PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTIVES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIA IN THE 21st CENTURY

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Abstract

This research paper attempts to introduce the problems and prospective in Distance Education System in India. This paper begins with the definition of distance learning and then proceeds to tell about the types of distance learning. It discusses and analyses the synchronous and asynchronous of distance education delivery system and emphasizes that the asynchronous method is more flexible than synchronous instruction. It also emphasizes that the instructional design, technology and support are the elements which are of paramount importance to any successful distance education program.

The history of distance learning narrates the development of distance learning and discusses how it found an alternative method to the then existing effective system which brought the students together to one place and one time to learn from one of the masters. It reveals how the pioneers of distance education used the best technology of their days to open educational opportunities to people who were unable to attend the regular conventional institutions. It also lists and discusses the problems such as lack of student's co-ordination, conducting examinations, publishing results and other related problems. Further, it attempts to converse on the origin, salient features, and the technologies used in distance education in India. It also brings out the four themes of distance education system and their prospective. Finally, it summarizes and suggests solutions for the problems faced in distance education and also widens the scope of any researcher to further research on the problems and prospective in distance education and to improve the values in distance education system of learning in India.

Key words: *distance education, definition and types, technology, problems and prospective*.

Introduction

The Distance education generally defines as "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, and employs a form of pedagogic interchange between the teacher and the learner to promote learning, assessment and support".

Holmberg refined the definition by stating that Distance Education is a concept that covers the learning-teaching activities in the cognitive and/or psycho-motor and affective domains of an individual learner and a supporting organization. It is characterized by non-contiguous communication and can be carried out anywhere and at any time, which makes it attractive to adults with professional and social commitments. (Holmberg, 1989 p. 168)

The term Distance Education received a formal recognition in 1982 when the four decades old International Council for Correspondence Education was renamed as the International Council for Distance Education. The old concept of distance education was exclusively associated with print materials, whereas the new concept of distance education includes supplementary material being used through non-print media such as radio, television, computers, laptops, recorded lectures in Mpeg and Avi formats in CDs and DVDs and Self Learning Materials (SLM) through projectors, video conferencing and interactive sessions between students and

faculties via internet. Institutions of these types are termed as dual mode institutions.

Synchronous and Asynchronous are the two types of Distance Education. Synchronous method requires face to face participation of the student. The interaction is done in "real time" and has immediacy whereas asynchronous does not require simultaneous participation. The need for students and instructors to be gathered at the rendezvous is ruled out and students choose their own time frame for interaction.

Because of the limitations and hurdles in the formal education system in India, the central advisory Board of Education in 1961 resolved to introduce Correspondence Courses in India. In the same year the Government of India appointed a commission headed by the then UGC Chairman Dr.D.S.Kothari to examine and study for the initiative of correspondence courses .The expert committee observed that "the correspondence method admits greater flexibility than class room education, particularly in the combination of subjects leading to a degree and this is an advantage that should be fully exploited in the interest of sound education".

The objectives of distance education/correspondence education were enunciated in the guidelines issued by the University Grants Commission in 1974.The objective of correspondence education is to provide an alternative method of education to enable a large number of persons with necessary aptitude to acquire further knowledge and improve their professional competence. Correspondence Courses are thus intended to cater for (a) Students who had to discontinue their formal education owing to pecuniary and other circumstances; (b) Students in geographically remote areas; (c) Students who had to discontinue education because of lack of aptitude and motivation but who may later on become motivated; (d) Students who cannot find a seat or do not wish to join a regular college or university department although they have the necessary qualifications to pursue higher education; and (e) individuals who look upon education as a life -time activity and may either like to refresh their knowledge in an existing discipline or to acquire knowledge in a new area.

The first correspondence courses in B.A Degree were 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 Punjab 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) was established in 1985.

In late 800's, at University of Chicago, USA the first major correspondence programme was established in which the teacher and learner were at different locations.

Isaac Pitman (An English man) was the pioneer of correspondence education and he began teaching shorthand through correspondence in Bath, England in the year 1840.

The first Open University was established in the United Kingdom in 1969. It was established mainly to teach adult students who were at distance. After a preparatory work it started enrolling students from 1971.

As per the DEC there are 249 approved Distance education Institutes are there. But only 178 Institutes are offering Distance education programmes in UG as well as PG levels.

Advantages of Distance Education

- It saves a lot of time, money and energy by cutting down on travel. The time saved can be judiciously used for personal and professional life.
- You can work at your own convenience: Since all the classes are asynchronous, you have the liberty to review your assignments or do your homework during off-hours or at home.

