

TEACHER TRAINING THROUGH DISTANCE EDUCATION (CONCEPT, EFFECTIVENESS AND SOME OBSTACLES)

By

Dr. Muhammad Shah *

ABSTRACT

Distance and non-formal education has emerged as an effective mode in the area of teacher education throughout the world. Whenever there is a shortage of teachers or there is a need of skilful personnel, distance and non-formal education becomes unavoidable.

Keeping in view the present practice of teacher education through distance education in Pakistan and other countries following main research questions were tried to be solved through this article such as:

- 1. how distance education is defined by different writers and how many countries get benefit of distance education for teacher training?*
- 2. what are the main obstacles and hurdles in the course of teacher training through distance education; and what are the merits and contributions of Distance Education through Teacher Training?*

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide use of distance education for teacher training is a signal of success. To cope with the problem of shortage of teachers, a large number of teachers are trained through this system. A variety of subjects and specialization in the area of teacher education to a large number of students is possible only through distance education.

*The writer is working as Assistant Professor in Institute of Educational Research, Gomal University, D. I. Khan.

Through this system, the teachers use new technologies and develop new instructional styles which are more effective and more satisfying.

Distance and non-formal education has emerged as an effective mode, particularly in the area of teacher education in Pakistan. Thousands of PTC, CT, B.Ed and M.Ed students are enrolled in Allama Iqbal Open University in every semester. The graph of enrollment is increasing day by day. A detailed review of concept of distance education, its effectiveness in different countries, its comparison to general education and some obstacles particularly in use of technology are the main parts of the study.

SOME DEFINITIONS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Some important definitions of distance education have been stated by different writers are as follows:

G. Dohmen, 1967 (a director of the German Distance Education Institute (DIFF) at Tubingen in the Federal Republic of Germany) has defined Distance Education as:

1. It is a systematically organized form of selfstudy in which student counseling, the presentation of learning material and the securing and supervising of students' success is carried out by a team of teachers, each of whom has responsibilities. It is made possible at a distance by means of media, which can cover long distance. The opposite of distance education is direct education or face-to-face education a type of education that takes place with direct contact between lecturers and students.
2. On 12 July 1971, the French Government passed a law regulating the conduct of distance education in its territories. The law contained this definition: Distance education is education, which either does not imply the physical presence of the teacher appointed to dispense it in

the place where it is received or in which the teacher is present only on occasion for selected tasks.

3. O. Peters (1973) defined Distance Teaching/Education as a method of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes which is rationalized by the application of division of labour and organizational principles as well as by the extensive use of technical media, especially for the purpose of reproducing high quality teaching material which makes it possible to instruct great numbers of students at the same time wherever they live. It is an industrialized form of teaching and learning.
4. M. Moore (1977) defined the term distance teaching as the family of instructional methods in which the teaching behaviors are executed apart from the learning behaviors, including those that in a contiguous situation would be performed in the learner's presence, so that communication between the teacher and the learner must be facilitated by print, electronic, mechanical or other devices.
5. Micke, Dan (2000) has defined distance education in explanatory terms which are as follows: Distance education is a method of education in which the learner is physically separated from the teacher and the institution sponsoring the instruction. It may be used on its own, or in conjunction with other forms of education, including faceto-face instruction. In any distance education process there must be a teacher, one or more students, and a course or curriculum that the teacher is capable of teaching and the student who is trying to learn. The contract between teacher and learner, whether in a traditional classroom or distance education, requires that the student be taught, assessed, given guidance and, where appropriate, prepared for examinations that may or may not be conducted by the institution. This must be accomplished by two-way communication. Learning may be undertaken either individually or in groups; in either case, it is accomplished in the physical absence of the teacher in distance education. where distance-teaching materials are

provided to learners, they are structured in ways that facilitate learning at a distance.

To summarize the definitions of distance education and to bring them together, following six basic defining elements of distance education can be proposed:

- the separation of teacher and learner which distinguishes it from face-to-face lecturing;
- the influence of an educational organization which distinguishes it from private study;
- the use of technical media, usually print, to unite teacher and learner and carry the educational content;
- the provision of two-way communication so that the student may benefit from relevant materials & initiate dialogue;
- the possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialization purposes; and
- the participation in an industrialized form of education which contains the genus of radical separation of distance education from other forms within the educational spectrum.

DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR TEACHER TRAINING

Many countries have adopted a variety of organizational strategies in running distance education for teachers. Tanzania has enrolled some 45000 trainees to meet the shortage of trained teachers. The programme was run by a loose consortium of institutions, including the existing teacher-training colleges and the National correspondence Institution which had already developed expertise in training through distance education system. Zimbabwe used four of its teacher-training colleges to train teachers on a sandwich-course basis so that they spent some time in the colleges and some time working in the schools. While they were working at school, trainee teachers followed correspondence lessons.

