



Challenges in Teacher Education through Distance Mode

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Abstract

The Government have set up a number of distance education institutions to make access to higher education to a large number of both aspiring students and teachers. Undoubtedly, Distance Education has today emerged as a very significant tool in providing education. This method has evolved over the years to reach a much wider group of students and community to include them in the generation of information power. Knowledge, today, can be provided in so many ways and Distance Education fits in very well to cater to this increasing need which is across the nation. Information Technology has enhanced the power of this mode of education and has over a period of time to fill the gap between the "distance" that exists between students and teachers.

Distance education has also undergone a tremendous change – paper, pen toe-mode. This paper attempts to bring out why these types of institutions are imperative if the country has to achieve the desired Gross Enrolment and to deal with shortage of qualified teachers and a strong discrimination against students and teachers graduating from such mode of education and their recruitment. So the challenge is how to resolve the issues without diluting quality of education.

Key words: Experiences, Challenges, Teacher Education, Distance Learning

Introduction

Shale defined "Distance education is beset with a remarkable paradox - it has asserted its existence, but it cannot define itself". From the perspective of many educational

technologists, distance education is "inexorably linked to the technology" (Garrison, 1987) offers a minimum set of criteria and allows more flexibility. They suggest that distance education uses technology to mediate the necessary two-way communication. Following are the characteristics of education through distance mode -

- Distance education implies that the majority of educational communication between teacher and student occurs non contiguously.
- Distance education involves two-way communication between teacher and student for the purpose of facilitating and supporting the educational process.
- Distance education, with its diversity of activities and staffing, the nature of its students, and externally based instructional programming, requires very effective communication.

In 1973 Moore introduced the theory of independent study. An important foundation of distance education, it suggests that successful teaching can take place even though teacher and learner are physically separated during the learning process.

Kaye and Rumble (1981) cite the problems of educational institutions, in introducing distance learning programs, how to resolve the conflict between distance education, which often requires the management and structure of a business enterprise, and traditional academic areas which have a completely different style of administration.

Heinich (1982) suggests that we tend to treat all technological innovations almost the same, yet technologies such as television can affect the power structure in education, and faculty prefer the power structure the way it is. According to Sarason (1990), the communication network, which is dependent on personal contact and on who knows whom, often identifies the path for implementation of an innovation.

A team approach to the development of learning materials is often considered the most appropriate for distance education. (Verduin & Clark, 1991). These instructional development activities should support the institution in fulfilment of its mission and vision.

Studies on the use of various media in distance education have supported Schramm's (1977) view that "learning seems to be affected more by what is delivered than by the delivery medium". Bates (1984) suggests that new technologies promise a wider range of teaching functions and a higher quality of learning, lower costs, greater student control, more interaction and feedback for students.

The immediate advantages comes to mind includes - competing priorities of work, home, and school, adult learners desire a high degree of flexibility. The structure of distance learning gives adults the greatest possible control over the time, place and pace of education; however, it is not without problems. **Loss of student motivation** due to the lack of face-to-face contact with teachers and peers, potentially prohibitive start up costs, and **lack of faculty support** are all barriers to successful distance learning.

Distance Education- A Significant Mode Of Learning.

Cantelon, (1995) in his book, 'Facilitating Distance Education, Projects' mentioned that most of higher education will take place off-campus through technological methods of delivery.

More than any other teaching method, **distance learning requires a collaborative effort** between student and teacher, unbounded by the traditional limits of time, space, and single-instructor effort. While distance education is already a fact of life for most universities and an increasing number of community colleges, **knowing the intrinsic problems** and overcoming them will be critical to successful implementation of distance programs on a larger scale in the future.

The distance learner can now have almost the same instructional contact and interaction as the student on campus. But **remote access** education does not need to eliminate all the benefits of human contact. Teleconferencing, and the World Wide Web provide a information and contacts that were previously unavailable to the learner as well as the tutor.

Student centred learning

Changes in technology have accelerated the growth of distance learning. The accessibility and availability of technology made more students to take part in the learning process. Distance learning is student-centered learning; thus it is important to know the characteristics and demographics of the distance learners to get the data about barriers to learning.

But it is very complex and time consuming process to understand the exact needs and requirements of the students in distance mode. Thus **getting exact information about the students is a tedious job**. Knowing these personal characteristics is an important aspect of planning distance learning courseware and strategies.

The above discussion thus leads to the conclusion that being a learner centred system of education, knowing the learner should be a focus area for any distance education institution.

Challenges In Distance Education With Respect To Learners

It is observed that the problems and barriers encountered by the student can be categorised into following categories -

- Costs and motivators.
- Communication.
- Feedback
- Student support services.
- Isolation.
- Lack of experience in distance mode learning
- Lack of training.
- Trouble in self-evaluation.
- Lack of ICT knowledge.
- Technical barriers

The following studies support these challenge areas in distance mode education –

Challenges in distance education with respect to faculty

There are certain challenges observed, related to the faculty are as follows -

- Lack of staff training

- Lack of expertise in course designing, development and delivery
- Lack of knowledge of technology
- Lack of support for distance learning
- Inadequate faculty selection for distance learning courses
- Inappropriate courseware
- Programme implementation
- Evaluation strategy
- The use advanced technologies suitable for distance courses

Challenges with respect to organization

Along with challenges identified related to students, and faculty there are few challenges observed related to institutions as -

- Infrastructure and technology problems
- Funding to create an administrative unit
- Commitment of the Institutional leaders
- Technology problems includes financing new technology
- Inadequate telecommunications facilities
- Hardware issues, course production and delivery, and Internet problems
- Course content, course standards, curriculum development and support,
- The quality of the material presented in distance courses.
- Assessment

Marrs (1995) agrees when he says, "Without this support, distance education is at risk of becoming a peripheral activity, without commitment from or significance to the institution."

Conclusion

Distance education has also undergone a tremendous change – paper, pen to e-mode. This paper analyzed various studies to bring out the challenges with related to

students, faculty and Distance education institutions. These challenges thus may give guidelines for the educators to resolve the issues without diluting quality of education.

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