

SAMPLE

Scope and Nature of Distance Education

Lesson Aim

Identify differences between various modes of distance education and other forms of education.

TRENDS IN EDUCATION

Education, like many other disciplines, is a dynamic industry where trends change according to the latest research and developments. Current trends in the field indicate the following:

- The more popular courses are becoming student-centred rather than teacher centred. As people's lives become busier and their time valuable, more and more are turning to self-paced and flexible distance learning alternatives when considering their education needs and goals. As a result, a greater number of institutions now offer distance education to cater for people wanting a more personalised approach to their ongoing studies.
- Developers of educational courses are now taking into account the needs and wants of a wide range of the population when designing and offering courses and qualifications.
- As more and more people own and are literate in their use of computers, educational institutions are responding by providing an ever increasing array of distance education courses online via access to the Internet and email.
- Knowledge based education has some problems; the retention of facts, figures and complex concepts has always presented difficulties for a lot of people. Therefore the most progressive courses are putting increasing emphasis on teaching "how to find information, and how to apply it" rather than "how to carry out specified tasks" or "understand specified concepts". Some of the best universities have dramatically cut lectures and lab classes in degree-level courses and replaced them with group projects focussing on solving defined problems. Research has suggested that graduates from these courses not only know as much as graduates from traditional courses, but advance faster and further in their chosen careers.
- More and more institutions are adding new technologies, such as online learning to their existing provision of courses to students. As we become more technologically advanced, there will probably be an increased need to maintain and offer new online courses aimed at meeting the educational expectations and needs of the general population.
- The best and more popular courses are increasingly offering greater flexibility and diversity in the way people study. Instead of all the education being conducted in a classroom, learning may involve a combination of practical tasks, set readings, research projects, tutorials, lectures and online education. Using technology, these might all happen on campus, or off campus, or as a combination of both. Often off-campus study is the most cost effective, and that means off campus students can be provided with better value for the education dollar than on-campus students.

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND CHANGES IN THE WORLD

The 'tools' available for educators to communicate with distance education students in the past were very limited. In the middle of the 20th century, most distance educators communicated with students through the postal system alone. Some also used radio transmissions (for example School of the Air in Australia conducted classes for school children on isolated properties using short wave radio).

The situation today is very different in several ways:

1. *More Tools for Distance Education*

Many new tools have become available for Distance Educators to use (eg. Internet, Fax, email, telephone, more extensive courier services, better air services, etc)

2. *Classroom Education more Costly*

The cost of classroom education, particularly in developed countries, has become increasingly prohibitive, often resulting in a depreciation of standards and services.

3. *Greater Social Acceptance of new Technologies*

New technological tools have become increasingly widely available around the world.

4. *Globalisation Opened up Markets*

Courses can be offered to a wider demographic of people living in many different countries.

5. *Busier Lifestyles*

There is an ever increasing need for greater flexibility in education –which did not exist in the past. People's lives and their life choices are constantly changing and this is being reflected in the variety and scope of educational courses being offered.

6. *Self Directed Education is more effective*

Research is actually showing that student centred education and self directed education is more effective and graduates have better career prospects.

Growth of Distance Education

Distance Education is one of the strongest growth areas in vocational and tertiary education, both in Australia and internationally. There are perhaps two main reasons for this:

1. People are busier than ever before, moving location, working odd hours etc, so there is a greater need than ever for people to be able to study where and when they are able to find the time.
2. Technology has enabled distance education to be delivered more effectively than ever before.

Disadvantages of distance education are obvious:

- The teacher/trainer cannot see the students face to face continually throughout every part of the course
- The students cannot see and hear the teacher/trainer continually throughout all parts of the course.
- Students need to maintain motivation without peer encouragement or teacher input
- Students need to be more self disciplined in their approach to their studies

Advantages of Distance Education are both obvious and not so obvious. Obvious advantages include:

- The student has greater flexibility in terms of when and where and how often they study
- The tutor has more flexibility regarding when and where to assess or to respond to students.

Not so obvious advantages are:

- The student does not get bored with the teacher.
- The student cannot lose attention in the midst of study through others in the class
- The teacher cannot be so easily upset, disturbed or stressed by particular students
- There is a reduced likelihood of teachers/trainers becoming overly stressed and letting that stress impact on the quality of training.

- The student is more likely to have the undivided attention of their tutor whenever they interact (eg. Through written communications, phone calls, or meetings).
- There may be greater equity. The course may be better documented than a lecture; hence, if developed properly, there is less chance of a lesson not succeeding. For example, in a classroom, everything depends on the lecturer. If they have a bad day, are sick or over stressed, this can reflect in the way they deliver the lesson. However once written, a distance education lesson will be delivered with the same consistency to all students who attempt it.
- The students can feel that they have a closer relationship with their tutor/teacher as there is no classroom competition for attention.

FORMS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

There are a number of other ways students can study courses via distance education. These include the following delivery mechanisms.

- Traditional Distance Education (paper-based education)
- Projects (mentor guided research)
- Video or audio courses
- Real Time Conferencing
- Online
- E Learning
- Blended learning.

