

E- learning: Need of the New Millennium

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Abstract

The Strategy of learning is position at the forefront of transforming classroom practice and student learning opportunities. While the term “e-learning” has been thrown around quite a lot in recent years, many are still unaware of what it actually means and how it can help them achieve success in both their professional and personal lives. E- learning is the expression broadly used to describe instructional content or learning experience delivered or enabled by electronic technologies. We can also define the use of internet, intranet/extranet, audio and videotape, satellite broadcast interactive TV and CD Rom, not only for content. In essence, e-learning is a computer based educational tool or system that enables one to learn anywhere and at any time. The present paper dealt with the need, types, advantages and disadvantages of e-learning.

The term “e-learning” has only been in existence since 1999, when the word was first utilized at a CBT systems seminar. Other words also began to spring up in search of an accurate description such as “online learning” and “virtual learning”. However, the principles behind elearning have been well documented throughout history, and there is even evidence which suggests that early forms of e-learning existed as far back as the 19th century. In the early days it received a bad press, as many people thought bringing computers into the classroom would remove that human element that some learners need, but as time has progressed technology has developed are now we embrace Smartphone and tablets in the classroom and office as well as using a wealth of interactive designs that makes distance learning not only engaging for the user, but valuable as a lesson delivery medium. Building partnership with quality training provider and combining this with a dedicated experienced technical team and support staff, Virtual College provides the perfect blended learning environment, offering any one the change to take their online training to the next level.

Today e-learning is mostly delivered though the internet, although in the past it was delivered using a blend of computer-based methods like CD-ROM. Technology has advanced so much that the geographical gap is bridged with the use of tools that make you feel as if you are inside the classroom. E-learning offers the ability to share material in all kinds of formats such as videos, slideshows, word documents and PDFs. Conducting webinars (live online classes) and communicating with professors via chat and message forums is also an option available to users. There is a plethora of different e-learning systems (otherwise known as Learning Management Systems, or LMSs for short) and methods, which allow for courses to be delivered. With the right tool, various processes can be automated such as the marking of tests or the creation of engaging content. E-learning provides the learners with the ability to fit learning around their lifestyles, effectively allowing even the busiest person to further a career and gain new qualifications. Some of the most important developments in education have happened since the launch of the internet. These days learners are well versed in the use of smartphones, text messaging and using the internet so participating in and running an online course has become a simple affair. Message boards, social media and various other means of

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online communication allow learners to keep 7 in touch and discuss course related matters, whilst providing for a sense of community. In the fast-paced world of e-learning the available technologies to make a course exciting are always changing, and course content can and should be updated quickly to give students the very latest information. This is especially important if the e- learning training is being given to employees in a sector where keeping up-to-date on industry developments is of the utmost importance. This is one of the reasons why many businesses are now offering training via elearning - other reasons includes low costs and the ability for employees to study in their own time and place. Overall, traditional learning is expensive, takes a long time and the results can vary. E-learning offers an alternative that is faster, cheaper and potentially better.

Type of E- learning: -

There are diverse ways of classifying the types of e-learning. According to Algahtani (2011), there have been some classifications based on the extent of their engagement in education. Some classifications are also based on the timing of interaction. The internet-based learning according to Almosa (2001) is a further improvement of the computer-based learning, and it makes the content available on the internet, with the readiness of links to related knowledge sources, for examples e-mail services and references which could be used by learners at any time and place as well as the availability or absence of teachers or instructors (Almosa, 2001).Algahtani (2011) divided e-learning into two basic types, consisting of computer-based and the internet based e-learning. Algahtani (2011) described the completely online mode as “synchronous” or “asynchronous” by the application of applying optional timing of interaction. The synchronous timing comprises alternate on-line access between teachers or instructors and learners, or between leaners, and the asynchronous, to him allows all participants to post communications to any other participant over the internet.

Synchronous E-learning: -

In the synchronous e-learning are online chat and videoconferencing. Means any learning tool that is in real time, such as instant messaging that allow students and teachers to ask and answer- questions immediately. The main benefit of avoids feeling of isolation since they are in communication with other thought-out the learning process. However synchronous learning in not as flexible in terms of time as student would have to set aside a specific time shop in order to attend a live teaching session or online course in real-time. So it may not be ideal for those who already have busy schedules.

