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Barriers and Limitations of E-Learning

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, e-Learning has become increasingly important in educational institutions. The development and introduction of a variety of e-Learning tools has been causing numerous changes in higher education institutions. On the other hand there are some barriers and limitations in actual implementation. In this paper author has discussed these limitations.
Keywords- limitations of e-learning, ICT, barriers in online learning

I. INTRODUCTION

The environment of higher education is evolving. Rising costs, shrinking budgets, and an increasing need for distance education are causing educational institution to reexamine the way that education is delivered. In response to this changing environment, e-learning is being implemented more and more frequently in higher education, creating new and exciting opportunities for both educational institutions and students.

In today's rapidly changing electronic world (e-world) the key to maintaining the appropriate impetus and momentum in organizational and academic environments is knowledge. In this situation continuous, convenient and economical access to training and qualifications assumes the highest priority for the ambitious individual or organization. This requirement can be met by e-learning, one of the fastest growing areas in the high technology sector. Numerous names are used to denote learning activities supported by the Internet and other ICTs. These include Web-based learning, online learning, Asynchronous Learning Networks and Blended learning.

E-Learning:

E-Learning may also be defined as the acquisition and use of knowledge distributed and facilitated primarily by electronic means. This form of learning depends on networks and computers but may involve CD-ROMs, software, other media, and telecommunications. E-Learning can take the form of courses as well as modules and smaller learning objects. E-Learning may incorporate synchronous or asynchronous access and may be distributed geographically with varied limits of time.

E-learning has yet to be widely accepted as the term to describe 'technologized' learning in all its forms. Authors agree that a single definition for eLearning has yet to be found.

A range of terms such as tele-learning, telematics ,online learning , distributed learning, flexible learning may all point to a similarly conceived educational experience. Rosenberg (2001), writing about corporate e-Learning, forms a definition based on three fundamental criteria:

- e-Learning is networked, capable of instant updating, storage/retrieval, distribution and sharing of instruction and information.
- It is delivered to the end-user via a computer –using standard internet technology.
- It focuses on the broadest view of learning –learning solutions that go beyond the traditional paradigm of training.

However no weightage is given to any of the concepts in the framework, thus the potential to connect dispersed groups of learners, to develop new forms of interaction in the learning experience and to provide greater flexibility for the learner appear equal to the use of internet, intranet, telephone and broadband technologies.

Barriers in E-learning:

The problems relating to e-learning which need immediate attention were as following:

i) Issues Related to Teachers:

In online environment, a teacher has to be an administrator as well as instructor. Basically, a teacher has to have four main skills of an administrator, facilitator, technical supporter, and evaluator. They should have administrative skills to ensure that the programme runs smoothly. General feeling among teachers is that for implementing e-learning programmes they have to work in addition to the routine work of traditional teaching; they have to write course materials, check assignments, attend to users' queries, and provide feedback through e-mails. Studies have revealed that teachers need nearly twice as much time to teach an online course compared to a traditional course. So they need to be supported and facilitated in terms of resources to ensure that e-learning courses are developed appropriately and needs of the students are optimally met. They should get help and support through the transition period before e-learning courses become commonplace. It takes more time on the part of faculty members to develop content and provide online versions of content therefore; teachers should be given incentives and appreciations from accreditation agency for engaging in e-learning applications. Professional development of teachers is a prerequisite for any e-learning programme to be sustained over a period of time. The teachers should be offered training at regular intervals so that they are well versed with latest technologies and protocols and are ever prepared to embrace and implement e-learning in their teaching work unhesitatingly. The administrators and faculty members have an indifferent attitude towards introducing innovations in education. They feel they will not be rewarded for the additional work and efforts which they take. The university authorities and accreditation bodies should give some recognition or incentive to those who initiate ICT-enabled teaching and learning procedures.

ii) Issues Related to Institutions:

Institutions often have to cope with shrinking budgets and weak infrastructure to engage in any sort of innovations with regard to teaching and learning. Complain about quality assurance has acquired lot of

importance in higher education sector. The national bodies like NAAC and NBA (of AICTE), which provide guidelines for development and maintenance of quality assurance and procedure should also develop and set benchmarks for e-learning programmes. The accreditation bodies should clearly cover areas such as course structure, development, student support service, teaching and learning, and assessment and evaluation. Presently, the online degrees do not have the credibility and recognition in the society and the market. The lack of interaction between the teachers and the learners and the low admission standards for online courses are the causes of concern among the employers and the public. More concerted efforts should be taken for wider recognition from accreditation bodies of the country, which in turn would help to gain more learner interest in e-learning programmes.

iii) Issues Related to Students:

It should be widely communicated among the student community and potential employers that e-learning programmes are at par with the traditional ones. This will certainly encourage the students to go for online courses. For instance, the LIVE programme of IGNOU has less than 10 students whereas the equivalent distance learning course of the same university has students in hundreds.

