

The Role of the M.Ed Distance Education Program in Building the Capacity of the Ministry of Education

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Abstract: The main purpose of this study is to identify the major problems encountered in the Master's of Education (M.Ed) distance education program in the process of accomplishing stated goals and objectives and to indicate feasible solutions to the prevailing situation. The study was conducted in the Ministry of Education (MoE) and its affiliated organizations, i.e., Education Media Agency (EMA), Institute for Curriculum Development and Research (ICDR) and National Organization for Examinations (NOE). A total of 90 respondents and program coordinators and instructors from the College of Education were the sources of data. The study focused on the roles played by the MoE and Addis Ababa University in launching and strengthening the M.Ed distance education program, and factors that affect the program. The results of the study revealed that the M.Ed distance education program was very effective and efficient, according to the graduates of the program, their immediate bosses and colleagues. On the contrary, without thoroughly evaluating the program, the top level officials of the MoE have concluded that the M.Ed distance education program is less effective and decided to close the program. This shows that the existing leadership and management practice of the MoE is either not interested in the M.Ed distance education programs or not aware of the use the programs can have in building the capacity of professionals working in the center and the regions. In addition, it was found that graduates were not placed in their field of studies which might have affected the performance level of employees. In the light of these findings, it is recommended that the MoE, higher education institutions and stakeholders should discuss the issue in depth and find ways and means to strengthen and expand distance education programs for building the capacity of various target groups.

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Introduction

Ethiopia formulated the Education and Training Policy (ETP) along with its strategy in 1994. The focus of the policy has been on expanding education, restructuring the education system, changing the curriculum so as to increase the relevance and improve the quality of education at all levels. Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) was also formulated to enhance effective implementation of the policy and has become operational since 1997/98.

Following the realization of decentralization, educational bureaus have been established in all regions. Moreover, a number of teacher education institutions (TEIs) have been opened and former ones expanded to train qualified teachers for both cycles of the primary and secondary schools. Studies, however, have underlined that there was an acute shortage of high level qualified human power in the center, in the regions and in TEIs, more so in the fields of curriculum studies, and educational planning and management.

To meet this felt need, the Addis Ababa University (AAU) agreed to undertake M.Ed distance education programs. Accordingly, on the basis of a memorandum of understanding signed between the Federal MoE and the AAU on April 7, 1999, the Addis Ababa University has launched the M.Ed distance education program in the Faculty of Education. The program had been operational for four successive cohorts and terminated in 2003. Though, it was mentioned in the memorandum that evaluation of the program and further improvements would be made jointly by both parties (MoE and AAU), the MoE alone imposed the termination of the program without discussing the issue with the AAU and other stakeholders.

In mid 2003, a survey study with an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of the M.Ed distance education program was made by the Department of Education Programs and Teachers' Education of the MoE. The findings of the survey revealed that the M.Ed distance

education program was effective and efficient in producing high level personnel and it was recommended for the continuation of the program and its expansion in other colleges and universities in various disciplines. However, there has been no action on the part of top level executives of the MoE to implement the recommendations and restart the M.Ed distance education program.

Thus, in this paper an attempt is made to identify to major causes for the termination of the M.Ed distance education.

Research Questions

The following questions were set forth for this study:

- What is the need for M.Ed distance education program in Ethiopia?
- How was M.Ed distance education delivered in the Faculty of Education?
- Was the M.Ed distance education program effective?
- Why was the M.Ed distance education program discontinued?
- How can the M.Ed distance education program be started?

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are:

- To identify the major causes for terminating the M.Ed distance education program,
- To find out what views graduates of the M.Ed distance education programs, their colleagues and immediate bosses have about the causes for terminating the program,

- To indicate the importance of the M.Ed program in producing high level qualified personnel required at various levels at the center, regions and TEIs.

Review of Literature

Why Distance Education?

Distance education, in which the student and instructor are separated in time and space, is currently becoming the fastest growing delivery mode of education everywhere in the world. This fast growth is facilitated mainly by the rapid advancement of technology. Nowadays, courses are being delivered to students in various locations using a variety of media to serve the educational needs of growing populations. The implementation of distance education differs markedly from country to country. Most distance education programs rely on technologies and such programs are particularly beneficial for those who are not financially, physically or geographically able to obtain traditional institution – based education.

