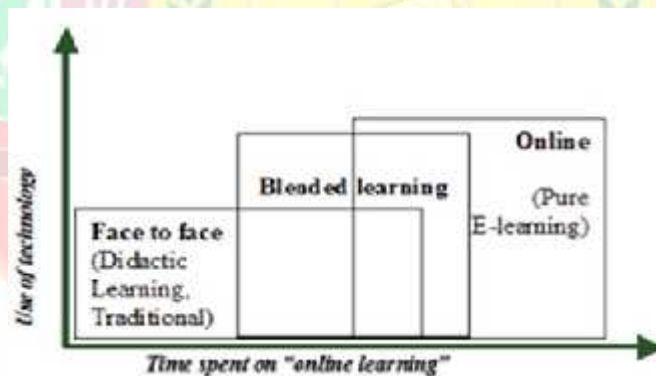
Graph No.1: Distribution of ICT with Focus on Virtual Universities

Some of the most important Virtual Universities missions have indicated by such universities are as follow:

- Increasing educational opportunities for learners who could not attend regular classrooms.

- Providing educational opportunities to deliver high quality lifelong learning education.

- Providing academic programs that are equivalent by leading institutions of higher education for everybody, every time and everywhere.

- Providing interactive, media-rich educational opportunities in a flexible, student-centered learning environment to a diverse population of learners

3. **Distinguishing Virtual University on Traditional University**

There are differences in some aspects of Virtual Universities and Traditional Universities. These different have been indicated briefly in follow table:

Table No.1: Distinguishing Virtual University on Traditional University

Index	Virtual University	Traditional University
Philosophy to exit	Science to follow students	Students to follow science
Mission	Learning	Teaching / Education
Strategy	Multi teaching methods	Unique in teaching methods
Classroom	Unlimited	Limited (Capacity)
Student	Part time	Full time
Teacher	Part time & High Experienced	Full time
Teaching method	Clear & measurable	Ambiguous & immeasurable
Instructional technology	Teamwork & Student -oriented	Lecture & Teacher- oriented
Teaching material	Highly advanced media resources & active	Written resources & inactive
Equipments framework	Expand	Few
Communicational equipment	Expand	Few
Time table of the	Unregulated & conformable to	Regulated & anticipated

classroom(Calendar)	students	
Research instruments	Cheap	Valuable
Instructional interactivity	Indirectly (Face to Face) & semi-independent	Directly (Face to Face)
Administration	Complicated & high especial	Complicated
Student condition	Scientific ability & Network ability	Scientific ability
Cost	Costly	Costly

4. Passing Crisis in Higher Education Via Virtual Universities

Early 1990s was eternity of some new challenges in higher education that developing Universities had faced which were unavoidable.

Advances in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are opening up new opportunities for distance learning. On other hand some new limitation in higher education such as increasing demand for higher education, Cost of establishing new colleges and Universities for applicants and several other reasons have seem to be essential. Some of these reasons are as follow:

- The limited capacity of Indian and Iranian Universities.

- Concern of keeping up-to-date with advances in international science and technology in higher education at institutions of developing countries.

- Increasing cost of services in higher education.

- Increasing request of the graduate.

- Increasing speed of alternatives of field of studies.

- Increasing coefficient entrance of students to the Universities.

- Growing request of adults for education.

- High cost of establishing new Universities.

Indian and Iranian Virtual Universities categories:

Virtual Universities according to their purposes of developing have defined to different categories. There are many reasons for expanding Virtual Universities such as:

- Traditional (non-profit) colleges and universities.
- Non-profit open universities.
- Non-profit virtual universities.
- For-profit universities.
- Internet software and networking firms.
- Content and training firms. (AL-SHEHRI, 2005)

Generally, Virtual Universities in India and Iran divided in many categories with emphasis on some common problems and needs such as:

a. Distance Education programs in Virtual Campus

Virtual Universities in India and Iran have often created by Traditional Universities. In fact, they are a part of Universities by different name. Generally, both countries Virtual Universities are technology-based.

E-campus of Tehran University and Tamil Virtual University are two patterns of them in which the base of them is web technology.

University of Tehran E-learning   www.utec.ut.ac.ir

Tamil Virtual University   www.tamilvu.org

A success case in this type of Virtual Universities versus of Indian and Iranian Universities which have had an extensive developing in presenting and integrating programs in detail of Virtual Universities:

California Virtual University   www.cvc.edu

These Traditional Universities multi-institutions that are offering Virtual programmes as well as on-campus programmes such as:

University of Phoenix Online   www.phoenix.edu

Obviously, moving fast toward Virtual Universities have created some problems such as lack of proper education environments and shortage of experienced professors. On other hand, this kind of education saves time and money of students who have wished to study in one of the best Universities of their countries. Population of Iran is 74 million and 3.5 million of them are students in which 50.5 percent male and 49.5 female who are studying in 2232 unit of Traditional Universities and 24 Virtual Universities.

