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Distance education, as a supportive system for the late bloomers, dropouts and to the deprived: A conceptual view

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Abstract

Education today believes in freedom, spontaneity or self - prompted activity of the learners. More importance is laid on learning rather than on teaching. Teacher's authoritarianism in education has been derecognized at present. Teaching aids and instruments, rather than the teacher is to teach. Modern educational technology has provided a wide and promising scope to teach with greater success in achievement. The educational environment has been according to the international level, making globalization of education possible.

In recent years, education has become more important than before in the civilized countries. It is observed today that education is designed to help not only children, but also the adult people whose education has been neglected in childhood and youth.

In our individual and social life, there has been a gradual realization that education is a life- long process and a recurring need of development. Individual and society are in the process of continuous development for greater and higher achievement of mankind. Formal education could not help to achieve such comprehensive need and goal of the millions of people outside the school. There is a system of education that needs to be developed in scope and flexible in its approach, to serve the growing needs of education for all.

At present, education is said to be indispensable for life and its development to every individual. Although, every individual cannot be physically brought to school for imparting education, owing to various reasons as such a system of non- formal education has been possible to set up in order to serve the need of education even to those that are living in the distant places. Modern development of educational technology has made it possible to bring useful education nearer to learner more conveniently. This education being free from all formalities of our traditional classroom education has emerged as a distance system of education.

Keywords: Distance education, supportive, late bloomers, dropouts, deprived

Introduction

In a changing world, no concept can be defined for all times to come. What we call the formal system today must have been a very revolutionary concept and practiced a few hundred years ago. This could be seen in the same happening in the case of several deceptive at the university level as well. For example- Philosophy has served as the mother science for disciplines like psychology and education.

Education being one of the most important factors in achieving the developmental goals of the country; it is the key to national development. It is an investment in the human resources. If the fruits of education have to reach the common man, it must be adequately and properly administered. In the present age of science and technology, it has been increasingly realized that one needs to be educated not only to become a better social being, but he should also be a creative and productive being. So, a need for such an educational system was followed which may be flexible and within the approach of everybody. The result was that the distance education is a coordinated form of formal and non-formal education and it has good points of both of them. It is thus regarded that the destiny of a nation is shaped by gravity and quality of students coming out of schools and colleges. The emergency of a learning society in which, people of all ages and all sections not only have access to education but also gets involved in the process of continuing education. In this environment, open non-formal, part-time and adult education becomes as meaningful as formal education; in fact, the two streams reinforce each other.

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In the present scenario, the higher education system as a whole is faced with many issues of concern like financial and management, including assess, equity, relevance and reorientation of program me by laying emphasis on values, ethics and quality of higher education together with the assessment of institutions and their accreditation. These issues are of vital importance for the country as it is engaged in the use of higher education as a powerful tool to build knowledge based society of the 21st century.

Operational Definition of the Terms

- Late bloomers - someone who becomes successful, educated, productive etc. at a later time in life than other people.
- Dropouts-a person who leaves school, college or University before completing his/her course or qualification.
- Deprived – to remove or withhold something from the enjoyment or possession of.

Distance mode of learning being flexible in nature can be adopted to the needs of individuals organizing distance education courses, needs sufficient financial help, brilliant and devoted teachers, expert planning, creative organization of teaching programmes, dynamic leadership, efficient academic arrangement and effective implementation strategies. There is a general complaint that offering different academic courses through distance education system will deteriorate the standards or quality of education. However, a good deal of thinking and planning is needed before launching courses through distance mode of learning. A noteworthy feature of distance education is that it needs massive organizational effort which is similar to industrial organization. Thus, we see that distance education institutions have two distinct characteristics – academic and industrial

The ‘academic’ represents the development and preparation of course material, whereas ‘industrial’ refers to production and distribution of educational material.

Distance education thus represents distance teaching plus distance learning. The operating activities are split into two–

- a) Course sub-system
- b) Student support system

Student support services

Being an innovative system, distance education has always been open to all teaching methods and media. It is a teaching learning system which combines both teaching and learning activities. It imparts education to students at a distance. The earlier exponents of the system, correspondence educator laid greatest emphasis on instructional printed course material. But, in due course of time, the concept of two way communication was indocile into the system to make it more effective. The tremendous development of communication technology in recent years provided a wide choice to distance educator to integrate new media into the distance education teaching learning processes. This led to a change of thinking among distance educator and it was realized that even though the printed course material would continue to be the main stay of the distance education system, integration of (communication) technological devices could greatly help in strengthening the teaching learning process.

As distance education is gaining more and more popularity, varied target groups were drawn to the system and the institutes had to devise varied teaching learning programmes to cater to the needs of ever increasing number of learners. In this developmental process, distance educators realized the need of well-organized student support services. And communication technology came to be recognized as an effective support service both for the teacher and the learner.

- Extending comprehensive learner support through study centers viz, counseling and library facilities besides laboratory facilities and multimedia learning assistance.

