Chapter 1
A Global Framework for E-Learning

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ABSTRACT

With the Internet's and digital technologies' rapid growth, the Web has become a powerful, global, interactive, dynamic, economic, and democratic medium of learning and teaching at a distance. The Internet provides an opportunity to develop learning-on-demand and learner-centered instruction and training. There are numerous names for digital learning activities, including e-learning, remote learning, Web-Based Learning (WBL), Web-Based Instruction (WBI), Web-Based Training (WBT), Internet-Based Training (IBT), Distributed Learning (DL), Advanced Distributed Learning (ADL), distance learning, Online Learning (OL), mobile learning (or m-learning) or nomadic learning, remote learning, off-site learning, a learning (anytime, anyplace, anywhere learning), microlearning, etc. In this book, the term e-learning is used to represent open, flexible, and distributed learning. This chapter explores a global framework for e-learning.

INTRODUCTION

The spread of COVID-19 pandemic affected all of us globally regardless of nationality, level of education, income, or gender. Schools, colleges and universities around the world have been either fully or partially closed. As alternatives to traditional classroom-based educational practices, academic institutions have increasingly adopted remote learning methods. However, at no other time in history has the e-learning field gained such enormous and overwhelming attention globally, the education world was caught flat-footed, underprepared or unprepared in its response to the pandemic. With no substantive preparation, educators were asked to move from traditional face-to-face instructional models to delivering content remotely for virtual learning. Many educators had neither the tools nor the expertise to shift from face-to-face instruction to virtual education via e-learning within a short period of time.

E-learning is an open educational system which is different from traditional classroom instruction. Traditional classroom instruction is pretty much a closed system, taking place within the confines of a classroom. In contrast, e-learning is a flexible form of education that allows learners to learn from anywhere, at any time.

I recently moderated two international Webinars on remote learning. K12 students, teachers and staff, and university students and faculty members from the United States and other countries shared various issues of online education including, but not limited to: mental health, the digital divide, student data security, dropouts, infrastructure, tuition, and digital accessibility (Khan, 2020, 2021). Since 1997, I have been researching on critical factors associated with success and failures of online education, and many of the remote learning issues raised by students and faculty members during the Webinars were very inclusive of what I found in my research. It appears that blended learning and microlearning have been recommended for the new normal in education. In the new normal, artificial intelligence is emerging as one of the most disruptive techniques to customize the experience of different learning groups, teachers, and tutors (https://elearningindustry.com/5-main-roles-artificial-intelligence-in-education).

The old normal is gone forever," says Ashok Goel, a computer science professor at Georgia Institute of Technology. "Even when students return to campus, they'll be going back to more online and blended courses, and we'll be looking for ways that AI can enhance those classes. (Cited in Peterson, 2020).

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Designing and delivering instruction and training on the Internet requires thoughtful analysis and investigation, combined with an understanding of both the Internet's capabilities and resources and the ways in which instructional design principles can be applied to tap the Internet's potential (Ritchie & Hoffman, 1997, cited in Khan, 1997). Designing e-learning for open, flexible, and distributed learning environments is new to many of us. After reflecting on the factors that must be weighed in creating effective open, distributed, and flexible learning environments for learners worldwide, the following definition of e-learning is adopted in this book.

E-Learning can be viewed as an innovative approach for delivering well-designed, learner-centered, interactive, and facilitated learning environment to anyone, anyplace, anytime by utilizing the attributes and resources of various digital technologies along with other forms of learning materials suited for open, flexible, and distributed learning environment. (Khan, 2005, p. 3)

The above definition of e-learning raises the question of how various attributes of e-learning methods and technologies can be utilized to create learning features appropriate for globally diverse learners in an open, flexible, and distributed environment.

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