

Transnational Distance Learning and Building New Markets for Universities

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Chapter 5

Transnational Distance Learning: A Student Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the online educational experiences of students in both emerging and developed countries around the world. The authors are from France, Japan, India, Cyprus, Canada, the United States, and Fiji. This cross-section was chosen to present a global view of student needs for transnational education. The chapter presents personal vignettes of the online educational experiences, as well as the authors' views of student needs in the future. The authors also describe how they used technology to coordinate writing this chapter from six countries around the world.

INTRODUCTION

Crossing the geographic boundaries of a nation virtually to learn something new is what transnational learning is all about. Throughout the globe, across the countries there is a huge diversity not only in culture but also in education and learning. A course available in one country may not necessarily be available in another country, and

it is not always feasible to hop around different countries and places to study it. If the same quality of education can be provided without leaving one's comfort zone, then what is the purpose of settling for a regular, domestic course? From here starts the journey of transnational learning.

With the journey of Distance Learning, learner environments can change dramatically. In transnational settings, with different cultures,

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Transnational Distance Learning

languages, and even ideas about what constitutes education, this change can be amplified to great degrees. Seven transnational students from around the world were asked to explain their stories and synthesize them in this chapter. These case studies paint a picture of the variety and similarities of studying across countries and cultures, showing how vastly different learner experiences can be, yet how education can exist in many contexts and under many different conditions. These seven case studies bring the focus of transnational study to the learner's perspective. This chapter itself also illustrates the mechanics of how students from across the globe can work together in creating and learning from each other, regardless of distance. The chapter was constructed as a global team, to highlight for the reader the individual transnational learner environments.

As shown in Figure 1, the student authors were selected from all over the world. Each author has their own respective learning background and field of study, making the chapter diverse and valuable. The chapter consists of the student sections. The authors composed their section show-

ing their own experience through transnational learning and, thanks to file sharing, were able to initiate working together without much concern for distance. As our individual stories formed, we were able to discuss with each other how to enhance the chapter and complete the introduction and conclusion via Skype and email. Even real world considerations like personal vacations did not limit the completion of this chapter. The method used to create the chapter shows how to work with distance learning, and it can be useful for transnational educators too.

This chapter explores several prominent and recurring themes in distance learning as experienced by the seven co-authors through their learning experiences. Some of the prominent themes that will be explored are the flexibility that online learning provides to learners; its convenience over traditional classrooms; the sense of connectedness and the use of social networks to create a sense of connectedness. It also explores pivotal notions such as the cost effectiveness of online learning, quality when compared to traditional learning methods, and the opportunities

Figure 1. The student authors in this chapter used DropBox, Skype, and email to coordinate their writing



that distance learning provides for learners who do not have access to mainstream education or for those who are not limited by commitments to their family and work. The chapter will explore in particular how these themes vary and how they are similar, given the transnational background of the writers.

MY DISTANCE LEARNING NEEDS

In the following sections, each of the co-authors describes his/her experiences and views about transnational distance learning. The unique feature of this section is that the authors are from very different countries with widely varying Internet access and educational needs.

Glen Cochrane

Introduction

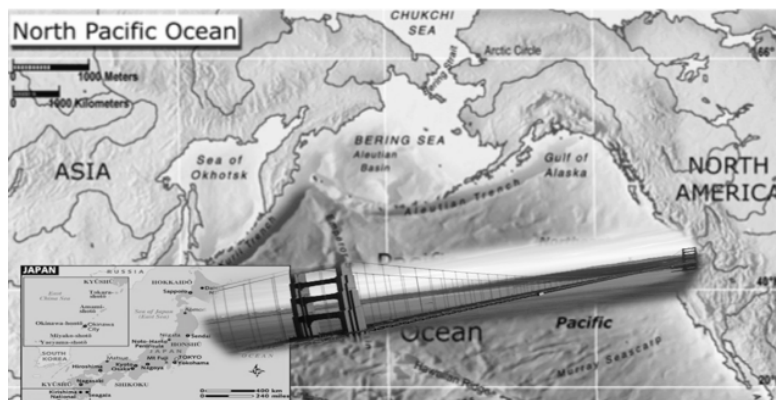
I moved to Japan six years ago from Canada with my wife, a Japanese citizen. When I decided that I wanted to complete a master's degree, I found limited options within Japan. There were two reasons. First, the language of most universities is Japanese—definitely not my strong point. Second, despite being technologically advanced, in particular with mobile technology practices,

Japan has been slow to adopt e-learning and online study. The reasons are regulations and a cultural preference for face-to-face education. For these reasons, e-learning is not a mainstreamed part of the educational system. As a result, few Japanese universities could meet my educational needs.

Online Program

Therefore, I decided an overseas distance education degree taught in English might be my best option. After investigating several universities that offered degrees online, I decided upon Athabasca University in Canada because it offered a masters degree program in an area useful for me both now and in the future—distance education. The Master of Distance Education (MDE) is based in the Moodle course management system. It is easy to follow and most of the interaction is asynchronous. Even the few times I have needed to use synchronous technology to contact administration or work on group projects, it has not been much of an inconvenience. Courses usually follow a weekly schedule and there is a lot of opportunity to read and work ahead. Most interaction is through class forums and email, which suits my time difference perfectly. I found that my online program created a navigable bridge (Figure 2) that connected me across the Pacific with my Canadian university.

