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The difference between presence-based education and distance learning

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Abstract
Attempts to define distance learning always involve comparisons with presence-based education, as the latter is the most direct reference that the former has. It is on this basis that the convergent points, similarities and differences of the two types of approach are established. This article opens with such a comparison, before going on to focus mainly on distance learning and to examine methodological strategies that should be borne in mind when implementing an e-learning system.

Key words
Distance learning, e-learning, presence-based education, educational technology, didactics

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Introduction

Attempts to define distance learning always involve comparisons with presence-based education, as the latter is the most direct reference that the former has. It is on this basis that the convergent points, similarities and differences of the two types of approach are established. Both aim to provide instruction and, in principle, education is planned with the learning process or the result thereof in mind. This formulation is put into practice in specific didactic methodologies and models, some of which are better known and more widely applied than others, as is the case, for example, of methods geared to expounding in comparison to those oriented to interaction, or of magisterial classes in relation to project-based learning.

In the case of presence-based education, all the aforementioned models are typified by the interaction of four basic didactic components, namely lecturers, students, material and methods. Modern distance learning (i.e. e-learning) involves a further component, which is technology. Technology has given rise to educational platforms in the form of virtual desks and campuses. Previously, the tradition of distance learning has encompassed different contexts and forms of education, involving the application of pedagogical models expressly designed with distance in mind and the use of specific technological resources geared to imparting educational content. All of the above has had a bearing on the evolution of distance learning, this being the source of the positive or negative opinions registered in debates in which comparisons are persistently made with a view to defending or criticising one type of approach in relation to the other. The

same argument was conducted between technophiles and technophobes fifteen years ago as regards computer-aided education (CAE), advocating or opposing computers and their inclusion in learning processes. Technological progress has seen the continuation of the debate, the difference being that whereas the discussion previously focused on the rejection or endorsement of computers, the bone of contention now consists of which of the two types of educational approach is better and what each is able to offer that the other cannot.

Only the comparative elements of that debate are of interest here, not for the purpose of taking sides and resorting to the same Manicheism, but rather with a view to developing a knowledge of the topic and reflecting on how to reap the benefits of distance learning and compensate for its shortcomings. Once this issue has been dealt with, the focus will shift to analysing and gaining a better understanding of distance learning in its own right, leaving the area of presence-based education behind. The different manners of conceiving of distance will be examined, along with certain methodological strategies geared to its reduction.

1. Presence-based education vs. distance learning

Many aspects of distance learning are used not so much with a view to characterising it, but in order to compare and contrast it to presence-based education. This can be gleaned from forums dedicated to the topic, such as Octeto, Bitácora, Aefol, etc. This being the case, it can be gathered that it still appears to be necessary to register arguments that justify the validity, advantages and even the profitability of distance-learning systems. In every instance, the emphasis depends on the eventual objective of the education provided and the context in which it is applied. For example, a system's profitability is one of the most important aspects in the case of company-oriented education. In an academic context, the perspective of pupils is used to establish the beneficial nature of distance learning, taking into account other aspects, such as flexibility in terms of time, the customisation of content and independence as regards learning. Finally, validity is considered from more-pedagogical angles, on which basis a debate is conducted as to whether or not distance learning in the form of e-learning constitutes a new paradigm of distance learning and education.

All these points of view give rise to various comparative analyses between presence-based education and distance learning. The analysis set out here is a synthesis of the study performed by García Aretio (1996: 56-58) in this respect. In his systematic analysis, the author does not restrict himself to particular elements involved in the processes of teaching and learning, which usually consist of the teacher and the student, but deals with all the components therein, i.e. students, teachers, resources, communication tools and organisational and institutional structure. In addition to being comprehensive, this comparison is a vision that manages to encompass both the pros and cons or each type of approach and which is shows an awareness of the fact that both sides of the coin are of equal importance.

