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ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF E-LEARNING IN COMPARISON TO TRADITIONAL FORMS OF LEARNING

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ABSTRACT:

Internet education is soon to become the dominant form of education in the world. A lot of effort is being devoted into furthering the work methods and communication among students and professors, aimed at bettering the quality of this kind of studying. Moreover, further development of virtual education in the future will depend on the advance of contemporary technologies and the Internet. Having this in mind this paper has tried to explore to what extent the previous results have been accomplished, as well as to classify the different modalities of this kind of learning and to ascertain their advantages and disadvantages. A special emphasis has been put on the great utility value for all developed economies, which have made great progress in the development rate and in the spreading of virtual faculties' network. The author especially emphasizes the fact that **faculties with "classrooms without walls" will not fully replace traditional faculties.**

KEY WORDS: Internet education; e-learning; Learning Models.

INTRODUCTION:

The education system provided via the Internet is being improved year after year and has been enhancing along with the development and advance of Internet technologies. The advance of e-learning has, to a great extent, been affected by the development and application of wireless Internet. Furthermore, the advance of e-learning has been influenced by numerous software programs, such as the Blackboard system, and others. By means of these, as well as other programs, students are enabled to be in constant contact with their virtual professors (**Radović-Marković and Nelson-Porter, 2009**).

Most often, they have lectures or consultations with their professor live, twice or more times a week, whereas during other days throughout the semester, professors ask students questions, initiate discussions, send additional reference materials, assign topics for seminar papers, etc. Yahoo voice messenger, Skype and similar programs, where the professors' voice may be heard, along with video conferences, are used for lectures (**Keegan, 2000**).

At the end of the semester, the student takes the examination, most commonly in a test form, also performed online and writes an independent final paper defended orally.

Depending on whether the student has chosen a certified or a non-certified program, upon completing the study program, he/she will or will not be awarded a diploma. However, what is most important to many students graduating from virtual faculties is the fact that the diploma most often does not state the type of studies, that is, whether he/she studied online or face to face. The reason for this lies in the fact that these two methods of studying

are regarded fully equal and no distinction is being made among them in terms of employment (**Radović-Marković, 2009**).

In spite of the fact that virtual faculties have been in existence around the world for about ten years, not much research has been conducted showing to what extent the knowledge acquired in this way differs to the traditional knowledge acquisition, in respect to quality, pedagogical methods used, and other matters (**Capogrossi, 2002**). Furthermore, there are still doubts about what is considered e-learning, what the e-learning process is, and what has to be included in order to create a quality online study program. Bearing this in mind, in this paper, we will endeavor to provide an answer to these questions, based on the latest research conducted in the past several years in the world, as well as first-hand experience and personal research.

THE SPECIFICS OF E-LEARNING:

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES IN COMPARISON TO TRADITIONAL LEARNING: As far as e-learning development is concerned, Western faculties, which have more than a decade long tradition in this field, have made the biggest advancement. Firstly, this fact may be explained by great investments being made by the Western countries for online studies development and encouragement of professional education for e-learning activities. However, big investments into e-learning follow significant research, the purpose of which is to determine the policies of its further development (**Radović-Marković and Nelson-Porter, 2009**). In accordance with this, recent research has been conducted, covering a sample of 200 educational institutions.

The aim of this research was to find the answer to several crucial questions, as follows:

To what extent does e-learning improve the process of knowledge acquisition, by juxtaposing this educational model with numerous other models?

What are the prerequisites in terms of the technical infrastructure and logistics for e-learning?

What models of e-learning are in use and which ones give the best results?

To what extent is the role of the professor-instructor modified in working with students who opt for this model of education?

What are the costs compared to the profit earned at faculties organizing Internet studies?

Based on the results of this research, which is considered one of the most comprehensive and recent of this kind in the world, indicative data for this form of education have been collected. The most significant indicators include:

? Students at more than 90% of virtual faculties are satisfied with this kind of education and knowledge acquisition

? All the faculties that provided an adequate training for the professors, as well as other members of virtual faculties, have managed to adapt to the new method of work in a fairly short time and achieve the desired results

? Educational institutions have made significant savings in terms of human and other resources utilization, and thereby have increased their profits.

