

Distance education as a new method of teaching

Developments in technology allow distance education programs to provide specialized courses to students in remote geographic areas with increasing interactivity between students and teachers. Although the ways in which distance education is implemented differ from country to country, most distance learning programs rely on technologies which are either already in place or are being considered for their cost-effectiveness.

Distance education relies heavily on technologies of delivery. Print materials, broadcast radio, broadcast television, computer conferencing, electronic mail, interactive video, satellite telecommunications and multimedia computer technology are all used to promote student-teacher interaction and provide necessary feedback to the learner at a distance.

Until the advent of telecommunications technologies, distance educators were hard pressed to provide for two-way real time interaction, or time-delayed interaction between students and the instructor or among peers. Interaction between the student and the instructor usually took the form of correspondence of self-assessment exercises that the student completed and sent to the instructor for feedback. With the development of synchronous (two-way, real time interactive technologies) such as audio teleconferencing, audio graphics conferencing and videoconferencing it is now possible to link learners and instructors who are geographically separated for real time interaction.

The dramatic growth of the adult learner population is making distance learning an increasingly popular choice of learning techniques.