Asynchronous E-learning:-

Asynchronous learning on the other hand can be carried out even when the student or teacher is offline. Coursework and communications delivered via web, email and messages posted on community forums are perfect example of Asynchronous e-learning. In these instances, students will typically complete the lesson on their own and merely use the internet as a support tool rather than venturing online solely for interactive classes. A student is also to follow the curriculum at their own pace without having to worry about scheduling conflicts. This may be a perfect option for users who enjoy talking their time with each lesson plan in the curriculum and would prefer to research topic on their own.

Why do we need E-learning

The main purpose of e-learning is, the face of classroom is changing. The teacher should prepare to keep up with technology utility in the classroom. ICT or e-learning is not only an essential tool for teachers in their day to day work, but it also offers them opportunities for professional development. In e-learning, participants can collaborate and help one another, reach learning goals by providing feedback, answering question and working as a distributed group. E-learning can support education institutions working together to raise standards by allowing collaboration between colleagues, allowing pupils to take special subjects offer by another educational institution without the need to travel. E-learning enables the development of teaching communities that can be used by teachers to share resources, including online libraries, discussion boards, and synchronous communication tools and help teacher to strengthen their curricular and teaching practices in professional collaborations to develop and review learning materials. E-learning is not a single technology but multifaceted, covering a wide range of approaches and method, one major but general benefit is that learning is enhanced with technology. Classroom is boarding. Today students feel school is not challenging or interactive enough. It has been said that there are two reasons why we learn, some learning is essentially forced on us while the other is what we sit back and enjoy. E-learning has brought back the joy in learning through innovation and interactive content and delivery among students.

Advantages of E-learning:-

Convenience:- Online learning does not require physical attendance. Learning is self-paced (neither too slow, nor too fast). You are unbound by time courses, available 24 hours and 7 days. You are unbound by place like study at home, or work on the road. Material online or download them for reading later is also a good facility.

Cost and Selection: - Choose from a wide range of courses to meet needs, degrees, vocational and certificate programs. Continuing education individual courses wide range of prices to fit budget. Go back to school to get a degree learn a new skill, learning a new craft or just have fun. From art to zoology you can do it all online in a price range to fit your budget.

Higher Retention: - E- learning draws topics likes and enjoys. Studies show that because of the various methods used to reach different types of learners, retention is frequently better than in a traditional classroom.

Greater Collaboration: - Technology tools make collaboration among students much easier. Since many projects involve collaborative learning, the online environment is easier to work. Where there is no boundation for learner.

Global opportunities:- The global learning community is at your fingertips with online learning. The technologies used give online instructional designers the ability to build in tools that take us to resources we may never see in a traditional classroom.

Flexibility – eLearning can be done in short chunks of time that can fit around your daily schedule. Unlike public scheduled and in-house training, you don't have to dedicate an entire day to the training that has been organised by your company. Instead, you will have a set amount of learning, normally divided into modules, so you can work on those topics you want to focus on.

Mobile – As eLearning can be done on laptops, tablets and phones – it is a very mobile method. Learning can be done on the train, on a plane or any other time that could normally be wasted. Whilst you used to be confined to the classroom, the whole world can now be your classroom.

No Travel– As just mentioned, eLearning can be done wherever you have a device capable of doing so. Therefore again you can fit it in to your schedule, but also save money on the costs of travel. As mentioned before on the public scheduled blog, external courses can sometimes only be sourced in locations far away from your company so you then have to pay the costs of travel as well potentially accommodation. eLearning takes these costs away completely.

Lower cost – As you aren't using a trainer's time or any room or equipment, eLearning tends to be the much cheaper option. If you already have a device capable of carrying out the training on, then the savings can be considerable. Therefore if you and your company are on a budget, this can be the ideal option for you. Equally for companies that have thousands of employees then it can reduce the cost per head especially on areas such as Money Laundering, Compliance and Microsoft Office training.

