

INTEGRATING THE E-LEARNING DIMENSION IN THE EDU-RES MASTER'S PROGRAMME

Abstract

Electronic communication training techniques are a relatively new approach to learning. The basics notions remain the same, only the means of transmitting and acquiring knowledge changes. Using information and communication systems for education means attaching to the learning process the element of freedom: students can learn when and where they wish.

About motivation, pedagogical studies show that in general all training systems, classical or modern, are unmotivated. Viewed in this aspect, e-Learning systems are no exception. Conclusion: an e-learning system is unmotivated. Considering all these elements we propose a conceptual model for EDU-RES.

Initiated in 2006, Research and Teacher Education for Business & Economics (EDU-RES) is a interdisciplinary master programme in English promotes professional development.

Keywords: e-Learning, master programme in English, training systems

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E-LEARNING ÎN PROGRAMUL DE MASTRAT EDU-RES

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Rezumat

Utilizarea tehnologiilor informatice și de comunicație (TIC) în instruire este o abordare relativ nouă. Noțiunile de bază rămân aceleași, doar mijloacele de transmitere și achiziție de cunoștințe se schimbă. TIC pentru educație înseamnă aducerea elementelor de libertate în cadrul procesului instructiv-educativ: cursanții pot învăța unde și când doresc.

Referitor la motivație, studiile pedagogice arată că, în general, toate sistemele de formare, clasice sau moderne, sunt nemotivante. Privitor la acest aspect, sistemele de e-Learning nu fac excepție. Având în vedere toate aceste elemente, în prezenta lucrare propunem un model conceptual de instruire asistată electronic pentru EDU-RES.

Inițiat în 2006, EDU-RES (Educație și Cercetare pentru Economie și Afaceri) este un program de masterat interdisciplinar în limba engleză, promotor al dezvoltării profesionale.

Cuvinte cheie: instruire asistată electronic, TIC, e-Learning, program de master în limba engleză



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1. INTRODUCTION

E-Learning systems analysis appears to be simple if we take into consideration some of the approaches employed by researchers so far (Făt, 2007). But the dynamics of e-Learning requires caution. For more than seven years there have been discussions about a new generation of e-Learning, namely e-Learning 2.0 (Karrer, 2006). The e-Learning market is estimated to bring a revenue of U.S. \$ 56.2 billion in 2013 according to Certifyme.net, the industry leader in online training, and this amount is projected to double its value by the end of 2015.

In Romania, a team of researchers from the Centre for Development and Innovation in Education – has been using techniques aimed at identifying and classifying theoretical and practical approaches to training and education. If we consider the mission of this non-governmental organization (with no political affiliation) to promote the principles and values in education through innovative technologies and approaches (such as conducting programs and e-Learning projects, developing curricula, education for democratic citizenship, lifelong learning and continuous training of teachers) then we can rely on the experience of the organization and the seriousness with which the foundation is involved in defining and e-Learning phenomenon.

Their mission is supported by its partners:

- European Network for Educational Cooperation in South East Europe - SEE ECN (South East Europe Education Cooperation Network), initiated by the Centre for Education Policy Studies, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia and Austria KulturKontakt within the Stability Pact for Europe South East.
- EULLearN (European University Lifelong Learning Network), a network through which Socrates Erasmus aims to promote coherent strategies and practical measures to boost Lifelong Learning in universities, the main purpose being the consistent and effective use of tools and specific resources.
- European Foundation for Quality in e-Learning, an initiative of the European Commission, which aims at increasing the quality of e-Learning in Europe.
- E-Learning Romania Program, a national initiative that aims to create a forum for all stakeholders in the effective use of new information and communication technologies for education and training.

The e-Learning phenomenon fits theoretically between two opposing theories. In the early '80s, Jonathan Perraton, lecturer at Sheffield University, detailed the current phase of globalization and how

modern societies refer to politics, economy, culture and communication when discussing migration, environment, legislation and the military forces. He said that "distance education (defined today largely as eLearning) is doing very well without any theory."

Since the late twentieth century until today, more and more voices have argued that the assumptions on future electronic training systems and hence distance education can only be confirmed or refuted by the results of scientific research (Kuhn, 2008). Thomas Khun launched the idea that scientific theories are actually immersed in contexts that determine their interpretations.

2. CONCEPTS AND TRENDS

To outline the limits of the e-learning concept, beyond the views expressed by specialized organizations, we have reviewed over 100 articles and books in the literature that discuss the phenomenon.

A simplified definition of the concept of e-Learning is given in Romanian literature by a researcher at the Institute of Education Sciences: "*The e-Learning (training distance or virtual education) consists of a planned teaching-learning experience organized by an institution providing material in a sequential and logical order to be acquired by students in their own way, without forcing agents through co-presence or synchronicity*" (Istrate, 2000). Mediation can be achieved through various media, from the floppy or CD material (possibly by mail) to technologies for transmitting Internet content.

If we go beyond this definition then, broadly, eLearning can stand for all educational situations in the use of ICT resources is significant. The term eLearning, mentioned in 2004 by an American professor Brut in his book *Tools for E-learning*, a modern teacher's information guide. He expanded the meaning of eLearning from the primary etymology, which meant learning by electronic means, to cover the area of intersection between modern information media and educational activities.

