FROM CHALKBOARDS TO CHAT BOARDS:
"THE e-LEARNING"

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, people have to learn more than ever before. Especially for global organizations, live classroom-based training is becoming too costly and cumbersome. Even if employees had the time to attend all the courses and seminars and to read all the books and reports they should to remain up-to-date in their area of work, the cost of such learning would be prohibitive. The need to transform how organizations learn points to a more modern, efficient, and flexible alternative: eLearning. The mission of corporate eLearning is to supply the workforce with an up-to-date and cost-effective program that yields motivated, skilled, and loyal knowledge workers. Therefore,this paper tries to explore the trends and methods of eLearning in classroom, and at the same time exposes the benefits, advantages, and disadvantages of this new form.

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INTRODUCTION

Distance education began in the nineteenth century in what is known education by correspondence, where the aim was to low profits, as the educational institutions design educational content necessary for the methods of non-traditional learning in response to the desire of learning in classes of society to be able to attend classes required by traditional education. In that time was educational content sent by mail and consists of printed material in general, and the study guide, and written articles, tasks and other functions. (Ibid: 90)

Educationby correspondencehas spread in 1873 with the help of Christian churches in order to spread education among Americans. In 1883 the Chautauqua College of Liberal Artin New York prepared degrees through education by correspondence.

Inlight ofthe developments in teaching methods and the spread ofusing electronic systems in all aspects of life, entered the eLearning strongly invarious educational institutions, including universities, and achieved great successes. As a result, there are more than 400 universities offer programs via the Internet.

eLearning,i.e., to study by correspondence, Norway was the first country which regulated education by correspondence through Parliament as in 1948, organized by private institutions approved by the government in several ways to participate the institutions with the schoolGeneral system. (*Statistics Norway*, 2009: 12-26)

Recently appeared in some Arab universities, the eLearning, one of those important Arab experiences is theUniversity ofBeirut, which is the first academic institution for eLearningin the Middle East, take upon themselves the task of quality education for students in the Arab world. Also, Turkey and Iran established in1994 private university, and adopted thee University education systemin 1998, included four colleges on the net work which are : Business management and Administrative Sciences, School of Public Healthand Health Sciencesand Nursing, and the College of environmental Sciences and the College of Engineering. (76:1424، يوسف بن عبدالله)

Another experience in the field of global eUniversity Education, the University of Al Lootah in Dubai in collaboration with the University of California beginning in 1995, which is the first e-university of educational programs broadcast over the Internet to the world in both languages English and Arabic. (80:2000،عبدالقادر سلطان)

Another experiment is the Arab e-University which has been established on the Internet in 1997, the first of its kind, destined for Arabic speakers over the Internet, and allows the study for those interested in different fields such as computer and the Internet.(23:2003،الغراب)

Whatis eLearning?

ELearning is learning utilizing electronic technologies to access educational curriculum outside of a traditional classroom. In most cases, it refers to a course, program or degree delivered completely online. There are many terms used to describe learning that is delivered online, via the internet, ranging from Distance Education, to computerized electronic learning, online learning, internet learning and many others. We define eLearning as courses that are specifically delivered via the internet to somewhere other than the classroom where the professor is teaching. It is not a course delivered via a DVD or CD-ROM, video tape or over a television channel. It is interactive in that you can also communicate with your teachers, professors or other students in your class. Sometimes it is delivered live, where you can "electronically" raise your hand and interact in real time and sometimes it is a lecture that has been prerecorded. There is always a teacher or professor interacting /communicating with you and grading your participation, your assignments and your tests. (Chabot, 1999:56)

Methods of e Learning

ELearning resources within the eLearning site are related to online, delivery and interaction over the Internet, using classroom management systems (CMS) such as Blackboard, Moodle, Vista or Angle. Using a CMS (and a web browser), students can log in from anywhere in the world to access their class materials and interact with one another. Each institution uses a specific system, but they are all similar in their ability to present course material including class syllabus, assignments, quizzes, and provide video and audio plus a whiteboard screen where the lesson is presented just like it would be on a classroom's video screen or blackboard. (Colins& Jones, 1997: 30-36)

