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E-Learning Improves Quality in Higher Education

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Abstract:

Our paper is an attempt to trace the importance of E-Learning in higher educational system. E-Learning initiatives are ubiquitous in Higher Education. It has been growing as a popular topic since the inception of the web-based courses in the mid- to late 1990's. Academic leaders are recognizing the importance of e-learning for institutional growth and increased access. E-learning initiatives are allowing students to enroll in courses or on campuses that would not previously have been accessible to them. The integrative stage involves the more dynamic interactions, which replace direct face-to-face interactions between the teachers and the students. Finally, the transformatory phase allows the integration of the actual resources into the education systems that yields an online learning community. When E-learning is combined with traditional methods of learning, it is known as blended learning

Key words: *E-learning, environment, manageability*

Introduction

E-learning refers to a system of education which integrates Information and Communication Technology with the current forms of education to improve the manageability of the learning process. E-learning can be divided into three major stages which include the informative stage, integrative phase and the transformer stage. The informative stage involves provision of relevant information for program specification in form of books, modules and other external resources.

The future delivery of education is envisaged through eLearning technology providing lecturers with superior teaching tools. Volery (2000) argues that online methods facilitate more effective education and offer significant advantages over traditional teaching methods. This can be via full blown technological implementation or limited technology based environments such as bulletin boards, virtual lectures and eLibraries. McClelland (2001) contends that in eLearning environments lecturers can offer constant educational support, as students are able to communicate with classmates and lecturers, visit web sites and view course material regardless of their time and location. To maximise the potential of eLearning teaching tools Holley (2000) advocates two methods to modify the learning process. Firstly, educational re-engineering that will revolutionize classroom practices and secondly educational fortification that will improve the learning courseware through technology. Despite the apparent advantages of eLearning teaching tools there appear to be certain practical problems with regard to utilizing these techniques in educational learning environments. Teare (2000) explains that initially the process of teaching via eLearning may demonstrate features of educational enrichment but in reality

eLearning methods prove highly problematic. Teare's (2000) studies suggested that some students who participated in online learning courses found the delivery of course content impractical and frustrating due to technological failures. It seems that the teaching tools associated with eLearning may have the potential to equip lecturers in higher education with flexible channels and a model for the delivery of courses.

The concept of e-learning:

E-learning is an all-encompassing term generally used to refer to computer –enhanced learning. It may include the use of web-based teaching materials and hypermedia in general, multimedia CD-ROMs or websites, discussion boards, collaborative software, e-mail, blogs, wikis, text chat, computer aided assessment, educational animation, simulations, games, learning management software, electronic voting systems and more, with possibly a combination of different methods being used.

E-learning can also refer to educational websites such as those offering worksheets and interactive exercises for children. The term is also used extensively in the business sector where it generally refers to cost-effective online training. It has been stated by many in different forms. Some of them are given below.

- E-learning is learning on Internet time.
- E-learning is the convergence of learning and the Internet.
- E-learning uses the power of networks, primarily those that rely not only on Internet technologies but also satellite networks, and digital content to enable learning.
- E-learning is the use of network technology to design, deliver, select, administer, and extend learning.
- E-learning is Internet-enabled learning. Component can include content delivery in multiple formats, management of the learning experience, and a networked community of learners, content developers and experts. E-learning provide faster learning at reduced costs, increased access to learning, and clear accountability for all participants in the learning process. In today's fast-paced culture, organizations that implement e-learning provide their work force with ability to turn change into an advantage.

Important Features of e-learning:

The following are some of the important features of e-learning

- Learning is self-paced and gives students a chance to spend up or slow down as necessary.
- Learning is self-directed, allowing students to choose content and tools appropriate to their differing interests, needs, and skill levels.
- It accommodates multiple learning styles using a variety od delivery methods geared to different learners; more effective for certain learners.
- Designed around the learner.
- Geographical barriers are eliminated, opening up broader education options.

- 24*7 accessibility makes scheduling easy and allows a greater number of people to attend classes.
- On-demand access means learning can happen precisely when needed.
- Travel time and associated costs (parking, fuel, vehicle maintenance) are reduced or eliminated.
- Overall student costs are frequently less (titution, residence, food, childcare).
- Fosters greater student interaction and collaboration.
- Fosters greater student/instructor contact.
- Enhances computer and Internet skills.
- Draws upon hundreds of years of established pedagogical principles.

Components to be Included in e-learning:

E-learning can incorporate many elements that make learning new material, a new process or a new program more fun. Making learning more fun or interesting – is what makes it more effective. Obviously, every type of training can't be turned into e-learning, but many can with excellent results. The components that are to be included to make e-learning successful are:

1. Varying the Types of Content: Images, sound and text work together to build memory in several areas of the brain and result in better retention of the material.
2. Creating Interaction that Engages the Attention: Games, quizzes and even just required manipulation of something on the screen creates more interest, which in turn builds better retention.
3. Providing Immediate Feedback: e-learning courses can build in immediate feedback to correct misunderstood material. The more immediate the feedback the better, because each step of learning builds upon the previous step. If no feedback is given, then the next step may be building upon an incorrect interpretation.
4. Encouraging Interaction with other e-learners and an e-Instructor: Chat rooms, discussion boards, instant messaging and e-mail all offer effective interaction for e-learners, and do a good job of taking the place of classroom discussion. Building an online community significantly influences the success of online programs.

Apart from providing virtual education, E-learning can be used to improve classroom learning processes as well as blended learning. According to KleeBen [10], the application of ICT in traditional systems is bound to have a significant impact on the overall education system by enhancing the accessibility of adverse education opportunities and improving its qualities within minimum costs. For maximum benefits of E-learning at minimum costs, proper policies and strategies must be implemented to integrate the available local technologies with the current education system. Some of the significant benefits of e-learning are given below. They are:

i) Convenience and Portability

ii) Cost and Selection

iii) Flexibility

iv) Higher Retention

v) Greater Collaboration

vi) Global Opportunities

The use of enormous integrated set of computer and internet tools and resources in the new learning environments allows us to achieve more efficient and effective training. The students are no longer passive consumers of the educational programs and services, but active participants in the educational process. Their skills and competencies to work effectively with digital technologies are prerequisite for successful and responsible solving and presentation of scientific problems and case studies. The eLearning term includes a wide range of uses of such technologies, starting from working with computers and ending with distance education, to which already is drawn more attention. It includes the use of CD\DVD-based (offline), network - Intranet or Internet-based (online). The documents of UNESCO highlights that the practices of e-learning "offers personalized monitoring coupled with flexibility in the management of learning and greater autonomy in the acquisition of knowledge"

The development of new information technologies in the 21th century is expanding the range of information resources; it is also creating conditions for the formation of a global informational, educational and cultural space and therefore changes occur in the education system. The paper underlines that high results cannot be achieved in the learning and the educational process without integrating new information and communication technologies in the education system. The use of enormous integrated set of computer and internet tools and resources allows us to achieve more efficient and effective training. The students are no longer passive consumers of the educational programs and services, but active participants in the educational process. Their skills and competencies to work effectively with digital technologies are prerequisite for successful and responsible solving and presentation of scientific problems and cases. E-learning definitely improves quality in higher education.

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