
“E – Learning in India” its Prospects and Challenges**Dr. Soumitra Chandra**

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INTRODUCTION

E-learning or electronic learning in India is gaining prominence slowly, but indeed steadily. This is due to the fact that more than half the population of India today is below 25 years of age and the number of Internet users are growing continuously. The tremendous growth of the economy in the recent past has also helped in the growth of online education in India. E-learning in India is specially popular with the young professionals who have joined the work force quite early but still would like to continue their education that may help them move up their career ladder quickly and safely. The importance of e-learning and e-learning solutions in India cannot be ignored with the growing pool of highly qualified individuals. People across the world have saved time and money and students have managed to get easy accessibility irrespective of their place of residence. With e-learning solutions, businesses have trained their people online and students have gained higher education degrees at respectable universities and colleges without any expenses on traveling, accommodation, food and high fees for tutors.

In present paper it is tried to highlight upon the various aspects of e – learning; such as:

- Evaluation of e - learning;
- State of e – learning in India
- Higher education & e – learning;
- Government & e – learning;
- Women & e – learning;
- Advantages of e – learning;
- Safety measures to be taken in e – learning;
- Suggestions and conclusion.

WHAT IS E - LEARNING

E- learning means learning through electronic media. Mainly through internet and CDs. The term e-learning involves using the Internet as a communications medium where the instructor and students are separated by physical distance (Cooper, 1999). The learners can access

educational content anytime, any place. Apart from the classical arguments of cost and consistency, e-learning has also made education accessible to students, especially in the higher education space. Common e-learning tools include discussion boards, email, chat rooms, video streaming, document transfer, and other technologies to facilitate the educational process.

India has a robust cellular network and broadband Internet to facilitate easy connectivity with the rest of the world along with the ability to provide service round the clock. India has therefore become a good option for many to get offshore e-learning solutions. High quality, e-learning solutions are being developed in India supporting various sectors. Industry watchers estimate that because of its advantages, India is bound to grow in stature as the hub for e-learning programs.

Trends in e-learning

Business-to-employee initiatives will address e-learning	Companies will build B2E intranets or corporate portals to conduct business with employees, and provide them self-service for access to benefits, forms and information. B2E capabilities will become increasingly important tools for recruitment, retention, and employee-relationship management.
e-learning will extend to customers	CRM initiatives might include customer education. According to Gartner, companies can use e-learning to introduce new products, educate customers in self-service techniques, and compare competitors' products and services.
Simulation, gaming and interactivity will enrich e-learning	Research shows that student understanding and retention improves when they learn by experience. Technologies such as collaboration, interactivity, modelling, simulations, virtual reality interfaces and gaming will help students experience the skill while being taught.
There will never be enough of the right skills	Along with technologies and business practices, some skills are changing so quickly that they're outdated within a few months of introduction. In addition, the number and range of skills required of the average employee is increasing.

INDIAN SCENARIO

The e-learning scenario in India is still growing at an experimental stage. Traditional mindsets are beginning to change, with the corporate sector leading the way in embracing

technology-based learning avenues. Many schools have started augmenting teacher-led programmes with content-rich e-learning modules. Government initiatives are not far behind either.

Evolution of e-learning

The CBTs (Computer Based Training programmes) represented the first phase of e-learning, which had a heavy dose of graphics, audio, and video. These were mostly self-paced learning modules and learners didn't have any opportunity to interact with instructors or other classmates. The early days of web-based learning were marked mostly by simple page-turners. Today, with better bandwidth, web-based learning has also started incorporating audio, video and 3D animation. Moreover, technology has enabled the use of more interaction, including elements such as chats, discussion rooms and multi-player educational games and simulations. The latest tools are more engaging, soothing to the eye, are simpler to programme, can track student-learning patterns and adjust delivery based on the needs of one or many.

Premium educational institutes such as IIM-Bangalore have started executive MBA programmes, which are partly e-learning driven. Symbiosis, Pune, also offers courses through e-learning. McGraw-Hill Education, a leading educational publisher, has (in association with Education Times) recently launched an e-testing module called 'Testmate' that targets aspirants preparing for various competitive examinations such as IIT, CAT and AIEEE.

The major hindrance to the acceptance of e-learning can be attributed to the Indian mindset that is more inclined to traditional classroom learning. The visibility of e-learning is currently limited to IT and educational CDs for children. But however with PC penetration and overall online accessibility increasing by leaps and bounds in the country, the future of e-learning looks promising, provided the organisation of content and delivery is well-structured.

