

# ISSUES IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING EDUCATION

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## **Abstract**

*Distance education or distance learning has come to stay as an alternative method of teaching and learning. It could be applied to formal, non-formal and informal types of education. Its application to higher education is becoming tremendous, especially in the developed world where it started around 1780s. This work discussed distance learning methods to include voice, video, data or computer based systems, print and outreach. Other very important issues discussed included synchronous and asynchronous instruction in education. The basic success principles for the addressed as well as the types of distance education. Testing and evaluation in distance education was given attention as well as challenges, conclusion and recommendations.*

The concept of open distance education is prevalent now in developing countries for the last decades and it is very much in vogue in developed countries (Passerint and Granger, 2004:2). Distance education has grown faster than any other form of education over the past twenty-five years. It is currently the subject of much controversy between those who regard it as an inferior kind of education and those who see it as a great opportunity for developing countries.

Open and distance learning in the developing world sets the expansion of distance education in the context of general educational changes and reviews its use for basic and non-formal education schooling, teacher training and higher education. Distance education began in 1963. In that year Michael Young and Brian Jackson established the National Extension College as a pilot for an open university.

Distance education also called distance learning is any type of instruction in which the student and instructor are separated by physical distance (Wahlstrom, Williams and Shea, 2003:2). Class room teachers rely on the number of visual and unobtrusive cues from their students to enhance their delivery of instructional content. A quick glance, for example, reveals who is attentively taking notes, pondering a difficult concept or preparing to make a comment. The student who is frustrated, confused, tired, or bored is equally evident. The attentive teacher consciously and subconsciously receives and analyzes these visual cues and adjusts the course delivery to meet the needs of the class during a particular lesson.

In contrast, the distance teacher has few, if any, visual cues. Those cues that do exist are filtered through technological devices such as video monitors. It is difficult to

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carry on a stimulating teacher-class discussion when spontaneity is altered by technical requirements and distance.

Without the use of a real-time visual medium such as television, the teacher receives no visual information from the distant sites. The teacher might never really know for example, if student are asleep, talking among themselves or even in the room. Separation by distance also affects the teacher and students of a common community link.

### **Distance Learning Methods**

Distance learning is generally defined as any situation where the instructor and learner are separated by either time or distance. At its basic level, distance education takes place when a teacher and students are separated by physical distance, and technology (i.e, voice, video, data and print), often in concert with face-to face communication is used to bridge the instructional gap ([www.uidalvo.edu/dist/.htryl](http://www.uidalvo.edu/dist/.htryl)).

A wide range of technological options are used. Some separate the instructor and learner over space and some over time. There are many ways to provide distance learning and endless ways to combine methods. The various methods can be grouped into five categories. Each has its strength and limitations.

#### **Voice**

Instructional tools include the telephone conference calls (also known as audio conferencing) and audiotapes.

#### **Video**

Instructional video tools include slides, film, videotape and interactive video. One interactive, or compressed, video system used by regional service centres is known as the Texas Educational Telecommunication Network, or TETN.

In this type of system, users go to designated places. Using telephone lines, participants are able to see and talk to each other in 'real time'.

#### **Data, Computer-Based Systems**

These systems rely on computers to send and receive data. The learner may work independently on web-based activities or courses. Sometimes the learner participates in chat rooms or submits information to discussion boards. Information may be received or submitted via email or fax machine. It may be necessary to watch video clips via your computer.

#### **Print**

The first distance learning methods used print in correspondence courses. Print formats include, textbooks, study guides, work books, course syllable, and case studies.

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## **Outreach**

Outreach involves university faculty and students traveling to a specific site, such as regional services centre. At that site the faculty may employ traditional methods or any combination of the above.

## **Synchronous and Asynchronous Instruction in Distance Learning System**

When the learner and instructor are interacting at the same time, it is called synchronous instruction. When the learner and instructor are interacting at different times, it is known as asynchronous instruction.

**Below Are Examples of Synchronous and Asynchronous Types of Distance Learning.**

<b>Samples of Synchronous Instruction</b>	<b>Samples of Asynchronous Instruction</b>
Computer chat rooms	Computer discussion boards
Interactive video instruction(ITV)	Web-based instruction
Outreach instruction	Correspondence course
Face-to-face classroom instruction	Computer-assisted instruction

## **Basic Success Principles for a Distance Learner**

Learning through distance methods can be a change and sometimes it is a difficult adjustment. In addition to learning a large block of information, you must also adjust to a new learning modality. Before, you begin, it is necessary to review the prerequisites. Past experience has indicated that the equipment and skills listed below are critical for the future success of a distance learner.

The World of computers is ever changing; computers get more powerful almost weekly. It is impossible to say precisely what type of a computer system you will need; however, it should meet the minimum requirements listed below. Additionally, distance learning methods will call on a different set of skills.

