

Student Learning Support & Technology in Distance Learning

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ABSTRACT

Distance education is a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge to all the sections of society without any discrimination. Teachers & learners are at a distant place, communicating with each other with the help of learning support system & technology. The first National Open University is the Indira Gandhi Open University (IGNOU) established in 1985, when the Parliament of India passed the Indira Gandhi National Open University Act, 1985 (IGNOU Act 1985). IGNOU is run by the central government of India. It has 21 schools and a network of 67 regional centers, 2667 study centers, and 29 overseas centers (15 countries). IGNOU offers 226 academic programs comprising courses at certificate, diploma and degree levels. Distance education has given the new meaning to education & adapts learner centered approach which provides fruitful results too.

Keywords: *Distance Education, Teacher, Learner, Support System, Technology, Study material, Generations, Self-study.*

“Education for all declares that everyone has a right to education. Its aim is to give everyone a chance to learn & benefit from basic education – not as an accident of circumstance, or as a privilege, but as a right.” Education is considered "essential for civic order and citizenship and for sustained economic growth and the reduction of poverty" (World Bank, 1995, p. Xi). Education is a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge to all the sections of society. Education represents the indicator for the human development and progressive growth of a nation. It is the basic & a fundamental right for every person. It is really difficult to provide equal educational opportunities for all remote areas & disadvantaged peoples of the society. Distance education is a boon for achieving the target of education for all. It is known by a variety of names, viz. Correspondence Education, Home Study, Independent study, External study, Off-campus Study, Open Learning, Open education, etc. Distance education has gained popularity all over the world as a means of extending continuing education to all people, particularly professionals. It has been analyzed as a single product of the era of industrialization (Peters 1989). The first distance education course in the modern sense was provided by Sir Isaac Pitman in the 1840s, who taught a system of shorthand by mailing texts transcribed into shorthand on postcards and receiving transcriptions from his students in return for correction - the element of student feedback was a crucial innovation of Pitman's system. This scheme was made possible by the introduction

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of uniform postage rates across England from 1840. The United States Distance Learning Association defined distance learning in 1998 (Roblyer& Edwards, 2000) as "the acquisition of knowledge and skills through mediated information and instruction, encompassing all technologies and other forms of learning at a distance." Rao, K.V (2003) "Distance education is the form of indirect instruction. It is imparted by technical media such as correspondence, printed material, teaching and learning aids, audiovisual aids, radio, television and computers." Distance education is the general term that includes the range of teaching and learning strategies used by: Correspondence colleges, Open universities, Distance education departments of conventional universities, Distance education training units of private sector organizations. Keegan (1990) rightly mentioned the following characteristics of distance education: (1) Separation of a teacher and learner throughout the learning process,(2) Separation of the learner or learners from other learners or learning groups,(3) Provision of means for two-way communication so that the learner(s) can benefit from or initiate dialogue,(4) Utilization of electrical [sic] means of communication to carry the content of the course.

BIRTH OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIA

Distance education in its earlier form of correspondence education started in the West in the middle of the 19th century, though distance education in India began almost a century later in the form of postal correspondence education. The origin of postal education in India, however, can be traced to the educational activities of commercial institutions. The International Correspondence Schools (ICS) and the British Institutes (BIET) are the prominent institutes of postal courses, based in Bombay (now Mumbai), which offered a variety of postal courses in areas of engineering, management, architecture, interior decoration, dress making, journalism, beauty care, photography, cartooning, commercial arts, radio, transistor, refrigeration, among others (Chib, 1977). The first correspondence courses in B.A Degree was introduced in 1962 by the School of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education, University of Delhi. It attracted a large number of students. In 1968, the Punjabi University, Patiala and the University of Rajasthan launched correspondence courses by opening Institute of Correspondence and Continuing Education. The first Open University, the Andhra Pradesh Open University (Later re-named as Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University) was started in 1982. The first National Open University, Indira Gandhi Open University (IGNOU) established in 1985 with a budget of ₹ 20 billion (20 billion Indian rupees), when the Parliament of India passed the Indira Gandhi National Open University Act, 1985 (IGNOU Act 1985). IGNOU is run by the central government of India. It has 21 schools and a network of 67 regional centres, 2667 study centres, and 29 overseas centres (15 countries). Approximately 20% of all students enrolled in higher education in India are enrolled with IGNOU. IGNOU offers 226 academic programs comprising courses at certificate, diploma and degree levels.

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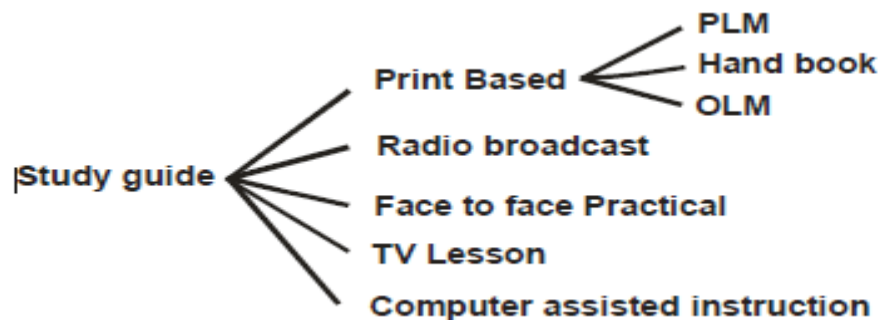
Growth of Distance Education in India

Year	Universities	Students (millions)	% of DE in total HE system (Total enrolment in HE) in millions
1975-76	18	0.06	2.3 (2.49)
1981-82	22	0.19	5.7 (3.34)
1990-91	40	0.56	10.1 (5.55)
1999-2000	74	1.58	17.0 (9.31)
2000 – 2001	74	2.00	20.0 (10 approx)

