



Introduction

In reviewing the history and current state of online distance education in Germany, two separate developments are noticeable. Firstly, private initiatives can be traced back to the 1850s, ranging from correspondence to traditional distance and modern online distance education endeavors. In contrast, developments in the public educational sector are more recent, dating back to the 1950s after the Second World War, when Germany was divided in East and West Germany, and later from 1990, when the country was reunified. Distance education in East Germany was fundamentally different from developments in West Germany. East German structures were controlled centrally by the State, whereas in the Federal Republic of West Germany, eleven *Bundesländer* (states) decided autonomously on educational policies, thus resulting in multiple developments.

In 1990, after the reunification of Germany, the Eastern regime and structures collapsed and the West German federal constitution was extended to 16 states. The current picture of online distance education in Germany is a result of 16 autonomous educational policies, supported by a great variety of national funding programs.

Private for-profit institutions, the FernUniversität of Hagen and various specialized online and distance education initiatives at conventional universities share about one third of the total number of distance learners. The FernUniversität of Hagen is state funded and offers tuition-free degree granting programs.

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In conventional universities, open, online and distance learning initiatives are offered predominantly in life-long continuing and professional education programs that are partly self-supporting. The most acquainted examples are mentioned and discussed in this chapter. Most initiatives in public higher education are originated as state-funded trial runs, and only a few have resulted in sustained and effective practices.

Private Initiatives in Education and Training at a Distance

In Germany, “the evolution of the character and practice of distance education” (Holmberg 1995) is deeply rooted. Usually, records of the history of German distance education refer to Charles Toussaint and Gustav Langenscheidt, the founders of a language school in Berlin in 1856 that offered self-explanatory study letters for language teaching distributed by postal mail. Since their *Methode Toussaint-Langenscheidt* aimed at one-way instruction, it has been debated as to whether they can be viewed as the pioneers of correspondence education in Germany (Delling 1978, pp. 11f.; Holmberg 1995, p. 108, 2005 p. 14). There is less doubt about the so-called *System Karnack-Hachfeld* introduced in 1896 by the publishing house Bonneß & Hachfeld in Potsdam, Germany, supported soon thereafter by a technical school, the *Technikum Frankenhausen am Kyffhäuser*. The study letters developed by this school covered the fields of mechanical and civil engineering comprehensively, and the initiative became a long-lasting success. In this context, the term *Fernunterricht* was coined. *Fern* refers to distance, and *Unterricht* stands for instruction. The Technikum’s concept of *Fernunterricht*, originated in 1896 (Delling 1978, pp. 14f.), combined three elements: (i) written study materials (study letters); (ii) written assignments; (iii) two-way correspondence. These methods indicate a pioneering correspondence school, which spawned generations of followers in both the private and public sectors.

Today, in 2016, about 80 private institutions are members of the professional association in Germany, the *Forum DistancE-Learning*,¹ which counts more than 400,000 learners in a wide range of offerings in distance education and training, comprising short courses as well as university-level degree programs.² The modern concept of distance education augments the original ideas of correspondence education (dating back to 1896) and includes multiple media for delivering taught programs, e-learning tools, online teaching and learning environments and an emphasis on tutorial support. Such support may be decentralized and face-to-face in regional study centers, or in online discussion fora.

The most ambitious private institution in the field of professional training is the *DAA-Technikum*.³ Notable in the field of degree-granting higher and continu-

¹<http://www.forum-distance-learning.de/> [08.09.2016].

²<http://www.forum-distance-learning.de/news/5734> [08.09.2016].

³www.daa-technikum.de [08.09.2016].

ing distance education providers are subsidiaries of the family-owned *Klett Group*,⁴ such as the *Deutsche Weiterbildungsgesellschaft mbH (DWG)*, the *Wilhelm Büchner Hochschule*, the *Europäische Fernhochschule Hamburg (EURO-FH)*, and the *Studiengemeinschaft Darmstadt (SGD)*. The *Klett Group* represents the majority of the current 112 courses of study offered by a total of 16 private institutions.⁵

When tracking the development of *Fernunterricht* in Germany from its beginnings to this day, it becomes apparent that the private sector has established and developed a rather coherent concept of teaching and learning at a distance (Dieckmann and Zinn 2016), characterized by two-way correspondence, including various forms of “mediated student-tutor interaction as a constituent element” (Holmberg 1995, p. 47).