## **Equipment**

### **Processor**

- Required 200 MHZ or Macintosh system B. I or better
- **Preferred** Pentium or AMD equipment
- Memory
- **Required** 64 megabits of RAM
- **Preferred** 256 Megs. This is a situation where more is better.
- Printer
- **Required** Quality ink jet or laser printer with adequate ink or toner
- Supply
- **Preferred** Since you may be called upon to print graphics, you may prefer a colour printer.

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### Modem

**Required** 28, 800k bailed modem.

This is rare minimum. You will have a hard time downloading photos and programmes. However, it is possible

- **Preferred** 56, 600k baud or faster modem, such as a cable modem, DSL or other high-speed connection, especially for downloading graphics.

### Internet Service Provider (ISP)

- **Required** Any reputable and reliable service.
- **Note** Some people have had problems with AOL. Other people have had problems with busy signals from small companies. However, any ISP will work for the purposes of your courses and activities.

### Browser and Related Programmes

- Either Netscape or Internet Explorer will work.
- **Required:** Adobe Acrobat Reader. This is a free downloadable programme. If you do not have it you can find it and download it at: [www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readermain.html](http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readermain.html).
- Depending on whether you take internet or ITV courses, you may be required to download Perk Duck and Quick time. Your instructors will advice you.
- **Note** You may also need to download a free Video and/or sound programme from the web. If so, your instructors will advice you.

### Email Service

- **Required** Any reliable service. Note: some service place restrictions on attachments or size of emails.

### Skills

#### Internet Skills

- **Required** Ability to find and navigate through any web site
- **Required:** Ability to copy and paste information from a website to another document.
- **Required:** Ability to download information from the web.
- **Required:** Ability to print information from the web
- **Note:** It is critical that all students be competent internet users.

Conducting research and completing courses activities via the web will be a significant part of this programme. If you do not have these skills you must take a class or workshop immediately.

### Email

- **Required** Ability to send and receive mail
- **Required** Ability to send and open attachments.

### **TETN Meetings**

- **Required** Willingness to communicate via this system to speak out to get your needs met. At any given time, the instructor can only see one site, the last person who spoke, she or he will not be able to see your dequestioning eyebrow.
- **Required** Willingness to listen to the instructor and not participate in outside bar discussion.

This distracts the others in the room and obscures the information being delivered while you are talking. While side bars discussions can annoying but not intrusive in traditional classes in which they can be destructive in this format.

### **Types of Distance Education Courses**

The following are the types of distance education courses.

- Correspondence conducted through regular mail.
- Internet conducted either synchronously or asynchronously.
- Telephone/broadcast, in which content is delivered via radio or television.
- CD-ROM in which the student interacts with computer content stored on a CD-ROM.
- Docket PC/Mobile learning where the student accesses course content stored on a mobile device or through a wireless server.

### **Testing and Evaluation**

Distance education has had trouble since inception with the testing of material (Holmberg, 2005:13). The delivery is fairly straight forward which makes sure it's available to the student and he or she can read it at their leisure. The problem arises when the student is required to complete assignments and testing, whether quizzes, tests, or examinations. Online courses have had difficulty controlling cheating because of the lack of teacher control. In a class room situation as teacher can monitor students and visually uphold a level of integrity consistent with an institution's reputation, with distance education, the student can be removed from supervision completely. Some schools address integrity issues concerning testing by requiring students to take examinations in proctored setting (Moore, 2005:15).

Assignments have adapted by becoming larger, longer and thorough so as to test for knowledge by forcing the students to research the subject and prove they have done the work. Quizzes are a popular form of testing knowledge and many courses go by the honour system regarding cheating. Even if the students are checking questions in the textbook or online, there may be an enforce time limit or the quiz may be worth so little in the overall mark that it becomes inconsequential. Exams and bigger tests may be harder to regulate. In smaller tests a professor may employ another computer programme to keep all other programmes from running on the computer reducing the possibility of help from the internet.

## **Challenges**

Many teachers feel the opportunities offered by distance education outweigh the obstacles. Many challenges posit distance education.

Some of the challenges are outlined below:

- The challenges to reach a wider student audience
- The challenge to meet the needs of students who are unable to attend on-campus classes.
- The challenge to involve outside speakers who would otherwise be unavailable.
- The challenge to link the students from different social, culture economic and experiential backgrounds.

## **Conclusion**

Distance education or distance learning is now more than before an alternative mode of teaching and learning. Distance learning could be adapted to all forms of educational development-formal, non-formal and informal. Major problems facing distance learning systems is lack of information and communications technologies (ICTS). Many homes can not afford these technologies and many people lack computer skills which is the key skill for distance learning.

## **Recommendation**

The following recommendations have been made for this paper. They are:

- (1) Hardware should be made available and accessible.
- (2) Computer literacy should be introduced in schools
- (3) Non-formal education programmes should be made national programmes to enhance and promote learning environment.
- (4) Distance education should be introduced in the school curriculum.

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