From my point of view, today the e-Learning concept is defined as eEducation. The semantic particularities of eLearning overlap and they stand for a multitude of terms that capture the variety of learning experiences that can benefit from technological support assisted instruction/ mediated by computer, digital/ mobile/ online learning, etc. Under the heading of teaching and learning software, a wide range of electronic materials (on CD) is developed to support the education process: maps, dictionaries, encyclopedias, educational films, presentations in various formats, books (e-books), tutorials, simulations, software forming skills, practice software, educational games, etc. Computer and electronic materials/ media are used to support teaching, learning, assessment or as a means of communication (for making individual tasks, etc.).

If I had to choose a definition suitable for the general public, accepting a more restricted horizon, I would choose the definition of Professor Gross. He says that *"e-Learning is a type of distance education as a planned teaching-learning experience organized by an institution providing material in a sequential and logical order to be acquired by students in their own way, without forcing agents through co-presence or synchronicity*. Mediation is done by new information and communication technologies, especially the Internet. The Internet means both the distribution of material and the channel of communication between stakeholders. Functional only in higher education and adult education, internet training system components respond and adapt the traditional teaching approach: planning, specific content and methodology, interaction, support and evaluation.

From the content of these reviews I noted that: e-Learning approaches effectively combine face to face and distance education, fundamentally changing the role of the educator, particularly of those involved in online training situations. Therefore, I believe that eLearning is the result of evolution, not of a revolution in the field of education. There have been numerous attempts in literature to come up with an innovative terminology to describe this type of learning (Androniceanu and Abăluță (Sabie), 2008).

Such an innovation is mixed or blended learning. The term "mixed-mode" approach describes the combination of face to face and distance teaching without necessarily requiring the highest technology. Other experts prefer the term "Resource-based Learning" or a term used especially in vocational training, namely the "Blended Learning". Regardless of the typology used, the most important are the training strategies used for this purpose (Popescu, 2009).

Electronic communication training techniques are a relatively new approach to learning. The basics notions remain the same, only the means of transmitting and acquiring knowledge changes. Using information and communication systems for education means attaching to the learning process the element of freedom: students can learn when and where they wish.

The launch of electronic communication training techniques was done via the Internet. The disadvantage of the previous distance education method was that learner-instructor interaction could only be asynchronous, not synchronous. The latest achievements in the field of software for distance learning processes by means of information and communication technology allow for real-time communication, both text and audio-video, thus creating true virtual classrooms (in Romanian "teleclase").

The e-Learning solutions presented are the result of technology developments that support this functionality. Thus, with the advent of huge storage capacity, distance traditional education methods (which had been using printed material sent by mail) were improved by the use of eBooks. Later on,

interactive information and communication technologies have become central elements for new deployment training with electronic media.

Table no. 1 below presents some of the minimum standard elements required, as they were drawn from the literature, which must be taken into account when designing an e-Learning System.

TABLE NO. 1. FACTORS CONSIDERED IN DESIGNING E-LEARNING SYSTEMS

Elements	Remarks / Examples
TARGET GROUP	students, teachers, people seeking employment, employees;
LEARNING CONTENT	information, skills, abilities, attitudes and knowledge in various fields of expertise.
TEACHING STRATEGIES	co-operative learning strategies, inductive learning, discovery learning, project-based learning, etc.
IT&C TOOLS	e-mail, website, video conferencing, chat, educational software;
RESOURCES	budget, time, personnel assigned;
OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME	training, specialization, communication of new knowledge, deepening knowledge, skills and competence creation in different areas, etc.

As a synthesis of the presented approaches, our position is similar to that of the researchers who consider the e-Learning industry as relatively new and unexplored, which involves covering a broad set of applications and processes based on learning on a computer (Manole et al., 2011).

E-Learning means the electronic distribution of information content (media, Internet, Intranet) and is more accurately defined as:

- the convergence of learning and the Internet;
- the use of information and communications technology to build, deliver, select manage and extend learning;
- learning via the Internet which may include information in multiple formats and a network of communication between those involved;
- the fastest way of learning, with the lowest cost, allowing for increased access to education for all participants.

eLearning Conceptual Model Proposed for the EDU-RES Master's Programme

According to recent studies and practical approaches some of the most important factors to be considered when designing an electronic training system are:

- Motivation

- The information content
- The development, which includes:
 - Technology hardware;
 - Technology software.

About motivation, pedagogical studies show that in general all training systems, classical or modern, are unmotivated (Dimian *et al.*, 2012). Viewed in this aspect, e-Learning systems are no exception. Conclusion: an e-learning system is unmotivated. Electronic information content is more suitable for the appropriation of concepts and creating difficult skills and abilities. It is designed just for easy concepts and skills (). Considering all these elements we propose a conceptual model for EDURES. The main components are:

- Specialized software for creating electronic presentations with static or dynamic text;
- Audio video;
- Libraries;
- Support for interacting with the communication system.

