

3. Internet – Participating in the knowledge society

” “Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.”

Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations, January 1997-December 2006

CHECKLIST FACT SHEET 10 – SEARCHING FOR INFORMATION

Do you read the disclaimer when you are consulting a website?

How can you be sure the information you find is factual and objective?

Do you consult several websites to check your facts?

CHECKLIST FACT SHEET 11 – FINDING QUALITY INFORMATION ON THE WEB

Before downloading files, do you check that your anti-virus software is active?

If you get your news from the Internet, do you seek multiple perspectives on the same story?

Clean out your cookies from time to time to avoid being “profiled” by search engines.

CHECKLIST FACT SHEET 12 – DISTANCE LEARNING AND MOOCs

Choose a method of distance learning that is appropriate for you: determine what type of learning (synchronous, asynchronous, open schedule, hybrid distance learning) will best help you reach your goals.

Before selecting a distance learning course, research the reviews – both from students and teachers.

Take adequate precautions to ensure that your computer equipment and software is secure from hackers, viruses and other threats.

CHECKLIST FACT SHEET 13 – SHOPPING ONLINE

Do not make online purchases on unsecure Internet connections.

Understand and agree to the key information provided about the product or service.

Disable in-app purchases on your smartphone or tablet.

Do not believe all user recommendations you see, creating “user” recommendations can also be a money-making business.

Distance learning and MOOCs



Distance learning is a formalised teaching system where students and teachers are not physically present in a classroom together. The educational process takes place via electronic media; as technology has advanced, so has distance learning. We now see virtual classrooms where students and teachers exchange content via e-mail, instant messaging, video-conferencing, chatrooms, bulletin boards and more.

— Regardless of the technology used, distance learning remains a proven method that opens up lifelong learning opportunities to students of all countries and all ages, making it possible for them to earn diplomas, certificates and degrees from almost any online university in the world. Students are also able to have discussions with other students – or teacher(s) – who may be located hundreds or even thousands of kilometres away, which definitely adds an enriching element to learning.

— Distance learning began in the mid-1800s with generations of adults seeking advanced education at home, in the military or on the job. Courses used to be done by correspondence, with material sent back and forth through the traditional postal system. These days, however, distance learning

has evolved to take advantage of current technology. It thrives via the Internet, and students can study for degrees without ever setting foot in a brick-and-mortar classroom.

Distance learning exists in different forms today, ranging from the classic definition above, to massive open online courses (MOOCs), to peer-to-peer YouTube training and webinars, or to Periscope for virtual field trips. Although technology has progressed rapidly, the fundamentals of distance learning remain the same: providing education.



TYPES OF DISTANCE LEARNING

MOOCs

- MOOCs were first introduced in 2008 with the goal of delivering content via the Internet to anyone who wants to take a course with no limit on attendance. Interactive community forums were created to allow exchanges between students and teachers.
- By 2012, MOOCs were being sponsored by formal educational institutions and one could find universities such as Stanford University, Princeton University, the University of Michigan and the University of Pennsylvania aligned with Coursera, a for-profit educational technology company.
- Other successful MOOC programmes include Udacity, another Stanford University partner, and edX, a MOOC provider founded by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University.
- MOOCs are based on a teacher-student model, whereas the existence of YouTube has created another type of distance learning model: peer-to-peer.

Peer-to-peer training

- Peer-to-peer training can be described as sessions where people learn from colleagues with similar backgrounds to theirs. An example could be children educating children, lawyers educating lawyers, etc.
- This co-teaching module is easily found on YouTube, where YouTube “teachers” with millions of subscribers offer software tutorials, website design tutorials, make-up tutorials, writing tutorials and thousands of other subjects.

Webinars

- Webinars or web-based seminars, can also be found across the Internet. Coaches, educators, gurus and anyone professing to share knowledge can offer a webinar.
- Webinar formats may include presentations, lectures, PowerPoint presentations, videos, workshop materials and more.
- Webinars may also include downloadable materials to be worked on at a later date.

Periscope

- Periscope is a broadcasting app which allows people to see what you are seeing, in real time. The app has had unparalleled success in its first year and educators are still searching for useful applications.
- Some educators believe that virtual field trips, sharing their classrooms or getting real-time questions from student viewers might have uses; however, this is a distance-learning tool to monitor in the future.

Advances in distance learning have revolutionised learning environments, from elementary school to tertiary education. For example:

- Lectures can be given via streaming media¹ or as printed material saved in files which are stored on the educator’s server².

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Streaming_media

2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_server

- Students communicate with the teacher and each other through message boards³, e-mail⁴ and chat⁵.
- Open educational resources (OERs) are documents and media (usually open-licensed) that are useful for teaching, learning and assessing, as well as for research purposes. OERs provide yet another means of enabling teachers to use and exchange content with other schools, educators and continents. OERs are sometimes also created by non-teacher experts on specific topics, and can be easily shared and selected through a repository, such as OER Commons⁶.
- Tools such as the above have given rise to the “flipped classroom”, an instructional strategy and a type of blended learning that reverses the traditional educational arrangement by delivering instructional content, often online, outside of the classroom and moves activities, including those that may have traditionally been considered homework, into the classroom. Learn more about tools at Edutopia⁷.
- Students can upload assignments into a drop box, which is a usually free-of-charge service, where registered users can keep files safe, sync them and easily share with whoever they choose. Even quizzes and exams can be automated and taken online.
- With MOOCs and distance learning, course materials are always readily available and can be easily updated. Moreover, these new learning environment formats provide unparalleled flexibility for self-paced work.



