TEACHING ENGLISH BY DISTANCE: AN INTRODUCTION

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1. Introduction

We have been experiencing gradual integration of the most recent technology into every field of our daily lives from entertainment and leisure to commerce and professional domains and education is no exception (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016; Hartnett, 2016; Jaldemark, 2021; Stevens, 2010; Webster & Murphy, 2008). Consequently, the introduction and integration of the internet and computers has triggered a process of unprecedented transformation in the operations of educational institutions in the last forty years (Fischer, 2010; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2015; McAvinia, 2016; Simonson et al., 2015). It has been argued that educational institutions at all levels need to adapt to the requirements of this transformation in order to cater for the needs of their learners by upgrading their content and the way they convey it to the learners (Altmann et al., 2019; Eshet-Alkalai, 2009; Fillion et al., 2010) and become more competitive in international arena (Childs & Crichton, 2019; Fischer, 2010; Krusekopf, 2019; Moller et al., 2012; White, 2003). The unexpected outbreak of Covid-19 in the first quarter of 2020 further accelerated this process and educational institutions across the globe had to adopt distance education as an emergency solution. Not surprisingly, such swift shift to distance education raised questions as to the readiness of the stakeholders (including decision makers, educational institutions, teachers, students and parents) as well as the effectiveness of distance education. In this regard, this chapter aims to introduce the concept of distance education by dwelling upon its historical development and technological foundations as well as steps to be taken in the design, delivery and assessment procedures.

2. Historical Background and Definition of Distance Education

The history of distance education (DE) can be traced back to 1720s and this long history of DE has witnessed certain stages starting with written correspondences and radio/TV broadcasts and continuing with the utilization of computers and the internet (Allen et al., 2019; Jung, 2019a; Meshur & Bala, 2015). More specifically, the evolution of DE can be divided into three generations; namely, *correspondence courses, internet-based courses* and *courses offered in the technology-enabled space*. In the correspondence courses, the course content used to be delivered in written, audio, or audio-visual modes. On the other hand, while the introduction of the internet (2^{nd} generation) made it possible to provide instruction supported by file sharing and basic learning/course management systems, 3^{rd} generation DE builds on these opportunities and makes use of various participative, interactive, collaborative, visualization, simulation, modeling and discovery technologies (Moller et al., 2012). Bearing the long-standing marriage between technology and education in mind, it can be argued that the evolution of DE will continue as long as innovative technologies emerge (Childs & Crichton, 2019).

As of 2021, it is assumed that DE has entered mainstream thanks to progressive improvements and innovations in digital technologies (Allen et al., 2019; Hartnett, 2019; Jung, 2019b; Lerch et al., 2009; Moller et al., 2012; Obexer, 2019; Simonson et al., 2015; Torrao & Tiirmaa-Oras, 2007; Weller, 2020) and it has been labeled as the fastest growing

formal and informal education model (Berge, 2019). The outbreak of Covid-19 has expedited this tendency (Rennell, 2020) and it would be justified to argue that learning without technology has become hardly conceivable. More often than not, DE is delivered online today and since online DE shares the same roots with traditional forms of DE, Zawacki-Richter (2019) advocates that the extant heritage should not be lost and program designers should build on existing history, research, theory and practice. To sum up, the concept of DE has merged with online education in the 21st century and online learning is regarded as the equivalent of DE even though several other terms such as *virtual learning, distance teaching and learning, online education, online teaching and learning, e-learning, distributed learning, open learning*, or *asynchronous learning* are used interchangeably to refer to the same or similar phenomenon (Allen et al., 2019; Burns, 2011; Cleveland-Innes, 2021; Davis, 2019; Koç, 2020; Simonson et al., 2015).

DE has been defined as "… a planned learning experience or method of instruction characterized by quasi-permanent separation of the instructor and learner(s)" (Burns, 2011, p. 9). Ally (2008) defines online learning as "…. the use of the internet to access materials; to interact with the content, instructor, and other learners; and to obtain support during the learning process, in order to acquire knowledge, to construct personal meaning, and to grow from the learning experience" (p. 5). Moore and Kearsley (1996), on the other hand, view DE as an intentional instruction that entails unique techniques of course design and instruction, specific ways of communication supported by technology and distinct institutional, administrative and organizational arrangements. As can be understood from the definitions provided, the main characteristics of DE are: *a)* separation of learner(s) and the teacher, *b)* the utilization of digital media to connect the teacher and students, *c)* provision of two-way interaction and *d)* implementation of individualized instruction (Siedlaczek, 2004; Simonson et al., 2015). Moreover, DE can also be viewed from a broader perspective featuring a great degree of variation including the institutional context, the technology or media utilized, the nature and content of the instruction and the level of interactivity (Burns, 2011). In this respect, traditional approaches to DE view it as taking place in a different place and at a different time; however, thanks to the latest innovations in interactive technologies, the modern understanding of DE has evolved into taking place at the same time but in a different place (Simonson et al., 2015). It should be admitted that the overall context in which instruction is to be provided is a determinant factor in terms of the classification of online learning and the significant role played by the context has not gone unnoticed by Bertin and Gravé (2010b), who state that technology influences the context and, correspondingly, context has a significant effect on DE. As a consequence, DE can be implemented in various forms (see Table 1) depending on the peculiarities of the context.

