E-LEARNING – AN EMERGING TREND IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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Abstract

Information and communication technologies have become an integral part of many spheres of human life – business, industry, medicines, education etc. In the sphere of education, these technologies are creating a new learning environment in which student is now having the chance to learn through computer-application based courses of studies. Teaching is the life blood of education. Teaching methods and techniques assume great importance in the entire process of modern education. ICT has given birth to a new method of teaching learning which is referred to as “E-Learning”. E-learning involves distance education imparted using computer networks. This new technology allows the teachers, students and specialists to communicate with each other. In the present era of information explosion, if we want to keep ourselves in an advantageous position, it is very important that we understand the need, concept and importance of e-learning. The tripod of Content, Services, and Technology determine the success of an e-learning programme. E-learning is broadly divided into forms like Computer Based Training, Web Based Training and Virtual Classrooms. Whether one accepts or not e-learning has entered into the Indian education system. NCERT has taken steps to integrate school curriculum with the ICT. IGNOU the mega university is also offering two online educational programmes viz. Bachelors of Information Technology, and Advanced Diploma in Information Technology. Virtual universities to offer a wide range of courses have already come into existence in various states like Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Haryana, Karnataka etc. In Gujarat, e-learning is used in various corporate like TCS, Wipro, Patni Software Developers, General Motors, call centers like Emphasis etc. Many other educational institutions like ICFAI, Company Secretaries, MICA, IIM-A, NIIT, Aptech etc have already taken up the initiative of using e-learning in its teaching learning process. Thus, e-learning has opened a new avenue for those who find it difficult to attend the conventional classrooms. It creates an environment of classroom in home itself. The quality...
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of higher education is constantly improving in our country. We have established our superiority in the Silicon Valley. We, the Indians, have also proved that we can think constructively. The government is also striving for improvement in literacy rate and in the quality of higher education. Banks and other industrial sectors have already taken initiatives to enter into collaboration with education institutions thus trying to bridge the gap between the education and the practical scenario. All this indicates that there are better prospects for e-learning in India.

NEED, CONCEPT AND IMPORTANCE OF E-LEARNING

Where is the life? We have lost in living
Where is the wisdom? We have lost in knowledge
Where is the knowledge? We have lost in information

We are living in an era of instability, insecurity, and constant change. The knowledge acquired by a person during his formal education becomes obsolete at a very rapid rate in the digital environment. Lifelong learning is the only way to survive and thrive in the rapidly changing environment.

E-learning is the cutting-edge of lifelong learning and e-learning gained ground during 1990s along with e-commerce when companies started selling their products via the web and using it for multimedia and interactive presentations and employees’ training.

E-learning or Electronic Learning is the delivery of educational content via any electronic media, including the internet, intranets, extranets, satellite broadcast, audio/video tape, interactive TV, CD-Roms, interactive CDs, and computer-based training. E-learning is distributed in many different forms of educational programs including online courses, web enhanced learning and distance education either in synchronous or asynchronous way.

Thus, E-learning is based on the concept of creating media-rich collaborative virtual experience that offers the benefits similar to the real physical experience in face to face
learning and teaching. E-learning facilitates just-in-time learning without disruption of the daily work schedules. Moreover, it offers on-demand courses at the convenience of the learner. It is flexible in the sense that the traditional constraints of space and time don’t bother the learner. E-learning requires only a web browser and modem connection for access. Speed and minimal cost are the additional benefits. E-learning market is thus heading towards tremendous growth. E-learning alone can answer the global educational needs of individuals and society as a whole.

COMPONENTS OF E-LEARNING
E-learning comprises of three basic elements- Content, Services and Technology. The content mix will consist of a combination of pedagogy skills, IT skills, business skills and interpersonal skills depending on desired competencies. The technology enables hosting the service and content management through Learning Management Systems (LMS). The service mix consists of collaborative tools including mentoring, threaded discussions, online seminars and subject matter led chat sessions.

FORMS OF E-LEARNING
There are various forms of presenting e-learning content, however, it can be broadly classified into three major forms i.e., CBT (Computer Based Training), WBT (Web based Training) and Virtual Classrooms.

CBT: The CBT packages are such where the students can study at their own place, pace and time. Learning through CD-ROM allows the students to take advantage of E-learning benefits without the need for an Internet connection. The learning experience becomes more in-depth, flexible, convenient, personalized and above all enjoyable. The E-learning package is rich and valuable; quite often more convenient than classroom learning. Following are some of the components of a CBT package:

- E-Textbooks
- E-Lectures
- Lecture Notes
WBT: As we know that Internet is the ocean of knowledge, therefore it is better to open (introduce) this ocean to all students as early as possible in their life. This can be done by introducing or using Information Technology & related tools in education or by using World Wide Web as education delivery medium. The WWW is used not only to disseminate information but it also provides a great opportunity to extend learning outside space and time boundaries. The Web Based Training has the potential to meet the perceived need for flexible pace, place & face. The web allows education to go to the learner rather than the learner to their education.

