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Challenges & Practices of Female Language Students in Distance Education: Jimma & Bahirdar Universities in Focus



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ABSTRACT

The controversies over the impact and role of distance education continue all over the world. On one hand, we hear that the scholars criticize the expansion of DE compromises the quality of education in the higher institution, however, others would appreciate the growth of DE at an explosive rate because of different reasons. One of their argument to support the expansion is that DE has played a significant role in reaching the marginalized societies from education. Thus, the proponents of the DE existence preach that females highly benefited from the Distance Education Institution. This research was aimed to investigate the challenges and practices of Female Language Students from DE. Both quantitative and qualitative research methodology was used, and three data gathering tools (questionnaire, FGD and document analysis) were selected to address the objective. In addition, relevant review of literature was reviewed to keep the quality of the data. The participants of the questionnaire for the study were chosen by simple random method from Jimma and BahirDar Universities attending in the distance education program. Based on the data, the result of the finding showed that the female language students of JU & BDU distance program attendants seem they benefited from the program like by producing the degree and earning salary increment, but the result also indicated female language students faced various challenges from the DE. Low-quality module, inappropriate tutorial, less concerned instructors, and poor grading systems are some among the many. As a result, the researchers would recommend that the Distance education centers are expected to critical consider the overall activities of DE for entire students in general and for female language students in particular. Moreover, DE as an institution should worry in sustaining the quality of education rather than only focusing on the production of degree certificates.

INTRODUCTION

Distance education, especially for the country like Ethiopia in which education needs more support is much more than an intellectual interest. Both developing and developed countries are using distance education extensively for various purposes. However, because of the increased demand for trained and educated manpower by various sectors in developing countries, the need to run distance education was widely realized. In its simplest form, distance education is a form of teaching and learning which takes place at a distance from educational institutions. In the case of university level Distance Education, DE could be said to take place outside the walls of the ivory tower, the proverbial bastion of academic dispute and pure intellectual knowledge Christine, P. (2005). Distance education has created a substantial impact on students, faculty, and institutions, and DE classes now are routinely available to many students. In a survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, the percentage of two- and four-year degree-granting institutions offering distance education classes increased by 11% from 1995 to 1997. The number of courses being offered nearly doubled in the same time period (Sikora & Carrol, 2002). To bring this to Africa in general and Ethiopia, in particular, the first two decades of African independence witnessed a tremendous amount of effort into the development of education. Heavy overall investments in physical, human and financial resources were allocated to the sector. The achievements in the educational development of this period are exemplified by the fact that “adult literacy, estimated at about 9 percent in 1960, increased to 45 percent by the mid-1980s (Economic and Social Policy Division Working Papers Series 1997).

According to Christine, V. (2015), distance education has the ability to reach anyone anywhere and thus is widely accepted as a method of educating large populations of people in developing countries. The women, in particular, are able to reap the benefits distance education has to offer by overcoming many of the barriers faced through conventional methods of learning. It is accepted by many that distance education is an excellent mode to reach adult learners who, for various reasons, are unable to attend classes in traditional face to face classrooms (Bates, 2005; Moore and Kearsley, 2005) cited in (Christine, V. 2015). This is congruent with the reality of females in Ethiopia in which the documents from DE stations show that the majority of the participants are women. It can be concluded, therefore, that distance education is a catalyst to higher education for those faced with barriers of time, geography and economics in the pursuit of their education. It is not a difficult issue to realize how much distance education is relevant to Ethiopia females due to dozens of reasons that

they may share with other females of the globe. Historically and culturally, women have occupied a very significant proportion of the human society. There is an excellent expression which can vivid this. "Teaching a male is just teaching an individual, whereas teaching a female is teaching a nation." Kwapong (2007) provided another view for the provision of distance education. She opined that DE has emerged as a tool for widening access to higher education for women. She added that all over the world, gender disaggregated data on education has shown that compared to their male counterparts, females have attained low levels of formal education. Several reasons have been cited for this situation. Studies reveal that the neglect of female education takes its root from traditional attitudes towards the education of females. We are unable to provide no special reason for females' absence than the explained in Ethiopia as well. This research project targeted to address Jimma and Bahirdar Universities of Ethiopia with regarding the service they render to the females specifically. The information obtained had shown that the two above mentioned universities played a significant role in not only launching the DE program, but they also shouldered huge responsibilities to reach the very far communities from their town via DE for adults in general and females in particular. The DE at Jimma University was first started in 1980 at Jimma College of Agriculture to train the students in general agriculture at diploma level. Even though there was high demand for distance and off-campus programs from different stakeholders, due to various reasons there was only one program in distance, management at certificate and diploma level at the College. Gradually the office expands its programs to the summer in-service, and in 2003 the office started two summer programs namely: teachers' education at degree level and Law at diploma level. Soon the office expands these programs to other disciplines. www.ju.edu.et/cssl/?q=node/246. The Distance Education (DE) of the University grow up and reorganized in 2009. With this, the office launched a full-fledged distance education in various disciplines at degree level and Postgraduate programs in summer. Distance education is actually an innovative educational strategy that offers an educational opportunity to people who are already in the career without detaching them from their workplaces and residence. It follows a student centered teaching approach with the use of user-friendly course materials and continuous monitoring. In this program, the office provides every support to learners through available means of communication and arranging special sessions for face to face contact. A great number of students enroll in distance learning programs in all field of study in general and try to complete the programs successfully in the language study in particular. In the process of distance education in language program, students take various courses depending upon their majors. Jimma University and Bahirdar

University seem to realize that the significance of DE is paramount that helps extremely poor rural females in Ethiopia who are often the most marginalized and are the least likely to receive the educational support they need to learn so as to change their lives. Scholars agree that human development is about ensuring that individuals and societies have the choices and resources to construct the lives they value. When human rights and gender equality are not ensured, sustainable development is stunted. When women's lives are dictated by rigid gender roles, they have less choice. So, their choice is widened by education. Thus, the main intention of the current research project writers was assessing the challenges and opportunities of distance education that female language students benefit from.

1.1. Statement of the problem

Although DE is not only challenging for female educators, distance education by itself is about challenges. On the institutional level, concern with female students and gender issues challenges a distance teaching university to review the study materials, the course contents and presentation, the teaching system, and even the composition of its staff and course authors. Once it is discovered that the seeming neutrality is in fact biased and unfavorable circumstances are created for females, the university is faced with the challenge of developing measures which would ensure equal opportunities in all areas. It could need to overcome resistance to these changes based partly on a natural inertia favoring the status quo and partly on deep-seated attitudes concerning the status of men and women. With regarding the challenges of distance education, the writers of this proposal do have wide experience to mention the challenges encountering FLS of Jimma and Bahidar Universities.

In order to look into the research works done in the areas of the challenges and opportunities of females in distance education, much-related review of literature are selected as below. As cited in Christine, V. (2015) vol.4, (Kanwar and Taplin, 2001; Sultana and Kamal, 2002; Mhehe, 2001; Usman, 2001; Zuhairi and Zabadah, 2008) females in developing countries face many obstacles to furthering their education. Firstly according to their finding, women's families preferred to send the male members of the family to school and they were not allowed to travel outside the immediate neighborhood without a male escort. Next, their study indicated that they needed their husband's consent to access education; having a university degree would be a threat to the male authority. Furthermore, all the researchers found that women in Africa had to do all the housework and child rearing, consequently did not have any free time for studies or were too tired at the end of the day. And the study had

shown that they did not want to start a course because they felt their family responsibilities and/or work responsibilities would prevent them from completing the course. On the other hand, the finding made by Kanwar and Taplin's (2001) cited in the same article, (Christine,V. 2015), Brave New Women of Asia found that distance education changed women's lives. The study was aimed to examining women's experiences with distance education in China, Hong Kong, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The case studies targeted to encourage females to further their education by demonstrating that most of their doubts concerning the furtherance of their education are unfounded.

Locally, Tesfaye (2002) attempted in the areas of distance education in Ethiopia. As it is indicated in Tesfaye (2002),the major problems which have significant impact on the success of distance learner at the secondary level are: the disparity between the needs of distance learners and the provision of tutorial services; The style of the presentation and delays in the distribution of the self-learning materials (modules); Inefficient organization and administration; Absence of standard criteria to recruit tutors and course developers'; shortage of trained tutors in distance education and inadequate facilities. Thus, the primary purpose of this study is to address the above-mentioned problems at the tertiary level.

To the contrary, the universities and the stakeholders need to maximize the advantages of the DE towards FLSs. There is a gap between the rhetoric and the reality (the intended and the on-going practice of DE). By virtue of the researchers' profession as English language teachers, they have a first-hand information about testing the difficult of DE occurring to female language learners and specifically heard different complaints about the program when they visit various centres and from English language teachers and students and the women language teachers, from the horse's mouth as well. Female language students complain that they are being encountered several challenges while engaging in the DE.

Most of the previous studies both the universals and the local did not address the challenges and opportunities encountering the FLSONDE. Thus, the main intention of this research was to assess the challenges and opportunities of female language students from DE. This has become the critical problem facing JU and BDU English language teaching system as a component of the program, and the DE coordinating office and female language students as well. To fill this gap, the need for research in the area has a paramount significance.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

The main objective of this study was to investigate the challenges and opportunities of female language students (FLS) undertaking DE in some selected centers of Jimma and Bahirdar Universities.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this research were to:

- examine if female language students gain outcome or benefited from the DE
- find out the challenges/barriers facing female language students undertaking in DE
- identify female language students perception towards DE

Basic Research Questions

In order to achieve the above objectives, the investigation attempted to answer the following questions.

- What are the challenging factors that can affect FLS engaged in DE?
- What improvements will be made to overcome those challenging factors?
- Does DE improve the educational trust of women language teachers, and to what extent they obtain outcome out of it?
- Is DE learning materials or the designed courses suitable for FLS?

Significance of the Study

The intention of this research was to give highlights about the challenges and opportunities of female language students undertaking in DE in some selected centers of Jimma and Bahirdar Universities. It provided basic baseline data concerning the actual experience and challenging issues of female language students engaged in DE. By doing so, results of this study would help female language students, university DE coordinators, university teaching material developers, the practitioners, policy makers and experts to identify the root challenges of female language students undertaking in DE. That is, it is believed that these bodies would be benefited from the findings of this study when the results of the study shall be

communicated. Of course, university English language teachers and students would also benefit from this document.

Delimitation of the Study

This study was delimited to the two government universities (Jimma and BahirDar universities). In addition, the focus of the study was delimited to the female language students attending DE in the mentioned two universities and delimited to only the language streams as well. The data gathering tools were also delimited to questionnaire, FGD and document analysis.

Limitations of the Study

As it was expected, this research project is not free from the limitations. Firstly, using FGD as a data collecting tool has its own inherent problems though we believe its advantage outweigh the disadvantages. For instance, the majority of the participants of the team in the FGD were reluctant to share their opinion, and few individuals over dominate the discussion as well.

Another limitation came from the less return of the questionnaire paper in which 25 respondents were unwilling to return the paper. It was obvious that this had its own implication on the quality of the work.

Collecting the respondents either for FGD or for questionnaire was a very daunting task that for one thing the study was only focused on females. In Ethiopia culture it would not be difficult to guess meeting with females is not as easy as that of males. Because it was unfortunate that we did not have a female researcher in the team, it was tough to approach the females and it took time as well. That is, of course, the respect part of our culture to be appreciated and continued.

With regarding the document analysis, the modules are very irregulars, so it became difficult to prepare a uniform checklist; however, the team had managed at last after difficulties.

Abbreviation

DE:Distance education

FLS:Female language students

EFL:English as Foreign Language

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

It is hoped that review of related literature is the backbone for any study. Typically, this chapter surveys relevant literature works from the major subject fields underlying the project to justify its various conceptual foundations. It presents the relevant literature pertaining to the challenges and opportunities of female language students in DE.

