

CONTROVERSY BETWEEN BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS IN DISTANCE LEARNING PROCESS

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Distance education is a concept that has gained significant popularity over the past few years. Distance learning programs have helped many students who are unable to attend campus-based or full-time courses to realize their educational aspirations. With distance education, learning instruction is disseminated over the internet through an online learning portal or video conference software. Such video conference software as ezTalks Cloud Meeting offer robust tools that can help instructors deliver full lessons to students from all over the world. But just like any other education program, distance learning comes with a set of pros and cons [1; 3; 5].

So, the purpose of this paper is to underline main advantages the impact of which can intensify the educational process and pay the attention on some sufficient disadvantages consideration of which can help the learners to overcome obstacles.

Advantages of Distance Learning

Greater Flexibility. With distance learning programs, students can pursue and complete their desired courses from anywhere with the use of computer and internet connection. A larger percentage of those that enroll for distance education are actually persons who are working. Distance education allows such students to find convenient time to study without interfering with their already busy schedule. One can study after work, in the middle of the night or during weekends. Learning materials and instruction can actually be obtained online at any time. So working students can learn as they earn [1; 3].

No Commuting. Distance learning takes place online, which means students don't need to spend money and time commuting to and from class venues. Students can take lessons and complete assignments from the comfort of their home. Most institutions that offer distance learning programs deliver lectures and tutorials through online video conferencing. That means students don't have to be stuck to the classroom. One can actually enjoy class sessions from the comfort of their living room couch, bedroom or garden. Video conferencing solutions like ezTalks Cloud Meeting offer innovative whiteboards and screen/file sharing options that make classes more interactive. Its full HD video and audio experience duplicates the real-life class scenario that makes online lectures more meaningful [2; 4].

Significant Cost Savings. The cost of online-based education programs is generally lower compared to those offered in brick-and-mortar institutions. Undertaking an online course or program also eliminates the costs associated with commuting, renting an apartment and/or getting meal plans. That means distance learning an economically viable option for both students and parents. Apart from the convenience of pursuing a course from home, students will have a perfect opportunity to save more on their studies (fig. 1) [2; 5].

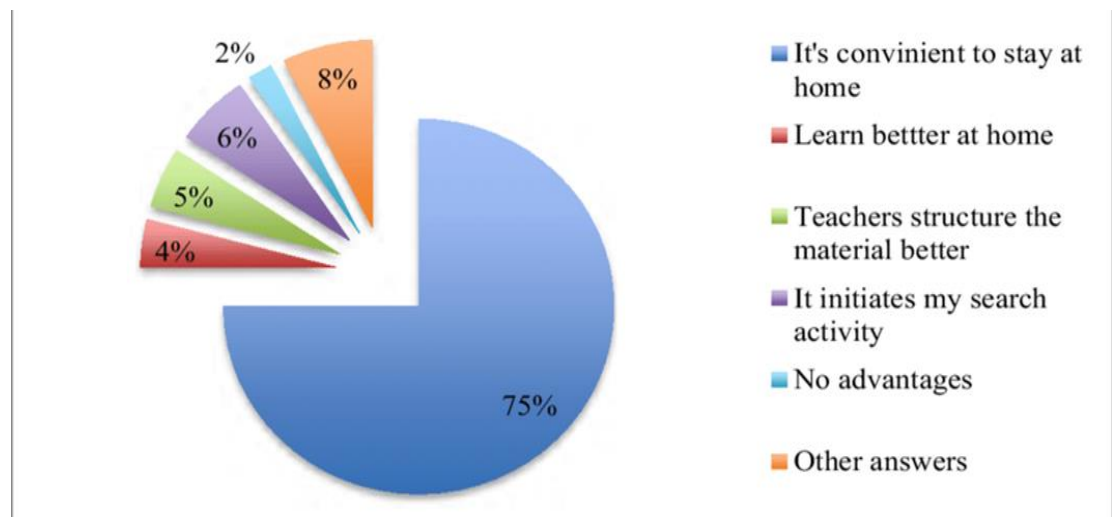


Figure 1. The Main Advantages of Distance Learning

Convenient Learning. For most of the working class students, going back to the classroom is rather intimidating. Asking questions about a hard concept about a given topic can also be embarrassing for shy students. A disciplined and self-motivated student can learn at his or her own pace. Online education combines the use of tutorials, eLearning materials and video conference class sessions to deliver knowledge to students. That means learners with different abilities can have the opportunity to understand the course in much detail (fig.2) [3].

Lack of Social Interaction. Learning in a brick-and-mortar institution presents students with the opportunity to meet and interact with people from different locations on a personal level. Distance learning only limits students to classes and learning materials that are based online. Though students can interact through chat rooms, discussion boards, emails and/or video conferencing software, the experience cannot be compared to that of a traditional campus [1; 3].

