Trends That Will Shape the eLearning Industry in the Next Decade

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Table of Contents

Introduction

01 Key eLearning Trends in the Recent Past

02 Key Trends that Influenced the Industry

03 Expectations from Academic & Corporate Learning Leaders

04 The Trends That Will Shape the eLearning Industry in the Next Decade

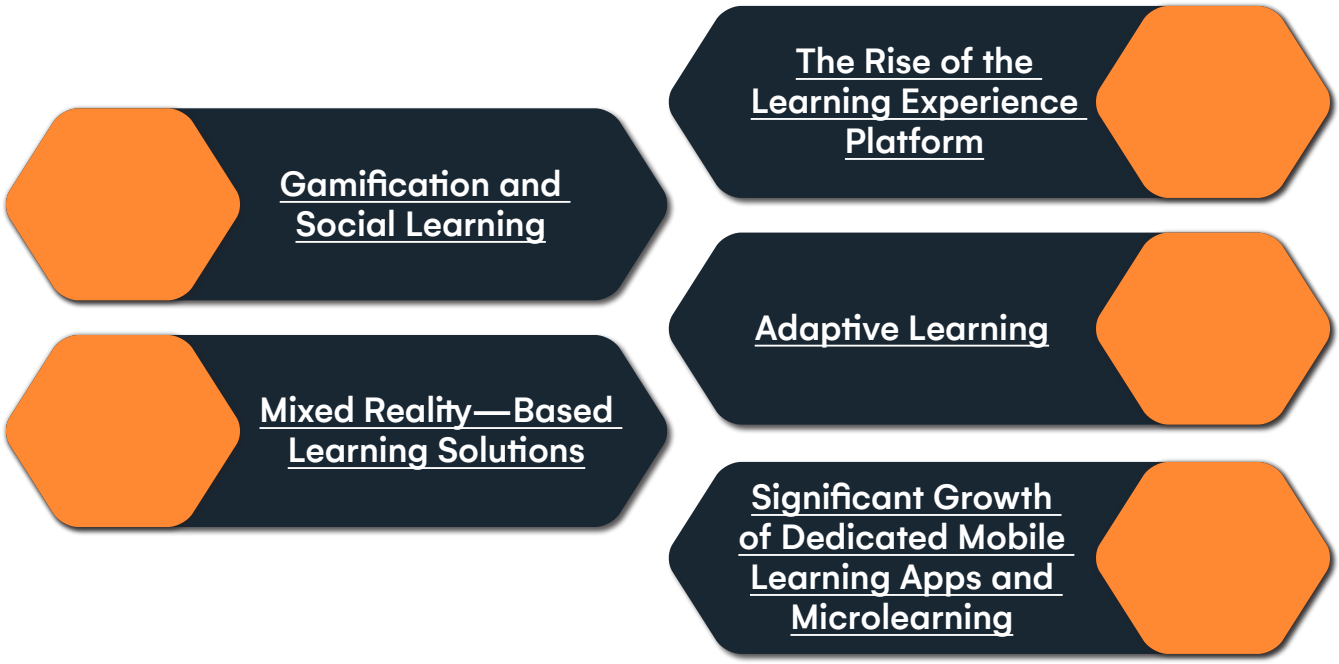
Conclusion

Introduction

Welcome to this eBook prepared by the S4Carlisle Digital & eLearning Business Unit. This eBook aims to look at some of the important trends that influenced the eLearning industry in recent years and to provide a far-sighted look based on current technological innovations to discuss the trends that will shape the eLearning industry in the next decade. If you have any suggestions or queries about the content of this eBook, please write to sales@s4carlisle.com.

The Key eLearning Trends in the Recent Past

Some of the most popular eLearning trends that influenced the industry in the last few years are as follows:



Learning experience platforms and learning management systems continue to coexist with mobile learning apps. The company intranet still remains a big learning tool in corporate learning. Microlearning and video-based learning solutions are extremely popular and cater to the problem of attention deficit. Adaptive learning makes for better learning experiences and intelligent assessments. Gamification and social learning, when used effectively, foster learning and improve learning engagement rates. Mixed reality—based learning solutions are still seen as a large investment to make by firms, and although prices of virtual reality (VR) headsets are coming down and mobile-based VR experiences are becoming popular, mainstream adoption in the workplace and academic learning has to grow.

Expectations From Academic and Corporate Learning Leaders

It needed a pandemic for both corporates and academic institutions to fully understand the strengths of eLearning. Many lessons were learned in the two tough years that the pandemic brought to the world. People who scoffed at the idea of remote work had to completely realign their strategies and business models. Several businesses shut, and many businesses navigated the challenges and became stronger.

