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STUDY WEBS AND ACTIVE LEARNING FOR YOUNG ASPIRING MINDS – A STUDY



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Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM) is the world's biggest MOOC platform, a program initiated by the Government of India. It is the world's largest initiative of its kind taken by any government to consolidate the education governing bodies under one umbrella and make quality education accessible to country's residents free of cost. The platform is developed by the Ministry of Human Resources and Development (MHRD) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) with Microsoft as a technology partner. WizIQ joined forces with Microsoft to develop and implement the platform. The Government of India is focused on the following with this project:

- Reducing the dropout rate in secondary and higher education
- Addressing inadequacy of higher education facilities in specific geographical locations
- Finding a solution for increasing the cost of education
- Supporting a massive user base
- Taking education to a multi-lingual population
- Improving technology adoption across India

Introduction

The platform hosts over 2,000 interactive courses taught in Indian schools and colleges from 9th grade to post-graduation with e-content of 80,000 hours to be consumed by 30 million learners for free anytime and anywhere. The initiative was designed

keeping in mind the three fundamental principles – access, equality and quality of education – to bridge the gap between the privileged and the less-privileged.

SWAYAM differs from other Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platforms like Coursera, Udemy, Udacity, and Lynda.com in the following ways:

- The platform consolidates the apex education governing bodies in India.
- The courses offered are entirely in sync with the Indian education system. It hosts courses that are taught in physical classrooms in India.
- The earned credits are transferable to the main degree course if the candidate is enrolled in any.

Microsoft Azure's robust and infinitely scalable cloud infrastructure with automatic load balancing offers the elasticity to scale from 1 to 1,000 in a minute ensuring flawless learning delivery to millions of concurrent users. The platform works smoothly even when traffic spikes suddenly. The auto-scale feature optimizes the cost and performance of the platform.

Microsoft played an immense role in planning the entire project, detailing time frames, tasks, resources, roles and responsibilities, and platform evolution in different phases. Given its massive size and scope, the success of the project depended on a lot of planning, project governance, and review. Microsoft made sure that the investment went in the right direction.

While Microsoft was involved more in the business delivery aspects, WizIQ, on the other hand, handled the technical development and implementation of the project. WizIQ leveraged various Microsoft Azure technologies to address several potential scalability challenges and to offer the most comprehensive and integrated online education solution to the Government of India.

Advantages/Benefits of the Platform

1. **Scalability:** WizIQ's scalable education platform powered by Microsoft Azure ensures that millions of educators and learners use the platform seamlessly.
2. **Infinite Storage:** WizIQ offers practically endless storage space, given the size of the content (and in any format) uploaded for the mass consumption. SWAYAM users can upload content and forget about it without thinking about storage management.
3. **Single Sign-on:** WizIQ provides a single sign-on facility to learners enrolled in courses on SWAYAM by leveraging Azure Directory Services.
4. **Content Access:** SWAYAM administration doesn't need to worry about the performance and consistency if traffic spikes.
5. **Consistent Learning Experience:** WizIQ deploys certain technologies to offer a consistent experience to SWAYAM users regardless of the traffic spike.

- 6. Search in Multiple Indian Languages:** SWAYAM users can search in their mother tongue or local language apart from English. SWAYAM is the only platform offering relevant searches in multiple regional languages.

Issues Addressed By SWAYAM

Education is the foremost sector that shoulders the biggest responsibility of shaping the future of any nation. India is presently facing multiple challenges in offering education through MOOCs. India has started their own MOOC as SWAYAM, an effort of the government in making the education accessible for all irrespective of any factor such as their educational qualification, geographical disparity. There are several issues in delivering MOOC, as discussed in the previous section. Some of these issues addressed by SWAYAM are:

Adoption of MOOC among learners: Since SWAYAM supports the blended learning where after learning from the online courses the learner will also go to their college/institute. The learner will experience face-to-face learning along with online learning. So, the lack of oral communication is not a problem anymore. Also, due to the inclusion of traditional learning, chances of feeling cut off or alone is reduced. The learner will definitely avail all the benefits of a traditional learning environment such as lab access, hands-on experiments. The course credits obtained from a SWAYAM course will be considered by the institutions. According to new UGC guidelines, 20% course credits will be generated from the MOOCs offered on SWAYAM. It will surely help in improving the adoption of courses among the learners.

