

E-Learning: A Replacement or Supplement to the Traditional Classroom?

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Abstract: A form of learning, using electronic means, primarily the internet is E-learning. E-learning covers a wide set of applications and processes, such as Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration. The teacher's role in online learning is mainly that of a facilitator. There is less direct teacher-to-student interaction than normally found in the classroom. E-learning is largely self-motivated, and the student bears more individual responsibility to manage time and complete tasks within the given time frame. However, some students learn less effectively through this method and do not have the required self-discipline to learn via the internet. Although e-learning provides a number of advantages like personalization, interoperability and reusability, flexibility for users, significant disadvantages also exist for students. The teacher in an online course plays an integral role in the success or failure of the same. Majority of the students feel comfortable in the traditional classroom where they can interact face to face with the teacher. The effectiveness of e-learning also fluctuates based on an individual's learning style and behavior type. Moreover, their learning styles may differ and they may not be able to comprehend the given information without further explanation from a teacher. Not all students are self-motivated and self-determined to handle online courses. Therefore, as suggested by this research conducted on 1st year students of general degree colleges of North 24 Parganas, E-learning may not be able to replace the traditional classroom completely it can be used as supplement to it.

Keywords: E-learning, traditional classroom, replacement, supplement.

1. INTRODUCTION

In academia, e-learning may enable students to complete their education through flexible course schedules. It is defined as "a generic term covering a wide set of ICT technology-based applications and processes, including computer-based learning, web-based learning, virtual classrooms, digital collaboration and networking" (Huang, Hsiu-Mei, 2002). It also refers to the technology and services that help create, deliver, and manage those activities (Tenopir, Carol, 2002). E-Learning means a lot of different things, an innovative step on the part of teacher and learner. The e-Content Report (2004) describes e-learning "as an umbrella term describing any type of learning that depends on or is enhanced by electronic communication using the latest information and communication technologies (ICT)". It is used by the teachers and students alike for instruction purposes for its convenience and cost effectiveness.

Simplifying, others refer to it as teaching and learning that is web-enabled use of new multimedia technologies and internet for improving the quality of learning by means of access to resources and services, and long distance collaborations and exchanges.

E-learning is an increasingly preferable alternative to conventional classroom learning. It provides students and teachers with unprecedented flexibility and convenience. However, many current instructional Web sites just simply deliver course materials over the Internet and do not provide effective and efficient supports for using these materials to construct knowledge. As a result, learners only passively receive the presented materials. Educational systems are thus looking to e-learning programs to help address these challenges and to substantially improve the quality and content of their education. Integrating e-learning into existing higher education system can, however, be a major challenge. Higher education systems in developing countries are undergoing rapid change, particularly this is the threshold for the students to prepare

themselves for entrepreneurship. It broadens the scope of distance learning. Investment in e-learning is, however, not an alternative to investment in higher education generally; the two should be seen as being complementary. Implementing a comprehensive e-learning program would mean changes to the curriculum, infrastructure, teachers' professional development, textbooks, and exams. This blending is to bring the constructivist model or method where students work collaboratively and socially construct new knowledge. However, e-learning is just now in its infancy. Personalization, interoperability, reusability and flexibility are some significant features of e-learning (Clara, E. B. 2012).

E-learning requires patience, motivation, self-confidence, dedication, and a general knowledge of using a computer – characteristics that students may not wholly possess. The effectiveness of e-learning also fluctuates based on an individual's learning style and behavior type (Clarke, J. E. May 2010).

However, some teachers involved in these programs may not be accustomed to using a computer for the purpose of teaching - learning, or may not be willing to adapt to change. Some individuals become frustrated with using E-learning and may even reject it. Additionally, studies have indicated that several factors alter the success each individual has with e-learning, such as age and gender (Huang 2002).

Instructors of e-learning programs also face a number of new challenges. The teacher in an online course plays an integral role in the success or failure of a course. She/he must know and understand his/her role and limitations as a remote instructor, and must be able to communicate with the students on a regular basis at sporadic times to help them to move forward at a steady

pace (Easton 2003). Teachers must take the initiative and occasionally initiate a discussion with the students. In online instruction in particular, instructors must make extra efforts to communicate with students. However, several factors may impede a teacher's ability to communicate with students through E-learning. These factors include the instructor's lack of computer literacy, resistance to online education, different philosophical beliefs about the nature of communication online and heavy workloads (Watanabe, K. 2005). If classroom learning is completely eliminated, an extremely large student segment will be left at a significant disadvantage (Watanabe, K. 2005).

