Synchronous e-learning: aspects to be considered in this teaching model

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Communication is a tool for exchange, which makes it important and indispensable for life in society. The communication process consists of the transmission of information between a sender and a receiver that decodes the message transmitted in the verbal or non-verbal language (gestures, facial expression, among others).

When teaching an online course and planning synchronous moments through technological resources, such as chat rooms (chats), cell phones (with or without the use of a camera), video conferencing and web conferencing, the teacher as mediator must pay attention to the conditions that are established in a relationship that requires fluidity and dexterity in technological handling so that the conversation can achieve the mere objective of socialization of group members in informal conversations and exchanges or stimulate and generate debates and positions on any theme studied.

Communication is two-way or multi-way.

It is important to note that in synchronous e-learning, the teacher and the students are connected at the same time, regardless of their physical location. Communication is two-way (one to one and many to one) or multi-way (many to many).

In synchronous relations, the various time dimensions need to be considered, especially those with academic and formal objectives. The first is the establishment of a possible schedule of days and times that includes, as fully as possible, the participation of most (if not all) students in these meetings. If the group of students is large, we recommend different moments of online meetings so that the management and administration of the participation and interactions between students are better done. Another recommendation is to be sure that all students are aware of the theme(s) to be addressed in the meetings and that they are prepared to give their relevant contributions to the theme. Special attention should be given to distinct time zones when online sessions gather individuals from different locations.

Another aspect to be considered is the time to start and end the online sessions which should not extend over a very long period that causes students´ discouragement and disinterest in participating. The ideal time can be agreed between the teacher and the students, taking into account the student´s profile and the quality of the access to the available online communication tools.

In chats, the students´ expertise and their times (dictated by faster individual rhythms / slower typing) should also be taken into account so that some students are not privileged against others in times of individual manifestations in the collective space of speech.

When it comes to chatting for foreign language teaching, you can also use the transcription of the session's conversation for the improvement of grammar, spelling, and vocabulary structures.

To the technical knowledge of operability, limitations and potentialities of each technological resource for synchronous e-learning, didactic-pedagogical planning of their uses should be associated to ensure that the uses of these resources will benefit or improve learning.

Besides the technical peculiarities, in the synchronous session, the interactions between individuals do not take place at random or in a vacuum. The figure of the teacher is fundamental to establish the steps (rhythms, times of interactions, time of programmed activity, creation of motivation and control of interactions that must be respectful and cordial). The planning of

synchronous e-learning should account for each of these details carefully so that it will result in student´s learning derived from the exchanges of shared knowledge.

After the end of each online session, it is recommended that the teacher evaluate the outcomes according to his or her objectives and asks students for feedback. Follow-up evaluations help the teacher diagnose the possible need for programming individualized conversations with students who need encouragement, support, or guidance on behaviors and procedures regarding the expected objectives of the online sessions. Also, follow-ups help the teacher to establish the steps for the new sessions, to make appropriate course corrections, to replan and redesign more appropriate didactic strategies for synchronous e-learning.

Advantages and Disadvantages of synchronous e-learning

Among the advantages we can highlight the possibility of real-time interactions with students (even with those from different cultures and different locations); giving them immediate answers to their learning doubts; creating an environment of knowledge exchange and socialization, because the feeling of proximity is present.

One advantage of synchronous e-learning, which brings together individuals from different regions of the country, or even from different languages and cultures, is that the online sessions provide an opportunity for the exchange of regional, cultural and social knowledge of the members of the different groups participating in these meetings.

Among the disadvantages, it is important to consider that synchronous e-learning requires prior establishment of the meeting agenda; establishment of terms and rules of participation; commitment of the group to participate in the virtual sessions; negotiations regarding the time and schedule of the sessions, quality of training of both the teacher and the student to interact in an appropriate manner in these environments.

Another disadvantage is that unforeseen reactions can occur during online sessions. In these cases, the teacher needs to be attentive and perceptive and quick in resolving disputes, without prejudice to the proposed learning objectives.

Concerning the use of video conferencing or web conferencing, when holding online meetings, one should not overlook the fact that video conferencing requires a technician to configure the equipment, which can be considered a disadvantage for its use. In the case of web conferencing, the disadvantage is the scarcity of free programs and the dependence on a good quality broadband network for its execution. For both video and web conferencing use, it is recommended that testing and data training be carried out for the effectiveness of their use.

Considering the dimension of approach as a prerogative in the relationship between teachers and students and one of the most basic requirements in the success of the teaching and learning process, in synchronous e-learning making use of interfaces that promote conversations such as chats, video and web conferencing has the potential to create social and affective bonds and can be considered as additional resources in the list of online teaching tools, since they are drivers of dialogues even with the limitation of instantaneity, speed and lack of eye in eye contact.

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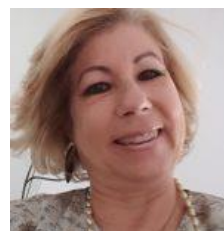
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