Communication with a Distance

Uttara S. Deolankar
Assistant Professor, Department of Academics, Symbiosis Centre for Distance Learning, Symbiosis Bhavan, 1065 Gokhale road, Model Colony, Pune 16, Maharashtra, India
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Abstract

Teaching and learning are no longer confined to the classroom or the school day. There are many technologies that can offer a great deal of flexibility in when, where, and how education is distributed. The teaching – learning process is no longer a teacher centered process but has now become a student centered process. The students have a choice as when, where and how they want to educate themselves. The traditional mode of teaching is now supplemented with the distance mode of teaching. The distance mode of teaching fulfils the demands of students, like flexibility of when, where and education could be taken. Hence becomes more and more student centric. As education is imparted through distance mode, the face to face interaction between students and the facilitators shows a declining graph. This where the two modes of communication come in focus, synchronous and asynchronous communication.

Introduction

Education is an on – going process and fetches benefits throughout life. The teaching – learning process has undergone many changes, which reflect to the comfort of the candidates attending the various programs. The education imparted is essentially "Student Centered". Student Centered learning is about helping student to discover their own learning styles, to understand their motivation and to acquire effective study skills that will be valuable throughout their lives. The universities offer courses in traditional mode as well as in distance mode. There is a greater need for on – line learning as it is flexible as compared to the teachings given in traditional mode. Flexible and online learning (commonly known as distance education) continues to grow in popularity. Teaching and learning take place online rather than in a classroom, allowing for complete flexibility to study when and where the learner wants.

A Scenario

Anju is a very good at athletics, but due to the busy schedule of her athletics programs she could not attend her college graduation classes at all. She dreaded the isolation as she wanted desperately to keep up with her friends so that she could graduate in the same as her friends did.Fortunately, Anju's teachers worked out a plan that incorporated Distance Education. With an Internet connection and a computer with audio and video capabilities at home, she was able to keep pace with her peers. And hence she could complete her graduation with flying colors. She studied through Distance Education mode and hence could achieve her dreams that to, in time.

Distance education can be roughly divided into *synchronous or asynchronous* delivery types. Synchronous means that the teacher and the student interact with each other in "real time." For example, with two-way videoconferences, students interact with "live" video of an instructor. Less complex technologies, such as telephone conversations, are also synchronous.With Asynchronous communication the two or even more parties do not communicate directly in person. Instead the communicators employ methods that allow each to communicate to the others and wait for a response.

Fig 1 Synchronous communication and Asynchronous communication

There are various methods of *synchronous communication.* One of them is video conferencing; which is tremendously useful in Distance Education.

Video conferencing is desktop video communication that allows two individuals to see and hear each other. Videoconferencing is great for one-on-one communication. For instructor-student conferences, many students are more comfortable if they can see who they are talking to.

Interactive slide shows can be prepared in hand while the Instructor or the user is explaining the concept. An interactive slideshow allows the user to control the slides. This control can be as simple as moving forward and back within the show, or as complex as moving through sections of a show.Interactive slideshows allow for quick material overviews. As supporting documentation for an assignment, or for the inclusion of graphics, interactive slideshows are great.

An advantage to interactive slideshows is user control. The instructor can move through the material at thepace of the student's understandings and review material as often as they like. A disadvantage is details of the concept cannot be depicted on the slideshows. By their very nature, slideshows are not meant to provide a great level of detail as too much text can be frustrating for the learner to read for a person with a distance with the taught. Another disadvantage is the compatibility. The widely used software is Microsoft PowerPoint and it generally works only with Internet Explorer. Mac Keynote software works only with the browser Mac. There are some options out there for creating slideshows that are not browser-specific, but there is a cost involved.

Interactive slideshows provide the "visual" that many distance learners need. Used as additional material in an online course, the slideshow can generate some interest in a topic because of the interactivity combined with the visual appeal.

With *Asynchronous communication* the two or more people do not need to communicate directly in person. Instead the communicators employ methods that allow each to communicate to the other(s) and await a response.

There are several methods for communicating asynchronously. Examples of asynchronous communication include blogs, Wikis, and e-mail.

A blog is a posting of the thoughts of an individual or group to which readers react via the Internet. There are several free blog sites available on the Web. In the case of education, a blog can be set up to discuss a particular aspect of education in my case, distance learning. An idea or concept is posted to which opinions and replies are expected. The blogger often posts these replies within the blog, generating a kind of "conversation".

One of the biggest advantages to a blog is control. The originator is the only one who normally posts to a blog, thus controlling the content and the responses s/he wishes to include. The biggest disadvantage is that blogging is essentially a one-way communication.

Communication in teaching and learning process is crucial, it is only through communication one will understand whether the concepts were understood or not. In traditional classes the facilitators would come to know while teaching in the classes. But the teaching – learning process is no longer confined to the classrooms. There are many technologies that can offer a great deal of flexibility in when, where, and how education is distributed. This usually happens in the distance education mode.

Hence while teaching through distance mode one has to know the various forms of communication, which are aptly *synchronous or asynchronous forms of communication.*

So let us communicate *synchronouslyas well as asynchronously* with a distance!

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