
SOME SPECIFICS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

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Abstract: Distance education in the contemporary world is one of the important and useful forms of education. A tradition for over 150 years has been significantly enriched by a variety of sophisticated capabilities that appear in the age of Internet, which appearance contributes to the development of distance education. The system of interactions in the field of distance education, different in shape, role and contents, works in accordance with the nature of the communication for this area of education. In the field of distance education, direct interaction of the participants in the educational process is present to a lesser extent; to a significantly greater extent, the model of indirect and personalized interactions is present. In the process of distance education features of motivation are caused by the specifics that relate to the purpose of the program that is realized, the nature of the contents that are being adopted, indirect "presence" of teachers in the educational process, etc. Evaluation and assessment of learning outcomes in the field of distance education are different than in the conventional education that takes place in the classroom. There are also some gaps in the assessment, including the fact that it is not possible in every situation to determine the level of independence in the performance of specific tasks that the students are assigned in a program.

Keywords: distance education, interaction, motivation, evaluation, assessment.

1. INTRODUCTION

The area of distance education is one of education areas that owe its intense and complete development and expansion in modern times to the development of the Internet. In addition to the term "distance education", in educational theory and practice are also used the terms such as "distance learning", "online education", "online learning", "electronic learning" (e-learning) and other terms, that in a greater or lesser extent cover the scope and content of common term "distance education" or belong as part of the content. The term "online" implies the existence of an active connection between computers on the Internet, and in this case, "online education" and "online learning" include the use of computers connected to the Internet in the process of distance education.

According to Moore and Kearsley (2005) [1], the essence of distance education is to provide educational opportunities for individuals who are unable to be physically present where education takes place, within a particular institution, or who are physically remote from the institution which provides an opportunity for distance education in the form of constituted program of distance education. This area of education is particularly suitable for so-called extended education (*further education*), *post-secondary non-tertiary education*, and to develop different models of adult education. In practice, the implementation of some programs of distance education have shown that good results can be achieved just in the field of adult education, which is being created for different purposes (professional development, acquiring titles out of the profession, acquiring a higher level of education, etc.).

The field of distance education usually belongs to the complementary (alternative) educational opportunities. This field of education is constituted along with areas of regular, institutional education, an area that includes permanent presence of students who are educated through the implementation of constituted educational program, which is usually implemented in the form of teaching. Thus, the institutions of formal education, in accordance with the legal opportunities, can constitute special programs of distance education, while these programs may also constitute those institutions that have only this type of education, that is institutions which sole activity is distance education. Alternative educational opportunities may refer to programs that are implemented in regular mode, and the special programs that are not covered by the field of regular education.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

As the field of education, distance education is an activity that has its own line of development and historical dimension. An advertisement in *the Boston Gazette* from 1728s is considered to be a start of distance education. In this advertisement, a teacher teaches students in stenography with the new Short Hand method of work, through assignments that students accepted weekly and that they were working on independently. This distance learning was applied by Isaac Pitman, who taught stenography via mail, in the UK in the 1840s. The important role in the development of distance education had the development of postal service, which enabled the establishment of commercial correspondence colleges. These colleges have been available throughout UK territory. [2]

London University was the first higher education institution in the world to offer the acquisition of titles via distance education, establishing the External Programs way back in 1858. In the line of development of distance education then there are some key points. In Boston in 1873 a company was established to support education at home (Society to encourage studies at home), and the University of Queensland (Australia) established the department for distance learning (Department of Correspondence Studies) in 1911. University of Pretoria (South Africa) established a program of distance education in 1946. In New Zealand, distance education or school education (extramural education) at the level of higher education began in 1960, at Massey University in Auckland.

In today's world there are specialized universities that offer distance education programs. The largest university in the UK for distance learning is the Open University, and it is founded in 1969, while in Spain it is National University of Distance Education (*Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia*), founded in 1972, in Germany it is the University of Distance Education in Hagen (FernUniversität), founded in 1974.

Today in the world there are a number of different higher education institutions for distance education, often with the name "Open University". Many of these institutions are attended by more than 100,000 students. It is well known that private University of Phoenix, which is primarily an online university, has enrolled 200,000 students, and it ended serving up to 500,000 students in the distance education mode in 2010. In addition to distance education organized at the university level, there are a variety of private, public, profit and non-profit institutions that offer programs for acquiring degrees in distance education at secondary and postsecondary non-academic level.

3. COMMON FEATURES OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Features of the models and contents of distance education programs in a modern economy are largely based on characteristics and opportunities of the Internet (Moore & Kearsley, 2005) [1], as the key medium that can enable the implementation of various programs of distance education. As it is the case in the present time with the Internet, so the phenomenon in the past was an intensive use of certain media of mass communication for facilitating the development of distance education (telephone, radio, television and satellite communications).

The field of distance education requests the existence of mainly indirect communication with a person who is educated through various media of communication; with Internet being a key medium. Nevertheless, direct communication in the process of distance education is not necessarily excluded. Usually in some extent direct and indirect communications are present, and direct communication serves as an aid to enable and facilitate

the successful implementation of planned educational programs.

