onTrain

Online Training, the treasure within

A. Online Training
1. Introduction to E-Learning

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Content

Let's start

Digital media is all around us and is also used evermore in education. Information which complements classes or lectures is often uploaded as pdfs or linked to, so participants can "read up something online". However, E-learning is not very common in adult education and is often met with scepticism.

## What am I learning here and why?

In this chapter you'll learn what E-Learning is. We want to give the trainer an initial overview of the topic of E-Learning. Basically, it is about the definition of the term. In the end, the trainer knows what E-Learning is and which components it consists of.

What content will I find here?

Learners are able to describe several opportunities to learn online and know about the basic terminology in online environments. They learn the difference between e-learning and blended learning, and also, know the difference between synchronous and asynchronous communication in online environments. Also, you will know, which advantages and disadvantages both learning forms have.

What is E-Learning?

The most people think E-Learning is short for "electronic learning" meaning learning utilizing electronic technologies. But the "E" in E-Learning means much more than "electronic" when applied to e-learning — think instead of a big "E" for "exciting, empirical, empathetic, extra, emerging, energetic, exceptional, early, eloquent, everywhere, ephemeral, extended, effortless, epic, evangelistic, eclectic, engaging, extended" learning — and more. The point is that e-learning may be individual, tutorial, a significant part of a mentoring process, and a tool for personal communication that is not well understood[1]. Knowledge and information are presented and conveyed with the help of digital media, in collaboration with learning groups on the internet. Sometimes E-learning is dubbed online learning, multimedia learning or computer-based learning.
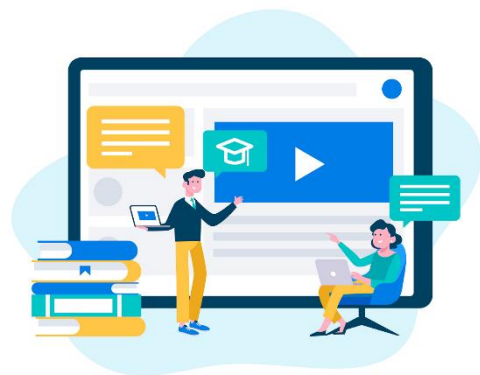
The **application** of E-learning can be entirely different:

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[1] Cf. Luskin, Bernard (2010): Think "Exciting": E-Learning and the Big "E". online: https://er.educause.edu/articles/2010/3/think-exciting-elearning-and-the-big-e   access: 2019-10-21

- There are courses with weekly in-class meetings where the teacher points to digital learning materials. Students ought to read up on the topic and/or prepare for the next meeting. In this case, we speak of **an in-class course with assisted E-learning**.

- The training you take part in, is a **blended-learning format.** There are a few in-class meetings, but, primarily, the courses take place online where all the resources and contents are. Here the fully prepared contents can be accessed and studied. The aim of the in-class meetings is getting to know each other and exchange. As you can see, blended-learning is a mixture of E-learning and in-class education.

- E-learning-only online classes, in other words, without personal interaction and accompanying meetings are not common in adult education. They are a concept mostly up-and-coming at universities. In the next chapters, you will learn why this method is getting more popular by the day and of its advantages.

E-Learning components

E-learning courses are varied. They differ in size, selection and in the number of E-learning components, as well as in the groups they target, or the way they look (depending on authoring tools). Still, there are some constant components:

- **Interactivity:** E-learning's biggest advantage over books and movies is interactivity. Interactive exercises, like the ones you are completing in this course, demand participants to be active, discuss with the others and take part in general.

- **Adaptivity:** There are E-learning programs that are able to adjust to the needs and characteristics of each participant, e.g. depending on prior knowledge and interests, certain contents are adjusted, clues given or the order is simply changed.

- **Exercises and tests:** Exercises and tests can liven up the learning experience, be fun or help revising learned materials. They are very different kinds of exercices: anything from selection exercises, placement tasks and input questions. Evaluation and Feedback are immediate.

- **Mobile Learning:** Learning today is becoming more and more an on the go thing, thanks to the Smartphone. Pay attention, that the platform you publish your contents on is compatible with mobile devices.

