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Motivational characteristics in distance education

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Abstract
This review of literature is about motivational characteristics of the distance education learner. Provided is a brief overview of literature in the areas of distance education, the adult learner, and motivation of the adult learner in a distance education setting.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background

For over 150 years, distance education has proven to be one of the most effective delivery methods for the adult learner (Schlosser & Anderson, 1994). Many adults choose distance education programs over traditional programs for various reasons. These students enroll in distance education programs, which fit their individual needs and situations. The literature suggests adults select distance education delivery modes for such reasons as economics and convenience.

There are many factors that motivate students to engage in distance education. This discussion will begin by defining distance education. The definition of distance education can be fuzzy at times; nevertheless there is consistency in almost all of the definitions to date. There are many definitions for distance education, however all have several elements in common.

Verduin and Clark (1991), defined distance education as, “formal instruction in which a majority of the teaching function occurs while educator and learner are at a distance from one another” (p.13). Dr. Robert Hardman stated that, “distance education simply means the instructor and student are separated by space and/or time” (personal communication, October 20, 1997).
Keegan presented the best-known definition of distance education; he has linked the essential elements from many definitions of distance education (Schlosser and Anderson, 1994). As new technology emerges, the definition of distance education may be redefined. The new definition may be "learning which occurs by separation of time, space and technology" (Keegan, 1996).

In addition to being a more economical means to study, distance education requires no travel to campus, expenses for meals, or parking and lodging expenses. Distance education is convenient, allowing students to learn in a setting of their choice. Students enrolled in a distance education program are also able to maximize their time. By not having long travel time or being able to work at home allows the student to use their time more efficiently. Most importantly, distance education allows students to keep their present job and continue to earn an income while securing a degree or taking courses.

Viewed as a preferred method of instruction by many adults, distance education is recognized by the United States Department of Education. Many universities offer distance education programs for Bachelor, Masters, and Doctorate degree programs. This is accomplished by means of voice, video, data and print or a combination of multimedia.

In alignment with traditional education, in distance education the role of the student is to learn. In ideal conditions, this challenging endeavor
requires motivation. Eastmond (1995) explained that in the distance education setting, the process of student learning is more complex for several reasons. First, the students are normally older than in traditional higher education programs, are employed, and have a family. Another reason is the geographical location from the institution prohibits taking courses on campus.

Research (Schlosser & Anderson, 1994) has suggested that the distance education students have basic attributes, which influence their learning experiences. These characteristics also directly influence the students' success. The distance education students are highly motivated and self-disciplined.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this review is to analyze and synthesize the literature related to motivation and the distance education learner. This writer will address two components related to distance education and motivation of the learners. The first component examines the adult learner. The second component examines motivational theories and characteristics of the adult learner and distance education.
Definitions

1. Affect: To act upon or have influence on a situation.

2. Distance education: A method of education in which the learner and the instructor are physically separated.

3. Effect: A result or consequence.

4. Extrinsic: Being outside the nature of a thing, not inherent.

5. Intrinsic: Pertaining to the nature of a thing, inherent.

6. Motivation: To impel into action, a factor or factors that influence.

7. Reward: Something gained for merit.

8. Reinforcement: An event that increases the probability of the occurrence of certain behavior.

9. Technology: In distance education this may refer to audio, video, satellite-delivered instruction, computer-aided instruction, or print.

Research Questions

1. What are the motivational characteristics of the distance education learners?

2. Does distance education promote effective learning for adult learners?
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review examined current literature on motivators which have a direct influence on success of the distance education learner. The definition of distance education, according to leading authorities in the field is examined. The profile of the adult learner will be supplied. Factors, which motivate the learner in a distance education environment, will be identified. The major characteristics of the distance education learner will be described.

Distance Education Defined

For the United States Distance Learning Association (1997), distance education is defined as:

the acquisition of knowledge and skills through mediated information and instruction, encompassing all technologies and other forms of learning at a distance. (p.1)

To Eastmond, (1995) the term distance education suggested that, "learning takes place within an instructional context, even though teacher and students are spacialy separated" (p.9).

