

# **WEB-SITE TEACHING: ANALYSIS OF ITS FUTURE DEVELOPMENT**

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**Abstract:** Web-site teaching has become increasingly popular in universities and continuous education. This article discusses the advantages of web-site teaching. In particular the effect of web-site teaching on life-long learning is examined. It is concluded that web-site teaching will have large scope of future development and that education institutions especially those aiming at providing life-long learning to mature working people will need to start preparing for this revolutionary change in method of teaching.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The use of IT in education has become a trend nowadays. In particular, web-site teaching has become increasingly popular in University teaching. Indeed technology has developed so rapidly that methods of teaching unheard of a decade ago are commonly used now. Development in information technology has not only transformed the way of communication, but has exerted its influence in education and has changed completely the traditional method of teaching.

There are motives for teachers and lecturers to adopt new information technology in their teaching. Firstly, the adoption of IT considerably enhances the effectiveness of teaching. Secondly, IT such as web-site teaching provides a high degree of flexibility for the students in pursuing their study. They can study at home or in their work place in front of computers connected to the internet. They can study at the time convenient to themselves and at a pace suitable to themselves. Thirdly, IT such as web-site teaching has considerable cost advantages to the teaching institutions since it does not require much classroom resources and needs only the minimum face to face teaching, the result of which is substantial savings in manpower. Lastly, but most importantly, IT such as web-site teaching provides the path for life-long learning which has been so much stressed nowadays as a human resource policy.

## **THE ROLE OF 'IT' IN RAISING TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS**

Education nowadays is no longer the privilege of a small group of people in society. It has become something that everyone has the right to access. Education has the effect of satisfying human want for knowledge. The acquisition of knowledge itself raises a person's self-esteem, confidence and brings about happiness. Education viewed this way is consumption in the words of economists.

However education is now generally regarded as investment rather than consumption. It is an investment in 'human capital'. The acquisition of knowledge yields a return, which is the higher income to be earned in the future. People are thus motivated to make effort to study. Study is

therefore seen as an effective tool to combat poverty and to improve one's standard of living. Education has become a way for upward social mobility. (Schultz T.W. 1960)

With the great increase in demand for education, and the policy of the government to expand education, teaching institutions especially the universities are under tremendous pressure to increase supply of education, and more precisely, of good quality education. The traditional form of teaching whereby the teacher conveys the subject matter of a discipline verbally and through writing on the board is no longer sufficient. Audio and visual aids are needed to help teaching. Computer teaching is a great progress, as interest of the students can be considerably enhanced. Now web-site teaching, an elevated method of computer teaching, provides the maximum flexibility and efficiency for teaching.

There have been great disputes on what should be considered as good teaching. Classifications such as 'teacher centred teaching and learning', 'student centred teaching and learning', 'surface approach of teaching' and 'deep approach of teaching' etc have been under discussion by academics in education. But it is generally accepted that good teaching occurs when students succeed in acquiring knowledge and are able to make use of the knowledge, i.e. to apply it. In this respect, IT is an effective instrument to bring about good teaching, as it provides efficient communication through which the subject matters of a discipline are transferred from the teacher to the students and feedbacks are transferred from the students to the teachers. IT being a fast and powerful means of communication indeed is an effective instrument for teaching.

### **FLEXIBILITY OFFERED BY WEB-SITE TEACHING**

The idea of 'consumerism' has been increasingly becoming popular in education. Education is now considered as a good which consumer buys. As such education needs to be of good quality, to fit the purpose of consumers and to be distributed to them at the time and place most convenient to them. Web-site teaching can adequately fulfil these requirements. A student with a computer connected to the internet is able to pursue his/her study at the time convenient for him/her, at the place that suit him/her, and at the pace that fit his/her ability.

The change from traditional programme-based system to credit-based system is in fact a step to provide flexibility to students in programming their studies. Web-based teaching provides further flexibility to the students in managing their studies. When credit-based system is combined with web-site teaching, flexibility becomes really great!