Public Initiatives in Education and Training at a Distance

The provision of teaching and learning at a distance in the public sector in Germany is less clear and is a more recent development than in the case of private providers. The most striking circumstance which had an impact on this field is the division of Germany into East Germany [*Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR)*—the German Democratic Republic (GDR)], and West Germany [*Bundesrepublik Deutschland (BRD)*—the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)]. This was the case during the period 1949–1990, which was then followed by the reunification of Germany.

Public Initiatives in East Germany (1949–1990)

In East Germany (*DDR/GDR*) education was under central state control, which allowed the development of a nation-wide distance teaching system in the early 1950s. This involved almost all institutions of higher education, resulting in an astonishing 25% of all university degrees being granted through this particular mode of *DDR* distance education (Möhle 1986). Initiated as a talent hotbed for recruiting socialist leadership and cadres in the early years of the *DDR*, the system was also needed later to thwart the brain drain when millions of people fled into the West. Adults were attracted by ample leave allowances which allowed them to attend weekend classes at conventional universities. They were offered standard university lectures in addition to printed study material for independent home study. The so-called *Konsultationszentrum* (decentralized consultations center) provided advice and support. This massive intervention in the *DDR* university system slowed down in the 1970s when professional development opportunities came to the fore through specialized institutions for higher education and training (Adler 1990; Möhle 1990).

⁴<https://www.klett-gruppe.de/home/our+business+units/adult+and+continued+education.772.htm> [08.09.2016].

⁵<http://www.hochschulkompass.de> [08.09.2016].

The centrally defined need for qualifications and professional development controlled privileges for attending distance education offerings. The combination of work and study continued to be a driver for developments in distance education in the DDR. However, all these practices came to an almost abrupt end after the unification of Germany in 1990, leaving an unfortunate aftertaste that has burdened the understanding of distance education ever since. This negative impression views distance education as mass education with limited academic freedom, expository teaching and drill, pre-fabricated study materials and poor student support.

Public Initiatives in West Germany (1949–1990) and in Reunified Germany (1990-to Date)

West Germany (*BRD/FRG*) contained eleven Länder (states) until 1990 that were autonomously responsible for their respective educational systems. With the reunification of Germany, the number of educationally autonomous states grew to 16. Today education remains a federal state authority. The first remarkable developments towards teaching and learning at a distance were the *Funkkolleg* (literally translated: radio course of lectures) in 1966 and almost in parallel, the establishment of the *Deutsches Institut für Fernstudien (DIFF)* (the German Institute for Distance Studies) in 1967. Each of these initiatives is now discussed in more detail followed by a section on the *FernUniversität* which was established in 1975.

Funkkolleg

The *Funkkolleg* was set up by the state of *Hessen*, the *Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt*, and the *Hessische Rundfunk* (the public radio station of Hesse). The *Funkkolleg* followed the tradition of university extension programs, although applied in an unusual way. Lectures were broadcast on the radio and accompanied by study material for independent learning and local tutor-led discussion circles. These courses reached out to hundreds of thousands of participants, many of whom completed the courses and gained a certificate of more or less the same value as those offered by ‘massive open online courses’ (MOOCs) today. The *Funkkolleg* could be viewed as a ‘massive open radio course’, which shows that today’s MOOCs are not nearly as innovative as their originators might like to think. In fact, the *Funkkolleg* provided a fairly effective multi-media, mixed mode approach to distance education, which in today’s preferred terminology could be considered as ‘blended learning’. Most importantly, the *Funkkolleg* has exhibited impressive sustainability and adaptability, as it has continued to exist for over 50 years (Greven 1998). Recent innovations include podcasts and an online platform which was introduced in 2006. A *Kinder-Funkkolleg* was launched in 2011.⁶

⁶<http://www.ard.de/home/intern/fakten/abc-der-ard/Kinderfunkkolleg/1144824/index.html> [09.08.2016].