2.1. Concept of Distance Education

Distance learning means different things to different people. For some, distance learning is in sharp contrast to the traditional face-to-face classroom, integrating little more than interactive video between geographically separated campuses of training locations. To others, distance learning is an entirely new medium for instruction; it is a new instructional strategy distinct from the typical “bricks and mortar” classroom setting where students and professors interact over Internet-delivered video and audio conferencing, share collaborative projects among students, or participate in synchronous or asynchronous instruction opportunities.

Distance education is defined as a system of education that involves independent study or open learning based on self-instructional materials (Rumble, 2002). Thus, the major feature of distance education is that distance and time separate the teacher from the learner. To Murali (1996), India, in particular, has one of the fastest rates of adoption for distance learning. This is, in part, due to legislation that ensures that a government or public sector employee who earns a degree through distance learning benefits from an increase in both pay scale and pension (Murali, 1996: p. 8). The Institute of Continuing and Distance Education (ICDE) of India reported that “approximately 24 percent of all higher education students in India are enrolled in distance education institutions, specifically in the 13 national and state open universities and the 106 institutions, mostly public, which offer both on-campus and correspondence programmes” (Prasad, 1998: p. 16). However, according to a 2007 study conducted by the Commonwealth of Learning (CoL), there exist vast potentials for distance education in a country like India with millions of young aspirants eager to pursue higher education but with conventional universities and colleges simply not being in a position to accommodate them.

Africa has also been identified as a potential market for the expansion of distance learning. The continent's current participation rate in higher education is less than 45 percent overall, and in some areas of sub-Saharan Africa, participation is less than 2 percent (Hanover Research, 2011). Barney Pityana, Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Africa (UNISA), observed that Africa has the greatest demand for higher education, and often the smallest capability to deliver it domestically. The continent as of now houses two major institutions that offer distance learning, UNISA and the African Virtual University.

In Africa, as elsewhere, a great deal of conceptual confusion exists as to the precise meaning of the terms non-formal and distance education. However, as Simkins (1995) points out, a common thread underlies the increasing popularity of NFDE in the sense that it is, to some degree, set in antithesis to the currently dominant model of education delivery which concentrates on the pre-career education and training of relatively young people, primarily through the formal educational system. Be that as it may, non-formal education, for the purpose of this report, is defined, following Dodd (1996:2) and Simkins (loc. cit.: 34) as:

Any organized educational activity outside the established formal system - whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity - that is intended to serve identifiable learning clientele and objectives". The activities or programs may or may not have curricula, examinations and certificates. "But they are organized; they do not happen by chance; students join with a specific goal and know that to succeed they must pursue that goal for a significant period of time"

On the other hand, distance education is defined as "any organized learning activity in which a significant proportion of the teaching and learning takes place with the teachers and the learners at-a-distance from each other". In other words, separation in time and space is the defining characteristic of distance education. Correspondence education is the best example of distance education.

There are few local universities in Ethiopia which are participating in this regard. For instance, the Indian Institute of Technology at Delhi has started an international outreach program with students in Ethiopia and St.Mary with Indira Gandhi and Admas College could be some others as well.

In a general sense, distance education, some call it open learning, mainly serves learners who cannot attend face-to-face courses or programs for one or another reason. Learners stay at

home or office and follow the course, do the assignments, and interact with each other and the teacher via internet. In other words, they take the responsibility for their own learning, which means that learner autonomy is of great importance. Sampson (2003:104) defines distance learning as "... a mode of delivery (independent learning at a distance through the means of self-study texts and non-contiguous communication)". As Holmberg (1989:24) states, people prefer distance education for "the convenience, flexibility and adaptability of this mode of education to suit individual students' needs". Actually, distance education appears in the educational field as a new technique because of the increasing demand for these flexible and convenient aspects. Ohler (1991:22) emphasizes two aspects of distance education: "how it can change our approach to learning and how it can change us". In fact, what Ohler focuses on is related to innovation in education.

Distance education mainly rises due to learners' needs for lifelong learning. Distance education (DE) is generally defined as an educational process in which the learner is separated from the instructional base or teacher either in space and/or time for a significant proportion of his learning (ADEA, 2000). Open learning, in turn, is a philosophy of learning based on the principle of flexibility to increase access and equity to education and training. It is an organized educational activity that uses a variety of media and/or teaching materials, in which "constraints on study are minimized in terms either of access, or of time and place, pace, method of study, or any combination of these" (Perraton 2002). Nowadays, it is fully acknowledged that Distance Education is particularly appropriate to reach widely dispersed teacher populations without disrupting their personal, professional and social lives. It suits best countries where face to face institutions cannot respond urgently and adequately to increasing demands for teacher education due to lack of space and facilities following the introduction of Free Primary Education.

By its definition, DE has not brought any misunderstandings for researchers like us. But, for the sake of addressing the target of this research, we better define DE from the very specific point of female learner not learner as general. This is to mean from female learner point of view. The writers of this research strongly agree with scholars like Sampson, 2003:104; Perraton, 2002; and ADEA, 2000. They all emphasized that DE plays an indispensable role to satisfy the need of those students who are unable to get the opportunity of face to face learning because of one or another reasons. Females in the world in general, and in Ethiopia,

in particular, do get less opportunity to learn in face to face program institutions when compared to males.

The rapid spread of distance education in the world not only offers learners and teachers great opportunities but also brings a lot of challenges. Learners are unsupervised, self-directed, independent, and expected to be more autonomous. This freedom brings many questions together such as Does it leads to low-quality education? Are the materials developed by specialized teachers used effectively as in face-to-face courses in distance education? Who controls the materials? and so on. Besides these negative opinions, some researchers state that students are not alone in the process, but they are in a constant interaction between teachers and their peers. Although there appears opposition to distance education, it seems to continue to catch the attention of educators, teachers, and learners in the future.

Theory and Practice in Distance Education

Although in Ethiopia Distance education's (DE) age is at the very infant stage, it has a long, rich history of over 100 years in the world. The beginning of DE was correspondence study. In 1892, Penn State University was one of three universities to initiate a new way of reaching out to students capitalizing on the newly developed system of Rural Free Delivery (RFD). While RFD has been credited with many outcomes, the role of RFD in establishing DE is not well known. Since the earliest days of open and distance universities, women have been seen as forming one of their primary constituencies. Females have traditionally been under-represented in face-to-face higher education; their educational careers and aspirations are subject to interruption by the demands of childcare, and they often spend considerable amounts of time in the home, which is targeted as the natural place for distance study. This is also the same scenario in Ethiopia context. Women should, therefore, feature prominently in distance education and their needs should be of primary concern to the designers of distance education courses.

On the face of it, distance education appears *per se* a 'woman-friendly' form of acquiring education and formal qualifications. There are two characteristics which are generally seen to render this mode of learning especially suitable for women, by making distance education compatible with other spheres of life: first, there is little or no attendance requirement; second, at the same time, there is a high degree of flexibility in learning schedules and time

management. These characteristics have three distinct and undisputed advantages for the distance student.

Firstly, since the main part, if not the whole, of a distance teaching curriculum is designed for independent study and does not require classroom attendance, there is no need for students to live on a university campus. Studying at a distance can thus be reconciled with occupational and personal commitments and with living at home with a partner or family. Secondly, since the learning material is sent to the student's home or workplace, and since tuition is provided mainly through the use of media (letters, telephone calls, electronic communication) distance students do not have to live in the same town – or even country – in which their school or university is located. While studying at conventional institutions often involves a move to the university town, studying at a distance enables students to maintain their place of residence, as well as family and work commitments. Lastly, although distance teaching systems vary in the degree of flexibility, all allow students to set their own timetables for actual studying. For instance, there may be prescribed times for completing and handing in assignments, but students are free to choose when, in a given time-span, they work through the course, and whether they work continuously or with interruptions. Equally, although tutors and other teachers may set times at which they are available for consultation in person or on the phone, answering machines, fax services, and electronic mail (e-mail) provide round the clock access to the support services students may need.

According to Christine, V (2000) it is easy to see why these factors are assumed to favor women in particular. With respect to changing their geographic location in order to further their own educational or career goals, women have traditionally been less mobile than men. Images of the housebound mother of small children and of the dependent wife of a working husband are often called up in this context. Conversely, women might have to move away from a location near their school or university because their partner relocates to a different part of the country or is posted abroad. Women are also less able than men to leave a family home for any length of time in order to commute to school or university on a daily or weekly basis.

The 2000s, with easy access to the Internet, are characterized by the rapid development and wide use of online technologies to deliver educational content. As a result, not only a number of distance learning universities have grown, but “traditional” universities began to explore online technologies (Miller, 2014) in various disciplines. In particular, e-learning tools and

technologies extend distance language educators' awareness of the technical possibilities at their disposal for developing online distance learning resources (Rogerson-Revell, 2007).

With this regard, particularly from the Ethiopian Distance Education point of view, there are still open for argument. For instance, the schedules are already prepared for the convenience of the DE coordinators, not from the learners' point of view. Again, from the ICT perspectives, there are many assignments still we need to perform; our students have begun hardly learning through e-videos and internet.

In the history of modern distance learning and e-learning, not including the initial type of distance learning of correspondence or the further ones of radio and television, the following characteristics and approaches may be distinguished (according to the summary of the characteristics of distance learning education by P. Williams, D. Nicholas, B. Gunter, in their overview) (Williams, Nicholas & Gunter, 2004): distance education is imparted where the learner is physically separated from the teacher (Rumble, 1986); DLR are a planned and guided learning experience (Holmberg, 1986, 1989); distance education consists of a two-way structure distinct from traditional classroom instruction (Keegan, 1988); the higher level of independence or "learner control" (Holmberg, 1995) which is a feature of distance education. Baynton (1992) developed a model to examine this concept in terms of independence, competence and support. It was also affected by competence (ability and skill), and support (both human and material) (McIsaac & Gunawardena, 1996).

Another concept that of "transactional distance", was advanced by Michael Moore (1990). Here, "distance" is determined by the amount of communication or interaction which occurs between a learner and an instructor, and the amount of structure which exists in the design of the course. Greater transactional distance occurs when a course has more structure and less communication (or interaction). A continuum of transactions might exist in this model, from less distant, where there is greater interaction and less structure, to more distant where there may be less interaction and more structure. There is these days, the problem of conflating of distance learning with e-learning. It could be argued that e-learning provides such a high level of interaction that the "distance" is necessarily smaller (Williams, Nicholas & Gunter, 2004).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, interest in e-learning, scholarly and commercial, increased substantially. Studies of American students in virtual programs at both the elementary and

secondary levels led researchers to tout benefits of e-learning, including its flexibility in geography and scheduling, its ability to address various learning styles, and its overall expansion of educational access to people in remote communities (Kellogg & Politoski, 2002; Cavanaugh, Gillan, Kromrey, Hess & Blomeyer, R. 2006). While some of these studies have been criticized for not following a “robust research” methodology (Barbour & Reeves, 2009), the general impression of, and evidence for e-learning as a paradigmatic shift in the field of education (Harasim 2000) remains intact. Indeed, according to a 2009 report on the state of online-based e-learning in U.S higher education (Allen & Seaman, 2010), over 4.6 million American students took at least one online course during the fall 2008 academic term – a 17 percent increase over the number of students reported in fall 2008 (Roemer , & DeCrease, 2010).

The Learning Environments of Female Distance Students

In the distance learning process, the role of the learning environment cannot be underestimated. There should be the availability of instructional materials and the instructors or teachers or the facilitators.

In addition to the constraints of geographical location, limited available time and financial resources, females in developing countries face additional obstacles to furthering their education that their male counterparts do not. Misogyny is a term used to describe a group, most often men, who display negative, demeaning and oppressive behaviors towards women (Stalker, 2001) cited in Christine, V. (2015). Many women in Ethiopia who do endeavor to further their learning are faced with misogynistic responses from both male relatives and their society, which makes their pursuit of learning extremely difficult.

