

**A DISTANCE LEARNING REVIEW – THE COMMUNICATIONAL MODULE  
'LEARNING ON DEMAND-ANYWHERE AT ANY TIME'**

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## ABSTRACT

The society of knowledge refers to the society marked with the principle which requires that knowledge, information and life-time learning hold a key to success in the world of IT technology. Internet, World Wide Web, Web Based Education and ever so growing speed of IT and communicational technologies have enabled the application of new modes, methods and models of learning. This treatise conveys a survey of notional aspects of Distance Learning and a description of the new Module of Distance Learning, named «Learning on Demand-Anywhere at Any Time». The roles and tasks of individual participants of the IT Team of experts are described, as well as those, belonging to the Team which conceptualizes the tuition process, the Team that incorporates the content on the website, the Team of teachers and students who make the central core of Distance Learning contained in the presentation of the communicational module «Learning on Demand-Anywhere at any Time».

## KEY WORDS

Distance Learning, Learning on Demand, Participants to the Distance Learning, The Advantages of the Web Based Education, IT-Communicational Technologies;

## 1. Introduction

During the Roman Empire, the central resources of the economy originated in labour; in the Feudal Era it was the possession of the land; in the commercial era it was trade and traffic. During the Industrial Era the wealth meant the machinery and plants. In the post-industrial societies, information became the foundation of the wealth» /1/, while ever so growing and ever more sophisticated development of IT-Communicational technologies have enabled the application of new technologies in all social areas, and a special area relates to education. The present society has been defined as the society of knowledge. In such societies, information as such, its storing, right and legal application and life-time learning should occupy a top position of the list of priorities of each and every individual, as according to Porushov Law «the participation in the latest communicational technologies has been an obligatory requirements for all those who wish to remain an integral part of the culture.» /2/.

Development of the WWW and Internet has affected the Distance Learning, making it ever more popular way of educating. Creation of «Cyber Bridges» which covered gaps between physically distant places, institutions and people, avail contact at the shortest imaginable time, while each individual with an access to Internet, becomes either an active or passive rambler over the bridges of knowledge.

## 2. Distance Learning -Notional Determination

According to M.Moore and G.Kearsley «distance learning is the planned learning which usually takes place in premises that are far away from the place of teaching, and in order to prove efficient require application of special educational and communicational techniques, as well as application of electronic and other technologies.» /3/

To our opinion, this definition covers all features of distance learning from the pedagogic and IT aspects (according to Mrs. N.Tatković) while quality education with remote tuition may be formulated in the following manner: it is an educational, interactive communication between a student and, a teacher, realized by means of modern IT-Communicational technologies, with its proper didactic, logical and methodical articulation, with its purpose, its causality and consequences, its strategies and goals, its resources by which the educational programmes are realized and programmes that avail creative maximum and satisfaction of individual needs.

The problem of great distances and impossibility to organize education in countries like Australia, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand and others has been surpassed with this new way of educating-with distance learning. This mode of training has been realized in conformity with the plans and programmes of dislocated courses provided by special schools which utilize audio-visual media such as wireless-sets and TV-sets. Distance Learning has caused a number of changes in the traditional educational system and made it more interesting by providing alternative approaches to those groups which had no access to education. Courses, training-sessions and corresponding diplomas have become possible without physical presence of students in educational premises. The usage of PCs and new IT-communicational technologies provided access to education to every individual ANYWHERE and atANY TIME, because

«today, distance learning, by means of digital media serves to satisfy the needs of people who are unable to participate physically in educational courses. The explosion of IT-technology avails access to virtual classrooms where a student sits at his 'own desk'. The Web Based Education may be available at our own PC through WWW and there is a number of advantages /4/ such as :

1. One may learn anywhere
2. One can learn whenever he wishes so
3. You are the one who decides when do you wish to learn
4. You get the feedback
5. You are connected to the latest text-books
6. The low cost
7. You may give up the original goal.

Queries relating to efficiency of such kind of teaching are frequently asked. Relevant researches proved that distance learning may not only be judged equally efficient when

compared to traditional training, but it provides a series of new forms and methods of teaching such as :

- The method of efficiency,
- The method of practicality, and
- The method of flexibility.

Such education opens new pedagogic directions and intermittently searches for more efficient responses to questions like the following one: how to make education accessible to each and every individual? Which teaching methods (curricula type) should be applied in determined pedagogic situations?

