

## A study on the practices and challenges of Distance Training Programme (DTP) under Kigali Institute of Education (KIE)

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### **Abstract**

*This article is built upon the findings from the dissertation report conducted in Kigali Institute of Education (KIE) and Rwamagana Distance Training Programme (DTP) centres during the whole academic year of 2011/2012. The researchers were interested to learn in depth about the practices under DTP programme. It was found out that the DTP programme relies mostly on print materials supplemented by week-end tutorials and face-to-face sessions. The ICT supported learning and assistance modes are not yet integrated and a number of challenges were highlighted.*

### **Résumé**

*Cet article est construit sur base des conclusions du projet de recherche accompli dans les centres de l'enseignement à distance (DTP) de l'institut Supérieur Pédagogique de Kigali (KIE) et Rwamagana tout au long de l'année académique 2011/2012. Les chercheurs étaient intéressés d'apprendre en profondeur à propos des pratiques au sein de ce programme de DTP. Il a été découvert que le programme de DTP utilise fortement l'imprimé complété par les classes de travaux dirigés de week-end et les séances face-à-face. L'apprentissage et l'assistance des apprenants sur base des TIC ne sont pas encore intégrés et un certain nombre de défis ont été relevés.*

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**Key words:** *Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), Distance Training Programme (DTP), Distance Education (DE), Open and Distance Learning (ODL).*

### **Introduction**

Since the last century (20<sup>th</sup> century), many countries, governments have been committed to build a strong basic foundation of their country's development through educating of a big number of their population. To achieve this commitment, the area of focus for educational planners has been universal primary education, education for all and free education.

In fact, the literature demonstrates that the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave root to most important educational opportunities especially the emerging of open and distance learning institutions which are by nature open to learners of all ages and backgrounds and addresses issues of lifelong learning beyond the usual educational span.

Open and distance as learning mode is becoming well known worldwide as it particularly gives chances to candidates to catch up the learning occasions lost in the past and acquire new competences and qualifications for the future. It is based on the real benefits and effectiveness to address community educational challenges that open and distance learning institutions have been created throughout the world. For instance, in Nigeria, there has been an imbalance between the demand for higher education and the available means. In such a case, ODL has been the only suitable and effective solution. In Rwanda, a strategic plan for DTP (Distance Training Programme) has been developed since 2001-2002. The same was followed by the starting of DTP at KIE with the intention of responding to the need of training massive qualified trained teachers (already in-service) for secondary schools.

The findings in this article clearly show how the DTP operates in terms of teaching-learning and learner support. The same enabled to draw a kind of comparison between the practices under DTP and open and distance learning standards.

### *Research questions*

Here below are the questions that guided the research:

1. What are the current practices of Distance Training Programme in KIE?
2. How does DTP comply with the current ODL standards?
3. What are the challenges faced by distance training programme in KIE?
4. What are the possible solutions to overcome the challenges faced by DTP in KIE?

### **Literature review**

#### *Understanding the concepts of Distance Education & Open and Distance Learning (ODL)*

The concept of distance education is used interchangeably to distance learning and many people have given different definitions of these concepts. Among these one can refer to Holmberg (2005) and NCREC (2012). The understanding of various definitions leads to the following characteristics that shapes distance education:

- An education that does not require the learner and the teacher to meet in a fixed physical location
- The possibility to impart knowledge to a big number of learners at the same time
- Teaching and learning being brought about by media, teachers and students are separated by distance and sometimes by time
- An education whereby learners play the central role and communication with tutors is ICT mediated

The concept of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) which is of course a revolution of distance learning is also better understood through the approaches it uses such as removing the barrier to education which are basically linked to time, geography, economy, social aspects and communication. UNISA (2008) and COL (2000) reinforce these approaches by adding the increase of flexibility of learning provision, possibility of face-to-face meetings for tutorials, increased learner support and interaction, institutional accreditation and the use of mixed-media courseware.

#### *The rationale and potential of distance education*

Greville (2003) and UNESCO (2002) explain clearly the justification of the distance education as a formal mode of education. In fact, due to life constraints including geographical and socio-economic factors many people are deprived from access to educational services. Moreover, there are many people who are not unable to attend on-campus regular courses. Therefore, distance education has emerged as a solution to these.

According to KIE report (2002), distance education has the potential to open up access to educational programmes in Rwanda, by reaching people who are working and would find it difficult to follow a full-time campus

based program, and by offering opportunities to study for a degree offered by foreign universities without having to leave the country.

### *Media, technology and distance education*

Distance education uses different means to deliver its courses of studies. With the spread of modern technologies today, distance education is not an island. In various contexts and places depending on the level of economy and advancement, distance education uses technologies such as print, radio, television, web, telephones, fax, audio-conference, video-conference, email, e-resources, etc.

