

Full Length Research Paper

Opinion of managers and teachers of distance education in Iran

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Distance education in Iran is a method whereby the learner does not attend physically in the class and training environment. The most important difference between distance education and other methods is the physical distance between learners, teachers and educational institution. This method of teaching has solved the problem of distance in order to provide learning knowledge and skills. The main purpose of this research was to study barriers (information technology, educational planning system, administrative and financial) centers of distance education from managers and teachers' opinion in Kurdistan high schools. The study was a descriptive survey and the population of the research included all management and teachers (94 in number) in the Education year 2011. The sample of the study consisted of all 18 schools managers and 76 teachers who were familiar with different aspects of the system. Samples were selected via multistage random cluster. The instrument of the study was a questionnaire with 35 closed-item questions at Likert scale designed by the researcher, and one open-ended question offered to managers and teachers for the purpose of the promotion of distance education programs. In order to analyze data from the Statistical analysis of variance, t-test was used. The findings showed that among the many barriers of implementation of distance education in the given institutions, the following barriers can be mentioned: non-usage of information technology and non-access to these technologies, dedicating insufficient hours to teach specialized lessons and not having discipline in providing educational material, not having optimal managerial and official systems of distance education, having skilled persons such as educational, computer, ... experts, financial inability of students in paying costs and not having financial support for students in these centers. Also, the results showed that there is a significant difference between teachers and administrators' perspectives about the barriers of information technology and educational planning system of distance education, but there is no significant difference between financial and official barriers of distance education.

Key words: Managers and teachers, barriers of distance education, guidance schools, high schools, information technology.

INTRODUCTION

The development of communications and information in teaching and training programs are effective and long lasting steps that have qualitative evolution of aims, programs, methods, approaches and teaching and training effectiveness. So, distance education, as an innovative approach in teaching and training, has provided learning possibility in all places and times

(Etezadi et al., 2009).

The beginning of distance education teachings was first among increasing education opportunities and then among providing essential qualitative and evolution methods in teaching materials and methods. Now, these teachings are not only the complement of education but also a good opportunity for updating materials and

making learning and teaching methods more flexible (Alhosseini, 2005).

Distance education institutions are said to achieve license for providing distance education. These institutions were established officially, unofficially and out of the country borders based on the 700th act of teaching and training meeting dated 20th of December, 2003, institution statute and teaching and training conditions for the students of guidance schools, high schools and pre-universities who do not have the chance to be educated in daily guidance schools and high schools, have the appropriate age for education, but due to some reasons such as unavailability of guidance schools and high schools in their area, physical and movement disability, being the head of household, living abroad, prisoners, and some other reasons which have been confirmed by education and training commissions cannot go to daily schools (Hosseini, 2006).

In Iran, cultural revolutionary meetings established the constitution of the distance education institutions with the suggestion of teaching and training in 1996. This institution was first officially and unofficially established in 200 distance education centers in 24 provinces of the country.

According to the fact that traditional education is not enough for educational needs of the society, teaching and training conditions was established for distance education institutions for implementing its educational programs. The executive activity of this institution was started from the educational year of 2004-2005 in 15 provinces which was generalized in all 24 provinces in the educational year of 2005-2006. A total of 400 centers were provided this year for deprived areas and started their activities in order to increase the education. Kurdistan province started its activities by 5 unofficial institutions which were then 43 centers by 2009.

So today, distance education is a predominant learning in the world, but because it is a few years, distance institutions have been started in different levels of education in the country and they are increasing in numbers; thus there is an important chance of increasing the quality and development of this education through recognizing its optimal implementation barriers. So, it is necessary to investigate the barriers for improving and developing educations.

This article tries to investigate the barriers of optimal implementation of distance education in the centers and institutions of Kurdistan province in terms of information technology, educational planning system, and official and financial barriers. Dodge (2001) believes that recognizing distance education problems has an effective result in professional development of high schools students-based environments. Therefore, evaluating those people who play a role in these educations helps recognizing the problems and weaknesses.

