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E-Learning: Future of Education

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Abstract

This paper highlights the significance of E-learning in modern education and discusses its technical aspect, market, pros and cons, comparison with instructor led training and possibility of whether E-learning will replace the old classroom teaching. Presently the concept of E-learning is becoming very popular as the numbers of internet savvy users are increasing. Faster bandwidths have immensely helped in boosting the growth of E-Learning. Many institutions of higher education and universities are resorting to E-Learning. Big corporate companies are also heavily investing in E-learning and setting up interactive classrooms. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), the world's largest Open University launched a 24x7 E-learning satellite channel called Gyan Darshan. E-learning gives the advantage of 24x7 and 365 days a year round access as compared to Instructor-Led Training, which is one time class that must be scheduled. E-learning is cost effective as course content once developed could be easily used and modified for teaching and training. E-learning also provides students freedom from carrying heavy school bags and stop cutting of trees for the sake of paper, pencil and rubber. E-learning is the future of education as it is interactive, interesting and entertaining way of learning, and will soon replace the paper books in the form of touch screen tablets.

Keywords: *E-Learning, Interactive Learning, ILT, SME, Future of Education, Interactive Classrooms*

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Introduction

E-learning can best be defined as the science of learning without using paper printed instructional material. E-learning is the use of telecommunication technology to deliver information for education and training. With the progress of information and communication technology development, E-learning is emerging as the paradigm of modern education. The great advantages of E-learning include liberating interactions between learners and instructors, from limitations of time and space through the asynchronous and synchronous learning network model (Pei-Chen Sun *et al.*, 2008). E-learning is commonly referred to the intentional use of networked information and communications technology in teaching and learning. A number of other terms are also used to describe this mode of teaching and learning. They include online learning, virtual learning, distributed learning, network and web-based learning. The term E-learning comprises a lot more than online learning, as the letter “e” in E-learning stands for the word “electronic”, E-learning would incorporate all educational activities that are carried out by individuals or groups working online or offline (Som Naidu, 2006).

Market of E-Learning

UK Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development published its latest survey on E-learning trends in 2011. The survey was based on responses from over 600 learning practitioners. 53% of organisations reported that they have increased their use of E-learning in the last 12 months and over 90% of public organisations reported that they are presently using E-learning. The figure was only 75% for private sector organisations but these responses included many smaller organisations with less than 250 staff, of which less than half used E-learning (Kineo.com, 2012). According to a new report by Ambient Insight, the worldwide market for Self-paced E-learning products and services reached \$32.1 billion in 2010. The five-year compound annual growth rate (CAGR) is 9.2% and revenues will grow to \$49.9 billion by 2015. The report is called "The Worldwide Market for Self-paced eLearning Products and Services: 2010-2015 Forecast and Analysis," and analyses expenditures by seven regions: North America, Latin America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Asia, Middle East, and Africa (Prnewswire, 2012). E-learning has greatly benefited McDonald's as their online E-learning initiative for Food and Restaurant Safety has been a great success. McDonald's has made significant cost savings of £4 million since the introduction of training. The training also increased the standard of hygiene across restaurants; which is felt attributable to the fact that the programme is now specifically about McDonald's restaurants rather than generic materials. An online E-learning initiative for 8,000 people saved M&S over £500,000 in year one but also delivered: connection with learners, customer feedback improvement and contribution to sales (Kineo.com, 2012). E-learning can be a powerful and cost-effective alternative to classroom training,

E-learning vs. Instructor-Led Training

E-learning gives us the advantage of 24x7 and 365 days a year round access as compared to Instructor-Led Training (ILT), which is one time class which must be scheduled. E-learning is convenient to learner in comparison to ILT which has scheduling conflicts and inconvenience. E-learning is cost effective as course content once developed could be easily modified in future, used for teaching and training, whereas ILT is expensive as there are several costs associated with it like course development cost, good teaching professional cost, printing cost, paper cost, infrastructure cost, electricity cost, training material cost, stationary cost, travel expenses, meal expenses, lodging expenses, parking expenses, and several other costs are associated with it. One advantage of ILT over E-learning is the physical presence of instructor in a classroom, who can solve the queries of students instantly. E-learning provides students to learn at their own speed, but in ILT students are pushed through course in specific time frame, also ILT is not self-paced. In E-learning student can learn what is important and can skip unnecessary information, but in ILT all students are taught all the information and at the same level as rest of the class. After considering all these factors, it can be said that E-learning is far better, inexpensive and learner friendly way of learning as compared to the old fashioned ILT.

