



Original Article

Public-Private Collaboration in Distance Learning: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract

The paper addresses the issues relating to the collaboration between the government and private institutions in distance learning and suggests preliminary solutions. This paper highlights the challenges that distance learners experienced in taking their course of study. It identifies the problems related to the distance learning system that require actions and provisional resolutions to overcome these obstacles, thereby enhancing public-private cooperation in distance learning. To this end, secondary sources, including various books, journals, and the internet, were utilised to gather materials and subsequently identify issues related to public-private collaboration in distance education. The paper addresses the issues faced by distance learners and provides suggestions on how these challenges can be overcome. The methods are descriptive and analytical. Nevertheless, the ways out are utilising different resources, establishing specific collaborations, and investing in technologies and training. Open and distance learning (ODL) or public distance learning (PDL) is a type of education where students and teachers are physically separated, and they utilise technology to conduct instruction and communication. It is also flexible and accessible to individuals with diverse limitations, including those with work or family demands. The notion of private distance learning refers to educational programs offered by institutions that are not funded by the government, allowing students to study at their own pace, typically online.

Keywords: public-private collaboration, distance learning, flexible learning, open learning, online learning, lack of face-to-face interaction.

Introduction

Public-private collaboration in distance learning relies on the capacity to utilize the resources of both parties, their skills, and their risks to enhance access, quality, and efficiency of distance education by forming collaborations with each other. Distance learning deals with public-private partnerships (PPPs), a contract between government agencies and entities in the private sector to provide education services with the aim of realizing academic objectives more efficiently than could be done without the collaboration of the entities and the agency (Kumar Attri, 2012). To overcome challenges associated with distance learning, public-private collaboration may assist in increasing access by reaching the underserved groups and providing more educational opportunities. Applying the innovative methods and resources of the private sector may help in the improvement of the learning process and outcome (Panahi & Borna, 2014). Public-Private partnership can be used to optimize the distribution of resources and increase the overall efficiency of distance learning programs. One of such types of learning is public-distance learning, which involves teachers and students being physically apart, and they rely on technology and use other media to provide guidance and communication, thereby offering accessible and flexible education. Public distance learning has a few features like connecting through virtual platforms. Distance learning employs extensive use of technology, such as online learning management systems and several other digital applications, to provide content and support interaction (Mahasneh et al., 2022). Because of its flexibility in terms of time and place, this approach can reach individuals who are unable to participate in traditional classroom instruction for work-related or other reasons. In private-distance learning, learners can learn at their own pace and technology aids in creating such interaction with the subject that they learn. Online courses taught by individuals or small organizations would be considered as a part of private-distance learning. Self-directed learning via online sources, or even video call-based tutoring also come under private distance learning (Palanci et al., 2024).

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Public vs. Private distance learning

The schools in various districts, both public and private, follow the state education guidelines to admit a wide range of students. Their curricula are standard and align with state requirements, but they may still offer advanced or dual-enrollment options. However, public programs may not be available in all regions or to students living abroad, because they operate within structured timelines due to funding regulations and standardized testing. The programs offered in private-distance learning rely on tuition fees and so, they are more selective and they have more freedom in setting their admission criteria. They are also flexible in designing their own curricula, tailoring courses to specific subjects, choosing their style of learning and career pathways. Additionally, private programs tend to be more widely accessible and offer greater flexibility in pacing and course choices, though this often comes at a higher cost (Panahi & Bornha, 2014). The main differences between public and private-distance learning depend on the following factors: funding the sources, admission policies, designing the curriculum, accessibility, and overall flexibility.

Distance learning is a teaching method where students get access to the various educational programs, often using technology, without requiring physical presence in a traditional classroom. In the past, correspondence courses were a type of distance learning offered by universities and high schools. Students frequently received course materials via mail, and assignments were either completed online or mailed back to the instructor (Ojorka Akor, 2024). To provide more personalized and a productive learning experience in a variety of distance education courses, distance learning programs have recently taken advantage of the opportunities provided by contemporary technology. Across all levels of education—from kindergarten and elementary school to the college level—online learning has emerged as a practical and effective alternative and a viable option.

Conceptual Framework of Distance Learning

Distance learning is a process that uses a variety of technology to connect with students for better learning engagement. Distance learning mainly uses technologies like the internet, email, and satellite-transmitted television to make education accessible. Such arrangements have especially benefited students, learners, and community members in remote or tiny areas. Distance learning is gaining attention and surpassing traditional classroom instruction worldwide (Palanci et al., 2024). One of the best ways to reach adult learners is through distance learning. Lot of options are available for the adults to access their preferred courses and learn at their own pace. For accrediting evaluation purposes, distance education is described as a formal educational process where most instruction occurs when the student and instructor are not in the exact location. Both synchronous and asynchronous instructions are possible (Muilenburg & Berge, 2001). Computer, audio, and video technology, as well as correspondence studies, can all be used in distance learning. The education of people who, for various reasons, prefer to