Distance Education Helps to Meet the Needs of the Vast Population

The system of distance education has tremendous potential to fulfill the enormous responsibility of universalization and democratization of education as it holds the promise of checking the falling standards at reasonable costs making the maximum use of media and technology and providing education according to the needs of the country. At the same time, there are structured, well prepared instructional packages which are produced by a multi-disciplinary team of experts for the use of distance education learners.

In defining distance education, emphasis the planning aspects of learning in places and at times that are more convenient for learners rather than teachers or teaching institutions. To quote their definition in the ‘Principles and theories of education’- ‘Distance Education is planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design’ special instructional techniques, special methods of communication by electronic and other technology as well as special organizational and administrations arrangements’. Desmond Keegan has enumerated the characteristics of the concepts of distance education that provide operational facilities for the use of distance education. Separation of teacher and learner emphasizes that the latter can learn autonomously. While, he can learn of his own, there is the educational organization which does the planning for him. A variety of media are used to teach the students. Efforts are also made to provide interaction between the teacher and the students. There may be an occasional peer group interaction. On the whole the student learns on his own which may be described as privatization of institutional learning.

The Indian Education Commission, 1964-66 has pointed out, “There must be a method of taking education to the millions to depend upon their own efforts to study, whenever they can find time to do so. We consider that distance education course provides the right answer for these institutions”. Due to the effective utilization of various media, methods and materials by the efforts of the educationist, curriculum planners, financial management, infrastructural facilities and researches in the programme, distance education system is becoming more successful today. Not only for eradicating mass illiteracy but also for meeting the ever increasing demand for higher and quality education.

India’s Constitution has promised to provide equal opportunities to every individual. But in class room situation only a few students can be benefited. The students who for one or the other reasons cannot attend the school remain neglected. India is a developing country. A large number of populations are living in remote areas and the promise of equalization of education is meaningless to them. Hence,

educational programmes should be conceived for development and operation to a massive scale to make it possible. For them to contribute to the rational goal of achieving universalization an academic quality to all is a must. In this regard, distance education implies the full development of the new means of communication. It uses all the educational methods and media offered by the communication technology for the dissemination of information and knowledge. Thus distance education helps to meet the needs of the vast population. And the effectiveness of education depends largely on how well it is managed. The criticality of the functioning factors has been very well recognized in the reports of various Commissions in the past as well as the national policy of education in India.

Elimination of illiteracy has been one of the major concerns of our government since independence. An ambitious programme of social development was launched in the First Five Year Plan. Although providing of funds in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th plans was meagre, several programmes at the state level as well as the national level were launched. The government then launched programmes on a massive scale in 1978 known as National adult education programme. This programme was relevant to the environment and learners need, flexible with regard to duration, time, location, and instructional arrangements and open to diversity in curriculum, teaching learning materials and methods.

Distance education as a mode of teaching has become popular with the establishment of two open universities in our countries. In 1982, the Andhra Pradesh Government gave a lead to the country by starting the first state level Open University in India, Andhra Pradesh Open University located in Hyderabad. And in 1985 Indira Gandhi National Open University was established with a Parliamentary act. This was to strengthen distance education in the country. IGNOU is serving as a significant land mark in the development of distance education in our country, through different media.

Since independence in 1947, Indian adult education has been dominated by an ideology of westernization. The changing policy environment for adult education in India in recent years is set in the historical context of shifting educational priorities in response to the changing nature of the individual state and its developmental approach. In the Indian context, adult education in general deals narrowly with adult literacy education. Hence, the focus is on adult literacy policy and programme and not on adult education in the broad sense. Nevertheless, an effort is made to highlight the extent to which general education policy has paid attention to non-formal education with the formal education. (Daswami. C.G *et al.*, 2000, pp. 3, 68) ^[5]

Parameters of Distance Education

Emergency of Distance education is described by Henry Deinzide as the ‘Copernican Revolution’ changing the center of gravity from teacher centered mentality to the student centered approach. Distance has been defined by many and most of the definition described it through two parameters; distance between the learner and the teacher and stricter of the teaching-learning programmes-

Desmond Keegan has considered some definitions of Distance Education and given the following main elements in the definition.

Distance

- The separation of the teacher and the learner which distinguishes it from face to face study.
- The influence of educational organization which distinguishes it from private study.
- The use of technical media, usually print, to write teachers and learners to carry the educational contents.
- The provision of two-way communication so that students may benefit from or even initiate dialogue.
- The possibility of occasional meetings of both didactic and socialization purposes and
- The participation in an industrialized form of education which if accepted contains genus or radical separation of distance education from other forms.

Structure

Structure of the educational institutions resembling industrial form, should carry out the following functions-

- **Course Creation:** ‘After Studies’ and ‘market survey’ develops the courses on learning programmes that would serve the needs and requirements of the target groups.
- **Course production:** To multiply the learning material in print and audio-visual forms to fulfill the needs of students enrolled.
- **Course transmission:** Through the educational network, the contents are carried to the students
- **Evaluation:** To carry out continuous evaluation to help the learners in their studies and the end of the students and certification.

