Models of Distance Education

Module Details

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1. Learning objectives:

At the end of this module you will be able to

- Explain the Aspects of Distance Education
- Explain the Five Models of Distance Education
- Compare the Models of Distance Education

2. Introduction

Distance education opened the doors of capacity development of large population and educated human-power round the world. It has something to offer both for the masses as well as for the classes. Distance education has been playing a crucial role both for the people as well as for the industries. The overall population became more productive and thus more useful for the industry. Hence it is gaining more and more popularity from various sectors.

3. Content:

There have been certain attributes of distance education that made it unique as compared to the conventional system of education. These attributes also made the whole system more learner-centric. We shall discuss each of these aspects in detail now.

3.1 Aspects of Distance Education (Keegan: 1986)

As discussed in earlier module the system of distance education came into existence in order to address the challenges of number and time. The new system added new dimensions to education in the form of various aspects. Keegan (1986) has listed them as follows:

- The separation of teacher and the learner
- The role of educational organization
- The place of the technical media
- Two-way communication
- The separation of the learner from one’s peer group
- Industrialization

We shall now discuss them one by one.

- **The separation of teacher and the learner**: The conventional system expected the teacher and the learner to be in front of each other in order to teaching-learning to take
place. In fact it could not accommodate the teacher and the learner to be separated from each other. But the system of distance education came into existence for those, who cannot go to institution and/or university for further and continuing education. The very premise of distance education is that the teacher and the learner/s is/ are separated from each other geographically.

- **The role of educational organization:** Though the system of distance education gives the freedom of pace, space and content to the learner, you cannot say that this is the informal or casual system. Distance education is an institutionalised kind of system and therefore different from private study.

- **The place of the technical media:** The system of distance education has to deal with large number of learners spreaded over large geographical areas, that too may be at varying time dimensions. Also the study material has to be provided to the learners to a greater extent. Hence, it cannot but has to collaborate with the information technology and media. In fact the wedlock of distance education and the media is so strong that one cannot think of any distance education program without media. Thus media has a kind of central position in actual offering of a program through distance mode. Various types of technically advanced media like print, telephone, audio-video, broadcasting, computer/internet and different types of conferencing can be used.

- **Two-way communication:** The physical separation of the teacher and the learner is an essential attribute of the system of distance education. According to Keegan (1986) distance education is something that needs to be supported by strong interpersonal communication. Distance education is the separation of teaching acts in time and place from learning acts (Keegan, 1986). Hence, it is very crucial that the university/institute not only communicates with the learners, but also ensures that the system gives enough opportunity for the learners to communicate back to the university/institute. They are therefore in dialogue with the institution always.

- **The separation of the learner from one’s peer group:** In distance education the learners are not only separated from their teachers, but also from their co-learners, from their peers. Distance education is the most highly individualized form of education, even though study groups may be formed, this is not compulsory. A learner is free to work on his own as per his/her pace and space.

- **Industrialization:** Peters (1993) termed distance education as industrial form of education. In order to illustrate the industrial characteristics of distance education, he applied concepts from business management literature and developed the categories like Rationalization, the Division of Labor, Mechanization, Assembly Line, Mass Production, Preparatory Work, Planning, Organization, Scientific Control Methods, Formalization, Standardization, Change Function, Objectification, Concentration and Centralization. These aspects discussed above have bearing on the various models of distance education that will be discussed ahead.

### 3.2 Aspects of Comparison
The system of distance education has come a long way over the period of years. We are on the verge of understanding the details of the same. In order to make this understanding better, let us first take a closer look of the aspects that will form the basis for the comparison. The following are these aspects:

- **Flexibility:** This refers to the flexibility of time, pace and space for the learner. This also indirectly refers to the flexibility of media that contribute in giving the variety of freedom to the learners.

- **Refinement of Materials:** This aspect refers to the refinement of the study material in terms of instructional designing, interactivity, user-friendliness, forms of the material, ability of the material to address the variety in learner characteristics.

- **Advanced Interactive Delivery:** Especially as the distance education progressed and the discipline of educational and instructional technology went on progressing and getting mature, the concept of interactivity got more core and central role – may it be in the context of study material or may it be program delivery.

- **Institutional Variable Costs Approaching Zero:** In any education system some part is a fixed cost while some part is a variable cost. The fixed cost remains the same irrespective of the number of learners (eg, infrastructure). The variable cost changes depending on the number of learners (eg, cost needed to print the study material). As there are more and more technology-based practices being in use in distance education (eg, making the study material available online), the variable cost goes on reducing and finally reaching almost zero. This is once again a newer concept that has come into use after more and more use of technology.

In the next section we shall compare the various models of distance education and these four aspects will be used as base for this comparison.

### 3.3 Models of Distance Education

Scenarios: There are three different persons learning through the system of distance education. Let us see what are the similarities and differences in their experiences, the pre-requisites as learners.