Information technology has an effective role in developing distance education because it makes a good

and real learning. Using electronic tools, people can learn materials visually in all places and times without any barrier in terms of place, time and social circumstances. So, appropriate materials can be provided through information technologies in distance education and make to easy learning (Etezadi et al., 2009).

Frاند (2006) believes that using educational technologies in class increases the students learning. Jamtsho et al. (2007), about improving the quality of distance education through recognizing problems, claims that most students (87%) have not enough access to information communication technologies and services. In an investigation (Pina, 2008) about effective factors in developing distance education, results showed that factors such as access to technologies especially libraries online are one of the most important factors.

The design of educational planning system is another barrier that has been investigated in distance education system, because this kind of educational system needs special design principles and curriculum establishments. Therefore, in order to solve these barriers, we need libraries systems (online) growth, variety of learning resources and educational materials, quick access to these resources in addition to special skills and planning system. Porter (2008) believes that in order to improve learning quality, we need to have a systemic curriculum in which we show the relationship between planning principles and with their technological merits. The other barrier is the financial barrier of these institutions. In Murphy's (2008) view, one of the barriers in education is the lack of enough budgets, since most students seek to have access to most services through paying fewer costs.

The results of the research showed that the lack of investment and financial pressure in developing countries provides some problems for distance education and financial problems have some harmful factors such as the decrease of the number of the students' enrolment; it is known as the second barrier in distance education (Valnian, 2002; Akley, 2004; Taghvaei, 2006).

Paying attention to financial and official systems is one of the other barriers which have been investigated in implementing distance education. So, Etezadi et al. (2009) in an investigation entitled "investigating the problems of distance education in the perspective of Isfahan high schools, teachers and students found that having a lot of activity volume in these centers and undesirability of managerial and official systems is the official problem of these centers.

Since managerial systems of distance education which is responsible for official affairs has been designed in a way to be constant (Etezadi et al., 2009), so not paying attention to this fact is a barrier for the students' participation and enrolment in these centers (Aaron, 2007; Akley, 2004). Hosseini (2006), in an investigation entitled "Investigating distance education and educational planning effectiveness of all high schools in the education

year of 2005-2006", found that human resources and possibilities were not enough desirably.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the current study, the descriptive method of research was used. This quantitative investigation employed the survey method as its research design.

Sample

For the current study, the sample comprised two groups:

- 1) 18 school managers of both middle schools and secondary schools;
- 2) 76 full time teachers who were working at the Kurdistan middle and secondary schools.

A total of 94 questionnaires were distributed to all concerned samples for collecting the data.

Instruments

Theoretically based, reliable and validated instruments were used to measure school managers and teachers' perceptions of the distance education barriers in the Kurdistan schooling system. The instruments were pilot tested on samples to assess the internal reliability of each dimension. The results indicate that internal consistencies (based on Cronbach's alpha) are very high and ranges between 0.86 and 0.88. The questionnaires began with a demographics section to examine any demographic factors that might have influenced participants' responses. Respectively the participants' gender, age, and years of working and teaching experiences were taken into account. Following the demographics section, instructions about how to complete items were provided. The questionnaire consisted of 35 closed items questions following with one open-ended question asking participants to highlight their possible strategies for promoting the quality of distance education mechanisms. The responses for items questionnaire were based on five-point Likert scale anchored with very low and very high. SPSS® version 19 for Windows was the statistical software program used to perform all procedures. For the data analyses, exploratory data analysis, descriptive statistics, independent sample t-test and ANOVA were applied.

Finding

Question 1: What are some of the problems related to information technology and communications of distance education institutions in the perspective of teachers and administrators?

Table 1 shows that most averages were given to idea 3 (no educational technology use in these centers) with average 3.17, and a few answers were given to idea 10 (no library equipment in these centers) with average 2.55.

