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DISTANCE EDUCATION AND ITS POTENTIAL FOR THE RED SEA NATION, ERITREA: A DISCOURSE

By
Ravinder Rena*

Abstract

All over the world, distance mode of education is gaining a momentum and becoming more popular than conventional education. It is a system in which schools, universities and other educational agencies offer instruction wholly or partly by mail. Eritrea, a newly independent country in Africa has been facing many challenges particularly in its education sector. It does not have sufficient educational institutions at tertiary level, thus, distance learning which is more cost effective, could be an alternative method of higher education for this country. The distance education programme could promote higher education by providing access to large number of urban people and disadvantaged groups in rural and remote areas including working people, fighters, women and other adults. An attempt has been made in this paper to discuss various issues related to the establishment and development of distance education. It also provides the distance education programmes that so far undertaken in Eritrea and highlights the potential for the distance education in the country.

Key words: *Distance Education, Eritrea, Potential, Ministry of Education, UNISA*

1. INTRODUCTION

Distance Education (DE) is a generic and buzz term in the recent past. All over the world, it is now evident that distance mode of education is gaining a momentum and becoming more popular than conventional. It is to be noted that the learners in developed countries prefer distance learning to conventional education. The DE is an educational phenomenon that marked a big educational and structural change in a short duration of time than the preceding schools of education (Harry, 1992). It has become a vital issue in education and in strategic planning for regional, national and international development (Keegan, 1996). Since the school education is relatively cheaper than tertiary education, many countries have developed policy frame works for the development of distance education at tertiary level for the fact that it promotes further education to upgrade and update the skills and the knowledge of the contact students. Distance education at the tertiary level could offer leap-frog going certain phases in educational developments. In addition, it creates the possibility of increased access to tertiary education at more cost effective-level (Terry and Juler, 1991; Saint, 1999). Mass education is attained through distance learning because of modern technology where the world is becoming boundary less. Technical developments have greatly contributed for the development of distance

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education (Visser, 1994; Daniel, and Mega, 1996). The modern world has created a new and more effective form of cultural imperialism which gave an added incentive to cultivate distance education capacities (Moore, 1990; Marrs, 1995). Further, distance education is changing with an alarming speed, particularly as educational processes become increasingly globalised in terms of physical reach and scope of courses and programmes of study offered. Different view points on distance education are emerging, reflecting the rapidly evolving nature of this increasingly important educational discipline (Khan, 1993; Wills, 1998).

The Encyclopedia of education defines correspondence/distance education as “as system in which schools, universities and other educational agencies offer instruction wholly or partly by mail. The dictionary of education defines it in more specific terms.

“It is a method of providing for the systematic exchange between students and instructor, of materials sent by mail for the purpose of instruction in units of subject matter: a set of printed lessons or assignment based on textual materials and / or instructional media with directions for study, exercises, tests, etc., to be used as primary or supplemental aids to learning outside of regular class room environment (cited in Keegan, 1983)”.

Distance education, as part of nation’s educational fabric, is being called upon to do more efficiently and more diversely than ever before. The people who learn through distance education these days are increasingly diverse. Nowadays distance education can be anything from mass to “boutique”. (Terry and Juler, 1991). In distance learning students and teachers will find themselves playing different roles better than in traditional education (Denzin, and Lincoln, 1994). More than any other teaching method, distance learning which exercises new mode of delivery, requires a collaborative effort between student and teacher unbounded by traditional limits of time, space and single instructor effort. Distance education as a provision will undoubtedly help the learners to enhance the acquisition of new knowledge and skills to lead a better life. Hence joint work of the government and private sectors is needed to lay a firm ground to the implementation of the correct DE programmes (Holmberg, 1995).

1.1 Literature Review

During the 1960s and early 1970s, writers like Otto Peters, Charles Wed Meyer, Borje Holmberg, John Boarth and Michael Moore started publishing in the field of distance education. Although a relatively young discipline, substantial theoretical contributions have been made by various researchers and theorists (Holmberg, 1995). These theoretical contributions in the field of distance education serve merely to introduce us, some of the foundations of our thinking on distance education that we find in the literature. Various writers (Rumble, 1999) describe distance education as an educative process in which a significant proportion of teaching is done by someone who is removed in space or live from the learned. But it should also be pointed out that even the learners too are usually

dispersed in space or live. Distance education involves the use of a range of media such as print, electronic, written correspondence through assignments, audio and computer based media. The modern electronic technology instructs successfully and delivers lessons without the teachers' direct presence (Moore, 1990; Harry, 1992).

