HISTORY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Introduction

Distance education is not a new concept. In the late 1 800s, at the University of Chicago, the first major correspondence program in the United States was established in which the teacher and learner were at different locations. Before that time, particularly in preindustrial Europe, education had been available primarily to males in higher levels of society.

The most effective form of instruction in those days was to bring students together in one place and one time to learn from one of the masters. That form of traditional educational remains the dominant model of learning today. The early efforts of educators like William Rainey Harper in 1890 to establish alternatives were laughed at. Correspondence study, which was designed to provide educational opportunities for those who were not among the elite and who could not afford full-time residence at an educational institution, was looked down on as inferior education. Many educators regarded correspondence courses as simply business operations.

Correspondence education offended the elitist and extremely undemocratic educational system that characterized the early years in this country (Pittman, 1991). Indeed, many correspondence courses were viewed as simply poor excuses for the real thing. However, the need to provide equal access to educational opportunities has always been part of our democratic ideals, so correspondence study took a new turn.

As radio developed during the First World War and television in the 1950s, instruction outside of the traditional classroom had suddenly found new delivery systems.

There are many examples of how early radio and television were used in schools to deliver instruction at a distance.

Wisconsin's School of the Air was an early effort, in the 1920s, to affirm that the boundaries of the school were the boundaries of the state. More recently, audio and computer teleconferencing have influenced the delivery of instruction in public schools, higher education, the military, business, and industry. Following the establishment of the Open University in Britain in 1970, and Charles Wedemeyer's innovative uses of media in 1986 at the University of Wisconsin, correspondence study began to use developing technologies to provide more effective distance education.

2.1 Correspondence Study to Distance Education

In 1982, the International Council for Correspondence Education changed its name to the International Council for Distance Education to reflect the developments in the field. With the rapid growth of new technologies and the evolution of systems for delivering information, distance education, with its ideals of providing equality of access to education, became a reality. Today there are distance education courses offered by dozens of public and private organizations and institutions to school districts, universities, the military, and large corporations. Direct satellite broadcasts are produced by more than 20 of the country's major universities to provide over 500 courses in engineering delivered live by satellite as part of the National Technological University (NTU). In the corporate sector, more than $40 billion
a year are spent by IBM, Kodak, and the Fortune 500 companies
in distance education programs.

What, exactly, are the prospects and promises of distance education? Desmond Keegan (Keegan, 1980) identified six key elements of distance education:

• Separation of teacher and learner

• Influence of an educational organization

• Use of media to link teacher and learner

• Two-way exchange of communication

• Learners as individuals rather than grouped

• Educators as an industrialized form

Distance education has traditionally been defined as instruction through print or electronic communications media to persons engaged in planned learning in a place or time different from that of the instructor or instructors. The traditional definition of distance education is slowly being eroded as new technological developments challenge educators to reconceptualize the idea of schooling and lifelong learning. At the same time, interest in the unlimited possibilities of individualized distance learning is growing with the development of each new communication technology. Although educational technologists agree that it is the systematic design of instruction that should drive the development of distance learning, the rapid development of computer-related technologies has captured the interest of the public and has been responsible for much of the limelight in which distance educators currently find themselves. Although the United States has seen rapid growth in the use of technology for distance education, much of the pioneering work has been done abroad.

2.2 Distance Education in the U.K.

The establishment of the British Open University in the United Kingdom in 1969 marked the beginning of the use of technology to supplement print-based instruction through well-designed courses. Learning materials were delivered on a large scale to students in three programs: undergraduates, postgraduates, and associate students. Although course materials were primarily print based, they were supported by a variety of technologies. No formal educational qualifications have been required to be admitted to the British Open University.

Courses are closely monitored and have been successfully delivered to over 100,000 students. As a direct result of its success, the Open University model has been adopted by many countries in both the developed and developing world (Keegan, 1986). Researchers in the United Kingdom continue to be leaders in identifying problems and proposing solutions for practitioners in the field (Harry, Keegan & Magnus, 1993). The International Centre for Distance Learning, at the British Open University, maintains the most complete holdings of literature in both research and practice of international distance learning. Research studies, evaluation reports, course modules, books, journal articles, and ephemeral material concerning distance education around the world are all available through quarterly accessions lists or on line.

2.3 Distance Education in Pakistan

The National Education Policy 1972-80 reviewed the literacy situation and commented that 'Pakistan had one of the highest rates of illiteracy in the world that was 84.6 percent with highest among the rural women in remote areas.

It estimated that there were about '40 million illiterates' and about 'one million' were being added every year due to population explosion.' In this situation the efforts by the formal school system almost were aborted to cope with the increasing number of children. The Education Policy 1972-80 suggested universal elementary education- the only remedy to eradicate illiteracy. Besides, it accentuated the needs of adult education to craft the larger chunks of population productive and contribute to their full share to 'the nation's growth and prosperity. The Education policy also stressed the need for continuing education for rural/factory workers as well as housewives to improve the quality of their life and work. To achieve the above mentioned desired objectives, the Education policy suggested employing the non-formal and lifelong education.

2.4 Establishment of Peoples Open University

The idea of an "Open University" was integrated in the wider set of guidelines included in the National Education Policy 1972-80, in these words:

> "Open Universities are being used in several countries to
> provide education and training to people who cannot leave their
> homes and jobs for full time studies. An Open University will,
> therefore, be established to provide part time educational facilities
> through correspondence courses, tutorials, seminars, workshops,
> laboratories, television and radio broadcasts and other mass
> communication media"

In 1974, first people's open university established. University's name was changed from People's Open University to AllamaIqbal Open University in 1977 at the eve of the first centenary of the national poet and philosopher, Allama Muhammad Iqbal,through People's Open University (Amendment) Ordinance 1977.