Also, most teachers' answers were given to idea 5 (no educational technologies equipment in these centers) with average 3.68, and a few answers were given to idea 11 (no teacher awareness about appropriate methodologies for distance education) with average 2.84.

Question 2: What are some of the barriers related to educational planning of distance education institutions in administrators and teachers' perspective?

Table 2 shows that most averages were given to idea 2 (no appropriateness in the dedicated time of specialized lessons) with average 4.16, and a few answers were given to idea 1 (no match between given materials and dedicated time) with average 3.16. Also, most teachers' answers were given to idea 9 (no review in educational planning) with average 4.96, and a few answers were given to idea 1 (no match between given materials and dedicated time) with average 3.43.

Question 3: What are some of the official barriers of distance education institutions in administrators and teachers' perspective?

Table 3 shows that most averages were given to idea 1 (no appropriate managerial system and distance education office) with average 4, and a few answers were given to idea 3 (no professionals such as educational experts, computer, etc) with average 3.72. Also, most teachers' answers were given to idea 3 (no professionals such as educational experts, computer, etc) with average 4.24, and a few answers were given to idea 1 (no teacher, administrator and clerks awareness of these centers and its current affairs) with average 3.75.

Question 4: What are some of the financial barriers of distance education institutions in administrators and teachers perspective?

Table 4 shows that most averages were given to idea 1 (no students financial ability in these centers for paying costs) with average 3.72, and a few answers were given to idea 2 (no financial support for students having weak financial circumstances in these centers) with average 3.67. Also, most teachers' answers were given to idea 2 (no financial support for students having weak financial circumstances in these centers) with average 4.17, and a few answers were given to idea 3 (no support in these centers for providing and maintaining official necessities and multimedia technologies) with average 3.96.

Question 5: What are the best strategies of optimal implementation of distance education in Kurdistan province in teachers and administrative perspectives?

Table 5 shows that most answers related to the

Table 1. Percent of the answers of teachers and administrators related to the barriers of information technology and communications.

Idea		Very low	Low	Mean	High	Very high	Average
No courses for computer skills of students	Administrators	11.1	33.3	16.7	27.8	11.1	2.94
	Teachers	6.6	14.5	27.6	27.6	23.7	3.47
No contact with teachers and classmates through e-mail	Administrators	16.7	2.22	11.1	27.8	22.2	3.16
	Teachers	11.8	3.9	17.1	40.8	26.3	3.56
No educational technology use in these centers	Administrators	11.1	22.2	27.8	16.7	22.2	3.17
	Teachers	11.8	--	39.5	21.1	27.6	3.52
No access to educational websites in these centers	Administrators	16.7	5.6	44.4	27.8	5.6	3
	Teachers	13.2	10.5	22.4	27.6	26.3	3.51
No educational technologies equipment in these centers	Administrators	33.3	16.7	16.7	22.2	11.1	2.61
	Teachers	5.3	13.2	26.3	31.6	23.7	3.68
No connection with each other through internet in these centers	Administrators	33.3	16.7	5.6	38.9	5.6	2.66
	Teachers	6.6	6.6	32.9	22.4	31.6	3.43
No access to multimedia technology in these centers	Administrators	16.7	33.3	16.7	33.3	--	2.66
	Teachers	19.7	15.8	23.7	28.9	11.8	3.55
No laboratory equipment in these centers	Administrators	--	56.6	22.2	16.7	5.6	2.72
	Teachers	6.6	6.6	32.9	22.4	31.6	3.65
No scientific ability in using FAVA for teachers and administrators	Administrators	27.8	11.1	22.2	38.9	--	2.72
	Teachers	19.7	15.8	23.7	28.9	11.8	2.97
No library equipment in these centers	Administrators	11.1	44.4	22.2	22.2	--	2.55
	Teachers	6.6	5.3	36.8	40.8	10.5	3.43
No teacher awareness about appropriate methodologies for distance education	Administrators	16.7	22.2	22.2	16.7	22.2	3.05
	Teachers	21.1	19.7	23.7	25	10.5	2.84
No attraction in providing materials	Administrators	11.1	22.2	27.8	38.9	--	2.94
	Teachers	9.2	23.7	23.7	30.3	13.2	3.14
No scientific ability in using FAVA for students	Administrators	5.6	27.8	38.9	27.8	--	2.88
	Teachers	5.4	19.7	34.2	26.3	14.5	3.25

