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AUTHOR   Wilson, Charles D.
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ABSTRACT
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distance education serve people in the developing world--most of whom
are probably FD? It is the author's opinion that in order for FD
learners to succeed at distance education programs, external controls
and more structure is required. The use of study centers, mentors,
and other facilitative interventions are needed to provide structure,
assistance, deadlines, and goals in order for the FD learner to
succeed. In 1988, 73.3% of the International Correspondence
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Presented by

Charles D. Wilson

International Correspondence Institute

Regional Director for Central Africa

P.O. Box 130

Jos, Nigeria

Abstract

The literature indicates that Field Independent (FI) learners are more likely than Field Dependent (FD) learners to succeed at Distance Education. The question is, how can Distance Education serve the developing world---most of whom are probably FD? It is the author's opinion that in order for FD learners to succeed at Distance Education programs, external controls and more structure is required. The use of Study Centres, mentors and other facilitative interventions are needed to provide structure, assistance, deadlines, and goals in order for the FD learner to succeed. In 1988, 73.3% of International Correspondence Institute's (ICI) graduates worldwide were Africans (who are classically FD). It is the author's hypothesis that the reason for this success is that the majority of African students studied ICI in Study Centres. Distance Education can serve both cognitive styles as long as programme planners allow for flexibility and adaptability to accommodate both groups of learners.

Study Centres: Key to Success of Field Dependent Learners in Africa

Introduction

Traditional print-driven distance delivery programmes have taken a rather naive posture towards cognitive learning styles. Research does indicate that Field Dependent (FD) learners have had a more difficult time succeeding in distance education programmes. However, International Correspondence Institute (ICI) has stumbled onto an approach that has made it possible for FD learners to succeed: the use of study centres is becoming the key for Africans.

ICI is a distance delivery programme providing non-academic and academic Christian training courses in 164 countries of the world. At the degree level, it has approximately 12,000 active students worldwide. Africa has been a major user of the ICI programme; 73.3% of the 1988 degree graduates were from Africa (Love, 1989). Of these African graduates, 97% of Nigeria's   graduates and over 95% of Southern and   East Africa's graduates studied ICI through study centres (personal conversation with Mark Hayburn and G.L. Haggard, 1992).

ICI's success in Africa has been more out of "default" than "design": the choice to facilitate the programme through study centres was not based on the benefit of distance delivery programmes, nor the knowledge of learning styles of the students, nor the value of study centres, nor research on course completion.   The decision was strictly an institutional decision--- ICI offered the only viable programme available to these institutions.

There are several factors why ICI's programme has been successful in Africa:

1. **Design:** provides a highly structured curriculum that is more suitable for African learners.

2. **Gobalization:** enables Africans to have a greater understanding and cooperation with the peoples and nations of the world through an internationally produced programme (Utsumi, Rossman, and Rosen, 1988).

3. **Accreditation:** ICI's international accreditation is a significant factor why many students choose the programme and why many countries are willing to endorse the programme for their people.

4. **Accessibility:** enables a massive and widely dispersed population to take advantage of a international programme through distance delivery systems.

5. **Self-Contained:** the instructional design of the ICI programme enables residential institutions to offer courses even if they have inadequate or untrained instructors.

6. **Cost-Effective:** ICI is able to reach large numbers of geographically dispersed students through the mass production of courses which are more cost-effective than establishing face-to-face mode of instruction.

Two premises must be stated at the beginning of this paper. The first is that the majority of Africans are FD according to Bowen and Bowen (1989) (Gilbert, 1992). Of the students they tested, they found that: 83% of Kenyan secondary school students are FD, as are 97% of the theological students across the continent and 100% of Nigerian students. The second premise is that FD learners are less likely to succeed at distance delivery programmes; the research of Chickering (1976), Thompson and Knox (1989) substantiates this point. It is the author's hypothesis that the reason that ICI has been successful in Africa is that the majority of African students who completed the ICI degree programme were facilitated through study centres (Wilson, 1991).