Table 1: Dimensions of DE (Source: Wagner et al., 2008, p. 27)

Dimension	Attribute	Meaning	Example
Synchronicity	Asynchronous	Content delivery occurs at different time than receipt by student.	Lectured module delivered via Email.
	Synchronous	Content delivery occurs at the same time as receipt by student.	Lecture delivery via web cast.
Location	Same Place	Students use an application at the same physical location as other students and/or the instructor.	Using a Group Support System (GSS) to solve a problem in a classroom.
	Distributed	Students use an application at various physical locations, separate from other students and the instructor	Using GSS to solve a problem from distributed locations.
Independence	Individual	Students work independently from one another to complete learning tasks.	Students complete e-learning modules autonomously.
	Collaborative	Students work collaboratively with one another to complete learning tasks.	Students participate in discussion forums to share ideas.
Mode	Electronically Only	All content is delivered via technology. There is no face-to- face component.	An electronically enabled e-learning course.
	Blended	E-learning is used to supplement traditional classroom learning.	In class lectures are enhanced with hands-on computer exercises.

As can be understood from Table 1., DE can be offered either asynchronously or synchronously. While asynchronous interaction offers flexibility as to the time learners access the course, synchronous courses enable the participants to communicate on a real-time basis, which may motivate the learners and decrease the feeling of isolation. It should also be noted that, with the aim of benefitting from the advantages of both options, synchronous and asynchronous forms are being combined (labeled as *multi-synchronous*) by many institutions (White, 2003). As for the location, DE may be offered at the same place, or alternatively, it may be given in a distributed way. It may be argued that, thanks to mobile devices, the teacher and the students do not necessarily need to be in the same place and flexibility in terms of location is generally regarded as an advantage of DE. Students may study individually or collaboratively in DE; however, considering the widespread use of social networking technologies and necessity of forming a community, collaborative study has the potential to yield better results. Finally, the instruction may be provided either in a blended/hybrid mode or completely online. The context, institutional resources and

constraints, characteristics of the course and a multitude of other factors need to be regarded while making a decision as to the mode of DE.

As has been aforementioned, online learning has merged into the implementation of DE and it has been defined as "…an approach to teaching and learning that includes the use of Internet technologies for learning and teaching. Learners use the online learning environments not only to access information and course content but also to interact and collaborate with other online participants within the course" (White, 2003, p. 27). Therefore, rather than following one standard model, a continuum of practices can be offered for the concept of online learning (Burns, 2011). Table 2 below summarizes the general classification of online learning provided by educational institutions.

Table 2: Classification of Online Learning (Source: Allen & Seaman, 2008, p.4)

Proportion of Content Delivered Online	Type of Course	Typical Description
0%	*Traditional*	Course with no online technology used - content is delivered in writing or orally.
1 to 29%	*Web Facilitated*	Course that uses web-based technology to facilitate what is essentially a face-to-face course. May use a course management system (CMS) or web pages to post the syllabus and assignments.
30 to 79%	*Blended/Hybrid*	Course that blends online and face-to-face delivery. Substantial proportion of the content is delivered online, typically uses online discussions, and typically has a reduced number of face-to-face meetings.
80+%	*Online*	A course where most or all of the content is delivered online. Typically have no face-to-face meetings.

As can be seen in Table 2., an *online* course implies that at least 80 % of the content is delivered online and there is almost no face-to-face contact between the participants. On the other hand, a *blended/hybrid* course refers to a comparatively balanced combination of face-to-face and online delivery. When less than 30 % of the course content is delivered online, it implies that a *web facilitated* course is offered rather than online or blended/hybrid course. The potential of blended (or hybrid) learning in the 21st century has been underscored by many scholars (Graham, 2019; Thorne, 2003) and it has been argued that it promises to transform and reform higher education in a positive direction (Matheos & Cleveland-Innes, 2021). For instance, Fillion et al. (2010) and Jung (2019b) have observed that in the last decade there has been a gradual shift from traditional face-to-face mode to hybrid/blended or completely online modes. The main advantage of blended learning lies in its ability to blend the innovative educational technology with the participation and integration presented by traditional face-to-face education in the best way without any restrictions as to time and location (Thorne, 2003). It has also been reported that blended learning offers new forms of

communication and innovative didactical opportunities for learners to construct their understanding more permanently and effectively by tailoring the experience to the needs and preferences of learners (Torrao & Tiirmaa-Oras, 2007).

It should not go without saying that the introduction of Web 2.0 tools has made it easier, cheaper and more practical for many higher education institutions to provide their students with effective hybrid or even DE (Childs & Crichton, 2019; Fischer, 2010; Graham, 2019; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2015; Meshur & Bala, 2015; Simonson et al., 2015; Torrao & Tiirmaa-Oras, 2007; Weller, 2020). More precisely, web 2.0 tools enable users to become active and dynamic contributors rather than passive receivers and consumers; in other words, the users have become authors who share and produce content to express their ideas and emotions within a social milieu (Montebello, 2017), which supports the collaborative dimension of DE.

2.1. The Role of M-learning

M-learning has been defined as "any activity that allows learners to be more productive when interacting with, or creating information, mediated through a mobile device that the learner carries on a regular basis, has reliable connectivity, and fits in a pocket, a purse or a handbag" (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2015, p. 199). Just about a decade ago, it was unimaginable to expect every student in the class to own smartphones with internet connection; however, students today have become dependent upon their smartphones and access the internet mostly, and even exclusively, via their smartphones, which implies that DE designers, practitioners and researchers need to reconsider and revise their existing approaches to DE (Allen et al., 2019). Thanks to their widespread use, mobile devices such as smart phones, personal digital assistants, tablets or laptop computers have been increasingly adopted by educational institutions in recent years with the aim of enabling learners to access content anytime, anywhere, through a multitude of devices, alone and/or collaboratively (Ahrens & Zaščerinska, 2015; Allen et al., 2019; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2015; McKeown & Howard, 2012; Meshur & Bala, 2015; Pandey, 2015). The main value of mobile devices lies in the fact that they provide the users with personalized connectivity and encourage collaboration through instant and/or real-time interactivity multi-modally (Berge, 2019; Burns, 2011; Jakobsdóttir et al., 2010; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2015). In addition, m-learning provides the learners with the opportunity to learn both inside and outside the classroom formally and/or informally. Thanks to their light weight, small size, wireless networking capability, ubiquity and battery power (Houser & Thornton, 2009), mobile devices have emerged as promising technological tools and replaced fixed computers resulting in a paradigm shift in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) utilization (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2015; Mayes & Burgess, 2010).

