

Open and Distance Learning System as a Mean for Catering Learners' Need

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ABSTRACT

According to Koul, L.(2000), 'Distance education refers to the mode of education where the interacting learner and teacher are separated by space and time, while open learning focuses on removal of many restrictions and rigidities in opening the doors of education for the needy learners. The Open and Distance Learning can provides a viable alternative mode with the objective to take education to the door steps of the learner, enhancing social equity, and creating flexibility for lifelong learning'. Recently, it is seen that the demand for higher education has increased enormously throughout the country because of massive awareness. At this time, the system of higher education fails to accommodate this ever increasing demand. In this moment, there is an urgent need to think for better option to cater the learners need. In this paper, effort was made to study about the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system through analytical and descriptive way. After reviewing all the facts & findings, author came to the conclusion that the ODL system is more learner centric and suitable approach in the present system of education to cater the increasing demand of the learners.

Keywords – Distance Learning, Open Learning, ODL System

INTRODUCTION

In the last five decades, Indian higher education system occupies the second largest system of higher education in the world after America (Tiwari, 2010). In spite of being one of the largest systems of higher education, it has failed to guarantee the students' accessibility to higher education as per the need. Recently, the demand for higher education has increased enormously throughout the country because of massive awareness. But the system of higher education fails to accommodate this ever increasing demand. Viewing the increasing demand of higher education and a lot of limitations to face, Indian higher education needs a serious make over. The Open and Distance Learning can provides a viable alternative mode with the objective to take education to the door steps of the learner, enhancing social equity, and creating flexibility for lifelong learning (Koul, 2000).

CONCEPT OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

The most important terms used are distance education and open learning which jointly call Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Distance education refers to the mode of

education where the interacting learner and teacher are separated by space and time, while open learning focuses on removal of many restrictions and rigidities in opening the doors of education for the needy learners(Koul,2000).

The concept of Open and Distance Learning is quite comprehensive. Open learning is a state of mind rather than a method with particular characteristics. In a distance learning system, the learner and the teacher are not face to face. In order for two-way communication to take place between them, a medium such as print, radio, or the telephone has to be used. Problems such as distance and time, which are barriers to conventional learning, are overcome in Open and Distance Learning with the use of ICT, self-learning materials and a good student support mechanism.

METHODOLOGY

The study is purely analytical and descriptive. The information/ data being placed in this paper are taken from secondary sources, such as from different books, journals, research papers, articles, etc.

ROLE OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING SYSTEM

The Open and Distance Learning System plays a crucial role in promoting the education in a knowledge society by leveraging different methodologies.

- i) Access and Reach
- ii) Equity and gender
- iii) Quality and effectiveness
- iv) Cost-effective education for all

- v) Bringing quality education to the door step of millions.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Purpose of quality improvement programmes at Open and Distance Learning

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- i) Equitable access to benefits of higher education to all
- ii) Optimization and integration of modern methods of teaching and learning
- iii) To ensure continuous improvement of total institutional performance
- iv) To ensure stakeholders of institutional accountability
- v) To evolve mechanisms and procedures for effective and progressive performance
- vi) Credibility of evaluation procedures
- vii) Proper allocation of support and services
- viii) Resource sharing through networks of collaboration.

SUPPORT TO HIGHER EDUCATION

However, the following are the main contributions of ODL towards higher education.

Overcoming Physical Distance

Open and distance learning can overcome problems of physical distance for -

- learners in remote locations who are unable or unwilling to physically attend a campus; and
- learners and teachers who are geographically separated; for example, teachers in urban settings instruct learners in rural settings.

Solving the Problem of Time and Schedule

Open and Distance learning can solve time or scheduling for -

- client groups unwilling or unable to assemble together frequently;
- learners engaged in full-time or part-time work;
- learners who have family and community commitments.

Expanding Access

Open and distance learning also provides access where -

- campus-based institutions are less in number; and
- there are stringent entrance requirements.

Promotion of Equity

Open and Distance learning can deal differences in cultural, religious, and political considerations and consequently -

- widens women's opportunities to learn;
- helps the rural, tribal and minority groups and disabled to learn;
- meets the needs of populations affected by violence, war, or displacement;
- makes learning possible even when group assemblies are proscribed.

Leveraging the Enrolment

The ODL system boosts student enrolment every year. It has the need based and flexible curriculum, technology supported and cost effective quality education, easy delivery system, flexible admission and examination system and a suitable learner support system.