Deutsches Institut für Fernstudien (DIFF), Hochschulvereinigung für das Fernstudium im Medienverbund (HVF), and FiM-Versuch

In 1967, soon after the establishment of the *Funkkolleg*, the *Deutsches Institut für Fernstudien (DIFF)* at the *University of Tübingen* in the state of *Baden-Württemberg* became another important milestone for the development of distance education in Germany. The mission of the *DIFF* was the development of *Fernstudienlehrgängen* (distance studies teaching materials) for the further education and professional development of teachers (*Deutsches Institut für Fernstudien an der Universität Tübingen 1981*). This included undergraduate and higher continuing education, as well as the development of study materials to accompany the *Funkkolleg*.

Regarding the Anglo-American discussion about the origin of the term ‘distance education’ (Moore and Kearsley 1996, p. 198), it is worth noting that the term *Fernstudium* (distance education) and *Hochschulfernstudium* (distance education in higher education) appeared for the first time in the German literature in 1967 (Peters 1967) and then in the title of the first volume of the *DIFF* book series (Dohmen 1968).⁷

From 1967 until its closure in 2001 the *DIFF* was a hub for the development of course materials—it was a highly regarded center of distance education research and a catalyst for bringing together many diverse stakeholders. These included the German states with their keenly protected autonomy in educational policies, and German professors with their untouchable right to decide on what was taught, based on the constitutional Freedom in Research and Teaching Act. Nevertheless, in the late 1960s there was a largely accepted need for the expansion of educational opportunities through new ways and means.

Under such circumstances, three developments are noteworthy:

- (a) The *DIFF* established a remarkable research record on various topics, e.g. learning through the medium of text (Mandl et al. 1984), and many other related works. When the *DIFF* was closed in 2001, its research capacities migrated partially into the *Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien*—the Knowledge Media Research Center—at the *University of Tübingen*.⁸
- (b) The extent of course materials developed under the auspices of the *DIFF* was impressive and voluminous.⁹
- (c) Although the *DIFF* was generously funded and developed instructionally well-designed, research-informed distance education course materials, it was not able to initiate or participate in sustained higher distance education settings. At best, its operating level was continuing education and professional development, hence the non-degree status of its reach into the areas of education and training.

⁷<http://terrya.edublogs.org/2013/11/25/the-man-who-invented-distance-education/> [09.08.2016].

⁸<https://www.iwm-tuebingen.de/www/en/mitarbeiter/ma.html?uid=fhesse> [30.07.2016].

⁹The list of all *Studienbriefe* (study letters) created until 1981 can be found at: www.edudoc.ch/static/infopartner/periodika_fs/bis_1997/010280.pdf [07.09.2016].

The FernUniversität and distance education at conventional universities

In the complex situation in Germany in the 1970s, the largest state, *North Rhine-Westphalia*, took distance education initiatives to the greatest possible extent by establishing a distance university, the *FernUniversität*¹⁰ in Hagen, which started operations in autumn 1975. Originally conceptualized by the social democratic government as a bold approach to widen access to higher education (as with the Open University UK), the *FernUniversität* came to reflect the “different social, cultural and academic traditions” in Germany (Peters 2001, p. 200). According to the basic understanding of a (West-) German university the *FernUniversität* was constituted as a research university with the unique distinction of offering single-mode distance teaching.

Entrance requirements for enrollment in general German higher education institutions were applied, with only limited features of an open university as practiced notably by the Open University UK (Zawacki-Richter et al. 2015). *Studienbriefe* (study letters) were written following the highest possible subject-matter related standards and degrees were granted after a selective examination process culminating in face-to-face seminars. Places at these seminars were limited up to around 25 seats, constrained by the teaching load of each individual professor. Thus there was a mix of modes—distance teaching and independent learning in the beginning of a course and face-to-face seminars in the final stages of study. This implied two things: A guarantee of an indisputable and comparable academic degree, but at the same time an inherent conflict between large-scale enrollments and limited output as a consequence of compulsory face-to-face seminars with limited capacity.

