

Distance Education: An Emerging System of Learning

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ABSTRACT: The present article is going to aware the students or peoples who are not directly the part of any educational institution. The distance education is a new system which has the potential to enhance and support the traditional learning system and already it is becoming an integral part of the learning tools used by every educational organization.

Keywords: distance education, learning

Introduction:

Distance education or distance learning is a field of education that focuses on teaching methods and technology with the aim of delivering teaching, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional educational setting such as a classroom. It has been described as "a process to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both." Distance education courses that require a physical on-site presence for any reason (including taking examinations) have been referred to as hybrid or blended courses of study. (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia 2013)

History and development

Distance education dates to at least as early as 1728, when "an advertisement in the Boston Gazette 'Caleb Phillips, Teacher of the new method of Short Hand" was seeking students for lessons to be sent weekly.

Modern distance education initially relied on the development of postal services in the 19th century and has been practised at least since Isaac Pitman taught shorthand in Great Britain via correspondence in the 1840s. The University of London claims to be the first university to offer distance learning degrees, establishing its External Programme in 1858. This program is now known as the University of London International Programmes and includes Postgraduate, Undergraduate and Diploma degrees created by colleges such as the London School of Economics, Royal Holloway and Goldsmiths.

Germany's Fern University in Hagen followed in 1974 and there are now many similar institutions around the world, often with the name Open University (in English or in the local language). All "open universities" use distance education technologies as delivery methodologies and some have grown to become 'mega-

universities', a term coined to denote institutions with more than 100,000 students.

The development of computers and the internet have made distance learning distribution easier and faster and have given rise to the 'virtual university, the entire educational offerings of which are conducted online. In 1996 Jones International University was launched and claims to be the first fully online university accredited by a regional accrediting association in the US.

Objectives of Distance Education in India

A. Objectives of National Open School

1. To provide opportunities for continuing and developmental education to interested learners, through courses and programmes of general education, life enrichment modules and vocational courses, at the school stage, and using a diversity of teaching- learning strategies, including appropriate communication technologies.
2. To provide consultancy services and to engage in model building, in close collaboration with States and a variety of other agencies and institutions.
3. To serve as an agency for effective dissemination of information related to Distance Education and Open Learning.
4. To identify and promote standards of learning in Distance Education Systems and Open Schools which may be set up in different parts of the country, through Research and Evaluation and to maintain standards of equivalence with the formal system, while keeping its own distinct character.
5. To exercise normative and coordinating functions while promoting standards in Distance and Open Learning Systems in the

country, and thus to make its own contribution to the evolution of a Learning Society.

B. Objectives of Open Universities

1. To provide an alternative cost-effective non-formal channel for tertiary education.
2. To supplement the conventional university system and to reduce the pressure on it.
3. To provide "second chance" education to those who have had to discontinue their formal education or could not join regular colleges or universities owing to social, economic and other constraints.
4. To democratize higher education by providing access to large segments of the population, in particular the disadvantaged groups such as those living in remote and rural areas, including working people, women and other adults who wish to acquire and upgrade their knowledge and/or skills.
5. To strengthen and diversify the degree, certificate and diploma courses related to employment and necessary for building the economy of the country on the basis of its natural and human resources.
6. To provide continuing and life-long education to enrich the lives of the people.
7. To provide an innovative system of university level education, which is flexible and open in terms of methods and pace of learning, combination of courses, eligibility for enrolment, age of entry, conduct of examination and operation of the programmes with a view to promoting learning and encouraging excellence in new fields of knowledge. (Moore and Anderson 2003).

Technologies used in Distance Education

The types of available technologies used in distance education are divided into two groups: synchronous learning and asynchronous learning.

Synchronous learning technology is a mode of delivery where all participants are "present" at the same time. It resembles traditional classroom teaching methods despite the participants being located remotely. It requires a timetable to be organized. Web conferencing, videoconferencing, Educational television, Instructional television are examples of synchronous technology, as are direct-broadcast satellite (DBS), internet radio, live streaming, telephone, and web-based VoIP.

The asynchronous learning mode of delivery is where participants access course

materials on their own schedule and so is more flexible. Students are not required to be together at the same time. Mail correspondence, which is the oldest form of distance education, is an asynchronous delivery technology and others include message board forums, e-mail, video and audio recordings, print materials, voicemail and fax.

The two methods can be combined in the delivery of one course. For example, some courses offered by The Open University use periodic sessions of residential or day teaching to supplement the remote teaching.

