

# Education

Will the internet transform the way we learn?



## **Education: Will the internet transform the way we learn?**

*With the global e-learning market expected to reach revenues of USD107 billion by 2015, education over the internet has become easily accessible. Demand for e-learning is growing rapidly, as a function of changes in the skills mix is needed for cutting edge industries<sup>1</sup>. Is the internet bound to change the way we learn?*

### **What is e-learning?**

Electronic learning or e-learning refers to computer-enhanced learning. The concept of e-learning evolved from the idea of computer-assisted instruction. A prominent example of computer-assisted instruction is the PLATO system – developed at the Urbana Campus at The University of Illinois since 1960. This system was further enhanced, leading to the emergence of content-based learning through software<sup>2</sup>.

The popularity of online education continues to soar due to population growth, the availability of e-learning platforms as well as increased global internet penetration. The number of internet users increased tenfold from 1999 to 2013. In the Asian region alone – home to close to 55 per cent of the world's population – internet penetration is 49 per cent<sup>3</sup>.

### **E-learning platforms to explore**

Once characterized by a traditional classroom model, education has evolved into learning that is online, instant, self-driven and on the go. To meet the demands of evolving learners, several e-learning platforms have emerged:

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<sup>1</sup> 5 Top Trends in Education Technology 2015: Why the industry is primed for big things this year, Inc., Aaron Skonnard, 3 February 2015

<sup>2</sup> eLearning, Innovative Learning, Richard Culatta, retrieved on 22 July 2015

<sup>3</sup> Internet users in the world, Internet Live Stats, retrieved on 22 July 2015

## Moodle

Among all the online education platforms, Moodle is one of the oldest and largest open source e-learning platforms. In other words, it is a free-to-download software. It has been called Moodle (short for modular) since 2003<sup>4</sup>.

The key success factor for Moodle lies in its adaptability – educators can use the open source software for discussion forums, instant messages, online news, announcements, file downloads, online calendars, online quizzes and Wiki<sup>5</sup>.

## M-learning

*Studies have shown that global expenditure on education will reach USD8 trillion by 2020 – out of which mobile education will be worth approximately USD70 billion.*

M-learning or mobile learning is a subset of e-learning. It provides technology-enabled learning solutions accessible to users from any platform. Tools that provide access to educational content via a mobile connection include Laptops, tablets and mobile phones<sup>6</sup>.

Studies have shown that global expenditure on education will reach USD8 trillion by 2020 – out of which mobile education will be worth approximately USD70 billion<sup>7</sup>.

## Blackboard Learn

Blackboard Learn is a web-based server program for virtual learning experiences, operating since 1997. It enables the communication and exchange of content between students and teachers through

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<sup>4</sup> Best Online Learning Platform, People's Choice Awards, Study, retrieved on 25 May 2015

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> E-learning Insights: What is m-learning, Aurion Learning, Noleen Turner, retrieved on 22 July 2015

<sup>7</sup> Transforming learning through mEducation, McKinsey & Company, Vivek Pandit, Jean-Christophe Lebraud, Ramdoss Seetharaman, April 2012

announcements, chats, discussions and e-mail exchanges. Teachers can further use this to work on assignments, learning modules and tests. The program has upgraded itself to many levels, which is why institutions now use it for full online and virtual campus education instead of augmented traditional classrooms<sup>8</sup>.

For instance, Boston University – a private research university based in the U.S. – uses the Blackboard e-learning tool to impart education to their students through customized training modules<sup>9</sup>.

