A CASE STUDY ON THE CHALLENGES OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN THE STATE OF ASSAM FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Distance education system enables people to make their educational choices for the near future. The distance education system is considered one of the most important educational innovation of the century. Distance education is an alternative method to conventional schooling. It has been seen that the professionals of governments, public employees & other stakeholders need to convince that in ODL mode, the institutions are not providing half baked educational system. It is fast becoming an indispensable and accepted part of the mainstream to the educational system in almost all the countries around the globe. The open and distance learning is not a new concept. In the year of 1800s, the University of Chicago newly launched some major correspondence program in the United States, in which the teachers and learners were in different locations. It addressed the wide range of potential intergovernmental, non-government, partners and government organizations, industrialists, associations, specialized institutions and others interested could seek their cooperation from the newly introduced education system and organized some need-based meeting, training through open and distance learning system. After development of radio channels during the First World War and after the invention of television in the year 1950s, the mode of instruction system to the ODL education system outside the traditional classrooms had suddenly found a new education delivery system. In the present time, we are using audiovisual and conferencing system which influenced delivering lectures in higher educational institutions, public schools, etc.

KEYWORDS: *Challenges; Higher Education; Distance; Learning*

INTRODUCTION

Distance learning is one of the education systems which focuses on teaching–learning methods and use of technology to deliver lectures to the individual students who are not present in traditional classroom.

In distance mode of education, courses required the physical presence of students, that is the courses which require a physical onsite presence of students who would like to include taking examinations have been referred to a blended or hybrid courses study.

On the other hand, distance e-system is less a philosophy and more a method of education policy. The learners can study their books in their free time at their place of choice without face–to-face contact with their teachers. Technology is also a critical element of the distance education.

Concept of Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

There are many approaches to define the term open and distance learning. Open and distance learning can be defined as an organized educational activity which is based on the constrained use of the study teaching materials, minimized in terms of entry and access systems and place and method of study in any combination. Thus, the main concept of open and distance learning shows an educational approach, which is designed to reach the learners in their offices,shops, homes, etc. and provides learning resources to them in order to qualify without attending formal classes or create an opportunity for lifelong learning, irrespective of the time and place of study. There is an increase in Learner's demand for their opportunities at university level to continue due to population growth and the necessity for continuing the education to upgrade their skills. It means that majority of the learners in ODL are generally in the adult stage who have other responsibilities. They are from a highly heterogeneous group with varying cognitive processes, skills, values, knowledge and prior experiences with their age and worldly responsibilities which results in some new situations, reflecting a change in the learner's profile.

Open and Distance Learning in India

The open and distance learning education system is like a crucial vehicle in society with sustained knowledge development. However, India is prepared to face knowledge-based challenges of the 21st century for higher education, which presents a rather dismal picture. According to MHRD, 10% of the population in relevant age group is enrolled in higher education and merely 5% are graduates with a degree. With rapid growth of the knowledge service and associate sectors in economy, it is also imperative that the populace is equipped to contribute and take the benefit from these developments. It also requires radical overhaul in higher education in terms of access to enrollment and its quality. The existing 'mortar and brick' compass alone cannot cope with current and future demands for higher education, which gives limited resource for their construction and management, even though it imparted that state commits to universal access to the higher education. The open and distance education system (ODE) holds their promise to address the questions to access to provide the new and alternative forms of their building capacity.

The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was established by Prime Minister of India in 2005 to recommend reforms to make India as a knowledge-based society. The most important part of NKC is to build excellence in the learning systems to meet the knowledge and challenges of the 21st century and to increase India's competitive advantage in the field of expertise. The open and distance education (ODL) forms a crucial component to the higher education system. The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) decided to constitute a working group with some terms and conditions as follows:

- To redefine objective of the open and distance education for higher studies.
- To identify problems and challenges relating to open and distance education for higher studies.
- To recommend changes and reforms to address issues with challenges relating to the range of higher education to ensure a holistic human resource development, which is necessary for the knowledge-based society.

- To take steps needed for mobilizing and upgrading the existing infrastructure for delivery mechanism and choosing a suitable pedagogy in order to gain e advantage of the latest version in Information and Communication Technology (ICT).To explore the possibility for an innovation and initiate new programs relevant to learner's needs and suggest methods to bridge the gaps between the needs of the employers and employable human resources development (HRD) by the open and distance education to continuously upgrade their skillset.

- To suggest means of raising standards and promoting excellence in the open and distance education including training of professionals in the same for higher education.

- To suggest a mechanism to preserve and give access to the indigenous knowledge.