India's condition is not different but kind of problems are different. For instance: Population of India is second most populous country in the world with a population of 1028 million and 68.3 % of population is below the age of 35. Out of earning 77% of the population, survives less than US $ 20 per day.(Shah, 2010)

India's educational system is the third largest education system in the world. Literacy rate of India is 64.84% with 304.11 million illiterates (30 % global). There are 431Universities, Formal Institutions involve Colleges 20677. Situation of India in Non Formal Institutions is exception. There are also 82 University departments of Adult and Continuing Education also there are 14 open Universities and 7 Virtual Universities. These are only a little part of statistics of India and can add 26 state resource centers in adult education to that statistics. Although these statistics are prominent but increasing enrollment ratio is only 11%. However, increasing rate of demand to higher education has been new crisis for each higher education. From Indian Virtual Universities, Virtual Campus of Punjab Technical University is an excellent example for Virtual Universities in India.

a. Virtual Universities

Generally, full Virtual Universities established by educational institutions. Most problems in these categories of Virtual University have been copying from educational system of Traditional Universities. Then software and facilities in these Virtual Universities are flexible than Traditional Universities.

For instance from Indian and Iranian Virtual Universities can mention to:

BITS Virtual University (India)   http://www.vu.bits-pilani.acin

Institute of Mehr Alborz   http://www.mehralborz.com

These groups of Virtual Universities could be involved a web site based or not need to campuses. In fact we can't putative those group of distance Universities because one of essential objectives of those Virtual Universities providing option of face to face pipeline for solving need of students. Despite claim of this group of Virtual Universities in India and Iran, for presenting full Virtual services to student but in detail of evaluation and examinations in both countries, there are some problems which can't say full Virtual Universities. Of course this problem is not exclusive to developing countries. However, one of the solutions which can help higher education that is moving toward Virtual Universities. From success cases are:

International Virtual University of UK   www.ivu.org.uk

The international Virtual University of UK is an emerging lifelong learning and non-Traditional University in the Great Britain.

5. Challenges related to Virtual Universities of India and Iran according to globalization

Thoroughly, challenges of Virtual Universities are related to construct Traditional or regular Universities. Virtual Universities often are branches of regular Universities and they try to keep their structure and implementation their program by new environment. Although establishing e-campuses is ahead one step but there are some challenges about:

✓ Designing is limit to the current needs

Although there are some standards normally, Virtual Universities prefer to use SCORM (Sharable Content Object Reference Model but implementation of that standard need a strong designer.

✓ Students, Faculties and Administrators:

Although students of Virtual Universities according to standard Universities have trait as: Self-directed, self-motivated, self-regulating, lifelong learning but those Universities cannot provide possibility of reaching to those objectives.

Obligation of faculties' in Virtual Universities is creative of learning opportunities, facilitator of learning, using new technology and encouraging collaborative learning. Due to lack of enough

professional skills in teachers, often students in Virtual courses (synchronous & synchronous) request to regular courses.

✓ Infrastructures of Virtual Learning:

Despite of developing Information and communication technologies (ICT) but there are some problems in each components of Virtual learning which are:

1) Software:

The most important software in a Virtual learning system is the LMS (Learning Management System). LMS is involved with facilities of Virtual Universities. Facilities of Indian Virtual Universities are more having Iranians LMS but they are not enough for a Virtual student. For introducing a good pattern is: www.ptuonline.com

2) Hardware:

Such as computers, servers, routers, telephone lines, and fiber optic lines are relatively in good conditions in India and Iran. Although there have the required capacity but Universities don't use completely.

3) Telecommunication services in private companies have started to provide broadband services such as ADSL. In some remote areas there are VSAT (Very Small Aperture Terminal) connections.(Kiani, 2010)

6. **Barriers and advantages of Virtual Universities:**

Some of barriers in Virtual Universities are:
   ✓ Changing students to customers.
   ✓ Disability of faculties in managing students.
   ✓ Difference in learning styles of students.
   ✓ None-equivalent technology which is available for students in different districts of countries.
   ✓ Lack of equal policies in international centers for superintend on them.
   ✓ Disability of students in using of communication facilities which are provided in Learning Management System (LMS).
   ✓ Limitations in area of assessment and evaluation.

Some of the advantages of Virtual learning in Iran Virtual Universities which can be briefly explained as follow:

- Providing high education opportunity to everyone in every University, especially people in remote areas, as well as Universities in small cities.

- Providing conditions for less stress among families by accepting candidates who were not able to get acceptance to a University.

- Overcoming several social problems and families' concerns about sending their children to large cities.

- Providing a suitable environment for cultural interchange, inside and outside the country.

- Providing a very good opportunity for natural cultural growth among different ethnic group of people.

- Providing a suitable atmosphere for cultural creativity and to secure the country's cultural heritages.

- Helping individuals to do independent learning, self studying and self researching.

- Exploring and developing hidden talents.

- Providing a proper environment for flow of knowledge in community which nowadays is more important than generating knowledge.

- Paving the way for moving from teacher-based learning system to student-based learning system.

- Constructing proper environment to create a learner society.

- Providing proper background for stable development.