It is not a far history to remind what was happening to the Ethiopia women in terms of getting the opportunity of learning. Due to our tradition, females in Ethiopia are hardly encouraged to learn their education instead they are forced to take house working responsibilities like rearing children, cooking food, fetching water and wood, and more than these activities. To this effect, Jimma University and Bahirdar University from the government institutions are the forerunners in taking the huge responsibilities to facilitate distance education so as to benefit females in general and FLS in particular. Despite the fact that both JU and BDU have equally planned activities that serve males and women, the writers of this research intended to assess the challenges and opportunities facing FLS from DE.

Role of the teachers

The important task of the teachers is to raise the awareness of the distance learner through the assigned or relevant study materials. The learner should be allowed to further on their learning interest area. Teachers or facilitators should tolerate uncertainty and encourage risk taking. Real life problems should be brought to the classroom to be worked on. Deadlines and other regulations should be determined. Learning strategies should be taught and how to apply them. The learners should be taught the value of revision and critical appraisal in their work. The tutor's qualification, training especially training in distance learning and experience play an important role in the learning process. Tutor's involvement in tutorial service activities apart from usual teaching shows their interest in distance education and distance learners. An efficient tutor is one who prepares lessons according to a precise plan and in a well-structured manner. Tutor should prepare assignments, evaluate and arrange special test for evaluating learners' performance. Also, they should communicate results to the learner in time. The extent to which tutors are not engaged in tutorial center related activities after tutorial hours is a poor indication of tutor commitment to their learners, tutorial services and their profession.

Role of the Coordinators

Learners strong points should be emphasized through the coordinator's experts. Learners should be guided to explore ideas through peer discussions. Independent and positive attitude should be encouraged in the average learner. Learners' needs and interests should be investigated and coordinators should also support them. The self-esteem of the distance learners should be boosted. The Self-confidence of the learner is highly necessary because it will help in determining the acquisition of self-learning skills. Stress management is also core to learning. The coordinators should work hard at managing the stress of the distance learners because their success or failure depends on their relaxed minds. The sense of belongingness of the self-learner should be aroused through the creation of study groups. According to many scholars' definition, the definition of environment described it as a situation where a learner who is ready and able to learn will assimilate conveniently and effectively. Thus, for learning to take place and the performance of students be enhanced, the learning environment must be stimulating and encouraging.

The learning environment must be inviting or welcoming, conducive and accommodating for adequate and effective learning to take place. According to Grant (1985), infrastructure of any learning environment should be suitable, adequately furnished and well equipped for learning. Inadequate infrastructure may affect keen mental stimulation. It has been proved that students that are taught in stimulating environment with adequate and relevant instructional aids, will go a long way to enhance assimilation.

Although the development of a national policy framework for distance education is still envisaged, some countries (Botswana) have adopted implementation strategies in line with their national policy on education to set up pre-tertiary distance education institutions to increase access to educational programs. In 1992, the Master Plan for Education 2000 and beyond, an official policy document on education, in general, defines the objectives of distance education as follows:

- ✓ To improve access to education and skills for new groups such as the unemployed, housewives and school drop-outs;
- ✓ To increase access to tertiary education in a variety of subjects; and
- ✓ To upgrade teacher qualifications

Many educators agree that distance learning is also normally open learning, Cowan reminds us that distance learners have greater freedom than their conventional counterparts to choose what, when, where and how to learn. For example, the distance learner can set the pace of his or her learning. There is, of course, another side to that coin. As Cowan points out: 'Once learners are freed to study at their own pace, then the prospect of bringing a group together . . . rapidly becomes less and less feasible.' In general, distance education means reduced contact with peers and with tutors, often resulting in a sense of isolation. Furthermore, the distance learner 'does not have the same opportunity to be aware that the difficulties which she or he is encountering are shared by others, and are not merely an indication of personal incompetence'(p. 17). These disadvantages can be overcome to a large extent by providing adequate support for the learner, as other chapters demonstrate (Broady; Haworth and Parker, for example). Important as it is to counteract the drawbacks, designing a good distance-education program is equally a matter of exploiting its potential. One advantage of distance education that is stressed in a number of chapters is the possibility for learners 'to draw on resources available in the world outside the classroom' (p. 16). Distance education permits learners to continue working, and apart from the personal benefits arising from this, there is a

significant professional advantage for the teacher-learner. Outside the classroom of the course, there is the classroom of the workplace.

Teaching and Learning Strategies for Distance Education

The design, development and provision of learning support system for distance students is based on the foundation and theories of distance education, i.e., theories of autonomous and independent study, theories of interaction and communication, and the theory of industrialization (Sewart, Keegan & Holmberg, 1988). These three classical theories of distance education have been widely referred to during the past few decades, and until today they remain relevant as underlying principles of distance education practice, and these have been further supported and strengthened by more recent theories (Anderson, Garrison, Gibson, and Sammons, as cited in TOJDE,2007).

Theories of autonomy and independence lay the basic foundation of distance education practice. Independent study is an effort to organize instruction so that greater freedom in learning is possible for learners. It enables learners to carry out learning tasks and responsibilities on their own pacing and patterns, provide learners with opportunities to continue learning in their own environments and develop learners the capacity to carry on self-directed learning. Independent learning and teaching can be considered as an educational system in which the learner is autonomous and separated from the teacher by space and time so that communication is mediated (Moore, 1973). In distance education, learner and teacher are connected by a variety of communication techniques through media. Distance is defined as —a function of individualization and dialogue, rather than measured in terms of physical proximity. Distance education comprises the elements of learner independence, interaction between learner and instructor, and certain characteristics of course design (Moore, as cited in Holmberg, 1967). More recent works on self-directed learning and on learners and learning also support these theories. From the theories of interaction and communication, distance education is viewed as a natural means of instruction, involving two-way communication between the teacher and the student, if they are at a distance from each other (Holmberg, 1989).

Moore (in Rosenblatt, 1999) classified distance education programs as autonomous (learner-centered) or non-autonomous (teacher-determined) according to the following criteria: autonomy in setting the objectives; autonomy in methods of study; autonomy in evaluation.

Some suggest that distance education does not perhaps need teachers at all. Carried to the ultimate, student autonomy would entail the end of teaching in distance education. For students with complete responsibility for their course, there is no need for teachers beyond preparation of study material. However, most scholars and practitioners believe that teachers have a firm and central role in distance education, and particularly in the framework of fully fledged distance teaching universities. Evidently, Tutors in distance teaching universities need a variety of talents and abilities.

Daniel & Marquis (1979 as cited in TOJDE2007) draw attention to keep the balance between interaction and independence in distance learning, believing that all learning involves interaction, that is, activities where the student is in two-way contact with another person involving reactions and responses which are specific to the two party's requests. Interaction includes activities such as counseling, tutoring and contacting students; teaching over interactive telecommunication; bringing students together into discussion groups; and engaging in residential gatherings. Independence comprises activities such as studying written material; watching or listening to broadcasts; writing essays and assignments; working alone on a computer; writing essays and assignments; and conducting experiments, surveys and project work at home. More recent works on modes of interaction, on teaching and learning also support these theories.

Distance education includes both real and mediated communication processes, and the purpose of the two-way communication is to motivate and facilitate students in learning and to provide feedback (Holmberg, 1981). Education is based on communication between teacher and student, and on peer group interaction, and as a method of guided didactic conversation, distance education aims at learning and the conversation facilitates learning.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Distance Education

The contribution of distance education as catalyst for social, economic and sustainable development has been undoubted in response to the need for the development of high caliber human resources. Distance education has been the appropriate answer to this challenge due to its flexibility, its capability to accommodate learners unable to attend the traditional form of education, and its ability to provide quality education for a large number of students.

Distance education is said to be an excellent mode of learning which is able to meet the education needs of all students, regardless of location, class or gender, specifically for those

students unable to attend traditional face to face classes (Kanwar and Taplin). Distance education can offer a wide variety of formal and non-formal courses and programs of study utilizing print, radio, television, audio and video cassettes, CDs and Internet-based technologies (Kanwar and Taplin, 2001; Spronk, 2001; Usman, 2001; Bates, 2005; Pena-Bandalaria, 2007).

Receiving distance education provides numerous advantages to education seekers who are restricted by time, resources or transportation but can still advance their career through education.

- ❖ Increasing student access by making courses available at convenient locations.
- ❖ Increasing student access by reducing time constraints for course taking.
- ❖ Making educational opportunities more affordable for students, another aspect of student access was a very important goal of their distance education program.
- ❖ Increasing the institution's access to education and training for employees.
- ❖ Reducing costs of education and training.

In addition to the constraints of geographical location, limited available time and financial resources, women in developing countries face additional obstacles to furthering their education that their male counterparts do not. Misogyny is a term used to describe a group, most often men, who display negative, demeaning and oppressive behaviors towards women (Stalker, 2001). Many women in developing countries who do endeavor to further their learning are faced with misogynistic responses from both male relatives and their society, which makes their pursuit of learning extremely difficult.

Distance education students encounter problems and live with all sorts of anxieties. Very few of them can study effectively on their own. Distance education, therefore, needs qualified personnel to counsel. They need the chance to discuss what they don't understand and often what they think they do understand with people who know about the subject. Such a help, whether it is face-to-face or at a distance, is the basis of tutoring and counseling services. They relate not only to academic problems but also to personal study difficulties; they also consist on encouragement and resource. They should begin before the student enrolls, continue throughout the course, and include assistance in finding ways to follow up and apply what have been learned.

Despite its advantages overweight the disadvantages, DE has the following critical problems: unaffordability of course materials, time constraints because of competing priorities, especially during examination period, late delivery of materials, long distance travel to study centers, failure to participate in compulsory practicum, lack of learner support, lack of learning resources in study centres, lack of quality tutors, tutoring being assimilated to traditional teaching, lack of interaction between learners and with tutors.

2.6. Distance Education in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, non-formal distance education is normally referred to as adult education because it caters mostly to the adult population. This form of education can be traced back to the early 20th century of Emperor Menelik and Zewditu's proclamations of "Let all learn." In 1944, Emperor Haile Selassie's Government instituted an education policy under the title Memorandum on Education Policy. This memorandum incorporated non-formal teaching methods complementing the formal school system (Caulk, 1975: 7). In 1955, on the Emperor's coronation, a national policy was initiated to provide free and compulsory education to enable illiterate adults aged 50 and above to become literate. The policy urged all organizations to promote the achievement of literacy and compelled teachers in traditional schools and the clergy to become involved in teaching adults. The then Ministry of Education and Fine Arts was given the responsibility of running literacy programs (SendekAlamachin, Hidar 6, 1948 E.C.). A National Literacy Council was officially established to coordinate literacy programs and the adult literacy project being implemented by UNESCO/UNDP. In 1957, a Ministry of Community Development was established to promote socio-economic development.

To support this objective the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with USAID and UNESCO, instituted special teacher education centers at Debre Birhan and Majete to train teachers for elementary and adult education. At the grassroots level, community development agents were charged with the task of promoting development programs in literacy and numeracy. The program was to be implemented by a team of five men and two women for each woreda (district). Trained village level workers from the Awassa Community Development Centre were assigned to some 20,000 peasants per Development District.

Self-help projects and youth clubs were encouraged at NFE units known as Community Development Centres. Thus, the idea of community schools for basic education and rural

development contributed to a nationwide strategy designed to reach the rural people through non-formal arrangements. Community development programs sponsored by these centers addressed issues pertaining to health and sanitation, agricultural extension, food and nutrition, cooking, sewing and handicraft, the cottage industry, and vegetable growing. The Ethiopian Women Welfare Association (EWWA), established in 1941, also participated in NFE efforts by providing literacy and skill training programs in handicrafts for low-income women. Despite EWWA's efforts to extend such services to women in the outer districts, the largest participation of women remained mostly in Addis Ababa and other larger cities in Ethiopia.