### **COST ADVANTAGE OF WEB-SITE TEACHING**

As the demand for education increases, increase in supply should follow. Teaching institutions especially the universities are now under heavy pressure to supply education for more students. However as education is costly, most governments are reluctant to provide substantial funds to the teaching institutions. In view of this web-site teaching is a feasible solution to the problem. It allows teaching to take place for numerous students at the same time. So there is tremendous economies in the delivery of lectures as it saves classroom resources and manpower resources. The idea of cyber-universities has emerged whereby a university may teach only through web-site, running its educational programmes with very low costs.

With web-site teaching, the market for the cyber-universities is enormously expanded. Its market is not limited by geographical constraints as the internet can reach every location in the world. So

web-site teaching does not only lead to cost savings, but to great increase in the demand for its services.

## **ROLE OF WEB-SITE TEACHING IN LIFE-LONG LEARNING**

Traditional thinking is that one needs only to take up enough studies for acquiring a job or engaging in a profession. As knowledge and technology are continuously increasing and improving, it is now generally recognized that learning should be a life-long process. This is a “cradle to grave” perspective of education.

Life-long learning challenges the notions that learning belongs only to the classroom and the idea that learning is essentially a pre-experience formative process. Life-long learning requires the rethinking of the functions of education institutions and the nature of learning in a knowledge-based society. (Chris Duke, 1999, p.22)

Life-long learning have made the traditional study programme not quite workable. Students in a programme may come from all age and background. Full- and part-time students are not easy to identify clearly, with respect to their background, study programmes or employment status. Young and mature age, working and non-working, degree-seeking or for personal interest, now are likely to be taking part in the same teaching learning process. This is the picture of life-long learning. (Alan Wagner, 1999, pp.58-59)

In deed life-long learning has been put into the aim of university education. Students are supposed to be educated in such a way as to be able to pursue life-long learning after leaving college. The provision of a scheme for life-long learning is now the concern of most governments. It is their preoccupation to set up schemes which are effective and inexpensive for providing life-long learning to their people.

The flexibility offered by web-site teaching can contribute to the life-long learning process. It is envisaged that more and more adults will be engaging in study programmes through internet teaching. There will be more adults enrolling in degree courses doing their studies part-time through internet teaching. Those who want to up-grade their knowledge of their work or profession will enroll in specially designed courses taught through the internet. Continuous study is so easy and convenient with a computer connected to the internet.

In providing life-long learning through Web-site teaching, effort must be made to design course materials for different categories of students. According to Martin Trow (1999, p. 207) we should disaggregate the pattern of use of IT very finely along at least four crucial dimensions, i.e. by the nature of the subject taught, by the location of the student (whether inside a college or university or at home or at the workplace), by the purpose of the instruction (whether to transmit skills and knowledge or to cultivate mind and sensibilities) and by the academic talents and motivations of the learner.

Policies in life-long learning must be set to suit the diversity of student population. It is inevitable that experiments are to be taken with initiative from below rather than from top. According to Martin Trow (1999, pp.207-208) if the provision of lifelong learning is to suit the diverse student populations, then policies for continuing education through the new media of communication must be responsive to the nature and goals of the educational effort, almost course by course, to the market for knowledge among consumers and to the judgement of the academics who know better than anybody who they are teaching and how those students learn. How these conflicting requirements – of function, demand and pedagogy – balance out cannot be the subject of general rules or state policy. On the contrary, it means that policies must allow – indeed encourage – experimentation by those who introduce the use of these technologies into higher education, and

especially into distance learning. He therefore advocated that institutions and the people in them should be given the freedom and resources to initiate from below and to experiment in different directions, and that policy-makers must accept the possibility of failure in some cases. (pp.207-208)

Researches are urgently needed to find out the impact of web-site teaching on life-long learning. Such impacts are complex in nature. The convenience of taking up a course through internet may increase the demand for such courses. The response to the availability of web-site teaching may be different for different categories of people. The pursue of life-long learning may change the life-style of people, their family relation, their spending pattern, their interest and so on. All these aspects are unknown, as the outcome will take place only in the future. (Martin Trow, 1999 p.203)

## **RESISTANCE TO ADOPT WEB-SITE TEACHING**

In spite of the advantages brought about by the introduction of IT especially web-site teaching, there is resistance from some teachers and students. New education technology has impacts both on the teachers and the students. On the one hand, new technology helps to increase the efficiency of teaching on the part of the teachers and provides greater degree of self-study and critical thinking on the part of the students. On the other hand, there is resistance to change since it is new and requires efforts to acquire the skill for the adoption of the new technology.

