Chapter VII
E–Learning Value and Student Experiences: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT
This chapter focuses on understanding how the value of student learning and the student learning experience could be improved given pertinent environmental and academic constraints of an e-learning case. Believing that a better understanding of student behaviour might help course design, the chapter revisits the outcomes of two studies of e-learning and analyses them further using a framework which conceptualises the value of e-learning from a stakeholder perspective. The main objective of the chapter is to identify some of the important issues and trends related to the perceived e-learning value. The analysis of the emerging and future trends indicates that in the future blending of e-learning and face-to-face learning is likely to occur not only along the pedagogical, but also along the technological and the organizational dimensions of e-learning. Therefore, new blended learning and teaching models should emphasise further the alignment of learning with work/life balance.
INTRODUCTION

E-learning is used as a comprehensive term to identify the use of a variety of information and communication technologies to enhance and support learning, often blending their use. Online learning can be defined as an implementation of e-learning using Web-based technologies (Petrova, 2007). Online learning and e-learning are used as synonyms throughout the text.

Across universities worldwide, participants’ engagement and achievement and the support provided by educational technology have become the subject of intensive research, development, and discussion (Blinco, Mason, McLean, & Wilson, 2004; Buzzetto-Moore & Pinhey, 2006; Kickul & Kickul, 2006; Lee & Nguyen, 2005; Sharpe & Benfield, 2005). The work presented here has a specific focus on understanding how the quality of student learning and the student learning experience could be improved whilst working within environmental and academic constraints, believing that a better understanding of student behaviour might help course design.

The main objective of the chapter is to identify some of the important issues and trends related to the perceived value of e-learning. To this end, the outcomes of two studies of e-learning are revisited and analysed further using a framework, which conceptualises the value of e-learning. Current and emerging trends about the drivers of student satisfaction are discussed and recommendations are presented.

BACKGROUND

E-learning was first introduced into the undergraduate business programme at the New Zealand university used in this case study as early as 1999. However, since these early adoption days e-learning has become widespread across the whole university and its importance is now recognised as a strategic approach to providing a learning environment that promotes and supports student success.

The programme used in this case study is a typical three-year undergraduate programme. A cornerstone of its philosophy is to encourage independent student led learning. Entrants to the programme come from a range of backgrounds. Due to ethnic diversity, some students might have English as an alternative language and even full time students work long hours. E-learning was introduced in an attempt to alleviate some of these problems. However there is evidence to suggest that the continuing effort involved in developing and delivering e-learning courses may lead to a significant demand on academics’ time and institutional resources, as the amount of individual attention needed may “rival a one-to-one course” (Tastle, White, & Shackleton, 2005, p. 249).

Since 1999, e-learning within the case study programme case has gradually developed into two distinct teaching and learning models of Web-based online learning, known as “flexible mode” and “enhanced mode.” Both models belong to the category of “hybrid” or “blended” learning (Mortera-Gutierrez, 2006; Petrova, 2001) as their delivery format combines face-to-face and online teaching and learning.

In enhanced mode, e-learning is used to complement (in-class) and enhance (off-campus) the 3 hours per week classroom teaching by using the institutional e-learning platform (BlackBoard™). E-learning activities include exercises and demonstrations; off-campus they are mostly used as a vehicle for questions and answers about the course and assessment. As a rule, in enhanced mode online activities are not formally assessed.

In flexible mode, a portion of the face-to-face teaching is replaced by the equivalent time in online activities, performed off-campus, in the students’ own time. Students are given detailed instructions about the e-learning activities they are expected to engage in, and about the expected outcomes. The “flexible” online activities may