

2. PROJECT GENESIS



PARTICIPANTS IN THE PROJECT TECHNICAL MEETING AT THE UTPL

The project “Virtual Center for the Development of Quality Standards for Higher Distance Education in Latin American and the Caribbean” began with the concern of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the resulting invitation of a group of experts to a consulting meeting in Washington D.C. in August, 2000, to analyze the distance education situation in Latin America and the Caribbean. The purpose of the meeting was to study a working paper that discussed the history of distance education and the projections for the following decade.



IDB COORDINATING COMMITTEE—WASHINGTON, DC

Both the Ibero-American Association of Higher Distance Education (AIESAD) and the Inter-American Distance Education Consortium (CREAD) agreed with the proposal, promoted by the IDB, that the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja (UTPL) of Loja, Ecuador, take charge of managing the project.

Next, the appropriate contacts were established between the UTPL, the IDB, the AIESAD and the CREAD, cementing the commitment from all participants to go forward with the program after the meeting in Washington, held May 29, 2002.

2.1 HISTORICAL EVENTS THAT DROVE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

The primary concern of the participants in the project was the quality and assurance of existing distance education programs in Latin America and the Caribbean. They recognized that this applies to all universities, both distance and on site. The purpose of this project was to have these experts evaluate these issues.

Referring to a recent study by Dr. Rama¹ (Director of the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean), we briefly relate the history of higher education in Latin America, focusing on significant aspects of the evolution of the universities of this region, beginning with the First Higher Education Reform, which originated in the Córdoba movement of 1918. At that time, quality was not the focal point of the reform; rather it was assumed that the level of quality was not to be questioned and that the focus was to nationalize the quality of education of the elite universities. This reform forced the universities to adjust to the values of a new middle class and not necessarily to the demands of the working class.

Throughout the twentieth century, public universities worked towards achieving autonomy and co-governance amid strong social and political movements. The idea of educational quality in these universities was indirectly linked to the movement towards university autonomy. Universities at that time rejected the external imposition of quality controls in favor of establishing them internally. The reason for this was supposedly to encourage independence, but the actual motive was to assure monopoly and control.

The universities established parameters and systems to ensure standards of quality such as competitive hiring for teaching personnel and procedures for promotions. There were few teachers, and it was assumed that they were highly prepared because they were educated outside the region. This system

¹ Rama, Claudio (2003): Los sistemas de control de la calidad de la educación superior en America Latina en la III Reforma Universitaria.

of co-government and autonomy was based on assessment of quality and distribution of power. Advancing in an administrative career meant meeting requirements that positively affected the quality of education.

The overcrowding of universities as a result of the demand from new students affected the already weak quality assurance mechanisms in existence. This, combined with a series of fiscal limitations beginning in the 1970s, was the beginning of a new stage in relation to quality.

The Second University Reform in Latin America of the 1970s (which was similar to that in France in May, 1968) expressed concern about the instability of the previous model, overcrowding, the impossibility of maintaining increased public spending, the imbalance between supply of and demand for professionals, the decline in the quality of education, and the search for greater autonomy aligned with the university's modernist visions as an expression of political demands. All of these issues provoked student protests.

This reform caused a transformation in private education, with a resulting further decline in the quality of public institutions and conflicts within these institutions in their struggles for increased budgets and higher admissions standards.

This diversity of public and private education gave birth to more disparity of quality in higher education. Involvement in the free market system without regulations was the reason for these divergent levels in the public and private sectors.

As a consequence of the disparity in quality of various institutions, the level of education of the average graduate, and the mechanisms of university admission, the value of the certifications began to deteriorate.

The lack of national safeguards to guarantee quality was not seen as a problem; rather it was thought that the market would determine the appropriate levels of quality and that the students would select the best options to enhance

their marketability. This approach did not take into account corporate standards of professional associations.

In the third phase of the University Reform the following concerns must be noted: reduction in public financing, global technological revolution, student overcrowding and the proliferation of universities², the dissimilarity of these universities, regionalization, and the creation of higher learning institutions oriented to the market that in many cases did not have either internal or external quality control systems. Also, at this time, comprehensive quality assurance systems were instituted, which provided one of the keys to the beginning of the third stage of the evolution of higher education systems in the region.

This new phase, which began in the 1990s, is now ending. In the opinion of Dr. Rama, the author of the article on which we have based our conclusions, this phase is characterized by awareness-raising, negotiation, and the implementation of the regulatory frameworks for national systems of quality assurance.

Based on the study conducted by this project's expert team, in the majority of countries the regulatory frameworks have been approved with the creation of quality assurance agencies characterized by internal self-assessment, peer evaluation, and external evaluation.

Without carefully direction of their development, these mechanisms have in some cases restricted liberty through numerous rules with barriers to national and international admissions.

The lack of uniformity of quality assurance mechanisms in public and private universities results in admissions standards that vary greatly in different institutions.

