

# Employability and e –Learning – An Empirical Analysis

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## Abstract

This paper studies the overall impact of E- learning on student learning and employability. With the rapid growth of digital technology and rise in virtual learning centres offering online courses and degrees to students, E-Learning has gained a vital role to play in future as a class room teaching tool and self-study platform for skill development. The emphasis of this paper is to identify prominent factors of e-learning for the development of job-specific skills. Step wise multiple regression analysis was performed. The result suggests that from the student's perspective, besides other factors flexibility in E-learning is the most prominent factor for developing job specific skills. Several studies have been conducted related to dropouts from on-campus and distance education courses. However, no clear definition of dropout from academic courses was provided. Consequently, this study proposes a clear and precise definition of dropout from academic courses in the context of e-learning courses. Additionally, it is documented in literature that students attending e-learning courses dropout at substantially higher rates than their counterparts in on-campus courses. Little attention has been given to the key factors associated with such substantial difference. Results show that students' satisfaction with e-learning is a key indicator in students' decision to dropout from e-learning courses.

Moreover, dropout students (non-completers) reported to have significantly lower satisfaction with e-learning than students who successfully completed (completers or persistent students) the same e-learning courses. Additionally, results of this study show that the academic locus of control appears to have no impact on students' decision to drop from e-learning courses. Discussion Multiple research is conducted that shows the various factors that contribute to persistence and student success in e-learning courses (Bawa, 2016; Deschacht, & Goeman, 2015; Geri, 2012; Levy, 2007; Perry et al., 2008, Willging, & Johnson, 2009). The study conducted by Mason (2001) suggests that major reason for student withdrawal from the courses is the lack of time rather than the long distance. The present study also confirms that from student's perspective, the flexibility of e-learning is the prominent factor for developing job specific skills. The lack of time and long distance hinders the persistence in e-learning courses; it is a substantial problem as some individuals struggle to stay on top of course activities (Gafni & Geri, 2010; Levy & Ramim, 2012).

*Key words: Computer-mediated learning, Dropout rates e-Learning, Students' satisfaction, e-learning courses*

## Introduction

The current educational infrastructure in India is inadequate to meet the challenges of future needs of the country. Digital India initiative by Indian government will enhance the Internet usage. This is going to help the education sector in providing quality education to larger neglected population and it can be boon for the learners to have access to quality education to skill and re-skill themselves for current and future jobs available in the market. The previous study suggests that E- learning market in India is expected to grow twice as compared to global average with a compounded annual rate of 17.4% during 2013 to 2016. Even though India is marked by having more than half the population under 25 years of age, due to inadequate education infrastructure, the country is going to face a crunch of 250 million skilled workforce by 2022. In this situation, E-learning has a pivotal role to play in addressing employability skill gap and helping employers to reduce the burden and cost for training. For E-learning it is important for the educators to know that there is a need to shift the learner's attitude towards learning, they should be intrinsically motivated to learn and for this, there is a need to create awareness and develop an understanding of the relevance of the employability skills amongst them. As educators, it is necessary to understand how they can engage, impart knowledge, develop relevant skills and make them ready for the employment. The study also confirms that e-learning is preferred by the students as it is easy to use & occupation oriented that make them ready with job specific skills. Further, it suggests that transfer of skills & knowledge is also one of the factors of e-learning considered by users. The researchers, however, agree that the student's level of skills with information & communication technology has a significant impact on the participation in e-learning activities (Fredericksen et al, 2000; Hara & Kling, 1999). Thus for educators involved in e-learning business must ensure to incorporate, easy to use and occupation oriented modules for e-learning along with flexibility.

This paper basically focuses on identifying different factors that motivate the students adapting e -learning for developing job- related skills. Research work can be of relevance for the educators while developing their course modules and delivery methods.

### Objective:

This study explores two main constructs: (1) academic locus of control; and, (2) students' satisfaction with e-learning. Pros:

### The critical success factors in an E-Learning environment

Those in a traditional learning environment. The institutions incorporate elements of online learning into degree courses and many are looking in hindsight at the factors that affect the performance of students who enrolled. Quality assurance is a key issue in the implementation of E-Learning. As the number of non-accredited institutions, which are offering degrees, increases rapidly, these are damaging the reputation of online learning.