The students can interact with instructors, access course materials and stimulate debate among their fellow students when it fits their schedule. In most courses, they must keep up with the scheduled course work. Courses are instructor led and in most instances, follow the same semester schedule as traditional courses. All specific course information such as how to reach the instructor, what work is expected, and deadlines to turn in assignments and take tests will be found within their course site.(ibid: 45)

Benefits of eLearning

The benefits of eLearning are almost too numerous to count. You can cover the material when you have time, go over it as often as you need, all without traveling to the classroom. There are no parking problems or expenses, transportation fees, athletic fees, housing and food service fees, plus you can take the class from any location with internet access. There have been many studies showing that eLearning students retain the material to a significantly greater degree than face-to-face instructor led classes. The content delivery is

ABEER HADI SALIH, SAHIMA ABDULSALAM BDAIWI

consistent and can be easily repeated if needed to gain a better understanding.(Greg,1997:67)

The advantages of eLearning:

1. The biggest benefit of eLearning, is that it eliminates the expense and inconvenience of getting the instructor and students in the same place. Opting for eLearning means that courses can be pared into shorter sessions and spread out over several days or weeks.

2. Web-based products allow instructors to update lessons and materials across the entire network instantly. This keeps content fresh and consistent and gives students immediate access to the most current data. Information can be retrieved just before it is required, rather than being learned once in a classroom and subsequently forgotten.

3. Technology-based solutions allow more room for individual differences in learning styles. They also provide a high level of simulation that can be tailored to the learner's level of proficiency.(Hardy,1994: 403–418)

4. In times when small instructor-led classes tend to be the exception, electronic learning solutions can offer more collaboration and interaction with experts and peers as well as a higher success rate than the live alternative. Teaching and communication techniques which create an interactive online environment include case studies, story-telling, demonstrations, role-playing, simulations, streamed videos, online references, personalized coaching and mentoring, discussion groups, project teams, chat rooms, and e-mail.

5. Students taking an online course enter a risk-free environment in which they can try new things and make mistakes without exposing themselves. This characteristic is particularly valuable when trying to learn soft skills, such as leadership and decision making. A good learning program shows the consequences of students' actions and here/why they went wrong. After a failure, students can go back and try again. This type of learning experience eliminates the embarrassment of failure in front of a group. (ibid)

Disadvantages of eLearning

1. **Technology dependent:** learners will need access to a machine of minimum specification as dictated by the e learning supplier or access to a service with a high bandwidth to transfer the course materials in a timely way.

2. **Material Incompatibility:** some materials designed for one particular system will not function properly on another (for example, the Apple Macintosh and the Windows PC). Standards will help in the area.

3. **Unsuitable for Certain Types of Training:** any skill that relies heavily on inter-personal contact although these courses could be supplemented by eLearning.

4. **Unsuitable for Certain Types of Learners:**elearning requires a high-level of self-discipline and personal time management. eLearners need to be highly self-motivated to take full advantage of the medium as often the online learning experience can be impersonal. Working through 'packaged' programmes can be irritating.

5. **Reliant of the Quality of the Content:** it is too easy for some institutions to defer the photocopying costs onto the learner by placing all lecture notes and course handouts online. Such practices often mean that the course materials are in an inappropriate format for online learning. Course providers need to develop new technical skills and course design skills to suit the new medium.

6. **Expensive:** start-up cost of an eLearning service is expensive and the cost of production of online training materials is very high. Teachers must be confident that the extra costs are balance with the benefits of delivering a course online. Significant time needs to be invested in course set-up and in ongoing maintenance (checking links, updating course content etc.

7. **Reliant on Human Support:** eLearning is still dependent on help on either the course materials or the software.

8. **Social/economic disadvantage:** can limit or prevent access by some student groups (for example, cost of equipment, online access and printing).

9. **No Match for Face-to-Face Teaching:** Electronic communication does not necessarily provide a good match for face-to-face communication and is more linear than face-to-face discussion.

10. **Too Reliant on IT Skills:** learners may have limited IT skills, or be uncomfortable with electronic communication and need to learn how to use the medium effectively.

11. **Disabilities:** Students with visual or physical impairments may be disadvantaged.

12. **Inflexible:** Flexibility may be lost as adjustments to the course in response to student reaction are not easy to make once the course is underway.

