

Institutional Aspects of Distance Education

Study Group 1 decided to choose Otto Peters classification scheme. It is based on seven different models, classified according to different educational approaches. These models are examination preparation model, correspondence education model, multiple (mass) media model, group distance education model, autonomous learner's model, network based distance teaching model, and technologically extended classroom model.

We used the following characteristics to classify institutions.

1. Technology used
2. Role of the instructor
3. Learners' autonomy level
4. Interaction between course participants.

Institutional profiles based on the above models

The Open University, UK as network based model

This institution is classified as network based distance education model. It offers vast number of courses in various fields. The main reason this institution is classified as a network based distance education model because the study material involves specially written textbooks, CD-ROM's, DVD-ROM's, audio/ video recordings (Open University, 2010a). Students submit their coursework electronically and use latest technologies for online chats and discussions

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(Moore and Kearsley, 2005). Support is available from instructor via email or phone.

Communication is mainly asynchronous. Student- instructor interaction is moderate. Students are expected to study independently, which makes it highly autonomous learning (Open University, 2010b).

University of Kaiserslautern, Germany as correspondence model

University of Kaiserslautern can be classified as correspondence education model. It conducts distance education courses by exchanging texts, media between students and instructors (Peters, 2004). The reason this institution is classified as a correspondence education model as it explains the characteristics of distance learning and correspondence education and also talks about the self controlled learning (Universitat Kaiserslautern,2010, P0) , a strong characteristic of a correspondence education model. Student- instructor interaction is low and communication is asynchronous. Students are expected to have a high level of autonomy.

Curtin University, Australia as autonomous learners' model

Curtin University or Open University of Australia can be classified as autonomous learner's model. The key characteristic of an autonomous learner's model is students make their own timetable and study with their own schedule. Instructors play a little role in guiding and providing feedback (Peters, 2004). This university was classified based on the above main points. In the study processes section, it is clearly mentioned the role of the instructor and

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planning a study schedule (Curtain University, 2010). Mode of communication is primarily asynchronous.

Indira Gandhi National Open University, India as examination preparation model

This University is classified as examination preparation model. Students are expected to study without any guidance and appear for the exam to work towards their degrees (Peters, 2004). Face to face instructions are not offered so the communication between the course participants is zero. This also eliminates the mode of instruction. IGNOU offers On Demand Examination program (IGNOU, 2010). The level of autonomy is very high because students are expected to self study for the exam.

B.R.Ambedkar Open University, India as multiple (mass) media model

This institution can be classified as multiple (mass) media model. B.R. Ambedkar Open University provides students with printed materials, audio/ video lessons (Peters, 2004). It also broadcasts lessons through the local television channels and airs lessons through the local radio stations (B.R. Ambedkar Open University, 2010b). The University dispatches course material via regular postal mail, which is asynchronous mode of communication (B. R. Ambedkar Open University, 2010 c).Low tuition, adult learners make this institution an Open University, which is a key characteristic of multiple (mass) media model (Peters, 2004). Students need to study on

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their own schedule and so the level of autonomy is high. Mode of instruction is mainly asynchronous and there is very low communication between students and instructors.

Howard Community College, USA as group distance education model

This institution can be classified as group distance education model. It offers TeleWeb courses, in which instructions are delivered through videos, audios and local television channels (Howard Community College, 2010). Delivery of the lectures is targeted towards a big group via telecasting, which categorizes this institution as a group distance model. (Peters, 2004). Students meet periodically in a group for discussions or tests. The level of autonomy is high as students need to set their own study timetable (Peters, 2001). Mode of instruction is mainly multimedia with little face to face discussion and the communication between students and instructors is asynchronous. Level of interaction with peers is low to moderate.

Rochester Institute of Technology, USA as technologically extended classroom model

This institution is classified as technologically extended classroom model. Some of the distance education courses offered by this institution are conducted via Webinars (Rochester Institute of Technology, 2010). Instructor delivers a course via audio and / or video chats. The lectures are broadcasted to multiple locations or 'classrooms', which are geographically separated, at the same time (Peters, 2004). This is synchronous type of learning where students can interact instantly with instructor. Use of power point presentations, chats, and whiteboards

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makes the communication more interactive. Mode of interaction is synchronous 'face to face' lectures. Students can directly ask questions to instructor, which makes it a moderate to low learners' autonomy.

Conclusion

Classification of distance education institutions is not very easy. Distance education should be developed and implemented as a special case by keeping in mind various factors such as students' demography, modes of instruction, available technology, funding and institutional policies. Otto Peters' pedagogical classification helps us to identify some of the key features of different institutions.

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