- **Communication:** There are quite a few ways, on learning platforms and in the internet in general, that provide places for communication between participants and tutors. Chats offer synchronized (= simultaneous), Fora and e-mail allow asynchronous (=delayed) communication. Further means of communication are Skype, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.
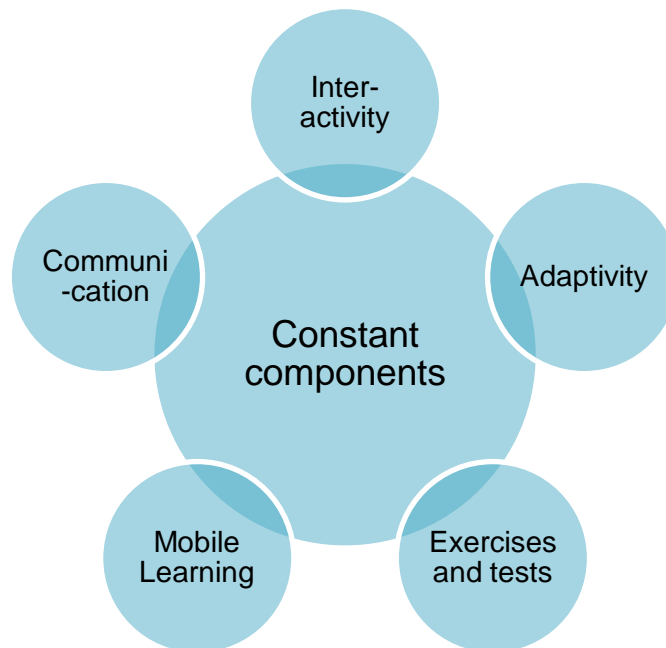
The components above are mainly about the different ways you can design your course. There are, however, further elements that shape the outcome of the course:
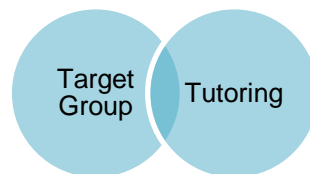
- **Target group:** What is your target group? People taking part free willingly or is their aim to achieve a certificate? Do they have prior knowledge? Are they fit in using the internet or are there any beginners? Usually, senior citizens are constant learners, because they strive for knowledge in fields of their interest. At the same time, they may require more support and repetition than younger participants. Grading the levels of knowledge is unnecessary. Some people favor exchange with other learners, and some like to keep to themselves when studying. As you can see, motivation looks different for everyone and so does the level of prior knowledge. The more participants know, the better they can adapt and generate their own contents accordingly. That's why it's best to know, for whom you are creating content.

- **Tutoring:** Another thing that ought to be considered is tutoring. Some E-learning courses come without any supervision. If you decide to tutor the participants, you should think about the following questions: Who is going to supervise the course? How often will be replied to questions and concerns? Who checks the exercises? How are they going to be supervised (fora, e-mail, Facebook, chat etc.)?

As you can see: E-learning does not equal E-learning. Many factors influence how the course will turn out! You, the author, make the pivotal decisions!

To illustrate this point, we want you to check out these very different E-learning courses:

Examples:

- There is a huge variety of online course on this website: https://www.edukatico.org/en/courses.

- Filter the courses by language "English" and cost "free course".

- *Add further examples, depending on your country!.*

MOOCs (Massive Open Online Course) too, offer modern video courses and are an interesting learning and teaching platform Videokurse.

- Online courses that are free of charge and in English (you need to register): https://iversity.org/en.

Nowadays many health care providers offer free E-learning courses on topics such as health, movement and diet. Have a look at the following offers!

Info: free vs. courses with costs

Many E-learning courses are free of charge, although they are often far more elaborate and expensive to create than in-class events. There are a few reasons for this:

- Often, E-learning projects are funded with public funds. The OnTrain project, too, profits from funds given by the European Commission. In return, courses are obliged to fulfill certain criteria. For example, courses have to be free of charge or the fees are to be used for course related things such as tutoring.

- A few providers have a huge variety of courses with costs and want to gain participants by offering some for free.

- Free courses can't always match up with courses with commercial courses. Many offers, thereunder Youtube videos are produced on a low budget and are not fully thought out. That's why you ought to watch out. Don't waste your time on poor learning materials.

- Tutoring, feedback to input exercises and certificates are something free E-learning courses lack in.

As you can see, although there are many free alternatives, it makes sense to require fees.

Synchronous vs. asynchronous learning

Synchronous learning is any type of learning that takes place in real-time, where a group of people are engaging in learning at the same time. Although learning occurs at the same time, learners don't have to be there in person. Or even in the same location! Some examples of synchronous learning include: Live webinars, Instant messaging, Virtual Classroom.

PROS	CONS
Because of the social nature of **synchronous learning**, learners can easily interact with instructors and other learners, making group activities possible. **Synchronous learning** takes place in real time, which means they can get immediate feedback. Ideas and opinions can also be promptly shared with fellow learners. Similarly, if your learners are having trouble with any of the course content, **synchronous learning** allows them to ask questions and get instantaneous answers.	**Synchronous learners** have to be online at a certain time, and therefore their learning has to adhere to a specific training schedule. Learners can't access content where and when they like. Due to the group dynamic of real-time **synchronous learning**, some learners may feel they are not receiving the individual attention they need. The effectiveness of how well your learners understand the course content depends more on the quality of the instructor than the learners themselves.

Asynchronous learning is more learner-centered, enabling learners to complete courses without the constraints of having to be in a certain place at a certain time. In essence, asynchronous learning doesn't hinder learners by place or time. As long as they have access to the internet, asynchronous learners have the freedom to complete course materials whenever they choose, and from any location.

Some examples of asynchronous learning include: Email, Blogs, Pre-recorded video lessons or webinars, Online discussion boards.