Distance education has experienced dramatic growth both nationally and internationally since the early 1980's. The goals of distance education, as an alternative to traditional education, have been to offer degree granting programs, to battle illiteracy in developing countries, to provide training opportunities for economic growth, and to offer curriculum enrichment in non-traditional educational settings. A variety of technologies have been used as delivery systems to facilitate this learning at a distance (Glaser, 1992).

Delivery System of Distance Education

Delivery system of distance education relies heavily on technologies. Print materials, educational radio, television, computer conferencing, electronic mail, interactive video, satellite telecommunications and multimedia computer technology are all used to promote student-

teacher interaction and provide necessary feedback to the learner at a distance (Barrett, 1992; Harasim, 1993; Salomon, 1993).

Research in distance education reflects the rapid technological changes in this field. Although early research was centered on media comparison studies, educators have recently become more interested in examining how the attributes of different media promote the construction of knowledge. According to Salomon and Globerson (1991), a variety of technological options are available to the distance educator. These options fall under four major categories:

1. *Voice*-Instructional audio tools include the interactive technologies of telephone, audio conferencing, and short-wave radio. Passive (i.e., one-way) audio tools include tapes and radio.
2. *Video* - Instructional video tools include still images such as slides, pre-produced moving images (e.g., film, videotape), and real-time moving images combined with audio conferencing (one-way or two-way video with two-way audio).
3. *Data* - Computers send and receive information electronically. For this reason, the term "data" is used to describe this broad category of instructional tools. Computer applications for distance education are varied and include:
 - Computer-assisted instruction (CAI) - uses the computer as a self-contained teaching machine to present individual lessons.
 - Computer-managed instruction (CMI) - uses the computer to organize instruction and track student records and progress. The instruction itself need not be delivered via a computer, although CAI is often combined with CMI.
 - Computer-mediated education (CME) - describes computer applications that facilitate the delivery of instruction. Examples include: Electronic mail, fax, real-time computer conferencing, and World-Wide Web applications.
4. *Print* - is a foundational element of distance education programs and the basis from which all other delivery systems have evolved. Various print formats are available including:

textbooks, study guides, workbooks, course syllabi, and case studies.

Appropriate Technology

Though technology plays a key role in the delivery of distance education, educators must be skillful in choosing appropriate technology for specific instructional outcomes. The key to effective distance education is focusing on the needs of the learners, the requirements of the content, and the constraints faced by the teacher, before selecting a delivery system. Typically, this systematic approach will result in a mix of media, each serving a specific purpose as shown next.

- A strong print component can provide much of the basic instructional content in the form of a course text, as well as readings,
- Interactive audio or video conferencing can provide real time face-to-face (or voice-to-voice) interaction. This is also an excellent and cost-effective way to incorporate guest speakers and content experts.
- Computer conferencing or electronic mail can be used to send messages, assignment feedback, and other targeted communication to one or more class members,
- Pre-recorded video tapes can be used to present class lectures and visually oriented content,
- Fax can be used to distribute assignments and last minute announcements, receive student assignments, and provide timely feedback.

Using this integrated approach, the educator's task is to carefully select among the technological options. The goal is to build a mix of instructional media, meeting the needs of the learner in a manner that is instructionally effective and economically prudent.

Program Effectiveness

Many scholars ask whether or not students in distance program learn similarly to that of students receiving traditional face-to-face education. In this regard, a research comparing distance education to traditional face-to-face instruction reveals that the teaching-learning process at a distance program can be as effective as traditional face-to-face instruction, when the method and technologies used are appropriate to the instructional tasks, there is student-to-student interaction, and there is timely teacher-to-student feedback (Moore & Thompson, 1990; Verduin and Clark, 1991).

Without exception, effective distance education programs begin with careful planning and focused on understanding of course requirements and student needs. Appropriate technology can only be selected once these elements are understood in detail. There is no mystery to the way effective distance education programs develop. They do not happen spontaneously; they evolve through the hard work and dedicated efforts of many individuals and organizations. In fact, successful distance education programs rely on the consistent and integrated efforts of students, faculty, facilitators, support staff, and administrators.

Key Players

The following are assumed to be key players in a distance education program:

Students - It is true that an effective distance education program is the one that meets the instructional needs of students. Obviously, the primary role of the student is to learn and this demands motivation, planning, and an ability to analyze and apply the instructional content being taught. In delivering distance education, various challenges occur. Students are often separated from one another. They are not in a position of sharing their backgrounds and interests, and have few opportunities to interact with teachers outside of classes. Hence, they

must rely on technical linkages to bridge the gap missed from classroom participation.