The literature on distance education is not solitary but relational where its concept and its delivery may be interwoven with other literatures. As a matter of fact it is a new educational provision where its act of teaching can take place at the same time as learning delivery or teaching can be separated from learning in terms of time (asynchronous) mode of delivery. It is a form of education characterised by: i) Physical separation from the teacher; ii) An organised instructional programme; iii) Technological media; and iv) Two way communication (Moore and Kearsley, 1996).

Terry and Juler (1991) discussed that the ever developing world has hundreds of distance education teaching universities. Each of these universities is born out of specific social need. It is not easy to supply, sustain, improve, plan finance and manage universities with unique characteristics. They experience barriers in one way or the other like: i) Problems and barriers encountered by students; ii) Study limitations within and without the Institutions; iii) Lack of feed back or contact; iv) Lack of supports and services; v) Problem of feeling alienation and isolation; vi) Problem with newer students; vii) Lack of organisation – infrastructure, technology; and viii) Lack of material, competent computer staff to support Internet use. Never the less, a cursory look at the basic literature on the developments and trends of education through out the world reveal that education system of developing countries have made unprecedented progress in recent years. However, in many parts of the world, where the need to learn is big, good and sufficient education feasible is more difficult to find.

Keast (1997) has discussed and analyzed that if the programs of implementing distance education become effective, and if institutions are established, in order to: i) Equip the target audiences with knowledge, skills and attitude required from the diverse course they pursue; ii) Empower women so that they can actively participate and contribute in economic, social, and cultural life of the community and the nation; iii) Deploy resources for students attending into who were/are (fighters, disabled, women, adults and what have you) deprived from conventional (traditional) in-campus schools for certain reasons; iv) Provide and upgrade teachers' professionalism and their career development at work; v) Promote an innovative system of university education, which is both flexible, open in methods and pace of learning; and vi) Play a role in the correct implementation of government policy in education, which ultimately ends at making it to all qualified prospective learners; and vii) Deploy lifelong learning that practices flexibility while encouraging the learner's experience and choice; where, when, what and how they learn as well as the pace at which they will learn.

The term " distance education" covers the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in

lecture rooms on the same promises, but which nevertheless benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition of tutorial organisation (Holmberg, 1995; Keegan, 1996). The family of instructional methods in which reaching behaviours are executed apart from the leaving behaviours, including those that in a continuous situation would be performed in the learners present, so that communication between the teacher and the learner must be facilitated by print, electronic mechanical or other devices (Rumble, Grevile and Oliveria, 1999).

Distance teaching / education is a method of imparting knowledge, skills attitudes which rationalised by the application of division of labour and organisational principle as well as by the extensive use of technical media, especially for the purpose of reproducing high quality teaching materials which makes it possible to instruct numbers of students at the same time where ever they live. It is an industrialized form of teaching and learning (Wills, 1995; Keegan, 1996).

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The basic question is that, whether the Government of Eritrea (GoE) is able to implement this educational program or not? All efforts that were made in 1996 lasted for just two years and then discontinued. Keeping this backdrop in mind, an attempt is made in this paper to study the status of distance education in Eritrea as an alternative education system to the existing traditional system of education. The insights gained through this study would help the policy makers of education in implementing the distance education in Eritrea. It will also open new vistas for further research in distance education in the country. The following objectives are set for this study:

1] To advocate creation of an environment in which distance education strategies, resource and support systems are taken as standard system for education; 2] To develop and provide training and the necessary information to move distance education from the periphery of education and create a separate educational structure for effective functioning; and 3] To encourage, support and identify opportunities for co-operation in sharing of resources between public and private distance education providers.

1.3 Methodology and Data

In order to meet the said objectives, the data was collected from different sources related to distance education both from the public sector and the private sector (Baumgartner and Strong, 1998). Informal discussions made with many concerned people and the stakeholders of this distance programme. The government officials (related to this program), students and staff of the College of Education in Eritrea Institute of Technology (EIT) - Mai Nefhi; Asmara Teacher Training Institute, elementary teachers (who are learning their distance education in Asmara University), Teachers working in some secondary schools (of Zoba Maekel) like Red Sea, Asmara Comprehensive, Barka, Denden, Issak Teweldemedhn and some students and employees are contacted and discussions held with them. All in all 10 directors (including heads), 30 teachers, and 60 students at all levels are contacted and interviews held with them. The data also collected

from the relevant documents. Besides, researcher also used open ended interview in order to free the interviewee to discuss openly (Kvale, 1996; Merriam, 1998). Further, they were also informed that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained in this delivery. The respondents trust the researcher and deliver correct information of what they know and do not know about distance education program and its implementation. The study was conducted during the period October 2005 to March 2006.