Distance education in Ethiopia is a recent phenomenon. It is started with emergence of private colleges and universities in the country. So far it is provided at higher education level including diploma and degree. There is also the beginning at masters level. In fact, most of the masters level programs are given in cooperation with foreign institutions. Some examples in this respect include the cooperation between St. Merry University College and Indra Gandhi Open University and Addis Ababa Commercial College and UK Open University. University of South Africa (UNISA) has also opened a distance education campus in Addis Ababa and started offering programs at second-degree level. It is expected that the demand for distance education in the country continues to increase for the coming ten years. The basic reasons for the demand to increase are the following, among others:

- ❖ The continued need in business, agriculture and industry for specialization and specialized skills.
- ❖ The competitiveness of the labor market.
- ❖ The introduction of distance education by government institutions.
- ❖ Expansion of private colleges and universities that offer distance education.
- ❖ The increasing need for working people to acquire education and training in a flexible learning environment.
- ❖ The cost-effectiveness of the education system for students.
- ❖ Advances in ICT technology that simplifies the learning and teaching process on a distance basis.
- ❖ The envisaged high economic growth of the country.

To the contrary, all the stakeholders need to revisit critically not only the production of the degrees or certificates but the process, how the DE goes on should be questioned. For example, most educators agree that the power of computers and the internet in the current

century enables all learners to study at their home without having to attend a regular face-to-face course or school. This might be an argument in Ethiopia as well.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve the intended purpose and to answer the basic questions of the study, a descriptive research design was employed. A mixed approach (quantitative and qualitative approach) was used to collect the relevant data. A descriptive research design had been adopted because it was believed that such approach is appropriate to look into what really occurring for the challenges and opportunities of women language teachers undertaking DE. In relation to this, Neuman (2007:16) confirms, descriptive research presents a picture of the specific details of a situation, social setting, or relationship; it focuses on *‘how what ‘and ‘who? ‘questions: Who is involved?’* Other scholars, Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010), also support this in that descriptive research aims to describe behaviors and to gather people’s perceptions, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs about a current issue in education. In this study, thus, an attempt was made to look at the investigation of the challenges and opportunities of women language teachers engaged in DE.

Research setting and Subjects

Jimma and Bahirdar Universities were selected as the setting of the research. The two universities (Jimma and Bahirdar) are among the five public universities which were recognized for their effective facilitation of the DE. The researchers were more convinced in the setting that most of the centers somehow distant from the center and it exactly addresses the target of DE in teaching the marginalized. To this end, the researchers took more time before the selection of the distance centers from both universities.

It is agreed that the two universities are mainly selected due to the following issues. Firstly, both of them have a long and thick experience in facilitating the continuing and distance education. The another assumption is that both of the universities are known for their experienced teachers in different field of studies. They are not only built with experienced instructors, but they are also equipped with effective teaching facilities like libraries, books and online books when compared to other universities. Jimma University has nine distance centers, whereas Bahirdar University gives service in seven distance centers.

With regarding the research subjects, three groups of the informants were included. The first one was Female Language Students (FLSs), the second one was distance center coordinators and the last one was language teachers or tutors. Female language students are the students from one of the three (English, Afan Oromo and Amharic) language students. And language teachers are those assigned tutors or teachers to teach tutorial classes, whereas distance center coordinators are individuals who have a recent information and who closely supervise students of DE. In all cases, the participants were communicated during the exam schedule at the centers.

Sampling Technique

The Female language students' respondents were selected by simple random method. Simple random sampling method was chosen because it is the simplest sampling techniques that require less time and cost, guarantees that the sample chosen is representative of the population and allows participants to have equal chance of being included in the sample. Tutors respondents, on the other hand, were purposefully selected on the criteria of being delivering tutorial and preparation of teaching materials (module), whereas availability sampling was used to incorporate the coordinators in the study.

The reason that the coordinators and tutor respondents were selected as the target of the study is that it is believed that they have a capacity to provide evaluative information about the challenges facing students in general and female language students in particular. The tutors provided tangible information about the female language students with regarding the opportunities they are given in the teaching material and any difficulties encountering in the teaching-learning process. In addition to the tutors, the coordinators were given credible information in relation to the challenges encounter female language students. There might be complaints provided to the coordinators by the DE students in general and female language students in particular.

Data Gathering Tools

To gather the data necessary for the study, three different instruments were employed. These were FGD, questionnaire, and document analysis (modules and other teaching and learning materials offered to female language students). There was the assumption of the researchers that an FGD would help to elicit different information from female language students about the challenges and opportunities of DE. In addition, questionnaire was administered to female

language students, keeping notes, assessing different documents prepared for teaching language teachers.

Focus Group Discussion

The researchers employed an FGD with female language students for various reasons. An FGD is a qualitative data collection technique that provides a forum for a group of people of similar characteristics to discuss issues of importance to their group or community. Since the questionnaire was distributed to the female language students via simple random sampling, 12 female language students were involved in FGD. Four female language students from three distance center participated in the FGD. The discussion in one center took an average of 50 minutes. The aim is to gather general perceptions rather than individual experiences “participants should not be asked to narrate personal experiences” The essentiality of using FGD would be mainly to get; specific issues or topics (resist the need to cover all topics), group dynamics should be observed and recorded and agreements or disagreements may occur. Moreover, large amount of information is gathered from many people in a short time – appropriate handling of data is critical. The data collected by FGD was prescribed and translated by English language, and the respondent's name was used anonymously as it can be seen on page (39-45) below.

Questionnaire

In order to get information on the challenges and opportunities of distance education on female language students, both closed and open-ended questions were initially designed based on the conceptual framework of the study. To cover larger data source questionnaires were developed for tutors and students. For both groups, items were constructed for the variables and presented on a five-point scale and open-ended forms. The preparation and construction of items were done by reviewing the literature on concepts of student support service in general and tutorial services in particular. The researchers developed all items with a five point Likert scale forms together with some open-ended items. Items were constructed in English language for both tutors and students.

For the study, questionnaires were distributed to (125) female language students in the five centers. The purpose of the questionnaires is to gather the responses of these subjects regarding the challenges and opportunities occurring to female language students.

The questionnaires basically cover background of the respondents, activities concerned DE, tutors and center coordinators, respondents perceptions on the overall aspect of DE. The first part of the questionnaires for female language students sought information on the respondent's personal data, such as sex, their batch (1st, 2nd and so on), years of experience in teaching, and the like. The respondents were asked to fill in the required information or to tick in then appropriate boxes. The second part of the questionnaires asked the benefits of DE for female language students, and the third part was the challenges of DE on Female language students. Measured frequency rating scales: Always, Sometimes, Undecided, Rarely and Never were used to identify the extent to which female language students are benefited from DE.

Document Analysis

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that documents are readily available and stable sources of data. Bearing this in mind, the researchers reviewed some documents like modules and other teaching materials prepared by the universities. This enabled the researchers to get the information how much DE is backed up by materials in general and to which extent female language students are advantageous from DE in particular. On top of reviewing the universities document, some materials like policies and syllabuses were visited in connected with DE. This was particularly useful because it gave the researchers the opportunity to compare what is mentioned about DE and what is being practiced in the universities. On the other hand, the researchers believe that note keeping during the visit of each distance center. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2001), and McKay (2006) recommend that field notes are essential for descriptive studies because they provide a recording of what the researcher/s has/have seen and heard. Regarding reflective field notes, Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) also suggest that reflective field notes include descriptions of the observer's feelings and thoughts about what is being observed. Such notes allow researchers to reflect on their own feelings, values, and thoughts in order to increase their awareness of how these might be influencing their observations. In order to achieve the overall data collecting through document analysis, the checklist was prepared.

Data Analysis

Before commencing the data analysis the questionnaires were checked for response accuracy. To assess the challenges and opportunities of DE on women language teachers, both

quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques will be carried out in the study. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations will be employed to analyze the data. Finally, the results shall be interpreted and discussed in relation to the research questions and relevant literature. In order to interpret data obtained through questionnaires, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviations) will be applied, and to make the interpretations more dependable, a one-sample t-test will be employed by taking 2 (neutral) as a test value using SPSS for Windows 20. Data analysis and discussions shall be made by correlating, consolidating and computing quantitative and qualitative data as Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006) suggest in interpreting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data within a mixed approach.

Ethical considerations

The current researchers have designed appropriate ways of ethical consideration so that many people are willing to disclose a lot of personal information during our research so we confirmed that we treat all the participants and the information they provide with honesty and respect. Thus, the participants were provided with written consent (informed consent) in the introduction part of the questionnaires and given the opportunity to determine their confidentiality or anonymity. Informal ethical issues are those that emerged in the field. The researchers considered and respected informant requests; informants were informed that they would remain anonymous throughout the study.

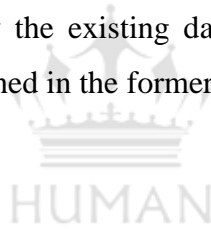
Data Collection Procedure

Prior to collecting the data, the researchers did the following major activities. Firstly, they visited Jimma's and Bahirdar's Universities DE main office so as to get general information about the sites and the respondents. Then, the selection of five centers was made based on convincing reasons. Next, the selected distance centers were visited by the researchers and official letters were submitted as well. During the visit, they were acquainting themselves with the distance coordinating centers and prospective research participants and familiarize with the environment.

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS OF THE DATA

Introduction

In this chapter, the various data collected for the study are presented, analyzed, and interpreted according to the nature of their collection. The first set of data to be dealt with is the FGD conducted with the 24 teachers (12 from JU and 12 from BDU) under study. It was planned to engage more number of discussants; however, the majorities of the students became reluctant. Of course, they were willing to participate in the questionnaire. The FGD was conducted intentionally before the distribution of questionnaires to the respondents. The second set of data, the questionnaire, is presented and analyzed to see the challenges and practices of distance education on female language students. This part contains the respondents' personal profile, the benefits the language females students obtain from DE, the challenges of DE from the perspectives of module, instructors and DE coordinators (institution). The third section, which attempts to crosscheck the data obtained through FGD and questionnaire was the document analysis. It is believed that reviewing the available document would strengthen not only the existing data, but it also help to triangulate the information obtained which was obtained in the former with the later one.



Socio- Demographic Characteristics of Female Students

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Selected Universities	JU	62	61.4
	BDU	38	37.6
	Total	100	100.0
Major Field of Study	English	26	25.7
	Afan Oromo	42	41.6
	Amharic	32	31.7
	Total	100	100.0
Working Experience	6-10	20	19.8
	11-15	38	37.6
	16-20	29	28.7
	>20	13	12.9
	Total	100	100.0
Batches /Year	1st year	29	28.7
	2nd year	11	10.9
	3rd year	46	45.5
	4th year	14	13.9
	Total	100	100.0
	DE Importance	very important	80
Important		7	6.9
less important		1	1.0
not very important		12	11.9
Total		100	100.0

The above Table 1 contains five different variables and categories. Every one of them explicitly explained based on the data collected. Thus, the first variable shows the frequency of the two universities (BDU& JU) involvement in the research. Accordingly, 62 (61.4%) respondents were engaged from various centers of Jimma University. On the other hand, 38 (37.6%) of the respondents were from Bahirdar University. Although the researchers attempted to use equal number of participants from the two universities, this was impossible

due to convincing reasons. Firstly, the number of the centers in BDU is less than that of JU. This could have its own implication on the number of students as well. Secondly, for the sake of administering the questionnaire, JU was little bit convenient when compared to BDU. In fact, researchers were JU's employee so that the supervision at JU was easier than BDU. Generally, 62 participants from JU and 38 participants from BDU attending in different centers and having different major of studies and batches/years engaged in the study with total number of 100 female language DE students. The second variable elicits information of female language studies major fields of study. The majority of the participant's major field of study 42 (41.6%) were Afan Oromo, whereas Amharic was the second major field 32 (31.7%). English was the last in attracting the students as a major field of study in which 26 (25.7%) of the students studied English language as their major field of study. From this, one can easily deduce that the distribution of language studies in connection with Ethiopia Education Policy that the regions encourages their students to upgrade their study in the local language. From the 3rd variable, it is seen that the larger percentage of the respondents serve between 11-15(37.6%) and 16-20 (28.7%) while the lowest percentage of service year is greater than 20 years in which only 13 (12.8%) of them serve for more than 20 years. From this data, the majority of the females serve between 11 and 20 years. This means DE give them an opportunity to proceed to their education after such huge year of service. The next data shows the female students batch or year of study in the institution; for this, there are four batches from 1st year to the 4th year. Accordingly, 46 (45.5%) of the respondents are the 3rd year of DE female students. The 1st year students are the second larger batch 29(28.7%). To the contrary, the respondents from the 2nd batch and 4th batch are lower when compared to the other batches. The last category of the above table wanted to collect the importance of DE for the females; however, it seems unquestionable. The researchers intentionally designed this type of question since it has different implications for the teaching learning and material preparation and even on the quality of education. As a result, the majority of the respondents 87 (86.1%) replied that DE is important for female language learners. In contradiction 12 (11.9%) of the female language, students replied DE is not important. This data is checked with for its reliability with other tools later that there are a lot of arguments on the quality of education. In fact, the majority of educators hardly deny the importance of DE in general, but there are irregularities and doubts with the DE of Ethiopia from the view of current researchers.

