

Distance Education in India and Recommendations for Open & Distance Education

Abstract

Distance education or **distance learning** is a mode of delivering education and instruction, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional setting such as a classroom. Distance learning provides "access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both."

The paper emphasis to make the best use of the provisions and opportunities provided by this system, it is necessary to orient the distance learners into the instructional science and technology that characterizes distance education.

Keywords: Open Learning and Distance Education, Teaching Learning Process in Distance Educational Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Quality Assessment.

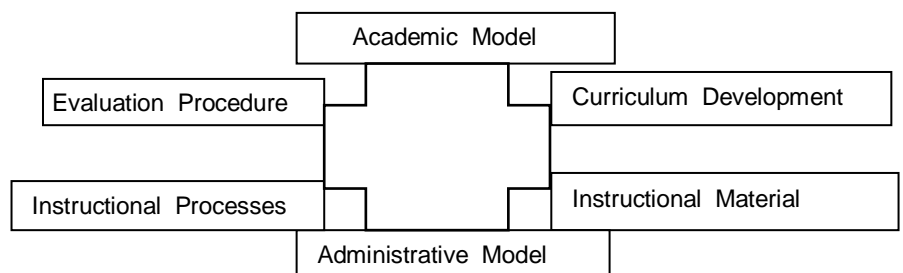
Introduction

Continuous self examination and periodic systematic checks are valuable evaluation exercises for evolving paradigms like open distance learning. Apart from contributing to learning about ourselves, these help us to keep a reality check in the euphoria of growing popularity, convex student enrolment curves and healthy growth rates.

The emergence of Open Learning and Distance Education is probably the most important development in the field of education in recent times. Since learning for all is the ultimate aim of humanity a new paradigm of networking has emerged which recognizes a new way of learning in the era of present globalization. Distance and Open Learning System helps to accelerate the process of transformation from a conservative and informative society to a functional, knowledgeable and well versed society of the twenty first century. Government of India is also encouraging distance learning mode by encouraging open universities across the country with a basic objective to make the masses educated. Open Universities have proven to bear essential and innovative component of higher education and are perceived by educational planners and policy makers as well as the community as a vital instrument of human resource development and educational justice.

Distance Education came to be recognized as viable alternative to the formal education a decade later than correspondence education. It is based upon learning resources prepared by the teachers for use by students located at a distance. It purposes to make education more interactive and intimate than does correspondence education. In a way, Distance Education is like formal education except that a physical distance separates the teacher and the taught. In Distance Education, teacher employs all the technique of correspondence education with personalized tutorials to as mass media, i.e. radio, news sheets and television. The purpose of Distance Education Center is to generate good atmosphere for good learning to learner.

Chief Components of Distance Education



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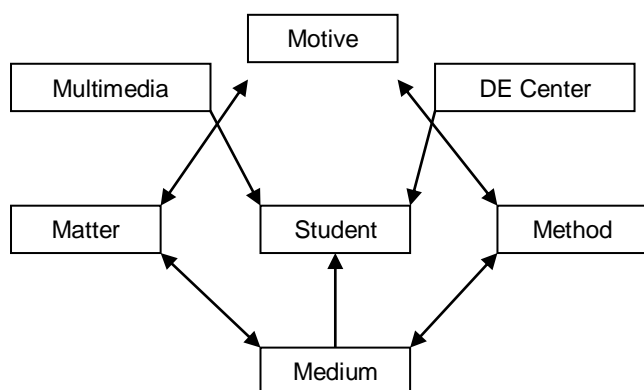
Goals and Objectives of DE Programs

1. Social & Educational Justice.
2. Educational need of the disadvantaged groups
3. Cost effectiveness.
4. Colossal demands of higher education

Teaching Learning Process in DE

Learning is a cyclic process which creates conducive emotional and intellectual conditions by relating them to the students needs and expectation.

Cycle of Distance Teaching Learning Process 4.



Recommendations

Following are the recommendations for ODE by NKC (An Institute of Govt. of India)

Create A National ICT Infrastructure For Networking ODE Institutions

A national information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure must be set up through government support for networking all ODE institutions. In this regard, we recommend that the digital broadband Knowledge Network proposed by NKC should have provision for interconnecting the major ODE institutions and their study centers in the first phase itself. Eventually, minimum connectivity of 2 mbps must be extended to the study centers of all ODE institutions. A national ICT backbone would enhance access and e-governance in ODE, and enable the dissemination of knowledge across all modes, that is, print, audio-visual and internet based multimedia.

Set Up A National Education Foundation To Develop Web-Based Common Open Resources 6.

A National Educational Foundation with a one-time infusion of adequate funds must be established to develop a web-based repository of high quality educational resources. Open educational resources (OER) must be created online through a collaborative process, pooling in the efforts and expertise of all major institutions of higher education. The OER repository would supply pedagogical software for various programs run through ODE and be available for utilization by all ODE institutions. An enabling legal framework that would allow unrestricted access without compromising intellectual authorship must be devised for this purpose.

Establish A Credit Bank To Effect Transition To A Course Credit System

Transition to a course credit system must be carried out to enable the learner to undertake programs

across all ODE institutions and disciplines. As a part of this process, an autonomous credit bank must be established for storing and filing credits acquired by every learner. In addition, admission criteria and the system of credits should be as flexible and adaptable as possible. Provisions must be made for multiple entry points and exit points, a flexible time-table and assessment mechanisms for supporting life-long learning.

