



## Are the concepts “onsite study” and “distance study” outdated?

Ingibjörg B. Frímannsdóttir\*

Aðallandi 19  
108 Reykjavík  
Iceland

### Abstract

Today’s students demand another approach to learning than the approach taken for students entering the school system 20 to 30 years ago. Modern students’ expectations and demands with regard to how and when they want to study are not the same as they used to be. Students now want more independence in how they plan their study, including having the ability to take distance courses, receive material and information posted online and take advantage of the potential of today’s technology. A growing interest in distance learning is one part of this development. Concepts like “onsite” and “distance” study and students have been used, but with a large – and growing – part of the course material being available online for both onsite and distance students, the barriers between these two groups have been minimized. The question is: are these concepts outdated, and is it necessary to make a distinction between onsite and distance study and students? Research was done within the course *Spoken and written language* at the University of Iceland in the year 2012 to discover whether it is possible to combine onsite and distance courses into one, throw away the old concepts and use only “study” and “students”.

**Keywords:** Onsite and distance learning, onsite and distance education, changes in teaching.

### Introduction

Considerable changes occurred in education in recent years. These changes are largely a result of ever-evolving technological advances entering the classroom, introducing opportunities to completely rethink how education is delivered. Distance education has grown into a mainstream method of conducting teaching, and on the back of that change and in some respects, has resulted in the decline of traditional, in-classroom education.

Teaching within the traditional classroom, which has roots that date back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, seems to be retreating while students’ requirements as to how their study is planned and what study is available have changed significantly. Today’s students demand another approach to learning than that demanded by those who entered the school system 20 to 30 years ago. Today’s students prefer more active learning, and their tolerance and needs have changed (Roehl, Reddy & Shannon, 2013).

---

\*Ingibjörg B. Frímannsdóttir ([ingfrim@hi.is](mailto:ingfrim@hi.is)) is an Assistant Professor at the School of Education at the University of Iceland. She has a master’s degree in linguistics. Her expertise is in applied linguistics with emphasis on phonetics, elocution, spoken and written language. Ingibjörg has supervised onsite and distance courses for 20 years and has worked on the development of modern teaching methods, for example by working to redefine distance and onsite students as part of the same group.

Students now want to receive teaching materials and information posted online and many teachers have worked to meet these requirements. But some teachers have taken advantage of technology in teaching and started putting all teaching material and various data online, where the students have full access to them. The great popularity of the flipped learning approach is a good example of this movement (Bergman & Sams, 2012). In this framework, students are able to take advantage of the potential of today's technology and be more independent in how they plan their study. This approach also fosters personal responsibility with regard to the own learning. Educators have had to evolve their teaching methods accordingly to cater to today's students and how technology has influenced today's students' expectations. A part of this change is number of options for distance study, which have been increasing over the last two decades. Instead of coming to class to watch the teacher lecture, the students want to have control over their study and be able to choose how, when and where to study.

This has made the separation between onsite and distance study vague and has to some extent eradicated the difference. However, the distinction between onsite and distance study is very clear in curricula. Courses are offered either as onsite or as distance study courses. Heading into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it seems as though education and technology have evolved to merge into each other, effectively wiping out any meaningful distinction between onsite and distance student or study. But the organization and nomenclature behind the concepts of onsite and distance student and study have not changed as rapidly. It is time to take this final step, abandoning the qualifiers and referring to the concepts only as “*student*” and “*study*”. When both groups – onsite and distance students – have their teaching material online, this distinction is unjustified and can to some extent be a hindrance for the development of the teaching theories.

In the autumn semester of 2011 the supervisor of the course *Spoken and written language* at the University of Iceland took this next step in practice and experimented with eliminating the barriers between onsite and distance study. The concepts of onsite study, onsite student and distance study, distance student were made redundant and were never used in writing or speech; in the course the terms *study* and *students* were the only terms used when the course was planned. The entire organization was integrated; everything was the same for all students and no distinction was made between students based on how they had enrolled for the course as onsite or distance students.

A survey was done in order to confirm the belief that it is possible to change the use of the terminology, and get an answer to the question: How realistic is it to stop using the distinction onsite study, onsite student versus distance study, distance student for the course *Spoken and written language*? And how effective is it to only use the terms “*study*” and “*student*”? It examined whether students experienced any differences in the course's structure and services for the two groups of students.

This text outlines the reasons for discontinuing the use of the terms onsite study, distance study, onsite student and distance student, the various teaching models are presented, a report is discussed regarding the joint teaching of onsite and distance courses at the University of Iceland's School of Education, an experiment conducted at the University of Akureyri is presented, and, finally, the expected developments in teaching methodologies in the future are discussed. Then the structure of the course *Spoken and written language* will be outlined where the concepts of onsite study, distance study, onsite student and distance student, were rejected.

The hypothesis is that it is possible to “throw away” the concepts of onsite and distance study and onsite and distance student and just talk about “*study*” and “*student*”. With

Frimannsdóttir (2015). *Education Reform Journal*, 2015, 1(1), 1-18.

these barriers fading and students choosing either to take courses online or face-to-face, even during the same term, the question arises as to whether the concepts of onsite study, onsite student and distance study, distance student, are outdated. The theory here is that by using these terms, students make different demands of the courses in terms of what they “think” a distance or onsite course represents or stands for and therefore the distinction might be an obstruction.

## **Distance education**

University of Iceland’s School of Education can be considered the cradle of distance education in Iceland. With the development of distance education, its structure has mostly remained similar to what was started two decades ago, i.e. distance education, either with or without onsite learning sessions, but most often with organized onsite learning sessions, often one or two per semester, with attendance generally being compulsory (University of Iceland, 2014). Additionally, now the teachers provide recordings of lectures that are uploaded to the course web page that is accessible by all students regardless of their location. Development has been similar overseas and the most prestigious universities in the world now offer distance teaching together with onsite teaching in a similar manner as the Icelandic university does. These include Harvard University (Harvard Extension School, 2014-2015), Stanford University (e.d.), University of Florida (2014), among other universities.

