Volume : 3 | Issue : 7 | July 2014 • ISSN No 2277 - 8179

Research Paper

e-Learning and e-Marketing in Libraries

Library Science

KEYWORDS : E-learning, Education, E-markets

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ABSTRACT

Due to globalisation and frequency in information exchanges, the role of e-learning is gaining momentum. The present paper highlights the key concepts of e-learning & e-marketing with the distinguishing dimensions, implementations, benefits, barriers, success factors and recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

E-learning is defined as a network or online learning that takes place in a formal context and uses a range of multimedia technologies (Garisson & Anderson, 2003). It is essentially a learning system that is supported by electronic hardware and software either online (synchronous) or offline (asynchronous). The learning is carried out either individually or on a small or large group basis and can be used as a hybrid to the face-to-face format, or exclusively in open and distance learning (ODL). As such, e-learning is not confined to the boundaries of the online format but also includes the offline format using any form of electronic media to facilitate the teaching and learning processes. The prospects of e-learning are immense. It continues to grow at a tremendous rate both in education and training. The growth rate for the different education and training markets is projected at 10 -15 percent annually. These markets command a value of US$ 2 trillion out of which the USA has a share of US$740 billion (RocSearch, 2003). It is very likely that e-learning will become the future trend in learning, notably in OD. Higher education will emerge at the top with US$23 billion in 2006 increasing to US$44 billion in 2011. Where the institutions of higher learning in USA are concerned, 60 percent utilise emails, 42 percent use Internet resources while 31 percent use WWW pages as the modes for the instructional delivery (Wende, 2000). In the Asia Pacific region, Japan has the highest number of Internet users, estimated at 55.9 million followed by 33.7 million in China. Malaysia has 6.5 million users. However, in a 2004 survey, the number of Internet users in Malaysia has increased to 8,187,000 (Jaring, 2004).

Dimensions of E-Learning

The extent of e-learning technology use in course delivery varies widely. The variations in the configuration of e-learning offerings can be described through a number of attributes. These attributes can be classified into the dimensions of synchronicity, location, independence, and mode. An e-learning course component can be described by indicating which one of the two attribute values from each dimension is applicable. E-learning can be synchronous (real-time) or asynchronous (flex-time). Synchronous e-learning includes technology such as video conferencing and electronic white boards (Romiszowski, 2004), requiring students to be present at the time of content delivery. Asynchronous applications include programmed instruction and tutorials that allow students to work through the screens at their own pace and at their own time. Most of the courses available on the Internet are based on this asynchronous model (Greenagel, 2002). Students can be involved in e-learning from distributed locations, as in distance learning, or from the same place, such as using a group support system in a classroom to work on an assignment (Gunasekaran et al., 2002). E-learning applications also differ in the levels of collaboration that they involve. Some courses are entirely independent and individual, while others incorporate some elements of group learning such as discussion forums or chat rooms. The mode of course delivery can be entirely electronic (with or without an instructor) or take a more blended approach integrating electronic and classroom delivery to varying extents. Many current e-learning offerings follow the latter mode, taking advantage of the benefits of various types of delivery (Jack and Curt, 2001).

E-Learning Market

Given the variety of definitions of e-learning, it is difficult to estimate the size of the market. However, e-learning is believed to be the fastest growing sub-sector of the $2.3T USD global education market, with the market for online higher education expected to grow to $69B USD by 2015 (Hezel Associates, 2005). There are many reasons for the growth of the higher education e-learning industry, both from the institutions' and students' perspectives. Globally, the demand for post secondary education is increasing. For example, in the United States, college enrollment among high school graduates increased from 56% in 1980 to 67% in 2003 (Morrison, 2003). In Canada, it is expected that over 70% of new jobs created will require at least some post secondary education (Industry Canada, 2001). With the limited capacity of existing classrooms at academic institutions and the prohibitive cost of building new facilities, e-learning is an attractive alternative (Werbach, 2000). In an effort to remain competitive and maintain their market share, many traditional higher education institutions have expanded their offerings to include e-learning courses to compete with the growing number of virtual higher education institutions (Huynh et al., 2003). In doing so, they can use their brand names to expand their target market internationally in order to capitalizing on excess demand that exists in the education systems of other countries. In addition, increasing the use of information systems within educational institutions also provides an opportunity for the organizations to reengineer their existing time and paper-intensive processes to improve their overall efficiency (Sun Microsystems, 2003). E-learning makes it possible for this lifelong learning to occur as a part of the student's every day life, removing the need to travel to a traditional institution or be confined to a specific class schedule (Industry Canada, 2001).