A number of virtual programs have thrown up quality concerns, which in turn means that providers of quality E-Learning programs must fight harder for recognition from employers and the wider society. The implementation of the E-learning with digital technology is a costly affair due to the huge investment to initiate. The operational cost is required for up gradation and maintenance of digital tools affect outcome. Another limitation in the online world is the continuous availability of internet connection. A reasonable proportion of students who enrolled for various online courses have discontinued it, which proves that absence of human factor in virtual learning is a major drawback for its final success. Employability is not about getting a job. Conversely, just because a student is on a vocational course does not mean that somehow employability is automatic. Employability is more about developing attributes, techniques or experience just to enable a student to get a job, or to progress within a current career. It is about learning and the emphasis is less on employ and more on ability. In essence, the emphasis is on developing critical, reflective abilities, with a view to empower and enhance the learner. Employability is the ability of an individual to gain employment that is appropriate to his/her educational standards. An individual employability depends upon his or her assets in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes; the manner in which these assets are used and deployed; presented to potential employers and the context within which the individual works. Lacking in employability skills may lead to a risk of unemployment or it will be difficult to progress at work. Poor employment skills are of great concern for the individuals as well as employers, society, and economy. Employability skills refer to personal skills like self-management, problem-solving, and people skills supported by functional competencies like traditional literacy, numeracy, and effective use of Information and Communication Technologies. The skills, knowledge, and competencies that enhance a worker's ability to secure and retain a job; progress at work and cope with changes, secure another job if he/she wishes or has been laid off can enter more easily into the market at different periods of the life cycle. E-learning can be used in teaching, training, and learning strategies for all the employability skills in various ways. E-learning provides structures that take account of the relationships between the employability skills that facilitate the identification of effective teaching and learning strategies. Employers need reliable, responsible workers who can solve problems and who have the social skills and approaches to work with other workers. Employees with these skills are in demand and are considered valuable human capital assets to companies. Unlike occupational or technical skills, employability skills are generic in nature. With the help of E-learning, an individual can get knowledge and employability skills.

### **Using E-learning as a tool for self-learning**

The individuals are lagging behind in the personal qualities such as team spirit, cooperativeness, taking responsibilities, honesty, adaptability, and flexibility. These qualities are developed when a person learns or gets training in the traditional way. Online or learning through ICT based technologies give more knowledge to the learner's but the traditional way not only nurtures them with the knowledge but also guides them how and when to use this knowledge. Although there is a rapid growth in E-learning sector, but traditional learning has its own

importance and values. In traditional learning ICT based tools can be used to enhance the quality of knowledge and will keep alive our tradition of Guru-Shishya.

**Flexibility** – Your eLearning content can be done in sections, to fit around your already busy schedule. Unlike traditional in-house training or public schools, you don't have a structured schedule to dictate when you access your eLearning content. Online learning gives you full flexibility to accomplish your goals, on your own time.

**Lower cost** – eLearning allows you to learn from anywhere. Since you aren't using a trainer's time or equipment, online learning becomes a much more affordable option. With the exception of your own computer or mobile device, you generally do not have many other expenses.

**Mobility** – Instead of the confinement of a traditional classroom, you now have the flexibility to learn in any location you'd like, including on a train or a plane. eLearning allows you to take full advantage of your time and get things done when you wouldn't normally be able to.

**Cons:**

**Lack of structure** – Sometimes learners with low motivation can quickly fall behind in an online course. With no fixed schedule or routine, eLearning can become difficult for people to meet specific deadlines or goals.

### **Technology issues –**

It is important to lay out your technological requirements at the very beginning of your course; your learners need to have devices that are compatible with the eLearning software. Of course, there is always the risk of having technology issues when using computers so heavily, such as internet connection or power reliability.

**Computer proficiency** – Some learners or employees may not be comfortable using computers. Even if the software is user friendly, it may be a daunting task for some. These particular learners may struggle, and would probably be more successful in a traditional classroom setting.