In the United States, enrolment in distance education has increased rapidly. Distance learning will become more popular in the coming years. Nowadays out of nearly 20 million enrolled students at the university level in 2010, over 6.1 million, or 31 percent, of all students in higher education were enrolled in at least one distance course in the autumn semester of 2010, an increase of 560,000 from the previous year. The corresponding number was almost ten percent in 2002 (Allen & Seaman, 2011). It is estimated that the number of American students who enrol in traditional education would fall by about 71 percent during the period 2010 to 2015 - from 14.1 million to 4.1 million (Moskal, Dziuban & Hartman, 2013). As the growth trend continues, more types of students are included in online distance education courses, and they will become more inclusive (Corry & Stella, 2012).

## **Changes**

Today distance students do not necessarily live in the countryside, as was the case in the early days of distance education; in fact a distance student can just as well be living next door to the school and possibly also be enrolled in some onsite classes during the same term. Neither does the term onsite study mean the same thing nowadays as it did years ago, when the majority of the course material was included in textbooks.

The concept of onsite and distance students has therefore changed within the last decade, and the students are also different. Now the worlds of onsite and distance students have met because teaching takes place largely online, and it is the same for onsite and distance courses. Often, a large part of the course material is located online. Communication between students and teachers mostly takes place online, both for onsite and distance students, and written assignments are more often than not submitted electronically. The differences between onsite and distance students have thus been reduced, since technology has advanced considerably and education is now quite different from what it used to be. Thus, the hypothesis is proposed that the meaning of the concepts onsite study, distance

study, onsite student and distance student has been exhausted and weakened with regard to the process of coursework planning.

Specialists are continually searching for the best teaching model for distance and onsite teaching. As it was stated above, at the dawn of distance education, the teaching methods that distance teaching and onsite teaching employed were usually quite separate and the only thing that they had in common was similar course descriptions and common final examinations. Over the years, teaching methods have evolved and changed with advances in technology, widespread computer ownership and students' access to the internet.

The possibility for students to choose between onsite and distance study increases the need for teachers to look for new ways and adapt to new thinking. Teachers who have experience with onsite teaching encounter big challenges when it comes to teaching in the distance-learning format. Besides the efforts to maintain the foundation that they have created in onsite teaching, they need to find a way to change the functionality and structure of onsite teaching to suit distance teaching – how to convert a well-structured learning and teaching programme for an onsite course and at the same time make full use of the electronic media available (Sugar, Martindale & Crawley, 2007).

This struggle has produced a number of positive changes in teaching methodology, which has to some extent become more diverse, for example because of the efforts to maximize efficiency and bring teaching closer to modern practices. One result of this has been the so-called *blended learning* method, which is now widely used where onsite and distance study is mixed (Moskal, Dziuban & Hartman, 2013). The benefits of the blended learning method have in reality produced a new twist to teaching. Instead of teaching onsite and distance courses in two separate programmes, these two programmes are now being combined.

**Table 1**

*Teaching methods*

Proportion of Content Delivered Online	Type of Course	Typical Description
0%	Traditional (A)	Course where no online technology used; content is delivered in writing or orally.
1 to 29%	Web Facilitated (B)	Course that uses web-based technology to facilitate what is essentially a face-to-face course. May use a course management system (CMS) or web pages to post the syllabus and assignments.
30 to 79%	Blended/Hybrid (C)	Course that blends online and face-to-face delivery. Substantial proportion of the content is delivered online, typically uses online discussions, and typically has a reduced number of face-to-face meetings.
80% +	Online (D)	A course where most or all of the content is delivered online. Typically have no face-to-face meetings.

Before proceeding, however, one needs to define the terms onsite study, distance study and “blended learning method”, as they are used here. Allen and Seaman (2011) have proposed a definition of how to view different types of study programmes with regard to onsite study and distance study. They prepared the following table (Table 1) in order to facilitate the analysis; it is shown here in columns 1-3. Despite the considerable diversity with regard to course structure and the methods used by teachers, this table demonstrates to some extent a typical classification.

This chart provides a definition of the various teaching methods. Teaching methods (A) and (C) are probably the ones that have been used the most at the University of Iceland’s School of Education, on the one hand (A) pure onsite courses, where onsite students receive typical teaching, lectures, and exercise classes, and, on the other hand, (B) courses where most of the course material is on the internet but the students attend onsite study cycles. Distance students get access to lectures that have been recorded in a lecture hall with onsite students attending, or lectures that have been specially recorded for distance students. Often discussion threads are created on the internet for distance students to use as a partial substitute to exercise classes. The courses take place simultaneously. The course material is the same, and examinations and homework are the same. This would be classified as the traditional form of these two teaching methods. Method (D) has in some cases been used, but primarily because of the teacher’s decision to “drop” onsite study cycles. It is the teachers, not the students, who decide what teaching method is chosen, and by choosing method (C), the teachers (perhaps unconsciously) have created conditions for the concepts “distance teaching” and “onsite teaching” to become redundant.

Neither learning nor teaching is today confined solely to the classroom. Course web pages, which offer many benefits with regard to course material distribution in different forms, are becoming more and more efficient. Both onsite and distance students now want course material to be distributed online. They want to have access to all course material online: lectures, if they are to be shared, slides, supplementary reading material, URLs and any other materials, as well as online communication with teachers. Students want to have access to the course material at any given time that suits them: to be able to listen to recordings, view slides, work on projects submitted to the web, read materials that have been made available online, and more<sup>1</sup>. All this helps students in the learning process and makes learning more diverse and suitable for more people. The future is in this type of education.

Following the development of teaching online, so-called flipped learning has gained a foothold around the world and in all likelihood this method will develop rapidly over the next few years. In this teaching approach, the traditional teaching method is turned upside down (Bergmann and Sams, 2012). The actual learning is in front of the computer, iPad, iPod or iPhone, through recordings, which have been made available online. Each student can watch or listen to the recording as often as necessary. During onsite sessions the knowledge is processed (Alvarez, 2011, Davies, Dean & Ball, 2013). The most prestigious universities in the world now offer flipped classroom teaching, such as Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), University of California at Berkeley and other respected

---

<sup>1</sup> These statements are based on surveys conducted annually since 2007 for the course *Spoken and written language*.