Faculty - The success of any distance education effort basically rests on the shoulders of the faculty. In a traditional classroom setting, the instructor's responsibility includes assembling course content and developing an understanding of student needs. Beyond these, special challenges confront the distance delivery mode. For example, the instructor must:

- Develop an understanding of the characteristics and needs of distant students with little first-hand experience and limited, if any, face-to-face contact,
- Adapt teaching styles taking into consideration the needs and expectations of multiple, often diverse, audiences,
- Develop understanding of delivery technology, while remaining focused on teaching role,
- Function effectively as a skilled facilitator as well as content provider.

Facilitators - The instructor often finds it beneficial to rely on a site facilitator to act as a bridge between the students and the instructor. To be effective, a facilitator must understand the students being served and the instructor's expectations. Most importantly, the facilitator must be willing to follow the directive established by the teacher. Where budget and logistics permit, the role of on-site facilitators has increased even in classes in which they have little, if any, content expertise. At a minimum, they set up equipment, collect assignments, proctor tests, and act as the instructor's on-site eyes and ears.

Support Staff - These individuals are the silent heroes of the distance education enterprise and ensure that the myriad details required for program success are dealt with effectively. Most

successful distance education programs consolidate support service functions to include student registration, materials duplication and distribution, textbook ordering, securing of copyright clearances, facilities scheduling, processing grade reports, managing technical resources, etc. Support personnel are truly the glue that keeps the distance education effort together and on track.

Administrators - Although administrators are typically influential in planning an institution's distance education program, they often lose contact or relinquish control to technical managers once the program is operational. Effective distance education administrators are more than idea people. They are consensus builders, decision makers, and referees. They work closely with technical and support service personnel, ensuring that technological resources are effectively deployed to further the institution's academic mission. Most importantly, they maintain an academic focus, realizing that meeting the instructional needs of distant students is their ultimate responsibility.

The Need for M.Ed Distance Education Program in Ethiopia

Distance education is a mode of addressing education for those who for various reasons cannot get an opportunity for face-to-face instruction. As compared to the traditional face-to-face instruction, it is accessible to a wider audience in a very short time with relatively cheaper resources in a more effective manner. Mostly it is characterized by the separation of students and teachers, with students provided the learning materials through a variety of media and support, and feedback is put in place to assist them in pursuing their studies.

There will be capacity limitation to train all personnel working in the center, regions and TEIs, because the number of participants is huge as compared to the available universities who are offering M.Ed program. In addition, there will be shortage of human resources to cover all the duties to be done in each organization. To overcome this

problem, MoE has revealed that distance education was the only means to satisfy all parties. In this respect, an M.Ed distance education program was seen as being advantageous for the following main reasons:

- Greater number of students can participate in the program;
- Students from remote rural areas can have access to the program;
- Students can take courses while doing their jobs;
- Students can organize their own study times to their own convenience; and
- Courses are cost effective.

Basically, the M.Ed distance education program was designed to solve the shortage of high level qualified personnel both in the center and the regions. In addition, it was envisaged:

- To improve the quality of curriculum studies ,and educational planning and management in the center and the regions; and
- To meet the needs of key personnel in the MoE, regions and TEIs (Student Handbook: 1999).

Aims/Goals of the M.Ed program

Any program is organized to achieve stated goals and objectives. Likewise, the ultimate aims/goals of the M.Ed distance education program were the following.

- To strengthen the capacity of the MoE and regions in the areas of curriculum studies and educational planning and management,
- To meet the learning opportunities of aspiring professionals of the MoE and regions who have been unable to undertake

studies in postgraduate level in education through regular residential programs,

- To deliver the courses by distance education so that students can continue with their work and family obligations while studying for the masters degree,
- To provide a program that is tailored to the job requirements of the students while meeting the academic requirements for awarding degrees,
- To lay a foundation at Addis Ababa University for distance education programs in other areas.

