Research Paper Education

E-Learning and its Implementation in Distance Education

Neeraj Bishnoi | Research Scholar, TECHNO GLOBAL UNIVERSITY, SHILONG

ABSTRACT

In this paper the meaning of e-learning has been highlighted. E-learning requires the delivery of the subject matter content in an alternative form. A positive disposition in the organization towards technology is a must for the successful deployment of e-learning. The modalities of elearning has been discussed. Its implementation requires certain requirements such as effective planning, designing and evaluation. E-learning can adopt to the scheduling needs of students and teachers. It leads to wider access to the content and techniques of teaching and learning. The future of learning is inextricably linked to the development of quality learning objects. (Mc Greal,2004) other see digital learning objects as the "building blocks of e-learning" and learning object repositories as the "libraries of the elearning era" with the potential to "fuel elearning as the stock exchanges fuelled the industrial era (Richards, Hatola & McGreal,2004). Thus, the implementation of elearning is a must in our education system.

KEYWORDS

Introduction

E-learning is also known by names such as online learning, virtual learning, distributed learning, network and web based learning. It is commonly referred to the intentional use of network information and communications technology in teaching and learning. The letter e" in E-Learning stands for the word "electronic", e-learning would incorporate all educational activities that are carried out by individuals working online or offline via networked computers and other electronic devices.

Modalities of E-Eearning

Individualized Self pacede-Learning online Individualized self paced e-leaning offline Group based e-learning synchronously

Group based e-learning asynchronously

1) Individualized self paced e-learning online refers to situations where an individual learner is accessing learning resources such as a database or course content online via an intranet or the internet.
2) Individualized self paced c-learning offline refers to situations where an individual learner is using learning resources such as a database or computer assisted learning package offline.
3) Group e-learning synchronously refers to situations where group of learners are working together in real time via an intranet or the internet. It may include text based conferencing and one or two way audio and videoconferencing.
4) Group based c-learning asynchronously refers to situations where groups of learners are working over an intranet or the internet where exchanges among participants occur with a time delay.

Several leading researches of the time argued that learning and any learning gains are actually caused by the way the subject matter and content is presented via a medium, rather than medium itself (Clark & Soloman, 1986; Kulik, 1985; Schranim, 1977). Clark concedes that media can have important influences on the cost and speed of learning, but argues that it is only the instructional method that can influence learning. Kozma reviewed relevant research on learning with media which suggests that the capabilities of a particular medium, in conjunction with methods that take advantage of these capabilities, interact with and influence the ways learners represent and process information and may result in more or different learning when one medium is compared to another for certain learners and tasks'(Kozma, 1991).

Requirements of E-Learning

Foremost this will include attention to the technology and infrastructure that is necessary to support it. E-Learning technology needs to work and fluidly to allow teachers and students to concentrate on learning and teaching and not be distracted by the technology. E-Learning will require the delivery of that subject matter content in alternative forms such as online. A more efficient and effective model of course development is the team approach. In E-Learning the subject matter is made accessible to the learners, it needs to be modified, enhanced and presented in a form that is amenable to the technology. Content once generated will need to be updated. E-Learning because of the flexibility it affords in terms of time and space independence is more unfair to learning and assessment practices. Opportunities for these occurrences need to be properly managed. Evaluation of the impacts of the processes should be closely integrated into the planning and implementation of any e-learning activity (Naidu,2005). Internet technologies have fundamentally altered the technical and economic landscape so radically that it is now possible to make quantum leaps in the use of technology for learning.

Fundamental Criteria of E-Learning

E-Learning is based on four fundamental criteria:

1) E-Learning is networked, which makes it capable of instant updating, storage / retrieval, distributing and sharing of instruction and information.
2) It is delivered to the end user via a computer (also Web TV, cell phones, tablets, and personal digital assistants) using standard Internet technology such as TCP/IP protocol.
3) It focuses on the broadcast view of learning, i.e. learning solutions that go beyond the traditional paradigms of training to include tools that improve performance.
4) E-Learning spans distance. E-learning is a form of distance learning but distance learning is not necessarily e-learning.

E-Learning and its Implementation

E-Learning is neither a cheap nor an easy educational option. It does not offer a quick fix for problems. Lack of careful planning and implementation of e-learning can actually lead to decreasing standards and morale. Any effort to embark on e-learning must be preceded by very careful planning. This would comprise strategic and operational planning that is consistent with the values, mission and goals of an organization. A critical component of this is orienting or reorienting for the successful adoption of e-learning is institutional sponsorship .For e-learning to succeed in any setting, there has to be complete support for the initiative from the highest levels. Staff needs to buy into the initiative and be committed to its success (Hawkridge, 1979).

Implementation of E-Learning in Distance Education

Distance education particularly via e-learning, can adapt to the scheduling needs of students and teachers. It can also address the particular needs of the students. For example In California, ESL (English as a second language) students make up to 92% of people enrolled in distance learning courses. The quality of distance education program that uses e-learning tools is determined in part by the functioning of the tools themselves. Students have found that certain characteristics of learners, such as age and gender, are relevant in assessment of objective. As distance education delivered via e-learning becomes more popular, an emerging concern is the effect of the delivery system on achievement in learning. Several studies have compared traditional classroom instruction with distance education and found no significant differences in student outcomes (Askov, Johnston, Petty and Young, 2003).

Some suggestions for successful programs in distance education and e-learning include:

1) Screen students to assess the likelihood of success in distance education and e- learning. Screening includes assessment of the student's familiarity with technology, ability to solve problem and level of self directedness.
2) Hold orientations sessions to acquaint learners with the requirements of the curriculum and the technology. Petty and Johnston (2003) found the orientation process a critical factor in the success of programmes in the Pennsylvania pilot study.
3) Face-to-face instruction can provide lower-level learners with support and help them develop confidence in their ability to succeed using e- learning tools.
4) Help students develop their ability to engage in self- directed learning.
5) Provide support for learners through frequent contact with instructors via multiple modalities.
6) Provide access to technical support through help lines or other means. Help learners troubleshoot technical problems that they encounter in distance learning.
7) Encourage the development of learner cohort groups. Members of cohort groups can encourage and support each other in their learning endeavors.
8) Provide professional development to ensure that instructors can effectively use e-learning tools in distance education.

Conclusion

E-learning is relatively new endeavor. More research is needed to understand which learners will benefit from the use of e-learning tools and under what conditions. The promise of expanded services and resources require the field to examine how best to take advantage of recent advances in educational technology. The access to e-learning must be flexible. These applications enable learners and teachers to engage in synchronous as well as asynchronous interaction across space, time and pace. ELearning affords as a wide range of opportunities to capture, store and distribute information and resources of all types and formats. It included multimedia based simulations of complex processes. E-learning affords opportunities to design learning environments that are authentic, situated in the learning context.

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