Characteristics of E-Learning

Today, E-learning is still in an early stage with many uncertain issues to be clarified and investigated. There are many factors potentially influencing E-learning effectiveness, such as media characteristics, learning context, technology, and learner characteristics. While our experiments have demonstrated that E-learning can be at least as effective as conventional classroom learning under certain situations, we are not in a position to claim that E-learning can replace traditional classroom learning. Learning is mostly a socio-cognitive activity. Not every student will find E-learning suitable

for his or her learning style. Some students feel bored or intimidated in front of computer. Other important issues in E-learning must also be taken into consideration. Issues of trust, authorization, confidentiality, and individual responsibility must be resolved. Owners of intellectual property should be properly compensated. Security on the Internet is a growing challenge, primarily due to the open access by the public to this universal network. In addition, since multimedia materials are heavily used in E-learning systems, a high-bandwidth network is a basic requirement for efficient content access. Nevertheless, E-learning is a promising alternative to traditional classroom learning, which is especially beneficial to remote and lifelong learning and training. In many cases, E-learning can significantly complement classroom learning. E-learning will keep growing as an indispensable part of academic and professional education. Efforts should continue to explore how to create more appealing and effective online learning environments. One way to achieve this is to integrate appropriate pedagogical methods, to enhance system interactivity and personalization, and to better engage learners. (Zhang *et al.*, 2004).

Will E-learning replace ILT?

In the past few years, E-learning has emerged as a promising solution to lifelong learning and on-the job work force training. E-learning can be defined as technology-based learning in which learning materials are delivered electronically to remote learners via a computer network. Effective and efficient training methods are crucial to companies to ensure that employees and channel partners are equipped with the latest information and advanced skills. Rushing to fill this need, thousands of online courses, including degree and certificate programs are now being offered by universities worldwide. In 2001, MIT announced its commitment to make materials from virtually all of its courses freely available on the Web for non-commercial use (Shea, 2002; Zhang *et al.*, 2004). An advantage E-learning has over ILT is that it can be developed and delivered much faster and can be used at the same time by a large population spread throughout the world. It can also be accessed by the learner when it is convenient for them and they can navigate through the course to view content that pertains to their need. ILT may include information that is not relevant to the learner. With E-learning courses, a learner can filter through the course and participate only in the section that is relevant to his current position. This saves the learner's and the company's time and cost. Most companies gain significant returns from even modest investments in E-learning technology. Most E-learning customers have quickly recognized first tier benefits, including reduced costs for travel, customer support, human resources overhead, and regulatory compliance and eventually second-tier benefits, such as increased employee performance that directly impact profitability (McLeod, 2006). Dobrin (1999) found that 85% of the faculty teaching online courses felt that student learning outcomes were comparable to or better than those found in face-to-face classrooms. E-learning has an advantage in nearly every area, including efficiency and velocity. According to a Brandon Hall article in Forbes, online learners enjoy an efficiency advantage in being able to cover the same material in approximately half the time of a traditional class. In addition, E-learning has a velocity advantage by being able to reach a large number of learners in a shorter time. To understand this velocity advantage, think about a classroom event that needs to be scheduled weeks in advance, but E-learning can enable instant access to knowledge at exactly the point in time it is needed. Anytime, anywhere, anyone including employees can access training when it is convenient to them, at home or in the office (Alt-Media, 2012). McLeod (2006) observed that in most cases the benefits of E-learning outweigh the benefits of ILT. Offering training through an E-learning format provides many advantages to the learner. Of course, some courses may be better suited for a blended learning approach but overall E-learning has supremacy over ILT.

Conclusion

The concept of E-learning is getting very popular these days, as many universities are offering degree and diploma programs through E-learning mode. Many big companies are investing in E-learning and setting up their interactive classrooms like Reliance and Tata. Also subject matter experts are developing new and versatile tools to create E-learning modules. One of the major drawbacks of ILT in institutions is the weight of school bags that learners have to carry on their shoulders and face the problem of backache. Also, as the number of trees is becoming less and less by each passing day due to cutting of trees for manufacturing paper, pencil and rubber; though banned by most governments in their respective countries, is making way for E-Learning. E-learning will overcome these drawbacks, if instead of heavy school bags, each learners is given a tablet with the course content fed in it, which would be much more attractive, enjoyable and thoughtful decision to take in the present era of modernization. Thus, the day is not far away when E-learning will become the future popular method of education throughout the world.

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