The key expectations from academic and corporate learning leaders from learning solutions providers are:

- Better learning experiences, both in terms of the content and the medium of delivery.
- Less expensive learning solutions.
- Learning solutions that enable a positive change among the learners, which can be clearly measured.
- Collaborative learning solutions that are not heavily dependent on technology.
- Solutions that do not require an "always-connected" scenario. This is especially important in developing nations where both cellular connectivity and electric power supply fluctuate a lot.
- Learner analytics data that makes sense and helps the management take correct decisions.
- Ability to easily integrate with existing systems within the institution or organization.
- Dedicated support and prompt customer support services.

The Trends That Will Shape the eLearning Industry in the Next Decade

Chat GPT and the Open AI Project

We have been quite fascinated with the developments surrounding Chat GPT and Dall-E from the Open AI Project, and the last two years have seen the team behind Open AI Project making announcements that have made even the larger tech companies take note of their work.

The latest iteration of Chat GPT has put teachers in a spot of bother because more students are using it to complete their assignments and submit them without verifying the details. API integration enabled by Open AI is helping several new businesses spring up with detailed answers and support for specific queries related to a niche area, be it investing in the stock market or in automobile engineering. It is evident that Chat GPT and similar solutions powered by AI are here to stay. The fear of jobs being taken over by AI and robots may not hold true for all spheres of work, but automation will definitely be impacting several industries. It is important for people to understand the implications of AI and use the power that it offers to work better and smarter.

With specific reference to eLearning design, developing storyboards will become easier, and creating mock-ups of templates or coming up with assessments will become easier. It is important to remember that we need to cross-check and verify every output result that the AI-based solution offers. Do not blindly trust and use what AI offers as an answer

Metaverse

People of a certain generation will remember “Second Life” fondly. Developed as an online platform in 2003, it allowed people to create virtual “avatars” of themselves and live in an online multiplayer world. The Metaverse that we see everyone talking about, especially after Mark Zuckerberg rebranded Facebook and other subsidiaries under the brand name “Meta” is something similar. There are a lot of people working on something akin to a virtual world and allowing people to buy things, live and interact with other members, and utilize points earned in the virtual world to redeem actual shopping coupons or gifts in the real world. This tries to simplify the whole concept of the Metaverse, which in science fiction treats the entire Internet as one connected virtual world where people can interact wearing VR headsets.

The Metaverse has immense potential in academic learning, and startups are working to develop solutions for the same. Do read this report published on the NLM website that examines the possibilities and limitations of the Metaverse in education.

It will be interesting to see which leading tech giant makes the most appropriate and fully functional learning solution developed around the Metaverse.

Psychometric Profiling–Based eLearning at the Workplace

Psychometric profiling has been around for a long time now. Personality tests like the Myers–Briggs, the Dominance, Influence, Conscientiousness, Steadiness (DiSC) profile, 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF), and Enneagram are some of the most popular tests used to analyze human behavior and personalities. Over the years, leading corporates have used such tests or variations and combinations of popular tests to evaluate employees and hire them. Several studies have been conducted over the years to examine the efficacy of such tests, and experts present contrasting opinions on them. Irrespective of all the studies and the reports emerging out of them, psychological and psychometric profiling can indeed play an important role in the way workplace learning is designed for employees.

Personalized learning designed for employees in a specific department or at a specific learning or intelligence level is one facet of learning. What psychometric profiling does is that it adds another layer of information about the learner. It provides data on how a learner will react in specific scenarios and presents the emotional quotient of the individual. It is quite possible that we will see customized learning paths designed specifically for each employee or learning paths designed for employees who share a similar psychometric profile.

This can also be applied to academic learning in schools and colleges to design better and more effective learning experiences for students.

Learning-as-a-Service and Platform-as-a-Service—Granular eLearning Experiences

When Software-as-a-Service or SaaS became a popular buzzword and traditional tech firms woke up to the possibilities of cloud computing, the entire concept of software got democratized. Now, small organizations would not be forced to buy huge enterprise-grade solutions at a massive cost. This concept is being explored with varied degrees of success in the eLearning industry, but a lot needs to be done to improve the overall experience.

In the next few years, what we are likely to see is a clear separation of the medium of delivery of learning—the platform, be it an LMS, LXP, or mobile app, and the actual course content. We will see the rise of on-demand learning that gives greater importance to individual learning units instead of huge libraries of catalog or customized courses. Customers/learners will just take the exact learning unit that they need to attain a certification, learn a new skill, or just complete a mandated organizational requirement.

What we observe now is platforms like Coursera, Udemy, or edX combining high-quality learning content with a platform for delivery all linked together. You buy a course on a platform, you have access to it, you complete it, and then in certain cases you pay extra for a certificate with your score based on your performance in the assessments. All this takes place within the platform.

