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THE CHALLENGES OF MODERN TECHNOLOGIES AND DISTANCE LEARNING

As we get deeper into the information age, traditional ways of learning and knowledge acquisition are challenged with rapidly changing technologies. The growing entanglement of work and education imposes pressure on individuals and universities. Adult learners are increasingly looking for pervasive study opportunities.

Key words and expressions: education, distance learning, modern technologies.

Studying and learning anytime and anywhere is an idea that reaches back to the19th century, when Anna Eliot Ticknor founded the Society to Encourage Studies at Home to provide study opportunities for US women on the basis of correspondence instruction (Ticknor, 1891). Much later, distance education approaches evolved with the advent of radio and TV broadcasting and possibilities to record audio and video. But only after the early success of the British Open University a wave of foundations of distance teaching universities in Europe and other parts of the world during the 1960s and 1970s provided real alternatives to traditional on–campus higher education. Their special mission is higher education off–campus serving particularly students who have part–time or full–time jobs, family obligations or other reasons that prevent them from studying on campus.

In Europe and elsewhere, developments in information and communications technology (ICT) throughout the last decade have substantially changed distance education environments (Krämer, 1997). The traditional correspondence– or TV–based style of distance teaching was enriched with (interactive) educational media(Krämer& Wegner, 1998), Web–based courses, Internet–enabled synchronous and asynchronous communication and collaboration (Qu&Nejdl, 2001),computer–based tutoring systems (Rosi et al., 2000), Internet–based assignment and assessment systems, learning management systems, and other ICT–based services. Learning on the move with mobile devices stretches the concept of anywhere–anytime learning even further by use of the wireless Internet and other wireless communication facilities and supports the seamless continuation of interaction when the learner isaway from the desktop PC (Bull et al, 2004; Keegan, 2007). Virtual reality environments can supplement traditional laboratories with remote or simulated experimentation sessions (Duro et al., 2008) or provide a visual and interactive test bed for distant engineering students (Kötter et al., 1999).

Distance education has provided handful of opportunities for working professionals, students and even housewives to achieve their dreams of pursuing higher education. Different people have different perceptions regarding distance education. Distance education was earlier perceived to be similar to correspondence education. But with their good experiences while pursuing higher education in distance education mode, students have now clearly understood the dividing line between distance education and correspondence learning. Distance education and its importance are clearly understood by people living in metropolitan cities. This can be gauged by the number of students pursuing distance education in metropolitan cities. But in small towns

and cities there is less awareness regarding distance education. So in small towns and cities efforts have to be made to make people believe that a distance education degree is at par with a regular degree. People in small towns and cities still consider a regular degree superior to distance education degree. Distance learning has provided an excellent platform to students for learning at their own convenience and at their own pace. In this rapidly changing system of learning, if we are working and need a good degree as well as specialized knowledge to enhance our career then Distance Education can be our cup of tea.

Distance education is also called distance learning, e–learning or online learning. Unlike conventional classroom learning, it is not bounded by space and time. In fact, teachers and students are commonly separated by space and time, although they may choose to interact synchronously or meet periodically over the length of the course. Distance learning also needs to use technology. In the early days of distance education, radio and television were the media used to conduct educational activities. Currently, the methods have extended to the internet, email, software, video, tapes, cameras, etc. In comparison, instructors and students may choose to use technology in a conventional classroom teaching but is optional. The progression of long distance learning from pen–pals, college correspondence courses, teleconferencing over speaker phones, teleconferencing via modem, transporting still pictures along with interactive audio, to the latest technology of two–way, full audio, full video communication has implications for public education.

Besides fostering common educational practices in conventional classrooms, distance education is portrayed as possessing more potential and thus more promise in promoting student interactions and enhancing learning outcomes by utilizing advanced computer technology. For example, Bruce et al. (2005) suggest the web has the ability to provide student interactions and multiple paths for learning. Learners can have greater control over information access, individualized pacing and timing and with more support in the inquiry process.

