Addis Ababa University
School of Graduate Studies

The Practice of Learners' Assessment and Evaluation in Distance Education: The Case of Alpha and St. Mary's Distance Education

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Abbreviations

ASE – Agri – Service Ethiopia

BOU British Open University

CACC – Council for Accreditation of Correspondence Colleges

CRT- Criterion Referenced Test

ICS – International Correspondence School

IGNOU – Indra Ghandi National Open University

NRT- Norm Referenced Test

NVCA – National Vocational Correspondence Agency

SDL – Self Directed Learning

TGE - Transitional Government of Ethiopia

TWTC – Trans World Tutorial College

ULCCS – Universal Language Commercial Correspondence School

UNESCO- United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

Abstract

The purpose of the study is about the practice of learners' assessment and evaluation in distance learning, I have chosen randomly 90 distance learners and 20 tutor and/or subject matter experts each from Alpha and St. Mary's Distance Colleges in Addis Ababa.

In my study, I have used mainly quantitative methodology and questionnaire as my instrument of data collection from distance learners. I have also organized structured interview guides to get general ideas and the attitudes from the tutors and/or subject matter experts. The information gathered from these sources could also be used to cross-check and triangulate for the reliability of the data collected.

The data collected were statistically analyzed, counter checked, and reported.

According to the data analysis, the largest majority of the respondents commented that the distance program is useful for: those who do not have a chance to go to conventional schools for different reasons: to get a job; for career development; to compensate for educational opportunities they missed in the past due to different reasons, etc.

The types of tests (exams) they took were also in accordance with CRT format according to majority of respondents, justifying that exam assessments are in accordance with the objectives of the distance courses.

In both Colleges support services are very limited; the majority of the respondents from both Distance Colleges commented that there is insignificant or no tutorial support at all.

Large numbers of students are pursuing their education through distance. For its effective implementation the use of support services, such as tutorial services, preparation of standardized course materials or modules, consistent assessments and evaluations should be given especial emphasis.

Table of contents *Page*

Chapter One

Introduction

Over the last three decades many developing and developed countries have used distance education as part of the demands to quantity, resources and quality of education.

Higher education in many developing countries are suffering a lot from such things as teaching with very limited resources, of libraries without sufficient reference materials and journals, because of economic constraints. In most Sub-Saharan countries, such as Ethiopia, the use of libraries and laboratories has become so limited. With population explosion and the deteriorating economic condition of developing countries, especially those in sub-Saharan regions, are not in a position to provide to all of their citizens traditional education that demands school buildings and teaching staffs which are costly. So the need for less costly educational systems should be the focus of today's learning processes.

Educational techniques that do not demand school buildings and large number of teaching staffs seem to serve best for public or adult education.

As a result distance education has struggled and became the possible alternatives to regular schools. If properly managed, and the techniques of distance education could be adapted to the needs of some of the millions who dropped out of the school due to different reasons, such as family responsibilities, holding jobs while learning etc...(Ossian Mackenzie,1987).

In fact, distance education actually is not only qualified for dropouts. These days distance education is being catered for various groups, such as:

i. the pre-university age groups also referred to as k-12, that is from kindergarten to grade twelve;

ii. Disabled and homebound citizens who cannot easily travel from place to place;

iii. learners from geographically difficult terrains; and

iv. all who are not able to go to regular school for different reasons, such as being engaged in a job, family responsibilities, raising children etc.

In general, there is a need to shift focus from traditional (conventional) method of education, that is relatively expensive and involving only limited number of learners to distance education as complementary to traditional one so that large number of distance learners, have a chance to reap the fruits of knowledge and technology (Goal, A. & Goal, S.L. 2001).

1.1 Background of the study

In an era of knowledge explosion, technical revolution, and social policy of equity and equality of educational policy, the mission of education is to foster and produce competent people – people who are able to apply their knowledge under changing condition, particularly to engage themselves in lifelong self-directed learning.

The former definition of the purpose of education as the power of transmitting knowledge is no more appropriate because the new way of thinking about education, that is, "performance based education" or "competency – based education" is replacing it. This new way of thinking about education has its implication for the education of children and youth, but it seems to be especially relevant to a field of practice that has responsibility to help adults live productively in a world of accelerating change.

Distance education is found to be a good instrument to teach adults at work so they can easily associate and change into practice what they learned theoretically.

In the past most distance education focused on adult learners. This remains, even to day, the most common world- wide application. In addition to the training of adult learners the application of distance and open learning also have became instrumental for groups, such as, disables and Homebound individuals who cannot easily travel, for those who cannot pursue their education for different reasons in regular institutions including senior citizens, disabled and also for K- 12 (from kindergarten to grade 12) distance education which is considered as the more rapidly growing age group.

Assessing of distance students performance helps to safeguard and maintain the highest possible educational quality, because assessing distance students entails the assessment of the program itself. To do so, the follow up may and should at least consider the two widely applied methods of evaluations; namely, the formative evaluation (developmental assessment) and summative evaluation (after coverage of a course in a given period of time)

In addition to these, the notion of the stakeholders in evaluation systems, such as, consulting experts, the would-be employers and/or teaching bodies, tutors, and distance students' attitudes are so important.

1.2 Statement of the problem.

In this modern era of knowledge explosion, technological innovation, and a social policy of education for all has become the demand of the society.

Moreover, the mission of education is to produce competent people - people who are able to apply their knowledge under fast changing conditions, and they should have the chance to engage themselves in self-directed learning.

To full fill this demand for the need of distance education, one may ask about the nature of assessments and evaluation of exams and the program itself. But in this research, emphasis is given mainly to the assessment and evaluation of distance learners.

What methods of learners' assessments are employed in distance education? Are there any means of detecting about how and who really does the

assignments, even the exams? Since distance students are distant by definition, some times it is hard to know really who is who even if there is a system of its own. Assignment and home take exams are also commonly liable to academic dishonesty. There is also a speculation that it has become common practice that distance assignments are done in some cases by non-distance learners.

For developing countries, like Ethiopia, where the scarcity of resources - trained man power, finance, infrastructures etc. are inadequate, the development and application of distance education is of paramount importance. The success of the distance education program also depends on the efficiency of its methods employed during evaluation and assessment. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how the distance learners are assessed and evaluated.

This research, therefore, tries to study about the following questions with respect to the practice of learners' assessments and evaluation in Alpha and St. Mary's distance education programs.

1. How assessments and evaluations are employed in St. Mary's and in Alpha Distance Education programs? Is there any means of detecting who and how the assignments for submission are done?
2. Are student general support services, such as, face-to-face tutorial services according to the requirements of distance education?
3. What are the attitudes of distance students and tutors/subject matter experts about distance courses and their means of assessment and evaluation?
4. How, when and where the tests (exams) in distance education are administered? How the exams are prepared, dispatched, corrected and the results announced?
5. What are the reasons or factors that may discourage distance learners? What are the reasons for dropping outs?

1.3 *Purpose of the Study.*

The purpose of this research paper is to make a thorough study about the practices of learners' assessment in distance education at two different colleges that provide distance education, namely: Alpha Distance Education College and St. Mary's Distance Education Colleges in Addis Ababa.

There are different attitudes concerning about the legitimacy of distance education. Some proponents of distance education say, if properly applied it can be used to enhance education (Perraton,2000), and some opponents say, it is a "step child" of education, and the use of it should be discouraged because it encourages rote learning.

The purpose of the study is, therefore, to identify the nature and methods of learners' assessment, as how they are assessed and the level of the instruments of assessment. It is aimed to collect pieces of information and the notions of the stakeholders, (tutors, faculty, and facilitators and distance students), whether or not the assessment and evaluation methods are up to the expected standard.

1.4 *Significance of the study.*

In educational systems, be it traditional or distance, assessment and evaluation techniques are generally used to: measure the outcomes of the instruction, weather the instruction or the program as a whole is effective or not; to certify pupils' achievements, promoting students to the next grade or detaining them to repeat the course, and; to provide material to research.

Since big numbers of students are pursuing their education through distance learning, this research makes its point that thorough investigation of the program with respect to assessment and evaluation of distance students is so imperative. Some say that once you are registered in such distance program,

you are guaranteed to get your paper (certificate, diploma, degree etc) with very little effort. Some even consider Distance Education as "stepchild" of education, as second class educational system. The enigma of academic non - acceptance of distance education also persists in some educational establishments. That being the case, the study makes this research more significant, especially for distance curriculum designers, educational policy makers and course evaluators and also for the main beneficiaries - distance learners.

1.5 Scope and delimitation of the study

Though there are more than ten distance education colleges in Ethiopia, the sample of the study is based mainly on two Distance Education Colleges; namely St. Mary's and Alpha Distance Colleges here in Addis Ababa. Obviously the pieces of information that can be obtained from these two centers are limited. Again the level of status among these distance colleges are wide, some with longer period of distance educational experience (serving for about 25 years, Alpha College for instance), and some even collaborating with international open universities, for example, St. Mary's distance college affiliated with Indra Ghandi National Open University (IGNOU) in India. Also the number of respondents involved from these two Distance Colleges are few compared to the large number of distance students. So, the information obtained from the two centers may not fully ascribe the problems under the study. However, it would give some highlights to other researchers who would like and intend to make further studies on the topic in the future.

1.6 Limitation of the Study

As in most researches, this research has its own limitations. Since the research is on distance learners, the distribution of the questionnaires to the students requires time until they gather for tutorial session or for examination. After distribution of the questionnaires, the most frustrating part is to bring them together, since they are not regular students, where one may find them as a

group, there was very limited means to collect the distributed questionnaires. Out of 90 questionnaires distributed for each distance college students (with total of 180) only seventy six per cent respondents replied from St. Mary's and forty seven per cent respondents replied from Alpha Distance College.

The generalization of the study therefore, is based on limited number of respondents. The limited number of respondents, even if they represent different varieties in terms of age, sex, level of education, etc., could serve as an indicator as to how the current distance education assessment and evaluation are being carried out.

Another form of limitation that the researcher had observed while conducting the research or that could be considered as source of error was that the questionnaire itself should have been prepared in Amharic. Actually from the pilot study and suggestions from some people serving at distance colleges, the researcher has noticed the possible problem that could arise in understanding the questions and filling out the proper answers.

However, I insisted to conduct the research in English considering distance learners as, at least, college students who can fill out the items with no such exaggerated problems.

1.7 Definition of key terms

The following definitions are given according to Piskurich (1993) and World Book of Encyclopedia, Volume 6, 1992.

Distance Education (learning) – learning system that commonly taking place outside school or college, where physical interaction between teachers and students is almost absent.

Tutor – a teacher who directs and provides supports during face-to-face studies of a number of students in a group occasionally while learning at a distance.

Correspondence learning – distance learning commonly based on print materials through postal services. It is believed to be the oldest distance learning method.

Evaluation – The process of delineating, obtaining, and providing useful information for judging alternatives in learners' examination. It is used to make the student pass to the next program or class or to make him/her repeat the course.

Criterion-referenced evaluation – An evaluation methodology which is widely used in distance education programs where it refers to a comparison with a criterion or absolute standard, which helps to decide whether a learner needs more work on some skill or set of skills.

Norm-referenced evaluation – An evaluation methodology about where a student stands compared to other students of similar type, or kind of evaluation that helps to determine a student's place or rank among the group.

Mastery learning – A design characteristic in which the trainee is expected to achieve a preset level of mastery for the materials to be covered. This mastery level is usually measured through a criterion-referenced evaluation.

Module - A unit of instruction pre designed and to be covered by distance learners. A learning package may be made up of a number of modules.

Self-Directed Learning (SDL) – A training design in which the trainees master packages of predetermined materials, at their own pace, without the aid of an instructor.

Chapter Two

Review of related literature

2.1 Introduction

This part of the thesis deals with the definition of distance education from different points of views. About the historical aspect of its commencement, the needs and applications, the mode of its delivery and assessment (evaluation) methods which is the central part of this research. It also deals about the economy of distance education, different perceptions about, and the importance of distance education to in solving the problems of the society at large.

2.2 What is Distance Education?

Distance Education, formerly known as correspondence and adult education which also has known by different synonyms at different places and at different times as:

"External studies," "extra-mural studies," "off-campus", "correspondence education", "home-study", "independent study", "non-traditional learning", "open-learning," "outreach programs".(Sara Guri - Rosenblit, 1999).

Different scholars define Distance Education in different ways. According to Rawson-Jones (1993), distance education is a multi-media educational process in which the teacher and the student may or may not meet in a face-to-face situation.

As can be understood From Rawson's definition, if there is no face-to-face interaction between the teacher and the student, the mode of the interaction between the learners and the teacher is not mentioned as such.

But Mugridges(1991) gave a better definition about distance education as: a form of education in which there is normally separation between teacher and

learner and thus one in which other means, such as, the printed and written word, the telephone, computer conferencing or teleconferencing, for example - are used to bridge the physical gap. The mode of interaction in distance education is elaborated in Mugrides' definition

Distance Education has been defined also, as an educational process in which a significant proportion of teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner or characterized by non-contiguous communication (Holmberg, 1989). His definition relates a pure form of distance education, which does not involve physical face–to–face meetings between teachers and students.

Keegan (1980a, 1986) also defined distance education as the quasi – permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process as one of the major characteristics of distance education.

Daniel's (1989) interpretation of the term distance education embraces all forms of instruction in which classroom sessions are not the primary means of education. Distance education is mostly homework, with occasional work in class, while conventional education is mostly class work with occasional work at home.

Distance learning often makes use of several different media. Students may learn through print, broadcasts, the internet and through occasional meeting with tutors and with other students (UNESCO, 2002).

Many distance teaching universities (institutes) use face-to-face tutorials, summer schools, seminars and laboratory sessions. Moreover, the advent of interactive media challenges Holmberg's definition from another angle. Nowadays, interactive computer networks, teleconferencing and interactive satellite sessions are both used by distance teaching and conventional campus based universities (Guri- Rosenblit, 1999).

Distance teaching universities can also be viewed in many aspects as forerunners in facing and dealing early in with challenges confronting higher education systems today, such as: providing lifelong study opportunities to working adults; defining flexible access policies for second–chance students;

teaching unprepared students...reducing cost per student and providing economies of scale; creating virtual classroom/settings, and promoting globalization and international cooperation (G-Rosenblit, 1999)

By eliminating the lecture hall, seminar-room and university library and placing student at home, the distance universities have presented the most radical change yet to the traditional concept of a university.(Keegan and Rumble, 1982 : 24)

Different scholars define open and distance learning differently and in some cases interchangeably. Distance education and open learning are used synonymously by some scholars and practioners (Guri-Rosenblit, 1993).

But McKenzie et al. in their 1975 book *Open Learning* define 'open learning' as follows:

> Open learning is an imprecise phrase to which a range of meaning can be, and is, attached. It eludes definition...For its very imprecision enables it to accommodate many different ideas and aims.
>
> (McKenzie et al. 1975:21)

In order to avoid the confusions, in defining open and distance learning, I prefer to use these two terms according to the criteria used for admission of students into the corresponding institutions. Therefore, universities which decided to adopt an open access policy (no requirement for enrollment) as open universities, and for those imposing entry requirements, such as educational backgrounds, as distance teaching universities. Since most distance learning institutions in our case require entry or registry requirements, I would rather prefer to use distance learning to open learning throughout this paper.