Frímansdóttir (2015). *Education Reform Journal*, 2015, 1(1), 1-18.

schools (Hardesty, 2013). Furthermore, Sal Khan at the Khan Academy (2013) has earned a good reputation for his short instructions on the web, with short, targeted recordings on certain specialized subjects. This is a prime example of content that is openly available online that students can use as additional material, both onsite and distance.

### **Blended learning and personal choice**

The decision to change teaching methods must be taken in agreement with the community that is to work with these changes. For example, if two-thirds of academic managers believe that distance education is “equally good” or better than onsite education, as a survey quoted by Allen and Seaman (2011) suggests, this means that one-third of all academic managers continue to believe that distance study is less effective than other methods of instruction. Such attitudes are very serious and do not facilitate progress in teaching methodologies. This should give us the strength to stop using these terms and “dare” to make the final step.

Garrison and Kanuka (2004) ask the question: What are the risks associated with the transfer of university education from a 19<sup>th</sup> century level to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when more and more people believe that sitting in a large lecture hall several times a week is not intellectually stimulating or worth making a trip to the location? One should seek out new ways. It is important to keep in mind that blended learning is not a technological trend; it is a procedure and a method that is possible to build in a progressive, systematic and deliberate way. Blended learning makes it possible to create the necessary conditions in the classroom to mix these features with onsite education and the use of electronic materials.

One thing is certain: blended learning does not promote “being in a rut,” said Garrison and Kanuka (2004). It does not mean finding the right “blend” of technology or increased access to learning materials, but instead it means restructuring the relationship between teaching and learning. Blended learning has taken on a new form with the development of technologies that are used, such as video recordings, interactive communication with video conferencing and discussions, flipped teaching and more. It involves rethinking the approach, redesigning the teaching and learning environments. This work can be carried out together with either onsite or distance students, and as a result it becomes easier for the teachers to make the concepts onsite student and distance student redundant.

Blended learning constitutes the choice and work of teachers who strive to take advantage of all the technology that can be utilized to make teaching more effective with a wider range of methods and easier access to the course material for all students.

It is not just teachers who consciously or unconsciously have weakened the difference between onsite teaching and distance teaching. Students have also played a role in the process of making the concepts redundant. As stated above, the School of Education's students need to choose every time they register for a course whether they intend to take the course as onsite or as distance students. It has emerged that students increasingly choose to put together their own programme of study, including both classroom learning and distance study. That is, the same student chooses to be an onsite student for one course but a distance student for another. Those students who choose to do so most likely do not see themselves as either/or, that is, as onsite students or distance students. It raises the question as to whether the difference between onsite and distance study has any importance for students any more. This question has not yet been answered, but it can be assumed that students select courses mostly according to the nature of the courses and based on whether they find the courses more suitable as onsite or distance courses.

Frímannsdóttir (2015). *Education Reform Journal*, 2015, 1(1), 1-18.

This has been called “self-blend” (Staker, 2011), but here will be called “personal choice”. It involves students organizing their studies independently and by doing so they have, to some extent, chosen to stop using the concepts onsite student, distance student, onsite study and distance study. Those students who make a personal choice to mix onsite and distance courses hardly considered themselves either as onsite students or distance students, but simply as students. Staker (2011) states that in the United States the number of students who choose a blended programme of study is rising sharply, especially in primary and secondary schools. The same trend has been observed in Iceland but mostly at the university level.

### **Onsite and distance courses under the same course code**

A study of the attitudes of teachers and students from the School of Education to the joint teaching method, conducted by Jóhannsdóttir and Jakobsdóttir (2012) in collaboration with the Centre for ICT and Media, the teaching board and the management of the School of Education at the University of Iceland, showed that students preferred to be able to enrol in courses either as onsite or distance students, and that they welcomed flexibility with regard to teaching methods. It is not known why. In an interview with Hanna Þóra Hauksdóttir (17 April 2013), project manager at the teaching office of the School of Education, she stated, based on data that she provided herself, that many of the students at the School of Education preferred to take advantage of the right to be able to choose to enrol in a course either as onsite students or distance students<sup>2</sup>.

The aforementioned study by Jóhannsdóttir and Jakobsdóttir (2012) showed that after the first year of joint teaching onsite and distance courses under the same course code, participants' experience was that the new course structure was worse than before. An evaluation survey regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the joint teaching method among students and teachers indicated that the new arrangement experienced some growing pains and both teachers and students thought it had more disadvantages than advantages, compared to teaching in separate groups for onsite and distance study (Jóhannsdóttir and Jakobsdóttir, 2012).

The results of the survey are interesting but one might ask whether the results would have been different if, during the planning of the courses, the terms onsite study, distance study, onsite student and distance student had not been used. In this respect, reference is made to the author's experience that the expectations and beliefs of each one of the groups vary depending on the teaching method they choose – onsite study or distance study. As soon as the student chooses one of the methods, he or she creates certain expectations regarding services from the teacher. Those who are registered as distance students expect all course material to be found on the course web page and communication with the teacher to be by email with prompt responses! Those enrolled as onsite students like to “get to attend” classes and lectures and like to and expect to be able to knock on the teacher's door. These results further support the idea that the meaning of the concepts onsite study, distance study, onsite student and distance student has been weakened when it comes to the planning and teaching of courses.

During the spring semester of 2011, Björnsdóttir did an experiment by teaching three courses with the greatest possible flexibility at the University of Akureyri. It was proposed

---

<sup>2</sup> No numbers are available.

Frimannsdóttir (2015). *Education Reform Journal*, 2015, 1(1), 1-18.

that no distinction would be made between onsite and distance study. Subsequently, a study was conducted regarding the students' attitudes towards internet-based teaching instead of attending traditional classes at the university or at a distance-learning centre at a fixed time (Björnsdóttir, 2012). Emphasis was placed on minimizing the differences between onsite study and distance study as much as possible and giving all students the opportunity to pursue their studies regardless of time and place (Björnsdóttir, 2012).

The results from Björnsdóttir's study (2012) showed that the connections between onsite students and distance students were not big and they did not regard themselves as belonging to the same group of students even though they attended the same course. Besides, certain scepticism was observed among members of both groups regarding cooperation across groups; this scepticism being considerably higher among onsite students. Björnsdóttir (2012) concluded that the goal of making the students view themselves as belonging to the same group had not been achieved completely. According to Björnsdóttir, the explanation may lie in the fact that the students had already defined themselves as belonging to separate study groups before they started the course. It is also possible that onsite students had not managed to get to know the environment as well as is necessary for working online.

