DISTANCE EDUCATION: THE NEW TENDENCIES IN THE DOMAIN OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO FRENCH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Every individual has the right to learn at any point of his life. Being a child, the individual is sent to school to inculcate the social and moral values through learning but at later stages an individual is independent to choose his/her own course of knowledge. At times, it becomes challenging to choose a specific domain due to many reasons which may include health issues, family or financial problems, lack of interest, location factors etc. Distance education has come in as a ray of hope for people keen in continuing or restarting their learning. Open and Distance Education (ODL) and distance learning (DL) denote training and curriculum followed remotely on the Internet that can lead to the certification through the different institutions, universities and private schools. ODL are integrated into the educational technologies that bring progress and scientific resources using information technology and communication that can be used in self-Supports educational resources available on the Internet and / or CD-ROM and DVD. The following paper tries to explore the advantages related to the Distance learning in the field of foreign languages with special concern on French language. At the same time, it tries to of unfold the new knowledge systems with respect to distance learning in French Language

Introduction: "Do not train children to learning by force and harshness, but direct them to it by what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each" Plato

The modern day learner is confronted with many factors in his education which crop up during the course of his effective learning. The constraints like time, available resources, knowledge and other personal reasons like marriage, family pressure to earn etc. have always posed as the major obstacles in the path of continuous and successful studies. This has either retarded the personal growth of the individuals or has put many people to disgust as far as higher studies are concerned. In such a scenario, Distance education comes as a lifejacket for people drowning in the ocean of hopelessness and longing to carry on their studies despite several hindrances in their lives. The quality distance education infuses the same educational and moral values as offered by a regular continuous course with the simple difference of introducing the learners' autonomy. The distance learning mode seems to be porous, fruitless and superficial to some people but in depth, it offers a wide variety of courses to choose from and thereby strengthens oneself in that domain with the continuous supervision and guidance of the experts. In India and abroad, distance learning has become a buzz word and thus has been widely accepted not only by the learners but also by the organizations and administration further soaking these learned people in the work environment. Recently, in a private University, few language faculties were given notices in order to furnish their documents related to their Masters Degree, PhD etc. and if not then they were requested to pursue further studies. This put the language experts into a great dilemma as they couldn't leave their job to pursue their higher education nor could they pursue a regular course with their job as it requires a certain percentage of regular attendance which wasn't possible with a current job. Thus the people were in a great confusion and they were clueless as to how to go about this new system. In such a chaotic situation where the job and higher studies becomes an opponent of each other, the Distance Education enters as helping hand for such seekers.

Distance education

It is a way of imparting education and coaching, to students who are not physically present in a conventional arrangement such as a classroom. Distance learning provides "proximity to learning when the point of generation of the knowledge and the students are divided by the basis of time

and distance, or both". MOOC and MOODLE are the acronyms of the Massive Online Open Courseware and Massive Open Online Distance Learning Education that offer a wide variety of courses to the learners to pursue and continue their education.

At times it is possible that Distance education might seem to be precarious on the grounds of no direct and constant touch with the teachers. Also, the feeling of being a solitary student might lead to discouragement or insecurity in terms of personal growth. At times, the students may become casual with their courses and thus could either quit the program in between or could become undisciplined as far as the interest is concerned. The involvement of technology might render the learners totally over dependant on the electronic system and thus could take away the personal creativity and innovation.The above mentioned points are relevant for those who do take the Distance education as a compulsion and try to compare it on the grounds which are not equivalent like students in the classroom, full time teachers' presence etc. One should understand that the Distance learning is for those who have certain constraints in pursuing the regular course and thus register themselves in the distance education. The benefits that one can take from the Distance education are far more fruitful than any other arrangement for studies.

It's Learners' Oriented: The distance education is a learner's friendly format of learning which enables a student to learn at the pace defined by the learner. This way he/she can comprehend things in a vivid and effective manner. The learner is out of the context of asking again and again to the teacher; thereby he/she can redo the same things over and over again in case of requirement.

Its 24*7: The most efficient way is to be comfortable with the internet and technology during the Learning at the Distance mode. The word distance of the distance education is bridged with the help of the technological advancement. This helps in accessing the study material online whenever one wants and also clear doubts, exchange views and discuss with the virtual class-mates.