According to Keegan (1996) there needed to be a clear definition of distance education. In order to define distance education early definitions should be compared to find common elements.
Keegan (1996) offered the following early definitions, using them to compose one definition of distance education:

1. The first definition is chosen from Dohmen, director of the German Distance Education Institute (DIFF) at Tubingen in 1967 defined distance education as:

   Distance education (Fernstudium) is a systematically organized form of self-study in which student counseling, the presentation of learning material and the securing and supervising of students’ success is carried out by a team of teachers, each of whom has responsibilities. It is possible at a distance by means of media, which can cover long distances. The opposite of 'distance education' is 'direct education' or 'face-to-face education': a type of education that takes place with direct contact between lecturers and students. (p. 41)

2. The second definition involved Peters work at DIFF in Tubingen and later at the Fernuniversitat in Hagen.

   Distance teaching/education (Fernunterricht) is a method of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes which is rationalized by the application of division of labour and organizational principles as well as by the extensive use of technical media, especially for the purpose of reproducing high quality teaching material which makes it possible to instruct great numbers of students at the same time wherever they live. It is an industrialized form of teaching and learning. (p. 41)
3. The third definition presented by Borje Holmberg stated:

...covers the various forms of study at all levels which are not under continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which, nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organization. (p. 42)

For Keegan (1996), the following are more recent efforts to define distance education:

1. The first presented by Garrison and D. Shale implied that...the majority of educational communication between (among) teacher and student(s) occurs noncontiguously. It must involve two-way communication between (among) teacher and student(s) for the purpose of facilitating and supporting the educational process. It uses technology to mediate the necessary two-way communication. (p. 42-43)

2. The second definition by Barker and colleagues believed that the definition of distance education needed broadened to accommodate new technologies. They wrote:

Telecommunications-based distance education approaches are an extension beyond the limits of correspondence study. The teaching-learning experience for both instructor and student(s) occurs simultaneously—it is contiguous in time. When an audio and/or video communication link is employed, the opportunity for live teacher-student exchanges in real time is possible; thereby permitting immediate response to student inquires and comments. Much like a traditional classroom setting, students can seek on-the-spot clarification from the speaker. (p. 42)

The third presented by Moore, editor of the American Journal of Distance Education, stated that:

Distance education is all arrangements for providing instruction through print or electronic communications media to persons engaged in planned learning in a place or time different from that of the instructor or instructors. (p. 42)
3. The fourth by P. Portway and C. Lane wrote in a volume on Telecommunications technology in distance education:

The term 'distance education' refers to teaching and learning situations in which the instructor and the learner or learners are geographically separated, and therefore, rely on electronic devices and print materials for instructional delivery. Distance education includes...distance learning-the student's role in the process.

(p. 43-44)

Keegan (1996) identified six main elements consistent to prior definitions, and composed the following definition of distance education:

- the separation of teacher and learner which distinguishes it from face-to-face lecturing;
- the influence of an educational organization which distinguishes it from private study.
- the use of technical media, usually print, to unite teacher and learner and carry the educational content.
- the provision of two-way communication so that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogue;
- the possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialization purposes; and
- the participation in an industrialized form of education which, if accepted, contains the genus of radical separation of distance education from other forms within the educational spectrum.

(p. 44)

The publication of this definition by Keegan (1996) in 1980 led to extensive discussion by other distance education authorities.
Schlosser and Anderson (1994) stated that Garrison and Shale argued that:

Keegan’s definition was too narrow, and did not “correspond to the existing reality as well as to future possibilities”…Garrison and Shale would not offer a definition of distance education, they did offer the following criteria they regarded as “essential for characterizing the distance education process”. (p. 2)

1. Distance education implies that the majority of educational communication between (among) teacher student(s) occurs noncontiguously.

2. Distance education must involve two-way communication between (among) teacher and student(s) for the purpose of facilitating and supporting the educational process.

3. Distance education uses technology to mediate the necessary two-way communication. (p. 2)

According to Schlosser and Anderson (1994), a single best theory of distance education has not been recognized. As advancements in technology are discovered, the theory and definition will also accommodate those changes. Additionally, distance education in one part of the world may not be the same as in the United States.

**History of Distance Education**

Distance education has been traced back approximately 150 years. The first recognized distance education program originated in Sweden in 1833. A printed public notice in the newspaper announced the opportunity to study “Composition through the medium of the Post” (Schlosser & Anderson, 1994, p.2).
The first formal distance study program has been traced back to the Society to Encourage Study at Home located in Boston. More than 10,000 students studied classical curriculum in a 24-year period. The organization was founded in 1873 by Anna Eliot Ticknor, who is known as the “mother of American correspondence study” (Verduin & Clark, 1991).