Some teachers or lecturers who are already accustomed to the traditional way of delivering lecture may find using computer teaching especially web-site teaching difficult for several reasons. First, they have to learn the new technology before they can make use of it. Second, they have to rewrite all their teaching materials and input them into the computer, which requires substantial works. Also repeated testing of the teaching materials is needed before they can be used. Third, there is considerable risk associated with the outcome of computer teaching. Students may not be able to follow. They may not like it. They may need assistance in order to use it. Therefore it is something new and a risk-avert lecturer by nature would reject it.

With computer-facilitated learning, increased independence on the part of the students has become a goal or a desirable side benefit of the innovation. These innovations generally have direct or indirect impact on other aspects, such as coursework and assessment, which further provides opportunities for increasing the self-reliance of the students. However the innovation may not be accepted instantly by the students. So measures must be taken to ensure a smooth shift to the new educational technology. Otherwise, discouragement on the part of the students will bring about failure in the teaching-learning process. Many students still have the concept that teaching must be in the classroom and with the assistance of the teacher near by. However in web-site teaching, the student is left alone sitting before the computer without a classroom environment and unaccompanied by his/her class-mates. This is a complete change of the mode of teaching and learning. So there must be a kind of preparatory works to smooth out the psychological shock of such a change. (Akerlind and Trevitt, 1999, pp.97-98)

It is advisable that the adoption of web-site teaching be carried out in two stages. In the early stage some web-site materials are posed in the web-site so that students can have access to them. But at the same time lectures and seminars are still provided. In this way students will have the chance to attend lectures and seminars. In the later stage, teaching will then be carried out totally through the web-site. With such a transition arrangement students will find it easier to adapt.

The above transition arrangement will also be beneficial to teachers and lecturers, as they can have more time to prepare their web-site materials. In the early stage, they need only to prepare notes, multiple choice questions, basic activities, etc., which they may already have prepared for the traditional lectures and seminars. It is only in the later stage that they need to up-grade their

teaching materials for a complete web-site teaching. Also it is advisable for the teaching institution to provide technical assistance to the teachers and lecturers for the preparation of the web-site materials. In the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, funds have been granted to the Education Development Unit to help teaching staff to carry out web-site projects. These funds are used to employ technical staffs and students helpers for the preparation of materials for web-site teaching. Staffs are thus encouraged to embark on these projects without the feeling of being forced to adopt the innovation.

## **CONCLUSION**

What conclusion can then be drawn? Certainly the use of IT especially web-site teaching will become increasingly popular. The impact of introducing web-site teaching on traditional methods of providing teaching is great. It changes the way teaching is conducted. It changes the structure of the education system. It changes the views of people on learning. Its effects spread into practically all aspects of people's lives.

As educators, we must be prepared for these changes. We need to up-date our skill of web-site teaching and to design programme materials for web-site teaching. We need to research on the possible effects on teaching and learning because of the adoption of web-site teaching. Indeed there will be a renewed emphasis on teaching as against research. (Sarah Guri-Rosenblit 1999, p.286)

For institutions that target at the life-long learning market, there are lots of areas they should consider. How is the development of such a market? What are the products demanded by the consumers? How large is the market? How should the market be served?

As the competitors in this market are many, i.e. the universities, the vocational training institutions, overseas educational institutions, etc., competition will definitely be keen.

For certain, things are to change tremendously and rapidly. It is time now for us to make plans and provisions for the changes. A new era has come in which information technology will play the main role in education.

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