The results from Björnsdóttir (2012) are perfectly in line with the results of Jóhannsdóttir and Jakobsdóttir (2012) as well as the results of the surveys that were conducted in the course *Spoken and written language*. Both groups, onsite and distance students, believed that they did not receive the services they needed. The expectations were dictated to some extent by the teaching method they chose rather than by the structure of the course. Onsite students believed that distance students received more material posted on the web, even though this was not the case, and distance students complained of the lack of communication and thought that onsite students received better services in the classroom.

### **Spoken and written language**

The results of Björnsdóttir's (2012) and Jóhannsdóttir and Jakobsdóttir's (2012) research constituted one of the reasons why a survey was made to find out whether the students in the course *Spoken and written language* felt the same. Since 2011 the course has been structured according to the blended learning method with both groups – onsite students and distance combined. The structure and services are the same for onsite and distance students – identical for everyone: the lectures were in an auditorium, recorded and made available online. At the end of the 2011 semester a survey was conducted and the results indicated that the experiment had been successful. Therefore, it was determined to use the same method during the autumn semester of 2012<sup>3</sup>. This experiment is what initiated the discussion here, supported by a survey conducted among the course's students in Moodle<sup>4</sup> in 2012, as well as the regular course evaluation surveys on [Ugla.hi.is](http://Ugla.hi.is)<sup>5</sup> in the autumn semester of 2012. The following research question is namely specified: How realistic is it to stop using the distinction onsite student versus distance student for the course *Spoken and written language* and instead use only the term student?

Preparing the structure for the course, one common course description was made, identical for the two groups of students. A short recording (screen cast) was made available

---

<sup>3</sup> And have been done since.

<sup>4</sup> Moodle, Open-source learning platform/Moodle.org

<sup>5</sup> [Ugla.hi.is](http://Ugla.hi.is) an internal web for University of Iceland



Frimannsdóttir (2015). *Education Reform Journal*, 2015, 1(1), 1-18.

online every week, containing a description of the material for the coming week, a reminder of the reading materials, attendance at lectures and class presentations when it was necessary, and finally, a brief discussion of the projects for the week. These recordings were intended for all students of the course – both onsite students and distance students.

Lectures were held in an auditorium and all students were encouraged to attend. The lectures were recorded on eMission<sup>6</sup>, made available online and accessible to all students of the course. Classes with presentations had to be attended by all students of the course. There were no other classes, only individual meetings with the teacher for guidance with regard to research papers. The individual meetings were available to all students, regardless of their residence or enrolment choice. Students could have the interview in person or via Skype, and as before, this was not related to their enrolment choice. The course ended with a written examination.

When students had to be placed in groups for peer assessment of written assignments, which were entirely done online, they were randomly placed into groups of five to six students, regardless of their enrolment choice. The students had to evaluate each other's projects.

In the schedule for the semester<sup>7</sup>, two onsite study cycles were published, intended for distance students. During the course, however, the term “onsite study cycle” was never used; instead these were referred to as “onsite sessions”. The presentation part of the course was organized around these sessions for all students of the course – both distance and onsite students. It was at the students' discretion as to when they would attend each session.

When dividing the students into groups for class sessions, each group was given a number from one to six. Groups one through three had to attend at the time the classes were scheduled, and groups four through six had to attend the week before the first onsite session and the week after the second onsite session. Students could then change groups as it suited them and eventually the groups were mixed with both onsite and distance students, although those terms were never used.

## Method

A survey was done in the autumn semester of 2012 to find out if wiping out barriers between onsite and distance courses had been accomplished successfully. The goal was to measure whether the experiment to delete the distinction between the two groups was successful. The feeling of discrimination with regard to services is very subjective and is related to the theory that has been put forward here: when students choose one of the teaching methods, this automatically implies certain expectations among the students with regard to the services they would receive and the services that other groups would receive. These speculations can also be seen in the conclusions of Björnsdóttir (2012) in her study at the University of Akureyri.

In addition to the 2012 survey, this paper also refers to the course evaluation surveys on [Ugla.hi.is](http://Ugla.hi.is) for the years 2009 to 2012, where students evaluated the course *Spoken and written language* with regard to factors, such as its structure, how clear its objectives were,

---

<sup>6</sup> eMission enables seamless recording and mixing of various media inputs: <http://www.emission.is/>

<sup>7</sup> At the School of Education class schedules are published twice a year – for the autumn and spring semesters. As a rule, there were two classroom study cycles – one in the beginning of the semester and the other in the middle of the semester.

Frimannsdóttir (2015). *Education Reform Journal*, 2015, 1(1), 1-18.

how much the instruction was in line with the objectives and how clear the requirements were. These surveys were done on Ugla's web service and cover all students. The university website features the following information with regard to the ideology and implementation of the survey.

## Participants

The survey was presented to all students in the course *Spoken and written language* through the educational system Moodle 2.2, to 84 onsite students and 35 distance students. It was open for 11 days, during the period November 22<sup>nd</sup> to December 3<sup>rd</sup>. Answers were received from 73 ( $n = 73$ ) students or 61.3 percent, 48 ( $n = 48$ ) onsite students and 25 ( $n = 25$ ) distance students.

Because of how few male are in the Faculty of Teacher Education the results are not looked at by gender; of 73 answers only seven were from men. For the purposes of processing, the respondents were classified into three age groups, 20-34 years, 35-49 years and 50 years of age or older. Since there were too few respondents in the group aged 50 and over ( $n = 4$ ) the age groups 35-49 and 50 years and older were merged for the purposes of analysis.

In addition, a review was done of the students' answers to questions in the course evaluation surveys during these two semesters, where students graded the course's structure and were compared to the answers in the years 2009 and 2010.

A total of 56 respondents were 34 years of age or younger, or 76.7 percent, and 17 or 23.3 percent were aged 35-50 years or older.

