STRENGTHENING TEACHER EDUCATION AND TEACHING PROFESSION THROUGH CREATION OF SIM

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Abstract

Relation of self-instructional material (SIM) and distance education begins with a consideration of the concept of 'learning through distance mode of education'. Distance education is defined as learning which is implemented with a geographical separation between the teachers and the students. Self-instructional material is described as a learning material given to distance learners so that they can grasp the concepts without the presence of the teacher. Self-instructional materials are given to adult students who are especially interested in learning that arises from the roles they play as they pass through the stages of human development (i.e., parent, consumer, employee, citizen). The teachers teaching through the face to face mode are experts in teaching the subject content through face to face mode. If the same content has to be taught through the distance mode of education then the subject content has to transform to self-instructional material. Hence this paper discusses the creation of self-instructional material and the implications which follow for newer avenues in strengthening the teaching profession.

Keywords: *Self Instructional Material, Distance education, teaching profession*

Introduction

Considering to be more than a profession, teachers are regarded as the strongest pillar of society. Teaching is a profession that is a mother of all other occupations. A teacher is like a pillar who shapes the minds of the students, making them appropriate members of the society. In India, teachers have a respectable place in society. The Indian educational system cannot be forgotten with the age-old system of education called the Gurukul system. In today's world, the educational system has changed a lot with the technological advancement seen in the educational arena. But the respectful place of the teacher has not deferred as compared with the Gurukul system. The change is seen only with the technological advancements in the educational system. The teachers have to adjust their teachings with the changing effects of technology in education.

To facilitate education to students, the traditional set-up utilizes a variety of factors such as the infrastructure and study material or, Self Instructional Material. Traditional ways of education are gradually being replaced by distance learning. The integral part of distance learning is the quality preparation of the self-instructional material. Hence, writing quality self-instructional material has become the core business of almost all the institutes imparting education through the distance mode of education. The need for the preparation of quality self-instructional material increases when the student has little or no access to Internet services. Good reference materials or easy access to e-libraries are not available to the students, making it difficult to get an education. And at the same time, the educational institutes are concerned with ensuring quality self-instructional material to the students as they cannot compromise on the quality of knowledge and skills transmitted to the students.

Hence the teachers of today's era should also focus their attention on the preparation of self-instructional material, apart from their teaching-learning activities. If the writing of self-instructional material is focused on then the teachers would also get an added advantage, which is that they will explore newer avenues for enhancing their teaching profession. Presently the teaching profession reflects only on the teaching-learning activities and the evaluation activities carried in a school or a college. With the teaching profession, teachers can also indulge in the preparation of self-instructional material.

Distance Education

Keegan (1986) identified six principal characteristics of distance education. Keegan's definition provides a synthesis of most of the definitions of distance education. The characteristics are:

Separation of teacher and student

Influence of an educational organization

Use of technical media

Provision of two way communication

Absence of group learning

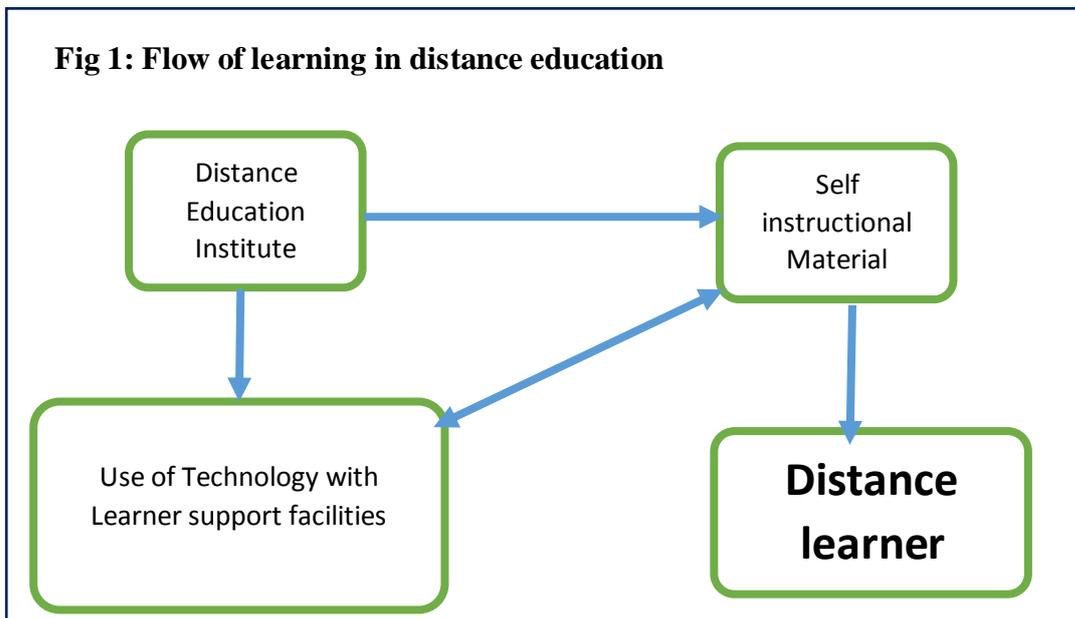Participation in the most industrialized form of education