2.2. Roles of Teachers and Learners in DE

Teaching in a traditional face-to-face educational context is quite different from teaching by distance and, as has been argued by Boettcher and Conrad (2016), "teachers who are effective in the face-to-face environment can be effective as online teachers, but it is not automatic, and it does not happen overnight" (p. xviii). Accordingly, the necessity of integrating the latest technology into the field of education and widespread adoption of DE has charged teachers

with some new tasks (Bertin et al., 2010; Childs & Crichton, 2019; Siedlaczek, 2004; Simonson et al., 2015; Stevens, 2010; White, 2003). Technological and pedagogical innovations in the 21st century require teachers to know the learner(s), the curriculum and the tools (Solvie, 2009). In line with this, instead of the transmission mode of instruction characteristic of traditional face-to-face education, DE calls for a social constructivist framework (Berge, 2019; Sturm et al., 2009; Swan, 2021) in which teachers are expected to encourage students to take part in collaborative work and express themselves in a self-discovery mode (Thomas, 2009). Therefore, in distance education, the role of the teacher shifts from telling or instructing to coaching, mentoring, guiding, and directing (Rennell, 2020) since students are expected and inclined to take on more responsibility by following their own lines of reasoning (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). Hence, teachers are no longer '*the sages on the stage*', but they should become '*guides on the side*' (Weller, 2020). In other words, the pedagogical focus shifts from teaching to learning (Swan, 2021); thus, teachers need to improve learners' self-regulation skills, which have crucial importance to succeed in distance education (Kramarski, 2017; Narcy-Combes, 2010b).

Teachers in DE are expected to perform some extra tasks such as communicating with students digitally, modeling the tasks, initiating and participating in discussions (Narcy-Combes, 2010b; Rennell, 2020; White, 2003), creating and managing groups and group activities, monitoring and recording students' progress, offering feedback to students (Allen et al., 2019) and designing and administering online assessment (Aisami, 2009). Some distance learners may tend not to participate in the courses due to factors such as technical problems, feeling isolated and demotivated, which, in turn, implies that it is the teacher's duty to monitor the students, identify the reasons underlying such problems and achieve active participation (Hartnett, 2019; Narcy-Combes, 2010b; Siedlaczek, 2004; White, 2003). Another role DE charges on teachers is the provision of *technical* scaffolding besides *cognitive* and *affective* scaffolding with the aim of enhancing active engagement, participation, interactivity and feedback (Haghshenas et al., 2015; Narcy-Combes, 2010b; Simonson et al., 2015). Campbell and Berge (2009) contend that distance teachers need to perform; *a) managerial roles* by making decisions as to any aspect of their instruction, *b) pedagogical roles* by making use of proper pedagogical techniques and strategies to facilitate their instruction, *c) technical roles* by ensuring that the learners do not encounter any problems with technology, and *d) social roles* by building a community and constructing a positive classroom climate. Especially for students without any DE experience, the teacher needs to provide training as to the procedures, social rules, and expectations by giving clear instructions with the aim of orienting students with the implementation of DE (Narcy-Combes, 2010b; Rennell, 2020; Simonson et al., 2015; White, 2003).

It should not be forgotten that today's learners are quite different from their predecessors in that they expect to be entertained in an interactive and funny learning environment, they desire immediate feedback and 24/7 access (Rennell, 2020; Simonson et al., 2015; White, 2003), wish to have a personalized learning environment (Meshur & Bala, 2015) and work collaboratively with their peers in a learner-centered atmosphere (McGlynn, 2008). In this respect, this new generation of '*digital natives*' demand an absolute reform in the current pedagogy to satisfy their diverse needs and preferences (Maclean & Elwood, 2009). Thus, the

characteristics and preferences of digital natives need to be noticed and appreciated by the teachers and DE should be planned, designed and delivered accordingly.

We have been experiencing a rapid and continuous transformation in digital technologies and internet, dictating teachers to have "a general knowledge of the nature, extent, and composition of the Internet's almost infinite resources—both in the areas of content and pedagogy" (Lapping, 2009, p. 2170). Contrary to the common belief that teachers need to improve their skills in the utilization of technology, Paulson (2009) maintains that they do not need to become technology experts; instead, "…a positive attitude toward technology, an easy disposition with technology, an understanding of the critical importance of technology for learning, and general insight into the generic world of technology" (p. 1915), labeled as *soft skills*, will suffice to cater for digital natives. Put differently, teachers should encourage and allow their students to make the best use of technology and simply get out of their way.

When it comes to the new roles of learners in distance education, it has been argued that learners need to participate actively in the course, discover the content and take on greater responsibility by directing their own learning experiences (Fillion et al., 2010; Siedlaczek, 2004; White, 2003). More specifically, distance learners are expected to think, read, write, listen, reflect, share, collaborate and review more frequently and meticulously in comparison to traditional face-to-face education (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). Distance learners need to follow their tasks, arrange their time and obey deadlines (Jaggars, 2019; Narcy-Combes, 2010a; Rennell, 2020; White, 2003). Distance learners should also be able to adjust themselves to the peculiarities of DE psychologically (Narcy-Combes, 2010a) since it may be a completely new experience for them and it is distinct from traditional face-to-face education.

