

Chapter XVII

Educational Design as a Key Issue in Planning for Quality Improvement

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on the need for redesigning courses to develop an appropriate educational or instructional model to achieve a high level of quality in e-learning. It argues that e-learning must be integrated as a process of innovation in the institution for it to become a factor of improvement in the quality of higher education. Transition from conventional education to any model of e-learning demands a well-founded planning strategy to ensure quality in education delivery. Consequently, drawing up strategic plans for the integration of e-learning in our institutions is fundamental. The authors consider there is an obvious need for a greater study into the use of instructional design models and techniques in the

sphere of e-learning. The selection of the most suitable instructional design model should allow researchers and practitioners to increase the quality of the educational offerings.

Introduction

Transition from conventional education to any model of e-learning, even if it is a mixed one, demands a well-founded planning strategy to ensure quality in education delivery. Generally, faculties try to extend their face-to-face activities to a technological environment without taking into account how the educational context has changed. This chapter focuses on the need for redesigning courses to develop an appropriate educational or instructional model for this new e-context. In planning this, we could in fact develop an e-learning proposal with a high level of quality, satisfaction, and achievements.

The E-Learning Approach

Distance learning has always been allied with the popular technologies in use at the time. The evolution of this consideration, however, did not coincide with the speed of technology evolution. Distance learning has usually been seen as a “compensatory” mechanism for the general educational system: a formula to permit access to education by those people who, for various reasons, cannot attend classes in the conventional way. Consequently, distance learning has become the lesser ill or, as defined by Wedemeyer (1981), “the back door” for a certain number of people.

The birth of the large distance learning universities or “mega-universities” (Daniels, 1997) at the start of the 1960s and 1970s and, in recent years, the emergence of the social use of information and communication technologies and the conceptualization of education as a lifelong process (Delors, 1998) have revolutionized the social perception of distance learning, even turning it into a benchmark for conventional education in classrooms and an instrument of change: “Distance learning, which was once a poor and often unwelcome stepchild within the academic community, is becoming increasingly more visible as a part of the higher education family” (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999, p. 7).

Thanks to the invaluable help of today’s information and communication technologies (ICT), specifically to virtual learning environments, one of the obstacles that had historically prevented distance education from being seen as a valid and efficient educational system has been overcome. It is the possibility

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