**Overview of Distance Education in Developed, Developing and Under Developing Countries**

**Historical background**

In order to evaluate the current status of distance education, a brief overview of its history is needed. According to Schneider &Germann [3], history of distance learning is divided into three generations, given as follows:

* First generation: “correspondence study”, where students and teachers communicate with each other through the mail.
* Second generation: “multimedia distance teaching” or broadcast/teleconferencing”, where television and radio broadcasts are used by the students and teachers for communication.
* Third generation: “interactive, web-based instruction”, where resources of the World Wide Web enhance communication, not only between students and teachers, but among students as well.

The evidence of first generation is found at least in 1883 in Sweden; in United States the movement begins in 1890’s. The start of second generation in the mid of 20th century has speed-up the communication between instructor and International conference on Millennium Dawn in Training and Continuing Education 24-26 April 2001 University of Bahrain, Bahrain students. However, it is still one-way communication. The beginning of “interactive, web based instruction” (third generation) has solved this problem, where the two-way communication is possible through news-groups, net-meetings, emails, and so o

**Overview of distance education in developed countries**

Many of the developed countries of the world are offering distance and online education primarily at tertiary level / university level of education. Therefore, the trend is diverging from developed nations to developing and under developed countries of the world as well.

**Distance education in England**

Siddiqi (2015) explained that a team of Oxford University carried out a study to examine the trends of distance education in UK. It was found that most of the universities were offering distance education programs at post graduate level. Most of the programs were being run on commercial basis in collaboration with private sector for continuous professional development. Most common areas of distance education in UK were business and management, law, education and the field of medicines.

**Distance education in USA**

As per U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) report explained by Hanover (2011) the trend of US distance education institutions is different from the rest of the world. Most of the enrollment in distance learning institutions is in under graduate programs rather than post graduate programs. This is followed by post graduate programs. More public sector universities are offering distance learning through ODL than private sector universities. With respect to enrollment, larger universities are offering distance education programs as compared to smaller universities.

**Distance Education in Canada**

Like many other developed countries, there are distance education institutions and universities in Canada as well. According to Wikipedia, there are more than thirty distance education institutions in Canada. The International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) was founded in 1938 in Canada and now it’s has institutional members from more than sixty countries of the world. ICDE's Permanent Secretariat is in Oslo, Norway, and has been hosted by this country on a permanent basis since 1988. It is also supported by Norwegian ministry of education. It is consultative partner with UNESCO and aims at promoting distance, flexible and online learning in the world in an effort to achieve millennium development goals of 2030. ICDE is coordinating platform for distance educations institutions and scholars of distance education. Its members regularly receive updated of events, webinars, conferences etc. Subscribers get the regular emails regarding different events, conferences, webinars, success stories; latest updates etc. through the newsletter of ICDE.

**Distance education in developing countries**

**Distance education in China**

The current trend of popularity of distance education is not limited to developed countries. The idea has now also got roots in developing countries, such as China. China's Central Radio and Television University (CRTVU) is an institution of higher education that operates directly under the State Education Commission. It runs multimedia distance higher education courses using radio, television, printed, and audiovisual teaching materials. Established in 1979, it now heads a modern distance education system comprising of CRTV, 43 Provincial, Autonomous Regional, and Municipal TV Universities (PRTVUs), 654 branch schools at prefecture and city level, 1500 work stations at the county level, and more than 10,000 teaching classes that cover China's rural and urban areas. While the whole Chinese distance education system was initially centered on CRTVU using China Central Television's microwave network, it now makes use of a Chinese satellite capable of reaching all of China plus neighboring countries in Eastern, Central, and Southeast Asia. Having 146,000 entering students, 300,400 students matriculated, and 120,000 graduates in 1992, CRTVU is probably world's largest university.

