

Chapter 2

Interactive Course Design in Online Learning Environments

Fatih Yaman

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7425-1369>

Muş Alparslan University, Turkey

Nihal Dulkadir Yaman

Burdur Mehmet Akif University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Education focuses on learning that translates into persistent changes in behavior. Like many other areas of life, the advancements in technology have affected education in multiple ways, and distance education has a prominent place in technology-mediated education. By its very nature, distance education does not require learner and instructor to be in the same physical place. This situation may cause concern about the level and quality of interactions because the interactions in the digital medium may not be directly observable. Considering various types of interaction, interactions within the distance education context should not be limited to learner and instructor interaction. Rather, multiple types of interactions including learner-content, learner-learner, and learner-instructor should be utilized. In this respect, the purpose of this chapter is to exemplify how various elements of interactivity could be used effectively in online courses. Numerous learning management systems are available to offer online courses to distance learners.

INTRODUCTION

There exist numerous definitions of education in the literature. Ertürk (1988) pointed out six different connotations of education including (1) a disciplinary area, (2) social service, (3) achievement, (4) learning, (5) social institute, and (6) an intentional tool and form of the acculturation process. Considering these connotations, most definitions of education are based upon the sixth meaning. The first five connotations could also be considered as pointers to the concept of intentional acculturation. Learning

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has a central place in education, and Schunk (2007) defined learning as persistent changes in behavior. Education, in general, takes various forms.

Looking at the different forms of education, one can see formal and informal education. Formal education then has sub-dimensions of institutional and lifelong learning. Like many other things in life, technological developments affected educational practice, and distance education was born as a result. Elitaş (2017) maintained that distance education emerged in response to the conditions including:

- The constantly increasing number of learners,
- Shortage of qualified teachers despite the increasing number of learners,
- Uneven distribution of educational institutions,
- Adults' demand for education,
- Technology's integration to education,
- And education's transformation as an easy and rapid means of acquiring knowledge.

While technology transforms education, it brings about some challenges, and interactivity is the most prominent challenge for distance education. Literature provides definitions for different forms of interaction. Moore (1989) emphasized learner-content, learner-learner, and learner-instructor interactions, whereas Hillman, Willis, and Gunawardena (1994) maintained that in addition to these interactions, learner-interface interaction is also important. Burnham and Walden (1997) suggested that learner and environment interaction should be considered. In a learning environment where learners and instructors are not together physically, it would be hard to employ the aforementioned elements of interactions. According to Moore's (1993) Transactional Distance Theory, the thing perceived as distance in distance education environments is not the geographical distance, rather it is a psychological and communicational gap. In this respect, designing online courses with rich interactive elements is of importance. Distance education is stemmed from technological developments. Despite its challenges, technology also provides facilities. Some features embedded in the learning management systems used in distance education could facilitate different types of interactions. In this chapter, the process of enriching an online course with various means of interaction is exemplified via Google Classroom.

Distance Education

On contrary to the notion that the Internet is a must for distance education to happen, distance education activities were conducted way before the invention of the Internet (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). Distance education refers to a series of educational activities that allow all stakeholders of education to gather via communication technologies even when learners, instructor, learning materials, and content are at different physical locations (Keegan, 1996). Holmberg (1995) stressed that, in distance education, (i) learner and instructor do not have to be physically present in the same environment at the same time, (ii) instructor does not always have control over the learner, (iii) guidance is needed, (iv) instruction is planned, and (v) there exist various study formats. Uşun (2006) defined distance education as a planned application of educational technology where (i) the source and the receiver are in different environments, (ii) various technological tools are used to bring individuality, flexibility, and independence to the teaching and learning process, and (iii) the communication between the source and the receiver is interactive. According to Kidd and Song (2007), distance education is a system where (i) the learner is free from the constraints of time and space, (ii) the instructor delivers the content through technol-

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