

EDUCATION AND E-LEARNING

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Received on 18th February 2017, Revised on 28th February 2017; Accepted 28th February 2017

ABSTRACT

Key words: E-learning, Quality, Teaching and learning



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Indian education system in its primary, secondary or higher levels is fraught with quality and quantity challenges. There are shortages of quality teachers, enabling environment for students and infrastructure in many areas. These hurdles are not going to go away soon even though there is a wide range in the number of students at all levels and an increasing demand for quality education. The journey of education in India has been dotted with innumerable milestones—the most recent among these is e-learning.

In e-learning environments the opportunity to communicate synchronously with the student is limited and usually it depends on the availability of the student. The temporal flexibility that e-learning allows has to be seen as an important feature as it allows all participants to participate in the learning process regardless of their availability but it also must be well designed and the participants must be aware of the required competences related to ICT mediated communication processes.

The survey and interviews suggest there are numerous factors which both help and hinder quality of engagement in e-learning Professional development. E-learning brings unique advantages, the prominent ability to provide personalized attention to all students. Some aspects of e-learning, professional development and quality assurance are considered in this paper.

“Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.”

—Albert Einstein

While Einstein’s words may have been intended in good humour, they aptly reflect the fact that effective education is constant and always helping to evolving. In fact, the face of education has experienced a sea change over the decades. Once characterized by the traditional classroom model, education has metamorphosed into learning that is instant, online, self-driven and on the go. The journey of education in India, too, has been dotted with innumerable milestones—the most recent among these is e-learning. Understanding eLearning is simple. E-learning is learning utilizing electronic technologies to access educational curriculum outside of a traditional classroom. In most cases, it refers to a course, program or degree delivered completely online. There are many terms used to describe learning that is delivered online, via the internet, ranging from Distance Education, to computerized electronic learning, online learning, internet learning and many others. We define eLearning as courses that are specifically delivered via the internet to somewhere other than the classroom where the professor is teaching. It is not a course delivered via a DVD or CD-ROM, video tape or over a television channel.

The use of Internet based Information Communication Technologies in teaching and learning strategies can, in most cases, be responsible for:

- promoting lack of leadership
- enabling difficulties in communicating
- fostering disaggregated teaching and learning processes and learning strategies
- increasing drop-out rates

Another aspect of the use of ICT as a mediator or a tool to enhance the learning environment is that it can lead to difficulties in the communication process between both teacher and student. ICT is the effective resource in present era. In e-learning environments the opportunity to communicate synchronously with the student is limited and usually it depends on the availability of the student. And even so, one cannot be sure of the willingness of the student to communicate or the effectiveness of the communication since written communication is rather different from oral communication. The temporal flexibility that e-learning allows has to be seen as an important feature as it allows all participants to participate in the learning process regardless of their availability, but it also must be well designed and the participants must be aware of the required competences related to ICT mediated communication processes.

For an online e-learning environment to be effective it should encourage -

1. contact between students and faculty members,

2. reciprocity and cooperation between students,
3. prompt feedback,
4. time on task,
5. active learning techniques,
6. communication of high expectations
7. respect diversity and
8. ways of learning from each student.

Some research discusses and suggests the importance of active learning techniques.

- (i) problem based learning,
- (ii) collaborative and cooperative learning
- (iii) role play simulation as relevant techniques for promoting active learning in online environments.

The truth is that e-learning in educational institutions require much effort; they must have:

1. necessary qualified experts and teachers to introduce educational programs.
2. equipment to introduce new educational programs and ensure their utility.
3. qualified technical personnel to provide smooth functioning of the equipment.

The survey and interviews suggest there are numerous factors which both help and hinder quality of engagement in e-learning Professional development. Most Professional development engaged in by staff is informal. Engagement in formal Professional development is influenced by organizational structure, co-ordination, poorly developed and/or implemented e-learning policy, differences in managerial support, and individual beliefs and time allocation.

Understanding impacts and influences on individual uptake and experiences of Professional development provides insights into the sorts of institutional practices and policies likely to improve quality in e-learning and in e-learning Professional development.

As a dynamic and iterative process, quality assurance is intertwined with the e-learning development process Design/methodology/approach. After reviewing the existing literature, particularly focusing on quality assurance frameworks, procedures, and methodology, a process-oriented model structured around three sequential non-linear phases is presented

- a- before: planning and analysis
- b- during: design, prototype and production
- c- after : post-production and delivery.

