

Original Research Article

Exploring the Advantages and Disadvantages of Distance Learning at the University Level

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning in universities in the context of increasing demand for socialized learning. Theoretical and practical studies show that, in addition to the advantages of meeting the needs of regular learning, learning at any time and any place, distance learning also presents difficulties such as little interaction with teachers, little connection with members of the class, and a learning environment that does not stimulate the initiative and creativity of learners. To properly assess the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning in universities, based on theoretical references, this study surveyed 121 people who are managers, lecturers, and students teaching at several universities. Based on the survey results, combined with previous studies and assessments, comparing and contrasting the results achieved, analyzing the underlying causes, this study recommends solutions to promote favorable factors and overcome difficulties in distance education of universities in the context of increasing learning needs.

Keywords: Advantages, Disadvantages, Distance Learning, University Level.

INTRODUCTION

We are in the era of the 4.0 industrial revolution, the digital age, an era of constant development and many issues that need to be resolved quickly. Many economic, political, cultural, etc., fields must also change their forms of organization and operation to suit the new trends, the trend of integration and development. The same goes for education, to meet the needs of continuous learning and learning of each of us, many forms of education have appeared, including distance learning.

Distance learning has existed for a long time, but in the late 20th century and early 21st century, with the explosion of the internet and digital technology, it has created conditions for E-Learning and Moocs to be born, bringing distance learning to a new level. Distance university training is a form of learning on a digital platform and is increasingly popular in the 4.0 technology era. This is a form of training and development of digital learning materials suitable for those who want to study, work, or get additional degrees and certificates to serve their work and the requirements of their professional titles.

Basically, distance learning is based on the E-Learning platform with high requirements for digital infrastructure and modern equipment. This is the process of training, learning or education provided online through computers or any other digital device. Although e-Learning is based on formal learning, it is provided through electronic devices such as computers, tablets and even mobile phones connected to the internet. This makes it easy for users to learn anytime, anywhere, with very few limitations, if any. However, limitations and difficulties also appear during the learning process, when learners have little interaction with teachers, little connection with members of the class, the learning environment does not stimulate students' initiative and creativity, etc. These advantages and disadvantages require educational managers and universities to have solutions to improve the quality of training.

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In recent years, universities such as Tra Vinh University, Ho Chi Minh City Open University, Hue University, Da Nang University, Cuu Long University, etc., have rapidly developed this form of training. There have been many improvements in the organization and management of distance teaching and learning activities, but they are still not comprehensive. There are still some limitations that are not enough to motivate learners to develop their self-study ability. To clarify the advantages and disadvantages as well as find solutions to promote the advantages and limit the difficulties, this study focuses on answering the following questions:

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of distance training at universities?
- What are the causes of the advantages and disadvantages of distance training of universities?
- What solutions are needed to promote the advantages and limit the difficulties in distance learning at universities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of distance learning is not a new one. For many years, computer-based courses or courses via media have been available to supplement traditional classroom courses or to provide an alternative. However, these materials and programs were previously considered to be of lower quality than the traditional classroom format. In recent years, with the advent of high-speed networks and the accessibility of higher education on a global scale. This information technology revolution has allowed the provision of virtual classrooms in which students connect with each other and with instructors regardless of time or place. Thousands of students are now taking online courses and distance education courses over the internet. This has clearly shown the advantages of distance learning. However, this form of learning still has no unified concept of distance learning, distance education.

According to Nguyen Oanh (2024), distance learning is a form of learning in which the learner and the teacher are not in the same location. Learners can learn anytime, anywhere and at any time, just need a computer with an internet connection. Lecturers will teach through the E-Learning training platform. This type of learning has broken the limits of space and time, helping students who cannot go to class to learn through digital documents, digital training platforms, and between the two sides, the school and the candidate.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2022), distance learning is a way of studying in which you do not attend a school, college, or university, but study from where you live, usually being taught and given work to do over the internet. They offer advanced degrees or professional certification through distance learning.

According to Causera (2023), distance learning, or E-Learning, is an educational process in which students learn at least partly through electronic means, such as the internet, videoconferencing, and webinars. Distance learning can be synchronous, if all participants interact at the same time, or asynchronous, in which participants interact with learning materials at different times.