RESULTS FROM QUESTIONNAIRE

Table 2: Benefits of DE for Female Language Students

Key: 0(never); 1(rarely); 2(undecided); 3(sometimes); 4(always)

	Items	Response	Fr	%	Mean	St. Dev
1	How often you gain from DE to fulfill your house responsibilities?	never	6	5.9	3.0400	1.04369
		rarely	1	1.0		
		undecided	13	12.9		
		sometimes	43	42.6		
		always	37	36.6		
2	Do DE help you to generate income and upgrade your education?	undecided	5	5.0	3.5300	.59382
		sometimes	37	36.6		
		always	58	57.4		
3	How frequently DE help you to think critically?	rarely	7	6.9	3.3800	.72167
		undecided	55	54.5		
		sometimes	31	30.7		
		always	7	6.9		
4	Do you think DE helps you in changing your social and economic issues?	undecided	12	11.9	3.3200	.67987
		sometimes	44	43.6		
		always	44	43.6		
5	How often DE helps you to acquire better communication skills?	undecided	9	8.9	3.5700	.65528
		sometimes	25	24.8		
		always	66	65.3		
6	To what extent you are advantageous from DE in terms of geographic proximity and limited resource?	undecided	7	6.9	3.6500	.60927
		sometimes	21	20.8		
		always	72	71.3		
7	My families usually send males to school than females	undecided	12	11.9	3.4500	.70173
		sometimes	31	30.7		
		always	57	56.4		
8	How often you built your confidence because you have learned in DE	undecided	7	6.9	3.3300	.60394
		sometimes	53	52.5		
		always	40	39.6		
9	How often have you saved your time by attending	rarely	7	6.9	3.2700	.85108

	DE?	undecided sometimes always	5 5.0 42 41.6 46 45.5		
10	Do you attend in DE to get your degree satisfaction?	undecided sometimes always	12 11.9 54 53.5 34 33.7	3.2200	.64479
11	Because of the access of DE, I can easily learn and raise my children	undecided sometimes always	5 5.0 48 47.5 47 46.5	3.4200	.58913
12	Because of DE, my job improves	undecided sometimes always	21 20.8 32 31.7 47 46.5	3.2600	.78650
13	My knowledge and skills improve after attending in DE.	undecided sometimes always	5 5.0 35 34.7 60 59.4	3.5500	.59246
14	Distance students can save costs because they do not have to travel to campus	sometimes always	68 67.3 32 31.7	3.3200	.46883
15	More female students need to be trained to increase gender parity in enrolment levels.	sometimes always	42 41.6 58 57.4	3.5800	.49604
16	DE contributes to a more equitable representation of females	undecided sometimes always	9 8.9 21 20.8 70 69.3	3.6100	.64971
17	females are financially and emotional dependent on male family members	undecided sometimes always	9 8.9 53 52.5 38 37.6	3.2900	.62434
18	DE motivates females to compete with males in education	undecided sometimes always	7 6.9 61 60.4 32 31.7	3.2500	.57516

From the Table 2 above, we mainly perceive that the data depicts the benefits of DE for the female language students. There are about 18 statements which are explaining directly or indirectly whether the DE is benefiting the female language students. As it is seen from the table, Q1 was designed to gather the information how often the female language students

fulfill their house responsibilities. For this their reply was: 43 (42.6%) sometimes; 37 (36.6%) always; 13 (12.9%) undecided; 7 (6%) never. The majority of the respondents replied that DE sometimes helps them to gain in fulfilling their responsibilities. Q2, 58 (57.4%) always; 37 (36.6%) sometimes; 5 (5%) undecided. Most of the respondents answered that DE always helps them in generating income. For Q3, 55 (54.5%) undecided; (30.7%) sometimes; equal percentage (6.9%) replied rarely & always. The majority of the respondents were unable to decide how frequently DE promotes their critical thinking. Q4 wanted to elicit how often the DE changes their social and economic issues. Thus, the majority of the respondents (43.6%) replied that DE sometimes change their economy and social issues, whereas (11.9%) undecided how frequently DE changes their social and economic cases. Q5, (65.3%) always; (24.8%) sometimes; (6.9%) undecided. From this result, we can understand that DE always helps the female language students to acquire better communication skills. Q6, (71.3%) always; (20.8%) sometimes, and (6.9%) undecided. So, the majority of the females always advantageous from DE due to lack of the nearby schools. Q8, (52.5%) sometimes; (39.6%) always; (6.9%) rarely. Q9 was designed to ask how often the females save their time because of learning in DE. Thus, (45.5%) replied they always save their time, to the contrary (5%) of the female language teachers replied that they were unable to make their decision. Q10, (53.5%) sometimes; (33.7%) always, and (11.9%) rarely. Q11, the majority of the respondents almost same (47.5%) & (46.5%) respectively replied sometimes and always. Q12, (46.5%) always; (31.5%) sometimes, and (20.8%) never. Q13, (59.4%) always; (34.7%) sometimes ;(5.0%) never. Q14 wanted to know how frequently the female students DE saves their cost. As a result, the majority of the respondents (67.3%) replied that they sometimes saved their cost. Q15, (57.4%) always, and (42.6%) sometimes. Q16, (69.3%) always; (20.8%) sometimes, and (8.9%) undecided. Q17, (52.5%) sometimes, (37.6%) always, (8.9%) never. The last item of Table 2 was designed how often DE motivates female language students to compete with their counter males. For this, (60.4%) of the respondents replied DE sometimes motivates them to compete with males, whereas (31.7%) of them said DE always help them to compete with males. On the other hand, 7 (6.9%) of the respondents answered that they were unable to decide how often DE motivates them to compete with males.

Table 3: Module/Course Related Challenges

Key: 1(no); 2(yes)

	Items	yes		No	
		Fre	%	Fre	%
19	Are the modules clear and attractive?	42	41.6	58	57.4
20	Are the objectives of the courses clear?	38	38.6	62	61.4
21	Are the reading sections are useful to females?	43	42.6	57	57.4
22	Do the overall contents interesting to females?	25		75	74.3
23	Are the speaking and listening skills are useful to females?	34	33.7	66	65.3
24	Are the modules distributed on time?	20	19.8	80	79.2
25	Are the assignments logical and relevant?	25		75	

The above Table 3 tries to show the challenges that the female language students face from the module of DE. This data is also supported by the data collected through document analysis. Accordingly, for Q19, 58 (57.4%) of the respondents replied modules are neither clear nor attractive, whereas 42 (41.6%) of the respondents replied positively. For Q20, the majority of the respondents 62 (61.4%) answered the modules' objectives are unclear, to the contrary 38.6% of the respondents replied the objectives of the courses are clear. Question 21 focus on the reading section where 57 (57.4%) of them replied the reading sections are not useful for females, but 43 (42.6%) of them replied that it was useful to them. Question 22 wanted to elicit had the contents of the courses interesting for the females. For this, the majority of the respondents replied that the courses are not interesting, whereas only 25 (24.7%) answered that the courses are interesting to them. For Q23, 66(65.3%) no, 34(33.7%) yes; Q24, 80 (79.2) no, 20(19.8) yes. Q25 was designed to know if the assignments in the module are relevant and logical. Most of the respondents 75(74.3) replied the assignments are not logical and relevant, whereas 25 of the respondents said the assignments are logical and relevant to them.

Table 4: Instructors/ Institution Related Issues

Key: 0 (Strongly Disagree); 1 (Disagree); 2(Undecided); 3 (Agree); 4 (strongly Agree)

	Items	Response	Fr	%
26	Some of the course instructors give less support	DA	12	11.9
		Undecided	14	13.9
		Ag	31	30.7
27	Instructors give insufficient tutorials	DA	7	6.9
		Undecided	8	7.9
		Ag	57	56.4
28	Feedback provided by instructors were less	DA	14	13.9
		Undecided	8	7.9
		Ag	29	28.7
		SA	49	48.5
29	DE coordinators have less concern for the program	DA	7	6.9
		Undecided	8	7.9
		Ag	49	48.5
		SA	36	35.6
30	The institution by itself is less organized	DA	5	5.0
		Undecided	5	5.0
		Ag	63	62.4
		SA	27	26.7
31	The knowledge and capacity of the instructors is under question	DA	49	48.5
		Undecided	29	28.5
		Ag	22	21.8
32	DE program works for the benefit of the students	Ag	61	60.4
		SA	39	38.6

As it can be seen from Table 4, there are 7 statements prepared to elicit information from the instructors or institutions related challenges of DE. Accordingly, Q26, 43 (42.6%) strongly agree; 31 (30.7%) Agree; 14 (13.9%) undecided, and 12 (11.9%) Disagree. Q27, (56.4%) Agree; (27.7%) Strongly Agree; (7.9%) undecided, and (6.9%) Disagree. Q28, (48.5%) Strongly Agree; (28.7%) agree; (13.9%) Disagree, (7.9%) undecided. Item 29 was designed to gather information on the concern of coordinators to DE. Thus, (48.5%) agreed that

coordinators are less concerned for DE program. Again, (35.6%) of the female language students strongly agreed that coordinators have less concern for the DE program, whereas 8 (7.9%) of them were unable to decide the concern of the coordinators. Q30, 63 (62.4%) agree; 27 (26.7%) Strongly Agree, 5 (5.0%) disagree. Q31, (48.5%) Disagree; (28.5%) undecided, and (21.8%) Agree. Q32, (60.4%) Agree and (38.6%) Strongly agree.

Table 5: Female Students Related Attitude for DE

Key: 0 (Strongly Disagree); 1 (Disagree); 2 (Undecided); 3 (Agree); 4 (strongly Agree)

	Items	Response	Fr	%
33	I am ready and capable to attend DE	DA	7	6.9
		Ag	49	48.5
		SA	44	43.6
34	Because I could not get the other opportunity, I should learn in DE	Ag	61	60.4
		SA	39	38.6
35	I am interested the grading system of DE than the regular	SDA	49	48.5
		DA	44	43.6
		Ag	7	6.9
36	I can easily handle the learning in DE with house management	DA	46	45.5
		SA	42	41.6
		Ag	5	5.0
37	I focus and attend tutorial classes	DA	22	21.8
		Ag	58	57.1
		SA	20	19.1
38	I could understand the contents in the module and attempt the assignments	DA	15	14.8
		Ag	49	48.5
		SA	36	35.6
39	I believe DE is more important for me than males	DA	7	6.9
		Undecided	8	7.9
		Ag	49	48.5
		SA	36	35.6

Table 5 presents the FLS related attitude of DE. Item 33 wanted to know the capability and readiness of female language students on DE. The majority of the respondents 49 (48.5%) agreed that they were ready and able to attend, whereas 7 (6.9%) of them disagree they were neither get ready nor capable to attend. Q34, 61 (60%) Agree and 39 (38.6%) Strongly agree. Q35, (48.5%) strongly disagree; (43.6%) Disagree, and (6.9%) Agree. Q36, (45.5%) Disagree; (41.6%) Strongly Agree, whereas (5.0%) Agree. Q37, 58 (57.1%) Agree; 22 (21.8%) Disagree, and 20 (19.1%) Strongly Agree. Q38, 49 (48.5%) Agree; 36 (35.6%) Strongly Agree, and 15 (14.8%) Disagree. Q39 was designed to gather the attitude female language students on the importance of DE to females than males. The result showed (48.5%) of the respondents agree DE is important for females than males, whereas (6.9%) of them replied disagree on the importance of DE when compared to males.

