Chapter 98
Evaluating Trends and Issues in Distance Learning

Seda Khadimally
University of Phoenix, USA

ABSTRACT

Today's learners are intrinsically motivated in that they are apt to analyze, synthesize, internalize, rebuild, share, and disseminate knowledge not only with their instructors, but also their peers, and the greater community, including a plethora of learning communities from across the world. Web-based technologies play a key role in this learning process. Particularly online social media networks and mobile technologies, the two selected technology trends evaluated in this paper, are thriving in online learning/teaching settings, immensely helping students acquire valid learning gains. These technologies are not a fad, a myth, or talk-of-the-day in learning and teaching environments in any given discipline. With that said, there are also certain issues and challenges that accompany these media and technologies for learning and teaching practices, which will also be addressed in this paper. Finally, future implications on these trends and issues in DL will be further discussed with the hope that educational leaders can draw on them for further inquiry and development in the field.

INTRODUCTION

Recent scholarly research, practice, and ongoing debates on trends in and challenges to distance learning (DL) inform educational leaders, instructors, those who train with cutting-edge technologies, instructional designers, educational technologists, and all other learning agents in the field that not all learners learn the same way. In fact, each learner comes to a learning environment pertinent to any subject area with diverse educational, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, as well as with different learning styles (Bloom, 1969). Their ability to think critically and outside the box, combined with their previous learning experiences about the real world outside enriches students' knowledge repertoire, emboldens their ability to direct their own learning process, which is also referred to as a learner-centered and self-directed learning approach in the DL field.

From an evolutionary perspective, these unconventional approaches to learning and instruction in the DL field manifest brand new instructional paradigms (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012) when compared to the traditional instructional methods of the past. Emerging educational technologies tremendously assist today's net generation (Glenn, 2000) with reconstructing the information provided to them. Besides, multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983) they possess, along with their personal interests in various topics, preferences, and most importantly, their competencies and conscious choices to utilize a vast array of digital tools for their learning play a critical role in the way they transform the traditional classroom.

Background

In the current educational milieu, considering that traditional classrooms pose the best learning option for all learners would not be a sustainable option within the mainstream education. It would not be a viable strategy to keep learners engaged in class-related activities with teacher-centered instructional methods for majority of learners today come from diverse areas, educational, cultural, and social backgrounds, with diverse cognitive skills, linguistic competencies, traditional classroom etiquette, and others. And when it is adult learners, majority of whom tend to enroll in online courses or distance education programs, learning and teaching at a distance and/or online, or in a blended format needs further address and inquiry. With respect to this, Bean and Metzner (1985); Kasworm (2005) provided that adult learners comprise an increasing rate of the total enrollment in today's universities and colleges in the U.S. and around the world. Thus, the implications are that DL is not going anywhere anytime soon; in fact, more scholars, practitioners, and leaders of the education field will be further investigating alternative routes to redesign, develop, and restructure their curricula, by incorporating state-of-the-art technologies into their school system. This will certainly be less costly than what is spent in traditional classrooms' learning resources today; however, time and finances used on ample teacher training in the field, consultations with subject matter experts (SMEs), and instructional designers, educational technology specialists, getting all staff (i.e., instructors, administrators, etc.) on board, collaboration among school administrators and instructors, parental involvement, and support from the larger learning community, as well as other stakeholders in this field will tell.

New Trends in Online Education: A Room With a View

Simonson et al. (2012) analogized today's classroom to a room with a view thanks to the surge of emerging telecommunications technologies. The Internet makes the content available to users instantly, which looks like almost real. Such technologies arising with DL also allow educators, learners, and school leaders to overcome challenges that traditional classrooms pose. These tools also help them eliminate the limitations of time and space; two of several issues involved with the physical classroom. In addition, it is undoubtedly that advances in technology promote the expansion of DL not only in the house, but across the world. Globalization, innovative minds and novel ideas, students' learning needs, study skills, and interests in diverse subject matters, their versatility to utilize technology devices, their motivation to learn at their own pace and time, as well as digital technologies emerging all pose challenges to the practice of today's traditional approaches to learning and teaching.

14 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/evaluating-trends-and-issues-in-distance-learning/271243

Related Content

Research on Musical Tone Recognition Method Based on Improved RNN for Vocal Music Teaching Network Courses
Kaiyi Long (2023). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies (pp. 1-18).*
www.irma-international.org/article/research-on-musical-tone-recognition-method-based-on-improved-rnn-for-vocal-music-teaching-network-courses/327948

Incorporating Innovative Instructional Strategies to Enhance Learner Engagement in Online College Courses
Lynne Orr, Linda Weekleyand Brianna Reyes (2021). *Research Anthology on Developing Effective Online Learning Courses (pp. 1411-1428).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/incorporating-innovative-instructional-strategies-to-enhance-learner-engagement-in-online-college-courses/271213

Understanding the Use of Twitter for Teaching Purposes in Saudi Arabian Universities
Sophia Alim (2017). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies (pp. 1-22).*
www.irma-international.org/article/understanding-the-use-of-twitter-for-teaching-purposes-in-saudi-arabian-universities/181757

Design, Development, and Implementation of an E-Learning Course: A Case Study Implemented in the COVID-19 Pandemic
Refa Jamal Ramahi (2023). *Research Anthology on Remote Teaching and Learning and the Future of Online Education (pp. 634-652).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/design-development-and-implementation-of-an-e-learning-course/312748

Design and Application of a Multi-Semantic Art Education Communication Platform
Changliang Guo (2023). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies (pp. 1-17).*
www.irma-international.org/article/design-and-application-of-a-multi-semantic-art-education-communication-platform/331075