



e-Learning in Education: A Modern Scenario

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INTRODUCTION

There has been an increasing interest in e-learning in teacher training at universities during the last ten years. With the developing technology, educational methods have differed as well as many other processes. Firstly, a definition on e-learning as a new approach should be given. E-learning could shortly be defined as a web-based educational system on platform with Internet, Intranet or computer access. The concept of e-learning has two main subtitles as synchronized (where a group of students and an instructor actualize an online conference meeting in a computer environment) an asynchronous (where individuals actualize self-training in computer environments). Students have access to the course contents whenever they want and communicate with their peers or teachers via communication tools such as e-mail and forums. In order the distance learning system to succeed in e-learning, the program should be planned as both synchronized and asynchronous.



There have been many studies on e-learning.

Aljanazrah & Bader (2006), in their study on e-learning approach in laboratories, developed a teaching model for this application. In this model, the lessons planned were simulations and software's for students on polymers and metals. Nine experiments were designed on the topic. Students were interviewed and administered laboratory attitude scales at the end of the experiments. The study concluded that the experiments in the new model were appropriate to teacher training programs and could successfully be administered to large groups.

Fisher, Thompson & Silverberg (2004-2005), developed a model for computer assisted online courses in their study on the effects of cooperative method on group work. This model forms a sample case. The findings concluded that cooperative learning was highly effective in student works.

Davies & Graff (2005), in their study on the performance of e-learning applications, focused on student interactions within online programs. The interactions of 122 university students were compared to their end of year grades. A significant increase in the performances was observed, however, some factors were determined to cause some gaps in online programs.

Usal & Albayrak (2005) examined the Turkish model within the framework of the general structures of distance learning models, their communication environments, technologies as well as the effective parameters in education. They concluded that with the growing utilization of Internet communication technology in Turkey, etransformation could be actualized.

Ashton, Beevers & Bull (2004) evaluated the pilot e-learning applications to be administered in private schools in Scotland. The application, which depends on the higher education system developed in UK, involves the formal evaluation of basic concepts of e-learning and its effects on students. The application was administered on various groups and successful results were attained in such fields as computerassisted math education or computer programming courses.

Frank, Reich & Humphreys (2003), in their study on creating an e-learning environment where students' needs are addressed, evaluated the e-mail using frequencies of students aged 6, 11 and 12 within the distance learning process.



Moreover, students' basic computer skills, student-teacher relationship and the role of the teacher were also examined.

The number of studies on the issue has been increasing rapidly and great improvements have been recorded in terms of its usability and applicability. e-Learning is instruction that occurs when the instructor and the students are separated by time, by distance, or both. It can be divided into 2 major delivery methods:

- Synchronous learning
- Asynchronous learning

Synchronous e-Learning or training happens in real-time with an instructor facilitating the training. Most commonly this type of learning takes place over the Internet, using a “chat room” on specialized Web Sites. Each student logs in at a specific time and can communicate directly with the instructor and with each other. Synchronous e-Learning may also be accomplished through telephone or video conferencing or through two-way live television broadcasts between instructors and students in distant classrooms.

Asynchronous e-Learning or training is e-Learning in the more conventional sense of the word. Asynchronous e-Learning is usually CD or DVD-ROM-based or can be Intranet or Internet based. Students generally work on an interactive “self-paced” program of study. This may include access to instructors or experts through online bulletin boards, discussion groups and e-mail. Programs may also be completely self-contained with links to various reference materials in place of an instructor. Asynchronous e-Learning allows the student to learn anywhere and usually at any time, if they have the proper equipment.

e-Learning uses technology to enhance and expand the learning experience. These technologies are used to create and deliver individualized, comprehensive, dynamic learning content that facilitates learning, anytime and anywhere. It is an innovative approach to communicating almost any type of instructional information. e-Learning can be delivered and supported using a variety of electronic media but is also the perfect complement to a traditional education or training program.



Education via the Internet, network, or standalone computer. e-learning is essentially the network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge. e-learning refers to using electronic applications and processes to learn. e-learning applications and processes include Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms and digital collaboration. Content is delivered via the Internet, intranet/extranet, audio or video tape, satellite TV, and CD-ROM

What is the meaning of e-learning?

E-learning is a new education concept by using the Internet technology, it delivers the digital content, provides a learner-orient environment for the teachers and students. The e-learning promotes the construction of life-long learning opinions and learning society.

It means:

1. E-learning is a new education concept; it may be different from the old educational concept. We should provide a new explanation to this new concept.
2. Delivery of the digital content is the main characters of e-learning. We can tell what e-learning is and what is not.
3. This definition extends the environment on the Internet. We mean that the Internet provides a learning environment for the students and teachers. This environment is learner-oriented, so we can throw out the thoughts of traditionally teacher-center's instruction in classroom.
4. As a new concept of education, e-learning gives a condition for us to realize the life-long learning principle and help us to build a more real learning society.

Benefits of e-Learning

e-Learning has substantial benefits and offers unique opportunities for people who might otherwise have limited access to education and training. It incorporates innovative and creative approaches to instruction and provides unprecedented access to resources and information.

- **e-Learning is student centered.** The learner is the core of any e-Learning system.

Materials and activities are designed with the needs and interests of the learner in



mind. Students assume control of their learning experience and use it to suit their own specific needs.