This study predominantly used qualitative approach, which was supplemented by quantitative approach wherever necessary (Merriam, 1998). The methodological strategies employed to address the basic interview questions are semi-structured interviews with staff members of the ministry, EIT-Mai Nefhi, ATTI, secondary school students and employees. The study is mainly conducted in two localities: Asmara City (selected secondary schools mentioned above) and Eritrea Institute of Technology- Mai Nefhi, situated 28 kilometers southwest of Asmara. The interviewees were friendly and open to discussions when necessary. As a matter of fact, they were knowledgeable, if not in distance education, working in big government and non-government organizations. The researcher chose these two because it is believed that the concerned persons of those areas give the necessary data, documents and insights to the study.

The researcher embarked upon qualitative research paradigm, which is suited to dealing with people's attitudes and perception about the DE. "The term qualitative research is an umbrella term referring to several research traditions and strategies that share certain commodities. There is an emphasis on process, or how things happen, and a focus on attitudes, beliefs and thoughts how people make sense of their experiences as they interpret their world (Merriam, 1998)".

There were some inconveniences regarding the time constraints with dispersed full time interviewees and time-sensitive communication services. A few of the respondents were not fully aware and knowledgeable about distance education, as it is a new concept. In light of all the data collected from reliable sources and the interviews with persons of high caliber who indulged in all walks of educational spheres were very helpful. Their views and opinions could undoubtedly help distance education program implementers in open and distance institutions.

Distance education program is almost a new concept in Eritrea, although, in other countries, it has been practiced for many years. It is with a great hope that this study will make a significant contribution to the existing literature in school government, community and distance education in Eritrea. No matter how education background is diverse, persons whoever maybe and wherever they may live, realises the importance of distance education. Keeping this in mind, the researcher has motivated to conduct a study and write this article. An attempt has been made in this paper to delve into the study of Distance Education Programs in the state of Eritrea. It is therefore, believed the outcome would be useful to the needy and who are ready to further education their through distance education. The researcher justifies its importance for the disadvantaged, disabled

and persons who are unable to pursue their studies in conventional institutions for some reasons. The alternative to traditional mode of education is believed to be distance learning, which could satisfy the need of modern education through advanced Medias where they are. Since it is a new area of study, there is a room to conduct further research and many studies could possibly aware all learners the limitations and strengths they may encounter as distance learners. In conclusion, the distance education program implementation could undoubtedly add something to the educational development of Eritrea. An attempt has been made in this paper to explore the desired implementation of distance education programmes in Eritrea. The paper also deals with factors leading to the establishment of distance education programmes at tertiary level and open and distance education programmes initiatives in Eritrea. It highlights the experience of distance education programmes for elementary teachers in Eritrea and University of South Africa's (UNISA) experience of distance education programmes in Eritrea etc.

The paper is organized into five sections. The first section dealt with introduction and the second section provides a brief note on the educational background of Eritrea. Section three discusses distance education programmes implemented in the country. Section four delves the future prospects for distance education in Eritrea and also provides the perception of the respondents about the programme. Section five presents the concluding remarks.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE EDUCATION SECTOR

The world map vividly shows that Eritrea is strategically located in the Horn of Africa, sharing border with the Sudan to the north and west, Ethiopia to the south, Djibouti to the south east and the Red Sea to the east respectively. It has a population of about 4.5 million. It covers an area of 124,320 sq kms, stretching from 18.22' to 12.42' degrees longitude. Eritrea's coastlines extend about 1,200 kms, flanked by coral reefs and 354 islands, including the important Dahlak Archipelago (Killion, 1998:1.) Eritrea fought for thirty years (1961-1991) to obtain its de facto independence on 24 may 1991 and its official independence on 24 May1993 after a UN supervised referendum in which 98.8% of the people voted in favour of independence (MoE, 1999; Rena, 2005^b). Peoples' instability in the long war for independence and the recent border dispute with Ethiopia has severely affected the economy, political and social development of the country.

Eritrea has had different types of educational systems since earliest times. The history of modern Eritrean education can be divided into various periods on the basis of social and political conditions. The objectives of education were in general based on colonial requirements and a policy that put more emphasis on indoctrination and subordination (Taye, 1992:25; Rena, 2005b). Indeed, Eritrea inherited its educational system from a variety of sources and it was reflected only the ideological interests of the colonizing powers of the time. Contrary to the above colonial educational policies, the government of Eritrea believed that education not only as a fundamental human right but also as a vehicle for national development and poverty reduction initiatives (Rena, 2005c ; MoE, 2006).