Distance education university study in the United States began in 1874 at Illinois Wesleyan University, where both graduate and undergraduate degrees could be pursued in absentia (Verduin & Clark, 1991). Enrollments at Wesleyan decreased between the years 1890 and 1900. Concerns of the quality of the program led to the recommendation to terminate the program by 1906 (Schlosser & Anderson, 1994).

In 1978, John Vincent introduced a home reading circle for adults. Vincent was one of the founders of the Chautauqua movement, a popular education society. The society emphasized the expanding of access of education to all Americans. Thus, Chautauqua is known as the “first significant distance education effort in America” (Verduin & Clark, p. 16, 1991).

In 1882, William Rainey Harper, the “father of American correspondence study,” induced Chautauqua educators to allow him to start a correspondence study program for summer school students (Verduin & Clark, 1991). Soon after this event Chautauqua became an
accredited university in New York State. In 1892, he became the first president of the University of Chicago and founded the first university-level correspondence study division in America.

In 1891, a newspaper editor from Pennsylvania, Thomas J. Foster, offered a correspondence course in mining and the prevention of mine accidents (Schlosser & Anderson, 1994). His work matured into the International Correspondence Schools located in Scranton, Pennsylvania. At the University of Wisconsin, the development of the “short course” and farmers’ institutes in 1885 formed the foundation for university extension (Schlosser & Anderson, 1994). The National Home Study Council (NHSC) was created in 1926 as an accrediting body intending to address problems of quality and business ethics related to correspondence study.

According to Schlosser and Anderson (1994), in the United States, the advances of electronic communications technology helped determine the dominant medium of distance education. In the 1920’s, over 100 radio stations were built at educational institutions to teach distance education, most were closed within ten years. The invention of the television soon replaced this medium.

In the early 1930’s, the University of Iowa, Purdue University, and Kansas State University used experimental television. It was not until the 1950’s until college credit was given for broadcast television courses
Western Reserve University was the first to offer a continuous series of such courses, beginning in 1951.

Schlosser and Anderson (1994) claimed satellite technology developed in the 1960's was not made cost-effective until the 1980's. This technology caused the rapid spread of instructional television. Federally funded experiments, such as the Appalachian Education Satellite Project in 1974 and 1975 demonstrated the feasibility of satellite delivered instruction (Schlosser & Anderson, 1994).

To Schlosser and Anderson (1994), distance-teaching universities were similar in many ways; their missions and practices were different. For example, the Open University of the United Kingdom favored employed, part-time students, above the normal study age. The formal entrance exams and qualifications for these students were waived.

In comparison, the German FernUniversitat employed a more unyielding program than the Open University. Their program required formal entrance exams. From 1975 to 1985 they had enrolled 28,000 students, but only 500 students completed the full curricula for the university degree (Schlosser & Anderson, 1994).

Schlosser and Anderson (1994) believed that two attributes have marked distance education's development. First, sophisticated communications technologies have been included into many distance
education programs. Second, distance education has developed in each region utilizing local resources while integrating philosophy of the universities offering the programs.

Previously, in the United States research and development of distance education has been impeded by the lack of a general accepted theory (Schlosser & Anderson, 1994). Problems were not because of the deficiency of proposed theories. Innumerable theories have been proposed which either attempt to explain distance education using the existing theories, or new distance education theories have been developed.

Schlosser and Anderson (1994) explain that a theory that is acceptable at one time and in one place may be unacceptable in another locale. For example, the distance education program used in Australia may not be the same as used in Iowa. Additionally, it may be that one theory or definition of distance education is inadequate for all programs.

The United States Distance Learning Association (1997) stated that:

Faced with retraining fifty million American workers, corporate America is using distance learning for all aspects of training both internally and externally. Many major corporations such as Hewlett-Packard save millions of dollars each year using distance education to train employees more effectively and more efficiently than with conventional methods. (p. 1-2)
Kember (1995) stated that in respect to practice and promise, distance education is a rapidly growing field. He believed that in regard to respect to promise it is a field which may “redefine 21st Century education.”

The Adult Learner

According to Schlosser and Anderson (1994), the original target groups of distance education efforts were adults with occupational, social and family commitments. The students coordinate the different areas of their lives that have a direct influence on each other. There are a variety of reasons that the adult learner engages in distance education.