Learning Styles and Distance Education

Understanding of the individual differences in learning styles has achieved significant status in educational research through the pioneer work of Herman Witkin in the 50's and early 60's. Witken's use of the field dependent/field independent dimension of learning styles measured the extent to which individuals are able to overcome effects of distracting backgrounds when they attempt to differentiate relevant parts using the "Embedded Figures Test" (EFT). Witkin's research concluded that the more independent of the distracting elements, the more analytical, or field independent (FI), the person was. Conversely, the more the person was dependent or sensitive to the distracting elements, the more field dependent (FD), or global, the person was. The research in field dependent/independent learning styles has provided an understanding of learner characteristics in Table 1 (Witken, Moore, Goodenough, & Cox, 1977; Witken & Goodenough, 1981; Pelto, 1991; & Gilbert, 1992).

Table 1

Characteristics of Learning Styles

Global (Field Dependent)	Analytical (Field Independent)
Group-oriented	Independent Action
Learns best through small-step programs with frequent subtests.	Successful with either large or small step programs
Extrinsically motivated (Learns best through socially set goals)	Intrinsically motivated
Concrete learner	Abstract learner
Vulnerable to criticism	Copes with criticism
Needs advance organisers-- Concepts need to be presented in sequential order	Less affected by order of concept presentation
Learns best through visual modelling	Learns either by visual or verbal method

The research of Ramirez and Castaneda (1974) developed instruments that measured the sensitivity of teachers and described behaviors of FI/FD teachers in Table 2 and 3:

Table 2   Field independent teaching style

Personal Behaviors
1.   Is formal in student relationships; authority figure.
2.   Focuses on instructional objectives; gives less attention to
        social atmosphere.
Instructional Behaviors
1.   Emphasizes individual effort and independent student
        behavior.
2.   Encourages competition between students.
3.   Adopts a consultant role; encourages students to seek help
        only when they experience difficulty.
4.   Encourages learning through trial and error.
5.   Focuses attention on assigned tasks; task oriented.
Curriculum related Behaviors
1.   Focuses on details of curriculum materials.
2.   Focuses on facts and principles; teaches problem solving
        using short cuts and novel approaches.
3.   Emphasizes math and science abstractions; tends to use
        graphs, charts, and formulae in all teaching.
4.   Emphasizes inductive learning and the discovery approach;
        starts with isolated parts and slowly assembles them.

Table 3   Field dependent teaching style

Personal Behaviors
1.   Displays physical and verbal expressions of approval and
        warmth.
2.   Strengthens relationship with students by using personalized
        rewards.
Instructional Behaviors
1.   Expresses confidence in student's ability to succeed; is
        sensitive to those having difficulty or needing help.
2.   Gives guidance to students; makes purpose and main
        principles of lessons obvious; clear lesson presentation with
        clearly delineated steps.
3.   Encourages learning through modeling or imitation.
4.   Encourages cooperation and working together as a unit.
5.   Holds informal class discussions; encourages relating
        concepts to personal experiences.
Curriculum Related Behaviors
1.   Emphasizes global aspects of concepts; ensures that students
        understand the performance objectives; identifies
        generalizations.
2.   Personalizes curriculum; relates material to interests and
        experiences of students and self.
3.   Humanizes curriculum.
4.   Uses teaching materials to elicit expression of feelings.

Implications of the FD learning style (Gilbert, 1992) must be
considered in the development of a distance delivery programme for Africa:

1. Learning tasks should be concrete and sequential with clearly defined parameters and free of ambiguity.
2. Group process-oriented learning must be integrated into the instructional design of any distance delivery programme.
3. The role of facilitator or mentor is essential for FD learners.
4. Formative evaluation must be built into the instructional design.
5. Curriculum must be global in design: the students need to see the whole, lesson objectives and outline must be presented---they must see how each lesson fits into the whole.
6. Facilitator or Mentor Guides must be developed for group process learning---FD facilitators or mentors expect to be told what to do.

Most print-driven distance delivery programmes do not take into consideration some of these implications for FD learners. The FD learner does need the high structure that print-driven programmes generally offer, but they also need interaction with mentors and fellow students who provide assistance, direction, and controls that are normally not available to the independent study student.

Use of Study Centres in Africa

A summary of the literature on distance education, substantiates the role of study centres (Wilson, 1991). Study centres are anything from a single classroom to multi-classroom centres. Their purpose is to be community-based or institution-based centres, offering easy access to their programmes by adults, emphasizing the socialization aspect of learning, and providing interaction with faculty. Classes facilitated through study centres provide additional structure and face-to-face contact. In cross-cultural settings, centres provide remediation and assistance in adapting new information to the student's culture. Another advantage of study centres is that, through interaction with fellow students, faculty and other school representatives, students are motivated to continue; Billings' (1988) research revealed students are more likely to complete programmes through study centres.

