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DISTANCE EDUCATION: EDUCATION OVER A DISTANCE

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Abstract : Its purpose is to make higher education more accessible and flexible for the learners who are unable to continue their education in the traditional classroom setting. Starting in 1728 as correspondence courses, distance education has undergone several changes and developments with time and technology.

The Indian Government too, realizing the need for distance education, has taken necessary steps and had entrusted University Grants Commission (UGC) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) to perform the roles and responsibilities in their respective jurisdictions. Despite some disadvantages, distance education is becoming very popular for its flexible choice of courses it provides. As such, with proper vision and co-ordination, it can be utilized to extend the field of education in a country to reach the unreached, the poor, the disadvantaged groups and the rural folks.

Keywords: Distance education, traditional classroom, time and technology, flexible choice, reach the unreached

INTRODUCTION

After food, education is the second greatest challenge for human community. In this sector, governments of different countries all over the world, have given much importance. Though the governments have supplied more funds to this sector, but still education has not been able to reach the grass root level of the human community. Considered sometimes to be the poorer cousin of regular college programmes, education system who are unable to be present physically. The purpose of this mode of education is to make higher education more accessible and flexible for learners who would not be able to continue their education within the traditional classroom setting.

History:

The birth of Distance Education is supposed to be as early *Teacher* (Moore, 2005)

Sir Isaac Pitman, the pioneer of distance education, provided the first distance in 1840s.

. With the help of uniform postal services, Pitman's system of education grew successful which in England. By University of London became . Later on, was introduced in different universities all over the world.

Definitions:

As involves so many different environments, thinkers have defined it in different ways. Greenberg has defined contemporary distance learning as “a planned teaching/learning experience that uses a wide spectrum of technologies to reach learners at a distance and is designed to encourage learner interaction and certification of learning.”(Greenberg, 1998) Teaster and Blieszner are of the opinion that “the term distance learning has applied to many instructional methods : however, its primary distinction is that the teacher and the learner are separate in space and possibly time.” (Teaster P & Blieszner R, 1999) The most thorough definition has been given by Desmond Keegan. He opines that distance education and training result from the technological separation of teacher and learner which frees the student from the necessity of travelling to “a fixed place, at a fixed time, to meet a fixed person, in order to be trained.” (Keegan, 1995)

Development: With the rapid growth and advancement of technology, since the late twentieth century, distance education has undergone several changes catering to the needs of the students. Education researcher S Nipper has shown how distance education has gone through three major historical shifts. Correspondence teaching, the first generation model, relied mainly on printed materials. In this model, the traditional student-teacher hierarchy remained intact. The second generation model, referred to as multimedia distance education, developed in the late 1960s. This model was based on a combination of print material, broadcast media and a face-to-face interaction between teacher and student. The third generation model came into force in the late twentieth century with the development of web-communication technologies, such as, email, chat-rooms, webcast etc. Communication between students and teachers and among students was given priority in this model. This model is also defined by “its use of group work, more flexible curricula, and the narrowing of the social distance between students and teachers.” (Nipper, 1989)

Mode of Study:

Technologically, distance learning can be divided into two categories : resembles traditional classroom and needs where all learners are present at a fixed time though being located remotely. Web-conferencing, video-conferencing, educational television, internet radio, direct- broadcast satellite etc. are some of the examples of synchronous learning mode. In asynchronous learning learners present at a fixed time. They can access their course materials flexibly as per their own schedules. Mail correspondence, message boards, CDs etc. come under asynchronous learning mode.

Distance learning courses offer education using different modes for providing the course material. In most cases, the print materials, audio and video CDs and other relevant materials are sent either through post or through emails or collected by the students and the students appear in the examinations at the end (semester/annual). Generally, classes are conducted at weekends and students have choice to attend or not to attend them. Radio and television are growing as a master teacher. Several universities broadcast educational programmes through these media. Allen Cook writes:

(Cook, 1938) Virtual classrooms are another way of dissemination.

Students gather in a 'classroom' on a selected date and the teacher can lecture them through video conferencing. Modern internet technology has come as a blessing in promoting distance education. Teachers can chat/video chat with the students using this technology and thereby exchange knowledge.

MAJOR BENEFITS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION:

(A) Institutional Perspective :

2. Alleviate Capacity Constraints: This mode of education,

3.: Institutions can gain financial benefits by adopting this mode of education and providing (value-added) courses and so on as these

4. Catalyst for Institutional Transformation: Distance education programmes to the modern marketplace which

(B) Learners' Perspective:

1. Equal Opportunity to Education: In this mode of education receive equal education regardless of income status,cast.

2. Accessibility: There is no need learners with restricted mobility (such as handicapped, disabled, injured, elderly people) can use their own comfortable furniture in their persons with family responsibilities (such as parents with young children at home) to further their education.