In Vietnam, the form of distance learning has been legalized and regulated in legal documents of the Ministry of Education and Training. According to Article 2 of the Regulation attached to Circular 28/2023/TT-BGDDT, the form of distance learning is regulated as follows:

- i. Distance learning is a form of training in which 50% or more of the total volume of the training program is implemented according to one or a combination of distance learning methods: Computer Network and Telecommunications, Correspondence, Radio - Television.
- ii. The Computer and Telecommunication Network method uses information and communication technology, mainly computers, mobile devices and the Internet or telecommunications network to transmit information and create an environment for lecturers and learners to interact.
- iii. The Correspondence method uses letters or post to transmit information between lecturers and learners.
- iv. The Radio-Television method uses broadcasting media, including radio programs or television programs, to transmit information between lecturers and learners.
- v. The distance learning system of a training institution is a comprehensive system consisting of the following basic components: the department in charge of organizing and managing training; documents regulating distance learning; distance learning programs; distance learning materials; teaching staff, learning support staff, and management staff; distance teaching and learning management system; testing and evaluation system; technical support system.

Thus, system learning is a form of training that is not limited by space and time, helping teachers and learners to participate in learning without being limited by geographical barriers. This is also considered a part of the online training form that is being implemented by educational systems around the world. In Vietnam, distance learning is widely applied in higher education. This form of training helps employees not have to go to class like the traditional formal method. Learners can completely study at home while still ensuring that they keep up with their study progress and receive a degree of similar value. That is, learners can completely stay in Vietnam and become students, graduate from universities in

developed countries, or anywhere in the world.

RESEARCH METHODS

Theoretical Research Method:

Systematically study domestic and foreign documents and materials related to distance learning activities in general and university-level distance learning activities in particular. In addition, study the works of prestigious domestic and foreign authors related to the content of the topic. From there, build a theoretical framework and content for the survey, and orient the design of research tools and the practical investigation process. In addition, to ensure the accuracy and transparency of the research, the author systematically records and summarizes important information. This will create a solid foundation for implementing research content related to the topic.

Survey Method:

conduct an online survey via the Google Form platform. This questionnaire will focus on the following basic contents: (i) Advantages and disadvantages in distance training of universities; (ii) Causes of advantages and disadvantages in distance training of universities; (iii) Solutions to promote advantages and limit difficulties in distance training of universities.

Scale Convention:

Use a 5-level Likert scale. Each question is measured with 5 levels increasing from 1 point to 5 points according to the convention in the scale convention table. In the Likert scale, “jump” refers to the distance between points on the scale. In a 5-level scale, the jump is usually 1 point, meaning that each point is one unit apart. This step creates an even spacing between the ratings, making data analysis easier. The scale convention is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Rating scale for mean values

Score	Attainment Level	Level of agreement	Level of influence
From 1.0 to 1.80	Poor	Disagree	No influence
From 1.81 to 2.60	Weak	Slightly agree	Little influence
From 2.61 to 3.40	Average	Moderately agree	Moderate influence
From 3.41 to 4.20	Rather	Rather agree	Rather influence
From 4.21 to 5.0	Good	Strongly agree	Very influence

This study uses Excel software to analyze and statistically analyze specific research data as follows: Statistics and data entry of collected survey tables; Data coding and cleaning after entry; Creating a list of variables; Processing variables using commands; Descriptive statistics using statistical methods or commands to perform statistics from simple to in-depth to clarify the research object.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Advantages in Distance Learning at the University Level

Previous studies have shown many advantages in distance learning at the university level. Nguyen Oanh (2024) identified 05 advantages, Causera (2023) identified 04 advantages, Ngo Thi Lan Anh & Hoang Minh Duc (2020) identified 5 advantages, etc. To properly assess the advantages of distance learning at the university level, this study conducted a survey of 121 managers, lecturers, and students at some universities that are providing distance learning with the conventions in Table 1. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Advantages of distance learning at the university level

Order	Content	Level of implementation					Average score	Rating
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	Students will easily follow the lectures according to the school's schedule at home through the E-Learning system. Connecting the learning process only requires smart devices with an Internet connection, making learning more flexible and easier	3	10	37	45	26	3.67	1
2	Proactively accessing new technology to acquire knowledge anytime, anywhere, while also helping to save on learning and travel costs	4	13	36	44	24	3.59	3
3	Learners can conveniently follow lectures anytime, anywhere	4	15	36	43	23	3.55	4

4	Saving students a lot of expenses (food, accommodation, travel, printing, etc.)	5	15	37	42	22	3.50	6
5	Learners can learn and choose to register for courses that only focus on necessary subjects, compared to asynchronous learning	5	17	36	41	22	3.48	7
6	The flexibility of time helps learners to study at any time, thereby easily arranging work and life and being able to work and study at the same time, or make good use of their time to accelerate learning and improve skills and experience	4	15	37	42	23	3.53	5
7	Participating in distance learning, you can shorten the time to earn a university degree to the minimum time	3	11	36	46	25	3.65	2
8	Increase the ability to advance for learners	6	19	37	38	21	3.40	8
Total average		4.25	14.50	36.38	42.63	23.25	3.55	

