

Chapter 1

Current Trends in Digital Learning and Innovation

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ABSTRACT

Digital learning has gained a lot of attention over the recent years and is increasingly being utilised as a substitute for both distance education and face-to-face learning activities. This chapter initially defines and briefly discusses the advantages and disadvantages of digital learning. With the advancement in technology, there are various digital tools that are now available to enhance the effectiveness of digital learning experience, and some of the major innovative digital tools are detailed in the chapter.

INTRODUCTION

Digital learning is defined as any type of learning that actively integrates technology and/or that uses instructional practice that utilises technology effectively. It is increasingly being utilised as a substitute for both distance education and face-to-face learning activities. However, evidence suggests that using a blended learning model incorporating asynchronous discussion systems to extend learning beyond the classroom aligned with technological interventions have been successful (Rose and Meyer 2002).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-1662-1.ch001

The current generation of online learning platforms or course management systems is no longer seen to be focussed on administrative support. Rather they aim to pursue innovative approaches to developing collaborative learning tools or activities. They seem to offer tools and activities that educators can use in a variety of contexts including self-directed, face-to face, distance and blended learning models and theories.

Some of the common digital/online learning tools and platforms widely used by educators include gamification, virtual reality (VR) technologies, digital pin boards and social networking to name a few. These platforms have been increasingly utilised as the primary learning tool and or in combination as a blended learning model. They have been recognised as an effective learning tool due to their practical advantages (anytime, anywhere learning) and improved engagement amongst learners. In the modern digital era, learners are predominantly willing to explore innovative platforms that evaluate their knowledge and skills. This approach in combination with quality feedback strategies have been instrumental in constructing a supportive and interesting learning process (Cook 2007).

Though multiple facets of digital learning is known to favourably stimulate the learning process, a few impediments have been identified. The identification of such biases or barriers is of utmost importance to deliver an engaged, interesting and innovative learning module. This chapter focusses on the role of digital environments in the overall learning process. It also highlights the advantages and drawbacks of digital learning in addition to recommending appropriate digital learning practices.

Advantages of Digital Learning

There are several benefits of adopting a digital learning approach for higher education at universities and other institutions. Several studies have highlighted the advantages of digital learning and how it impacts the learning and teaching experience both from learner's and educator's perspective (Arbaugh 2002, Khan 2005, Klein and Ware 2003, Standen et al., 2001). One of the most striking feature and an added advantage of digital learning is that the digital learning focuses primarily on the learners than the instructors (Holmes and Gardner 2006).

Some of the major advantages are discussed below.

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