2.3 *Historical development of Distance Education.*

Distance education in a form of correspondence instruction is not a recent, modern phenomenon. Examples of an intensive exchange of letters for educational purposes have been known since ancient times, such as the

correspondence between Plato and Cicero with their students (Sara Guri - Rosenblit,1999:2)

According to Rawson - Jones (1973), it is claimed that the first recorded attempt of correspondence learning was on the 20th March 1728 edition of Boston Gazette notice from the teacher called Caleb Philips that stated any person in the country could learn through postal correspondence perfectly as those that like in Boston. Later, in the 1840s, Mr. Pitman was credited as the first to start regular courses through correspondence.

Reddy (1998) reported that until 1995, there were about 835 institutions offering 35,511 courses through distance education in 995 centers. Similarly, Heinich, etal (1996) indicated that the earlier term "correspondence education" has changed to" distance education" in 1980s when learning took place through electronic communication which included radio, telephone, television and computers that enabled to communicate at a distance.

The correspondence study system, which otherwise known as "the pen and ink system", the postal tuition or the tutorial system is being replaced by distance education that is mainly based on, knew scientific innovations, such as computers and multi-media which resulted learning in 21st century to be heavily dependent on new technologies.

The University of London, which got its Royal Charter as a distance examining body in 1836, enabled students studying in private correspondence colleges in any part of the British Empire to take its Examination. From 1858 it opened all of its non-medical examinations, from matriculation level upwards, to candidates any where in the world, regardless of their methods of preparation (Guri-Rosenblit 1999).

The foundation of a correspondence program at Illinois State University in 1874 can be taken as the start of distance education at university level in USA (Keegan and Rumble, 1982). Similarly, the university of Chicago under William Harper offered the first university sponsored correspondence in 1892 (Verdun & Clark, 1991; Moore, 1987).

The University of South Africa (UNISA) is held to be the first full fledged autonomous distance teaching university. It started teaching at a distance in 1946 (Boucher, 1973; Holmberg, 1995).

Since the inception of university in the eleventh century, it has evolved in diverse directions in different places and at different times. On a more general level, the common denominator of all universities through the centuries is their ability to combine certain definite intrinsic and extrinsic qualities (Van Vught, 1994). The intrinsic qualities are related to the ideals of the search for truth, and the conservation and transmission of knowledge, while the extrinsic qualities are expressed in the services the universities provide to society.

It can be traced back to as early as the eighth century with the invention of printing, the advent of a publishing industry and the development of modern postal services boosted the utilization of correspondence for educational purposes (G. Rosenblit, 1999).

Evidently, distance education as a form of higher and continuing education offered by universities has existed since the early half of the nineteenth century (Rumble & Harry, 1982; Holmberg, 1986).

In 1883 the state of New York authorized the Chautauqua Institute to award degrees through correspondence methods. Chautauqua was a summer training program for Sunday school teachers who continued to receive instruction by mail after they returned to their homes (Moore & Kearsly, 1996).

It was reconstituted in 1951 to provide degree courses for external students only. In 1962 it was officially established as a distance teaching university through a governmental decree (ibid).

A royal charter, granted in 1969, established the British Open University, as an independent university authorized to confer its own degree. Consequently, the foundation of the British Open University was the most striking event in the history of higher education since the establishment of the land-grant universities in USA in 1860s (Perry, 1977). Since then many others have heralded the new teaching universities as the most conspicuous development in higher education systems in recent decades.

Until the 1970s, distance education was used mainly by commercially motivated individuals who set up schools and colleges to enable people who work during the day to study for qualification offered by a variety of academic, vocational and professional institutions. Many of these private providers sent materials of poor quality and offered little or no support during the learning/teaching process, aiming mainly to maximize their profit (Perry, 1992). Most correspondence schools were perceived as second–class education (Glatter & Wedell, 1971). But the drastic shift from private to public sponsored distance education on a wide scale, as being a product of governmental planning as large – scale higher education institutions set to fulfill national mission, took place in Europe, as well as in some other parts of the world, in early 1970s. These fully fledged distance teaching universities moved distance higher education from the margins to the mainstream (Tait, 1994a).

Not all correspondence institutions operating prior to the 1970s deserved bad reputation. Some are well known to offer their students a real chance of successfully completing their studies (Holmberg, 1986; Perry, 1992). Actually the presenter of this paper could not find supportive literature as to the distance institutions that are not really involved in providing second class education since 1970s. But I fell that there are some open and distance institutions that are not free from putting themselves in such disreputable but lucrative businesses.

From the above discussion it is obvious that the future mode of education could be blended of both systems, whereby the dominance nature of the conventional education over the distance one is no more as important as it has been used to be. The gap between the two is no more significant.

2.4 The development of correspondence education in Ethiopia

According to Desta (1989), there are two groups of agencies involved in developing correspondence education in Ethiopia.

A Non-government Agencies

Before the inception of correspondence education by governmental agencies, there were two foreign correspondence schools in Addis Ababa, namely;. Trans World Tutorial College (TWTC) and, International Correspondence School (ICS) TWTC started operating in 1957 and continued giving its services up to 1978, which was replaced by British Tutorial College in 1981. It offered courses in accounting, management, auditing, business etc. On the other hand ICS started to give its services in 1969 offering more than 200 courses. Some of the courses included English, modern mathematics, elementary French, advanced French; courses on management, computer programming, and mechanical engineering.

Both correspondence schools used course materials that were used in many countries. They were recognized by the Council for the Accreditation of Correspondence Colleges (CACC).

In addition to these colleges, there were also three non-governmental or private correspondence agencies. These were; National Vocational Correspondence Agency (NVCA), Agri-Service Ethiopia (ASE), and Universal Language and Commercial Correspondence School (ULCCS)

NVCA used to offer non-formal vocational courses for the first time since 1981. Some of the courses given were; general mechanics, auto-mechanics, wood-technology, agriculture, personal and factory management, purchase and supply management (Flinck and Wangdahi, 1983 as cited in Desta, A. 1989).

Agri-Service Ethiopia (ASE) was also a non-governmental agency that started giving agricultural correspondence education particularly for farmers. ASE used course materials developed by the World Food and Agriculture

Organization by the African Institute of Social and Economic Development. (Kabwasa and Kaunda, 1973 as cited in Desta, A. 1989)

Universal Language and Commercial Correspondence was also a private agency. The aim of the agency was to teach English language as a second language for Ethiopian students. It was opened in 1974, and offered courses in; E.S.L.C.E. English preparation, essential academic English, spoken English and conversation, junior secondary English, etc.

B Governmental Agencies

Addis Ababa University (AAU), then known as Haile Selassie First University, and the Ministry of Education (MOE) jointly planned to develop secondary courses in correspondence in 1967/68. They were pressured to develop the program after repeated demands made by teachers, people working in different places, military organizations and factories. "With an agreement reached a correspondence education unit was established under the Extension Division of A.A.U." (D & D, 1985, G.C :6, as cited in Desta , 1989).In collaboration with Netherlands's Distance Education Organization and financial and experts support from U.S.A, distance courses in Amharic, English, Math, and Geography were prepared for grades 9 – 12 in 1972/73 under A.A.U.

Immediately after the revolution, the Ministry of Education took over the whole responsibility of the correspondence education. Since 1977 distance courses in Amharic, English, Mathematics, Geography, Physical Science and Biological Science have been made available. Varies administrative forms and guidelines were also ready to start the program. Currently there are more than ten privately owned distance colleges operating in Ethiopia.

2.5 *Why Distance Education?*

There are different reasons or attributes that are considered as to why for the emergence of distance education. With the explosion of population, where people are widely separated and living at a distance could automatically be a problem to manage such groups at specified centers. Even if people live in such scattered form, there is always a need for education.

As Rawson-Jones (1973) put it: Scattered communities, large geographical areas and difficulty of organizing a face-to-face teaching are neither the only nor necessarily the reasons to establish distance education. For him distance education has emerged as educational form because there was an educational need of the society that the traditional curriculum could not and cannot still satisfy.

Hopper (1971) remarked that the introduction of distance education has allowed the learner to make his/her personal choices about what they want to learn, where and when to learn.

Berg (1998) revealed that in distance education students learn more independently, using materials that meet their own individual learning needs, abilities, references, and interests. It is also believed that distance education is a good instrument to teach adults at work and to relate abstract experiences with concrete experiences. So, adult learners at work can easily associate and change into practice what they learn theoretically. Guri-Rosenblit (1999) concluded that, all distance teaching universities reflect a concern with widening access to higher education. They also offered a second chance of part-time study to adults, regardless of work, geography, family commitments and constraints. With advancement in technology, adult learners need to adopt themselves to the need of prevailing technology and working conditions.

More successful programs have been carefully integrated, and they have not been designated as second-class alternative to conventional education but as a

part of a complementary system using a variety of different approaches, each chosen for its appropriateness to the curriculum and the audience.

In addition to the application of distance learning for different purposes, it has been widely applied to teacher education and there is some record of success in its use for all regular elements of the curriculum-general education, subject–specific knowledge, pedagogy, and practical teaching (G-Rosenblit ,1999).

The economy of distance education

The main considerations behind the establishment of distance teaching universities was for less expensive way of providing education to growing number of students. The total cost of each institution (distance and traditional) are made use of both fixed and variable costs. In the area of fixed costs, distance universities do not support campus or residential facilities, so they are significantly cheaper. On the other hand, distance universities require heavy investment to set up the infrastructure for the production of the study materials even before a single student is enrolled. The choice of media, such as, TV, the number of subject areas covered, and the number of courses provided demands heavy investment (Rumble, 1993).

In traditional universities, the variable costs increase almost directly with the number of students and the volume of activities, that is, more students require more staff. But as the number of distance students increases, the cost per student decreases (Smith, 1992; Perraton, 1993; Rumble 1993; Holmberg, 1995).

In general, while the start-up costs of distance universities are high, the marginal cost per student decrease as the more students enroll.

One of the features which distinguish distance teaching universities from the mainline, residential universities is the disbanding of the campus and reaching out students wherever they prefer and whenever they wish to study.

Campus universities, with all of academic situations and residential arrangements, with students and teachers living together as a self-contained community also with recreational facilities and with an advantage of creating

the grounds both for faculty-student dialogue interaction as well as for student meeting points. Since most open and distance universities are designed mainly for part–time adults, the campus life was either of lesser attraction or impossible (Guri – Rosenblit, 1999)

The application of distance education has already become common place practically in all countries as a means of teaching big number of learners.

In the educational sector distance education with vast potentialities generated through new information technology can bring about revolution in the field of education, training and consultancy. That is why the future thrust is bound to be on distance education and not on traditional (face-to-face) classroom education system (Goal, A & Goal, S.L 2001).

In 1994, Sir Geoffrey Holland, stated that "by the year 2020 every education and training program leading to qualification of a credit towards one will be available in three modes: full time, part time and through distance learning" (Wild, 1994). In fact, it has become true that the gap between the two educational systems is getting narrower because of the access and facilities through technological innovations.

Moreover, one of the arguments in undergoing distance education is its cost effectiveness compared to conventional education. If one can learn from print, or from a broadcast or cassette or computer, as well as you can from a teacher, there should be no educational objection to substituting another medium for the teacher. If there is no teacher you do not need a school, college or hall of residence in order to study which can reduce capital investment.

The main considerations behind the establishment of distance teaching universities was for less expensive way of providing education to growing number of students. The total cost of each institution (distance and traditional) are made use of both fixed and variable costs. In the area of fixed costs, distance universities do not support campus or residential facilities, so they are significantly cheaper. On the other hand, distance universities require heavy investment to set up the infrastructure for the production of the study materials even before a single student is enrolled. The choice of media, such

as, TV, the number of subject areas covered, and the number of courses provided demands heavy investment (Rumble, 1993).

In traditional universities, the variable costs increase almost directly with the number of students and the volume of activities, that is, more students require more staff. But as the number of distance students increases, the cost per student decreases (Smith, 1992; Perraton, 1993; Rumble 1993; Holmberg, 1995). In general, while the start-up costs of distance universities are high, the marginal cost per student decrease as the more students enroll.

According to Perraton (2000), the costs of distance education tend to behave differently from those of conventional education. One major difference is that distance education may make it possible to expand education without investment in buildings. Distance teaching universities need headquarters, and may need centers, but don't demand a program of campus building commensurate with the number of students they are to teach. A higher proportion of the costs of distance education tend to be fixed, and a lower proportion to vary with the number of students. As the number of students on course increases, so the cost per student declines, something that does not happen with classroom based education (Perraton, 2000: 120).

The economic profile of students at both educational systems is also an indicative of the nature of learning processes. For example, students at a distance tend to be studying part-time; often they are older; quite often they are poorer of live in more remote places; those with best educational records tend to go conventional universities and those who have done less well in their school examination to distance university (ibid.)

Despite the fact that distance education is less costly than that of conventional education in general, part-time off-campus students (distance students) have lower completion rate and/or many dropouts than full-time on-campus students, so that the costs of production at a distance are higher than they are on campus if the number of students in a program are fewer than expected.

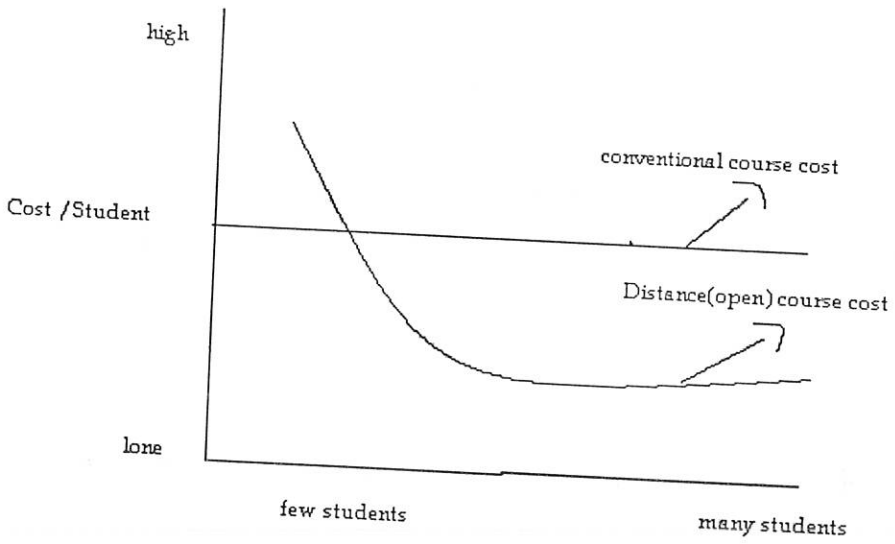
For any course, there are three main determinants of the cost per student.

The first determinant is the total number of students; the cost per student tends to decline with the large number of students. The second determinant is the choice for sophistication of the medium chosen. Television for example, is likely to have a production cost ten times that of the radio. The third determinant is the amount of tutorial support that is built into the course. Courses that may provide generous student support, either through face-to-fact sessions or through frequent marking of student assignments or even though computer-based interaction tend to be costly.

