E -learning as a tool for higher education and its challenges

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to provide a discussion of the e-learning and its challenges for the student as well as for the teachers. As the years go by, ways of learning are modified and adapted to suit the trends and the requirements of the era. Due to the rapid growth of Internet technology e-learning has become an increasingly popular approach to learning in higher education institutions. Internet is a perfect tool of learning that offers flexibility and feasibility to learners at the same time offering endless opportunities for innovative teaching. Technological development has changed people's lives on different dimensions including teaching and learning. The internet is one of the channels that open the door for students around the world to access education that too on low costs. E-learning is adopted by organizations to offer training for their employees. It requires a different approach to pedagogy especially in areas of individual or group interaction and online assessment. However these skills are not unknown to all, as borders become less meaningful, global competition strengthens. International expansion has led to larger and more complex corporations. Due to the introduction of different new techniques online learning has become easier and interesting. The present paper will explore the challenges which are faced in the higher education. Development of new technologies and software tools are providing real learning experience, which is helping in developing a true learning society based on technology. Academics are only good as much as they can adapt to the new technology, which is a challenge for most academics. The current challenge for academics in an e-learning is to understand the Learning styles, motivation, Time-management etc. of different students for better learning outcomes.

KEYWORD: e- learning, Higher Education, Challenges.

I.INTRODUCTION

During the last 800 years, higher education has shown its sustainability, flexibility and transformable proficiency. In this complex and demanding world we are influenced by technology. Technology helps in interconnectedness of nations and their peoples. New knowledge societies require more flexibility to adapt new styles of learning and teaching, new intellectual and social needs, and new levels of skills development. Globalization, government initiatives, outsourcing and increasing demand for IT knowledge based jobs are the major factors responsible for e-Learning growth in higher education. Technology acts as a tool and as a support for communicating with others. Student actively makes choices about how to produce, obtain, manipulate, or show information. E-learning is considered one of the distance learning forms, and can be defined as a method

of using advanced technologies in computer science, such as network, software, multimedia, electronic library, internet, and multimedia. The important is to deliver the information using easiest way in a short time i.e. saving time and energy. As a result of rapid advanced in information technologies and its effect in all aspects of life, the university education must be more responsive for these dramatic changes and rapid development.

E-Learning is a shift in teaching and learning and the rapid development in modern technology have spread the belief that education can be transferred from the classroom and books to the electronic world with little variation. (Zhang and Nunamaker, 2003) E-learning is the web-based learning; it is defined as the transfer of education in a flexible and easy way through the use of internet to support individual learning or organizational performance goals (Clark and Mayer, 2011). It eliminates the obstacles of time and distance, now individuals can take the responsibility of their own lifelong learning. E-learning environments decreases the cost of provision and therefore increase incomes for academic institutions (Masa'deh et al., 2016).With the arrival of e-learning technology, academics are facing the challenges of obtaining and implementing IT skills for the purposes of teaching. According to some eminent researchers internet is a perfect and flexibility tool and provides feasibility to learners and offers endless opportunities for innovate teaching (Hardaker and Singh, 2011).Information technology (IT) is considered as one of the most important forces that brings change in the all sectors of our lives (Alshurideh and Alkurdi, 2012; AL-Syaidh et al, 2015; Hajir et al., 2015). Nowadays many students want to learn online and in turn get degrees from worldwide colleges and universities, but still cannot go anywhere as they live in isolated areas without proper communication systems (Tarhini et al., 2014; Darawsheh et al., 2016).Many researchers motivate learning courses under the e-learning system as it saves time and energy of those students staying at any far off distant regions from the universities or colleges they have enrolled (Hubackova and Golkova, 2014). Indeed, e-learning in higher education is increasing in most universities around the world. e-learning is among the most recent types of education systems that has been attracted the attention of the educators in the world. Due to the rapid growth of Internet technology e-learning has become an increasingly popular approach to learning in higher education institutions. Students determine the schedule and study at their own pace. They can analyze the material for as long as they wish. The students participate with an instructor and other students, although not at the same time. They can attend the classes whenever they need or until the course material is completed. In this method feedback is given from the instructor and classmates. Many researches and case studies have been conducted to show the importance of technology. Maximum research is focused on the needs of the student. For the improvement of students learning many designs, recommendations and resolutions have been developed. Place of teacher is irreplaceable, but the importance of e-learning cannot be overlooked because of its importance and pervasiveness for students. Therefore e-learning is being changing modified and adapted as expected. Now distances are no longer an obstacle to someone who wants to study. Nevertheless in some cases the use of e-learning requires some initiation/training in order to achieve familiarization. E-learning has many benefits for students. It acts as a tool for students especially for higher education.

II.ADVANTAGES OF E-LEARNING

1) Reduced cost**:** Most important benefit of e-leaning is reducing the cost. Total cost can be reduced through reducing the instructor costs, travel expenses, room rentals, lodging and meals. The time required for attending the class could be used for other duties.

2) Well-organized: e-learning organized the resources to train many people. At one time one instructor can be sufficient for many classes in many locations in the same time.

3) Accessible: E-learning solves the problems of unavailability of experts. It helps in universal access to experts. At the same time e-learning overcome the problem of communications with the instructor. E-learning provides cross-border contact and/or exposure to expert knowledge and top instructors.

4) Convenient. Asynchronous e-learning solutions allow a student to learn based on their personnel circumstances. Synchronous e-learning allows students in different locations to attend classes morning or evening.