² In 1950 there were 75 universities in Latin American and the Caribbean and a reduced number of non-university higher education institutions (BRUNNER, 2002). In 2002 the same author points out the existence of more than 5,000 higher education institutions, with 900 of them universities. The number of students has had a similar growth; in 1960 there were 573,000 and in 1994 the IDB found that the number of matriculating students reached 7.4 million (de Moura Casto y Levy, 1997), and in 1997 Brunner notes that that number had risen to 9.4 million.

The new values and roles in the regulation of higher education constitute a new institutional structure within the university systems of the region, but there are large dissimilarities in their definition and application, depending on the country or political system or on their own university structures.

We should not lose sight of the hope that distance education can solve many of the problems of higher education and that its continued expansion may bring about the social development hoped for.

International organizations are sensitive to the new trends, as we have seen in the Delors report. Below, we explain other aspects of the trends in Europe and Latin America:

• Europe

“ .. in the **European Union Treaty of Maastricht** (1992), Article 126 is entirely dedicated to education, and it ends with the recommendation to strengthen and stimulate distance education. In order to achieve this, on July 6, 1989, the **Council of Europe Assembly** approved a recommendation (1.110) that advised intergovernmental cooperation in the field of distance education. In October of that same year, the European education ministers—meeting in their XVI session—encouraged investment in and use of new computer and communication technologies. They considered these technologies to be ideal instruments for the development of distance education. The goals of these efforts is to collaborate on professional retraining, increase the enrollment of new students, and promote cultural activities.

The **European Council for Cultural Cooperation** is developing a series of activities and research projects with the goal of maximizing the profitability of distance education, such as undertaking comparative studies of the politics of distance education in Europe, identifying affected groups, assisting with the goal of establishing distance education networks among universities and

institutions in Eastern Europe, and coordinating related actions by member countries.

The European Parliament adopted a resolution in July 1987 on Open Universities that generated extensive debate about this educational modality and resulted in two reports. In May, 1991, the Report on Higher Distance Education in the European Community was approved, and in November the Memorandum on Open Distance Learning in the European Community was released. These reports explicitly state the need for continuous learning – the possibility of which is provided by distance education, its integration in various community programs, and the value of its exceptional methodology.

... On November 27, 1992, a meeting in Brussels of the **Council of the Education Ministers of the European Community** was held with the goal of clarifying the criteria for community action in the areas of open and distance learning related to facilitating cooperation between institutions and organizations of the sector, expanding training of trainers, highlighting the importance of quality and the need for competent tutors, and consulting the states, users, providers, and transnational associations that operate in the sector.

Some noteworthy European distance education associations are the Association of European Correspondence Schools (AECS), which unites associations, institutions and people from numerous European countries involved in open distance learning, and the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), that integrates not only exclusively distance universities (Open University of Great Britain, UNED of Spain, Fernuniversitat of Germany, Open Universiteit of Holland and Universidade Aberta of Portugal) but also includes numerous consortiums and associations throughout the continent.

- **Latin America**

In regards to Latin America, we highlight several sections of the **Declaration Document of the Latin American Ministers of Education in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil** (July 7 and 8, 1993) within the Latin American Conference of the Ministers of Education. This document implements a socioeconomic analysis of the educational situation of the Ibero-American countries in the 1990s. It states that there is an urgent need to undertake reforms in the educational systems of these countries in order to effectively prepare their students for the workforce.

To achieve this goal, the need for educational structures and training that are more variable, open, and flexible should be addressed. They constitute an option capable of multiplying and diversifying the educational options for all persons, helping to realize the ideal of true educational democratization. The methods of open distance learning would be strengthened by the concurrent use of educational materials and technological advances in communication and information.

The document justifies this decision because of the enormous numbers of people who need basic education and training for work, especially those who, for reasons related to their location, family, or work, are unable to attend regular courses. This suggests the necessity of developing flexible systems that permit self-directed learning and knowledge acquisition. The document finally urges that countries make an effort, at the individual and community level, to put in place open distance educational systems that expand the educational, professional and technical training offerings currently available almost exclusively in on site educational centers and establishments that.

According to the document, by using these policies, the Latin American education ministers aspire to increase opportunities for access to education and training and reinforce the educational infrastructures in the most disadvantaged areas and those regions farthest from training centers, and by doing so to improve the possibilities for continuous training and promote independent learning methods.

The most outstanding association of distance education institutions in Latin America is the Ibero-American Association of Higher Distance (AIESAD) whose permanent headquarters is located in Madrid (UNED). AIESAD was founded in 1980 with the goal of promoting higher distance education for the benefit of the people of Latin America and as a permanent mechanism for information, coordination, and cooperation. The AIESAD publishes the Latin American Distance Education Magazine (RIED), whose headquarters is located in the Instituto Universitario de Educación a Distancia (IUED) of the Spanish UNED³

The Inter-American Distance Education Consortium (CREAD) is another one of the important educational organizations in Latin America.