? Furthermore, the number of students has increased, and a higher study efficiency has been achieved.

? E-learning has enabled a higher degree of interactivity among professors and students and easier study material coverage in both undergraduate and graduate students.

? Students have shown a great adaptability to this kind of studying. Namely, e-learning has proven to be a very popular and acceptable way of studying, owing to its flexibility, as well as its higher degree of innovativeness in terms of introducing new and contemporary programs in comparison to traditional faculties. In addition, many faculties that have opted for e-learning have started implementing various software packages supporting online learning, and applying different studying modalities. University of North Texas (UNT), for example, which started offering online and onsite courses in 1995, has significantly improved its activities since their introduction (Keegan, 2000). Namely, by using video conferences they managed to link all the locations in a radius of about 40 miles from the University's headquarters.

? Many prestigious world universities have long withstood this kind of education; it also offered this kind of studying. It has entered the market with the highest quality world programs in e-learning as well, and has thus maintained its decades long standing high rating.

? Research has revealed that both students and administrators believe that the quality of e-learning responds to the traditional teaching methods in terms of quality. According to this research, three quarters of leaders in state faculties and universities trust Internet-based learning quality to be the same or even better than face to face learning. This research has also shown that universities offering online studies have so far had more than 2 million students and that the number has been increasing by 25% on an average every year.

? Compared to traditional ways of studying, study efficiency is increased in this way, as a result of continual learning, so that studies may be completed in a time frame shorter than assigned.

? Although the popularity of online learning has been on an increase worldwide, many traditional faculties use extensive e-learning, i.e. they use it as a supplement to traditional ways of learning, and few are willing to organize exclusively independent online programs.

This is particularly characteristic of faculties with the highest rankings. They are reluctant to abandon the traditional teaching ways and are not so keen to invest money into new programs and new technologies required to support online programs.

WOMEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING:

The changes in women's educational and career attainment may have multifaceted characteristics. Women might have increased their enrolment in colleges compared to men, but women may still differ in terms of the types of subjects in which they are enrolled (Pulichino, 2006). Distance learning is becoming increasingly attractive for women, as shown by some research studies. Namely, more than 60% of those over 25 years of age and female opt for this type of development and education in the world (Capogrossi, 2002). The reason for this lies in the fact that this method of learning offers numerous advantages. Among the most prominent benefits, the following may be pointed out: the flexibility of the learning process (students study at the time most convenient to them) achieving a better balance between personal and other commitments (they may spend more time at home with their families)

Minimizing costs (both time and money savings are made) a deeper sense of self-fulfillment (acquiring relevant and useful knowledge and achieving professional goals).

Accordingly, women are given the opportunity of choosing some of the programs from a broader range, the ones that best suit their professional interests and goals, without the requirement to move geographically (Corporate University Exchange, 2000). In other words, women are no longer limited to the local educational institutions, but have at their disposal a more comprehensive choice of educational programs offered worldwide.

Also, studying over the Internet enables women permanent development thus reducing the educational gap in comparison to men. At the same time, the social status and life quality of women are being improved.

Anytime, anyplace” nature of online learning suiting female students more than male where women are fitting their education in among their regular work was the opinion of 70 % of respondents (female and male together).

Men and women respondents (45%) course favors women and older Students who seem more motivated, better at communicating online and at scheduling their learning.

The half of 54 respondents doesn't like to have discussions with other students and teachers that they can't see.

PERSPECTIVES OF E-LEARNING:

Throughout the year 2006, a research has been conducted exploring the future trends in e-learning. A questionnaire was made, covering three groups of subjects:

1. Higher education institutions
2. Corporations
3. e-learning providers

They were offered a multiple choice form, dealing with several aspects of e- learning and its future use. One of the most important questions referred to the development perspectives of e-learning. To this purpose, subjects were offered the following responses:

e-learning has a big future and will continue to grow
e-learning will show decline in its importance in the years to come
e-learning will not develop in either of the two ways

As many as 75% of the subjects circled the first proposed answer, i.e. that e- learning has a big future and that “it will continue to grow”, whereas 16% circled the second answer that “e-learning will show decline in its importance in the years to come”. During the year 2006 the same survey was conducted showing that the number of those believing that “e-learning will show decline in its importance in the future” has gone down, while the number of those believing that “e-learning will continue to grow” has remained stable” (75%).