It is understood that during the armed struggle, most of the Eritrean youth were engaged in the struggle and thousands were forced to leave for neighbouring countries and else where because of repression by the Ethiopian government. As a result, in the aftermath of independence, there occurred an acute shortage of trained man power in all fields of economic and education spheres. At that time more than 60 per cent employees in Eritrea were Ethiopians who fled back to their homeland (Killion, 1998; Rena, 2004; Rena, 2005^b). It is a severe jolt to the whole education system of the country and there are many challenges to overcome. Access to the schools in some remote localities in the six *zobas* (provinces), a zonal division of the country, are difficult as the new nation inherited heavily damaged infrastructure and badly affected people in education (Moe, 2006).

Low learning achievements, handling large classes, lack of qualified teachers, poor facilities in the school are the cause for an unsatisfactory quality of education in the country. To bring a drastic change, the Ministry of Education has introduced educational reforms in 2003 and started to prepare a standardized curriculum for schools (Carrol, 2004). The women participation rate is very low at all levels of schools. Most of the schools in the country have been working in a shift system. To conduct free time (all day) schools is difficult for the government, as it requires adequate number of school buildings. Many people who are living in both urban and rural areas of the country need to learn. Some of the elementary schools in some localities are situated within the vicinity of seven kilometers (Rena, 2005^a).

To provide education to all and to make further education accessible to those who are interested to continue their studies, learning besides the regular system and provide cost-effective education, the only alternative mode is distance learning. First of all distance education programs, should aim for teachers at all the three levels who must be trained in order to attain or achieve quality education at school level. Then the distance education must aim at acquiring matriculation and degree courses. Taking all these issues into account, the MoE could open distance education and initiate various programs to elevate the major concerns posed to the lack of highly skilled professional and technical man power. To upgrade teachers' professionalism and work esteem, the government institution in cooperation with various development partners had been sending their staff members to both for short and long-term overseas training programs, in addition to what technical, vocational and managerial education is provided at home. In line with this, the curricula makers and designers in Eritrea always strive to maintain that an efficient education system carefully employed in schools: conventional and distance to serve as an effective means of accelerating and promoting economic, social, scientific and technological progresses (MoE, 2006; Rena, 2006).

The ruined infrastructure that Eritrea inherited has been developed considerably under the "*Warsay Yikealo Development Campaign*" mobilized to ensure the economic

reconstruction of the war-devastated nation.¹ After independence, the government has been trying to practice a policy regarding education that is the ultimate right of every Eritrean. The motto "education for all" means obligatory education from first to seventh grade, and free education up to secondary school. Moreover, the regular students who scored high results in secondary school level could get the chance of joining Asmara University and/or Eritrea Institute of Technology- Mai Nefhi, and other recently established colleges in the country. The remaining mediocre students who scored less result Grade Point Average 1.25 are all enrolled into other vocational schools such as Asmara Commercial College and Pavoni Technical Institute (Rena, 2004; Rena, 2005^a). It is to be noted that the educational policy of Eritrea was designed to fulfill and extend educational opportunities to all Eritreans irrespective of their age, sex and geographical location in Eritrea.²

In Eritrea education has become an indispensable catalyst for economic and social developments where all institutions are built to render being: i) Tertiary enrolments of nations will undoubtedly expand rapidly in the year to come; ii) Tertiary education as viewed by some educators in the future will be based less on academic disciplines and more gross-cutting topics or trans-disciplinary issues (Rena, 2005^c). Great emphasis is placed on ability to learn independently to communicate effectively with others, to collaborate productively in teams or groups, to be culturally and socially sensitive, to be flexible and to accept social responsibilities (Saint, 1999).

3. DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ERITREA

At the beginning, although there were no established schools, but education was carried out under a tree or rocks. With the liberation, the education started spreading fast in different areas. It is to be noted that disabled fighters who were residing in the Port Sudan under the umbrella of Eri-clinic were also receiving education in schools. These disabled had serious injury and were using the Eri-clinic for both treatment rehabilitation center and also some basic education was provided. They were thirsty and later quenched their thirst through distance education learning. Had it not been for their strong yearning, they would not have learned successfully. Most of them started school in the field. No wonder they became literate. Therefore, it is believed that the revolution (freedom struggle) has been the greatest university for Eritreans.³

¹ The *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Development campaign was launched in May 2002, and just after five years, the assessment of what has been accomplished, has been rated commendable, although a lot remains to be done. The Campaign has been focusing its developmental programs on the following major undertakings. These mainly focus on infrastructure renovation and development, agricultural intensification and modernization, raising industrial output, mining schemes, the tourism sector, human resource development etc.

