ASYNCHRONOUS AND SYNCHRONOUS DISTANCE EDUCATION: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

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الملخص

ظاهرة مجرد ليست أنها إلا ، عشر التاسع القرن منتصف إلى تعود بعد عن التعليم أصول أن من الرغم على كورونا وباء لتفشي نتيجة 2020 عام في كان كما العالمية والأهمية الاهتمام من القدر هذا تلقي لها يسبق لم. حديثة عن التعليم بين الأساسي الفرق إيجاد على البحث هذا يعتمد. الفردية الوطنية الحكومات نفذتها التي السلامة وتدابير يجب ولماذا ، منهما كل وسلبيات إيجابيات مع النوعين لكلا خلفية إعطاء خلال من والمتزامن المتزامن غير بعد. ومتزامنة متزامنة غير أوضاع في والتعلم التدريس في استخدامهما

بعد عن التعليم، المتزامن ، المتزامن غير التعليم: الأساسية الكلمات

Abstract

Despite the fact that the origins of distance education goes back to the mid-nineteenth century, it is not solely a modern phenomenon. Never before has it received as much global attention and importance as it had in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the safety measures implemented by individual national governments. This research is based upon finding the basic difference between asynchronous and synchronous distance education by giving a background of both types along with their pros and cons, why they should be used in teaching and learning in asynchronous and synchronous modes.

Keywords: Asynchronous , Synchronous, Distance Education

Introduction

Historically, distance education (henceforth DE) has been beneficial to students who are geographically separated from education centers or tutors, allowing them to make the best use of educational resources(Moore et al. 2011). In the past few decades, colleges and universities in a variety of countries have widely integrated distance education into their educational programs and provided students with online education experiences(Roopnarinesingh and Whiteman, 2020). Distance education can be delivered in two ways: synchronous or asynchronous courses. Building on that this research will present both types in detail. It aims at:

Shedding light on the concept of DE.

Explaining the chosen types of DE: asynchronous and synchronous in detail.

Following the two above, the difference between these two types of DE will be presented.

History of Distance Education

Harry et al. (1993:32) states that DE refers to "an interactive, educational process among teachers and students separated by a physical distance". It has a long history which dates back to the 1700s, when the training for employability skills was done via mail correspondence (Olszewski and Corwith, 2011). Correspondence education persisted into the 1800s, as universities began to offer students the option of taking distance courses (Greenway & Vanourek, 2006). DE increased in 1930s, when providing learning opportunities was via radio for students in elementary and high schools. In the 1950s, the emergence of newer technologies led to the improvement of DE (Cavanaugh et al., 2004). Radio and television broadcasts were used in classes to provide students with information more quickly. The use of computers, videoconferencing, and the Internet in the late 1970s resulted in email and online file sharing, which eventually led to today's online education programs (ibid).

However, advances in communication technology have enabled new methods of implementing DE, as a result, terms like open learning, distributed learning, web-based learning , flexible learning, online learning, and blended learning have emerged (Rigo and Mikuš 2021). The attainment of education and knowledge today goes beyond the boundaries of educational institutions. Learning and education take place in a variety of forms, making it easier for the general public to gain access to education. Furthermore, of these new forms of learning, asynchronous and synchronous DE are the main concern of this research.

Asynchronous delivery was used in the early days of online education. However, latest technological advances have offered the necessary tools to offer courses synchronously (Hrastinski, 2008). Generally, a learning management system is typically used to deliver both synchronous and asynchronous courses such as Angel, Moodle, or

Blackboard (Jackson, 2012). The following sections are devoted for these two types of distance education and the difference between them.

Asynchronous Distance Education

The word "asynchronous" means not to keep time together, which refers to the ability of students to access information, to demonstrate what they have learned, and to communicate with classmates and teachers at their own time. Students do not need to be in the same time zone or same classroom to participate (Trach, 2018). It is also defined as an instructional model that provides students with greater autonomy and flexibility in their learning (CSUSM, 2020).

As such, asynchronous DE is a student centered learning method used widely in online learning. Its basic assumption is that learning can take place at different space and time particular to each learner. In asynchronous learning, the teacher usually builds up a learning path that the student engages with at his/her own pace (Finol, 2020).

It is of great importance to draw attention to the benefits and drawbacks of asynchronous DE as follows

The Pros of Asynchronous Distance Education

Asynchronous learning methods allow students to learn regardless of time or location. Students can learn independently, according to their schedule and learning style. Which includes consuming material in small doses or watching segments of recorded lessons.

The flexibility enables students with varying obligations from day to day to work at times that do not contrast with other obligations.

Asynchronous DE reduces the technological barrier to entry, i.e. access to technology and internet speed are less likely to impede successful learning.

Increases student agency by shifting to a learner-centered model.

The Cons of Asynchronous Distance Education

A lack of real-time engagement could lead to lower student buy-in or feelings of detachment.

Students may be frustrated if they have to wait for questions to be answered or for other students to reply during group activities.

The learner-centered model relies on students motivating themselves to achieve tasks, and a lack of scheduled interaction can result in procrastination and hasty work (Murphy et al. 2011).

Why should Asynchronous Distance Education be Used?

Considering the pros of this type we can find more than one reason why it should be used in EFL classes such as allowing students to learn regardless of time or location,

autonomous learning, flexibility and reducing the technological barrier. Given the current state of uncertainty regarding student accessibility to technology, arrangements for living, health, and work schedules, this method will give them a flexible option for meeting their learning objectives. While asynchronous education is not without challenges, many of the negative images associated with it have been addressed in recent decades. There are numerous innovative approaches to teaching and assessing students that more closely reflect how digital native learners consume information and the kinds of tasks they will be required to answer in their careers. Some of the work completed in distance education courses may be transferred to face-to-face courses in the future (Lin et al. 2012).

