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Virtual University: Meaning and Concept

A virtual university provides higher education programs through electronic media, typically the Internet. Some are bricks-and-mortar institutions that provide online learning as part of their extended university courses while others solely offer online courses. They are regarded as a form of distance education. The goal of virtual universities is to provide access to the part of the population who would not be able to attend a physical campus, for reasons such as distance—in which students live too far from a physical campus to attend regular classes; and the need for flexibility—some students need the flexibility to study at home whenever it is convenient for them to do so.

Some of these organizations exist only as loosely tied combines of universities, institutes or departments that together provide a number of courses over the Internet, television or other media, that are separate and distinct from programs offered by the single institution outside of the combine. Others are individual organizations with a legal framework, yet are called "virtual" because they appear only on the Internet, without a physical location aside from their administration units. Still other virtual universities can be organized through specific or multiple physical locations, with or without actual campuses to receive program delivery through technological media that is broadcast from another location where professors give televised lectures.

Program delivery in a virtual university is administered through Information and communications technology such as web pages, e-mail and other networked sources.

As virtual universities are relatively new and vary widely, questions remain about accreditation and the quality of assessment.

The notion of a “virtual university” is a potent vision of the future of higher education.

Virtual university – a “university without walls” –“Defeating all geographical boundaries and conquering the fast-paced time” is seen as an institution that has torn itself free from the geographical confines of the campus, using the new communications technologies to connect learners, potential learners, teachers, researchers, alumni, employers, research funders and administrators in flexible ever-changing network organization. This vision has captured the

imaginings of academics, university managers, educational policy-makers, corporate personnel and training managers and private entrepreneurs across the world.

Virtual university is positioned to straddle between traditional campus based universities and the growing number of distance-learning projects. Distance learning using current methodology offers many advantages to students in remote areas and students attending part-time courses. However it lacks the sense of community and social interaction which can be achieved by sharing the same environmental spaces and experiences.

In the long term we foresee Virtual Worlds technology becoming a tool for enabling completely new and innovative teaching methods.

The primary goal of the Virtual University is to offer maximum flexibility, independence and individual service to the learner and at the same time to provide tutorial support and social contact thus avoiding the typical situation of distance learning. The technical and organizational challenge is the development of homogeneous systems which smoothly integrates all functions and provides a personalized view of the complex information space “university” to the user.

The virtual university is an important example of the potential of ICT in the delivery of higher education in a wide range of countries. Although the term 'virtual university', has been used to denote quite a varied number of activities and institutions, it can be defined as ' a metaphor for the electronic, teaching, learning and research environment created by the convergence of several relatively new technologies including , but not restricted to, the Internet, World Wide Web, computer mediated communication '(Van Dusen, 1979). Such initiatives began to emerge in the 1990s, taking several different forms: from the online arm of a traditional university to a university operating completely in cyberspace, and from well-known and respected public institutions to private profit-making ventures. This new form of institution appears to be an important development in the efforts made over time to adopt technology and adapt it to the needs of the institution and of governments, staff, students and employers. Governments have a role in ensuring access to higher education for individual, societal and economic needs, and to do so as cost effectively as is feasible. If ICT-supported education can provide access to more students while containing costs and ensuring quality, then governments may be able to increase the offer of higher education to their citizens. ICT offers staff new tools for teaching and managing, but demands that they learn new skills to

use it effectively. From the perspective of the student, the virtual university and e- learning offer flexibility and freedom from the constraints of time and place, but the student, too, must learn new skills. Employers look to the university to educate the highly qualified personnel they need to compete in the marketplace, and to offer continuing education opportunities to support the need for a continually upgraded workforce. Initial graduates that have gained a certain level of ICT skills through their education offer an advantage to their employer. And flexible learning opportunities may be more appropriate than traditional ones offer to the needs of the worker who seeks to upgrade his or her skills.

Virtual University in Indian Context

The National Institute of Information Technology (NIIT) is a global IT solutions corporation that delivers software and learning solutions, as well as IT training, to customers all over the world. Based in New Delhi, it has a network of some 2,500 centres operating in 38 countries. It currently has close to 500,000 students enrolled worldwide.

NIIT was founded in 1981 by entrepreneurial IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) Delhi college friends, Rajendra S. Pawar and Vijay K. Thadani. P. Rajendran, who was also at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, joined them a few months later. They had an early vision of a society that would need to cope with the information age in the future, but that was unprepared to do so at that time. Their mission was: 'Bringing people and computers together, successfully'.