² See the Provisional Government of Eritrea (October 2, 1991) *Department of Education Policy of Education Document*, Asmara: the State of Eritrea.

³ In the town of Nackfa, a revolutionary school that was popularly known (*Tsabra* school) was set up and provided education and training for many children and fighters in 1970s and 1980s.

About 75 per cent Eritreans are depending on agriculture and its allied activities, thus these peasants are busy the whole day with their agriculture profession and hence they had no access to school. There was lack of teachers and teaching materials as well. Despite the fact that regular classes were difficult to continue due to various constraints, other alternatives had to come. All these factors facilitated the distance mode of education that emerged as an accepted alternative. The first task of the committee responsible to run distance education in Port Sudan and Suakin was to make a research as to know the level of their academic status and were grouped as follows:

- i) Foundation course for students from 1 to 7 grade
- ii) Refresher course for students from 8 to 9 grade
- iii) O – level course for students from 10 to 12 grade

With these grouping, learning was conducted in two centres in Port Sudan and Suakin for many years, which ceased after independence due to some constraints.

Distance education is an important means that help distance learners to achieve more educational reform goals as well as to expedite the process of reaching the unreached and improve the quality of education and ultimately stimulate the future educational and economic development of Eritrea. In that context, upgrading teacher education both in a pre-service and in-service context is a priority concern. The staff authorities in the Ministry of Education believed distance education to add more potential to deliver the precious resources of knowledge to some of the most destitute areas and people, while at the same time stimulating the growth of fledging telecom and educational infrastructures in the country (Ministry of Education, UNESCO and the Government of Italy, 1996). The government of Eritrea recognizes the need and importance of improving education system in Eritrea through distance learning that can enable the country to go with modern technological world.⁴

In line with this, there is a need to accommodate an increasing number of candidates like fighters, disadvantaged adults, women, teachers etc. in distance learning is an issue that will be used to extensively reinforce the formal education system(Rena,2006). Eritrea is willing to share a spectrum of varied experiences relevant to its commitment to attaining its goals. It is to be noted that, there are some programmes are been organized like UNISA, home or independent study in USA, external studies in Australia tele enseignment in France; Fernstudium or Fernunterricht in Germany; education a distance or ensenanza a distance in Spanish speaking countries and tele educanas in Portugal

⁴ It is observed that the Distance, Education programmes for Elementary Teachers in Eritrea (DEPETE) programme is succeeded to improve elementary teachers work esteem and professionalism. This programme was monitored by the staff authorities in the MoE, Italian government and UNESCO every effort was made to make it successful. However, the programme discontinued before six years due to lack of expertise, lack of experience, logistic, quality materials and student support services collectively etc. For further details see Ministry of Education (1996). *Brief Description of DEPETE: Tasks and Achievements, Department of National Pedagogy.* Ministry of Education, Asmara, Eritrea.

which succeeded as the result of their materials, logistics, and human resources potential. It is therefore interesting to see the future distance learning programmes in Eritrea's institutions taking new initiatives to promote and expand human capital in the country. In line with this, the MoE is ready to resolve the problems mentioned above by supplementing proper distance education programmes in the schools that it aims to establish soon in 2007 (MoE, 2006).

Prior to the ODL program, the Asmara University was given the mandate, has set a committee division by the president on October 21, 1991 to study the possibility or feasibility of expanding its current programme to include distance learning programmes. Hence, Asmara University, given the responsibility, where the case of its tertiary education has carefully and exhaustively received distance education offerings from the other countries like UNISA and UK to its own needs. The role of Asmara University in the establishment of distance education at tertiary level to: i) Conduct a feasible study of this project; ii) Secure the necessary budget for projects implementation; and iii) Carefully implement the project (University of Asmara, 2002).

In order to extend the present limited service, to all Eritreans as indicated clearly in the educational policy, Asmara University, wants to discharge this responsibility, by opening a distance education tertiary level programme.

3.1 The Open Distance Learning (ODL) program

The Open Distance Learning (ODL) program was launched on 29 March, 2006, at the Asmara University Main Building. The ODL program, is a collaborative venture between the Ministry of Education and the University of Asmara, and is offered to upgrade the capacity of middle school teachers through-out the six zobas (provinces) in Eritrea. During the launching ceremony, then Minister of Education, Mr. Osman Saleh, said that the Government, realizing that "education is the basis for economic growth, has given priority to education and is actively working on it. He added that the Ministry of Education has been working on capacity building by organizing distance-learning and other forms of training."