The survey results in Table 2 show: With XTB = 355 in the “Agree” range. This shows that, in recent times, the form of distance learning at university level has been of interest to many universities and society. With the socio-economic development of the country, with the requirements for socialization of education, with the need to foster and improve qualifications, it has created favorable conditions for the form of distance learning at the university level to develop more and more. Among the basic advantages (shown in Table 1), the content “Students will easily follow the lectures according to the school’s allocated schedule at home through the E-Learning system. Connecting the learning process only needs to be through smart devices with an Internet connection, thanks to which learning becomes more flexible and easier,” is rated the highest with XTB = 3.67. The content “Increasing the ability to advance for learners” is rated the lowest with XTB = 3.40. According to the results of Table 1, there are still many people who do not agree with the issues raised, specifically: 4.25/121 people rated as “Completely disagree” (Completely unfavorable), 14.50/121 people rated as “Disagree” (unfavorable) and 36.38/121 people rated as “Quite agree” (Quite favorable). These ratings show that there are still difficulties in distance education at the university level.

Difficulties in Distance Education at the University Level

Along with studies on advantages, previous studies have pointed out many difficulties in distance education at the university level. Nguyen Oanh (2024) identified 03 difficulties, Causera (2023) identified 05 difficulties, Ngo Thi Lan Anh & Hoang Minh Duc (2020) identified 04 difficulties, Nguyen Thi Thu Ha (2019) identified 03 difficulties, etc. To properly assess the advantages of distance learning at the university level, this study surveyed 121 people who are managers, lecturers, and students at several universities that are training in the form of distance learning with the conventions in Table 1. The results are shown specifically in Table 3.

Table 3: Difficulties in distance learning at the university level

Order	Content	Level of implementation					Average score	Rating
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	Difficulties in terms of technology and engineering: For distance learning, learners need to have a certain level of technological proficiency to participate in classes and interact effectively online	4	12	36	44	25	3.61	1
2	Limited interaction: This reduces the spirit and learning attitude of learners, not fully developing their abilities.	5	16	35	41	24	3.52	3
3	Lack of direct connection between learners and learners: This disadvantage of online learning will greatly affect the quality of students’ learning, because psychology is considered a core factor and plays a very important role in determining learning effectiveness	4	15	36	43	23	3.55	2
4	The learning environment does not stimulate learners’ initiative and creativity	6	17	36	41	21	3.45	4
5	Learners lack online learning equipment. Unsecured equipment and transmission lines will affect the quality of learning	7	17	34	41	22	3.45	4

6	Lack of direct practice conditions (from learners and universities)	6	18	36	40	21	3.43	5
7	Lack of time and space constraints can easily cause learners to procrastinate. Learners do not have high self-awareness and time discipline, they find it difficult to complete the study program on time and according to plan, and the quality of learners' output is also reduced	7	17	35	42	20	3.42	6
8	Using distance learning tools is not effective	8	20	35	38	20	3.35	7
Total average		5.88	16.50	35.38	41.25	22.00	3.47	

The survey results in Table 3 show that: With XTB = 3.47 in the range of “Agree”. This shows that, in the past, the form of distance learning at the university level has encountered many difficulties. Among the identified difficulties, the content “Difficulties in terms of technology - technique: For distance learning classes, learners need to have a certain level of technological proficiency to participate in classes and interact effectively in cyberspace” was rated the highest with XTB = 3.61; the content “Lack of time and space constraints easily causes learners to procrastinate. Learners do not have high self-awareness and time discipline, they can hardly complete the study program on time and according to plan, the quality of learners' output is also reduced” was rated the second lowest with XTB = 3.41; “The content “Using distance learning tools is not effective” is the lowest with XTB = 3.35. Identifying these difficulties will help higher education institutions take appropriate measures to overcome them in their training process.

