

Quality in Distance Education: A Preliminary Review of the Literature
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Distance Education has been a form of instruction in the United States for over 110 years (Moore, 2003). Since then distance education evolved immensely and has utilized several different delivery strategies and technologies. With advancements such as public television, digital media, and e-learning. A survey was conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics and this survey found out that from 1994 to 1997 the number of distance education degree programs has increased by 72%. Another shocking statistic I found in this article was that it is predicted that in the next 5 years, 95% of all workers will use some form of informational technology in their jobs (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, Zavcek, 2000).

The purpose of this study was to reveal the meaning of quality in distance education based upon a review of literature. The most common forms of quality evaluation are formative and summative techniques. Formative being learned along the way, typically smaller stakes. Summative being a cultivation of everything you learned from that particular unit or chapter. One source promoted the idea of proactive evaluation for enhancing quality in on-line learning (Sims, Dobbs & Hand, 2002). "By focusing on the planning and design phase of the cycle, proactive evaluation addresses the issues associated with the creation of learning resources and environments for delivery in an online context to ensure they will have a greater chance of achieving educational outcomes" (Sims, Dobbs, & Hand, 2002, p. 147).

The next portion of the article displays a table that evaluates areas for quality and dependent variables. It breaks them down by the year, the author, the area, and the dependent variable. My biggest takeaway from the table is that quality is evaluated at different levels and it changes depending on what is being measured or addressed.

To summarize what I gained from this article, it's important to note that this study was just a preliminary review of the literature concerning quality in distance education. The definition of quality still varies and the reason for this is because the areas that are actually being evaluated change frequently. The reason this article is helpful and adds to the progression of distance education research is because it provides us with incredible stats showing the growth of not just online education but also with the jobs that require technology knowledge. It also provides a clear definition of what quality is and what areas can be evaluated when looking for high quality.

Article Reflection/Application

This particular article hasn't been as relevant as my past two article reviews, but it is still relevant for the fact that we might be facing an extended period of distance education due to the circumstances the world is facing right now. It's pretty clear to see that distance learning is here to stay. I will use this information at work by remembering that quality is evaluated at different levels and it changes depending on what is being measured or addressed. There is no one size fits all equation when you are measuring quality. There are several factors that come into play when you are trying to measure "quality". I think one factor in quality is based on course design. In order to be high quality, it's pertinent to be flexible, simple & intuitive. Another factor in high-quality online education would be you, the teacher. We are a critical component of quality, with the instructor having an impact on student involvement in the course and learning as measured by objective performance, course grades, and student satisfaction. This makes it critical that distance learning courses be taught by instructors who are passionate about their subject, approachable, and able to encourage engagement.

There was a quote I found in a separate article that summarized quality in distance education very accurately in my mind. Milne (2002) premised that 'quality, like beauty, can be seen to be in the eye of the beholder and therefore, any attempt to construct an objective measure at an individual's level is possibly destined to failure (Milne, M. 2002, The construction of journal quality: no engagement detected Accounting Forum 26 (1): 72-86).