Figure 2. My Internet link was the bridge connecting Canada to Japan



Conclusion

I think my online degree earned from a Canadian university (Degrees, 2005), along with my experience living in Japan will both enhance my career and be useful within the Japanese society. I have no doubt a foreign-based MA will open potential job opportunities in the Japanese educational system that would otherwise be closed. Being a language teacher, I found the MA program at Athabasca enabled me to focus my course work on not only distance learning but also on language acquisition. This dual focus of distance education and language acquisition complements each other. This type of flexibility of content is important to me because a Canadian institution gives me a curriculum focus of a country that I may very well relocate back to in the future. My family and I have not made any long-term decisions about where we will be in 10 years. According to Milhauser and Rahschulte (2010), ideas like global education and independent study are becoming increasingly necessary. The global village is a specialized village these days, and it is nice to have skills that are applicable to more than one village.

As Japan increasingly recognizes the need to strengthen the global focus of its educational systems, the move is toward mandatory study of English. Japan is increasingly accepting online learning as a valid teaching method, which is further loosening educational regulations. The online learning may also help with the language issue. Japanese students still struggle with English compared to other Asian countries. In the new world economy, the trend is for business and industry to adopt English. If so, students will be looking for a more globally centered, English-based education. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) study, which is traditionally popular in Japan, is perhaps poised for another surge in popularity. Each day on the train, as I study myself, I can spot at least two or three people in the same car studying English from a book. I can only imagine how many are also studying with audio or smartphones, and not just

language either...any subject. Which may mean a surge in distance learning itself.

Distance Learning certainly has a place in Japan. Japanese students may be discouraged from overseas courses because of the language and culture differences, but it is a cost effective way for any student to gain global experience. There are exciting possibilities these days in providing bilingual course design and language support. Discussion forums and course content can easily be supplemented with tremendous amounts of Online Open Resources for language learning; these days students can learn what they want and strengthen their language skills at the same time.

Jalal Mohammed

Introduction

Some of my best experiences in learning and in teaching have been through distance learning. By distance learning, what I mean is the definition proposed by Angelino, Williams, and Natvig (2006) which states that distance learning is the “method of course delivery that uses advanced electronic delivery systems” (p. 2). By this definition distance learning is far removed from the traditional teacher-centered physical classrooms where the learner is an empty vessel. Instead it creates a virtual classroom that engages the learner via asynchronous learning technologies. The demand has never been higher for distance learning—both internationally and in Fiji, where I am from.

But it was not always like this. The South Pacific is a region that consists of small island nations with tiny populations and limited resources. Separated by vast expanses of ocean, the enormous distances between islands nations have made higher education less accessible. With but a single regional university serving the region’s needs, distance learning meant *correspondence courses*. It was not until recently that two more universities were created in Fiji. The limited of-

ferings even today means that students have to travel from one island nation to another in order to undertake a university education. In my case, I left Fiji to pursue a university education because the program was not offered at the university in Fiji.

While doing my MBA, my work required regular trips to the United States and to South Korea. I remember missing classes every time I was away, and going through the long process of seeking university approval to be away. I also remember lugging books around from one country to another; the airport lounge and the flight became crucial times to study. Even so, when I was away, I missed out on crucial interaction with my classmates, lecturers, and tutors. It was during this period that I craved more flexibility in my courses. Whilst the backboard offered me limited interaction with my classmates, I needed my education to be fully online in order to meet my work schedule.

Online Program

It was not until I was doing my Master of Business Administration degree that I was first exposed to Web-facilitated and online learning. The first course was primarily a traditional lecture course supported with materials online. According to Allen and Seaman (2006), a Web-facilitated course is one in which 1 percent to 20 percent of the course is delivered online. The second course was fully online with a highly interactive virtual classroom.

Web-Facilitated Learning

In my first distance-learning course, the lectures were delivered in a traditional classroom setting that was supplemented by the Blackboard learning management system. Blackboard was used to download notes and PowerPoint presentations. It was also supposed to be used as a discussion forum, but I found it was rarely used. This may have been due to the fact that there was no feedback from the lecturer on the discussions. Instead,

all questions were answered in the face-to-face tutorial sessions. As a result I felt no connection to the online discussion forum.

Although my Web-facilitated course lacked regular feedback, it still provides the flexibility to further my education while working in a job that did not allow me to attend face-to-face classes. Had that course not been web facilitated, my career today would have been very different. I perhaps would not have been able to undertake the Masters in Public Health, a crucial step in me transitioning into academia at the Fiji College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences of the Fiji National University.

Blended Learning

When I undertook a Postgraduate Diploma in Education course, two of the courses were delivered by blended learning mode. Allen and Seaman (2006) define blended learning as courses that are delivered 30 percent to 79% online. In my blended course, most of it was online along with two or three face-to-face classes throughout the semester.

The blended course offered me even more flexibility to take courses. Gone were the days of having to travel to university and sit in a class for up to three hours, or worse having three one hour sessions each week. Doing a course online meant that I could do the course from anywhere, as long as I was connected to the Net. I could be at home, out of the country for work, or even be at the beach with my laptop working on my course.

Online Learning

One of my graduate courses was offered fully online. It was in this course that I experienced the virtual classroom. That course opened my eyes to the application of social networks in teaching and learning and it shaped my own teaching practices. I now lecture less and facilitate more.

The online course varied significantly from my previous Web-facilitated courses. The online course personalized weekly feedback as com-

pared to the usual generic collective feedback I was used to in face-to-face classes. The online feedback was Socratic, corrective, informative, and motivating. The weekly feedback allowed me to monitor my progress in the course, which allowed me to pick up where I was going wrong and take corrective action. The feedback enhanced my learning throughout the course.

