Online Education

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Abstract

Online education has made vast improvements since the Internet was created. Before the Internet, schools were using various forms of technology to teach classes from a distance. Distance learning ranged from using the United States Post Office to mail assignments to using radio, television, and telephone. In this paper I will discuss how online education is advancing and becoming more competitive with traditional “brick and mortar” schools.

Distance education has evolved tremendously over the past 100 years. Correspondence schools were developed in the late 1800s to allow students to go to school from far distances. The 1900s were full of improvements that allowed schools to offer classes through radio, television, and telephone. One of the most monumental advances in online education was the creation of the Internet. Schools started to use the Internet to their advantage in 1981 (Miller, 2014). From this time period, schools have quickly adopted this form of education to teach their students. Online education has given some students the opportunity to earn an education who may not have previously been able to do so.

There are many universities that offer full online degree programs. Students are able to continue their daily lives and still earn a degree at any age. Online classes offer flexibility which is a huge benefit to students with full-time jobs, children, or those who are in the military. Often times, online universities have more affordable tuition compared to traditional schools. In a society where education is vital and yearly tuition increases, affordability can be a deciding factor for students when choosing their educational future.

Many online programs offer “hybrid” or “blended” courses. These are courses that have a mixture of students in-class and online (Hiltz and Turoff, 2005). These blended courses allow instructors to use effective teaching methods to provide the same educational experience for both types of students. The use of technology has allowed instructors to interact with online students in very helpful ways. Many management systems, such as BlackBoard, allow instructors to post videos, announcements, discussions, and detailed feedback to educate their students. In an article by Hiltz and Turoff (2005) discussing the evolution of online learning, they state:

There is no need for the instructor or student in a blended course to be concerned with which students attend the face-to-face class and which students participate online. All learning experiences are also available in a digital form that is at least equally effective.

This quote illustrates that online courses have just as much quality as face-to-face courses offered at a traditional school.

Online education has been a growing trend which has caused an increase in the competition for higher education. In 2014, University of Florida became the first public school to offer fully online degree programs (Miller, 2014). Many schools are expected to follow. These changes may be a strategy implemented by the university to ensure their long-term survival in the changing education industry. In an article by Sara Burnett (2001) titled, “Going the Distance”, Sara discusses how online education will soon expand. The generation of students coming out of high school has been raised with Internet and may expect to have the option of online classes at the university they attend. Some may even enroll in a strictly online school. It is important that schools realize online classes are becoming more popular in our society. If they do not change, they could miss out on a large population of student enrollments.

The National Center for Education Statistics released a study in 2012 that stated one in four students took an online course during the fall that year (Haynie, 2014). The total number of students in that study amounted to 5.4 million. Although this number was 1.7 million lower than they had originally predicted, it is still a large number of students attending online courses. An additional key factor that was found was graduate students were more likely to obtain their degree online rather than in-class. For only having been around since the 1980s, online education has made a tremendous impact on the way we look at education.

Online education has come a long way in our society. We are continuously improving as a society which puts more importance on obtaining a higher education. From the beginning, it has enabled more and more students to learn at the secondary level. Online education will continue to grow and expand as we become more advanced. Universities that embrace online learning and educational changes are setting themselves up for success in the future. As Charles Darwin stated, “It’s not the strongest of the species that survives, not the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change” (Darwin, 1859).

References

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