Some 590 junior school teachers holding certificates and wanted to upgrade them to diploma level are participating in the ODL program. The teachers are guided by around 150 faculty members from the university, in addition to staff from the Ministry of Education. The training of tutors, who are middle school English and Mathematics teachers from different zobas, was a portion of the preparations ahead of the launching of the Distance Education Diploma Program.

The collaborative program is a 3-year diploma course for teachers, and 26 information centers have been set up all over the country. Meanwhile, the University of Asmara, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, offered a week long training of tutors from February 17 to February 23 as part of a preparation for the Open Distance Learning Program. It is reported that the second batch of the open distance learning program

started in 2007 and targeted the remaining 1,400 certificate holding junior school teachers.

Mr. Tedros Sium, Director of Human Resource Development at the Ministry of Education, said that "the rationale and objectives of the establishment of ODL program for middle school teachers is basically related to the ongoing transformation of the overall education system, and also to the government's plan to transform its education and training system through comprehensive program of human resource development and revised approaches to teaching and learning." He also pointed out that a plan to establish a Distance Learning Program is one among the major measures taken to alleviate the acute shortage and constraints of qualified teachers at the middle school level. "The Ministry believes that the commencement of open distance learning will play a very useful part in Eritrea's Education Sector Development Program." "It is also important to note that a good and effective system of open distance learning depends on the existence of a good system of learner support" he added.

3.2 UNISA experience of distance education programmes in Eritrea

South Africa has developed a policy frame work for tertiary distance education which could possibly shape with that of Eritrea's specific content designed based on its national conditions. The overarching objective was to improve capacity of government Institutions in a sustainable fashion, and this would be done by resolving the major problem posed by the acute shortage of skilled and professional man power.

Table: 1 Students of UNISA enrollers

Status	Number
Passed	358
Failed	213
Withdraw	276
Others	42
Total	889

Source: Consultancy Testing Center, University of Asmara - Records

It is presented in *table-1* that a total of 889 trainees from 34 public sector entities were originally enrolled in 44 areas of specification of the UNISA program. As indicated in the table, the attrition rate was quite high. While 213 (24%) failed another 276 (31%) had to withdraw before completing their respective training modules. The main beneficiaries of the UNISA programmes are/were the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Defence who consist of 53 percent of the participants followed by the Ministry of Local Government (University of Asmara, 2004).

For the UNISA programme to operate effectively investing the creation and functioning of a mentoring system was required. There was initially a high level of enthusiasm among public sector employees (PSEs) to enroll in distance learning with over 2,800 applications received from almost all government Institutions. Following a screening process conducted by Consultancy Training and Testing Centre (CTTC) in Asmara university to determine eligibility about 75 % (BA = 170, MA = 381) of applications were submitted to UNISA, leading to the enrolment in 2002 of total PSEs from 37 government of Eritrea (GOE) Institutions in BA level degree programmes. An additional 50 applications for Master Programmes were processed in 2003. Of the 889 PSEs enrolled in 2002, 364 PSEs passed their training modules and 507 (60%) either failed or withdrew, by the second semester academic year 2002/03 only 404 PSEs with less than 15% were enrolled, of these 273 passed about 125 or 46% failed.

The high attrition rate was reportedly due to the following reasons:

- 1) Students have difficulties in managing their study programmes while also coping with their work pressures and were en-counterling logistics and transportation problems.
- 2) Some-students lacked the discipline to pursue their studies independently.
- 3) Lack of computer skills and communication problems with instructors and tutors
- 4) Students felt that tutorials and support systems were inadequate
- 5) There were delays in dispatching the materials for exams, assignments (materials come on average in three weeks time by courier – South Africa – via Kenya to Eritrea)
- 6) Students complain that there was less feedback given to them
- 7) Students were provided with material guides only, other books and references need to be purchased and they faced several inconveniences.

3.3 Eri-British Institute

It is a new distance learning institute established in a private sector by an Eritrean and the Edexcel, UK institution, which is closely supervised by the Ministry of Education in country and the British Council Library, Eritrea. This institute provides various courses at undergraduate to postgraduate level programs. It has a very cost-effective study fees comparing to overseas cost for the same programs. So far many distance learners have already enrolled.

3.4 Eri-Tutorial College

Besides this, within Eritrea, new distance education institutions are emerging. The school of Modern Consultancy Service launched an "Eri-Tutorial College" to nurture educational opportunities. The modern consultancy service (MCS) has established a local school of distance learning in 2003 in order to help those students who, for whatever reason, find it inconvenient to attend the normal MCS courses. According to the owner of MCS, the distance learning courses are written in his institution in clear and easy ways in English. The manuals are also written to the level of education of the contact learners to pursue their studies successfully.