They gained their qualification by passing an end-of-course examination equivalent to that taken by students in regular colleges of education.

Both Indonesia and Sri Lanka have considerable experiences of distance education and have developed open universities, which include teacher education among their responsibilities. Both countries, too, have shortages of trained teachers, which are particularly severe at secondary level.

The National Teachers' Institute in Nigeria offers courses for two main primary level teaching qualifications, which are also available in conventional, pre-service training colleges. Similarly, on a much smaller scale, in the 1970s both Botswana and Swaziland used a single college of education to run distance-education programmes, while other colleges continued with their regular work.

The university of the West Indies (Multinational Dual Mode university) Caribbean has offered a programme of a certificate of education through UWIDITE in 1983. Similarly, private foundation, ROYTEC, set up by the Royal Bank of Canada in Trinidad and Tobago, is offering a B.Ed. level programme via INTERNET in cooperation with university of New Brunswick. A comprehensive account of teacher education by distance in the Caribbean was also found in 1998 entitled "Facilitation of Teacher Training by Distance".

In Uganda, the Northern Integrated Teacher Education Project (NITEP) was started in April 1994. It aimed to train upto 3,000 untrained primary school teachers in the North and North Eastern parts of the country, using distance education (Odurkene, 1995).

The open universities in Britain and Pakistan have, offered programmes of teacher education beside their degree, diploma and continuing ducation work. The Ontario Institute for studies in education, which is the educational faculty of the University of Toronto, has used audio conferences as a way of teaching graduate students throughout the province of Ontario.

Australia has a fully qualified teaching force. But, over the years, the entry level to teaching has risen so that there are large numbers of teachers in the service who feel that their promotion may be blocked unless they raise the level of their qualifications. Deakin University, which is a bimodal institution teaching both on the campus and at a distance, offers a programme for primary-school teachers working part-time for a B.Ed. degree.

The University of Nairobi has long experience both of teacher education and of distance teaching; taking advantage of that experience, it has developed plans to introduce external, degree-level teaching. In 1986 it launched a B.Ed programme for experienced non-graduate secondary-school teachers.

The university of South Africa (UNISA) is an institution for higher distance education which has an academically sound faculty of education. The faculty has four departments (the department of primary school teacher education, secondary school teacher education, further teacher education and education studies), two institutes (the institute for educational research (IER), and the two units (the unit for training and development and the unit for community development). The certificate programmes offered by these units provide specific, practically oriented non-degree training which could grant a candidate university admission. These courses cover a wide range of subjects including reception-year teaching, student development, environmental education, career guidance, parental involvement, counseling, meditation and divorce mediation.

Once students have obtained a degree in the faculty, they may be registered for B.Ed. degree or a postgraduate diploma. If a teacher has an M+3 qualification she/he may register for a further diploma in education (FDE). After passing a B.E degree or diploma in tertiary education, students may register for a master's degree for which they have to submit a dissertation. Doctoral degrees are awarded on

submission of a thesis. The Institute of Educational Research supports students with their master's and doctoral studies.

According to the SAIDE report (1995), distance education (DE) is the largest sector of formal teacher development in South Africa, with more than a third of existing teachers involved in some form of DE in 1995 and the majority of these teachers are in-service teachers studying to upgrade to M+2 or M+3, and the most rapid expansion in enrollments is teachers upgrading 'above the line' to M+4 or M+5.

There is a worldwide use of distance education for teacher training and other areas. A lot of researches have been conducted on its effectiveness, cost and evaluation etc. the increasing enrollment in open universities in many countries shows interest of the students. There are also some problems in the use of technology particularly in teacher education i.e. lack of expertise, lack of coordination between teachers and technicians but its success cannot be denied.

SOME PROBLEMS AND OBSTACLES

Bertram (1999) has argued that the report for the National Teacher Education Audit was not terribly positive towards those providing teacher education at a distance, concluding that material was generally of poor quality with a focus on learning as a process of memorization, that there was little or no student support, that programmes did not focus on the development of good practice and that assessment was usually made up of a content-recall exam. The audit was also of the view that very high through-put and pass rate, given the lack of support, poor learning materials and inadequate assessment techniques.

South Africa has a situation where large numbers of teachers are involved in distance education, but where the programmes provided do not appear to be addressing the needs of the education system, nor of the teachers. Teachers emerge from their studies with formal qualifications, but not necessarily with the knowledge, skills and

competencies which they need to ensure that quality learning happens in their classrooms.