Traditional Distance Education

This is a paper-based form of education. Traditionally, sufficient quantities of course materials (e.g. study guides, notes or text books) are printed to supply needs over several years. Some traditional correspondence courses have been known to use materials decades after initial printing. In today's world of rapid change, material can become out of date rapidly, and this traditional approach is generally less than desirable. Other institutions will print notes as required from a data base that can be updated at will.

Provided adequate resources are allocated for maintaining relevance of content, this method can deliver very up-to-date material. If students take too long to complete a course, though, and are working with materials supplied to them a year or more earlier, this system can also have dated content.

Projects (mentor guided research)

This is more commonly used for delivering post graduate courses, and not by all universities. It involves providing guidelines or instructions for the student, and assigning an academic expert to provide support as they work through a project.

The mentor may have well defined responsibilities, such as "to provide guidance and direction" when called upon, "to monitor progress" and "to record adherence to guidelines provided".

Video or Audio courses

Audio education has been used to deliver some forms of education, in particular language courses (e.g. Linguaphone and Berlitz) for many decades. Video education though more recent, has still been used extensively over recent decades, if not to supply a complete course, at least in blended learning situations.

Real Time Conferencing

These can include, telephone conferencing, internet chat, video conferencing and in some cases short wave radio.

Online

This involves utilising instruction and information sources that are transmitted via the internet.

Online education can be relatively simple, or very complex. In its simplest form, documents are simply viewed and read on web sites. These may have text, photographs and illustrations. There may be both information about the subject being studied, as well as instructions to follow, guiding the student through the learning process.

A very simple course may not even contain assignments that need to be submitted. It could be as simple as three steps:

1. Read the notes
2. Answer some questions
3. Go to a different part of the web site to check your answers are correct.

A step up from this may involve automating stage 2 and 3 so that the student can test themselves.

Complex online learning systems are not only more sophisticated in what the student works with; but also incorporate programming to support administration, allowing such things as the college to track the students work and automatically record progress.

E Learning

This is similar in some ways to online education, though it does not depend upon any type of link between the computer being used, and other computers. Courses are in electronic format, so that text and graphics are viewed on a computer screen. It may also involve video, automated assessments, access to an online library and other support facilities etc.

Blended learning

This involves using two or more different methods of delivery. It may involve on campus studies as well as distance education (e.g. periodic workshops, or some modules such as lab classes which can only be taken on campus).

HOW DATED ARE BOOKS?

Text books are not always as up to date as you might think. Some publishers can take years to publish a book; so the publication date may sometimes be two or more years after the date the author finished writing it.

WHAT STYLE OF STUDY WORKS BEST?

This is an important question that can and should be asked when planning and delivering a course. There are several key approaches and most of them can be applied in different ways.

Study Options

Information Based Learning – A traditional approach where the core focus is on acquiring information.

Competency Based Training – Focus is on competencies (i.e. the ability to do something tangible). The emphasis is placed on the student demonstrating how they have achieved the competency in the workplace or in the real world. Sometimes assessing a competency becomes more important than learning it. Usually however the competencies need to be backed up with demonstrable knowledge as well as practical skills.

Student or Teacher-Driven Learning – Traditional education involves a teacher determining and controlling what is studied (within a curriculum framework) and how it is studied. Student driven learning allows the student to determine these things.

Problem Based Learning - i.e. the student is set a problem then through research the student comes up with a range of solutions. The student works independently or within a group learning situation, under the guidance of the teacher. This is the basis of Problem Based Learning.

All of these methods have their value, and different approaches are suitable for different contexts and subject matter. However, Problem Based Learning has been demonstrated to be highly effective not only in allowing students to develop specific skills, but also to adapt these skills to the unique and ever-varying situations found in the 'real world'.

ADAPTING TEACHING-LEARNING MODELS TO DISTANCE LEARNING

Some models based on the above styles of study are outlined below. Teaching practice is generally defined into 5 main models. There are no definite boundaries between each of the models. No one model is regarded as superior to another. A thorough knowledge of all models leads to greater teacher flexibility and efficiency. Notice that these can be readily adapted to distance education

Exposition Model

This approach is teacher-centred, whereby the teacher narrates and explains, and practice and revision is used to consolidate the learning. It is based on the traditional approach. It is not inflexible, but the narration, explanation, revision and practice are considered basic to effective teaching. Content focuses on traditional subjects, with a strong emphasis on the basic skills.

Techniques such as the use of videos, telephone and video conferencing etc. enable this approach to be used for distance education.

Behavioural Model

This model is based on well-structured steps of learning and the use of reinforcement. This has been used in formal full-class teaching or face-to-face instruction. This approach is still teacher-directed. With modern technology and on line training techniques (like video conferencing), it is now possible to apply this model to distance education.

Cognitive Development Model

Here, the teacher creates a supportive atmosphere, selects tasks according to the student's developmental level, and elicits the student's reasoning in relation to the tasks. This approach requires planning of steps, but emphasis is on student's reasoning. A number of cognitive approaches are examined within the context of this model. The pupil learns in a resource-rich situation by using reasoning to solve problems. Distance education allows each student to be treated as an individual, giving each student a selection of optional assignments from which to select, according to the level at which the student is capable.