Enrollments at the *FernUniversität* grew fast, surpassing 20,000 after four years, and reaching over 80,000 in 2010. In the light of such large numbers, relatively low numbers of completed degrees can be reported. This discrepancy is often explained as a typical drop-out phenomenon of distance education systems (Moore and Kearsley 1996, p. 159 ff.). However, the particular case of the *FernUniversität* must be interpreted in the context not only of limited opportunities to attend the required face-to-face seminars, but also of the academic tradition of a German university, where the so-called drop-out is seen as a result of a robust selection process in order to maintain academic quality. In addition, the *FernUniversität* caters for a different and diverse student body, most of whom are working adults, who welcome the opportunity to have a second chance at higher education, studying part-time. Not all of them are necessarily interested in obtaining a degree, but rather in continuing their education by independently making best use of the print-based course materials provided (Peters 1992).

With the establishment of the *FernUniversität*, distance education took on a new dimension in Germany. The *FernUniversität* attracted students from all West German states and also from abroad; however, local student support was provided only within the state of *North-Rhine Westphalia*. The other states in Germany faced strong pressure to also provide support for their students enrolled at the *FernUniversität*.

¹⁰<https://www.fernuni-hagen.de/english/> [09.08.2016].

A novel solution was soon found by seven states which established central units for distance education at ten conventional universities, with the twofold responsibility of (i) supporting students of the *FernUniversität*; and (ii) developing their own distance education programs (Groten 1992; Bernath 1994, 1996; Kappel et al. 2002).

The concept of local student support in study centers of the *FernUniversität* is rather unique. Whereas the British understanding of student support “means that for each course the student has a tutor, whose task is to mark and comment thoroughly on their assignments and to hold optional local tutorial sessions every few weeks” (Daniel 2016, no page ref), the *FernUniversität* accredits a *mentor* for student support. The mentor must be an expert in interpreting the respective subject matter area independently from the professors at the *FernUniversität*, who have exclusive control over assessments and examinations. Thus there is a strict division of labor between the professors who carry the credentials and are responsible for teaching and assessment and the mentors in study centers who are expert partners to the students in supporting their distance learning experience (Bernath 1992).

The Digital Era and New Developments in Teaching and Learning at a Distance

The digital era, which emerged in Germany in the late 90s, had a self-propelling impact on new information and communication technology (ICT)-enhanced teaching and learning as a result of widespread investment in e-learning infrastructure. The whole higher education system was captured by a consistent process of transition towards the application of e-learning tools, preferably as an add-on to the campus-based teaching and learning environment. Solutions at conventional universities became labelled as ‘lifelong’, ‘online’, ‘blended’, ‘e-learning’ or ‘virtual learning’. An example is the state-wide approach adopted by the *Virtuelle Hochschule Bayern (VHB)*, the virtual higher education system of Bavaria, which “promotes and coordinates the use and development of multimedia teaching and learning in Bavaria”.¹¹

The universal trend to adopt digital tools in higher education put an emphasis on *learning* and consequently a more active role of the learner in a great variety of approaches; however, new technologies applied by teachers usually supported a continuation of expository teaching, albeit in modern forms, as shown by the findings of Zemsky and Massy (2004) in the United States. As a result, the distinctive feature of distance education in pre-digital times—of *mediating* teaching and learning as opposed to direct teaching and learning relations in conventional classroom settings—almost disappeared. New media and digital technologies captured all areas in higher education and former differentiators became in blended teaching and learning scenarios, with evermore variations of expository teaching and independent learning as the basic form of public higher education in the digital era.

¹¹Translated from: <http://www.vhb.org/startseite/> [30.08.2016].