With the understanding of the direction that higher education has taken in the region, we recognize that distance education provides us with many new tools to solve the problems of traditional on site education. Most importantly, we see that distance education has the potential to improve social development in Latin America and the Caribbean, providing access to education for the great majority of the population. Therefore, we believe that this project, "Virtual Center for the Development of Higher Distance Standards in Latin America and the Caribbean," is a necessary next step that will promote distance education in the region.

The need to develop this work using internationally accepted standards level is paramount because otherwise we run the risk of perpetuating the same sub-standard conditions that exist today. The participants in this project are seeking appropriate evaluation instruments that are not influenced by politics or private interests. They believe that providing quality education is the result of efforts that unite rather than divide.

As we began this project we had an idea of how ambitious it was, and we were cognizant of the diversity of the proposed mechanisms for assuring quality in traditional university education. We were also aware of the need to regulate

³ UNESCO (1998): Aprendizaje Abierto y a Distancia. Perspectivas y consideraciones políticas. UNED, p.24

distance education with its own parameters. At the conclusion of the work, and after the research had been implemented, we recognized the necessity for the participants to move towards a consensus of what quality means.

We recognize that there is great diversity in distance education offerings in Latin America and the Caribbean.

2.2 CURRENT TRENDS IN OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING

It is important to take into account current trends in distance education in Latin American and Caribbean systems and to look critically at the past in order to understand the present and plan for the future.

The UNESCO text “Open Distance Learning” describes the general characteristics of the subject from a perspective on current trends worldwide. We take this document into account along with other research texts that we have consulted. We combine and expand the comments regarding Latin America and we add a more concrete vision of the trends in our countries.

Current trends in open distance education in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The fact that higher education was conceived for young adults has resulted in most courses for adults—adult education—being of short duration. This is an old tradition in countries such as Great Britain, the United States, and Germany. Adult education rarely includes university studies. This trend is still observed in many countries, in particular Latin America. Another aspect to take into account is that higher education has traditionally been directed towards favored social classes.

Distance education has thrived in countries such as Japan, Sweden and Canada, whose governments who are trying to give a second chance to adults or to provide equal opportunities to people who for geographical reasons,

physical limitations, and family or work obligations are unable to attend on site universities. It is now known that the distance education population is getting younger, signifying that students are working at an earlier age and need institutions that don't obligate them to meet a fixed schedule or to take courses in a specific place.

These two factors are applicable to Latin American countries; however, their universities typically conform to traditional European models which, as we can see from the case of Casas Armengol,⁴ are now facing various problems:

- Student overcrowding as a result of changes in social and political values
- The high cost of financing and time needed for expansion of facilities
- The need for significant high quality intellectual resources
- The need to train professionals in new specialties
- The difficulty in making the necessary transformations and improvements for the new social, scientific, and technological demands of the respective countries

The need for new educational methods.

This analysis and the current educational crisis show us the need for new educational methods; for many reasons, distance education stands out as the most feasible solution. The outdated thinking in both developed and underdeveloped countries that higher education is only for young adults, which also perpetuates the privileges of some social groups, has been substantially modified as a result of new social, political and economic realities. This creates the need to provide higher education to a large number of people who for geographic reasons, physical or financial limitations, or family or work obligations, can't attend traditional classes.

In underdeveloped countries, and especially in Latin America, traditional universities have also been faced with other problems that have been difficult to

⁴ CASAS A, M: Universidad sin clases – educación a distancia en América Latina. Venezuela. Cap. III p. 82

resolve. They have attempted to find innovative and appropriate solutions, but in many cases the results have been less than satisfactory.

We see a clear tendency in Latin America to convert to bimodal universities, although this may be an oversimplification. On one hand, some small isolated institutions are dedicated to distance education; on the other hand, in many cases it is believed that a good distance education can be had only if the institution offers the same program in an on site setting. Nothing can be further from the truth. We only have to look at the successful experiences of the large distance universities that developed independently of on site education, such as the Spanish UNED or programs in Latin America such as the UNA of Venezuela or the UNED of Costa Rica.

The historical panorama of distance education is very extensive, especially if we consider the sporadic nature of some programs that have started and stopped. At the risk of overlooking some prestigious institutions, we will attempt to summarize the most notable experiences of the various countries, keeping in mind the continuity and magnitude of the programs discussed.

• MEXICO

Mexico has developed a diverse array of distance education experiences at both the secondary and higher education levels. The oldest and most important program is the “Open University System” that dates from 1972 and is integrated into the Universidad Autónoma de México (SUA/UNAM). The reason for its inception was to reduce overcrowding in the university’s enormous central campus. The university has about ten conventional programs and is supported by the professors and resources of these respective programs. It offers studies with the same academic validity as those offered on site. However, this is more of a supervised-study program than a distance education program.

