Distance Learning - Future Perspective or Reality

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Abstract

It is difficult not to agree with his Excellency Mr. President Mikheil Saakashvili in estimation that he did, not a long time ago, during the meeting with young generation. He, at the same time, thanked the young generation and Ministry of Education. Exactly those who consequently perform education reform, the task is not easy to realize. The revolution reform carried out in education system has become the topic for discussion for every citizen. "The main achievement of education system is that our youth can plan their life according to their possibilities, get needful education".

But still there is a lot to achieve, there is need of consequent and devoted work is needed to make modern education system, and that's why all the necessary means must be used.

Distance learning is education of XXI century. Though its assimilation started at the end of the past century, it is carried out successfully in many countries of the world. It provides academic mobile that is based on contemporary technology. Herewith, method of distance learning is especially effective to solve the problems that are supposed to be taught the whole life. Teaching - improvement of qualification - change of qualification - getting supplementary education and all that with the basic activity, regulates time so that it would be available for those who wish to get education.

Key-words: Distance learning, qualification, education, system.

Arguments for distance learning are many:

- There is rise in education institutions around the world that develop their staff using nontraditional technologies;
- The number of people wishing get education rose three times in 90s compared with 1960, and traditional high schools could not satisfy increasing demand;
- During the last ten years the index of growth of distance learning students is significantly increased compared to the index of internal course students.
- To get education with distance learning can help those who have no means of learning on internal courses. In Georgia's reality it is especially active, as far as the law about higher education is not acquainted with the form of external learning.
- Centers of the distance learning work on practically in all continents.
- Also in Georgia distance learning exists a little, but positive it is a experience (Among them in Georgian Technical University and in Tbilisi Ivane Javakhishvili State University). This experience should not be lost.
- In Georgia the number of internet users increases daily, mostly among youth. Accordingly, it raises the number of people wishing to get different types of distance education, among them the number of applicants wishing to get higher education.

On the basis of a representative selection, in summer, in 2006, 1000 citizens of Tbilisi, age of 18 were. (The static index does not surpass 3, 2%). At the question, age 18 or more were asked if they used the internet, every one citizen from five, gave a positive answer. The data show that the Internet is very popular in the young generation: in Tbilisi, 36% of internet users are the age of 18 - 24 years, and almost every third one (28%) is the age of 25 - 34 years. Internet was accessible for the Georgian population about ten years ago and only small number of older generation uses it. Only 17% of the people, whose age is about 45 and more, use internet.

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The great number of consumers (41%) use internet at home. If we foresee the age distribution of internet users, the popularity of internet cafes, it will not be surprising (27%). What about the frequency of use? Almost the half part consumers (43%) use internet every day, and every third (31%), use it at least once in a week.

The picture is clear. Internet is becoming more and more popular among the youth, but its popularity will increase following the growth of the prosperity of the population.

The result of the second inquiry is very interesting too. It was conducted in the beginning of 2007. There were 500 contact respond by the telephone. At the question, if there was a wisher in the family, who wants to get the higher education, 62% gave a positive answer. The wishers, who wanted to get technical education, were not a lot (28%). Only 40% of them knew about distance education. Accordingly, the wishers of distance education, was 28%. We think, that it is communicated with the fact, that only 42% of respondents had the means to use internet. 70% of respondents wished to have the means of using of resource centers. Regarding the cost of learning, the majority of respondents think that, it must not be surpassed by the quantity of state grant financing.

As we have mentioned, distance education is set up in the whole world. Accordingly, goes its scientific and methodological treatment. A lot if theories have been found which the objects of discussing of scientists and experts are. We think, it would be interesting to acquaint with some of them:

! The Theory of Industrialization - these conceptions have not been in used 25 years, because distance education has thoroughly changed.

! The Theory of Independent Education and Autonomy - experts think that, the followers of this theory stand in front of the serious risk. The high level of authority can also damage the learning, as the not suitable authority. In the time of high authority, there is a possibility that the distance education would be used by the technocrats and not professionals. The result of the dependence like that is clear.

! The Theory of Communications and Cooperation - the theory like that works only in distinct conditions.

! The theory of Distance education integrated models - it is admitted as the most rational.

