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### E-learning – the challenges ahead

Revolutionising the process of education – that was the big promise it started with. Has e-learning achieved that today? A reality check with experts in the field.

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Classrooms without teachers, no textbooks, and learning that could happen anytime, anywhere – this was the promise e-learning started with. But how much of that has been achieved? *Education Plus* spoke to experts in the field to understand the current scenario of e-learning in India and what the challenges are in adopting it.

A catch-all phrase that included any form of technology-assisted learning, e-learning was poised to revolutionise the process of education. "After the big bang, people expected the big bang to continue," says Vipul Rastogi, president, Enterprise Solutions (India), NIIT, which offers e-learning solutions, talking about after the initial buzz on e-learning how the journey was expected to be. In place of the big bang, there is a "silent revolution taking place," he says.

The sectors which are entering the field of e-learning serve as a testimony to the growth of e-learning. Telecom, banking, finance, and government are rapidly moving towards e-learning, he says, adding that the primary driver is not just to decrease cost but also to increase reach. Universities are also looking at e-learning modules to supplement their regular curriculum courses.

In this context, it becomes necessary to understand how effective e-learning courses are. Three to



**WIDENING REACH:** For e-learning to be effective, ensuring that the learning process is right is important. PHOTO: K. RAMESH BABU

five years ago, e-learning was 'good to have', rather than 'must have' in universities and corporate houses, says Rajesh R. Jumani, chief marketing officer, Tata Interactive Systems, which offers e-learning solutions. The focus was on the "look and feel" rather than the learning. "You had fancy things moving about, planes zooming," rather than making sure the learning process was right, which is now changing, he says.

More simulation-based training based on games are being incorporated in e-learning. And a high level of acumen is required to develop such e-learning modules. For instance, a course in finance could be taught by a game where you are the Finance Minister. The decisions you take would impact the economy of a country – a game you would play to understand financial concepts, he says.

"The most difficult question to answer is how effective is a training programme," says Mr. Jumani. Instead of surveys or feedback forms on how good the course was, there

have to be measurable feedback, he adds. For instance, in a corporate house, the feedback could be in terms of whether there was an increase in productivity after going through the course, he says. And for an e-learning programme to work, it is important to first understand whether something is suitable for e-learning or not, he adds.

The audience has to be understood, says Mr. Rastogi. There is a difference between the way a 10+2 student understands a concept versus the way a professional working for 10 years understands it, he says, adding that after understanding the audience, the audio-visual components need to be woven around that. Hence, there are two layers to a successful e-learning programme – the technology component and the learning component.

In India, e-learning courses could be made more popular through availability of broadband connections at competitive rates, regional language-based content for technical subjects, two-way interaction for doubts, and perfor-

mance feedback with students, says S. Giridharan, CEO, EdServ, a education firm. "The real India, the bottom of the pyramid, still lacks education and guidance to a proper career," he says, adding that e-learning could be a solution for employability.

A shift in mindset is required to adopt e-learning, says Mr. Rastogi. It is the same barrier that exists with any adoption to technology. But once that is overcome, e-learning would prove beneficial, he says.

The issue with e-learning being adopted more in universities and government is the classic chicken and hen case – who would pay for developing e-learning content, asks Mr. Jumani.

Private companies would not invest in creating content, unless they knew they would have a market, and universities and the government are reluctant to invest money up front in creating content, he says. And content could not be imported from abroad, as it has to be culturally sensitive to the context, he says.