Improving effectiveness of open and distance learning

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ABSTRACT

Ever since the existence of humanity in this universe, man has been knowing, learning, and developing. This knowing, learning and developing being the main agenda of education is continuing and will continue till doomsday. Every religion in this world lays emphasis on the importance of receiving and imparting education. Learning, the main goal of education starts from cradle and continues till death. The holy book of Muslims the Quran lays importance on obtaining knowledge so much that the word knowledge is repeated 854 times in it. The Bhagwat Gita, the holy book of Hindus has major theme of acquiring wisdom or knowledge i.e., the ability to distinguish the eternal from transient. In Biblical perspective again in old testament passage on education is found in Deuteronomy 6:5-8. In the beginning of civilisation people used to learn through self exploration and self directed plays. As the industrial revolution reached to climax literacy became an expediency. In view of high skills, acute division of labour and job differentiation, higher level of technical training became essential. Cambridge and oxford were then opened to all by the abolition of test Act. Education gradually was given the compulsory status. Rising standards of living and health conditions led population explosion hence, the established schools and colleges could not educate all the people further personal reasons like poverty, traditional home environment for women, working for survival and sometimes even the socio-political conditions of many areas like Kashmir wasted time of students and this hindered their education. Thus, the efforts to improve distance and open learning are going on worldwide. This paper highlights such efforts.

Keywords: humanity, education, the QURAN, the Bhagwatgita, distance, open.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the existence of humanity in this universe, man has been knowing, learning and developing. This knowing learning and developing is the main agenda of the education and will continue till doomsday. Every religion in this world lays emphasis on the importance of education for each and every human being, learning as the main goal of education starts from the cradle and continues till graveyard.

The holy book of Islam the Quran lays such emphasis on obtaining knowledge that the word knowledge is repeated 854 times in various forms and human beings are asked to think, consider and reason. The holy book of Hindus the Bhagwat Gita has major theme of acquiring wisdom or knowledge i.e., the ability to distinguish the eternal from the transient. In Biblical perspective again in old testament passage on education is found in Deuteronomy 6:5-8.

In the beginning of civilization, for thousands of years people used to learn through self-exploration, self-directed plays and verbal orations.

NEW MODES OF EDUCATION

Modern educational institutions are very recent. Modern school system is a gift of Horace Mann when he became Secretary of education in the Massachussets in 1837. Thus, educational institutions came into existence with development in civilizations. The need of being educated and spread of education all over the world further bloomed the growth of educational institutions and acknowledgment of education as a fundamental right in many countries like India thus further highlighted the educational institutions.

Development in the field of health led to growth of population and resulted in population education, rise in industrialization and poverty of poor led to increase in child labourers. As a result society got divided into upper class and lower class with middle class in between.

Although education became a basic human right, there are still millions of people who are illiterate and still a good number of people who could not continue their higher education due to various reasons like;

1) POVERTY: poor people cannot afford to continue higher education in traditional colleges and universities. Some individuals need to earn to continue their survival or to support family hence, they are unable to get education in the traditional colleges and universities.

2) Dropouts: due to some reasons many people get a break in their education and after many years of break it becomes difficult for them to get admission in regular colleges and universities.
3) conservative mind set towards women; women of many areas and sects are not permitted to continue education in regular mode. some women get married early and it becomes difficult for them to continue education in regular colleges and universities.

4) Population Explosion; All the students cannot be accommodated in regular universities as these have certain criteria to which all students do not fit.

5) IN-SERVICE CANDIDATES; Distance education serves as an in-service vehicle to fulfill a mandate to upgrade the knowledge, skills and qualifications of the employees like teachers and corporate sector. Hence, as all regular colleges and universities are not enough to fit needs of all the students and thirst of knowledge so must be quenched through Distance education. This helps to satiate individuals and the society.

UNESCO defines Distance Education as “an education process and system in which all or significant proportion of the teaching is carried out by someone or something removed in space and time from the learner.” Distance education is called by different names as it serves different purposes. In Australia, Distance learning is called as an external system. In North America it is called Independent study or home study. In France, it is known as it is known as ‘tele-enseignement’ and in Germany it is called ‘frenstudium’ In Spanish, it is described as ‘Education a distancia’.

History of Distance Education dates back to 1728 when Caleb Philips, a teacher of the new method of short hand wanted to teach students weekly through mailed lessons. The first university to offer distance learning degrees, establishing its external programme in 1858 was the university of London.

IN INDIA, there was also the dire need of educating the masses. Dr. S Radha Krishnan Commission says “education must be universalised and equal opportunities for all be given. Each and every citizen be given education irrespective of his caste or creed, social or economic status, motivation or aptitude”. Again, Indian Education Commission points outs, “there must be a method of taking education to the millions who depend upon their own effort to study, whenever they can find time to do so. We consider that correspondence or home study courses provide the right answer for these situations.” The National policy on Education 1986 says, “life-long education is a cherished goal of the educational process this presupposes universal literacy, opportunities will be provided to the youth, housewives, agricultural and industrial workers and professionals to continue the education of their choice, at the pace suited to them. The future thrust will be in the direction of open and distance learning”.