Preparing the Platform for Loading Courses

Step 1. Create course categories

The screenshot displays the user interface of the 'English Language Education and Research Communication for Business and Economics EDU-RES' platform. On the left, there is a sidebar with a calendar for June 2013, a login section with fields for username and password, and a list of online users. The main content area features a header with the platform's name and a banner image. Below the header, there is a 'Course Modules' section with descriptive text about the program's structure and a 'COURSE CATEGORIES' section listing various course offerings such as '1st Year - 1st Semester' and '2nd Year - 2nd Semester (4)'. A search bar is located at the bottom right of the categories list.

Course categories are taken from the curricula of the master.

Step 2. Specifying disciplines course according to the curriculum.

English Language Education and Research Communication for Business and Economics EDU-RES

My home ▾ Courses ▾ 2nd Year - 1st Semester ▾ Add/edit courses Blocks editing off

Course categories: 2nd Year - 1st Semester ▾
[Edit this category](#) [Add a sub-category](#)

COURSES	EDIT	SELECT
Evaluation and self-evaluation methodology in economic Higher Education		☐
International requirements of academic and research writing		☐
Scientific communication in the age of globalisation: genre- and corpus-based approaches to research		☐
Quality assurance in education at European standards		☐
Transnational challenges and strategic perspectives for Romania - Interdisciplinary approaches		☐

Move selected courses to: ▾

Step 3. Selecting activities according to syllabus

Educational management: methodological & practical aspects

My home ▾ Courses ▾ 1st Year - 2nd Semester ▾ Educational management Turn editing off

TOPIC OUTLINE

- News forum
- Virtual class
- Course materials

1. Add a resource... ▾ 1. Add an activity... ▾

1. Attitudes Towards Thinking and Learning

2. Add a resource... ▾ 2. Add an activity... ▾

2. Class Observation: Challenges and benefits

3. Add a resource... ▾ 3. Add an activity... ▾

3. Book reviews and presentations

Resources contributed by participants

4. Add a resource... ▾ 4. Add an activity... ▾

For Educational Management discipline have been selected 4 activities: forums, chat, support of loading homework and a survey.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Education is seen as one of the most important factors for poverty alleviation and economic growth in developing countries and the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for

dissemination of education is believed to have huge potential for governments struggling to meet a growing demand for education while facing an escalating shortage of teachers.

Today, the development of the Internet into a worldwide, high-speed, multimedia communication platform has enabled the development of e-learning as an effective teaching and learning mechanism. (E-learning, with its various communication tools, plays a significant role in creating and promoting learning communities and their development. E-learning has made leaps and bounds in the education system. Nowadays European Union has pushed forward a policy to support R&D in the use of ICT in education, including IT connectivity and digital learning and teaching. The strategic plan aims at using technology to enhance the quality of education and training, at increasing the effectiveness of education and training delivery systems, and at increasing the efficiency of education and training management. E-learning is not a luxury but a necessity for current and future generations. Distance learning via the Internet combined with multi-media platforms can satisfy the demand for alternative forms of education. Entering the 21st century, with the Internet and World Wide Web leading the way, distance learning is already affecting the lives of millions of children, teens and adults through interventions in their patterns of learning. Learning objects and games can build skills that engage learners in the content. Learners are more connected than ever before and the fact that the users is connected to the content offers opportunities for anyone to learn anywhere anytime.

E-Learning as a structured process requires certain quality standards and procedures for offering an efficient and easy to use platform. To fulfill this conditions the development of professional eLearning platform solution should be designed so as to meet the next user requirements:

- Efficient procedures and templates for publishing of multilingual content
- Integration of media objects into contents
- Features for image processing
- Flexibly configurable meta-data model for contents
- Drop-down formatting options for authors
- Import and export functions for XML structured contents
- Procedure for administration and release of content (work-flow engine)
- Search functions for authors and users
- Support of the publication procedure through tailored interfaces

- Cross media publishing (export to multiple formats)
- Version management for publications
- Integrated link management and link consistency check
- Functions for content distribution

To encourage the use of e-learning platforms, both by teachers and by the learners, it is important that e-learning platforms and the digital content to be easily created and accessed.

We believe that after inclusion of eLearning in EDURES program can take into account a number of goals such as:

1. Each person has a particular way in which he learns best
2. Variability exists in the human population in terms of how they learn and how they gain knowledge. This variability is of two types: group and individual. Group variability refers to the common preferences of individuals belonging to a particular group: the local community, age group, socio-economic group, etc. Individual variability refers to the personal preference of a particular individual overlapping general preferences. When they own and drive their learning, they are more motivated to want to learn.
3. As educational content folds better on the user preferences (general and personal) than the acquired competencies and knowledge will be obtained faster and will be more durable over time.
4. The followed desired preferences of individuals are the stable ones and not the variable in time (not taken into discussion type of learning style preferences with scientifically unproven existence).
5. Humans have the best results in learning from interaction with other human individuals (traditional learning). Non-personal learning not provide maximum efficiency in learning but provide efficiency in producing contents (egg. text).
6. Using computers in learning can be at least as effective as the traditional

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