Establish A National Education Testing Service for Assessing ODE Students

An autonomous National Education Testing Service (NETS) must be established through legislation and invested with functional powers and responsibility for assessing all potential graduates in ODE. This unified examination system would test the learners' ability to perform intellectual and practical tasks. All courses, degrees and activities offered through ODE should be certified through this system.

Facilitate Convergence with Conventional Universities

The lack of convergence between programs run by open universities and correspondence courses offered by the distance education wings of conventional educational institutions is a cause of great concern. Rather than function as parallel systems at odds with each other, open universities must forge organizational alignments with conventional universities geared towards common goals and strategies. They must engage each other in the collaborative creation of pedagogical resources via OER and its delivery along shared modes. Programs and courses offered by each should be subject to the same stringent norms of quality assurance. This implies that the distance education departments operating within conventional universities must be encouraged to put correspondence courses through the NETS for purposes of assessment. At the same time, universities must also ensure that their distance education programs are not stand-alone, but should benefit from regular interaction with university departments in concerned disciplines. The aim of such convergence is to eventually enable learners to move freely from one system to the other.

Set Up A Research Foundation To Support Research Activity In ODE

An autonomous and well-endowed Research Foundation must be established to commission and facilitate multidimensional and multidisciplinary research in ODE. In addition, a favorable environment for research must be created by setting up infrastructure like libraries, digital databases and online journals, holding regular workshops and seminars, granting sabbatical leave for undertaking research, establishing a peer reviewed journal to provide a platform for publication for scholars, and other such measures. A robust research environment is essential to accord ODE value as a discipline, as opposed to it being consigned to a 'mode'.

Overhaul Training Programs for Educators

Training and orientation program must be conceptualized to enable educators and administrators to effectively utilize technology to cater to diverse learners' interests. The content of the

training modules must promote familiarity with the theories and practices of self-learning. Their delivery should take place through several modes, including web-supported, audio-visual and face-to-face interaction on a regular basis with experts, practitioners and peers. Most importantly, these packages must be updated regularly and administered directly.

The B.Ed. curriculum must also be revised, updated and made to emphasize theories and practices of self-learning.

Increase Access for Learners with Special Needs

Special Education Committees must be set up in all ODE institution to address the needs of learners with disabilities as well as senior citizens. These committees must devise mechanisms to ensure their participation and provide effective mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation of policies, and collection of feedback. Admission criteria and time tables must be flexible enough to provide diverse options for meeting program requirements to differently able learners and senior citizens. Pedagogical tools and components from the open educational resources must be adaptable to alternative formats for special learning needs. This could include, for example, Braille, color-contrast texts and voice recordings for the visually disabled.

Create A New Standing Committee for the Regulation of ODE

At present, the Distance Education Council (DEC) under IGNOU arbitrates standards and disburses funds for ODE institutions across the country. We believe that this arrangement cannot provide adequate and appropriate regulation. A new regulatory mechanism must be established by appointing a Standing Committee on Open and Distance Education under the Independent Regulatory Authority for Higher Education (IRAHE) proposed by NKC. This statutory body would be responsible for developing broad criteria for accreditation as well as laying down standards for quality assurance. It would be accountable to stakeholders at all levels and to IRAHE, and have representation from public, private and social institutions involved in the education and development sectors; these include the central open university, state open universities, private open universities, conventional education institutes, as well as chairpersons of the specialized bodies to be set up to look into infrastructural requirements of ODE.

In addition, two specialized bodies should be established under the aegis of the Standing Committee:

1. A Technical Advisory Group with representatives from the IT sector, telecom, space and industry should be constituted to provide guidelines, ensure flexibility and track the latest developments in application. The most important function would be to devise common standards for labeling learning content developed by different agencies in order to support indexing, storage, discovery and retrieval of this content by multiple tools across multiple repositories.
2. An Advisory Group on Pedagogical Content Management with should be set up to provide

guidelines curricular content and development of repositories, exchange of material, access to students and other such issues.

The Standing Committee on Open and Distance Education would also serve as the nodal agency for the National Educational Foundation on open educational resources, the National Education Testing Service (NETS) and the Credit Bank.

Develop A System for Quality Assessment

Reliable external assessment is valued by employers, students and other stakeholders in the given context of a market driven economy. In view of this, a rating system to assess the standard of all institutions imparting open and distance education must be evolved and made publicly available. The Standing Committee would stipulate grading norms and independent rating agencies would be licensed by IRAHE to carry out this function. In addition, it is recommended that every ODE institution have an internal quality assurance cell to ensure that statutory quality compliances are regularly met.

Establishment of the new organizations proposed above, namely, the National Education Testing Service, the Credit Bank, the National Educational Foundation for developing common open resources, the Technical Advisory Group and the Advisory Group on Pedagogical Content Management would initially require financial support from the government. Additional finances for networking ODE institutions and creating access centers, developing training programs for educators and administrators and providing scholarships and services for needy students would also be required.

Conclusion

Open and distance education is a flexible mode which helps the learners to study and work from their homes and offices, and at their own pace. This system of education provides access and equality of opportunity to need-based and community/national development programs at the doorstep of the learners. Despite its significant success, in expansion, the system is challenged with the twin threat of underachievement of the students and student dropout. This is mainly because of the incompatibility of the distance education methodology and the conventional methodology from where majority of the distance learners come. Open and distance education adheres to instruction through largely the constructivist methodology and is built on andragogical principles. The system offers flexible time scheduling as well as flexible learning space.

Distance learners are unfamiliar with the special features and opportunities offered by open and distance education. In order to make the best use of the provisions and opportunities provided by this system, it is necessary to orient the distance learners into the instructional science and technology that characterizes distance education.


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