However, because of the limited opportunities for face–to–face interactions between an instructor and their students, distance education has brought many new challenges to the teaching and learning process. Wang and Newlin (2000) point out that little is known about the characteristics of students in distance education courses. As a result, effective curriculum design is hindered by the lack of understanding of the characteristics, attitudes, and needs of the students in these courses (Smith, 1997). At the same time, the faculty needs to develop skills in helping students adjust to the unique features of distance education. However, the lack of adequate training may prevent them from fully participating in the distance education practices (Galusha, 1998), especially considering that they have to spend twice as much time in preparing and delivering an online course as compared to a traditional course (Willis, 1994). With all of the challenges facing distance education, studies show that distance learning students desire content and motivational support beyond course materials and are limited in their success without it (Williams, 2006).

Distance education is a mode of education that by and large occurs in a different location from teaching. It provides student with one more chance to gain college or university education. It can be helpful for those who suffer from constraints like limited time, distance or physical disability.

Distance mode of Education also helps to update the knowledge base of working professionals. So for the success of distance education, new techniques of course design, new techniques of instruction and

fast and latest methods of communication are used. It also requires excellent managerial and administrative planning. In this mode students are provided with study material. Even classes are organized almost on a regular basis although it is optional for students to attend these classes. The rapidly growing population is causing a scarcity of infrastructure, financial, and personnel resources. Distance education comes out as a solution to these constraints and helps a large number of students to fulfill their educational dreams. But among the various methods of education this mode has the best chance to control our national problem of illiteracy. Getting education through distance learning is economical as compared to regular education and less time consuming as well. Distance Education mode opens the way to make use of latest technology for education. Students can decide their place and time of learning in this mode of education.

Besides student segment, distance learning is also gaining popularity among adults who are eager to upgrade themselves for better career opportunities. Distance learning provides an alternative method for people to improve their education without undergoing traditional classroom learning.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to distance learning:

Advantages:

- **Lots of flexibility**. With distance learning courses, students can complete their course work from just about anywhere, provided there's a computer and internet connection. This allows students to work when and where it is more convenient for them without having to squeeze in scheduled classes to an already busy life. Students can usually also set their own pace of study. It is their decision as to when and where you study.
- **No commuting**.Taking a course online can be one way to cut down on costly gas or public transportation. Since students can often work from home to complete their class assignments, both time and money are saved in cutting out the trips to and from class. Distance learning is also a solution for people who are keen to do a certain course but feel shy in joining a class. Hence, they choose to do distance learning courses because these courses do not require them to attend classes.
- **Numerous choices for universities and colleges.**Even if we live in a community with few or no colleges distance learning allows us to choose from a wide variety of schools to complete our education. One may find online universities that specialize in our particular field or one that can provide a great general education. Either way, our options for education will be greatly expanded. Some people take up distance learning courses because they live far away from the place of education and attending classes is inconvenient. For some, this problem arises because the program they want to study is not offered by a nearby college or university and they have to choose a college or university far away from their residence. Some people find attending classes difficult due to their family commitments. These people may have elders or kids at home to look after and are not able to attend classes. Distance learning is an excellent solution to their problem. Studying through distance learning can enable them to look after their family while they can continue with their study.
- **Lowered costs**. Prices for online coursesare generally cheaper than their traditional (on–campus) counterparts and students won't have to worry about commuting, moving or getting meal plans on campus, some additional benefits to learning from home.

- **Learn while working**. As distance learning can usually be completed on our own schedule, it is much easier to complete distance learning courses while working than more traditional educational programs. Keeping our job gives us more income, experience and stability while completing our degree giving you less to worry about and more time to focus on our studies.

Disadvantages:

- **Lack of social interaction**. If the classroom environment is what we love most about learning we may want to take a step back and reconsider distance learning. We are likely to get some interaction on chat rooms, discussion boards and through email, but the experience will be quite different than traditional courses.
- **Format isn't ideal for all learners**.Not everyone is an ideal candidate for online learning. If a student knows he/she has problems with motivation and needs lots of individual attention from an instructor student may want to think long and hard before enrolling in an online learning program.
- **Some employers don't accept online degrees**.While a majority of employers will, there are some who still see a stigma attached to distance learning. Realize that your online degree may not be the ideal tool for some job fields or forfuture learning.
- **Not all courses required to complete the degree may be offered online.**
- **Requires adaptability to new technologies**. If you've never been one to love working with technology you will probably get a lot less out of an online course. One shouldmake sure that students (as well as teachers) feel comfortable working with computers and with online programs before they sign up for a class.