Interaction Model

This model emphasises learning based on the student's interaction with other people and with society, i.e. personal interaction. This model works mostly on group situations. The focus is on social interaction. Content focuses on social-moral-cultural problems which produces self-aware people. A distance education student can interact with tutors or other students via the internet (email, video conferencing etc), fax, phone or mail. It is now more than ever, possible for schools that wish to develop the service, to provide even greater and more immediate interaction between the student and others, than ever before.

Transaction Model

This is a pupil-centred model involving a range of teacher structuring with which the self-directed student interacts. It is assumed that change (learning) results from those interactions. The teacher functions more as a guide. Focus is the action (transaction) of the learner. This model is derived from progressive education and open learning. Distance education can work extremely well for this system.

LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Learning management systems were introduced to facilitate the delivery on content based on a web platform.

Any decision maker will need to provide adequate thought for which is the LMS for their school or college. Two commonly used systems are Blackboard Learning Systems and Moodle.

Moodle

“Moodle is a software package for producing Internet-based courses and web sites. It is a global development project designed to support a social constructionist framework of education.”

*“Moodle is provided freely as Open Source software (under the GNU Public License). Basically this means Moodle is copyrighted, but that you have additional freedoms. You are allowed to copy, use and modify Moodle provided that you agree to: **provide the source to others; not modify or remove the original license and copyrights, and apply this same license to any derivative work.** Read the license for full details and please contact the copyright holder directly if you have any questions.”*

*“Moodle can be installed on any computer that can run PHP, and can support an SQL type database (for example MySQL). It can be run on Windows and Mac operating systems and many flavors of linux (for example Red Hat or Debian GNU). There are many **knowledgeable** Moodle Partners to assist you, even host your Moodle site.”*

“The word Moodle was originally an acronym for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment, which is mostly useful to programmers and education theorists. It's also a verb that describes the process of lazily meandering through something, doing things as it occurs to you to do them, an enjoyable tinkering that often leads to insight and creativity. As such it applies both to the way Moodle was developed, and to the way a student or teacher might approach studying or teaching an online course. Anyone who uses Moodle is a Moodler.” www.moodle.org 2011

Moodle is supported by an active online community and is constantly evolving.

Moodle provides a wide range of functionality from adding quizzes, grading, embedding videos, connecting to repositories, forums, messaging, assignment upload and notification and more.

Moodle demonstration site: HYPERLINK "http://demo.moodle.net/" <http://demo.moodle.net/>

Blackboard/WebCT

WebCT was developed by University of British Columbia. It is not open source freeware like Moodle, however it was the first commercial successful online learning management system available. Blackboard is used by many Universities worldwide.

Blackboard Learning System (WebCT)

WebCT (short for Web Course Tools) is an online course management system. Many Sinclair instructors use WebCT to organise their course materials and make use of the study and communication tools offered by WebCT, including course mail, an online calendar, chat rooms, discussion forums, gradebook, quizzes, etc.

WebCT is used to develop and deliver educational materials on the World Wide Web. Created at University of British Columbia, it is a tool that facilitates the creation of sophisticated www-based educational environments. It is used to create entire online courses, or publish materials that supplement existing courses. Using this system, course managers can: create admin, course designer, marker and student accounts with passwords; quickly set up pre-designed modules for e-Mail, Chat Rooms and Bulletin Boards; automatically download student lists from existing registration information; download and setup entire tables of contents for courses; link internally between existing pages of course material and externally to World Wide Web resources; and deliver their courses on-line to anyone in the world on any platform that has an internet connection and supports typical web browsers like Netscape Navigator or Microsoft Internet Explorer.

Traditional Distance Education

Assignments can be submitted via post, fax, courier, email or in person

Interactive On Line Education

Assignments are submitted via email only

(There may be occasional, minor exceptions)

Assessment is mostly through assignments submitted at the end of each lesson

Additional assessment is given through automated, interactive self tests. You answer questions and get an immediate response.

Information is supplied mostly through printed notes or text books

Information is mostly supplied electronically and often that means more photos and more information can be supplied

Course notes or additional reference materials are sent more slowly, through the post (snail mail)

Course notes or additional reference materials are sent faster, over the internet.

Services are limited by the resources of the school

Services can be more extensive; not only directly from the school, but also from other organisations to which the school can refer you.

Assignments may be typed or hand written

Assignments must be typed on a computer

Learning is self-paced but turn around time on assignments and submissions may be slow.

Students and teachers have greater flexibility in the pacing and timing of learning.

Fast responses via email to questions and assignments.

Student more removed no peer interaction.

Students feel more connected to peers through chat rooms and email.

SET TASK

Investigate the scope and nature of distance education being used in your country, both by:

- a. Government Education Services

and

- b. Private enterprise

When identifying the **scope of education** services, list all the different kinds of distance education offered in your country.

When describing the **nature of the education** services, investigate at least 4 different kinds of education in depth. Find out as much as you can about the kinds of courses offered, methods of learning, and other information. Take notes.