Only a few universities and some specialized institutions of applied sciences (just as the *Wissenschaftsrat* had recommended emphatically in 1992) developed and continued to offer dedicated distance education programs reaching out to students located at a distance from the institution. The *Hochschulkompas* lists a total of 264 distance education degree-granting programs (undergraduate and continuing education) in 2016 at state universities in Germany (data as at 8th September 2016).¹² Their professional association is the *DGWF* (the German Association for University Continuing and Distance Education¹³). It is a hallmark of these institutions to demonstrate low-cost-and-high-outcome solutions in distance education and training (Bernath and Hülsmann 2004). The most radical and comprehensive distance education scenario showcasing the advancements of the electronic age (launched in 2000) is the fully online *Master of Distance Education* program offered jointly by *Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg* and the *University of Maryland University College (UMUC)* in the United States (Bernath and Rubin 2003; Hülsmann and Bernath 2010).

The *FernUniversität* in Hagen continues to apply the distance education model with print-based distance-teaching materials, increasingly embellished with online components, thus carefully transforming teaching and learning modes into online distance education. The *FernUniversität* dissolved regional student support centers in collaboration with conventional universities and provides student support all by themselves. The *Zentrales Institut für Fernstudienforschung (ZIFF)*, the central institute for distance education research at the *FernUniversität*, once a hallmark and highly regarded internationally, was closed in 2006. Seminal works by the most outstanding researchers remain treasured, for example Peters (1998, 2010) and Holmberg (1986, 2005), as well as the series of 126 volumes, edited by the *ZIFF* comprising all relevant aspects of distance education and authored by almost everyone of distinction in the field.¹⁴

Current Regulatory Framework for Open and Distance Learning in Germany

The 16 German *Länder* (states) have authority over their respective education systems, hence 16 different sets of laws and regulations need to be taken into consideration. Detailed statements of these laws can be found in the *Deutsches Hochschulrahmengesetz (HRG)*¹⁵, the German higher education framework law, the *Landeshochschulgesetze (LHG)*¹⁶, the university laws of each federal state, and the

¹²<http://www.hochschulkompas.de/studium/suche/erweiterte-suche> [08.09.2016].

¹³<https://dgwf.net/arbeitsgemeinschaften/ag-f/ueber-die-ag-f/> [01.09.2016].

¹⁴ZIFF-Papers: <https://ub-deposit.fernuni-hagen.de/servlets/solr/find?q=ZIFF+Papiere> [04.09.2016].

¹⁵http://www.bmbf.de/pub/HRG_20050126.pdf [18.07.2016].

¹⁶<https://www.hrk.de/themen/hochschulsystem/hochschulrecht/> [25.08.2016].

Gesetz zum Schutz der Teilnehmer am Fernunterricht—Fernunterrichtsschutzgesetz (FernUSG¹⁷)—the law of the protection of participants in distance learning.

Promulgated in 1977, the *FernUSG* defines in detail the requirements that a program must meet in order to be accepted as a distance learning offering. The *FernUSG* defines *Fernunterricht* as “contractually imparting for profit knowledge and skills, when teacher and learner are exclusively or predominantly separated and when the teacher or an authorized person are monitoring the learning outcome” (*FernUSG*, § 1(1)). Since this law is derived from the laws for consumer protection, it is obligatory for *private* distance teaching enterprises. There is an ongoing debate as to whether these regulations should also be applied to *public* universities, particularly in the case of marketed, fee-charging courses and programs.¹⁸ In recent years, alongside the growing activities of universities in the field of further education and professional training, the introduction of the ISO 29990¹⁹ as an international quality standard for learning services has also influenced the debate on quality standards in higher distance education.

Among the 16 federal state documents on university laws, 13 explicitly mention distance education as a possible mode of delivery. However, none of them contain a special section about programs offered entirely at a distance. The general understanding for all university laws and regulations is the traditional campus-based setting. Distance education is therefore seen as an additional offer or variation, which is not intended to replace campus-based programs. Most universities therefore use a blended learning approach as a framework for their online offers. In accordance with the *Deutsches Hochschulrahmengesetz (HRG²⁰)*—which states that credits obtained from distance education courses may be recognized in traditional undergraduate and graduate degree settings [Section 13(2)]—more universities have recently expanded their programs to target new groups besides ‘traditional’ students. However, as most statements on university distance education are linked primarily to the fields of continuing education and professional training, these areas continue to be more relevant for teaching at a distance in Germany’s public higher education sector.

