e-learning Opportunities and Challenges in India

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ABSTRACT *In the age of globalization and technological revolution the term e-learning has got enormous importance in recent years. Globalization has generated a good vibration and more opportunities in the field of education and there is e-learning technology got potential to spread and provide learning facilities at remote locations. The use of internet has given needed space to reach e-learning at wide area through computer networks. e-learning has been accepted as a learning tool by primary and higher educational institutions. Its features make possible 24x7 availability, mobility and skill improvements. Present paper concentrates on two major aspects e-learning tools & techniques and finding opportunities and challenges for e-learning.*

Introduction: The term e-learning stands for electronic learning. The term is in use since many years but in last five years it has gained popularity and a formal tool for teaching and learning activities. e-learning is a rapidly developing field in academic, government, corporate and community sectors. e-learning focus on human interaction and different methods are used for e-learning i.e. online learning, internet learning, distributed learning, networked learning, tele-learning, virtual learning, web based learning, distance learning, etc.

According to the research report "India e-learning Market Outlook to FY'2018 – Increasing technology adoption to drive future growth" is market is estimated to grow at CAGR of 17.4% over the period FY2013-FY'2018. The driving factors are increasing government initiatives to promote e-learning, increasing adoption of technology, shortage of quality education, convenience, cost, etc.

According to Clark students gain significant learning benefits when learning from audio/video instruments as opposed to conventional instruction. Similarly, Schramm (1977) suggested that learning is influenced more by the content and instructional strategy in the learning materials than by the type of technology used to deliver instruction. [7]

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. Fundamentally, they all refer to educational processes that utilize information and communications technology to mediate asynchronous as well as synchronous learning and teaching activities. On closer scrutiny, however, it will be clear that these labels refer to slightly different educational processes and as such they cannot be used synonymously with the term e-learning. [5]

According to Bonk and Reynolds (1997), to promote higher order thinking on the Web, online learning must create challenging activities that enable learners to link new information to old, acquire meaningful knowledge, and use their metacongnitive abilities; hence, it is the instructional strategy and not the technology that influences the quality of learning. [7]

Objectives
- To understand the concept of e-learning.
- To find out opportunities and challenges of e-learning in India.

Tools of e-learning
A tool provides facility for learner or teacher to understand the concept and get skilled in a specific objective. It is very important to use accurate tool as per the requirement of the problem.

- Chatting
- Digital boards
- Virtual class room
- Video Conference
- Online Exam
- Online Teaching
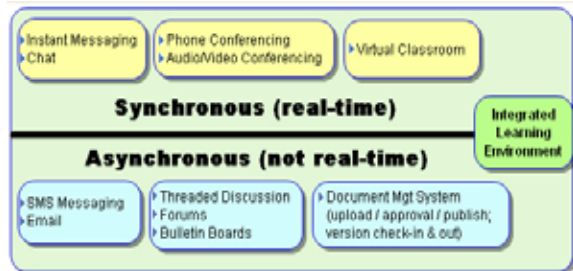- Sharable content object reference model (SCORM)
- Website

Delivery Trends of e-learning
Synchronous e-learning refers to a learning environment in which everyone takes part at the same time. Lecture is an example of synchronous learning in a face-to-face environment, where learners and teachers are all in the same place at the same time. Before technology allowed for synchronous learning environments, most online education took place through Asynchronous learning methods. Since synchronous tools that can be used for education have become available, many people are turning to them as a way to help decrease the challenges associated with transactional distance that occurs in online education.

Asynchronous e-learning is a student-centered teaching method that uses online learning resources to facilitate information sharing outside the constraints of time and place among a network of people. Asynchronous learning is based on constructivist theory, a student-centered approach that emphasizes the importance of peer-to-peer interactions. This approach combines self-study with asynchronous interactions to promote learning, and it can be used to facilitate learning in traditional on-campus education, distance education, and continuing education. This

combined network of learners and the electronic network in which they communicate are referred to as an asynchronous learning network.

