

Book Review: Teaching and Learning at a Distance: Foundations of Distance Education (7th ed.)

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Volume 23, numéro 3, septembre 2022

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1092444ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v23i3.6332>

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Éditeur(s)

Athabasca University Press (AU Press)

ISSN

1492-3831 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Keshavarz, M. & Mirmoghtadaie, Z. (2022). Compte rendu de [Book Review: Teaching and Learning at a Distance: Foundations of Distance Education (7th ed.)]. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 23(3), 280–283. <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v23i3.6332>

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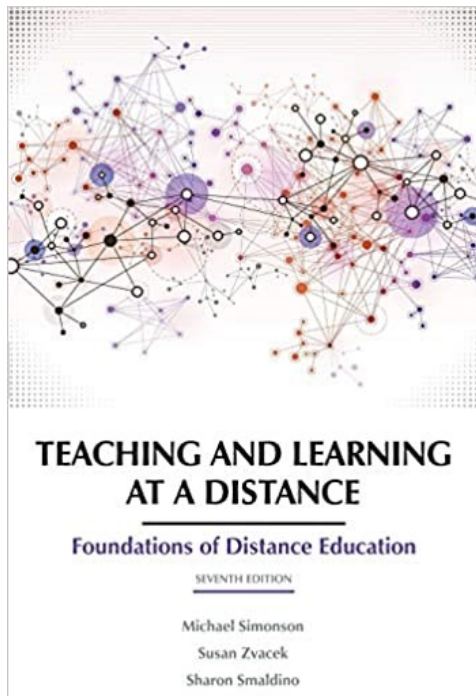
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September – 2022

Book Review: Teaching and Learning at a Distance: Foundations of Distance Education (7th ed.)



Authors: Michael Simonson, Susan M. Zvacek, and Sharon Smaldino (Information Age Publishing, 2019, 368 pages)
ISBN: 978-1-64113-626-6

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First published in 1999 and edited and published seven times over the past 23 years, *Teaching and Learning at a Distance* has clearly been popular in the field of distance education. It was written primarily for distance education courses for learners to better understand of key issues and concepts in this area. The text includes 12 chapters divided into three main sections: Foundations (Chapters 1–4), Teaching and Learning at a Distance (Chapters 5–9), and Managing and Evaluating Distance Education (Chapters 10–12).

To review the book, we first use a descriptive approach to describe essential information about the specifications, content, and structure of the book; we then present the goals of each chapter. The key features are described in the conclusion section with an analytical and critical perspective.

The first chapter of *Teaching and Learning at a Distance* explains the concept of distance education and explains its impact on education systems. This chapter presents the historical roots of distance education.

A highlight is the reference to Richard Clark's views and theory in the field of media and education, emphasizing that media are "mere vehicles that deliver instruction but do not influence student achievement" (p.69).

The main purpose of Chapter 2 is to review the definitions, history, and theories of distance education and explain its historical roots since Isaac Pitman.

In the third chapter, the authors present research on distance education. Research on various aspects of distance education is pointed out to be currently based on theory and methodologically appropriate. Its positive effect on the performance of distance education is also discussed.

Chapter 4 refers to the technologies used in distance education. This chapter provides information on a broad range of technologies including audio, video, the Internet, Web 2.0, and massive open online courses.

From Chapter 5 onward, the book focuses more on instructional design and teaching and learning aspects of distance education. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a process for designing instruction at distance environments.

Chapter 6 provides guidance and advice for the instructors teaching at a distance education environment and identifies role and responsibilities of educators in online teaching. The authors argue that teaching methods should be chosen based on characteristics of the instructor, students, the course content, and the transfer system. Also, in designing instruction for a group of online students, the teacher needs to consider and address student issues.

The main focus of Chapter 7 is on distance learners. Its purpose is to describe the distance learner's characteristics and responsibilities. Learners in distance education are of different ages and have different educational backgrounds. Instructors should pay special attention to learners' differences based on their age, general ability, prior knowledge and learning styles.

Chapter 8 presents information about the effective use of learner support in distance education. It explains principles used to design the typical distance education course, covering course logistics, course policies, instructional activities, assessment information, and additional information. The authors provide a model and guide for designing e-books as interactive study guides (ISGs). An ISG can be used in any online classroom and is an essential tool for distance educators, helping them to provide better learning support.

The main topic of Chapter 9 is assessment in distance education. The authors present measurement as an essential tool for measuring student learning and discuss evaluation methods that are suitable for identifying learners' strengths and weaknesses and giving them feedback.

Chapter 10 discusses the implications of laws relevant to the creation, use, and protection of intellectual property for teaching in distance education environments. The key concept of this chapter is intellectual property. This chapter also presents the latest in the open education movement.

Chapter 11 discusses the functions and professional concerns of an administrator of distance education programs, and its main focus is on the concepts of management and leadership in distance education systems. The authors emphasize that the role of distance education manager is very important and plays a pivotal role in the success of an organization's programs.

Finally, Chapter 12 presents approaches for evaluating distance education courses, programs, and systems and focuses on approaches to evaluation for the purpose of improving distance education and determining the worth of distance education activities. The authors argue that e-learning evaluation should provide leaders the evidence they need to support or to refute training decisions. Kirkpatrick's four levels of evaluation and the AEIOU approach to evaluation (accountability, effectiveness, impact, organizational contexts, and unanticipated consequences) are discussed.

A highlight of *Teaching and Learning at a Distance* is that it is appropriate as a recommended text in a distance learning class. It covers a wide range of topics such as instructional design, student characteristics, student assessment, program evaluation, and copyright in the field of distance education. Each chapter includes a summary and self-assessment questions. The book has academic references, which give students a foundation in theory and research in distance education.

The objectives of the chapters as forming a conceptual framework provide regular and structured information to the book's audience. In explaining the concepts, the authors use clear practical examples with new information in the field of distance education, and this feature distinguishes the new edition from previous editions. Structurally, new visual images have been added to this edition, and the sources in each chapter have been updated. A prominent feature of this edition is the use of educational scenarios. Question-and-answer sections address and explain topics. The concept of educational design in online education is especially emphasized.

A salient feature of *Teaching and Learning at a Distance* when compared with similar books in this field is the authors' special attention to the history of distance education up to the present; few books have so beautifully stated the historical trends of distance education. This book attempts to properly explain the relevant theories in the field of e-learning and different perspectives. The principles and guidelines of the book are considered as a kind of instruction. Policy makers in the field of distance education can use them to plan and implement virtual learning environments. The text also highlights the duties and responsibilities of policy makers, educators, and students in the field of distance education.

Teaching and Learning at a Distance gives examples of different types of educational design models and distance learning systems. These models help readers gain a conceptual picture of the topics covered. Credible research and extensive statistics and information in the field of distance education are presented. By viewing this research and the results and statistics, readers can better understand the concepts of distance education and can rethink new research in this field based on previous research.

Finally, a weakness of the book is that it does not focus much on details of new educational technologies. It is mostly based on theory and examples in the field of distance education to provide practical guidelines and instructions in the field of instructional designing in distance education systems.