A Learner Centric Approach to Education

The ODL system follows learner centric approach, where –

- Students can learn at any time
- Students can learn at any place
- Students can learn at their own pace
- Students can learn more efficiently when concepts are presented with multiple media so students can select those which best assist their own understanding and retention.
- Students can learn only what they need to know, reinforcing both retention and motivation learning and then applying individual modules of a course.
- The course content and course quality are constant; organizations can document training coverage and student learning over a wide geographical or temporal area.
- The need for costly, permanent teaching facilities is reduced; learning can take place at home, in dorms and workplaces, or in temporary facilities.

Providing Need Based Programs and Courses

The ODL system always tries to launch need based programs and courses catering to the demands of different learners.

Producing, Reproducing, Storing, and Disseminating Materials

Almost all the ODL institutions have their own production house, storage and method of dissemination. This saves their time and promotes easy access for students. They have their own course materials like print, audio, video, or computer software; they disseminate through post, courier, transport companies, telecommunications, broadcasts, satellites; and in many cases they have specialized equipment and personnel required for storage, handling, packaging and dispatch.

Examination

ODL follows the credit system whereby each course and program has a specified number of credits. The learners can keep accumulating credits as per their convenience. They have also adopted the modular approach, which helps the learners in moving gradually, through small modules towards higher levels of learning. Besides that, they also promote formative evaluation and quality controlling mechanism in evaluation.

Promoting Research Work

The ODL system provides enough flexibility to learners in conducting their research works.

Cost Effectiveness

ODL is cost effective from the side of learners and providers. Learners get education with a much less cost than that of formal education system. The institutions utilize both human and material resources to the best, and thus prove themselves to be cost effective.

DISADVANTAGES

There are still some demerits in ODL system, such as –

- i) Student must be more active and self-directed in learning environment.
- ii) Time and frustration involved learning how to get on-line for novices.
- iii) Distance learning does not give students direct access to instructor
- iv) Lag of time between student input and feedback.
- v) Potentially less group support for learners leading to isolation and possible non-completion of program.
- vi) It demands large effort and cost to develop appropriate materials, technological infra-structure.
- vii) It is not for undisciplined learners or inflexible instructors.
- viii) Distance learning does not give students the opportunity to work on oral communication skills.

ADVANTAGES

Though there are some demerits, there are many more advantages in the ODL system, such as -

- i) It allows own pace of study.
- ii) Here, students can determine time and place of "class-time"
- iii) It doesn't matter where one's live – he can gain knowledge from anywhere in the world.
- iv) It is less expensive than a full-time degree.
- v) It provides the opportunity to study more subjects and reach out to programs as per choices that are not available in the immediate area.

- vi) Distance learning is much more flexible than traditional styles of classroom education. Students who need to take other classes or work can do classwork whenever they have a free moment instead of being restricted to a rigid schedule.
- vii) Students who enroll in classes with online education obtain a wider range of networking opportunities. By this way, it enables students to make connections with a more diverse range of people.
- viii) There is no need to travel to and from class every single day. Someone who doesn't drive or want to spend money on the costs of public transportation every single day will likely choose to get an online education over the traditional classroom.
- ix) Distance learning enables students to learn from some of the most prestigious professors and guest speakers in each field.
- x) A student may learn better at different format without sitting in classroom.
- xi) Online classes, offered in distance mode, are just as, if not more, effective at teaching students than the traditional classroom style of learning.
- xii) It provides for an increase in Access to education for those who otherwise have no other opportunities due to work, family or physical limitations.
- xiii) Provides for a modality of instruction better suited for certain learners.
- xiv) It provides opportunity to develop technology competencies for instructors and learners.
- xv) It has the potential to equalize access to education.

CONCLUSION

In a country like India where economic resources are still scarce, the open and distance learning is complementing the conventional educational system. Education through the open and distance learning is not only cheap in terms of monetary expenses on the learner but also provides the learner a chance to earn and learn together. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) at New Delhi in India, in the recent past has grown up as a national university of international recognition. It is a non-conformist, innovative and non-traditional approach to education and learning. Open and distance learning introduces major innovations and recent upcoming technologies to make their courses academically effective and socially relevant. It provides for innovations in the curriculum, course content relevance to real-life situations, teaching strategies and caters to different learning styles of the learners.

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