¹⁷<http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/fernusg/> [18.08.2016].

¹⁸Critique and reply on the Law of the Protection of Participants in Distance Learning (S. 765 ff.): http://www.zfu.de/files/Mitteilungen/alte_Mitteilungen_der_ZFU.pdf [24.07.2016].

¹⁹<http://www.beuth.de/de/norm/din-iso-29990/135409271> [25.08.2016].

²⁰http://www.bmbf.de/pub/HRG_20050126.pdf [18.08.2016].

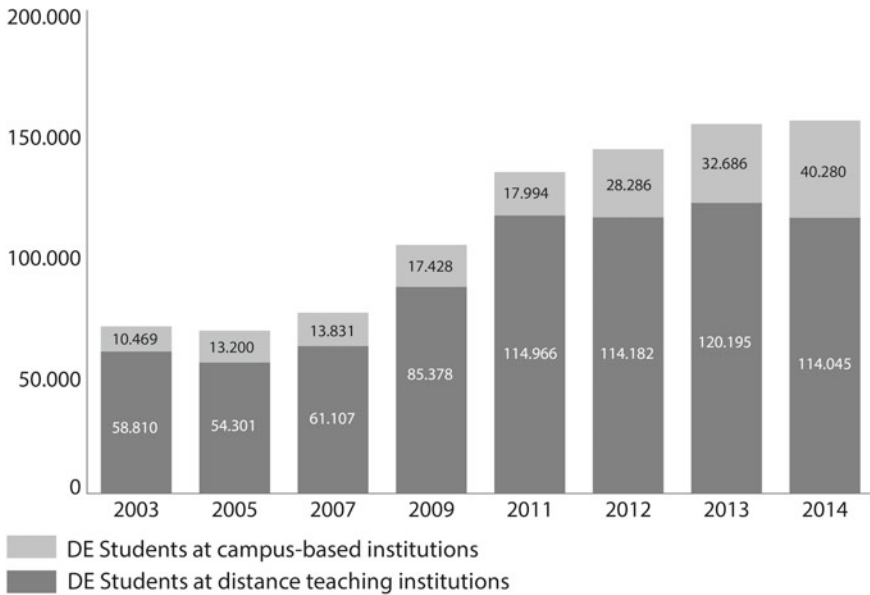


Fig. 1 Numbers of participants in distance and e-learning programs from 2003 to 2014 [based on *Forum DistancE-Learning, Fernunterrichtsstatistik, 2014* (<http://www.forum-distance-learning.de/fernunterrichtstatistik> [24.08.2016])]

Statistics About Students in Distance Education and Training

Figure 1 displays the numbers of participants in the sector described as *Fernstudium* (degree-granting distance higher education programs) at distance teaching institutions and campus-based universities from 2003 to 2014:

In 2014, 154,325 students were enrolled, with 114,045 of them at distance education HEIs (such as the *FernUniversität*) and a smaller proportion (40,280) in distance education programs at campus-based HEIs. Of the 114,045 students enrolled in distance education institutions in Germany in 2014, 70,632 studied at the *FernUniversität*, and 42,959 students were enrolled at private universities of applied science; both these numbers have nearly doubled since 2007.²¹ And even for distance programs provided by campus-based HEIs, student numbers grew from 13,831 in 2007 to 40,280 in 2014. These latter programs are financed mainly through cost-recovering participation fees (Graebner 2007). Of the total of 2.8 million students enrolled in all German universities and universities of applied science in 2015,²² an estimated 1.5% were enrolled in distance education programs (*Fernstudium*). This proportion has not changed significantly since 1991 (Holm 2013, p. 108).

²¹http://fdlmedia.istis.de/FU-Statistik/Fernunterrichtsstatistik_2014.pdf, p. 16 [01.09.2016].