**Table 2**

*Number and percentage of respondents by age and enrolment choice*

	Onsite	Distance
20-24 years old	n= 42 (57.5%)	n= 14 (19.2%)
35-50 years or older	n= 6 (8.2%)	n= 11 (15.1%)
Total	n= 48 (65.7%)	n= 25 (34.3%)

Onsite students were 48 or 65.7 percent of those who responded to the question regarding enrolment choice, whereas 25 or 34.3 percent were distance students.

**Table 3**

*Number and percentage of respondents by programme and age*

	Elementary school teacher	Kindergarten teacher	Pedagogy and education	Other
20-24 years old	n= 42 (57.5%)	n= 8 (11%)	n= 5 (6.8%)	n= 1 (1.4%)
35-50 years or older	n= 10 (13.7%)	n= 4 (5.5%)	n= 1 (1.4%)	n= 2 (2.7%)
Total	n= 52 (71.2%)	n= 12 (16.5%)	n= 6 (8.2%)	n= 3 (4.1%)

The distribution of respondents by programme shows that 52 or 71.2 percent of the respondents were in the elementary school teacher programme, 12 or 16.5 percent were in the kindergarten teacher programme, 6 or 8.2 percent were in the pedagogy and education programme, and 3 or 4.1 percent of the respondents came from other programmes of study.

The responses are examined with regard to the students' enrolment choice (whether they chose to register as onsite or as distance students). Then, the respondents' age was examined, but because the respondents were so few, it was considered impractical to examine the responses with regard to the programme in which students were enrolled.

## Survey

The survey had 27 questions that were presented to the students regarding various aspects related to the course; seven were open questions where the participants could express their views regarding questions that had been asked before. The first questions were about the age, gender and enrolment choice of the respondents.

This text discusses the answers to two multiple choice questions related to the structure and services to students as well as the answers to two open questions, which were related to the aforementioned multiple choice questions, and made it possible for students to express their views regarding those questions.

The questions are:

1. Do you believe that there is any difference between the **services** offered to students in the course *Spoken and written language*, who are registered for the course as distance students, on the one hand, and onsite students, on the other hand? [Figures 1 and 2.]

2. Do you believe that there is any difference between the **structure** of the course *Spoken and written language* for onsite students, on the one hand, and distance students, on the other hand? [Figures 3 and 4.]

In the instructions with the survey the words “service” and “structure” were vaguely introduced. By asking about service I was looking at whether the students thought one group got more or better service than the other. The word “service” means how easy it is to get in contact with the teacher, how active the teacher was in answering e-mails and similar things. The second question was about structure: Do you believe that there is any difference between the structure of the course *Spoken and written language* for onsite students, on the one hand, and distance students, on the other hand? By asking about structure I was looking at whether the students noticed or perceived any differences in the structure for either group, for example in the curriculum, on Moodle or elsewhere.

To measure the answers five options were given for both questions:

Much more for onsite students  
Same for both groups  
Much more for distance students

More for onsite students  
More for distance students

Frímannsdóttir (2015). *Education Reform Journal*, 2015, 1(1), 1-18.

Other questions in the survey were related to the workload, the listening to brief weekly recordings that were made available online, multiple choice questions related to attendance at lectures and listening to recordings of the lectures, the grade weight and validity of written assignments, peer evaluation, presentations and course evaluation. The answers to some of these questions will be discussed elsewhere. This survey was not pretested, but similar questions were submitted to another group of students the year before and the results were almost the same.

## **Procedure**

A questionnaire was presented to students in the course *Spoken and written language* in the undergraduate programme of the Teacher Education Faculty of the School of Education at the University of Iceland in the autumn semester of 2012. It was conducted at the end of the course in the autumn of 2012. Students were asked whether they experienced any differences in the course structure or service for onsite students, on the one hand, and for distance students, on the other. In addition, students were asked about their attitude to the service they received, with regard to the surveys conducted by Jóhannsdóttir and Jakobsdóttir (2012) and Björnsdóttir (2012) and whether the students had the feeling that the services offered to both groups were the same or not.

The survey was presented to the students through the educational system Moodle 2.2, which is an open-source learning platform that was used for the course material so it was familiar to the students. Surveys in the Moodle 2.2 system are anonymous and answers cannot be traced through the computer system. The results were imported and processed in SPSS 2.1.

## **Results**

The results of the survey for the two selected questions about whether the students think there were any differences in the course's structure between what services are offered to onsite students versus distance students show that they have the feeling that there were small differences.

Students were asked whether the structure was designed to suit more or much more for onsite students, on the one hand, or distance students, on the other hand. Because of the low response rate, the features “more” and “much more” were combined for calculation purposes.

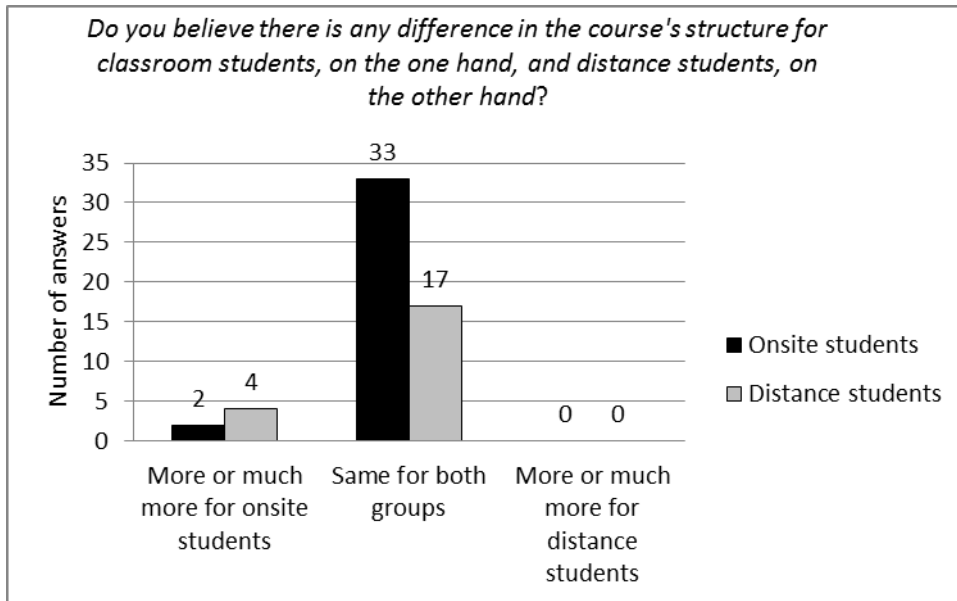


Figure 1. Enrolment choice. Do you believe there is any difference in the course's structure for onsite students, on the one hand, and distance students, on the other hand? (n = 73, P = 0.161)

A total of 33 onsite students of 48, or 68.75 percent, believed that the course's structure had been the same for both groups, as did the same percentage, 68 percent of distance students, or 17 out of 25. Almost a quarter of the respondents, or 17 of 73 respondents, chose not to answer. Interestingly, none of the respondents thought that the course was structured to suit distance students better. There is no significant difference in the responses of onsite students and distance students.