The digital technology and rise in virtual learning, education centers are offering online courses and degrees to students. E-Learning has a vital role to play as a class room teaching tool or self-study platform for skill development in future. The entry of mobile technology in the information era has witnessed a radical effect on the knowledge acquisition of an individual to sustain in the competitive scenario. The professional of the digital age is expected to acquire ICT (Information and Communication Technology) skills to survive and succeed in their career. The learning with digital technology comprises of ICT products such as teleconferencing, E-mails, audio, television lessons, radio broadcasts, interactive voice response system, online videos, etc. For E-learning, it is important for the mentors to know the need about shifting the learner's attitude towards learning. They should be intrinsically motivated to learn and for this, there is a need to create awareness and develop an understanding



of the relevance of the employability skills amongst them. As a mentor, it is necessary to understand how a mentor can engage, impart knowledge, develop relevant skills, and make them ready for the employment. Benefits of E-learning are easy to use, useful even at distant places and in remote areas, helps in professional development & continued education, helps in educating large number of people, develops reflective & critical thinking, and delivers a broad array of solutions, knowledge, and performance. Apart from the aforesaid benefits, E-learning needs careful planning in implementation. Students do not automatically become conscientious, self-motivated individuals. Success in fact depends on the level of interaction between students and lecturers that is required to stimulate good results. Students' lacking in the skill to study independently is not reacting well in a virtual environment. The issue of isolation caused by E-learning has sparked a rigorous debate amongst researchers.

### Synergy

The online format allows a dynamic interaction between the instructor and students and among the students themselves. Resources and ideas are shared, and continuous synergy will be generated through the learning process. Each individual can contribute to the course discussions and comments on the work of others. The synergy that exists in the student-centered Virtual Classroom is one of the most unique and vital traits that the online learning format possesses.

### High Quality Dialog

Within an online asynchronous discussion structure, the learner may reflect on comments from others before responding or moving on to the next item. This structure allows students time to articulate responses with much more depth and forethought than in a traditional face-to-face discussion situation where the participant must analyze the comment of another on the spot and formulate a response or otherwise lose the chance to contribute to the discussion.

### Equity and Accessibility to Technology

Before any online program can hope to succeed, it must have students who are able to access the online learning environment. Lack of access, whether it be for economic or logistic reasons, will exclude otherwise eligible students from the course. This is a significant issue in rural and lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. Furthermore, speaking from an administrative point of view, if students cannot afford the technology the institution employs, they are lost as customers. As far as Internet accessibility is concerned, it is not universal, and in some areas of the United States and other countries, Internet access poses a significant cost to the user. Some users pay a fixed monthly rate for their Internet connection, while others are charged for the time they spend online. If the participants' time online is limited by the amount of Internet access they can afford, then instruction and participation in the online program will not be equitable for all students in the course.

## Computer Literacy

Both students and facilitators must possess a minimum level of computer knowledge in order to function successfully in an online environment. For example, they must be able to use a variety of search engines and be comfortable navigating on the World Wide Web, as well as be familiar with Newsgroups, FTP procedures, and email. If they do not possess these technology tools, they will not succeed in an online program; a student or faculty member who cannot function on the system will drag the entire program down.

## Limitations of Technology

User friendly and reliable technology is critical to a successful online program. However, even the most sophisticated technology is not 100% reliable. Unfortunately, it is not a question of if the equipment used in an online program will fail, but when. When everything is running smoothly, technology is intended to be low profile and is used as a tool in the learning process. However, breakdowns can occur at any point along the system. For example, the server which hosts the program could crash and cut all participants off from the class; a participant may access the class through a networked computer which could go down; individual PCs can have numerous problems which could limit students' access; finally, the Internet connection could fail, or the institution hosting the connection could become bogged down with users and either slow down or fail altogether. In situations like these, the technology is neither seamless nor reliable, and it can detract from the learning experience.

## The Students

While an online method of education can be a highly effective alternative medium of education for the mature, self-disciplined student, it is an inappropriate learning environment for more dependent learners. Online asynchronous education gives students control over their learning experience and allows for flexibility of study schedules for non traditional students; however, this places a greater responsibility on the student. In order to successfully participate in an online program, students must be well organized, self-motivated, and possess a high degree of time management skills in order to keep up with the pace of the course. For these reasons, online education is not appropriate for younger students (i.e. elementary or secondary school age) and other students who are dependent learners and have difficulty assuming responsibilities required by the online paradigm.

