TEACHING IN A WEB-BASED DISTANCE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

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The expansion of distance learning, creating distance courses and enrollment in elementary, high school and higher education continues to rapidly expand with no signs of slowing. The demand for online courses is derived from a push "to provide quality education to all students, regardless of location and time". The need for flexible learning environments for potential learners who are hospitalized, have phobias linked to school environments, are single parents, have been expelled, are dropouts seeking to gain a diploma and many other specific cases and situations that we observe nowadays have led to a growth in the amount of distance learning courses and programs that are offered. Online learning has the potential to create educational opportunities for individuals who may have faced unsurpassable barriers prior to the expansion of online educational programs [2].

All we know that when teaching online, we are no longer dealing with students who are surrounded by other students who are thinking about the same thing at the same time in a protected, one-breaking hour environment dedicated to a subject. Now students are surrounded by all these interruptions that don't have anything to do with it. We all have lots of things competing for our attention [1].

In every classroom, there are students who always have their hand raised to participate, and those who are hesitant to engage. Whether they're introverted, tend to think awhile before they contribute, or are just having a bad day, it can be hard to bring students into discussions who are reluctant to add their voices [13].

Challenges

The challenges of getting students to participate have intensified during distance learning, we've heard from many teachers. Digital platforms can create

added communication barriers by making it hard to know when to talk, for example, or how to read subtle but important elements of discourse like a person's body language and facial expressions [4]. Additionally, online discussions are often hindered by variability in students' access to technology and by privacy concerns, and consequently many teachers have had to rely on students' submitting work over isolated channels like email, which can leave back-and-forth between peers (and between students and the teacher) by the wayside. Getting students to contribute in virtual classrooms takes some work, it turns out. The absence of peer interaction can negatively affect some aspects of the learning process. Furthermore, explaining that the "social and emotional aspects of learning are as important as the technical information" taught to students [9]. Although some literature highlights the lack of community as a deficit in the online learning environment, others have suggested that student-student interaction is much less of a concern than student-instructor and student-content interaction.

We would like to offer a range of strategies, both synchronous and asynchronous, to integrate the values and the voices of all students – even the quietest ones.

SYNCHRONOUS STRATEGIES

For synchronous learning, some teachers said they translated traditional discussion strategies from the classroom to live video chats, while others found that digital tools helped boost classroom participation [5].

1. **Spider web discussion:** During distance learning students led their own discussions over Google Meet. Before the live class, students answered questions independently, and then shared their responses at the start of the meeting as a jumping-off point for a broader class discussion.

While students conversed on video, we should listen and draw lines on a sheet of paper tracking the flow of the conversation, resulting in a spider web. At the end of the discussion, we share the drawing over video, and then asked students to reflect on the experience and what they learned about who talked, who listened, and who built on the ideas of others [10].

2. **Using chat to check for understanding:** After giving lessons use the Google Chat feature to ask and answer questions or type in emoticons or emoji, like a thumbs-up or thumbs-down, to show whether they understood a concept. The practice will help to check for student understanding and pushed students to engage more with the content.

We can type "T" or "F" for true and false questions while answering grammar problems in the chat box, and some even attempted to write sentences in response to her questions. Typing responses also provided a lot of keyboard practice for students [8].

3. **Flip your classroom to stimulate deeper discussion:** asynchronous and synchronous instruction worked well to stimulate student discussion during remote or distant learning.

First, we teach new content asynchronously through recorded videos and online activities. At the start of a live class, students briefly summarized the concepts they had learned together and then divided into breakout rooms to solve related problems in small groups. It allows spending less class time in direct instruction – and listening to students at the start of class and in small groups helped him identify, and then address, where students were struggling [3].

4. **Adapting think-pair-share to Zoom or Google Meet:** Giving more project-based learning activities to students – and allowing them more autonomy over assignments – naturally encouraged richer discussions in virtual learning. "If we give students as much freedom as possible to experiment, research, and pursue interests within our content area, then they inevitably have a lot more to say" [6].

ASYNCHRONOUS STRATEGIES

Some teachers and students said, that synchronous discussions were more engaging because they resembled a traditional classroom [14].