May we conclude that «distance learning has been oriented towards development of educational capacity to transform information into knowledge and the knowledge in action.» /5/

The Croatian academic and research network CARNet held its first experimental lecture of distance Learning in 1997. The participants to that lecture were the students of the Faculty of Electronics at Osijek, Croatia who acted both as audience and active participants in the lecture held by the Faculty of Electronics and Informatics in Zagreb.

The experts agree that «life-time learning process have become the key resources for successful business and personal success. Although the term 'learning' is a more general notion in respect of the term 'education', the schools are still the major actor within the process of learning. In developed societies, schools have become more and more connected to the Internet.» /6/

Most of educational institutions of the Republic of Croatia have already developed their own website that contain information, curricula content, lectures, exercises and the like, executed and/or performed by teachers. In most of educational institutions it is possible to apply for an exam on an on-line basis. In the Republic of Croatia, the distance learning system does not exist in the true sense of the word, although there have been recorded attempts to organize tuition in a more quality and efficient manner at the shortest possible time.

### **3. The Roles of Participants in the new Communicational Module of Distance Learning called «Learning on Demand Anywhere, at Any Time»**

The Distance Learning may be considered successful providing a good relation between the teaching content, mode of presentation, rate of motivation and expectations of the participants has been achieved. In order to secure a quality education, the educational results have to be evaluated by both, external experts and actual participants in the course.

When it comes to the question of quality, distance learning procedure should satisfy a set of determined criteria:

- 1.) Planning of lessons as a criterion for a successful completion of the distance learning procedure
- 2.) The criterion of a successful interaction
- 3.) The criterion of the working and emotional atmosphere
- 4.) The criterion relating to the degree of satisfaction of needs and joint interests.

#### Criterion of successful interaction

One of the possible criteria relating to the achievement of quality teaching contains the issue of interaction to be created between participating students and teachers. In order to establish a major degree of quality interaction and communication between students and teachers, it will be necessary to select adequate educational strategies and technologies.

Although the «face to face» interaction contact does not exist in this procedure, the humane elements of communication must be present. At the beginning of the educational course, the participants should be provided with instructions how to use the presented technology, and make them familiar with communicational modules, accessible technology and the like.

#### Criterion of the working and emotional atmosphere

Regardless of the number of participants in the selected group, some authors stress the importance of the working atmosphere created in a given session to achieve the satisfactory results in teaching, as the said atmosphere reflects the totality of relationship and pertaining goals which result from the interpersonal communication. This atmosphere is furtherly completed by the positive emotional attitude created among all the participants, that provokes sensation of a nice atmosphere, friendly disposition of the participants who will show more tolerance and more democratic approach in their tackling of issues.

#### Criterion relating to the degree of satisfaction of needs and joint interests

The joint interests are put together within the official tuition plan and programme with details on the rate of efficiency and scheduled completion of a given educational course.

The new proposal of the communicational module of distance learning, entitled «Learning on Demand-Anywhere, at Any Time» changes the process of learning/teaching, research and creativity, as well as the roles of all participants in the process.

Who are the participants of that module and what are their roles?

The system consists of five teams which are connected through a permanent communication and interaction.

The Teams include the following participants:

1. The IT Expert Team
2. The Curricula Content Team of Teachers
3. The Website Curricula Content Handling Team
4. The Team of Teachers (Tutors, Moderators)
5. Students

What are their roles?

Each of the above teams have their individual tasks to be carried out with as much quality as possible in order to put the execution of the entire process to an extremely high level of expertise, competency and efficiency.

1. The IT Team of Experts consists of: IT-experts of various professional profiles (programmers, web designers, system clerks, system engineers and other experts).

The task of this team is the following :

- Selection of required technical equipment (hardware and software)
- Design, creation and updating of Web pages
- Allocation of user names and passwords to each participant to be able to enter a specific web page of the school
- A permanent technical support and consulting
- Organization of IT-Courses for teachers
- Verification of IT-literacy and computer literacy of the teachers
- Provision of expert guidance through the website.

2. The Curricula Content Team of Teachers consists of : the school Headmaster, Pedagogue, Psychologist, School Secretary, Teachers Council.