Convenient: The assignments and the exams could be taken at ones convenience and as per the preparation. Whenever the candidate feels that he/she is prepared with the assignments or the exams, then the candidate can apply for the same, there is a lot of suppleness in this context with respecttotheexamination.

It's inexpensive: These courses are almost always cheaper as compared to their on-campus

counter-parts. One can also cut down on the costs incurred during commuting as things could be resolved at the house end.

It's Flexible: One can earn and study at the same time. This factor of flexibility is the major advantage of distance learning courses. This stands true especially if one is a working professional. Everyone doesn't have the comfort of taking their own time to finish their studies. Those people who had to due to some reason restrain from studies to start working, such courses are a boon and provide the opportunity to pursue higher education.

Study at your own Pace: Not everyone has the same pace of learning. Some students pick up things fast, others need time to grasp a concept. One of the biggest advantages of distance learning is that you can study at a pace that is comfortable for you.

It's for all: The courses available on line are meant for all public. The constraints of age, sex, prior knowledge, nationality etc which form the rudiments of admission do not become part of the online education.

Saves Time & Energy: One can stay at ones home town and can pursue a course that is available in some other city. One might be based out of a remote village or town which does not have enough options for higher studies. Distance learning courses eliminate these obstacles.

Stress Free Education: The numerous deaths and mishaps taking place due to the improper or under performance during the exams by the students is a hidden cruel face of the regular courses. Many students could not cope up with the studies pressure and exam pattern and thus are forced to take such heartless steps.

Teachnology: Distance learning courses are the ones which are technology oriented and thus the teaching becomes an integral part of this process. The blend of the two i.e. teaching and technology gives the way to teachnology. This teachnology helps in attaining maximum worldwide interaction and thereby smoothen and update ones learning.

Autonomy: the most important advantage of the distance learning is the ability to have autonomy over oneself. This is through this autonomy that one learns not only to steer through on his/her own but also to enhance the thinking and relating capacity.

Future Teachers: the future teachers produced through the distance learning are the ones those are into learning through a self directed mode. The learning that they acquire through self

motivation and through self learning helps them learn things meticulously. This way they could land up easily in the field of teaching.

Availability of Distance education In India:

Various studies have shown that distance learning programmes can be as efficient and valuable as regular classroom programmes sometimes even better. Sometimes the learning material for distance learning programmes by certain universities {eg: Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)} can be way superior to that of a regular classroom course. Thus, being a learner, one has to decide if distance learning programme suits to his/her personality and temperament.In a country like India, where a basic graduation degree is mandatory to get a respectable job, where the figure of aspiring students outnumber the quantity of college seats available by an obscenely high margin, distance learning programmes is the choice of many. The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), the leviathan with 500+ programmes and 3 million plus students was found to be at No.1 position in a recent rating of Distance Learning Institutes.

Theories related to the Distance Learning in Languages

The different parameters to judge the efficiency and applicability of the language

As far as the Distance education in the foreign language is concerned. There are six parts:

1) Learner's Autonomy;

2) Learner's Perspectives and Support;

3) Development of Intercultural Competence;

4) Methodology and Course Design;

5) Learning Environments; and lastly

6) Language and Teacher Development.

Wedemeyer

According to Wedemeyer (1977) – Wedemeyer has used terms 'Open learning', 'Distance education' and 'Independent study' in his work, but favors the last term consistently. He defines 'Independent learning' as follows:

"Independent study consists of various forms of teaching learning arrangements in which teachers and learners carry out their essential tasks and responsibilities apart from one another, communicating in a variety of ways. Its purposes are to free on-campus or external learners with

the opportunity to continue learning in their own environments and developing in all learners the capacity to carry on self-directed learning, the ultimate maturity required of the educated person." Further he adds:

"What non-traditional learning does not need is anything that would diminish the freedom of choice, autonomy and independence that has kept this kind of learning vital, practical, resourceful, innovative, and humane from the beginning of this century"