- **e-Learning is self-directed and self-paced.** Learners control the amount of time they spend on any particular topic. This allows learners to spend additional time on difficult items before moving on or to skip material they already understand. This “individualized” approach usually allows learners to complete their education and training faster than in traditional courses.
- **e-Learning is interactive and hands-on.** The use of a variety of multimedia in e-Learning increases student involvement and reinforces the learning experience. This leads to increased retention and a stronger grasp of the subject at hand.
- **e-Learning is flexible.** Learning can take place anytime and anywhere, as long as the necessary equipment is accessible. The logistics and expense of face-to-face education and training can be extremely limiting when students are separated by distance. e-Learning also allows physically or otherwise challenged students to more fully participate.
- **e-Learning provides consistent and effective training.** All of the target learners can participate simultaneously and receive the same information, reducing the variability introduced through multiple sessions in different locations.

Limitations of e-Learning

Although e-Learning has many benefits for students and organizations alike, it also has limitations.

- **Computer literacy and access to equipment.** Any e-Learning system involves basic equipment and a minimum level of computer knowledge in order to perform the tasks required by the system. A student that does not possess these skills, or have access to these tools, cannot succeed in an e-Learning program.
- **Some topics are not appropriate for e-Learning.** Certain subjects that require physical exertion and practice, such as sports and public speaking, are not good



candidates for e-Learning. However, e-Learning can be a useful companion to traditional education for teaching background and technical information.

- **Students themselves can be a limitation to e-Learning.** The flexibility and student-centered nature of e-Learning requires a high level of student responsibility. A successful e-Learning student must be well organized, self-motivated, and have good time management skills. What you get out of an e-Learning program is directly related to the amount of effort you put in.

Strategies for e-Learning Success

Recent technological advances and the advent of e-Learning have dramatically altered the world of education and training. There are millions of e-Learners in the U.S. and around the world. Today's e-Learners come from a wide variety of backgrounds and are of all ages. Most are working people who are trying to continue their education and improve their opportunities. Still, e-Learning is quite different from traditional classroom learning and is not for everyone. Successful e-Learning students share certain qualities and abilities.

- **E-Learning requires motivation and self-discipline.** Successful e-Learning students are able to study independently and incorporate study time into their busy lives. Students should set aside regular study time. e-Learning requires a real commitment to keep up with the flow of the process and to finish within the required period of time.
- **Define your goals and plan for success.** Define your goals and objectives for your e-Learning experience. Understand the requirements and plan ahead so that you will know what's expected of you and how your performance will be evaluated.
- **e-Learning requires good reading and writing skills.** The ability to efficiently read and interpret instructions is a critical skill in e-Learning. Most activities and communications are also written, so it is important to be comfortable with your ability to express yourself through writing.
- **Incorporate work, life, and other educational experiences as part of the learning process.** e-Learning requires the student to make inferences based on experience as



well as facts. Meaningful reflection and critical analysis of information are an essential part of the learning process. Look for opportunities to apply what you have learned in your life.

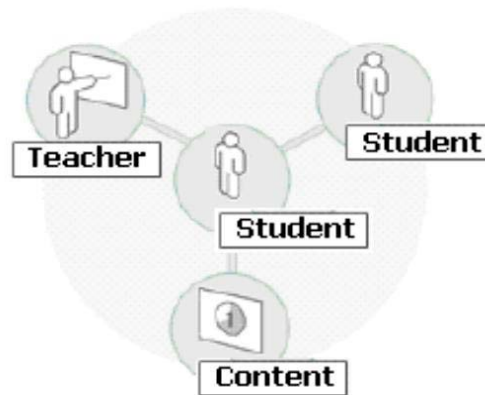
- **Be willing and able to commit adequate time to the e-Learning process.** e-Learning is a convenient way to receive education and training, but it is not easier than the traditional educational process. In fact, it often requires more time and commitment.
- **Have access to the necessary equipment and create some personal space.** It is important that you have a place to study in a peaceful and focused manner.

To be a successful e-Learner you must believe that meaningful, high quality learning can take place without a traditional classroom. When properly designed and executed, e-Learning is a highly effective and rewarding learning environment.

LEARNER-CONTENT INTERACTION IN E-LEARNING

Within the designing process of teaching, it is an important step to organize the interaction and communication opportunities. Interaction is an important factor especially in Open University where students, teachers and teaching resources are away from each other in terms of time and place. Learning-based interaction mainly has three types. These are learner-content, learner-teacher and learner-learner interactions (Moore, 1996).

Another accepted interaction type is the learner-interface interaction. Learnerinterface interaction emphasizes the learners' interaction with technology whereas the learner-content interaction focuses on a pedagogical interaction. At Open University system, since learner-teacher and learner-learner interaction is limited within distance learning, learner-content interaction has a critical importance in reaching the learning targets.



Types of Interaction in Learning Environments

With the content provided to the Open University students and the students' own ways of interaction not only ease the self-learning but also affect the learning process positively. In this system, where the learner-content interaction is provided by books as main materials, e-learning services such as TV programs, e-exams, edrills, e-books, e-television and e-counseling would reinforce the interaction and increase student achievement.

In a study where the Two-year Police Occupational Education Program students' elearning records and student information were analyzed between October 2003 and September 2004, a comparison was made between the students who belong and do not belong to the e-learning program.

According to the end-of-year averages, students of the e-learning program had higher achievement levels than the others (Mutlu, Erorta, Kara & Aydin, 2005). In 2003-2004 academic years, a study was conducted in order to determine how the achievement levels of e-learning program students of Open University differed from the ones who were not involved in the e-learning program. The midterm exam results showed that the scores of the students of e-learning program were higher than that of the ones who were not in the program (Mutlu, Erorta & Yılmaz, 2004).

As e-learning services varied, learner-content interaction was observed to have improved in the Open University, which contributed to the increase in the student achievement levels.



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