²²<https://www.bmbf.de/de/der-studierendensurvey-1036.html> [18.08.2016].

The demand for flexible distance education programs in Germany is expanding. The most important reason reported by students for studying at a distance at the *FernUniversität* is the flexibility offered by distance programs (cited by 80–90% of students). Most other reasons cited are closely linked to this flexibility because all of them relate to the students' professional and/or family commitments (Stöter et al. 2014, p. 443).

State Funding of Distance Education and Related Modes of Teaching and Learning

In 2014 the Federal Government of Germany implemented the so-called “*Digitale Agenda 2014–2017*” in order to cope with the challenges in seven different policy fields, one of them being education, research, science, culture and media.²³ The aim of this agenda is to enhance the digitization of the educational system, with many funding programs being implemented in 2015. Since universities lack the resources for their own development (Kerres et al. 2012), most efforts are driven by external motivations linked to special projects funded by the government or the European Union (Hanft and Maschwitz 2012). Unfortunately, the interest of HEIs in such projects may be driven by the funds themselves, rather than by the themes and aims of the projects (Kreidl 2011). This aspect is emphasized by the indicator-based granting of funds by German states to their HEIs, since one major component of state funding is success in procuring third-party funds (Stöter 2015).

Since 1999 there have been several nationwide funding programs with a focus on the development and implementation of distance education or blended learning programs.

These large-scale programs can be viewed as the primary reason for universities to adapt and strengthen their use of distance education tools and to develop strategies for implementing the necessary infrastructure. The future of distance education in Germany, at least for the public sector, depends largely on these kinds of programs, but even more so on the strategies that institutions need to develop for sustainable implementation of the project outcomes.

Future Developments in German (Open) Distance Education

The development of the distance education sector within German HEI is driven mainly by national authorities, which support HEIs by means of various funded projects. Due to political and strategic decisions, the institutions themselves do not focus on the development of specific distance programs. But through funded projects the development of distance education programs is enhanced from outside of the institutions. In the years to come, a number of universities will have developed

²³<http://www.bmwi.de/DE/Themen/Digitale-Welt/digitale-agenda.html> [23.08.2016].

continuing education programs based on blended learning designs, and adult students will have the opportunity to study in a format suitable for their needs; however, these courses will be subject to significant fees. The challenge will be to learn from the processes adopted by these continuing education programs, so as to enrich traditional study with distance education modes. The positive outcome is that there will be more opportunities to enrol in distance education programs for more people, especially at campus-based HEIs.

In order to provide a glimpse into possible future developments of the distance education sector in Germany, we summarize some aspects of current developments, which pose a challenge to traditional universities. The new regulations that were established in 2009, and the following years forced HEIs to adjust their programs to the needs of new target groups, in addition to the on-going struggle to cope with the growing number of ‘traditional’ students. Although programs for adult learners, based on blended learning designs at campus-based HEIs, have been enhanced through various initiatives, national public HEIs will need to compete against the private sector to attract students from this new target group.

From the total number of 427 universities or universities of applied sciences across Germany only a fraction provides online or blended distance education programs. Based on an analysis by the *Hochschulkompass*²⁴ in March 2016, a total of 198 distance education programs offered by traditional universities were identified. Of the 52 providers of distance education university programs, 36 are public universities or universities of applied sciences (86 programs) and 16 are private providers (112 programs). Nearly all the private providers offer their courses exclusively at a distance and, due to the demand for flexible study programs and the lack thereof at traditional, campus-based HEIs, this private sector has been expanding massively.

Only a few public institutions have established distinct centers for their distance education programs, which are selected by very small proportion of students, although the total numbers of enrolments are growing, so do the numbers of students in general. Most of the universities in Germany tend to continue to focus on their ‘traditional’ target groups and study programs, and are therefore designed with these groups in mind, remaining campus-based in general; however, the various funding-programs might foster a change.

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²⁴<http://www.hochschulkompass.de/> [25.08.2016].

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