In this course, I was amazed to see how online discussions in Moodle, Skype, Twitter, team blogs, and Nicenet were used to create social networks that enhanced learning. The online course took learning to the students and it provided a nurturing virtual classroom. Unlike my Web-facilitated course in which there was little student online discussion, in this course the students were online every day. I have never seen so much enthusiasm in any course I have taken. But the course offered more than excitement. It promoted what Biggs (1999) calls a deep approach to learning, whereby students actively learn through applying, relating, and theorizing. It was this active, problem approach that I found much more invigorating than the surface learning that consisted of memorizing information.

One of the most appealing parts of online learning for me was the sense of connectedness. The online learning environment creates a social atmosphere as well as bonds between the students and the facilitator. I have gone through many face to face classes where I have not known half the students of my class—it was usually the scenario that student came to classes, listened to the lecture, and left. However the online environment is quite different in nature. I formed bonds with fellow classmates through team activities, online discussion, and interacting with them in a social nature.

Conclusion

In just the short time I have been taking distance-learning courses, the technology and teaching methods have improved. No longer am I even tied to my laptop. In my online course, I often

used a smartphone to check my learning management systems and do my Tweets and emails. My smartphone even allowed me to use Skype to converse with my facilitator and my fellow classmates. Downsizing from a bulky laptop to a smartphone, now that is learning on the go. As technology continues to evolve, I only see that online learning growing to meet the needs and demands of learners, fitting learning to their schedules.

Online courses also put the world at your fingertips. With a face-to-face course, when there are concepts that you do not understand in a lecture you must wait for the next tutorial to have them answered. With online courses, you can get immediate answers on Skype or near-immediate clarification through email. This is great for the student, although it does increase the amount of time the instructor spends on the course. One way around this is to post your queries to the discussion forums. I found that most of the time someone in class understood the concept. What the online course also taught me was how to go online and do my own problem solving.

Some may say that online learning is not the *Pacific way*, as it does not fit our cultures and our ways of communicating. I would clearly say to these people, “Take an online course.” In face-to-face courses, students tend to be inhibited by their culture from speaking in class, which is termed the *culture of silence*. Students are unlikely to disagree with other students or the instructor less they appear discourteous. In face-to-face classes, age, position, race, and gender all limit free open and free discussions. I have experienced these barriers both as a learner and a teacher.

On the other hand, online courses promote more open discussion. I notice that Pacific Island students are more open in online classrooms. They quickly dismiss the cultural barriers that limit them in traditional classrooms. Interaction is more active and open, especially among female students.

Once I went online, it became hard to go back to the traditional classroom. In my last class, I had

to go to the University to attend a three-hour class each week. As fantastic a course as it was, I still found it difficult to make time to attend class. I also found it difficult to sit in one spot for so long! Gone was the flexibility of online learning that I had become used to. No longer did I have the ease of studying in my pj's sprawled out on my couch and eating away. It was at this point that I truly appreciated the convenience of online learning.

As technology changes in the Pacific, bandwidth is up and cost is down. As the needs of Pacific islanders change, students are increasingly unable to leave their jobs and family to study at a distant university. Online learning is one cost-effective way to meet this growing need for education in developing countries. In the Pacific, one of the pressing needs is to educate more of the population. I firmly believe that online learning will not only help meet this need, but will also open up new market segments for traditional education.

Chetan More

Introduction

I am from India and have completed my post graduate diploma in management at the Jaipuria Institute of Management in the field of finance. I will be joining Deloitte as a US Tax Analyst in Hyderabad in June. Currently I reside in the capital of India, New Delhi.

Throughout my education from primary to post graduation, I have studied at different institutions throughout India. I belonged to a small place where quality education was scarce, and distance learning was never heard of. That was the reason I was sent to a boarding school in Dehradun from standard 1st, which is often referred to as primary school. As the expense of my education became a burden for my father, I was shifted to a not-so well-off school near my hometown, but again in boarding. I studied there till standard 7, before I was again shifted to a new school, which followed

a different curriculum, as my parents were not satisfied with my performance. I had to change many schools and colleges before completing my post graduation because, in the developing countries like India, distance learning is not respected if it is of graduate or post graduate level. Fortunately or unfortunately, I have never stayed long in my hometown. Fortunately because in India, being such a vast country, I was exposed to various cultures and people while studying at different places, and unfortunately because I never got an opportunity to be with my parents.

Traditional Courses

From the beginning, I was exposed to only classroom contact programs and not distance learning. There were no distance learning programs when I was in high school or an undergraduate. However, after graduation, I came across various distance learning courses. Generally in India students opt for regular courses, but after graduation the percentage of students opting for distance learning increases, be it for financial or anything other reason. A point is clear from this that in India distance learning is also viewed as a cheaper source of being educated.

Distance Learning Courses

It was during my MBA that I came across various courses of a different nature, i.e. professional courses that I wanted to pursue, but they were available through distance learning only. Universities are available throughout the country, which are generally funded by the central and respective state governments thus making it affordable for students. However, some universities are better off than others in terms of grants, quality education, libraries, thus making it a difficult task to enter the league. Taking the example of Delhi University, this university runs many courses and every year many students apply for only a few thousand seats.

