

CORRESPONDENCE

Content

E-Learning: Local Perspective

It is a privilege to see editorial on a very important subject of modern era by such a prestigious figure. At this point in time, so much revolution is happening on ways of getting and delivering knowledge in almost all fields of life including medical profession. It is very important and encouraging sign to see that in our environment, people are working to change the mind set of people and make them aware of ways and methods by which learning opportunities increases by many folds and economy. In this modern era of science and technology one has to go hand in hand with it so as to get maximum advantage.

E-learning includes all aspects of electronically supported learning and teaching for transfer of skills and knowledge. It can be self-paced or instructor-led and includes media in the form of text, image, animation, streaming video and audio. Abbreviations like CBT (Computer-Based Training), IBT (Internet-Based Training) or WBT (Web-Based Training) have been used in this regard. The worldwide e-learning industry is estimated to be worth over \$48 billion US¹. Advances in internet and multimedia technologies are the basic enabler of e-learning with five key sectors of the e-learning industry including consultation, content, technologies, services and support².

William D. Graziadei, in 1993, described the possibility of an online computer-delivered lecture using electronic mail. He published an article in 1997 further explaining the concept and idea focused on developing an overall strategy for technology-based course development and management for an educational system.

Recently, there has been a trend to move towards mixed learning, where computer-based activities are integrated with practical or classroom-based scenarios.

Bernard Luskin argued that the "E" must be understood to have broad meaning, if e-Learning is to be effective and it should be interpreted as exciting, energetic, enthusiastic, emotional, extended, excellent, and educational in addition to "electronic".

Screen casting is considered as a recent trend with many tools available with the latest being web based screen casting which allow the users to create screen casts directly from their browser and make the video available online so that the viewers can stream the video directly. The advantage of such tools is that it gives the presenter the ability to show his ideas and flow of thoughts rather than simply explain them, which may be more confusing when delivered via simple text instructions.

Asynchronous activities can use technologies such as blogs, wikis, and discussion boards so that participants may engage in the exchange of ideas or information without the dependency of other participants involvement at the same time. Electronic mail is also asynchronous in that mail can be sent or received without having both the participants' involvement at the same time. In asynchronous online courses, one proceeds at their own pace. If they need to listen to a lecture a second time, or think about a question for awhile, they may do so without fearing that they will hold back the rest of the class. Synchronous activities involve the exchange of ideas and information with one or more participants during the same period of time. A face to face discussion is an example of synchronous communications. Synchronous activities occur with all participants joining in at once, as with an online chat session or a virtual classroom or meeting.

E-learning plays vital role now a days at all levels of learning in our profession, right from undergraduate level to postgraduate and consultant level. The undergraduate teaching and learning is undergoing extensive changes³. E-learning can play vital role in understanding scientific basis of medicine.

Let's not forget the importance of traditional ways of education as both the traditional and e learning are at least equally effective in delivering results⁴. In my view, some aspects of traditional learning are superior, such as face to face sessions or practically following and/or assisting seniors during delivery of health

services to community. Although E-learning along with traditional methods can go hand in hand but cannot supersede traditional ways.

One should also keep in mind the mental readiness, right attitude, and appropriate training on computing knowledge and skills of students before implementing the integration of technology in any educational system. It is imperative to assess the readiness and acceptance of various stakeholders regarding the innovative concept.

In Pakistan, E-learning is spinning its web at least slowly and gradually if not at same pace as in other parts of world. Publications of such editorials will make great impression in this aspect and will go long way. Being fresh, futuristic and receptive the undergraduates are at best place to gain maximum benefit from this new tide of learning methodology. Most if not all the postgraduate colleagues are getting beneficial effects from multiple modalities of E-learning. The senior colleagues must change their gears as well to use this utility for self development. In the end, I will strongly suggest to incorporate different

modalities of E-learning into our system, so that our present and future generations at least keep pace with others, if not lead them.

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