Method of the Study

Participants

A descriptive survey was the method employed for this study. A total of 90 respondents drawn from the MoE and its affiliated organizations, i.e., Educational Media Agency (EMA), Institute for Curriculum Development and Research (ICDR) and National Organization for Examinations (NOE) were involved in this study. Out of these, 25 (27.8%) were graduates of the M.Ed distance education program of whom 10 (40%) were from Curriculum Studies and 15 (60%) from Educational Planning and Management. They are currently working in different positions 5 (20%) as department heads, 8 (32%) as panel heads and 12 (48%) experts. Among these graduates, more than 10 were assigned in areas different from their fields of study: some graduates of Educational Planning and Management were assigned in curriculum studies, and some graduates of curriculum studies were also placed in areas different from their field of study.

The other group of respondents (Non-MEd distance graduates) were 10 (11.1%) department heads, 23 (25.5%) panel heads and 32 (35.6%) experts. In terms of gender, 75 (83.3%) of the respondents were males and 15 (16.7%) were females.

Instruments

To get pertinent information from various groups of respondents three sets of questionnaires were prepared based on the statement of the problem and the researcher's experience. The final copies of questionnaires distributed were:

- One set of questionnaire for department heads and panel heads,
- A questionnaire containing 30 items for graduates of the M.Ed distance education program, and
- A questionnaire containing 50 items for experts working in various departments in the MoE and its affiliated organizations.

The content of the questionnaires mainly focused on the usefulness and effectiveness of the M.Ed distance education program, its contribution in filling the gap created due to shortage of high level qualified personnel in the education system, and the quality of performance shown by graduates of the M.Ed distance education program.

Procedure

Prior to the distribution of the final copies of the questionnaires to the respondents, a pilot test was conducted in the head office to check the relevance and clarity of the questionnaires. This was considered important for the researcher to check the validity of each question item.

Findings

Participants of the M.Ed Distance Education Program

The M.Ed distance education program was initially launched in 1999 by involving the center and four regions (SNNPR, Tigray, Amhara and Oromia). Though for some reasons some of the regions were unable to use their quota effectively, all regions participated from the second cohort onwards.

Table1: Participants Registered, Dropout/Dismissals and Graduates of the M.Ed Program in the last four successive cohorts (1999-2003)

No.	Region	EdPm			Curriculum			Total		
		Registered	Dropout/ dismissals	Graduated	Registered	Dropout/ dismissals	Graduated	Registered	Dropout/dis missals	Graduated
1	Tigray	9	2	7	7	1	6	16	3	13
2	Afar	3	-	3	1	-	1	4	-	4
3	Amhara	17	3	14	9	-	9	26	3	23
4	Oromia	14	1	13	10	1	9	24	2	22
5	Somalia	3	2	1	3	-	3	6	2	4
6	Benshangul Gu.	3	-	3	3	-	3	6	-	6
7	SNNPR	15	3	12	12	1	11	27	4	23
8	Gambela	1	1	-	3	-	3	4	1	3
9	Harari	1	-	1	2	-	2	3	-	3
10	Dire Dawa	3	1	2	2	-	2	5	1	4
11	Addis Ababa	6	1	5	2	-	2	8	1	7
12	MOE	28	7	21	17	2	15	45	9	36
Total		103	21	82	71	5	66	174	26	148

As understood from Table 1, the MoE has been participating with a relatively bigger number of candidates than the regions. This

arrangement seemed justified because if the capacity of MoE is well developed in all aspects, it will help to develop better policies, strategies, and guidelines, and provide training, professional support, etc., to regions and TEIs more effectively and efficiently.

In the last successive rounds, a total of 174 students drawn from the center and regions were attending the M.Ed distance education program in Curriculum Studies and Educational Planning and Management. Out of these, 148(85.1%) successfully completed the program while 26 (14.9%) were either dropouts or academic dismissals. In light of the data from Table1, the program is said to be successful in accomplishing its stated goals and objectives as 85.1% of the participants graduated after fulfilling the requirements of the program.

Program Contents and Training Materials

Graduates of the M.Ed distance education program, coordinators and instructors in the College of Education have reported that the contents of the program were more of tailor made as they were identified and agreed upon by both parties - the MOE and the AAU. It was these selected program courses that were later on adapted to the regular post graduate program. As clearly mentioned in the memorandum of understanding, course coverage as well as program requirements are similar to the regular face-to face program. Moreover, term papers, assignments, review questions, seminars, tests and exams were the evaluation techniques applied for both regular and distance programs. Though all graduates agreed on the appropriateness and relevance of all course contents, they commented on one course namely, "Economics of Education and Planning", that it lacked coherence, relevance and depth. Besides, three successive batches faced a problem of permanent instructor of this course.

