

Keynote Address

eLearning as a Science and Profession

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Abstract

As a new discipline, eLearning has emerged itself to be an increasingly important science in education and training. As a science, it has three major components: nomenclature, body of knowledge, and mode of inquiries. As a profession, eLearning has its own autonomy, possesses unique nature of services, involves an intellectual process, has its own curriculum of knowledge and experience for educating and training its members, requires professional experience or internship, requires certification and licenses, has its own set of ethical standards for controlling the behaviors of the practitioners, and is governed by a standard organization to lay down the professional and ethical standards and control the behavior of its member.

eLearning is a new discipline emerging from the advance of information and communication technologies and becomes both a science and a profession with its own unique characteristics and guidelines to ensure effective implementation into real life situation.

The eLearning Concept

eLearning is an instructional and training system via network computer using

computer and telecommunication as the backbone to support interactive two-way communication among learners and instructors using the combination of on-screen interactive (OSI) instruction to impart knowledge and experience via online or web-based instruction through the Internet and off-line instruction through digital and analog recorded materials, either asynchronous (on demand) mode or synchronous (real-time) mode.

In education, eLearning is used in the context of ICT-based distance education.

Distance Education is defined as an educational system where instructors and students are physically apart. Knowledge and experiences are planned, prepared, delivered via multi media packages comprising core media and supplementary media in the forms of print media, broadcast media, and electronic media to help students learn effectively at their dwellings without attending regular classes or relying upon the instructor or other resources under reliable evaluation system. After completing all the requirements, they are awarded degrees or certificates of equal value to those from traditional, closed admission universities.

In distance education, eLearning is used both online via the Internet and off-line via recorded digital and analogue materials.

Via the Internet, distance education is referred to the Internet-Based Distance

Education or Internet Distance Education (IDE) meaning a distance education system where the planning, preparation, production, presentation, and evaluation of knowledge and experience are conducted using the Internet as the core media and augmented by other media relevant to the needs of the students and the infrastructure of the society.

Via off-line instruction, knowledge and experiences are imparted through supplementary media such as prints, audio tape or CD, video tape or CD, network-based seminars, and face-to-face interactions where necessary.

eLearning as a Science

As a science, eLearning comprises three major components: nomenclature, body of knowledge, and mode of inquiries.

Nomenclature, meaning the system of naming, is a set of technical terms or jargons to be used and understood by members of eLearning scholars. eLearning technical terms were derived from those of computer sciences and educational technology and communications. The terms have been steadily increasing alongside with the new innovations in computer sciences and eLearning sciences. To ensure effective implementations and communication in the areas of eLearning, technical terms and jargons, through nomenclature, need to be compiled and consolidated.

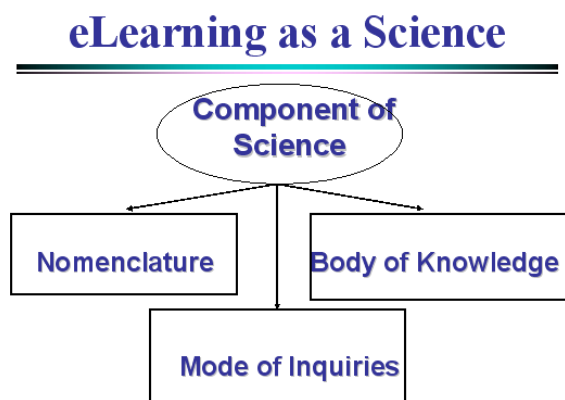


Fig. 1 The component of a science

The body of eLearning knowledge contains principles, theories, and best practices in eLearning implementation. The body of knowledge comprises three dimensional scopes: Content-dimension, role dimension, and context-dimension.

Based on the content dimension, eLearning contains a set of knowledge and experience for eLearning practitioners to be able to perform effectively. The content comprises areas: Systems Approach and Systems Design, Behavior and Performances, Methods and Techniques, Networking and Communication, Environment, Management, and Evaluation.

Based on the role dimension, eLearning plays important roles in administration (registration, admission, HRD development and training), academic affairs (courseware production and delivery), and servicing areas (eLibrary, Information Center, Knowledge Center, Database etc.)

Based on the context dimension, eLearning may be used for formal education, non-formal education, distance education, and dissemination and training.

The modes of inquiries, through research and study, help create new knowledge and expand the frontier of knowledge. Each profession must develop its own modes of inquiries to best serve the needs of its members.

eLearning as Profession

As profession is a higher level of career, the members of such profession must have proper education and training.

There are eight criteria for a vocation to be considered a profession:

First, a profession has its own autonomy or freedom of the members to practice in the boundary accepted by members of the profession and the laws.

Second, a profession has a unique, distinguished nature of services different

from others, for example teaching profession is different from law or engineering.

Third, a profession involved an intellectual process, not mere physical labor.

Fourth, a profession must have a curriculum containing nomenclature, body of knowledge, and mode of inquiries to give education to prospective practitioners to ensure that the members possess adequate knowledge, skills, and attitude to practice their profession effectively.

Scope of eLearning Content

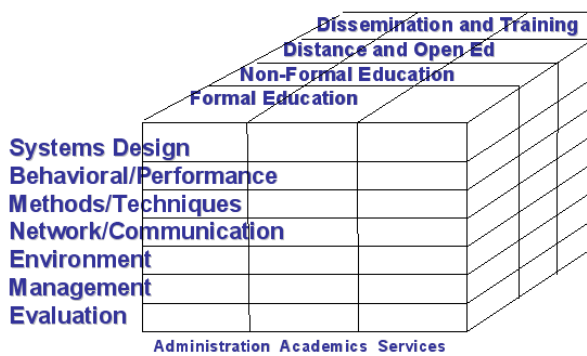


Fig.2 Scope of eLearning

Fifth, the professional experience or internship is required for a person to be qualified for a profession to ensure the prospective practitioners possess sufficient know-how and skills to perform their profession effectively and safely.

Sixth, a certification and licenses are needed for a person to practice the profession. The certification is issued by an educational institution while license is granted by a legal body through a screening process to determine if the applicants possess sufficient knowledge, skills, and experiences to perform the profession according to the set standard or criteria.

Seventh, a set of ethical standards is needed to control the behaviors of the practitioners in order to protect the customers' interest, safety, and satisfaction. Should any practitioner abuse the set of

ethical standards, his or her certificates and licenses may be revoked.

Eighth, a standard organization must be established by laws to lay down the professional and ethical standards and control the behavior of its member.

In conclusion, eLearning as a science and a profession requires a high standard of education and training. The prospective professional members must get adequate knowledge, experience and skills before entering the eLearning profession. The eLearning students must work hard to gain knowledge, attitude, and skills by themselves with minimum assistance from the instructors. Most important of all, the students must be alert at all time for the rapidly development of ICT in order to keep abreast with the changes in eLearning and education as a whole.

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