

ACADEMIC INTEGRATION IN DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR THE HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

Twenty first century has been acknowledged world widely as “ knowledge century”. In order to develop oneself as a resourceful, skilled person, education and continuous updating of knowledge is imperative. But due to a lot of complexities and barriers like jobs, familial problems, it becomes impossible to a person to pursue any course regularly. Here lies the importance of distance education. Though it is said that the distance mode of learning offers many courses through which students can integrate their reflection of life-experiences with academic learning in reality, there is little scope for learning through social interaction and inculcation of values for life through the means of ideal teacher-student relationship. This paper focuses how different aspects of distance education like user friendly calendars for contact classes, comprehensive and continuous assessment through online mode, activity based project, assessment can be molded so that it not only provide the scope for further studies but also facilitates the holistic development of the learners which will foster academic integrity. The paper also reflects academic integrity not only in terms of inculcation of values but also implementing it in real life situation so that the physical, cognitive and social processes of the learners can be directed properly for making him or her a resourceful, skilled individual to bring a positive change in individual, social and national arena. Effective learning through distance mode is characterized by flexibility in learning provision, openness to access various learning resources, autonomy of the learners where there is scope for maintaining honesty, self regulation, discipline and quality of learning environment which leads to academic integrity.

Keywords: *Academic integrity, flexibility, autonomy,value inculcation, self regulation.*

Introduction

“ Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.” – Swami Vivekananda

In the human endeavour towards perfection, Education plays an imperative role because this is the only way to be resourceful to the country but also to be a worthy member of the society. As food, water and shelter are the basic need for survival so also education because without it being the best creation on the world, human being cannot live to its optimum level. India is a diverse country having diverse culture, political, socio-economic background, geographical barriers etc. In spite of all these challenges one uniform education should be provided to every child. This is imperative because India has now the largest number of youth force and the youth of a nation builds its future. So the youth force should be guided in a productive way through proper qualitative education, otherwise it will be a sheer waste of human potential. Due to various challenges sometimes individual cannot pursue regular academic courses, here Open and Distance education works as its complementary. It not only quenches the thirst of knowledge of an individual but also update his or her knowledge through upgradation to make him or her suitable for the changing context of the society.

Education is the panacea i.e. it is the remedy to all the individual, social and national problems. But now a days education is falling short to solve the purpose. The reason behind it is the academic disintegration. Academic disintegration means when there is lack of harmony among different parts or domains that should be developed within an individual. In other words when there is an incongruity among the development of cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects of the learner. From another point of view academic disintegration may be seen as a gap between the theoretical knowledge of the learners and its practical implication in their day to day life. Besides, it can also be visualized as a disharmony exists between individual and society or nation. Academic integrity comes only when the factors responsible for the gap or disintegration are overcome through a qualitative, practical, organized educational system. Open and Distance education as a complementary to regular academic integration, it can give individual proper scope for the holistic development of learners. Besides it inculcates values among learners through self pacing educational system. It not only makes individual capable enough to be independent in every aspect of life, but also make him or her desirable positive changes in behavior and development of the society and nation.

21st century is knowledge century

Academic Institutions (Jan 09, 2013), our Honorable Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, “ I have a dream. I dream of society that is continuously in knowledge and where each individual is part of the creation of knowledge. I dream of a society where youngsters can do courses of their choice where technology is used but the importance of guru is retained.” Knowledge in the evolving era of economy has great importance for the development of the society. It has been coined with the characteristics of growing economic production in every field where the applicable of knowledge has been fruitful. Since so it has enhanced the competitiveness of the citizens by giving the set of skills enabling identification of three main blocks like generating learning skills, innovation oriented skills and collaboration skills contribute to the economy of the society or nation (Paris Tech Review/ Editors/feb10,2015). Distance learning is the education of students who may not always be physically present at a school. So National Policy on Education suggested strengthening of open school system for extending open learning facilities in a phased manner at secondary level all over the country as an independent system with its own curriculum and examination leading to certification.

In July 2002, the Ministry of Human Resource Development amended the nomenclature of the organization from the National Open School (NOS) to the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) with a mission to provide relevant continuing education at school stage, up to pre-degree level through open learning system to cater to the needs of a heterogeneous group of learners and also to universalization of education, to bring greater equity and justice in society and to the evolution of a learning society. Universalization of education leads to reaching of education in every corner of society. The NIOS provides opportunities to interested learners by making available the following courses or programmes of study through Open and Distance Learning(ODL) mode like-