The future offers possibilities for curated learning experiences built on collaboration between different course providers and learning platforms. You could choose different learning units from multiple course aggregators, then choose to access it all on one platform or receive the units as videos in Dropbox or a similar cloud-storage solution. The content would be encrypted and would be available for a specific length of time within which the course would have to be completed. Steps would also be taken to ensure that course providers don't face a situation similar to Netflix subscribers sharing passwords. Perhaps they could even offer a friends and family learning solution/subscription pack that lets multiple learners access the eLearning content.

It needs to be seen how organizations balance profitability and course and platform accessibility along with collaborations with other service providers to provide a better integrated granular learning experience.

Robot-Assisted Learning for People with Learning Disorders

Learning disorders, if not diagnosed properly, can have a huge impact on the intellectual growth of a child and cause severe confidence issues when the child grows into an adult. A learning disorder is defined as a neurodevelopmental condition that impacts how an individual perceives a condition and processes information. The disorders impact areas like:

- Reading
- Writing
- Speaking
- Math skills
- Movement
- Attention span

In addition to this, there are other conditions that are not exactly classified as learning disorders but that can nevertheless affect a child's ability to learn. These are:

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or ADHD
Dyspraxia
Auditory Processing Disorder
Visual Processing Disorder

Awareness about these disorders is definitely much more in the USA and Europe. The other parts of the world are gradually realizing the different aspects of the learning disability spectrum, and work is underway to make lessons simpler and easier to understand for such children. Occupational therapy, speech therapy, care, and understanding go a long way in making these children feel they "belong" and will help them learn better and gradually lead normal lives as adults.

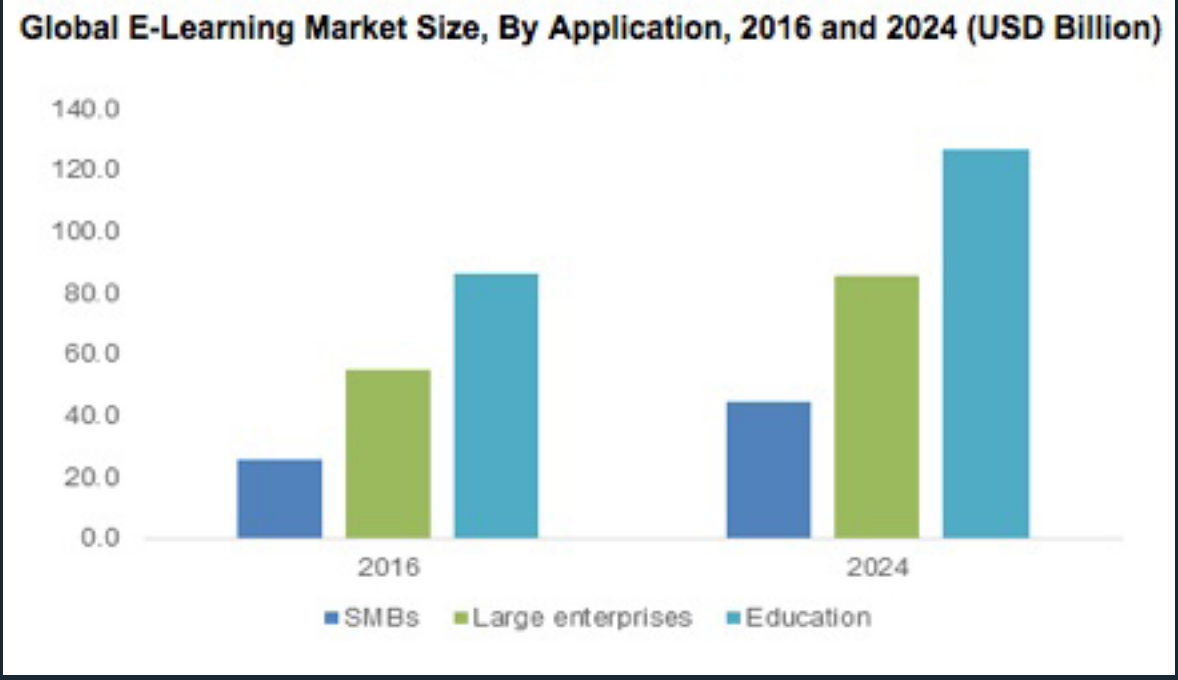
In the future, we can see the growth of robots designed and programmed to especially support such children and help them learn better. This could range from guiding them in their lessons, helping them remember tasks, and assisting them in moving with ease. Robotics and AI together have a huge market for growth. We have seen products from Sony that brought us a robot dog that was a massive success. Tech companies need to look beyond toys and vanity projects to create mass-produced robots that will make life easier and better for children and adults with learning disorders and or physical disabilities. The future brings huge opportunities for tech companies and eLearning service providers to join hands and create robots that can guide young learners. Please remember that we are not looking to replace human teachers but to provide robots that can assist teachers and help those students who need extra care and attention.