- You can do your correspondence course from anywhere in the world. This provides a lot of flexibility to professionals, especially if they have a travelling job.
- It's easily accessible to all through online classes, online resources, virtual classrooms, video conferencing with the particular subject lecturer, study materials provided at the right time and so on
- The increased use of the internet has facilitated distance education in more than one way.

Disadvantages of Distance Education

- You have to juggle between job and studies.
- It does not offer immediate feedback from the learners and instructors.
- It leads to social isolation: Most often you'll be studying alone.
- Students pursuing Distance Education tend to be less seriousness.
- There is lack of interaction and motivation.

Problem of Research

The distance education is analyzed as a problematic conception in social reality. Because of the educational facts, it has been realized many radical changes in modern era that could be rated as revaluation. New technologies develop continuously distance education models, so it must be expected new revolutions become reality. However, rapid change in social reality causes to lose structural balances and to prevent benefits of distance education.

Theree elements are most importanat to any successful distance education programme.

- Instructional design
- Technology
- Support

Distance education and technology are contributing to this general fact. Interactions between people and society make education institutionalized and develop technology. The most important factor in new knowledge society is to use new technologies in education. It speeds up the process of social mobility, and condenses socialization. In conclusion, researches in the field of distance education should cover all social units in which socialization is in question.

In order to describe the technologies used in distance education, we have selected "The 4-Square Map of Groupware Options" that was developed by Johansen et al. (1991) which is based on recent research in groupware (see Fig. 1). This model seemed most suitable to our purpose, because we see distance education moving from highly individualized forms of instruction, as in correspondence education, to formats that encourage teaching students as a group and collaborative learning among peers. The "4-square map of groupware option" model is premised on two basic configurations that teams must cope with as they work: time and place. Teams or groups of people who work together on a common goal deal with their work in the same place at the same time as in face-to-face meetings, and sometimes they must work apart in different places and at different times, as in the use of asynchronous computer conferencing. They also need to handle two other variations: being in different places at the same time, as in the use of telephones for an audio teleconference, and at the same place at different times, as in workplaces, study centers, or laboratories. Based on these configurations, the 4-square model classifies four types of technologies that support the group process: (1) same time/ same place, (2) different time/different place, (3) same time/ different place, and (4) same place/different time. These four categories are used for describing technologies that currently support distance teaching and learning. While we use the 4-square model to discuss the major distance education

technologies currently being used, we feel that this model does not lend itself very well to discussing new and future developments in integrated telecommunications. Since these integrated systems incorporate many of the features that we classify separately in the 4-square model.

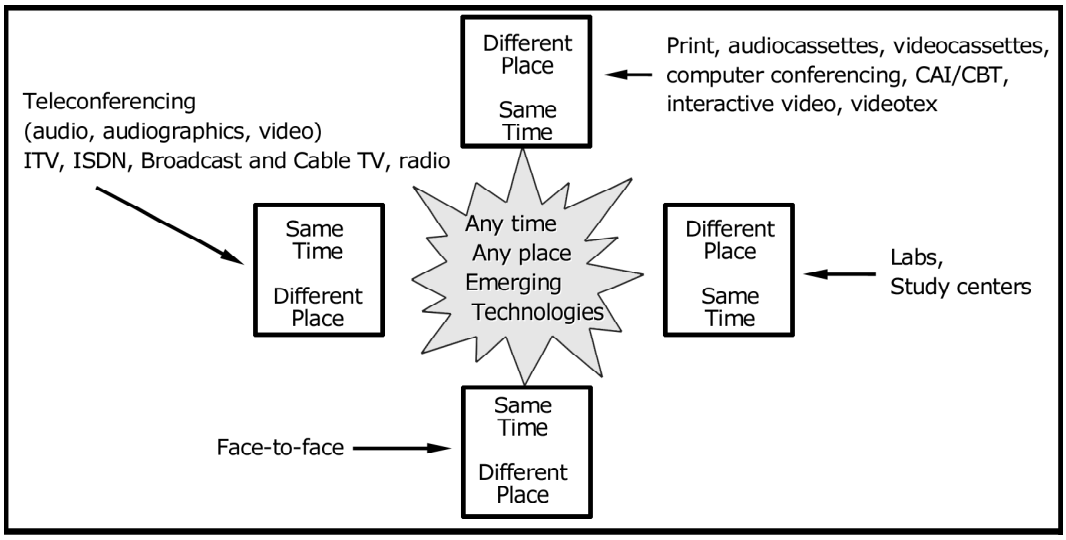

Figure 1: The 4-square map of distance education technology options. (Adapted from R. Johansen et al., p. 16.).

