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Introduction to Online Learning and It's Scope in Education System

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INTRODUCTION TO ONLINE LEARNING

One of the difficulties in gaining a clear sense of literature on online learning is the multiplicity of terms used to represent the phenomenon. Commonly used terms are distributed learning, distance learning, online learning, e-learning and computer mediated learning. Online learning refers to learning and other supportive resources that are possible through a computer. Online learning also known as e-learning is the process of engaging in learning through the use of electronic technology. It consists of the use of computer programs, CD-ROMs, online puzzles, computer quizzes, learning quests, researching online, bulletin boards, online discussions, DVDs, online streaming and television. In an online lesson the computer displays material in response to the request of a learner. The computer prompts the learner for several information and presents proper material concerned on the response of learner. The material can be as easy as lessons from a classroom course and supplement tests that are typewritten into a computer program or as complex as a program that tracks user input and suggests proper learning material. It can be a work session that exists on computer in which case the learning is a byproduct of the experience or it can be configured for needs other than learning in which the learners go through it with the aim of acquiring specific content. Several software companies claims to be electronic learning specialists. The outcomes of electronic are no varied from conventional learning results needed by teachers in tasks of offline classroom. The material can be represented as graphics, text, audio, video, animated graphics or a combination of any of these. Some institutions of education begin their commands as training students who are dispersed geographically from the institution and from one another themselves. They denote what has been referred to as distance education (Carliner, 2004, p 1-4; Bowman, 2010).

How does online learning look like?

Online learning is configured as a reference rather than a course but it has an educational needs. In its online form it is all about several basic form of online learning some text, easy graphics and a limited amount of interaction. More complex online learning will consist a larger number of intentional interactions than hyperlinks. This interaction consists of drills such as those used to teach note mathematics skills or make sure that workers know and follow safety procedures when working with toxic chemicals. More complex system consists of simulations such as aircraft simulators or fictitious conditions involving management challenges or medical patients in the workplace. A computer provides several flexibility and variety making online learning flexible and versatile. Instances of more complex forms of online learning courses are scheduled regularly lectures by videoconference on online a web page with supplemental materials such as videos of previous lessons, discussions outside of class by electronic mail and online tests whose outcomes are recorded automatically in student records (Chute, Thompson and Hancock, 1998).

Finally online learning can be used to learn any subject. Subjects such as lower order thinking skills and technical training lend themselves most easily to online learning. But the designers of imaginative course have taught all sorts of other subjects online successfully and courses on compliance with similar opportunity laws, leadership skills for business managers, screenwriting, how to make technical and scientific presentations and delivering courteous customer service.

ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Rudestam and Read (2009, p 8-10) described that online learning exists within several environments of educational learning from the traditional universities of distance learning to electronic learning for profit. Nowadays what follows is the classification of the dominant players in the profession of online learning. Nonprofit traditional universities of distance learning: Traditional distance learning schools have exposed into the online environment and brought with them the values and philosophies of education of their traditional environments of distance learning. Other traditional learning and institutions of distance

learning have extended directly into the online market.

Traditional nonprofit universities: Big traditional public universities have the biggest number of online degree and certificate programs as well as courses across a vast number of disciplines. There are instances of traditional universities developing wholly new entities for their online programs. Several universities also applied corporate practices to their efforts of online courses.

CORPORATE ONLINE UNIVERSITIES

Several major corporations have developed corporate universities with online elements. For corporate universities it is a similar practice to work collaboratively with for profit learning organizations. Several electronic learning organizations offers contracted services as providers or consultants to corporate universities. The Corporate University offers information for organizers of corporate university consisting of e-news, annual conference, newsletters, survey research and webinars.