Today with the development of modern technologies it is rare to find a language class that does not use some form of technology. In recent years, technology has been used to both assist and enhance language learning. Teachers at K–16 levels have incorporated various forms of technology to support their teaching, engage students in the learning process, provide authentic examples of the target culture, and connect their classrooms in the U.S. to classrooms in other countries where the target language is spoken.

Further, some technology tools enable teachers to differentiate instruction and adapt classroom activities and homework assignments, thus enhancing the language learning experience. Distance learning programs can enable language educators to expand language–learning opportunities to all students, regardless of where they live, the human and material resources available to them, or their language background and needs. In sum, technology continues to grow in importance as a tool to assist teachers of foreign languages in facilitating and mediating language learning for their students. Technology tools may be employed to make learning more efficient, for instance, using the Web to acquire reference materials. Students may use search engines, e–mail databases, spreadsheets, and word processing to find, analyze, and produce documents and other products to display learning in academic subject matters. Technology can also be used to deliver instructional opportunities that match the background and pace of the learners. Such uses typically involve integrated programs delivered in computer or multimedia mode, encouraging students to acquire specific knowledge and skills. Students also have the benefit of learning how to use classes of technology tools that they can apply to subsequent school or work requirements.As technology continues to evolve, it brings with it new

opportunities and challenges for educators and students. Technology is an important factor in distance education.

While technology can play an important role in supporting and enhancing language learning, the effectiveness of any technological tool depends on the knowledge and expertise of the qualified language teacher who manages and facilitates the language learning environment. As many teachers begin to use distance environments for the first time, they face unfamiliar tasks and responsibilities. There are three broad areas that will be unfamiliar to them. These are forms of communication and interaction in distance environments, the need for new kinds of awareness and skills, and the scale of processes in distance language teaching (adapted from Moore and Kearsley (1996)). In some cases, however, college and university administrators have permitted technology to drive the language curriculum and have even used it to replace certified language teachers. Language technology companies have made unsubstantiated claims about their products' abilities to help students learn languages, thus confusing administrators into thinking that these technologies can be an effective cost–cutting measure. There is currently no definitive research to indicate that students will acquire a second language effectively through technology without interaction with and guidance from a qualified language teacher.

The role of teachers within language learning has been revised and reconstructed many times over the last two decades. Brumfit (1984:60) noted that the teacher`s role was moving towards that of a facilitator and participant in the learner`s learning and that 'learning will be partly dependent on the teacher`s ability to stop teaching and become simply one among a number of communicators in the classroom'. His emphasis on the communication skills of the teacher, and on the teachers as learner

are two key features of the role of distance language teaching.

Our students use technology for almost everything they do in their daily lives. Every one of the students surveyed used a smart phone, and a computer or a laptop. Therefore, it could be assumed that these students would prefer online learning to conventional classroom instruction. The surveys revealed that our students use technology for communication with one another, and for entertainment. Most of our students, not yet fully engaged in the workforce or advanced careers do not use, or have limited experience using, technology for business. Therefore, they fail to recognize that this technology is also an instrument for learning and productivity, and vital for their future careers. Smart technology provides students with a vast amount of information. This huge amount of online information demands careful interpretation, critical evaluation, and independent effort while using the technology they claim to prefer. Online learning, and their future careers, will demand all of these skills. Therefore the online class, form a learning perspective, is essential in today's learning environment.

There are two primary types of distance learning courses: synchronous courses and asynchronous courses:

What is Synchronous Distance Learning:

Synchronous distance learning occurs when the teacher and his pupils interact in different places but during the same time. In this regard, it resembles traditional classroom teaching methods despite the participants being located remotely. It requires a timetable to be organized. Web conferencing, videoconferencing, educational television, instructional television are examples of synchronous technology, as are direct–broadcast satellite (DBS), internet radio, live streaming, telephone, and web–based VoIP. Online meeting software such as Adobe

Connect has helped to facilitate meetings in distance learning courses. Synchronous distance learning may include multimedia components such as group chats, web seminars, video conferencing, and phone call–ins.