The International Commission on Education appointed by the UNESCO, to report on the development of education in international context submitted its report in 1972 entitled, “THE WORLD OF EDUCATION” had recommended: “Our last assumption is that only an over-all lifelong education can produce the kind of complete man, the need for whom is increasing with the continually more stringent constraints, learning the individual as under, we should no longer assiduously acquire knowledge once for all, but learn how to build up a continually evolving body of knowledge all through life.”

Common wealth of learning was established through a MOU between governments of common wealth countries in the year 1988. It is an inter governmental organisation created by common wealth heads of government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning, distance education, knowledge, resources and technologies. It is helping developing nations to improve access to quality education and training.

Thus, Distance education is one of the best means of eradicating mass illiteracy and meeting the ever increasing demand for higher education and is the imperative need of the present day society as it has undergone many changes with the scientific explosion.

In India the first school of correspondence courses was established at the university of Delhi in 1962. Today more than thirty three universities are offering correspondence courses in India besides, four full fledged Distance teaching universities. These institutions have greatly helped India to make education easy and accessible to almost every Indian.

Another recent manifestation of gradual trend towards democratization of education is the Open Learning. It is a relative term referring to degrees of openness compared to some existing practices like an open admissions policy which places few or no restrictions on entry, in contrast to those applying strict selection criteria.

present in India there are thirteen state Open universities and these are single mode institutions exclusively meant for distance education. These include:

1. B:R Ambedkar Open University Hyderabad
2. Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, KOTA Rajasthan.
3. Nalanda Open University Patna Bihar

IJRAR- International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews
Research Paper
The national centre for innovations in distance education in India. The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) got established in 1985 after the passing of Indira Gandhi National Open University Act, 1985 in the parliament of India. It has total enrolment of over 4 million students and is largest open university in the world. With the efforts of such universities Distance education is expected to double up in the next decade. IGNOU has been the recipient of the centre of excellence in Distance education award conferred by the common wealth of learning in 1993. The secretariats of SAARC consortium on open and distance learning (SACDIL) are hosted by IGNOU. It has an efficient effective network of 67 Regional centres and over 2667 learners support centres all over India and 29 overseas partner institutions. The mandate of IGNOU is “TO REACH THE UN REACHED”.

**USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION**

IGNOU has entered into long term collaboration with Deutsche Welle Academy Germany for the conduct of various training programmes. The DeutscheWelleAcademy is one of the premier institutions of media and education in Europe. The academy has conducted programmes in the areas of online journalism, training of trainers and media management at IGNOU campus as a part of collaboration. It is also contributing in providing video and audio educational programmes for Gyan DARSHAN and Gyan Vani—the educational television and radio channels of IGNOU.

IGNOU has also established a centre of innovations ‘The national centre for innovations in distance education’ (NICDE) in December 2005. It is a facility for promoting, supporting, re-engineering and disseminating innovations in open and distance learning system (ODL). The NCIDE has been successfully developing several cost effective ICT-based innovative learning and support solutions for the IGNOU. Thus, every effort is going on to make distance education effective and successful. With all these efforts new techniques are used in every way to make distance education easy, accessible and fruit full for learners some other services to learners in IGNOU to make Distance education easy include:

1. **ONDEMAND EXAM; NCIDE** came up with scheme of On Demand Exam. This scheme is innovative and flexible scheme of examination and is fully operational in more than 135, courses through more than 185 regional centres. This scheme is free of many traditional frames like fixed time, waiting for six months for term end examinations. This scheme uses the unique software for generating individualised question papers and is fully confidential and secured.

2. **Bilingual digital Questionbank**: NCIDE has developed a bilingual digital question bank for instant generation of question papers for on Demand EXAM and term end exam.

3. **Prototype Online Examination system**: NCIDE is aiming at “instant testing” instant result system to make examinations more flexible and learner friendly. This online exam scheme will help in spontaneous generation of question paper online and immediate transfer of student data, their result and evaluation.

4. **Automated TMA Generation and Assignment Banking system**: This pilot project of university gives a facility for instant generation of course wise assignment test by the faculty.

5. **e-Resource Experts**: IGNOU also has web based solution for identifying best available expertise in the country for different academic activities.

**USE OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA**:

Doordarshan in India has more than fifty channels. Through its three tier programme service – National, Regional and Local it caters to telecast of educational programmes.
DD National has coverage of 9.80% for educational category.
DD Regional’s educational coverage is 11.2%.
DD Bharti’s educational coverage is 30%.
DD GyanDarshan is the 24 hour educational TV channel of India and is joint venture of Doordarshan and IGNOU.

