

E-learning and Digital Learning Tools



Learning Journey 5:
Introduction to E-learning and Digital Learning
Tools

Foreword



Digital technologies are impacting not only on the way we work and play but also on how we teach and learn. It is creating opportunities for Vocational Education and Training (VET) teacher/trainers, VET institutes and the VET sector to innovate how training and education is delivered.

This Learning Journey has been developed as part of the Erasmus+ project called **Enterprises Growing Through Business Simulations (E-Growth)**. This is about VET teacher/trainers in the use of **Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL)** within in VET courses. In addition to this set of seven **Learning Journeys**, the project has also developed a business simulation called, **PROSPER**, as an example of the use of TEL – the simulation supports the development of the knowledge and skills associated with running and growing an enterprise. The project has also published an e-book called, **A Guide to Technology Enhanced Learning in VET**.

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LJ5: E-learning and Digital Learning Tools

This Learning Journey is called **E-learning and Digital Learning Tools**. It is part of a set of seven Learning Journeys exploring the use of TEL methodologies including simulations and serious games, e-assessment and e-portfolios and Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs).

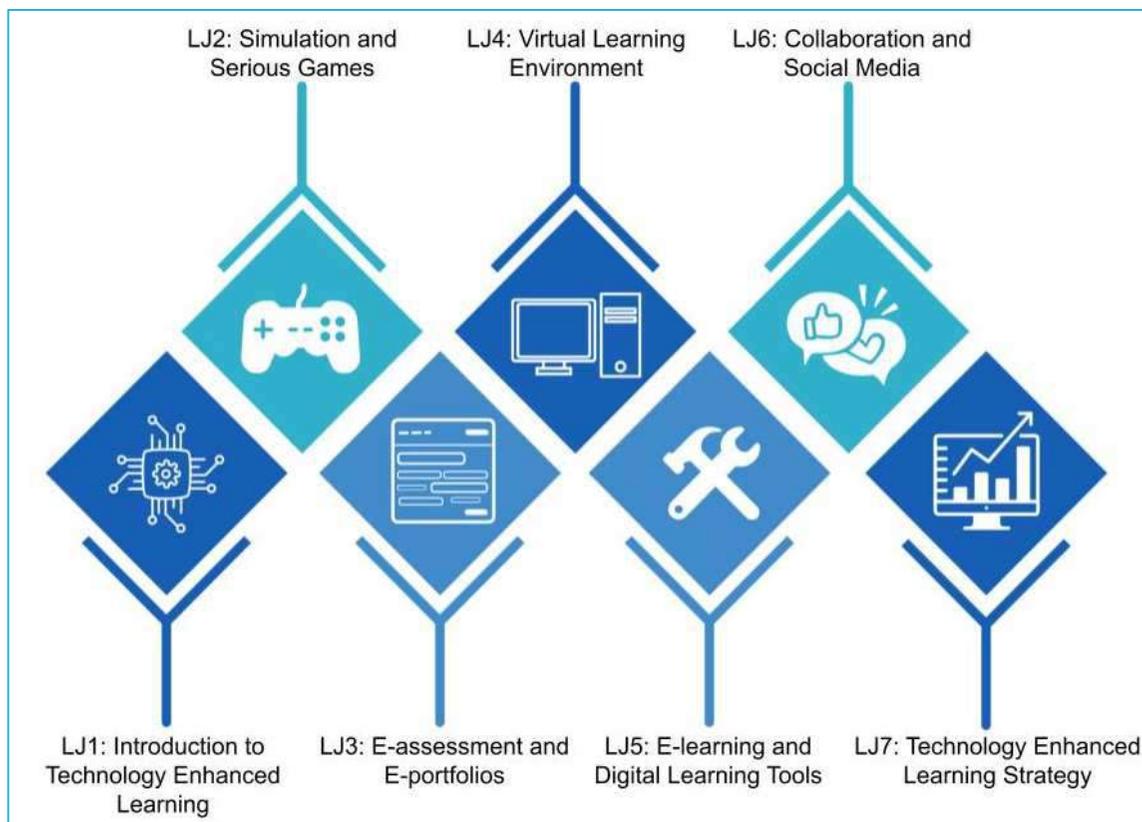


Figure 1: Learning Journeys - Technology Enhanced Learning

Each Learning Journey comprises an explanation of key terms, tools and methodologies. In some Learning Journeys, there are:

- Practical 'how to checklists'
- How to guides and
- Examples of digital tools

The last Learning Journey is designed to help you to plan and implement your own Technology Enhanced Learning Strategy.