During the development of distance education, the indirect communication took place in different ways, through different technical agents of communication. Initially, distance education, in the form of correspondence education, took place by sending letters through the postal service. It was a relatively slow and inefficient medium of communication. The birth of Internet and the e-mail, as one of its key tools of communication represent the drastic change and the increase of the efficiency of communication. In every respect, the Internet has made distance learning faster, easier and more effective in terms of modern education as an irreplaceable medium in the field of education.

Distance education, the field in which the Internet has an important role, is not necessarily continuously carried out only with the help of the media, under the direct (on-line) link of computers of program users with the Internet. Some parts of the program may be constituted to be implemented in off-line mode, thus without computer connection to the Internet (Matijević, 1998) [3]. Also, communication within the program of distance education can be conducted by telephone, correspondence through classical postal mail, and direct gathering of students (users of distance education programs).

Communication in the field of distance education includes several stages, which can be reduced to at least four phases, as the following: (1) conceptualized assignment is sent to student to be performed, which is a part of a larger program; (2) received assignment is executed by student in accordance with the proper directions and guidance, and returned to its sender; (3) analysis and evaluation of assignment are undertaken; and (4) information feedback is sent to student with further suggestions to complete the assignment, as well as suggestions for any corrections, additions and the like.

4. INTERACTION IN THE FIELD OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

The essence of the education process in general is an interaction, which can be varied in form and content. Also, one of the key features of distance education are very specific interactions that occur in the process of education in this field. By definition, the interaction in the process of education is made by coordinated activities of two or more subjects of activities, which has the effect on a single individual activity and aimed at achieving a pre-defined task. In the process of education in general, interaction allows more efficient teaching and learning, and the development of competences and skills.

The interaction in distance education can take place as *personalized* (takes place between at least two individuals) or *non-personalized interaction* (takes place between the individual and the educational content). Realization of any education activity always implies the presence of some form of interaction, personalized or non-personalized, direct or indirect interaction. The

relationship between teachers and students and the complex interaction that takes place between them are essential attributes of the education process. In the field of distance education these relations are slightly different, due to the nature of the communication that takes place in this area.

Student activities within an educational content involve direct non-personalized interaction with the content and indirect personalized interaction with content creator (teacher, writer of textual content). These two types of interactions are dominant and characteristic for the field of distance education.

Considered forms of interaction occur in the field of distance education. However, it is undeniable that in this field of education at least direct personalized interaction is present. This type of interaction within the program of distance education is mostly replaced by the indirect personalized and non-personalized interaction, which is largely prevalent in this field of education. For better quality of the process of implementation of the program of distance education it is desirable that there is an optimum diversity and the presence of different forms of interaction.

5. MOTIVATION IN THE FIELD OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

How it is stressed by Lepper & Chabay (1985) [4], there are some activities which serve as an indicator of the presence of basic internal, intrinsic motivation in students, in the field of education in general and in the field of distance education. Those are the individual and by the nature of the contents motivated student activities conducted through certain procedures and learning activities. These procedures and learning activities, by their nature, are a reflection of the interest and pleasure of dealing with the act of learning some content, and they are the main factor of motivation. In this case, according to Ntoumanis (2001) [5], the inner satisfaction of students occurs as a consequence of the fact that the object of learning, the nature of knowledge and concepts that are discovered and adopted and the activities that occur in the process of learning, are interesting for students, and they acquire them with pleasure in the process of learning.

There is no doubt that the motivation in the process of distance education differs from the motivation of students in the conventional educational process that takes place in the classroom. The key difference stems from the fact that in the process of distance education the presence of a teacher or direct interaction and collaboration of teachers and students is not directly possible, and this kind of activities are very sporadic as a part of the process of education in this area. The lack of this kind of activities arises from the common need that teacher should be an initiator of student motivation.

There are different methods and procedures of impact on the motivation of students in the process of distance education. A key role in this process is consciousness of students about the process in which they are involved. On

the other hand, to form a model of motivation (extrinsic or intrinsic motivation) the fact about the nature of reasons for participating in the process of distance education is of key importance. If the reasons for participation in the distance education are of personal nature, for example, a desire for professional development and personal growth, in this case there are conditions that students can develop the model of intrinsic motivation.

6. EVALUATION ACTIVITIES IN THE PROCESS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Some parts of the program of distance education consist of activities of evaluating and assessing student work. There are some specific models of evaluation and assessment in this area. Shortcomings in the implementation of evaluation of distance education programs relating to various aspects of knowledge and skills that are evaluated in students, and which are the outcomes of the education process. Despite the fact that there can be established clear and precise assessment criteria, when it is known what is assessed and in what ways, that can not be evaluated in every moment the actual level of engagement of students in relation to the potentials that he/she has.

The option that provides effective control of the process of evaluation and assessment is the gathering of students in distance education programs, in order to conduct a testing procedure (through tests of knowledge or skills), or otherwise. This is the case of using the same model of evaluation and assessment that is used in the conventional educational process.

7. CONCLUSION

Some of the features of post-industrial information society point to the fact that a significant further development of distance education can be expected. The key reason for this expectation lies in the need of modern man to be educated and professionally developed in the option of lifelong education and learning. In addition, Internet continues to play a critical role for the further development of the field of distance education, as the most prevalent and the most effective medium of mass communication.

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