

## Defining Distance Education – Shannon W. Sahabi

Distance education could be defined as instruction delivered through an institution via technology by an instructor who is separated from the learner by geography, time or both, with the potential for interaction between the learners and the instructor.

My definition is quite similar to the one presented in *Teaching and Learning at a Distance*: institution-based, formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources, and instructors (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, and Zvacek, 2012). According to Moore, "Distance education is planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, special methods of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organizational and administrative arrangements" (Distance Education Definitions, n.d). This is also similar to my definition as well as Ian Mugridge's definition: "a form of education in which there is normally a separation between teacher and learner and thus one in which other means - the printed and written word, the telephone, computer conferencing or teleconferencing, for example - are used to bridge the physical gap" (Mugridge, 1991). Wikipedia also defines distance education as "access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both (Distance Education, 2014).

Although these definitions are similar, Wikipedia, for example, does not mention how access to learning is gained, whereas my definition, as well as Moore's and Mugridge's, emphasize a use of some kind of technology to connect the learners to the instructor. Currently, emerging definitions are including words such as "open learning" and "virtual" (Simonson et. al, 2012).

Edwards states that distance education provides distance learning opportunities using mass-produced course ware to a mass market while open learning places greater emphasis on the current specific needs and/or markets available (Simonson et. al, 2012). The term *virtual school*, often used in K-12 education, implies that the school is not necessarily real, whereas distance education is as real and actual as education can be (Simonson et. al, 2012). A new term should be applied here as the education is coming from a real institution with real teachers leading the instruction, only not in the same time or place.

Since most definitions include a separation of learners from instructors in either place, time or both, I think my definition will stand the test of time since I used the terms *technology* and *interaction*. Technology is constantly improving and changing, therefore the term will not get old. Since globalization has inspired new approaches for students and instructors to connect with each other to make it two-way communication, some kind of *interaction* is likely to take place.

### Reference:

Simonson, M., Smaldino, S., Albright, M., & Zvacek, S. (2012). *Teaching and learning at a distance: Foundations of distance education* (5th ed.): Pearson.

Distance Education Definitions. (n.d.). Retrieved September 15, 2014, from <http://www.novastars.com/distance-education/index.html>

Mugridge, I. (1991) Distance education and the teaching of science, *Impact of Science on Society* 41 4, 313-320.

Distance Education (2014). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved September 15, 2014, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distance\\_education#cite\\_note-1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distance_education#cite_note-1)