CFA

The very first course I Googled was CFA, a dream course post-graduate student in the field of Finance. Chartered Financial Analyst, or CFA, is a graduate-level self-study program that combines a broad-based curriculum of investment principles with professional conduct requirements. While collecting information about the CFA, I came to know that the papers of this course were to be given at some international location and India was not amongst the various test centres around the globe. Moreover it was conducted only twice a year. From there the problem began. The closest centre was either Sri Lanka, Nepal, or Thailand. Choosing Nepal as my option, I found that in Nepal that paper is conducted only once a year, and again did not align with my plans. So at last I had to postpone taking this course.

National Stock Exchange Certification of Financial Markets (NCFM)

My second experience with distance learning was when I enrolled for NCFM, which is an initiative from the National Stock Exchange of India to educate people through short-term courses on stock markets. Everything was online; the study materials were available within a week of registration. The best part was that I was able to schedule the exam according to my flexibility, but within the timeframe of six months from the payment of fees. The course was online, but the examination was face to face. Although I had to travel to the examination centre, it was not painful. The program had a test center in all major cities across the country. From the place I lived, it took about an hour to reach the centre as it was directly connected through the metro rail line. The problem encountered with this course was student services, particularly online payment. The stock exchange website had limited options for online payment. Online was only available

through a limited number of banks. Since I did not have a net banking facility with those banks or a credit card, I was in a fix. The fee payment was the greatest difficulty I faced in taking this online course.

Conclusion

Entering into the corporate world leaves the student with little time at their disposal, but aspirations that can only be met with a college education. Distance education helps a person taste the fruits of success. Organizations should encourage their employees to get a higher education in the field of their respective expertise. Although it is being practiced in the country by many, MNC's are generally accepted only at the higher levels of the organizational hierarchy. It should be made prevalent throughout. It will give everyone equal opportunity to rise and would definitely increase the human resource talent pool of any company and the country. What I personally think is that if a course is available both in distance education as well as classroom contact mode, one should always opt for classroom contact because it is not only knowledge that matters at the end but the way that knowledge is presented, and that could be learned only through classroom contact programs. Maybe I am saying this with a little bias because in a country like mine distance education is still not developed to a level where it could stand against the regular classroom contact courses. For example, a person doing an MBA from a regular program gets an opportunity to get a job through campus placements, but it is not so in the case of distance learning. For courses like CFA and CPA that are highly professional and for people already at a certain level in their career, this condition doesn't apply. So there should be a segregation of the courses which should be allowed in distance mode and which should not.

Joseph Scarcella

Introduction

My name is Joseph A. Scarcella, II. I am a recent (2011) graduate of King's College in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. My degree is a Bachelor of Arts in history and government. What distinguished me from most of those students with whom I graduated from King's College was the fact that I began my undergraduate work at a Community College, attaining an Associate of Science degree from Luzerne County Community College (LCCC) before moving on to King's. When I told my family and friends of my decision to attend a community college following my graduation from high school, they were skeptical and encouraged me to reconsider by decision. They were uncertain as to why I chose to take such an unorthodox academic route when nearly all of my friends and many other students throughout the country enrolled directly into the four-year college they intended to graduate from.

The reasons for my decision were twofold. First, I had investigated and discovered the community tuition (\$1260) was only a fraction of the tuition (\$27,680) of the four-year private college I planned to graduate from. Second, I realized I could save more money by living at home the first two years and commuting to the community college.

Having just graduated only a short time ago, I look back and confirm that my decision was the correct one for me. I graduated from the community college with my Associate's degree nearly free of debt. In those first two years, I saved a total of \$55,360 in tuition and \$21,340 in board. Although the cost was less, my associate degree fully qualified me to enter King's College as a junior. When I walked down the aisle with my cap and gown along with my friends from high school this past May, I received my degree for approximately \$70,000 less.

As it turned out, the community college had other benefits. I found it gave me the opportunity

to hone my academic skills in a more personalized atmosphere. The professors were of the same quality at my four-year university, but they also offered more mentoring and guidance. While my peers might think I missed the essential *college experience* those first two years, I much prefer having skipped that aspect of college life in favor of being able to begin my *real-life* experience. Now as I have just graduated, I have far more options opened to me compared to graduates burdened with debt. It is simply a question of priority.

Online Program

Another benefit of Luzerne County Community College (LCCC) was my experience with distance learning. While LCCC has many branch campuses, including one in downtown Hazleton, not all courses are offered at each campus. Without online learning, my only options would have been to travel nearly two hours each day of the week to class, or to delay graduation. The prospect of traveling that far each day for one or two classes was not inviting, especially considering the extensive workload I had in my other classes. The constantly rising gas prices made online look even more attractive. The way I found out about distance learning was through the college administration. When I told them the Hazleton branch campus of LCCC was not offering the courses I needed that semester, they pointed me toward the distance learning catalogue. The campus administrator explained to me that the college was adding a full online program to make education more accessible to students who could not travel because of other commitments such as family, work, or course conflicts. Even students who could attend classes at a campus near them could eliminate the time of travelling to campus. In addition the online approach was asynchronous so it did not interfere with face-to-face course schedules.

Relieved as I was to hear this, I was still a bit anxious. Who wouldn't be? For 12 years throughout grade school and high-school, I had

been both accustomed to and comfortable with the classroom learning. There was a sense of security and familiarity with a hands-on classroom because it afforded you, your classmates, and the teacher a sense of community. Despite my apprehensions, the administrative staff assured me that each of these aspects of traditional classroom learning had been considered when designing the online courses. They said the teaching method was designed to simulate the in-classroom experience.