The structure should enable us to develop ‘knowledge’ to serve large scale needs of learning society. (Keegan Desmond, 1986, p. 31) ^[6]

In order to function properly, any educational institution must keep the following points in mind.

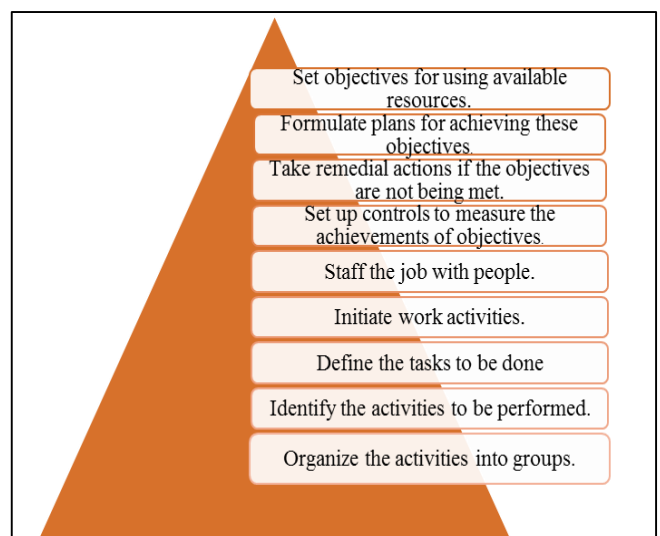


Fig 1

Pillars of Distance Education

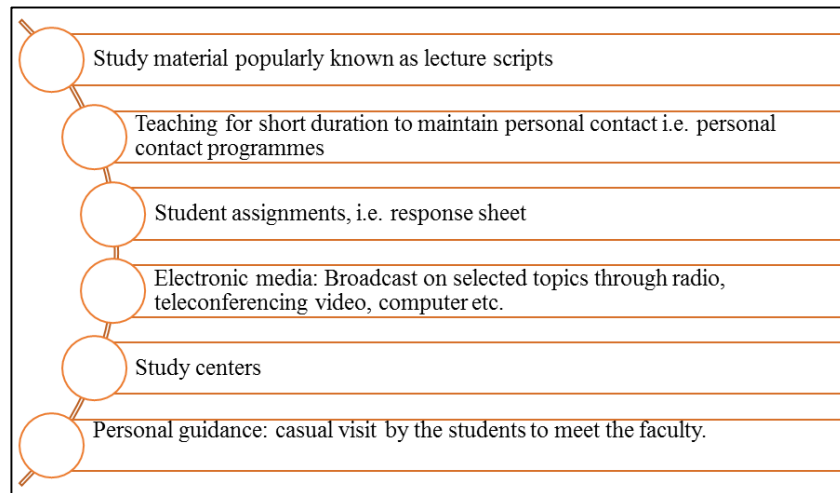


Fig 2

There are certain prestigious institutions in the country which are as good as any other international institutions. But very few people have access to them. Similarly, high quality education is by and large confined to certain pockets in urban areas and rural areas have to be content with substandard universities. Variations in the quality of education are mainly because of proliferation which has taken place without reference to quality. Secondly, resource allocation for education has been going down. The net result has been that, while the Nation is spending more on education, the per capita expenditure has really been going down within the institution, there have been glaring inequalities. There are universities and other institutions of higher education where per capita expenditure is much more than the others. Therefore, the need is to improve the average quality of education. Most students need to have access to good quality education and this can be done not only through regular formal institutions but also through the distance institutions. It also appears necessary to have a very clear and comprehensive idea about the existing state of affairs in this field. Therefore, it is suggested that a detailed survey or techniques presently adopted in the field of management will be successful.

It is said that distance education proposes to be a more effective approach to solving certain problems of education for individual growth as well as national development. The education provided under distance education is both need based and functional. It is not only cost-effective but also innovative and goal oriented. It offers a more effective multi-disciplinary approach to the problem of development in a country than the formal. Its effects are both short term as well as long range.

Conclusion

In the context of modernization and globalization importance of education cannot be neglected as it is the most singular and important means building human capabilities- the essential and individual powers to reflect, make choices, seek a voice in the society, improved personal endowments, overcome constraints and in the process, enlarge their available set of opportunities and choices for a sustained improvement. In short, education is one of the most powerful instruments known to make people a productive member of the society.

Educational enterprises all over the world are expanding fast. Present educational activities are entirely different from earlier ones in organization and operation. The National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration has rightly pointed out that the educational systems all over the world are growing in size and scope as well as in complexity. Education is fast becoming a major National endeavor. Distance education, as a viable alternative is able to reach the unreached, and help the needy ones.

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