Abdal-Haqq, Ismat (2000), has pointed out some obstacles to technology use in teacher education in his paper *Infusing Technology into Pre-service Teacher Education as follows. He says:*

The limited use of computers in K-12 classrooms cannot be attributed solely to pre-service teacher education. Schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDEs) are considered to be lagging behind in meeting the needs of new teachers to develop technological competencies (Walters, 1992). Critiques of teacher education's performance in training new teachers generally focus on three areas. First, teacher educators do not sufficiently model appropriate use of computers for instructional purposes, either in courses or field experience (Bosch and Cardinale, 1993). Second, these programmes, do not, typically, incorporate technology across the curriculum (Walters, 1992). Third, the instruction that is provided to pre-service teachers tend to focus more on the older and simpler instructional applications of computer technology (e.g., computer assisted instruction, word processing) and less on exposure to and practice with newer, more sophisticated tools (e.g., electronic networks, integrated media, problem-solving applications), which support development of students' higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills (Baron and Golman, 1994; Office of Technology Assessment, 1995a).

Improving the performance of SCDEs in preparing technologically proficient teachers, will require expanding technology use among teacher educators. Top et al. (1995) and Baron and Goldman (1995) identify several obstacles to infusing technology into teacher education programmes. They include: (1) limited availability of equipment; (2) lack of faculty training; (3) no clear expectation that faculty will incorporate technology in academic activities; (4) lack of funds; (5) lack of time to develop facility in using equipment and software; (6) doubt about the pedagogical validity of using some of the newer technologies since the appearance of literature about these tools is

relatively recent; (7) lack of technical support; (8) lack of appropriate materials, particularly integrated media materials suitable for teacher education instruction; and (9) absence of clear programmatic goals for the teacher education programme as a whole.

An additional obstacle is disagreement among teacher educators about the best approach to preparing teachers who are proficient in computer-based instructional technologies. One source of contention is whether computer literacy courses, which expose pre-service teachers to K-12 computer applications and teach them how to use basic computer tools, should be phased out. Instead of discrete computer literacy courses, computer instruction would be integrated into existing methods and foundations courses (Weibe, 1995). A related concern is the need to infuse technology, in a coordinated fashion, across the college curriculum, into the liberal arts content areas where students acquire their subject-area skills and knowledge, as well as the education specialties (Office of Technology Assessment, 1995a).

EFFECTIVENESS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN TEACHER TRAINING

Different writers and researchers have explained the effectiveness of distance education in teaching learning process. A brief summary of these researches is as follows:

Strain (1987) explains the success of distance education that with this system teacher becomes conversant with new technology and develops new instructional styles, moving from creating instruction to managing resources and students and disseminating views. Administrative and faculty support for distance education are critical to the success of this instructional method. St. Pierre (1998) states that students in distance education settings perform as well or better on assignments, class activities, and exams when compared to campus-based students.

Rintala (1998) has argued that self-direction, a passion for learning, and strong individual responsibility are important influences on achievement. There are indications that distance education works best for more mature, motivated, well-organized, and already accomplished learners.

Garrles (1997) describes five critical elements for successful teaching at a distance:

2. Teaching materials are properly prepared in advance. Timing, variation, and smooth transitions are also planned. Instructors allocate from 3 to 5 hours of preparation for each hour of distance instruction. Great attention and detail is required long before the actual classroom activity occurs (Summers, 1997).
3. Whatever the modality used to teach at a distance, the instructor always encourages and facilitates ongoing communication between the students and the instructor.
4. The teachers are familiar with the technology used in the class format. The faculty development is important before beginning any distance activities, and instructors are trained in video use, computer use, or other forms of instructional technology used.
5. Production staff, graphic designers, and technical staff members help the instructional setting for successful teaching at a distance.

Schlosser and Anderson (1994) stated that because distance education and its technologies required extensive planning and preparation, distance educators must consider the following in order to improve their effectiveness:

- Extensive pre-planning and formative evaluation is necessary part of Teacher Education and distance learners value instructors who are well prepared and organized (Engan, et. Al., 1991).

- Learners benefit significantly from a well-designed syllabus and presentation outlines (Engan, et. Al., 1991). Structured note taking, using tools such as interactive study guides, and the use of visuals and graphics as part of the syllabus and presentation outlines contribute to student understanding of the course.
- Teachers are properly trained both in the use of equipment and in those techniques proven effective in the distance education environment. Learners get more from the courses when the instructor seems comfortable with the technology, maintains eye contact with the camera, repeats questions, and possesses a sense of humor (Engan, et. Al., 1991).
- The use of technologies such as fax machines, computers, and telephones can also provide learner support and interaction opportunities.

Ludlow (1994) has discussed the benefits of distance education inspite of high cost. He has argued that although the costs of offering distance education courses may be high, there are high costs associated with offering conventional courses. Benefits of distance education courses to the learner include:

Accessible training to students in rural areas.

Students may complete their course of study without suffering the loss of salary due to relocation.

Students are exposed to the expertise of the most qualified faculty.

To conclude, the materials are easily accessible, technology is used for effective learning, students can do another job along with getting education, students are motivated and they can interact with experts, therefore distance education is more successful than conventional instruction.

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