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# E-LEARNING: ISSUES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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Technology is constantly improving and way of doing things has tremendously changed. The impact of technology can be seen in all aspects of organizational functioning. Technology is naturally enough a significant part of the change scenario. It is used to cut people costs; to speed up manufacturing assembly processes; to capture information and to facilitate the meetings of customer needs, anywhere, at any time, in the form it is wanted.

Transportation seems to grow easier and cheaper over time, the boundary between what is tradable (fungible) and what is not tradable (non fungible) is constantly shifting. Over time, more and more things become tradable. Because of packets of digitized information many services are now tradable and many more will surely become so. In the future, and to a great extent already in the present, the key distinction for international trade will no longer be between things that can be put in a box and things that cannot. It will, instead, be between services that can be delivered electronically over long distances with little or no degradation of quality, and those that cannot. The tradability of as vast array of services is the new thing.

"And there is little doubt that the fraction of services that can be delivered electronically will grow". We have entered an era in which technology will literally transform every aspect of business, every aspect of life and every aspect of society. Giving so many people access to all these tools of collaboration, along with the ability through search engines and the web to access billions of pages or raw information. Web-enabled platform for multiple forms of collaboration. This platform enables individuals, groups, companies and universities anywhere in the world to collaborate for the purpose of innovation, production, education, research, entertainment. This platform now operates without regard to geography, distance, time and in the near future even language. Going forward this platform is going to be at the center of everything. Hence it would be apt to say, that technology has revolutionized everything and its penetration can be seen in all domains of life. ICT (information and communication technology) has made the world a "global village".

In terms of organizational/business, technological tools can be utilized for education and learning purposes. Moving from a time where CBT (Computer Based Training) /PI (Programmed Instructions)/CAI (Computer Aided Instructions)/CAL (Computer Aided Learning) to the latest web learning/online learning/ E-learning, virtual learning. In a sense asynchronous learning has

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become the "new mantra" of the "new age". This has been facilitated by IT tools which are catalyst in bringing about transformation in learning and training and the mode of delivery of content. IT has brought about a big change in the methods of training. As compared to traditional methods which focused on synchronous learning wherein the focus on face-to-face learning (direct interaction between the learner and instructor) which includes various on-the-job and off-the-job training.

Starting from Computer Aided learning/Computer Based learning/ Programmed Instructor (PI) the latest development or shift in paradigm has been towards online learning/training called by various other names like **web based training/ E-learning** which applies to the area of training in organizations. The introduction and continued development of various technological advances have influenced a philosophical change in learning and training. This shift is one from knowledge being fixed to a certain time and place to knowledge that is accessible anytime, anywhere, anyplace and at any pace.

**What is E-Learning.**—E-learning is essentially education via electronic network in which content is transferred via the Internet, intranet, extranet, audio/video tapes, satellite television and CD-ROMs. As opposed to the computer-based training of the 1980's, the term **E-learning** refers to computer-enhanced training. E-learning is usually delivered via a personal computer. It includes learning delivered by other communication technologies. Methods include online lectures, tutorials, performance support systems, simulations, job aids, games, and more. Effective E-learning is often a blend of methods. E-learning, therefore, is an approach to facilitate and enhance learning through both computer and communication technology. Such devices include personal computers, CD ROMs. Communication technology enables the use of the Internet (WAN), LAN, e-mail, discussion forums, WIKIs, collaborative software, classroom management software and team learning systems. Thereby creating a Managed Learning Environment (MLE) which is Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) combined with a Management Information System (MIS), in which all aspects of a course are handled through a consistent interface that is standard throughout an institution, giving learner a consistent user interface.

E-Learning facilitates web-based transfer of knowledge and skills, virtual classroom and virtual clubs of similar discourse. In corporate world, where decentralization is the buzzword, companies depend largely on e-learning capabilities for coordination of their various activities, for example, mutual working on a physically dispersed project. Their dependence is also in terms of employees training and orientation. Today every big or small organization wants to incorporate e-learning in their network. This has resulted in a wide range of tools in the market for e-learning modules and every customized help is readily available in this regard. Whereas

Online training means a **"reference to E learning specifically over the internet and typically used in conjunction with corporations or professionals"**.

While it is still in its infancy, training on the internet is already a reality and there seems no doubt that firms will soon be relying on the internet to offer at least some of their training programs. Companies can use this approach for delivering training programs inexpensively nationally and internationally, but that's not all. Furthermore devices are already on sale which permit voice transmission via the internet and this will probably further facilitate using the internet for delivering training programs.

**Benefits of E-Learning.**—There are many benefits gained from using e-learning, including the following:

**Time-saving.**—Learning time is reduced by an average of 50% as the learner can access the course content at any place and anywhere with the connectivity provided by internet hence there is no time spent on travelling and delays resulting due to time is checked.

**Cost-effective.**—Cost gets reduced when same training program is taken up by multiple learners. Further all costs related to travelling, facilitator/instructor, training infrastructure is also reduced.

