

Chapter 43

Distance Education at University Settings

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ABSTRACT

Distance education has become a feasible alternative to traditional face-to-face education especially in support of new technology advancement. In order to see the current status of distance education, it is important to look at how distance education has evolved since its inception in the 1830s. Distance education has also affected the pedagogical paradigm throughout the years in parallel with its evolution. Therefore, when designing and developing a distance education course, a systematic approach needs to be employed using instructional design model, focusing on interactions provided by several technologies and collaboration techniques, as well as assessment methods. Specific emphasis is given to Web 2.0 technologies and how these technologies improve the collaboration in web-based courses.

INTRODUCTION

In parallel with the development of information and communication technologies, distance education has been broadly considered as a response to the need for new courses and training in educational settings. Although distance education is not a new field, it now affects people's lives more significantly than ever because of the use of new

technologies. Many educators and trainers use those technologies to offer courses online, reaching learners without limitations of time or place. Moreover, many for-profit institutions have started taking advantage of the ability to have students without any geographic or time zone boundaries, and many students prefer taking courses from a distance, even when they and the institutions are located in the same geographic place. This educational change encourages other institutions to offer technologically driven courses in new

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forms as well as traditional classroom-based courses, and almost every institution now has its own distance education department or institution. Distance education is used to provide opportunities for people who have some time or geographic restrictions to enjoy long-term and cost-effective education, and to increase the quality of education by providing new learning opportunities, among its other benefits.

Since distance education has significantly influenced the education system, it is important to view the phenomenon as both a result of and a reason for changes, including changes in educational technologies. When we look at the historical roots of distance education, it becomes especially clear that its main purpose has been to provide opportunities to improve knowledge and skills for people who formerly had no physical access to education or training. It is also important to remember that the main philosophy behind distance education involves the way in which learners and instructors are separated, even if they are in the same geographic area. An examination of the current tools and platforms available for distance education will make this clearer.

BACKGROUND

Moore and Kearsley (2005) define distance education as "...planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching, requiring special course design and instruction techniques, communication through various technologies, and special organizational and administrative arrangements" (p.2). Distance education is not as easy to offer as traditional courses and training, so when designing and developing a new distance course, there are many factors to be considered, such as instructional design and technological infrastructure. Regarding distance education, Moore and Kearsley (2005) ask some key questions, such as: "...who decides what is to be learned, when and how it is to be learned, and when learning has been

satisfactorily completed? If such decisions are not made in a classroom, this is not distance education. If they are made, and communicated from instructor to the learner by means of a technology, the program is distance education" (p.3). Since learners and instructors are in different places, the shape of distance education depends on how courses are instructionally designed and the type of technologies used to create interactions among learners, instructors, and content.

History of Distance Education

In order to understand what distance education is, it is important to look at how distance education has evolved and the challenges that now face distance education today.

Correspondence Study

The history of distance education started with instruction offered through the postal services; at the time, it was called correspondence study. Instruction by mail in Europe, especially in Germany and Great Britain, began in the 1830s (Holmberg, 1986). The main purpose of correspondence education was to provide instruction to improve skills and knowledge related to the correspondents' professional development.

In the United States, this movement was started by Bishop John H. Vincent, who created the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle in 1878 to offer instruction in reading. Correspondence study was used in higher education by the Chautauqua Correspondence College to offer courses through mail (Scott, 1999). The learners in this correspondence study were primarily adults, who wanted to improve their work-related skills and knowledge.

Broadcasting by Radio and Television

When radio was first used as a new technology in the 1920s, it attracted interest as a new way to

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