In order to compare the cost of reaching a particular educational goal either by distance education or by conventional (traditional) study, it is essential to compare both the input and output of the two systems. The input could be the total cost (students' fee, government or other financing and subsidies, the loss of income incurred by students who give up work for studies, etc.). Whereas, the output could be the degree or other goals reached and possibly even its economic values.

Refer figure 2.1 for comparison of cost in conventional and distance educational systems per student.

Fig. 2.1 Comparison of distance learning and conventional course cost per student.



Source: Fred Lockwood, Ed. 1994: Material production in Open and Distance Learning

In distance learning, initial expenditure is high but marginal costs - the cost of taking on extra students are low.

There is a gradual shift from mainstream (traditional) education to distance education. As a result, to day between 5 and 12 percent university students in industrialized countries are likely to be studying at a distance in the developing countries the figure is often between 10 and 20 percent (Perraton, 2000:1).

Despite all the advantages discusses so far, there are limitations in learning at a distance. Some of the disadvantages while learning in distance education include the following.

Disadvantages in distance education

a) Lack of campus Environment and Peer Group Interaction

In distance education, students may often experience feelings of extreme isolation; the lack of interactivity with peers, the missing out of the enjoyment of campus life. According to Moore (1995) even the highly motivated students who register for distance education courses on their own initiative find the experience lonely, difficult, and sometimes daunting. There are no chats over a cup of coffee at the student centre, no causal encounters on campus with either the professor or with fellow students, no contact with people who took the same course previously. Isolation from fellow students is a grave shortcoming of distance education, and is of no lesser effect than remoteness from the teacher. The most important aspect of learning is the social interaction among the peer group which is lacking in distance learning.

One of the features which distinguish distance teaching universities from the mainline, residential universities is the disbanding of the campus and reaching out students wherever they prefer and whenever they wish to study.

Campus universities, with all of academic situations and residential arrangements, with students and teachers living together as a self-contained community also with recreational facilities and with an advantage of creating the grounds both for faculty-student dialogue interaction as well as for student meeting points. Since most open and distance universities are designed mainly for part–time adults, the campus life was either of lesser attraction or impossible (Guri – Rosenblit, 1999).

b) Drop-out Rates

Some of the problems that are common in distance education related to drop-outs are attrition and wastage. They signify a waste of time, energy and resources on the part of the students, education providers and society as a whole (Powell and Woodley, 1995). Obviously, in distance teaching universities with an open admission policy, drop out may be unavoidable consequence of combining quality and equality in higher education (Guri-Resenblit, 1993).

Many distance learners' dropout or cease to study at various points in their career, which Fritsch (1988) classifies student dropout into four categories: student who enroll, but who don't take up their studies in practice (non-starters); students who begin their studies, but abandon them after the first attempt (draw backs); students who sent fewer assignments than required, and for this reason were not allowed to sit for examination (drop-outs); and students who failed the examination (failures).

Since part-time learners have the options as to when, what and where to learn in distance, the chance of dropouts for different reasons in some cases are as high as 85% (Holmberg, B.1981:116)

c) The Dangers of Indoctrination

Distance teaching universities teach massive number of students by the use mass media and additional interactive technology. All these have the capacity to disseminate widely ideas that have a powerful impact on their students. Perry (1976) remarked that in 1970s certain non-democratic regimes were

interested in the idea of a distance education university, mainly to prevent students from concentrating in campuses and thus posing a political threat. Distance teaching universities in totalitarian countries can easily be put to use as a vehicle for propaganda. Distance teaching universities can disseminate any given political and social view with ease especially to students in globally dispersed location. BOU materials for instance, are used in wide range of countries, developed and developing. Even without intending to be cultural colonizers, some distance teaching universities may find themselves doing precisely their political dissemination (Roll, 1995).

2.6 *Views Related to the Application of Distance learning.*

Is it Legitimate and effective?

One of the most commentary aspects of distance education is its legitimacy in terms of the quality of education rendered. Distance learning is often seen as barely legitimate. Its history is marked by the work of institutions that accepted student fees, gave them poor service, and kept their costs down by encouraging students to drop out once they had paid all their money. Learning at a distance, particularly from printed materials, lends itself to rote learning. If teaching material gives all the answers then there is no room for an individual response while it fails to do so the student may feel challenged but frustrated. Distance learning can be soulless and isolated activity so that dropping out is more attractive. Most parents and probably most educational planners would encourage their own children to study at a conventional university rather than distance University (Perraton 2000).

But there is a threefold case to be made of its legitimacy:

First, the evidence of public – sector distance universities, and dual –mode universities that teach both conventionally and at a distance, is that students can achieve results that match those of conventional universities.

Second, distance education has been powerfully effective in reaching audiences who could not meet their educational needs from conventional institutions.

Third, where distance learning provides opportunities for student interaction with tutors, it allows open – ended dialogue, often regarded as the touchstone of legitimate education. Thus, while distance learning may lend itself to rote learning – as does learning in large classrooms – this is not an essential defining characteristic (Perraton, 2000).That is because the quality of education in large classrooms is no better than rote learning, that is the number of students in a classroom affects the quality of education rendered. The place of distance education in the society varies from country to country (Rawson Jones, 1973).

Distance learning is found to be more effective for training of teachers. According to Chale (1993), many programs of teacher education, in all continents, have succeeded in enrolling students in significant numbers. Where teachers have been promised improved status or pay at the end of the course, completion numbers can be as impressive as enrolment numbers. As an example, in its program to extend the teaching service in 1970s, Tanzania succeeded in recruiting 45,000 potential teachers of whom 38,000 (84%) went on to get their qualification (Chale 1993, in UNESCO 2002).

Different people have different perceptions about the effectiveness of distance education. Proponents of distance education tried to develop yard sticks that can be applied in order to keep the qualities of courses delivered through distance to be as effective as mainstream education. They developed some criteria that distance education needs to satisfy through assessment of the program and distance learners are adequately meeting the social needs that lead students to enroll.

Distance students tend to be older than students studying conventionally and, almost by definition, have used distance education because of some kind of social, educational or geographical disadvantages (Perraton, 2000).

It is found that distance learning can respond adequately to educational demands. The extent to which it actually satisfies them is conditional by its efficiency, which is measured in terms of the cost per student and the cost per successful student.

The best–run programs are probably better, more effective, and more interesting for students than they were before. Good practices may include using combination of media, ensuring that there is effective tutoring and student support, having an efficient administrative system, and developing clear and well produced teaching material. But, yet many institutions are a long way from achieving and implementing what they know to be good practice. Despite to lip-service to the use of a combination of media, most distance education remains dominated by print: distance educations have not moved all that far from correspondence education (Perraton, 2000).

Even within the distance education literature there is a continuing dialectic. On one hand its founding parents, from the ideologues of 1960, to the technophiles of the 1990s, argue that it is transforming education, widening access, and offering a future that is both richer and more equitable. On the other hand, its critics from H.G. Wells who denounced its encouragement of rote learning see it as a poor substitute for the real thing (Wells 1934, as cited by Perraton, 2000)

It may indeed, foster rote learning. If students have to rely on pre-prepared text, then they may come to regard the word – rather than critical dialogue – as sacred. It is unsocial form of learning, lacking or restricting the opportunities for interaction among students and tutors that is at the heart of much lively and rewarding education.

When these inherent weaknesses are put alongside the evidence of its inefficiency, an elegant and simple conclusion is that it is inherently second-rate form of education, lacking full educational legitimacy (Perraton,2000).

The same is also true for much conventional education as substandard. Many students want to pass their examination, learning by rote if need be more than they want unfettered dialogues. A working hypothesis might then be that open and distance learning has to face severe difficulties if it is to match the best conventional education, if well designed, may often match the best of what is available (Perraton, 2000).

One of the reasons for the expansion and promises of distance learning was that it is possible to extend educational opportunities at a lower cost than conventional education. If it could teach more, and reach more or accelerate educational change and these were reasons enough for the educational planners to try it (Perraton, 2000:10). Accordingly, the evidence that distance learning can be effective is reasonably firm, and contrasts with that on efficiency and quality. People studying at distance learning can pass examinations and gain qualifications that attract formal recognition and public esteem. Teacher trainees, studying at a distance, perform as well in the classroom as those trained more conventionally (Perraton 2000).

The measures of efficiency include examination pass rates and successful completion rates, or their inverse, dropout rates. Some forms of distance education are notoriously inefficient, correspondence schools (colleges) used to make their money by taking student's money in advance and providing such a poor service that they could spend the minimum on tuition (Perraton, 2000).

If that is the case, then how can one differentiate between the educational values and those of market values?

By extending his argument, he affirms that; it is easy enough to argue that distance learning lends itself to rote learning or that it enables people to pass examinations without following a worthwhile program of the study (ibid).

The skeptics, such as Kless also draw evidence from higher education in arguing that, 'distance education system...have thus usually been seen as giving a second - class inferior education to...the most disadvantaged' (Kless 1995, 403, as cited in Perraton).

The proponents of distance education, such as Daniel concluded that, "these mega universities are revolutionary in two aspects: they have brought down the cost of higher education dramatically and they have made lifelong learning a reality for adults wherever they live and work". (Daniel 1996:86, as cited in Perraton).

The above two different outlooks about distance learning were forwarded some twenty years ago. Since then a lot of positive (in terms of the proponents of

distance education) or negative experiences (in terms of the opponents) have been suggested.

In order to use and apply properly distance education programs for development of trained manpower the implementation and means of assessment and evaluation should be given special considerations.

Who is to control the quality of education to be delivered through distance education? Are the natures of the courses delivered in different distance colleges with the same course numbers (if the course numbers do match) actually the same in content, in depth and in credit hour?

We are in an era of lucrative business, and these days students participating in both traditional and distance education are said to be suffering from "diploma disease". Most students even if not all tend to get their qualification by hook or crook through all illicit means. Distance courses are more exposed and liable for such illegal means of dishonesty in academic world.

2.7 Key players in Distance Education.

Every program has its own proponents and organizers. There are also major protagonists in distance programs with their unique roles.

According to Berg (1998), in distance education there are different roles assigned to the teacher (faculty, facilitators) and to student.

Some of the teachers' roles are: integrating technology into course delivery; facilitating, and co-coordinating learning; focusing on access of learning resources; using team approach in designing; and, developing instructional materials while students roles include: working autonomously; directing self; exercising cooperative relationship; and, participating in groups work.

In order to facilitate the smooth running of the program the coordinated action of all parties involved is so important.

2.8. Modes of Learning in Distance Education

In distance education different forms or modes of education are applied.

Mode of learning in distance education follows its own different pattern. Some of these patterns and processes suggested by Piskurich(1993:325-331) are given bellow:

Self Directed Learning (SDL) – is a training design in which trainers' master packages of predetermined material, at their own pace, at their own time and place without the aid of an instructor.

A training design - One of a number of possible methodologies that one may use to solve a training problem or need. The alternatives might be classroom processes, monitoring, or on the-job training.

In which trainees master – the term master specifies the evaluation criterion for SDL. The trainees must exhibit a certain level of expertise through the process of criteria – referenced evaluation. There is no curve, no relative or comparative measure, not even a grade. There is simply a preset goal to achieve.

Packages: The basic working units of SDL, which are divided contents into parts (chunks). The trainees master each of these small pieces in sequence which leads to mastery of the complete packages.

Predetermined materials – decisions such as what materials need to be learned or when the learning will take place are often made by others. These decision makers include subject matter experts, supervisors, manager and executives.

At their own place: this depends on the nature of the training. In business environment, it is achieved within certain limits that are set by the day-to-day needs of the company and by the time it can afford to devote to training.

Without the aid of an instructor: in SDL PACKAGES ARE SELF INSTRUCTIONAL. An instructor, as disseminator of knowledge is neither needed nor desirable.

As distance instruction, SDL involves learners learning without regular face – to – face contact with teachers (Rowtree, 1986).

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communication came into being (Guri-Rosenblit, 1999). Distance teaching universities of 1970s were regarded by many as open universities of the air. Television on those days was the queen of the media.

2.9 Defining Educational Assessment and Evaluation

As the main topic of this research, about assessment and evaluation of distance students, much part of this section is on definition and explanation of these two terms and how they are commonly applied in educational settings. In order to understand the common methods employed in education, and in particular in distance education the two terms that are used need to be discussed thoroughly.

Some people erroneously equate evaluation to assessment and use them interchangeably but, they are different despite the fact that they seem synonymous. According to Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia, defines assessment as: the process of documenting, usually in measurable terms, knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs.

Similarly, Derebssa (2004) defined assessment as: the process of investigating the status of an individual or group, usually with reference to expected outcomes. (Derebssa: 2004: 244)

And Dodge, et. Al. (2004) defined ongoing assessment as:

The process of gathering information in the context of everyday class activities to obtain a representative picture of children's abilities and progress. (Dodge, et. al; 2004: 21)

The definition given by Wikipedia and Dodge, et. al. equates assessment to measurement which Derebssa defined as the description of a situation or a behavior in numerical terms so as to avoid value judgments. It makes assessment free from judgment of worth attached to the information collected. The definition given by Derebssa makes assessment synonymous to evaluation which goes beyond measurement and assigns judgments or determining the worth of a thing.

In arguing about the distinction between evaluation and assessment, Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia stated that:

When such a distinction is made, 'assessment' is said to primarily involve characterizations – objective descriptions, while 'evaluation' is said to involve characterizations and appraisals – determinations of merit/and or worth. Merit involves judgments about generalized value. Worth involves judgments about instrumental value (Wikipedia, 2006b: l).

The definitions of evaluation and assessment forwarded by Dessalegn (2004) clearly manifest not only the distinction between the two terms but also the broadness of evaluation than assessment. According to his argument evaluation bases itself on the information gathered through assessment.

> "Assessment is a way of observing, collecting information and making decisions based on information.
>
> Evaluation is an overall judgment of students learning based on continuous assessment (sometimes exams)" (Dessalegn, 2004:2)

According to Shiundu and Omulando (l992) evaluation is the process of generating data which is used in assigning value to something and finally making a decision, to accept, improve or reject it.

Wikipdia, the free online encyclopedia defines evaluation as:

The systematic determination of merit, worth, and significance of something or someone. (Wikipedia: 2006b, l)

However, a profound and modern definition of assessment is given by Frey, et.al (2006) and it should be taken as a basis for discussion in this paper.

