

Seven Dilemmas Challenging the Future Development of Distance Education

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“By eliminating the lecture hall, seminar room and university library and placing the student at home, the distance teaching universities have presented the most radical challenge yet to the traditional concept of a university”.

Keegan & Rumble, 1982:24

“Bringing down the costs of education and training has usually been an aim of distance learning systems. That is their relevance to the search for a more cost-effective model of mass higher education for the 21st century”.

Daniel, 1996:60

“Single-mode distance teaching institutions will find fierce competition from the traditional systems on their doorsteps, and will need to change in order to have a role to play at all in the future”.

Roll, 1995:xiii

“In a world of complexity, boundaries are constructed only to be torn away. Invisible barriers arise and disappear as do formal barriers”.

Rothblatt & Wittrock, 1993:9

Seven Dilemmas

- **What are the current (and future) missions of DE?**
- **Are DE providers mainly/only teaching institutions or research-oriented?**
- **In which domains are the innovative/openness dimensions of DE manifested?**

Seven Dilemmas (continued)

- What are the current (and future) leading models of DE?
- Should DE providers be internationally, nationally or locally oriented?
- How can the digital technologies be harnessed most efficiently for DE?
- How do the privatization trends affect DE?

#1

Current and Future Missions of Distance Education

- **Widening access to higher and professional education mainly for second chance students?**
- **Competing also for first chance students?**
- **Focusing on undergraduate, graduate, professional, continuing education?**

Current and Future Missions of Distance Education (continued)

- Providing a cost-effective model for mass higher education?
- Developing high quality materials?
- Offering programs mainly in market-demanded areas or in nationally-needed domains?
- Enabling or also supporting institutions?

Second chance parameters

- Lack of entry qualifications
- Work/family/health constraints
- Living in a remote location
- Serving in the army
- Being a woman
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Enabling or Supporting Institutions?

- **DE more demanding than F-2-F**
- **Novices in academia need more guidance**
- **Students of disadvantaged backgrounds need even more support**
- **Support systems are human intensive**

#2 Teaching and Research

- **Mainly/only “distance teaching universities”?**
- **If research oriented – what kind of research? (DE related or general and broad?)**
- **League tables as affecting status**

#3 Innovative/openness dimensions

- **Open access**
- **Place**
- **Pace**
- **Flexible curricula**
- **Accreditation**
- **Open source (like OER)**

Open Source Challenges

- **To what extent does the open source movement influence the revenues of DTUs as publishing houses?**
- **How is it possible to mobilize the open source movement to widen access to higher education and professional development?**

#4 Leading Models

- **Single-mode**
- **Dual-mode**
- **Extensions**

- **Blended-mode**
- **Consortia-type**

Merits of the Industrial Model

- Absorbing large numbers of students
- High quality (materials & study process)
- Economies-of-scale

What are the merits of the “new” models?

- Interaction between students-teachers and in-between students
- Access to libraries and remote data bases
- Easy update feasibility

What are the merits of the “new” and flexible models? (continued)

- Large numbers of students - ?
- High quality materials - ?
- Economies-of-scale - ?

#5 Global, National, Local?

- Target populations
- Range of programs
- Role of academic faculty
- Nature of support systems
- Budgeting
- Language of instruction

Major Challenges of Globalization

- **Monitoring quality**
- **Harmonizing cultural diversity**
- **Bridging over the digital divide**

#6 Harnessing the Digital Technologies

- Digital divide (developed vs. developing countries, rich vs. poor)
- DE and e-learning: Not the same thing
- Add-on functions or substitution?

Challenges facing DE in the digital age

- **Are there still cost-effectiveness advantages to DE delivery in the digital age?**
- **How can the large DTUs restructure their overall operation and underlying premises?**

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#7 Impacts of Privatization

- Many new private DE providers
- Danger of 'diploma mills' - affecting status and reputation
- Private operation within public institutions
- Essential need to establish quality assurance mechanisms

Concluding Questions

Do distance teaching providers have nowadays a distinct role?

- Yes, they still do.

- **Traditional clienteles of DE**
- **LLL - professional update and upgrade + recreational purposes**
- **Developing countries - widening of access to all educational levels**

How is it possible to strengthen the status of DE?

- Being clear about missions
- Finding the balance between access-quality-costs in the digital and globalized era
- Establishing quality assurance networks (like E-xellence)
- Collaborating with academic counterparts and the corporate world (both in teaching and research)

Thank You