Since 1997, this university has put more emphasis on authentic distance learning. In the Open System Rules, the Entrance, Attendance and Exams section separates the admissions of the two systems, allowing the students to

choose their subjects at their own pace; and external organizations have been given the authority to provide courses under the supervision of the university. The university has also implemented many continuing education and postgraduate programs. In 1997-1998 an enrollment of 10,000 students was reached, still a modest number in relation to the total UNAM enrollment of more than 300,000 students. As a result of the independence enjoyed by the faculty of the Modelo Federativo of the UNAM, distance studies at the institution are uniquely effective.⁵

- The Universidad Virtual del Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM) has been one of the most innovative institutions in using the new technologies to expand continuing education with a minor focus on university careers. The ITESM began as a private technological university and was located in the Mexico's most advanced industrial zone, supporting industrial development of the region and the country. With the goals of improving its academic offerings, taking advantage of modern technology, and extending its actions to the international level, the ITESM has since 1997 offered the Virtual University which provides Master's, PhD, and continuing education programs in Mexico and other countries of the Americas.
- There are many institutions in Mexico that offer some type of distance education program. In 1991 the Inter-Institutional and Interdisciplinary Commission on Open Distance Education (CIIEAD) was created to support, coordinate, and facilitate the various systems. There are currently more than 50 institutions in Mexico offering distance education, with local, regional, national, and in some cases international access as in the case of the Instituto Latinoamericano para las Comunicaciones Educativas (ILCE) and the Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM).

⁵ CASAS ARMENGOL, M. (2003): La Enseñanza y aprendizajes abiertos y a distancia en América. Perspectiva Internacional de la Educación a Distancia. UNED: Master en Enseñanza y aprendizaje abiertos y a distancia. Módulo VII. p. 13.

• Ecuador

In Ecuador, the distance modality began at the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja (UTPL) in 1976 with the name Universidad Abierta de Loja. It began by offering a degree in Educational Sciences with an enrollment of more than 1,200 students the first semester, demonstrating that in a small country such as Ecuador, demand for this type of training was considerable. The vision at that time, which developed from the need for teacher training, was the driving force behind the modality that was developed not without criticism but with a firm resolve to undertake a clear mission.

The UTPL is a typical example in some ways and in others unique. The distance modality grew out of the traditional university, but in a very short time the number of distance students outnumbered the on site students. Currently there are 17,000 distance students studying 13 university careers, along with postgraduate students and short course enrollees, while the on site student body numbers 3,000. The experience of this bimodal university is a clear example of the worldwide trend toward distance education that flourishes when strong effort is put towards its development. The UTPL is slowly moving from a traditional distance education system to an on-line system, taking advantage of new technologies but at the same time paying attention to local needs. Since 1999 it has provided virtual support to centers in 22 provinces throughout Ecuador through lectures, conferences, and seminars, via satellite signals from its headquarters in Loja, as well as from prestigious universities in other countries.

Since 2000, the UTPL has implemented an integrated and organized virtual campus that can be viewed as a model educational institution. The use of multimedia and computer systems, fundamentally associated with distance education, has become the UTPL's most recent challenge in the educator/student setting because it requires a change in pedagogy and in the fundamental training of the teachers. However, the characteristics of the country—a dispersed population located in areas that are difficult to access and lacking in educational opportunities—has reaffirmed the social calling of this

institution. There are now 113 educational centers within Ecuador, as well as three abroad (in Rome, Madrid and New York), which were created with the goal of serving the numerous Ecuadorian emigrants who live in these cities.

- Within the Escuela Politécnica del Ejercito (ESPE), another distance program was implemented in 1989. At first associated with the UTPL, it became independent and subsequently created its own pedagogical model, growing to about 5,000 students in undergraduate studies throughout the majority of Ecuador's provinces.
- In Ecuador, a distance education pioneer in Latin America because of the UTPL program, a majority of the approximately 35 universities currently have some type of distance education program, but the great majority have an on site requirement—a system known as semi-present distance learning.

• **Costa Rica**

The Universidad Estatal de Costa Rica (UNED) was created in 1977 as a true distance university. The vision was to address the growing demand for higher education, to serve an adult population that had not had the opportunity to study in a university, and to reduce the costs of higher education. For many years, this university and the UNA of Venezuela were the only higher education institutions in Latin America that exclusively provided distance education for professional careers. Today the UNED offers 21 careers (principally education and administration), as well as extension courses and specialized courses throughout Latin America. In total the university has more than 20,000 students—a significant figure given the country's population of 3,500,000. The flexible curriculum allows students to earn certificates or titles at different levels, making it possible for them to work and pursue a degree at the same time.

As with all large distance universities, there is a high student drop-out rate. This number is declining; however, in 1993, 5.4% of those who enrolled graduated,

and 3.6% earned degrees. At the diploma and technical level the percentage was 6.7%. As can be seen, the drop-out rate exceeds 90%.

• Venezuela

In the 1970s, The Universidad Nacional Abierta (UNA) of Venezuela had a rich background of distance studies integrated into the traditional universities. Called “Supervised Studies” (EUS), these precedent-setting programs combined independent studies with face-to-face meetings for discussion and practice, offered by various universities such as the Universidad Central de Venezuela (UCV)—which granted bachelor’s degrees in education—and the Universidad Simón Bolívar (USB)—which offered “Free Studies” in math and physics. The Universidad de Zulia (LUZ) offered general studies, and the Universidad Nacional Experimental Simón Rodríguez (UNESR) focused on degrees in education and educational administration.

