



E-LEARNING: AN APPROACH

INTRODUCTION

In the last years, with the appearance of new information technologies, the code "e" has been used to talk about to all the activities related to computer science and electronic format.

Internet has revolutionized the distance education at all levels. It has appeared e-learning or virtual education, as a new way of learning, complementary to classroom teaching and as substitute of the present education.

E-learning has a lot of definitions, possibly because there isn't a single type of e-learning. A general definition shows the "learning" made by means of WEB technologies, or through an preinstalled software in a computer with multimedia capacity, either in an **asynchronous** way (separated student and source on time: auto-formation), or in a **synchronous** way (connected student and source in real time, a "*virtual class* ").

Traditionally distance education has been **asynchronous** (teacher and students learning in different places and in different times). The newness introduced with information and communication technologies (TIC) has brought the possibility of developing a **synchronous** formation, in which teachers and students listen, read and can be seen, independently if they are in different places.

E-learning is an auto- assisted learning system. The student will be able to assimilate knowledge, which "is dictated" by a program, by means of a computer. The student feels more comfortable and can repeat the lesson all the times he needed it.



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The level reached by the student is evaluated through exams or tests. But formation through Internet presents several levels of complexity:

- Correspondence courses that use e-mail. The student receives books and he can communicate with the tutor via electronic mail.
- Formation improved by the Web: teacher develops web pages with links, as complement to the classes. This is an open and accessible modality that uses resources available in Internet: discussion forums, chats, forms, etc.
- e-learning Platforms: virtual learning environments, where students find necessary things to learn.

The principal characteristics of Formation through Internet are:

- Interactive
- Multimedia
- Open-system
- Intercultural Communication
- Multiplicity of Experts
- Control of the student of its learning
- Collaborative learning
- Online Evaluation



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E-learning allows to form different formative scenes , if they are combined, it can provide a more significant learning:

Type of learning	Tradicional Formation	E-Learning
Synchronic	Typical class in which it takes part a teacher and several students	All the class is connected to Internet in a Chat. The participants present ideas to the class using audio or text or videoconference.
Synchronic/ Asynchronous	Groups of students meet outside the class timetable to make some task	Groups of students meet in a Chat to make a propose task
	The teacher meets with students during tutorship hours	The teacher uses the tutorship hours to advise, in a chat, to students
Asynchronous	The students complete individually assigned tasks, making report for the teacher	The students download the tasks and resources of information from the Web site. The teacher provides to the student tutorship hours by e-mail
	The library is used as formation resource	The students have access to the excellent information of Internet through proposed connections.

VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

- Education and distance formation systems are not an education alternative more. They are an educative model of pedagogical innovation in the present century.
- The "face to face" education with students in specially designed spaces, "the classrooms", constitute their basic pieces. In the distance education modality, "the virtual classroom" is constituted in the new learning environment, and it's becoming a powerful device of communication and distribution of knowledge, which offers a "space" to take care of, guide and evaluate the participants.



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- The virtual classroom , available in Internet the 24 hours of the day, offers all services and necessary functionalities to distance learning and gives meet the educational necessity of teacher and students of a direct communication and immediate or deferred customized attention.

ADVANTAGES

The advantages to have an e-learning platform:

- Formation costs reduction.
- No physical space and displacements required.
- More possibilities for the people who are far from Formation Centres.
- Access to courses with flexible timetable.
- Learning and cooperative work environment.
- Information is distributed to all participants quickly.
- Students are prepared to compete in the market more agile, quickly and efficiently.
- This formation is complemented with the actual formation

DISADVANTAGES

- The design and development of a course by e-learning require more labour than actual courses.
- Teachers are required more effort, because they are going to receive different doubts from different students.
- It´s required a good instructional design.
- Human contact between students and professors missing.
- E-learning changes the habitual form to work in a course. This system requires self-discipline, regulation of the time, etc from the students.
- Abandon, as in other modalities of distance education, can reach a high level.



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EVALUATION

It is important to remember that evaluation is considered the method of verification of assimilation of the contents, and it allow us "to guarantee the learning". However, many educators say that the evaluation demands a synchronous activity between educators and students; but in the distance education this perception cannot be applied. For example, in the case of web pages, the situation presents some interesting dimensions: The Online evaluation can be made using active programming tools in Web, but we must remember that the permanence in front a monitor produces a decreasing level in attention and concentration, and at the moment of an evaluation the cybernauta student may escape of the evaluation disconnecting the device.

Thus, Educators must coordinate evaluations "Offline", where they can use a variety of evaluation instruments. The development of learning instruments can be made on line as much as out of line.

A valid alternative is to give the evaluation via Web, for its later downloading, and to give to the student the possibility of presenting its results through the same via.

FORMATION MODEL

Principals characteristics must have the proposed model of formation:

- E-learning must offer to the students varied options of **INTERACTIVITY**: interaction with other students, teachers, so with contents and activities of the course.
- E-learning must contribute to **COLLABORATION** between students, fomenting task groups, in which the students must use different synchronous and asynchronous tools to communicating.
- E-learning must incorporate special elements facilitating **SIGNIFICANT LEARNING**, using conceptual maps and case-studies.
- E-learning must promote the **ACTIVE LEARNING** by means of the development of individual and group tasks that the students to practical accomplishments lead.



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- E-learning must promote a **FORMATIVE EVALUATION** of the students through different media.
- E-learning must promote a **SYNCHRONOUS** and **ASYNCHRONOUS COMMUNICATION** between teacher and students, so the students could find availability and faster answers to their doubts.

STRUCTURE OF E-LEARNING PROGRAM

The students will be able to have the components that are described next :

- **SCHEDULE:** The schedule informs of new features in the course, new subjects incorporation, appointments for Chats, and information about activities' delivery.
- **COMMUNICATIONS AREA:**
 - E-mail: students can communicate with teachers, tutors and other students.
 - Chat: students and teachers can contact in real time.
 - Forum: let students ask and answer about interesting questions.
- **FORMATION AREA:** Students find the different blocks that the program consists of. In each block the student will have access to the content of it, and later he will have to accede to the Activities' Mailbox, in which he will find the activities to develop. Students will be evaluated at the end of each block, and the overcoming of the evaluation is essential to accede and study the following blocks.
- **RESOURCES AREA:** For the course development, the student can use a wide variety of resources: :
 - Examples of on-line courses
 - Frequent questions
 - Interesting links and web pages, ...