So in the Summer Semester of 2008, I decided to give distance learning a try. I could do one class, and if I did not like it, I could go back to my old way of learning. I selected an online course when I was not taking any other courses. I considered it a testing period to determine whether online courses would be useful to me in the future. To be perfectly honest, I fully expected a confusing situation which would require me to spend a great deal of time getting used to the way in which I was supposed to be completing my work in an online setting. In reality, it was quite the opposite.

My first distance learning course was astronomy, and to put it succinctly, it worked beautifully. The course began with a required face-to-face class with the professor and my classmates. We reviewed the syllabus, course requirements, and were introduced to WebCT, the distance learning module that we would be utilizing. I was amazed that it enabled me to submit papers online, take tests and quizzes, and contact the professor and other students. In the course, we used WebCT to hold debates and discussions.

I actually found that the organization of the online module allowed me to keep my files and schedule straighter than in a classroom setting. WebCT acted as my secretary, reminding me of submission deadlines, test and quiz dates, and any other work that needed completion. This is not to say the online course eliminated the need to organize and prioritize work. Indeed, it was quite the challenge. Despite the fact that it was

a summer course, I still had to manage my time carefully to keep the work from piling up.

These were the mechanics. But what about the social interaction I was used to in my classes? I soon began to realize that sitting in a classroom day after day, year after year is not necessarily social interaction. For instance, the classroom experience provides students with the prospect of working with the rest of the students in the course, while also allowing you the chance to interact with the professor in a personal and professional manner. Online courses, if designed properly, can mimic those qualities through conversation and messaging boards, blogs, postings, Skype, Twitter, and even Facebook. I found online courses required far more attention and time, but it was worth it.

As I have said, the first online course was a great experience. So great in fact that online courses became a mainstay until I graduated. Looking back, I find it amazing that this student from a rural coal mining area in Pennsylvania completed the following courses online:

- Criminal Justice
- American Government
- Music
- History
- Health

Something that I soon noticed in my online classes was how surprisingly easy it was to develop a rapport with the professors, and to forge relationships with fellow distance learners. The independence afforded in online classes was also something I found personally very pleasing and professionally beneficial. In my online courses, the projects, research papers, and discussions in virtually every class gave me the liberty to pursue whatever topic interested me in the larger scheme of the course. This not only piqued my interest, but also prepared me for upper-level courses and the world of business.

Conclusion

In writing this brief snippet of a portion of my collegiate career, I feel that I am very fortunate to have participated in a good number of distance learning courses. Although on a very small scale, each discovery made me think how Edison must have felt when he first gazed upon a working light bulb, or Henry Ford when he heard the first roar of his engine.

I truly believe that distance learning courses and programs will be a bridge that connects far-away continents and different cultures. Though only in its infancy now, one can only imagine the great benefits for humanity. In Pennsylvania where higher education is facing a 50% budget reduction (Newall, 2011), online learning could make up for reduced funding. Unlike the bland online course I feared I was signing onto, now video conferencing, wireless Internet, Skype, Twitter, and Facebook have become teaching tools. The next step ahead looks to be mobile computing. But such decisions—iPhone, Blackberry, iPad—too many choices.

Personally, I am currently looking into the possibility of pursuing my master's degree either entirely or partially through an online program. I have investigated the possibilities of doing this through accredited and very respectable institutions both in the United States and abroad, particularly Europe. Because of my experiences with distance learning at LCCC, I do not hesitate to contemplate such a decision. There are only added benefits from distance learning on the graduate level.

I am still a home-body and the opportunity to pursue a higher degree from or near my home and while working interests me. I do not want to take off another two years to earn my masters when I can do it online. These opportunities make distance learning a very effective learning option for me. I truly look forward to watching the progress and undoubted growth which distance

learning programs will assuredly undergo in the following decades, and consider myself very fortunate indeed for having been able to be a part of the first generation of students to benefit from it.

Awneesh Singh

Introduction

I have been involved in distance learning both as a student and as a facilitator for a number of years. My first experience with distance learning was more than five years ago when I enrolled in an undergraduate mathematics course offered at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. At that time, I was employed as a secondary school teacher located about 240 km from the university. Since I could not take a study leave at that point in my career, my only options were to travel three days a week to attend lectures and tutorials, or take the course via distance education. I chose the latter. My second distance learning experience was an online graduate education course. This course was taught wholly online. My third experience was as a facilitator assistant for the same online course.

Now, I am studying for my doctorate in Toulouse, the fourth largest city in France and home to the largest space center in Europe. My study is based on the physical oceanographic aspects of climate changes in the tropical Pacific region and modulation of ENSO events. Naturally, the research is theoretical as well as statistical, but I took time out to contribute to this chapter because I believe it is necessary to share my experiences especially since my initial perception of distance learning took a huge turnaround. Of course, I used, and still use, online technology every day to stay abreast with the latest news and happenings around the world as well as keep in regular contact with colleagues, friends and family via email and Skype. However, I did not believe at that moment that this technology would be sufficient enough to deliver courses to students particularly in sci-

ence. The following is a synopsis of my experiences that led me to an entirely novel opinion of distance learning.

Online Programs

Undergraduate Mathematics Correspondence Course

The discrete mathematics course that I enrolled in was the final requirement for me to complete my Diploma in Computing Science program. Therefore, it was motivation enough for me to get registered for this course and obtain my diploma by the end of the semester. The course was discrete in that there was no online communication, no classes or tutorials conducted outside the university campus. Needless to say, it was not a distance-learning course. However, with my motivation to finish the program, I studied on my own with minimal correspondence with the lecturer or students and only traveling to the university campus to sit for the tests and the final examination. I did pass the course but at the same time I realized that the importance of interaction and feedback required is paramount to undertake a distance-learning course. After this unpleasant experience (of my own doing), I vowed never to be involved in a distance-learning course again. However, as fate would have it, I got involved in this mode of learning again, but this time I had a completely new experience.