In this research, students' response to e-learning was studied. Although this was a limited study, it tries to identify whether e-learning can be used to completely eliminate classroom-based learning or to complement it.

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

E-learning does not have a way of ensuring that the students are really learning the material. In this study, tests and quizzes conducted in online classes were not monitored and, as a result, it is unknown whether or not students use notes or other resources to complete tests. Therefore, it is unclear if students completed exams based on knowledge they accumulated from e-learning, or if the illicitly used outside sources to "cheat" during exams. This problem can be prevented by human supervision.

E-learning also does not accommodate the different learning styles of the students. All students are not self-motivated and self-determined to handle online courses (Agarwal, E. S. 2013). Students learn independently and from others who share in the discussions. If students are not focused and willing to push themselves to do the work, they will not be able to succeed in an online course. Some students need a human teacher physically in front of them, explaining the course subject matter and materials, answering spontaneous questions, and monitoring their work. In order to learn, these types of students need the learning environment of a traditional classroom that e-learning is not able to provide.

Further, many instructors are not properly trained to facilitate online learning. They lack many of the necessary skills such as technical knowledge and the ability to move traditional content and time (E-Markovic, M. R. 2010). Learning is extremely time-consuming for both the teacher and the student. Teachers must invest ample time to communicate with students individually during online sessions.

This study shows that the teachers will have more responsibility in this innovative teaching – learning condition. As noted, there are many problems with online learning and many reasons for not being able to completely eliminate the traditional classroom.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Online e-Learning system is subsidiary to traditional face-to-face education. Many institutions will implement e-Learning to meet students' needs, especially those of non-traditional students with full time jobs. Since e-Learning is conducted

using the Internet and World Wide Web, the learning environment becomes more complicated. Students' satisfactory experience with technology-based e-Learning will determine whether they will use the system continually or not. The objectives of the study :

to survey the answer to the following research question:

“Can e- learning replace the traditional classroom or supplement it?”

The study will also review students' response to both traditional classroom and e-learning system .

4. METHODOLOGY

The target population of this study is under graduate students. The research was conducted at degree colleges of North 24 Parganas. Students who attended this course came from various social classes and backgrounds. Those who have currently enrolled in General degree course were surveyed.

Number of Sample: Total 100 (50 male, 50 female)

Sampling Technique: Purposive sampling technique is used to conduct the research.

The population of this case study focused on both male and female students. The age group of the students was between 18 and 20 years. The students were placed in the online environment for three weeks. They received a book to supplement their learning. They also used online resources to gather more information to help gain a better understanding of the topics. In addition, the students were involved in online teaching learning evaluating system which is through e-module, based on their curriculum. They were given assignments to complete out of the book to test their knowledge. At the end of the third week, they were given an online test. Then, they were switched to the traditional classroom setting. Once again, they were given assignments to complete and a test at the end of the three weeks. During these weeks, the teacher explained several concepts to them .Thus they were taught through both e-learning and traditional way. At the end of the experiment, the students were given a survey to gather their thoughts and opinions about the course. The students were not aware that this was an experiment to prevent bias in their responses.

5. DATA COLLECTION

There was a set of questionnaires that was used for collecting data from learners. The questions one to four were to determine the demographics of the sample. The questions five to nine were to identify the student's choice of course. The questions ten to fifteen describe about the students access towards online education, syllabi, and course materials. The questions sixteen to twenty- five focus on the medium of the instructors, language of communication, facilities provided by the institute and the accessibilities through technical devices.

6. FINDINGS

A case study was conducted on both male and female students of the first year who took the course. Total one hundred and twenty students, participated in the case study. Survey was conducted with a questionnaire filled by individual students. It gives qualitative information about students who had experienced one class from the traditional classroom and one from e-learning. The success of the class using e-learning has various factors which is discussed in detail. The many advantages and disadvantages are discussed, including the factors that help determine each. In addition, a detailed comparison between e- learning and the traditional classroom is also discussed, showing how the traditional classroom is more preferable than e-learning by these students. Even though e-learning has several advantages over the traditional classroom, This paper suggests that e-learning may not completely replace the traditional classroom at college level. It can be supplemented time to time.