- To develop tools for monitoring the activities and evaluate outcomes of the open and distance education program to make it as a sustainable developmental event.

Special Features of ODL

Open Distance Learning is a challenging mode of the education system offered by a different university at a different level. ODL mode provides sufficient opportunities for those students who desire to have university level education (UG & PG) in their workplace or their residence. This education system is also popularly known as the Distance Education, perhaps it is the only way to meet increasing demand for higher education, especially in a developing country. The distance mode of education is specially designed:

- For those candidates who have discontinued their formal education owing to pecuniary.

- For those candidates who are residing in a geographically remote area.

- For those candidates who cannot get admission to the regular UG or PG programs.

- For those who are employed and cannot pursue their studies as a full-time candidate.

- For those individuals who wish to pursue his/her degree for knowledge's sake.

- For those candidates who want to upgrade their skills and knowledge.

Open and Distance Learning mode is the only system that has been planned in such a way that it caters to all those who desire to seek their higher education even though they are in a disadvantageous position due to socio-economic and other reasons. It also provides increasing demand for higher education and flexibility in terms of qualification, age, time, location, etc., introduced to the maximum extent.

Objectives of ODL

To study about the special features of open distance learning.

- To explore challenges of distance learning.

- To find out the difference between formal and informal education system in higher education.

- To analyze merits and demerits of the distance learning.

Hypotheses

- Generally, the distance education is free from the timetable, dress code, compulsory attendance, etc.

- The distance education mode is much helpful for the employees, household women, physically challenged and some additional category learners.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology is much essential to conduct the research work equally in qualitative and quantitative methods which were used in the study. To prepare the review, I have collected some secondary data. These secondary data have been collected from some published resources, such as varying periodical articles, books and journals, reports and literature on the subject. From the point of gathering the latest updated information on the merits of e-resources are also sighted.

Challenges

- Some communication problems.
- Dress code and cultural obstacles.

Merits of Open Distance Learning System

- ODL mode makes education open to all irrespective of religion, location, time and age, hereby providing education accessible to all.

- ODL mode provides opportunities for employees to combine education and work at a time.

- It offers affordable, cost-effective and flexible educational opportunities to the learners.

- ODL mode of learning is a veritable instrument of lifelong education.

- ODL mode of education provides opportunities for dropout students who are interested in learning can continue their education.

- ODL mode is easy to access education for women irrespective of religious and cultural background.

- ODL mode reduces inequality to the educational services.

- ODL mode provides efficient training to target learners.

FINDINGS

- The distance education system is much easier than a formal education system.
- In today's generation, the distance education systems are acquiring their own demand in higher education.

SUGGESTIONS

- The education system should maintain their valuable role, especially for valuating and evaluating the prospective results.

- Provide a sophisticated library facility, computer labs, websites - sources and additional study materials to establish a qualitative education system.

- Avoid purely educationally backwarded, academically failed and corruptive open universities for distance education to maintain valuable training.

- To improve students' work in assignments, interact with lecturers often through chat or e-mail.

Importance

- Distance education saves time, money and energy.
- t is useful for the physically challenged, household women and working professionals.
- Distance education is very useful for those people who are very far from the necessary facilities from schooling.

CONCLUSIONS

The most challenging problems in India and other developing countries have to face in the coming decades will be to provide health and economic security to millions of population. Now, all developed countries have achieved universal literacy, i.e., overall approximately 94.99% of the adults can read and write. Also, the female literacy levels are even higher or equal in India and other developed countries. The post-school higher educational opportunities are between 60 to 80% in all the developed countries. Also, there are some educational gaps, which are characteristics of all the developing countries. Approximately, 20.01% of the relevant age group is currently enrolled in higher education whereas in the developing countries, the corresponding figures stand in between 40.01%–59.99% of the relevant population.

The emergence of the ODL system is to be expected and remarkable evolution in the history of educational development internationally. ODL is the process of teaching in which learners are separated in time and space from the teacher. This system utilizes a variety of technologies to provide and enhance the quality of education for a large number of the learners. We must accept that the ODL mode of learning has become a viable alternative to the traditional way of learning in developing countries, particularly in their human capital development efforts and consequently to raise their socioeconomic status. The ODL mode of education is now a fast-growing system in recent times. The time is not far when the entire educational system will be fully controlled by ODL system. Nowadays, many of the people prefer distance education, especially for employees, married women and additionally weaker and physically challenged people supposed to be preferred for distance education. In Assam, especially IDOL, GU have been playing a vital role in higher education in ODL mode.

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