

Scoping Sustainable eLearning (SeSCOPE): Research with the Higher Education Academy

Starting point: professional learning

Many e-learning initiatives fail. Transient as they are, 'innovative projects' often exhaust the resources and degrade in their impact - destined to be unsustainable. The lasting success of e-learning initiatives is a growing concern for educational initiatives around the world that rely on governmental funding or commercial benefits. Austerity measures have led to a renewed interest toward the concepts of sustainability and sustainable practice in e-learning. This study investigates the viability of integrated e-learning services and their cost-effectiveness, aiming to inform policy and strategic decision making.

Background

The education sector has to adapt continually to external drivers, including societal and technological and economic changes.. Hence, institutions have to anticipate, withstand and, where possible, capitalise on the current and future waves of change. Consequently, e-learning attracts the attention of administrators and policy makers. Many universities have introduced e-learning to improve cost-effectiveness and enhance innovation. However, e-learning initiatives are often not sustained.

Method

This research is based on a scoping review of the sustainability of e-learning practice in Higher Education. The scoping review allowed identification of themes and trends in sustainable e-learning emerging from diverse bodies of scientific knowledge. Key themes associated with sustainable e-learning were identified, coded, categorised and synthesised into a set of broad domains: Resource Management, Educational Attainment and, Professional Development and Innovation. Although each domain is distinct, there is overlap across the domains as illustrated in Fig 1. The numbers in each section correspond

to the number of papers reviewed and categorised in each domain.

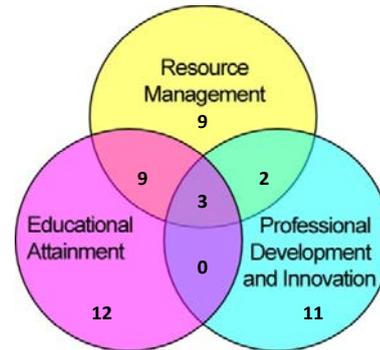


Fig 1. Key domains of sustainable e-learning

Key findings

- 1 Sustainable e-learning must be framed within broader, fundamental societal issues related to learning. These issues include globalisation, economic transformations, changes in employment & lifelong learning.
- 2 Therefore sustainable development of e-learning must draw on knowledge dispersed across the three key domains (Fig 1).
- 3 There is also scope to develop meta-level analysis, combining and synthesising empirical work to inform the sustainable development of e-learning.
- 4 Tensions between the concepts of cost-efficiency, effective pedagogy, and continuous innovative practice must be considered.
- 5 There is a need for education business models based on sustainable e-learning.

Project team

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The Caledonian Academy is a research centre in Technology Enhanced and Professional Learning at Glasgow Caledonian University.