PROS	CONS
Asynchronous learning offers lots of flexibility. Although there's usually a deadline in sight, asynchronous learners can go at their own pace and access their course at any time they choose and from any place. It's a cost-effective way to train learners that are based in varying locations.	Although learners may have access to trainer, contact through **asynchronous learning** may be limited. Answers to queries cannot be given in real time (e.g. learners may need to wait for an answer to an email).
Asynchronous learning means your learners can engage in courses regardless of their time-zone or location.	The lack of interaction with trainer and fellow learners that accompanies **asynchronous learners** leaves some feeling isolated. This could lead to a lack of motivation and engagement in courses. Combat learner isolation by focusing on creating great course content.
With **asynchronous learning**, learners have significantly more time to reflect on the content material they are learning, which means they are likely to understand it more thoroughly.	

Asynchronous learning is learner-centered, so those taking courses in this way need self-discipline and focus to be successful in completing the required course work. Using tools like gamification helps to keep your learners engaged[2].

Examples

So-called learning platforms are used to support teaching and learning processes in e-learning and also to manage learning materials and user data. On the one hand, these can be distinguished according to the functionalities they fulfil (CMS vs. LMS): content is organised and managed in content management systems (CMS). In the meantime, these have developed into complex editorial systems in which cooperative web-based workflows and processes can be mapped. On the contrary, Learning Management Systems (LMS) are designed to support teaching and learning processes with digital media.

On the other hand, these software systems can be distinguished by whether they come from commercial providers or are considered an OpenSource solution[3]. The best known

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[2] Lawless, C. (2018): Synchronous vs Asynchronous Learning: Which is Right for your Learners? online: https://www.learnupon.com/blog/synchronous-learning-asynchronous-learning/ access: 2020-03-13

[3] Arnold, P.; Kilian, L.; Thillosen, A.; Zimmer, G. (2018): Handbuch E-Learning: Lehren und Lernen mit digitalen Medien. 5. Auflage; W. Bertelsmann Verlag: Bielefeld; p.87. (chapter 3: virtual educational space)

OpenSource solutions for Learning Management Systems (LMS) are for example moodle and ILIAS. Via these it is possible to upload content, manage content and participants, but also to compile content to complete online courses, i.e. to create an online learning offer.

See for more information: Moodle: https://moodle.org/?lang=en ; ILIAS: https://www.ilias.de/en/

Exercises

At the beginning of an online course it is often the case that silence prevails for the time being. This is perfectly normal, as many of the participants are likely to be attending or have attended an online course for the first time or only a few times. To break the silence, so-called "icebreaker" methods are recommended at this point. This is to ensure that the participants exchange information with each other and that a kind of "social presence" is established in the virtual space. In the following two different possibilities are introduced.

Exercise 1: Advise cities

In order to warm up and get to know each other, you have always organised a kind of small competition in the virtual classroom. You threw a picture (e.g. of a city) with the projector against the wall, which was almost completely covered. The learner's task now was to see as little detail as possible as to which city is shown on the picture. As a trainer, you have gradually uncovered the picture further, as long as no ideas have been brought to you by the learners through requests to speak or calls. This is no longer possible in online training. Therefore, this method cannot be transferred 1:1 from classroom teaching to online training. Think about how you can still perform this exercise in an online learning environment, even if it is done with other media.

1. How would you approach this?
2. What considerations need to be made?
3. What needs to be considered?
4. Do I have a synchronous or an asynchronous virtual learning environment?
5. How does the communication between me and the learners and between us and the learners take place?

Guiding Questions for this Lesson: How does concept x relate to concepts y and z? What do we already know about concept x with relation to pre-existing cognitive structures?

Exercise 2: Expectation query/ Feedback query

It is part of every good learning unit to ask the expectations of the training before the training starts. Also, an essential part is the feedback at the end of the training. In classroom teaching, this can easily be handed over to the participants using moderation cards and a pen as a task. In the online learning environment, this is no longer possible.

However, instead of moderation cards in online learning arrangements, there are different software packages that allow similar activities. For example, there is the "**padlet**": this is software that represents a virtual pinboard and on which various "virtual moderation cards" can be posted or attached. This could be easily embedded in a forum, for example, by giving learners the additional task of panting their expectations on this virtual pinboard at the beginning or during the course of the training. At the end a feedback round is requested.

Try it! The software is web-based and free of charge. Only a registration is required. (https://de.padlet.com/).

This chapter provides a first overview of online learning in general. For more detailed information on specific topics in online learning environments, please also see all subsequent units such as chapter 2 (New role of the online trainer), chapter 3 (New role of the online learner), chapter 4 (Course management) and chapter 5 (Course material). Of course, all other topics here in this manual are also important for a prospective online trainer and are intended to expand the trainer's knowledge and skills in online learning environments.

Summary

In this chapter, the trainer learnt all about opportunities and boundaries of E-Learning in adult education. They now know the characteristics as well as the advantages and disadvantages of E-learning. In the same way, prospective online trainers are now aware of the differences between online courses and classroom courses and can thus weigh up which form of implementation is best suited to their learning content. They know also all important things about "what is a blended-learning-scenario".

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Further

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