The period of prosperity in Venezuela as a result of the rise of oil prices and the advent of new national politics in 1974, when abundant resources were dedicated to social and educational reforms sparked the idea of creating a distance university in 1975. A commission was organized, and two years later the Universidad Nacional Abierta (UNA) was made a reality.

Similar to the UNED in Costa Rica, the UNA began as a state university dedicated exclusively to distance education; it tried to provide an answer to the crisis facing traditional higher education, address the growing demand for education from the adult population, and counteract the negative influence of “informal education.” Authors such as Díaz⁶ pointed out other aspects such as the need to improve the effectiveness of the teachers (a scarce and costly resource), and the need to improve the quality of the “teach-learn” process were addressed.

⁶ DÍAZ, L. E. (1976): Las Innovaciones en Educación Superior en Venezuela. Trabajo presentado a LACFEP. Caracas, citado en Casas A. (19) *Ibíd.* p. 104

The UNA today has more than 50,000 students despite the political instability of the country. It offers 11 careers in education, administration, engineering and mathematics. There are 21 Local Centers located in the principal regions of Venezuela. The drop-out percentage exceeds 90%.

In 1996, with international sponsorship, a series of courses on distance education and new technology was broadcast throughout Latin America via the Latin American Association of Educational Television (ATEI). Another series of sponsorships by international companies resulted in the development of a “Corporate University,” supported by technology and oriented towards training students with the aim of improving business and achieving competitiveness in the petroleum industry.

- Regarding other distance education institutions in Venezuela, the aforementioned Universidad Nacional Experimental Simón Rodríguez stands out. This university incorporates new technology in an ambitious program developed in conjunction with two universities in the United States.

• Colombia

Since the beginning of the 1970s, universities such as Javeriana, el Valle, Antioquia, Santo Tomas, and la Universidad Abierta de la Sabana, started distance education programs. In 1972, the Universidad Javeriana began a distance education program via television, broadcasting a program called “Educators of New Men.” The Universidad Abierta de la Sabana, with headquarters in Bogota, began to offer its first courses with this method in 1975. In the same year there was an effort to create a university exclusively offering distance education, but for many reasons this project did not begin until many years later. In 1981 the Universidad de San Buenaventura—Sección Cali—began to offer its primary education degree via distance education. In 1982, a decree regulating open and distance education was approved, and the National Council on Open and Distance Education and the Columbian Institute for the Promotion of Distance Education (ICFES)—institutions with the mandate to

support, promote, train, supervise, and evaluate distance programs—were created.

As opposed to the UNED of Costa Rica, the UNA of Venezuela and the Open University of Great Britain, the government launched a model that was decentralized in its operations but centralized in its politics, promotion and financing. This gave rise to a national organization that defines politics, financial support, and standards and evaluates programs originating in a diversity of traditional higher education institutions. Financial and technical support for this program was provided by the United Nations Development Program, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, and the Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educación.

The following general policies have been declared in Colombia:

- a) Democratize and widen access to higher education
- b) Diversify available educational programs via programs that meet the needs of the regions and productive sectors of Colombia
- c) Discourage the use of quotas in higher education, which has resulted in areas without access
- d) Improve the internal productivity of higher education, avoiding high rates of drop-out
- e) Offer programs that stand out for their quality.
- f) Obtain institutional cooperation and take advantage of available human and technical resources.”⁷

A national open university was not created in Colombia; rather, emphasis was placed on standards for providing financial resources to traditional universities so that they could develop distance education courses.

This strategy was completed when the government converted the Unidad Universitaria del Sur (UNISUR) into a center of innovation in distance education

⁷ CASAS ARMEGOL, M. (2003): *Perspectiva Internacional de la Educación a Distancia*. UNED: Master en enseñanza y aprendizaje abiertos y a distancia. Módulo VII. p. 19.

materials and gave it responsibility for the complete development of the system. The UNISUR is dedicated to the production and use of its own instructional materials, within some regions, and will provide support for the training of distance educators.

Chacón and González (followers of the aforementioned Dr. Casas) commented:

“In regards to instructional methods, the most commonly used approach in Colombia is multimedia, 1970s-style, where the teaching materials include printed texts, videos, audio cassettes, slides, and overheads. It is important to mention Columbia’s experience with the use of newspapers as an instructional method and the dissemination of education programs via INRAVISION, the State’s educational channel. The universities of Valle, in Cali, and the Industrial de Santander in Bucaramanga use audio and audiovisual teleconferencing to support education. This is a large program which was begun in 1997 and also uses computers as a method of communication.”⁸

The program lost momentum due to lack of political and financial support from subsequent governments. However, recent governments have broadened the activities of UNISUR and transformed it into the Universidad Nacional a Distancia (UNAD), which is now the primary Colombian university dedicated exclusively to this model. There are more than 40 regional distance education centers which offer courses in education, administration, health science, agro-technology, animal production, and other technical and professional fields. The social focus of this university is manifested by its Social Interaction and Participation Circles, which are exchange forums; in addition, in order to graduate, students have to implement a project that supports the needs of the local community. Similarly, the university’s community focus is evidenced by course offerings such as Solidarity Economics, Management of Cooperatives, and Social Promotion.