3. Flexibility: Flexibility is the biggest advantage of distance education. For persons with irregular work schedules, working professionals, those who had to take a break from studies to start working courses of distance education are a boon and provide the opportunity to pursue higher education.

4. Saves Time and Money: require commuting and are almost always cheaper as compared to their on-campus counter-parts. Distance mode of education, hence, saves time, energy and money.

5. Self-paced Learning: Everyone doesn't have the same pace of learning. Some students pick up things fast, others need time to grasp a concept. In this mode of education learners can study at a pace suitable for them which

6. Convenient: Learner their own they do not They can review their assignments and do their

Disadvantages of Distance Education: As there are two sides of a coin, distance education, too, is not without some disadvantages.

1. No Direct Contact: Lack of personal and verbal interaction with teachers and other students often affect the learning of the distance learners. Voluminous books with no mentor to guide can be overwhelming to some learners. Counseling classes have helped in keeping learners in contact with faculty to some extent.

2. Lack of Discipline: Lack of direct contact with the faculty may lead the learners to fall through cracks more easily. To get the full advantage of a distance learning programme learners need to be mature and disciplined.

3. Costly and Overdependence on Technology: Some distance learning programmes, particularly online courses, require a computer with access to the internet which may be costly for some learners. This required technology may not always available or the learner may not be comfortable with this system. In such a situation the learner will find studying and interacting with his faculty online difficult.

4. Not All Courses Can be Taught: Some specific degrees or subjects like medicine, engineering etc. can't be taught online. Practical classes, experiments needed for these can't be conducted

5. Feeling of Loneliness: Due to the lack of physical interaction, though in a virtual classroom, a distance learner may feel detached and lonely. This can be solved only if one is comfortable with using the internet.

6. Social Isolation: Studying alone, a distance learner may sometimes feel isolated. This can be minimized with the proper video-conferencing.

7. Not Acknowledged by All Employers: Though most employers acknowledge distance learning, there are some employers who still prefer a candidate who has pursued a regular programme.

Indian Scenario:

The history of in India, goes way back to 1960s.To cope with the growing demands for higher Ambedkar State Open University in1982 and the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in 1985, distance education has emerged as a distinct educational system in our country. As regards higher education, through the distance mode,

Indira Gandhi following two main objectives:

1. To provide opportunities for higher education to a large segment of population, especially disadvantaged groups working people; and
2. in the educational co-ordinate and determine the standards of such systems.

No wonder, Indian universities top the charts on the number of Distance Education courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Most universities in India now have Distance Education programmes offering a wide variety of courses. Government of India had clarified distance mode (provided approval of the concerned DEC—the Distance Education Council) for employment under it01/03/1995.

In August 2010, the Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD) constituted a committee under the chairmanship of N R Madhava Menon to suggest measures to regulate the standards of education being imparted through distance mode. On the basis of the findings and recommendations of the committee, DCE has been dissolved by the MHRD and IGNOU in May 2013 and UGC as well as AICTE have been entrusted to perform the roles and responsibilities of DEC in their respective jurisdictions. (Gov. of India, 2011)

India is vast country. More than 70% of its population lives in villages. Higher education is still inaccessible to this vast population. In a country like India, where a basic graduation degree is mandatory to get a decent job, distance education or distance learning program has become the choice of many. It is growing well and becoming very popular in India for the choice of courses it provides. Most of the universities and colleges in India now provide distance learning courses in almost all the fields. Vocational or professional courses along with the regular courses offered in distance learning mode have been able to translate the dreams of thousands of students into reality.

CONCLUSION:

Distance education system has opened a new window of opportunities for further studies. It can be utilized to extend the field of education in a country to reach the unreached—the poor, the disadvantaged groups, rural folks—and perhaps to support the conventional education system.

Various studies have shown that distance learning programmes can be as efficient and valuable as regular classroom programmes, sometimes even better. Sometimes the study material or learning material for distance learning programmes by certain universities can be way superior to that of a regular classroom courses. The print material and other support services provided by this system help the students in improving their skills, self-enrichment and achieving professional qualifications.

Despite the cost, co-ordination and training that require to be put into a programme, distance mode education or learning has “great potential to deliver and receive educational to and from remote sites” (Weber, 1996) and hence “the challenge is to design cost-effective and educationally-effective systems for use in the new millennium of the new technologies that permit for the first time in history (electronic) teaching of students face-to-face at a distance.” (Keegan, 1995)

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