

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, distance education has emerged as one of the most feasible modes of instruction that aims at bridging many of the educational objectives and practices between the formal and the non-formal sector. For the last decade, distance education has attracted educators and policy makers as a new measure of educational provision. Especially in Asia and the Pacific, distance education institutions and/or programmes have developed rapidly and played an important role. Despite its importance and wide scope of practice in many countries, not enough is known about distance education in this region.

In light of this, UNESCO and the National Institute of Multimedia Education (NIME), Japan have completed this project, "Distance Education in Asia and the Pacific" to add to our knowledge of where distance education stands at the present time. We initiated the project by inviting experts to write a case study and to co-ordinate the gathering of questionnaires about distance education institutions in their countries. For various reasons, we could not survey the entire Asian and Pacific area, but through the responses collected here, perhaps a comprehensive picture of the region emerges. The resulting case studies are attributed to their individual authors, while the survey has been compiled by us based on the efforts of the country coordinators and those who completed the questionnaires. Our efforts are therefore presented in two parts. The first part contains the case studies outlining the growth and environment of distance education. The second part presents a compilation of the surveys covering distance education institutions throughout the region.

Regarding the surveys, a few methodological points should be noted. Our primary objective is to systematically organize and present the data based on the information supplied to us by each country. As such, the amount of detail varies. Furthermore, in most cases the entries have been proofread by the participants and some have been subsequently updated. Thus, the information included here is as current as possible. However, the process of compiling questionnaire responses runs the risk of discrepancies. Therefore, we apologize for any errors that might exist.

Our editing policy of the case studies has been directed to presenting a uniformity of style. Aiming at clarity and coherence, this has in some cases required the editing of length. Regardless, we have fully retained each author's individual viewpoints, and hope the integrity of their work remains intact. In addition, we have included all references and citation information provided by the authors, including those which refer to sources in languages other than English. Compiling international references presents a challenge of accuracy due to varying customs of bibliographic format. Interested readers may therefore wish to contact authors directly for more comprehensive citations.

This is only the beginning. We have much more to learn about distance education and its potential in the future. The information collected here will hopefully serve not only as a general reference for people unfamiliar with this innovative mode of learning, but will also inform and inspire those who are involved in planning and decision-making in distance education, as well as administrators, educators, and academics. This work is the result of a collaboration among many experts and practitioners in the field. We thank them for the research they have done and for sharing their knowledge and experience. As pioneers in a young and growing field, we have come far in expanding the horizons of conventional education. By taking a moment to reflect on the past and present of distance education, the insights we gain from sharing our experiences may spur us on to an auspicious and enlightened future.

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