Abstract

E-learning is Self-paced, interactive training programs produced on CD or the Web that contain multimedia elements (i.e., sound, video, animations) and automated test questions that provide instant feedback to the trainee. Due to the advancement of E-Learning everywhere, people who are in the arena of educational institutions have much to adapt to this technology. The introduction of E-Learning in the Universities has been integrated in a strategic reorientation. The new teaching and learning strategy aims at promoting greater flexibility in learning styles and strategies and supporting them through staff development programmes. If the provision of E-Learning is to become a key element of university education, employers will need to provide a major programme of staff development and training. Training and support is required to ensure that technology can be integrated into daily routines and that its use will be efficient and effective. Lecturers in many departments were starting to explore computer-supported learning to meet the aspirations of new students. However, many of them complained about the lack of direction or support for development in this area. This paper examines the issues surrounding the implementation of E-Learning into higher education, including the structure and delivery of higher education, the implications to both students and lecturers and the global impact on society.
INTRODUCTION

The amazingly rapid expansion and growth of the World Wide Web in the past decade has been nothing less than a paradigm shift in the way humanity and society, as a whole, perceives reality. Communication as a whole has changed in its parameters; Because of this revolution many societal issues are currently being debated, discussed, hypothesized, theorized, written about, talked about, etc. The issues all tend to revolve around the three main aspects of society: learning, working, and communicating.

This paper is a consideration of the issues associated with the infrastructural aspects, pedagogic considerations and the need to associate the usefulness of technology to enhance the learning experience. This technological path will potentially enhance the learning process, not replace the lecturer or tutor.

WHY E-LEARNING?

There is a need to acknowledge that active learning within a technologically based environment necessitates the establishment of a theoretical framework as part of the learning process. This realization will mean that the use of technology is not about replacing learner process, but enhancement and extension of such. This necessitated the learning process to be given a new approach and a technological outlook and that came into existence in the form of E-Learning.

This paper is based on the educational institutions and lecturer-student approach towards E-Learning. E-Learning is considered to describe e-learning that utilizes Information Communications Technology (ICT) to promote educational interaction between students, lecturers and learning communities. The fast expansion of the Internet and related technological advancements, in conjunction with limited budgets and social demands for improved access to higher education, has produced a substantial incentive for universities to introduce e-learning courses. If universities do not embrace e-learning technology that is readily available, they will be left behind in the pursuit for globalization.
IMPLEMENTATION OF E-LEARNING

E-learning has different aspects to be taken into consideration when it comes to implementation. As this paper involves E-Learning in the educational institutions, we consider the implementation and issues in implementing e-learning process in universities, lecturers and students. This paper also describes the benefits gained after the implementation of E-Learning.

In the process of implementing E-Learning the traditional universities must take care that they provide education that has equally well-equipped service when compared with corporate universities and virtual universities. Implementation of an E-Learning strategy must offer the same benefits as a corporate university or else be at a competitive disadvantage when recruiting graduates into postgraduate courses.

The demand for higher education is expanding exponentially throughout the world. This increase in demand is widely attributed to the changing culture of employment, where a job for life is no longer the norm, and to the advent of the so-called ‘knowledge-driven society’. Society requires higher levels of skills and qualifications to fill the same ‘worthwhile’ jobs and individuals see education as a status provider and the capacity constraints and resource limitations that can be overcome through the implementation of e-learning, creating a new opportunity to satisfy this growing demand. The growth in demand will be a transition in the type of students undertaking higher education. The educational needs of individuals are now seen to be continuous throughout a working life, as labour markets demand knowledge and skills that require regular updates. A phenomenon of ‘life-long learning’ has begun and this new concept is quickly gaining social and political recognition as Governments recognize the positive impact of education on the health and growth of modern economies.
THE IMPLICATIONS OF E-LEARNING

