

DISTANCE LEARNING EVOLUTION

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Abstract

The distance education represents the study by correspondence, but the requests of the moment are inclined to more approach more the new methods of the information circulation, by audio or video technology, or by the internet.

The electronic learning represents an interaction between teaching process - Information and Communication Technology (ICT), meeting a wide range of learning practices from the traditional education to the online one.

1. INTRODUCTION

The distance learning or distance education is a way of teaching/learning practiced ever since the beginning of the 20th century. Before the new information technologies appearance and their broadcast, teachers were using printed material and the post-office services to send information, accomplishing this way the so called "distance education".

A study taken in 1910, dedicated to a distance education institute shows the situation in USA and in Canada, declaring that: "No less than 1600 persons are engaged in the educating activity of The International School by Correspondence, the main role of which is to penetrate the heterogeneous mass of the humanity and to discover, direct and convince people of the education benefits".

Another way of educating was by the radio, but with more reduced popularity, because at the same time with the developing of this information spreader, have also been used other mass-media communication tools. After 1921, when the Salt City University obtained the first education by the radio license, in Romania also come up the first suggestions regarding the methods of teaching by the radio.

Thus, starting with 1930, at Dimitrie Gusti's suggestion – President of the Radio Romania Broadcasting Corporation, have been organized "two conferences at the radio with the pupils from the 1st to the 8th grade", pointing out the role of the radio in the school education, even if this time was only formal.

The TV education, which had at its base the materials taken from different textbooks, the press that helped at the storage and the transfer of the information and had its contribution at the cultural informing which could also have been employed for education, has been used as a pedagogical alternative among the teachers since 1945 (when The Iowa University obtained the 1st license), until the middle '80. The investigations made showed that the results obtained thanks to the TV education are not lower than those obtained with the traditional education, because of the presentation to pupils of some realities that are not opened to the direct observation, by the join of images and sound, by reusing later the materials.

Regardless of the spreading field they had, these ways of mass communication are out of being part of the educative means because of two difficulties, namely: [8]

- the radio and TV communication has an unidirectional feature, there is no feedback because it's missing any dialog between a transmitter and a receiver.
- the receiver, represented by a very great number of people, could carry the risk that speaking to anyone will be actually speaking to none.

2. THE PASSAGE FROM DISTANCE TO ELECTRONIC LEARNING

The distance learning appeared at the beginning of the 20th century, has been followed by the Computer Based Learning (CBL), appeared at the beginning of the '70, having as a main didactic material the educative software put on the pc memory back in that period.

The rising and development of the web (1984) brought the diversity of the educational offer, so the Web Based Learning (WBL) brought a change in the WWW service, many educational materials being accessible online.

The Web Based Teaching (WBT) brought the online education spreading through the organization of students in groups coordinated by a tutor, counting many communication ways, like: forums, e-mail lists, videoconferences, etc. Through the new learning methods appears the virtual class with the real time communication thanks to the chat, to the interactive television, or to the videoconference system, and appears also the Networked Learning offering this way to students a complete space and time independence, making easier the non-synchronized interactive communication both with the tutor and with the online resources.

So one can say that the electronic learning represents an interaction between teaching process - Information and Communication Technology (ICT), meeting a wide range of learning practices from the traditional education to the online one [1].

For the e-learning term have been given many definitions, like:

- the sum of the educative situations during which the information and communication technology means are meaningfully used [3];
- "learning in a virtual world in which the technology cooperate with the human creativity to hasten and facilitate the deep knowledge of the studied field [14]";
- "learning, educating opportunities or educative programs through electronic means [13]";
- "a way to facilitate and improve the education by using the calculation devices and the communication technology [1]. The used devices are often personal computers, CDs, DVDs, USBs, digital television, etc.

3. THE ELECTRONIC EDUCATION IN ROMANIA

Any school or education institute in Romania can provide Web space to any discipline, on which the teachers or tutors can post or publish different didactic materials, homework for pupils and students, marks registers, the communication with the pupils and students being accomplished in discussions forums.

