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Interactive Radio Instruction

Interactive radio has been used to enhance formal and informal education programs for approximately 30 years. As this document indicates, its prime focus has been on pupil activity. However, it offers significant opportunities for the professional development of teachers. As connectivity and access to appropriate equipment improves, similar programs may be achieved with newer technologies. At present it offers interesting possibilities for incorporation into open and distance-learning CPD programs.

What Makes Interactive Radio Instruction Different from Other Distant Learning Methods?

IRI is the use of lessons in which an audio component—delivered by an “audio teacher” through the radio or audiocassette—and classroom activities, carried out by the learners, are carefully integrated. Within this structure, the audio teacher directs learner activities (exercises, answers to questions, songs, and practical tasks), which take place during carefully timed pauses in the audio script. The classroom teacher acts as a facilitator. IRI is distinct from most other forms of distance education because its primary goal is to improve the quality of education. Unlike many distant-learning efforts that prioritize accessibility, IRI was initiated as a tool for the classroom to counteract low levels of teacher training, poor achievement among learners, and limited resources. While IRI has demonstrated that it can be used to expand access and increase equity in both formal and informal educational settings, it retains an emphasis on quality improvement. IRI’s development strategy and methodology require *active learning*, attention to pedagogy, and formative evaluation to be included in the design.

The IRI methodology is also different in that it requires learners to react to questions and exercises through verbal response to radio characters, group work, and physical and intellectual activities *while the program is on the air*. For both the teacher and the student, the lesson becomes an immediate hands-on and experiential guide. Short pauses are provided throughout the lessons after questions and during exercises to ensure that students have the time to adequately think and respond. Interaction is also encouraged within the learning environment between the teacher and learners as they work together to conduct short experiments, do activities,

and solve problems using local resources, imaginative situations, and stories.

The pedagogy of IRI is deliberate: IRI series guide participants through a progression of activities related to measurable learning objectives. Educational content is organized and distributed across lessons so that learning is built upon previous knowledge, and new learners can more easily construct an understanding of the subject being taught. Activities and problems are first demonstrated by radio characters so that the teacher and learners understand the process and the skills and support that may be required. All of these elements are knit together through storylines, music, characterization, and other attributes available through the audio medium.

IRI programs are tailored specifically to the audience and the context in which they will be used. One of the most important aspects of the design, therefore, is the reliance on audience research, participation, and evaluation to ensure that lessons are engaging and relevant and that learners achieve their educational objectives. In the preparation of an IRI series, the format, activities, and pauses in a program change with each new cycle of observation and feedback.

What Is Known about Effectiveness?

The appeal of the IRI approach can partially be attributed to the learning gains for students using IRI programs as compared to students in control groups. While these data are impressive at face value, they are even more impressive when effect sizes (the effectiveness quotient in cost-effectiveness studies) are analyzed.



Source: Bosch, A. Interactive Radio Instruction: Twenty-three Years of Improving Educational Quality. Washington, D.C.: the World Bank.

See Also: Improving Educational Quality Through Interactive Radio Instruction: A Toolkit for Policymakers and Planners. Washington, D.C.: the World Bank March 2005.