



Assistive Technologis for Differently-Abled



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THUNCHAN MEMORIAL GOVT. COLLEGE, TIRUR

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ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES FOR DIFFERENTLY-ABLED

Shravyam

The aim of the project is to generate audio resources for visually challenged learners especially in the regional language. This practice was implemented with the objective to mitigate the difficulties that differently-abled students and faculty often encounter within academic institutions due to the non-availability of such resources. The situation indicated that there was some disparity in the distribution and accessibility of knowledge sources for the differently-abled and it was the responsibility of an institution for higher education to take immediate measures to assuage the gap through equal opportunity enterprises like Shravyam.

Shravyam was conceived by a visually challenged faculty of the Malayalam department from the hurdles he faced in accessing teaching resources in the regional language. Unlike in English, very few audio resources were available in the Malayalam language that students and faculty could easily access. A number of differently-abled students were being admitted every year into the institution in the seats reserved for them. Even though the students received individual grants, there was no other project as such implemented by the government in higher education institutions to cater to their particular needs, and no special funds were allocated for the same. Though the governmental aids and policies safeguarded the rights of the differently-abled at the entry-level into higher education institutions, how they really navigated the spaces within academia depends greatly on the institutional support and facilities provided to them in a non-discriminatory manner.

Shravyam began in 2016 with a collection of around a hundred audiobooks and recorded expert lectures on various academic topics. The books available were often subject books included in the recommended reading list of the Malayalam syllabus of the University of Calicut and similar books on specific academic areas or authors. Yet, books of general interest like novels and short stories too were included. The lectures in the collection were on diverse topics and specimens of classical and folk music to facilitate the study of meters and genres of literature are part of the recordings. From 2017 onwards, audio compilations of all the important talks and seminars held in the college were added to the repertoire. A few faculties, many students, and some volunteers from outside the institution had contributed recordings of books for the project over the years. Initially, the recordings were made using recording devices, but with the easy availability of android phones, the recordings are now done using them. The recordings were carried out on a priority basis, considering the students' demand for specific materials. They were done completely voluntarily and as no financial assistance is available for the project, payments were not possible. Currently, the collection has over five hundred books in audio folders that can be shared digitally. Students of the college as well as differently-abled students and faculty from other institutions access these resources via emails and social networking platforms. The resources are also open to other students and many of





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them have been beneficiaries of this project. The collection of audiobooks and learning materials under Shrivayam has been growing slowly but steadily and the immediate target before the team is to amass more than one thousand books in the shortest time. The practicality of expanding the collection to other subject areas is also under consideration.

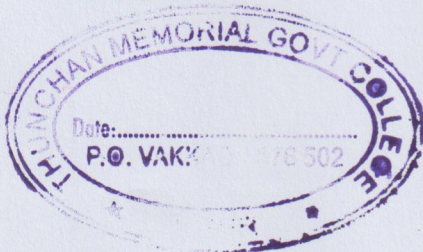
The project was a success as illustrated by the growing number of audio resources in the collection. The students utilizing the resources had increased over the years and the demands for specific titles from them prove that they found it useful. The team had been consistently sharing resources digitally following the requests of students from other institutions. The project played a significant role in trying to create equal opportunities for the differently-abled and in transforming the institutional practices in more democratic ways. The involvement of students, faculty members, and other volunteers in the project showed that they felt part of the team and wished to contribute towards supporting the differently-abled amongst us. The significant participation of student volunteers was heartening as they discharged a social responsibility and, in the process, seemed to be more aware of the rights and needs of their fellow citizens. The digital platforms available today also had a huge part in the success as it is the technology that made these resources readily available to more beneficiaries.

Other Facilities

This includes ORCA screen reader facility, digital talking books, headphones, and lenses. Audio recordings of the classes are provided to visually challenged students. The differently-abled students are offered the facility of the Braille software to develop their skills. Android apps like Vlingo virtual assistance, Eyes, Voice Search, Walky talkie, etc., are provided for differently-abled students.

Tirur

21/02/2023



Principal

Principal,
T.M. GOVT COLLEGE
TIRUR