Generally, synchronous learning works best for students who can schedule set days and times for their studies. It is often preferred by those who like structured courses heavy on student interaction.

What is Asynchronous Distance Learning:

Asynchronous distance learning occurs when the teacher and the pupils interact in different places and during different times. Students enrolled in asynchronous courses are able to complete their work whenever they please. Asynchronous distance learning often relies on technology such as message boards, email, pre–recorded video lectures, mp3s, and traditional mail correspondence.

Often, asynchronous distance learning is preferred by students with complicated schedules. It tends to work well for self–motivated learners who do not need direct guidance to complete their assignments.

Distance learning is not for every student. Successful online learners are self–motivated, self–disciplined and willing to put forth the time and effort it takes to be successful. Learners who choose this form of learning must be open–minded and willing to share experiences, able to self–advocate and speak up when problems arise, able to use critical thinking skills to solve problems and able to think through responses before responding. Finally, to be successful, students must have basic familiarity with technology, a willingness to learn new technologies and consistent access to the internet.

Step 1

Success in a distance–learning course requires everyday involvement in the virtual classroom. Your interest in the class often depends upon how often you engage online. Become familiar with the tools of the electronic platform so that you're ready to participate in discussions, take quizzes and upload assignments. Online discussion is a main way we'll be evaluated, so one should think about the image your written words convey. For example, if one uses all capital letters, one may appear aggressive or unhappy. Check over messages before posting to ensure that our thoughts are complete and spelled correctly.

Step 2

Since we won't be in a physical classroom, maintaining course participation requires self–discipline and time management. Make a schedule that includes time to study and be engaged in class. Treat our online class just as we would a class in person. Plan to spend nine to 12 hours a week studying and participating in a three–hour class. Schedule time to read the textbook or on–line materials. On online learning environment may seem less rigorous, but it can be just the opposite. For example, we may need to post discussion five to 10 times a week to satisfy online class participation requirements.

Step 3

Making a connection with an online instructor requires extra effort. Take the initiative to develop a relationship right away. Online instructors maintain office hours for student appointments. Email or pick up the phone when we have questions or if we want to share something of interest. This will set us apart from other students. Meet our instructor in person, if possible. Similarly, if one has technical issues with the virtual platform, let our instructor know or call the distance–education department to get help right away. If we lose online access, we are missing class.

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ՄԱՐԳԱՐԻՏԱ ՊԵՏՐՈՍՅԱՆ

Երևանի պետական համալսարան, ռոմանագերմանական Ֆակուլտետ,
անգլերեն լեզվի և գրականության ամբիոն, 2–րդ կուրսի մագիսրոս

21–րդ դարում՝ նորագույն տեխնոլոգիաների դարաշրջանում, ուսուցման ավանդական ձևերը աստիճանաբար զիջում են իրենց տեղը: Դրանք ավելի լայն հնարավորություն են ստեղծում կազմակերպելու հեռավար ուսուցում՝ անկախ գտնվելու վայրից և ժամանակից: Այսպիսով՝ հեռավար ուսուցումը բացում նոր հնարավորություններ է ընձեռում ուսանողներին ստանալու բարձրագույն կրթություն աշխարհի լավագույն համալսարաններում:

ПРОБЛЕМЫ СОВРЕМЕННЫХ ТЕХНОЛОГИЙ И ДИСТАНЦИОННОГО ОБУЧЕНИЯ

МАРГАРИТА ПЕТРОСЯН

Ереванский государственный университет, романо–германский факультет,
кафедра английского языка и литературы, магистр II курса

В XXI веке, в эпоху современных технологий, традиционные методы обучения постепенно уступают свое место. Они дают больше возможностей для организации дистанционного образования, независимо от места и времени. Дистанционное обучение дает студентам возможность получить высшее образование в лучших университетах мира.