Graduate Online Course

Not so long after my previous distance learning experience, I was fortunate to be enrolled in a graduate course that was offered online. Although I was by that time working at the university and could attend class, it was still more convenient to take it online. The course was designed to teach the principles of online teaching and I found it a very good opportunity to experience student-centered, problem-based online learning. At the onset of the course, I had mixed feelings as I was looking forward to how the delivery of this

course would compare with my previous experience but also my skepticism that science courses (physics in particular, as it is my field of study) can be delivered online. The former query was answered even before the course officially began! The facilitator started communication with each of the individual students personally and this allowed us to be ‘fearless’ and comfortable when the course actually started. The later query took some time but it was answered with positive and genuine reasons. The course itself was divided into two parts: first students learn the pedagogies of teaching online and second, they implement what they have learnt by being online facilitators to the other students in the course. These approaches merge student-centered methods with the latest educational technology to create a vastly interactive online classroom. As the course progressed, my appreciation for online learning grew and it was not until I completed my assignment on the online resources I could use to enhance my physics course that I began to look forward to teaching a physics course online! This is how dynamic the course was to change my initial view on the online delivery of science courses. Although there still are some consequences of online courses, mainly related to time management, I have been satisfied and impressed with this new mode of teaching and learning. What had been lacking before (interaction and feedback) had been more than catered for in this mode of teaching and learning.

Online Facilitation

More recently, while I was underway with my doctorate studies, I got an opportunity to be involved in the online course mentioned above but this time as an assistant facilitator. I took the opportunity as another learning experience to improve my online facilitation capabilities. It may sound foolish to be involved in this course in the first place, especially since I am concentrating on higher studies at the moment. But after my nice experience with this course as a student before, and knowing that it will not take much of my time, I decided to go ahead

with it while keeping focused on my top priority. I had learnt the concept of assistant facilitators as a student but this was the first time that it was being implemented in this course. Moreover, I have been fascinated with this idea from the beginning as it negates the requirement for the presence of the facilitator at the same geographical location as the students. We can be in any part of the world and can communicate with the class at any time provided the technology is there. As expected, the hat I wore did not take up much of my time and I was able to provide feedback to my allocated group of students efficiently. In addition, I got to know the students' viewpoint on certain issues and their way of thinking. Everyday, I looked forward to their postings and finally I understood and appreciated the meaning of the following: *online you get to know your students' minds not just their faces* (Harasim, et al., 1995).

Conclusion

Some courses in physics were offered via distance learning by correspondence and video mode. However, they were discontinued a few years ago due to the cost and unsatisfactory pass rates. The percentage of students passing the course through the DFL mode in member countries was very low (always less than 20%) compared to students taking the courses in person at the university in Fiji. In comparison, the success rate for on-campus face-to-face students since was always more than 70%. Another problem with the correspondence method of delivery has been attrition. The attrition rate is much higher for students taking the courses by print. In comparison, Angelino, Williams, and Natvig (2007) report that online courses have attrition rates comparable to face-to-face.

In my experience, the high failure rates in the correspondence courses were due to the lack of interaction and feedback, combined with poor time management skills. Now that online learning is in the growing stages here in the Pacific, thorough preparation has to be done to implement this dynamic mode of learning being offered as

an option in the DFL mode. Bower (2001) and Bruner (2007) agree that a number of factors need to be considered, such as, faculty acceptance, time and effort required from the course coordinators, student discipline, and infrastructure.

These distance-learning experiences have made me realize the importance of regular interaction with the lecturers and students. If asked would I take another correspondence course, I will definitely say "NO." Asked the same about an online course using today's technology, my answer is a definite "YES." From my perspective, online adds what is missing in correspondence courses—interaction and feedback.

Countries in the Pacific are small and scattered. It would not be feasible and economical to have a university built on each Pacific island country to cater for their small populations. There is a regional university that does cater for the needs of 12 of the Pacific island countries but it costs the respective governments a huge amount of money to run it. In addition, students have to spend a long time away from their families and this creates for them feelings of loneliness, which may affect their studies.

A solution could be to take the same courses from their own countries through the online mode. However, this would require good Internet bandwidth in their countries and good online facilitators who would be able to efficiently deliver the course. Another solution could be, provided technology is not a problem, to enroll in online courses provided by specialist online universities. This will overcome any problems of delivery, interaction and feedback in addition to exposing students to the world outside the Pacific region. Faculty and administrative resistance to change are challenges, as is the need for faster, cheaper Internet service. *But the biggest obstacle is thinking the future can be done in the old way.* Distance learning is one of the fastest growing areas in education and developments in computer science and information and communications technologies have spurred this growth (Rutherford & Kerr, 2008). Offering programs online is the new trend in distance

education and as Donna Abernathy said back in 1999 *online learning is not the next big thing; it is the now big thing.*

Zeynep Uyar

Introduction

My name is Zeynep Uyar. I am about to graduate from the Middle East Technical University in Cyprus with a major in Computer Engineering. As a way of introduction, my family and I (Figure 3) live in Mersin, Turkey. Although the distance is not too great from the university, I do not get home as often as I would like. My solution is to call the family on Skype. My father reminds me that when he was at university he stood in line for hours to call home. Today, I call wherever my laptop has a good signal.