IMPORTANCE OF DISTANCE LEARNING

- The Internet is perfect for setting up a virtual learning environment. Students can, for example, stay in their own hometown while studying at a virtual university abroad or share their learning time across different places, for example between a company and a school for commercial students.
- Providing students with an access to the whole base of learning material gives them the opportunity to become more autonomous and gain a deeper understanding of why and what they are learning.
- Students have more ownership of their own learning, and the role of the teacher is transformed into the role of a coach.
- Courses are not restricted to the opening hours of “normal” schools or universities, so everyone can benefit from more opportunities to become lifelong learners.
- Distance learning changes the behaviour of both the teacher and the student. Successful students develop persistence and organisational skills and the teacher must become more conversant in technology.



ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RISKS

Accreditation

- The ability to distinguish between accredited and non-accredited programmes is useful when determining the legitimacy of the course provider.
- Accreditation badges for distance learning⁸ are emerging in a wide range of areas and represent an important step in equity of learning opportunities.
- When programmes do not have actual accreditation but are partnered by well-known and established universities, they often carry some form of skill validation.

3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_forum

4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Email>

5. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Online_chat

6. <https://www.oercommons.org>

7. <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/flipped-learning-lets-talk-tech-jon-bergmann>

8. <https://wiki.mozilla.org/Badges>

Teacher and faculty

- Distance learning does not change the fundamental requirement of having competent teachers. In fact, more than ever it underlines the need for teachers to be given more training opportunities to keep up with emerging educational trends.
- The value of face-to-face learning cannot be denied, but the benefits of technology and education are also noteworthy.
- Since anyone can set up their own webinar or peer-to-peer online course and even brand themselves as an “expert”, critical thinking is as important for users here as it is with all other forms of web content.



HOW TO

■ You should be aware that you, as the user, are responsible for taking certain precautions when choosing a degree or other distance-learning programme. Here are some points to watch:

- Remember that there are dubious distance-learning institutions out there right alongside the legitimate ones. Make sure you research a programme/organisation thoroughly before enrolling;
- Security issues are always key, as with any exchange of information over the Internet. Viruses (see Fact sheet 19 on security) and hackers⁹ can wreak havoc on a distance-learning system so be sure to consult Fact sheets 9 on privacy and 19 on security to see which precautions you should take;
- Copyright¹⁰ is usually protected by the law of the student’s home country. However, when following distance-learning programmes in other countries be sure to check that the learning sources are covered by international copyright.



IDEAS FOR CLASSROOM WORK

- Place students in groups of two, where one group is the “teacher” and the other is the “student”. Have the students research a course topic and provide reasons why one type of distance learning would be better than another for that given topic.
- Once students agree on the distance-learning method and a course topic, have the “teacher” group research ideal course requirements and ask the “student” group to do the same. Compare and contrast the needs of teachers and students.
- Choose a method of distance learning and research and check what type of certification is available. Is it a reputable institution? What indicators tell you whether an institution is reputable? Does the institution offer certificates or badges?
- Discuss the difference between learning apps and learning courses. How can both provide new learning opportunities for people with disabilities?
- Invite students to set up their own short learning course on a topic in their favourite subject area and encourage other students to take the course. From this experience, have the class draw up a list of criteria that make online learning more effective.



GOOD PRACTICE

- The Internet is changing the way we learn and it is very important for students to have access to all information and tools available to help them learn.

9. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacker_\(computer_security\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacker_(computer_security))

10. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copyright>

- The “digital divide”¹¹ is seen as a leading issue in the economic and social growth of many nations and the use of distance learning can narrow this gap. However, the opposing view notes that if there is a digital divide and people cannot access the Internet (and distance learning), then the gap will widen.
- Distance learning can increase student learning in measurable ways. It provides Internet training with hands-on experience for students, their families and teachers.
- Distance learning provides an opportunity for students to build new skills and qualifications and grow in new directions.
- Distance learning can also provide access to disabled students who may not previously have been able to attend a classroom. The students are able to participate in an online classroom and have exchanges with other students and the teacher.



FURTHER INFORMATION

- The Distance Learning Portal provides information on distance learning programmes and institutions around the world: <http://www.distancelearningportal.com/>.
- The International Council for Open and Distance Education provides information and resources on international institutions: <http://www.icde.org/>.
- European Schoolnet, a consortium of European ministers of education, provides an OER repository for teachers: <http://lreforschools.eun.org/web/guest>. It also provides educational resources for special needs: <http://lreforschools.eun.org/web/guest/sennet>.

11. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_divide