From all the existing theories, we have chosen four basic theories, from which the most optimum one is the theory of integrated models. In the most cases, the methods of distance education are worked out on the base of this theory. A little while ago, the city of Kiev held an international learning (training) about the questions of the governance system of distance education. (It is possible to see the materials of training on the web - site of the Technical University). Analyzed modern achievements were analyzed and were illuminated learning principles of distance method. From the materials shown, it is clear that in the theory of distance education, integrated models is preferable.

The main aim of distance education is to provide learning despite of the location of the potential learner. In this case, it is possible for our citizens abroad who cannot get education in native language to use this method of learning.

The use of distance education will give the student the possibility to achieve a qualification without stopping his work, receive supplementary specialty and the main - get necessary information and materials without stopping learning at an arbitrary place, in town or out of town, or abroad, despite of the necessity of his moving.

The superiority of distance education is that it is realized with basic work. By way of an exception, we can pick out contacts that are necessary to get a qualified estimation of the exam or the other form. Herewith, it is also important that the universities, which carry out distance learning, have a possibility to invite teachers and specialists from abroad, get necessary materials from them by the electronic means, also, allow them to give them the lectures.
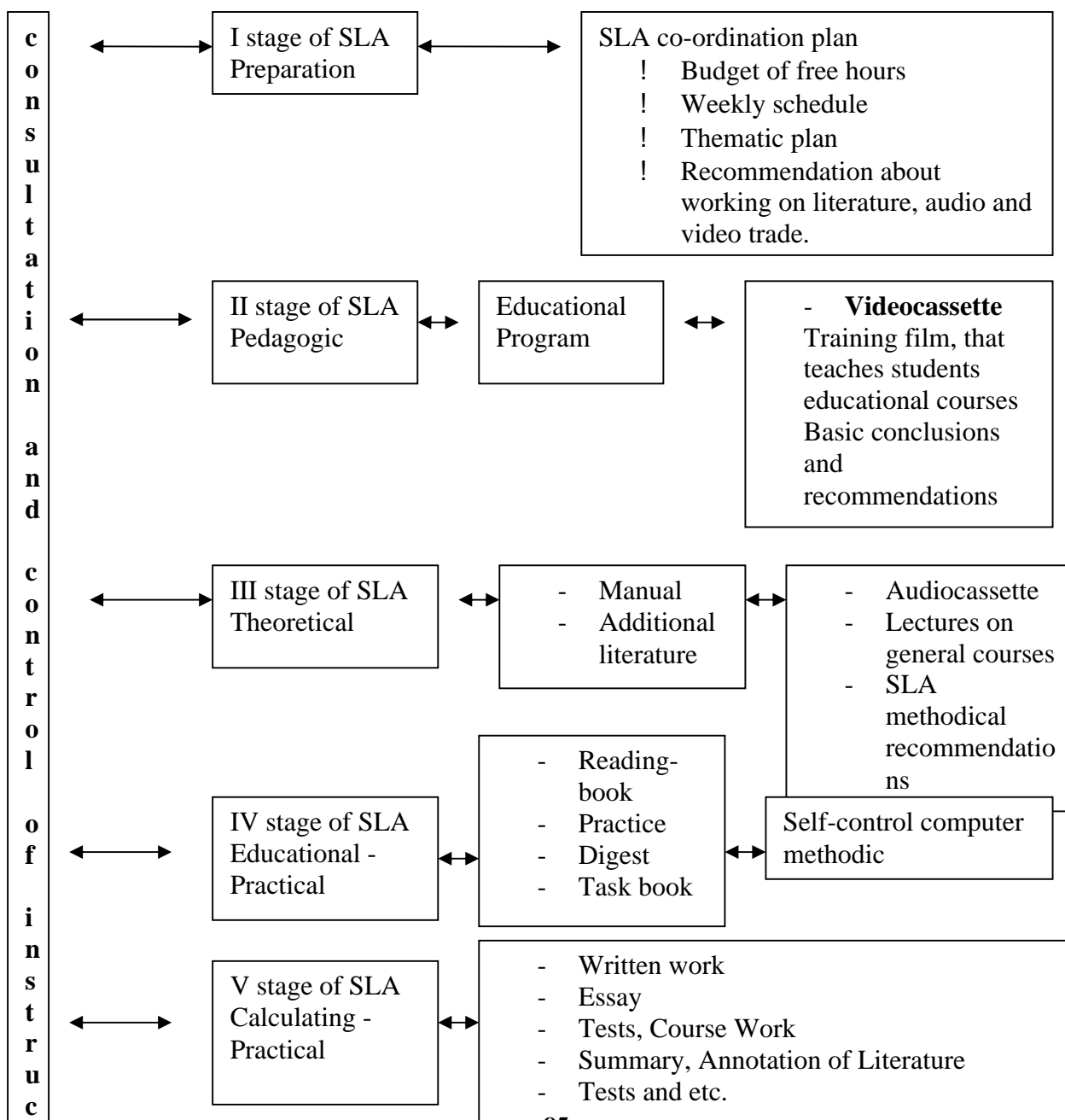
For more dexterity, the universities, which use distance education, have a possibility to invite high school professors and teachers from the regions to conduct examinations and attestations and carry out consultations and estimations with their participation.