State of e-learning

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 permits the delivery of knowledge and information to learners at an accelerated pace, opening up new vistas of knowledge transfer. 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. On 19th July 2005, the AICTE (All India Council for Technical Education) and NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Services Companies) inked a MOU. According to the MOU, AICTE will serve as a link between Industry and Education for ensuring relevant and quality learning. This was to strengthen the Indian Technical Education through curricula, faculty, infrastructure, pedagogical improvements in

line with the industry's (specially IT) requirements of relevant skill-sets in various disciplines at different levels (graduate, post-graduate, doctoral).

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Higher Education and e – learning

In higher education, there is a growing tendency to create a virtual learning environment (VLE) in which all aspects of a course are handled through a consistent user interface throughout the institution. Several universities, as well as newer online colleges, especially in the US, have begun to offer a select set of academic degree and certificate programmes through the internet at many levels and disciplines. Some of these programmes do require students to attend orientation sessions in colleges, but most of the course content is delivered online. Several universities also offer online student support services, such as online advice and registration, e-counselling, online textbook purchase and student newspapers. E-learning has the potential to overcome the non-availability of adequately qualified teachers in rural India. Live online tutoring, streaming videos and virtual classrooms are some of the solutions that e-learning can offer to these problems. While there is no substitute for effective and organised classroom teaching, e-learning's popularity would increase if it is oriented more towards effective short-term, specialised courses with a clear objective.

Coming to the aspect of quality, infrastructure and faculty are two major concerns that need to be focused on. The UGC and AICTE are also pursuing various measures to lure fresh graduates into research and teaching profession. Very recently, the Ministry launched National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (ICT). An amount of Rs.4612 crore is being incurred during the 11th Five Year Plan for the scheme. The government alone cannot address all these challenges. The private sector needs to play a proactive role to supplement the efforts of the government. A PPP model is to be developed with the active participation of stakeholders at the central and state level.

The 11th Five Year Plan has kept a target of raising the gross enrollment ratio to 15% by the end of the plan year. This is where ICT steps in. Integration of ICT in education will give an impetus to our efforts to attain our target of increasing our gross enrollment ratio by widening the reach of education to the remote and marginalised areas of our country.

With a large percentage of our population constituting the workforce, ICT also gives them space to pursue education at their own convenient pace and time. The role of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) systems, which have accepted and integrated ICT in their

functioning and outreach, particularly finds mention here. Interestingly, many companies are booming up here in India for providing eClasses; places like Mumbai and Bangalore are becoming prominent centers for providing eTutorials.

FICCI-Ernst & Young report (Making the Indian higher education system future ready) was recently released at the FICCI Higher Education Summit 2009. The report has identified five 'game changers' that can strengthen the higher education system. In fact, the imperatives that are likely to make the system future ready include financial innovation, ICT, reinvigorating research, thrust on vocational education and training (VET), and regulatory reforms.

To enable a healthy ICT environment, the report recommends development of collaborative networks along with creation of a common centralised repository for e-journals, digitised PhD thesis, research papers, e-books, etc. Vocational education and training (VET), too, needs attention, while facilitating mobility between VET and mainstream education through a system of credit transfer should be a priority.

Government and e – learning

E-learning/Virtual learning is gaining much importance in each and every sector of our economy. Government is another sector which has set out to tap the advantages to a higher level. With the increasing pressures on the costs cutting measures, they are constantly on a look out for alternatives that would cut down the costs and increase effectiveness.

Key issues concerning the government can be solved through e-learning such as:

- It can help government to communicate rules and policies effectively.
- It can create awareness about various schemes and plans among citizens.
- It can deliver the government agenda.
- Give people an open platform to communicate or learn.
- e-learning learning can manage semi-structured and unstructured information
- It will help citizens co-operate with the government.
- A good e-learning learning solution can help government in multiple aspects. in terms of: Providing the Learning Portal around Government Policies, Rules & Regulations in Public Private Partnership (PPP) model.
- Educate people on social entrepreneurship and civic activities as well as to make its citizens aware of its rules and policies, particularly the taxation laws, such as property tax, land tax etc., and cooperate towards its ongoing tax mobilization campaigns
- A transparency in governance can be attend by way of a meaningful education among the people.

