

Psychological Barriers in Accepting E-Learning in Professional Education

Basavaraj Katageri¹
and Deepak Kulkarni²

KLE Dr. M.S. Sheshgiri College of Engineering and Technology, India

¹basavaraj971@gmail.com

²dgkgoa@gmail.com

Abstract - Though e-learning has been in the forefront in all educational systems, yet the traditional class-room teaching and learning is prevalent. Learners bank on the information provided by learning portals or internet learning, but the knowledge received by this medium is yet to be recognized by the stake holders in particularly the Government and the industry. As skills and more so motor skills are necessary for some professional courses, not all the subjects have this component. There are various domains which require hands on training and experimentation and elearning cannot replace the traditional learning. This paper discusses the barriers in the adoption of a formal elearning process which needs recognition worldwide and how a balance can be brought about in the use of E-learning and traditional learning.

Keywords - Psychology, Learning, E-Learning, Barriers

I. INTRODUCTION

Psychological barriers are mind-associated issues that keep a learner from reaching a decision of learning through a particular source. The source may be either attending a tutorial, or a demonstration or a self study module. The ultimate goal of a learner is to understand content in the light of its applicability of reproducing it the examination. Therefore, understanding what these issues are will help to overcome intangible fears and frustrations in relationship with a particular mode of study.

II. BARRIERS FOR ADOPTING A SPECIFIC LEARNING MODE

Learners need to understand which mode of learning is suitable for them. All the modes of learning may not result in the same proportion of learning and understanding. There learners who best learn when they have no fear of examination while some learn best when they are pushed to give an examination. Some learners find it convincing to attend a lecture while some prefer to stay away from a college and learn in an isolated space either through books or internet. Such learners cannot make themselves comfortable in a group learning system like a college. Some of the major issues that were identified during informal interviews with learners of different ethnic and cultural groups were as follows:

A. Fear

A major psychological barrier is fear. Learners are afraid to start a new subject or topic because somebody has implanted an opinion about the difficulty level of the subject. The learner is influenced by the past examination results in that particular subject. The fear of failing is very dominant. Perhaps the learner would prefer to enjoy life right now procrastinating learning. Fears are personal -- learners are afraid of failure, rejection and possible conflicts.

B. Self-Esteem

A low level of self-esteem prevents a learner from making a comfort zone in a group learning environment. The low self esteem may be due to communication skills, cultural background, personality etc. Sometimes a

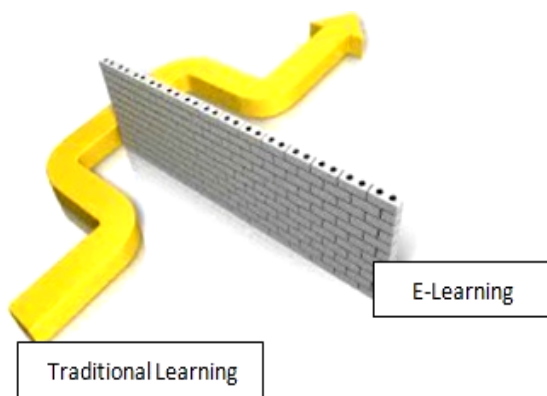
learner may feel that his abilities can't live up to the standards of others in a group. Such students may prefer to be slow learners and learn at a pace they feel comfortable and adopt e-learning as a major component of learning.

C. *Trusting the Source of Knowledge*

Trust is a major issue with learning. Deciding to learn from a teacher or through the internet may depend on how the trust factor is perceived. A lack of trust can be a psychological barrier that might prevent one from adopting e-learning as the e-learning portals may have the contents but not the details of the content writer. Developing successful relationships with the learner is required for reinforcing the trust factor.

D. *History*

The past history often creeps into perceptions about the future. You might want to learn from a particular teacher or in a particular institute and in a specific mode – conventional or e-learning and you remember that you did not get along well with this type of learning in the past. The recognition of a particular course by the stake holders or the acceptance of fact that the learner is at par with the conventional university learner can become a major barrier in e-learning process. These past negative experiences could keep the learner away from adopting e-learning because he is afraid that the scenarios from the past will happen again.



III. THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

A good learning environment is one that has a positive influence on learners of all ages. This can be realized by promoting equality and inclusion through methodologies aimed at encouraging positive relationships and behavior. A good learning ambience is achieved by selecting a proper location of study, method of study and time of study. Generally the perception of a study room or classroom is that it must be comfortable, quiet, well ventilated and free from distraction. Some learners are able to study or concentrate in a room with slow music in the background; others prefer a totally quiet environment while some prefer noisy places. A good learning environment must be free from activities and objects that may distract the learner's learning stimuli.

Creating and sustaining a healthy learning ambience within learning arena enhances learning. In a conventional classroom which is a dynamic and engaging place for learners fosters interaction and unconscious learning.

IV. OBSERVATIONAL LEARNING

Observational learning is learning by watching others and imitating their actions. This method of learning is very commonly seen in young children as they observe and learn from people around them. This indirect form of learning takes place in babies as young as a month old and continues throughout the children's life.

Children and adults are more likely to mimic actions of people they admire, respect, trust or see as nurturing. Observational learning is important in children's socialization. Children learn how to interact with others, how to speak, how to write, how to represent etc. by observing the actions of their peers.

In professional education like Engineering and Medicine, observational learning contributes to a major part of learning. Projects, operations, diagnosis are all embedded with observational learning. This

component is difficult to incorporate in an elearning system unless the elearning portal does not support videos, cases and an open forum for discussion and has another component where the learner can have an opportunity to meet up with other similar learners so that the element of classroom dynamism is not missed.

V. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Considering the various barriers in learning, we can relate some barriers to effective elearning. A interview with 30 students of MBA and 30 students of Engineering regarding elearning showed the following statistics:

The reasons that were quoted by the students were as follows:

1. Elearning information is sometimes contradicting in nature. Two portals explain it differently and hence there is ambiguity.

2. Discussion forums give many opinions creating confusion in the mind as to what is correct.

3. Reading from a book is very convenient as we can make comments and highlight important points.

4. Sometimes the elearning screens are too messy with drop down windows, task bars etc which distract the reading process.

5. Since a hand is involved with scrolling with the mouse, it becomes cumbersome. A book is preferred in that way.

**TABLE I
RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS**

	MBA students*	Engineering students*
Q1. Do you prefer to have PURELY elearning	Yes: NIL No: 30	Yes: NIL No: 30
Q2. Do you refer elearning portals to substantiate conventional learning	Yes: 12 No: 18	Yes: 8 No: 22
Q3. Do you refer Internet for information	Yes: 30 No: Nil	Yes: 29 No: 01
Q4. Do you refer Open Sources portals	Yes: 28 No: 02	Yes: 26 No: 04

*Demographic ratio: 15 girls and 15 boys

VI. CONCLUSION

A learner in a higher education segment will be around 18 years of age. He/She would have learnt in the conventional method by books, writing and listening to a teacher by attending group class. A sudden change in the method of learning may not suit the learner. The introduction of e-learning should be done gradually considering the learners age. Young learners today between the age group of 5 to 8 years can be molded to adopt total elearning. But, the question arises - Can we really do away with conventional learning? Reflective teaching and empathetic teaching foster learning. Limited access to quality technology, poor computer literacy, social isolation and the need for self-discipline are all barriers to elearning environments. As online courses are driven by computer technology and Internet access, a learner without these capabilities finds elearning a difficult option. While flexible scheduling and learn-when – you-want is a key benefit of elearning inability to self-schedule and regulate performance are disadvantages for some. Students, who are not self-motivated with self-discipline and not having a drive to learn, typically struggle more

in a virtual learning environment than in a traditional classroom. There are no teachers and peers in a position to offer regular reminders about assignments, projects and tests. Students must pace themselves and set aside ample time to complete class activities and out-of-class assignments.

Limited instructor interaction and isolation from a learning group are also disadvantages. Instructors of elearning portals typically attempt to communicate through email or the virtual learning tool which cannot substitute for the effectiveness of face-to-face communication. The interaction and feedback through virtual tools take longer time than a traditional face-to-face exchange. Social isolation can be challenging for students who thrive on daily interaction with peers and the informal comfort that comes with a traditional classroom setting. Hence, looking into the psychological barriers which hinder elearning, it is suggested to have a combination of traditional class with a component of elearning which has a provision for the learners to meet up with the local city instructor at specific times for interactions and clarifications.

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