

# E-Learning: a virtual boon and the challenges in Tourism Higher Education

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## Abstract

This paper presents a critical review of research on challenges for e-Learning with a particular focus on developing countries. A comprehensive literature review including 124 papers on e-Learning benefits and challenges was undertaken for the purpose of understanding how to implement e-Learning in developing countries. The literature study found 62 papers which were condensed to base on exclusion and inclusion criteria designed to find the research papers which match the criteria and objectives of the present study as well as papers that clearly investigated well-defined advantages and challenges of e learning in the education system. The research found 30 specific challenges which were grouped into four categories, viz.: courses, individuals, technology and context. The overall conclusion is that these advantages and challenges are equally valid for both developed and developing countries.

**Key words:** e-Learning, developing nations, computer-based learning

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In the modern education system of 21st century, people have to learn more than ever before they used to. Especially for global organizations and teaching education system live classroom-based training is becoming too costly and cumbersome. Even if employees had the time to attend all the courses and seminars and to read all the books and reports they should to remain up-to-date in their area of work, the cost of such learning would be prohibitive. The need to transform how organizations learn points to a more modern, efficient, and flexible alternative: e-Learning. The mission of corporate e-learning is to supply the workforce with an up-to-date and cost-effective program that yields motivated, skilled and loyal knowledge workers, anywhere, anytime, anyone.

E-Learning is essentially the computer and network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge. E-Learning applications and processes include Web-based learning,

computer-based learning, virtual education opportunities and digital collaboration Content is delivered via the Internet, intranet/extranet, audio or video tape, satellite TV, and CD-ROM e-learning is increasingly being utilized by students who may not want to go to traditional brick and mortar schools due to severe allergies or other medical issues, fear of school violence and school bullying and students whose parents would like to home school but do not feel qualified. Cyber schools create a safe haven for students to receive a quality education while almost completely avoiding these common problems. Cyber charter schools also often are not limited by location, income level or class size in the way brick and mortar charter schools are e-Learning has now been adopted and used by various companies to inform & educate both their employees and customers. Companies with large and spread out distribution chains use it to educate their sales staff as to the latest product

developments without the need of organizing physical courses.

Computer-based learning, sometimes abbreviated to CBL, refers to the use of computers as a key component of the educational environment. While this can refer to the use of computers in a classroom, the term more broadly refers to a structured environment in which computers are used for teaching purposes. E-Learning is naturally suited to distance learning and flexible learning, but can also be used in conjunction with face-to-face teaching, in which case the term Blended learning is commonly used.

The education under e learning process can be delivered and presented to a learner in many different ways and for a range of purposes. The different types of e-Learning are based on the degree of interactivity required of each.

**Tier-1 learning:** Tier-1 learning involves low interactivity mainly text, multimedia or one-way communication. This type of learning can be delivered through PowerPoint presentation, learning on a personal digital assistant, e-books, podcasting, videotape and audiotape.

**Tier-2 learning:** Tier-2 learning involves moderate to high interactivity and has some degree of learner to computer interaction. This kind of e-Learning can be delivered through interactive resources, quizzes, tests, reflective learning, games, demonstrations and simulations.

**Tier-3 learning:** Tier-3 learning involves higher interactivity and also includes learner to learner and learner to trainer interaction. It can be delivered through virtual classrooms, streaming media, group games, video conferences, audio conferences, chat groups, emails, discussion lists, blogging, wikis, and mob logging.

In e-Learning a student can learn whatever he needs from the net. There are virtual classrooms in net where teachers from

different locations come and teach the lessons according their curriculum by online and students can also clarify their doubts through video conference. It is a great boon for all those students who are unable to go to schools and colleges and especially for the disabled. Apart from students it is also useful for professionals to learn, prepare and complete their international certification courses in their respective profession. Thus e-Learning had made quite a huge impact in the field of learning and it also provides job opportunities for many people. As mobile technologies become a household name among both students and educators, the questions about mobile learning are shifting from a common-sense rationale of every student having a mobile device to whether mobile learning enhances or improves learning, and if so, at what and whose cost.

Proponents of mobile learning argue that handheld devices enable learners to learn anywhere and anytime. However, anecdotal evidence shows that using handheld devices anywhere, anytime does not necessarily translate into students learning anywhere and anytime, and if they do learn, little is known about what type of learning happens and how to evaluate the qualitative value of such learning. This mini-track invites papers that focus on demonstrating the educational value of mobile learning on academic performance of learners, enhancement of learning, or cost-effective approaches to learning/teaching using mobile devices. It is envisaged that papers submitted to this track will be evidence-based, have a specific focus on a mobile learning intervention or critical review of a mobile learning intervention that exemplify effectiveness of, or contributes to understanding impact of using handheld devices for teaching and learning.