Many Universities in Romania have founded distance education specializations or are going to adopt this learning way as they have perfected the programs needed to this education type. So the ex National Council of Valuation and Academic Credential (CNEEA) has settle down a set of Standards regarding the use of the electronic learning programs in the distance education, standards relating to [1]:

- offered services for students;
- specific learning resources;
- offered services for the didactic staff;
- accessibility to the services offered by the electronic education program;
- the quality management of the services offered by the program;
- presented documents by the institution.

The CNEEA standards provide the following technical features for the sites dedicated to the distance education specializations [1] :

- the page containing the external and internal users must be flexible and it must be easy to adjust to the educative processes dynamics;
- the communication, synchronized and non, between students, teachers/tutors and the technical- administrative staff must be assured;
- the students assistance – online and offline, individual and/or by groups must be guaranteed;
- there must be offered information regarding the appeal and the use of the available educative services;
- facilities for the automatic gather of the statistical data about students and their use, to improve the offered services;
- facilities for online help, the education middle map, the web page structure on which is applied the course prop or tutorial, how to use the pictograms;
- accessibility to different study and communication resources: online data bases, news, correspondence, group synchronized and non, discussions, virtual seminars, virtual library;
- facilities of online and/or offline valuation and self-valuation of students achieved knowledge;
- periodical gathered feedback from students on the educative services offered to them;
- detailed information regarding the past activities;
- introducing some monitoring and intervention ways, in case of similar technical problems appears.

3.1 EDUCATIVE SITES IN ROMANIA

In the last few years, in Romania have shown up many projects (educative sites), offering material support to make the new modern methods of education become popular, like the following [1]:

a) The Ministry of Education and Research Portal (www.edu.ro)

This site was founded in 1998 and represents the Ministry activity, offering information and documents of the Public Information Office, concerning events, news, programs, normative papers of the preuniversity and university education, of the minorities, but also of research.

b) The courses offer portal (www.1educat.ro)

This site is specialized in presenting the courses offers, but also in promoting the improvement in different fields and includes useful information on career and educative environment planning.

c) The Online School Portal (www.e-scoala.ro)

The Online School Site offers a free data base, both to pupils, students, and teachers and to anyone willing for education. This is an open program so that anyone can contribute to its development both in the programming and in materials posted on the site shares.

This site's purpose is to improve the education process efficiency at learning spaces, by offering information to complete the school curriculum, by putting at the didactic staff disposal the modern methods of instruction, by offering information on the European education.

d) The SEI Portal (<http://portal.edu.ro>)

The SEI Portal (Computerized Educational System) is the only way of communication on web between The Minister of Education and the Romanian citizen. Since 2002 this site hosts pupils' computerized distribution at high schools, vocational

schools results, and teachers' nomination upon vacant positions results. Since 2002 this site has a discussion forum of over 40.000 registered users.

Through the SEI portal of the Ministry of Education and Research, have been also developed together with the SIVCO enterprise other applications, like:

- The Computerized Admission in High Schools and Vocational Schools (ADLIC), which represents a computerized system used to centralize at national level the capacity exams results between 2001 and 2006 and which was distinguished with the "Very Best Practice" award at the International Conference of e-Government organized at Brussels.
- Baccalaureate 2005, 2006 – the computerizing project of the national baccalaureate that offers facilities to candidates, their options, the exams results centralization, accomplishing statistics on centralized data, the partial distribution of the exam subjects through the internet.

3.2. INSTITUTES IN ROMANIA OFFERING ONLINE COURSES

There are at the moment in Romania many institutes offering online courses, directed to different aged students. So, there is in Timisoara a private corporation – Timsoft (www.timsoft.ro) [1] that offers online courses, host/development of lessons, online labs, advice and education in the e-learning program, development of the e-learning incorporate system, web design.