Independent Study- Charles Wedemeyer

Wedemeyer was related with the university level distance education in USA from early 1960s to 1970s. He is a person with a broad minded approach towards education and thus has always supported the field of distance education. His contribution to the theoretical groundwork of distance education comprises his analysis of the difference between distance education and the conventional face-to-face education. His analyses, while focuses on the major distinctions/differences between the two, present three key notions:

• Autonomy of the learner,

• Distance between the teacher and the learner, and

• Structural system

In Learning of French as a foreign language at Distance, the learner's autonomy plays a very significant role as he has to decide on his own about guiding himself with the supervision of his teachers. He needs to make choices and selections on the basis of available options and thereby being solely responsible for his growth and development. It is through this autonomy that the Distance education in French language offers the choice to select a specific course and thereby work accordingly. The Spatial difference between the teachers and learners produces a sense of freedom and control. The intermittent direction from the guide's side helps to learner to be on the correct track of learning and thus enable him to pursue his studies in a comfortable yet concrete pace. The systematic arrangement of course material and the exam pattern help him in achieving the desired end result from the mutual cooperation of learner and the guide.

Michael Moore:

According to Moore (1976) – Moore is more explicit in so far as the characteristic features of distance education are concerned. According to him distance education teaching may be defined as the family of instructional methods in which the teaching behaviors are performed apart from

learning behaviors, including those that in a contiguous situation would be performed in the learner's presence, so that communication between the teacher and the learner must be facilitated by print, electronic, mechanical or other devices.

Independent Study Revisited- Michael Moore

Moore independent study is a generic term which describes all such educational transactions as may be distinguished from the traditional formal education in terms of the variables of distance or 'apartness' and 'autonomy'. He describes the traditional formal system by the expression 'school environment' which is characterized by the classroom lecture or seminar and a setting in which the teaching and the learning activities are not only 'contemporaneous, but 'coterminous' also. And all other educational transactions which allow 'distance' and 'autonomy' are forms of independent study, be they Open University programmes, correspondence courses, external degree programmes or teach – yourself programmes. Any and all of these educational programmes can be classified in terms of the two variables, namely 'distance' and 'autonomy'. Being variables, both 'distance' and 'autonomy' can be expressed/ represented as continuation the basis of three critical characteristics of the system of independent study namely:

• Dialogue

• Individualisation (or lack of structure) and

• Structure

Theory of Interaction and Communication—Börje Holmberg

Holmberg's theory of distance education, what he calls guided didactic conversation, falls into the general category of communication theory. Holmberg noted that his theory had explanatory value in relating teaching effectiveness to the impact of feelings of belonging and cooperation as well as to the actual exchange of questions, answers, and arguments in mediated communication. Holmberg offers seven background assumptions for his theory:

1. The core of teaching is interaction between the teaching and learning parties, it is assumed that simulated interaction through subject matter presentation in pre produced courses can take over part of the interaction by causing students to consider different views, approaches and solutions and generally interact with a course.

2. Emotional involvement in the study and feelings of personal relation between the teaching and learning parties are likely to contribute to learning pleasure.

3. Learning pleasure supports student motivation.

4. Participation in decision-making concerning the study is favorable to student motivation.

5. Strong student motivation facilitates learning.

6. A friendly, personal tone and easy access to the subject matter contribute to learning pleasure, support student motivation, and thus facilitate learning from the presentations of pre produced courses, i.e., from teaching in the form of one-way traffic simulating interaction, as well as from didactic communication in the form of two-way traffic between the teaching and learning parties.

7. The effectiveness of teaching is demonstrated by students' learning of what has been taught.

In a general sense, this theory is taken to mean a set of hypotheses logically related to one another for explaining and predicting occurrences. Holmberg (1985) stated that: the aim of the theoretician is to find explanatory theories; that is to say, the theories which describe certain structural properties of the world, and which permit us to deduce, with the help of initial conditions, the effects to be explained. Holmberg (1995) further defined theory as, "a systematic ordering of ideas about the phenomenon of a field of inquiry, and an over-arching logical structure of reasoned suppositions which can generate testable hypotheses." He suggested that distance education has been characterized by a trial and error approach, with little consideration given to a theoretical basis for decision-making, and that the theoretical underpinnings of distance education are fragile. Most efforts in this field have been practical or mechanical and have concentrated on the logistics of the enterprise.