> "Assessment is an iterative (repeating steps or cyclical), four-stage, information feedback process for setting learning goals and objectives and then gathering, interpreting, and applying outcomes data from courses, programs, or entire curricula to improve student learning." (Frey, et.al, 2006, 23)

Frey, et. als', summarized assessment learning cycle is given on figure 2.2

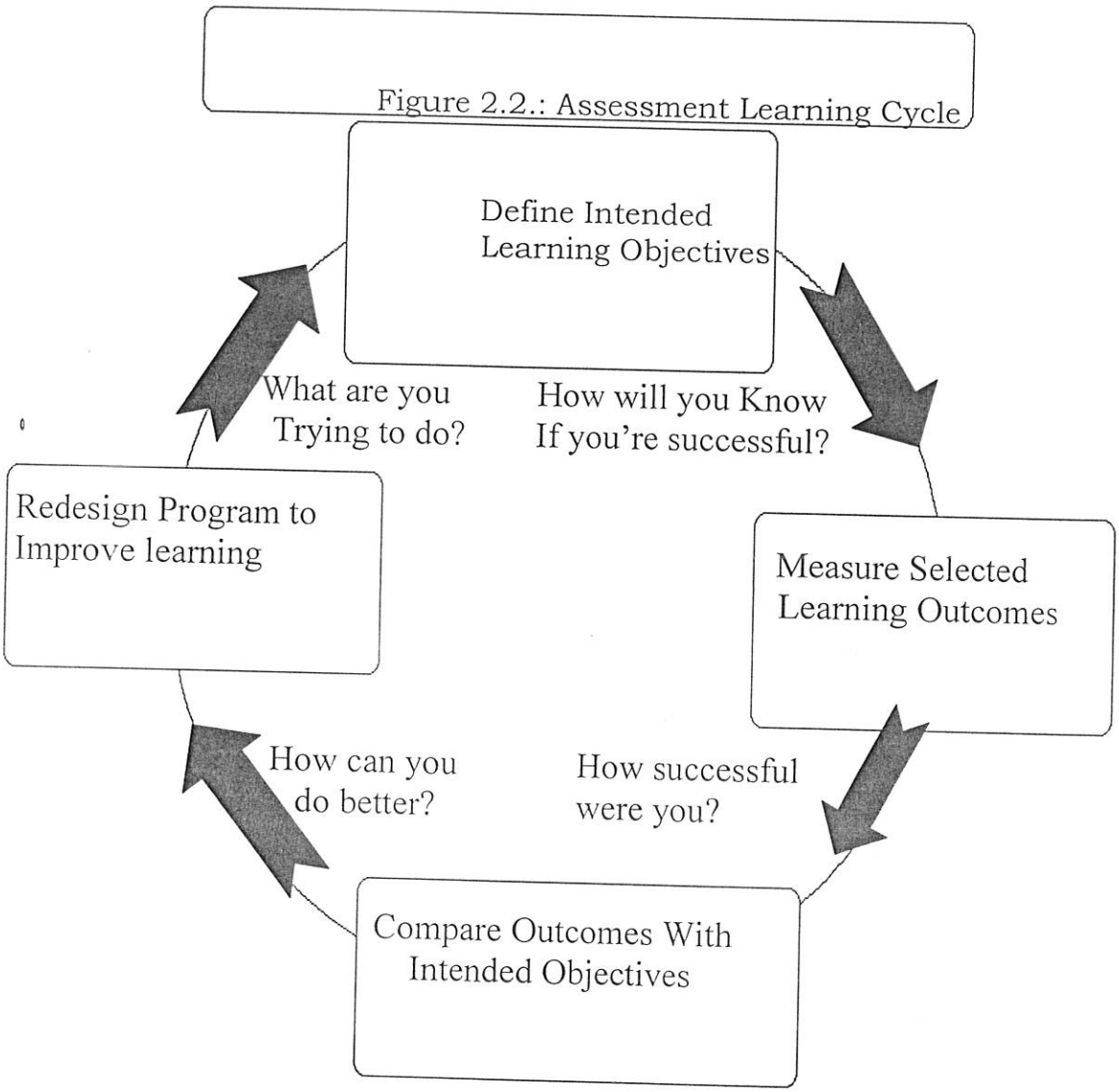

Figure 2.2.: Assessment Learning Cycle

Adopted from Frey, et.al. (2006)

I strongly believe, as many educational evaluators do, that assessment is different from evaluation in that in assessment we collect important data in the form of say, attendance, class activity(participation) tests or exams, etc, either in the form of numbers or words (objective and subjective data) so as to make a judgment on the worth of the data collected. To illustrate this, I will

use an example from school activity that we often apply. Teachers often focus on classroom assessments to follow the students' performance for the purpose of assigning grades (A, B or C) or deciding whether they should get promoted or detained. It is this judgment or decision which should be considered as evaluation.

The other example is that it is after realizing from the data teachers gathered using assessment that they can make a decision that their instruction was effective or not.

Although these three terms: measurement, assessment and evaluation have differences they support and reinforce each other in an educational setting. Without measurement and assessment there could be no evaluation. Evaluation bases itself on the data collected through measurement and assessment.

Categories of Evaluation

In terms of the purpose and the time when the collection of information takes place, evaluation can be categorized in to two and three broad areas according to Derebssa (2004) and Tuckman (1985) as cited in Richard (1990), respectively. The two categories stated by Derebssa are Formative Evaluation and Summative Evaluation. On top of these, Richard adds one more category known as Ex post facto Evaluation.

a) "Formative evaluation" is an internal function that feeds results back into the program to improve an existing educational unit: this kind of evaluation is used frequently by teachers and school administrators to compare outcomes with goals. Attainment can be measured and procedures modified over time.

b) "Summative evaluation" exists for the purpose of demonstration and documentation. Various ways of achieving similar goals can be compared. Summative evaluations help school districts analyze their unique characteristics and choose the program that will best achieve their pedagogical goals. An example is the evaluation of

the adaptability and success e work force of students who have emerged from a program.

c) "Ex post facto evaluation" is idy over time. It attempts to determine if new programs, la ed without readily predictable results, are achieving the desi oals. Here the data generated by continuous analysis are pared over time and, when available, compared with data similar pilot programs. Both longitudinal (comparison of re over time on the same group) and cross-sectional (compari of different student groups) results give evaluators the da) recommend improvement or termination.

Similarly, assessment has been categorize o two according to Wikipedia, (2006a); and Pratt, (1980) as formative and native.

In a learning context, formative and summ assessments are referred to as "assessment for learning" and "assessment rning" respectively.

As stated in Wikipedia (2006a), formative sment is generally carried out throughout a course of project, It is also re l to as "educative assessment", because it is used to aid learning. In an ec ional setting, a teacher, peer or the learner himself provide feedback on udent's work, and would not necessarily used for grading purposes.

As stated in Wikipedia (2006a) summative ssment is generally carried out at the end of a course or project. In ducational setting, summative assessments are typically used to assign stu ts a course grade.

Similarly, according to Pratt, 1980 as cit Derebssa, (2004), summative assessment refers to the type of assessmen ich is carried out at the end of an academic year to determine the achiev t of students in the subject or for grading purpose.(Pratt,1980 as cited in I ssa,2004)

An assessment type which has won wide p arity and which our Education and Training Policy (TGE, 1994) advocate as an appropriate method to assess student learning is known as contin or ongoing assessment.

According to Dessalegn (2004), continuous assessment refers to the process of making periodic observations to find out what a student knows, understands and can do. He further argues that:

> "Continuous assessment is not continuous testing. Giving tests every month and accumulating pupil's marks for final grading is an insignificant aspect of assessment package. Continuous assessment is a demanding task that requires the use of various assessment tools in order to assure the achievement of curricular objectives by each and every student." (Dessalegn: 2004, 21)

Frey, et.al. (2006) stated that assessment is intricately associated with the "learner-centered" method of teaching. I think it is this justification which influenced the introduction of continuous assessment along with the new approach of student-centered method in our current Education and Training Policy.

2. 10 Methods of Evaluation

Developmental testing - a method that applies try-out procedures characterized by small experimental group taking courses in preliminary version before they are offered for more general use, sort of pilot project. It is thus types of preliminary formative evaluation.

Evaluation as illumination - a method that calls for the participation of students in the evaluation process. It is considered important that the students should not be object of the study, but should be subjects themselves, this method of involving students themselves in the evaluation process is known as peer assessment and it makes them develop self esteem and responsibility. Participative work of this kind can lead to a method of action research study of the life of distance students.

However developing an assessment on a given course development and applying statistical methods to test their validity requires educationalists in

terms of experiments and studies of what actually happened in relevant situations. Assessing the course also helps for the adjustment to how students should be assessed.

2.11 Tools or Methods of Marking Assessment Activities

Plisses, et.al (2003) as cited in Dessalegn (2004) stated four tools or methods of marking assessment activities. First, rubric, which is used when an activity has many parts to be assessed. The score for each part is based on the evaluation criteria. Second, analytical list, which is a list of criteria for a particular assessment activity. The list includes the expected components of the criteria. It is similar to rubrics but it is considered as simpler than rubrics. Third, rating scale which when learners have a lot of different answers or responses on an assessment activity. They usually have a number part and a descriptive part. For instance, an 1-6 scale would have 1 as its lowest score and 6 as its highest score. And fourth, checklist, which helps us to indicate if some knowledge or skill has been mastered or not. They are often used when there are a large number of elements or tasks to be assessed.

Dessalegn (2004) sorted out seven kinds of assessment activities which can be used by teachers in schools to find out what the learners know and can do. They are:

1. Selected Response Assessment Activities in the form of tests and exams which are easy to mark. Examples are multiple choices, true and false, fill in the blank and matching questions.
2. Briefly constructed Response Assessment Activities where a student is required to respond from memory and provide a word phrase that completes a sentence. They are often used in tests and exams. Examples are fill-in-the blank, short answer and labeling a drawing.
3. Constructed Response Assessment Activities where learners are asked to use their knowledge from what they have learned.

4. Performance Assessment Activities where learners are asked to demonstrate or show in some way what they know and do. Examples are competence in skills such as athletics, music, drama, dance, oral reports, role plays, etc.

5. Product Assessment Activities involve the assessment of tangible objects that can be touched which students created.

6. Assessing Learners when they are working in groups where the teacher assesses the extent of students' participation in the group than the quality of the work they submit.

7. Using portfolio with learners which involves the systematic collection of students' work over a year, a term or a topic in a folder, drawer, filling cabinet, or other suitable container to make an overall evaluation of students work. It shows students progress over time.

Since criterion referenced tests (CRT) are commonly used in distance education, the first two and the last assessment activities suggested by Dessalegn are appropriate for distance learners.

Characteristics of a Good Measuring Instrument

The most important criteria which should be utilized in checking the properness of the measuring instrument for examining realization of an objective and the situation in which the objective is to be realized or not are validity and reliability. Verification of reliability and validity are the litmus tests of evaluation and assessment tools.

Validity refers to the degree to which a tool actually measures what it claims to measure. It indicates the closeness or agreement between what the instrument measures and the function it is supposed to measure.

Reliability refers to the consistency with which instrument of evaluation measures whatever it is intended to measure. This is to say that the instruments bear the same result when used by different evaluators or by the same evaluator at different times. Consistency in individual use of the

instruments is also measured by comparing it to grade level expectations or standards and by national percentile rankings (Derebssa, 2004; Richard, 1990).

Purposes and Functions of Assessment and Evaluation

The purpose of assessment depends on the method of teaching we employ. The purpose of assessment in "teacher-centered" methods is mainly for grading; therefore, only few one-dimensional tests are given to this end. In "student-centered" methods the purpose of assessment is for ongoing feedback and many multidimensional products will be given to achieve it. Frey, et. Al (2006) and Dessalegn (2004) argued that continuous assessment helps to assure the achievement of curricular objectives by each and every student.

According to Payne (1992) and Crooks (1988) cited in Abdelnasir (2001), measurement and evaluation procedures play vital instructional purposes such as:

a) to select, appraise and clarify instructional objectives;
b) to report students' achievement of educational objectives;
c) to plan and improve learning experiences; and
d) to increase learning and raise the motivation of the learner

According to Pratt (1980) cited in Derebssa (2004), evaluation and assessment have the following fundamental functions:

a. To inform the pupils of their attainment;
b. To diagnose the weakness and strength of pupils;
c. To locate areas where remedial measures are needed;
d. To guide decisions about students' future;
e. To inform students' competence to parents, employers, Tax payers, universities, etc;
f. To provide feedback in to instructional system;
g. To provide an operational target for the learner; and
h. To license candidates for a profession or occupation

Of course the evaluation and assessment methods mentioned above are commonly applicable for regular learners. To apply these methods to distance students is practically difficult because most assessment methods mentioned above require convectional educational settings.

2.12 Who plays a Role in Evaluation and Assessment?

The teacher and distance instructor should be involved in formative evaluation throughout all the stages of curriculum development right from the formulation of the programs. The teacher or the distance instructor can play critical role in evaluation in that he/she is closest to the learners and can constantly find out his/her performance and the problems inherent in the instructional program (Shiundu and Omulando, 1992).

According to Polham (1971) cited in Derebssa (2004), summative evaluation typically uses paper-pencil tests as instrument to appraise the degree to which the objectives of the courses have been achieved. However, as Dessalegn (2004) argued continuous assessment (with all its techniques apart from paper-pencil tests) enables the teachers to assess a curriculum which is being implemented in a classroom. It also allows teachers to evaluate, based on the curriculum, whether or not their teaching strategies are effective and to adjust the strategies to meet the needs of their students.

Dessalegn (2004) furthered his argument that ongoing assessment leads to an overall evaluation. It is difficult to rely on an exam to decide whether a student should get promoted to the next grade or not because exam may not provide an accurate picture of what the student knows and can do. Therefore, continuous assessment provides the teacher a strong basis to evaluate learners' overall progress.

The teacher should use the assessment results to:

a) diagnose students' learning difficulties;
b) take remedial action during the course of instruction;

c) re-examine and consequently revise the approach to teaching the subject;

d) help students improve their performance;

e) improve the curriculum at the school level; and

f) revise and improve the curriculum through out the nation by submitting the information gathered through assessment to the central office. When a problem is reported in the curriculum being enacted by several teachers, the central office will then view it as a national problem which should be solved immediately (Shiunda and Omulando, 1992).

The teacher as an individual or in a group can conduct simple research in subject areas and make sure that the findings reach the central office. Such information can be used by the subject panels, project teams and workshops to make decisions so as to improve the program and consequently assessment and evaluation of the learners.

Teachers can make a study on the syllabus, examine textbooks, guides and other materials from the central office and make constructive comments which should be communicated to the central curriculum planners through the proper channel.

Classroom teachers can also participate very actively in the construction, moderation, administration and marking of external examinations which are set by the central body. Teachers who are not members of committees or examination council panels can also serve as a source of information to the examination board or council by responding to the questionnaires from the council or by directly looking at the examination papers and making constructive comments which should be mailed to the concerned body. Such kind of information can help in the improvement of examination papers (Shiunda and Omulando ,1992).

According to Doge, et.al (2004) the data teachers gather from an ongoing assessment (formative evaluation) enable them;

- to learn more about each child;
- plan for children's learning, and
- track children's progress and whenever required generate outcome reports.

The result of the studies conducted by Daniel and Dessalegn (2001) and (Dessalegn (2003) on continuous assessment in the primary schools in Addis Ababa as cited in Dessalegn (2004) stated that teachers do not use continuous assessment in their classrooms due to the following mitigating factors:

- lack of ample training in continuous assessment;
- lack of skills to design continuous assessment tools;
- lack of manuals and supporting materials which guide teachers how to develop continuous assessment tools;
- large class size;
- lack of commitment and motivation by teachers; and
- teachers' attitude towards continuous assessment.

