

Chapter 15

Is E-Learning a Pro-Active Response to, or Reaction to, Changes in Educational Policy and Patterns of Educational Demand?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews and investigates the models and acceptability of E-Learning to the emerging students markets for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) from the More Developed Countries (MDCs) and seeks to evaluate the differing models of delivery from a practical and a socio-economic perspective. The research also investigates the impact of the shifts in population growth and the subsequent impact upon the levels of demand from students in Less Developed Countries (LDCs) for higher education. In addition, the logistical and quality factors affecting E-Learning are evaluated, looking at the aspects of academic rigour, plagiarism, and the methods of managing the originality and authenticity of student work. Similarly, the research looks at the viability of situations where the education provider may never physically meet the students through the exclusive use of VLEs, and the possible credibility issues that this may present to institutional and awarding body reputations.

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Technology does not cause learning. As an instructional medium, online technologies will not in themselves improve or cause changes in learning. What improves learning is well-designed instruction (Jasinski, 1998).

INTRODUCTION

This section considers the institutional development of an E-Learning strategy and the drivers that have fashioned this such as the need for new modes of delivery to attract a wider range of learners from different locations and backgrounds. This, in turn, is happening within an environment of rapid technological change and increased globalisation and international collaboration.

The University Centre at Blackburn College (UCBC) is a provider of Higher Education (HE) within a Further Education (FE) setting with a student population of approximately 3,500 full-time students. Through the original “East Lancashire Institute of Higher Education” and latterly the dedicated “University Centre” the college has been delivering higher education programmes since 1964. UCBC has longstanding partnerships with a several University partners who provide both validation and verification and who award degrees under their own charters which are delivered at UCBC.

Following the significant changes in 2012 to the tuition fee model in use in England, concerns exist and continue to be debated about the long term future of the traditional taught degree and models of university attendance. It is with this as a motivation that some institutions are actively investigating different modes of delivery that may improve both the efficiency and accessibility of Higher Education (HE) through innovative and alternative methods of programme delivery.

BACKGROUND

In this section, different definitions and different models of E-Learning are considered which have informed the E-Learning strategy of the University centre of Blackburn College. There are many different definitions and the evolution of different models of E-Learning which are in turn driven by learning theory and the development of electronic platforms, such as the Moodle VLE and the growth of the MOOCs which may yet again, re-define how E-Learning is offered as a product.

As outlined earlier in this document, E-Learning has a variety of differing definitions, from those looking at E-Learning as the use of technology in the learning environment (Morris & Rippin, 2002; Sloman, 2001; Rosenberg, 2001) to those that look at the situated learning perspective (Collis & Moonen, 2001; Sasikumar, 2008) and in describing the approach to E-Learning taken at UCBC the latter of these two definitions is applicable to UCBC.

For its domestic operations, UCBC has an E-Learning strategy that is mapped to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) E-Learning strategy from 2005-12 and the institution has developed E-Learning in line with the following objectives: (1) to meet the greater diversity of student needs; (2) Increase flexibility of provision; (3) Enhance the capacity for integrating study with work and leisure through work-based and home-based learning and (4) Develop approaches to individualised support for planning and recording achievements.

The strategy draws specific reference to “Enhancing Learning and Teaching Through the Use of technology: A Revised Approach to HEFCE’s Strategy for E-Learning (HEFCE 2009), which questioned the definition(s) of E-Learning, and

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