In fact, technologies are many and diversified because the learner is physically separated from his/her classmates and his/her teacher who plays the facilitation role. This implies that for effective learning to take place and ensuring that the learner has access to whatever required educational resources, a range of technologies are applied; each responding to a specified need depending on the context, location and possibility.

## **Methodology**

### *Research design*

In this study, a descriptive survey research design was used. This one actually enables investigators to analyze and describe a context or an area under study by using a variety of data collection instruments and techniques. The researchers therefore analyzed the existing reference documents, met the people involved in the DTP program before going further for data analysis and make whatever inference.

### *Sample size and sampling technique*

The sample was made of 2 DTP administrative staff, 20 trainees and 8 tutors. The selection of the respondents in the three categories followed purposive sampling technique, simple random sampling and stratified random sampling techniques respectively. Both men and women were represented as follows: 60% and 40% respectively.

### *Data collection instruments*

Data were collected through interviews, questionnaires and observation. The instruments were pre-tested to assess their validity with regard to the general objective of the study. In addition, materials from existing officials' documents and internet helped a lot.

### *Data analysis*

The analysis was done both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative analysis used techniques such as editing, coding and tabulation while the qualitative analysis exploited much the thematic approach.

## **Findings and discussion**

### *The current practices in KIE and Rwamagana DTP centres*

#### *1. Teaching and learning*

The majority of respondents representing 76.6% reported that printed based courses are the materials that dominate their Teaching–Learning in DTP, while face-to–face counts for 23.3%, audio and video cassettes with 16.6% while video conferencing, satellite transmission, television and video courses, radio broadcast and electronic mail are never used as teaching approaches.

Indeed, the majority of respondents (80%) said that the learning style is self-learning (individualization). Lecturing as teaching method counts for 26.6%, tutoring represents 73.3% while they never sit in group study for discussing and they don't do any further research. These last two demonstrates clearly the lack of active participation and peer support.

The lack of group discussion might be due to the isolation of students, location, long distance to the study centre, time and social-economic constraints, coupled with the ignorance of the benefits of such a learning style. This challenge may be addressed by introducing the use of web based instructions and online forums because as proposed by Ellsworth (1994) internet tools enable:

- Interaction between the students and professors in educational process.
- Interaction between the students and professors while searching for information on the net.
- Joint activities of professors and administration.
- Students' joint research project

## 2. *The means of communication*

60% of surveyed students said that they only communicate physically with the tutors, peer and DTP administration in study centers, 56.6% testified to use also phone calls although handicapped sometimes by network and economic problems. For the DTP administrative staff, they reported to use written announcements, radio communication, office station and field trip when they intend to meet large group of trainees.

According to UNESCO (2002), *“communication serves two purposes. One is the distribution of information, the second is the interaction between teachers and learners and where possible between learner-learner. In some forms of Distance Education this learner interaction is practically non-existent, but most cases it is considered important and may be provided in different ways. New technology allow the organization of “virtual groups”, and in countries where access to the internet is common, this is the fastest growing approach to distance teaching”*.

From the above said, the distribution of information between tutor-trainees, learner-learner, tutor-administrator and administrator-trainees should be reinforced by technological means if effectiveness of the program is to be assured.

### **The compliance of KIE DTP program with reference to ODL standards**

According to UNESCO (2002), any Distance Learning system should be characterized by a certain number of components which may be considered to evaluate its compliance and those are: the mission, the courses and curricula, teaching strategies and techniques, learning materials and resources, communication, support delivered

locally, the students and staff management sub-system, effective management and administration, housing, equipment and evaluation.

Table 1: The compliance of KIE program with reference to ODL standards

<i>Component</i>	<i>ODL standards</i>	<i>Status of DTP</i>
Mission	A clear definition of the role within a specified context	Its mission is to train teachers who are in service to acquire the required competences and qualifications.
Courses and curricula	Outlining the profile and ensuring compliance with the mission	The modules under DTP follow the programme specification as designed and approved by KIE. This also determines the exit award and certification procedures.
Teaching strategies and techniques	Meeting specific educational features and exploiting technologies	The correspondence courses dominate and a little use of face to face strategies. The use of media and technology is almost non-existing
Learning materials and resources	Motivating, pertinent, enough, diverse, enhanced, ample and well designed resources	Print materials written by subject teachers are distributed. Where necessary audio cassette are also supplied especially in Languages. However, newsletter, video cassettes, software on CD and video tapes are not yet integrated.
Communication	Communication channels should be diversified and serve in: - sharing information - interaction between learners, tutors and staff	Apart from phone calls, learners otherwise meet staff, tutors and colleagues during weekend tutorials or face to face sessions the unique opportunities to interact with respective faculty members of their area of specialization. Other tele collaboration forms of communication are not used.
Support delivery locally	There should be local study centre that learner may easily access to receive/send communication and getting access to further resource materials	Apart from the distribution of modules – which also does not stick to the academic calendar, the study centers do not have own libraries or laboratories. Access to computers and Internet is still limited although these facilities seem inexistent.
The student and staff management	A clear students' registration, monitoring, evaluation system has to be put in place. Indeed, staff should have a clear channel of command.	There is a management committee which combines all tasks related to DTP program and this works under the control of KIE authorities. However, due to some factors that may be associated to the growing number of students, poor coordination, insufficient staff and motivation, there are always issues in this programme. Among these are: lack of students' real statistics, the poor record of students' results in various assessments, never ending complaints and demotivation on behalf of the learners.
Housing equipment	There is little need of physical infrastructure at	Few offices accommodate DTP staff at KIE