Eastmond (1995) explained that the distance education learner has two main reasons for taking distance education courses. The first deals with fluctuations in the lifestyles of the learner preventing them from enrolling in a traditional learning environment. The second was the students work schedule interfering with a fixed class schedule.

The United States Distance Learning Association (1997) claimed that adult student attitudes are generally positive about a distance learning experience. Bolles (1979) stated that there is a “trigger” that explodes in the adult learner, which creates a need to learn. He claimed that 56% of the time a transition or change was identified as the reason for the adult enrolling in distance education.
A study conducted by Brickell and Aslanian found the major reason adult students entered distance education was due to a career transition or career change (Bolles, 1979). To Eastmond, (1995) students enroll in distance education programs due to shift work, erratic schedules, and extensive travel for the job. For many adult learners distance education is the only logical option available to continue their education.

Securing a college degree through distance education involves several factors. Eastmond (1995) claimed that components such as self-confidence of success, intellectual stimulation, and reaching long-term goals are among the most favored reasons. Literature also suggests, some adult students are not comfortable in the traditional classroom setting. Adult learners are normally searching for a change in their lives (Lockwood, 1995).

Adult learners place a great amount of importance on courses they pursue while retaining full-time employment (Boyd, 1994). Most adult learners lead extremely busy lives. They are normally searching for employment, or want to increase their chances to be promoted. For Lockwood, (1995) other adult learners are proving to themselves or their peers that they are capable of academic success.

Weathersby and Tarule, (1980) explained that data from a study of adult learners at Goddard College proved that “going back to school” is a
change in life structure. The changes are closely related to goals accomplished and goals desired. Adults engage in formal learning for many reasons.

To Galbraith (1991), there are six categories associated with the adult learner entering or returning to formal education:

Cognitive interest, social stimulation, social contact, external expectation, community service, and professional advancement. (p.18)

Weathersby and Tarule (1980) stated that adults use education to compliment transitions in life. Different life stages dictate how the adult learner views education. The life-cycle theory describes how the age of the adult learner predicts their view of education.

Eastmond (1997) identified four distinct types of adult learners seeking college degrees:

1. Necessity Learner:
Must complete their degree to keep their current position, advance or find a new job. (p. 24)

2. Recareers or Ladder Climbers:
Do not have the same external necessity to complete their education, these individuals were ambitiously achieving specific career ends and viewed education as an integral, enabling component for realizing those dreams. (p. 25)

3. Rainy Day Planners:
Have vocational reasons for pursuing their degrees, but were gaining the credentials primarily to leverage them into a career only if their current employment did not work out. (p. 28)
4. Star Seekers:
Those who are primarily chasing a university diploma because of their desire to learn and fulfill a long-suppressed college education dream. (p. 34)

Eastmond (1997) explained that the first three categories all had career development as their orientation. One variance noted was in the levels of vocational intensity among the learners. The "star seekers" were identified as a small group of adult students with personal or academic orientation. (p. 22)

Malcom Knowles (1984) is given credit for pioneering the field of adult learning. Lieb (1997) supported the following characteristics, which Knowles identified as common to adult learners:

1. Adults are autonomous and self-directed. They need to be free to direct themselves...the teachers must actively involve the adult participants in the learning process...they must get participants' perspective about what topics to cover and let them work on projects that reflect their interests...

2. Adults have accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge that may include work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education. They need to connect learning to this knowledge, which is relevant to the topic. They must relate theories and concepts to the participants and recognize the value of experience in learning.

3. Adults are goal-oriented. Upon enrolling in a course, they usually know what goal they want to attain...they appreciate an education program that is organized and has clearly-defined elements...they must be shown how this class will help them attain their goals.

4. Adults are relevancy-oriented. They must see a reason for learning. Learning has to be applicable to their work or other responsibilities to be of value to them.
5. Adults are practical, focusing on the aspects of a lesson most useful to them in their work. They may not be interested in knowledge for its own sake.

6. As do all learners, adults need to be shown respect...their wealth of experiences must be acknowledged. The adults should be treated as equals in experience and knowledge and allowed to voice their opinions freely in class. (p. 1)

Works conducted at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education by Allen Tough investigated what, why, and how adults learn and what help they obtain for learning (Knowles, 1984, p. 44). Tough claimed:

That adults are motivated to continuously keep growing and developing, but that this motivation is frequently blocked by such barriers as negative self-concept as a student, inaccessibility of opportunities or resources, time constraints, and programs that violate principles of adult learning. (p. 61)

This concept of learning projects was fully supported by Knowles (1984) as the basis of organizing adult educational programs. Tough defined students learning efforts as “episodes” and explained that in every episode the person’s motivation was to gain a knowledge or skill, or produce a change in themselves (Knowles, 1984, p. 46).