IGNOU transmits programmes from its electronic media programme centre at new Delhi .India’s educational satellite Edustat is entirely dedicated to the nations need for education. Tele Education has been taken up with the launch of edustat.

Still there are some recommendations about increasing the benefits of electronic media in distance education:

a) Educational programmes to be relayed should be advertised so that maximum number of students will get benefit by watching them. There should be advance reference of timing dates etc about tele lectures to students either at study centres or via their study material, SMS or email messages can also be used for intimation
b) Such important programmes should be relayed at evening times or at holidays so that the working learner can be benefitted.
c) Such programmes should be repeated many times to make them accessible to maximum people.
d) There should be consistency in broadcasting of lecture programmes of various courses so that students can systematically understand their course and their interest may increase.
e) A separate DD channel should be created for developmental broadcasting as a terrestrial channel and to ensure that cable systems also carry the same. Many poor illiterate still rely on terrestrial T.V for education. This separate channel could target both rural and urban audiences with programming that is more relevant to their lives.
f) Programmes for under graduate and postgraduate courses should be telecasted innovatively by programmers to maintain the interest of audience and thereby create awareness and bring about attitudinal changes among the masses.
g) Community viewing centres should be provided and strengthened in various rural areas
h) Email and fax services should be made more common in villages to familiarize people there.

Recommendations for distance and correspondence courses provided by many regular universities on the basis of difficulties faced by students at ground level:

Despatch Of Study Material: In the courses of correspondence education the printed study material is send to the students for home study .Students from far flung areas like Kashmir often complain that they receive study material very late. This material should be relayed appropriately before their contact classes programme so that difficulties faced by learner in understanding the study material can be discussed with the counsellors during contact programme. In case the study material is not sent by post and student need to collect them by hand then it should be bedistributed at hassle free and feasible environment. If material is given through soft copy then it should be ensured all students have access to such versions.

Quality Of study Material: THE printed study material sent to students should be updated timely by the subject or field specialists. This material should be easy to understand.

Response sheets /Assignment: The assignments or response sheets prepared by students should be seriously checked by the experts and should be returned to the students before examinations so that they can assess themselves. Proper advice notes /comments /correction notes should be mentioned on theassignment. Proper time should be fixed for submission of assignments so that students attend the contact classes seriously and get sensitised and interested towards the studies. Counsellors should be given proper training for evaluation etc.

Contact Class Programmes: It is a course of establishing direct contact between the educators and theeducands. It is necessary to make these contact programme sessions interesting. These contact programmes should be held at a place, feasible to all; rural, tribal and to urban learners. The timing of such classes should be either evening or holidays so that working learners can attend them. Information about the timing and dates of such classes shall be announced to inform every learner. This information can be mailed or sent by SMS.

Increasing Access to Regional: Centres The environment at study and regional centres should be cordial and staff should be friendly so that students could never hesitate to visit such centres to enquire about their queries.

Special concessions to SC/ST and women: there should be special concession to educationally backward classes in admission fee and other criteria. Provision of scholarships should be there and learners should be
well aware of such avenues usually, distance learners are unaware about different facilities made in their service by the government.

**Awarding Certificates**: There should be yearly certificate awarding functions for distance learners to boost morale of serious learners so that they won’t feel inferior to regular mode students.

Recognition Of Achievements: various distance learners excel in the field to education; become officers, educationists etc. such individuals should be recognised and appreciated in functions to make them role models for other distance learners.

**Number of study centres** should be increased for distance learners.

**Access to library**

**Conducting of examinations properly**

Advertisement should be done on large scale to attract large no. of learners.

**New job oriented courses** should be catered through distance mode.

**FAMOUS PERSONALITIES WHO HAVE PURSUED THEIR EDUCATION THROUGH DISTANCE MODE:**

**NELSON MANDELA**: A noble peace prize winner known to everyone today was once unable to continue his education via regular mode due prison confinement. He got his Bachelor’s degree of Law from university of London through distance learning and again Bachelor’s degree in Arts from the university of South Africa also through distance mode.

**MR. NARENDER MODI**: The great politician and PM of India pursued a degree in political science from Delhi university through distance education.

**CONCLUSION**: Open and Distance Education is thus, is trying to fulfil the dream of universal education and has succeed a lot in this field. Avenues of distance education like online learning is even used by companies to make their employees skill full and productive. Lakh of students every year get jobs on the basis of knowledge and degrees they get from distance education, thousands of drop out students move forward in life through open schooling and hundreds of women of far flung areas excel in education after marriage without moving out of home. This is the story of new India today and indeed we owe a great deal of it to Distance Education and Open schooling.

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