Diversified Needs: To satisfy the diversified needs of the Indian learners, firstly the platform is available in both, English as well as the Hindi language. It will surely minimize the language barrier for the learners.

Investment: SWAYAM is a fully government-funded project that covers the cost of everything such as, content creation, technical infrastructure, maintenance, human resources. For technical support, the government has signed a deal of 38 crores with Microsoft. According to a report published by UGC, the fund has been allotted to all the contributing institutes of SWAYAM for fastening the process of delivering the targeted courses.

Quality: For technical expertise, the government has already hired Microsoft. Furthermore, to enhance the expertise of the teacher or instructors in using the courses offered by SWAYAM, some training programs, workshops are being done all over India at the regional and local centers created for the purpose. These programs are organized by the top institutions that are contributors to SWAYAM such as, IITs, IIMs, and central universities, etc. The focus of these programs is to produce more qualified and technically sound faculties to deliver quality education to the learner. Also, these faculties will be able to solve problems of their learners who belong to the same institution as of faculty.

Technological Infrastructure: Before the launch of SWAYAM, it was clear that as a provider they need the technical infrastructure, for two primary areas; a) access and delivery, b) course content creation. For access to the network, connections across the institutions/schools and a backbone providing the advanced capabilities have started as a national initiative by the government. Also, some local authorities like Gram Panchayat have been involved in making it possible to provide network connectivity in their areas. Moreover, to create course content, the government is investing by partnering with the institutions (IITs, IIMs, IISC, UGC), which are competent in a specific area of education. Also, for the time being until the connectivity reach to each school or college, some local centers are established to train the instructors or teachers for using the platform.

Furthermore, to ensure fare credits and stop the plagiarism or cheating in the exam examination, these exams will be held in some designated local center, where the supervisors will be assigned from the coordinating universities/institutes to conduct the exam smoothly with the quality

Features of the Platform

1. **Dashboards:** WizIQ has developed a full-fledged learner and instructor dashboard. This is the default landing page of the learner-side interface. The dashboard gives a snapshot view of the learner calendar, recent conversations, and courses. A detailed dashboard has been created for the instructors with the clickable view of the calendar, courses live, enrolled students, assignments, recent conversations and discussions.
2. **Course Builder Innovation:** New Course Types – apart from the self-paced and scheduled courses such as the weekly reading list, articles, and invitation only courses. The section on course rating and reviews section gives a detailed view of the rating, required time to complete the course, credit information, coarse language, benefit, and teacher reviews. WizIQ has developed discussion boards where students can interact with fellow learners using filters like the creator, tag filters, and following. The group discussion boards can be created by an instructor for discussion on a particular topic. This gives insights into student activities and how they construct responses.
3. **Videos:** Another exciting feature is of adding captions/subtitles to videos incorporated for multi-linguistic and non-native English speakers in 9 different languages.
4. **Tests and Assignments:** In the Tests and Assignment section, the options for flexible assignment grading criteria and auto-graded assignments based on marks awarded are added. Mandatory pre and post-course surveys are integrated into the platform to ensure the effectiveness of courses available. Tests can be graded manually, and grading can be customized as the instructor desires.

5. **Awarding certification:** Upon completion of a course and payment of nominal fees, the learner is eligible to get a completion certificate
6. **Paperless Grievance Redressal Mechanism:** No online education platform other than SWAYAM has a built-in grievance redressal feature which allows students to 'raise a ticket' if they have any issues or are not satisfied with any course.

Conclusion

India's growth story is dependent on the education of its millions of youth struggling with infrastructure, cost, and resources deficit. 'SWAYAM' comes to the country at a time when India's online market is predicted to grow to USD 1.96 billion by 2021. The user base is predicted to increase from 1.96 million users in 2016 to 9.6 million users by 2021. WizIQ is invested in the success of this initiative with the Government of India.

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