Educational evaluation incorporates a great many diverse activities and functions. It includes assigning marks to learners, selecting individuals for special opportunities of training, appraising the performance of teachers or the quality of instructional materials, and assessing the effectiveness of various approaches to instruction. Evaluation in education always involves an appraisal of the desirability associated with learning and teaching that is also associated in terms of some value system.

The chief purpose of evaluation should be to improve achievement rather than just measure it for the purpose of classifying students or issuing certificates to them. Evaluation of educational achievement should be improvement oriented. (Dave, 1973).

In this case, Dave considered not only for the sake of final decisions that evaluation is used, it is also can and should be used for improving achievements of students in educational processes.

2.13 Assessing Distance Learning

Formative Evaluation is likely to strengthen any educational institution; it has a particular significance for distance learning partly because its methods are complex and likely to involve many partners and partly because its students are distant, unseen, and often unheard.

It goes on to propose that quality assurance in distance learning should be examined under six headings: System design; program design; approval and review; management of program delivery; student development and support; student communication and representation; and student assessment. Academic quality of the work at the centre is not enough: Institutions also need to know how well their systems are working for communicating with student, for sending and responding to their work, and for maintaining student records.

The students' attainment that can be detected through assessment and evaluation to the purpose of the course is considered important for the judgment of the effectiveness of the course. The effectiveness of the course could also be evaluated by looking for detailed information about the study in the form of summative evaluation, and in the form of educational follow up as formative evaluation. In education and training through distance methods, the effectiveness of the course is often measured by the use of pre-and post-tests. We often use the term quality in relation to course materials and services to indicate their fitness for the purpose intended. The Assessment of students' performance in terms of quality should also be given a priority.

Some of the methods commonly applied as to how to evaluate distance learning may involve:

Consulting Experts - In most cases, different basis for the judgment of distance - study course is the opinion of experts. This evaluation process means that the courses are submitted to criticism by subject specialists who may be

recognized as educational authorities. By evaluating the courses, the evaluation of distance students is enhanced.

Consulting would-be employers and/or teaching bodies - It is the task of employers or teachers in higher educational institutes to relate the courses and what it teaches to the requirements of the job or further study that the student is aiming at. The same is true for evaluation of distance learners.

Students attitudes - studies of students' attitudes about the courses they are taking is extremely important, students may be asked what they think about the course generally, how motivating, interesting and presentation procedures. Interesting and motivating courses facilitate good performances and hence positively affecting the assessment and evaluation of students.

2.14 What Assessment techniques should be used?

The wider availability of formal tests, the relative ease of administrating them, and the use of normative data are some of the major reasons why tests have been used within schools.

Educational assessment should be accompanied with methods of course delivery. Students need to be taught the subject matter in depth. The teaching and learning process should be conducive so that learner may have deep knowledge about the courses. With deep knowledge, the process of assessment and evaluation of the learners becomes more reasonable. Because distance learning is considered by some as second rate of learning due to its ' rote learning' or as surface learning as commented by some scholars, for example Kless,1995.

Knowles (1980), in his book on; "The Modern Practice of Adult Education", tried to show the modern trend of education, the tendency of shift from Pedagogy to Andragogy, that is, teaching adults in addition to children has also become important these days. Some of the advantages of teaching adults according to Knowles are:

The learners are more of self directedness (less depending);
Fewer lectures to more problem solving cases, field experience;
They tend to learn mainly "needs to know", when they are ready to learn, and;
Adult learners are "performance–centered" in their orientation to learning.

According to Edward L. Thorndike (1952) – the ability to learn declines only very slowly and very slightly after age 20. (A decline in learning capacity of about 1% per year after age 25). But according to Irving Long (Thorndike's Colleagues) – the decline is in the speed of learning not in intellectual power. Therefore, adults do have the capacity to participate in adult and distance education despite their ages and wrong public notions that they cannot be taken seriously as possible candidates. According to the data collected in this research, the majority of our distance students are within adult age, and the social as well as educational status of these group needs special attention.

Learning is an internal process – controlled by the learners and engaging their whole being - including intellectual, emotional, and physiological function-the experience of the learners; experience being defined as the interaction between individuals and their environment (ibid).

In distance learning there are different types of courses conducted depending on the weight of the courses. Formal courses are courses commonly with credit (grades), and informal courses (learning for its own sake) are with no credit. And there are courses with only auditing, where attendance is important, but with no credits or grades attached to them.

The use of grades introduces an element of formality and completion that runs counter to the very spirit of andragogy. So, adult learners do not feel comfortable with courses that are with credit. They rather prefer courses with audit (with no grades attached).

Formal courses are commonly accompanied by credits (grades) and informal courses are taken as learning for is own sake. But in the case of distance learning, the nature of the program being formal, the courses are accompanied with credits.

2.15 Tests and Assessments

In any educational courses that involve credit or grade the most common method to assess the process is by conducting test or exam.

High-stakes testing refers to the use of tests and assessments alone to make decision that are of prominent educational, financial, or social impact. Examples include whether: (a) a student may be promoted to the next grade or graduate from high school; (b) a school, principal, or teacher receives a financial reward or incentive, such as a school being identified as 'exemplary' or 'low performing'; (c) a state takes over the administrative control of a local school; and (d) a principal or teacher is offered an employment contract or extension.

The technical adequacy of a test, or its validity and reliability can be affected by different factors. Test misuse and abuse can occur when users of test results are unaware of the factors that can influence the usefulness of test scores. Some educators may consider test scores alone as a major achievement for important decision making for the future of a student. Test results should be considered to be a part of a broader 'movie' or process called assessment. It should be the findings of the broad assessment, not just test results that form the basis for important educational decision making.

If important educational decisions are to be made, critically evaluated test results should be combined with results from a variety of other assessment procedures, such as, performance and portfolio assessments, observations, checklists, rating scales, as appropriate, and integrated with relevant background and contextual information (e.g., reading level, language proficiency, cultural consideration) to ensure that educational decision are appropriate.

Although testing is one part of assessment, assessment encompasses much more than testing. In general, assessment is used as an integration of critically analyzed test results and other information results in a decision about a pupil:

to assign a grade, recommend for advanced program, to give instruction- to repeat, to review, to move on- to suggest about curriculum, replace, revise, or other educational factors (Kubiszyn T. and Borich G.,2003).

The purpose of testing is to provide objective data that can be used along with subjective impressions to make better educational decisions.

There are two ways to collect objective data;

Norm-Referenced Test (NRT), and Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT). Such types of tests give us different types of information.

Both inform us about how well students are performing but they are based on different approaches to testing (i.e. how we measure)

In Norm-Referenced Test (NRT) we can have information about where a student stands compared to other students of similar type, or kind of test data that help to determine a student's "place" or " rank" by comparing the student's performance to a norm or average of performance by other, similar students.

In Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT) we can have information about a student's level of proficiency in or mastery of some skill or set of skills. This is accompanied by comparing a student's performance to a standard of mastery called a criterion. The information it conveys refers to a comparison with a criterion or absolute standard, which helps to decide whether a student needs more work on some skill or set of skills.

Determining the appropriateness of a given type of test (NRT - CRT) depends on the purpose of testing. CRT tests must be very specific if they are to yield information about individual skill. In NRT, in contrast, tests to be general and measure a variety of specific and general skills at once, but it fails to measure them thoroughly. In the NRT, items vary in level of difficulty from those that almost no one answers correctly to those that almost everyone answers correctly. In CRT, the items tend to be equivalent to each other in difficulty. Following a period of instruction, students tend to find CRT items easy and answer most correctly. In a CRT, about 80% of the students completing a unit

of instruction are expected to answer each item correctly, where as in NRT about 50% are expected to do so (Kubiszyn T. and Borich G.,2003).

Performance-Based Assessment

Many educational test measure learning indirectly, and some skills and more complex cognitive outcomes are best assessed with paper-and- pencil tests. But other skills-particularly those involving independent judgment, critical thinking, and decision making - are best assessed with performance tests. It also allows teachers to observe achievement, mental habits, ways of working, and behaviors of value in the real world that conventional tests may miss. In other words, the teacher observes and evaluates student abilities to carry out complex activities as might be expected in a job, in the community, or in various forms of advanced training (ibid).

Teachers across the country are using performance tests to assess not only high level longtime skills but also non cognitive outcomes, such as self-direction, ability to work with others, and social awareness (Redding, 1992)

Portfolio Assessment

Assessment based on the idea that a collection of a learners work throughout the year as one of the best ways to show both final achievement and the effort put into getting there.

Classroom- level purposes that portfolio can achieve include:

- Monitoring student progress,
- Communicating what has been learned to parents,
- Passing on information to subsequent teachers,
- Evaluation how well was something was thought,
- Showing off what has been accomplished, and,
- assigning a course grade

In distance education the most common method of evaluation is practically cognitive evaluation that involves criterion referenced tests only. The other two types of evaluation, that is performance and portfolio can not be realized at all.

Instructional materials of quality are expensive to produce, and large number of students must use them before the cost per head becomes reasonable. Distance teaching universities have to be established and to operate as large scale organizations, otherwise their usefulness may be compromised (Perry, 1991). Holmberg(1995) also believed that the large–scale institutions, like autonomous distance teaching universities, could be regarded as innovations outside traditional higher education, in so far as they apply what Peters (1983) called "industrial working methods". Peters suggested that the salient feature of distance education was its high degree of industrialization (ibid.)
So the proper implementation and students' assessment and evaluation in distance education is found as an alternative to accommodate large number of students who otherwise can not go to conventional schools for different reasons.

Chapter three

Research Design and methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I tried to discuss the basic procedures that I used to conduct basically the methods employed in assessing and evaluating distance students in those two selected distance education colleges, namely Alpha and St. Mary's Distance Education Colleges located in Addis Ababa. The researcher believed that these two colleges have longer years of distance education services and access to them.

In this case, the collection of data from both distance colleges is to get general idea about assessment and evaluation of the distance learners in the respective colleges. Moreover, the purpose of this research paper is not about making a comparative study of the two distance colleges.

3.2 Research design

I have mainly chosen quantitative method of research that mainly involves questionnaire, so that I can express the results of the data in simple statistical description. In addition to this I used qualitative means of conducting observation as how evaluation and assessments of tests and assignments are administered, and also tried to use document survey as well as interview to get a general idea about how, when and where the distance program entailing assessment and evaluation is taking place from the department heads, coordinators, tutors and from the distance students.

The researcher believes that in some cases obtaining genuine information about the problem under study relies on real participation of all the stakeholders specified above. In order to check and counter balance some discrepancies among these groups, I tried to use triangulation method of data analysis.

3.3 Data source of the study

I tried to obtain data from the respondents of the two Distance Colleges because these colleges involve large number of students and also I believed that the respondents from the colleges can fill the questionnaire prepared in English with no problem.

a. from department heads, that are five in number from each college with total number of ten.

These department heads are also in most cases considered to be the subject matter experts of their respective departments. A subject matter expert is an individual with specialized knowledge in that particular subject who helps analyze, write, or evaluate the training material for that subject.

b. from twenty tutors at each college, with total of forty and these tutors are the one who have direct contact with distance learners and without whom the distance education program it self cannot be effective.

c. from 90 randomly chosen distance students at each college with a total of 180 . The basic part of the research is entirely dependent on the main stakeholders, the distance learners. Their genuine participation and feedback is paramount.

The total number of respondents were about 230. As a researcher, I tried to conduct a device to gather information by means of primary and secondary data. Although, there are a lot of ways in which to gather information to the research, I have chosen mainly questionnaire; for information concerning the distance learners to gather data that are pertinent to the research studies, interview for tutors, coordinators, and document survey as to what is generally happening at the distance centers, such as preparation, distribution, invigilation, collection, grading, announcing grades, etc.

Chapter four

Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 Introduction.

Chapter four is entirely devoted to the data analysis based on the research conducted on the two distance colleges, namely Alpha Distance College and St. Mary's Distance colleges in Addis Ababa. The theme of the research is the practice of learners' assessment and evaluation in distance education.

The method of the research being quantitative mainly, the analysis has been carried out according to normal statistical methods and the results are tabulated with relevant comments. Cross tabulations are used to show the relation between background variables and variables which describe participation, attitudes towards participation, attitudes towards distance learning, self-perception, choice of learning strategy, motivation, hindrance (obstacles) and about assessment and evaluation in distance and for further education.

4.2 Background of the respondents

Comparison between the two distance learning colleges may reflect basic differences and similarities in terms of their notions about the nature of the distance programs and the way of the assessments and evaluations of the courses. In this case the purpose of this research is to get general idea about the assessment and evaluation of distance learners in both colleges. With that regard the researcher collected data that are believed to be relevant to the study. Moreover, the researcher does not have the intention of making a comparative study about the two distance college students and the performance or general activities of the colleges.

The following table describes each sample with respect to backgrounds of the respondents.

Table 4.1. Percentage analysis to the background of respondents.

	Background of respondents		Alpha N = 42 (total)	St. Mary N = 68 (total)
1	Gender	male	52 %	62 %
		female	48 %	38 %
2	Age (years)	below- 30	4 %	10 %
		31-35	-	23 %
		36-40	23 %	17 %
		41-45	27 %	23 %
		above-45	46 %	17 %
3	Level of education	No formal educ.	-	-
		Primary educ.	-	-
		Secondary educ.	25 %	12 %
		Preparatory educ.	-	-
		College / university	75 %	88 %
4	Household size in a family	one (alone)	13 %	-
		two	-	12 %
		three	13 %	12 %
		four	75 %	36 %
		five and more	-	35 %
5	Employment	unemployed	4 %	-
		employed	88 %	100 %

Gender

In both distance colleges, the majority of the respondents are men. In Alpha Distance College nearly equal representation of distance students, in terms of sex, are observed whereas men are over represented (62%) in St. Mary's distance college. It is important to bear this in mind when interpreting difference in overall scale of participation and evaluation in distance education

Age

Distance education, which in some cases considered as adult education seems to serve mainly people at their later ages. In Alpha distance college, the majority of the distance learners (93%) are above the age of 35. But in the case of St. Mary's Distance Collage, a reasonable number of young student are enrolled (about 39%) with the age of below 35.

Size of household in a family

Since most of distance learners are above the age of student in regular (conventional) schools (colleges) most of them are believed to run a family. Consequently, respondents running a family may have greater difficulties in finding time for attending distance education, and those who attend may not have sufficient time to do their assignment and study for examinations after working hours.

The majority of the respondents in both distance colleges have three and more than three family members. Even, among the respondents from St. Mary's Distance College, those with five and more family members are more than 35%.

Employment

There are no as such important differences with respect to employment status between the two distance colleges. Which all the respondent of St. Mary distance colleges are employed, and about only 4% of the respondents from Alpha Distance College are unemployed.

All are government and/or non-government employees that may call for special attention in interpretation of some results.

Level of Education

In both colleges, the big majority of respondents (75% in Alpha and 88% in St. Merry) are found to have college and university level of education. And the remaining percent of respondents (25% and 12%) respectively are with secondary education just before they started the distance learning.

4.3 Participation in Distance Education

Table 4. 2. Studying in distance education (D.E).

Percentage analysis.

