

Chapter 8

Facilitating the Educational Process in Synchronous Group Advisory Online Meetings in the Hellenic Open University

Eleni Karakolidou

Hellenic Open University, Greece

Piera Leftheriotou

Hellenic Open University, Greece

Maria Pavlis Korres

Hellenic Open University, Greece & Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

ABSTRACT

The Hellenic Open University launched synchronous online group advisory meetings for the academic year 2016-17 through the Skype for Business videoconferencing platform. This chapter focuses on the extent to which interaction, immediacy, and collaborative learning are developed in this particular online learning environment, as well as on the skills required for an efficient adult e-tutor. Research conducted in 2019 has shown that learners scored high in terms of interaction, immediacy, and collaborative learning between each other and their tutor, especially when working in online workgroups, while the learning process was facilitated by immediate e-tutor feedback, which resolved queries, and the effective facilitation of the discussion. In terms of factors hindering the learning process, learners cited the lack of meaningful relationships with their peers as a leading one, e-tutors pointed to technical problems, while both agreed on the inadequate use of communication and collaborative tools in an online environment.

INTRODUCTION

Advanced learning technologies have shaped a new reality in education, making distance education a feasible and effective process in teaching and learning, through which the accessibility of adult learners in education and learning is facilitated and increased (Seaman, Allen & Seaman, 2018; Gallagher, 2019; Legon, Garrett, & Fredericksen, 2019). In present times, there is an abundance of e-learning programs offered in the context of both formal and non-formal education, aiming at the acquisition of qualifications and certifications. A number of programs are aiming to cope with the demands of the labour market, covering at the same time the educational needs of the workforce, seeking the convergence of existing skills with those required by the market (Stokes, 2015; Selingo, 2017). In contrast to the prevailing belief that e-learning programs are inferior to their respective live courses, they have proven to be just as good, if not better than the conventional courses (Bailey, Vaduganathan, Henry, Laverdiere, & Pugliese, 2018; Pavlis Korres, 2018). At the same time, there is also a change of attitude among employers who consider online degrees equivalent -to say the least- if not better than the conventional ones (Gallagher, 2019), reflecting the increasing popularity of those degrees.

The international literature indicates that all types of interaction increase, so does immediacy, whereas learning becomes more cooperative and social. Similarly, as learner satisfaction increases, so does the learning outcome. (Allen, Witt, & Wheelless, 2006; Schutt, Allen, & Laumakis, 2009). According to Dönmez et al. (2010), observing and studying interactions between learners can provide a variety of information regarding their characteristics, motivations and preferences, and each education system has to examine their individual characteristics (for example, gender, age and technological experience) in order to design appropriate educational/training programs.

However, the effectiveness of these programs is not based on proper and effective design (Song, Singleton, Hill, & Koh, 2004; Bonk & Zhang, 2006; Pavlis Korres, 2010). One of the serious criticisms levelled at e-learning is the lack of communication and interaction, due to geographical distance and time difference between educator and learner, which greatly impedes the creation of an effective learning environment (Anderson, & Garrison, 1998; Anderson, 2003; Muilenburg & Berge, 2005).

Therefore, the investigation of factors facilitating or hindering interaction, immediacy and collaborative learning in e-learning environments, is particularly important. E-learning environments adopt and combine asynchronous and synchronous e-learning modes, depending on the aim of the educational institutions and programs (Hrastinski, 2008). Among the educational institutions utilizing distance learning in Greece is the Hellenic Open University (HOU), the only University in the country offering distance learning for adults exclusively, through an asynchronous educational platform combined with face to face group advisory meetings. Since the academic year 2017-2018, HOU is offering alternative full online courses via Skype for Business, in which face to face meetings have been replaced by synchronous online ones, in order to overcome significant barriers in students' access to face to face meetings, especially those in remote areas of the country. These resulted in higher participation opportunity for learners, particularly in important meetings where support, feedback and further guidance is offered to the participants (Simpson, 2002).

This chapter focuses on the investigation of learners' and educators' views on educational process issues in the synchronous online group advisory meetings in HOU. In the first section of the chapter, the theoretical background is presented. In this context, the notions of interaction, immediacy and collaborative learning are clarified. The notion of collaborative learning is examined in relation to learning communities and social presence of the educator and the learners in an online educational environment

20 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/facilitating-the-educational-process-in-synchronous-group-advisory-online-meetings-in-the-hellenic-open-university/265329

Related Content

The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge of EFL Teachers (EFL TPACK)

Mehrak Rahimiand Shakiba Pourshahbaz (2019). *Advanced Methodologies and Technologies in Modern Education Delivery* (pp. 922-934).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-technological-pedagogical-content-knowledge-of-efl-teachers-efl-tpack/212871

Capacity-Building for Sustainability: A Cooperative K-12 Regional Education Service Provider Case Study

Clark Shah-Nelson, Ellen A. Mayoand Patience Ebuwei (2020). *International Journal of Technology-Enabled Student Support Services* (pp. 40-54).

www.irma-international.org/article/capacity-building-for-sustainability/255121

Learning without Boundaries MOOCs in Malaysia: Design and Implementation

Rachel Thomas Tharmabalan (2016). *Revolutionizing Modern Education through Meaningful E-Learning Implementation* (pp. 177-190).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/learning-without-boundaries-moocs-in-malaysia/157781

Learning Analytics

Constana-Nicoleta Bodea, Maria-Iuliana Dascalu, Radu Ioan Mogosand Stelian Stancu (2019). *Advanced Methodologies and Technologies in Modern Education Delivery* (pp. 739-750).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/learning-analytics/212856

Digital-Based Assessments for Higher-Order and Critical Thinking Skills in Higher Education

William Chakabwata (2022). *Handbook of Research on Digital-Based Assessment and Innovative Practices in Education* (pp. 228-246).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/digital-based-assessments-for-higher-order-and-critical-thinking-skills-in-higher-education/303501