Thus, papers are being solicited from a wide range of contexts, not limited to higher education, training colleges, and high schools; and could involve use of ubiquitous handheld devices.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to achieve a comprehensive charting of benefits or advantages of and challenges for e-Learning a literature search was undertaken to locate as many as possible. Hence, at the first step there were very few exclusion criteria. Almost all the kinds of distance learning supported to some extent by any information and communication technology were included. Due to the focus on distance learning, technology that is only used within a physical classroom was excluded. This focus was motivated by the fact that the major advantages for developing countries are supposedly achieved by overcoming the problems of distance and huge student populations which in many cases have problems at all getting to school.

Two main methods were employed for this search. The first was to use our University's academic search engine which covers several academic databases such as EBSCO, Science Direct and Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com/>) which covers more publications. Search terms used were: "e-Learning, E-Learning, eLearning, online learning, virtual learning, distance learning, distance education, ICT based distance education" in combination with "benefits ,boon, challenges, enablers, disablers, obstacles, drop-out, retention, attrition, successful, unsuccessful" and all words were used in different combinations. Papers were initially selected based on title and abstract. The initial wide search yielded 124 papers. Then 62 papers were then considered more in detail and most were excluded based on the ideas like were not addressing the benefits or advantages disadvantages and challenges per se, but rather reported so called "success stories" where the reasons for this success were never made explicit.

## **DISCUSSION**

Holtham & Courtney's (2005) practitioner focussed review of the benefits and

disadvantages of virtual learning environment (VLEs). A few years ago Browne and Jenkins (2003) put the figure at 86% of UK higher education institutions who responded to the survey now having at least one VLE in use. It includes the applications and processes include Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual education opportunities and digital collaboration. Content is delivered via the Internet, intranet/extranet, audio or video tape, satellite TV, and CD-ROM. It can be self-paced or instructor-led and includes media in the form of text, image, animation; streaming video and audio. Abbreviations like CBT (Computer-Based Training), IBT (Internet-Based Training) or WBT (Web-Based Training) have been used as synonyms to e-Learning. Today one can still find these terms being used, along with variations of e-Learning such as e-Learning, E-Learning, and eLearning. The terms will be utilized throughout this article to indicate their validity under the broader terminology of e-Learning.

The concept of e-Learning is naturally suited to distance learning and flexible learning, but can also be used in conjunction with face-to-face teaching, in which case the term Blended learning is commonly used. The E-Learning pioneer Bernard Luskin argues that the "E" must be understood to have broad meaning if e-Learning is to be effective. Luskin says that the "e" should be interpreted to mean exciting, energetic, enthusiastic, emotional, extended, excellent, and educational in addition to "electronic" that is a traditional participants joining in at once, as with an online chat session or a virtual classroom or meeting.

Virtual classrooms and meetings can often use a mix of communication technologies. Participants in a virtual classroom use icons called emoticons to communicate feelings and responses to questions or statements. Students are able to 'write on the board' and even share their desktop, when given rights by the teacher. Other communication

technologies available in a virtual classroom include text notes, microphone rights, and breakout sessions. Breakout sessions allow the participants to work collaboratively in a small group setting to accomplish a task as well as allow the teacher to have private conversations with his or her students. The virtual classroom also provides the opportunity for students to receive direct instruction from a qualified teacher in an interactive environment. Students have direct and immediate access to their instructor for instant feedback and direction. The virtual classroom also provides a structured schedule of classes, which can be helpful for students who may find the freedom of asynchronous learning to be overwhelming.

The virtual classroom provides a social learning environment that closely replicates the traditional "brick and mortar" classroom. Most virtual classroom applications provide a recording feature. Each class is recorded and stored on a server, which allows for instant playback of any class over the course of the school year. This can be extremely useful for students to review material and concepts for an upcoming exam. This also provides students with the opportunity to watch any class that they may have missed, so that they never have to fall behind. It also gives parents the ability to monitor any classroom to insure that they are satisfied with the education their child is receiving. In asynchronous online courses, students proceed at their own pace. If they need to listen to a lecture a second time, or think about a question for awhile, they may do so without fearing that they will hold back the rest of the class.

Through online courses, students can earn their diplomas more quickly, or repeat failed courses without the embarrassment of being in a class with younger students. Students also have access to an incredible variety of enrichment courses in online learning, and can participate in college courses, internships, sports, or work and still graduate with their class. In many

models, the writing community and the communication channels relate with the e-Learning and the M-learning communities. Both the communities provide a general overview of the basic learning models and the activities required for the participants to join the learning sessions across the virtual classroom or even across standard classrooms enabled by technology. Many activities, essential for the learners in these environments, require frequent chat sessions in the form of virtual classrooms and/or blog meetings.

