Chapter 1
Online Education Past, Current, and Future

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses the paradigmatic shift in traditional education. It presents a historical overview of online education as a content and framework for understanding its current state and highlights how online education has become entrenched in business and in higher education worldwide. Beginning with distance education's contributions to the paradigmatic shift, this chapter provides a framework for understanding online education. It focuses on the connections and contributions of distance education to present day online education, the current trends in online education, and the projections of the future of online education. This chapter concludes that the nature and practice of online education across the globe will change in the next few years.

INTRODUCTION

Online education grew out of distance education, which has been in existence for the past 100 years. With the development of the Internet and the World Wide Web, online education can now reach students around the globe. Present day online education provides high quality educational resources in various forms of media to students. It supports both real-time and allochronous communication between students and instructors and between diverse students (Means, Toyama, Murphy & Jones, 2010). Institutions of higher learning now view online education as a means of boosting enrollment, aiding student who otherwise would not have been able to attend traditional college/university due to reasons that include distance, jobs, and family-related issues (Wilson, 2015). For students, however, online education is convenient, accessible, it has flexible scheduling, and it has accelerated courses. Additionally, online education provides opportunities for independent study at one's own pace, location, and time. Finally, compared to traditional education, online education allows for a faster degree acquisition, and promotes a high level of accountability for one's own learning (Sit, Chung, Meyric, & Chow, 2005).

Overall, online education is growing rapidly. For the past decade, it has grown significantly faster that overall college/university enrollment has grown (Allen & Seaman, 2009) and has remained steady for several years. According to Allen & Seaman (2009), over 4.6 million students were taking at least one online course during the fall of 2008, which represents a 17% increase over the number reported in 2007-fall term. By 2010, the number of college students taking at least one online courses rose to 6.1 million, which represents an increase of 560, or 1000 students more than the number reported in 2009.

WHAT IS ONLINE EDUCATION AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

Online education refers courses in which 80% or more of contents are delivered online via the Internet and without any face-to-face meetings or interactions (Allen & Seaman, 2009; Allen & Seaman, 2011; Wilson, 2015). Online education can be offered in several different ways:

- Synchronous: Students enrolled with this method of online education have the lectures and materials transmitted to them via the Internet at a specified time. Just as in physical classrooms, students in synchronous online education take part in a lecture, discussion, or class activity in real-time from different locations.
- Asynchronous: Here, students have access to pre-recorded lectures and materials given to or not given to a physical audience by an instructor in the form of a video at their own time with deadlines to keep the class on track. In asynchronous online education, students can also be provided with course objectives and a schedule. Additionally, they are allowed to work when they are able to and progress toward weekly or bi-weekly milestones.
- Distance students: Distance students do not have any need to come to campus, except at the end of their online education when they are ready for their final defense.
- Another method of online education is where students enroll as on-campus students, living close to the university or college, but chooses to attend and take courses offered by the university online.
- Free MOOCs: Students can also choose to taking non-credit hour courses offered free of charge through Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) by a university without being enrolled in the university. Recently, some higher institutions in the United Stated have started offering the MOOC courses for credit and with stipulations that include enrolling in the university, attending meetings with the instructor, and taking required additional coursework (Lewin, Allen & Seaman, 2015);.

The Early Years of Online Education

Online Education brings together many historical threads-distance learning, computers, and telecommunication. This means that the history of online education dates back much further than the birth of the internet. Online Education also merges educational theory, computer technology, and legislation. All of these play vital roles in the development of online education.

Correspondence Courses

Online education in the United States began with the first correspondence course offered by University of Chicago in the late 1800s. Correspondence courses are courses in which the instructor sends lessons

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