Comparison between the presence-based and distance-learning systems

PRESENCE-BASED	DISTANCE LEARNING
Students	
Homogeneous in terms of age, qualifications and level.	Heterogeneous in terms of age, qualifications and level.
Single meeting point.	Study takes place at home, in work, etc.
Local residents.	Geographically dispersed people.
Controlled situation. Dependent learning.	Free situation. Independent learning.
The majority do not work and tend to be children/teenagers/youngsters.	The majority are working adults.
Greater level of social interaction.	Lower level of social interaction.
Education is students' primary activity, to which	Education is a secondary activity for students, to

they devote all their time.	which they devote part of their time.
Students generally follow a compulsory curriculum.	Students determine their own curriculum.
Established teaching and learning times.	Flexibility in terms of teaching and learning times.
Teachers	
A single type of teacher.	Various types of teacher.
Source of knowledge.	Support and guidance for learning.
Irreplaceable resource.	Partially replaceable resource.
Supreme judge of students' performance.	Guide as regards students' performance.
Basically an educator/teacher.	Basically a producer of material or tutor.
Their skills and competencies are widely recognised.	Their skills and competencies are less well known.
Standard problems as regards curricular assessment, development and design.	Serious problems as regards curricular assessment, development and design.
Previous problems depend on the teacher.	Previous problems depend on the system.
Communication/resources	
Face-to-face education. Personal dealings.	Multimedia education. Impersonal dealings.
Direct, instantaneous communication.	Communication with a delay in space and time.
Collective, formal teaching and learning areas of a single kind.	Individual, informal and varied teaching and learning areas.
Own workshops and laboratories.	Workshops and laboratories of other institutions.
Limited use of media. Focused teaching and learning media.	Use of media on a huge scale. Great variety in this respect.
A reduced number of attendees from a nearby (geographical) environment.	Open to a large number of people from different geographical areas.
Structure/administration	
Very little unitary and functional diversification.	A variety of units and functions.
Courses conceived, produced and disseminated in a simple, well-defined manner.	Complex course conception, production and dissemination processes.
Administrative problems as regards timetables.	Problems in terms of coordinating conception, production and dissemination.
Many teachers and few administrative staff.	Fewer teachers and more administrative staff.
Low degree of relationship between teachers and administrative staff.	Intensive relationship between teachers and administrative staff.
Administrative staff can be partially replaced.	Administrative staff are basically irreplaceable.
Students are rejected at university level. More elitist and selective.	Usually more democratic as regards access for students.
Many courses with few students on each (although this often depends on the type of	Many students on each course (this depends on the courses in question).

subject).	
Very low initial costs, but high costs where the student variable is concerned.	High initial costs, but low costs where the student variable is concerned.

Table 1. *Comparison between the presence-based and distance-learning systems,* adapted from García Aretio (1996: 56-58).

An observation that has become traditional among advocates of distance learning can be added to all these points. This comment arises when students are characterised as being responsible for their own learning processes, and is that a sufficient degree of self-discipline is always required in order to become a responsible student, both in and out of the classroom.

2. The concept of distance learning

The first difficulty encountered when tackling the issue of distance learning consists of producing a definition that encompasses every aspect of the term's meaning. The disparity of definitions stems from a fundamental point and is due to the term 'distance' being understood in different ways. The first way of comprehending the pedagogical model, the structure, the methodology, the resources applied, the type of educational material, etc., is to begin with the model or conception of distance learning taken as a basis.

On one hand, the various names given to distance learning in different countries offer specific views of the phenomenon and different manners of conceiving of distance, as can be seen in **Table 2.**

TERM	FOCUS AND ORIGIN
Correspondence education or *correspondence study*	Education that uses paper and audio-based materials sent by post (Europe – UK).
Teaching at distance *Distance education*	Formal education focused on didactic methods (Europe – UK).
Distance education	Formal education focused on students (USA).
Independent study	Predominantly refers to advanced studies (USA).
External studies *Non-traditional studies* *Off-campus programmes*	Online university studies that run parallel to presence-based courses with the same content and which are assessed in the same way (Australia).
Home study	Study carried out at home or in other centres (USA).
Open learning	Combines a choice of when to learn with what to study (UK, Portugal, Holland, Spain).
e-learning	The most developed definition thereof includes educational processes and learning that involves the use of technology. (USA, widely applied and used in all other countries).

Table 2. Adapted from García Aretio (1996) and Barberà et al. (2001).