The use of e-Learning is boon for development of skills and increasing knowledge. It refers to the electronic learning that means learning online. It contains information about wide range of subjects. With this, you can have access to any information online which belongs to any section or related with any subject. Simply type question and get your answer within a second. E-Learning is essentially the computer and network enabled transfer of skills and knowledge. It is online institute with A graded certificate .It ensures us about quality education. No age limit, no educational qualification, no degree, only your interest It gives us answer to any question whether it is simple or difficult. It is an effective and cheapest way of learning.

## **BENEFITS OF E-LEARNING**

The notion of e-Learning has definite benefits over traditional classroom training. national interpretation. This broader interpretation allows for 21st century applications and brings learning and media psychology into the equation.

In higher education especially, the increasing tendency is to create a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) (which is sometimes combined with a Management Information System (MIS) to create a Managed Learning Environment) in which all aspects of a course are handled through a consistent user interface standard throughout the institution. A growing number

of physical universities, as well as newer online-only colleges, have begun to offer a select set of academic degree and certificate programs via the Internet at a wide range of levels and in a wide range of disciplines. While some programs require students to attend some campus classes or orientations, many are delivered completely online. In addition, several universities offer online student support services, such as online advising and registration, e-counseling, online textbook purchase, student governments and student newspapers.

The use of e-Learning can also refer to educational web sites such as those offering learning scenarios, worksheets and interactive exercises for children. The term is also used extensively in the business sector where it generally refers to cost-effective online training.

The recent trend in the e-Learning sector is screen casting. There are many screen casting tools available but the latest buzz is all about the web based screen casting tools which allow the users to create screen casts directly from their browser and make the video available online so that the viewers can stream the video directly. The advantage of such tools is that it gives the presenter the ability to show his ideas and flow of thoughts rather than simply explain them, which may be more confusing when delivered via simple text instructions. With the combination of video and audio, the expert can mimic the one on one experience of the classroom and deliver clear, complete instructions. From the learner's point of view this provides the ability to pause and rewind and gives the learner the advantage of moving at their own pace, something a classroom cannot always offer. Research on the use of video in lessons is preliminary, but early results show an increased retention and better results when video is used in a lesson. Creating a systematic video development method holds promise for creating video

models that positively impact student learning.

## **COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES USED IN E-LEARNING**

Communication technologies are generally categorized as asynchronous or synchronous. Asynchronous activities use technologies such as blogs, wikis, and discussion boards. The idea here is that participants may engage in the exchange of ideas or information without the dependency of other participant's involvement at the same time. Electronic mail (Email) is also asynchronous in that mail can be sent or received without having both the participants' involvement at the same time. Asynchronous learning also gives students the ability to work at their own pace. This is particularly beneficial for students who have health problems. They have the opportunity to complete their work in a low stress environment.

Synchronous activities involve the exchange of ideas and information with one or more participants during the same period of time. A face to face discussion is an example of synchronous communications. In an "e" learning environment, an example of synchronous communications would be a skype conversation or a chat room where everyone is online and working collaboratively at the same time. Synchronous activities occur with all While the most obvious are the flexibility and the cost savings from not having to travel or spend excess time away from work.

1)It is less expensive to produce: By delivering the courses through technology or using trainer soft's authoring software to produce your own a synchronous training programs; e-training is virtually free once you reach the break-even point. Synchronous programs will have continued costs associated with the instructor managing the class, but will still be lower than traditional courses. In case of when delivered through technology based

solutions, training is less expensive per end user due to saleable distribution and the elimination of high salaries for trainers and consultants. The biggest benefit of eLearning, however, is that it eliminates the expense and inconvenience of getting the instructor and students in the same place. It was observed from the literature Magazine; corporations save between 50-70% when replacing instructor-led training with electronic content delivery. Opting for e-Learning also means that courses can be pared into shorter sessions and spread out over several days or weeks so that the business would not lose an employee for entire days at a time. Workers can also improve productivity and use their own time more efficiently, as they no longer need to travel or fight rush-hour traffic to get to a class.

2) It is self-paced: These e-Learning programs can be conducted when these are actually required. The "books" that you set up using Trainer soft create a module-based design allowing the learner to go through smaller chunks of training that can be used and absorbed for a while before moving on.

3) It moves faster: According to an article by Jennifer Salopek in "Training and Development Magazine," e-Learning courses progress up to 50 percent faster than traditional courses. This is partly because the individualized approach allows learners to skip material they already know and understand and move onto the issues they need training on.

4) It provides a consistent message: Using e-Learning eliminates the problems associated with different instructors teaching slightly different material on the same subject. For any organization education based training, this is often critical.

5) It can work from any location and at any time: E-learners can go through training sessions from anywhere, usually at anytime. This Just-In-Time (JIT) benefit can make

learning possible for people who never would have been able to work it into their schedules prior to the development of e-Learning. (If you manage a corporate learning program, however, be careful about requesting that workers learn on their own time from home.