Living close to home has many advantages for me. The greatest is the lower cost of my education. Since the university is very close to my country and there is no currency difference, my education expenses are much less. However, that could change when I go to graduate school. When I applied to several universities in England for my Masters in Economics, I learned that in addition to the high cost of living in England, the tuition for international students could be as much

as four time the rates for British citizens. Table 1 shows the tuition fees of the universities According to Kleiner (2004); much out of region tuition is “gravy” for universities. Paulson (2008) suggests that universities must price tuition based on cost. Otherwise students may not be able to afford it. That was what I experienced. I was planning to apply for to do my Masters in Economics. Although I would like the opportunity to study in England, the educational cost is too high for me as an international student, and so I am investigating alternative ways to earn my advanced degree.

Online Program

When I was thinking of possible alternate educational solutions that would be less expensive and allow me to be close to my family, I remembered the course I had taken in my third year. It was a technical elective course called *Foundations of Distance Education*. To be honest, at the very beginning of the course I had low expectations. I only took the course because it had a reputation for being easy. By the end of the course, my opinion had changed. It was a pleasure to take the course because it brought in different points of view. Before I took the course, I thought that online education was not as reliable as face-to-face. I agreed with people that degrees from a

Figure 3. My home and university locations

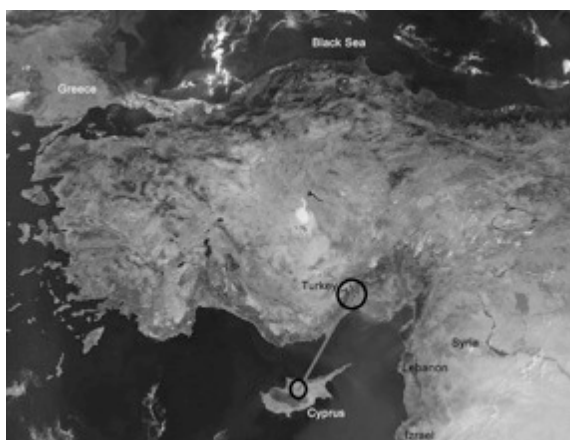


Table 1. British tuition rates for home and international students

Universities	Tuition Fee for Home Students	Tuition Fee for International Students
University of Nottingham	£4,700	£11,620
University of Glasgow	£7,000	£13,750
University of Oxford	£3,375	£14,550
University of Cambridge	£5,625	£13,035

distance were inferior to ones obtained by sitting in a classroom.

However, my online experience showed me this was a completely false assumption. Before the course, I thought distance education was not widespread. However, in the online course, I learned about distance education in the United States and other countries where distance learning is being used in secondary and even widely used in primary schools. In such courses, two classrooms can be simultaneously connected, even if they are on different continents.

In Turkey, the idea of distance education is not common knowledge. Therefore, at the beginning of the semester, the instructor had divided the lecture into two parts. Although it was an online course, we were required to come to the class once a week so that the instructor gave us information about distance education, and the platform that we were going to use—Moodle. I believe this is called blended learning in other countries. We were required to do our assignments on Moodle. The assignments were about the structure, advantages, and disadvantages of distance education. Moreover, we had online quizzes every Sunday. The quizzes had a time limit that began once you opened them. The to third online course element was the weekly discussion forums on Moodle.

Conclusion

In the discussion forums, we debated various topics. At the start of the course, I was not impressed with this idea and considered the debates simply another course requirement. However, as the semester progressed, I found I liked the debates more and more. One of the debate topics was the advantages and disadvantages of distance education. Rather than being lectured to, the debate gave me the opportunity to speak up and compare my reactions with other people. I do not believe I would have been as comfortable debating face-to-face. If I had not taken this distance education course, I might have been one of those students

who completed their 5-year undergraduate degree without having spoken a single word in the large lecture classes. In my online class, I got to talk with my peers. I never had this opportunity in my traditional classes. Even though the distance class is long over, I still stay in contact with some of my classmates.

Kento Yoshida

Introduction

Hello, my name is Kento Yoshida. I'm in my fifth year at Suzuka National College of Technology in Japan. I major in material sciences, such as iron and steel, alloys, and plastics. I have traveled abroad only once now, but I would like to go to foreign countries after I graduate. It is one of my dreams and I think it is the best way to enhance myself.

Generally, it is thought that we Japanese are not good at English. I am 19 and have studied English for 8 years. My classmates have also studied the English language hard at the school, even doing cram schools and private lessons. In spite of this, we still feel that we have trouble mastering it. There are several reasons. First is the geography. Japan consists of Pacific islands. Lacking borders with other countries, we have less chance to talk with people of other nationalities. In contrast European countries share a multitude of languages that give people the opportunity to strengthen their language on a regular basis. Since we do not have such opportunities, we struggle more with English. This isolation is definitely an important factor that limits our ability to improve our English speaking skills. I find the best for me is to become friends with native English speakers. This really helps to improve the quality of my written and spoken English.

The second reason Japanese students have limited English skills is the way it is taught. In Japan, the pressure to graduate is so great that almost all high school students take cram schools for the college entrance exams. The teachers

always say, “This is important for the exam!” or “You should study more efficiently to solve questions.” Teachers and students are obsessed with scores, and lose sight of the most important purpose of learning English, which is the ability to use English for business and casual conversations. The purpose of learning English is more than being able to answer exam questions. This tendency to teach to the exam rather than for the conversational and writing skills needed in international business further limits students’ abilities to master the English language.

