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DOCUMENT 7**An Overview of the Management and Administration of Teacher-Education Programs Using Open and Distance Learning**

This is an extract from an analysis of the system needs of open and distance-learning programs. It provides an important overview of the administration and infrastructure needs of ODL programs.

Management and Administration of Distance-Education Programs

Effective management is central to good practice in education; however, it is especially vital for distance education. The range of activities involved in distance teaching is broader, and the skills required to develop, produce, and deliver courses are more diverse than those typically found in conventional education.

The provision of distance-education programs coordinates a wide range of activities of varying complexity:

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- Writing and editing course texts, study guides, and radio scripts
 - Typesetting, printing, and binding course texts and other printed materials
 - Producing audiocassettes for radio transmission
 - Organizing a network of study centers based on part-time use of external facilities
 - Recruiting and managing part-time tutors
 - Distributing course texts and other materials to individuals and groups that may be widely dispersed
 - Assessing student progress through correspondence-based marking services
 - Managing financial activities
 - Recruiting and registering students
 - Maintaining student records
 - Evaluating program effectiveness
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Managers' failure to oversee these activities inevitably leads to the following problems:

- Excessive delays in writing and producing course materials
- Inadequate subject content and instructional effectiveness of courses
- Poor integration of the different components of courses (that is, written texts, face-to-face sessions, and radio transmissions)
- Inadequate delivery of course materials to all students or failure to deliver on schedule
- Excessive delays in marking and returning assignments to students
- Inadequate training or monitoring of supervisors and tutors

The authors encountered all these problems in the course of their field studies. These and other failures of poor management inevitably lead to higher dropout rates, lower examination scores, and greater waste of scarce resources.

Management Expertise

Even managing small distance-education systems imposes demands on practitioners. Individuals with the required expertise are seldom readily available, which may explain the number of vacancies in some of the institutions visited.

In the distance-teaching institutions examined in this survey, managers recognized the social complexities of managing distance-education programs. However, only two of the six countries studied had a director with any management training. Thus, managers in distance-teaching institutions and policymakers responsible for staffing should consider the following:

- Revising the current patterns of expenditure to fill key posts
- Introducing measures to avoid turnover of experienced staff
- Reviewing procedures to ensure the early recruitment of replacement staff for vacancies
- Providing staff-development programs, including on-the-job training, to provide a pool of in-house candidates from which staff losses may be replenished

Management Structures

The degree of autonomy that distance-education institutions enjoy varies. The administrative structures within which distance-education systems operate have a significant influence on the program's effectiveness and on the system's management as a whole.

In each of the six countries, governments establish and fund institutions that provide distance education. As already indicated, these institutions maintain a close relationship with the government. Certain advantages accrue. At a minimum, this helps ensure that the distance-education institutions remain responsive to the priorities of policymakers in the ministry. However, a high degree of centralization inevitably imposes constraints on managers, and this has its own disadvantages. As mentioned earlier, in many institutions, managers lack autonomy in the key area of staffing. The central department determines the number of staff employed, their grade, and conditions of appointment.

Program leaders face similar constraints with regard to policy formulation. Thus, managers' limited autonomy may account for the dearth of specific program objectives.

Financial Management

The financial management of activities is an important task in educational management. The task is more important in distance education because the range of items and activities that incur expense is typically wider than for conventional education, where a high proportion of recurrent costs, especially teachers' salaries, are fixed in the short run.

In these six countries, each institution is subject to the allocation process of its parent organization and has little autonomy in financial matters. Few institutions pay directly for goods and services received, and fee arrangements are also centrally controlled. As a result, little financial analysis is available. For example, no figures were available on the cost per student who had enrolled or the cost per student who had passed examinations for any institution.

Education policymakers and relevant ministry officials should consider delegating financial control to senior management in distance-education institutions. They will do so if managers demonstrate efficiency and prudence. One step in this direction would be to allow institutions to set their own fees. Policymakers should also consider allowing distance-

education institutions to retain a substantial part of fees received as a major component of their total income. This would encourage greater attention by managers to the cost efficiency of their operations.

Student Records

All distance-education systems must maintain student records. Typical records include details of the following:

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- Students registered
 - Fees received
 - Course texts and other materials distributed to students
 - Assignments returned by students
 - Marks awarded by tutors
 - Student attendance at face-to-face sessions
 - Examination results
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Well-maintained and easily accessible records (student progress, dropout rates, and examination results) are a vital source of information for managing programs efficiently and analyzing institutional effectiveness. Such records can also be used to assess the progress of individual students, especially those experiencing learning difficulties. Early identification of such difficulties allows the staff to take timely remedial action and lower student dropout rates.

In most well-developed distance-education systems, records of this kind are now kept in a computer database maintained on a mainframe or mini-computer. The rapid development of hard-disk microcomputer technology and database software has now brought this technology within reach of systems with small and modest resources.

With the exception of Lesotho and Malawi, most records in the six countries studied are kept manually. Some are well kept, but for the most part, records are difficult to access and do not seem to be used systematically to analyze student progress or assess institutional effectiveness.

Distance-education institutions should examine the feasibility of using a microcomputer-based student-record system. A common database format



could have the advantage of providing a basis for comparative analysis of distance-education systems in different countries.

Source: Murphy, Paud, and A. Zhiri. 1992. "Distance Education in Anglophone Africa." Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.