Results from FGD

FGD Facilitator: I thank all of you very much err..for volunteering for this FGD err.. first, I'd like you to tell me your experience of learning language and your understanding of DE in relation to female language students. I do not like to interfere while you begin the discussions unless there is a big deal. So, all of you feel free and discuss on each question openly. Generally, here are the questions that you can start based on their sequence.

A. Benefits you gain from DE as Female Language Students (FLS)

- *Increase life confidence*
- *Obtain degree*
- *Respect from community*
- *Improves economy and lifestyle*
- *Facilitates home responsibility*

B. Challenges of DE on Female Language Students (FLS)

B1. Course/ Module Related challenges

B2. Instructors' Related challenges

B3. Assignments and grades Challenges

B4. Coordinators' Related Challenges

B5. Any challenges from Female Language students

FGD₁: I also thank you very much for giving us this opportunity to discuss the issues of the DE. Emmmm.... I think your work might help to solve some of the problems on DE. To begin with question number A, I can say emm...I get a lot of advantages. As you can see I am old kkkkkk laughing... I mean I cannot go to university but now I learn because of this program.

FGD₂: Yes. As my friend said DE helps us to gain knowledge, to get certificate. You see now I am going to graduate with first degree in the near future.

FGD Facilitator: Oh... an excellent discussion, anyone to add....

FGD₃: As my sisters already say I agree that DE is....many things for us. I mean for females. You know in Ethiopia females had less opportunity to get education. Thanks to the DE program emmm..... by now we get the chance which is advantageous.

FGD₁₈: በዘህየር ቀትትም ህርት ተጠቃሚ በመሆኔ በጣም ደስተኛ ነኝ።
እኔ እወጥቼ ነገር ከፍተኛ የመማሪያ ላይ እንደሌሎች ወደት ዳር ዓለም በመግባት ከሚወደው ትምህርት እስከ መጨረሻ የተቋራረጥ ኩመስሎኝ ነበር።
ነገር ግን ይህ የርቀት ትምህርት በማግኘት ያለምንም ችግር ልጆቼንም እያሰደኩትም ህረቴንም እየተማርኩ እገኛለሁ።
እግዚሐቤርካለከሁለት ዓመት በኋላ አጠናቅቋለሁ። (ሳቅ) ቂ ቂ ቂ.....

“I am very happy to get the opportunity of DE. Had not I got the opportunity of DE, it would have been impossible for me proceed to my education simultaneously with marriage. Now, thanks to the opening of the program I am attending my education and raising my children as well. I hope I can graduate soon after 2 years. (Laugh)”

FGD₄: This student strongly emphasized that DE solves their problem of time. Previously, they have scarcity of time to get school since they are overburden by many jobs at home. For instance, feeding the child, cooking, washing clothes and many other tasks are on the women’s shoulder. As she said DE helps them to work simultaneously with other activities in their home.

FGD Facilitator: Fantastic! FGD₅, anything to say?

FGD₅: As my sisters repeatedly explained DE have many advantages. Ah..... the first is marriage. After you married, it would be very difficult to attend the regular classes.

FGD₁: My sisters have said a lot about the advantages of DE. For example, DE helped us to work actively with active students. It helps us to share knowledge and experience on the lesson. It is known that some students are very fastest learners, whereas some are slow, so the DE gave us an opportunity to learn from each other. As we all know the culture of Ethiopia was not conducive for female students to learn, instead of females were encouraged to work in the house.

FGD Facilitator: I thank you **FGD₁**. Any more to say on the issue, please?

FGD₃: In DE we obtain different advantages when compared to regular students. For instance, we are not forced to attend the class all the time like regular students. Had we been forced to attend the class, it would have been impossible to learn again. There are various instructional assistances. For example, when we are given assignments we can consult various working mechanisms and work collaboratively. These activities are very less in the regular learning.

FGD₅: Distance Education gives for me freedom to work at my own pace and in my own separate ways. This means I have the opportunity to exercise choice between valid and significant options that affect their learning, in respect

FGD₇: I can study at my own pace, I can spend time over something that puzzles or intrigues me before I proceed. That's something I cannot do if the teacher controls the pace of my learning, and particularly if the teacher controls the pace of a class group who may not all be experiencing the same difficulties, or interests, as I am.

FGD Facilitator: Some more chance. Emm.... Yes **FGD₁₀**

FGD₁₀: In distance learning, I can arrange my week to suit my work and family commitments; I can schedule my studies at times that would be awkward or unsuitable for you as my teacher and for my fellow students. I can allow other commitments to delay my studies by a week or more, provided I make time thereafter to catch up on my studies before I encounter one of your fixed deadlines. I control pace to a great extent.

FGD Facilitator: I really thank all of you for making such hot and honest discussion for the **A part** (Benefits of DE) of discussion. I am sure you almost said and digested them, so let me politely request you to pass on **B part** (Challenges of DE on Female Language Students) discussion, please. Can we do that?

FGD 12: Possible.

FGD Facilitator: Thank you! So, one of you can start!

Emmmm.... FGD₇₁ Go head, please!

FGD 12: Although DE has different advantages for us, there are also many disadvantages we are facing from it as well. Firstly, we do not possess the module on time. The contents of the module are unclear and sometimes not understandable. Totally, most of the modules in the language areas lack quality.

FGD₃: There is a big problem of mis-communication. This inevitably suffers because most of our teachers do not live where we live. We are not accessible to video-conferencing; it is possible for groups to see each other and to speak to each other, on two or more sites. Through teleconferencing, many isolated students have been able to join in group work and in exchanges with a tutor that proves invaluable to them. So, I can say DE is very poor in terms of communication between learners and teachers.

FGD₉: One of the major problems I faced in DE is teachers' related. For example, some of the teachers who are assigned to give tutorials are less prepared. They do not use the time appropriately and wisely; they hardly give chances to ask them questions. Again, few of them seem under qualified.

FGD₃: Although we are freed to study at our own pace and time, at the end of the day our learning experience would vary from one student to the other. We do not have the same opportunity to be aware that the difficulties which she or he is encountering are shared by others, and are not merely an indication of personal incompetence.

FGD₆: Distance education courses should be carefully designed and developed before instruction begins. Errrr... Now, most of the courses are less in the quality of instruction and development. And again, there is a critical scarcity of resources. There are less adequate support systems in providing us resource materials.

FGD₁₁: The assessment system is really poor one. Assessment should be designed to relate to the specific learning outcomes of the instructional experiences. Another point, I need to add is the grading system. I am very sorry to say that the grading system of DE is not comfortable to me due to dozens of reasons. Firstly, we do not collect our grade on time; this has a

negative effect on our learning. There are times when we are asked to make the other examination because they recklessly avoid the results of exam. Lastly, most of the grades are not satisfactory and in most cases, I really doubt if it is our achievement.

FGD₁₅: AniyaadakiyyasirrittiibsachuufafaanOromootiinhaas'uunbarbaada. Naafeeyyamama?

FGD Facilitator: Continue, please!

FGD₁₅: Rakkoogurguddaabarumsifagoonkunqabukeessainniguddaantokkoakakkooti. Namootniyknbarattoonnibarumsa kana barataneenyu? Eessadhufan? Kanjedhuwalaaluutujiranattifakkaata. Baayyeenkeenyabakkafagoo material yknkitaabairrawaadubbifnuhinqabnu. Akkasumastekinooloojiittifayyadamuullehindandeenyu. Hedduunkeenyagarabaadiyyaarajiraanna. Rakkoobiraajedhekananiyaaduhaalabarsiisotaati. Barsiisonnitokkotokkobaayyenugargaaruyaalu; haata'umaleeheddunisaaninugargaaruuffedhiwaanqabanhinfakkaatan. Kanaafbarsiisotatuutoralaatsnirrattixiyyefannaankennamuqaba. Fixadhe, galatooma.

“According to my observation, the major problem of DE is that unable to understand the background of the students. The institution should realize where do we come from? where do live? And so on. You know that the majority of the students come from remote areas, and most of are inaccessible to technologies. The another problem we are facing from DE is the problems connected to teachers/tutors. I agree few tutors are willing to support; however some of them are not. So, the assignments of the teachers should be considered.”

FGD Facilitator: Excellent expression; anyone to add!

FGD₁₇: Akkumaammaobboleetiinkiyadubbatterakkoonnijira. Fakkeenyaaflakkoofsikeessanxiqqoodhajejuuntuutooriikennudiduu. Gaafiiyerooaddaaddaaitigaafatamtootabuufatayeroogaafanunujalacallisuu fi ittigaafatamummaabahuudhabu. Qormaatniqoramnuyerootokkotokkomoojulaarrakanhinbaane ta'u. Qaphxiikeenyaootoohinbeekinyeroohedduuturuuirrakanka'eabdiikannamakutachiisuta'u.

As clearly explained by my sister, DE has got problems to be solved as soon as possible. For example, as the number of students decrease we are not given tutors. Again, the coordinators at distance centers are reluctant to respond our questions and less responsible. Most of the

times the exams are not prepared from the module and it takes couples of semester without getting informed our grades.

FGD Facilitator: Wow! Thanks. Anyone to add, but don't repeat what your sisters have already said please.

FGD₁₂: You know that DE students encounter problems and live with all sorts of anxieties. Very few of us can study effectively. Distance educations, therefore, needs qualified personnel to counsel. I hope the coordinators assigned in the centers should play good role in this regard.

FGD₈: With regarding the courses taught, i.e. in DE I believe there should a kind of reconsideration. Emmmm... it is sometimes difficult to learn all courses via distance; this is because of the nature of the courses. For example, take language listening skills that we are advised to use laboratories.

FGD₁₇: በርግጥችግሮችየሉምአይባሉም። መንግስትእንዴመንግስትእኛምእንዴተማሪማስተካከልየለብንገሮችይኖራሉ። ለምሳሌየጊዜአጠቃቀምላይበጣምችግርአለ። ትምህርትበትከክልሳንማርጊዜስባከንእናያለን። የምዱሎችጥራትብታይናበደንብብዘጋጅእንድሁምተማሪዎችበትከክልየሚሰጣቸውንብተገብሩናየትምህርትንጥራትለማስጠበቅብሁኑ።

In fact, we do not deny that there are visible problems in connection with DE. Firstly, there is a gap in managing the time properly. Then, there is the quality problem on the materials we are given. The students are also less in achieving their part.

FGD₇: DE should revisit the relationship between learning teaching with that of degree or diploma collection. Now, there are many universities and colleges which are producing degree holders with their nomenclature. So, all the concerned bodies should critically discuss the quality of the lesson given by DE. No books, no modules, no adequate tutorials, no interested instructors, no, no,...(laugh)

FGD Facilitator: Wow, it is really an amazing discussion being underway. What about any problem you might add from your (students) point of view, please?

FGD Facilitator: Yes FGD₄!