Online learning open sources and digital content resources: Sample of websites and online organizations that offers support for collaboration and research content for online learning indicates there is a support wealth and wide expansion of web based resources. A well-developed effort to support online learning environment is the learning network which has enhanced asynchronous learning containing educational and research resource. Online learning information resources such as ASTDs Learning Circuits publish electronic learning research and news. Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching offers a web site for peer reviewed online discussion and course material. The content covers several disciplines and includes lectures, tutorials, hypertext books and simulations. Electronic learning and online distance journals several of which are peer reviewed offers a rich source of simple accessible research. Wikis, blogs and virtual reality sites offers a new generation of possibilities of electronic learning. Along with vast competition and growth in ventures of online education some online learning schools have been already witnessed the consolidation and demise. Future developments will continue to be impacted by an organization or institution's mission, leadership commitment, faculty and administration beliefs and desire to improve access that online education is similar to or better than traditional education as well as an impetus towards collaboration and creativity (Brosche and Feavel, 2011; Collison, Elbaum, Haavind and Tinker, 2000).

Why Online Learning?

Students decide to involve in an online learning for several reasons the major one is convenience. Technology based pedagogies can enhance and motivate guided learning, directed learning and self-learning. These experiences of learning can be an exciting way to involve students in the classroom and at home. Online is seen by education authorities as the medium which will advance school charter aims to motivate wide curriculum aims students skills and knowledge acquisition, lifelong learning and preparation for work. Specifically students can be involved actively in producing similar content to denote an activity established by the teacher using different multimedia integrated with web publishing and web tools. Collaborative tasks can offer increased opportunities for students and teachers to gain the aims of education. Teachers can use the importance of online to liberate students and describe the positive outcomes of independent learning and collaborative learning styles (Hoareau, 2004).

Online learning has been around for several time periods and has used different media to support learning and communication. There has been and will often be a requirement to attain people who cannot be reached easily through traditional face to face methods. Alterations in society and the increasing requirement to retrain and train people mean the requirement to learn and teach at a distance will enhance (Shank and Sitze, 2004).

FIVE STAGE FRAMEWORK OF ONLINE LEARNING:

For online learning to be happy and successful the students must require to be supported through a structured process of development. A structured learning scaffold provides necessary development and support to students at each stage as they build up expertise in learning online. The below figure shows the model of learning and teaching online:

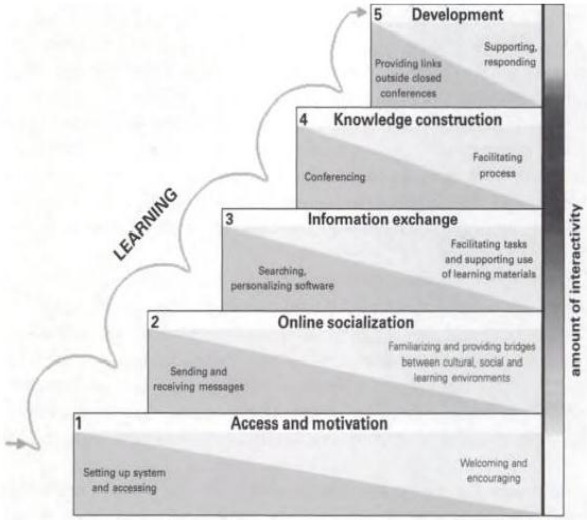

Figure 1: Model of learning and teaching online

Source: Salmon G (2002), E-tivities: the key to active online learning, Routledge, London.

The above 5-stage model offers an instance of how students can benefit from increasing comfort and skill in networking, working and learning online and

what e-moderators requires to do at every stage to help them to gain this success. The model shows how to encourage online students to build learning through proper e-tivities and to move online learners through programmes of training and development (Salmon, 2002).