6) It can be updated easily and quickly: Online e-Learning sessions are especially easy to keep up-to-date because the updated materials are simply uploaded to a server. CD-ROM-based programs may be slightly more expensive to update and distribute, but still come out cheaper than reprinting manuals and retraining instructors.

7) It can lead to increased retention and a stronger grasp on the subject: This is because of the many elements that are combined in e-Learning to reinforce the message, such as video, audio, quizzes, interaction, etc. There is also the ability to revisit or replay sections of the training that might not have been clear the first time around. Try that in a crowded auditorium.

8) It can be easily managed for large group of students: Trainer soft Manager allows corporate training directors, HR managers and others to keep track of the course offerings schedule or assign training for employees and track their progress and results. Managers can review a student's scores and identify any areas that need additional training.

#### **SCOPE OF e-LEARNING INDUSTRY IN INDIA**

The concept of e-Learning is one of the emerging fields that are growing on par with the information technology industry. It is a field where the instructional designers, developers and graphic designers brainstorm together to develop effective and creative learning content for the instructor-led and web based courses. People who are looking for a creative career and others like freshmen and graduates can enter the

field of e-Learning. The e-Learning industry in India has created many opportunities for many students to get educated through e-Learning in India. There are many e-Learning courses in India and there are many new institutes opening new ways for electronic learning in India. Many students are also applying to various courses offered by them.

## **CHALLENGES**

The Challenges of E learning are various in many developing countries there is a lack of vital e-learning components such as computers, electricity and skills (Dhanarajan, 2001; Heeks, 2002; Rajesh, 2003); and the active, participative student that is required for interactive learning is also very rare in countries where the tradition is to teach in a more didactic manner (Eastmond, 2000; Evans, 2005; Sehr, 2003). For those concerned with implementing e-learning in developing countries especially India, it is important to understand all challenges. Because e-learning most often is being transferred from the developed world we need to know not only what challenges that are already found and to some extent met in the developed countries, there is also a need to understand which additional challenges, if any, there may be in developing countries as follows:

### **1. Course**

The most frequently mentioned challenges concern issues relating to the course given. Concerns are raised about the content of the course, the activities undertaken during the course, the support functions provided, and the delivery mode of the course. The first issue identified here is the curriculum which stipulates much of the course actions and content. There are discussions on the need to develop new curricula specifically designed for an e-Learning setting; thereby showing awareness that e-Learning is different from traditional class-room based teaching. (Andersson & Gronlund, A 2009; Levy, 2007)

### **2. Individuals' Characteristics**

The characteristics of the individual student, like Student motivation is a factor that is frequently discussed in surveys on what affects students' satisfaction and capacity. Highly motivated students perform well in most cases whereas non-motivated students tend to drop out. The association between motivation and other e-Learning factors is rarely elaborated; the reasons for success or failure in the studies are simply referred to as "personal motivation" or "lack of motivation". Another important factor is conflicting a priority, which has to do with the amount of time students have to, and want to, devote to the course. Having enough time for learning is an important predictor of a students learning and retention and those who study more hours are generally more successful in their studies. Just as was the case with students, the teachers' confidence in using computers and other technologies, their technological confidence, matters.

Moreover the instructors or teachers and trainers level of motivation and commitment makes a difference. This factor concerns the teachers' motivation for teaching at a distance and their ability to see benefits of e-Learning tools and techniques. It also concerns their commitment in the e-Learning classes; when teachers put little effort into giving feedback students tend to either drop out or not pass. Finally, the teachers' qualification and competence (in general and in online teaching in particular) and the time they have available for developing and taking part in e-Learning courses matters. (Andersson & Gronlund, 2009)

### **3. Contextual Factors**

The context of e-Learning includes the context of the delivering organisation (typically a university setting) as well as the context of the society in which the e-Learning takes place, including culture, traditions, rules and regulations.

Research on societal factors focuses on culture, traditions, rules and regulations. Societies hold many values and beliefs that impact on education. One factor identified in this study is that of the roles of teacher and student. One issue here is how the power distance between teacher and student that affects the e-Learning; where power distance is a measure of the inequality between bosses and inferiors and the extent to which this is accepted (Hofstede, 1984; Andersson &, Gronlund, 2009).

## CONCLUSION

The now commonplace use of e-Learning to supplement face-to-face teaching, combined with the interesting and at times surprising findings from existing evaluations, is a powerful argument in favour of further explorations of students' perspectives of e-Learning.

This review has highlighted that there are benefits and challenges of the e-learning courses and training programmes especially in the service industry. The main advantages of e learning is that it is less expensive self-paced, easy to update and easy to manage the large group of students etc. while the various challenges like course content, characteristics of the individuals characteristics of the students, technological challenges the context of the society in which the e-Learning takes place, including culture, traditions, rules and regulations (Andersson & Gronlund, 2009)

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