

ADOPTING E-LEARNING FOR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA: PERADENIYA PERSPECTIVE

S.H.I.P. Ratnapala

*Computing Centre, Faculty of Engineering, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
iroshinir@pdn.ac.lk*

The concept of e-learning, which utilises electronic, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for teaching has already been taken in to consideration for implementation in tertiary education in Sri Lanka. The effective and efficient use of it will add a significant value to an educational institution by enhancing the teaching quality and efficiency. University of Peradeniya has recently accommodated e-learning through faculty Learning Management System (LMS) for the students. This research reported herein was conducted during October 2013 to December 2013 in all 8 faculties of the University to assess the perspective of academics on adopting e-learning for university education. As per the qualitative research techniques data were collected using observations, field visits, document reviews (phase A) and a survey (phase B). Phase A focused on analysing the infrastructure facilities, present utilisation of LMS and staff commitment at the faculty level. In the phase B an online questionnaire was designed and made available for the academic staff in the university.

In total 65 academics from all the faculties contributed their ideas anonymously. The questions were planned to obtain the academic's perception on 'adopting e-learning in a blended environment (incorporate with present learning techniques)' under 3 categories; 'Personnel Awareness', 'Organisational Inspiration' and 'Motivation and Contribution'. It was observed, that all the faculties accommodate reasonable computer and Internet facilities for the staff and the students and an Internet based e-learning system. But only 3 faculties could be reported to have significant proportion of students and staff actively using the e-learning system. Out of the 65 members who participated in the survey only 63 (97%) who were aware about e-learning were considered for the evaluations presented herein. Awareness of e-learning was remarkable since 74% could define the concept and the 90% answers are close to the Oxford definition. The faculties have provided personal network connected computers to 33% while 25% use personal laptops. 80% indicated that e-learning was adopted by their faculties and 60% from them reported experienced deficiencies in the faculty LMS. 43% are not provided sufficient training; 27% noticed insufficient student usage; 13% faced site access problems while 3% stated the resources are inadequate. Insufficient time, no interest and system complexity are some reasons listed by other 13%. All the answers given under "suggestions for improvement" supported the need to "*provide consecutive training with a helpdesk and more resources for both teachers and students*". While 94% agreed that blended learning enhances the university educational quality, only 89% believe that it should be compulsory. After analysing the data it could be concluded that the e-learning adoption has not been well established in the University of Peradeniya. To achieve the highest success rate in adoption of e-learning for university education it should be included in the course curriculum after resolving exiting deficiencies in the e-learning systems and provide extensive training to the faculty staff and students.