study at home rather than attend traditional schools, colleges, or universities is referred to as distance learning. Ried (2010) provided one of the most thorough definitions, proposing six fundamental components that define distance learning. According to his observations, distance education is distinguished from in-person instruction by the following: the separation of the student and the tutor; the potential for sporadic meetings for interaction; and the self-directed nature of the learner's involvement. To put it even more succinctly, remote education is defined by its emphasis on providing open access to education and training, releasing students from time and location restrictions, and providing both individual and group learners with flexible learning options (UNESCO, 2002). People in high demand for education but cannot finish their education through the formal or regular system of education can benefit greatly from distance learning. Some in-service persons may be very active and are still curious about their changing surroundings. Some students who don't meet the requirements to enter a university and also, some people who live in rural or distant places without access to colleges or universities for higher education, those who could not access colleges and universities due to a fixed number of seats or merit, dropouts for personal reasons who are now motivated to study again (Kumar Attri, 2012).

Characteristics of Distance Learning

Flexibility, accessibility, technology-enabled Learning, and innovative delivery methods are the main characteristics of distance learning. That is, distance learning allows students to be flexible with the timings to access the sessions and study at their own pace, from anywhere with proper internet connection. This is very significant and a great advantage for those with busy schedules or geographical limitations. Distance learning helps the learners from different geographical background (Palanci et al., 2024). This method provides education to a broader number of individuals, including those in remote locations or with disabilities. It has the capability of supporting diverse learning styles and preferences and delivering in different formats and modes. Distance learning is technology-based, online learning management systems (LMS) are used to create virtual classrooms and uses other technology platforms that helps in interaction and learning (Kangwa et al., 2024). Multimedia resources utilize a variety of media, including video, audio, and interactive simulations, to enhance learning. Distance Learning uses various methods of learning like providing online courses, which are delivered entirely online and the courses are accessible through websites like Coursera, Skillshare etc. Hybrid learning is another blending method of online learning where the programs are a combined session of online and in-person interactive sessions. Distance learning programs also provide printed materials, such as textbooks or study guides as a supplement to online education.

Need and Significance of Distance Learning

Distance learning addresses the need for flexible, accessible, and affordable education, offering significant benefits like accommodating diverse schedules, breaking down geographical barriers, and promoting lifelong

learning, making it a valuable tool for personal and professional development. Rapid advancements in science and technology have led to an explosion in knowledge. Because of its rigidity and high cost, the formal education system finds it difficult to quickly adopt new modifications as needed. To meet the needs of a wide range of pupils, distance learning is required. For individuals who wish to learn while they study, distance education is particularly necessary (Latchem, 2007). A lot of people wish to enhance their educational credentials while they are employed. These individuals can enhance their qualifications through distance learning. Distance learning expands access to education for individuals who might otherwise be unable to participate including those in remote areas or with limited mobility. It empowers individuals to acquire new skills, knowledge, and qualifications, enhancing their career prospects and personal growth (Pant et al., 2014). The nation requires to produce a more educated workforce that can contribute to economic growth and development. Distance learning promotes inclusivity by providing educational opportunities for marginalized groups and individuals with diverse needs. It is also well-suited to the rapidly changing needs of the modern world, allowing individuals to stay updated with new technologies and skills (Berge et al., 2002).

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the challenges faced by the learners who do distance learning courses.
2. To find out the challenges that they face while they engage with distance learning.
3. To suggest solutions to tackle these challenges.

Challenges and Solutions for the Progress of Distance Learning

Distance learning could also be equally challenging because it requires the connection to be established between the learner and the course that they prefer to learn from anywhere. Distance education should focus on selecting and delivering need-based courses, with subject specialists regularly revising and updating the course materials. Study materials must be developed in regional languages, printed with adequate quality and organization, and dispatched to students on time. Student assignments and response sheets should be evaluated consistently to maintain academic standards. Regular personal contact programs should be organized in accessible locations across districts, with proper boarding and lodging arrangements for out-station students, and conducted by subject experts and experienced professors. Study centers must be well-equipped with libraries and essential facilities, while clear and appropriate guidelines should be issued for smooth functioning. To enhance learning, electronic media should be used extensively across distance learning centers, supported by dedicated radio and television channels. Strengthening face-to-face teaching opportunities within distance learning is essential to eliminate the perception of it being a “second-rate” mode of education. Wherever possible, practical training should be provided, and the overall costs of distance learning should be kept affordable (Ravi, 2018). Both public and private distance learning systems encounter similar challenges, such as technical difficulties, time-

management problems, limited face-to-face interaction, and the need to sustain student engagement and motivation.