### **Key emerging markets**

The e-learning market continues to outreach across the globe. The five-year Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of global e-learning market stood at 7.6 per cent in 2014. This growth differs according to region – Asia recorded the highest growth rate of 17.3 per cent, followed by Eastern Europe (16.9 per cent), Africa (15.2 per cent), and Latin America (14.6 per cent)<sup>10</sup>. The key regions where growth potential is evident include:

#### **India**

India has the second largest population in the world with 1.28 billion people in 2015<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, the number of internet users in India is expected to reach 213 million by June 2015 from 173 million in December 2014<sup>12</sup>. This demand highlights the nation's potential to emerge as a huge market for e-learning. India's online education market is bound to reach USD40 billion by 2017<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Wherever your learning takes place, Blackboard provides the tools that elevate education for all, Blackboard Inc., retrieved on 22 July

<sup>9</sup> Blackboard Learn, Information Services & Technology, Boston University, retrieved on 22 July 2015

<sup>10</sup> Why e-learning has a promising future in India, The Indian Express (P) Ltd., Shivaji Chatterjee, 15 December 2014

<sup>11</sup> Population of India 2015, India Online Pages, retrieved on 22 July 2015

<sup>12</sup> India will have 40m new mobile internet users in 6 months, Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd., 14 January 2015

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

Distance learning through online media is also picking up in India. Studies have shown that India has the one of the fastest rates of adoption for distance learning. This is partially due to a law that ensures that a public sector or government employee with an online degree benefits from a hike in compensation and pension<sup>14</sup>.

However, challenges continue to hamper the full potential of India's e-learning industry. Excessive inclination towards conventional classroom-based education, low broadband speed as well as limited availability of recognized online courses continue to restrict growth<sup>15</sup>.

## **China**

China has the largest population in the world at more than 1.3 billion in 2014. Its internet penetration rate stood at 45.8 per cent by the end of 2013. The e-learning user base in China is massive, with 632 million internet users by June 2014<sup>16</sup>.

***The revenues of China's digital English language learning market are expected to soar at 23.6 per cent a year to reach USD931.8 million by 2018 from USD323.1 million in 2013.***

With over 9 million high school students competing for 6.5 million available college places<sup>17</sup>, China's e-learning market is driven by factors like demand for English

language proficiency, online test preparation products as well as e-learning in early childhood. The revenues of China's digital English language learning market are expected to soar at 23.6 per cent a year to reach USD931.8 million by 2018 from USD323.1 million in 2013<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> The Soaring growth in the global e-learning market, Apollo Lightspeed, LLC., Judy Quinn, 22 September 2014

<sup>15</sup> E-learning : Moving towards a self-servicing society, Ernst &Young Global Limited, Satish Kaushal, retrieved on 22 July 2015

<sup>16</sup> The 2013-2018 China Self-paced eLearning Market, Ambient Insight, Sam S. Adkins, October 2014

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

However, concerns surrounding low standards and questionable credibility of e-learning continue to hinder its growth in China<sup>19</sup>.

## **Africa**

Widely seen as the most dynamic e-learning market in the world, steady growth in Africa is supported by government initiatives, technology companies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)<sup>20</sup>. According to one study, the overall growth rate for e-learning in Africa is 15.2 per cent<sup>21</sup>. Africa had a 10.3 per cent share of worldwide internet users in 2014<sup>22</sup>.

New technological marvels such as eBooks, tablets and cloud computing technology are facilitating rapid development in this market<sup>23</sup>.

However, challenges such as high electricity costs and broadened variety of languages hinder growth. Nonetheless, technology companies and governments are working to deploy solar and wind power stations to lower the electricity costs associated e-learning devices<sup>24</sup>.

## **Stepping into digital culture**

Effective education techniques are always evolving. What is driving the rapid growth in the e-learning sphere?