strategies of the barriers of communications and information technology were given to idea 2 (equipping distance education institutions to communication and information technology). Few answers were given to idea 8 (providing guidance and consultancy services in order to use communication and information technology by students). Most answers related to the strategies of the barriers of educational planning were given to idea 4 (having educational courses for administrators and teachers) with 19.1%. Few answers were given to idea 7

(providing consultancy services) with 6.3%. Most answers related to the strategies of official and managerial barriers were given to idea 2 (dedication and employment of experts such as educational, computer and educational planning experts for distance education institutions) with 29.7%. Few answers were given to idea 5 (similarity of acts with needs of distance education institutions) with 10.6%. Most answers related to the strategies of financial barriers were given to idea 2 (financial support for those students who cannot pay

Table 2. Percent of the answers of teachers and administrators related to the barriers of educational planning system.

Idea		Very low	Low	Mean	High	Very high	Average
No match between given materials and dedicated time	Administrators	--	27.8	4.44	11.1	16.7	3.16
	Teachers	7.9	11.8	27.6	34.2	18.4	3.43
No appropriateness in the dedicated time of specialized lessons	Administrators	--	5.6	27.8	11.1	55.6	4.16
	Teachers	5.3	9.2	18.4	38.2	28.2	4.42
No attention to age characteristics and learners desires in giving lessons	Administrators	5.6	11.1	16.7	33.3	33.3	3.77
	Teachers	3.9	13.2	17.1	26.3	39.5	3.84
No match for the education level of the class	Administrators	5.5	5.6	22.2	16.7	5.	4
	Teachers	1.3	6.6	13.2	22.4	56.6	4.26
No courses for students awareness about distance education system	Administrators	--	22.2	11.1	33.3	33.3	3.77
	Teachers	--	7.9	18.4	18.4	55.3	4.21
No attention to students ideas and desires in creating, implementing and improving educational planning	Administrators	--	11.1	22.2	22.2	44.4	4
	Teachers	2.6	7.9	14.5	19.7	55.3	4.17
No time for solving educational problems	Administrators	--	16.7	11.1	27.8	44.4	4
	Teachers	3.9	7.9	11.8	21.1	55.3	4.15
No educational consultancy	Administrators	16.7	5.6	16.7	16.7	44.4	3.66
	Teachers	10.5	10.5	14.5	9.2	51.3	3.67
No review in educational planning	Administrators	11.1	22.2	11.1	22.2	11.1	3.44
	Teachers	1.3	7.9	6.6	27.6	55.6	4.96
More students population in classes	Administrators	11.1	11.1	22.2	27.8	27.8	3.50
	Teachers	10.5	11.8	18.4	9.2	50	3.76
No moral discipline between students like absence, cheating, delay, etc	Administrators	--	27.8	22.2	16.7	33.3	3.55
	Teachers	10.5	17.1	14.5	9.2	48.7	3.68
No discipline in giving educational materials	Administrators	--	22.2	22.2	27.8	27.8	3.61
	Teachers	1.3	9.2	25	36.8	37.6	3.80
No flexibility in planed curriculum	Administrators	--	16.7	27.8	16.7	38.9	3.77
	Teachers	--	7.9	21.1	19.7	50.2	4.80
No comparison about students scientific abilities of these centers and other daily schools	Administrators	--	11.1	38.9	27.8	22.2	3.61
	Teachers	7.9	9.2	13.2	28.9	40.8	3.85

costs) with 29.7%. Few answers were given to idea 1 (financial support for these centers for compensating current costs and investments) with 20.2%.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, the barriers of distance education in the

perspective of the teachers and administrators of distance education institutions were investigated in terms of information technology, educational, official and financial planning system, and the difference in their perspectives for the above mentioned areas.