⁸ CHACÓN, F. 7 GONZALEZ, I. (1996): *Visión Histórica y Prospectiva de la Educación a Distancia en América Latina*. Caracas. UNESCO/CRESALC. p. 27

- In 1983 the Universidad Francisco de Paula Santander created open and distance education programs.

From its beginning, distance education has tried to respond to the inequality of opportunities. Chacón and González, cited by Dr. Casas (CASAS 2003 p.19), points out that in 1996 there were 37 distance programs offered primarily by public and private universities, with approximately 200,000 students in either mixed or exclusively distance programs. He also notes that among all of the institutions there were more than 300 regional centers throughout the county, notably extending to rural regions and fishery and mining areas.

• Cuba

Since 1979, when the Teaching Faculty was created within the Universidad de La Habana by the Education Ministry, distance education has been valued for its capacity to expand conventional higher education enrollment.

• Argentina

In the 1960s, various primary education programs were offered via television and through tutorials. In the same way other programs were offered focusing on employee training in specific professions. In the 1970s, the Education Ministry included various distance education courses in the National Development and Security Plan, which gave rise to the Armed Services Training Plan and the National Permanent Education Plan, which was begun in the Universidad de Buenos Aires. At this time, the Universidad de Luján was also created, offering distance education programs. In 1983, the Universidad de Belgrano created the Distance Education Department, and in 1979 the Argentine Distance Education Association was created. Currently, numerous distance education programs exist in the national universities, in the bimodal model offered by the various faculties. There is no entity regulating the system, but the courses are offered using the methods of the traditional programs. Recently postgraduate and technology programs have been offered, the latter by the Universitaria de Educación a Distancia (RUEDA).

The major difficulties faced are the lack of political continuity, the high cost of incorporating new technologies, and the lack of responsive from small business and community education sectors. Chacón and González (CASAS 2003, p.24) point out that, similar to other countries, there are problems such as the unfavorable image of distance education as compared to traditional education, lack of recognition by other institutions, high drop-out rates, the need to improve the tutoring system, and the difficulty of convening face-to-face discussion groups.

• **Dominican Republic**

In the Dominican Republic, as in other places we studied, there is a need to reach adults who have had little access to education. The APEC Distance Education Centers (CENAPEC), founded in 1972, try to reach this population. University centers delayed implementing distance education methodology for many years. In recent years, because of rising concern, programs have been started in some universities such as the Universidad Pontificia Madre y Maestra (PUCMM) and the Universidad Abierta para Adultos (UAPA).

• **Brazil**

Since 1939, there have been many adult literacy campaigns, and a multitude of programs have been launched with little success. The majority have been responses to specific needs of trade unions and organizations. In the university realm the Fundação Brasileira de Educação (FUBRAE) stands out for its teacher training program, which it began in 1973. The Universidad de Brasilia (UNB) began an unsuccessful effort in 1976.

Despite past difficulties, the situation is changing in Brazil. In 1996 the “National Education Bases and Guidelines” law was approved, which in Article 80 states that public authority “will encourage the development and practice of distance education programs in all levels and methodologies of teaching and continuing education.” As a result, both state and Catholic university

consortiums have been created and are promoting distance education on a large scale.

A representative of one of these consortiums, the Higher Distance Education Center of Rio de Janeiro (CEDERJ), participated actively in this project, contributing information about Brazil's experiences in recent years.

The catalog of the Brazilian Association of Distance Education (ABED) lists 60 institutions, 22 of them universities, and also identifies 19 educational television channels, 4 transmitters and 34 educational radio stations. The satellite "Brasilsat" is utilized, allowing for national coverage (CASAS 2003, p.22)

• Peru

Distance education in Peru at the higher education level began with teacher training programs during the summer months. In 2001, there were 29 universities with semi-present educational courses for primary and secondary teachers. The private university Inca Garcilaso de la Vega offers several careers via distance education, and the Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina is one of the few universities offering courses and postgraduate diplomas in education via online distance education.⁹

The Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú is developing various master's programs and education degrees via internet-based distance education. This university is the Peruvian counterpart of the World Bank's Global Development Learning Network (GDLN) and has included in its Institutional Strategic Plan a Special Distance Education Project.¹⁰

9 (2003): Estudio de Internacionalización de nuevos proveedores en la educación superior en el Perú. Boletín Digital N. 57, Julio UNESCO. p. 19-22

¹⁰ www.pucp.edu.pe

• Chile

“Distance education is perceived as potentially important but difficult to implement, and its growth has been less than expected due to the high costs of setting up quality programs. However, the availability of non-presence education, particularly e-learning, has increased notably.”¹¹

Chile’s experiences in distance education, as with many other countries, consist of mostly specific short-term programs. Many traditional universities have had distance education programs, such as the TELEDUC program of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile—which was used to improve teacher skills—and programs in the university extension center. Between 1967 and 1977, 246,146 students were enrolled in this program. Likewise, the state Universidad de Los Lagos, has more than 15,000 students in this type of program, and the Universidad Arturo Prato, also a state institution, has more than 10,000 enrollees.