Technical Challenges

There are some technical challenges faced in doing distance learning which becomes one of the most significant barriers. Access to technology is not easily available and this creates a digital divide. Not everyone relies on the devices, some may face internet connectivity issues, some would not be able to afford the necessary devices, and not everyone is skilled to handle technical devices and access distance learning programs, which becomes a disadvantage. Even when they are equipped with technical devices, they also face some technical issues like software glitch, malfunction in the hardware and unstable internet connection. All these issues would hinder the learning progress and eventually disrupt the classes. Not everyone is having access to essential tools like computers, laptops, tablets, internet modem, which limits the availability of resources that they could possibly access and learn through online. This affects the students' participation and the smooth delivery of online education.

Student-Related Challenges

There are instances where students also face challenges in accessing online education. Students will find difficulties in managing the time, not being able to balance online study with personal work and household responsibilities. This method limits the effective communication between the students and the teachers which reduces the opportunities for face-to-face interaction, immediate clarification and meaningful exchange of subjective thoughts and opinions. Students may also struggle with motivating themselves and maintaining interest throughout the learning period, because online learning can feel isolating and monotonous. Studying at home would contribute to more distractions where the learners would find difficulties in concentrating. Distance learning may also limit opportunities for social interaction and collaborative learning, reducing the sense of community typically found in classrooms. Moreover, personal circumstances—such as family problems or illness—may negatively affect a student's ability to focus and learn effectively in an online setting.

Institutional Challenges

Institutions face obstacles in providing quality distance education. Digital infrastructure, technological tools, and skilled personnel is facilitated through funding and when funding is limited, the institution's ability to develop the infrastructure is also limited. Students' commitment to online studies may get affected due to the lack of external support from family, employers, or friends. Pedagogical challenges are observed by the teachers who struggle to adapt themselves to using digital platforms, ensuring the active participation of the students in receiving and learning the content. Providing poor feedback and instructions can create confusion, especially when students do not receive updates from their instructors. The major concern of the institution was not ensuring fair access for all learners because socioeconomic disparities and geographic

limitations continue to widen the digital divide. Many students still face difficulties to access and use internet, especially in underserved areas and in the areas where they lack network facilities.

Distance learning must meet the diverse learning needs, which includes the students who speak different languages or with disabilities. The resources must be more personalized and adaptive. Distance learning poses a further challenge where the students would miss to interacting with the peer members and would miss experiencing the actual classroom environment, leading to social isolation. Interactions in the classroom support emotional and academic well-being which is lacking in distance education. Technical difficulties continue to be a persistent issue due to hardware failures, compatibility problems, software bugs, and poor infrastructure. Effective interaction and communication among instructors are very essential among, students, and teachers but the maintaining the consistency is communication is quite uncertain when interactions happen only through digital platforms. Finally, institutions face the challenge of sustaining student motivation and engagement, which demands the use of interactive content, personalized support, and dynamic teaching strategies.

Findings of the Research

One effective approach to bring the innovation, collaboration and effective strategic planning in distance education is providing funds in private sectors to include advanced technologies and creative learning platforms that can be utilized to develop interesting online courses, facilitate individualized learning, and improve service delivery to students. The government educational institutions collaborate with the private organizations because partnerships would allow help in sharing technological infrastructure, resources and innovative learning methods. This also involves collaborations, sharing of resources, and innovation driven projects, which enhances the general quality of distance learning.

Digital infrastructure needs to be reinforced to facilitate distance education. Online learning can be more accessible and reliable with the help of expanding the area covered by broadband, affordable devices, and technological compatibility. Support and training of educators and learners is also significant because both classes require the ability to work with online tools with a sense of security. This includes the pedagogical training, technical advice as well as support of digital learning platforms.

Distance education can be made more responsive to various learning requirements by adopting open and flexible models of learning, such as MOOCs and blended learning. Online discussion boards, virtual study groups and live video conferencing are some of the community-building activities that allow one to conquer loneliness as well as socialize. Moreover, technology-based personalized learning methods also provide teachers with the opportunity to differentiate teaching and assistance based on each student and enhance the overall learning experience and enable students to succeed in an online environment.

Conclusion

The collaboration between the government and businesses establishes an environment of distance learning that is more inclusive, open, and efficient. With the help of solving the current issues and implementing new solutions, one will be able to empower learners and make quality education available to everyone. Distance learning has become a prominent phenomenon in contemporary pedagogical practice, which brings fresh possibilities in the field of education. As it gains increased use, the strain on conventional classroom systems will be alleviated thus assuaging the pressure on institutions in terms of population and playing a positive role in solving many of our educational problems. This alternative to the traditional schooling will be able to impart education to millions of people and make their dreams of higher education come true. The 1986 National Policy on Education argues the distance education to be a treasured objective of the learning process. It assumes that everyone is literate. The youth, housewives, agricultural and industrial workers, and professionals will be offered opportunities to further their education at a pace of their choice. The future impetus will be towards open and distance learning. It is hard to argue with the fact that it is a great way to get lifelong education that is the key to the development of our country.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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