Base=all respondents (distance students).

The reasons for choosing to study in distance education.

The reasons why you study in distance education?	Alpha N = 42(total)	St. Mary's N = 62(total)
To get a job	-	-
To get a qualification (recognized)	43%	17%
To change the type of work I do	8%	16%
To be promoted	2%	17%
For career development	25%	32%
To fill blanks in my previous education	2%	-
To upgrade my qualification	12%	10%
Not to miss my present job and family	8%	9%
Social contact/to engage my self	-	-

For the reason why do(did) you prefer to participate in distance education (for question.No.6); the majority(43%) of Alpha distance students replied that to get or obtain a qualification (degree or diploma), while that of St. Mary's (32%) said

for career development or to develop their educational background. None of the students from both colleges claimed to get a job. All students from both colleges seem to be employed one way or another.

The second majority (25%) of Alpha students also claimed that they pursue distance education just to develop their capacity to do their jobs properly (refer table 4. 2).

Cross (1981) describes participants with such motives (learning for career development) as "goal oriented". He fills that goal oriented persons first identify a need and subsequently look for learning opportunities. Participation motivated by a desire for social contact and breaking out of the everyday routine is described as "activity orientation". Activity oriented participants, according to Cross, participate more for the activity itself than in order to achieve specific learning goal. They may go on a course to avoid feelings of loneliness or boredom at home or to get away from a job or home situation.

Educators in both industrialized and developing countries have used open and distance learning to help solve their problems of resources, access, quality and quantity: running education with little money; opening doors to new groups of students, raising the quality and standard of education; expanding numbers (Perraton, 2000). According to Perraton, then one can conclude that open and distance education is a necessity to fill the gap in terms of educated human resources, which otherwise can not be attained only through regular schooling.

The following part of data analysis is based on general questionnaire filled out by the respondents from both colleges starting from question number seven.

What did (do) you choose to learn in distance education? (qn.no.7). The big majority of distance student in both colleges, 63% and 74% at Alpha and St. Mary respectively, choose to study general and /or academic courses. But only 33% and 19% of them respectively, choose to study vocational or work-related courses. From these data it is possible to conclude that the big majority of distance learners in the two colleges are those who are interested to study

general or academic courses. In both colleges there are no students who take recreational and leisure courses. Such courses, for recreational purposes, are actually common in developed countries where people are interested in taking such courses that are not directly related to their careers and, people with no economic constraints and taking such courses only for the sake of leisure.

The next question number 8 is about the number of courses an individual in distance education takes at a semester. The number of courses taken in a semester can be used as an indicator how effectively the distance education is progressing. One of the advantages of distance learning is, students have the choice as to the number of courses they can take at a time. That depends on his/her free time, capability, economic situation, etc. Based on these facts, 56% of alpha distance student respondents take more than three courses and 68% of the respondents at St. Merry similarly, take more than three courses at a semester. 36% of Alpha and 26% of St. Mary's take three courses at a time (semester). It is seems that the big majority of students in both distance colleges take three and more than three courses at a time. In this case, the question could be how effectively the courses are delivered? The depth, the width and generally the contents of the modules for three and more than three courses seem to be a daunting task to cover for distance learners in order to sit for examination after studying the modules at a distance. By definition, distance learners are part time students, again they are also believed to be engaged in different job related activities. From table 4.1 we see that all are workers and most with families of three and more. So taking three and more than three courses at a semester seems to be unreasonable. The important consideration in this case could be (seems to be) just to finish the distance courses in very short period of time by compromising with the quality of distance education. Distance students seem to take three and more than three courses at a time just to finish distance courses in less number of years.

In distance learning there are commonly different methods employed to conduct the courses. The following question is based on how distance learners prefer to learn. For the question; "how do you prefer to learn in distance

Distance College suggested that time constraint as main reason, 24% age/health, 16% as lack of motivation and 12% as due to economic problem or money. From both distance colleges the main reason that is considered as to the main hindrance to take part in distance courses is time constraint. In this case one may ask basic question as why time is taken as a primary reason as a barrier for distance learners. On question number 8 of the questionnaire, the big majority of distance learners take three and more than three courses at a season (semester). If that is the case, distance students seem to have much free time to cover the modules assigned for the courses. But in the last question number 10, time constraint suggested as a main factor that may hinder learning from participation in the distance courses seems to be a contradiction because researchers have classified barriers (hindrances) to participation in distance in different ways. Cross (1981) distinguished between different types of external obstacles and characterized the obstacles in three main groups: *situational, institutional* and *dispositional* barriers.

Situational barriers encompass matters such as costs, lack of time, care duties, responsibilities with work and transport.

Institutional barriers involve; study plans, lack of information, strict attendance requirements or lack of relevant course.

Dispositional barriers include; low self confidence, lack of faith in one's learning ability, lack of desire or perseverance, and generally being tired of school. However distance students who claim time as main constraint should have taken fewer numbers of courses in a semester.

The next question is about the quality of distance education, and what distance learners feel about themselves when compared to conventional students. They were asked "how to rate themselves after completing the distance program with respect to conventional (regular) student with the same qualification."

92% of the respondents from Alpha Distance College rated themselves as equal as to regular students and only 4% as inferior and remaining 4% as superior to the regular students. The response of respondents from St. Mary's where 81% of them replied as equal as to the regular ones, 7% of them as superior, 4% as

inferior and the remaining 7% suggested as hard to tell. From the collected data then one may say the big majority of the respondents tried to justify the distance education as equal as to that of conventional educations.

According to Wells;

> "distance learning indeed fosters rote learning, if students are to rely on pre-prepared text, then they may come to regard the word- rather than critical dialogue as sacred...when these inherent weakness are put alongside the evidence of its inefficiency, an elegant and simple conclusion is that it is inherently second-rate form of education, lacking full educational legitimacy". (Wells 1934:343-52 as cited in Perraton, 2000).

On the other hand, the proponents of distance education, such as, Perraton,for instance suggested that if well designed, distance learning may match the best of what is available (Perraton, 2000).

Different distance learners have different motives to learn in distance. Question number twelve is designed to seek some answers as how useful the distance courses are for them. These questions are to be related with the degree of usefulness of distance courses for each respondent using scale rating; as very useful, moderately useful, useful, not very useful and, not useful at all to the corresponding entries.(refer question No. 12 of the questionnaire in the appendix.

As to that of the usefulness of distance education to get a job, 63% of Alpha distance respondents say it is useful and very useful while the rest as not very useful and not useful at all. But respondents from St. Mary's responded as useful (83%) and the rest as not useful. For the second entry, to get qualification (to upgrade my qualification): 63% of Alpha college respondents commented as it very useful, and 25% as useful, the remaining respondents as not useful. But, respondent from St. Mary's 77% responded as very useful, and 23% as useful.

From these responses, respondents seem to be interested to acquire their qualification through distance learning.

As to that of the 3rd entry, "to change the type of work I do", 42% of Alpha respondents responded as very useful, 21% as useful and 33% as not useful, and 67% of St. Mary's respondents responded as very useful and 23% as useful and only 10% of them as not useful. From the responses it is possible to conclude that distance students engaged in the distance program to get their qualifications which they could not in conventional learning for different reasons.

For the fourth entry, about to perform my work better; 96% of Alpha college respondents said it is useful and only 4% not useful. Similarly, 97% of the respondents from St. Mary's said it is useful, only 3% as not useful. In this case the big majority of the respondents believe that distance courses help them to perform their jobs better.

As to that of the fifth entry; to improve my self-confidence, 71% of the respondents from Alpha college commented as very useful and the remaining 29% as useful.

Similarly, 97% of St. Mary's respondents said to improve self-confidence and only 3% said not useful at all. In both cases, respondents seem to enjoy self-confidence they develop by distance learning.

For that of the sixth entry; "to be promoted", only 33% of respondents from Alpha's responded as very useful, 42% as useful and the rest 25% as not useful. But 63% of the respondents from St. Mary's commented as very useful and 30% as useful and the rest 7% as not useful. Here we have mixed cases where distance learners enjoying the privilege of being promoted at their work places, particularly those respondent from St. Mary's. In this case it seems that there are working places that may recognize capacity building that should be accompanied with promotion and economic benefits.

For that of seventh entry; to fill blanks in my previous education (missed opportunities), 46% of respondents from Alpha commented as very useful, 29% as useful and 17% as not useful at all. But respondents from St. Mary's, 50%

of them said it is very useful, 30% useful and the rest not useful as such. In this case one may speculate that the majority of the respondents who said that it is useful seem to fill the gap they lost in the past due to some reasons, such as, marriage, raising children, etc. and those who said not useful could be imagined as relatively younger and who did not miss the chance of regular schooling.

As to that of question number thirteen; about the frequency of contacts with tutor in a course, 50% respondents from Alpha commented as the need arises (it depends), 29% no contact at all and 12% once in a month. It seems that distance students have no obligation to attend tutorial classes. But distance education being distance, those who like to attend may come to tutorial classes as they wish.

But 50% of respondents from St. Mary's commented on that there is no contact at all with the tutor. 18% responded as once in a week, and similarly, 18% as the need arises, and the remaining 14% as once in a week and once in a month. It is up to the colleges to organize and conduct tutorial sessions and follow-ups about what is going on. Such disparities, as half-of the respondents commenting on the absence of tutorial sessions, seem that there is low level of organizing and conducting tutorial classes by the respective distance colleges. Such distance courses are best complemented when they are supported by tutorial classes. It is true that such tutorial classes could incur additional money to the colleges but lacking of tutorial sessions affects the quality of the distance program that should not be compromised by such attitudes.

The question that follows is directly related with question number 13. It asks if they make contacts with their tutor, the means of contact is?" To reflect on this question 50% of the respondents from Alpha said in person (face-to-face) and 4% with telephone and 4% through written message. The remaining 42% did not respond, as it could be expected from question number 13. Similarly, 46% of respondents from St. Mary's responded as in person (face-to-face), 14% through written message, 7% with telephone and 29% no response at all. In

educational settings feedbacks from both sides are important for good mutual interaction between the teacher or the tutor and the students. Pupil can learn a lot from their mistakes.

For the question, as how the scores of the results (exams and assignments) are announced to distance students; 63% of the respondents from Alpha said they are posted in the compound of the centre, 29% through mail (postal service) and 4% each as by telephone and through all means. Similarly, 67% of respondents from St. Mary's said it is posted in the compound of the centre, 17% said by all means, 13% through mail and the remaining 3% said by telephone. From both data, one can be certain that results of tests and assignments are announced by posting them inside the compound of the centers. The rest means of announcements do not seem practical. In order to announce the results, the phone numbers, or/and postal addresses of each student should be known. It is also economical to uses such means to announce results. The best way and least costly is by posting the results in the compound of the centers.

The following questions are used to identify factors that may affect most about participation of learners in distance education. Question number 20 has five entries with five possible options. (Refer table 3)

Table 3. Factors that may affect distance learners.

Elements (problems)	Distance College	Discourages most	D. Much	D. Less	D. Least	Non at all
Lack of study skill	Alpha St. Mary	2% 30%	13% 13%	17% 27%	43% 27%	25% 3%
Difficulty of course materials	Alpha St. Mary	7% 13%	10% 23%	48% 33%	35% 23%	- 8%
Delay in supply of course materials	Alpha St. Mary	13% 43%	26% 17%	17% 23%	39% 10%	5% 7%
Delay in feed back on assignments	Alpha St. Mary	26% 33%	17% 27%	35% 3%	17% 30%	- 7%
Volume(amount) of courses to be covered	Alpha St. Mary	17% 33%	17% 27%	30% 30%	35% 10%	- -

The first entry about the factors that may affect distance learners is about; "lack of study skill", 43% of respondents from Alpha commented that its effect is least, 17% of them said it has less effect, 13% has much effect and only 2% said discourages most and the remaining 25% as no effect at all.

But respondents from St. Mary's suggested that lack of study skill discourages most (30%), 27% each for less and least, and the remaining 13% said lack of study skill discourages much and 3% none at all. In this case, study skill seems to depend on the background of the distance learners. Both groups show different trends in terms of study skills.

The second entry of question number 20 was about the difficulty of course materials as a possible reason that may discourage distance learners. 48% of respondents from Alpha commented as having less effect, 35% of them as having least effect and the remaining as much 10% and 7% discouraging most. But respondents from St. Mary's, 33% of them as having less effect, 23% as least effect, 23% as having much effect, and the remaining 13% as discouraging most and 8% as none at all. In both cases the difficulty of course materials are not taken as a serious discouraging factor.

As to that of the third entry of question number 20, the effect of delay in supply of course materials (modules); 39% of the respondents from Alpha suggested it has least effect and 26% as having much effect , 17% of them as less effect, and 13% of them as most discouraging and 5% as none at all. On the contrary, 43% of St. Mary's respondents replied that the delay of course materials as discouraging most, 23% said it has less effect, 17% as discouraging much, and 10% as affects least and 7% as none at all. From the above data analysis, almost 60% of the respondents from St. Mary's indicated that the delay of course materials as having discouraging effect on the distance education.

However, it must be clear that, distance learning is based on predetermined printed materials, the provision and distribution of such materials to distance students in time is so imperative. Delaying or missing to receive the materials is danger to the students' performance in a way affecting the quality of the program.

The fourth entry is about the delay in feedback on assignments; 35% of respondents from Alpha commented as having less effect, 26% of them as a factor that discourages most, and 17% each as much discouraging and least discouraging factors. As to that of respondents from St. Mary's; 33% of them claimed that delay in feedback on assignments discourages them most, 30% of them as least affecting factor, 27% as much affecting and only 3% as a factor affecting less. Reasonable number of respondents from both distance colleges commented on that the delay in feedback on assignments as a major hindrance in distance education, which may lead them to dropout the course.

The last entry in question number 20 is about the volume (amount) of course materials to be covered in a course; 35% of the respondents from Alpha said it affects least, 30% as less, and the remaining 17% each as much and most affecting factor. As to those of St. Mary's; 33% of the respondents said it is most discouraging, 30% as less discouraging, 27% as much discouraging and 10% as least discouraging. The attitude towards this entry seems to be different in the respondents of both colleges. In such cases, one may ask a question "who sets the standard of the learning materials in distance education?" "What types of topics are covered for the same qualification at different distance colleges?" The extent of the topics and sub-topics, the width and depth of the course materials to be covered, etc. in different distance colleges need to be standardized.

Question number twenty one is about the degree of relevance of the course materials with the process of assessment. It has six entries. (Refer table 4.)

Table 4. The degree of relevance of distance course materials.

