

The Definition of Distance Education

Introduction

The term distance education can be referred to as distributed learning, correspondence study, independent study, online learning, and adult education. All of these terms can be used interchangeably to describe what distance education is. Even though, many traditional terms and definitions exist for distance education, a good piece of terminology is needed in order to gain an adequate understanding of this concept (Holmberg, 2005). This paper hopes to identify and discuss a single definition that accurately describes what distance education is and provide an explanation for the selection of this rationale.

How is Distance Education Defined?

According to Schlosser & Simonson (2010), distance education is defined as an “institution-based formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources, and instructors.” This definition was chosen because it accurately delineates what distance education is and its defining attributes. This delineation has four components that make up the meaning of distance education. The subsequent paragraphs will break down these four components and expound upon this rationale.

The Defining Characteristics of Distance Education

There are four constituent elements that define distance education. The first element of this terminology deals with distance education being established by an institution. Distance learning is an industrial mode of education because corporations, businesses, companies,

colleges, and universities offer nontraditional courses to people at a distance. This form of education has become industrialized, and it has helped people all over the world gain greater access to a quality education (Schlosser & Simonson, 2010). For example, according to Garrison & Cleveland-Innes (2010), British Open Universities in the 1970s started to adjust and coordinate their educational and institutional structures to embrace the “massification” of teaching and learning. Furthermore, this industrial mode of education was aimed at concentrating on the “organizational economies of scale.” The objective of this pedagogy was to help those impoverished individuals gain greater access to a good education (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2010).

Next, the second constituent involves having a division amid the student and instructor. The student and instructor are not physically in the same location at the same time (Schlosser & Simonson, 2010). For example, Garrison & Cleveland-Innes (2010) pointed out that the division between the pupil and teacher occurred because they were geographically separated or the student had personal obligations that stopped him or her from attending class. These obligations include things such as work, family, and transportation issues. From an educational perspective, distance education is supposed to close the gap amid the pupil and teacher by providing a means of communication (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2010).

The third component is concerned with using a two-way system of communications to transmit or disseminate information from one person to another at a distance. This media can be technical or nontechnical in nature. This can include radio, telephone, television, computer, or printed or written material (Schlosser & Simonson, 2010). For instance, Garrison & Cleveland-Innes noted that, in the 1970s and 1980s, technology such as radio and television was supposed to be an inexpensive way to disseminate and transmit educational material. Rather, it proved to

be too costly, and educational institutions continued to use written material as a means for delivering their course instruction (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2010).

Finally, the fourth component is the notion of linking the students, teacher, and instructional material together. This means the teacher communicates with the students and the educational materials are readily prepared, which gives students the ability to access it at their convenience. In turn, the student will have the capability to acquire knowledge from the teacher's instruction. These educational resources are constructed in such a way that it facilitates learning that can be grasped, apprehended, and perceived by the student (Schlosser & Simonson, 2010). Garrison & Cleveland-Innes (2010) asserted that technology such as the Internet has helped to connect the educators with the learners. The internet has helped educators to facilitate educational material more easily, made access to education more convenient, learners have greater access to resources, and it has increased the students' learning experience (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2010).

Conclusion

The term distance education has various meanings, and it comes in many different forms. There is no one way to describe the meaning of this word. Education no longer has to take place in a classroom setting; it can be done from any place and at any time. The four elements of distance education include being established by an institution; having a division amid the student and instructor; using a two-way system of communications to transmit or disseminate information from one person to another at a distance; and linking the students, teacher, and instructional material together. Many traditional definitions that give a description of distance education often lack one of these four qualities. If one of these determinants is omitted, then the

definition of distance education may not accurately suit this term today. Therefore, a strong rationale is needed to dispute these traditional views of distance education.

References

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