STUDENTS - ADAPTING TO A CHANGE IN LEARNING PROCESSES: It is widely acknowledged that implementation of e-learning leads to a fundamental shift in learning styles; Firstly, e-learning will benefit students who are used to being ‘spoon fed’ on the basis that students can no longer be passive about their learning. This view is endorsed in order to gain results, students must take responsibility for their own learning. Secondly, the students will not automatically become conscientious, self-motivated individuals and that success in fact depends on the level of interaction between students and lecturers that is required to stimulate good results. Based on the lack of conclusive evidence relating to the effects of a change in learning style, it seems appropriate to assume that not all students respond well to an e-learning environment. The independent learners have the potential to be successful in distance education, however those lacking in the skills to study independently will not react well in a virtual environment. Under such circumstances, institutions implementing e-learning must be aware that students will react differently to the changing paradigm of learning and rather than implement changes across the board, should aim to offer courses tailored specifically towards the different learning styles. In failing to take such action, universities run the risk of low success rates and at worst, failure.

DEALING WITH THE ISOLATION ISSUE

The issue of isolation caused by E-Learning has sparked a rigorous debate amongst researchers. The lack of interaction associated with E-Learning is of prime concern. Electronic contact cannot currently sustain the qualities and multi-dimensionality of the kind of tutor-student relationship that real learning seems to require. If technological developments are to be incorporated into higher education, this should be accompanied by increased human contact. The distance learners require a great deal of interaction, although mainly with the purpose of giving reassurance that everything is ‘going okay’. The development of a virtual world motivates students to participate in the educational process by exploring and playing with the lesson material. It can potentially provide an active, independent, student centered and tutor facilitated engagement which enables communication with other students and tutors which may not always be enabled within the traditional classroom setting.
THE IMPLICATIONS OF E-LEARNING FOR LECTURERS

INCORPORATION OF NEW TEACHING STYLES

In the implementation of e-learning programmes, HIGHER EDUCATION institutions are demanding a change in the role of university lecturers. Traditional teaching lecturers are posed with the task of developing a new model of effective teaching. The key message here is that students are not spoon fed, but rather shown the way. This involves splitting distance teaching into three phases of activities: preparation, presentation, and participation. In an online environment the role of a lecturer focuses more on administration than teaching. The need to over-come barriers to successful learning, such as technology and time and place, shifts the core focus away from the needs of the student.

Whilst it is clear that administrative factors require consideration and action, it seems inappropriate and inadvisable to take the focus away from students, particularly during a period of significant change. The implications of E-Learning for lecturers are significant and should not be overlooked. Lecturers must be provided with full support throughout with sufficient time and resources to ensure that online courses are suitably developed and implemented to meet the needs of students.

THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance is a key issue in the implementation of E-Learning as the number of non-accredited institutions offering degrees increases rapidly, damaging the reputation of online learning. A number of virtual programmes have thrown up quality concerns such that the quality E-Learning programmes must fight harder for recognition from employers and the wider society. The measurement of ‘quality’ is often qualitative rather than quantitative; It is possible that online students have to be more disciplined and work harder to achieve their goals. However, online students lack sufficient immersion and interaction to develop qualitative characteristics such as interpersonal skills.
It is possible that the quality of E-Learning will always be in question, however through implementing rigorous controls, institutions can ensure that students are working to attain credible qualifications, as they would be in a traditional learning environment. Employers and Humans Resource professionals have also voiced concerns over the quality of e-qualifications. This means that institutions also have to consider the impact of E-Learning on the employment prospects of students.

The major issues for employers are the unknown source of the degree, the lack of student interaction and the high potential for low admission standards into degree courses. In contrast, some employers place more value because they appreciate the hard work, motivation and commitment required to attain a degree online. It is difficult under any circumstances to assess the suitability of a candidate for a job.

**Identification of Critical Success Factors**

The critical success factors in an e-Learning environment are different to those in a traditional learning environment. As institutions incorporate elements of online learning into degree courses, many are looking in hindsight at the factors that affect the performance of students. The findings were valuable to those institutions planning e-learning strategies. A common theme was that students who have prior experience of using information technology would generally be more successful in a virtual learning environment than those who do not.

For new e-Learning providers it is important then to accommodate students with little prior experience by offering help. This could be in the form of having workshop explaining the usefulness and purpose of E-Learning. The success of the technological infrastructure also has implications for the success of virtual learning, by teaching students to identify and troubleshoot malfunctioning hardware, software configuration, slow or down servers, busy signals and lack of access are all barriers on the learning process. The instructor is also a major factor contributing to the success of E-Learning should be well trained and should act as a trouble-shooter.
Three characteristics of instructors that influence student performance: attitude towards technology; teaching style; and control of the technology. Each of these factors should be taken into account in the identification of suitable lecturers.