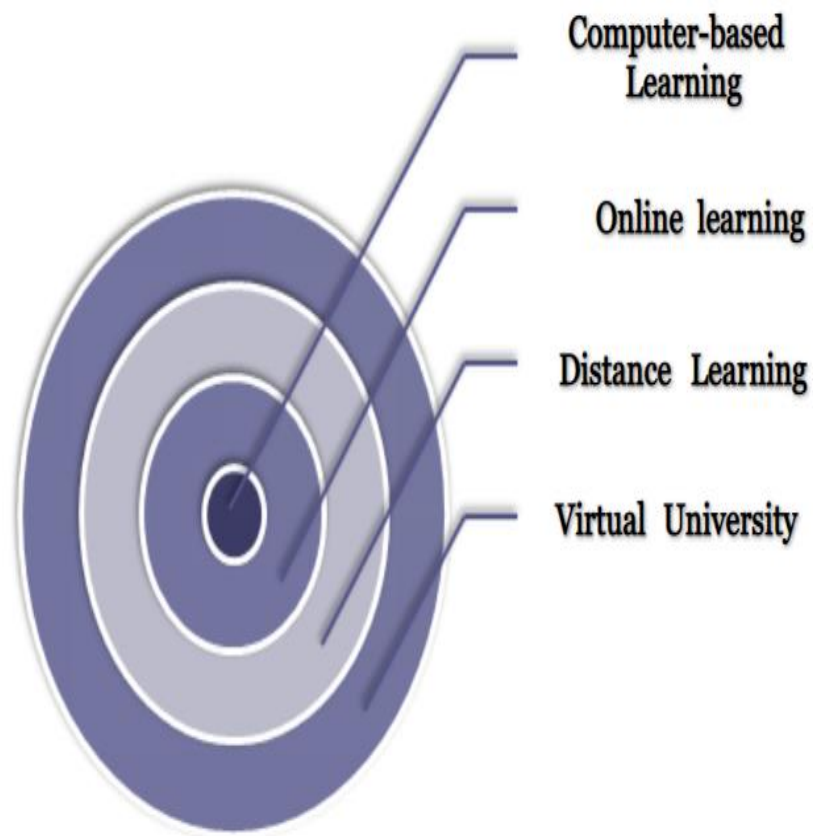
By 2002, NIIT was the 13th largest IT training company in the world and among the top five publicly listed IT companies in India. The company has been growing steadily, driven by demand for its software solutions products and development of its learning solutions business. NIIT grossed US\$200 million in revenues in 2001. NIIT began with a vision of massive requirements for IT talent in a world moving into an information-based economy. Its mission has been to deliver IT training to a broad spectrum of people, from students seeking a career in computers to IT professionals requiring advanced skills, and from managers seeking a competitive edge to schoolchildren using computers as a learning tool. One of NIIT's achievements has been to make this education easily accessible to people, in their own neighbourhoods, and now even within their own homes through the Internet. Education and training NIIT pioneered IT education and training in India in 1981 and over the years it has developed a range of curricula for people with diverse requirements. NIIT's focus is on

providing advanced training on a myriad of software platforms and creating 'industry-ready' professionals who have the necessary 'hot skills' for a career in IT.

Understanding the concept of Virtual University through following representation:

➤ Virtual University :subset

9



ADVANTAGES OF VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

➤ Why Virtual University?

8

➤ Virtual University over the Traditional University.

Problems of traditional Universities	Solution offered through Virtual University
<input type="checkbox"/> Growing of educational institutes without having proper infrastructures.	✓ No need to have a classroom and Building
<input type="checkbox"/> Requires a considerable amount of funding.	✓ In long run, it is very cost effective and proves to be a good revenue model.
<input type="checkbox"/> Unable to meet new educational and learning challenges like flexible learning	✓ It addresses to new educational challenges like giving education-at-ease which is time and space independent
<input type="checkbox"/> Extra Administrative efforts	✓ Since the students are off-campus, minimal administration
<input type="checkbox"/> Increasing student-teacher ratio, lack of quality faculty and unattractive salary structure	✓ No need to recruit regular faculty, VU may have a panel of good faculty from other institutes on consultancy basis since faculty need not come to traditional class.
<input type="checkbox"/> Number of students enrolls as per the availability of classrooms, teachers and Infrastructure.	✓ Enrollment of students is open and can be increased to a large extent.
<input type="checkbox"/> Linear learning approach	✓ follows non-linear approach

Sources:

- 1) Wikipedia
- 2) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000146558>
- 3) https://www.academia.edu/5650830/The_Virtual_University_Advantages_and_Disadvantages
- 4) <https://slideplayer.com/slide/4904990/>
- 5) Reference Books