Motivational Characteristics of the Adult Learner

Knoll (1985) defined motivation as the goals which people hope to achieve by behaving in a particular way. Motivation in adult education would then be defined as listing the hoped for benefits an adult learner would expect to receive from securing a degree. An example would be a promotion at work, or entering a new career.
McCombs (1991) defined motivation to learn as a natural response to learning opportunities that is enhanced by:

1. A recognition of the role of thinking and conditioned thoughts in learning and motivation to learn under a variety of conditions, including self-constructed evaluations of the meaning and relevance of a particular learning opportunity.

2. An understanding of one's natural agency and capacities for self-regulation.

3. Contextual conditions that support natural learning as well as perceptions of meaningfulness and self-determination. (p. 1)

According to Atkinson and Raynor (1974), a well-developed area of research highly relevant to learning is "achievement motivation". They believed that motivation to achieve was a natural response of the individual desire for success, expecting to succeed, and the rewards obtained.

The study also pointed out that when the individual expected to succeed, the rewards would follow. Studies have shown that students have a high need for achievement. The student also earns better grades in courses, which they feel are relevant to their career goals (Weiner, 1990). Kember (1995) contended that motivation is either intrinsic or extrinsic in nature.
Hill (1997) presented information from research conducted by Wankat and Oreovicz, which defined intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as:

Motivation is usually considered either intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is internal. It often satisfies basic human needs...Extrinsic motivation is externally motivated and includes many things that the instructor can do, including grading, providing encouragement and friendship and so forth. The difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are not always sharp...(p.1)

For Schlosser and Anderson (1994) extrinsic motivation is the level of commitment to completion of a course or program. Intrinsic motivation is, “the level of interest in the subject matter itself or interest in learning for its own sake” (p. 19). Research has suggested that, of the two, “intrinsic motivation produces a stronger goal commitment” (p. 19).

Hill (1997) presented Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which is based on the assumption that people are motivated by a series of five universal needs. These needs are ranked, according to the order in which they influence human behavior, in hierarchical fashion. Physiological needs are deemed to be the lowest level needs. At the bottom of the list are basic needs for human survival. At the top of the list are needs for individual identity (Figure #1).
Maslow’s theory stated that when a need is unfulfilled, the individual would be motivated to fulfill that need. When the lower level needs are satisfied, higher level needs can be addressed and the person will be motivated to satisfy those needs. Furthermore, if a lower need is partly filled, it is hard to reach the next higher level need (Hill, 1997).

Wlodkowski (1985) supported the competence theory of motivation, which stated that human beings inherently desire to gain competence over the environment. Competence theory said that being human; a person is intrinsically motivated. This theory is the basis for other

Reprinted from Hill, 1997, p. 4
psychological theories such as attribution theory, achievement motivation theory, and cognitive evaluation theory.

Kember (1995) explained that intrinsic motivation is the interest level in a subject for the student. Intrinsic motivation deals with the student’s interest in the subject matter of content. Extrinsic motivation is driven by career opportunities that have been denied a student due to lack of qualifications, promotion and financial reward.

Hill (1997) presented the definitions of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and expounded:

Motivation is usually considered either intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is internal. It often satisfies basic human needs... Extrinsic motivation is motivated within...(p.1)

For Hill (1997), “people are motivated by a sense of competence and achievement” (p.2). Human beings receive pleasure from doing things well. He also stated that grades are one of the most important motivators for students.

According to Tomkins (1970), the adult learner deals with success and failure in achievement and accomplishment activities. The learner’s personal feelings are always rampant as they react to their progress or absence of progress. Learning is unpredictable and the outcome is seldom certain. For the adult learner, this risk may be higher because new learning may be a requirement for a job, promotion or another important personal goal.
Elias and Merriam (1980) stated that attitude is a combination of concepts, information and emotions. This results in a predisposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to certain people, groups, ideas, events or objects. Tomkins (1970) wrote:

Attitudes are important. They will influence motivation to learn from the beginning of instruction. Attitudes of the learner play an important role in motivation to learning. (p.52)

Wlodkowski (1985) contended that there are over twenty internationally recognized theories of motivation. Knoll (1985) supported deficit motivation and growth motivation. Deficit motivation is when the student is able to keep their current job and take courses to bring them up to date on the latest developments in their field. Growth motivation changes as the adult learner's age increases. In addition, the learners will gain further qualifications, which will allow advancement to a new job or career.

