Chapter 6
Collaborative Learning:
An Effective Tool to Empower Communities

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ABSTRACT

Learning is considered as one of the essential tool to empower a community. Over the past three decades, technology mediated learning has been recognized as an alternate channel strengthening the traditional forms of education. However, the organizational learning at the peripheries and capacity development at the grass roots remain almost unattended, despite recognized global efforts under many bottom-up empowerment sequences. Social components at large within the transitional and developing economies remain outside the enclosure of universal access to information and thus access to knowledge has always been constricted to equitably compete with the global knowledge economy. Despite challenges in designing and implementing collaborative learning techniques and technologies, this article would like to emphasize on introducing collaborative learning at community level and improve the knowledge capacity at the grass roots for their empowerment. The article, further, investigates the relationship of collaborative learning towards improved e-governance.

INTRODUCTION

Learning nowadays is not only comprise of traditional brick-and-mortar classroom sessions, but also encompasses advanced computer assisted collaborative learning and peer learning (Roberts, 2004; Tu, 2004) that support education, knowledge development and research. In recent years, traditional education has shifted towards new methods of teaching and learning through the proliferation

of information and communication technologies (ICT). At the same time, the continuous advances in technology enable the realization of a more distributed structure of knowledge transfer (Dutton, Kahin, O'Callaghan & Wyckoff, 2005; Iahad, Dafoulas, Milankovic-Atkinson & Murphy, 2005). Furthermore, Internet has allowed the learners and education providers to reach out the sky as the limit in designing, understanding and taking knowledge acquisition processes through various learning techniques. In addition, as classrooms do not remain enclosed to confined peripheries anymore, and the learners do not confined to regularly attended sessions anymore. Anyone, with capability and acceptability can attend a learning session at any time in sequel of his/her career.

Learning is no more a customized pattern of education, but an accumulation of information, content and knowledge to become an accomplished sequence of knowledge acquisition. It is a shift from traditional education to ICT-based personalized, flexible, individualized, self-organized and at the same time collaborative, depending on the demand of a community of learners, teachers, facilitators, experts and researchers (Markus, 2008). Learning has broadened the door of knowledge acquisition processes in multi-disciplinary faculties through multi-dimensional approaches. It is become more dependent on the dynamism of interactive information and content, rather than static information and content that were only available in the form of print. As the society and community that have been based on information, has been more or less, turned into information society and as the economy of information society is mainly based on the creation, dissemination and exploitation of data, information and knowledge, thereby not only learning, but also the whole life system has been inclined towards the dynamism of information and content. In this aspect, Figure 1 illustrates the different component of a computer mediated communication leading to knowledge acquisition and Figure 2 shows the technological evolution in the learning processes based on virtual form of knowledge delivery.

Figure 1. Technology evolution in e-learning (Adopted from Markus, 2008)
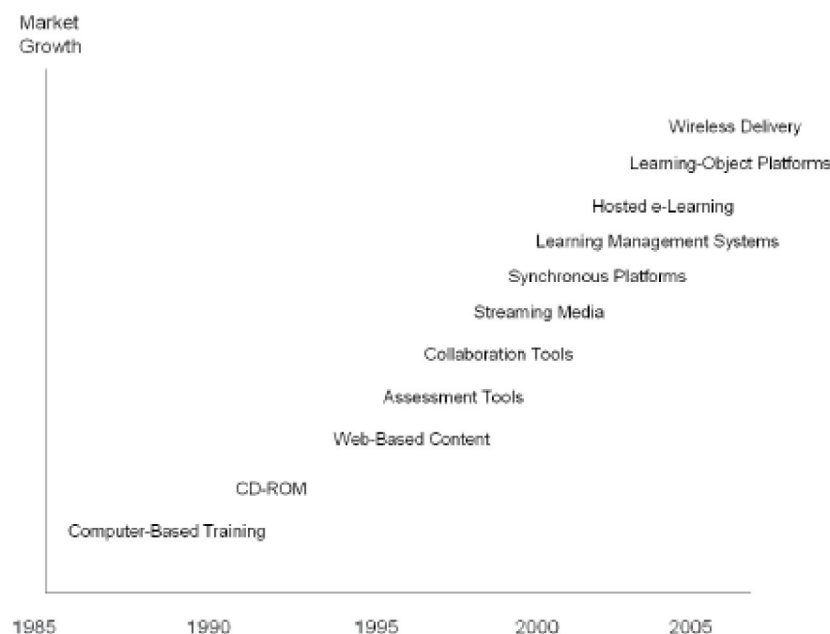
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