Although the focus is primarily on the views of onsite students and distance students, it is interesting to investigate whether there are any differences with regard to age.

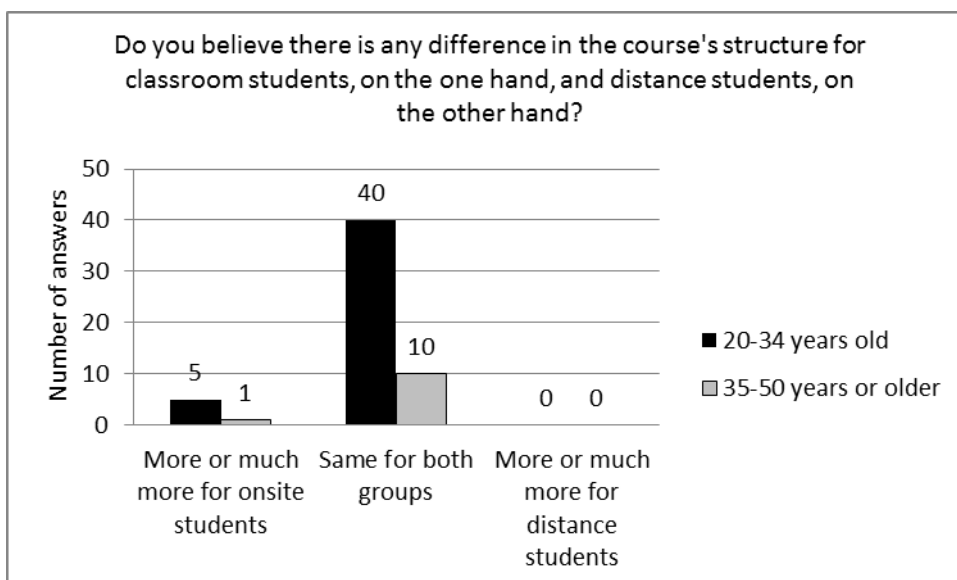


Figure 2. Age distribution. Do you believe there is any difference in the course's structure for onsite students, on the one hand, and distance students, on the other hand? (n = 73, P = 0.09)

The students' experiences of the course's structure vary little with regard to age. There are, however, slightly more students aged 20-34 years, or 71 percent, who experience no difference in the course's structure compared to the respondents in the group 35-50 years. Of them, 59 percent or 10 experienced no differences. Five students, or 9 percent, in the younger group thought the course was structured to suit onsite students more. Seventeen students chose not to answer. There is no significant difference in the responses of onsite students and distance students.

Students tend to experience differences in the services provided to them, according to their enrolment choice. Distance students believe that they receive different services than onsite students. Emphasis was placed on structuring the course in such a way as to integrate the services as much as possible.

Students were asked whether they believed there was any difference in the services provided to onsite students, on the one hand, and distance students, on the other hand. Because of the low response rate, the features “more” and “much more” were combined for the purpose of calculations.

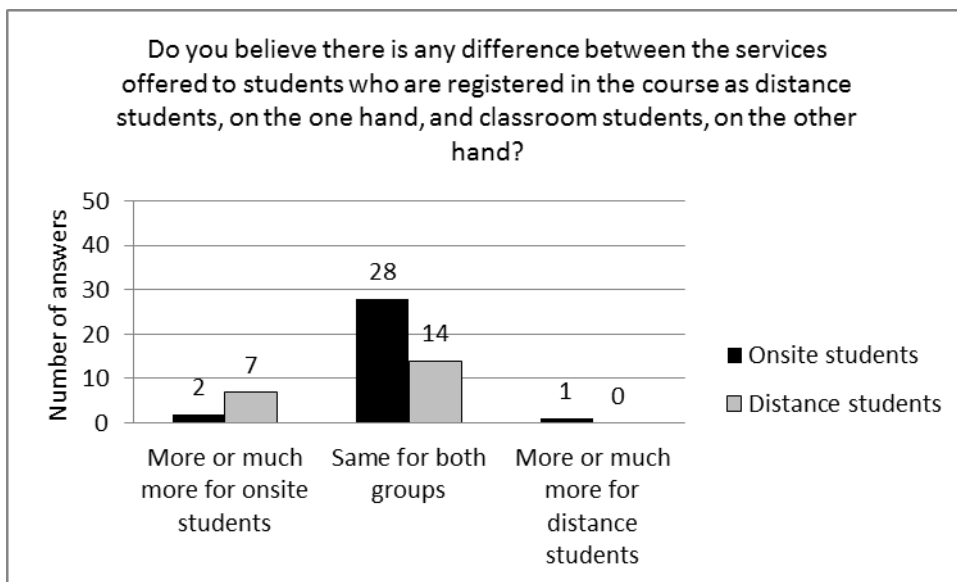


Figure 3. Enrolment choice. Do you believe there is any difference between the services offered to students who are registered in the course as distance students, on the one hand, and onsite students, on the other hand? ( $n = 73$ ,  $P = 0.029$ )

A total of 28, or 58 percent of onsite students, and 14, or 56 percent of distance students, thought the services provided to the two groups were the same. A total of 14.6 percent of distance students, or 7, believed that onsite students had received better or much better services and 2 onsite students thought distance students had received better services. A total of 21 students did not answer this question. This result shows a significant difference between the onsite students and distance students. More distance students believe that onsite students receive better services. Differences between the age groups were also examined.