On the other hand, regardless of its type and the technological means applied thereto, every distance-learning system has an underlying manner of approaching and dealing with distance, and it is this focus and treatment that orients its development. Studying those systems and, in particular, their pedagogical models, reveals that distance is perceived in the following ways:

a) **Evasive conception:** distance is not considered to be relevant where education is concerned and it is even thought that distance learning is (or can be) better than its presence-based counterpart. Institutions tend to adopt slogans such as "open system" or "no distances". Viewed from another angle, distance does not constitute an obstacle

and it is therefore as if it were completely unimportant. Examples of this kind of conception take the form of all systems that are described as being "open". This would be the case of the UOC (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya).

b) **Compensatory conception:** this view is the opposite of the previous vision and envisages distance as an obstacle that must be overcome at every stage of the educational process. In this respect, the objective is to mitigate the disadvantages that distance-learning students experience in comparison to those working with a presence-based system. Assistance and tutoring are required to this end, as is aid that facilitates and allows for learning, orients students and serves as a guide for them throughout the educational process. This type of conception corresponds to the case of the UNED (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia).

c) **Complementary conception:** this is the view that distance learning is a type of approach that complements presence-based training, in such a way that the combination of the two constitutes the most beneficial way of learning. The closest example available where this type of conception is concerned is the educational model of the UB-Virtual (Universitat de Barcelona Virtual).

d) **Substitute conception:** this is the result of combining the three previous conceptions to produce an eclectic model in which the same education is offered to students who attend classes as to those who work from a remote location. All students participate in a single learning and communicative environment, although the way in which distance is understood and perceived entails many contradictions. One vision replaces the other. This case would correspond to the master programmes offered by La Salle OnLine.

These four perceptions of distance are the source of the different systems, and each conception gives rise to the application of the corresponding pedagogical models. It is thus that the so-called 'open' systems (the well-known 'open universities' such as the British Open University, the UOC or the Universidade Aberta), 'semi-presence-based', 'combined', 'complementary' or 'dual-mode' systems (such as the Autònoma Interactiva and UB-Virtual) and what are simply referred to as 'distance' systems (such as the UNED and the UPC) come to exist. In each case, the training of teaching staff, the type of agents involved, the use of different communication tools and the type of educational materials and the means used to convey them all depend on how distance is understood. This is also the origin of different distance-reduction strategies, which are described below.

2.1. Type of approach to teaching

The methods and strategies applied in the didactic communication process define the way in which elements are structured and the relationships that are established between them. The attitude adopted towards students, content and the approach taken to communication, style and teaching and learning relationships produce three different educational techniques, namely the logocentric (content-focused), paedocentric (student-focused) and endocentric (lecturer-focused) approaches.

▪ **Logocentric approach:** by way of a methodological axis, the basic principles that orient educational practice are defined as a conception of education that focuses on the subject being studied. In terms of the field of application, this approach corresponds to interest in the production of materials and the use of different media to present content. It can be said that this is one of the best-resolved aspects where the process of establishing a distance-learning system is concerned. The results thereof have given rise to self-teaching programs, interactive hypertextual materials, the filming of presence-based classes and the creation of demonstrations and tutorials.

▪ **Paedocentric approach:** where this axis is concerned, the student becomes the focal point of the teaching and learning process; i.e. they are regarded as being the central component of all pedagogical action. The maxim of action being centred on learners rather than on the subject being taught is such a common feature of e-learning systems that a whole catalogue of false myths is associated thereto in the guise of educational concepts, such as independence in the learning process, effort-free learning, individualised education, methodology adapted to students, etc.

- ▪ **Endocentric approach:** this axis is the opposite to that of paedocentrism. In this case, the figure of the teacher is the central component of pedagogical action. While many distance-learning models claim to have found the formula for bringing a definitive end to academic freedom, it is true that, over and above the educational material required of teachers, it is they who subsequently define the type of relationship that they establish with students. Furthermore, the fact that educational teams consist of various figures (lecturer, consultant, tutor, coordinator) means that students establish degrees of trust and respect for each such figure and make a particular distinction in the case of those who are responsible for assessment.

Depending on the priority given to any of these three approaches over the others, students find themselves with the feeling that they are alone with the content, that the lecturer is remote and unavailable, or that they are not an important part of the process.

2.2. Use of a virtual campus compared to a virtual desk

So-called educational platforms or LMS (learning management systems) are known as virtual campuses and virtual desks. In simple terms, they can be described as websites that require user identification and which can be accessed by students in order to download content and contact their peers, lecturers and tutors. Some sections of these platforms have different names, depending on the terms that each institution chooses in this respect. In general, it is possible to refer to sections in which students can find learning materials, activities, tools geared to communication and interaction (such as forums and chat facilities), exams, marks, etc.