	the head office and efforts are made locally through renting/grant/cooperation with local institutions.	while regional and provincial centres are hosted by secondary schools through the established collaboration.
Evaluation	An effective and efficient evaluation system has to be put in place	The evaluation system exist and uses instruments such as Continuous Assessment Test, self-evaluated assignments and examinations but it still has some weaknesses such as failure to provide feedback to learners in time, limited revision time (1 day) because examinations in most of the times follow immediately the face to face period resulting in poor performance, and ignorance of academic regulations on behalf of the learner that causes some of them to be dismissed or retake the modules.

Based on the analysis of the table above, KIE DTP programme still has a way to pursue for it to meet ODL standards. The analysis shows that some components of DTP acknowledge strong weaknesses while others have to be built and implemented.

#### Challenges related to DTP and proposed remedial solutions

The administered questionnaire enabled the researcher to come up with a number of challenges of KIE DTP and their possible solutions

Table 2: Challenges related to DTP programme and proposed remedial solutions

Problems related to KIE DTP program	Proposed remedial solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of appropriate infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working hand in hand with secondary schools so that the hosted study centers can be renewed.</li> <li>Equipping computer labs and providing access to Internet.</li> <li>Implementing small physical laboratories and libraries for reference materials.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students' drop out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing learner support and advisory services</li> <li>Tracing the registered students and making their serious follow up.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of working and teaching-learning materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insuring that the DTP coordination office requests and supplies the study centers with required materials in good quantity and in time.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trainees are not given in advance the academic calendar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>KIE should produce and publish in advance the DTP academic calendar.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Irregularities in students' attendance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students should be facilitated as much as possible as travel and accommodation expenses are still hard to meet. In view of this, more study centers should be created, implement the use of ICTs that enable anywhere and anytime learning, synchronous and asynchronous communication.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delay in payment of wages/allowances for tutors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Salaries/allowances should be paid on time because delays demotivate tutors and affect KIE image.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of assistant who may help in students support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The study centres have to be staffed. The Regional Coordinator alone cannot play all the roles.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On behalf of trainees, the content is difficult to understand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The modules have to be written in simple language and further self-explanatory materials should be produced and distributed.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a limited interaction between trainers-trainees and trainees-trainees</li> <li>• The academic regulations are the same for both day and distance students</li> <li>• There is a short time for completing modules</li> <li>• Combinations are not enough to meet the needs of required secondary school teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities and possibilities for interaction have to be increased by putting in place a learning management system supplemented by close meeting and communication channels/venues.</li> <li>• There should be specific academic regulations about DTP and not to handle DTP students using the academic regulations of on-campus students. Context and characteristics of the learners are quite different.</li> <li>• Modules should be produced and distributed in time so that learners get their due time to learn before they are subjected to examinations.</li> <li>• Increasing the number of combinations to meet the subjects taught in secondary schools.</li> </ul>

The table above shows that KIE DTP program is facing serious challenges that, with no doubt, affect its effectiveness and of course the quality of its services.

### Conclusion

The findings have shown that the current practices in Distance Training Programme in KIE are dominated by correspondence courses and a little by sandwich periods of meetings between trainees and trainers. Technologically supported channels of communications such as the use of the web, computer and audio-video or Internet are not yet designed nor implemented. Indeed, there are a number of challenges associated with the context, background of the learner and the working environment of the staff in charge. Therefore, researchers recommend the restructure and modernization of the current practices of DTP under KIE. This would enable to address the following major weaknesses that this study conducted in KIE and Rwamagana DTP centre has highlighted:

- The failure of using ICTs' modern technologies
- Limited resources such as library access and textbooks
- Poor record and learner support systems
- Inadequate number of staff and used facilities
- Drop out and failure on behalf of the students

For sure, the KIE DTP programme has to be more effective and respond to the modern pedagogy of active learning, enhancing of collaboration between learners and facilitators of their learning process. This can only be achieved through the improvement of the highlighted aspects of communication, teaching strategies and techniques, learning materials and resources, mission, local support, management system and evaluation which are much defective in the current KIE DTP programme if really this programme wants to pursue the way to meet the terms of ODL.

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