

E-learning

New road to knowledge

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SUPPOSE you are a very busy corporate executive and urgently require an academic degree to upgrade your organisational position but have little time to sit for a traditional classroom based education. So how will you accomplish your mission? The answer is e-learning.

Perhaps you have heard the name or are vaguely familiar with e-learning activities. As the name implies, e-learning is a virtual academic environment that diminishes time barrier and geographical obstruction. On the other hand, e-learning can be considered as a dynamic solution to spread education to unprivileged community in developing countries.

Introduction

The generic term 'e-learning' refers to a learning system that integrates both traditional and non-traditional learning elements to deliver lessons.

However, the entire e-learning system is greatly based on modern telecommunication systems. For instance, online education the other form of e-learning is an internet oriented learning system and many academic institutions in the developed countries have already adopted this scheme to extend their academic programs outside the campus. Canadian Virtual University (CVU) is a good example.

Furthermore, m-learning is also gaining popularity day by day. M-learning enhances mobile computing and chronological advancement of wireless technology enabled portable devices to upload and download academic contents from any place at any instant. Other elements of e-learning are multimedia CD-ROMs, interactive software, online chat, educational animation, blogs, e-mail etc.

Real world scenario

E-learning and modern communication technologies are interrelated. Without sufficient technological progress e-learning will not be able to achieve its goal. Developed countries where people nestle with hi-tech devices can easily be benefited from e-learning.

Consequently, in developing countries where technologies are a far-fetched idea for average citizens, this system will be of no benefit. So, technology is a crucial consideration for the widespread implementation of e-learning.

Developing countries can utilize e-learning to create social awareness as well as narrow the digital divide. But prior to this infrastructure development is mandatory. Developing countries like Bangladesh can connect her rural areas to the internet through wireless technology. In this regard, cell phone operators and NGOs can play a pioneering role.



At present, almost entire Bangladesh is under cell phone coverage. NGOs can purchase connections from cell phone operators and establish tele-centres or village information centres. Telecenter or village information centres can conduct telemedicine programmes, emergency news service and online training on AIDS or other socio-economic issues.

The government can take the initiative of providing internet connections to all schools and colleges in every district. As a result, students can access online tutorials, check their SSC and HSC exam results and download forms of different universities.

All universities in Bangladesh can promote e-learning by creating full functional virtual university system (Vus).

Vus is a specialised website where students interact with their instructors, download e-books, take online exams and acquire online degree. In case of online degree a candidate must investigate several things such as accreditation, course contents etc before jumping to a decision. Till now HRM managers give precedence to traditional degree rather than degree from an internet based institution. So universities must start interaction with various industries to familiarise e-learning.

E-learning on the other hand is independent of location and time limitations. People can participate in e-learning from their home, office or other places at any time convenient for them. But in all circumstances they require a PC, microphone, speaker, essential software and other logistics relevant to this process.

The concept of e-learning is universal and for this reason some strategies are defined to retain its flexibility. To shine in competitive market and acquire credibility e-learning providers must develop well designed, learner centered, affordable, easily accessible, efficient and effective flexible learning systems to meet the learner's needs.

Flexible learning
The prime advantage of e-learning is its flexibility. On the other hand, e-learning offers a big dimension compared to the traditional classroom based teaching. In the classroom oriented system options are limited to the students. Moreover, this system is one way which means students only receive information but are not able to contribute their ideas frequently.

Institutional: The institutional category is connected with issues of administrative affairs, academic affairs and student services related to e-learning.

Management: The management of e-learning refers to the maintenance of the learning environment and distribution of information.

Technological: The technological category examines issues of technology infrastructure in e-learning environments. This includes infrastructure planning, hardware and software.

Pedagogical: The pedagogical category refers to teaching and learning. This category addresses issues concerning content analysis, audience analysis, goal analysis, medium analysis, design approach, organisation, and learning strategies.

Ethical: The consideration of e-learning relate to social and political influences, cultural diversity, bias, geographical diversity, learner diversity, the digital divide, etiquette and legal issues.

Interface design: Interface design refers to the overall look and feel of flexible learning programs. Interface design categories encompass page and site design, content design, navigation, accessibility and usability testing.

Resource support: The

resource support category examines the online support and resource required to foster meaningful learning.

Evaluation: The evaluation of flexible learning includes both assessment of learners and evaluation of the instruction and learning environment.

E-learning status of Bangladesh
Bangladesh remains at the nascent stage compared to other countries where e-learning have already started to play a provocative role in their mainstream education. It is due to the government policy and lack of insight that e-learning has not been able to emerge as a potential way to influence the traditional education system. Recently Bangladesh has connected to the SE-ME-WE-4 submarine cable and this paves the way for widespread internet coverage throughout the country. So this is high time for us to utilize this technology to promote e-learning.

E-learning can have a profound impact on the economy of the country. Business organizations, especially ICT related companies regularly organize training programs for their employees to achieve the strategic goal. In the traditional way companies face problem to arrange such programs but if e-learning is introduced in these organisations, the interested employees can avail the training, according to their credibility and convenience.

The government has started planning and implementing e-governance with various service sectors (BTTB for example) through electronic media. For successful implementation of e-governance, employees in government organisations need to be trained to use these services. If these trainings were provided through the e-learning system, it would be a fast, easy, efficient and cost effective way.

It is worth mentioning here that in recent times some young, vibrant and dynamic Bangladeshi people took the initiative to create an e-learning awareness among the locals. Dr. Badru Khan is one of them. He presently works as an associate professor of George Washington University, USA. He wrote several books on e-learning and presently is working for Asian Virtual University (www.asianvu.com) a unique platform for e-learning. At a discussion he told the StarTech that, his virtual university would offer course like telemedicine rather than conventional courses. He also envisaged that, his virtual university would create a true e-learning trend in Bangladesh.