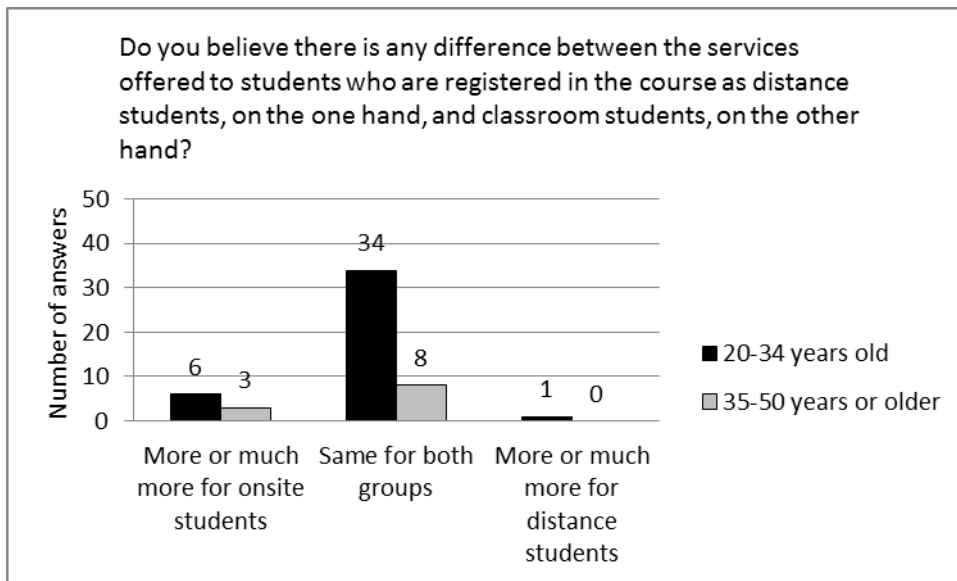


Figure 4. Age distribution. Do you believe there is any difference between the services offered to students who are registered in the course as distance students, on the one hand, and as onsite students, on the other hand? ( $n = 73$ ,  $P = 0.876$ )

When age distribution is taken into account, 34 students or 60.7 percent of the younger group, believed the services were the same, whereas 6, or 10 percent of this same group, thought onsite students received better or much better services. Eight, or 47 percent, of the students who were 35-50 years or older experienced no difference in the provided services. One student thought services were better or much better for distance students and 21 did not respond. The difference was not significant, however.

Few responses were received to the open-ended questions related to the course structure and services, and some of the answers were actually comments on something different from or other than what the question asked.

There was a complaint regarding the lecture recordings: “It is very disturbing that the lectures are constantly being recorded and consequently when someone says something it is always being repeated, and therefore I have not asked a single question this semester. I cannot handle it when everything one says is repeated because then I do not remember what I wanted to say and therefore I do not ask anything.”

There was the exact opposite comment from one participant: “The teacher should remember to repeat the students’ questions during lectures so that distance-learning students can also hear them.”

There was also a comment regarding a Facebook group that was not related to the course, so this must be due to a misunderstanding of some sort: “I find it intolerable to have distance students in the Facebook group because they have questions that do not concern our studies and have a disturbing effect. Last week someone asked where the lecture hall Bratti was located. And a lot of questions that have a completely confusing effect. Sometimes I get shocked because I have forgotten to do this or that, that I do not actually need to do but distance students need to do.”

Otherwise, some students made comments in this box regarding the arrangement for essay submission and distance students’ difficulties in using the library: “Although everyone has good intentions to provide the necessary services to distance students, there are still certain shortcomings, for example, it is difficult to obtain course materials from the library,

Frimannsdóttir (2015). *Education Reform Journal*, 2015, 1(1), 1-18.

because not all materials are borrowed and therefore it is not possible to take advantage of all that I want, if the school library is a long way away.” And: “The main problem for distance students may be obtaining diverse sources for research essays.”

Finally, two participants answered the following: “[I] have not acquainted myself with this so [I] cannot really answer this.” “I don’t have information about the programme and the services for distance students.”

### Course evaluation survey

The course evaluation survey that students are asked to answer in the teaching system [Ugla.hi.is](http://Ugla.hi.is) at the end of each semester includes questions about the course structure. It can be said that the question is related to the research question in this paper regarding the course structure, and this evaluation can be an indicator of how successfully the two study programmes – onsite and distance study – have been mixed, and the course organized, so that the students see no difference between onsite and distance student groups.

The course evaluation survey includes the following statement: “The course is well organized.” The possible answers are: “Strongly agree”, “agree”, “neutral”, “disagree”, and “strongly disagree”. A rating of 1 to 5 is given.

**Table 4**

*Average rating for the course; 5.0 is the highest*

Year	Average grades SWL <sup>8</sup>	Average grades Faculty of Teacher Education	Average grades School of Education
2009	3.91	4.00	4.03
2010	3.37	4.06	4.05
2011	4.24	4.1	4.13
2012	4.29	3.89	4.01

Table 4 shows that the ratings between the years 2009-2012 steadily rose. In 2009, the course got a score of 3.94 out of 5 for its structure, but fell in the autumn semester of 2010 to 3.37, when, for the first time, the onsite and distance courses were taught under one course code instead of two. The average score for the course for 2011 was 4.24 out of 5.0, and 4.29 for 2012. In 2011 and 2012, the course scored well above average both within the Teacher Education Faculty, with a score of 4.1 and 3.89 respectively, and within School of Education faculties combined, with a score of 4.13 and 4.01 respectively.

### Discussion

No significant difference can be observed in the students' answers to the question as to whether they experienced any differences in the course structure for onsite students, on the one hand, and for distance students, on the other hand. It became clear that 68 percent of both groups believed there was no difference. A similar percentage is obtained if the responses are examined with regard to age. It is therefore quite clear that students do not see any difference

---

<sup>8</sup> SWL = Spoken and written language.



between the two groups. This result can be considered very positive and supports the theory that it is possible to organize courses without using the concepts “onsite student” and “distance student”.