According to Bou (2001: 25), in comparison with a virtual desk, the structure of a virtual campus is having a negative effect on distance learning. The difference between the two is that with a virtual campus, the menu system follows the logic of university administrative staff, which is remote and unfamiliar to users. Thus, for example, clicking on "Teaching action" following the selection of an option such as "Teaching support" results in being taken to a different place where the dates of a forthcoming exam are available. The university manager knows that there is an office called "Teaching support" in their centre and that course organisation is referred to as "Teaching action" in its terminology. They therefore find the aforementioned menu path extremely logical and correct. However, it is as clear as mud for students. They want a menu that resembles their desktop, icons accompanied by texts such as "Notes", "Secretary", "Exam-date query", "Marks", etc. In other words, they want everything to be as familiar and as similar to their previous experiences as students as possible, where, for example, everybody knows which notice board is used for posting marks in a centre. The alternative organisation of a distance-learning system, in a manner opposite to that entailed by a 'virtual campus', is referred to as a 'virtual desk'.

In summary, the structure of a virtual campus situates users within a pyramid that has branches of options, but which follows the organisation's administrative structure. On the other hand, the structure of a virtual desk is based on the needs of students, who access requested services as and when necessary.

The result of an organisation using a virtual campus as a model is that system managers (particularly tutors) spend all their time sending personal messages to users, telling them where everything is and describing the menu options to be selected in order to move through the maze-like structure of the campus. This information gives rise to the idea that the designs of many educational systems are significantly flawed and should be the subject of an exhaustive usability study. The fact that student users feel permanently lost in a campus entails a systematic rejection of the tools that they should learn to use in order to participate in various instructive activities. There can be no doubt that these difficulties are behind certain types of interference with students' learning, as cognitive resources that should be devoted to tackling educational content have to be applied excessively where getting to grips with the campus and its tools is concerned.

2.3. Learning and communication tools

Discussion forums and chat facilities tend to be the tools found most frequently on educational platforms. The communication tools used by well-known virtual communities and discussion groups have been incorporated into these learning platforms. Such communities consist of groups of people who, between them, create a meeting area where they can talk for a while or share knowledge. Communities of this type are characterised by sharing common interests and topics, and by pursuing the same objective. Their dynamics and success have shown them to be real **informal-learning** contexts, and attempts have been made to transfer them to other **formal** and **non-formal** learning environments.

Educational contexts

Formal learning and education: a type of approach that has the basic coordinates of intentionality and systematisation, and which is subject to a series of regulatory requisites. Child education, compulsory primary and secondary education, professional training, higher secondary-education studies and university education all fall under this category.
Non-formal learning and education: this type of didactic approach is, likewise, characterised by intentionality and systematisation. The difference between this and the previous approach lies in the regulations that govern each of them. Where the non-formal approach is concerned, regulations are established by authorities from within each educational institution. Continued or higher education courses (specialised and postgraduate courses, masters) are examples that correspond to this category.
Informal education and learning: this context is free from intentionality and systematisation as regards who plans, processes and assesses education. This is the type of education and learning that occurs in the social physical environment. This category includes the effect of the media (including the internet) as a source of information and education.

These tools are generally incorporated into the e-learning format with a clear educational application. Their use in one case or the other is distinguished on the basis of the aspect of intent, which is inherent to all educational action. In this respect, the two applications can be separated by the degree of methodological systematisation applied to forums and chat facilities for the planning of teaching and learning activities.

Any teaching and learning activity carried out by means of a discussion forum or a chat facility must therefore encompass a learning objective, planning and assessment. Intentionality, systematisation and didactic use are the factors that distinguish between the employment of these tools for a specific purpose and a more general application thereof.

How do these tools bring students closer? The answer is that their methodological use makes this possible. Many planned activities are supposed to take place via a chat facility but are eventually used in order for a lecturer to offer students a complementary class. When students find themselves limited to merely looking at the lecturer's messages, they quickly lose interest. They would prefer a session in which they can ask questions, raise doubts and find out whether or not they are assimilating content properly, whether their doubts are the same as those of their classmates, whether or not all this is relevant, etc. Most importantly, they want to know how to find answers to all these questions. In the worst case, some sessions are arranged without knowing exactly what is to be discussed, which represents a waste of time for students. The fact that they participate in all sessions is due exclusively to the fact that doing so always has a bearing on assessment.