To the wide public of Romania are also reserved other kind of courses placed at anyone's disposal by different institutes, like:

- The Continuous Education and Distance Learning Center (CECIDDD) of the West University of Timisoara (www.cecidd.ro) offers distance courses, after university, improvement and training courses in marketing and management;
- The Economic and Managerial Qualification Center (www.cpea.ro) guarantees the professional economic, computer science, law and office automation training.
- Arrow Professional Qualification Center (www.centrulonline.ro) – guarantees courses on the continuous training in financial – accountant, human resources, real estate activity.
- Online Courses (www.cursurionline.ro) – offers general online courses in computer science, business.

4. THE DISTANCE EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ORADEA

At the University of Oradea has been approved the foundation of the Distance Education Department after the Senate session on August 30, 1999, by increasing the number of fee places at:

- The Faculty of Economics (specializations: Bookkeeping and Computer Science Management, Finances and Assurances, Marketing, Management);
- The Faculty of Law (specialization: Public Administration);
- The Faculty of Physical Training and Sport (specialization: Physical Training and Sport);
- The Teachers College (specialization: Foreign Languages)
- The College of Management (specialization: Public Administration).

So, in the university year 1999 – 2000 have been admitted at the Distance Learning Department, 568 students.

In 2000 – 2001 took place the admission exam to the distance learning at the Faculty of Managerial and Technological Engineering (specialization: Economic Engineering in the Mechanic Field) and at the Faculty of Electro techniques (specialization: Computers).

As a result of the visit of the Valuation Comity on July 19, 2001 have been temporary accredited two specializations of the Faculty of Economics and the Faculty of Managerial and Technological Engineering, the other specializations of the Distance Learning System running into settlement.

Starting with 2003 – 2004 the distance learning students have on hand a site (figure 1) at <http://id.uoradea.ro>, where they have access to all information regarding the education process (important news, learning plans, structure of the university year, timetable) and also an e-learning program – the MOODLE program dedicated both to students and teachers/tutors.

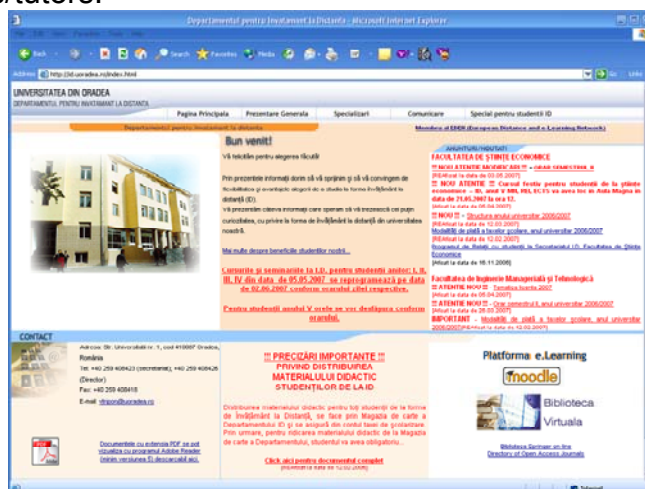


Figure 1. The site of the Distance Learning Department

The MOODLE program (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) is a software package intended to conceive the courses on internet and offers support to the management and security of the information. At the moment, over 1300 registered students at the Distance Learning Department of the University of Oradea have access at the electronic program.

With this program (figure 2) the students can take courses, access lab activities, writing homework, not counting the grade and specialization. The students' access at the program is made with a username and a password, both of them being given by the program administrator, the open of each and every course taking place using a little key received from the disciplines titular didactic personnel.



Figure 2. MOODLE Program Site

5. CONCLUSIONS

Thinking at the distance learning as a complementary way of instruction, comes from the guarantee and the regards of some quality criteria concerning the pedagogical, academics, technical and administrative aspects.

The task of the education and training based on the new information and communication technologies is not to show straight away the obtained results, but to replace a part of the today structures with something new, superior in facing the changes in culture and civilization.

The elimination of the space and time obstacles or the domination of a learning system, guarantees the study possibility to a wide social category, without breaking their professional activity.

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