**Learning quality is improved.**—The content can be kept more up-to-date and it is easier to measure results. It allow for immediate updates to lessons and materials, keeping content fresh and accurate. It can be customized to the needs of the learner. There is better instructional consistency when the material is taught the same way each time a learner participates in the program. Learners can access programs or portions of the program as a refresher course at any time.

**Self paced.**—Self-directed instruction happens at the student's pace. Learning is flexible. The opportunity to learn is available at any time, not confined to a classroom schedule. Learners can access programs or portions of the program as a refresher course at any time.

**Issues and Challenges.**—Some of the issues and challenges associated with E learning and online course delivery are as follows:

**Instructor issues.**—In the online environment the instructor/trainer is required to have knowledge of both course content and delivery technologies. As all instructors/trainers don't have the skills and experience to effectively do so. Instructor's issues also relate to how to keep track of learners progress, how to rate the overall learning and how to assess online learning.

## Instructor issues for online course delivery

- Assessing group performance in an online setting.
- Added time requirements to develop content and setup in the interactive online environment.
- Copyright issues.
- Learning to use software and updates.
- Developing meaningful assessment techniques.
- Structuring assignments and providing clear and explicit instructions.
- Course revisions for both content and delivery technologies.

**Quality issues.**—On line courses delivered through E learning should ensure quality issues relating to the content to be delivered, mode of delivery, which tools/platforms to be used, maintaining learners interest in the program and overcoming technological constraints like bandwidth problem.

**Quality initiatives :**

- adequate infrastructure and technical support.
- instructor training.
- adequate development and preparation time.
- structure learning activities(assignment, cases, discussions) specifically for the online environment.
- structure assessment and exams for the online environment.
- collaborative activities for the online learners.
- prompt feedback by the instructor.
- clearly articulated directives for assignments, projects, etc.

**Building discussions.**—Discussion groups should be used to deliver content online to facilitate interaction between learner and instructor/trainer. Other issues relate to overall design of the course, planning assignments, managing learning activities etc.

**The Future of E-Learning in India.**—Tata Infotech Education is the education services division of Tata Infotech. It is a pioneer in the field of IT education, providing career and professional courses through state-of-the-art centres across India and abroad has taken a pioneering step by organising the first user conference of high-end E-learning users in India. (the conference was held at Mumbai on February 19, 2002, and at Bangalore on February 20, 2002, was attended by users from different verticals, including health care, banking, telecommunication, insurance, call centres, IT, government and academic institutions, among others). Some of the biggest companies in India, like Wipro, Infosys, Compaq, PSI Data Systems, TCS, WockHardt, L&T Infotech and Om Kotak Mahindra, who are the users ofE learning, shared their experiences at the conference. The world over, E-learning is being integrated into the strategic planning process of companies. E-learning can lead not only to increased revenues by entry into new business areas, but also reduction in costs. Participants at the user conference were convinced that learning has lead to business benefits and results. They also felt that there has to be a "pull" created for the learner, which could be through incentives or through defined and communicated career growth plans. This will ensure that learning is applied well and, hence, is effective. This alternative learning model has helped the various companies excel in their own individual industrial verticals.

Although E-learning has potential in India, adoption has been slow and will need a major marketing and awareness effort. Early adopters are companies that have tried to supplement face-to-face meetings, demonstrations, training classes and lectures with this technology. The adoption of E-learning in all spheres- corporates, schools, universities, etc- is low at present. E-learning or

internet-enabled learning is showing signs of growth with more and more corporates now investing extensively in this technology to train staff in new applications, processes and services, soft skills and customer interaction. According to National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) estimates, although the corporate E-learning market in the country is at present in a nascent stage, it is expected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of about 25% in the next four years. "Most of this growth is being propelled by the fact that vendors are now improving content and resolving localisation issues.

NASSCOM says that "increased usage of the internet, faster, more reliable connections and declining telecommunication costs have also contributed to the growth of the market". E-learning in India has been most successful in the corporate segment where it is seen as a means of achieving business goals and motivating employees. Further E learning is used by corporates to rapidly update, develop and disseminate data, information and knowledge. They are leveraging E learning for customer learning and increasing employee skill levels.

## Conclusion :

E-learning is a wide set of applications and processes that include web based, computer based learning and digital collaboration by the use of internet/ intranet or extranet. "There's the need to train more people on more topics, to do it faster, to do it on a worldwide basis and do it cheaper." says Brandon Hall, editor and publisher of the Multimedia & Internet Training Newsletter and author of the Web-Based Training Cookbook. E-learning has become a strategy for imparting knowledge and skills in organization. Its effectiveness and potential to deliver results to organization depends largely on how it is designed, delivered and evaluated. The chief reasons of E-learning includes introductory/orientation training, certification training, to deliver academic course and to provide remedial training. Chief advantages include lower cost, portability, use of multimedia and shorter training time. Disadvantages include learner motivation, technological limitations (bandwidth), and lower level of interactivity. Written word and face-to-face types of training still works. However World Wide Web has brought an entirely new learning format including a blend of textual, visual and kinesthetic. Although E learning is not the panacea for all learning/training needs but this integrated/blended learning is emerging as an effective tool to meet all types of training and learning objectives of organizations for various purposes in all domains of business activities.

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