Chapter 2
Mastering Distance Education in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explains the overview of distance education; the current issues and approaches in distance education; and the implications of distance education in the digital age. Distance education is a viable option for many individuals of all ages who desire to get an education. Distance education provides the opportunity to study more subjects and reach out to programs that are not available in the immediate area. Distance education platforms, when fully developed and built out, can offer strong features that enhance the learning experiences. Through distance education, online classes typically cost less than an education in a traditional classroom environment. There are less space limitations and learning materials required for each student and the savings are passed from the educational institution to each student.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, many university-based education methods go online regarding the advanced learning technologies (Safford & Stinton, 2016). Distance education plays an important role in broadening educational access and increasing higher educational opportunities (Tabata & Johnsrud, 2008). Distance education is a method of education in which learners are physically separated from educators (Kaya, 2012), focusing on the pedagogy, technology, and instructional system design (Xueqin, 2012). Distance education becomes the recognized approach for education in the information age (Yilmaz, 2012).

The emergence and application of information and communication technology (ICT) in educational settings significantly imply the changes in the learning tools utilized in the modern learning environments (García-Peñalvo & Conde, 2015). The Internet-based distance education is considerably growing (Guohong, Ning, Wenxian, & Wenlong, 2012). Information technology (IT) and infrastructure development allow the effective delivery of educational contents (Kutluk & Gulmez, 2012) across the globe (Massey, Lee, White, & Goldsmith, 2012). In distance education, the learning material constitutes the...
main access to knowledge for adult students and determines the pedagogical practices (Christidou, Hatzinikita, & Gravani, 2012).

This chapter focuses on the literature review through a thorough literature consolidation of distance education. The extensive literature of distance education provides a contribution to practitioners and researchers by revealing the important perspectives on distance education.

**Background**

There is the tremendous growth in the use of the Internet to deliver distance education at community colleges (Cejda, 2010). The virtual environment offers many interesting options for continuous dialogue, through the application of such tools as asynchronous e-mail or threaded discussion forums, real-time conferencing platforms, and instant messaging functions (Meyers, 2008). Nowadays, there are numerous alternatives to the traditional learning model which generally try to improve the quality of university education (Abtahi, 2012). Distance education can be defined as a result of the attempt for educational progress (Gündoğan & Eby, 2012). The main goal of distance education is to deliver education to students who are not in a traditional classroom by allowing the self-determined, independent, and interest-guided learning through information systems (Gündoğan & Eby, 2012).

Higher education systems across the globe are challenged by the advent of ICT and the Internet (Guri-Rosenblit, 2005). The effect of using the Internet in modern education has gradually increased, and new technologies have improved the student’s learning (Kaya, 2012). The process of modernization leads to the development of new educational methodologies with the utilization of modern IT (Emil, Roza, & Anastasia, 2015). Educational institutions have created the new opportunities regarding development of the Internet, and they also provide electronic learning (e-learning) environment to provide the Web 2.0 support in distance education (Tavukcu, Arap, & Ozcan, 2011). E-learning allows students to select the learning content and tools appropriate to their various learning interests, needs, and skill levels (Kasemsap, 2016a). Web-based learning can support the open learning concept by providing students with the ability to connect to the educational resources (Kasemsap, 2016b).

**IMPORTANT PERSPECTIVES ON DISTANCE EDUCATION**

This section provides the overview of distance education; the current issues and approaches in distance education; and the implications of distance education in the digital age.

**Currents Issues and Approaches in Distance Education**

Education is an important factor in economic development and social change (Rashid & Elahi, 2012). Education, especially higher education, is vital for maintaining national and individual competitiveness in the global knowledge economy (Liyanagunawardena, Adams, Rassool, & Williams, 2014). Distance education enables education applications to be shareable and improvable through Internet and Web 2.0 technologies (Erturgut & Soysereker, 2010). Distance education is an important part of modern education (Kaya, 2012). Distance education is among the significant fields for the application of educational technology (Ding, Niu, & Han, 2010). Distance education is not only significant in terms of finances and student enrollment, but also in terms of meaningful learning (Annetta & Shymansky, 2006).