Research Focus

Distance education in India had its genesis in the early 1960s. It started as Correspondence Education - a supplementary method of education to meet the growing demand for higher education. Since then it has expanded rapidly, particularly over the last two decades. In 2005, there were 12 open universities [including the Indira Gandhi National Open University – (IGNOU)] and 106 dual mode university distance education institutes / centres in the country, catering to over 2.8 million students. At present, there are 13 state open universities, 127 dual mode universities and 9 institutions conducting distance education programmes of which IGNOU has the lion's share of enrollment of 2.5 million students so far. Each year, nearly 1.3 million students register for various courses in these universities and institutions. This is an economical and a quick way of increasing enrolment in higher education.

The present research is carried out scientifically to suggest why the enrolment and passed out ratio has decreased tremendously for the last three years and to give positive recommendations to implement the system.

Methodology of Research

General Background of Research

Based on their operations, popularity of courses and study centres the distance education institutes analyses the following parameters.

1. Resources' & Reach
2. Learning & experience

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3. Result & Efficiency

As of now the available data of 10 Distance education institutes are taken into consideration based on their enrolment, study materials efficiency, personal contact programmes and Learning technology.

1. Resources' & Reach

The parameters used in this involves number of faculties/total students admitted, number of academic counselors/total students admitted, number of study centres or student support centres/ total students admitted, number of courses offered, current enrolment, and active enrolment/years in existence.

2. Learning & Experience

In Learning and Experience the parameters considered are the quality of course material in SLM format (Self-Learning Material), e-learning platform, quality of e-learning platform (verifying by testing), telephone counseling availability (include effective tool-free nos.), quantum of audio visual study materials created, exam schedule, responsiveness (student friendliness & forthcoming), and Personal Contact Programmes (PCP)

3. Result & Efficiency

The parameters used in result & efficiency are: pass ratio, transparency, unique features/ special projects/seminar, validity of course certificates, and job opportunities.

Sample of Research

Out of 149 Institutes which vary in size, reach, quality and efficiency and with different curriculum and syllabus the data of 10 selected institutes has been taken based on the quantitative and qualitative parameters as explained earlier. (Refer Table 2)

Data Analysis

The HRD Ministry Annual Report reveals the following student's data. We have taken these data for a comparative study.

Table 1. Progress overview during 2009-10.

Total Enrolment in Universities and Colleges	**136.42 lakhs**
University Departments	16.69 lakhs (12.24%)
Affiliated Colleges	119.73 lakhs (87.76%)
Enrolment in Distance learning	30 lakhs
Enrolment of Women	65.49 lakhs
Intake in Technical Education Degree Diploma	 14.10 lakhs 5.09 lakhs
Institutions in Technical education Degree level Diploma level	7272 2324
Number of Universities	504

Number of Colleges	25,951
Faculty	5.89 lakhs
Academic Staff Colleges	66
National Assessment and Accreditation Council as on 28 March 2010, assessed	4094 Colleges and 159 Universities

Source: Annual Report, MHRD, 2009-10.

Table 2. Student's enrolment data from various distance education universitiies & institutes.

	Name of the University/Institutes	Total Enrolment up to Dec.2010
1.	Indira Gandhi National OpenUniversity, New Delhi	3200000
2.	YCM Open University,Nasik	2432000
3.	Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad	465000
4.	Delhi University, Delhi	322000
5.	Tamil Nadu Open University,Chennai	250000
6.	M.P. Bhoj University, Bhopal	205000
7.	Sikkim Manipal University, Gangtok	185000
8.	Annamalai University,Annamalai Nagar	179000
9.	Maulana Azad National Urudu University Hyderbad	169000
10.	University of Madras	150000

Source: From the respective websites of the Universities & Institutes.