The results of this research made the barriers and problems of distance education in the Kurdistan province

Table 3. Percent of the answers of teachers and administrators related to the managerial and official barriers.

Idea		Very low	Low	Mean	High	Very high	Average
More job opportunities in these centers	Administrators	--	16.7	27.8	16.7	38.9	3.78
	Teachers	1.3	2.6	23.7	22.4	5.	4.17
No appropriate managerial system and distance education office	Administrators	--	16.7	16.7	38.9	27.8	3.77
	Teachers	6.6	9.2	11.8	26.3	46.1	3.96
No professionals such as educational experts, computer, etc	Administrators	5.6	16.7	11.1	3.3	33.3	3.72
	Teachers	2.6	2.6	19.7	18.4	56.6	4.24
No teacher, administrator and clerks awareness of these centers and its current affairs	Administrators	--	11.1	16.7	3.3	38.9	4
	Teachers	11.8	11.8	18.4	5.3	52.6	3.75
No appropriate * and * for these centers	Administrators	--	5.6	38.9	22.2	33.3	3.83
	Teachers	2.6	10.5	9.2	31.6	46.1	4.08

Table 4. Percent of the answers of teachers and administrators related to the financial barriers.

Idea		Very low	Low	Mean	High	Very high	Average
No students financial ability in these centers for paying costs	Administrators	--	5.6	44.4	27.8	22.2	3.72
	Teachers	2.6	11.8	18.4	17.1	50	4
No financial support for students having weak financial circumstances in these centers	Administrators	16.7	11.1	5.6	22.2	44.4	3.76
	Teachers	6.6	7.9	11.8	10.5	63.2	4.17
No support in these centers for providing and maintaining official necessities and multimedia technologies	Administrators	5.6	11.1	16.7	38.9	27.8	3.68
	Teachers	3.9	9.2	18.4	23.7	44.7	3.96

centers to be recognized. Barriers of information technology was the first question to be asked and the results showed that no educational technology use in these centers and no educational technologies equipment in these centers are among the most important barriers in this area. Also, the results of independent T-test showed that there is a significant difference between teachers and administrators' perspectives in level 5% and the average of teachers is more than that of administrators.

Since it is a few years these centers have started their activities, no enough attention has been paid to information technology as a significant fundamental. So, solving its challenges solves a lot of problems in education. The results of this research are similar to those of Pina (2008) that showed having no access to educational technologies are effective factors of underdevelopment of distance education methods. Also, the results of this research are similar to those of Taghvaei (2006) and Etezadi et al. (2009) that showed

having no equipment in information technology is important in distance education.

The barriers of educational planning is another issue to be investigated and the results showed that not having enough dedicated time in administrators perspectives and not having discipline in giving educational materials in teachers perspectives are among the most barriers of this area.

Therefore, since these education is not complete and we have few hours for solving problems the students will be in the class less than before which causes problems. So, the problems of distance education are more than traditional methods. In this regard, the results of this research are similar to those of Porter (2008) that is related to not having enough dedicated time.

