Developing Critical Thinking Skills through Interactive Radio Programs (IRPs): Building Online Knowledge Networks In Distance Education

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ABSTRACT

In considering how best to optimize distance education systems, economy (cost effectiveness and efficiency), technology (communication technologies) and equity (gender, accessibility, minority, language, religion etc.) are vital issues in any distance education systems. Moreover, how end-users, distance learners, can equally share and exchange knowledge and resources for educational purposes, how they can promote their higher-order thinking skills as well as how they can cope with the limitations they have (such as time, age, gender, language etc.) are major concerns in distance education milieus. Kurubacak strongly emphasize that interactive radio programs, as a forgotten educational media, with a little cost can effectively integrate in any distance education systems. Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to focus on interactive radio programs to build critical and creative knowledge networks among diverse learners in the distance education systems of developing countries.

Keywords: Interactive radio programs, critical thinking, distance online education, asynchronous learning.

INTRODUCTION

While cutting-edge communication technologies are increasing challenges (such as digital gaps, digital diversity etc. due to their high prices) to design interactive learning environments, interactive radio programs (IRPs) are providing more open and flexible environments, which are mutually supported learning for empowerment. Educational degree programs and courses, therefore, can be constructed over IRPs with the emerging communication technologies to engage learners interacting with knowledge from diverse resources around the world fast and with out time barriers in especially elearning-based distance education systems. Unfortunately, IRPs, as forgotten educational medium, with a little cost can effectively integrate and use in any distance education systems (Kurubacak & Yuzer, 2004).

This understanding of broadcasting course contents via the IRPs with the asynchronous method in developing countries can support more collaborative and interactive shared power in online learning, which is implemented in control over the curriculum (Giroux, 1983). Besides, these multi-way interactions via the mixed broadcasting strategies of the IRPs can empower online learners to share and exchange the ideas, beliefs and facts of others from the real-life experiences. Needles to say, the development of learners does only occur in mutuality with others from the world. The free exercises of the high rhythm of real life through knowledge sharing process among online learners and virtual society improve the critical skills and proficiencies of people in distance learning.

PURPOSE

IRPs can be defined based on a radio programming concept and technique, which has two-way communication among presenters and audiences. Two-way communications open to have immediate messages from audiences. Therefore, IRPs is a radio concept to bring together instructors, learners, resources, experts etc. even if they have not been at the same place and same time. In this context, the main purpose of this paper is to explore and discuss the main characteristics of interactive radio programs (IRPs) for distance online courses to promote the critical learning skills of online learners;

> ➢ to engage them in projects designed to be realistic, intriguing and relevant real life experiences,
> ➢ to promote IRPs to model how theory translate into practice in higher education,
> ➢ to integrate IRPs by proposing situate learning in an authentic context by helping them think deeply,
> ➢ to encourage online learners to take ownership and responsibility for their critical thinking process,
> ➢ to support them to act as cognitive coaches throughout IRP, and
> ➢ to give them guidance as needed, but encouraging them independence in thinking critically.

IRPs are vital for the online learners in developing countries to be engaged citizens, informed individuals and dynamic members of their virtual society. Therefore, these learners with different learning styles and strategies are most in need of opportunity and encouragement for improving their critical thinking skills. Distance online learning has been limited by a lack of research about learners' critical thinking skill developments during their learning process that would serve to assist lifelong learning with real-life experiences. This study is breaking new ground by addressing key questions about learners' critical thinking skill developments, IRPs and life experiences. Based on the main purpose of this research and the concerns discussed above, the key research inquiries in this study are:

> ➢ To what extent do online learners' abilities continue to improve their critical thinking skills with IRPs?
> ➢ What kind of online learning experiences are associated with critical thinking skill development with IRPs?
> ➢ What are online learners' patterns of participation in critical thinking skill improvements with IRPs in distance online contexts?
> ➢ What are the impacts of critical thinking skill developments with IRPs on their learning outcomes?

With the emerging communication technologies to create interactive milieu via educational radio, although there are two major approaches to broadcast the programs: 1) taped-broadcasting or asynchronous and 2) live broadcasting or synchronous. The researcher will emphasize the framework how to plan, design, implement and evaluate the asynchronous IRPs for developing countries to develop online learners' critical think skills to become global citizens of the world.

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