In the case of discussion forums, there are many that are established with a question, only for the lecturer to disappear without trace. In such instances, discussion threads are left in the hands of students and the success of the debate in question depends on whether or not the topic is really of interest to them and whether or not they have time to participate during a given

week, as well as on other variables. In these cases, a forum's structure tends to develop vertically and examining each contribution will show that students have written more or less what they like, without much consideration for what has or has not been said beforehand. This is another case in which participation usually counts towards assessment.

When using learning and communication tools, it is important that students' needs are taken into account. This is the factor that determines the type of activity to be carried out and the selection of the most appropriate tool in each case. Evidently, every activity must be structured on the basis of a learning objective, which serves to orient all the other aspects of the activity in question. In such cases, the learning objective in question is always specific, intermediate or geared to recycling.

Consider the example of certain methodological strategies and the specific case of a chat activity focusing on conceptual content. Initially, a learning objective is established and a brief introduction is given as regards the orientation of the discussion and the topic to be examined or revised. Next, it is over to the students. Once they have made their contributions, a couple of messages are used to summarise the ideas that provide the best synthesis of their thoughts. Corrections are made where necessary and the discussion is redirected towards other aspects of the same topic. In terms of communicative skills, it is important that the supervisor of the chat activity uses familiar language, expresses themselves in a way that participants feel comfortable with, uses emoticons and even includes certain comments that help to make the conversation somewhat less formal. At the end of the chat activity, it is important to provide a brief summary by way of a conclusion. A particular style is subsequently applied to the chat document in order to highlight the most significant ideas. This is accompanied by an introduction that sums up the objective of the chat activity, the initial proposal and the most noteworthy contributions that provide answers as regards the topic in question. The transcript of the chat activity is made available to students. Such activities tend to be useful in terms of giving students the chance to ask questions and raise their doubts.

In the case of a forum, the objective of the debate is likewise specified and an issue is raised from two differing points of view, on which basis students can register their opinions. The forum supervisor must take up discussion threads again, either to synthesise ideas or to redirect the debate. As in the previous case, it is important for communication to take place in a way with which participants are comfortable and, in particular, that opinions are not censured nor the impression given that there are correct and incorrect views. Orientation of this kind usually gives rise to more horizontal and tree-type structures, in which contributions tend to be much more fruitful.

In either case, it is important that all a group's participants or members feel represented and that the supervisor does not assume a superior hierarchical position than everybody else; it is preferable for this person's participation to be seen as being on a par with that of others. This role is closer to that of a moderator or a guide, rather than of a lecturer in the more traditional sense.

In conclusion, planning, orientation, the degree of representation and the type of communication established help students to feel that their participation in activities of this kind is meaningful. All this can count towards assessment, by way of an extrinsic incentive.

2.4. Educational agents

An educational team working in the field of e-learning consists of different figures with different roles and functions. The most commonly found agents are educational coordinators, lecturers, tutors and educational-platform administrators. Depending on the model in question, these agents may be given other names, such as consultant or advisor (for the lecturer figure), or instructor (for the tutor or lecturer figures). Other models feature the figure of the author, who is only responsible for producing materials to be used and presented as educational content by lecturers. It is very rare for an author to be involved in the teaching and learning process.

Regardless of the names given to them, it should be noted that educational action, which is the responsibility of a single figure (the lecturer) in presence-based education, is distributed between various figures where distance learning is concerned. This is not an innovation that corresponds to e-learning, but a practice that has been implemented since the first distance-learning model was created. The only new figure to be incorporated by e-learning is the platform administrator, due to the use of technology in the process requiring the inclusion of a figure with a more technical profile, who contacts students to inform them of new developments and newly-available material and activities, and to resolve problems that arise as a result of interaction with the platform. This is, all in all, an educational teaching team in the broadest sense.