LJ5: E-learning and Digital Learning Tools



Aim:

This unit is about the selection and use of e-learning and digital learning tools to support effective learning

Learning Outcomes:

- Be able to explain what is meant by the terms 'e-learning' and 'digital learning tools'
- Understand how to select and use 'e-learning' to support effective learning
- Understand how to develop and use 'digital learning tools' to support effective learning

WHAT IS E-LEARNING?

- E-learning is a style of learning made digitally via electronic media, usually involving the internet.
- It may be accessed via most electronic tools such as a computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone, making it a versatile and easy way to learn wherever you are. E-learning resources come in several shapes – from software programmes and digital courses to interactive online platform and applications.
- While teaching can be based in or out of the classrooms, the use of computers and the Internet forms the major component of E-learning.
- E-learning can also be termed as a network enabled transfer of skills and knowledge, and the delivery of education is made to a large number of recipients at the same or different times. Earlier, it was not accepted wholeheartedly as it was assumed that this system lacked the human element required in learning.
- E-Learning is a technological advancement that it is now embraced by the masses.
- The introduction of computers was the basis of this revolution and with the passage of time, as we get hooked to smartphones, tablets, etc, these devices now have an important place for learning in the classroom. Books are gradually getting replaced by electronic educational materials like optical discs or pen drives. Knowledge can also be shared via the Internet, which is accessible 24/7, anywhere, anytime.

Below are some common types of e-learning methods and the differences between them:

1. DIGITAL MATERIALS

E-learning can be carried out by using videos, PDF documents, slideshows and word documents. The availability of these resources makes it extremely easy for anybody to teach themselves a new skill at their own pace.

2. ONLINE COURSES

Online courses are often provided by Learning Management Systems (LMS) and allow learning material to be delivered at a pace to suit the learner. The courses are organised into smaller sections and chunks, making it easier for the learner to plan their learning schedule. Interactive materials are often built into the LMS and these allow the learner to test and apply their own knowledge. There are many online course providers including Skillshare and Udemy.

3. VIRTUAL TUTORING

The Internet has helped to considerably reduce the cost of tutoring, both for the provider and the learner. Websites such as [MyTutor](#) and [TutorHub](#) offer a range of courses and subject at affordable rates. Lessons are completed using video communication platforms such as [Skype](#) or [Zoom](#).

4. APPS & SOFTWARE

Apps and software are continually developing, and offer the benefit of self-taught learning through apps which can easily be download. Learning software can also be used both online and off to engage in shared learning courses. They can also be used as part of a personal learning journey.

WHAT IS E-LEARNING IN EDUCATION?

The worldwide pandemic, COVID-19, forced many schools across the world to temporarily close. Teachers and students turned to e-learning methods to enable them to continue their studies from home.

Prior to the pandemic, many schools were already embracing educational technology in the classroom and digital platforms were being used to create a seamless and flexible learning experience. COVID-19 saw an increase their use.

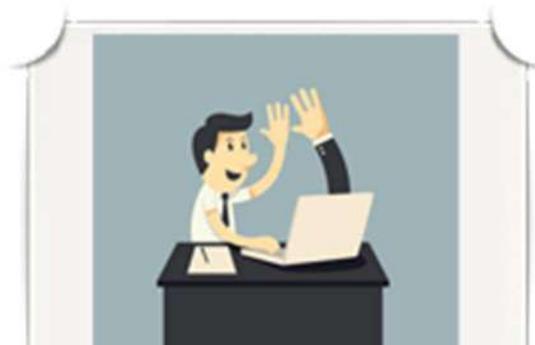


Teachers apply e-learning to support the teaching of their curriculum. Video communication platforms like Zoom can be used to set up virtual 'classrooms' or lessons. The teacher is able to plan and teach lessons as normal, with the students attending the lessons remotely. Video communication platforms provide flexibility as they can be accessed on a phone as well as a computer.