Generally the institutions, universities complain of paucity of funds and dwindling of budget, which prevent them from implementing e-learning programmes. To overcome this problem, some policy needs to be laid down and a certain percentage of university budget should be earmarked for piloting and implementing e-learning programmes. The students are also found not to be techno savvy so they avoid taking e-learning courses.

Those students who are comfortable with e-technologies and spent hours in chatting and surfing also have a negative mindset in applying the same for the purpose of education and training. The students need to have skills of critical thinking, research and evaluation as there is abundance of information in electronic environment. Students are highly independent and need to be immensely motivated to learn. The e-learners perform as well as the learners in the conventional system; but there is higher incidence of drop outs. The learning outcomes are affected by e-learning system quality, e-learning readiness, and e-learners' competencies. Efforts should be taken to improve up one- learners' online learning skills of self-direction, met cognition, and collaboration. The e-learners should also get adequate learner support system to succeed. They may not know how to participate in discussion forums, bulletin boards, make use of blogs, wikis, podcasts and vodcasts and so on so forth; they doubt if they will get teachers' support. For this, training sessions, user awareness and orientation programmes should be organised before e-learning courses are launched. Students may take time to get accustomed to the new e-learning environment. They should be told how to access and use courseware and other electronic resources; pop-up boxes in the courseware can be incorporated in order to provide advice and guidance to the learners.

Limitations of E-learning:

Students need necessary hardware for e-learning such as desktop or notebook computers and printers. Therefore, one of the major technological limitations of e-learning is the necessity of computer hardware and relevant resources. Although, e- Arising from extensive literature review, e-learning limitations can be categorized as technological limitations, limitations compared to traditional campus, and personal issues. Limitations that do not fit into these categories are considered as other limitations.

i) Technological limitations:

Learning comes with benefits such as unlimited access 24 hours, 7 days a week, this privilege does not seem to be feasible for some people in rural areas due to the inability to access Internet services.

ii) Personal limitations:

Preparation is indeed needed for newcomers as they may think that non-traditional learning such as e-learning is the same as a traditional learning environment. Newcomers to nontraditional learning may get lost because they do not know what to do as there is no detailed guidance from the teacher. These newcomers need some orientation courses in order for them to get used to anon traditional learning environment like e-learning. Therefore, it is not surprising to see newcomers needing to be psychologically prepared for the e-learning environment.

iii) Limitations compared to Traditional Campus:

Lacking physical interaction is another limitation in e-learning. The lack of physical interactions made e-learning students feel isolated and apprehensive. Lacking physical interaction may also affect the completion rate. Physical classrooms however will enable learners to learn faster, as they can always refer to the instructors or peers for guidance. Body language is absent in e-learning.

Apart from this lack of physical interaction, e-learning is also criticized for not having facilities like traditional campuses: internship, volunteer opportunities, access to physical library, book stores, career and development counseling.

iv) Design Limitations:

Poor design of the e-learning courseware is a major issue for learners and e-learning providers. A poor design "gave users a feeling of being stressed and badly treated by the system". They further said this causes users to feel frustrated and eventually stop learning. Courseware design should be tailored to the needs of the learners: it should be easy to use and students should have easy access to guidance and information. Since e-learning is designed basically for the ICT savvy, it may be too technical for ICT novices. In short, the courseware should be easy to use and come with detailed guidance and ultimately be suitable for all learners.

v) Other limitations:

Although e-learning provides 24 hours and 7 days of unlimited access, this may not be advantageous to some individuals. 24/7 is a good marketing scheme, but online learners and professors burn-out easily". This never-ending learning and teaching process will easily stress both the learners and especially the instructors. Difference in time zones is another problem in online e-learning, as it is accessible for learners from all over the world. It is rather hard to schedule an online class to accommodate different students from different time zones.

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