Where performing functions and developing roles are concerned, a significant difference can be noted in distance-learning systems that have been created by institutions that do not provide presence-based education in comparison to those that originate from institutions with a tradition and track record mainly rooted in presence-based education. In the latter case, the figures of the educational coordinator and the tutor are confused with profiles that are more closely related to academic and administrative management, which entails a notable loss for the education provided as a whole. The functions of these figures and the roles they play determine the nature of communication established with students. This is the basis on which distance is established between the team members and the learning group, usually accentuating the feeling of remoteness.

Additionally, an interpersonal interactive and communicative relationship is established as part of all educational action, meaning that, regardless of their functions, each member of an educational team should have a certain level of specialisation and communicative skills in order to develop a given role. Where different levels of specialisation are concerned, this is a reference to the figures of the lecturer, tutor and educational coordinator.

Lecturer
- The first distinction that a lecturer must make is that 'educate' does not mean 'inform', and that pedagogical action implies that education is a responsibility that is shared with students.
- Lecturers must understand that didactics is more than a discipline of pedagogical science and is the source of the principles of rationalised education, for which reason these principles must be known and put into practice.
- A lecturer is regarded as a guide to content. In this respect, there are no privileged positions as regards the control of information, meaning that lecturers are no longer the source of all knowledge.
- Lecturers' more vertical, hierarchical and authoritative position in relation to students no longer applies and they must establish a closer, more horizontal and human relationship.
- It is important that lecturers use their experience as students to recall educational models that, due to the approach to teaching or the attitudes involved, caused students to reject both the content and lecturer in question.
- Lecturers must understand that students really do constitute the central component in all educational action, and that this is not simply a pedagogical formula.
- Lecturers have to be prepared to work more and must understand that the process requires the production of materials and the correction of work and exercises. If they harbour the notion that e-learning involves a smaller workload, it would be better for them not to venture into this field.
- Lecturers must be aware that a process of pedagogical innovation and acquiring new skills involves self-criticism, a practice that is both healthy and necessary if it is understood that the objective is to improve teaching and learning processes.
- Lecturers must learn to work in a team that also contains other educational figures and accept that there are many sources of decisions other than themselves.

Tutor
- The first distinction that a tutor must make is between their figure and that of the academic manager. Limiting a tutor's functions to academic management and distancing

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them from educational action would entail a great loss in terms of the characterisation of
the educational team and where ways of approaching students are concerned.

- The closer a tutor gets to educational action, the more relevant their functions are.
- Tutors carry out **academic, orientation** and **planning** tutorials. Doing so enables them to
improve the way in which students are monitored and to gain a better knowledge of the
latter.
- Empathy must be one of a tutor's main characteristics.
- **Active listening** must be one of a tutor's main working techniques.
- The competencies that best define and characterise the figure of the tutor consist of a
group of communicative skills that are necessary in order to get to know, guide and
motivate students properly.
- A remote figure who simply issues informative messages using formulae suited to
manuals on writing business letters will only distance themselves from students and
generate an impression of a lack of humanity.
- It is important that tutors enjoy a certain degree of independence as regards the
educational policy applied to distance-learning systems, in order to avoid generating
mistrust between their figure and learning groups.
- Tutors work closely with students and, in particular, with educational coordinators,
analysing educational-platform data that is directly related to monitoring students.

Tutoring
Academic tutorial: focused on the course and on explaining objectives, content, methodology,
materials, resources and assessment.
Orientation tutorial: focused on participants' knowledge, with a view to promoting the
personalisation of educational processes and becoming familiar with aspects that may interfere
with learning. This kind of tutorial has to be used to motivate and encourage students to study.
Planning tutorial: based on the planning of students' study, involving the adaptation of learning
objectives and content, for which purpose a personal work plan is established. The ultimate goal
of this kind of tutorial is to develop students' aptitudes for orienting themselves.

Active listening or the ability to listen
'Active listening' can be defined as taking an interest in what someone is saying. It should
therefore be evident that the listener is actually listening and they should show a high level of
comprehension and respect. This technique, the use of which should encourage students to
express their feelings and concerns without them having to be coerced, can be broken down
into four methods:
Reflection. This concept involves reflecting the sense or prevailing idea of what a student has
just said, summarising or paraphrasing their words and omitting critical evaluation and personal
opinions. It is a means of checking that what has been said has been understood and of
showing a student that they are being understood.
Fluid dialogue. This concept involves avoiding questions that can be answered with a 'yes' or
'no', as well as those that begin with 'why'. Such questions tend to disrupt a student's natural
train of thought and give the impression of interrogation, causing the student to adopt a
defensive stance.
Expectant attention. This concept consists of providing evidence of continuing to listen. Short
words and expressions tend to be used (yeah, yes, a-ha, hum, OK, I see, right, etc.).
Listening to silence. This concept entails not interrupting when gaps occur in a conversation.
Silence can sometimes be embarrassing and attempts may be made to fill it with a comment.
However, this is often not necessary, as doing so disrupts the student's reflections.