Source : Kulandai Swamy (2002)

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The success of distance education totally depends on what kind of learning support is provided to the learners. Garrison and Baynton (1987) defined learner support as the resources that learners can access in order to carry out the learning processes. Learning support acts as a life supporting machine for the distance education system. Learning material should be designed by keeping in mind the need & requirement of learners. That's why Thorpe (1988) described learner support as the elements of an open learning system capable of responding to a particular individual learning. Successful online support services aid both students and faculty. As higher education expands its distance education offerings, "the diversity of its student population increases, particularly in the area of students' proficiency with technology" (Bruso, 2001). The study material should be designed for self-study and self-explanatory so that learner will be able to understand the content without the help of an educator. Fjortoft (1996) found a need for (distance) educators to help adult learners prepare for further study with self-assessment exercises & possible, learning style inventories. Dillon and Blanchard (1991) described four types of support systems: Learner support and learner needs, learner support and content, learner support related to the institutional context, and, learner support and technology. The overall purpose of support system is to provide the learning experience of study in which they can learn through self-study or without the help of teachers, that's why their study guide must be a combination of a variety of mediums through which they can get learning experience without facing difficulties.



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All study guide material must follow the general rules like Moving from specific to general, known to unknown & simple to complex. The technology, which used in distance learning, is the backbone for the smooth functioning of delivery of quality of education to the learner & helpful in achieving the targeted goal of distance education. Rumble (1986) said that four media, namely print, audio, television, computer are available for teaching purposes, in one technological form or another. Teachers' role also taking new shape and form with the up gradation of the latest technological innovation in the field of distance learning. Now teacher centered learning approach become student centered approach to learning. Sellers (2001) wrote that the traditional classroom teacher, served as the initiator of all classroom activities, and as such, he/she was responsible for students' learning opportunities. Online learning is ultimately student centered and student-driven. The online environment encourages student-centered learning in which intellectual acquisition replaces the didactic force of the teacher as the main impetus of learning. In distance education students are not taught with traditional methods of teaching. They teach with online web technology, video conferencing, audio- visual aids, CD- ROM, tapes, etc. Chu and Schramm (1975) performed a meta-analysis of 421 studies that compared instructional television with traditional instruction. Their findings indicated that students at all levels learn as well in almost every subject, but younger students favor television for instruction. Bhatnagar (1997) has rightly pointed out that most of our institutes of distance education in India have miserably failed on both quality and timely supply of study materials and as a result, they have brought a bad name to themselves as well as to the system at large. Bhatnagar has also listed out some of the important qualities a distance education study material should possess. The qualities of an ideal study material are comprehensiveness, style of presentation, self-instructional nature, etc. The language of the study materials (conversational style) should also be considered. The lesson must be properly embedded into the totality of the framework of the syllabus. Inclusion of self-check exercises and adequate illustrations in the study materials enhance its quality. It is clear that in distance education the communication between teachers & students depends on technology & there are various alternatives in the use of technology. This variety provides students with study opportunities in order to make them successful. Radio & television broadcasting, audio- visual cassettes, tele- conferencing, computer & internet & printed material are educational tools in distance education. The world of technology, both provide information about different technologies & also defines their strengths, limitations & differences (Global Distance Education 2000). Technology is always being a double edged sword which has to be used with care. Experts are needed for the proper implementation & utilization technology. Before applying the technology in education field one has to understand the basic rules for its implementation. Chickering and Ehrmann (1996) provided seven principles for implementing new technologies in distance education programs. Online distance learning can integrate emerging technologies for either synchronous or asynchronous modes by applying these seven principles. Regardless of delivery method, technology should: (i) Encourage contact between students and faculty, (ii) Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students, (iii) Use active learning techniques, (iv) Give prompt feedback, Emphasize time on task, (v) Communicate high expectations, (vi) Respect diverse talents and ways of learning. Distance education has passed

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through various generations where they provide the education by using the different way of technology & show how far they have improved over the passage of time and now giving competition to the traditional way of teaching too. More & more students are attracted toward distance education as it provides convenience as well as effective knowledge with the use of latest technology and does not provide boring classroom & teacher centered learning environment. The different generations of distance education provide different ways for student learner support through various ways of technologies which are given below:

Model of Distance Education & Associated Delivery Technologies

FIRST GENERATION

The Corresponding Model

- Print

SECOND GENERATION

The Multi Media Models

- Print
- Audiotapes
- Videotapes
- Computer based learning (e.g. CML/ CAL/ IMM)
- Interactive Video (Disk & Tape)

THIRD GENERATION

The Tele Learning Model

- Audio Conferencing
- Video Conferencing
- Audio Graphic Communication
- Broadcast TV/ Radio & Audio Teleconferencing

FOURTH GENERATION

The Flexible Learning Model

- Interactive Multimedia (IMM) Online
- Internet Based Access to WWW Resources
- Computer Mediated Communication

FIFTH GENERATION

The Intelligent Flexible Learning Model

- Interactive Multimedia (IMM) Online
- Internet Based Access to WWW Resources
- Computer Mediated Communication, Using Automated Response System
- Campus Portal Access to Institutional Processes & Resources

CONCLUSION

Distance education usually involves a situation where learners are separated at a distance from their teachers, involves the provision of systems (electronic or otherwise) to establish and maintain communication between teachers and learners. The first National Open University, Indira Gandhi Open University (IGNOU) established in 1985 when the Parliament of

India passed the Indira Gandhi National Open University Act, 1985 (IGNOU Act 1985). The success IGNOU depends on learning material & technology support provided to the learner. IGNOU is a world famous name. Latest innovations are taking place in imparting the distance education which helps in achieving the target of education for all without any decimation.

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