

Distance and Campus Universities: Tensions and Interactions A Comparative Study of Five Countries

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**Reviewed by ASHOK SHARMA
Lecturer in Psychology,
Vaish PG College, (Haryana) INDIA**

The mode of distance teaching-learning is getting due importance and increasing attention around the globe during past few decades, particularly in the field of higher education. It would not be an exaggeration to say that in many fields or challenges confronting higher education systems today, distance education has proved to be forerunner to traditional educational systems. Also, one must not be surprised to know that studying and comparing the distance education system of different distance teaching universities deeply not only could provide some advantage to the persons belonging to different distance teaching universities but administrators, policy makers, and educators in traditional, campus universities might also gain better insights in facing and dealing with various problems related to higher education system. This is the observation that led Prof. Guri-Rosenblit to pour all of her experiences of over two decades in comparing the emergence, development and proceedings of five, single-mode, fully fledged, distance teaching universities operating in five higher education systems: the UK, Spain, Germany, Canada, and Israel. The catchy title of her book, "Distance and Campus Universities: Tensions and Interactions-A Comparative Study of Five Countries" reflects in itself what the author wants to convey.

Introduced and foreworded by Guy Neave of International Association of Universities, France, this book is one in Series on "Issues in Higher Education". This book is divided into eight chapters wherein each one deals with different questions on higher education system in the context of five distance-teaching universities of UK, Spain, Germany, Canada, and Israel. The first chapter, beginning with 'the idea of a distance teaching university,' attempts to examine the extent to which the early 1970s born distance teaching universities have departed from the first-generation correspondence institutions of higher education system. This chapter details the birth, establishment and development of British Open University, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED, the Spanish distance teaching university), The Open University of Israel, FernUniversität in Germany, and Athabasca University of Canada. It is interesting to note that although the British Open University was established without a model, it served as a model for the establishment of these and other distance teaching universities all over the world. This chapter also covers and analyses seven distinctive issues/features/specific goals that have distinguished distance teaching universities as special universities. These issues pertain to broadening access to higher education; large-scale operation; changes in student-faculty interaction; high quality university-level textbooks; multi-media; reduced capital expenditure; and non-campus university. This chapter broadly deals with the extent to which these distance teaching universities present a challenge to the well-established traditional/campus-centered universities; with various socio-political factors led to the establishment of these distance teaching universities; and with various socio-academic goals these distance teaching universities are expected to fulfil.

Next chapter concentrates on distance teaching universities in their national settings, how do these distance teaching universities differ from each other, how much is each distance teaching university innovative in its national setting, and how does the innovations of each distance teaching university affects its national counterparts? Each of the selected five distance teaching universities for this comparative study were compared within its national higher education system on eight parameters of innovative features viz., distance teaching at university level; access-exit requirements; part time adult students; ethos of academic freedom; size of a distance teaching university; modular credit accumulation; academic year calendar; and use of mass communication.

The third chapter deals with the profiles and roles of students and academic faculty in these five distance-teaching universities and compares them with those of students and faculty in campus-based universities. The facts presented are supported through appropriate data. For example, Table 3.1 presents students' distribution by age, gender, state of employment and purpose of study at each of distance teaching university studied, Table 3.2 reveals registrations' distribution by fields of study, and Table 3.3 shows the academic staff at the five studied distance-teaching universities. The chapter ends with a very thoughtful discussion on some problematic variables related to learning and teaching. These pertain to the lack of campus environment and peer group interaction, distributed teaching responsibility, drop-out rates, on the dangers of indoctrination, support systems and services concentrating on study centres, tutor-student relations, and counseling services.

The fourth chapter of her book is devoted to "academic curricula," in which she tried to tap the fields of study each examined distance teaching university has chosen to concentrate on, how the distance teaching universities' academic curricula differ from each other and from traditional, campus-based universities, the types of diplomas and degrees these universities offer, and other related questions in this chapter. It was noticed that, although data were presented on academic courses of these five distance-teaching universities, the data needed to be updated.

The next chapter covers the technologies that are utilized in the service of distance teaching universities. This chapter is broadly focused on (i) production and delivery technologies, and (ii) interactive communication and information technologies. First, in production and delivery technologies, the use of print and electronic publishing; radio and audio cassettes; television, video cassettes and tutored-video instruction; and computer-based pre-developed programs in the five examined distance teaching universities is discussed. Then, in interactive communication and information technologies, the author discusses the use of correspondence, fax, e-mail, telephone and audio conferencing, video conferencing and computer-mediated communication. The chapter ends with the importance of choosing a balanced mix of media for effective distance teaching.

The sixth chapter deals with the comparison of governance, funding and organization in distance teaching universities in the context of the norms prevailing within their national milieu. Concentrating on the study centres, the author describes the centralized versus decentralized control of the distance teaching universities' study centres. In her second-last chapter on "Distance and Campus Universities: Skepticism, Collaboration and Competition," she rightly remarks, "On a general level, the relationships between distance teaching universities and their conventional counterparts in each national setting can be described as evolving over the years from a widespread skepticism of the latter towards the former in the 1970s, through growing cooperation in the 1980s, to increased competition in the 1990s. All three elements of skepticism, collaboration and competition, each at various degrees of intensity, still co-exist and even today characterise the intricate relations between distance and campus universities in nearly all national settings" (pp. 199-200). This chapter taps the existence of these three elements in distance and campus universities.

The concluding chapter of this book explores the potential which globalisation holds for the role of distance teaching universities. This chapter, dealing with the 'lessons from the past and trends of the future' is a must read for policy-makers, administrators and academics to learn a lot from the various experiences of these distance teaching universities since these experiences provide a solid ground for the future planning of the establishment of both campus universities and distance teaching universities. The section on 'lessons from the past' mainly deals with equality, quantity and quality in higher education, lifelong learning and flexible curricula, closer interface with labour markets, support systems in mass higher education, reviving the focus on teaching and learning in higher education, technologies in the service of higher education, and inter-institutional and international cooperation. Then the author provides a brief summary on main lessons. The second section of this final chapter concentrates on the 'future trends' and mainly touches upon crucial areas: potential student constituencies; the role of the academic faculty; generation of knowledge: its delivery and dissemination; organizational infrastructure; university-society dialogue; and global outreach.

The unique feature of this book lies in suggesting by Prof. Guri-Rosenblit, on the basis of her experience of over two decades of association with distance teaching system, some guidelines to be considered for initiating and establishing new distance teaching universities in the future that are based on the past experiences of veteran distance teaching universities.

On the basis of the above review, it might give an idea to the readers that this volume is mainly a comparative, in-depth case-study of five distance teaching universities that highlights the higher education system in distance learning mode. Overall, this book is very well researched, a marvelous product, worth reading and possessing. The content is to the point, of very high quality, and authenticated by the quotations of relevant references. The print quality of this book is worth appreciating, and especially, I would like to mention the eye catching 'pink' colour of the jacket, which forces one to pick up this book from the shelf. In sum, this book shall be useful for guidance to those who wish to gain deep knowledge of different distance teaching universities and particularly for the policy-makers and administrators who wish to establish a new distance teaching university.

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