

Chapter 9

Enhancing Learning Through Companionship in Distance Education

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ABSTRACT

While distance education offers individuals the flexibility to learn at their own pace and location, it can also lead to feelings of isolation during the learning process. In order to get over this sensation of isolation, it is essential to establish a sense of learning companionship in distance education. Through the use of learning companionship, individuals in the group are encouraged to share responsibilities, acquire knowledge from one another, and collaborate on finding answers. Developing interaction among learners is crucial to ensure a sense of learning companionship. This connection not only enhances the learning process by making it more comprehensive, engaging, and purposeful, but also fosters cooperation and collaboration among learners. Although learner-learner contact is crucial in distance education, it is often insufficiently implemented and lacks sufficient focus on its enhancement. Learning companionship and learner-to-learner interaction in distance education have been greatly affected and changed by what happened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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LEARNING COMPANIONSHIP IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance education is an evolving educational approach where students pursue their studies remotely, without physical presence of the instructor or the educational institution (Keegan, 1986; Holmberg, 1995). Distance education provides an alternative global education approach that overcomes the constraints and accessibility challenges of traditional systems. Therefore, distance education is an important field of education that differs from traditional education methods in various aspects. The unique features of distance education, stemming from the physical separation of students, instructors, and institutions, have highlighted the significance of factors like self-esteem and loneliness in influencing academic performance, dropout rates, and course satisfaction, all of which impact students' successful engagement in a distance learning setting. The unique features of distance education, stemming from the physical separation of students, instructors, and institutions, have highlighted the significance of factors like self-esteem and loneliness in influencing academic performance, dropout rates, and course satisfaction, all of which impact students' successful engagement in a distance learning setting (Workman & Stenard, 1996; Von Prummer, 1990; Kurtz et al., 2009). Due to the nature of distance education, it may cause the student to be isolated from other students, teachers, support materials and resources. This scenario might induce feelings of solitude in the student. Obtaining personalized and intelligent assistance from a teacher or peer learner is challenging in distance learning compared to a traditional classroom setting (Brusilovsky, 1999). Although distance education processes provide individuals with spatial and temporal freedom; it is a process that may cause individuals to feel alone in their learning journey. Feelings of loneliness are a major factor causing individuals to abandon their distance education programs. In order to overcome this feeling of loneliness, it is necessary to create learning companionship in distance education processes. Companionship is the state of spending time with someone or having someone to spend time with (Dictionary, n.d.). Based on this definition, the new phenomenon we encounter in distance education processes is “learning companionship”. The term “learning companionship” refers to a group of individuals coming together to strengthen their learning processes by providing support to each other. When two or more people come together and share their knowledge, experience and understanding, it can enrich the learning process. Learning companionship involves interactive learning strategies such as group members questioning each other, exchanging ideas, working together and providing feedback. This approach allows individuals to make their own learning more effective and to benefit from the perspectives of others. Learning companionship encourages the participants in the group to share responsibilities, teach each other and generate solutions collectively. Ensuring adequate interaction among learners is crucial for fostering learning

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