Other technology methods used in the delivery of distance education include online three-dimensional (3D) virtual worlds. A popular 3D virtual world, Active Worlds, is used for synchronous and asynchronous learning. Active Worlds provides opportunities for students to work collaboratively. (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia 2013)

Advantages of distance learning

1. Distance learning programs allow for increased access to learning and encourage life-long learning.
2. Distance learning does not require commuting. This saves you money and time that you'd otherwise spend on travel back and forth to school. You can schedule learning around other aspects of your personal and professional life.
3. You can complete most of the classes at your convenience. Most of the classes are asynchronous, which means you don't have to attend a lecture at a particular time and place. You can review the assignments and do your homework during off-hours or from home.
4. One of the biggest distance learning benefits is the issue of flexibility and time. Because students are not confined to a classroom for a certain number of hours on a given day, they can approach their coursework with flexibility and complete lessons when it suits their schedule.
5. Live anywhere, study from anywhere while pursuing the education of your choice. You don't have to live in the same city or the same country to attend the learning institution of your choice. You can study wherever you have access to a computer and Internet connection.
6. Gain extra knowledge. You can transfer the computer and Internet skills that you'll gain in the process of your distance learning experience to other facets of your life.
7. Self-paced learning. For slow and quick learners. This reduces stress and increases satisfaction.

8. Accessibility. Online classes address physical accessibility issues that some people with limited mobility encounter when taking traditional classes. You don't have to worry about gaining access to a classroom or sitting on uncomfortable desks. Instead, you can use your comfortable furniture in your home while enjoying free movement and a chance to further your education.
9. Distance learning allows students to choose from a wider pool of academic institutions for their ongoing learning including on-shore colleges
10. Distance learning schools enjoy better marketability, which means that more students can ultimately attend them.
11. Distance learning also allows for increased compensation and promotion potential
another benefit of distance learning to students is the ability to do interactive teamwork between groups (very much required in the virtual world now). Students have the opportunity to correspond with others from different backgrounds and to hear from a variety of speakers from around the world. Students have access to experts and tremendous volume of online databases, which are also distance learning benefits. Instead of searching for hours through card catalogs and library stacks, students can utilize online search engines to find countless experts' articles and research databases within seconds. (Haryono, A. & Librero, F. 2002).
12. Instructor communication is an additional distance learning benefit. With the evolution of e-mail and Internet chat rooms, instructor-student contact can be maintained and strengthened. This fosters a better educational experience for the distance learning student.
13. Have you ever had to make a special trip to campus to drop off homework assignment at two o'clock in the morning? The use of email can allow you to send your homework assignment to your professor at any time of day-safely and conveniently. What a huge benefit for distance learning students!
14. Have to take a test? Your distance learning professor can securely allow you to take an exam without the need for attending traditional classroom miles away. The use of local proctors to monitor the examination process can make the benefit of distance learning even more appealing. Many distance learning institutions require the use of proctors to maintain their accreditation.
15. Financial benefits of distance learning exist as well. Without the need to leave your home to spend a semester or a year in a distant city, you can substantially save on transportation, housing, and food costs. It goes without saying that you can keep your full or part-time job, too, when you matriculate to a distance learning institution.
16. There are also social benefits to distance learning. Without having to leave your community, you can maintain your personal, cultural, and social lifestyle. Your circle of comfort is maintained, reducing additional stress, as you pursue your degree.
 - Accessibility for those living away from the training center
 - No waste of time or other resources in transport, commuting to a central location for each class
17. Flexibility to study in any convenient location with an Internet connection
18. Self-paced learning:
 - a. Quickly browse materials you have already mastered, and concentrate time and effort in areas containing new information and / or skills
 - b. Study materials at a personal speed and intensity, without having to wait for slower pace of the average classroom
 - c. Flexibility to join conversations in the bulletin board discussion areas at any hour, and to review your classmates' comments since the previous visit
19. Just-in-time learning; more opportunities to study the most current material available
20. Flexibility for those with irregular work schedules.(www.distancelearningnet.com)

Conclusion:

Today, there are many private and public, non-profit and for-profit institutions worldwide offering distance education courses from the most basic instruction through to the highest levels of degree and doctoral programs. Levels of accreditation vary: some of the institutions receive little outside oversight, and some may be fraudulent diploma mills, although in many jurisdictions, an institution may not use terms such as "university" without accreditation and authorisation.

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