2.3. Pros and Cons of DE

The main advantage of DE arises from the fact that it removes the barriers related to time and location that are inherent in traditional face-to-face education as well as offering the learners the flexibility to decide on *what, when, where* and *how* to learn (Burns, 2011; Hartnett, 2016; Latchem, 2010; Simonson et al., 2015; Torrao & Tiirmaa-Oras, 2007; White, 2003). As a result, the personalized nature of DE allows learners to study and progress at their own pace (Simonson et al., 2015). Another benefit of DE lies in the fact that it provides the learners with an efficient, content-rich and interactive learning experience (Latchem, 2010; Sales, 2009). In this respect, it can be argued that DE has the potential to contribute to the learners' intercultural communicative competence if there are international students in their online classes (Allen et al., 2019; Latchem, 2010). Moreover, the employment of technology and the internet enables learners to become more active, urges them to involve in the experience intellectually and improves learners' digital literacy skills (Simonson et al., 2015). It has also been noted that the design and preparation of course materials require hard work at the beginning; however, once developed, it is easier to update and revise these materials in line with the changing demands of the context and the learners (Latchem, 2010; Simonson et al., 2015). The implementation of DE has been viewed from the perspective of inclusive education and it has been maintained that the barriers that exist in traditional face-to-face education may be overcome with the help of technology and DE may prove a promising

sample for social inclusion practices (Heiser & Ralston-Berg, 2019; Sheehy, 2010). In simple terms, it has been argued that equal educational opportunities have improved for a large number of students thanks to DE (Davis, 2019; Hartnett, 2016; Jung, 2019b; Latchem, 2010; Simonson et al., 2015).

DE is not without its critics, though. For instance, poor pedagogical practices (such as simply dumping course content on the web), information overload, lack of a favorable classroom climate and sense of community as well as technical and technological problems may hinder the instructional process to a great extent (Fischer, 2010; Lee & McLoughlin, 2010; Salter, 2009; Simonson et al., 2015; Thorne, 2003). Digital divide, signifying the gap between people with access to information technology and those lacking it (Carvin, 2000), appears as the primary barrier to distance education. It is highly possible that some learners cannot afford or access reliable high-speed internet and/or they may encounter system-based problems or obstacles stemming from their lack of familiarity with the system (Jaggars, 2019; Mizell & Sugarman, 2009; Simonson et al., 2015; White, 2003). The quality of interaction in DE has also been questioned since it may not be conducted as successfully as it is in face-to-face education (Rennell, 2020). Furthermore, some learners may find it difficult to take the charge of their own learning (Simonson et al., 2015; White, 2003) and may need extra scaffolding since they are not autonomous learners; nevertheless, this can be overcome with the help of small group pairings (Lerch et al., 2009). It should also be noted that some courses (especially those with practical components) may not adapt well to DE; thus, such courses cannot be delivered fully online and they need to be supported with face-to-face gatherings.

2.4. Catalyzing Effect of Covid-19

The global pandemic of Covid-19 is, unfortunately, responsible for the demise and sufferings of millions of people and it has had negative effects on a multitude of sectors from economy and commerce to tourism and education. However, it has also accelerated the process of digital transformation in the field of education (Kitishat et al., 2020) if we are to consider the issue on the positive side. Educational institutions at all levels have been offering DE to their students since Covid-19 hit the world in the first quarter of 2020. The implementation of DE was a novelty for most of the stakeholders (such as educational institutions, teachers, students, parents, etc.) and it can be argued that none of the stakeholders was prepared enough for the shift to DE (Aljumah, 2020; Rennell, 2020). Adequate preparation is a prerequisite for DE because quitting lifetime instructional routines and shifting to DE will surely demand considerable time, effort, willingness and patience on the part of both teachers and learners who are new to DE (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). The main reason behind this proposition is that the stakeholders need to make a multitude of decisions throughout the process as to the objectives of the course, delivery technology, course content and materials to be utilized, instructional methods and assessment procedures, most of which are, by their very nature, highly subjective (Childs & Crichton, 2019; Thompson, 2019). To exemplify, while making a decision as to the delivery technology, factors such as cost, institutional strengths and weaknesses, teachers' preferences, convenience and availability as well as learning objectives should be taken into consideration, which clearly depicts the challenging nature of the task. In this respect, Schroeder and Cook (2019) underscore the significance of *strategic planning* for

DE; however, it would be justified to argue that the sudden switch to DE due to Covid-19 had to be performed without much prior planning.

3. Instructional Design in DE

The significance of planning stage of instructional design in DE has been underscored since it is the planning stage that makes the difference for an effective and successful instructional experience (Simonson et al., 2015). Accordingly, an important factor to be considered while designing the instruction for DE is knowing about and understanding the learners (Burns, 2011; Narcy-Combes, 2010b; Simonson et al., 2015). To be more precise, such variables as learners' needs, goals and expectations, access to technology, geographical distribution, age and gender need to be paid close attention in the stage of instructional design (White, 2003). It should also be admitted that 21st century learners, labeled as *digital natives*, were born into and have grown up within technology. Technology and internet have penetrated into every field and moment of their lives (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016) and they "…blog, play games in immersive 3-D worlds, listen to podcasts, instant message friends, listen to music, author their own video for www.youtube.com and collaborate on the creating of 'digital stories' for their ePortfolio" (Duffy, 2008, p. 32). Their approach to education and leisure is different from their predecessors' and they are multi-taskers who absorb new information in multiple modes (text, image and/or video) simultaneously. Therefore, the power of technology and the internet should be integrated into the experience effectively (Latchem, 2010; Simonson et al., 2015; Thorne, 2003) because they have a preference for an interactive and collaborative learning environment (Gnanadass & Sanders, 2019); thus, interaction and collaboration need to be encouraged and included within the process.