In the step 1 Individual access and the students' commencement into online learning are necessary needs for online conference meetings. In the step 2 involves individual students setting up their identities of online and then predicting others with whom to communicate. At step 3 a form of cooperation exists whereby every person supports other aims of students. At step 4 discussions related to course group are developed and the interaction becomes more collaborative. In the final step 5 students view for several benefits from the system to support them to gain personal aims and reflect on the learning processes. Each step needs students to master specific technical skills. Each step is called for various e-moderating skills. The interactivity bar running along the right of the steps determines the interactivity intensity that teachers can expect between the students at each step. At the first Step they interact only with more than one student. After the step 2 others numbers with whom they communicate and the frequency gradually develops although step 5 always outcomes in a return to several individual pursuits. Given technical support, better intervention of human from a proper e-tivities and e-moderator to enhance interaction and action nearly all participants will progress through these steps of use of asynchronous networking opportunities. In the steps 3 to 5 are several constructive and productive steps for developmental and learning needs. However they will work well if participants have taken part in step 1 and 2 kind e-tivities first. Students will vary in the time period and they will require knowledge at each step before initiating. The benefit of using this model is to configure processes of development and builds an e-tivities programme for online learning is that the students will know how individuals are likely to destroy the system at every step and they can avoid similar drawbacks. The outcomes must be active online learning, better contributions, and interaction between increased satisfactions of students. Electronic moderators who understands the model and apply it must have fun in their work more and spends only small amount of time trying to appoint stubbornly resistant students and several period of time in running and designing creative e-tivities (Garrison and Shale, 1990).

GUIDING LEARNERS TO ENGAGE ONLINE

The role of a student as an engaged learner enhances over time. Collaboration and interaction is not related to several adult learners who have been educated in a predominantly lecture based environment. Initially a learner may be more comfortable in a passive student role and will require opportunity and guidance to become more involved in an online learning environment. An online learner must establish quickly comfort with the technology, higher level of self-direction and text based communication than in traditional classroom. If this comfort level is not reached the learner will walk away from the course in frustration. In addition to these elements learners have extra uncertainty of having to quickly build interdependence and trust with others that they may never meet face to face. It becomes the responsibility of the instructor to make sure that the learners find others in the learning environment with whom they can build collaborative relationship. To do this the online instructor must configure course component that motivate the learners growth in these new relationships. When the courses first moved online it seemed that more time was required for an instructor to handle a successful online course than had been required in the traditional setting of classroom. Initially the engagement framework phases initiated as a desire to handle the online communication level and focus instructors and learners on performing their new roles in online environment. This framework offers a means of developing proper tasks and introducing them in an effective sequence. The framework consists of exercises of introductory community building which constructs trust and help a group learn how to work together. As learners achieve more expertise and confidence they can be guided to move through extra engagement phases.

During phase I the learner and instructor establishes the initial course tone as being one in which she or he will be a guide. The students requires to be informed that others in the community will be just as necessary as the instructor if not more so at times. This tone can be established by an initial electronic mail from the instructor or by having first task of the course be a vast introduction that needs learners to learn about and interact with one another in a nonthreatening manner. There may be a tendency for new online instructors to rush through this beginning phase to get to what they may assume the heart of the content of the course. However experienced online instructors have predicted that interaction is the essence of the course. The remaining course will go much more smoothly of care is taken to enhance proper frame of mind in phase I of the process of engagement (Salmon, 2002, p 10-12).

Phase	Role of a Learner	Role of an Instructor	Weeks	Process
1	Newcomer	Social negotiator	1 to 2 weeks	Instructor offers tasks that are interactive and that helps the learners to het know one another. Instructor expresses expectations for course engagement offers orientation to the course and keeps learners on track
2	Cooperator	Structural engineer	3 to 4 weeks	Instructor makes learners dyads and offers tasks that needs reflection, ideas sharing and critical thinking. For instance task critiques and peer reviews
3	Collaborator	Facilitator	5 to 6 weeks	Instructor offers tasks that need small groups to collaborate resolve issues reflect on experiences. for example role playing, content discussions, jigsaws and debates.
4	Partner/initiator	Challenger/community member	7 to 16 weeks	Tasks are learner led or learner designed. Discussions initiate to go not only where the instructor intends but also where the learners targets them to go. For instance, group projects and presentations, learner facilitated discussions.

