IMPORTANCE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN 21ST CENTURY INDIA

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Abstract:

The distance modes of education play an important role in the field of education. The Rapid growth of distance and open learning systems all over the world has drastically changed the educational scenario everywhere today. The expansion of the distance and open learning system in other countries both developed and developing, has established beyond any doubt the fact that this system is going to play a very important role in the 21st century. Distance education has been viewed by many as a viable strategy to achieve the national educational goals quickly and at low costs. This paper looks at the importance and challenges of distance education in India. These challenges relate to access, quality, cost, equity, and lack of recognition and opportunities for lifelong learning. The issue discusses the features, needs, scope and quality assurance of distance education.

Keywords:

Open Learning, Distance Education, Importance, Challenge, Skills and Knowledge.

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Introduction :

The emergence of distance education likely evolved into the foremost component within education currently. The novel information and communication technology has afforded more adaptable customized learning approaches. The employment of communication technology alongside multimedia inputs additionally has rendered the system functional and quite effective. A modern networking prototype acknowledging a fresh path toward mankind including current globalization has materialized because education for everyone is mankind's supreme objective. Distance as well as open learning systems will expedite transformation. The mechanism shall convert a customary data society to a skilled, informed, and advanced society of the twenty-first century. For mass enlightenment, the Government of India intends to foster distance learning by encouraging open universities nationwide toward that purpose. Open University shows it contains meaningful and transformative elements of advanced learning, and educational strategists, society plus politicians view it as an important mechanism to cultivate expertise and enlighten. A number of prominent establishments for open and remote instruction provide web-based courses plus engaging digital media. These institutions, largely in the developed world, offer Internet-based access in conjunction with computer-mediated communication. Nonetheless people have voiced misgivings concerning distance mode's educational quality. Additionally, the range apparatus seems to be experiencing complications. Specifically within our nation, this is clear. These problems affect the process of learning and ultimately decorate the quality of the system.

It is a system for which instruction is offered completely or partly by mail in schools, universities, and other educational agencies. As a new nation in East Africa, Eritrea has many problems especially for education. There existed fewer tertiary-level educational institutions. Thus, learners in distance education learn the best in this country. Issues that are related to distance education of various kinds are discussed. This paper attempts to explore the establishment along with the development of distance education.

Need and Scope :

The Education Commission appointed by the Government of India in 1964, under the chairmanship of Dr. Kothari, recommended extending opportunities for part-time education through programs like evening colleges along with own-time education through correspondence courses as widely as possible toward including courses in Science and Technology. Distance education degree programs are justified amply in Engineering and Science. Technology sees this too.

India is presently undergoing a meaningful economic epoch economically. Lately, policy measures have been enacted for the economy's invigoration. The new Industrial and Trade Policies exist within that group. Diversified additional enhancement strategies are likewise featured. The Indian industry is exposed to more domestic along with global competition with new industrial Policies and Liberalization. To surmount this predicament they must renovate, improve the expertise of the workforce, use contemporary methods for administration, and improve efficacy and output while preserving caliber. In view of the above, the need for up gradation of the competency of the personnel in industry and other sectors of the economy is paramount to increase and productivity to meet the global competitiveness and to meet the challenges of the resource crunch effectively.

The existing facilities for continuing education as well as for retraining are insufficient indeed. Formalizing the retraining programs is a need for technology and engineering personnel in all sectors. Making of these programs a mandatory requirement is also important now. Modern communication devices should be used increasingly now. For the self-development and training of each of the scientific and technical personnel, we require program-learning packages in addition to distance learning methodologies. This could be in the strategy because it met goals for engineering and technical study during the English Plan nationally. So Engineering and Technology need the distance education mode. Thus encouraging it is of utmost importance.

Target Group of Distance Education :

The distance mode for education has an important role since it fulfills the requirements of persons who greatly seek education though they cannot finalize education by the formal system for regular education. They may be-

1. Employed people shall finalize academic credentials absent disruptions to employment given particular rationales.
2. Desires elevated scholastic standing yet substandard configuration of socioeconomic circumstances.
3. Those people desire education. They aspire to perform that concurrently .
4. People dwelling distant from major metropolises or within secluded regions are without institutions of higher learning.
5. Excess emanating from colleges/universities materialized. This arose from repair no. of seats or merit.
6. Dropouts, are impelled now toward study, stemming from individual rationales.

7. People perpetually desire training or to modernize or augment something novel in knowledge.

8. Such women who are housewives but do them for knowledge.

9. Some very active retired persons who still want to know about their changing environment.

10. Such students who cannot fulfill the basic qualifications for entrance to the university.

Characteristics of Distance Education :

The specific characteristics set it apart and provision it, which differentiate it from typical instruction as singularly analogous.