Distance Education plays a vital role in the development and access to education. As a philosophy in the distance education approach, it suggests the removal of the barriers and restrictions from learners in comparison to the face to face mode of educational setup.

Distance education is opening up learning opportunities to a wider range of people and enabling them to learn more efficiently and as per their time and geographical location.

At present state, distance education is offered in different ways, the first one is providing the learning material to the students either in soft or hard copy format. Secondly with the dismemberment of the learning material the contact classes are also taken for a student to solve their doubts and difficulties. The distance learner grasps the concepts through the learning materials and the contact classes. Then they attempt the emanations. The distance education institutes are now also equipped with support services like call center facility, where the distance students can call the institute for the addressing of their doubts. Hence it can be said that the whole distance education revolves around the self-instructional material given to the distance learners. Quality self-instructional material will lead to a better understanding of the concepts by the distance learner.

The diagram below states that the distance mode of education relies heavily on self-instructional material even if newer technologies are invented with time.

Fig 1: Flow of learning in distance education

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┌──────────────────┐              ┌──────────────────┐
│    Distance       │─────────────▶│      Self         │
│   Education        │              │  instructional    │
│   Institute        │              │    Material       │
└──────────────────┘              └──────────────────┘
        │                             ▲        │
        ▼                            ╱         ▼
┌──────────────────┐              ┌──────────────────┐
│ Use of Technology │─────────────▶│    Distance       │
│ with Learner       │              │    learner        │
│ support facilities │              └──────────────────┘
└──────────────────┘
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Self instructional material (SIM)

In distance education, usage of self-instructional materials in various forms are implemented like – print, audio, video, multimedia, web, etc. In order to help distance learners' study these and learn in their own time and at their own pace, these materials are designed in such a way to have the teacher built in to facilitate the learning process. There are

specific characteristics of self-instructional materials. For the teachers who are determined to teach through the distance mode of education, the characteristics of the self-instructional materials are to be clearly understood.The self-learning materials are designed based on learning theories, to a large extent on the basis of an eclectic approach combining behaviouristic, cognitive, and constructivist learning theories. Without going into these theories, a list five characteristics of self-learning materials: self-explanatory, self-contained, self-directed, self-motivating, and self-evaluating are given below. The characteristics of self-instructional material are as follows.