Their task is, as follows :

- They determine the required curricula for specific professions and select the relevant school
- They select the teachers for specific curriculum
- Together with teachers, they compile the respective tuition plan and programme for each curriculum
- They decide upon the timetable of lessons (scheduled lessons)
- They provide the premises for the teachers to attain undisturbed evolution of lecturing,
- They provide the conference hall for video conferences
- They organize conventions, meetings and other gatherings in the school premises that all interested parties and

students may attend, whenever required, with the purpose to promote better collaboration among the participants and a higher rate of their communication

- They decide about the mode of sitting for a Final Exam
- Based on decision brought about by the teachers, they assess the final success of each and every student
- They are responsible for the issue of correlative diplomas, both written and in the electronic form.

3. The Website Curricula Content Handling Team consists of editors and teachers. The team will have the task of incorporating the curricula content onto a web page. Before the curricula content were entered onto a web page, the editor, responsible for proof reading will edit the material.

4. The Team of Teachers (Tutors, Moderators) will consist of teachers responsible for specific curricula

The actual lessons will be adjusted to individual requirements of students, while one of the most important factors will be communication with a teacher. The teacher will have the role of a tutor, moderator, guide, director, and will be available to assist students at any time by means of modern forms of communication.

The role of the Teachers Team is :

- To create a draft plan and programme of curricula and to hand it over to the Curricula Content Team to be considered and approved
- To determine obligatory text-books and facultative text-books
- To design the articulation of a lesson (teaching unit) which contains:
  - Lectures,
  - Theoretical and practical part of the educational programme,
  - Repetitions of the previously learned data,
  - Exercises,
  - Directives for those who wish to learn more about a determined subject,
- To create thematic session, together with students and decide about reports and treatises to be presented by the students,
- To assist students to form adequate groups to work out the offered list of projects,
- To log records with comments on each and every student in so called «Students Log Book»,

- To compile and correct examination questions,
- To grant the final evaluation mark of a student.

#### Mode of communication with a student

Each teacher should tend to create a feedback communication relationship with each and every student with as much quality as possible.

The said communication may be performed as follows :

- through either fixed or cell phone (3rd generation of mobile phones), (in a given period of time)
- by means of e-mail
- through a Forum (a scheduled term for discussion group meetings)
- through the Chat (a determined point of time)
- through Video-Conferences (a determined point of time)
- by means of counselling at teachers' premises (scheduled dates and hours or setting up an appointment through the remaining means of communication).

Some of the tasks of teachers relate to their active participation in the creation of communicational modules called «Learning on Demand-Anywhere at Any Time» should have the purpose to :

- Develop a critical, analytical and reflective reasoning of a student
- Consider and approve wishes and interests of a student and to guide him through the entire educational process,
- Teach them how to think and how to learn,
- Develop creativity and stamina when resolving problems
- Develop communicational capacities of a student (a positive attitude when expressing his own opinion, proneness to making questions)
- Introduce new methods of teaching, new approaches and techniques of work
- Allow students to evaluate teachers' performance
- Develop creative potentials of the children,
- Follow closely the work of the students and direct them towards achievement of good results /7/

#### 5. A Student

A student is the central figure of the teaching process. According to his own interest, he chooses the place and time of lessons, tutors and curricula that he wishes to attend. His communication with his tutors is at the quality level. Students are motivated to participate in the above described system of teaching, while the learning becomes a challenge if set up in this manner.

Each and every student should :

- Know how to operate a PC and possess IT and computer literacy (the basics),
- Possess his own PC with respective equipment and have an access to Internet,
- Arrange a permanent communication with his tutors and other students,
- If possible, he should be able to meet all the participants in the school premises in order to socialize and put questions without embarrassment or shame
- To participate in, at least one project, to be carried out in smaller groups and/or a selected interest group,
- To use communication modules that suit him most (forum, chat, phone, cell phone, e-mail and the like).

## CONCLUSION

The possibilities offered to us by today IT and communicational technology in past times «The Indians did on foot». The Inkas' runners used to carry coded messages, transporting them to the scheduled take overs. In Northern America, the descendants used to communicate with distant people by means of frequently caricatured smoke signals» /8/, while today, this is possible to achieve in any given moment, it is sufficient to be on-line.

To our opinion, the distance learning educational method may prove a far better instrument of teaching that brings much better fruits, so we recommend the application of new forms and methods of teaching instead of traditional educational methods. Distance learning provides possibilities of education for any individual whatsoever, and, at the same time it teaches him to accept the concept of the life-time learning, as «on one hand, the major portion of teaching/learning is carried out through lectures – and we speak only about quality lectures and quality lecturers – a considerable portion is based on the research work, from the point of invention of the wheel and the personal inventions & innovations of everything once again.» /9/

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