As shown in the data analysis, 63.5% of the students participated did not feel comfortable with the online course or e - learning. They did not like the class and did not wish to take it. However, 55.2% would recommend the course to other students. In essence, just because they did not like the course does not mean that other students would feel the same way. In addition, 59.7% would take another online course, showing that they feel that there is a possibility that they may have a better experience with another course as they consider themselves now experienced with e- learning. 85.1% of the students surveyed believed the course to be harder than it was in the traditional setting. Only 36.4% were able to keep up with the assignments and tests and manage their time well. Also, 80.4% believed they would receive a better grade if the

course was taught in a traditional classroom environment. Test results show that 70% of the students failed the test given at the end of the first three weeks, 15% received a low D, 10% received a C, 4% received a B, and only 1% received an A.

The majority of the students preferred the traditional environment that they were used to learning in. 89.8% said their experience in the traditional setting was better than that in the online setting. 78.4 % felt they learned more from a teacher explaining the concepts they needed to know. 65.4% felt that the assignments were easier to complete and cope up with. 72.9% felt that they were better prepared for their test. The test results show that 77% of the students passed the test with a B or better, 15% made a C, 6% made a D, and only 2% failed the test at the end of the second three weeks. 74.8% of the students said they would recommend this course in the traditional classroom setting to other students. The comments received by the students were overall consistent. Each comment was a complaint. They could not understand why the teacher was not teaching them and leaving them to learn on their own. They did not like the online environment and felt it was not helping them learn what was needed for the test. They were not able to grasp a clear understanding of the topics and they did not do very well on the assignments or the tests. Approximately 28% students initiated, on an individual basis, complaints about the course. After the three weeks, students were switched back to the traditional classroom setting. They expressed their gratitude for the change. Some students felt that they were learning and understanding more after the change. These results suggest, the answer to the research question, that e-learning has not been able to completely replace the traditional classroom setting. It can be used as supplement to conventional class room. Many students still rely on the guidance of teachers and are not able to learn dependently and manage their time.

E-learning does not always provide students with comprehensive knowledge and understanding of a subject matter, and is unable to cater to the individual needs of each student. This limited study suggests that e-learning may be especially challenging when dealing with college students of diversified intellectual and social strata. It can be supplemented with e-learning.

7. LIMITATIONS

The results were limited to only under graduate college students in mostly rural areas. Some students may not have liked the instructor or the way she/he taught them during the experiment. The students' personal attitude towards the teacher may have influenced their comments and opinions. Their negative attitude did not allow them to have an open mind regarding the two styles of learning. They have less exposure to e-learning and they feel hesitant to take up this novel technique. Such factors must be considered in evaluating the results.

8. CONCLUSION

In this limited study, students did not seem to gain the same amount of knowledge using an online course as they would, if they used the traditional classroom method. The majority of students in this study were uncomfortable with the setting of online learning and preferred a live, in-person teacher in the classroom teaching. This was either due to their understanding or their changed study habits. It may be that after failing the first test, they chose to study harder for the next. All of these reasons support the existence of different learning styles, behavior types, age, and gender in the study group. Every academic institution needs to serve its students to think imaginatively with new ideas and the teachers should raise among them greater awareness like how to grow continuously with new ideas.

It is very urgent for the educational institution to generate and excel in various facets including the basic digital awareness especially at the beginning of higher education. The role of teachers needs to be shifted in the context of time. Their special task is to sit with the students, study their minds (of the students) and lead them accordingly.

Although, if we think of maintaining a bridge between the traditional and modern education system we need some expert syllabus makers who would recommend how much it would be better to allow our present generation to be dependent on technology based education. Qualitative transformation in present education system is needed.

It is the pertinent issue at present to be sorted out. Otherwise it is impossible to do justice to the students who are enrolling themselves in the academic institutions. So it is not their fault that they are facing difficulty in e-learning.

These students learn differently and do not feel comfortable with online learning system. Thus, our limited study suggests that the online courses are not for all the students and till now, online learning has not been able to replace the traditional classrooms completely in the present scenario. It can be applied as complementary to the existing system.

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