Chapter 6
Evolution of Distance Learning in History

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ABSTRACT

In the conundrum of what type of learning and teaching environments have a better impact on student learning and academic achievement or whether or not traditional learning and teaching setting surpass the emerging computer technology-rich education in today's digital era, scholars in the field of educational technology rather turn to history, focusing on what, how, and who as perceived change factors that tend to lead to long-lasting educational changes. With the emergence of the millennials, much of research conducted today ties to the importance of learning and teaching activities designed and delivered with appropriate media as vehicles for reaching positive learning outcomes. Current instructional practices are often tailored towards the specific learning needs of students that are diverse in many aspects (e.g., culturally, linguistically, technologically, etc.). Compared to learners back in the 1800s, it is undoubtable that today's local and distant learners need and prefer more different, progressive media tools for effective learning due to the exponentially changing demographics and social contexts, rapid growth in science, advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs), developing global economies, revision of educational policies, reassessment of media and technology tools, in addition to various instructional design principles and theories related to them, changing politics, and other subcomponents within this macro-system, all of which Moore and Kearsley view with a systems approach.

INTRODUCTION

As such, more than any other form of learning and teaching—be this e-learning, online learning, or virtual learning—distance education (DE) has probably been the most popular one among the digital learners today and managed to successfully deliver these diverse students' learning expectations. According to Simonson et al. (2012), recent research in DE indicates that the most effective learning outcomes originate from instructional designers' understanding of and appreciation for three major factors that allow for visible changes in student learning and success: 1) content, 2) method of delivery of instruction;

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and 3) students' involvement in the subject matter through their individual learning experiences. The last change factor leads up to a rather post-Fordist (Simonson et al., 2012), constructivist approach to learning based on the axiom that the student acts as the center of learning and teaching practices—and the instructor operates as a guide, a facilitator.

With the constructivist learning theory, which is a prevalent learning approach in DE—the learners constructs meanings for himself/herself from within the content, and collaboratively recreates it with his/her peers either in a conventional, brick-and-mortar classroom environment (Moore & Kearsley, 2012) or from remote locations, often by use of electronic communications or a web-based, computer technology. In this current context, it would not be a faulty assumption to make that students residing and working in locations distant from the instructor have so far had educational opportunities to earn an online degree. Utilizing the aforementioned web-based, high-speed networking technologies has tremendously assisted them with enhanced academic achievement (Simonson et al., 2012). The emergence of ICTs at the onset of the 20th century, followed by the introduction of the Internet in 1980 (Moore & Kearsley, 2012), as well as the advent of the World Wide Web in the early 1990s that has prevailed learning and communication until today have all stood as the pioneering DL tools in particular, representing the most relevant and solid examples to the advancement of DL in its current form today.

Evolution of DL in the Course of History: From Hornbooks to Computer Technology

The unequivocal transformation of education that has come along with DL is experienced and enjoyed today by a vast array of learners from across the world. When viewed from a historical perspective, computer-supported learning and teaching practices both in the U.S. and across the world have considerably developed since the colonial times. Research on the early history of education indicates that, before paper became more available for use, it was possible to see *hornbooks* that were the most common teaching devices (Johnson, Dupuis, Gollnick, Hall, & Musial, 2008). These devices were used at early colonial schools before the advent of printed books and other learning/teaching resources. History also shows that the transformation from this primary and basic textbook to computer technology particularly demonstrates the evolution of the U.S. educational system, particularly in distance education. Regarding this, it is possible to assert that today's learners and teachers can skillfully utilize computer technology from diverse locations and anytime in order to collaborate, deconstruct, and then reconstruct knowledge. A lesson learned based on these facts is that DE has been optimized with the introduction of the Internet since the early 1980s and web-based educational technologies, which have been substantial factors contributing to the advancement of DL.

DE Versus Traditional Learning

DE is no longer an educational phenomenon to be misperceived or vilified as a replacement of yesterday's conventional learning and teaching methods. Simonson et al. (2012) contended that the field of DE needs further research in order to find to whether or to what extent it is directly effective on student achievement in contrast to traditional learning/teaching settings and resources. The authors also pointed out that students still demand face-to-face interactions with the faculty, regardless of the distance and the delivery of instructional materials. Thus, despite the widespread acceptance and implementation of DE