Open Basic Education(OBE) program for 14+ years age group, adolescents and adults that are equivalent to classes 3rd, 5th and 8th of the formal school system, Secondary Education courses, Senior secondary Education course, Vocational Education courses or programs, Life enrichment programs. At the secondary and senior secondary levels, NIOS provides flexibility in the choice of subjects or courses, pace of learning and transfer of credits from CBSE. A learner is extended as many as nine chances to appear in public examinations spread over a period of five years. The learning strategies include; learning through printed self- instructional materials, audio and video programs participating in Personal Contact Program(PCP) and Tutor Marked Assignments(TMT). The study material is made available in English, Hindi and Urdu mediums. NIOS offers 28 subjects in eight mediums(Hindi, English, Urdu, Marathi, Telugu, Gujarati, Malayalam and Odia) for Secondary Examinations and 28 subjects in Hindi, English, Urdu, Bengali and Odia mediums for Senior Secondary Examinations. NIOS has provision of offering Vocational subjects in combination with Academic subjects at Secondary stage and 20 vocational subjects in combination with Academic subjects at Senior Secondary level. These Vocational Education programs in different areas such as Agriculture, Business and Commerce, Engineering and Technology, Health and Paramedical, Home science and Hospitality Management, Teacher Training, Computer and IT related sectors, Life enrichment Programs and General Services. Knowledge , skills and qualities of entrepreneurship have been made essential components in curricula for Vocational Education with emphasis on practical and on the job training in related industrial units. NIOS, as an accredited Institution is supposed to organize Personal Contact Programs on weekends or holidays under the guidance of a facilitator. During these sessions, teachers help students with the course work. Special practical classes are held for the students who have enrolled for the particular subjects that require practical exams. Learners should also attend PCP classes regularly to solve or clear their doubts and problems that they have faced while going through the study materials by themselves. Also , Tutor Marked Assignments should be taken seriously as these help in knowing one's progress and preparation. Life Enrichment Program is a collaborative effort designed to improve or advance the residents' live on mental, physical and spiritual levels. It encourages socialization in a positive and meaningful way; where seniors have the best quality of experiences throughout life, know the importance of activities in the assisted living facility. It is not just activities done to pass time, but to keep our residents. It recognizes personal satisfaction and enrichment in one's life through work. The NIOS provides resource support to the voluntary agencies and Zila Saksharta Samities (ZSSs) etc, for implementation of its Open Basic Education program. The NIOS programs pay attention towards requirements of the first generation learners, physically, mentally and visually challenged learners and candidates from disadvantaged sections of the society. The establishment of Indira Gandhi National Open University in 1985 ushered in era of quality higher education and training at a distance pursuing the policy of access and equity. IGNOU offered largely unconventional programs for a certificate and diploma level, besides programs for human resource development, continuing professional development in various

developmental and community development programs. In the year 2011-12, there are 14 Open universities and 140 Correspondence Course Institutes(CCIs) in conventional dual mode universities. The Distance Education Council(DEC) has extended technical and financial support to Open and Distance Education Institutes(ODIs) for development of technological infrastructure, Institutional reform, professional development and training, student support services, computerization and networking for improvement of quality of education. Distance Education programs have a strong foundation of curriculum and instructional design, with significant media mix to meet varied learning styles of diversified learners. The modular and credit based programs are more flexible, goal oriented, learner friendly and both market and development oriented. There are two models of Distance Education like Paced and self paced models. Paced model is similar to traditional campus based models in which learners commence and complete a course in the given time period, e.g. two year M.S.W courses, with in two year this course is to be completed. Institutions offer both distance and campus programs usually use paced models as teacher workload, student semester planning, tuition deadlines, exam schedules and other administrative details can be synchronized with campus delivery at the same time. Doing so, Paced model allows or gives the students more appropriately for inquiry and exploration on the concerned areas. Self paced model, in this type there is continuous enrollment and there is a freedom for learners to set the time according to their skill and commitment levels. It allows the learners to complete the course in their own pace of time. So the pressure to complete the course or program in this kind of model is reduce on great extent. It is the most familiar mode of distance learning.

Within higher education, new technologies have enormous potential to effect change. Technology is responsible for distorting the concept of distance between learner and instructor and enabling learners to access education at any time and from any place. It should encourage contact between students and faculty, develop reciprocity and cooperation among students by active learning techniques giving prompt feedback, emphasizing time on task. It should respect diverse talents and ways of learning. Emerging technologies with distance mode of learning, they enable Universities to meet a broader range of learner's needs, adopting teaching methodologies and offering online learning possibilities that allow individuals to learn anywhere and at anytime. They also create opening to engage in new kinds of collaboration and offer opportunities to distribute resources more effectively.