With regard to perspectives of e-learning, subjects were also offered several items to choose from, such as “significant increase”, “moderate growth”, “same rate of development”, “moderate decrease”, “significant decrease”, and “I don't know”. In this case, about 43% of all the subjects answered that there will be a moderate growth of e- learning in the future (. **Corporate University Exchange, 2000**). Additionally, opportunities for extending the use of e-learning to other domains, where it has not been applied so far, such as employee, customer and business associates training, have been considered.

According to the findings of this questionnaire, we can see that 38 % of all subjects expect “moderate increase in the application of e-learning in other spheres of its application”, whereas 20% expect “significant development”. The development of e-learning by means of complex media (simulation models, interactive algorithms, databases, flash and streaming tapes) was also covered in the questionnaire (**Pulichino, 2006**). In this respect as well, subjects expressed their high expectations regarding the application of the latest state-of-the-art media (48%) in the near future. Further research can continue to explore how and when online instruction is most effective (**Sloan Consortium, 2008**). For instance, additional investigation should look at motivational factors affecting students in taking elective and required courses in traditional, online, and blended approaches to instruction.

CONCLUSION:

The development of modern technologies, the Internet in particular, on the one hand, and the changes in ways of managing, communication and work organization in enterprises ,on the other hand, have in the recent years resulted in changes in the kinds of knowledge and ways for its acquisition.

Having in mind that the Internet has found its way into daily life and use, both in various domains of entertainment and business transactions, the use of the Internet in the education sphere is naturally expected. Namely, in the sphere of education, the Internet offers a global platform for information storage and its presentation in textual, visual, graphical or any other form. It also serves as a means of synchronous and asynchronous communication, (Keegan 2000).

Taking into consideration the above mentioned statements, it is logically expected that online studies will grow in popularity, and that the network of virtual faculties will keep spreading in the future. Further to this, Internet education will soon become the dominant form of education worldwide, which is to reach its peak in a few years.

At the same time, it is to be expected that the methods of work and communication among students and professors will continue to improve and that efforts will be made in increasing the quality of this kind of studying. The extent to which a country will become part of the global educational Internet network, will, to a great degree, depend on the degree of utilization of new Internet technologies and the level of popularization of this form of education. Namely, many world prestigious faculties offering distance learning studies, engage famous people studying there as the best promoters of this way of studying. This form of studying still now considered as some form of correspondence studies. In addition, many faculties yet lack the relevant software and accompanying equipment, as well as adequately trained staff, which would use them in their work with students. Furthermore, the development of Internet studies is still lagging behind in this country, as it is still at the bottom of the ladder among countries in terms of Internet users (about 20%). A factor further aggravating Internet studies development here is the fact that people's beliefs here change very slowly regarding any kind of novelty, especially in education.

In compliance with this, most people cannot imagine a "classroom without walls", nor a completely different way of studying. For a large group of people, it is unimaginable not to go to the faculty and not to attend lectures, as this would make it impossible for them to feel as academic citizens.

This does not mean that faculties with "classrooms without walls" will fully replace traditional faculties. They will continue to exist and to attract those students who prefer classical learning models, yet they will also have to change in accordance with the needs and requirements of contemporary education. In keeping with this, it may be concluded that virtual faculties and their expansion will have positive consequences and impact on innovating traditional faculties work as well.

It may reasonably be expected that in addition to high profits earned by faculties, students will be the ones to enjoy highest gain as they will get the education to their order and needs, as well as suited to the requirements of their future job positions. This is further corroborated with the fact that more and more employers do not distinguish between those students who have graduated from Internet schools and those who have graduated from other schools in their recruitment decisions.

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