In Africa, ICI study centres were adopted by institutions that lacked qualified instructors, sufficient instructors, library resources, and/or accreditation. They "import" the distance delivery system into the institution in order to a have viable programme in spite of inadequate resources. This "marriage" of distance delivery programme with traditional institutions has proved to be fruitful. In Nigeria, a comparative analysis of students studying ICI courses from June 1990 through June 1992 showed that the number of independent students attempting ICI courses (58) was nearly the same as those studying in study centres (66); however the study centre students attempted 382 courses and completed 363 courses, while the independent students attempted 240 courses and completed only 116 courses (see Table 4, 5, & 6). Students in the study centres attempted 45% more courses than the independent students and they competed 95.03% of their courses, while the independent students only completed 51.67% of their courses. Since the degree programme in Nigeria began in 1980, only five out of the 157 graduates have completed the degree through independent study.

Table 4   Comparative analysis of students studying ICI courses (1990-1992)

Description	Study Centres Students	Independent Students
Total number of students	58	66
Total number of courses attempted	382	240
Total number of courses completed	363	124
Percentage of courses completed	95%	52%
Courses not completed	19	116
Average number of courses completed by each student	6	2
Average time for course completion	5.15 (months)	7.41
Average student GPA	71%	79%

Table 5

Courses Attempted/Courses Completed

Number of Courses

400
300
200
100
0

Total Number of
Courses Attempted

Total Number of
Courses Completed

▨ Study Center   ▦ Independent Study

Table 6

Percentage of Courses Complete

100.00%
80.00%
60.00%
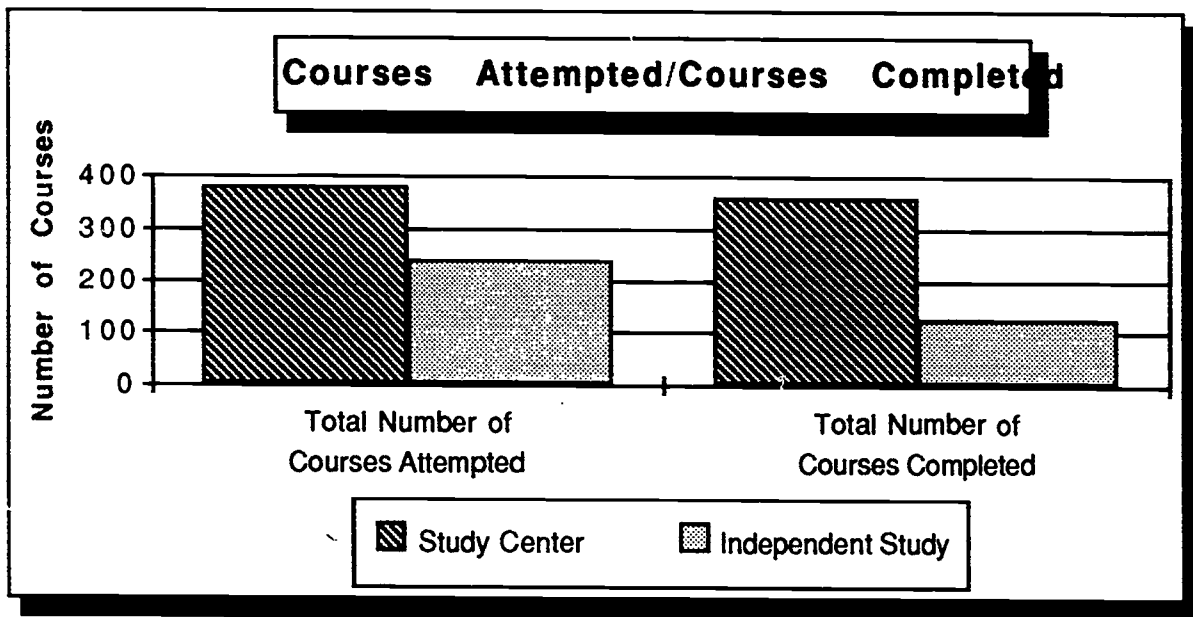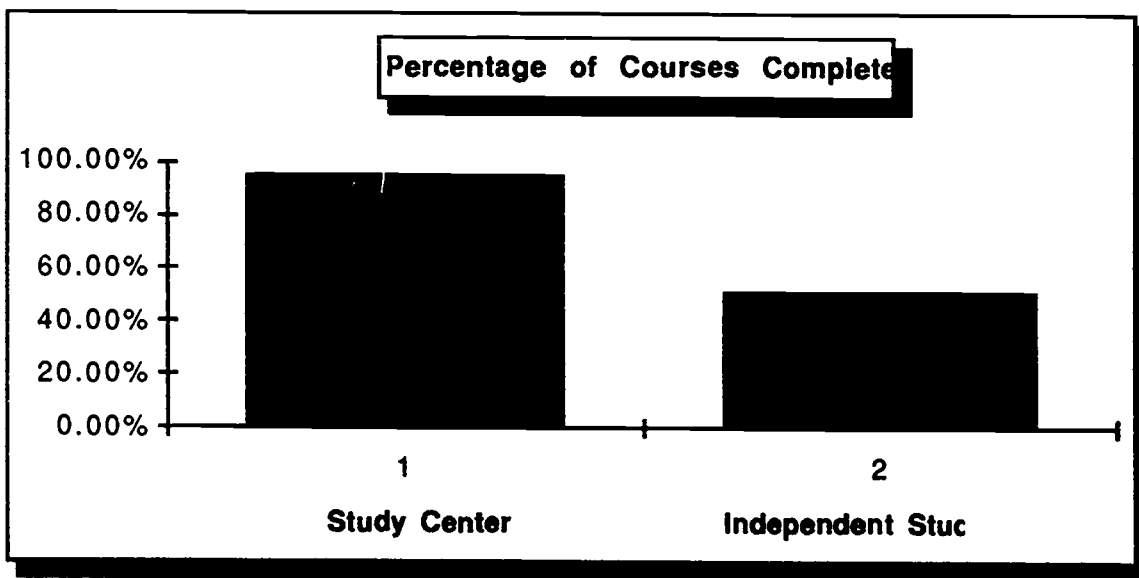40.00%
20.00%
0.00%

