



UNDERSTANDING TEACHER EDUCATION THROUGH OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

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Abstract

According to NCTE (1998) teacher is the most important element in any educational program. He plays a central role in implementation of educational process at any stage. The level of achievement of learner is determined by teacher competence. Kothari commission has very rightly said, "The destiny of India is being shaped in its classrooms." It is school teacher who mediate between a rapidly evolving world and the pupils who are about to enter it. With increasing standards and accountability in education, teacher quality and teacher training will be more important than ever. In facing up to the numerous challenges to teacher education in the era of digital technology and globalization, there has come a dire need for focused efforts which would ensure quality teacher education. It has been recognized that teacher education program should be structured and modified in a way that enables them to respond dynamically to the new problems and challenges in the field of education. This paper discusses about teacher education through distance mode and aims to focus on different aspects of teacher education through open and distance education (ODE).



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Introduction

Today there are new expectations for education where the focus is on having teachers cum futurist leaders to ensure sustainable education. The paradigm shift is from teacher-dominated classroom practices to that of partnership between the teacher and the learners and their peers. Universal accessibility to quality education is considered essential for development. This has initiated efforts to improve system of teacher education through open and distance education (ODE).

Distance education has been used to teach, support and develop teachers for many years. It has been widely applied to the education of teachers, both in an attempt to meet an emergency teacher shortage and to upgrade the qualifications of members of the profession. While the success of programs has varied, it has also been demonstrated that distance education can be used to enable teachers to learn and to gain qualifications. The use of new information and communication technologies has drawn new attention to open and distance education (ODE) and offers new possibilities making it one important way to impart quality education to teachers in future.

Distance education has been defined as an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner. Open learning, in turn, is an organized educational activity, based on the use of teaching materials, in which constraints on study are minimized in terms either of access, or

of time and place, pace, method of study, or any combination of these. The term 'open and distance learning' is used as an umbrella term to cover educational approaches of this kind that reach teachers in their schools, provide learning resources for them, or enable them to qualify without attending college in person, or open up new opportunities for keeping up to date no matter where or when they want to study. The flexibility inherent in open and distance learning, and the fact that it can be combined with a full or near full-time job, makes it particularly appropriate for the often widely distributed force of teachers and school managers. Some open and distance learning programs lead to a qualification, others do not; some are addressed to individuals and others to groups; some are tightly organized and others essentially a way of making learning resources available to teachers. All fall under this one umbrella of open and distance learning.

What is distance education?

Distance education, also termed as correspondence education has following major characteristics:

- Separation of teacher and learner
- Individualization of learning
- Preparation and provision of learning materials
- Establishing and linking various communication channels to link tutor and student.

The principle aims of distance education are to:

- Separation of teacher and learner
- Individualization of learning
- Preparation and provision of learning materials
- Establishing and linking various communication channels to link tutor and student.

Distance education at various levels of teacher education

- ✓ Initial teacher training
- ✓ Teacher upgrading
- ✓ Curriculum change and innovations
- ✓ Career development

The need and importance of distance education

1. In developing countries particularly ODE is an important method of expanding educational opportunities to the semi-adult and adult population. Teacher training program is an important area where ODE learning has made a major contribution.
2. In developing countries it is found that teacher training at a distance may reach large groups of students and have profound impact on the development of national education systems. This includes initial training for formal qualifications, in-service supplementary training for formal upgrading, and continuing in-service training in particular subjects and topics.
3. The use of ODE can help to include the ability to respond flexibly to the need for working adults to obtain training
4. It can provide opportunities for those who are most deprived by existing provision.
5. Programs at a distance often reach substantial numbers of women, in societies where women lack equal opportunities for participation in conventional forms of education and training.

6. The ODE is cost effective system and in India since the government has subsidized the education the programs have comparatively lesser fees than conventional courses.

New trends in distance education

- a) Online learning
- b) Use of technology
- c) E- learning
- d) Web- based learning
- e) Virtual learning
- f) Satellite
- g) M- learning

Challenges

1. Poor quality of learning material

Teacher education at a distance provides the material has been generally of poor quality with a focus on learning as a process of memorization. The learning material should be validated with a focus to make teachers “smart” to deal with changing scenario.

2. Inadequate assessment technique

Assessment techniques used at distance mode are still traditional and need to be timely updated to meet the standards of globalized world.

3. Lack of empirical evidence regarding efficiency of ODE

The programs provided in distance education courses do not appear to be addressing the needs of education system or the teachers. Teachers emerge from their studies with formal qualifications but they may not necessarily have the knowledge, skills and competence which they need to ensure that quality learning happens in the classrooms.

4. Less of practical exposure

There is hardly any exposure that teachers get about actual classroom teaching through ODE. The current ODE curriculum is rather more theoretical than practical. This interferes with the delivery of content during educational setting.

5. Less use of technology in instructional processes

The current mode of instructions in ODE relies more on traditional ways of teaching-learning and less on practice with newer and sophisticated tools which would support the development of students’ higher- order thinking skills and problem- solving skills.

Strategies to improve effectiveness of ODE in teacher education

1. Extensive pre- planning and formative evaluation procedures should be prepared.
2. The faculty development is the most essential aspect before beginning any program in ODE.
3. Well- designed syllabus and presentation outlines to ensure thorough understanding of the course.
4. The maximum and optimized use of technologies to impart education, provide learner support and interaction opportunities.
5. Distance education works best for more matured, motivated, well- organized and already accomplished learners.

Conclusion

Distance education now functions in two ways. On one hand, numerous single mode open universities have emerged to absorb large numbers of new learners, while, on the other hand,

increasing numbers of traditional universities have begun to offer their programs also through distance education mode.

The tremendous growth in ICT has reinforced this trend. The ODE has the potential to generate new patterns of teaching and learning. There is evidence that ODE can lead to innovation in mainstream education, and may even have effects beyond the realm of education itself. Therefore the ODE plays an especially decisive role in the creation of the global knowledge-based society. The current trends in ODE shows that open and distance learning will be an important element in future education and training systems. It is approaching acceptance within mainstream education and training in such a way that it will make up part of the range of most educational institutions in the future.

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