Women and e – learning

Traditionally women in Indian society suffer from various social and cultural handicaps and it is felt that unless the women are sufficiently empowered, the socio-economic development may be difficult to achieve. Empowering women starts from initial involvement in analyzing their own problems, proposing solutions and consequently taking collective action. Regional networking, social mobilization, changing the attitudes and knowledge of women is really needed to increase the women power.

Here, e-learning strategies can really shape them and translate the posed objectives into reality

- The e-learning techniques would empower women, create legal awareness, encourage them to take up cases of women and also help the women litigants.
- e-learning software would bridge the gap between the laws and their effective implementation in rural and urban areas.
- e-learning networking make links between social and legal organizations concerned with legal issues. For example e-learning networking would establish links between Mahila Mandals, lawyers and courts. This means by making concentrated efforts of e-learning we can bridge the gap between social organizations and legal system, between lower and high court, between rural and urban areas, between senior and junior lawyers and so on.

Advantages of e-learning

Nothing can replace traditional classroom teaching, but e-learning complements the process and can help reach out to the masses. The biggest advantage of e-learning lies in its ability to cover distances. For an organisation that is spread across multiple locations, traditional training becomes a constraint. All trainees need to come to a classroom to get trained. The trainee's learning pace is not addressed as all trainees are treated as having equal abilities and there is little flexibility in terms of timing and completion of the course. E-learning is self-paced, and learning is done at the learner's pace. The content can be repeated until it is understood by the trainee. It can be made compelling and interesting with multimedia, and the trainee can be given multiple learning paths depending on his or her needs.

To Summaries E – learning facilitates

- Availability of more reliable and cheaper means of learning.
- Ensure the understanding or learning process.
- Exploiting the available resources fully.
- Incorporate with traditional way of teaching.
- Make a conducive environment.
- Pre-services, in-services and post services training and development strengthened to cover effective use of materials.

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- Develop a participatory program approaches.
 - Easy Incorporation of commercial/ private players in the field.
 - Incorporation of Academics, Research Institutes, student representatives.

WHY e-LEARNING - A SURVEY

Here is a survey on e – learning conducted by Nishikant Waikar, Faculty, Institute of Management Studies, Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India, and Gunjan Saxena & Jagannath Prakash, Students, Masters of Hospital Administration-Ist Sem, Institute of Management Studies, Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India.

Sample Size-40

Target peoples-Medical students, Hospital administration students, Pharmacy students, Physiotherapy students and Nursing students.

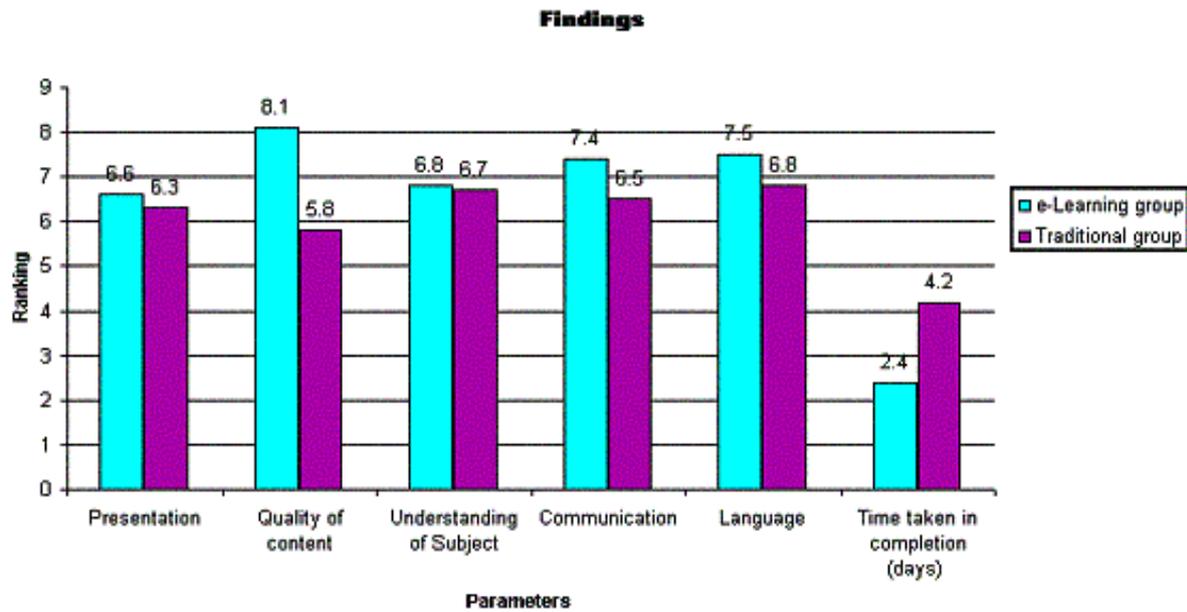
Procedure:

For conducting the study they took sample of 40 students from Healthcare Sector and further divided these into two groups of 20 each. Both groups are assigned a particular task, and asked to submit in written and present it before a fixed date.

One group has to use computer aided materials, online journals, web communication and so on to accomplish the task, while other group has to use only traditional techniques of education i.e. printed materials, books, notes, face to face communication etc. A panel of respected authorities of related streams evaluates and ranks the performance of the individuals on a scale of 1 to 10.

Findings

On the basis of survey, they got the following results, of two different groups



According to the above table it is clear that e-learning group is more effective and efficient.

SAFETY MEASURES

With modern technology, reality is being manufactured. People are manipulated into believing something. With live electronic video-manipulation, information can be bent out of shape. The viewer may be virtually fooled. American flag was shown fluttering on moon. Somebody questioned how it can flutter when there is no wind on the atmosphere-free moon. Virtual insertion technology (VIT) can show Saddam Hussain addressing American senators in the USA.

Our society should immediately begin resolving some of the most serious problems created by electronic media — increased violence and obscenity, unbearable consumerism and greed, cultural erosion, rising intolerance and insensitivity, monopolisation and twisting of facts, mushroom-growth of neo-illiterates addicted to visuals and fall in levels of creativity.

The developed countries will multiply and strengthen their ‘e-muscles’ to flood the developing countries with their own economic, educational and cultural models. Under the circumstances, what should we do?

A straight one-point solution is not possible, because of our immense socio-economic-cultural diversity. Healthy regulatory norms will have to be formulated after broad-based, prolonged open public debates and dialogues at various levels.

As short-term measures, a three-pronged strategy can immediately be adopted.

- An autonomous body should initiate self-introspection and auto regulation by the electronic media itself. The media must continue to remain on the fore-front. It should be more alert, alive, fair, non-aligned and responsible in its telecasts.
- Secondly, an aware citizens group can collect viewer-feedbacks and monitor the telecasts regularly at the regional levels.
- Lastly, the government may provide an overall control, protecting the national interests.

For long-term solutions, we will have to bank upon the educational institutions. Nature has equipped the next generation with better genomic inputs. We should educate, train, groom and prepare the youth to be more discerning viewers rather than passive spectators or participants.

SUGGESTIONS

- One of the problems with e-learning in India is the lack of course content, especially outside the mainstream focus areas of IT education, English-language content, and tutorial-like courses. Focus should be given to develop multi-lingual courseware for various topics to spread knowledge far and wide of our country.
- To give a boost to research, the immediate need is to facilitate industry-academia collaboration, increase collaboration between universities and government R&D labs.
- The government needs to stimulate a learning culture, and e-Learning must become a policy issue. Government must recognise the e-Learning Industry as a separate forum and not treat it as part of the IT enabled services or a sub sector of the IT industry.
- Government should take initiative to minimize cost of constructing a web site and using internet.
- Universities should improve the quality and employability of their courses offered.
- There should be one centralized monitoring system to ensure correctness and reliability of the e contents in the country.
- Precautions by the international regulatory bodies should be taken to avoid e contents showing matters against the welfare of the whole humanity. For example materials which can be used for developing terrorism, know-how to prepare mass destructive instruments, matters advocating communalism and hurting any religious belief.

CONCLUSION

Through e – learning global exploration into any branch of knowledge is quite possible sitting in front of a computer with Internet communication. These made technical and professional education more comfortable and uniform to all over the world. With the tremendous explosion in web usage as a knowledge sharing and delivering platform, e-Learning will become more a norm than an exception. It is incumbent upon all of us to drive this process.

Together we need to create an e-Learning infrastructure that is sustainable and continues to transform learning, education and training. What is required is a formal methodology which allows systematic content design and then an empirical evaluation of effectiveness of E-Learning environment created in such a way.

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