	Relevance indicator (items)	Distance College	Very low	low	medium	High	Very high
a	Exercises in the course materials	Alpha St. Mary	13% 9%	- 3%	39% 19%	17% 30%	30% 39%
b	Usefulness of examples in course materials	Alpha St. Mary	4% -	27% 10%	30% 19%	7% 32%	30% 39%
c	Clarity of given self test questions	Alpha St. Mary	4% 3%	9% 6%	39% 7%	26% 42%	22% 42%
d	The importance of model answers	Alpha St. Mary	9% -	13% 6%	26% 13%	17% 36%	35% 45%
e	Final exam(testes) questions	Alpha St. Mary	- -	- 3%	26% 16%	26% 42%	49% 39%
f	Assignments	Alpha St. Mary	-	-	13%	36%	50%

Entry one (a) is about the relevance of the exercises in the course materials with respect to evaluation; 39% of respondents from Alpha commented that the course materials have medium degree of relevance with the process of assessment or evaluation, 30% of them with very high relationship, 17% high relationship, and 13% as very low relationship. As to those of respondents from St. Mary's 39% of them said there is very high relationship, 30% high relationship, 19% as medium, 9% very low, and 3% low relationship (relevance). In both cases, the big majority of respondents commented as there is constructive relationship (relevance) between the course materials of distance education with the process of assessment and evaluation.

For question number 21 (b) about the usefulness of examples in course materials in distance learning; 30% of the respondents from Alpha suggested as very high relevance and also 30% as medium relevance, 27% as low degree of relevance, 7% as high degree of relevance and 4% as very low. As to that of St. Mary's respondents; 39% of them as very high, 32% as high, 19% as medium and 10% as low and very low correspondence between the course materials and assessment means. Again, once more here we see that the big

majority respondents from both colleges suggested that there is direct relationship between the course materials covered and the means of assessment (evaluation). One of the basic rules of distance courses is that the exercises and assignments are directly related to the objectives of the distance courses that are also in correspondence with predetermined courses. Distance students are to follow strictly according to the modules to cover the courses assigned. To do so, the types of tests they are expected to sit for are "criterion-referenced test", types of tests that are directly related to the objectives of courses. That seems to be the reason why there is strong relationship (relevance) between the examples in course materials and test (assignments) in the process of evaluation.

For question 21(c) about the clarity of self-test questions given with that of assessment and evaluation; 39% of respondents from Alpha commented as medium, 26% of them as high 22% as very high correspondence and 9% as low and 4% as very low relationship. But as to that of St. Mary's, 42% respondents said very high, 42% high, 7% as medium 6% as low and 3% as very low relationship. Still in this case it is also possible to see that large proportion of respondents commented on constructive relationship or relevance of self-test questions with course materials provided with that of assessment and evaluation processes.

As to that of question number 21 (d), the relevance of model answer with the process of assessment and evaluation; 35% of the respondents from Alpha commented as very high, 26% as medium, 17% as high relationship, 13% low relationship, and 9% as very low relevance. But the respondents from St. Mary's, 45% of them commented as very high relationship, 36% as high relationship, 13% as medium and the remaining 6% as low relevance (low relationship). Again in this case, the big majority of respondents from both colleges believe that there is encouraging relationship between the model answers and the means of process used in assessment and evaluation in distance learning.

For question 21(e), about the relevance of course materials with semester exams in the process of assessment and evaluation; 49% of the respondents from Alpha commented as very high relationship, 26% high and 26% medium. Similarly, 39% of the respondents from St. Mary's said there is very high relationship, 42% high relationship, 16% medium and only 3% as low relationship. In this case, in both colleges respondents responded very constructively about the relevance of course materials (modules) with the nature of assessments and evaluation of distance learners.

The last entry in question 21(f) is about the relevance of assignments with the course materials; again with this respect, 50% of respondents from Alpha rated it as very high, 36% as high and 13% as medium. Similarly, 48% of respondents from St. Mary rated it as very high 49%, 33% as high and 18% as medium. It is possible to see here, there is a striking similarity between the respondents of the two distance colleges in that almost all rating the high relevance of assignments given with the course materials used in distance education.

According to Piskurich (1993) in distance learning, questions should be prepared directly related to the objectives of the courses because the distance trainees know that the objectives are their guide to learning. In self-directed learning (SDL) course materials are written directly from objectives, so the questions and assignments should properly cover in the material if they come from the objective as well. Such types of questions that are directly related with objective of the course under the study are often described as criterion referenced or criteria based questions.

Question number 22 with four entries is designed to measure how relevant the objectives of distance education with the need and interest of the learners are. (Refer table 5)

As to that of question 22(c) that states "are the content of the courses interesting to you? 57% of the respondents from Alpha said it is very much interesting, and the remaining 43% as much interesting. Similarly, 65% of the respondents from St. Mary's suggested as very much interesting, and 35% of them as much interesting.

Here also we can see the correlation of distance learners at both colleges with respect to the interestingness of the contents of the distance courses. If distance learners are interested in what they learn the chance of drop outing gets minimum, that can also attract large number of distance learners

For question 22(d) that asks: "Are the type of questions in test (exam) in accordance with objectives of the course?", 61% of the respondents from Alpha responded as very much, 35% of them as much related, and only 4% suggested there is low relationship. Surprising enough, 61% of St. Mary's also responded as very much, 35% of them as much related, and the remaining 4% as there is low relationship. Here, even if the total number of respondents in both colleges are different in number (42 and 68 respondents at Alpha and St. Merry respectively), the percentage analysis showed that they have the same perception about the nature of questions in test (exam) as being in accordance with the objectives of the distance courses.

The next question number 23 was about the provision (supply) of course materials from the centre. 91% of respondents from Alpha said course materials are provided from the centre to the distance learners and the remaining 9% said these is no provision of course materials from the centers. Similarly, 97% of St. Mary's respondents said yes there are supply of course materials from the centre, while only 3% said no. With respect to this question, the researcher expected that there is (should be) 100% percent positive reply. Because every distance learning is supposed to be based on predetermined course materials that the trainees master each piece in sequence which leads to the mastery of the complete packages.

The next question number 24 was "how readable (interesting) the distance course materials are?" For this question, 22% of respondents from Alpha

suggested as very highly readable, 17% as readable or interesting, and the vast majority of them (61%) said it depends on the type of the subject. But respondents at St. Mary's, 57% of the respondents said it is very much attractive, 23% varies from subject to subject, and the remaining 20% responded as inviting. Once again there a question of, who controls the standard of distance education? Who sets or prepares course materials? Are the course materials to be covered in different distance institutions for the same types of courses the same? Are all similar courses at different distance institutions with the same credit hour? Also what about the total credit hours required for the same qualification at different distance institution?

As to that of question 25 that asks, "How do you evaluate the difficultly level of course materials in general?" In this case five possible rating scale options were suggested. 87% of respondents from Alpha said it is average, neither simple nor difficult, but 9% of them as simple and only 4% as difficult. Similarly, 57% of respondents from St. Mary's college said it is average, 23% difficult, 13% as simple and 7% as very difficult. In both cases again the big majority of respondents seem to be comfortable with difficulty level of the course materials in general.

The following question number 26 is based on the availability and use of learning resource materials at the centers with four possible entries. (Refer table 6)

Table 6. Availability of course or support materials at distance centers.

	Types of learning resources(materials)in the center	Distance College	Yes	No
a	Is/are there library (libraries)in the center?	Alpha St. Mary	87% 62%	13% 38%
b	Are there sufficient reference materials in the center?	Alpha St. Mary	64% 62%	36% 38%
c	Is/are there audio/video room facilities?	Alpha St. Mary	14% 33%	86% 67%
d	Do you have an access to computer/internet facilities?	Alpha St. Mary	23% 9%	67% 91%

The first entry asks about the availability of libraries in the centers. 87% of the respondents from Alpha replied as yes, there are available learning materials and the remaining 13% said no. As to those of respondents from St. Mary's, 62% of them replied as yes, and the remaining 38% as no. In this case, the researcher had a chance to visit the library at Alpha Distance University that is located on the main building at the head office. Since Alpha College also conducts regular (conventional) courses in the same compound, I saw some students using the library, but I could not be certain who are from distance and from regular learning. The provision of library service by itself is encouraging.

Concerning the second entry about the presence of sufficient reference materials in the centre; 64% of the respondents from Alpha replied as yes, there are sufficient materials and the remaining 36% as no. Similarly, 62% of the respondents from St. Mary's replied as yes and the rest 38% as no.

The third entry was a question about the prevision of audio/video facilities by the distance colleges. 86% of the respondents from Alpha said there is no such facility at their college, and the remaining 14% said yes there is such a facility at their college. Similarly enough, 67% of the respondents from St. Mary said there is no such facility, while 33% of them said yes there is.

The last entry to question 26(d) was; "do you have an access to computer/internet facilities?" In this case, the researcher has forwarded the question in an ambiguous form. Because Some respondents may have understood it as the facility provided by the distance college and still some may have understood it as a facility provided at any place, it could be at home or working places. Any how, 67% of the respondent from Alpha College said no, and the remaining 32% said yes. Similarly, 91% of St. Mary's replied as no and 9% as yes. In any case the big majority of the respondents do not have access to computer or internet which is important for learners.

Question number 27 is based on the main problem in distance learning. The problem of dropout in some cases may range between 20% and 80%. Since distance education by itself is a sort of education where learners learn

wherever and whenever they like at their own paces and places, there is high chance to dropping out problems. With this respect, the researcher tried to identify the possible reasons of dropping outs by enumerating five entries with five possible scale rating questions. (Refer table 7)

Table 7. Possible reasons for dropping out of distance learners.

	Reasons for dropping out	Distance College	Most reason	More reason	Some reason	Least reason	Never be reason
a	Lack of proper study skills	Alpha St. Mary	33% 30%	- 3%	43% 37%	14% 13%	10% 17%
b	Difficulty of course materials	Alpha St. Mary	- 20%	3% 7%	16% 23%	43% 23%	38% 27%
c	Economic problem(constraints)	Alpha St. Mary	47% 33%	1% 3%	33% 20%	14% 23%	5% 20%
d	Lack of motivation	Alpha St. Mary	24% 33%	- 4%	33% 23%	38% 23%	5% 17%
e	Lose of hope due to the lengthening of the year in the course	Alpha St. Mary	24% 27%	10% 7%	24% 23%	10% 20%	33% 23%

The first entry, 27(a) asks whether lack of study skills could be a reason for dropping – outs; 43% of the respondents from Alpha replied it could be as some reasons, 33% as most possible reason, 14% as least possible reason and 10% as none possible reason. Similarly, 37% of the respondents from St. Mary's replied as it could be some possible reason, 30% as most possible reason, 17% as none possible reason at all, and 13% of them as least possible reason. From both colleges' data, the big majority of the respondents remarked that lack of study skill may play great role towards the dropout of distance learners.

The second entry, 27(b) asks the reason about the difficulty of course materials; 43% of the respondents from Alpha replied as least possible reason, 38% of them as no possible reason at all, and 16% as some possible reason and 4% as more possible reason. But respondent from St. Mary's seem to have mixed perception with regard to this question because 27% of the respondents

replied as no possible reason, 23% as some reason, 23% as least possible reason, and 20% as most possible reason and 7% as more possible reason.

All in all, those from Alpha who suggested as least possible and no possible reasons are about 80% of the respondents, while in the case of St. Mary they are about 50%. From this general analysis, difficulties of course materials are not as such the main reason for dropouts. This conclusion also seems to correspond with data analysis mentioned on question number 25. According question number 25, the big majority of respondents were found to be comfortable with the difficulty level of the course materials in general.

The third entry, 27(c) was economic problem (constraint) as a reason for dropping outs. 47% of the respondents from Alpha reflected that it is the most possible reason, 33% as some possible reason, 14% of them as least possible reason, and 5% as none possible reason at all. Similarly, 33% of respondent from St. Mary's said it is most possible reason, 23% of them as least possible reason, and the remaining 20% each as some and none possible reasons. From the data then one may conclude that economic problem (constraint) could be one major reason as to why dropping outs is so common in distance education.

The fourth entry, 27(d) the lack of motivation as a reason of dropping outs; 38% of respondents from Alpha suggested as least possible reason, 33% as some possible reason, 24% of them as most possible reason, and 5% of them as never possible reason. But those of respondents from St. Mary's, 33% of them suggested that it could be the most possible reason, 23% of them as some possible reason, 23% of them as least possible reason, and 17% of them as not possible reason at all. Here, concerning entry, 27(d) respondents show different perception about lack of motivation as a possible reason for dropping outs.

The last entry, 27 (e) was the reason that could be considered for dropping outs as the loss of hope due to the lengthening of the year in distance education for a qualification. 33% of the respondents from Alpha responded that it can never be a reason, 24% as some possible reason and 24% as most possible reason and 10% as least possible and 10% as most possible.

On the other hand 27% of respondents from ST. Mary's responded as the most possible reason, 23% as some possible reason, and 23% as never be possible reason, and 20% of them as least possible reason. Again here also respondents show different perception as to the possible reason why students dropout as a possible reason of the lengthening of the years in distance courses. About 50% of the respondents from both distance colleges considered as some and most possible reason of dropping out due to the lengthening of the year in the distance courses.

As to that of question 28, about the frequency of meeting (contacting) the tutor for different academic reasons; for explanations, discussions etc. 62% of the respondents from Alpha responded as having no contact at all, 19% of them said rarely, 14% of them said sometimes, and 5% of them as mostly. But in the case of St. Mary's respondents, 24% of them said they do contact the tutor most of the time, 20% of them said whenever there is the need, and 20% of them no contact at all, and the remaining 17% each as sometimes and rarely.

In this case, the big majority of respondents from Alpha (62%) commented as there is no contact at all, while those from St. Mary's only 20% of them as no contact at all! Distance learning is compensated by making contacts between students and tutors occasionally so as to discuss problems related to the course materials. However, the data reveals that there is, at least no sufficient contact between tutor or the institution and learners.

For the last open ended question, few respondents replied from both colleges. Some of the remarks are about the process of the distance program related with assessment and evaluation that are treated in the questionnaire. And some of them are not directly related with the nature of this research. Just to mention few of them:

- "The college has a lack of coordination, mistreating of course participants". In this case it is not clear how they are mistreated, but I can infer that the mistreatment could be when trying to collect the course materials (modules). I

have personally observed a number of distance students queuing up impatiently to collect the modules at one of the centers.

- "The assignments and worksheets are not corrected and handed back in time before examination." In this case special attention should be paid as to handing back corrected papers because pupil can learn from their past mistakes.

- "The questions in the exams are not conceptual, only trying to test our English language proficiency." As it is understood and expected the nature of exams in distance programs should be based on the objective the course that is based on CRT.

- "Some times we should be given a chance for an open face-to-face discussion to address our complaints." To solve such problems, the colleges at least can organize applicable suggestion boxes.

- "Worksheet questions need be corrected, but they do not be used for evaluation purposes." Because, some students have access to the past worksheets, that could be copied. Again in this case the problem seems that questions used for assessment are repeated at least without modifications. Such practice could affect the motivation of students who do not have the access.

- "There is lack of loyalty around the duplication room." This problem also can be related with the above comment where some students managing to get the past exams. But if there is any disloyalty around the office it is grave problem that needs special attention.

- "Course materials (modules) are not provided in time and we have to spend much time to collect them. We regularly come to ask for modules but with no satisfying responses." This problem seems to be the most common one. Providing course materials in time in distance learning is the cornerstone of the program.

- "Make the course materials brief and shorter. Much course materials are covered for one course." In this case, there should be a general guide line as to

the extent and depth of studies for each course according to their credit hours for all distance colleges as a standard.