Some Reasons for the Advantages and Disadvantages

To properly assess the reasons for the advantages and disadvantages, this study surveyed 121 people who are managers, lecturers, and students at some universities that are training in the form of distance university training with the conventions in Table 1. The results are shown specifically in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4: Causes of the advantages

Order	Content	Level of implementation					Average score	Rating
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	Society is increasingly interested in distance learning	5	13	36	44	23	3.55	1
2	The need to improve the qualifications of a segment of people in society is increasing	6	16	35	41	23	3.50	3
3	Due to the needs and requirements of the work process	5	16	35	43	22	3.51	2
4	Due to the requirements for degrees of some professional titles	7	17	35	41	21	3.44	4
Total average		5.75	14.75	36.00	42.25	22.25	3.50	

The survey results in Table 4 show that: With XTB = 3.50, it is in the range of “Influence”. In which, the reason “Society is increasingly interested in distance learning” is considered the most important with XTB = 3.55. The reason “Due to the degree requirements of some professional titles” is rated the lowest with XTB = 3.44. Thus, the concept of distance learning to get a degree is an inaccurate assessment and there needs to be a change in people's perception when evaluating this form of training.

Table 5: Causes of difficulties

Order	Content	Level of implementation					Average score	Rating
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	The State has not invested adequately in distance education (IT infrastructure, training programs, etc.)	3	14	37	42	25	3.60	1
2	Direction and management do not follow the direction set out when establishing new universities	6	15	36	41	23	3.50	4
3	The project “Developing Distance Education in the period 2005-2010” was approved by the Prime Minister under Decision No. 164/2005/QĐ-TTg dated April 16, 2005 but was not implemented at all.	5	15	37	43	21	3.50	4

4	Due to the degree requirements of some professional titles	4	14	36	44	23	3.56	3
5	Lack of supervision by universities in the teaching process of lecturers and the learning of students	3	14	38	42	24	3.58	2
Total average		4.20	14.40	36.80	42.40	23.20	3.55	

The survey results in Table 5 show that: With $XTB = 3.55$, it is in the range of “Influence”. In which, the reason “The State has not had adequate investment for distance education (IT infrastructure, training programs, etc.)” is rated highest with $XTB = 3.60$. The reason “The direction and management do not follow the direction set out when establishing new universities” and the reason “The Project Developing Distance Education for the period 2005-2010” was approved by the Prime Minister under Decision No. 164/2005/QĐ-TTg dated April 16, 2005 but was not implemented at all” are rated equally with $XTB = 3.50$. This assessment result it shows that the State needs to have specific and detailed policies for distance education at the university level.

Solutions to Overcome the Limitations of Distance Learning

For difficulties in the technology-technical aspect: Schools need to pay attention to equipping students with skills in using information technology, information security skills, and skills in exploiting and effectively using applications serving learning activities. It is necessary to organize many first online lessons to guide students in the operations and skills in using LMS software proficiently, and at the same time, note common errors in learning this program for students to clearly handle when encountering problems before starting to study the first subjects.

For the problem of limited interaction in the distance learning format: During the teaching process, lecturers need to increase interaction and exchange with students to create a comfortable mentality and a sense of excitement for learners. Lecturers need to diversify teaching methods and integrate many activities into the curriculum to create interest in learning for learners, and create an environment for learners to present and share their views.

For the lack of direct connection between learners and learners: Schools should organize many playgrounds for learners. Establish student clubs, specifically:

Student Learning Support Club:

The club plays a role in connecting students together. Regularly organize exchange sessions to share effective learning methods, and support difficulties in applying technology in learning.

Student Business Club:

Includes alumni sharing work experiences, introducing jobs for students to work part-time or introducing jobs for students after graduation, etc.

These clubs will connect and support students in meetings, in work... creating a healthy playground, connecting people together is the motivation for learners to be more connected.

For the learning environment that does not stimulate students’ initiative and creativity: To have a quiet learning space, not affect learning. Learners need to arrange their time so as not to be affected by other work. Should study in a separate classroom, avoiding noise that distracts from learning.

For the problem of learners lacking online learning equipment: Schools should have policies and long-term investment plans for the field of building quality, rich online learning resources, not only for the immediate future but also for the long term, because the resources are always there on the internet, and at the same time invite reputable experts to inspect and evaluate. In addition, schools should have policies in conjunction with banks to lend students at zero interest to buy learning equipment to support their studies.

CONCLUSION

Each form of learning has its advantages and disadvantages. Learners must know the advantages and disadvantages of each form of learning, and at the same time, see which form of learning is suitable for their learning conditions, to choose the most suitable learning method. Any form of learning requires learners to be proactive in learning. Especially this form of distance learning. Learners must be proactive, self-studying, and think to acquire knowledge. This form is suitable for those who are working and want to improve their qualifications to meet the qualifications for their working position and at the same time develop further in a new position, a new job. Based on the study of theoretical issues,

this study has pointed out its advantages, difficulties, and causes, thereby proposing solutions to promote the advantages, limit the difficulties to further improve the quality of training from the commune in the future.

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