**Distance Educationin Africa**

Distance education figures prominently among strategies to assist African countries escape from educational crisis. Africa has already made considerable use of distance education to extend access to formal education, although most public institutions have often been severely constrained by lack of finance and manpower. Case studies of Zambia, Kenya and Zimbabwe suggest that critical factors for effectiveness of distance education are the provision of adequate resources along with some other factors. It is expected that distance education will continue to be used to strengthen formal education by training primary teachers, extending access to secondary education and by providing high school education although, so far, few African countries have attempted degree level studies at a distance. As a result of extensive research into distance education provision in Africa, the Nigerian National Commission for UNESCO has published in the current year the directory of distance education institutions in Africa. The directory lists 88 distance institutions from across Africa. In Thailand, Ramkamhaeng University (RU) was established in 1971 as an open university. It was designed as an "academic market"; i.e., admissions were not limited by qualifying exams, class attendance was not mandatory, and fees were kept low. The main instructional materials used for learning and teaching include textbooks, handbooks, and instructional sheets printed by the university press. The primary teaching method in use is the lecture method in either a regular classroom or a large lecture hall with closed-circuit television. Laboratory services and equipment are practical additional training facilities. RU started distance-learning system in 1995. Videoconference is used through THAI-COM satellite as an educational media. Videotape cassettes, radio, and television are also employed. At present, the University offers programs for a bachelor degree level through the distance education system for students studying in six provinces. At the master degree level, it is offered to students studying is four provinces.

**A Review of Distance Education in Pakistan**

**AllamaIqbal Open University**

Siddiqi (2015) explained that Allama Iqbal Open University was established by government of Pakistan in May 1974. At that time, it was the only second distance education university of the world and first distancesEducation University of Asia and Africa. There is no age limit Shahzad 92 for getting education from this university and it has been cost effective, government recognized and providing education to masses from matriculation (SSC exam) to PhD level study in different fields. At present AIOU has the major chunk of distance education enrolled students in Pakistan? At present students of the university are 1.3 million, which is a figure that has surpassed any other university of Pakistan. According to university’s website (www.aiou.edu.pk), university is offering wide range of degrees and courses including technical short courses for skill enhancement and self-employment of un-educated class of the society. University has now started active progress in the area of research and conferences etc. which would ultimately help it in getting higher ranking of HEC Pakistan. According to website, university has state of the art facilities including its own campus in Islamabad, labs and experimental equipment, library, access to HEC digital library for students and few of its own HEC recognized journals as well. Along with that AIOU has played a major role in the empowerment and education of women in the society. Most of the students of university are females. “Currently more than 2000 courses are being offered, the University has 9 regional campuses, 33 regional centers, 41 approved study centers (for face to face sessions) and 138 part time regional coordinating offices. It has the largest publishing house in Pakistan with over 1.8 million books printed annually”. Students from all over the Pakistan even from the remotest areas are getting education from Allama Iqbal Open University. University follows semester system of education in most of its degrees. Noreen, Z. (2013) conducted a research on M Phil and PhD scholars in Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad and strongly emphasized the use of technology for higher degree education such as for M Phil and PhD. SMS alert, use of Skype, LMS system etc. were recommended for better communication between peer scholars and tutors. It was also recommended that use of face book page dedicated for each class and use of Linkedin can be of great advantage for the research scholars of the university. In this regard, ODL of Virtual University of Pakistan has certain advantage over Allama Iqbal Open University with respect to its state of the art software and total ODL mode of education.

**Virtual University of Pakistan**

The second major institution of distance education in Pakistan is Virtual University of Pakistan. It has second major chunk of distance learning students’ enrollment after Allama Iqbal Open University. It follows online distance education system. It was established in 2002 with a federal charter and is recognized by Higher Education Commission. VU used ODL method through the use of internet and television channels. Ever since its inception, VU has shown a massive growth in students’ enrollment. According to university’s website (www.vu.edu.pk) university uses state of the art software’s including Learning Management System, exam software, virtual information system and many other software’s for students’ record and for interaction with students through the software’s particularly through LMS.

**Distance Education Saudi Arabia**

A pilot project under UNDP with Internet based distance training for Saudi professional women has been proposed in 1999. It is now an established fact that the Internet is an excellent medium for offering educational courses and material to well-defined groups of student. The main aim of the project is to establish an on-line facility initially in Riyadh in order to train Saudi professional women in the fields of executive level management, interpersonal skills, and information technology use and applications. Courses will be taught over and accessible through the Internet and can be supported by CD-ROM material. A central classroom will be used to offer training sessions. The classroom will be equipped with 20 workstations and computers, allowing participation of 20 Saudi professional women who are already working either in managerial positions or are potential managers in different organizations from both public and private sectors. The project will focus on equipping sites in three different locations around Saudi Arabia: Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam. Organizations already established as training centers will be equipped with the necessary hardware and connections to offer online courses.