McCombs and Whistler (1991) reported fundamental principles or keys to motivation to learn. They stated:

All learners of all ages are naturally quite adept at being self-motivated and at directing and managing their own learning on tasks that they perceive as interesting, fun, personally meaningful, or relevant in some way. Typically that means activities that are engaging or related implicit personal goals such as feeling competent, in control and/or connected to others. (p. 93-94)

Knowles (1984) presented Lewins' field theory. The field theory said:

That a total pattern or field of forces, stimuli, or events determine
learning...behavior is a product of the interplay of these forces...learning occurs as a result of change in cognitive structure produced by changes of two forces: (1) change in structure of cognitive field itself, or (2) change in internal needs or motivation of the individual. (p. 23)

Field theory places more emphasis on motivation of the individual.

According to Knowles (1984), the work of Edward Lindeman laid a foundation for a systematic theory on adult education. Lindeman believed that work, recreation, family situations, and social life influence the adult learner. He claimed these situations demanded adjustments, and this is when the adult education begins.

Wlodkowski (1985) contended that the adult learner needs and desires what is being taught, and they will be motivated. A need is a condition experienced by the learner as an internal force that leads the person to move in the direction of the goal. “Thirst (a need) leads to a search for water (the goal)” (p. 48). Wlodkowski claimed:

Needs act like strong internal feelings that push a person toward a general goal. The stronger the need, the greater the chances the person will feel pressure to attain a related goal. When emotions are positive when learning, they sustain involvement and deepen interest in the subject matter of activity. Learners feel something while learning and those emotions can motivate their behavior in several directions. (p. 48-49)

Wlodkowski (1985) believed that people can “feel driven to acquire food, money, or knowledge, which are just a few of the many compelling needs that seem to motivate human beings” (p. 48).
McCombs and Whistler (1997) presented “affective factors” and motivational influences on learning (p. 5). The depth and breadth of information processed, and what and how much is learned and remembered, are influenced by beliefs and emotions. McCombs contended that:

individual state of mind, beliefs about personal competence, expectations about success, and personal interests and goals all influence how motivated a student is to learn. (p. 5)

Elias and Merriam (1980) agreed that a student “learns’ what they perceive to be necessary or meaningful.” They contended that, “the meaning a learner places on a subject depends on their personal goals, interests, attitudes, and beliefs” (p. 126).

Zemke and Zemke (1984) explained that their research has generated the following results:

1. Adults seek out learning experiences in order to copy with specific life-changing events—e.g., marriage, divorce, a new job, a promotion, being fired, retiring, losing a loved one, moving to a new city.

2. The more life change events an adult encounters, the more likely he or she is to seek out learning opportunities. Just as stress increases as life-change events accumulate, the motivation to cope with change through engagement in a learning experience increases.

3. The learning experiences adults seek out on their own are directly related—at least in their perception—to the life-change events that triggered the seeking.

4. Adults are generally willing to engage in learning experiences before, after, or even during the life change event. Once convinced that the change is a certainty, adults will engage in any learning that promises to help them cope with the transition.
5. Adults who are motivated to seek out a learning experience do so primarily because they have a use for the skill being sought. Learning is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

6. Increasing or maintaining one's sense of self-esteem and pleasure are strong secondary motivators for engaging in learning experiences. (p. 1)

Kember (1995) believed a relationship exists between student motivational goals and success in distance education. He noted that:

distance education students “must decide whether the opportunity costs of time spent studying are worthwhile in the view of the perceived benefits of the eventual qualification or other benefits the student might derive from studying”. (Schlosser & Anderson, 1994, p. 20)

Schlosser and Anderson (1994) reported that a 1991 study conducted at the University of Pennsylvania presented interesting results. The research examined attitudes toward correspondence study and found that:

Motivation was the single most important of the feedback related independent variables influencing student satisfaction. (p. 22)

Knoll (1985) believed that, “motivation is a vital precondition for learning; motivation is also a concept with highly positive connotations” (p. 52). He believed that adults enroll in courses voluntarily and therefore the learner is highly motivated.
As it may be synthesized from the preceding review, there is disagreement on the definition of distance education. Distance education has numerous meanings because the term has been applied to many programs serving various audiences using different media (Schlosser & Anderson, 1994).

