

What eLearning is about

Imagine a very cheap car and a very expensive car both together in front of your house. The cheap one gives you mobility and so does the expensive one. But the second one additionally offers a navigation system, cruise control, air condition, traction control, stabilization adjustment, xenon-bulbs, 7 airbags, air-cleaning-system, electronic seat adjustment plus heating, leather-and-wood applications and many more things. Both can be called a car - but the differences are overwhelming, aren't they?

Will you ever go to a car-seller and ask just for "a car" - without any more details?

As in the story above, it is quite similar with eLearning. There are certain features that define the "e" in the learning, but the differences exist as well. The crucial and basic definition of eLearning is that it offers learning resources to people, whenever they want and wherever they want, that means independent from time and place. The media nowadays is not just the computer, but the internet. The internet-based eLearning is a kind of *advanced* eLearning, because it brings back a crucial aspect of learning: the interaction – between teachers and learners or between learners and learners.

Regarding eLearning, the worldwide-web changed a lot; today it must be considered that all borders are melting: many people call every new application of "web 2.0" an element of eLearning. There is some evidence because of course it can be or can lead to learning when you set up a weblog, communicate with others on a web-interface, schedule your meetings with an online-calendar, tag and share your favorites online, organize events and so on.

Everything is possible, but experience shows that not everything works. Some years ago the expectation has been that the technology (first computers, then the web) will dominate the whole learning – but this has been wrong. After this a new slogan arose: "content is king!" It meant that the learning will be accelerated if you just put enough content into the system. This has been wrong as well (although we're still in this period). Recently we're experiencing that the slogan must be "context is king". The success of learning very strictly depends on the whole context of this learning or to put it in other words: The "e" in "eLearning" is of no value in itself; all digitized resources will not boost learning, if there is no clear setting and pedagogical development of content and context. If these requirements are fulfilled, "eLearning" is a very prominent means to improve knowledge.

eLearning at ESTA. The technological framework

Product	Learning Management System ILIAS, version 3.6.3
Homepage	http://www.ilias.de/ios/
License	GNU Open Source
Languages	19 languages
Platform	independent
Space	2 GB (approx. 2000 users)
Hardware	1x Xeon 3,2GHz 2x GB DDR SDRAM 2x 73GB 10k U320 SCSI (RAID I) 2x 1GB NIC (1x connected)
Software	Linux, Windows 2000/XP browser „IE, Firefox, Opera“ PHP 5.1.4 MySQL 5.0.22 Apache httpd 2.2 (and others)
Tools	Generic content and glossary Imports from standards SCORM, AICC, HACP Bookmarking Performance-control Statistical learning-control Metadata description/classification Scheduling E-Mail Chat Fora (and others)

eLearning at ESTA. The pedagogical setting

As it is in learning in general, it is important to receive valid information about the targets (what is to be learned) and the target group (for example their existing IT-skills).

Both must be connected.

At ESTA we focus on the proven “blended learning” approach (a combination of real classroom-teaching and web-based teaching). The didactical design can be developed in more linear sequences or in more explorative sequences, due to the requirements. Often the linear approach is dedicated to target groups with only few experiences, because it is much closer to regular learning media (like books).

Interaction could be embedded (for example tests). Feedback could be embedded as human feedback (from a tutor/expert) or as non-personal feedback from the system. Tasks could be embedded as single tasks or collaborative tasks. Online-interaction should/could be embedded to guide/steer the target group. This interaction can be developed as synchronous (chat) or asynchronous (forum).

All these items can be called as interactive elements, because they require a social interaction or a dialogue between the people. As only few people feel comfortable with isolated learning these interactive aspects are very important, when you are interested in any sustainability and progress of the learning-process.