Recently there been related offerings at other universities such as the Universidad Playa Ancha de Ciencias de la Educación Valparaíso, which implements the Teaching Career in Basic Education program, a notable pedagogical training plan with two postgraduate programs.

In recent years various universities have begun to offer undergraduate careers through virtual and distance education. The National University Network (REÚNA II), which is made up of 14 traditional universities working with the Internet II, allows access to privileged services not universally available in the internet, such as online seminars, high quality video conferences, the exchange of large amounts of information, and real-time applications.

In Chile, effort has been directed recently to the application of new technologies to the process of teaching and learning. Many universities have virtual

¹¹ GONZALEZ, L. E. (2003): Los nuevos proveedores externos de educación superior en Chile. Boletín Digital N. 57, Julio UNESCO

platforms for educators, and others have implemented virtual campuses integrated into their institutional educational models.

There is a large variety of foreign programs at the postgraduate level; among those well-known in Chile are the Universidad de Educación a Distancia (UNED) of Spain, the Open University of Israel, the Universidad Abierta de Cataluña, the Teleuniversité de Québec, and the Universidad Virtual del Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey.

“Generally the institutions that offer the most serious distance programs demand that their students take exams in-person, either at their headquarters abroad, or in front of *ad hoc* commissions established in Chile. Others form agreements with Chilean institutions for this purpose.” (GONZÁLEZ, E. p.27)

• **Bolivia**

Despite the fact that distance education is still under scrutiny in Bolivia, there have been some serious experiments in this type of education, beginning in 1990:

“The project Design of a Distance Education System for Teacher Training arose, in its reformulated version, as the final project agreement between the MEC of Bolivia and the Cooperación Española, through the Ibero-American Cooperation Institute (ICI) in 1989. This project can be considered the inception of distance education in Bolivia. It was created to address the urgent need to end the practice of employing temporary teachers, who made up 24% of the teaching population (15,600 individuals). The technical and financial collaboration of Spain was fundamental because it provided financing for the basic infrastructure and training activities needed to implement the distance education method in Bolivia.

What began as a project ended up as a program. Because of the difficult conditions in the country, the educational possibilities were scarce or nonexistent. The objective of the program was not only to offer courses but also

to provide basic infrastructure, a network of distance education centers to train the temporary teachers, develop training programs, and ultimately bring a better level of education to those areas. With this great initiative, the Bolivian Distance Education System (SEBAD) was born in 1990.

At this time, the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI), through the Ibero-American Cooperation Institute (ICI) is soliciting collaboration from professors at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) of Spain to develop an operational program derived from the project entitled “Design of a Distance Education System for Training and Professionalization of Teachers.”

The SEBAD was organized with a structure similar to that of the UNED of Spain (central headquarters, tutoring centers associated with the departments, printed and audiovisual didactic material, etc.) but thinking in Bolivia, from Bolivia and for Bolivia.”¹²

It is in this context that we view distance education. Despite the Educational Reform Law of 1994 that recognized distance education and the efforts of many institutions which have dedicated extensive resources to alternative education, distance education degree programs have yet to crystallize, except for a few specific programs for the teachers previously mentioned.

Conclusions

- There is a great variety of distance education programs in Latin America, with a clearly increasing trend.
- Criticism and lack of understanding about distance education cannot be avoided. These ideas are often linked to traditional programs, and many professionals still hold the uninformed opinion that distance education shouldn't be permitted unless the same program is offered on site by the same institution. Although coordinating the two types of programs can be

¹² CASTILLO ARREDONDO, S. (2001): Contribución de la UNED a la profesionalización y capacitación del profesorado en Bolivia. Actas del IX Encuentro de la AIESAD. Prospectiva de la educación a distancia en Iberoamérica. Universidad Abierta y a Distancia (UNAD) Cartagena de Indias. Colombia.

effective, it is not necessary since distance education now has its own methodology and a sufficient presence to stand on its own without the support of on site programs. The challenge is to take advantage of the positive aspects that both systems can provide with imposing the same obsolete approaches of some traditional teaching methods. We should also recognize that the best distance universities have graduated many excellent students without the support of on site education.