Official barriers are one of the other variables to be investigated and the results showed that not having desirable managerial systems in administrative perspectives and not having professionals such as experts in education, computer etc., are among the most

Table 5. Frequency of strategies provided by those people studied in related areas.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Providing strategies in communication and information technology area		
Providing fundamentals of technological and computer in distance education institutions	7	7.4
Equipping distance education institutions to communication and information technology	21	22.3
Supporting distance education institutions for using communication and information technology	14	14.9
Enforcing distance education institutions for using communication and information technology	17	18.3
Providing books, guidance books, CDs in time	11	11.7
Equipping distance education institutions with laboratories and libraries	6	6.3
Having expert teachers in using communication and information technology for teaching	9	9.6
Providing guidance and consultancy services in order to use communication and information technology by students	4	4.2
No strategy	5	5.3
Total	94	100
Providing strategies in the barriers of planning system		
Similarity of lesson volume and dedicated time for each lesson	9	9.6
Annual review of the contents and programs	12	12.7
Considering age characteristics and learners desires	7	7.4
Having educational courses for administrators and teachers	18	19.1
Having enough opportunity for answering questions and problem solving	13	13.8
Administrators, teachers and students participation in planning and educational content	10	10.0
Providing consultancy services	5	6.3
The possibility of reviewing curriculum after final evaluation	15	15.9
No strategy	5	6.3
Total	94	100
Providing strategies in managerial and official barriers		
Optimizing managerial and official systems of distance education institutions	19	20.2
Dedication and employment of experts such as educational, computer and educational planning experts for distance education institutions	28	29.7
Supporting centers for providing books and educational facilities	21	22.3
Direct and continuous review of these centers through teaching and training offices of provinces	14	14.9
Similarity of acts with needs of distance education institutions	10	10.6
No strategy	20	2.1
Total	94	100
Providing strategies in financial barriers		
Financial support for those students who cannot pay costs	32	35
Financial support for these centers to pay teachers payments	21	22.3
Financial support for these centers for compensating current costs and investments	19	20.2
Financial support for these centers in order to provide educational facilities and other official needs	20	21.2
No strategy	1	1.3
Total	94	100

important barriers of this area.

The results of this research are similar to those of

Etezadi et al. (2009) entitled "investigating the problems of distance education in the perspective of

Isfahan teachers and administrators of high schools”, since the results emphasize the undesirability of managerial systems of distance education as the official barriers of this area.

Financial barriers are one of other issues to be investigated and the results showed that financial inability in paying costs in administrators’ perspectives and not having financial support in teachers’ perspectives are among the most barriers of this area. According to the fact that distance education institutions are managed unofficially and are not supported financially, we need students to pay costs who may not be able to do so; this fact causes lack of budget in these centers. The results of this research are similar to those of Murphy (2008), Valnian (2002), Akley (2004) in facing financial barriers. Also, the results of this research are similar to those of Etezadi et al. (2009) and Taghvaei (2006) that is about financial barriers in distance education.

Providing strategies for optimal implementation of distance education in Kurdistan province is the last issue which has been investigated. The results showed that equipping distance education institutions with communications and information technology, having educational courses for administrators and teachers, employing experts such as educational, computer, and planning experts are among the strategies of optimal implementation of distance education institutions.

Since it is less than a decade these distance education institutions have started their activities in Kurdistan province, it has some problems. Distance education is effective and successful in continuing education, developing flexibility in educational methods, effectiveness of technology on education, etc. The ability to solve these problems can just be done through an innovative strategy which is related to new methods, communications and information technology, and programs and courses review. Based on the investigated barriers and results, the following suggestions were made:

1. Distance education institutions equipment, enforcement and support for communications and information technology and providing books, guidance books, CDs, are among those strategies that have a significant role in distance education.
2. Having courses for teachers and administrators, increasing dedicated hours for specialized lessons, paying attention to age characteristics and desires, and administrators, teachers and students participation in educational planning, their content, and annual programs review are among those strategies that have a significant role in distance education.

3. Supporting these centers for providing educational facilities, dedicating and employing experts such as educational and computer expert, improving managerial systems of these centers through teaching and training offices of provinces are among those strategies that play a significant role in distance education.

4. Financial support for paying costs of some students, teachers, current costs, new established centers, and educational facilities are among those strategies that will play a significant role in distance education and will help in providing, maintaining and developing these centers.

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