

Chapter 15

Teacher Training in Distance Education and the Practicum Process

Belgin Aydin

Anadolu University, Turkey

Ilknur Kecik

Anadolu University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Distance education has long been used both in pre-service and in-service teacher education programs to provide wider opportunities to people who are not able to attend face-to face courses. Since teacher education is a wide topic with participants having quite a wide range of needs, there is still a need to get information on different models, especially on the practicum part of teacher education. Within the realm of this topic, this chapter aims to describe an innovative model, the design of which is based on a need in Turkey, and discuss it in the light of available literature. After a brief terminology clarification, major models and trends in language teacher education are brought forth and discussed. Then, the model developed by Anadolu University, Distance English Language Teacher Training (DELTT), is explained and further suggestions on the issue are made.

INTRODUCTION

Distance education has long been a major form of professional development for pre-service and in-service teachers all over the world. With advancements in information technologies, distance teacher education programs and courses have undergone various changes, too. Although

distance education has a long history within the broader subject of teacher education, there is still the need to obtain information on different models using different information technologies to improve the quality of the programs (Burns, 2011; Murray, 2013). What is more, teaching is a very complex process in which teachers should be well informed and competent in order to adapt to different contexts, and possess a life-long motivation. Practicum, the most crucial component of

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teacher training programs, is especially essential for pre-service and novice teachers who usually experience difficulty in combining theory and practice. It seems that literature on practicum within distance teacher education is not too extensive. In this line of thought, this chapter aims to review and discuss models and major trends in online language teacher training in the world and describe an innovative model designed to address a need in Turkey, with its focus being on the practicum component.

Firstly, a brief terminology clarification will be made, since both in distance and face-to-face teacher education, different terms are used sometimes interchangeably and sometimes side-by-side. Following this, major models and trends in teacher education, as provided in literature, will be identified and discussed. Lastly, a model developed by Anadolu University for training English language teachers, Distance English Language Teacher Training (DELTT), will be explained. The research conducted on this model as well as the needs of the current model will also be analyzed. Finally, some suggestions for future distance teacher education will be made.

Distance Education is gaining importance in teacher education because of its convenience, cost and flexibility. It is also stated that the insertion of technology promotes effective distance education applications, which indeed brings a new look at the term “distance”. After analyzing different definitions, Keegan (1980: 6) stated the main elements of a comprehensive definition of distance education as follows:

- The separation of teacher and learner which distinguishes it from face-to-face lecturing,
- The influence of an educational organization which distinguishes it from private study,
- The use of technical media, usually print, to unite teacher and learner, and carry the educational content of the course,

- The provision of two-way communication so that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogue,
- The possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialization purposes,
- The participation in an industrialized form of education.

A rather broad approach given in the OECD report states the basic requirements of distance education as follows (Burns, 2011, 9):

- Structured planning,
- Well-designed courses,
- Special instructional techniques,
- Methods of communication by electronic and other technologies.

With the development of information technologies, distance education is considered as a broad approach characterized by a high degree of variation. Such variation includes the types of media or technology used (print, radio, computer); the nature of the learning (workshop, seminar, degree program, supplement to traditional classroom, levels of support); institutional settings; topics addressed; and levels of interactivity support (face-to-face, online, blended, none) (Burns, 2011).

Within this perspective, distance education in this paper will be accepted as an umbrella term covering any approach which is well-designed and planned with special instructional techniques and which makes use of information technologies. While it could be designed without the presence of a teacher as in face-to-face learning, different levels of combinations of the two could be available as it is usually called blended learning. The other combinations in using multiple technology modes, combining pedagogical approaches, blending instructional technology with face-to-face students and teachers are also defined as blended learning (Martyn, 2003). In this paper, blending will be taken at the program and course level,

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