Fig 2: Characteristics of Self – Instructional Material

Self-Explanatory

Self-Evaluating

Characteristics of self instructional material

Self-Contained

Self-Motivating

Self-Directed
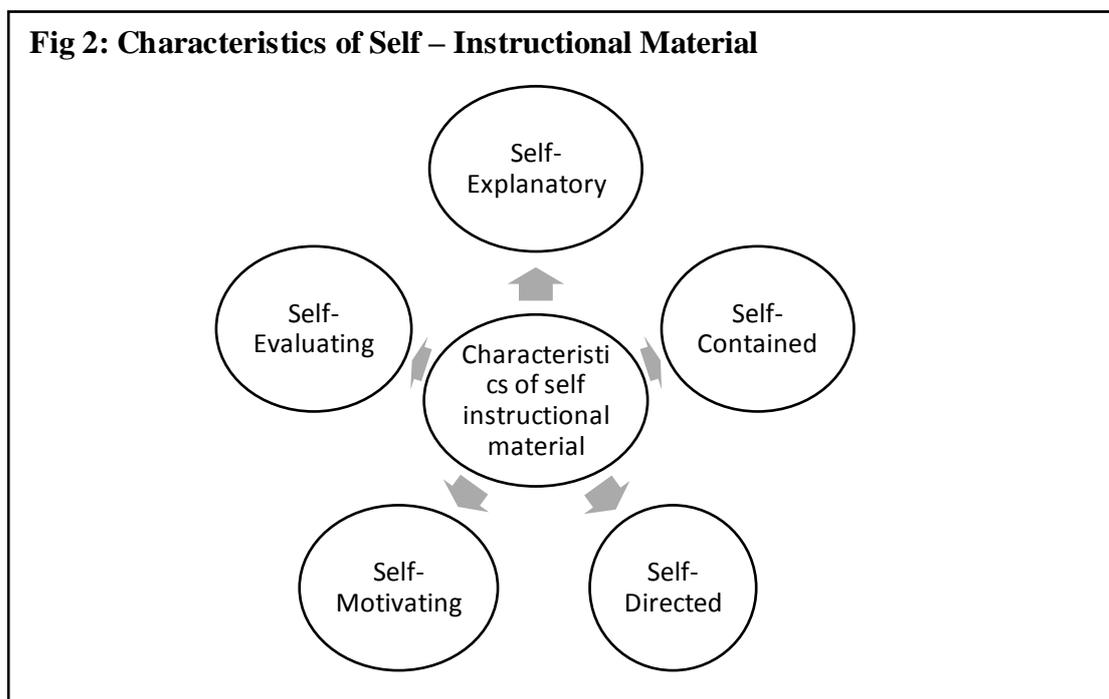
1. Self-Explanatory: The self-learning materials are written in a way that does not require any intermediary (teacher) to explain the content. This means, the content is written in simple language and in small chunks to help distance learners assimilate the content by reading and working through the instructions. Thus, a teacher is built in, into the text. But these are different from instructional manuals that come with electronic gadgets or home appliances.

2. Self-Contained: The self-learning materials are prepared in such a way that the distance learners normally do not require additional materials to learn the concepts/ subject matter. This is highly important for the distance learners, since they are isolated and dispersed; they may not have access to good libraries and learning resources. Therefore, it is necessary that the learning materials supplied to them are detailed and self-

contained in nature. This is also related to the nature of the 'curriculum' in distance education, which is open, whereas in face-to-face education, the curriculum is hidden in the syllabus. An open curriculum envisages that the content is clearly detailed, leaving nothing to the imagination of the learner and interpretation. Also, if a course requires the use of external source materials, these are supplied along with the course. For example, if a course requires the student to listen to an audio cassette then it should be supplied in the course pack to make it self-contained.

3. Self-Directed: As distance learners' study in isolation, it is important that the self-learning materials are designed in a way that provides necessary directions to the learners to study and progress. This is done in the self-learning materials by using a variety of techniques including the use of hints, notes, graphics (icons) and explicit directions on how to do, what to do and what is expected of the learner. The use of learning objectives, guidance in introduction, and a conversational style of writing text, instructions to do and how to answer the self-assessment questions are elements of self-direction that are used in self-learning materials to facilitate learning.

4. Self-Motivating: One of the major roles of a teacher in the face-to-face education system is to motivate and encourage the learners towards study and research. Teachers are role models and students generally try to emulate their teachers. They create interest and curiosity towards a subject. In distance learning materials, all these features should be included, and good self-learning material should arouse curiosity, and interest, encourage the learners towards in-depth study and critical thinking, motivate them to question and reflect on their own experiences and practices, and also provide reinforcement on learning progress. These are provided through the use of a personalized style of writing, use of anecdotes, examples, illustrations from real-life, feedback on self-assessment questions, etc.