Distance education has been used for many different programs worldwide for over 150 years. The Open University in the United Kingdom is one of the most recognized programs in the world today. Their program is unique as they almost exclusively use electronic telecommunications to serve a non-traditional student.

However, in the United States a combination of correspondence, video, audio, telecommunications, or a combination of media is used to deliver distance education. The definition of distance education may vary by geographical area and student and motivated to learn. Keegan is credited with the best known definition of distance education to date. He has combined the many essential elements from many definitions of distance education (Schlosser & Anderson, 1994).
Distance education has only existed for about 150 years but many advances have been made in this short timeframe. According to Schlosser and Anderson (1994), two characteristics have marked its development. They said:

First, there has been an adoption of increasingly sophisticated communications technologies as such technologies have become available. Second, distance education has developed in each locale in accordance with local resources and the philosophy of the organizations providing instruction. (p. 13)

Research presented that the development and study of distance education has suffered because of a lack of a general accepted theory.

One thing is certain about distance education; advancements in technology have improved the delivery method used to reach the learner. How distance education will change in the future is unknown. Changes in society, politics, economics, and technology are impacting the status of distance education worldwide (Schlosser & Anderson, 1996).

Some universities view distance education as a means to increase declining enrollment. Additionally, universities and instructors are under constant pressure to provide instruction to meet the diverse needs of society. The rapid changes in society and technology are seeking a "quick fix" to the needs of organizations experiencing a changing workforce.
Researchers and educators are still unsure if the distance education student learns as much as the traditional student. Research maintained that the instructional format of distance education has little effect on student achievement. Achievement tests conducted on distance education students tend to be higher for the distance education student (Zemke & Zemke, 1984).

The characteristics of the distance education student many times are different. Normally, they are older than a traditional student. Also, their reasons may be different for taking courses than the traditional student.

Traditional students are many times recent high school graduates who may or may not have defined their career goals. Many distance education students are older, have jobs, and families. Their reasons for taking courses may be to ensure promotion in their current job, secure a better job, or to broaden their education.

However, research does conclude that the distance learner is motivated by different factors than many traditional students. In the distance education experience the primary role of the student is to learn. Under the best of circumstances, this challenging task requires motivation.
Schlosser and Anderson (1994) reported that a study by Coldeway on the distance education student found that:

1. Most students progressed through courses more slowly than the institution suggested.

2. Most students did not study consistently, and their study was frequently disrupted by events unrelated to the course.

2. Motivation was not a stable characteristic: it was higher when the student approached an assessment point or "had an important interaction with a member of the instructional staff of the institution (usually a telephone tutor).

3. Students conferred with tutors far less frequently than school policy prescribed.

4. Attrition rates were somewhat inflated by the number of students who enrolled in courses, did very little work but did not officially withdraw. (p. 17)

Coldeway also concluded in his research that "learner motivation was somewhat a fragile thing," (Schlosser & Anderson, 1994, p. 17).

One of the major problems with conducting research on motivational characteristics of the distance learner is that motivation can not be measured. However, motivating characteristics have been identified and distance learning can be modified to accommodate these factors. Understanding what motivates the adult learner to enroll in distance education can assistance universities and instructors develop courses accordingly.
Recommendations

The prospects for the future of distance education are very promising. Effective distance education programs must be carefully planned and focus must be on the learner's needs. Appropriate technology should only be selected after these needs are addressed. In distance education the learner must be responsible for himself or herself. High motivation from the student is necessary to experience success in distance education.

Instructors can help motivate the student by providing consistent and timely feedback. Adult students need this interaction to ensure they are not wasting their efforts in the wrong direction. Motivation is a constant positive influence during learning.

There is a relationship between student motivational goals and success in distance education. Students have varying degrees of motivation toward completion of courses or degree programs. Higher expectations for future occupational status are directly related with a high attainment in success of distance education.

Further research is needed in the area of motivational characteristics of the distance education learner. Instruction for the distance education learner must be developed in a logical and systematic format to avoid
misinterpretation by the learner. Also, the adult learner must have an understanding of what is expected, and the format must be clearly defined.
References