New Systems in French language learning at Distance:

- The DramaFLE
- FOSEL (français sur objectifs spécifiques en ligne) Online French for Specific Objectives
- E français

DramaFLE: The DramaFLE i.e. the Foreign Language French through Drama is a method to develop the verbal interaction among the learners at Distance.

The new concept of Telesimulation:

Telesimulation is a new concept for coupling the principles of simulation with remote Internet access to teach procedural skills. With the help of this process, the verbal interaction and the intercultural meeting favors usefully the pleasure and the enthusiasm among the French learners.

The workshop titled "play and communication without borders with the help of new technologies" was the fruit of a work led in collaboration with the actor Matheiu Llearge. His purpose was to show how effectively the role plays could be used in teaching French at Distance to the learners with the help of videoconference.

These days the trainers of the workshop had the advantage of attending a session of live broadcasting with a concerned person. On the big screen of the auditorium of the Alliance Française, the cyber actor was making the public interact by reading the lines of the characters with the proper intonation and pronunciation. The students full of enthusiasm and anxiety continued the learning with the help of the role plays. This new technique has been in the vogue for some time now and the trainers of this expertise were also sent to some other countries to impart the same expertise to the other French language teachers. This technique is an ever renovating methodology to inculcate the verbal interaction and intercultural meeting.

What is Tele simulation?

The term "Cyber-theatre" has become "tele simulation" for better replying to the needs and the objectives of the learners. The tele simulation is an educative and artistic technique aiming to utilize the videoconferences to achieve the simulations and the role plays at distance. Deliberately action based, the purpose is not to correct the learner but to propel in a situation of communication in French and to allow him to achieve a task by tele collaborating with a native speaker.

In the cadre of this DramaFLE project, around 50 Teachers' sheets have been developed to develop and strengthen the students in independent learning. It's possible to reserve a session with the Cyber actors on the following site www.dramafle.com. The worksheets serve as the leading topic which connects to a real life scenario thereby helping the students to work on the 5 competencies.

For example: there is a worksheet on "Exchange of lodging", the learner listens firstly a conversation on the possibility of the exchange of a house for the vacations then the learner

replies to the questions of the oral comprehension. He reads thereafter an extract of the site and replies this time to the questions of written comprehension. He fills a registration form, and then replies to an advertisement by drafting an email. Finally, he is taken to communicate in French with the actor at distance.

A window to the world

It is correct to wonder about the interest that the role plays have at distance, when it could be done in class as well. It is true that the tele simulation will never replace the communication done in flesh and blood that could be played. However it brings something extra. Notably, the closeness with the external interlocutor in the class does help a lot in language acquisition, despite of the fact that he/she is francophone or not. The screen of the computer or of the projection becomes like a window to peep through to get connected with the outside world. And it's the role of the teacher that initiates and makes the student capable of the foreign language not only in the class but also outside. In this tele simulation, the leaner is confronted to a quasi authentic situation. He must understand and make himself understood to complete the task assigned at distance in the worksheet.

The partners for the DRAMAFLE:

Countries where the Cyber actors reside:

England, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Spain, France, India, Italy, Morocco, Mexico, Ukraine.

FOSEL (français sur objectifs spécifiques en ligne) Online French for Specific Objectives

The measures of the distance training to prepare the university students of Morocco to undergo the scientific courses in French– FOSEL (français sur objectifs spécifiques en ligne)

To accompany the students to attend university science courses and French scientists in order to develop their language skills and methodological knowledge using information technologies and communication, the draft of FOSEL was proposed. This specialized French Online system was based on an analysis of needs among students who are involved in the new academic and as part of the LMD system (Licence (Bachelor)-Master-Doctorate). An analysis of several e-learning and the needs and priorities of the audience, have helped to treat the different poles of the device while giving more importance to the development of digital resources using a realistic approach. Following a reform of education at the secondary level in 1985, the scientific disciplines (mathematics, physical sciences, life sciences etc) are taught in Arabic. Arabization is not

pursued at the upper end and students are faced with scientific training in French and therefore linguistic and methodological difficulties increased. Solutions to this problem have emerged as the introduction of the discipline "Translation" in high school and "Language and Communication" in the upper module. Despite these efforts, the linguistic and methodological skills students need to develop. How can one take advantage of information technology and communication, as a tool for teaching and learning, popular with students, to help them follow their scientific course in good conditions?