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF E-LEARNING

The implementation of the e-learning system by any institution can be achieved using one of three approaches. This implementation will depend on the level of readiness in terms of the budget, infrastructure and human resources such as experience, skills, knowledge and attitude. Some institutions are already practising e-learning in one way or other without using the network but by deploying the computer stand-alone learning materials such as the CD-ROMs, CAI courseware and other locally produced courseware. There are three main approaches to use e-learning within education:

1. Using the technologies to support or supplement the traditional face-to-face course
2. Integrating online activities into a traditional course to enhance the learning experience

3. Delivering a course that is entirely online

The Smart Schools project under the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) flagship. Apart from the Smart Schools, teachers in normal schools are provided with laptops and LCD projectors to teach selected subjects, namely, mathematics, science and English using standalone multimedia.

- The setting up of the virtual universities – the Universiti Tun Abd Razak (UNITAR) in 1998 and the Open University of Malaysia (OUM) in 2000.
- The establishment of the Multimedia University in 1999 to support the MSC projects.

- The establishment of the National Digital Library.
- The usage among higher institutions of learning of various forms of technology to support or supplement the delivery of traditional courses.
- The usage of e-learning in the distance learning programmes made available by universities.

BENEFITS OF THE E-LEARNING SYSTEM

It is a big challenge for the implementers to realise the benefits of online learning. Some of the benefits of online learning experienced are as follows:

- Tools for managing instruction and learning (e.g. online registration, the tracking of students' progress, etc.) have been created
- Support services for face-to-face instruction are available
- The problem of large classes has been minimised
- Learner-centred programmes are available
- Instructional time is controlled
- Immediate responses to teaching is possible
- Remediation and practice can be made
- Flexible learning -- anytime and anywhere – is permitted

BARRIERS TO ONLINE LEARNING

Like any other educational innovation, there are pitfalls and barriers confronting the introduction of e-learning. The following dimensions as areas of challenge had been identified:

- Accessibility and equity
- Maintenance of system and infrastructure and safety
- Selection of appropriate hardware and software
- The potentiality and limitations of the selected systems tool design (e.g., Web CT)
- Technical skills and support
- Top management support
- Courseware design and development team
- Pedagogical skills
- Training of lecturers, students and support staff
- Provision of efficient e-learning network (LAN, WAN, Internet)
- Recognition/reward
- Intellectual property and copyright
- Problems of adoption and innovation

KEY TO SUCCESS OF E-LEARNING

Based on our experience, the success of online learning may be attributed to the following factors:

- Sustainable government sponsorship
- Total commitment and support from top management
- Participation, cooperation and support from major universities
- Advanced technical skills
- Technical support
- Expertise in instructional design
- Marketing experience and skills

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are relevant to ensure the successful implementation of e-learning at the national level:

- The setting up of a special commission on e-learning at the national level to looking at the curricula, online teaching-learning methods and materials, the training of teachers on ICT skills, the Smart Schools facilities and infrastructure.
- The creation of a national integrated e-learning network through which all learners can receive high quality advice and guidance and participate in lifelong learning.
- The provision of an excellent delivery infrastructure with the capacity and technical support to enable all communities of learners wishing to participate in e-learning to do so at locations of their choice.
- The introduction of a national plan to raise ICT skills.
- The promotion of interoperability compatible with emerging international guidelines and quality standards such as SCORM (Shareable Content Object Reference Model).
- The continued development of competence in instructional design, graphics design and programming which facilitate the production of high quality Web- based materials.
- Promoting assurance that e-learning will greatly benefit a bilingual nation in the design and delivery of learning processes.

CONCLUSION

E-learning will gradually dominate the teaching learning system. The Ministry of Education needs to have some guidelines to help schools and higher learning institutions to implement e-learning successfully and efficiently. In USA, the Department of Education has set up a special commission related to Web-based learning in educational establishments. This will promote high quality learning experiences and provide different instructional and learning methods. Teachers and students must have technical and cognitive skills in ICT so that they become effective users of the technology.

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