6. **Online forums create back-and-forth dialogue**: We can use Google Classroom's question feature to get our class to respond to readings and discussion prompts during distance learning. When each student comments, we may reply with clarifying questions to create a back-and-forth dialogue and also asked every

student to respond to at least two of their peers' comments to create a broader base of discussion [12].

7. **Seeing and critiquing peer work through virtual gallery walks**: Virtual "gallery walks" give students an opportunity to view their classmates' projects while learning from each other. After the students presented their own projects through five-minute screencasts, they are required to give feedback to at least two other students on theirs.

Using Google Sheets, students provided feedback to their peers by answering the following prompts: What's something new I learned about this topic?; What's something that surprised me about this topic?; What's something I liked about this presentation? The online format gives every student the opportunity to see their peers' work and their assessment on theirs for deeper reflection [6].

8. **Moving station brainstorming online**: When carousel or station brainstorming activities are conducted in traditional classroom environments, small groups of students rotate around the room to different stations to answer prompts – and view and add to each groups' responses.

To translate this online, we should divide students into groups online and created shared Google docs – or a series of Google slides – for the prompts/questions. Each group left their thoughts under the questions by the assigned date and then followed up by commenting on the other groups' responses the next day. "The strategy still allows them to maintain a sense of classroom community (in a virtual setting)." [14].

Due to all above mentioned we could allocate the benefits of distance learning. They are:

- **connecting** – distance learning platforms allow teachers to stay connected to their students outside of university or school hours in order to exchange resources, videos, ideas, and pedagogical practices;

- **flexibility** – among the benefits of distance learning for teachers is the large variety of different resources such as videos texts, presentations, and quizzes

that they can use to adapt their tutoring methods to the learning styles of their students;

- **innovation** – the use of new technologies gives teachers the freedom to experiment in their teaching practice and the ability to make changes if something doesn't work;

- **accessibility** – online platforms that are now available 24/7 allow teachers to develop and create their materials according to their schedules and whenever they want to. It is also important to note that all teaching materials can be reviewed as many times as needed;

- **passion-based learning** – online platforms allow teachers to support their students outside the classroom where they don't spend much time together, and to give them additional instructions on subjects. It gives teachers the opportunity to lead students to success both during and after classes [8];

- **efficiency** – the benefits of distance learning for teachers include the ability to receive constant feedback from their students about whether they understand the material, if it is interesting to them, etc. Online platforms provide a large variety of assessment tools also;

- **saves time** – time is one of the most precious commodities for educators. By eliminating the need to commute to university or school during evenings and weekends, educators can spend more time on learning concepts;

- **lifelong learning** – distant learning platforms are one of the channels that educators can use to deepen their knowledge and increase their skills;

- **building a community** – online platforms allow educators to stay connected with colleagues from all over the world, as well as to share ideas and gain inspiration [11];

- **self-reflection** – modern platforms bring more benefits of e-learning to teachers, like the ability to make audio and video recordings of their lessons and then to watch, analyze, and reflect on the same recordings afterwards;

- **observation** – observing other educators in your university or via different online courses can be very beneficial. Teachers can compare different

teaching styles, practices, etc. They can become more aware of what kind of teachers they are [14];

- **feedback** – another important benefit of distance learning for teachers is the opportunity to receive feedback on their teaching style from their students and colleagues. In this way they get a better perspective on their work and learn where they can tweak their habits and make improvements.

Distance or e-learning is a channel and tool through which teachers can improve their teaching styles. The Internet has significantly changed how we communicate with one another as well as how we access, share and facilitate information [2]. The issue is no longer one of how to use technology to teach, but one where teachers acknowledge the way the world is already developing, and understand the significance of online literacy and the role that collaboration and online engagement plays in student learning and their future workplace environment.

Software and technology changes very rapidly, and it can be difficult to keep up with these developments. It is important therefore to focus on understanding effective pedagogical strategies for online teaching rather than the technology itself [1].

Summary

Distance learning provides students with access to education through a network of various technologies [3]. Instructor and student interact at a distance without having to be physically present in the same location. Online or distance learning environments allow for learning to occur in a setting that is not restricted by place or time. Web-based distance learning has the ability to disassemble barriers that have been constructed by poverty, location, disability, as well as other factors that we have nowadays.

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