1. No immediate interaction or face-to-face activity exists among teachers and students. Corresponding or advising meetings (CM) offset this deficit regarding interaction.

2. Educators with students engage in reciprocal communication. Institutions for organizations ease such communication. Learned authorities and trained professionals assist establishments in generating self-guided resources and acquiring their publication, dispatching them through postal service to students.

3. In this instance, instructors with pupils correspond circuitously, interacting usually through letters, and digital outlets additionally strengthen this. Communication necessitates the media in print or electronic forms.

4. The third attribute of distance education is designed to resolve learners' inquiries that arise following their SIM study during contact sessions or counseling sessions.

5. Given this is not a required activity, the cohort of learners under contact or counseling (CS) may be different. Computer Science subjects lack prior scheduling. Neither are they predetermined in CS. Thus, conceivably someone may reiterate that very subject since the cohort can converge on day two and the incoming pupils might inquire likewise.

Distance Education in India :

The General Enrolment Rate (GER) has remained so low because higher education is still a distant dream for a large section of the population for a variety of reasons including logistic, financial, cultural, etc. Many post-secondary students are required to opt for earning immediately of even before passing the 12th standard examination. Women rural, and disadvantaged groups are preponderant among those who cannot go in for higher education as regular students. Many of them aspire for

and are in need of improving their educational qualifications for better prospects. The open education system and the distance education mode are the available options that are globally accepted to fill in the gap in access. The Indian higher education system is going in a big way for them.

The trends and overall figures can be understood through reports like the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) released by the Ministry of Education. Here's a summary of the enrollment trends in distance education in India over the last five years, based on the available information:

- Overall Increase: The total enrollment in higher education, which includes distance education, has shown a consistent upward trend.
- In 2020-21, the total enrollment in higher education reached 4.14 crore, an increase of 7.5% from 3.85 crore in 2019-20 and a 21% increase since 2014-15.
- In 2021-22, this number further increased to 4.33 crore, a 4.6% increase from the previous year.
- Distance Education Enrollment Figures: While the overall higher education enrollment is increasing, the specific figures for distance education have fluctuated.
- In 2020-21, the enrollment in distance education was reported as 45.7 lakh, showing an increase of around 7% since 2019-20 and 20% since 2014-15.
- However, the AISHE 2021-22 report indicates a slight decrease in distance education enrollment, with 24.46 lakhs enrolled, down from 24.78 lakhs in the previous year. It's important to note that there was a significant spike in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20 (17.7 lakhs).
- Female Enrollment: Female participation in distance education has also been significant.
- In 2020-21, out of the 45.7 lakh students enrolled in distance education, 20.9 lakh were female.
- The percentage of female enrollment to total enrollment in higher education has increased to around 49% in 2020-21 from 45% in 2014-15.
- Distance education remains a crucial mode of learning, providing access to a large number of students, especially those in remote areas and working professionals.
- The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21 appears to have led to a notable increase in distance education enrollment.
- Online education is also emerging as a significant component of non-traditional learning, with a substantial increase in enrollment reported between 2021 and 2022.

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Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU):

As the largest open university in the world, IGNOU plays a vital role in distance education in India. IGNOU has achieved an all-time high in total registrations, reaching 753,286 for the 2023–24 period (covering the admission cycle of July 2023 and January 2024). Of these, 352,354 students enrolled in bachelor's degree programs, with the Bachelor of Arts being the most popular, garnering 109,840 registrations. In March 2022, IGNOU was ranked 247 in the Web metric ranking of Indian websites, based on the criteria of its presence on the internet in terms of impact, openness, and excellence. IGNOU serves as the National Coordinator for 6 DTH (Direct to Home) educational channels where it provides live classes in 14 Regional languages as well as for Diploma and Certificate level courses under the SWAYAM PRABHA initiative. It offers 268 MOOCs via the Swayam Portal and 43 online programs through its Learning Management System (LMS) portal.

The distance education council is a statutory body mandated to monitor the growth in this sector and to maintain the standard of education being imparted through it. Is shocking to note that many of the distance education institutions have launched even those academic programs which require continuous expert teaching guidance, well-equipped laboratories and workshops, reference libraries, etc. such as hotel management and catering technology, fashion designing, nursing, biotechnology, computer and information technologies, law management education, fine arts, electronics, bioinformatics, and the like. Many of the universities run a few programmes because; it is not profitable for them to do so. The number of distance mode programs that some of these universities offer runs into hundreds. Indira Gandhi Open University has launched more than 300 academic programs.

Role of Distance Education In India :

Distance education has in fact played such a role for most of the time since its beginning. However, it has taken a century for the rulers and education can play in a modern society.