## The Facilitator

### Lack of Essential Online Qualities

Successful on-ground instruction does not always translate to successful online instruction. If facilitators are not properly trained in online delivery and methodologies, the success of the online program will be compromised. An instructor must be able to communicate well in writing and in the language in which the course is offered. An online program will be weakened if its facilitators are not adequately prepared to function in the Virtual Classroom.

An online instructor must be able to compensate for lack of physical presence by creating a supportive environment in the Virtual Classroom where all students feel comfortable participating and especially where students know that their instructor is accessible. Failure to do this can alienate the class both from each other and from the instructor. However, even if a virtual professor is competent enough to create a comfortable virtual environment in which the class can operate, still the lack of physical presence at an institution can be a limitation for an online program. For the faculty as well as the participants, such things as being left out of meetings and other events that require on-site interaction could present a limiting factor in an online program.

### The Administration and Faculty

Some environments are disruptive to the successful implementation of an online program. Administrators and/or faculty members who are uncomfortable with change and working with technology, or feel that online programs cannot offer quality education, often inhibit the process of implementation. These people represent a considerable weakness in an online program because they can inhibit its success.

Sometimes administration cannot see beyond the bottom line and look at online programs only as ways to increase revenues and are thus not committed to seeing online programs as a means of providing quality education to people who would otherwise not be able to access it. In such a case, an institution that is not aware of the importance of proper facilitator training, essential facilitator characteristics, and limitations of class size would not understand the impact that these elements can have on the success of an online program.

## The Online Environment

### Levels of Synergy

Online learning has its most promising potential in the high synergy represented by active dialog among the participants, one of the most important sources of learning in a Virtual Classroom. However, in larger classes (20 or more students), the synergy level starts to shift on the learning continuum until it eventually becomes independent study to accommodate the large class. At this point, dialog is limited as well as interaction among participants and the facilitator. The medium is not being used to its greatest potential.

### What Should Not Be Taught Online

Even with recently generated excitement and enthusiasm for online programs, it is important to recognize that some subjects should not be taught online because the electronic medium does not permit the best method on instruction. Examples include: hands-on subjects such as public speaking, surgery, dental hygiene, and sports where physical movement and practice contribute to the achievement of the learning objectives. These subjects are probably best taught in a face-to-face traditional learning environment. Hybrid courses may represent a temporary solution to this problem, thus making that portion of the course more accessible to a greater number of people who would otherwise have difficulty getting to campus. However, solutions of that sort still underline the fact that online teaching cannot satisfy all educational needs and goals. Just because it may be technologically possible to simulate a physical learning experience, this does not necessarily mean that it is the best way to teach it.

### Employability and eLearning

#### Student Centered

Within an online discussion, the individual student responds to the course material (lectures and course books, for example) and to comments from other students. Students usually respond to those topics within the broader conversation that most clearly speak to their individual concerns. These situations result in smaller conversations taking place simultaneously within the group. While students should read all of their classmates' contributions, they actively engage in only those parts of the dialog most relevant to their own interests. In this way, students control their own learning experience and tailor the class discussions to meet their own specific needs. Ideally, students make their own individual contributions to the course while at the same time taking away a unique mix of relevant information.



## Level Playing Field

In the online environment, learners have a certain measure of anonymity. Discriminating factors such as age, dress, physical appearance, disabilities, race, and gender are largely absent. Instead, the focus of attention is clearly on the content of the discussion and the individual's ability to respond and contribute thoughtfully and intelligently to the material at hand.

## Access to Resources

It is easy to include distinguished guest experts or students from other institutions in an online class. Furthermore, today's students have access to resources and materials that may be physically located anywhere in the world. An instructor can compile a resource section online with links to scholarly articles, institutions, and other materials relevant to the course topic for students to access for research, extension,

## Conclusion

From the above study, it can be concluded that factors like easy to use and occupation oriented, transfer of skills & knowledge and flexibility in learning influence students in adopting the e- learning course. These factors facilitate job specific skills among the learners, and the educators must consider the above- mentioned factors while planning and developing their activities and modules for e-learning. The study is exploratory in nature and the data has been collected from the students up to 25 years of age in Delhi/ NCR with 337 valid respondents only, therefore, the findings cannot be extrapolated to a larger population. Further research with more inputs can be explored for better results.

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