

Chapter 15

Current and Future Trends in Higher Education Learning: Implications for Curriculum Design and Delivery

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ABSTRACT

Emerging educational practices and growing demand from education researchers and learners appear to be driving a shift toward the learner and context-centered teaching approach. Higher education is transitioning delivery from a predominantly teacher-centered mode to a non-traditional learner-oriented one. This change is being primarily facilitated by the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in curriculum design and delivery ushering online learning. In this chapter, we discuss the current and future trends in higher education for curriculum design and delivery using online learning. We present Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) as an online teaching-learning future trend that can help provide educational access to millions of students geographically situated all over the world. We share a case study from India, highlighting the initiatives in the field of higher education and course delivery with the use of ICTs and the changes in methods of learning-content delivery. The advantages and challenges associated with MOOCs are also discussed.

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CURRENT TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education has remained largely traditional and unchanged for more than a century (Molebash, 1999). Classroom teaching dependent on the wisdom of an expert professor is still being accepted as the dominant mode of instruction at many educational institutions (Molebash). Holz-Clause and Guntuku (2010) stated that the assumed role of a teacher in traditional contexts is to impart knowledge to those that do not possess it. The teaching strategies employed in higher education classrooms have been predominantly based on the “liberal adult education philosophy” (Elias & Merriam, 1980), which views the teacher as an expert and students as passive recipients of information. Despite many technological advances and new pedagogical concepts, a majority of today’s classrooms still rely on this top-down traditional teaching mode (Molebash). Holz-Clause and Guntuku stated that the changing situations and expectations of fast paced and technology savvy learners demand that this teaching method be changed. National and state wide educational reform movements are advocating for students to be actively engaged in learning and constructing a meaning of that learning (Soloway et al., 1996). One way to actively engage students in learning is by utilizing information and communication technologies (ICTs) to design and deliver programs online (Holz-Clause & Guntuku).

The stance on adopting ICT for educational design and delivery has been met with mixed response from different educational institutions. Most of the higher education institutional policy makers and administrators still see their experiences, focus and exposure to the vetted knowledge of a formally designed study course as the only real and valid thing. However, young people and continuous learners are no longer isolated or insulated from a broad knowledge context especially because of the ever emerging social media

networks. So, if the notion of the trend: “teacher-centered” to “learner-centered” can be taken a bit ahead to call it “learner context-centered,” that is the cusp of innovation and ICTs can be the framework of innovation for designing online courses. The inflection point in education can come when education professionals understand how to operate in an individual learner context. ICTs allow the broad educational context but the design philosophy for content and course design must be aimed at the individual learner.

Molebash (1999) asserts that “educators have thrived in a bubble, immune to advancements in technology, but the increasing rate of change of these advances now look to be threatening to burst this bubble” (p.1). These advancements in technology have led to the advent of online learning that has contributed greatly to making the predominantly teacher-centered educational model into a learner-centered one. The last decade has seen a revolution in the approach to student learning and classroom instruction, with more emphasis on learner-centered instruction (Hansen & Stephens, 2000) and online education. Huba and Freed (2000) stated that “We are failing to use existing knowledge about learning ... to produce graduates who leave the institution ready to succeed in the information age” (p.3).

There are many advantages to learner-centered teaching and online learning. People learn the best when actively involved in a topic, and will be motivated to seek and construct knowledge and skills (Norman & Spohrer, 1996), which is possible through learner-centered online educational delivery. Arizona Faculties Council (AFC, 2000) supported this view that learner-centered teaching enhances motivation, learning, and achievement of students, and provides a good basis for life-long learning. National Capital Language Resource Center (2006) stated that learner-centered instruction encourages students to take responsibility for their learning and helps them gain confidence in their ability to learn. Gonzalez and Nelson (2005)

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