1. Balancing inequalities between age groups
2. Offering second chance upgrading
3. Organizing information and education campaigns for large audiences
4. Training key target groups speedily and efficiently
5. Educating otherwise neglected target groups
6. Expanding the capacity for education in new areas
7. Extending geographical access to education
8. Offering a combination of education with work and family life

9. Developing multiple competencies
10. Offering Transnational programmes.

Quality Assurance in Distance Education :

Quality constitutes a buzzword within industrial and business circles as people articulate it regarding quality control. A quality inspection begets a quality product. Although the area of education recognizes the concept of quality, instructors battle to construe it. Items for example students and operations for example teaching learning are impalpable to a major degree. Quality represents a multi-dimensional dynamic entity, not an immutable concept. Within the formal system of education how teachers teach, researchers research, and candidates pass decides the quality. The subsequent items are delineated as Quality indicators.

1. **Learner's Profile:** age demographics acquire knowledge, familial units possess histories, revenues materialize, person obtains employment/loses employment, person finalizes schooling etc.
2. **Scholastic Resources:** The monetary analysts and structural personnel.
3. **Knowledge, skill, coupled with training**: Adopted teaching-learning methodologies and strategies toward imparting them.
4. Efficacy quotient and scholastic attainments caliber are governable via embracing the framework of methodologies. Quality control is at one terminus as quality enhancement is at the opposite point, as shown above.

Challenges of Distance Education in India :

The initial and the principal disapprove of the system for remote learning because it lacks a teacher's presence. They state that education includes teachers, students, and curriculum. The vital stake seems nearly absent or stays beyond observation in this procedure. As populace cognizance escalates toward schooling as well as finite availability within the system's institutions distance education institutions confront mounting duress. Therefore handling a large number of students poses a big problem. The nature of the background of the learner is important in the preparation of the learning materials. It is difficult to prepare lessons according to the individual differences of the learners.

A plethora of distance education programs are sprouting emphatically in both the Government and the private sector. As such, it is becoming increasingly difficult to safeguard quality in such institutions. There is a lake of adequate staff in these institutions. In most cases, distance education directorates or correspondence education institutes receive recognition from traditional system universities. Hence, we must depend very much upon their staffing. There is more emphasis on the sending of

printed materials. There is a death of multi-media instructional facilities. The variety in the learning materials also enhances quality learning. The factors in the learning materials that are written for and directed at students, are written by traditional system teachers, therefore they usually are lacking in their own instructional methodology.

One of the weaknesses of distance education is that a large part of the funding that they generate is aplenty diverted to the formal system. There are limited provisions for libraries, study centers and other learner support services. The contact programs are also scheduled to the minimum.

Traditional institutions have given step-motherly treatment to the teachers and staff in service conditions, salaries and other benefits. This results in resentment among them and this is duly reflected in their loyalty to the institution owing to the low job satisfaction they experience. There is little or no collaboration in the sharing of resources between different distance education institutions. Such collaboration would undoubtedly enhance the quality of this mode and would be economically advantageous. The students of distance education are denied the rich learning environment of traditional institutions. In the traditional system there is a physical relationship between teacher and taught.

Recommendation for Improving Distance Education :

1. More attention should be paid and career-oriented courses should be designed, appropriately for providing self-employment to the youth.

2. There may be more publicity of the courses offered by the Distance Education programs, plus creating additional study centers in the colleges of Gujarat State. In remote areas with no distance education initiatives, there should be efforts to let the students to know about the programs run under Distance Education in the Schools.

3. Although IGNOU is showing a special television program "Gyan Darshan" it is not available to all the viewers on their simple television sets. Consider steps that may be taken to show such programs even through simple antennae to all geographical regions of the country.

4. Radio interactive programs may be made more regularly and may be published at a suitable time to benefit all listeners.

5. The fee structure of the courses may be altered by lowering the fees, and may make a special package available for students who are from the states of India to promote their participation.

6. Students may be encouraged to join the Distance Education Programme by providing scholarships.

7.   Individualized Instruction **instead of** Distance Learning Institutions may **present** the Group Learning Method **as** findings **show** majority of students **prefer** individualized study **in lieu of** group learning.

Conclusion :

Distance education has an overwhelming response in India, the universities introduces many new distance education job-oriented courses according to the changing times and students requirements. However, in this process, the actual motive of providing quality education to all took the back seat as the main focus of universities slowly shifted to making more and more money. It would rather be more appropriate. Appropriate if an inter-university body is set up by the UGC or the International Council of Distance Education of India to monitor and review the distance education of India to monitor and review the distance education programs run by different universities and to ensure the smooth progress of distance education.

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