Synchronous Distance Education

Synchronous DE refers to all sorts of learning in which learners and teachers are in the same place and time for the purpose of learning, and it includes in-person classes, live streaming video when the entire class or smaller groups come together (Finol, 2020). Watts (2016:24) defines synchronous DE as " live streaming video and/or audio with instantaneous feedback". Additionally, Liyun et al. (2020) state that Synchronous DE involves simulating traditional educational communication models to some extent by synchronizing learning and teaching, as in live online conferences and virtual classrooms.

Moreover, Synchronous DE happens in real time, which means that in this type of learning, participants (teachers and students) interact at a specific time in a specific virtual environment, using technology such as real-time chat, video conferencing, teleconferencing, and video conferencing. Students can participate in classroom activities such as lectures, discussions, and activities (Hortos et al. 2013).

Similar to Asynchronous DE, Synchronous DE has its own pros and cons and as follows:

The Pros of Synchronous Distance Education

Many of the interactive benefits of face-to-face classes apply to synchronous distance education.

It enables the facilitation of interaction through real-time communication with students in both formal and informal settings.

Allows students to interact with one another in real time during activities and/or discussions.

Lessons in this type of education can be modified by instructors based on student feedback and/or questions. During these sessions, students can get real-time answers to their questions.

For some instructors, this type of education may be a more effective way of conveying complex information.

If the instructor is using a microphone, participants can hear his/her tone of voice. If he/she is using a webcam, their facial expressions can be seen as well

The Cons of Synchronous Distance Education

In this type, one of the fundamental principles of distance education is violated, that is the ability to work at their own pace and at times that are most convenient for their schedule.

Student's learning is restricted because of the fixed time of the course.

Students must overcome a higher technological barrier (fast internet connection to deal with the live feed, camera, microphone).

According to research on modern students' attention spans, block video lessons may be less effective than allowing students to work at their own pace by engaging in smaller pre-recorded video lessons (Alnabelsi et al. 2015).

Why should Synchronous Distance Education be used?

Noticing the pros of this type we can find more than reason why it should be used in EFL classes. Most importantly that many of the interactive benefits of face-to-face classes apply to synchronous distance education. If the instructor teaches in a field where he/she believe that having real-time interactions with students is critical to their success, comprehension of the material or evaluation of learning outcomes, a synchronous DE could be beneficial. This could consist courses with dense material or even where learning assessment is tied to specific demonstration of skill sets (language, speeches, performance, labs). This type is also useful for mirroring student engagement methods that many instructors are familiar with and providing opportunities for dynamic interaction in the classroom(Chen et al. 2005). This type of participation can help students achieve their goals while also allowing for more in-depth discussions about current issues.

Language Learning in Asynchronous and Synchronous Distance Education

Broadly speaking, effective education refers to the improvement of the relationship between collaborative, interactive, participatory, and responsible learning processes and objectives and outcomes such as problem solving skills, critical reasoning, and higher order thinking (Watkins et al. 1996). Therefore, to avoid frustration, the design and implementation of any online language learning pedagogy should provide highest support to learners in achieving outcomes and objectives (McCloskey, et al. 2013). Especially, when compared to conventional face-to-face language learning processes that provide real-time interaction, actual contact, immediate feedback, and a sense of human touch. This can be accomplished by establishing a context of language learning through collaboration as a communicative method to language teaching in order to

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encourage group activities and social construction of language through interaction, as well as a shift in emphasis from instructor-centered pedagogy to learner autonomy (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012).

Asynchronous DE enables students from a variety of backgrounds and levels of L2 proficiency to formulate a semantically and syntactically correct sentences by writing and rewriting them for use in emails or discussion comments. This gives students the opportunity to revise their sentences for accuracy. The answers of the questions and comments being openly available for reading by their fellow students and teachers encourages the learners to work on better statement formulations. The answers contribute in developing an understanding of the concepts. Furthermore, they have plenty of time to try out activities, rewrite their texts, or even seek advice on their writings before uploading them (McLoughlin & Lee, 2010).

On the other hand, synchronous DE allows students to listen to their teachers while also exposing them to native and non-native input. They receive direct feedback for their error at the same time, which can ultimately lead to conscious language learning. Also, the teacher's written presentations place the necessary pressure on students to read and comprehend quickly (ibid).

Conclusions

Despite the fact that synchronous DE is becoming increasingly popular around the world as a result of faster Internet speeds and technological advancements. Asynchronous DE is as well nothing less important. Both types of distance education discussed in this research have advantages. The most significant advantage of asynchronous DE is that it allows students, particularly independent students, to self-manage their learning time and, when combined with suitable mobile apps, it could be available at any time, allowing for reference to study material. While, synchronous DE has also a number of significant advantages. It increases interaction real-time interaction among the entire learning group and helps to reduce the sense of isolation which can result from DE models. It, additionally, allows for group activities and real-time collaboration, provides teachers with some interesting ways to vary lessons and gives them the ability to give direct instructions to their learning group.

From a different point of view both types of DE have also disadvantages. Perhaps the most obvious disadvantage in asynchronous DE is the lack of real-time engagement that could lead to lower student buy-in or feelings of detachment. As for synchronous DE, one of the fundamental principles of DE is violated, that is the ability to work at their own pace and at times that are most convenient for their schedule and the problems of internet connection. The matter of finding the best type of DE for teaching and learning depends on the circumstances and the possibilities that are available for teachers and students.

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