This model is supported by an advanced information system used to organize, track, collect, and generate reports regarding quality assurance changes and needed updates. Indian education system in its primary, secondary or higher levels is fraught with quality and quantity challenges. There is a shortage of quality teachers, an enabling environment for

students and infrastructure, just to point out a few. These hurdles are not going to go away soon even though there is a surge in the number of students at all levels and an increasing demand for quality education. There is also a corresponding demand from industry for skilled human resource.

But this thirst and demand for quality education and trained personnel will not be easy to quench because it takes time, funds and quality human resource to set up good institutions. Then there is the rule book: Starting a school or a college in India needs magical levels of energy and perseverance. In such a scenario, online education could be a boon for those who do not have access to quality education or are keen to re-skill.

The world of online learning is attractive not only because learning is no longer tethered to a classroom and timetables, but also because software programmes can “seamlessly integrate social media, making it possible to create online communities that are course specific”.

Along with the traditional textbooks, blogs, tweets, podcasts, webcasts, online chats, discussion boards, virtual study jams ensure that learning becomes multidimensional. Online courses can also help all those who are already in jobs to enhance their skills and remain competitive without taking time off from their careers.

The Reform Push

The government is a strong supporter of e-learning and the Department of Electronics and Information Technology has been actively developing tools and technologies to promote it. Department has supported e-learning-focused Research and development projects at various academic educational institutes. These include content development, Research and development /technology initiatives, HRD projects and faculty training initiatives to improve literacy through distance education.

Expanding e-learning

The rapid increase in internet connectivity has been an important catalyst for the growth of e-learning. A robust internet ecosystem, with a multitude of local and global players, will help online learning make further inroads. A large number of new users are accessing the internet for the first time from their smart phones, which is an ideal, personalised and commerce-enabled platform for e-learning adoption.

According to a report, India's online education market size is set to grow to \$40 billion by 2017 from the current \$20 billion. India has one of the largest education systems in the world with a network of more than 1 million schools and 18,000 higher education institutions. More than half of the country's population falls in the target market for education and related services.

E-learning brings unique advantages, the prominent ability to provide personalized attention to all students. In a conventional set-up, this is only possible when a highly skilled tutor offers one-to-one tutorials. However, considering that most institutions have a classroom-based set-up, such attention becomes difficult. Another advantage is people living in smaller towns and cities can get access to the best possible learning resources from across the world, at a very affordable price.

The developing wave of adaptive learning will help students with various levels of intellectual capabilities to glean the best from the learning process at their own pace, without feeling left out. Online tutoring will definitely pose a threat to conventional methods of teaching—while online learning can never look at completely replacing schools because schools offer much more than just academic knowledge inside their campuses. However, private tuition centres will have to take a second look at their education model and adopt digital learning aids to sharpen their offerings.

Aspects of e-learning

Although the foundation of education is still reading, writing and arithmetic, today's students need broader education. So, here we can consider the aspects of e-learning.

Live instruction: Certain curricula may require specialised instructors. By using live broadcasts, these instructors can remain in one location and provide instruction to many students in other locations. This type of specialisation increases as students move into higher levels of education. For example towards advanced degrees in education.

Video content delivery: Pre-recorded content such as lectures, documentaries and other video content may be delivered in a store and forward model so that the material can be viewed when needed.

Student-to-student interactions (video-conferencing): Students may learn just as much from each other as they do from teachers. So communications technology can be used to connect students.

Remote test administration: In some countries, standardised tests are used to evaluate students on a level-playing field. These tests must be delivered securely and on-time to meet testing schedules.

Up-to-date materials: Basics seldom change. However, virtually all textbooks must be updated. Textbooks are expensive to purchase, maintain and deliver. Digital delivery solves this issue when coupled with e-readers.

Self-learning: Computer-based training or self-paced learning is common in higher education and trade-oriented learning. Kiosks to support this may be located close to under-served areas where populations already work.

Conclusion

The most appreciated benefit of e-learning is visualization of explained lesson, attractiveness of learning environment, providing of a platform for individual study and testing, study programs with higher number of students. Presently the preparation of e-learning materials is very demanding and time consuming. Common difficulties may arise during practical use of e-learning in education of students. Ability of teachers for existing operating system and speed of internet browser is an important factor for e-learning. Lastly it can be said that by removing some hurdles e-learning can act as an essential tool in enhancing the quality education.

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