During distance education, with the traditional informational resources, is used special books with multimedia, electronic learning - methodical complete sets, which contain electronic books, educational subsidiary books, control - tested materials, educational video and audio records, practicum, made by electronic way and other materials, which are foreseen to transfer telecommunication system of connection are used.

Every participant in distance education must be guaranteed to receive the whole base of distance education, also the additional materials used in the learning process. It is also very important, to provide constant contacts between the university and student. The student must always know about the news and changes in his university.

The most important step in the distance education is the organization of student's independent work. This activity contains five steps: I - preparation step; II - pedagogical step; III - theoretical step; IV - educational - practical step; V - accountable - practical step. Every step is distinguished by its specific character, content and organization. We can visualize it this way:

The scheme of the organization of Student's Independent Activity (SIA)

consultation and control of instructor

I stage of SLA Preparation	SLA co-ordination plan ! Budget of free hours ! Weekly schedule ! Thematic plan ! Recommendation about working on literature, audio and video trade.

II stage of SLA Pedagogic	Educational Program	- **Videocassette** Training film, that teaches students educational courses Basic conclusions and recommendations

III stage of SLA Theoretical	- Manual - Additional literature	- Audiocassette - Lectures on general courses - SLA methodical recommendations

IV stage of SLA Educational - Practical	- Reading-book - Practice - Digest - Task book	Self-control computer methodic

V stage of SLA Calculating - Practical	- Written work - Essay - Tests, Course Work - Summary, Annotation of Literature - Tests and etc.

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What makes distance learning effective?

- Educational availability for everyone who has desire and corresponding data;
- Recognition of the confirming documents received by distance learning;
- Economical efficiency (Distance learning is twice cheaper than traditional forms of getting education).
- Guaranteed high level of received education, as far as in distance learning are involved only professors with high qualification.
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Colleges must be ready to create internet classes in the cities and regions of the country so that students who have no technical means can study. Such classes can be made by several colleges. We have already discussed about creation such classes with coordinators of EU, who work in Georgia on development of such learning.

One of the professors of Technical University who studied in Maastriht Management College has treated the project, and now it is possible to introduce distance learning, leaning upon college experience.

Unfortunately, according to Georgian legislation, using distance learning methods are not regulated for high schools and professional learning. For today, such education system can only be used for raising the level of one's skill. In my opinion at this stage, we can start from the following, accumulating needed experience. But we should not stop here, because in every country where distance learning is introduced, it involves all the stages except doctorate. Accordingly, such method of learning is justified and experts say that appropriate result will be achieved.

In my view there is need of alternations and additions to legislation. It is possible to manufacture separate legislative act that will define usage of distance learning in higher and professional education. According to above mentioned changes, it would be advisable to work out the methods of distance learning usage. It will become the basic foundation of directing such type of education around Georgia.

We would also like to mention another important question: Methodology of distance learning is specific, and it is very much different from traditional forms of education. License and accreditation call for different demands that we have to show to the question of license and accreditation. It is necessary to work out according criterions that will not be established on conditionality and artificiality. I take into account learning area, book fund etc. The main problem is the existence of corresponding techniques, knowledge of methodology, high qualification of professors and ability of usage of electronic means. Also very important is qualification of those workers who will develop administration of education.

We hope that method of distance learning will pave the way in the educational system in Georgia in the nearest future and would become one of the rings of reorganization. Reforms that are held in educational system, methods of approaches that we can see, all this gives us foundation to think that new technologies will instill as fast as the reforms of education are held.