13. **Pedagogically Unsound:** The electronic environment does not per se offer a pedagogically enhancing learning environment. (Bowsher,1998:35–51)

Future eLearning Trends

Futuristic eLearning will probably involve technologies and platforms that derive from current trends. Below are some of the recently popular and emerging trends, which could easily develop into exciting, advanced, and helpful learning models.

1. **MOOCs (massive open online courses)** are just what they sound like. These open, online courses allow millions of people to take the same course at once from just about anywhere in the world. Someone may be in Australia chatting with their classmate in Canada in real-time. Originally, MOOCs emphasized the open access features such as the open licensing of content, structure, and learning goals. However, newer MOOCs involve closed licensing for course materials, while maintaining free access to students. (Jonassen,2001:78)

2. **mLearing (Mobile Learning)**

Online courses will become readily accessible on mobile devices. Not only do mobile devices allow you to learn from anywhere, newer devices are equipped with digital compasses, dual cameras, incredible audio, etc.

There is a sharp distinction between formal and informal learning. However, e learning, and especially m learning, makes "informal learning" so accessible that much more "informal learning" could be incorporated into the curriculum. Students will eventually have nearly unlimited access to topics that interest them.

Perhaps students will eventually have much more choice about what topics they explore, as long as they are developing necessary skills and meeting a basic set of requirements. M Learning also introduces the possibility of incorporating social media into the Learning atmosphere. Social media could become the primary forum for idea sharing, tutoring, etc. Face book, Twitter, and other social media sites share the common attributes of "instantaneous idea sharing." If those ideas were directed towards academic or training content, we might rethink using Face book (or other social platforms) in the classroom.(ibid)

3. **Virtual Technologies:** In the 1990's and early 2000's, IMAX and 3D movies gave viewers a somewhat realistic experience. However, futuristic virtual reality technologies could actually put learners in the role of discoverer, astronaut, historical figure, businessman, etc. Technologies like Google Glass and other wearable tech devices might become so readily available that they can permeate throughout learning institutions. Sometimes called "immersive multimedia," the possibilities of virtual reality are endless , because if you can imagine it, you could virtually design it, interact with it, and incorporate it into the Learning experience. CAD software and multimodal devices are advancing rapidly, and so a futuristic learning experience could incorporate recreated sensory experiences including virtual taste, smell, sound, touch, and visuals.

4. **Gamification:** eLearning courses of the future will likely resemble an interactive video game rather

than a traditional lecture. Candy Crush and World of War craft have taught us a lot about the cognitive psychology behind engagement. Learners like games. (Jones,2000:18–28)

They like challenges, interactive elements, and opportunities to develop strategies. They also like mastering concepts , immediate feedback, and characters with distinct personalities. Great courses of the future will likely include many of these elements which will make the Learning experience so exciting, interactive, and fun that learners can't wait to participate and reap the benefits by mastering the content.(ibid)

What Will Happen to Schools and Teachers?

In 1997, Peter Drucker said, "*Universities won't survive. The future is outside the traditional campus, outside the traditional classroom. Distance Learning is coming on fast"* (12).

Distance Learning very well may be the future of schools, but if you're a teacher, principal, administrator, or professor, don't get scared quite yet. eLearning certainly will revolutionize our traditional notion of classroom or campus, but that does not mean anyone's job is on the line.

In fact, eLearning can be a great resource because it frees up time and provides much richer content, and educators' roles will evolve to fit the times. Laboratories, social outlets, activity hubs, sports teams etc. may remain as important amenities of schools, but the classroom will function differently.

Students may be able to choose a virtual setting for their courses, and this setting may change depending on what they are studying. A teacher may become a facilitator, motivator, and confidante rather than a transmitter of knowledge or disciplinary figure. Teachers may be the people designing the content, organizing the flow of courses, making sure students stay on-track, and supplementing the online content. Also, there may be no such thing as a "class" with thirty or so students, because students may join many different online Learning communities with students from all over the world.

Education today is certainly a diamond in the rough and eLearning could be the polish that cleans up sub-par teaching, provides equality across socioeconomic groups, and makes learning a whole lot more exciting. The possibilities are slowly emerging, but let's stay true to Albert Einstein's suggestion, so that in 2075, what we imagine can actually happen.

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ABEER HADI SALIH, SAHIMA ABDULSALAM BDAIWI

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