1
Study Center

2
Independent Stuc

Conclusion

It is the author's opinion when ICI is facilitated through study centres, the following benefits accrue:

- **Structured instructional design system**

Course content includes: an outline of the entire course, listed chapter by chapter; a summary of all objectives; chapter outlines included at the beginning of each chapter; concepts presented with illustrations, graphs, figures, etc.; clear and specific instructions; study questions interspersed with text content; study questions for group discussion and for homework; and self-tests at the end of each chapter (Gilbert, 1992).

- **External controls**

Study centres provide FD learners with strong correction and support, frequent criterion-referenced grading, feedback and reinforcement (1992). Study centres help students to set and achieve course assignment deadlines.

- **Interaction with mentors**

Mentors help set goals and deadlines, define learning objectives, assist in problem solving, provide feedback and reinforcement, facilitate group activities and provide a model for FD learners (Wilson, 1991). FD learners need to interact with people rather than print in order to learn concepts effectively.

- **Group-process oriented learning**

Study centres provide a vehicle for group projects and discussions and group problem-solving (Gilbert, 1992).

- **Contextualization of content**

Study Centres assist the students in adapting new information into their cultural frame of reference.

It is certain that ICI's African graduates would not have had access to a quality educational programme in existing institutions without the ICI distance delivery degree programme. And they would not have succeeded at distance delivery programmes had it not been facilitated through study centres.   An output assessment of the graduates reveals that all 157 Nigerian graduates (including the five independent students) are in full-time church work: 38 are in national or district leadership positions, Nine are Bible school administrators, 15 are teachers in Bible schools, and the rest are pastoring churches. Study centres have been the key for training FD learners in Africa through ICI's distance delivery degree programme--- a dynamic marriage has brought life to Theological training for Africa.

It is the author's goal that the lessons ICI has learned through the use of study centres will challenge other programme planners to adapt their instructional design of distance delivery systems to accommodate the FD learners that dominate the developing countries of the world.

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