# Chapter 1
# Quality Practices in Higher Education Distance Learning:
## The Perspective of Practitioners

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## ABSTRACT

*This chapter is an attempt to systematize the available knowledge in quality assurance and assessment in higher education distance learning, taking into consideration that information is consubstantiated mostly in grey literature produced in the past decade. It begins by framing the historical and the political approach to quality and accountability and then opts for an approach the outline the analyses, using the concept of distance learning as a system. This approach, which is a classical theoretical framework, considers the following sub-systems: management and administration; instructional design; teaching, provisions on teaching and learning; the teacher and the tutor; and students. As for the procedural aspects, it looks at the official information issued by specialized agencies that develop standards, benchmarks, audit and accreditations schemes, and to the information of the institutions themselves, in order to identify the most important topics and practices concerning quality assessment development and assurance.*

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the practices in quality in higher education distance learning (from now on HEDL) and the respective assessment. It starts by drawing an historical framework of the problem, mentioning the conditions that lead to the need for quality assurance in distance education systems.

Once done, that contextualization, the chapter follows with the discussion of the main topics related to the operationalization of quality assurance.

To attain that goal, it should be mentioned that are almost endless the approaches to the subject: political, legal, economic, theoretical, models, hands on approach… and as consequence they raise of two elementary questions: What type of perspective to give? What should it be the main topics to be addressed?

The answer to the first question is implicit in the title "the perspective of the practitioners". It means that more than presenting theories or the discussion of concepts, one shall try to systematize what are the practices and concerns in the quality assurance, both from the perspective of the education institutions and from the quality agencies. To attain this aim, it deliberately works upon the grey literature, issued by the most prominent authorities in the field of practice, quality assessment and accreditation.

The answer to the second question lies in the theory but derives also from the practice and the key is to consider distance learning as a system, that later on will be reasoned, with the following components:

a) HEDL Management and administration: which deals with the strategic management, the mission, governance, organizational development, these functions support the development of organizations and provide the means to accomplish it. This topic discusses how organizations should present evidence to sustain the excellence of their offer.

b) Instructional Design in Distance Education: although is one of the functions of distance learning that gather less attention, is undoubtedly one of the most important, as it deals with the design of learning processes, the respective support material and information how to plan and manage the efforts and time of the students against course and personal objectives, all this is done in a comprehensive approach matching requirements with practices in areas like course design team; syllabus; learning objectives; assessment; pedagogic resources.

c) Provision of Teaching Learning and Curriculum in Distance Education: is the next step after instructional design, this topic refers to the capacity that the institution has to carry out the different process and tasks associated with the *curriculum*.

  e) The Teacher and Tutor in Distance Education: this topic starts by point out the different functions of teaching and tutoring in distance education, then it deals with the profile of competencies and skills that should be mastered by teachers and stress the need for the organizations to have a recruitment training plan.

  f) Students are the last element of the system, first the social characteristics were addressed and then the personality traits necessary to study at a distance, associated with these two situations there is the dropout phenomenon, a ´peculiar situation that may victimize some students and for which institutions must have adequate responses, the chapter ends with the need to address the situation of students with disabilities in the educational context and in presence if this situation occurs.

To summarize the purpose of this chapter is to analyze how institutions can guarantee the quality of teaching/learning provision. To proceed, this objective is necessary to problematize, to understand and clearly define what are the requirements for the different processes and how they interlock.

Once, it should be stressed that it is not the objective to conduct theoretical discussion, but rather looking for answers in the practical field, examining the work and the documentation of the different accreditation agencies and universities, questioning the possibility of systematizing these themes, approaches and alternatives in a systematic way.

## Related Content

A Scenario-Based Instructional Design Model

Neal Shambaugh (2009). *Encyclopedia of Distance Learning, Second Edition (pp. 1820-1827).*

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A Case for Case Studies via Video-Conferencing

Ira Yermish (2000). *Distance Learning Technologies: Issues, Trends and Opportunities (pp. 208-217).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/case-case-studies-via-video/8590


A Chronobot for Time and Knowledge Exchange in E-Learning

Shi-Kuo Chang (2005). *International Journal of Distance Education Technologies (pp. 3-17).*

www.irma-international.org/article/chronobot-time-knowledge-exchange-learning/1654


Recent Contributions to a Generic Architecture Design that Supports Learning Objects Interoperability

Sotirios Botsiosand Dimitrios A. Georgiou (2009). *International Journal of Distance Education Technologies (pp. 17-37).*

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Intelligent Educational Support System

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