Furthermore, the information obtained from the respondents emphasized that the courses covered in both the Curriculum Studies and Educational Planning and Management of the M.Ed distance

program were very appropriate and relevant for application in the education sector. 27 (90%) of the M.Ed distance education graduates also reported that the program has helped them to carryout their job more effectively and efficiently.

With regard to the availability and sufficiency of course materials, it was reported that they were adequate for each stated course objectives. The preparation of modules, setting of appropriate exercises and supportive reading materials were also well organized. Since the program is new and the first in the history of the country's higher education, there were some problems encountered in organizing the program. In this respect, some errors were observed in photocopying and binding some supportive materials.

Moreover, there was no effort made to support the M.Ed distance education program with various media technologies such as computers, internet services, video or teleconferencing, etc to easily reach the learners at different locations.

Competence of the Instructors in the M.Ed Distance Education

In any teaching-learning process the teacher comes first. There is no technology that has totally replaced teachers. Based on this statement, it was reported that most instructors involved in the M.Ed distance education program were senior and well experienced ones in teaching and conducting research in various topics of education. It was also indicated that the quality modules prepared were products of these senior instructors.

Moreover, many of the instructors were found to have applied the participatory approach in their teaching. They approach students in a friendly way and encourage them to find solutions to the prevailing situation of planning, management, curriculum development, research and evaluation in the education sector in Ethiopia.

Capability of Tutors

Tutors in the M.Ed distance education program were assigned for each course delivered through distance. Most of the tutors were hard working and cooperative to help students, i.e., by classifying students in groups, assigning tasks to be done ahead of time and presenting them in whole group sessions. However, very few were not competent enough to manage the task and hardly knew the subject matter. Such tutors were simply assigned without thorough evaluation of their background.

Tutorial Center

As indicated in the review of literature, the effectiveness of any distance education program is highly dependent on using modern technologies. Initially it was proposed that tutorial centers should be well equipped with various media facilities like computers, fax machine, internet, duplicating machine, etc. However, as reported by most of the respondents, the tutorial center of the M.Ed distance program of the AAU was not well organized and there was no modern technology in the tutorial centers. Leave alone the availability of modern technologies, there was acute shortage of rooms for tutorial sessions in 2002/2003, though it was decided later on that the conference room of the Faculty of Education to be used for tutorial classes.

Center Coordinators

Whether due to lack of adequate orientation or any other unknown reason, tutorial center coordinators were not efficient to coordinate the program properly. Eventually, however, some improvements were made with consultation of course instructors and faculty deans.

Faculty of Education

The overall coordination of the M.Ed distance education program was the responsibility of the Faculty of Education. In the early stages of the program, attempts were made to coordinate all concerned parties towards stated goals and objectives of the M.Ed distance education program. In addition, much has been done in developing curriculum for the course and writing modules and compiling supplementary readings. However, such efforts were not strengthened to gear the program towards stated goals and objectives. In addition, the effort made by the faculty to evaluate the program in cooperation with the MoE was found minimal.

MOE

An outstanding effort was made by the then Teachers and Educational Management Staff Development Department of the MoE to launch the M.Ed distance education program in collaboration with the Faculty of Education of the AAU. After the commencement of the program in 1999, it was this department that was responsible for coordinating the program, conducting needs assessment of regions so as to enable all regions participate in the program from the second batch (cohort), by assigning quota to regions and the center. However, after December 2001, the department was non-existent and hence, the coordination function of the program became very weak.

The Performance of Graduates in their Assigned Posts

The quality of any program is measured by the product and its acceptance by beneficiaries. If the product is accepted by the majority of the beneficiaries, it will be judged that the program will continue in producing similar products until change is needed. However, if there is something wrong with the output of the program, it will be evaluated and some adjustments for improvement be made or closed totally.

Table 2: Total number of participants of the M.Ed in the MOE and its organizations

Item	MOE		NOE		ICDR		EMA		Total
	EdPm	Curr.St	EdPm	Curr.St	EdPm	Curr.St	EdPm	Curr.St	
Registered	23	2	1	2	-	6	2	3	39
Graduated	16	2	1	2	-	4	2	3	30
Dropout /Dismissal	7	0	-	-	-	2	-	-	9

Table 2 depicted that 39 professionals 26 (66.7%) in Educational Planning and Management and 13 (33.3%) in Curriculum Studies drawn from the MoE and its affiliated organizations were involved in the M.Ed distance education program. Out of these, 30 (76.9%) successfully completed the program. Due to various reasons, few number of participants of the program dropped out (or were dismissed) from the program in the last four successive rounds.