Platforms such as [Google Classroom](#) and [Edmodo](#) allow teachers to create and distribute learning materials to their students. They are also able to find and share lessons plans and learning materials online.

WHAT IS SELF-PACED E-LEARNING?

- Self-paced e-learning gives the learner the freedom to choose the pace at which they work through the teaching material; they decide when they are ready to move onto the next part of the learning.
- Self-paced e-learning can be enjoyable and creates a pressure-free learning experience. This will often result in better retention of information and greater interest in the subject.
- Most e-learning platforms, particularly apps and online learning courses, offer a self-paced style.



E-LEARNING ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES

E-learning has numerous benefits for those who are motivated to learn. However, there are also some disadvantages, meaning that it is not suitable for everyone. The main benefits and disadvantages of e-learning are outlined below:

BENEFITS OF E-LEARNING

Affordable and time-saving

E-learning can be accessed from anywhere offering internet access – including your own home. It eliminates travel costs, printed materials, and those costs associated with running an office or learning institute. Eliminating or reducing costs results in time saving and a more effective use of time. It also makes learning much more affordable for the learners.

Learners can study anywhere, anytime

A wide range of devices, including laptops, phones and tablets, can be used to access e-learning, so learning can take place anywhere. It is not restricted to the classroom. The learner can use apps and online learning platforms to continue the learning process when convenient for them, wherever they are. The learner is in control of their development.

Easy to track progress

The learner will be able to track and monitor their progress on most apps and Learning Management Systems (LMS). This can provide motivation and encouragement to continue. Teachers or tutors can also see how their students are progressing and can plan additional support if necessary.

It is personal

E-learning allows the subject to be worked through at a pace set by the learner. Interactive tasks ensuring a thorough understanding of the subject content, leading to better retention of knowledge.

E-Learning Disadvantages

DISADVANTAGES OF E-LEARNING

Requires self-motivation

A learner who is not self-disciplined and/or self-motivated is less likely to benefit from e-learning. The learner is fully in charge of their own progress therefore they will only get out of the learning what they put in. When using e-learning in schools, it will usually be overseen by a teacher, parent or leader, who can ensure students are committing to the process and getting the best results. However, if the e-learning is being done remotely, an element of self-discipline from the students is still required.

Practical training is not provided

E-learning is effective when learning the theoretical aspects of a topic, but it is less effective in delivering practical training, which may be needed in some subjects to ensure competency. If the practical element is important then blended learning should be implemented, which allows e-learning to be used alongside traditional face-to-face training.

Reduces the face-to-face aspect of learning

E-learning lacks face-to-face interaction which can be a huge motivator for some people. Having access to an online tutor can provide some motivation but the social aspect is missing, possibly making e-learning not a suitable option for everybody.



E-Learning and Digital Learning Tools



Examples of E-Learning and Digital Tools

How to create E-Learning courses



To create a powerful and effective e-learning course does not have to be difficult and it can be achieved in six straightforward steps as described below:

1. Choose the appropriate authoring tool

Choosing the right tool for an e-learning course is essential so consider what features and functions are needed, for example, is self-registration important; what is the quality of teacher-learner interaction; how easy does it need to be to use; will it produce reports; is accreditation required; will digital badges be issued? Take into account the skills and abilities of those who will be creating the e-learning course and of those who will be using the tool. Ideally, the e-learning authoring tool should offer a blend of flexibility and ease of use.

2. Research the needs of your e-learning audience and the subject matter

The e-learning course must be designed to meet the needs of the learners, so when developing an e-learning course assess and research the audience and the subject matter. If possible, consult with a subject matter expert to understand what content should be included and what can be left out. Surveys, interviews, or focus groups with potential learners, can help to gain an in depth understanding of what they would hope to achieve by taking the e-learning course and can identify their expectations.