FGD₄: For one thing we have educational background problem. The educational practices that we have in the high school should be stronger. We do not have up to dated and adequate

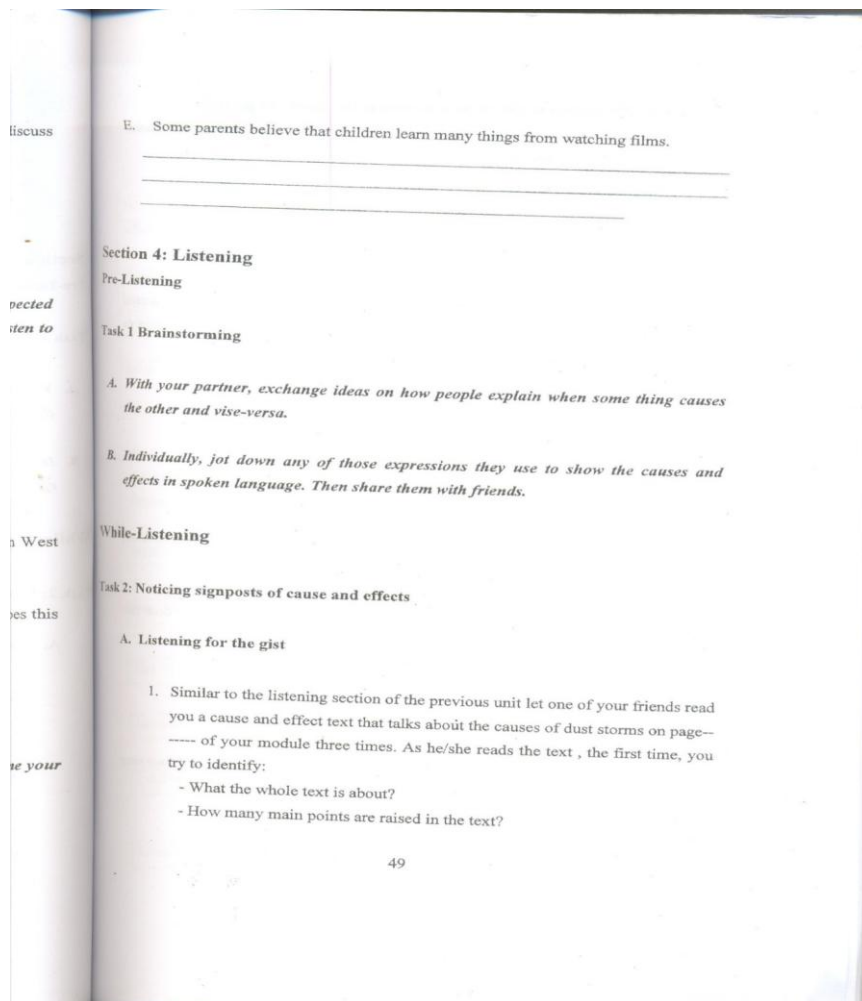
resources in our hands. Having less support and encouragement from home is one of my defects.

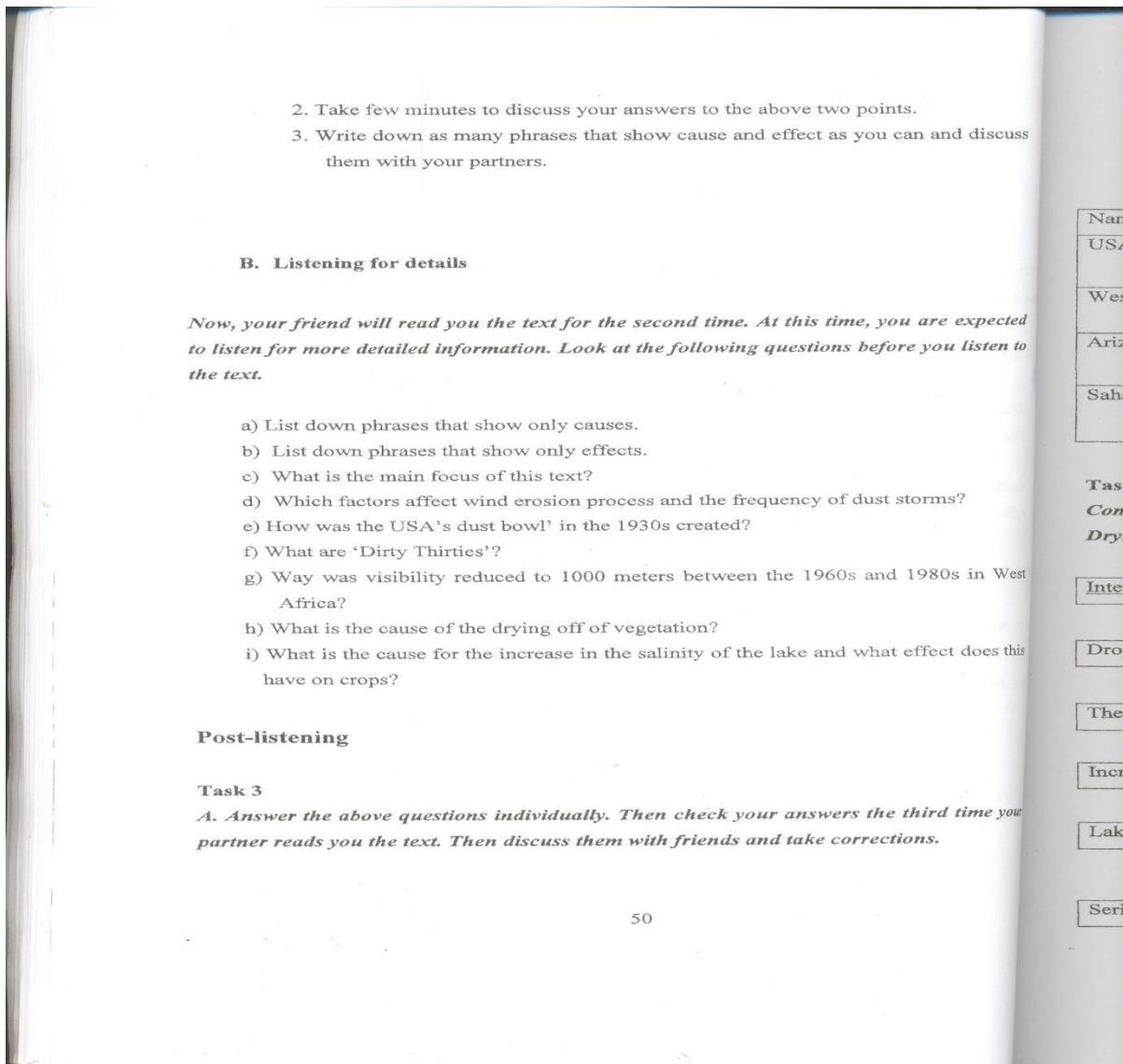
Results from Document Analysis

No	Statements	Clearly observed	Observed	Less observed	Not observed
1.	Instructor enthusiasm		X		
2.	Accessibility of teaching materials			X	
3.	Quality of the modules			X	
4.	Strong commitment to student interaction.			X	
5.	Familiarity with the technology				X
6.	Critical support personnel			X	
7.	Appropriate Scheduled Tutorial			X	
8.	Module distribution				X
9.	Standardized evaluation system			X	
10.	Efficient grading system			X	
11.	Suitability of the courses to DE			X	

The main target of the chart above was to triangulate the data collected by the other tools. While the researchers analyzed some of the modules, different chapters from different years of study were seen filled with many gaps. Despite its attraction to deal with, the researchers focused only on the few areas based on the checklist. Accordingly, let us see the module named “Communicative English Skills IIEEnLa 202” prepared for majoring English language students in 2009 in Jimma University. One of the failures with this material is the difficulty of preparing the lessons which are not advisable for distance. Here, the module contains the listening skill part; it would be ok to train the theoretical aspects of the listening skill. How dare to give practical exercises in the absence of teaching listening labs? When we look into page (49) of this module the students are given to read a material; surprisingly the readings’ text page is not known for the student (Cf. fig.1).This problem of this page again continues by repeating the same wrong exercise and page. So, it is not difficult to understand how much students are bored of such tasks, leave alone the wastage of time, resources and energy.

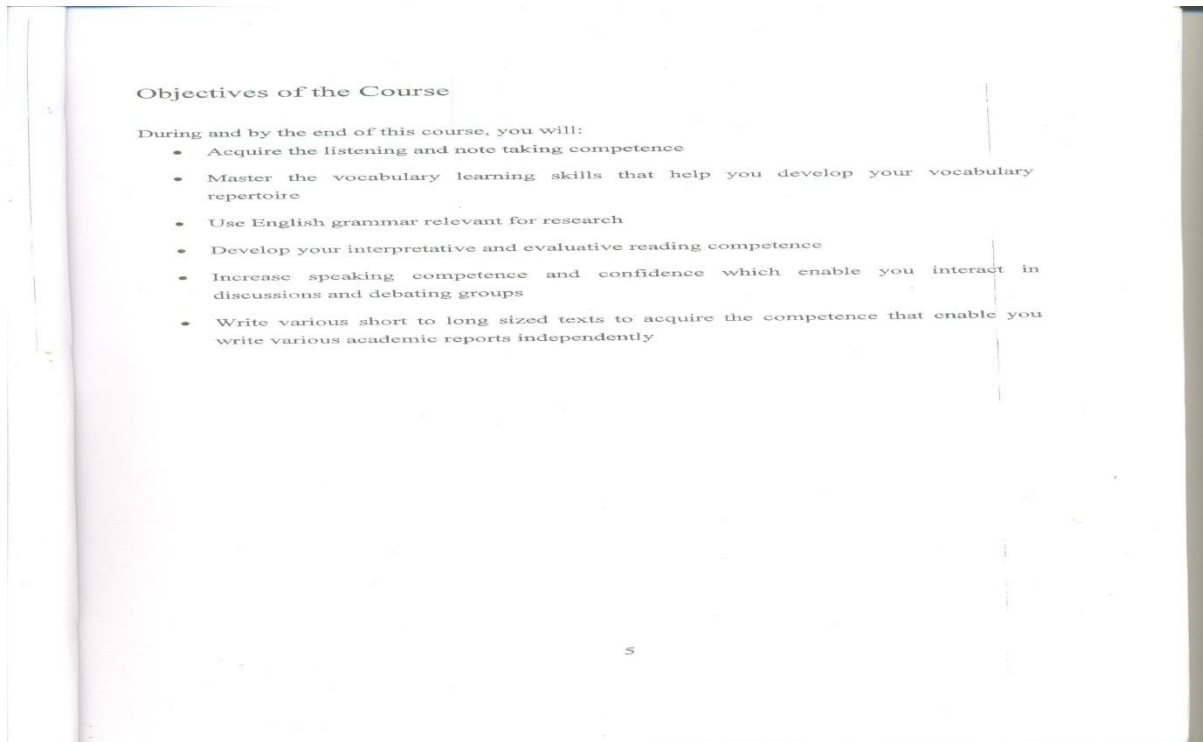
Fig. 1 Content Suitability





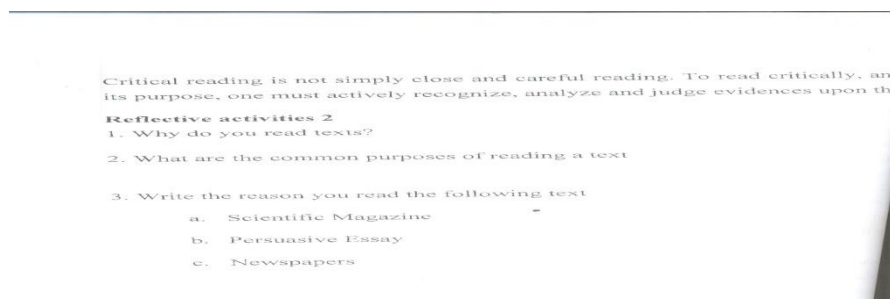
The general discussion for the course “EnLa 202”, as it can be seen from the objectives of the course on page 5; it seems student would obtain all the language skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) and language items (Vocabulary and grammar). But, the document analysis showed that the contents are neither sufficient nor competent to address all the objectives.

Fig 2: Ambiguous objectives



The other point of document analysis would take us to the course “**Critical Reading EnLa 401**” prepared for English language students. In this module, the concern of the document analysis was how much the contents of the courses are relevant to the title of the course, “critical” The main question raised during the document analysis in connected to relevance was that how critics are critics. As look into the contents of the module, the majority of the issues raised are theoretical perspectives.

