IS E-LEARNING SUITABLE FOR EVERYONE AND ALL SUBJECTS?

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Abstrak

Perkembangan teknologi memberikan dampak yang sangat besar terhadap aspek kehidupan manusia khususnya pada aspek pendidikan. Banyak universitas di dunia mencoba mengimplementasikan salah satu aplikasi teknologi yang berhubungan dengan pembelajaran, seperti electronic learning(e-learning). Beberapa orang meyakini bahwa metode pembelajaran ini merupakan cara yang terbaik di tengah era teknologi dan tuntutan kehidupan manusia. Di lain pihak, terdapat sekelompok orang yang mengklaim bahwa tidak semua pembelajar mampu melakukan pembelajaran secara online dan metode pembelajaran tradisional masih dibutuhkan dalam proses pembelajaran.

Pada paper ini, saya akan meng-examine apakah e-learning dapat diimplementasikan pada semua pembelajar dan semua mata kuliah dengan melihat dua sudut pandang yang berbeda. Pertama, saya akan menjelaskan secara singkat definiisi pembelajaran jarak jauh dan e-learning kemudian diikuti dengan beberapa alasan pro dan kontra terhadap e-learning dan diakhiri dengan kesimpulan berdasarkan diskusi pro dan kontra e-learning.

Keyword: e-Learning, face-to-face learning, online learning, pros of e-learning, cons of e-learning

INTRODUCTION

The development of technology has had a huge impact on many aspects of human life, especially in educational aspect. Many universities in the world have been trying to implement one of technology applications related to learning, i.e. electronic learning(e-learning). They believe that this technology is a better way of learning amid the technology era and demands of human life. Online learning gives flexibility, accessibility, and convenience, and is easy to be updated(Hall, n.d cited in Perey, n.d). However, others argue that online learning is not a better way than face-to-face learning. They claim that not all learners can study online, and face-to-face interaction is still needed in the process of learning(Bostein, n.d). In this paper I will examine whether e-learning is suitable for all students and subjects by looking at two different views of e-learning. Firstly, i will begin by explaining briefly what distance learning and e-learning are. Then, this will be followed by some reasons from the pros and cons of online learning.

Generally speaking, e-learning(electronic learning) is a part of distance education. According to ASTD-American Society for Training and Development, online learning is one of the forms in which lectures or instruction courses are transferred to other places(In Kaplan and Leiserson, n.d). In addition, ASTD defines e-learning as

A term covering wide set of applications and processes, such as web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms, intranet/extranet(LAN/WAN), audio and videotape, satellite broadcast, interactive TV, CD-ROM, and more(In Kaplan and Leiserson, n.d).
On the one hand, in an interview with Cobent Managing Director, Howard Sears (n.d) points out that e-learning is an application of using technology effectively and efficiently to facilitate the process of learning. Similarly, Robson defines it as "the automation of the processes of learning and training through the use of information technology" (cited in Pratt, 2002). In other words, in e-learning, the process of learning—that is the communication of matters related to learning between instructors and students—is carried out using media such as computers, audio and video tapes, satellite broadcast, TV, CD-ROM, and etc.

**The pros of e-learning**

What are the reasons that some people claim that e-learning is better than conventional learning? Here are some reasons:

The first reason is that e-learning offers good accessibility for learners. Online students can review the materials in e-learning whenever and wherever they want. They can go back to the lectures and restudy the material as much as they want. As a result, they can know the topics better and can get higher grades than other students enrolled in face-to-face classes. Suanpang and Petocz (2006, p.432) found in their research on the implementation of e-learning in Business Statistics at Suan Duan Rajabhat University (SDU), Thailand that students learning online got higher results than students learning in traditional classrooms. Also they found that the online students achieved higher grades and felt more satisfied with their learning than the others. Furthermore, from this research, Suanpang and Petocz point out that students could search the sources easily from virtual library which can provides much useful information they need(2006, p.432). Also Neuhaser points out that online students’ average test score(88.1%) were higher than traditional group(86.2%) as well as their mean final grade –online group’s grade was 3.5, whereas the traditional group’s was 3.35(cited in Chubb, 2006).

Another reason is its flexibility and convenience. Some e-learning use asynchronous style. In other words, the lectures and learners do not have to gather in certain place or at certain time to discuss a topic. The students can participate at anytime they want and they feel more comfortable because they do not have to see many people looking directly at them while their sending their ideas. Also, they can answer in a thoughtful way because they have more time to reflect on their answers. According to Chubb (2006) in GVM—one of Australian online media—, "online communication forces the voicing of all students whereas in a traditional classroom, learners may not contribute to discussions".