In order to improve the quality of teaching, Morocco introduced a reform that is part of the LMD (Licence-Master-Doctorate) and affects all levels of education. It is set to allow the opening to modernity and to the outside world while preserving the Moroccan cultural identity. At the university level, the reform results in a change in the structure of cycles (several training courses), teaching approaches and the level of content that has become modular with the appearance of new content to meet the need the job market. The reform puts in general the learner at the heart of any teaching-learning process and emphasizes the introduction and appropriation of information and communication technologies as a teaching tool.

Among the new university reform in science faculties include the appearance of the module on "language and communication" that allows students to master the techniques of expression and communication in French. The introduction of this new module is a response to the needs of students in this field on the one hand, given that "the acquisition of scientific knowledge inevitably a good command of the language of learning" and the other to ensure continuity of what students have learned in high school in the discipline "translation".

It is an integrated discipline in the Moroccan curriculum at the secondary level. Its main purpose is to help students of science subjects to pursue graduate studies in French in good conditions by helping to establish the following basic skills: bilingual language skills (oral and written expressive); the competence of understanding of scientific discourse; the skill of writing scientific discourse; communicative competence; the competence of self-learning; evaluative skills; competence-linguistic transfer.

During the first year, university students in science subjects are in an upper-secondary linguistic transition stage. The "Language and Communication" module therefore will support their science learning through the acquisition of language and communication skills. However,

diagnostic studies have identified some problems and identified some shortcomings compared with the assigned objectives for the module.

In addition to these studies in the context of accompanying the introduction of the LC (Language and Communication) module in academic monitoring units, interviews with students in science subjects have shown that they have difficulties both linguistic and methodological during their university education despite their assistance to "Language and Communication" module. These difficulties are related to poor control of the French scientist (students justified this by the fact that they studied in college and in high school science subjects in Arabic), difficulties adjusting to the new education system and learning (lectures, practical work with reports, presentations ...). And integration into working groups especially during the tutorials and practical.

 E-Français

A means of learning French online

The Franco-Japan institute of Tokyo has opened a new measure of learning French online. In Japan, the objective was to renovate the teaching methodologies and to touch the new public. The new system of e-Français before launching itself opted for the general French and the beginners' level. At the starting, two factors were very determining, which were:

- The internal competency
- The strategic priority

As far as the internal competency is concerned, the existence of a well developed correspondence class, the deep knowledge of the professors and creators having a deep understanding of their public, a concerned person for the information and technology.

As far as the strategic choices are concerned, it is based on the aspects like: Giving a chance to succeed to the learner.

The student based at a distance is helped with the practice classes, telephonic discussions, regular assignments, personal evaluation and the note booklet etc. The formulation of the chapters is done with the help of the team of the idea men which are thereby integrated in the platform of the e-français system to facilitate the learning of the students.

Today the e-français, comprises of 3 active levels, and different tracks from A1 to B1. Each lesson is followed by a title "Homework' which one has to submit by a fix date. The speaking and writing activities are directly registered in the system which can be later evaluated by the

examiners. The trimester ends with the 3 meetings with the teacher of 15 minutes each whether on the telephone or on the Skype. This distance learning system has enabled many new learners to acquire French with an ease and perfection.

Conclusion:

The new revolutions in the modern distance learning education have transformed the traditional learning. It has not only bridged the distance between the teacher and the learner but has also eliminated the variations of day and night. The continuous and learner friendly methodologies have enabled the learners to achieve the expertise in their respective domain. Today, the people incapable of pursuing the regular courses could register themselves in distance mode and thereby complete their studies. This Distance education in the field of languages has come up as a strong source of learning as all by staying at ones place a learner can submerge into the world of that language. This has not only empowered people linguistically and culturally but has also opened the chances to find new employment and opportunities in the job market. This Distance education has come as a ray of hope to many who had almost left the hope of continuing their studies.

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