ACCOMMODATING CHANGES IN WORKLOAD

Extensive dialogue over the changing role of lecturers has naturally led to concern about the associated changes in workload. Numerous factors contribute to the workload of a distance teacher, from the amount of time spent authoring the material, to the level of interaction between student and lecturer. The issue of workload is directly underpinned by the issue of quality, design time to contact time, as well as significant interaction between student and lecturer.

Two studies were carried out that analyzed the time taken to teach a course online compared with teaching it in a traditional classroom. The first reported that distance lecturers experienced a reduced workload: 2.7 hours per student compared to 3.2 hours in a conventional setting, whilst in the second study, lecturers needed nearly twice as much time to teach an online course compared with a traditional course. This contradiction can be explained as the limitation of generalizing the comparison, except to highlight that many factors contribute to the workload issue.

Training and support is required to ensure that technology can be integrated into daily routines and that its use will be efficient and effective. However, this too will add to workload pressure, particularly for those requiring significant training due to a lack of experience.
EFFECTS OF E-LEARNING

Structure and delivery in E-Learning

The technology in general has not only improved knowledge storing methods and learning techniques but has also acted as a catalyst to combat the barrier of inflexible organizational structures.

The structure of present universities must be 'changeable' in order to integrate distance-learning courses, and other educational providers, such as virtual universities and independent educational services, may bypass those institutions that will not or cannot change their structure to incorporate this technology.

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

There is a notion that an e-learning environment offers students an improved learning experience when compared to a more traditional learning environment. Student participants on e-learning university courses using techniques such as virtual lectures and bulletin boards, achieved better grades than students who studied in traditional learning settings. The constraints of conventional university teaching practices with regards to group working are removed in e-learning environments, as students can participate in-group activities without actually being situated in the same location. Indeed alternative relationships are developed within the context of an online community. This supports the view that e-learning environments loosen the time and space restrictions associated with traditional university practices. But this seems good only when compared with traditional way of learning.

Students from non-technical backgrounds, undergraduate students or those who are more accustomed to traditional face to face learning environments, experience problems absorbing course material in E-Learning environments. Furthermore, a lack of IT skills is one of the main reasons for student non-participation in e-learning courses.
**ENHANCED TEACHING TOOLS**

The delivery of education is envisaged through E-Learning technology providing lecturers with superior teaching tools. In E-Learning environments lecturers can offer constant educational support, as students are able to communicate with classmates and lecturers, visit web sites and view course material regardless of their time and location. To maximize the potential of E-Learning teaching tools there are two methods to modify the learning process. Firstly, educational re-engineering that will revolutionize classroom practices and secondly educational fortification that will improve the learning courseware through technology.

The teaching tools associated with E-Learning may have the potential to equip lecturers in higher education with flexible channels and a model for the delivery of courses. Web based learning allows lecturers to disseminate up to date course content in relatively no time at all and students can complete courses just-in-time, giving them the opportunity to apply knowledge in contemporary situations. Teaching methods such as virtual lectures, sustain group interaction whilst broadening the flexibility of communication between students, indicating that E-Learning teaching methods enhance student interaction and offer a flexible alternative to traditional time and place constraints.

**CONCLUSION**

Growth in eLearning is rapid as institutions race to compete for a share of the increased and changing demand for Higher Education. E-Learning could have potentially major effects on the way higher education is designed, implemented and delivered. Despite the apparent advantages of E-Learning there are certain drawbacks such that some students are not satisfied with the delivery course content. This shows that the drawback is not because of the failure in effective delivery of the course materials but the lack of proper technological support.
This paper has been presented that discusses the impact of E-Learning in educational institutions. It primarily concentrates over the implications, structure and delivery of e-learning among the lecturer-student community via educational institutions. E-Learning as a whole can be considered as a rejuvenating approach towards the style of education and enhancement of information technology worldwide.
References