Another important issue to be considered in this process is the learning styles of the students, which are defined as the overall approaches to learning and the environment (Narcy-Combes, 2010a; Simonson et al., 2015). It should not be forgotten that an individual has the ability to learn in various ways; however, when new information is presented in his/her preferred method, s/he will possibly feel more comfortable and competent; thus, learn more easily and permanently (Chambel & Guimarães, 2009). To illustrate, some students may learn better by listening (auditory), some others may prefer visuals while others may feel more comfortable with reading texts. In this respect, the cognitive preferences or the learning styles of the learners also need to be taken into consideration throughout the instructional design process in order to enable them to get the most out of their DE experience (Burns, 2011; Narcy-Combes, 2010a; Siedlaczek, 2004; Simonson et al., 2015; Thorne, 2003). Furthermore, learners' prior experience in DE and knowledge in the course content as well as the level of their self-regulation skills are many of the other factors to be taken into account throughout the stage of instructional design (Dennen, 2019).

It has also been noted that instructional design should be based on sound instructional strategies rather than presentation of information and focus on such cognitive processes as discovery, knowledge building, meaning making and problem solving (Moller et al., 2012; Narcy-Combes, 2010b). The objectives of the course, the context and characteristics of the students, content and the platform by which DE is delivered need to be taken into consideration while deciding on the teaching method to be utilized during the instruction and,

as has been offered by Simonson et al. (2015), student-centered methods with an emphasis on interactivity work best in DE due to the greater responsibility learners are charged with. Certain themes such as *collaboration, connectivity, student-centeredness, virtual reality, community, exploration, shared knowledge, multisensory experiences* and *authenticity* need to be taken into consideration in the instructional design process for DE (Branch & Stefaniak, 2019; Simonson et al., 2015). McKeown and Howard (2012) suggest that characteristics of the platform by which the content is delivered should also be taken into account throughout the stage of the instructional design so that learners can develop and construct a deeper understanding of the content presented.

In the preparation of content for DE, materials should feature: *modularity* (the core content should be presented as short as possible in various formats), *learnability* (the content should be supported with multimedia to cater for the preferences of diverse learning styles), *interactivity* and *collaboration* (Thorne, 2003; Tsang, 2008). The level of the tasks should be optimally challenging for the students and be linked to what they already know with the aim of facilitating students' satisfaction, motivation and achievement (Hartnett, 2019). Polly (2015) suggests that the content of the course should be presented via engaging activities and highlights the significance of teacher's presence, accessibility and two-way interaction between the teacher and the students. In a similar way, the power of creativity and imagination should be employed throughout the instructional design process with the help of activities such as structured discussions or debates, small group discussions, hands-on experiences with available materials, case study analysis or virtual field trips (Simonson et al., 2015).

4. Implementation of DE

The delivery of instruction in DE bears significant differences compared to traditional face-to-face education. As the teacher and the students are separated from each other in geographical and temporal terms, the interaction between and among the teacher and the students becomes tricky. Consequently, some of the students may feel isolated and demotivated, which can be alleviated if they are encouraged to build a community and collaborate with each other. Moreover, distance learners are expected to take on more responsibility of their own learning and may need guidance and scaffolding for gaining autonomy. It should not go without saying that implementation of assessment in DE brings with it certain problems in terms of fairness, reliability and validity concerns. Therefore, as Boettcher and Conrad (2016) argue, both DE and face-to-face education may be informed by the same theories of learning; nevertheless, the enactment of DE significantly differs from that of the physical classroom. In this respect, aspects to consider in the implementation of DE have been presented below.

4.1. Self-Directed Learning in DE

In its literal meaning, learning is a verb and refers to an action to be performed by learners (Moller et al., 2012). As a result, the main purpose of education in the 21st century is seen as focusing on *how* students learn as well as *what* they learn by helping them self-regulate, or self-direct their learning processes (Hoyle & Amy, 2017; Kramarski, 2017). Accordingly, the need to place learners at the center in DE has been frequently highlighted in the relevant literature (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016; Graham, 2019; Lee & McLoughlin, 2010; Simonson et

al., 2015) based on the view that "quality learning experiences not only depend on the efforts and preparation of the instructor but they are also largely determined by the efforts and preparation of the distant student" (Simonson et al., 2015, p. 201). In line with this, self-directed learning, or *heutagogy*, has been defined as "…a theoretical framework that can be utilized in guiding teaching and learning practices to more active and self-directed learning, where learners create their own networks of knowledge, learning, and information" (Blaschke, 2019, p.75). Put differently, the learner him-/herself takes on the control of his/her own learning, which is regarded as a key 21st century skill (Anderson, 2010; Jakobsdóttir et al., 2010). In order to get the maximum benefit out of DE, learners should be encouraged to self-direct their experience (Fischer, 2010; Lee & McLoughlin, 2010; Meshur & Bala, 2015; Narcy-Combes, 2010a; Simonson et al., 2015; White, 2003) and the fact that learners take on greater responsibility of their own learning suggests that they expect both their course designers and the technology exploited to match their learning priorities and preferences (Moller et al., 2012).

It should not go unnoticed that we are living in a fast-paced and information-rich world and learners are constantly bombarded with information overload (Usher & Schunk, 2017), which has been justly labeled by Benito-Ruiz (2009) as *infoxication*. In other words, there is too much to learn today. In such a context, it is highly likely that learners will feel overwhelmed and their self-regulation skills may assist them in directing their journey along the way. The skill of self-regulation is not an innate trait; on the contrary, it can be learned and developed (Usher & Schunk, 2017). Therefore, teachers are expected to fulfill a dual role; namely, they should first become *self-regulated learners* and they should function as *self-regulated teachers* (Kramarski, 2017). Moving from this line of reasoning, it would be justified to argue that acquisition and mastery of this competence is crucial for pre-service and in-service teachers.