Tailored to you – eLearning courses aren't confined to be fixed to try and suit the needs of the majority. If you feel you already know a particular area well and don't need to spend an hour on it again, then you can skim over it and concentrate that time on something you feel you need to work more at. Everyone is able to learn at their own pace – a massive factor that only eLearning can provide for.

Technological Possibilities – eLearning is fast becoming a more and more popular method and with it, so has the investment into how to improve it further. The computer based nature of training means new technology is being introduced all the time to help with the learning. Different apps are helping to further reinforce the learning whilst forums can be used to greatly increase the amount of interaction and engagement between learners. This is only going to improve as time goes on as well.

Global – With very few restrictions companies can be confident that their staff can receive the same content regardless of their location, and in many cases, their nationality. Therefore if you wish to provide the same training or have your staff understand and use common methodology, eLearning is a useful way of ensuring this happens with ease and reduced cost.

The Disadvantages of eLearning Training includes:

Lack of Control– Learners with low motivation tend to fall behind when using eLearning as there are no set times to be doing it and they are responsible for the organisation themselves. A lack of routine or fixed schedule can mean eLearning becomes complicated with various deadlines often given to different people at different stages of their learning.

Learning Approach – It doesn't appeal to all learning styles so some learners will not enjoy the experience – especially strong activists and pragmatists. It is still a challenge to make eLearning appeal fully to these groups as different people learn better or worse using different styles. Some may prefer images, some prefer just reading words and some prefer to talk about or actually do a task in order to learn.

Isolated – A lot of questions are a lot easily answered when face to face with someone when you can guarantee an instant answer. eLearning often doesn't allow that with trainers often

having to answer numerous questions all of the time and only doing it within working hours – where a lot of learners may prefer to do their learning out of working hours. This feeling of isolation can often demotivate individuals as they feel they don't have the support and reassurance that the physical presence of a trainer provides.

Technology Issues – With heavy reliance on computers that eLearning brings, comes the potential risks that comes with it. Firstly, you need to ensure that all learners have a device that is able to support the training modules. Some eLearning tools require software such as Flash that devices like i-Pads don't support. So all requirements need to be set out at the beginning. Poor internet connection and unavoidable general random faults also can interrupt learning and so need to be planned around. This is especially true if it is a global roll out as Internet connections and power reliability changes dramatically between countries.

Computer Competency – Some employees might not be too comfortable using computers, especially if their jobs don't require them to. Therefore even if the software is user friendly, the very idea of using the software can be daunting and demotivating for some. Therefore these employees are likely to learn a lot less than they would from a physical course.

Conclusion

One of the most longstanding debates in the field of education has been whether or not we can benefit from e-learning to actually learn. Do we, as human beings, have the ability to soak up information in this fashion, and can we truly learn new skills and expand our knowledge by learning virtually? We realize the reservations of people who will argue that computers promote procrastination and offer distractions, however we owe it to ourselves to dig a little deeper and see the other side of the coin that pinpoints the unique advantages of learning online. It's true that as individuals we don't all respond to one teaching method in the same way - some learn visually, and others learn with repetition or writing; some prefer to learn by themselves, whilst others need someone to guide them all along the way; some are extroverts and feel comfortable talking in front of people, whilst others are introverts and are afraid to communicate openly inside the classroom.

E-learning responds to those different needs with the use of different tools and a variety of materials. For example, e-learning commonly offers audiovisual content or interactive testing on the go that can be more attractive for younger learners than traditional books. E-learning also lets people communicate through email, forum or chat, allowing even introverts to take part in related conversations. E-Learning, in comparison with traditional learning, significantly reduces the time needed to locate information. It also offers access to online resources, databases, periodicals, journals and other material you wouldn't normally have access to from a library. If a student has trouble understanding part of the coursework, finding tips on the matter couldn't be easier than having immediate access to supplementary, unlimited and mostly free material online! Those characteristics can potentially maximize the time spent actually learning rather than looking for information (note however that seeking information can be a learning process in and of itself! – the word serendipity describes exactly that, the accident of finding something good or useful even when not specifically searching for it).

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