

Chapter 7

The Evolution of E-Learning in the Global Context and the Influence of Motivational Factors: Learning With the Support of Digital Technologies – Tool, Method, or New Learning Model?

Cristiano Dias Cechella
Universidade de Brasilia, Brazil

Silvia Generali da Costa
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

Renato Koch Colomby
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

ABSTRACT

E-learning can be defined as a teaching-learning process supported by equipment and electronic resources based content. Reinforced during World War II with the massification of educational films applied to the army formation and asserting itself after the computerization of society and its connection via telematic networks in the late twentieth century, the e-learning includes a historical dimension that analyzes theoretical, technological and pedagogical assumptions. This chapter aims to point out ways for e-learning, based on their motivational factors. Thus, in the light of learning theories and affective and cognitive issues, as well as the history of the emergence of e-learning, this chapter suggests elements for the development of learning models supported by digital technologies, such as: the choice of the most appropriate tools for the students' reality; the investment in technology and teachers and students training.

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INTRODUCTION

Economic, social, political and cultural “globalization” changed people’s lives. Many issues that for decades and even for centuries seemed familiar and permanent, rapidly changed and are no longer the same. An example of this fact is the expansion of communication. Until the last decades of the twentieth century, people had limited access to information. Education transmitted through the local radio and through television had the same probability to teach the same things. Today, precisely the opposite happens. Most people, even in peripheral countries such as Africa, have access to an infinite amount of data and are able to learn through the internet, for example. Within the scope of this context we may include e-learning.

E-learning can be understood through a set of perspectives. Many people mistake the concept of “Distance Learning” with “e-learning”, and indeed, there is an interaction between the two concepts. However, Distance Learning, as we will see through the definitions and the historical evolution of e-learning, first appeared as a learning tool in which students and teachers are at a distance regardless of the educational tools used; on the other hand, in e-learning, the digital technologies supporting the teaching-learning process are present, highlighting the appearance of the internet.

Many teachers and students believe that digital technologies alone make e-learning a new, exciting and challenging experience. However, this modality of teaching establishes teaching and learning presuppositions that have already been used with the aid of paper, pencil and the blackboard. Thus, this chapter emphasizes that e-learning offers much more than digital technologies in education service.

The chapter structure is the following: at first, is based on the main concepts and on the history of e-learning, and considering some theories of learning and the perspective of how learning theories evolved. After them this chapter focuses on the alliance between cognition and affectivity as a way of increasing the education of students through e-learning. At third, we suggest recommendations and perspectives for e-learning based on the analysis of its development trajectory. After them some future directions are identified and the chapter concludes by proposing different ways to develop contemporary educational assumptions based on digital technologies as well as some suggestions for future discussions.

Background

In recent decades, the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for educational purposes has increased, and the way that network technologies has spread has caused e-learning practices to evolve significantly (Kahiigi et al., 2008). However, any definition of e-learning, must settle the issue of what is and what isn’t e-learning (Guri-Rosenblit, 2005). The multiplicity of perspectives surrounding e-learning causes misunderstanding and, sometimes, even contradictions (Mason & Rennie, 2006). Not only have different concepts been attributed to e-learning, but the term has also been substituted by other expressions, such as computer-based learning, technology-based training, and computer-based training, which actually predates the first mention of e-learning in the mid-1990s (Friesen, 2009) or the more recent online learning.

E-learning can also be considered as a natural evolution of distance learning, since it has always taken advantage of the latest tools to emerge in the context of technologies for structuring education. In fact, some authors consider e-learning to be a new generation of distance education, even though they point to significant differences between the two and highlight a key starting point: “E-learning does not represent more of the same ... [It is] about doing things differently” (Garrison & Anderson, 2003).

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