Online eLearning in Tertiary Education

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ABSTRACT

Digital technologies can enrich student centered learning through Online eLearning, by providing improved access to learning resources and improved collaborative interaction between stakeholders (learners, teachers, provider management and administrators, employers of learned skill outcomes). It is an imperative for the effectiveness and survival of education providers that they optimally integrate online eLearning into their curriculum.

Keywords: eLearning, Online, Innovation, Adoption, Diffusion, Curriculum, Learned skill outcomes, Student centered learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, for curriculum to be student centered it should be deployed as Online eLearning centered.

Properly deployed, online eLearning can more (than curriculum without an Online eLearning core focus) effectively connect learners with learning resources to optimize a learner centered focused curriculum.

Online eLearning can connect stakeholders more effectively with content and each other for productive and collaboration interaction. Self, peer, formative and summative assessment can be more easily effected.

This poster reviews the literature on eLearning and identifies key barriers and enablers to its adoption and diffusion.

2. THE ADOPTION AND DIFFUSION OF ONLINE ELEARNING

It is now commonly agreed on that educational benchmarks and expectations can be achieved equally well, and in some cases better with online learning, than with traditional face-to-face courses (Carruth & Carruth, 2012).

In this poster diffusion refers to the structures, systems and processes that Tertiary education providers employ to increase the adoption of eLearning.

Rogers' (1995) defines several intrinsic characteristics of

innovations that influence an individual's decision to adopt or reject an innovation. Adoption refers to the stage in which a technology is selected for use by an individual or group of individuals. It covers that period when an individual engages in activities that lead to the adoption or rejection of an innovation.
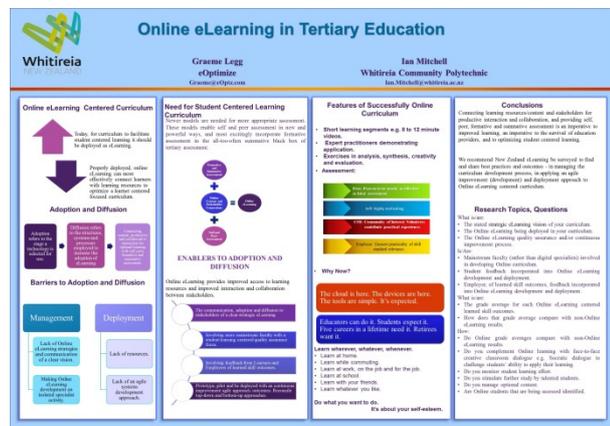
The diffusion of an innovation has been described by Rogers (2003, p. 474) as "the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels amongst the members of the social system" and is "concerned with the spread of messages that are perceived as new ideas".

3. BARRIERS TO THE ADOPTION AND DIFFUSION OF ONLINE ELEARNING

Smith (2002), highlights the lack of institutional eLearning strategies as one of the factors that hinders widespread adoption of eLearning by academic staff. Without the communication of a clear vision, academic teaching staff are likely to be hesitant in pursuing any eLearning initiatives regardless of their level of personal interest (McLean, 2005).

The adoption of learning technology applications is seen to occur in isolation from institutional infrastructure, manifested as small-scale initiatives that rely on the efforts of local enthusiasts and the goodwill of tutors (Salmon, 2005; Barczyk, Buckenmeyer, & Feldman, 2010).

The levels of adoption of eLearning by academic teaching staff have been disappointing (Singh & Hardaker, 2014).

4. ENABLERS TO THE ADOPTION AND DIFFUSION OF ONLINE ELEARNING

There is a consensus amongst eLearning scholars that top-down and bottom-up approaches need to be reconciled. (Roffe, 2002).

Management support is required not only in terms of resources but also in acting as role models to use eLearning systems, exhibiting a willingness to continuously learn and search for new knowledge and ideas, so that employees imitate them, and the propensity of employees to participate in eLearning is enhanced through maintaining morale, and creating a culture that promotes eLearning adoption (Huang, 2004).

Currently eLearning is too geared towards technically "literate" and innovative staff, and this strategy reduces the likelihood of mainstream faculty actually adopting

instructional technology for their own teaching. (Singh & Hardaker, 2014)

Online eLearning deployment needs to be a high quality deployment, rather than a lip service deployment. Online eLearning needs to be prototyped, piloted and be deployed with an agile continuous development and improvement approach. A continuous quality improvement approach is needed, that involves all stakeholders, including:
- More mainstream faculty with a student centered learning quality assurance focus.
- Feedback from learners of the functioning and performance of the learning systems.
- Feedback from employers of the effectiveness of learned skill outcomes.

A study undertaken by Kidney, Cummings and Boehm (2007) surmises that the merit, quality and success of the eLearning programme they investigated were mainly due to the proper application of quality assurance strategies.

Findings from eLearning studies have shown that individuals are more likely to adopt eLearning if they have control over their academic roles in teaching and learning (Eynon, 2005; Gibbs & Gosper, 2006). Lecturers need to be involved in the strategic change that is likely to have an influence on their academic roles. Failure to acknowledge this call by lecturers is likely to result in rejection or "false" compliance to top down directives. (Hardaker & Singh, 2011).

A 2012 evaluation of an international eLearning programme found that student feedback can provide valuable data to evaluate and improve the functioning and performance of an eLearning system. (Bentley, Parkin, & Selassie, 2012)

Fasihuddin, Skinner and Athauda (2012) propose that a framework for collaborative adaptive learning in the cloud (CALC) should provide learning materials provided by different learning providers so that learners can select preferred learning resources and learning communities to learn from.

5. CONCLUSIONS
Connecting learning resources/content and stakeholders for productive interaction and collaboration, and providing self, peer, formative and summative assessment is an imperative to improved learning. Consequentially it is also an imperative to the survival of education providers, and to optimizing student centered learning.

The management way forward requires:
- The communication, adoption and diffusion to stakeholders of a clear strategic eLearning vision.
- Transforming faculty mind sets by improving support for eLearning and more effectively involving them in the continuous improvement and quality assurance of the learning process and learned skill outcomes.
- Effectively allocating limited resources, money and time.

The digital development way forward requires.
- Enhancing the learner experience and increasing engagement by developing interactive online and digital content and processes.
- Effectively allocating limited resources, money and time by encouraging prototyping experimentation to develop eLearning based curriculum pilots, and rolling out the most successful pilots for continuous review and improvement.

We recommend New Zealand eLearning be surveyed to find and share best practices and outcomes - in managing the curriculum development process, and in applying an agile improvement (development) and deployment approach to Online eLearning centered curriculum.

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