7. Analysis of educational structure of Virtual Universities in India and Iran

Constructivism in education centers on the active learner within the teaching- learning process. The constructivism's greatest contribution to education may be through the shift in emphasis from knowledge as a product to knowing as a process. Although base of education in Virtual Universities is E-learning the methods of Virtual classroom and blended method then approach as the name suggests combines the most appropriate aspects of both constructivist and behaviorist perspectives. This approach assumes that learners will acquire 50% of knowledge by themselves and the other 50% through collaboration with others.(Anjali Khirwadkar, 2010)

However, facilities of Virtual Universities are based on Learning Management System (LMS) are neutral methods of Virtual Universities. E-learning involves Synchronous, Asynchronous learning and each of them has a promising pedagogical impact on students in higher education.
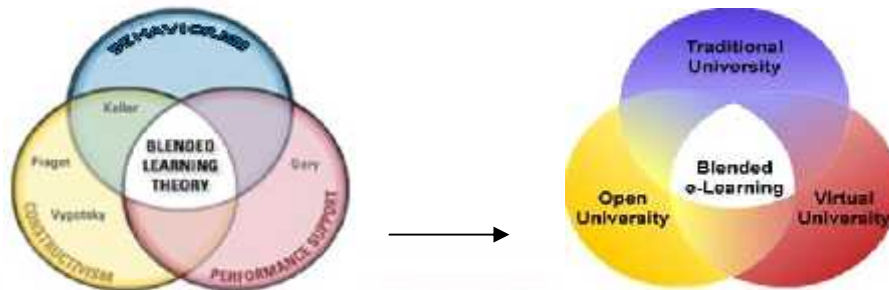
Graph No.2: Learning Theories with Focus on Virtual Universities (AYTAÇ, 2009)

Synchronous: Interact of participants with an instructor via the Web in real time.

Asynchronous: "Asynchronous" refers to instruction that is not constrained by geography or time. (Khan, 2006)

- ✓ One of the most important challenges of these Universities is concern of validity of proofs and certificates which have issued by them.
- ✓ Lack and unclear rules related to Virtual Universities.
- ✓ These Universities offer different courses which don't need practical, physical and laboratories.
- ✓ Face to face one of the most effective factors by Virtual Universities removed and instead of that students will be challenged in chat live process.
- ✓ Some of these Universities give in-class sessions for some courses, such as mathematics and physics, close to the end of each semester to answer questions.
- ✓ Team researches and group projects are not offered to the students.
- ✓ Some of the successful Virtual Universities which are international and have presented their program by synchronous learning.
- ✓ Evaluation of students is one of the unsolved challenges related to Virtual universities.

✓ Some of the successful Virtual Universities which are international and have presented their program by synchronous learning involving:

University of phoenix	http://www.phoenix.edu/
Michigan State University	http://www.msu.edu/
Royal Roads University	http://www.royalroads.ca/
University of Leicester	http://www.le.ac.uk/external/
Hong Kong Virtual University	http://hkvu.ust.hk/
Multimedia Malaysia	http://www.mmu.edu.my/

1. Conclusion

During the last 10 years, despite of establishing Virtual Universities in different types, their Universities mostly limit to present some national courses which participants was not satisfied. However, development of Virtual Universities has confronted with many limitations such as hardware and proper communication facilities as well as limitation of quality of e-content, technical and lack of experience of faculties… Analyze of Virtual Universities based on experience both developing countries have shown that there are some successful experiences and challenges these Universities are dealing with. Growing E-learning which is one of the results of globalization of ICT and created Virtual Universities have presented services to process of increasing request to lifelong learning in higher education. In fact, growing numbers of Virtual Universities should not be limit to present some national courses that is one of their objectives that has been forgotten by Virtual Universities in India and Iran in road of globalization by one of facilities of globalization. Creating e-labs and using experiences of developed Virtual University and try to use the method of e-evaluation according to mission of Virtual Universities is also recommended.

References

AL-SHEHRI, M. A. (2005). A virtual university: A proposed model 1-20

Anjali Khirwadkar, K. P. (2010). *E-learning methodology : perspectives on the instructional design for the virtual classrooms*: Sarup book

AYTAÇ, T. (2009). *The Influence of blended learning model on development leadership skills of school administrators.* Paper presented at the Special Issue on ICIT 2009 Conference - Applied Computing, Ankara, Turkey

Bris, E. S. (2009). Georg Simmel' group expansion: a visionary path to an understanding of globalisation *University of Massachusetts, Emulations n° 5 Vol. 3*, 31-33.

Kiani, M. F., M Jalali A. (2010). Cases on Challenges Facing E-learning and National Development: Institutional Studies and Practices.

Paul Bacsich, T. B., Sara Frank BristowIlse Op de Beeck, Sally Reynolds and Bieke Schreurs. (2007). *Reviewing the Virtual Campus Phenomenon* (Bieke Schreurs ed.): Euro PACE ivzwKapeldreef 62, 3001 Heverlee.

Shah, S. Y. (2010). *Lifelong Learning & Open and Virtual Universities:Indian Scenario*. Paper presented at the Lifelong Learning & Open and Virtual Universitie.

Tiffin, J. a. R., L (2003). *The Global Virtual University*. London and New York: Routledge.

Warden, R. (1995). The first virtual campus? *Catalonia The Financial Times Publication*