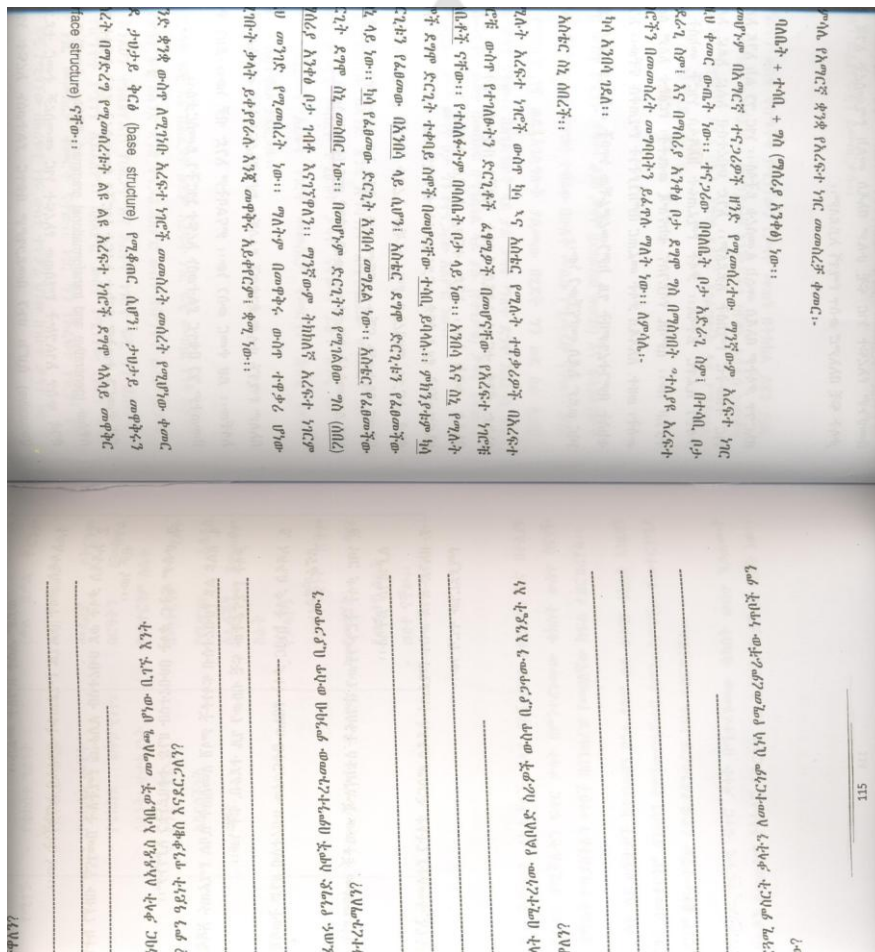
Fig 3: Irrelevance of the module



In this page the students are requested to answer about: why reading? What is the purpose of reading?... The document analysis reported that most of the exercises and contents are unable to achieve the objectives of the course.

From the Amharic majoring students' point of view, some of the selected modules were analyzed. The module analyzed was "Introduction to Translation II" and its course code is "ELAm 412" The analysis of the module showed that the course has lacked some important points which are very important for the female language students. First of all, the course is gender biased that it is dominated by the names of males in each exercises and passages. Their names of the females are rarely used in the module. This by itself does have an implication on the females learning. Students perception about their names not mentioned in the module affects their psychology. With regarding the quality of the module, it is really disorganized and less coordinated. Some of the pages are missing and some are ups and some are down. There is no question that this can have a negative effect on the students learning.

Fig 4: Less Quality module



With the case of exam schedules, the respondents have complained the schedules change because of different known and unknown reasons. This is also crosschecked by the document analysis that the exam centers made exam schedules accordingly; however, it was seen that the schedules were not functioning. There was exam postponing. Because of this, different problems were occurred to the students particularly for the females who are responsible for many things at home. It is obvious they are unable to fix schedules all of the sudden by themselves.

Discussion of the Results

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative findings gathered through the questionnaire, FGD and Document Analysis to find out the challenges of Female Language Students of Distance Education in Jimma and Bahirdar Universities. The questionnaire part contains personal information of the respondents, advantages of DE for female language students, challenges of DE related with instructors and courses. In fact, in the FGD and Document Analysis part, similar statements were coined to triangulate the data. But the approaches of the questions were quite different from each other based on the nature of their data collecting tools.

Totally, 100 female language students were engaged in the questionnaire, and 12 for FGD and appropriate observation checklist was prepared for the document analysis part. To begin with the first part of the questionnaire, the majority of the respondents (94%) replied that DE has many advantages for Female Language Students (FLS). With regarding the specific benefits they obtain from DE, for instance, 58 (57.4%) of the respondents replied that DE helped them always to fulfill their house responsibilities, and 66 (65.3%) of them replied that DE is always advantageous in acquiring better communication skills. FLS answered that they are always benefited from DE that whether the teaching institution is closer or not. In addition, the majority of the respondents reported that they always gain the advantage of finance from DE. To the contrary, few respondents 7 (6.9%) replied that DE always helps them to improve their critical thinking. Despite its disadvantages, from this result finding, it is possible to deduce that DE has tremendous advantages for FLSs. The result of this finding is also supported by the FGD and Document Analysis. From the FGD point of view, the majority of them explained that DE has solved most of their problems. We can look at one of the conversations taken from the FGD participants:

My sisters have said a lot about the advantages of DE. For example, DE helped us to work actively with active students. It helps us to share knowledge and experience on the lesson. It is known that some students are very fastest learners, whereas some are slow, so the DE gave us an opportunity to learn from each other. As we all know the culture of Ethiopia was not conducive for female students to learn, instead of females were encouraged to work in the house.

Though there are a number of damaging factors with the side of the DE, the result of this finding on the benefits of DE to FLSs is open. Accordingly, it was repeatedly reported that distance learning becomes popular and important. From the review of literature, it is supported by Baikie et al. (2005) and Temitayo (2012) agreed that women are studying in different DE programs in Lagos State and all over Nigeria at different levels. Despite DE is advantageous for FLSs, the respondents did not deny that DE has challenges related to instructors giving tutorials and module or course preparation. The result of the finding indicated that the majority of the respondents (43 42.6%) strongly agree that instructors give less support for DE students, and 57 (56.4%) of them agree instructors give insufficient tutorials. This finding was also supported by FGD and Document analysis as well.

One of the major problems I faced in DE is teachers' related. For example, some of the teachers who are assigned to give tutorials are less prepared. They do not use the time appropriately and wisely; they hardly give chances to ask them questions. Again, few of them seem under qualified.

The result of the finding from Document Analysis showed that the readiness and preparation of the instructors to deliver the course was less as well. Moreover, the result of the finding from the module preparation was below the expected. FLSs were neither satisfied on the module/course designing and nor for its content. For instance, 58 (57.4%) of the respondents replied that the modules are not clear and attractive, 62 (61.4%) of the respondents answered that the objectives of the modules are irrelevant. This finding was supported by the document analysis taking the module named "Critical Reading" prepared for third year English Language Students as it is seen from page 46 above.

Again, FGD can strongly support that the module has a basic problem. One of the discussants:

Distance education courses should be carefully designed and developed before instruction begins. Errrr... Now, most of the courses are less in the quality of instruction and development. And again, there is a critical scarcity of resources. There are less adequate support systems in providing us resource materials.

The result of the finding with students' satisfaction of the assessment is shown as below. The majority of the respondents (74.3%) of the female language students (FLSs) replied that the assessments prepared in the module lack logical arrangement and relevancy. This is supported by the data collected via FGD and Document analysis respectively.

The assessment system is really poor one. Assessment should be designed to relate to the specific learning outcomes of the instructional experiences. Another point, I need to add is the grading system. I am very sorry to say that the grading system of DE is not comfortable to me due to dozens of reasons. Firstly, we do not collect our grade on time; this has a negative effect on our learning. There are times when we are asked to make the other examination because they recklessly avoid the results of exam. Lastly, most of the grades are not satisfactory and in most cases, I really doubt if it is our achievement.

In the document analysis session, it was seen that the grades were poorly graded and lacked uniformity, the assessment for assignment was not convincing. Finally, the result of this study agrees with Emrah, E. (2014) who found that some of the students were satisfied with the distance education English course stating that the content, format, reading and grammar sections of the course were sufficient, but the majorities of the students were not happy in synchronous courses, listening, speaking, and writing sections. To the contrary, the current study's result is incongruent with DerejeTefera's (2010) who has found that students of DE were satisfied with modules, assessments, courses and tutors. His study sample was the private colleges of Addis Ababa, (Alpha and Admas).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the questionnaire, FGD and Document Analysis, therefore, it may be possible to conclude that Female Language Students of JU & BDU have benefited and encountered challenges from DE. Although some of the FLS reported that DE has multi advantages, the obtained data clearly revealed that the students faced various challenges from

DE. To avoid ambiguity during the data collection, the challenges were branched into teachers' related, module/course related, assessment related, and any challenges from the FLSs themselves.

The finding of this study verifies that the course design and module preparation are poorly organized. It revealed that the materials for learning and teaching are not only inadequate, but also it lacks quality. There are less an online service centers that might help the students to use references.

In addition to that, the finding of this study indicated that there was almost no efficient courses developed. Although it is time-consuming for a course designer to develop high-quality courses, the DE should sacrifice such kind of activities so as to help students, tutors, instructors and even the community. The result of the study also reported that there is no evaluation standard for the assessment of the DE.

The most common complaint from students was the delays and distributions of instructional materials delivery, which may be a cause for delay of graduation, create additional cost to students and the institutions. Distance education institutions are required devising ways so as to minimizing these problems is crucial to maximize the support service. Again, the delay in getting feedback for assignments and examination results, missing of results and requesting for re-exams, and tutor marked assignment are not properly managed. Assignments are not properly corrected and marks are not correctly filled. This resulted in the delay issue of diploma and degree. The study also found that some of the coordinators are irresponsible, less cooperative and reluctant.

Furthermore, the data obtained from the different instruments employed in this study indicated that there is a big gap between the needs of the distance education students and tutors coupled with inadequate facilities, such as shortage of course materials, inefficient technology-based instruction, facilities for practical sessions, inadequate facilities, such as shortage of course materials, inefficient technology-based instruction, facilities for practical sessions. Finally, in spite of the fact that educational technologies had been used in different levels of schools to improve the efficiency of instruction delivery and student assessment, this study revealed that the majority of the respondents used the technology very less to support their learning.

The above reports and experiences show that distance learning seems to be promising, though there are number of affecting factors. So, the conclusion of this study would not only preaching the advantages and sufficing the challenges, but it is to provoke the government to critical to revisit the achievement of the DE. With this, it will possible to predict the future of distance education in Ethiopia Higher Institutions in general and in JU and BDU in particular.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn above, the following recommendations are forwarded.

- Distance education in Ethiopia in all programs in general and for female language students, in particular, seem advantageous. However, the expected great success of distance learning and the virtual university paradise is still not coming. This research has confirmed female language students are happy because they have got an opportunity to join the DE institution, and they may be awarded degree. Therefore, it should be recommended that the advantages Female Language Students gain from the institution of the DE needs revisit.
- This study has verified that not only the distributions of modules but the quality of the modules are below the standard. This is, therefore, to recommend that distance education institutions should revise the quality of the module and its timely distribution as well.
- The role of the teachers as in any program of teaching-learning process, in DE the teachers' role, is indispensable. However, the result of this research finding reported that there are challenges occurred to the students in connected with the teachers. So, it is recommended that teachers should play their significant role in advising, coaching and mentoring the FLSs.
- In this research finding, again, the report has shown that the assessment and the grading system of the courses were not really normal. People have begun questioning that DE is seen as lowering the quality of instruction, a moneymaking rather than educational enterprise, an environment where cheating cannot be controlled, and an environment that threatens the teaching role both through the lack of any physical constraints on class size and through the objectification of the "course," thus threatening course ownership and potentially leading to the disaggregation of the roles of faculty. Thus, it is recommended that DE drivers and learners should develop awareness that DE is never a degree making factory.

- Tutors are indispensable factors in the achievement of educational goals and objectives. Distance learning tutors should develop and acquire innovation skills and strategies of teaching in distance mode to obtain meaningful learning. For this purpose, active monitoring in the teaching process at the tutorial center is highly recommended.
- Based on the results of the finding, we recommend that increase student's participation in the face to face tutorial attendance in the tutorial should be compulsory furthermore tutorial should be given in all the courses for which students registered.

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