<h1 style="text-align:center">What is Distance Education?[1]
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Elements of Distance Education

One of the leading authorities in distance education is Desmond Keegan and his description of distance education which lists its defining elements is one of the most cited definitions in the literature. His book, *The Foundations of Distance Education*, first published in 1986 and translated to Italian and Chinese is widely regarded as a basic reference. The defining criteria which he proposed in 1986, a revision of one he made in 1980, are:

1. The quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process: This distinguishes it from conventional face-to face-instruction
2. The influence of an educational organization both in planning and preparation of learning materials and in the provision of student support services. This distinguishes it from private study and teach-yourself programs.
3. The use of technical media, print, audio, video, or computer, to unite teacher and learner and carry the content of the course.
4. The provision of two-way communication so that many benefit from or even initiate dialogue. This distinguishes it from other uses of technology in education.
5. The quasi-permanent separation of the learning group so that people are usually taught as individuals and not in groups, with the possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialization purposes.

Verduin and Clark revised the first criterion listed by Keegan into the "separation of teacher and learner during at least a majority of the instructional process." The amount of time that teacher and learner are physically present in a specific place varies in different practices of distance education. Advances in technology have vastly improved communication between two physically distant individuals so that the physical presence in the same place of teacher and learner is becoming de-emphasized in new distance education programs.

The second criterion about the presence of an organization responsible for planning, organizing, supporting and carrying out the program of instruction and the evaluation of students is considered as an indispensable part of distance education. The learning and teaching activities in distance education are purposeful, planned and deliberate. The educational organization finds and organizes resources, and determines strategies to enable students to achieve learning goals. It also organizes the process of assessing and reporting the extent to which students achieve these goals.

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[1] Excerpted from Padolina, MCD. (2007). Module 1 – What Is Distance Education and Module 2 – The Development of Distance Education and Related Concepts. In Padolina, MCD; Saplala, PEL; and Westergaard, MLS. *Foundations of Distance Education: Experiences from the Philippines*. Quezon City: UP Open University.

As in any educational process, the learner and the teacher must be brought together, as does the learning programs and the teaching programs. In distance education, various media may be employed depending on what is appropriate and/or what may be available or accessible. Developments in information and communication technology have broadened the choice of means by which the interaction between learning and teaching is carried out. It is possible to bring together several groups of learners located in different places, both synchronously so that they see and hear each other in real time, or asynchronously where the interaction or communication between teacher and learners or among learners are done at their choice of time. In some cases, however, the choice of technology is limited by the cost of using the more modern means of communication and information exchange.

Verduin and Clark omitted the fifth criterion in Keegan's 1986 list in their own version thinking that there should not be any restriction for group study in distance education programs. With modern means of communication, there are, in fact, many ways that learners can form learning groups, carry out group activities and even accomplish group tasks.

Concepts Related to Distance Education

There are many concepts that are related to distance education. We shall briefly discuss these terms and differentiate them from distance education.

Correspondence education. This may be considered as an old form of distance education when the communication between the education provider and the learner was through the postal system. The student received learning materials through postal mail and sent back assignments and other course requirements through the same system. The term acquired a reputation of questionable quality in some cases. Developments in other systems of communication led to a change in terminology to "distance education." In 1982, the International Council for Correspondence Education changed its name to the International Council for Distance Education.

Home study. The term was most likely coined to refer to forms of study where a major portion of the learning process takes place at the home of the student. The present use of the term refers to systems where the students are children and the learning process is assisted by a parent or a personal tutor.

External studies. This usually refers to education or training conducted by an educational institution at a place outside of its campus. Some refer to this as extension classes. An example would be the extension classes on drought-tolerant crops conducted by U.P. Los Banos for farmers in the Ilocos region. Instruction in external studies may be through the traditional face-to-face classroom instruction and may not involve distance education at all. The distance education programs in some institutions, however, may have started with its extension or external programs as they found ways to cope with the distant location of learners without having to send staff.

Independent study. The learning process in a distance education program takes place with the students working largely on their own, guided only by instructions contained in a study guide. But independent study may also refer to one that is solely the initiative of an individual who would determine what and how to study.

Open learning. Distance education may be considered as a way of delivering education. Open learning, on the other hand, is considered by some as a view or perspective about learning where the student is given wide latitude in what, how and when to learn. The student is given a large degree of control of the learning process. The openness refers to entry criteria, time (including the pace) of learning, the place where learning takes place, the learning materials used and the learning process itself.

Flexible learning. There are some who use flexible learning interchangeably with open learning. One may consider flexible learning to be more limited, where the choices available to the student are wider than usual but not totally open. For example, a student may be allowed to choose when to be tested
but is limited to taking the test in a testing center or through a deputized individual.

Distributed learning. The word distributed in this term comes from "distributed resources" which refers to learning resources that are not located in a centralized place such as in the case of traditional learning in a university where the experts, books and other information resources, and peers are all located on campus. Distributed learning may take place in a traditional class where the teacher provides opportunities for students to learn from individuals and resources not found on campus. Distributed learning may also be implemented in a distance education environment. Some consider distance education as a subset of distributed learning.

Online learning. In online learning, learning resources are accessed by the student through the Internet. Communication between the educational institution, teacher and students is also through the Internet.

eLearning. The prefix "e" originally stood for "electronic" but eventually this was applied to anything that made use of computers and more recently to one that involves the use of computer networks — a local area network (LAN), a wide area network (WAN) or the Internet.

m-Learning. The prefix "m" refers to mobile so m-learning refers to the use of mobile or portable technology, such as mobile phones, hand-held computers or PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants) in the learning process. Like open learning, mobile learning is considered by some as learning that addresses the mobility of individuals in our present world.

Blended learning. A combination of multiple approaches to learning constitutes blended learning. Learning in a classroom situation may be blended with learning from Internet resources. Numerous combinations are possible.