5. Learning in experience: A Chinese proverb says, 'Tell me, and I'll forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I'll understand'. Difficult or dull subjects can be made more interesting, easier and more appealing by e learning. It is an active experience with the emphasis on interactivity and 'learning by doing'. Also, many studies have proved that engagement levels are at least 20% higher in e-Learning compared to traditional learning.

Disadvantages

1) Inappropriate content: The content must match the community requirements. Complex issues that require hands-on learning may not fit the mode.

2) Diminished personal interaction: E-learning limits personal interactions between the instructor and students. The forms of communication are dramatically limited with e-learning. Instructors may find it difficult to determine the level of the students of the subject matter.

3) Employee acceptance: Due to rapid development in ICT, more employees became aware with it, and the acceptance for e-learning grows. Some employees particularly may feel uncomfortable with e-learning. Cultural issues may also inhibit the use of technology for e-learning.

4) Motivation: E-learning training requires students to take the initiative to start and complete the training. Some students may not be motivated to give the time to learn.

Challenges of e-learning in higher education:

After reviewing the literature and highlighting the main problem areas, important factors and key barriers were grouped into different categories: learning styles, attitude towards effectiveness of e-learning, Motivation etc. are some of the key challenges of e-learning.

Even though information technology is considered to be "cool" it is still not regarded as a proper tool for delivering education; in many developing countries. It is still second best and not perceived to be 'as good as' traditional face-to-face teaching .This could become a major obstacle if e-learning is not promoted or introduced in a proper way. Many people from developing countries have negative attitude towards e-learning. Furthermore, the attitude towards e-learning is important, in order to achieve the promises of e-learning, users need to grip it and necessary support must be provided. Essentially, if they feel that e-learning creates more

problems than it solves or if they simply do not know how to use it, all involved will not be comfortable with its use, and will therefore demonstrate signs of resistance, thus rendering the e-learning system valueless.

The greatest challenge in learning environments is to adapt the computer-based system to differently skilled learners. If the environment is too complex, the user will be lost, confused or frustrated. On the other hand, too simple or non-systematic environments cause motivational problems (Sirkemaa, 2001).Technology is by nature disruptive, and so, it demands new investments of time, money, space, and skills and changes in the way people do things (Aaron et al., 2004). Furthermore, face-to-face communication is critical for classroom social relationships and interpersonal processes while, online technologies have reduced support for social interaction. Although emotions can be conveyed through e-mail or chatting, it does not replace "the fundamentals of our socio-emotional well-being, barriers can make technology use frustrating for the technologically understanding, let alone the many teachers who may be somewhat techno-phobic (Ezziane, 2007).

Another challenge of e-learning is that the academicians and learners are ignorant about effectiveness of e-learning. They might feel that e-learning is not as effective as classroom training and the trainees would miss the opportunity of face-to-face communication.

Motivation is one of the common challenges faced by the e-Learning developers. When you establish a course and leave the learners to their devices, chances are that e- learning may not be as effective as classroom training. Hence the challenge is, how you can motivate your learners and present a good learning experience to them?

One of the common challenges in e-learning could be to assess whether your course has the deliberate impact on the learners. How do you evaluate that the courses are attaining its goal and meeting the learning requirements of the employees or trainees?

Everyone has their own learning style along with their cultural influences; the ones who are taught with their own individual learning style and taking into consideration cultural aspects of individuals will perform better academically (Sywelem et al., 2012). Understanding of different learning styles of students can achieve the best learning results. Some students learn through collaborating, some prefer learning through visual demonstration, and some by listening to instructions and using written notes. This challenge has an implication on the learning outcomes and poses a serious issue for academics to understand the learning styles of their students in an e-learning environment. When a student has a preference to a particular learning style then it became difficult to learn other ways, which means academic must be aware of different styles and needs to design learning materials that enables students to learn. Therefore understanding learning style is critical. If learning style is not recognized then a possibility of learning will not be achieved and it is the most important duty to meet. A match between learning style and teaching style reveals increases in student's satisfaction Use of e-Learning gives the differences of insights users behave differently while using e-Learning tools and techniques for teaching and learning purposes.

Basic challenge for institutions is overcoming the cultural mindset whereby departments and individuals act as storage tower, keeping information and control to themselves .More-over, the training that educators do and receive does not always match with their educational requirements, because the faculty is rarely involved in the decisions about technology and design of new strategies for technology-integration (Juniu, 2005). In many developing countries ICTs have not spread to a great extent in many higher educational institutions due to many socio-economic and technological situations (Sife et al., 2007).

There is a difference of opinion whether e-learning reduces time and effort of academics. Some of the researches shows that e-learning makes some of the administrative tasks and communication easier and that having a central origin to place content is freeing up time for quality contact (Heinrich, Milne and Moore, 2009). However other researchers state that e-learning becomes 30% more time overwhelming for academics than traditional classroom teaching (Conrad, 2004), not just due to the increase in working hours but also academics' labor increase by 14% to teach efficiently (Tomei, 2006)

Although the benefits and advantages of e-learning are evident, it could be argued that it still has some flaws. Some users are not bound by time the course is available 27*7 and does not require physical attendance which could reduce the social and cultural contact. The learners may also feel lonely and unsupported while learning since the coaches and instructions are not always available. They may be bored with no interaction. The learners need to have access to resources such as computers, internet, and software. Learners must need competency with programs such as word processing, Internet browsers, and e-mail.

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