PROBLEMS OF QUALITY OF DISTANCE LEARNING ONLINE

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ABSTRACT
From this paper work we see distance learning and its relationship to emerging computer technologies have together offered many promises to the field of education. In practice however, the combination often falls short of what it attempts to accomplish. Some of the shortcomings are due to problems with the technology; others have more to do with administration, instructional methods, or students.

KEY WORDS: tertiary education; distance learning; literature review

INTRODUCTION
Despite the problems, many users like technologies such as compressed video and see continued growth in the area. This paper will examine some of the current research and thought on the promises, problems, and the future possibilities in modern distance learning, particularly types that are delivered via electronic means. Distance learning has become a pervasive and growing phenomenon giving a tremendous boost to the use of information and communication technologies in tertiary institutions.

These issues are brought about by a number of reasons, the major one being ever-increasing demand for knowledgeable, 'high-caliber human resources' that can effectively participate in the global marketplace. Educators are not in agreement how to evaluate quality and effectiveness of distance learning.

Supporters of online distance learning argue that learning at a distance can be as effective as or even more effective than a face-to-face pattern. It is reported that the delivery media for instructional content is unlikely to dramatically impact the learning outcomes, whereas content, teaching methods, communication, and learner support are extremely important for student satisfaction. Opponents, however, express concerns that students in online environments tend to feel more confused, isolated, and frustrated, and as a result their learning effectiveness and satisfaction can be. One overlooked factor in the success or failure of distance learning programs is the role that the technicians play in distance learning.

Of course they play a large role in the technical delivery, but little is known about the non-technical activities of the technicians that could have an influence on the instructional process. In a 1995 study, found that technicians could indirectly influence the learning environment by "orientating participants to the technology, reducing the anxiety of the participants" (including the instructor), "and by advising the instructor on instructional techniques".

This type of role, if viewed negatively by the instructor, can have a huge impact on the quality of the presentation, yet many times the instructor and the technicians do not meet until the initial class meeting. Olenski also found that the technicians felt the instructors were given inadequate orientation to the equipment and really could not operate it until they had hands on experience.

The technicians also saw a difference in the instructors who could adapt their styles to the technology, and those who could not. Those who adapted were, in the opinion of the technicians, superior in conducting the classes. So we see not only does the instructor need to adapt to the educational environment, they must also adapt to another person in the room that can help or hinder the delivery of the lesson. Much of the outcome depends on the attitude of the instructor...

LITERATURE REVIEW
Faculty commitment to instructional design and delivery is pivotal for creating effective virtual environments. The literature indicates that faculty needs to recognize that e-teaching requires design expertise and delivery skills.

Courses must be designed so that students could benefit from the interactive potential of online learning, so instructors require extensive training on how to utilize new technologies and adapt teaching methods to distance learning environment. Faculty positive attitude to ICT also does affect the students' perceptions of their distance learning experiences. Overall, faculty should understand that online instruction is generating new forms of interaction, learner support and assessment.

Distance students, due to their backgrounds, may also feel more pressure to collaborate and be part of the team. These collaboration and interaction issues must be thoroughly considered in the instructional design and student support services. Student support and resources are central to the students' success and satisfaction in virtual learning environments.

Tait defines student support as "a range of services which complement the course materials or learning resources" (p.288) and stresses that they must be provided for all students rather than those with specific needs. The author concludes that student support performs three essential and interdependent functions: cognitive, affective, and systemic. These contribute to developing learning through tutoring and assessment, enhancing student commitment and self-esteem as well as establishing user-friendly information management systems.

. Therefore, low grades often damage a student's ability to be effective. Yet, the authors argue that assessment must be more about learning support than measuring learning outcomes. It is suggested that under certain conditions assessment can support and promote effective student learning.

To achieve this objective, assessment must be frequent and focused, involve appropriate learning activities, and seriously engage students with demanding practice. In this case, assessment is likely not only to encourage students to allocate more study hours and efforts to assessed tasks, but also orient them to in-depth rather that a surface approach to learning.

These findings are bound to work well for full-time students, but there is still not enough research data on effective assessment strategies in virtual environment. What is still clear is that learning quality seems to be hardly attainable, unless effective interaction practices between students and instructors are put in place.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the research findings demonstrate a relatively high students' satisfaction with their distance learning. At the same time, we found that there are some controversies in the ways, in which students evaluate the effectiveness of their distance learning compared to other education patterns.

Being positively motivated to take an online course of study, they, nevertheless, face a number of challenges while learning at a distance. These involve low self organization, lack of control on the instructor's side, lack of effective interaction and sense of isolation, which obviously decrease their satisfaction with online learning experience.

These findings prove the thesis that to be highly successful and effective distance learning requires considerable attention and commitment on the part of faculty. The role of faculty is manifested in the way the instruction is designed and delivered as well as in the faculty ability to incorporate relevant course content with the emphasis on student support, interaction and assessment techniques as these are the key issues in effective distance learning.

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