- i) That some courses are modified and prepared in such a way to acquire Eritrean styles to encourage the contact learners continue their studies.
- ii) That the college has employed some experienced tutors to help distance learners learn different modules it offers.
- iii) That the college is established to upgrade learners' knowledge, skill, professionalism and standard of education, which undoubtedly will make the learners skilled professionally and technically. This by all means will upgrade man-power in the country.

Furthermore, the "Eri-Tutorial" College has already helped more than 700 citizens to complete their international correspondence studies and registered 50 local distance learners in the academic year 2005-2006.

4. FUTURE PROSPECT FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

4.1 Why distance education in Eritrea?

The curriculum designers and makers while trying to publish quality school books to all grades had the main pre occupation how to increase the number and improve the quality of the learning force against the daunting background of:

- 1) The acute shortage of teachers after liberation in 1991 to staff the schools
- 2) The limited capacity of the one teacher training (ATTI) and its subsidiary branch Eritrea Institute Technology (EIT)
- 3) An enormous increase in elementary school enrolment and there by construction of many new schools.
- 4) A two years university diploma has for long been a technical requirement for being middle school teachers in the country
- 5) The reluctance because of cultural or religious reasons of females or members of some ethnic groups to move away from their homes and families for training purposes.
- 6) The economic and domestic difficulties that prevent many teachers, particularly from remote regions from taking up training away from their localities.
- 7) The need to educate the disadvantaged irrespective of age, sex and place

Whilst spending on educational provision has increased greatly, there are limited budgetary means to cater to the financial costs that a new nation has to face when rebuilding infrastructure expanding medical, and welfare services and advancing economic and business opportunities. It is important to note that, no system of distance education can remain efficient if it remains static. It must be sensitive to trends and changing need in education, and must have the flexibility to modify its programme and practices, and to expand in response to the needs of the community it is serving. Ministry of Education has recognised the above issues and is working on the significance and importance of improving the education system in Eritrea. Its vision is ultimately to attain particularly a quality of education, access and relevance. Distance learning, a new mode of delivery, would undoubtedly promote educational quality and relevance in many ways.

As a matter of fact, the need of life long learning to enable workers to upgrade their skills and maintain competitiveness within rapidly evolving economics is becoming a wide

demand of the existing world, for establishing tertiary education. This is the need and aspiration of learned selves and the staff authorities in the Ministry to help and equip the desired education through distance learning. The tertiary education has to be extended beyond the in campus Institutions to satisfy the education needs of different employees, fighters and women in Eritrea. As wholeheartedly believed by Eritrean scholars, distance education learning will be used extensively to reinforce the formal education system, which is often hampered by deficient quality and lack of capacity to accommodate the ever growing demand for schooling in Eritrea(Rena,2007).

The need to accommodate increasing number of candidates in distance learning specially teachers is a burning issue to increase the existing man power and develop Eritrea with adequate infrastructural facilities. The new mode of delivery distance education provides systematic exchange between a student and instructor, of material send by mail for the purpose of instruction in units of subject matter: a set of printed lessons or assignment based on textural materials and/or in structural media with directions for study, exercises, tests, etc. Distance education may be the latest fashion in education but it is here to stay as modern model of teaching and learning phenomenon.

Therefore the ministry of education (MOE) in Eritrea plans to building up the Nations educational level potential, using distance education mode of delivery to needy and ready, providing the required certificate, diploma, Bachelor of educational and Master of education and MBA courses where necessary. The ultimate aim of the MOE is to create capable employees having a trained work force by providing a congenial atmosphere of learning and training opportunities they ought to have at all levels of studies (MoE, 2003).

It has made a lot of changes to assure the correct implementation of a standard system of education wholly put in practice in schools of different levels. The teachers in return are given successive professional training in work shops, seminars, short and long term refresher courses to upgrade their professionalism and work esteem. Many schools are built equipped with modern mode of teaching learning mechanisms. Meanwhile the government is following required implementation of: i) Significant expansion of integrated, low cost and community based early childhood programmes; ii) Universal access and quality primary education for all to be by 2015 Parallel to reducing male illiteracy to about 10 percent by 2010, achieve female literacy of at least 60 percent; and iii) Expanding 'life long' learning to achieve a modern cultural transformation among disadvantaged groups in rural and urban areas through distance education mode of delivery (MoE, 1999; Rena, 2006).

