

Chapter 5.22

Distance Education in South America

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the history, state of the art, and future trends in distance education in South American countries through an overview of the main experiences in the region.

South America is in the western hemisphere connected to Central and North America by the Isthmus of Panama. Twelve countries form this continent: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela. As reported by the United Nations Development Programme (2004), all of them are developing countries characterized by a difficult social reality as a result of political and economic crisis in the course of its history.

South American countries' basic indicators (see Table 1) show an average gross domestic product per capita three to 30 times lower than those from developed countries. Despite the sustained growth of access to information and communication technologies, with an average DAI (digital access index) of 0.47 (ITU, 2003) and

a bandwidth growth rate of 479% between 2001 and 2002 (Parkes, 2004), only 8.7% of the South American population has access to the Internet.

Multiethnic, multicultural, and geographically dispersed nations cause a gap, a social inequality between urban and rural populations, therefore governments as well as international institutions and nongovernmental organizations have been using different kinds of technologies to increase access to education (see Table 2) as a way to improve the standards of living and to reduce poverty.

HISTORY

South American countries have been involved in distance education since the beginning of the last century. Different approaches have been applied in the implementation of distance education projects: government management, private sponsors, branches from public or private universities, and management and sponsorship by nongovernmental organizations or some mixture

Table 1. South American countries' basic indicators (2003) Source: ITU (2004)

Country	Population (millions)	GDP (gross domestic product) per Capita in 2002 (U.S. \$)	Telephone Lines	Cellular Mobile Subscribers	Internet Users	Personal Computers	DAI
		(per 100 inhabitants)					
Argentina	36.98	11,180	21.88	17.76	11.20	8.20	0.53
Bolivia	8.41	935	7.14	16.67	3.24	2.28	0.38
Brazil	175.96	2,603	22.32	26.36	8.22	7.48	0.50
Chile	14.71	4,413	23.04	42.83	23.75	11.93	0.58
Colombia	43.78	1,874	20.03	14.13	6.24	4.93	0.45
Ecuador	13.00	1,076	11.91	18.41	4.38	3.11	0.41
Guyana	0.89	828	9.15	9.93	14.22	2.73	0.43
Paraguay	5.93	967	4.61	29.85	2.02	3.46	0.39
Peru	27.42	2,124	6.71	10.61	10.39	4.30	0.44
Suriname	0.53	1,860	15.17	31.95	4.16	4.55	0.46
Uruguay	3.41	3,640	27.96	19.26	11.90	11.01	0.56
Venezuela	25.70	5,105	11.27	25.64	5.06	6.09	0.47
South America	356.72	3,050	15.10	21.95	8.73	5.84	0.47

Note: The ITU's digital access index measures the overall ability of individual in a country to access and use new ICTs on a scale of 0-1, where 1 is the highest access (ITU, 2003).

of them with the help of international institutions like the Catholic Church, UNESCO, The World Bank, UNDP, FAO, and so forth. As on the rest of the world, each form of technology, from the postal service to Web services, has been used as delivery systems.

In 1904 International Schools from the United States started to sell correspondent courses through a branch office in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In 1923 Edgard Roquete Pinto, one of the pioneers of distance education in Latin America, created the Rádio Sociedade do Rio de Janeiro (Radio Society of Rio de Janeiro, later renamed Radio Ministry of Education) with the aims of “bringing every place some education, teaching and enjoyment” (Vianney, 2003, p. 74). In 1947 clergyman (later monsignor) José Joaquín Salcedo founded Radio Sutatenza in the Andean mountains of Colombia, where 80% of the people were illiterate at that time. For more than 40 years, Salcedo’s goal to *help people in their self-development* was

accomplished (Gumucio Dagron, 2001). When the project was closed in 1989, 10 million books were distributed, and 25,000 rural leaders and 8 million people were trained in basic education, health, and agricultural techniques. Through its existence, Radio Sutatenza was a model for distance education projects in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Gumucio Dagron, 2001).

In 1961 in Lima, the capital city of Peru, the Catholic Church established Panamericana Teleeducacion, the first telescuola (teleschool) using television programmes as a complement to formal education; 3 years later in 1964, Manuel Benavides created the Instituto Nacional de Teleducación (INTE; National Institute of Teleducation), a government-sponsored institution in charge of coordinating and empowering the flourishing radio and television distance education projects in Peru. Until its closing in 1990, INTE produced and coproduced educational television series for

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