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# Towards exploring a global scenario of e-learning in library and information science schools

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## KEYWORDS

Global scenario;  
E-learning;  
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**Abstract** The purpose of this study is to explore a global scenario of e-learning in library and information science (LIS) programs. We conducted an online survey of 370 LIS programs' homepages to explore e-learning offerings globally, covering Africa, Asia, Europe, America and Oceania. Data were gathered from the *ALA Directory of Accredited Programs*, the *IFLA World Guide to Library, Archive and Information Science Education 2007*, the *Directory of Library and Information Science Programs in Asia*, and from the Internet. A content analysis of the programs' homepages was carried out in order to explore trends in e-learning (EL), including use of EL tools and technologies, modes of course delivery, etc. Results show that 85 ( $n = 370$ ) LIS programs (around 23%) are using e-learning systems for delivering education; they are embracing EL for overcoming the barriers of students who cannot enter into a traditional education system due to work load, family commitments, or geographical location. Blackboard/Blackboard Vista (25.89%) is the most frequently used of the EL tools and techniques. WebCT/WebCT Vista (10.59%) is also being used frequently and the majority (i.e., 73 of 85 LIS programs; 86%) are delivering their course contents asynchronously.

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## Introduction

The expansive creation of information and communication technologies (ICT), the Internet, and the resulting deluge of information on societies and cultures have brought about a shift in the global education system (Mokhtar, Majid, & Foo, 2008). This shift has focused on the use and application of ICT techniques and tools in the teaching and learning process. However, these technologies also have had a huge impact on the world economy, corporate management and globalization trends, and they bear a tremendous potential to reshape the nature of study environments everywhere, for both

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conventional and distance teaching institutions (Guri-Rosenblit, 2005). Technology-enabled learning is therefore increasingly important and pervasive in higher education, and e-learning is allowing diverse learning forms with the use of ICT (Lonn & Teasley, 2009; Nishino et al., 2009). E-learning (EL) has been described as a merger of two previous technologies for computer-enhanced learning: computer-based training and multi-media programs delivered on CD-ROMs (Rosenberg, 2001). The merger of these technologies was realized ten years ago, when multimedia-based training material could be delivered over the Internet and presented in web browsers (Naeve, 2006). Many policy makers, scholars and practitioners in higher education use the terms e-learning and distance education interchangeably (Selinger & Pearson, 1999; Arnold, 1999; Evans & Nation, 2000; American Federation of Teachers, 2001; Twigg, 2001; Ryan, 2002). Some related terms that share similar characteristics with EL include web-based learning, online learning, distributed learning, computer assisted instruction, Internet-based learning, virtual learning, off-campus learning, innovative approaches to distance learning, collaborative learning, web-based interactive learning, learner-centered learning, self-directed learning, anytime and anywhere learning, ubiquitous learning, etc. (Bleimann, 2004; Grimson, 2002; Hamada, 2007; Lau & Tsui, 2009; Manjunath & Patil, 2006; McCombs & Varkili, 2005; Ruiz, Mintzer, & Leipzig, 2006; Sacchanand, 2008). Bates (2001) identified three main ways to use e-learning in universities and colleges: technology-enhanced classroom teaching, distance education, and distributed learning. Historically, there have been two common e-learning modes: distance learning and computer assisted instruction (Ruiz et al.). Chowdhury and Chowdhury (2006), on the other hand, mentioned that e-learning can take place, in three forms: supported learning, blended learning and learning that is entirely online, and in two modes: synchronous and asynchronous. However, all forms of ICT facilitated and supported learning is referred to as e-learning in our study.

Library and information science/studies (LIS) is an important academic and professional discipline, which teaches how to organize articulated information resources through classification and cataloging, to store and preserve them systematically for proper use and management, and to disseminate those resources among users according to their requirements. Education for LIS has also experienced dramatic changes, and it has become an enormously vibrant field incorporating emerging elements like digital libraries, the Internet, e-commerce, knowledge management, web/library 2.0, etc. (Roknuzzaman & Umemoto, 2009). Library and information science programs, all over the world, are therefore embracing and adopting e-learning technologies to deliver LIS education.

## Research motivation and objectives

E-learning has become a widely accepted and frequently used mode of learning in higher education and company training in recent years (Cloete, 2001; Hodgson, 2002; McPherson, 2005; Nishino et al., 2009). Conversely, there are numerous studies that debate the appropriateness of e-learning, discuss its applications and practices, and

investigate its influence of today's education (Davies & Graff, 2005; Naeve, 2006). Library and information science programs throughout the world are adopting EL to provide education services. Therefore, there is a need to understand the present status of EL usage in LIS education worldwide. We have made an attempt to explore the global scenario of EL offerings in LIS programs. We believe that the findings from this study will be valuable to LIS academics, as well as practitioners, enabling them to select the suitable EL tools and technologies for LIS education. The aim of this study is to explore the global scenario of e-learning in LIS programs. The more specific research objectives are:

- To identify and analyze the possible causes of embracing and responding to EL in LIS education as portrayed on programs' websites all over the world.
- To identify the most frequently used EL techniques and tools used for LIS education.
- To explore the role of the consortium for the diffusion of EL in LIS education.

## Research questions

In pursuing the above objectives, the following research questions have been posed that will guide our study as well:

### Major research question (MRQ)

- *MRQ*: How many LIS programs are providing their education through EL all over the globe?

### Subsidiary research questions (SRQs)

- *SRQ1*: Why might LIS programs and students be embracing and responding to EL for their education?
- *SRQ2*: What are the most frequently used EL techniques and tools for LIS education?
- *SRQ3*: What is the role of the consortium for the diffusion of EL in LIS education?

## Literature review

Burnett and Painter (2001) examined the evolution of library services for distance learners enrolled in one of the three web-based degrees offered by the Florida State University School of Information Studies.

Nicholson (2001) reported the findings from a survey that examined the differences in communication between students who used Instant Messenger (IM) services and those who did not in the same asynchronous distance education web-based course.

Koehler and Blair (2003) conducted a case study on distance education in the LIS discipline at Valdosta State University (VSU). In this study, they explored LIS programs in North America, which offered asynchronous and synchronous instruction using a variety of models. Then they performed a case analysis of the VSU Master's in LIS program.

Song (2005) explained the characteristics and applications of e-learning and distinguished between e-learning

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