Figure 1: "Synchronous-Asynchronous Learning"

(Source: http://www.cognitivedesignsolutions.com/EL-earning/Time-Place.htm)
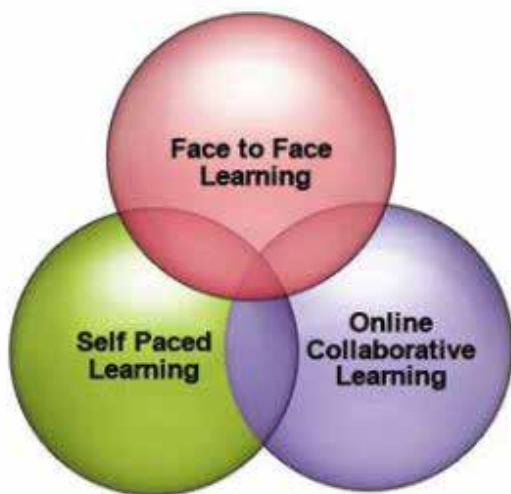
In the above figure no 1 the use of synchronous and asynchronous learning process is shown. Asynchronous learning is self-paced — occurring at different times as determined by the learner. Self-managing learning events is how adult learners prefer to learn. Most importantly, asynchronous learning offers the dramatic economic impact of making curriculum available 24/7. The essential dialogue of an instructor-student relationship can still be preserved in a self-paced, distance model if the tutorial is designed to include person-to-person contact through email, threaded discussion, phone and video.

Synchronous learning events are real-time — bringing instructor and student together at the same time in a live event. Synchronous learning involves social learning principles and dynamics, whether the interaction is one-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many. [6]

Blended Learning
Blended learning is combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning methods. As per the requirements required tools can be merged together to achieve the objectives.

Figure 2: "Blended Learning"

(Source: http://edbuzz.org/sroner/2009/07/blended-learning-boosts-achievement)

Figure No. 2 shows that synchronous and asynchronous

methods work together and makes new form of learning called as blended learning. It is also referred as hybrid learning.

Opportunities of e-learning
- Spreading education at wide level is possible in spite of geographical restrictions.
- Flexibility in learning and services availability at 24x7.
- Useful in improving knowledge, skills of a learner by using computer technology.
- It benefits in self learning and evaluation.
- Facility for online help and training to the students or teachers.
- Learning contents can be repeated as per the choice of learner.
- Availability of lectures, demos, etc in the form of videos and audio.
- Use of multimedia makes effective communication in teaching learning process.
- The learning activities can be shared from institute to another.
- E-learning provides consistency in teaching and learning activities.

Challenges in e-learning
- Awareness of e-learning in rural areas and making them understanding the concept and technology is one of the major challenges.
- Lack of infrastructure i.e. internet connection, computer system, installation, power supply, networking, etc.
- Sensitive content or material may create problems.
- Authentication is required in deploying the required services.
- Geographical issues can make differences in services.
- Pedagogical support is required as per the course contents.
- Appropriate maintenance is required.
- Securing adequate funding to handle demand.
- Providing 24x7 supports.
- Lack of online training.
- The literacy rate, gross enrollment rates have been at the bottom.

Conclusion
The purpose of this presented paper is to understand the significance of e-learning tools and techniques and its opportunities and challenges in the education sector. In the globalization process the role of information technology has been recognized as an effective tool for communication. Education is one of the fundamental requirements for providing the skilled man power which directly influence the growth of the country. e-learning provides lot of avenues in teaching and learning process. e-learning has formally been adopted as a learning tool in education system at primary, school and higher education level. Adequate funding and transparent implementation mechanism is required for spreading awareness of e-learning system at remote areas for ensuring the benefits of the technology. E-learning technology is not a replacement for traditional learning process but it can be a substitute or an additional facility to accomplish the learning activities.

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