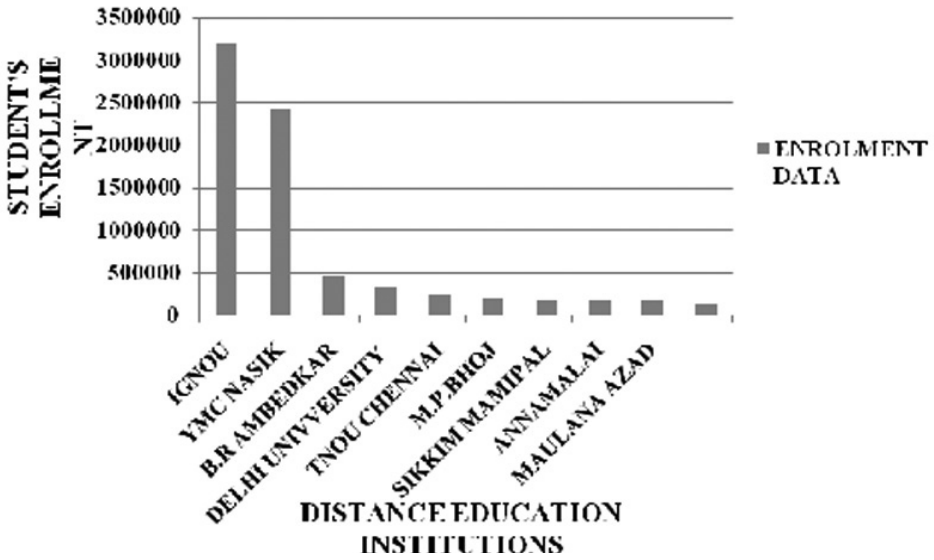

Figure 2: Students enrolment data.

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Table 3. Top 9 courses in distance education mode in India.

S.No	Name of the Course	Duration	Institute/University
	BA in Applied Sign Language Studies	3 Years	IGNOU,New Delhi
	M.Com in Business Policy and Corporate Governance	2 Years	IGNOU, New Delhi
	MA in Participatory Development	2 Years	IGNOU, New Delhi
	MSc in Dietetics and Food Service Management (DFSM)	2 Years	IGNOU,New Delhi
	M.Sc in Geoinformatics	2 Years	Annamalai University
	BSc in Visual Communication	3 Years	Annamalai University
	Certificate Course in Employability Skills	2 Years	IMT Jodhpur
	MS in Cyber Law and Security	91 Hours	IGNOU,New Delhi
	MBA in Shipping and Logistics	2 Years	TNOU,Chennai

Source: Careers360 magazine *of OUTLOOK*

Table 4. Top 10 universities offering distance education in the world.

Rank	Universities	Enrollment
1.	Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi Website :www.ignou.ac.in	(December 2010) over 3200000
2.	Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan Web site: www.aiou.edu.pk	A press release in July 2009 noted an enrollment at 19 lakhs.
3.	University System of Ohio, Ohio Web site : www.uso.edu	Noted as 478,376 in fall 2008 and over 15 lakhs in 2009 at the college Web site.
4.	Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran web site : azad.ac.ir	According to translation of the university home page 13 lakhs students.
5.	Bangladesh National University, Bangladesh web site: nu.edu.bd	About 10 lakhs students, according to the university home page.
6.	Anadolu University, Turkey Web site : www.anadolu.edu.tr	According to Turkish Online Journal (2006) 884,081
7.	Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad, India Web site : braou.ac.in	Approximately 465000 students.
8.	State University of New York, New York Web site : suny.edu	In August 2009, SUNY noted a headcount of 439523 students; however, an Albany CBS affiliate news station noted that 25,458 more students were enrolled in 2009, bringing the total enrollment number to 464981, “the largest ever in SUNY history.”
9.	California State University, California Website: calstate.edu	Now over 450000, according to the CSU Web site. While a more precise number might push this university higher on the list, expect a drop in 2010 as CSU plans to cut 40,000 students based upon lack of state funds.
10.	Ramkhamhaeng University, Bangkok, Thailand Web.ru.ac.th.	Approximately 430000 and an additional 1500 from the International division for a total of about 431500 students.

Note: Most enrollment numbers were gathered from university Web sites, but news resources also were used to gain insight into changes as enrollment finalized for fall 2010 classes.

Discussion

India is the pioneer in the innovative course in the Distance Education mode. As seen in Table 3 the innovative courses offered in India through Distance Education mode is most welcome irrespective of fees. For example: The general fee for MBA programme in all universities is Rs.10, 000(220 USD) per year. But, for MBA in Shipping and Logistics it costs about Rs.30, 000(660 USD) per year because of its industrial orientated curriculum and job assurity. Moreover country's biggest management B Schools offer distance education at a cost of Rs.20, 000(440 USD) to Rs.60, 000(1320 USD) per year. These business schools offer distance education in a well planned manner and deliver both study materials and lectures recorded in CDs in their relevant subject. This helps the students to access the materials at his convenience. Because of this the students opt for self study rather than PCP classes. The conventional universities in India can also start to distribute lecture CDs to students along with the regular study materials which would improve the enrolment of the students.