-
- It is evident that this methodology is becoming more and more accepted because it can address the need to incorporate innovations in the traditional systems of the region and provide solutions that face-to-face education has not been able to offer. The possibility of combining studies with work and family is becoming more and more necessary, increasing worldwide acceptance for this method.
- Distance education is seen as a key instrument for changing and restructuring the public universities of Latin America, but it cannot move forward without government support and quality offerings on the part of the institutions. It is therefore necessary to identify those institutions offering quality education as well as those that are not. The lack of quality control has hurt those institutions that do offer rigorous distance education programs. For this reason, we believe that the recent concern with quality evaluation—creating standards for distance education—is a sound idea that will give us a better understanding of the terrain. The best way to evaluate the importance and effectiveness of any type of educational institution is to consider, in the present but with a view to the future, the best relative indicators of the quality, innovation, and relevance of the institution in general and its programs in particular.

“In an international comparative study developed by Fern University during the 1990s it was estimated that approximately 1,500 institutions distributed throughout the world imparted distance education to about ten million students. Likewise, according to the American Center for Distance Education, half of the higher education institutions in the United States offer some form of distance education via electronic means.” (GONZÁLEZ, E. p. 26)

The same author also points out that international distance education offers advantages because it allows increased access to higher education, augments, and diversifies educational offerings at the postsecondary level, generates new trends, promotes innovation in education, and generates investment in the educational sector.

The major risk is that these programs are not run responsibly. This is a concern that we have heard from many experts as well as governments and international organizations. We understand that many institutions intend to address this concern by offering a rigorous programs and addressing quality by enacting institutional or project-specific evaluation programs. With this in mind, we point out the importance of the “Virtual Center for Higher Education Standards in Latin America and the Caribbean” project, sponsored by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and executed by the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja (Ecuador) with the support of international experts and the aforementioned institutions.

- We see an increasing trend in Latin America of universities offering isolated distance programs; however, undergraduate career programs and programs of longer duration are still scarce. In many countries the focus has been on offering courses in professional development, master’s degrees, and training in specific areas. In addition, taking advantage of the strengths of the entire university can help to avoid creating isolated programs. This can be accomplished by creating an entity that unites the various distance education programs within a university.
- We should also recognize that one of the roles of a university is to share technological advances. Theoretical and practical knowledge should be transferred from academia to society.
- A combination of on site and distance education has been identified as a solution to some problems faced by Latin American universities. The

development of the type of education is addressed in Ecuadorian law Article 13.

- On the other hand, we have seen that some universities have begun distance education programs using only the new virtual tools, thereby running the risk of assuming that the new technologies can support programs without taking advantage of already existing and well-planned pedagogical and curricular designs.

In 1993, the Latin American education ministers expressed their support for autonomous and independent learning methods, which they saw as a way to improve access to education and training, strengthen educational infrastructure in the areas most disadvantaged or remote from education centers, and improve continuous training opportunities.

It is evident that current distance education trends are linked to the difficulties and opportunities of the worldwide challenges resulting from the demand for appropriate professional and life-skills training, the need for equality in this subject, the rapid advance of technology and the direct impact that they have on education and training, the rise of the knowledge economy and the need for a flexible work organization. Distance education is the most likely solution to these educational demands.

One of the positive methodological trends of distance education in recent years has been the move away from behaviorist instructional models, criteria systems and objective evaluations to more extensive, non-restrictive knowledge construction models which permit self-evolution and personal creativity. Along with this comes the need to update materials and explore other models, propose innovations to curricular designs for both short and long-term programs and to offer technical and administrative as well as educational programs.

The high drop-out rate in most programs is an ongoing concern in distance education. Although actions have been taken to address this issue, it has yet to be resolved. One factor that distance education institutions have little control

over is the background of the entering students. Adults may have been out of school for a long time, be accustomed to another type of education, be lacking in study skills or ability to manage study time, think that distance study is easy, or have work or family obligations that affect their ability to concentrate on their studies. Because of this, universities should try to educate their incoming students about difficulties that may arise and the need to manage their time so that they make decisions based not only on their preferences or aptitudes but also on their available hours, family or work pressures, and inefficient study habits.

One key theme of the internationalization of higher education we must take into account is the importance of intellectual property rights. Because there is strong competition for quality educational materials, institutions should take steps to protect the materials they have prepared for online use.

The new technology that necessitates the development of new multimedia materials and the revamping of educational and pedagogical models is another emerging trend that will engage us for many years. This is especially true in the developing countries if we want to adapt appropriate models without simply copying materials from other sources.

The offering of short courses linked to business or to state organizations has become widespread in recent years to meet the training needs of the productive and public sectors.

The use of new technology has resulted in a significant increase in corporate universities and has given them a mandate, with the objective of optimizing efforts and offering higher educational quality.

Many vocational universities have promoted a type of collective research where a group of students located in various places work together to investigate a subject, each one responsible for various pieces of the “puzzle”. This type of research is useful because it helps students complete the studies that they

need to obtain their degree, but in a way that doesn't require much economic investment. It is also a convenient way to perform useful research on a large scale, the results of which can provide a benefit to society.

In the same way, distance universities' commitment to the community is evidenced by the fact that they frequently offer courses that take into account the society of which they are a part.