

# Chapter 15

## E–Learning: A Management–Oriented Fourfold Strategy in Some East African Universities

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### ABSTRACT

*Electronic learning (E-learning) strategies require a realization of the changes in both the demand and supply of e-learning resources. The conceptualization of e-learning, a precedent stage in any e-learning strategy development, affects the deployment and use of e-learning. Since the development of e-learning strategies corresponds to different models available, this chapter aims at highlighting on and proposing an e-learning fourfold strategy in the management of universities. The strategies to this effect are: Ideological, Methodological, Output, and Ecological. The chapter heretofore rationalises that the Ecological strategies have an impact on the other three. Universities are therefore called to develop a clear e-learning strategy framework that is commensurate with the existential needs; hence, a strategy that reflects and actuates the mission and vision of a university within a specific context. The chapter therefore analyses the impact of the fourfold strategy with particular reference to Africa-based universities.*

### INTRODUCTION

Technology can be conceived as an art, a process or a product. In the case of Information Technology (IT), it can refer to computers, telecommunications equipment and other technologies associated with automation. It has an impact on individuals, organisations and society (French 1992, p. 518). These technologies have to support the creation,

maintenance, manipulation and storage of information. It has its respective methods and applications. An Information Communication Technology (ICT) system can include: hardware, software, data and procedures. The Internet and World Wide Web (WWW) offer educators an opportunity to provide learners with innovative and new virtual environments that can eventually stimulate and enhance the learning process (Brown, 2002).

The transformation of the education sector generally, and the e-learning sector specifically, is

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being driven by a number of broad economic, technological, and social trends that have accelerated in recent years. One key aspect is the significant increase in the demand for higher education in both developed and developing countries. According to one estimate, overall demand for higher education is expected to grow from 48 million enrolments in 1990 to 159 million in 2025—an annual growth rate of 3.5 percent (LaRocque & Latham, 2003).

Different colleges and universities have endeavoured to develop their own ICT strategies to be competitive and deliver their functions efficiently and effectively. For instance, Makerere University in Uganda asserts with Stiles and York (2003) that ICT enables the Lecturer to equip the learner towards the achievement of goals. Strathmore University in Kenya follows suit and propagates e-learning as an indispensable means in the provision of alternative forms of learning.

Electronic learning (E-learning) is defined as the use of any of the new technologies or applications in the service of learning or learner support (Laurillard, 2006). It is learning/training that is prepared, delivered, or managed using a variety of learning technologies. E-learning includes the delivery of content via Internet, intranet/extranet (Local Area Networks/Wide Area Networks), audio- and videotape, satellite broadcast, interactive TV, CD-ROM (Boon, Rusman, Van der Klink, & Tattersall, 2005, p. 206). The Internet, computer based multimedia, and World-Wide Web are the underlying technologies of e-learning. E-learning is an off-shot of information technology ‘cyberbole’.

E-learning technologies can be used in three main ways in universities and colleges: i) technology enhanced classroom teaching; ii) distance education or distance learning; iii) distributed learning (a mix of deliberately reduced face to face teaching and online learning also called ‘the mixed mode’ or ‘flexible learning’). In technology enhanced classroom teaching, the teacher or lecturer acts as a guide to help the student explore the maze-work of information provided through

different technological devices. The student thus becomes more of an explorer in the intricate web of resources provided. The students are at times able to extract ‘new’ information to the classroom experience, from time to time unknown to the teacher. Distance education or distance learning is learning experience provided from another remote location. The geographical limit can span from few kilometres to thousands of kilometres. Distance learning is achieved through different networking devices and software applications in a bid to create a dialogue.

Some educationists emphasize on the need for any learning process to be a dialogue. E-learning can help to encourage dialogues and learner centeredness. Web, Jones, Barker & Van Schaik (2004) cite Kolb’s model, typifying learner centeredness, which involved an approach similar to action research. The approach was geared towards four elements: active experimentation (planning of learning experience), concrete experience (participation in a learning episode), reflective observation (an introspection of what has been learnt) and abstract conceptualization (an internalization of the learning as an integral entity of previous learning). In recent studies done, it appears that those social science subject areas that fall towards the harder end of the disciplines (Psychology, Economics and Geography) definitely use ICTs more successfully (Louw, Brown, Muller, & Soudien, 2009).

In many countries, there has been greater demand for e-learning because of the craze towards Knowledge Based Economies (KBES) and consequently the need for life long learning. This means that such economies are ready to access and to pay considerable sums of money to get relevant content delivered conveniently and flexibly (Bates, 2001, p. 25). E-learning has -as corresponding to it – aims, strategies, structures, standards, content delivery and pedagogy. There is increased use of e-learning in many educational institutions especially in universities. While universities – as the zenith of learning – should act as

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