Table 1: Phases of online learning

After establishing proper climate for engagement to exist in Phase 1 the instructor becomes a structural engineer who is responsible for arranging and facilitating the growth of the student as a cooperative students. From the introductory tasks based on information the instructor combines students in dyads of working. This approach minimizes the communicating threat with a huge number of unknown peers. Phase 2 may initiate in a social tone common to Phase 1 but it must turn the learners towards several academic exchanges. In Phase 3 the peer partners are integrated into collaborative teams in which members support one another and are responsible for one another's learning. As online instructors their experience is that it takes about 4 weeks for several learners to feel comfortable enough with technology mediated communication and their cyber peers to move into this phase. Teams can be formed sooner under the following conditions:

- There was a high degree of communication in the tasks of Phase 1.
- The learning community size is little.
- Team is structured tightly with feedback rubrics and contracts offered by the instructor or several learners are experienced collaborators of online.

An instructor engages learners to move to Phase 4 by introducing opportunities for teams and individuals to lead tasks. In this phase the instructor involves in learning environment like any other member of the learning community as another knowledge generator (Conrad and Donaldson, 2011, p 7-10).

BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS OF ONLINE LEARNING

According to Palloff and Pratt (2007, p 8-9) some attributes makes students successful in online learning when they are not in face to face classroom. Online offers an abundance of information that includes several kinds of educational resources such as research reports, government documents, magazines, database, newspapers and historical documents. This information can be used to enhance or offer background information similar to textbooks, stories or different topics of class. Online also offers worldwide access to resources such as informational websites, directories, books, guides, blogs, academic journals, blogs, handbooks, lesson plans, academic units, live webcams, teacher resources, discussions, news broadcasts and different of other informational sources. Students can communicate with experts and people around the world of any subject. Online also permits students to go on the virtual field trips to different places including museums, monuments, space mission and popular historical sites all of which can be used to develop their curriculum of social studies. Besides different information and sheer volume one benefit of online has over other sources of information such as magazines, newspapers and books are its immediacy. In online learning information and ideas move very fast into print form. A book can take 6 months to 2 years to move into print form, an academic journal can take many months, a magazine can take more than one week and a newspaper can take a day. Online can move information and ideas from the head of author into print and then be dispersed to the masses in a matter of minutes. Online is also personal in that students are capable to expand their learning by exploring online sites of their selection. The information they get us directly similar to the data or clues they first put in. And the online also offers students direct responses to their particular questions. Some of the characteristics of successful students in online learning programs are that:

- Students are self-disciplined and self-motivated and capable to communicate through writing.

- Students are opening minded about sharing work, life and educational experience as part of learning process.
- Students willing and capable to commit 4 to 10 hours per course per week.
- A student is also capable to meet minimum needs for the program and accepts difficult decision making and thinking as part of the learning process.
- The students are also capable to access a modem and computer and capable to think ideas before responding and feels that high quality learning can exist without going to a traditional classroom.

Organizations are acquiring online learning as the major delivery method to train employees. At the same time institutions of education are moving towards the use of online for distribution both at a distance and on campus. For institutions and organizations to make this always costly move there must be a perception that (Dawley, 2007, Bates, 1995) using online learning offers main benefits. Some of the major benefits for instructors and learners are described below. For instructors tutoring can be done anywhere and anytime. The materials of online can be updated and the learners can view the alterations suddenly. When learners are capable to access materials through online it is simpler for instructors to direct them to proper information based on their requirements. If configured appropriately online learning systems can be used to determine learner's requirements and present expertise level and can assign proper materials for learners to choose from them to gain their desired learning results. Whereas for learners online learning knows no zones of time and place and distance are not problems. Synchronous online learning permits for real time interaction between instructors and students whereas in asynchronous online learning students can access online materials anytime and from anywhere. Learners can use online to access up to date and similar materials of learning and can communicate with experts in the field which they are learning. Knowledge applications and skills and situated learning in particular contexts is enhanced since learners can finish online courses while working on the job or in their own space and can summarize online learning.

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