Educational coordinator
- This is another case in which it is a good idea to distinguish between the educational
coordinator and coordination of an academic variety, which is more closely linked to
administrative management tasks.
- The profile of an educational coordinator is usually that of a lecturer who specialises in the
field of educational technology.

- Educational coordinators establish the teaching calendar, with information on the order of educational content, the opening of discussion forums and the holding of chat sessions.
- Educational coordinators ensure that pedagogical action is developed properly and that students follow content correctly.
- An educational coordinator monitors all the agents and users who participate in a teaching programme via an educational platform, which involves analysing the activity of lecturers, tutors and students.
- Educational coordinators liase with tutors in order to compare student-monitoring data and analyse aspects that interfere with students' learning processes.
- Educational coordinators are responsible for mechanisms for assessing teaching action, in accordance with the plans made previously during curricular design with a view to implementing education.
- Educational coordinators ensure the quality of teaching, which involves monitoring any deviation that may be detected during the entire teaching and learning process.
- An educational coordinator intervenes in the event of conflicts between students or between students and lecturers.

In summary, communication is one of the most important human needs and is the basis upon which relationships with others are established. Such relationships do not only depend on the functions assigned to each educational agent, but also on the role that these agents play and how closely they identify themselves with teaching action. By way of starting points, students should be clearly informed of the former, as doubts often arise when a question is addressed to the correct recipient. The latter should be persistently worked upon, idealising the treatment that one would like to receive in the same situation, both in terms of response time and the manner of being dealt with.

3. Conclusion

Every distance-learning system is characterised by a certain way of perceiving distance. This conception is the basis for determining the type of agents involved in the education in question and, in particular, their functions and roles. The way in which distance is understood is always the decisive factor as regards gauging the degree of assistance to be offered to students, establishing a given type of communication, selecting specific formats to be made available to students and carrying out learning activities on the basis of a particular dynamic. For example, systems that correspond to an evasive conception of distance usually opt for students to work in a more independent and individualised manner. On the other hand, systems that correspond to a compensatory conception usually implement group-learning dynamics in order to compensate for students' feeling of being alone.

Comparative studies tend to contrast distance learning with traditional presence-based education. In these comparative points, it can be seen that, firstly, summarising criteria unifies the different perceptions of distance; and, secondly, distance tends to be characterised on the basis of presence, as the latter is more familiar. Defining distance learning therefore entails two difficulties. The first is that the various conceptions of distance give rise to different definitions. The second is that distance is always referred to from the perspective of presence, because this is the only position in which the defining party can be.

In light of all the above, certain methodological strategies have arisen for reducing the sensation of distance. These strategies range from a specific educational approach, focusing on students to a greater or lesser degree, to the functions performed and roles played by the agents involved in educational action, encompassing the use of a type of educational platform along the way. If it is possible to state anything about the difference between distance learning and presence-based education, it is that the problem that has developed between the two is due to them sharing too many common traits.

Additionally, while it is necessary to plan teaching action in the case of presence-based education, despite this being a detail that is easily forgotten, it is impossible to start up a distance-learning system that has not been planned previously in accordance with the minimum

directives determined by didactics and educational technology. Intervention during the teaching and learning process reveals the shortcomings thereof due to a lack of planning of educational action. When the model applied is nothing more than a replica of a form of intervention in presence-based education, its implementation in distance learning highlights all the failings of presence-based education. There can be no doubt that these are among the aspects that are most clearly reflected between both types of education. The lack of clarity of learning objectives, the emphasis placed on producing materials and the predominant role of the lecturer as compared to that of students are consequences of presence-based education being reflected in distance learning. This is unavoidable, regardless of how much technology is applied.

The current challenge consists of starting up distance-learning systems to provide content related to translation and tradumática (documentation, terminology and IT applied to translation).

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