**Conclusion**

* The MBA programs offered by institutions in America, Canada, Australia, Britain etc. are now available in most parts of the developing countries. This is true of many other programs offered by developed countries which are available in many developing countries.
* A huge population with limited resources in developing countries is an obstacle is delivering on-campus education to the people.
* Web-based distance education will be a dominating medium in near future in providing quality distance education.
* The learners in developing countries have access to education and training programs offered by many developed countries.
* The 'foreign degrees', can be acquired now without the learners going to foreign countries.
* Many developing countries with limited educational resources can have wider access to the world educational and training resources to supplement and complement their efforts to provide education to large numbers.
* The satellite technologies are extensively used by developed countries to beam their educational programs to remote areas in countries.
* There are more responses to the market demands to meet the educational and training needs in technical and professional areas like management, computer applications, education, multi-media etc. Even though the information superhighways provide opportunities of global transfer of knowledge, the developing countries are not yet properly equipped
* The outdated telecom facilities, high costs of connection, low levels of technological awareness and bureaucratic interference in using the technology may inhibit the developing countries to actively participate in the global provision of distance education programs.
* The inability to use modem communication systems and resultant delay in communication is one of the problems faced by in operationalizing one of its international programs in developing countries.
* In the most recent data of universities ranking, distance learning universities of Pakistan were not included in the ranking list of universities. According to website of Higher Education Commission in Pakistan, incomplete data was provided by distance learning universities of Pakistan. Higher education Commission in Pakistan ranks universities on the basis of three factors. These include

1. Research output
2. Quality assurance
3. Standard of teaching practices.

Although with respect to quality assurance both Virtual University of Pakistan and Allama Iqbal Open University fall in the highest “W” category of HEC. But perhaps teaching standard and research output of the universities still needs to be improved. Other than this, many universities are offering blended mode of education, some are offering part time / weekend programs and distance education services at international level as well. But there is quick growing trend towards online distance education in the world along with speedy introduction of massive open online courses “MOOCs” by some of the universities. Even some top ranked universities have made ODL very popular in the world.

Traditional means of education are not sufficient to meet the needs of relatively large populations, in terms of resources, even in developed countries. In most of the developing countries, education for all, at least past the primary level, looks like an unrealistic dream if conventional strategies are pursued. Relatively dense population in developing countries increasingly encourages the need to explore alternative solutions for education. One solution to overcome this problem is decentralization of educational institutes. These decentralized units have to reach critical mass in order to justify their educational existence economically. In developing countries, due to limited economical resources, it is not possible to build large number of above mentioned decentralized units. One way to overcome this problem is to utilize distance teaching or education wherever the decentralized support in terms of teaching and economic resources is not sufficient.

As mentioned earlier, distance education would rather be most effective in countries where the population is dispersed in a large geographical area and/or the population is dense. This is more or less the situation with most of the developing countries. Not only this, the ratio of population to resources is very high in these countries. This means that if traditional ways of educating people are continued, a large percentage of people in these countries would go illiterate. As relatively wealthy developed countries struggle to fund their mass higher education systems, many poor developing countries are still struggling to establish reasonable access to primary education. With the enormous capital and infrastructure costs associated with on-campus higher education, it is little wonder that developing countries wishing to create greater access are increasingly looking at distance education to provide the solution.

Internet is a relatively cheaper and accessible resource. Even in the poorest countries most of the universities are equipped with high-speed Internet facilities.

It is pertinent to mention here that there is no separate mechanism for ranking of online distance education universities of world. And most of the full time distance learning and ODL universities are ranked alongside with traditional universities which criterion and ranking system tough for distance education universities.

Top ranking Universities in distance education sector include following,

1. Open University UK

2. University of Derby

3. University of Maryland

4. Drexel University Online

5. Indonesia Open University - Universitas Terbuka

6. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)

7. University of South Africa (UNISA)