Mixed Reality Finally Comes of Age and Becomes Easily Accessible

One area that is likely to see significant growth is mixed-reality technology. Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality have been around for a fair bit of time now, although only in the last five years have we seen wider adoption and more interest in them as a solution to foster learning. Traditionally restricted to creating simulations for airline pilots, maintenance engineers, locomotive pilots, and training medical school students, mixed reality solutions are now making their presence felt across different industries for a wide selection of use cases. From luxury hotels showcasing their properties, and remote employee induction sessions, to fire and safety training, mixed reality—based learning solutions are seeing greater adoption.

The truth remains that although the cost of production of such simulated experiences has come down, it is still not easily accessible for someone on a budget. Dependence on VR headsets, subpar production values, and tacky animation are some of the key problems that organizations face. Another factor to remember is that more money does not always mean a better VR experience. Finding the correct vendor who will create the best VR experience is something that matters a lot.

In the next decade, we are likely to see cheaper VR headsets, perhaps under $20, and ones that are of good quality and strong enough. Perhaps even a sub-$100 Android phone may enable users to experience the magic of mixed reality with ease. What this also means is that mixed reality-based eLearning solutions will become more mainstream and be an integral part of both academic and workplace learning instead of being restricted to special scenarios.



Going Beyond 6G and 7G—Cellular Connectivity Defines the Learning Experience

A growing economy like India still lacks complete cellular connectivity across the nation. Several countries in Africa still lack basic infrastructure for Internet access. These are just two scenarios in two of the largest demographic regions in the world. We are seeing 4G and 5G adoption in key cities of the world and how 5G speeds are changing the mobile experience. Cellular connectivity, cheap Internet, and robust IT infrastructure are some key areas of focus for economic development. These are also factors that will contribute immensely to learning. A child living in a remote village could still access learning via the Internet or a video call on Skype or a simple WhatsApp video call with teachers in the nearest city. Faster Internet speeds will ensure that there is no lag in interactions with other learners and instructors. It will enable faster download of learning content. These are just some factors that excite us with a focus on the future of learning.

In India, Jio, from the Reliance Group, has completely redefined the way people consume data. If similar pricing patterns are replicated across other countries in underdeveloped economies, there can be a phenomenal positive change in learning. Tablets can be bundled with mobile connections and preloaded with learning content from services like Khan Academy, Discovery Kids, and the digital Britannica Encyclopedia. Faster and more reliable cellular connectivity will definitely play a key role in improving the learning experience. It needs to be seen how telecom companies revise the prices of their services as the speeds increase and how they will ensure connectivity in the most remote regions of their respective countries.

A Return to Classical Learning Sans Devices—A Distinct Possibility!

In ancient Greece and India, the educational system was quite different. In Greece, young boys were sent to schools and universities to learn and train under masters; they learned philosophy, art, science, logic, mathematics, debating, horse-riding, and archery, all considered to be important life skills. In ancient India, the "gurukul" system was followed. Young boys would train under "gurus," skilled instructors who would focus on the complete mental, physical, and spiritual development of their students. The young boys would live at the "ashram" of their gurus, and on completion of their training would return to their families. There was no distraction of any sort. Young boys would stay away from their families and grow into disciplined young men when they would return to their families.

In the modern context of learning, such a scenario is inconceivable. Parents would be unwilling to let their children be away from their watchful eyes for such a long period. Modern learning is heavily dependent on technology. The humble Android smartphone has truly democratized the whole process of learning. During the pandemic, teachers were able to communicate with students using WhatsApp video calls, Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts, and Skype to make learning easier and simpler. Schools with better infrastructure could invest in an LMS and digital assignment submission and grading systems, hosts instructional videos on the LMS, and help students meet their academic goals.

The future brings a distinct possibility of the need for a distraction-free, device-free learning experience. This may seem entirely opposite to what eLearning vendors and tech firms want. But there is a keen interest among many people, especially among the tech fraternity in Silicon Valley itself, for a learning system for their children that relies less on technology and focuses more on empathy, life skills, and learning by doing.

It will be interesting to see how this prediction comes true in the next few years.

Conclusion

At S4Carlisle, our eLearning Solutions team works closely with corporates, government bodies, NGOs, and academic institutions to deliver world-class learning experiences. Our aim has been to make eLearning accessible to everyone. This eBook is a forward-looking and predictive statement of the trends that will shape the industry in the next decade. Some of these predictions may come true, yet some may not necessarily come to fruition. We hope you found the content of this eBook useful.

To witness a demo of our capabilities in eLearning design and development or to get a quote for your next eLearning project, please write to sales@s4carlisle.com.