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Resource support: The



PHONE-PILLOW

Urban Tool's Veronika Fischer poses with the "perCushion" phone-pillow at the CeBIT computer, digital IT and telecommunications fair on March 15 at the fair grounds in Hanover, central Germany. The cushion has an integrated bluetooth phone with a microphone and speakers.

PHOTO: AFP

Xerox Star

The Star workstation, officially known as the 8010 Star Information System, was introduced by Xerox Corporation in 1981. It was the first commercial system to incorporate various technologies that today have become commonplace in personal computers, including a bitmapped display, a window-based graphical user interface, icons, folders, mouse, Ethernet networking, file servers, print servers and e-mail.



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TECHNEWS

Giant CeBIT fair offers peep into high-tech future

AFP, Hanover

THE world's biggest high-tech fair opened its doors on Thursday showcasing the must-have computer, telecommunications and consumer electronics products of the future. This year's CeBIT, running to March 21 in the northern German city of Hanover, unfurled the banner "Join the vision" and drawn more than 6,000 exhibitors from 77 countries. More than 430,000 guests are expected.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel took a tour of the halls Thursday and advised cutting-edge companies to capture users' imaginations without overwhelming them with too much complex technology.

"You have to encourage users to try to new things," she said, stopping frequently to read and send text messages on her cell phone.

"If you do that you'll have millions of customers."

Merkel was joined at an opening gala late Wednesday by Patricia Russo, chief executive of French-US telecommunications equipment maker Alcatel-Lucent, and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Naryshkin, whose country is the fair's guest of honour.

Russo said the communications market was being driven by insatiable consumer demand for all-in-one features.

"(Users) want the ability to watch their favourite TV programme, send instant messages to their friends about the show's latest plot twist and answer a call from their daughter when she needs to be picked up from basketball practice – all at the same time, and on the same device of their choosing," she said.

The European Information Technology Observatory has forecast a 2.9 percent boost in industry turnover to 668 billion euros (883 billion dollars) this year, while the global market weighs in at about 2.6 trillion dollars.

Russia ranks fourth among exhibitors at the fair with 150 represented, a sign of its dramatically growing stature in the world's high-tech market.

Naryshkin said his country aimed to exploit its strengths in

next-generation DVD players and handheld navigators.

Industry watchers were also looking out for how Microsoft's new operating system, Windows Vista, fares at the sector's biggest gathering.

Television services and roaming charges on mobile phones are two other hot topics as European Union telecoms



Visitors check out mobile phones on display at mobile network provider O2's stand at the CeBIT.

communications, electronic banking and digital equipment as a counterweight to its heavy reliance on its vast energy resources.

"Russia is not satisfied with a situation in which the state budget is dependent on the development of prices for oil and gas on the world market," he said.

"The Russian economy is now looking to high-tech sectors, to the information technology and telecommunications industry, to the structures of the economy in the 21st century, to the knowledge edge economy."

This year's CeBIT is to throw the spotlight on new advances in phoning on the Internet, mobile high-speed online connections, communications and electronic banking as a counterweight to its heavy reliance on its vast energy resources.

Organisers hoped the mix of serious business and visionary fun would stem a rash of cancellations at the CeBIT, short for Centre for Office and Information Technology, since the Internet bubble burst six years ago.

Compared to the record year 2001, attendance has fallen by about half and exhibition space has shrunk by a third.

The CeBIT plans an overhaul for 2008, shaving a day off the schedule and reorganising the show space so that the professionals will not have to fight their way through the crowds of consumers.



PHOTO: AFP

TECHSNIPPETS

Oracle's Best Partner-IBCS

STARTECH DESK

IBCS-PRIMAX got the best Partner award in Asian region for the promotion and expansion of Oracle Technological services, says a press release.

IBCS has substantial contribution in the IT sector of Bangladesh. This special award was offered in the annual regional conference 'FY 2007 Oracle Asian Partner Forum' organised by Oracle.

IBCS-PRIMAX has been a number of years. For this Oracle Corporation has chosen them for the "Best Partner of the Year 2006" award.

The award ceremony took place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

This special award was offered in the annual regional conference 'FY 2007 Oracle Asian Partner Forum' organised by Oracle.

On behalf IBCS-PRIMAX, Sheikh Kabir Ahmed took the award. This kind of achievement is definitely commendable in the context of the developing IT sector of Bangladesh. The contribution IBCS-PRIMAX will promote Bangladesh in the global IT Market.

BJIT and Linja Design team up for Asian and European markets

STARTECH DESK

Linja Design, a Finnish software-related interface design company, and Bangladesh Japan Information Technology Limited (BJIT), a software firm operating in Japan and Bangladesh, have mutually agreed on implementing cost-effective software development, says a press release.

According to the agreement, Linja Design will formulate an innovative program more appropriate for the customers, which

BJIT will develop.

The purpose of collaboration is to benefit the customer at all stages of the project from planning to implementation as well as save time and cost for clients.

"Added value for our customers is generated by the presence of Linja Design in Finland and the presence of BJIT in Bangladesh and Japan. This will enable the expansion of both companies' operations in new market areas," said Timo Vänttinen, executive vice-

president of BJIT.

Linja Design has 20 years experience from continuous cooperation with Nokia on innovations in user interface design. On the other hand BJIT has long experience to make software for cell phones. This collective effort of these two companies will generate dynamic output and strong positive experience for the mobile users.