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<sup>19</sup> Quality concerns slow e-learning growth in China, edweek.org, Katie Ash, 30 January 2012

<sup>20</sup> The Africa Market for Self-paced eLearning Products and Services: 2011-2016 Forecast and Analysis, Ambient Insight, Sam S. Adkins, January 2013

<sup>21</sup> Africa is most dynamic e-learning market on the planet, University World News, Wagdy Sawahel, 25 January 2013

<sup>22</sup> Internet users in the world – Distribution by World Regions – 2014 Q4, Miniwatts Marketing Group, 31 December 2014

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> An Analysis of e-learning – Impacts & Best Practices in Developing Countries, Michigan State University, Jennifer Olson, Joseph Codd, Kurt deMaagd, Eric Tarkleson, Julie Sinclair, Suengyun Yook, Rhonda Egidio, October 2011

## **Corporate learning**

Organizations now realize the value of online learning to enhance their employees' knowledge in ways that are flexible, cost-effective and tailored to each individual's skill-sets. A large number of open online courses are finding their way into the office. Millions of users are flocking to these free or low-cost web courses.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, employees or potential candidates are learning the relevant skills an organization needs at their own pace, thus reducing the time and cost for future training. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have been preferred by elite universities, but have recently surged in popularity among large corporations and organizations<sup>26</sup>. For instance, McAfee revamped their new-hire orientation procedure using MOOC's, reducing training duration significantly<sup>27</sup>.

## **Flexibility in learning**

Learning through text-based or even video-based tutorials is now a thing of the past. New learning styles are emerging, offering online learners more interesting and interactive learning experiences. Gamification is one of the emerging trends in 2015. It is the concept of applying game mechanics and game design techniques to engage and motivate people to achieve their goals<sup>28</sup>.

Flipped learning is also taking flexible learning to new heights. This is a form of blended learning where students watch video lectures to learn content online and then do homework with the guidance of teachers in person. This creates an interesting learning environment for both teachers and students.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Corporate Training Gets an Online Refresh, The Wall Street Journal, Melissa Korn, 1 October 2014

<sup>26</sup> 5 top trends in Education Technology 2015, Mansueto Ventures LLC., Aaron Skonnard, 3 February 2015

<sup>27</sup> How MOOCs Will Revolutionize Corporate Learning And Development, forbes.com, Jeanne Meister, 14 August 2014

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> 5 Education Tech Trends for 2015, Information week, Harman Singh, 29 December 2014

## **Online learning flourishes in educational institutions**

E-learning has crossed all the boundaries of school and college education to change the entire learning spectrum, including internet-based coaching for examinations. The high potential of this space has attracted many private players like Core projects, Educomp Solutions, Everonn Education and NIIT, who now have an established presence in this category<sup>30</sup>.

E-learning in schools and universities has witnessed rapid adoption across many countries. For instance, ChinaEdu in China has over 311,000 online students in both degree and non-degree programs (as of September 2014). Furthermore, ChinaEdu reported 211,000 students enrolled in their online degree programs, a 14.5 per cent increase over the year before in 2013<sup>31</sup>.

## **Skill training and measurement<sup>32</sup>**

E-learning providers are now focusing on a specific skill set or knowledge area. In future, this category will prove to be game-changing within the education industry. AT&T – a U.S.-based telecommunications enterprise – is a prominent example of an institution rolling out skill specific education to train its employees – with skill measurement systems to gauge ROI.

## **Moving forward**

The online education industry is poised to reach great heights. Ultimately no classroom, lecture theatre or excursion bus will be untouched. Factors such as availability of tried-and-tested e-learning platforms, growth in population as well as increasing internet connectivity are steering the industry forward. The growing number of e-learning platforms is encouraging students in both urban and rural areas to attain education using the internet.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Huge growth in eLearning in Asia, market report says, University World News, 26 September 2014

<sup>32</sup> Three trends that will influence learning and teaching in 2015, Online Learning Insights, 29 December 2014



India, China and Africa are booming online education markets. However, challenges continue to hold back full-fledged growth in these countries.

One of the key factors that will be needed if e-learning is to dominate the education sector is the emergence of great e-learning brands – brands that have widespread awareness, a tremendous track record and empirical proofs of pedagogic effectiveness.

E-learning providers – both educational institutions and ICT vendors – need to cultivate strong e-learning brands and the research to show that their approach works. Traditional education has great brands – think Eton, Harvard, Oxford, the Sorbonne and Tokyo University, to name a few. The world is ready for the rise of great e-learning brands.