Knowledge is meaningless, unless it can be applied to real action. So I think English education in Japan needs to become more practical, emphasizing speaking, listening, and expressing. It is important to reform the teaching of English in Japan because the present methods make the study of English boring and tiresome.

The third thing that inhibits Japanese from learning English is shyness, which makes them reluctant to travel abroad. I was one of them, but once I experienced a foreign country, I changed my own mind. The challenge is to find ways for others to overcome their shyness and be willing to travel and practice the language with English speakers.

My travel to South Korea introduced me not only to different languages, but also different cultures. All the time I was there I felt differences of the cultures and was moved by each of them. This experience showed me how very exciting it can be to touch different cultures. I have never experienced a more interesting thing than a different culture. It showed me the narrowness of Japan. I found that travel is not only pleasant but also invaluable. Each culture is full of wonders and entertainments. Furthermore, there are a lot of cultures in the world. Each country has one or more cultures. The same can be said about languages and races. It means that we can get uncountable pleasures from all over the world. How wonderful it is! If Japanese schools can focus

more on western cultures and practical applications of English, then students will experience this pleasure and want to learn more about other cultures. Then students will have more interest in the world and understand the necessity of English.

Online Program

We can touch real cultures not indirectly, but directly, which is very different from information on the Internet. Travel is by far more lively and exciting. It is a more valuable experience to see things with one’s own eyes. For example, I had known about Korean culture and landmarks by reading about them. But what I saw in Korea were so different from what I had read. The people were alive and they talked to me. Information on the Internet gives me only virtual knowledge. It doesn’t have the reality that is the essence of something I want to know. In order to know the true aspect of the culture, we need to see it, touch it, taste it, or experience it. Today, because of the development of the Internet, we can get much more information, but the quality seems to be degraded. Constantly receiving enormous amounts of information, we don’t pay attention to each of them. If someone had an interest in something, they would give up trying to learn about it because they don’t have the time. As a result, most of us miss the chance to experience it. This is one of the other aspects of the information innovation.

Information is too large, I think. It doesn’t have its own body, mind. It doesn’t teach the real meaning of human activities, which is warm, friendly, delightful, and indispensable. We can learn them for the first time by experiencing them. It applies to English. Although some studies (Freiermuth & Jarrell, 2006; Gilmore, 2009) claim that online chat benefits shy students, I have my doubts that it would help Japanese students learn English. On the Internet, we can exchange information and our ideas. But, I’m not able to know whether readers actually understand us. Come to think of it, we can

know the happiness of expressing ourselves when we talk with someone face to face and see how he or she feels about us, which is most important in learning a language.

Conclusion

We need to see or hear the thing directly to know its value. We could try anything if we knew how to do it. If you do so, the information gets its true meaning at last. We should live in reality, not in the Web. Let's go out! Once you have the courage to challenge anything, and travel anywhere, your life will become a wonderful one, I believe. If you stay in your own country, you will know only one country in your life. It is boring, isn't it?

I want to enjoy the world, not the country. That's why I want to go abroad. I think the best way to learn English is face-to-face. I do not think you can do this on the Internet. I understand my co-authors may disagree, but they do not understand the Japanese culture. I need to see the world to learn English.

CONCLUSION

The co-authors of this chapter come from all over the world. From India, Cyprus, Japan, France, the South Pacific, and North America, our educational systems vary greatly, as does the access to online technology. For some of us online learning has already become a standard form of course delivery. For others, the primary mode of learning is still face to face. We found that much of our attitude toward online learning was shaped by our educational experience and the acceptability and availability of distance learning in our various countries.

For Glen, a Canadian living in Japan, he sees his online masters as being a valuable tool in the International market. He was raised with online and is very comfortable with it. In comparison,

Jalal's online experience in Fiji is more recent because of the technology. Fiji is a developing country and the Internet speed and access became sufficient to support online learning less than a decade ago. Jalal sees online learning as more than a way to make education more convenient and accessible. He sees it as a tool to change the nature of teaching from student- to teacher-centered learning. He also views online learning as way to improve educational access in developing countries throughout the Pacific.

Chetan from India had the experience of wanting and needing online learning. Instead, he had to physically keep moving to different schools. It was not until he took his MBA that he was exposed to online learning. He sees transnational distance learning as the future for India to develop its potential in the global market and to raise the standard of living. He points out one of the greatest remaining challenges is access to technology in emerging countries. Joseph, on the other hand, took a variety of online courses as an undergraduate student and found they offered the convenience and access he needed.

Awnesh in France recalled his online science courses taken at a Pacific university. The courses were not well designed and taught. As a result the failure rate was so high they had to be discontinued. Later, Awnesh had the opportunity to take highly interactive, student-centered courses, and he was convinced. Zeynep took online courses in Turkey. His experience was that he felt freer to participate in online discussions compared to face-to-face. The chief advantages of online learning for him include reduced cost and the ability to stay close to family.

Kento from Japan did not see online learning as a good cultural fit. He preferred face-to-face, teacher-centered learning. He explained the Japanese felt they needed to strengthen their English skills, which makes them reluctant to do schooling in other universities. He also felt that they needed to visit other countries to be able

to appreciate the different cultures. But for him, online is not the way.

The co-authors discovered how their views of transnational distance learning were similar and different. They also later realized that this chapter was their latest online learning experience, and it was truly international.

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