In web based education we have two different types, asynchronous and synchronous learning: In asynchronous the educational module is to be installed from a particular web site and then you can unpack it offline on your machine. In this case there is no mutual interaction of student with teacher. In synchronous type there is synchronization among the students and teacher on-line. This synchronous E-Learning is an interactive experience with access to on line tutors and can be done from any computers once you have your password. Access is through web browsers such as Internet explorer and Netscape Navigator. The WBT is organized in the form of modules. The modules are approximately one hour session that focuses on specific subject of training. Using WBT the training can be brought right to one’s desktop. This makes technical training more convenient. During the live WBT, participants will have the ability to ask the instructor questions, get answers and interact with other students --- all on line.

VCR(Virtual Classrooms):
A virtual classroom is a learning environment that exists solely in the form of digital content that is stored, accessed, and exchanged through networked computer and information systems. Although the term virtual classrooms refers primarily to those learning spaces that
exist completely independent of physical classrooms, they may also work in conjunction with traditional classroom environments. The following are some of the tools used in VCR:

- E-mail
- Announcements
- Discussion boards
- File transfers and file management
- Chat rooms
- Whiteboards
- Journals and notes

All of these tools are the means of communication and transfer of information between students and the teacher. Some of these tools, such as the chat rooms and whiteboards, enable real-time, or synchronous communication, which is similar to face-to-face communication. While other tools, such as the discussion boards and e-mail, enable communication to occur at "convenient times" that suit student schedules and are not necessarily accessed at simultaneous or prearranged times. Tools such as these enable the exchange of asynchronous communication. Other communication tools that some virtual classrooms offer are video and audio streaming of content, or video/audio conferencing for live interaction between students and teacher. These are not standard tools in every virtual classroom, due to the computer and internet capacity requirements necessary to enable their functionality. These types of communication tools can be “memory intensive, meaning that they require a high Internet connection speed and a large computer memory in order for them to be used effectively or run smoothly.

E-LEARNING IN INDIA

According to Asia internet usage and population report (http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#in), there were 5,000,000 internet users in India in the year 2000, while the same is estimated as 1,129,667,528 by the end of 2007. Thus the growth rate of internet users in India (2000-2007) is 750%. This clearly shows the growing importance of internet in our economy. Internet is the place where the youth is going to spend most of its time and the belief that learning takes place in the place where we spend
most of the time follows. Hence, education should follow the suit and integrated e-learning in its teaching learning process. E-learning in India has been most successful in the corporate segment where it is seen as a means of achieving business goals and motivating employees. E-learning is presently used in various service sectors like software developing companies, BPO’s, call centers, banking sector, insurance sectors etc. Banks and institutions like ICICI, HDFC, Intel, Aptech, NIIT have already taken the initiative to enter into collaboration with various universities to provide various courses related to IT, Banking etc. According to the experts, the best place to E-learning service providers in the world is India because of the availability of experienced E-Learning services providers, cost-effectiveness and better quality system ("http://www.computerbasedtrainings.net/").

Recognizing the importance of e-learning in the development of our human resources, Department of Information Technology as per the recommendations of National Task Force on IT and 10th Plan Working Group, had initiated many development projects in the area of e-learning in many of the leading academic and R&D institutions (IIT, IIM, C-DAC, IGNOU, BITS etc) of the country.

With the objective of tapping the country's talent and to address all education and learning related needs of students, scholars, teachers and lifelong learners, the HRD ministry has launched one-stop educational portal called “Sakshat”. By next year, the portal would be accessible to students in 700 cities. The content for the portal will be developed by UGC, AICTE, IGNOU, NCERT, KVS, NVS, CBSE, IITs and IISc. 'Sakshat' will provide links to vast knowledge resources, educational news, examination alerts, sample papers and other useful links available on the web. It has an in-built repository of educational resources and online testing facility. The portal has five functional modules i.e., educational resources, scholarships, testing, super achievers, interaction.

Also, to meet the growing demands of higher education, UGC is also planning to start virtual universities with on-line exams (Press Trust Of India, 24/12/2006.) EMRC’s working under UGC have already started offering various e-courses. Further, many states in our country like Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Karnataka etc have already started many virtual universities.
IGNOU is offering two courses in IT as a part of its virtual campus. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University is also planning to start its virtual campus.

CONCLUSION

"E-learning is not just about technology, tools, content, etc. It is about training people and the resulting effect on the organization." Simply throwing courses online is not a viable model for success. Before one can measure the benefits of an e-learning initiative, one must understand what it intends to measure.

REFERENCES:


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