4.2. Interaction in DE

Interaction has been regarded as a key component of DE (Bertin & Gravé, 2010a; Lee & McLoughlin, 2010; Narcy-Combes, 2010a; Siedlaczek, 2004; White, 2003) since it is a determining factor on the achievement and satisfaction of learners (Korres, 2015; Rennell, 2020; Simonson et al., 2015). In this respect, interaction has been defined as "…the exchange of information between and among individuals in a distance learning (DL) environment, encompassing exchanges for students, instructors, and technology staff" (Bold, 2009, p. 1244) and it has close links to *discussion, collaboration, cooperative exchange, peer-to-peer learning, interdependence, dialogue, group work, feedback, teaming* and *mentoring* (Narcy-Combes, 2010b). Moore (1989) identified three types of interaction in DE; namely, *learner-learner interaction, learner-teacher interaction, and learner-content interaction.* Sims (2001) and Bertin et al. (2010) add a fourth type of interaction, which occurs between the *learner* and *interface,* and highlight that whereas the first three types of interaction also occur in traditional face-to-face education, the fourth type of interaction can be observed uniquely in DE.

It is much easier for students and the teacher to build a relationship in a traditional face-to-face education environment because they can chat, interact and socialize during breaks;

however, DE may not offer the same opportunities for developing such relationships (Allen et al., 2019; Narcy-Combes, 2010a). By its very nature, interaction in DE may not be as effective as it is in face-to-face education since it may not be possible to make use of extralinguistic and paralinguistic features with equal efficacy in DE (White, 2003); therefore, as has been offered by Rennell (2020) and Simonson et al. (2015), teachers may arrange online office hours with the aim of interacting with students individually or in small groups. Maddrell and Watson (2012) encourage the use of learning management systems that allow for simultaneous multimodal interaction between and among the teachers and learners in order to ensure efficient interaction. It should also be noted that the frequency of interaction alone may not be a reliable indicator of an effective and satisfactory distance education environment since the quality of interaction is at least as important as its quantity (Allen et al., 2019; Garrison, 2021; Simonson et al., 2015). As a final note, Abrami et al. (2012) highlight the significance of collaborative and promotive student-student interaction in getting the best from interactivity and posit that learners should: *1)* act in trusting and trustworthy ways; *2)* exchange needed resources, such as information and materials, and process information more efficiently and effectively; *3)* provide efficient and effective help and assistance to groupmates; *4)* be motivated to strive for mutual benefit; *5)* advocate exerting effort to achieve mutual goals; *6)* have a moderate level of arousal, characterized by low anxiety and stress; *7)* influence each other's efforts to achieve the group's goals; *8)* provide groupmates with feedback in order to improve their subsequent performance of assigned tasks and responsibilities; *9)* challenge each other's reasoning and conclusions in order to promote higher-quality decision-making and greater creativity; and *10)* take the perspectives of others more accurately; and thus, be better able to explore different points of view (p. 61).

4.3. Collaborative Community in DE

The necessity and efficiency of building an inviting and welcoming collaborative community in DE has been underscored by various researchers (Hartnett, 2019; Lee & McLoughlin, 2010; Narcy-Combes, 2010b; Rasulo, 2009; Siedlaczek, 2004; Simonson et al., 2015) and the concept of *community* is defined as "…shared culture in the online classroom, including shared values, norms, and beliefs" (Perry & Edwards, 2010, p. 132). The sense of community is viewed as the basis for an efficient educational experience in which students feel less isolation and higher self-worth, become more engaged and dynamic, and drop-out less often. In order to encourage learners to form social bonds and a collaborative community, utilization of ice-breaking activities, which help the construction of a positive classroom climate, is highly recommended (Korres, 2015; Simonson et al., 2015). Distance teachers are advised to make use of supportive strategies such as treating learners fairly and encouraging them to express their ideas wholeheartedly (Hartnett, 2019). Besides distance teachers, the course delivery system should allow the students to freely share their opinions and form a collaborative community.

Moller et al. (2012) regard cooperation and collaboration as different concepts in that cooperation involves a group of learners who work together to attain a shared goal and the work is divided among the individuals as a result of prior planning whereas collaboration refers to "…the combined effort of every participant to work together on all aspects of the problem" (p. 10-11) rather than everyone doing only his/her part. Therefore, *team*

membership skills, a culture of collaboration and *a place to collaborate using collaborative technology* have been regarded as essential components of a collaborative community (Shepard, 2012). Building on a collaborative constructivist view of pedagogy, Swan (2021) argues that *Community of Inquiry* framework, as a process model of DE, is a necessary condition for an efficient DE experience and it highlights the relationship between social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence, which are dwelt upon in the next section.

4.3.1. The Concept of Presence in DE

Although distance teachers and students do not have to be physically present in a classroom, they still need to make their presence felt in various ways. In this respect, three different types of presences have been underscored in the literature of DE; namely, *social presence* (referring to an environment where the teacher and the students are socially and emotionally connected with each other), *cognitive presence* (referring to the students' ability to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse) and *teaching presence* (highlighting the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the implementation of meaningful learning) (Richardson et al., 2012; Shearer & Park, 2019; Stavredes & Herder, 2019). Social presence is closely associated with interaction in that learners will freely express and share their opinions and form a community in an atmosphere where they feel socially comfortable. In addition, social presence will enable the learners to feel connected, increase social cohesion and support group dynamics (Hartnett, 2019; Lee & McLoughlin, 2010; Sharma et al., 2019; White, 2003). Cognitive presence, on the other hand, aims at cultivating learners' higher order thinking skills whereas teaching presence enables interactions that assist learners in developing cognitive presence and social presence (Stavredes & Herder, 2019). Teaching presence has also been shown to feature close links to student satisfaction, perceived learning and constructing a sense of community (Dennen, 2019; Swan, 2021); and thus, it is regarded to have critical importance for an effective and successful DE experience.

