

Chapter 52

Adult Learning: From Theory to Practice in the Online Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This chapter attempts to provide solutions on how to convert theoretical work into practical work in an online classroom. An analysis of various researchers provides quantitative statistics on how to put theoretical work into practice. The use of digital tools such as social media and the internet have been critically analyzed to provide a bridge between theoretical and practical work in an online classroom. The use of digital tools in linking theory to practice clearly shows the relevance of the topic.

INTRODUCTION

Since the introduction of the online classroom in the past decade, adult learning has become a vital topic in many countries. The introduction of an online educational platform has been based on maximizing the number of intellectuals in a country so as to increase the country's rate of production. The conclusion is reached that the online classroom has been one of the modes of development which has been supported by the government in an attempt to reduce poverty, unemployment, and even criminal activities (Sargeant et al., 2006). Statistics from the Babson Survey Research Group (2004) affirm that the number of students has increased by 3.9%, hence 5.8 million students have engaged in taking online courses at various universities and colleges that provide this online academic platform (Anderson, 2004). In this overview, the author will provide statistics illustrating the increase in the number of online students owing to the use of digital tools in enhancing the practical application of theoretical work in an online classroom.

Currently, several colleges and universities in the US have provided an online platform which has provided multiple courses to pursue. These universities and colleges include, among others, the Penn State World Campus, the UMass Online, Boston University, the University of Arizona, the Northeastern

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University (NE), the Indiana University (IU) online, and even the Washington State University-Global Campus (Sargeant et al., 2006). Online degree courses that have been provided by these academic institutions include Bachelor degrees in Humanities, Business Management, Information Technology, Education, Engineering, Nursing, Environmental Sciences, as well as Social Sciences (Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2011). The statistics provided in this case have aroused interest in identifying the reasons for the introduction of online classes and how to utilize theoretical work by putting it into practice in an online classroom.

Online sources such as YouTube have played a vital role in providing tutorials which enhance the understanding of any adult student doing an online course. YouTube is just an example of the numerous certified online academic sources which can provide quality knowledge to online students. This implies that the online classroom has been enhanced by the development of online sources. Other sources such as online journals and articles that have been made available by various universities and colleges have also played a major role in creating a studying environment conducive to any online student (Anderson, 2004). Anderson concludes that an online student has a higher possibility of performing better than a theoretical student because students studying online are exposed to more academic resources from institutions located all over the world. The use of YouTube has provided an opportunity for an online student to see the tutor's application of theoretical work hence one is able to practically implement theoretical work from an online classroom (Anderson, 2004).

The government's engagement in the certification of the online classroom has played a vital role in guaranteeing that both the student and the employer have acquired certified skills in a particular field of study. The US government's participation in online programmes has been illustrated by the previous president of the US, Barack Obama. He supported online classrooms by allocating \$9 billion US to aid community colleges to create a platform where more US citizens could acquire an education (Harasim, 2012). These funds would increase the quality of online programmes by approximately 25% and also increase the number of graduates by 17% (Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2011). This implies that the online classroom is the next step of developing academic support that any government should consider when tabling its annual budget.

The current digital era has been marked by the maximum use of social media which has enhanced the level of communication between online tutors and their students. To be more precise, social media has bridged the gap between a tutor and a student by limiting the number of interruptions which occur during communication. The use of social media tools such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and even IMO has resulted in the quality transfer of information between a tutor and online students (Harasim, 2012). These social media tools have provided video calls, voice calls, and text messages and have even made room for the attachment of any document in various forms to enhance the exchange of information. Therefore, online students can exchange information among them and submit their assignments to their tutors in a fast and efficient manner.

Website design is a very important tool that has made provision for online programmes or courses. The designing of websites, which are accessible in any part of the world via the use of satellites, has ensured that one can register and pay for any government certified online programme. The internet, in this case, has been used as the linking agent in connecting a student to the tutor. One is provided with updates on events taking place in the online classroom by joining an online conference that creates a virtual discussion meeting in which the tutor will be teaching in the same way as in the theoretical classroom (Sargeant et al., 2006). One can therefore conclude that websites are the official, virtual, academic institutions that provide us with extensive knowledge and updates on any occurrences in the online classroom.

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