- "In some cases the capability (proficiency on the subject matter) of some tutors during discussions is below our expectations."
- "Some of the reasons for dropouts are not the only points mentioned in the questionnaire; some of the reasons are,

i. lack of well prepared materials in the program.

ll. Some courses are not given according to their time tables.

iii. Preferring other colleges due to disciplinary problems by some examiners.

iv. There is no open discussion about the program and our problems which affects our motivation to learn in distance."

The reflection of the course tutors and subject matter experts for those structured interviews are treated below. Refer for the interview guides at the appendix (second and third).

For the first question, that asks about the participation of them (the tutors) in conventional schools as teachers, all responded as, yes. Teaching experience is so important to serve as a tutor. But, I personally do not consider it as a necessary condition as long as the tutor is qualified for that particular subject.

For the second question that asks about similarities or differences of their roles in both educational systems, they responded as quite different. It is true that acting as a tutor and as a teacher is quite different. Teachers teach in classrooms regularly but tutors explain questions and problems occasionally.

As to that of evaluating the relationship of the objectives of the two systems, they commented that they are quite different as that distance courses are self taught with occasional tutorial support. Actually the objectives of both systems are different and with this respect we can not expect different answers.

For question no. four that asks about the contents of distance courses to the need of the trainees, they commented that they are not as different from the

regular ones. Since the objectives of distance learning are different from the regular ones, one may (have to) expect quite different answer.

As to that of question no. five that asks about availability and accessibilities of resources and support services, they commented that they know as they are supplied with course materials but refrained from commenting about support services and accessibilities of other resources. The main problem of distance programs, as commented by the students, is the provision and accessibilities of resources and support services. So the provision of materials and support services in distance learning is so important.

For question no. six that asks about the general conditions at the centers, about;

A. sufficiency of logistics and availability support services, they commented as enough.

B. learners' attitudes, interest and participation, some commented as good and the rest as not encouraging.

C. the efficiency of the management, here again some of them are not willing to reflect their ideas. And some commented generally as good.

But all these points mentioned are again important in distance educational setting and their positive attitudes should be maintained.

As to that of questions no. seven and no. eight that asks about the originality of assignments for submission, or how to control cheating, they commented that there is no means of controlling and detecting them. Of course one of the problems in distance programs is the originality of assignments for submission. This obviously affects the assessment and evaluation processes in distance programs.

For question no. nine that asks about how to evaluate learners' skill developments as the result of the program, all responded as it is hard to know. Of course, skill developments in distance learners are hard to detect because the nature of the courses and the distance nature of the learners do not allow them to see the development of skills in the students.

For the last general question that asks for any comment pertaining to the improvement of the distance program, they suggested that the preparation of standardized course materials, general support services, regular tutorial services at least for reasonable number of times in a semester, and well organized administrative systems are essentials.

Chapter Five

Summery, conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

Chapter five is entirely devoted to the general consideration about how the distance programs are run (implementation) in those two selected distance colleges, namely Alpha and St. Mary's and the means of their evaluations and assessments with reference to the general expected criteria (requirements) and the objectives of distance learning programs. The final assessment, in this case the summary, conclusion and recommendation are based on the feedbacks from the respondents of distance learning programs, tutors and/or subject matter experts of both distance colleges.

5.2. Summary

In order to study about the assessment and evaluation of distance learners, particularly at Alpha and St. Mary Distance Colleges, the researcher has tried to use both quantitative and qualitative approaches as a survey of his research method.

To get first hand information, the researcher has tried to involve reasonable number of respondents from both distance colleges. The respondents from both colleges being distant students, collecting back the distributed questionnaires were a daunting task. Most of the respondents happen to come to the distance centers mainly when there is examination and/or when there is tutorial session. A big number of them even do not attend tutorial classes at all.

Similarly, most of the tutors are not available in the centers except those that are regular workers at the centers. The rest tutors come to the centers during only tutorial sessions and most of them are part timers. Collecting back the questionnaires from them was also a problem.

In order to meet the expectation, that involves the research, the researcher tried to use observation, questionnaire, document analysis, and semi-structured interview guides for tutors and/or subject matter experts as instrument of data collection.

Based on these instruments of data collections, the researcher has come across the following important points as his findings.

- Distance education in Ethiopia has become so poplar in all regions of the country. St. Mary Distance College alone has well above fifty centers in all regions of the country (According to the brochure of the college).
- Big numbers of distance learners are enrolled in more than ten distance teaching institutions in the country. The total numbers of distance students are believed to be not less than the total number of students currently enrolled in conventional higher institutions.

Most of the distance learners seem to be satisfied by the distance program at both colleges. More than 85% of the respondents from Alpha commented that the program is helpful to get job and for career development. Similarly, almost all respondents from St. Mary commented that it is helpful to get a job and for career development.

- Distance students from both colleges also commented that by getting their qualification through distance they can develop self confidence so that they can perform their jobs better which eventually would lead them to promotion.
- The constructive aspect of distance education is believed to be its strong support system, particularly tutorial support system. But in both distance colleges, respondents commented that there is little or no tutorial support at all.

5.3 Conclusion

The practice of distance education in Ethiopia has served and is serving a big number of students. Educating people using only traditional or conventional ways could not satisfy the demand for trained manpower in the country. The expansion of distance education should be encouraged and facilitated by the government. The expansion of distance education by itself is not a means of producing well trained manpower. At the same time, their effectiveness and responsibilities to produce the required and able trained personnel should be supervised. Distance education should not be a place where people can obtain their qualification with little or no effort.

- Distance education involves different means of provisions, but in our case it takes place only through the provision of print materials and using other forms of delivery is minimal as commended by 67% and 91% respondents from Alpha and St. Mary's Distance Colleges respectively.
- Distance education is well supported by face-to-face tutorial programs occasionally, but according to the respondents from both colleges the tutorial system is limited as commented as there is no contact at all by 29% and 50% of the respondents from Alpha and St. Mary's colleges respectively.
- Printed materials are the backbone of distance education, but the respondents from both colleges commented that modules are not provided in time, and unnecessary time is lost to collect them as commented on the open ended question to give general comments about the program.
- The distance programs show lack of coordination, lack of prepared materials, and lack of reference materials as commented for open ended question about the distance program.

- Some courses are not given according to their time tables, which could affect the motivation and could be a reason to dropouts as a comment suggested by some respondents for the last open ended question.
- The assignments and worksheets are not corrected and handed back in time before examination so that they can not have a chance to make corrections to their mistakes according to 42% and 30% respondents of Alpha and St. Mary's respondents respectively.
- The delay of feedbacks on assignments is also considered as a major hindrance in distance education. Assignments are not corrected and handed back in time as commented by 43% and 60% of Alpha and St. Mary's respondents respectively.
- The same types of questions are asked year in and year out, particularly on the worksheets so that some distance learners may have the chance to copy and such practices affecting the grades and the morals of other distance learners as commented by some respondents for the open ended question.
- Some also complained and commented that the course materials to be covered are so wide and need be brief and shorter for the open ended question.
- The tutors also complained about the need for more tutorial sessions. They commented that covering seven and eight chapters within two hours of a session in a semester is very hard.

Distance education can be so effective if it is well designed, the modules are updated, general support services are facilitated and if sufficient face-to-face tutorial services are organized. It is true that, all these services can incur additional expenses to the distance educational program, but the quality of distance education should not be compromised with the idea of minimizing the amount of additional expenses that may be required.

5.4 Recommendation

Perraton (2000) suggests that: "if well designed, distance learning may match the best of what is available".

The following recommendations the researcher generalizes are derived from the outcomes of the respondents of the questionnaire for distance learners, interview of the tutors and/or subject matter experts, and from what the researcher has observed through the process of the research.

1. The number of distance courses available; the more the number of different types of courses (options), the more the chance for distance learners to choose from. Some complained that they do not get the types of courses they intend to learn. So the allocation (assigning) of distance students according to their interests in some cases seem to fail. This obviously could encourage the number of dropouts. Even if distance learners are private fee pairs, who can choose what ever they like to learn in distance, they could be left with no alternatives and may register for courses that are only available for the time being. So proving as many as possible number of courses could initiate large number of distance students to take part in distance programs.
2. Some courses the distance students registered for are not available or are not given according to the schedule for some reasons. This could also be one of the reasons as to why there could be less motivation to learn and eventually leading to drop outings. The courses they are registered for need to be given according to the time table.
3. Some modules are not well designed to fit distance students demands. Some are very wide to be covered in a season (semester) along other courses. So the modules to be prepared should satisfy the objective of the course and the distance learners. The course materials (modules) should be updated and the additional reference materials also should be accessible.

4. The provision of modules should be in time so that distance students have enough time to go through the course materials. Since distance programs are mainly dependent on print materials, the provision of the modules in time can give distance students a chance to go through the materials to do assignments and sit for examinations without any stress.
5. The facilities for support materials (services) should be organized. Distance learning processes are best supplemented if they are accompanied by support services, without which the distance programs could be under question.
6. The number of tutorial sessions should also be sufficient enough so that it is possible to cover at least some of the chapters before examination. Some tutors complained that covering seven to eight chapters in two hours of a tutorial session is practically impossible. So, reasonable number of face-to-face tutorial sessions per semester should be organized. And also distance students should be encouraged to attend tutorial classes.
7. The assigning of tutors also has its own effect towards the normal distance learning activities. Some commented that, some tutors are not in a position to explain and make us understand the discussion points. The tutors assigned should have not only the qualification but also good teaching qualities.
8. In order to cover many topics during tutorial sessions, effective guide lines should be given to the tutors so that they can be selective and lead effective discussions and presentations within the limited period of tutorial sessions.
9. Some distance students suggested to have open discussions with officials from the centers about the strength and weakness of the distance colleges' activities. They do not have any advisor or facilitator to whom they go and contact and forward their problems and complaints. If possible then it is advisable to assign them an adviser or a facilitator to whom they can easily

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		V. Usefuly	M.Usefuel	Useful	Not V. useful	Not useful
a	To get a job					
b	To get a qualification					
c	To change the type of work I do					
d	To perform my work better					
e	To improve my self-confidence					
f	To be promoted					
g	To fill blanks in my previous education					
h	To up grade my qualification					
i	Not to miss my present job & Filmy					
j	I cannot be admitted to conventional education due to the requirements.					

13. How often do you make contacts with you tutor in a course?
    a. Once in a week b. Once in two weeks c. Once in a month
    d. As the need arises (it depends) e. No contact at all
14. If you make contact with your tutor, the means of contact is:
    a. telephone b. in person(face-to-face)
    c. written message (postal service) d. Other means, specify: _____

III. The following questions are based on assessment (evaluation)in Distance Education

15. How many assignments are given (expected) for <u>each</u> course?
    a. One b. Two c. More than two d. It depends
16. Do you fill comfortable while taking (writing) a test (exam.)?
    a. Yes b. No
17. If your answer is no, please, briefly specify the sources (causes) of discomfort

    _____

18. How often do you have a chance to see and discuss the corrected assignment and question paper?
    a. always b sometimes c. I do not know (no idea)
    d. No chance at all

27. Many distance learners drop-out (quit) the (program) course. Please indicate your opinion by marking a tick (✓)

	Reasons for dropping-outs	Most reason	More reason	Some reason	Least reason	Never be reason
a	Lack of proper study skills					
b	Difficulty of course materials					
c	Economic problem (constraint)					
d	Lack of motivation					
e	Lose of hope due to the lengthening of the year in the course					

28. How often does your tutor give comments, explanations, and guidance concerning questions, you failed to answer in the assignment?
    a. Always (whenever there is the need)
    b. Most of time
    c. Sometimes
    d. Rarely (seldom)
    e. Not at all.

29. Finally, if you like to give any remarks, comments or suggestions, Please feel free _____
    _____
    _____

A.A.U

School of Graduate Studies

Faculty of Education

Dept. of Curriculum and Teachers Development Studies

Interview guide for Course Tutors

Objectives

The main purpose of the study is to gather information on the appropriateness of the design, effectiveness of the implementation, efficiency of the instructional system and evaluation of distance education. Thus, as a tutor of the programme, it is hoped that the success of the study depends mainly on the information you provide.

Threfore,

1. Have you ever participated as a teacher in conventional program?

2. As a tutor of the distance learning courses, how would you say your role is similar or different from your role in the conventional program?

3. How would you evaluate the relationships of the objectives of Distance Education courses with the objectives of the conventional program?

4. How is your evaluation about the contents of the Distance Education Training Course Materials/modules to the needs and interest of the trainess?

5. To what extent or degree would you say that any available learning resources and support services are accessible to the trainees?

6. Would you like to explain the situation of the tutorial program with regard to:

- Sufficiency of logistics and availability of support services
- Learner's attitudes, interests, participation
- Efficiency of management

7. How would you evaluate the quality and originality of trainess? assignments for submissions?

8. How would you control (identify) plagiarism (cheating) on assignments for Submissions?

9. How would you evaluate learners' skills development due to the result of the training?

10. In general, would you like to add any comment, suggestions, or recommendations on how to improve the tuition (instruction) processes of such distance program?

Interview Guide for administrators and experts on the subject matter.

Objectives

The main purpose of the study is to gather information on the appropriateness of the design effectiveness of the implementation, Efficiency of the instructional system and evaluation of distance courses. Thus, as a coordinator for overall: design, production and dissemination of the programme, the information you provide is much vital to the study.

Therefore:

1. **Would you please brief me on how the course materials for the program, were designed, developed and distributed?**
2. **To what extent, do you say:**

   (i) the objectives, and (ii) the contents of the distance program are related to the objectives of the conventional training program?

3. **Would you please explain what have been used to maintain the match/fit between the objectives and contents of the distance program and that of the conventional program during the developmental stage of the materials?**

4. **To what extent do you think that the methodology designed for training the distance learners make them effective?**

5. **What instructional support materials were devised for the implementation and evaluation of courses? And how effective were these instructional materials used?**

6. **Who organizes and administers (conducts) assignments & exams?**

7. **By whom are the exams corrected and the results (scores) dispatched (announced)?**

8. **How do you rate the recent learners' academic performance compared to the previous years?**

9, How do you check the originality of assignments and exercises submitted for evaluation?

10. Finally, would you like to comment or give additional remarks about implementation and evaluation processes in distance learning?

Tutorial Session Observation / Classroom performances/ Check List

Location _____Name of the center _____

Subject observed _____Name of the tutor (teacher)_____

Date of observation: _____, Time: _____

1. Classroom situation:

   Large enough ____ light condition__ has facilities__ Noise protected___

2. Classroom performances:

Classroom performance		Degree of performance			
		Low	Medium	High	V. High
Trainees centeredness of the session					
Tutor knowledge of the subject matter					
Use of varied teaching/tutoring methods					
Tutor-trainees interaction(communication)					
Trainees' participation in the teaching-learning process (asking/ answering, etc.)					
Degree of confidence in asking/answering					
Methods applied	Lecture				
	Discussion				
	Eliciting				
	Q&A				
	Role				
	Playing				

Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my work and that all sources of materials used for the study have been properly acknowledged.

Name: Tesfaye Tegegne Habtemichael

Signature: _____

Date: Aug 24/2007