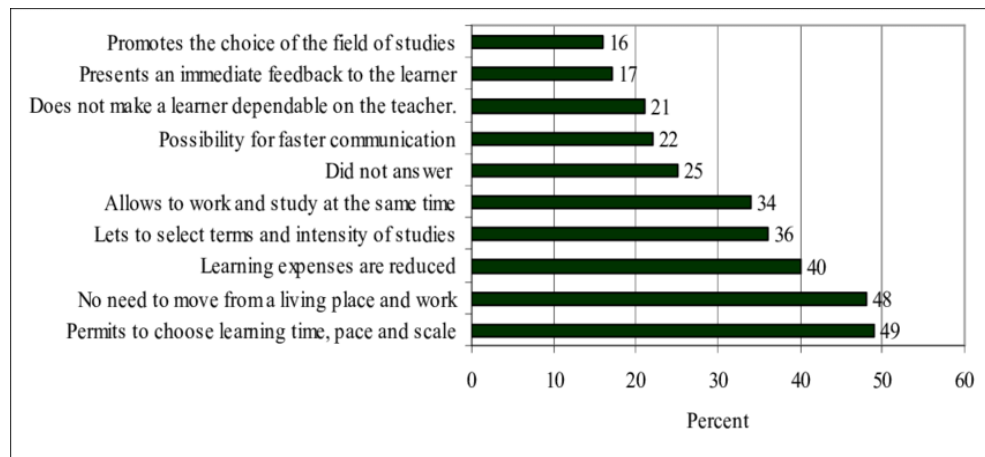


Figure 2. Benefits of Distant Education in Percentages Disadvantages of Distance Learning

High Chances of Distraction. With no face-to-face interaction with instructors and other students, those who are enrolled on an online program might find it hard to keep track of their course work and assignments. That's because there are no constant reminders about pending assignments and/or deadlines. It only requires one to be self-motivated and focused to be able to complete a course successfully. Hence distance learning cannot be a good option for students who keep procrastinating things or those who aren't able to stick to deadlines [3; 5].

Complicated Technology. Any student seeking to enroll for a distance learning program needs to invest in a range of equipment including computer, webcam and stable internet connection. There is absolutely no physical contact between students and instructors as instruction is delivered over the internet. This overdependence on technology is a major drawback to distance learning. In case of any software or hardware malfunction, the class session will come to a standstill, something that can interrupt the learning process. Moreover, the complicated nature of the technology used in distance learning only limits online education to students who are computer and tech savvy [2; 5].

Questionable Credibility of Online Degrees. Despite its convenience and affordability, distance learning is still not the best option for many due to lack of quality faculty members. Even when the instructors are fully qualified and experienced, they might not find it comfortable to teach in an online environment. The design and delivery of every course differs greatly. Sometimes the instructor might find little time to talk about trivial details of a given topic, which are otherwise important to helping students understand better a given concept. That, plus a host of other challenges like lack of proper assessment make credibility of distance learning degrees questionable [1; 4].

As a matter of fact, there many employers out there who do not accept online degrees as they still find stigma attached to distance education. That means students

have to evaluate whether or not their online degrees can be ideal for the target job or future learning. This discourages many students from undertaking a distance learning program even when the degree being offered is genuine and competitive in the market (fig. 3) [3; 5].

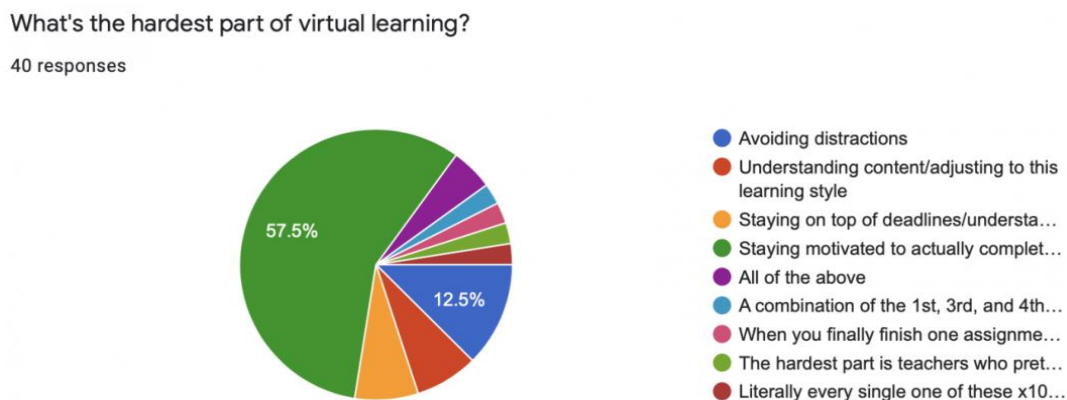


Figure 3. The Main Disadvantages of Distant Learning

In conclusion, despite its numerous drawbacks, distance learning still provides better learning options for students wishing to enjoy greater convenience and flexibility in pursuing a course. The greatest benefits of distance education is that it allows students to access numerous learning tools using minimum financial resources. Studying online is even made more interactive with the use of video conferencing software. That improves the ability to acquire and retain knowledge on a given subject.

However, distance education limits social interaction, involves use of complex technology and has a negative perception among some employers. Any student wishing to enroll for distance learning diploma or degree should weigh between its pros and cons to determine whether or not it's a good option. Generally, distance education can be the perfect option for working students.

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