4.3.2. Risk of Isolation in DE

Not surprisingly, some learners (especially shy and introverted ones) may find it difficult to communicate in the absence of a face-to-face setting and fail to become a member of the learning community. As a consequence, sense of isolation emerges when learners have limited or no contact with their instructors and peers (Montebello, 2017; White, 2003). Lack of physical contact and face-to-face interaction with their instructors and peers may trigger this feeling among the learners and the precautions (such as quarantine practices and long-term curfews) taken against Covid-19 have even worsened the situation for some learners. It has been reported by Lee and McLoughlin (2010) that distance learners at tertiary level run the highest risk of dropping out of their programs and this tendency has been attributed to sense of isolation because young people, particularly teenagers, need to socialize with their peers in order to develop their identity and personality in a healthy manner. It should not go without saying that when learners feel that they are a part of a community, the risk of isolation will possibly disappear (Allen et al., 2019; Lee & McLoughlin, 2010). Therefore, it is distance teachers' responsibility to ensure that a positive classroom climate exists, even shy students

can participate in discussions and express their ideas, and a collaborative community has been constructed.

4.4. Assessment in DE

Assessment has usually been viewed as the weakest component of DE programs (Burns, 2011) and plagiarism and cheating have commonly been reported as the drawbacks of distance education in terms of assessment (Simonson et al., 2015; Thompson, 2019). It would be naïve to expect students not to open their books or google while they are taking online exams that solely focus on recalling and/or recognizing and it has commonly been observed that students tend to cheat when assessment practices are deemed unfair, trivial and/or irrelevant (Simonson et al., 2015). As a consequence, it has been claimed that there should be an overlap between the course objectives and assessment practices and higher-level cognitive skills (as exemplified by Bloom's Taxonomy) need to be targeted so that learners can exhibit their skills in not only recognizing and recalling but also evaluating, critiquing, creating, generating, planning, and producing (Burns, 2011; Liu, 2009; Moller et al., 2012; Simonson et al., 2015; Thompson, 2019). It has also been reported that a variety of ongoing and multi-phased assessment practices may help to solve such problems (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016; Simonson et al., 2015). In a similar fashion, Burns (2011) suggests the utilization of both formative and summative assessments, first of all, to measure learners' knowledge, skills, and competencies accurately and to enhance instruction on the grounds that "students learn best when assessment is part of, not separate from, instruction" (p. 158). The deployment of alternative assessment techniques such as authentic assessments, performance-based assessments, and e-portfolios, as long as they are supported with well-developed and reliable rubrics, has also been recommended (Palloff & Pratt, 2009). Additionally, in response to the claims by constructivists who underscore the importance of self-assessment for learning, Swan (2021) contends that self-assessment should also be embedded into the broader assessment procedures. To sum up, it would be justified to argue that the use of alternative and authentic assessment techniques will possibly discourage or prevent unethical practices on the part of the students.

As has been aforementioned, DE provides the learners with great flexibility; thus, the flexibility offered by DE should be mirrored in the stage of assessment and, if possible, learners should be allowed to choose from several options about how they are to be evaluated. Likewise, the utilization of technology should not be limited with the delivery of instruction; on the contrary, the opportunities offered by the latest technology should also be exploited throughout the stage of assessment (Burns, 2011). For instance, rather than traditional paper-and-pencil tests, e-portfolios or e-journals that require the employment of technology may be assigned to the learners.

4.5. Satisfaction with DE

The concept of satisfaction has become increasingly popular in the 21st century in that customer/consumer/client satisfaction is continuously sought for in nearly every sector that involve human beings from medical services and commerce to governmental procedures and educational processes. As a matter of fact, satisfaction is a highly complex and idiosyncratic phenomenon because the same feature of a product or service may be absolutely satisfying for

one person and just the reverse for another person, which further renders the definition and evaluation of satisfaction even harder. In this respect, it would be more precise to speak of tendencies and arrive at generalizations without ignoring exceptions.

Many studies have been conducted so far with the aim of uncovering students' level of satisfaction with their DE experience and factors such as *teacher presence, learner-instructor interaction, communication, motivation, connectedness, sense of community, institutional reputation, physical infrastructure* and *instructor empathy* are reported to enhance learners' engagement and academic achievement as well as their satisfaction and the lack of these factors may lead to dissatisfaction and higher dropout rates (Allen et al., 2019; Gnanadass & Sanders, 2019; Hartnett, 2019; Stavredes & Herder, 2019; Swan, 2021; White, 2003). It has also been reported that teacher's perception of DE, quality of the course, perceived usefulness of the course content, flexibility of the course and students' technology anxiety are critical factors that influence students' satisfaction perceptions (Simonson et al., 2015). Moreover, the construct of satisfaction has been closely linked to the instructional design process because when the course is perceived as boring or too easy/difficult, students will possibly feel dissatisfied with the experience, leading to debilitative effects on their motivation (Allen et al., 2019). On the other hand, when learners feel satisfied with their experience of DE, it may promise to change and even restructure the perception of education irreversibly (Simonson et al., 2015). Therefore, as Allen et al. (2019) suggest, rather than questioning whether DE is a satisfactory experience from the perspectives of the learners, strategies should be sought for maximizing their satisfaction.

