

Chapter 12

Promises and Pitfalls of Open and Distance Learning: Course Design During the Corona Lockdown

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ABSTRACT

Amid the vast spread of the coronavirus pandemic, educational institutions have shifted to online learning across the world. In this connection, people of different cultures are experiencing a rigid period in which mainly school administrators, instructors, and students have to teach and learn at a distance due to corona restrictions. In this context, institutions that have already adopted the principles of ODL and have integrated these principles into their online courses utilized the promises that extend further educational opportunities and potentials from the beginning of the corona process. Therefore, the primary aim of this chapter is to shed light to the promises and pitfalls of ODL in terms of the steps to be taken and the necessary features of an appropriate course design. In addition, this chapter is intended to contribute to the related literature with the updated sources of recent developments during corona lockdown and guide professionals, researchers, and instructors who would benefit from theoretical and practical knowledge for effective distance course design.

INTRODUCTION

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is a field in which learners and instructors are not in the same milieu, lessons are offered through different information and communication technologies and the support is

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given at a distance. When evaluating these features according to the pitfalls of ODL, the current situation of education can be interpreted as a challenge that is full of rigid limitations. However, providing online support for both learners and instructors are among the advantageous features, so ODL may have strong potential for providing accessible education to diverse learners in the future. When evaluated within the scope of promises, the elements of having no specific barriers of time and space, meeting learning needs while working, and helping learners to improve themselves in the area needed can be counted. The advantages may also manifest learners in the time of the coronavirus pandemic lockdown but it should be kept in mind that a poorly designed online course will not meet the expectations of an effective learning experience, just as a poorly designed face-to-face (F2F) course will not.

Due to the pandemic conditions, the use of distance education (DE) has reached the highest level in history. In this connection, this restricted process has shown that DE is beyond an option but a necessity and most educational institutions around the world have been significantly affected. Instructional practices offered during the pandemic should not be considered as planned DE practices, but as remote access education in emergency situations in order for students under lockdown to continue their education (Hodges, Moore, Lockee & Bond, 2020).

One of the biggest problems observed in this period is that the existing lessons are tried to be given in online platforms as they are given in F2F milieus. In other words, the expected learning outcomes could not be achieved as learning materials and methods for F2F lessons, so they are transferred into online platforms without any changes or revisions. In addition, abrupt transition to online teaching is found to be extremely daunting to instructors who have limited or no prior experiences teaching online (Hargis, Yuan, Lu, Lian, Huang & Song, 2021). Therefore, it is becoming increasingly crucial for both the content and the instructors presenting that content to teach courses based on ODL principles. Lessons that are not designed within the frame of ODL learning principles may create problems for learners to be successful in online courses, and this wrong action may actually lead to a pitfall in terms of misperception of DE. These principles are based on a system of meeting multiple and diverse learning needs of students through course design, administrative processes, and learner support (O'Rourke, 2009).

Designing courses according to the ODL approaches can be an involved, complicated process. Among the factors on the effectiveness of an online course within the framework of ODL may include the implementation of impressive course design, having an awareness on learning outcomes, and creation of humane online communication between instructors and learners (Chun & Hargis, 2020). Considering these factors, ICT technologies, can also be used in various designs since learning environments have become independent of time and space, and it is no longer limited to classrooms (Taskiran, 2019b). However, it may be a misconception to think that the way information is transferred to the student only through ICT tools is a 'teaching approach'. In order for an application to be an ODL practice, it should include teaching-learning methods, classroom management, planning, guidance and organizing all of these mentioned elements (Holmberg, 1989). Without the limitations of space and time, an ODL system of learning should support curriculum and instructional design emphasizing acquiring, creating, and sharing knowledge through synchronous and asynchronous courses (Msweli, 2012). It may also not be an effective method for instructors to present only the content in course design but it should be considered that the learner diversity may be at the maximum level, especially when considering the courses given at a distance. In addition, the fact that the learners may not be in the same milieu with the instructor and therefore the planning and foresights should be updated accordingly.

Attention during information processing is another factor that should be considered during course design. Intention should be given to learner characteristics, cognitive domain, interaction, time-space

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