Current trends in the field of distance education indicate a shift in pedagogical perspectives and theoretical frameworks with student interaction at the heart of learner centered constructivist environments. While Pedagogy and Curriculum designs are matters for Institutions, Governments are responsible for defining the policy, legal and funding contexts which impact on the motivation and ability of Institutions to integrate new modes across higher education provisions. The emerging technology tools such as Wikis, Blogs and Podcasts to foster student interaction in online. A collection of writings, blogs are easily published and accesses via the Internet, these are the helping hands on socialize the learner and also learner control (Pallof and Pratt,1999). Blogs lend themselves to exploratory topics or enhancing writing skills, since they provide students with an audience (Kennedy,2003). And also Web blogs are the best used as student portfolios that keep record of an individual's progress, accomplishment as well as reflections and also documenting the student's personal and intellectual growth throughout the course. A virtual classroom comprises an electronic classroom from which the class is taught, a network of specially equipped electronic classrooms at which the students are present and the satellite microwave or cable linkages between them for teaching process, virtual classroom can be with video or audio. Massive Open Online Courses(MOOCs) offer large scale interactive participation and open access through the World Wide Web or other network technologies are recent developments in distance education. Summer camps have also been organized at National and International levels for identifying the learners to entry in perfect profession according to their interest. 29th and 30th National Summer camps on Entrepreneurial Adventures for college going youth for ten days each to help youth identify innovative and challenging career options and plan it entrepreneurially. A good opportunity for the youth to tap their latent potential for achievement. And also 28th and 29th National Summer camps on Entrepreneurial stimulation for school children duration of one week each. Summer camp programs are designed to provide children and teens with the experience of an actual profession.

Academic integrity is an integral part of quality education, whether education is delivered in the classroom or online, educators must be vigilant and relentless in upholding Academic honesty. Educators must take advantage of the benefits, technological advancement offers and uses it to enhance Academic quality and integrity. But some challenges occur in distance learning particularly in Self paced model of Distance Education, where there is no time bound. It is difficult to organize collaborative work activities, since all learners may not be available in the same time for such kinds of activities. And also in assessment part, since

Examinations can be written on any day making it possible for students to share Exam questions papers with resulting loss of Academic integrity.

Holistic development of learners lead to academic integrity

Integration is the act of bringing together smaller components in to a single system that functions as one. Developing oneself as a resourceful skilled person, continuous updating of knowledge is required. The mode of Distance Education gives individuals flexibility in their choices of continuing courses of education for which this mode of learning is user friendly. This also provides opportunities to each individual to apply theoretical knowledge in practical manner simultaneously in the field sector which brings skilled man power development with economic growth. Freedom in such learning increases autonomy of learner in paced set up. For the holistic development of learners, Academic Integration in Distance Education is very much required. Developing in all aspects like physically, mentally and socially which bring desirable changes in every field of life. Activity based project enlarges the areas for inculcation of values among learners. When participants in an course help to establish a community of learning(Palloff and Pratt,1999) by projecting their personal characteristics in to the discussion, at that time our own social presence reflects like affective, interactive and cohesiveness. Affective means the expression of emotion, feelings and mood. Interactive leads to evidence of reading, attending, understanding thinking about other's responses. Cohesive signifies that builds and sustain a sense of "belongingness", group commitment or common goals and objectives. And the cognitive aspect generalizes the extent to which the teacher and the students are able to construct and confirm meaning through discussion in a community of learning or inquiry. Cognitive presence can be demonstrated by introducing factual, conceptual and theoretical knowledge in to the discussion. Activity based projects incorporates collaboration among participants who are actively involved in the field. Flexibility in learning provisions or accessing various learning resources develop values lead to maintaining honesty, self regulation discipline which are related to integrity in academic field. It includes all work should be the result of an individual's own effort through the non-formal contact between teachers and students. Though Distance Education needs quality in learning, there is also a positive relationship between integration with moral codes, creating a learning context.

The world is changing rapidly and to cope up properly with the changing world around us for continuous up-gradation of knowledge and proficiency to implement in the betterment of life is very much important. Government has taken major initiatives in providing Open and Distance Education to those who cannot pursue their academic course regularly. These distance learning courses provide basic knowledge and skill. So that learners can have proper skill development which can be used to make him or her self sufficient economically. Besides skill development or sufficient man power brings economic development through immense production. Life enrichment programs not only make learners capable and efficient enough to tackle the problem, complexities and challenges prevailed in the life of post modern era but also accelerated his or her manifestation of the inner potentialities by bringing a coordination, harmony and integration among the development in cognitive, co-native and affective domains. Besides, for inculcation of values enshrined in our constitution, Education is the one and only way. Open andDistance learning provides individual proper knowledge about various rights as well as duties. So that the gap between individual and society or nation can be bridged. The individual can have awareness about their rights, so that no one can deprive them of their rights and at the same time a sense of duty and responsibility develops, so that other's rights are also fulfilled and the society and nation can function smoothly for its progress. Proper knowledge and inculcation of values among learners preserves the heritage of India "Unity in Diversity", as a sense of acceptance and oneness, when they are together. Thus, Open and Distance learning provides opportunities to all to actualize themselves. So that as an individual, as a member of family, as a part of society and as a citizen of India, they can contribute for advancement and proper enrichment in every sphere and this can make their lives meaningful.

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