The various modern training could be conducted in the existing kindergarten, elementary, middle and secondary, having in mind particularly the disabled, disadvantage rural youths including girls who have been deprived of the formal education and training because of various, social, religious and economic reasons. The scholars in the study propose that teachers' career development will be achieved through implementation of

distance education after the back ground viewed above is worked out. The focus is going to be on teaching teachers who could bring change in the education development. Basically, it will target kindergarten teachers, uncertified elementary teachers; elementary teachers who are promoted to middle level' (MoE, 2003; Rena, 2006).

It is aimed that all teachers in all levels will pursue academic and pedagogical courses parallel through distance education lessons in addition to the conventional courses they will attain. Similarly, through distance learning directors, supervisors and even MOE staff who are not teachers are expected to upgrade and improve their leadership and management roles. MBA courses too many be offered to senior MOE staff to make them more aware of and sensitive to changes in the training and education field, as well as the benefit in investing people with high potential to expedite the process of teaching the desired and to improve the quality of education.

4.2 The respondents' Perception

- 1) Most of the respondents are not in a position to differentiate the correspondence and DE programs.
- 2) Many did not have clear idea about the DE and the various programs implemented by the government of Eritrea.
- 3) Almost all respondents agreed that DE programs are very essential for Eritrea particularly to encourage mass education and coordination of education of all citizens.
- 4) It is agreed by some respondents that DE is nothing to do with the size of the country and its geographical barriers, if proper transportation and communication system is developed that will lead the success of DE programs.
- 5) Respondents could differentiate distance/ regular mode of education by way methods of interaction only they are not aware other differences.
- 6) Most of the respondents are not aware of the programs, which are not being offered by the government of Eritrea, unless the government pays attention about DE programs, the programme will not be successful.
- 7) The thirty years freedom struggle, border dispute and lack of financial resources etc., are forced the government to concentrate in the provision of food and health of its citizens.
- 8) All respondents sharply agreed that good tutor should be employed with good salary for the effective conduct of DE programs.
- 9) Many respondents suggested that effective postal services, e-mail, video/audio, TV, radio newspapers, ICT finance, logistics , distribution of study materials and effective organization of study centres are very essential for the effective implementation of DE programs.
- 10) Almost all the respondents have suggested that the government should spend huge amount of money on DE programme in the beginning.
- 11) It is agreed that the community should contribute a lot for the growth and implementation of DE programs.

- 12) Almost all the respondents agreed that the negligence of the concerned authority will spoil the whole trend of DE programs. So for the success of the DE programs personnel with sound knowledge skill and expertise and education are required.
- 13) Though government of Eritrea is concentrating on developing regular system of education, it has to concentrate on DE programs.

Developed countries succeeded with this new mode of distance education because the necessary infrastructures to guaranteed fast reasonably priced access to the internet in the place. In the case of developing countries like Eritrea the service providers of the new mode of delivery should take into account the limited access relevant internet cites and adjusts their services carefully. For Eritrea, it is therefore important and helpful to examine the other countries' experiences with regard to the notion of careful implementation of DE. So in the light of the above conclusions government of Eritrea should spare good deal of amount of money for the development of DE programs at all levels that suit the citizens. It also can encourage the private sector like the MCS who has zeal to establish DE institutions. The interview conducted with the owner of Eri-Tutorial College, MCS.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The distance education institutions could promote, socialize or democratize higher education by providing access to large number of urban people and disadvantaged groups in rural and remote areas including working people, fighters, women and other adults in Eritrea who are ready and determined to upgrade their knowledge and/or skills in various fields in the country and thus complement to more formal opportunities. It is to conclude that the borderless education through the internet and other mode of education may bring a revolution access over the next few years in Eritrea through huge changes of technologies like satellites, fibre optic cables and devices like mobile phones and computers in the near future.

Distance learning has become a major issue in education and in strategic planning for regional development. It is a possible source for developing the human resources of a small and young country Eritrea. It is to be understood that establishing distance education is simple but complex, time consuming and require substantial resources. Therefore, particular attention should be paid to the structural administrative development and the teaching material preparation. To meet this, Eritrea yet, needs to draft its own approach to the establishment of tertiary distance education programmes and institutions. To do this, it can learn considerably from the world wide experiences of distance education policy making and planning. To understand distance education it is necessary to have a theoretical framework that encompasses the whole area of education.

All in all, this new mode of learning showed a boom in the development of education worldwide. It needs to be established and begin to function with the required logistics, quality material, and student support and train man power to assure its feasibility in Eritrea. Therefore, constructive and effective measures have to be taken by the authorities

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in Ministries to enhance economic, social and education development in Eritrea. If Eritrea set up a strong base for distance education, it is a hope that this study may lay a ground to researchers as a guide in conducting the future research.

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