5. Self-Evaluating: It is important for the distance learners to know how they are progressing in their studies, particularly because they are quasi-permanently separated from the teachers and others in their peer group. The separation of teachers and learners inhibits two-way communication, and the learners may not get timely feedback or can't even compare their performance with other peer group members. Thus, the self-learning materials should provide self-assessment questions and their personalized feedback to allow the students to evaluate themselves and learn from their action

(correct/ incorrect). The self-evaluating characteristics of distance learning materials envisage that the distance learners use the learning material in an active manner. Learning activeness is the key, where use of in-text questions, self-assessment questions, unit-end exercises, reflective action-based activities and feedback all play significant roles. The use of learning objectives in behavioural action verbs to measure the achievement of learning is also another way to empower the learner.

Teaching profession with reference to distance education

Many teachers are nowadays imparting education through distance mode. There is a changing role of educators and trainers or teachers in the teaching-learning process. The significant increase in the enrolment of distance learning courses has left a profound impact on the role of educators teaching at a distance. Teachers revolve around a learner-cantered system with teaching activity focused on facilitating learning. The teacher is an expert in his or her content knowledge but lacks the skills of preparing the self-learning material. The teacher, no matter which course s/he would be implementing prepares the self-instructional material by providing explanations, references, etc. so that learning takes place. The study material is based on what the students would do and not on what the teacher wants to do. The teacher will just not transmit information, but also monitor and evaluate the work of students who are geographically apart.

The teachers in the traditional mode of education can explore this new avenue leading to the enrichment of their teaching professional development.

Strengthening Teacher Education and Teaching Profession through Creation of Self-instructional material (SIM)

The following reference is taken from Richard Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education, 2000, which is as follows.

"Improving teacher quality is at the heart of our national effort to achieve excellence in the classroom. This comes at a time when the very structure of education is going through a profound change. With knowledge all around us, available anytime and anywhere, the role of the teacher is going to be fundamentally transformed in the 21st century.

In the future, schools will be more fluid, teachers more adaptable and flexible, and students will be more accountable as the task of learning becomes theirs. The challenge of the modern classroom is its increasing diversity and the skills that this diversity requires of teachers. This is why we need to do some new thinking when it comes to the teaching profession.

We need a dramatic overhaul of how we recruit, prepare, induct, and retain good teachers. The status quo is not good enough. And we must revamp professional development as we know it. New distance learning models can be powerful new tools to give teachers more opportunities to be better teachers.

Our efforts to improve education will rise or fall on the quality of our teaching force, and higher education has the defining role in preparing the next generation of teachers. I ask leaders in higher education across the nation to please make this their mission."

According to Richard Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education, improving quality teacher courses should be the prime responsibility of every nation. The future schools will not be rigid, but flexible according to the convenience of the students. There will be no geographical restrictions on the students, implying that they have to attend the learning house in a particular location. The student of the present era will be given the flexibility to learn at his / her pace and speed of learning. The students will also be able to attempt the examinations according to his / her convenience. All the above said points are reflecting on the distance mode of education. Hence the role of the teacher is going to be fundamentally transformed in the 21st century. The teachers have to be ready to teach through distance mode of education with the traditional mode of teaching. For teaching through distance mode of education, the teachers should be equipped with the know-how of preparation of self-instructional material. Hence this vital point can be taken into consideration, which will certainly lead to the strengthening of teacher education and the teaching profession through the creation of self-instructional material for distance mode of education.

Conclusions

Self-instructional materials cater to distance learners who will not be in regular contact with the teachers and subject matter experts who design the courses. Hence, they rely very heavily on specially prepared teaching-learning materials that have been structured in such a way that learners can do the most, if not all, their learning from the materials alone. As pointed out by Rowntree (1977), 'the materials must carry out all the functions a teacher or trainer would carry out in the conventional situation – guiding, motivating, intriguing, expounding, explaining, provoking, reminding, asking questions, discussing alternative answers, appraising each learner's progress and so …" (p 11).

The studies were done on distance education and the importance of the preparation of self-instructional material lead the authors with many exciting conclusions. The teacher

education curriculum can include leaning content on the preparation of self-instructional material. If this inclusion is focused, then newer avenues of the teaching profession will be certainly explored. Newer avenues can be writing self-instructional material for distance education. This exposure will add to strengthening teacher education and the teaching profession through the creation of self-instructional material.

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