How to create E-Learning courses



3. Create an e-learning template or use an existing one

Using an off-the-shelf e-learning template can reduce course development time because the layout does not have to be created from scratch. There are many e-learning templates that can be accessed at no cost. Some of these templates can even be customised to include branding. Using pre-prepared templates allows those with minimal or no programming or design knowledge the ability to easily produce their own e-learning courses. Using pre-prepared templates is quick and convenient, leaving more time to focus on the content.

4. Choose a cloud-based learning management system

A cloud-based learning management system offers security and reliability as well as being more cost effective than many alternatives if it is to be used regularly. Access to the internet is required to use such systems. Without prior instructional design knowledge, an e-learning course can be easily set up, integrating custom content by dragging and dropping graphics and multimedia resources. Platforms such as [TalentLMS](#), [Docebo](#), [Litmos](#), [Canvas](#) and [Udacity](#) are just some of the online learning systems available.

5. Use links to add multimedia and resources.

Tools or skills needed to create multimedia elements are not always necessary. It is easy to embed links to videos, for example from [YouTube](#), presentations, and other online resources directly into the e-learning course. This provides learners with the opportunity to access relevant information quickly, adding variety to the content while accommodating different learning styles.

How to create E-Learning courses

6. Keep video, audio, and graphic elements simple and straightforward

Maintaining the attention and motivation of the learner is important so resist the temptation to include excessive amounts of information. Instead, just keep things simple and straightforward. The ability to create and implement bespoke e-learning scenarios and simulations will enhance the course, but this is not essential. Keeping video, audio, and graphic elements to a minimum will make the design and development process less stressful. The focus of the e-learning course and the subject matter is important, so make sure that the content addresses the primary learning goals and objectives. Avoid lengthy paragraphs and, where possible break the information down by using bullet points or headings and subheadings to avoid cognitive overload.



Examples of E-Learning products



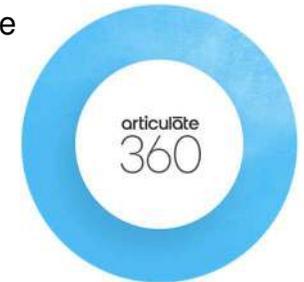
Teachable

[Teachable](#) is a website used to create and sell online courses without any technical knowledge. This online course platform, or Learning Management System, easily allows the creation of an e-learning course. Teachable provides course hosting, the necessary web pages, automatic enrolments for students, a payment system, plus many more features.



Articulate

Similar to Teachable, [Articulate 360](#) is a modern e-learning authoring tool allowing designers to create responsive courses for any device. Using a web-based course builder, it allows designers to easily create attractive online courses. It includes access to award-winning authoring apps, a library with 7+ million course assets; a project review app that streamlines the review process; and live and on-demand online training with industry experts. Articulate is a subscription-based tool and continuously informs of updates and new features.



Camtasia

[Camtasia](#) is a suite or set of programmes used to create video tutorials and presentations quickly and professionally. Camtasia is popular with beginners or with those who have little knowledge of how to create videos. Both versions of Camtasia have evolved to integrate screen capture and post-processing tools aimed at the multimedia information and educational development market. Although not free to use, free trials of the tool are available.



Examples of Digital Learning Tools



Socrative

[Socrative](#) is a cloud-based student response system allowing teachers to create simple quizzes that students can take quickly on laptops, tablets or smartphones. Socrative offers the opportunity to quickly and easily assess student understanding and to adjust teaching based on the results. This tool offers a free version and subscription-based plans.



Prezi

[Prezi](#) is a web-based tool for creating presentations (called prezis for short). It is similar to other presentation software like Microsoft PowerPoint, but instead of using slides it uses one large canvas on which the presentation moves around, zooming in and out to view the different frames. Prezi is a tool popular in schools and businesses where it is used to create engaging and eye-catching presentations. Prezi offers both free and account paid plans.



Canva

[Canva](#) is a free graphic design platform that allows the creation of lesson plans as well as invitations, business cards, flyers, backgrounds, and more using professionally designed templates. In addition, photos can be uploaded and added to Canva's templates using a drag and drop interface. Canva is easy to use and doesn't require extensive photo editing knowledge.



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