5. Teaching English by Distance

As has been aforementioned, DE provides all the stakeholders with rare opportunities; nevertheless, it also brings certain challenges with it. To start with, it has been proposed that teaching languages by distance is much harder in comparison to teaching other subjects because the content is also the medium of instruction in language education (Murphy et al., 2010). As a result of the overview of research they have conducted, Vorobel and Kim (2012) concluded that DE may prove at least as effective as traditional face-to-face education; however, they posed several questions such as "Is it possible to teach an L2 or FL at a distance? What do educators need to know about the difference in context and mode of delivery? Which instructional strategies are most effective in such classes? How should language teachers develop materials and assess students in distance education classes?" (p. 549). Bagapova et al. (2020) acknowledge the prospects offered by DE in second/foreign language education; however, they maintain that DE may not be appropriate for language learners at beginner level and it should be supplemented with face-to-face gatherings. Ekmekçi (2015), on the other hand, conducted a study in Turkish context with the aim of revealing tertiary level learners' needs about English courses in DE and concluded that while a great majority of the learners were satisfied with the content, format, reading and grammar sections of the courses, the skills of listening, writing and speaking were not regarded as satisfactory by the learners. Moreover, the provision of feedback was also regarded as inefficient by the learners because of the time limitations dictated by the synchronous nature of the courses.

It should not go without saying that several suggestions have been made as to the teaching of different language skills and areas by distance, yet it should be kept in mind that these suggestions may become obsolete in a few years' time in view of the rapidly changing nature of technology. To begin with, Liaw and English (2017) propose that Web 2.0 tools, reading-level classification tools, text-to-speech (TTS) systems and intelligent tutoring systems (ITS) may be exploited for developing distance learners' reading skills. Similarly, Hubbard (2017) reports that 3D immersive environments are gaining in importance for teaching listening to distance learners and stresses that teachers need to keep up with the innovations in educational technologies. Li et al. (2017) focus on the benefits of using Web 2.0 tools, automated writing evaluation (AWE) systems and corpus-based tools for developing the writing skills of distance language learners and encourage distance teachers to recognize and experience the potential of such innovations in assisting L2 writing. It should be admitted that the hardest skill to teach in DE is probably speaking, particularly in asynchronous modes of DE. The contribution of paralinguistic and extralinguistic features inherent in face-to-face communication is likely to be nonexistent in DE and some distance learners (and even teachers) may find it unusual and more challenging to speak in front of a web-cam rather than real interlocutors. Blake (2017) maintains that CALL applications can be employed to promote L2 speaking and teachers need to follow the innovations that are offered by the latest technology. Kozar (2012) advocates the utilization of synchronous audio and video tools with the aim of developing language learners' fluency and accuracy. According to Heift and Vyatkina (2017), Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and intelligent CALL applications, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and data-driven learning (DDL) techniques may be utilized to teach grammar in DE. In a similar vein, Ma (2017) suggests that the use of lexical tools (such as e-dictionaries or lexical concordancers) and applications with a special emphasis on the use of mobile technologies and self-regulated learning principles may be useful for teaching vocabulary in DE contexts. As a final note, Murphy et al. (2010) assert that distance teachers need to: a) have native or near-native speaker competence, b) construct a favorable classroom climate in which students can express their ideas, c) scaffold students in pronunciation and grammar, d) have a good command of course content and instructional expertise, e) be approachable, supportive, committed, enthusiastic, well-organized and focused, f) cater for diverse leaning needs and styles, and g) use technology competently.

6. Conclusion

The outbreak of Covid-19 has resulted in a revolution in the routine operations of many sectors including education in that the necessity and significance of technology integration has become well-established. The close relationship between education and technology, marked by growing popularity, has probably been evolving since the invention of paper (Allen et al., 2019; Kwan et al., 2008); however, in the aftermath of the pandemic, labeled as the *new normal*, it is highly likely that this trend of technology integration will not decelerate and the distinctive characteristic of current technology integration is learning *with* rather than *from* technology (Moos, 2017), which implies that DE or blended/hybrid forms of education will continue to be adopted by educational institutions. It should also be noted that our students, also labeled as digital natives, are already engaged with technology in their lives

(Boettcher & Conrad, 2016) and the instructional processes they are exposed to should be delivered in line with their preferences and tendencies. In this regard, this chapter aimed to familiarize the readers with the concept of DE with specific reference to its historical development and technological foundations as well as the steps to be taken in the design, delivery and assessment procedures.

A great majority of studies conducted so far with the aim of comparing the effectiveness of DE with traditional face-to-face education have found *no significant differences* (Allen et al., 2019; Lowenthal & Davidson-Shivers, 2019); nevertheless, it would hardly be justified to argue that both forms of education are comparable in terms of effectiveness and quality since "distance education offerings, including online courses, vary in effectiveness and student satisfaction, in the same manner as in f2f instruction" (Allen et al., 2019, p. 123). Simonson et al. (2015) maintain that a number of factors including the attitudes of students and teachers towards DE, classroom culture, prior learning and distance learning experiences, readiness for DE and students' learning styles correlate with the achievement of students; and thus, success of the overall DE experience.

The implementation of DE charges both the teacher and the learners with some new roles and responsibilities. Graham (2019) and Latchem (2019), for instance, underscore the value of responsibility, autonomy, self-efficacy, engagement and sense of connection in DE and claim that DE is fundamentally a constructive, social interactive, self-regulated and reflective undertaking. Distance teachers need to follow the changes that occur in technological affordances, learner demographics and contextual variables and update their design and implementation of DE (Childs & Crichton, 2019; White, 2003). Correspondingly, distance learners should improve their self-regulation and digital literacy skills and take on the responsibility of their progress.

As a final note, the adequacy of the curricula implemented across teacher education institutions in terms of preparing pre-service teachers for blended/hybrid or distance education needs to be reconsidered. As has been noted above, the curricula do not include any courses that train pre-service teachers for offering DE. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that although a great majority of pre-service teachers feature high levels of digital literacy, it does not secure that they can transfer these skills into their instructional practices. Therefore, rather than just adding one or two theoretical courses on technology into the curriculum, integration of technology into educational practices should be covered and focused on by many other field courses that have practical components such as the technique of microteaching or practicum in order to ensure that pre-service teachers can genuinely make the best use of technology in their practices.

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