The latest problem faced by Distance Education students is that they are not eligible for high level posts in India. The pathetic thing is that degree awarded by Distance Education universities & institutes is not being recognized by a few private and government sectors. Especially MBA and MCA students are greatly affected by the above reason.

Positive steps are being taken in this issue by the regulatory body of Distance Education, DEC (Distance Education Council) to publish press notice stating that the degrees awarded by distance education institutes and universities is equivalent to regular degree and the students who are awarded the degrees are eligible for all posts both in private and government sectors. But still these steps are only in printed form and no proper action has been taken in this regard.

In most of the countries because of accessibility and time constraint the student community could not be facilitated with proper higher education in the regular mode. Master of Science programmes is popular among the student community but because of lack of proper infrastructure and guidance from the staff students hesitate to choose distance education mode which increases the drop outs of PG degrees in distance education. So, the government has planned to initiate to start engineering, paramedical, innovative certificate courses and other relevant courses through distance education with proper guidance. The scientific courses in distance education should be monitored by DEC and Department of Science and Technology with advice from AICTE (All India Council for Technical Education).

The internet and multimedia has become a key role for communication between teacher and student in a virtual class. Students see and hear the lecture, ask questions and even get a reply. This learning experience has to apply in all the distance education programmes by the distance education institutes.

Nowadays, the new institutes have sophisticated the multimedia study material recording room with latest software's, modern equipments and techniques to deliver a worth full lecture. These lectures should be recorded in DVDs and should be delivered to the students along with printed study materials. This will enable and enhance the students learning in an effective way. This procedure will help the distance education institutes to avoid personal contact programmes.

The majority of dropouts in distance education is the exam pattern, and the results. The distance education and universities must have separate controller office to conduct, evaluate and publish the examination results on time. Unfortunately in India most of the distance education universities and institutes do not have a separate wing of controller of examination to monitor the distance education examination. Because of this issue, the mark sheets and degree certificates are not issued to the students on time. This damages the reputation of the institution and affects the enrolment of students.

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Conclusion

Distance education should bring students together. Advanced and real-time multimedia technology should be used to enhance the teaching effectiveness and to improve the interaction between instructors and students. With symmetric audio and video capabilities, students can quickly communicate their ideas with the instructor and other students. In addition, media-rich lessons should been shown to enhance student learning. Instructors must push distance education further through experimentation and innovation in their teaching methods. The distance education institution should modify their syllabus according to the learner's need and criteria. Computer aided and online teaching should be implemented in all universities for distance education mode. In India all universities should have a separate pool for distance education and cater to the needs of the learners. If the inconveniences are eliminated, there will be a great increase in the student's enrollment in distance education mode. It would be a great success if these steps are taken with the government aids and support.

According to the National Knowledge Commission the achievement of target of 15% of GER (General Enrolment ratio) by the end of the 11th five year plan and 20% by the end of the 12th five year plan.

Thus, many trends in higher education will influence the future of distance learning. Student enrollments are growing to surpass the capacity of traditional infrastructures. Learner profiles are changing, and students are shopping for education that meets their needs. Traditional faculty roles, motivation, and training needs are shifting while workload, compensation, and instructional issues continue to deter them from distance learning participation. The institutional and organizational structure of higher education is changing to emphasize academic accountability, competency outcomes, outsourcing, content standardizing, and adaptation to learner-consumer demands. The Internet and other information technology devices are becoming ubiquitous while technological fluency is becoming a common expectation. Funding challenges are increasing with fewer resources to meet expanding, lifelong-learning demands. Distance education is becoming more abundant, especially online, and location independent, increasing the need for effective course-management systems and teaching strategies that utilize technology.

In response to these trends, distance learning may rise to meet student needs and overcome funding challenges that traditional institutions cannot. Distance education administrators must resolve concerns with faculty and university administrators to ensure adequate support, as well as to develop the needed course management systems and teaching strategies. Technological advances and increased fluency will continue to open opportunities for distance education. Although higher education institutions are changing to favor distance education, the complexities of major transformations will require patience.

As Bates suggests, perhaps "the biggest challenge [in distance education is the lack of vision and the failure to use technology strategically" (Bates 2000 p.7). The challenge is understandable, given the complexity of the issues involved. "Clearly, each institution needs to understand where online distance education fits in its vision of the institution's future and in its mission."

Further, institutions will have to strengthen their distance-learning strategic plans by identifying and understanding distance-education trends for student enrollments, faculty support, and larger academic, technological and economic issues.

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