

Chapter 6

A Flawed Promise: Anytime Learning

ABSTRACT

Asynchronous online learning has increased access to education for millions of people in developed nations, and the next step is to expand educational access for billions more in developing countries. The problem is that flaws in asynchronous delivery will result in unacceptably high failure rates for students with limited English fluency and different educational backgrounds. There will also be cultural issues that inhibit student success in asynchronous delivery. This chapter reviews the limitations of asynchronous learning and discusses synchronous solutions that can improve student success and satisfaction by reducing isolation and improving student support.

INTRODUCTION

Asynchronous learning is an ideal medium for communicating information. In the blended classroom, instructors can now place their lectures in the LMS so that students can use them as an ongoing learning resource. In that way, the face-to-face classroom time can be used for student reflection and clarification, as well as higher order learning activities. The classroom sessions enhance the development of critical thinking, social, and behavioral skills.

Asynchronous discussion also strengthens analytical skills and can promote student interaction. However, written discussions are more challenging for students with limited English skills. When students have difficulty

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comprehending the question and following discussion threads, they are less likely to participate. Often they will keep their responses brief, repeat what others have said, and limit their number of replies. The students may also wait until later in the week to begin to respond.

Many students enrolled in borderless online courses will not be native speakers, which will be a disadvantage in written class discussions. A blended delivery that includes a mix of live classes and asynchronous activities will benefit international learners. The mixed delivery will improve written comprehension and speaking skills in a less stressful classroom setting that will reduce attrition. The mixed mode will assist students in strengthening their writing, reading, and speaking skills so that they can be more successful in the blended discussions and assignments. The mixture of written and oral discussions will assist students in strengthening their English skills in more quickly in a comfortable classroom setting.

One of the advantages of speaking in an online class compared to an on height campus classroom is that it is less stressful, especially for students from authoritarian cultures and educational systems in which discussion can be interpreted as being disrespectful. In the online synchronous classroom, students can have the option to speak without turning on their video. That option helps them concentrate on what they are saying. Even with the video on, students still feel a greater sense of privacy and comfort than when physically standing in front of a group. Synchronous online activities can be a bridge to help students cross over to in-person presentations.

Written discussions are a staple in most online courses, but less used in on-campus courses. It would seem that they would be equally important in both modes of delivery. There are two reasons why online discussion continues to be a major component of online courses. The story began at the onset of online learning when the Internet was slow, and the home Internet was delivered on telephone lines to computers with limited memory and low processor speeds. These constraints made video conferencing impractical. The first video classes were held in expensive video conferencing campus classrooms that used T1 lines to provide fast Internet and specialized televisions. It would be another decade before free video conferencing like Skype became available for users in North America and Europe.

Written discussion questions were introduced in online learning because it was not possible to support live discussions. At that time, teleconferencing by telephone was very expensive. At that time, no one imagined it would be

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