Regarding the effectiveness of the graduates, most experts, panel heads and department heads have said that graduates of the M.Ed distance education program are very competent in their assigned positions. Even if their number is very few, some of the graduates assigned in leadership and management positions are efficient in their managerial functions and well known within and outside of the MoE for their outstanding performance. It was also indicated that though these graduates were hardworking individuals before attending the M.Ed program, the education and training they pursued has refined their knowledge and skills further.

Table 3: Placement of M.Ed Distance Education Program Graduates

No	Field of Study	Placement			Total
		Placement in their field of study	Placement not in their field of study	Left the MOE	
1	EDPM	6	9	4	19
2	Curriculum Studies	5	5	1	11
Total		11	14	5	30

As indicated in Table 3, one third of the graduates were placed according to their field of studies. A little more than one third were not placed according to their field of study. And 5 (16.7%) of the graduates of the M.Ed distance education program left the MoE and joined other organizations.

Furthermore, respondents strongly indicated that taking into consideration the performances of the graduates of the M.Ed distance education program, it is possible to generalize that the program was effective and efficient to produce high level qualified personnel. However, very few individuals in the leadership and management positions have reported that the graduates of the M.Ed distance education program are found to be inefficient in their assigned positions and there is no change of behavior in their performance. Some of the graduates of the program have agreed with the comments of their bosses but said this was because they were not assigned in their field of study.

Program graduates further explained major weaknesses of the system by saying that even though, "We had the opportunity to attend the program and succeeded, we are not assigned in the field that we could make a difference using the knowledge we acquire in the program".

Causes for the Termination of the M.Ed Distance Education Program

In the memorandum of understanding, it was mentioned that taking the exemplary achievements and experiences of the M.Ed distance education program of the Faculty of Education, other faculties and colleges will embark on similar undertakings in the future. However, as mentioned in the survey study conducted by the Education Programs' and Teachers' Education Department (MoE, 2004), let alone expanding such programs in other faculties and colleges, it was decided to close the program which was highly accepted by all beneficiaries.

Reasons for the termination of the M.Ed distance education program of the AAU, as indicated by top officials of the MoE, were:

- Graduates of the program were found to be ineffective and inefficient in performing their jobs (there was no behavioral change as expected),
- The graduates were equipped with theories, and hence, lacked application of theoretical knowledge into the reality of the education sector,
- Graduates lacked self initiation and creativity in their assigned jobs,
- And, hence, no need of more wastage of scarce resources to continue an ineffective and inefficient program.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Distance education programs will continue to grow both in developed and developing countries. The main reason for this growth is related to the ever growing demand for trained human power with scarce resource (particularly financial) in the existing educational systems. Distance education programs will play a significant role in educating societies all over the world.

Accordingly, M.Ed distance education program will undoubtedly play greater role in meeting the need for high level trained manpower of the Ethiopian education system. DE is cost effective and allows independent learning and also gives better chance for combining learning and working. If the center, the regions and the TEIs are to cope with this growing need for high level educated workforce, the M.Ed distance education program must continue.

M.Ed distance education program should not be viewed as a marginal educational activity; instead, it should be regarded nationally as a viable and cost effective way of providing education to produce high level qualified personnel. Efforts should also be made to apply modern technologies in the M.Ed distance education program so as to erase the lines between traditional and distance learners and to enable more students have the opportunity to work with multimedia designed courses for individual and interactive learning.

Future studies should focus on developing a need-based distance education as a basis for development, and for this purpose universities should be autonomous to launch and terminate any program including M.Ed distance education programs.

Thus, the Ministry of Education, higher education institutions and stakeholders should discuss in depth the importance of the M.Ed distance education program. The role of the program in producing high level qualified personnel for the overall development of the country in general and its contribution for the education sector in particular should be properly considered. Therefore, in as much as possible it is very essential to find ways and means to strengthen and expand the M.Ed distance education programs. It should be understood by all concerned parties that the importance of the M.Ed distance education program is to build the capacity of various target groups, and to make them active participants in the country's political, economic and social development endeavors. Above all, it should be noted that decisions to launch and terminate a program should be based on assumed needs of stakeholders and the national development policies and strategies.

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