However, there is a significant difference in the responses of onsite students and distance students when they were asked whether they believed the services provided to students of the two groups were the same. As expected, distance students believe that they received worse services than onsite students. This is entirely in line with the results from Jóhannsdóttir and Jakobsdóttir (2012) and Björnsdóttir (2012). This result implies that the course could be improved, for example, by making students more aware of the services available to them from the beginning and for whom the services are intended, for example, with a short recording, where it is specifically explained that all course material is the same for both groups and available at a joint course web page. It should be made explicitly clear that there is only one common group of students.

The answers to the open questions often contain complaints, such as: “The lectures are constantly being recorded and consequently anything the students said had to be repeated, and therefore I have not asked a single question this semester,” which is a problem associated with recording lectures in an auditorium and has nothing to do with the distinction between onsite and distance students since both groups use the recordings. This can be best solved by all students sitting at the same table and the lectures being recorded without an audience and then sent to all students in the course, both onsite and distance students, as was done in the autumn semester of 2013. The flipped learning approach would be very appropriate in this case.

The results of the course evaluation survey in 2012 support this conclusion because students gave the course structure the grade 4.53 out of 5, and the grade for the course as a whole was 8.28 out of 10. It is certainly debatable as to what exactly is the perceived meaning of the concept “structure”, but it should be clear that whatever the definition, students have not experienced any lack of organization or confusion due to the disuse of the concepts onsite study, onsite student, distance study and distance student. It is clear that the proposed structure functioned well.

### **Conclusion**

The limitation of this research is how narrow it is. It is based on one survey conducted following one specific course. All kinds of factors might affect the results, including the curriculum, the teacher, the recordings given or other matters. These results, however, indicate that it is possible to combine onsite and distance courses and only use the concepts “study” and “students”. The course *Spoken and written language* is a good example of putting this into practice – from the year 2011, the course has been organized as a combined course, removing the distinction between onsite and distance teaching. The concepts of onsite study, onsite student, distance study, distance student never mentioned, only “*study*” and “*students*”.

This study therefore supports the opinion that it is possible to reconsider the structure of courses that include both onsite and distance students. It answers positively the question asked at the beginning: are the concepts of onsite study and distance study outdated? The results show that it is possible to plan a course using a single course number for both onsite and distance students without them noticing discrimination between the two groups and “only” use the concepts study and students.

Planning and offering both onsite and distance courses, separated, with the same material is therefore something that should belong to the past. Now it is time to rethink the organization of study by wiping out those distinctions and use only the concepts “*study*” and “*students*” and take the final step into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Frimannsdóttir (2015). *Education Reform Journal*, 2015, 1(1), 1-18.

## References

- Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2011). *Going the distance: Online education in the United States 2011*. Needham, MA: Babson Survey Research Group & Quahog Research Group, LLC. Retrieved from [http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/going\\_distance\\_2011](http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/going_distance_2011)
- Alvarez, B. (2011). Flipping the classroom: Homework in class, Lessons at home. Retrieved from <http://www.learningfirst.org/flipping-classroom-homework-class-lessons-home>
- Bergmann, J., & Sams, A. (2012). *Flip your Classroom. Reach Every Student in Every Class Every Day*. Eugene, Or.: International Society for Technology in Education
- Björnsdóttir, E. (2012). „Ég er svo óvanur svona fjarnemastússi.“ Aukinn sveigjanleiki við Háskólan á Akureyri [“I’m really not used to this distance education stuff”. More flexibility in learning at the University of Akureyri.] *Netla – Veftímarit um uppeldi og menntun*. Retrieved from <http://netla.hi.is/?s=Eygl%C3%B3+Bj%C3%B6rnsd%C3%B3ttir>
- Corry, M., & Stella, J. (2012). Developing a Framework for Research in online K-12 Distance Education. *The Quarterly Review of distance Education*, 13(3), 133–151
- Davies, R. S., Dean, D. L., & Ball, N. (2013). Flipping the classroom and instructional technology integration in a college-level information systems spreadsheet course. *Education Tech Research Dev* 61, 563-580. doi:10.1007/s11423-013-9305-6
- Garrison, D. R., & Kanuka, H. (2004). Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education. *Internet and Higher Education* 7, 95–105
- Hardesty, L. (2013). Higher-ed leaders meet to discuss future of online education. *MIT news*. Retrieved from <http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/2013/edx-summit-0306.html>
- Harvard Extension School. (2014–2015). Online and On-Campus Courses. *Harvard Extension School*. Retrieved from <http://www.extension.harvard.edu/academics/online-campus-courses>
- Jóhannsdóttir, Þ., & Jakobsdóttir, S. (2012). *Samkenntsla stað- og fjarnema í grunnnámi í kennaradeild við Menntavísindasvið Háskóla Íslands 2010–2011*. [Multigrade onsite and distance-learning undergraduate students at the School of Education at University of Iceland 2010–2011]. Reykjavík, Iceland: Rannsóknarstofa í upplýsingatækni og miðlun
- KhanAcademy. Retrieved from <http://www.khanacademy.org/>
- Moskal, P., Dziuban, C., & Hartman, J. (2013). Blended learning: A dangerous idea? *Internet and Higher Education*, 18, 15–23
- Roehl, A., Reddy, S. L., & Shannon, G. J. (2013). The Flipped Classroom: An Opportunity to Engage Millennial Students through Active Learning. *Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences*, 105(2), 44–49
- Staker, H. (2011). *The Rise of K–12 Blended Learning: Profiles of emerging models*. Retrieved from <http://www.innosightinstitute.org/innosight/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/The-Rise-of-K-12-Blended-Learning.pdf>
- Stanford University. (e.d.). *Stanford online*. Retrieved from <http://online.stanford.edu/>
- Statistics Iceland. (2012). Registered students at the upper secondary and tertiary level in autumn 2011. *Statistical series: Education*, 95(4), 1–28. Retrieved from <http://www.statice.is/Statistics/Education>
- Sugar, W., Martindale, T., & Crawley, F. E. (2007). One Professor’s Face-to-Face Teaching Strategies while Becoming an Online Instructor. *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 8(4), 365–385
- University of Florida. (2014). *UF, Distance Learning, University of Florida*. Retrieved from <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/>
- University of Iceland. (2014). Distance learning. *Course catalogue 2015–2016*. Retrieved from <https://ugla.hi.is/kennsluskra/khi.php?tab=skoli&chapter=content&id=32461>