1. Sangeeta has enrolled for BA program. She receives the study material at home. She reads the material and tries to understand the same. She has to go to a given center only for exam.

2. Ramola has enrolled for B Com program. She receives study material at home. She also receives the student guide having details of the course work, the assignment submission schedule, etc. There is a study center allotted to her. She goes to study center for contact sessions as per the timetable declared in advance. She submits the assignments there. The counselor gives her feedback on her work. If she has doubts, the counselors at the study center help her. Her exam is arranged at the study center or sometimes are another nearby institute.
3. Janhavi has enrolled for MA (educational management) program. Her study material is provided to her online through a learning management system. She has access to the material with the help of her login and password. In the learning management system itself she is told about which assignments to work on. There are intermittently interaction sessions organized in real time, wherein Jahnavi with the other learners log in from their own ends. So also the teacher logs in. The doubts are solved. At times they also meet F2F. There is also a facility to submit the assignments there itself. The counselor (online tutor) gives her feedback there itself. The exam is conducted through online mode.

You can note the similarities between the study modes in these three examples. Can you also note the differences, rather gradation, in these examples?

One can see the gradation of the distance education being used in these examples. Taylor (2001) has terms them as models of distance education. They are also termed as the generations of distance education. Thus there are total five generations of distance education. They are as follows:

- The Correspondence Model
- The Multi-media Model
- The Tele-learning Model
- The Flexible Learning Model
- The Intelligent Flexible Learning Model

**Gen 1: The Correspondence Model:** This was the very basic and first generation of distance education. The medium used was only print. There was some flexibility of time, pace and space available to learners. The study material was very less refined. The advanced interactive delivery was almost non-existent. Comparatively higher Institutional Variable Cost was involved.

**Gen 2: The Multi-media Model:** In this generation of distance education there was flexibility of media available for the learners (eg, print, audio, video, Computer-based learning (e.g. CML/CAL/IMM), Interactive video). There was some flexibility of time, pace and space available to learners. The learning material was little more refined as compared to the first generation. The advanced interactive delivery was still almost non-existent. Comparatively higher Institutional Variable Cost was involved for this generation as well.

**Gen 3: The Tele-learning Model:** In this generation of distance education there was flexibility of media available for the learners (eg, Audio-teleconferencing, Videoconferencing, Audio graphic Communication, Broadcast TV/Radio and Audio teleconferencing). There was no flexibility of time, pace and space available to learners. The learning material was as refined as in the second generation. The advanced
interactive delivery was still almost non-existent. Comparatively higher Institutional Variable Cost was involved for this generation as well.

**Gen 4: The Flexible Learning Model:** In this generation of distance education there is flexibility of media available for the learners (eg, Interactive multimedia (IMM) online, Internet- based access to WWW resources, Computer mediated communication). There is flexibility of time, pace and space available to learners. The learning material is more refined as compared to the third generation. The advanced interactive delivery is started being into existence. Comparatively lower Institutional Variable Cost is involved for this generation.

**Gen 5: The Intelligent Flexible Learning Model:** In this generation of distance education there is flexibility of media available for the learners (Interactive multimedia (IMM) online, Internet based access to WWW resources, Computer mediated communication, using automated response systems, Campus portal access to institutional processes and resources). Thus you can note the intelligent system that is available for the learners. There is increasing flexibility of time, pace and space available to learners. The learning material is even further refined as compared to the fourth generation. The advanced interactive delivery is in use and has become more mature. Comparatively even further lower Institutional Variable Cost is involved for this generation thus approaching gradually zero.

Now you reflect back upon the three scenarios that you read earlier. Try to classify them into various models / generations of distance education.

**Comparison of Models of Distance Education**

After understanding the basic tenets of each generation and after understanding them one by one, now let us try to see all of them together. Taylor (2001) has put them in comparative manner with the minute details. This comparison is shown in fig 1.
Fig 1: Comparison of Generations of Distance Education (Ref: Taylor, J: 2001)

You can see the minute level comparison in this tabular form. One can see the gradation of each aspect across generations.

After having a closer look at the tabular comparison now let us see the same comparison in the graphical form in fig 2. In this graphical form not a micro- but a mega-picture is shown.

Fig 2: Advancement of Distance Education

This graphical comparison is like a summary of the detailed comparisons that we have been discussing about. The major milestones while moving from first to fifth generations are:
- Interactivity, variety of high end media, system intelligence and refinement of material go on improving.
- Institutional variable cost goes on reducing.

4. Summing up

Any system becomes mature, flexible and capable of handling a variety of situations as it progresses. The same rule is applicable to the system of distance education as well. The system of distance education has become more and more learner-friendly through generations after generations. It is becoming more and more mature encompassing more and more learners’ needs.