Moreover, the content of e-learning is easy to be updated. The program is run automatically on a server that delivers the materials through Internet to the learners. If the instructions want to change their material, they can just change directly on the server and instantly the students can access the new materials(Brandon Hall, n.d). They not only can update the materials easily but they save time because they do not need to wait for delivery of materials.

The other reason is because e-learning can reduce the cost, particularly the cost of transportation. Students living away from the campus can easily access the program that is being taught from their house(Turner and Crews, 2005). In other words, they can see and hear the lecture live and also participate in the discussion actively. Therefore, e-learning not only reduces the cost of transportation, but reduces the cost for funding teachers who responsible for visiting the absent students so that the students will not left behind other students(Turner and Crews, 2005).

**The cons of e-learning**

Nevertheless, other people argue that e-learning is not a better way of learning compared with traditional learning. They have their own reasons why they cannot rely on online learning for studying. These are their reasons.

One reason why some people argue is that each student has their own learning styles. They doubt whether that online learning can handle the different learning styles that everyone has. Thompson(1998) claims that students have their own learning styles so e-learning is only appropriate for certain students(cited in Diaz, 2000). Furthermore, Grasha(1996) support this claim that learners’ learning styles always change each year(cited in Diaz, 2000). In other words, online learning cannot be adjusted to suit the students’ individual learning style and the changes that occur in students’ learning style.

Another reason is e-learning is not suitable for certain students due to the lack of certain skills. For example, students who lack self discipline and time management skills may not be appropriate for this program. If the program is conducted in a synchronous style, that is the schedule has already been set up so that the students have to follow that schedule, then for it is difficult for students who cannot organize themselves and their time to follow the lecture. As a result, they cannot obtain the knowledge better and they cannot achieve good scores. O’ Lawrence reports that some online students found that it is difficult to control themselves and manage their time when enrolling in e-learning(2006, p. 48). In addition, the lack of technological skills among students can also
be a problem during the process of learning. Kleinman and Entin found that because of the lack of technological skills, there was usually a large drop in the number of students registering in online learning programs during the first few weeks of the semester (cited in Turner and Crews, n.d).

Moreover, e-learning also has a psychological impacts. In O’Lawrence research he found that some online students felt “lonely” because they never met their teachers (2006, p.48). The absence of physical interaction in e-learning is also mentioned by Waltz (1998). He reports that the interaction between the instructors and learners is determined by the “equipment” and “according to proper technology etiquette” (p. 209). Thus, because of this situation, some students feel lonely.

Furthermore, e-learning system needs high-technology equipment. Some people argue that not all students can afford the equipment because the price is expensive. Also the program is run on the Internet, so students who want to register in web-based learning should connect their computer through Internet with the appropriate transfer speed. The use of low speed Internet can be barrier to the learning process. In fact, online learning materials can be given in audio or video format – according to e-learning definition above - which needs appropriate bandwidth*. Materials in video, audio, and image format need wider bandwidth – minimum bandwidth is 128 Kbps for upload and 384 Kbps for download (Boss, 2004). This is because if the bandwidth is not wide enough then it takes much more time to download the materials (Hall, n.d; cited by Perey, n.d).

Finally, online learning is not appropriate for certain subjects particularly subject which need teachers during learning process, such as arts and crafts. According to Salminen (2002, p. 22), the materials for subjects like crafts and arts are difficult for students to find. Therefore, it appears that for subjects like arts and crafts, the teacher must be involved in providing the materials related to those subjects. Also during the learning of subjects like arts and crafts, the face-to-face interaction is essential. For example, in drama, students need their teachers to guide them directly so that they know how to play characters that based on a scenario. On the other hand, the materials in e-learning for mathematics, science, and English are abundantly available. In addition, Leon Botstein (n.d) believes that online learning is suitable for subjects related to technical instruction, trades, and repetition.

Conclusion

Briefly, it seems that e-learning is not for everyone and not appropriate for all subjects. Using online learning as the way of learning depends on the circumstances of learners. E-learning can be a better way of studying for some students. For instance, students who have lack self-discipline, good time management skill and technological skills, and who afford the price of installing e-learning. Conversely, students who lack of time-management skills, self-direction, and technological skills are recommended to avoid this type of learning. Furthermore, some subjects requiring direct guidance such as drama, painting, crafts, and etc. are less suitable to be taught in online learning way. In fact, e-learning cannot replace traditional learning, but online learning can be provided as an alternative way of learning. Therefore, students should choose which type of learning is most appropriate for them.

REFERENCES


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