

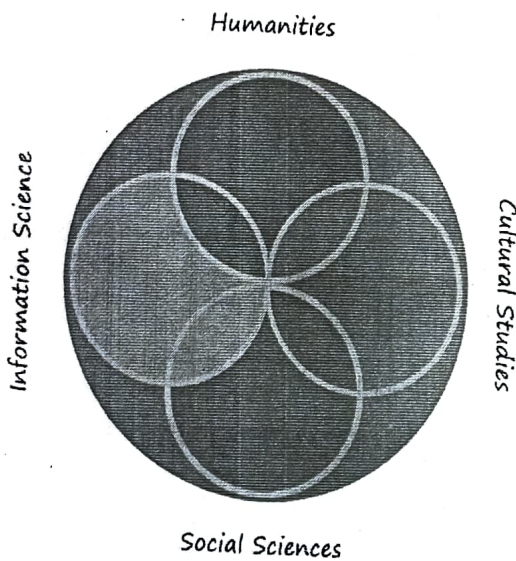
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The Potential of Distance Mode of Learning in Higher Education in India

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ABSTRACT

In present time, distance education has emerged as the most viable, successful and effective means and mode of expansion of the higher education in India. It has emerged as a viable alternative to conventional campus-based teaching-learning. Though the distance mode of education has been playing a significant role in democratization of the meaning of education to the masses; it is still considered to play a secondary/supplementary role to the conventional and formal mode of education. The very objective of the paper is to assess the role of distance and open education mode in improving the Gross Enrollment Ratio. The researcher also attempts to review the achievements of the distance education in the State Universities in Maharashtra. It also analyzes functioning of the state universities in distance education field, popularly called as dual mode universities.

Keywords: GER, Distance Education, Higher Education, State Universities, Open Education, DEI, AISHE.



FULL PAPER

Introduction

In a vastly populated country like India giving access of higher education to all eligible youths (18-23 age groups) is a highly challenging task for the government. Though the growth of HE in last 70 years has been remarkable and commendable having 864 universities, 40026 colleges and 11669 standalone institutions (<http://currentaffairs.gktoday.in>), it is inadequate to include all of them in the mainstream of HE. The statistical data published by NITI Ayog based on AISHE for 2017-18 is 21.1 at the national level. Tamil Nadu is top among the states with 42 and Chandigarh among the union territories with 51.3 (<http://niti.gov.in>). The target set by the government is 30% by the year 2020 which is still far behind the countries like USA with 85.8 % and China 43.39%. (<http://currentaffairs.gktoday.in>). In the given number of institutions and infrastructural constrains, the conventional mode (campus based/ regular/ face to face) of HE will be unable to meet the challenge of the growing young population of the country. The policy makers in the country have been exploring and devising other modes of HE to achieve the target. In the recent times, Distance Education has emerged as a viable complementary in the beginning and competent alternative in recent times to the conventional formal mode of HE in the country.

In India the socio-economical factors have confined the higher education to 26.3% calculated for the 18-23 years of age having 37.4 million enrollments with 19.2 million male and 18.2 million female. Apart from these reasons, the political will, and lack of planning and the country's age-old traditional mode of teaching –learning, the country has not been able to bring 73.7% youths in the fold of the higher education. In such scenario, distance education is seen as the most effective means and modes of expansion of the higher education in India. It is to be noted here that 10.62% of the total enrollment in higher education is found in the distance and open learning mode in the country.

The very objective of the paper is to assess the role of distance and open education mode in improving the Gross Enrollment Ratio. The researcher also attempts to review the achievements of distance education in the State Universities in Maharashtra. It also analyzes the functioning of the state universities in distance education field, popularly called as dual mode universities.



Distance Education: Theory

There have been several efforts to define distance education based on its characteristics distinct from the conventional mode of education. Educationists like Charles Wedemeyer, Michael Moore, Borje Dohmen, Otto Peters, and Holmberg have defined DE focusing on one or other aspect of DE.

Wedemeyer (1977) in his article 'Independent Study' favors this term to other terms like Open Learning and Distance Education. The same is used and preferred in USA to mean the both. He writes:

Independent study consists of various forms of teaching-learning arrangements in which teachers and learners carry out their essential tasks and responsibilities apart from one another, communicating in a variety of ways. Its purposes are too free on campus or external learners with the opportunity to continue learning in their own environments, and developing in all learners the capacity to carry on self-directed learning, the ultimate maturity required of the educated person. (IGNOU, ES311-2. p15)

To Michael Moore (1973), in distance education, teaching behavior remains separate from learning behavior, face to face teaching-learning also form part of system and media (print and electronic) also plays a significant role in the DE. (IGNOU, ES311-2. p15)

Borje Dohman (1971) focuses four major aspects of DE; self-study, study material, supervision of teachers and media to minimize distance. To him:

DE is a systematically organized form of self-study in which students counseling, the presentation of learning material and securing and supervising or students' success is carried out by a team of teachers, each of whom has responsibilities. It is made possible at a distance by means of media which can cover long distances. (IGNOU, ES311-2. p16)

Otto Peters (1973) finds DE more like an industrialized form of teaching-learning. To him, DE is a method of imparting knowledge, skills, and attitudes which is rationalized by the application of division of labor and organizational principles as well as by the extensive use of technical media specially for the purpose of reproducing high quality teaching material which makes it possible to instruct great number of students at the same time wherever they live. (IGNOU, ES311-2. p17)



Holmberg (1981) defines DE which covers:

The various forms of study at all levels which are not under continuous immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture room on the same premises, but which, nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organization. (IGNOU; ES311-2. p17)

Distance Education: Open Education and Correspondence Education

The terms like Correspondence Education (postal), Open Education and Distance Education are more often than not are used as synonyms for one another. The minute distinction among them becomes explicit in contrast with the conventional face to face mode of education. The conventional education term refers to education taking place at college/university campus where the definitions of eligibility, maximum age for admission, attendance in the time-bound schedules of teaching and methods evaluation are predetermined and rigid which do not offer any relaxation/exemption for any learner to attain a particular degree of a course.

The open education is meant for those who are not in position to comply the conditions of conventional mode of education. These conditions of the conventional mode are relaxed to a large extent in open education. To Wedemeyer, open education is system which does not operate through the conventional admission restrictions, attendance restrictions, restrictions on the candidature for examination, restrictions on the period of time to be devoted to the course, restrictions on the number of examinations given and taken in a year, restriction on the subject combination and restriction on the modes of didactic communication and didactic tasks. Such openness is a utopian non-existing entity even today.

These two terms are often confused with each other. Openness in methodology is a characteristic of distance education mode. However, the openness may be found in distance education mode as well and distance education is possible without being open.

The term used for mode rather than conventional mode before the 12th World Conference of International Council held in Canada 1982 was based on the Correspondence Education. It earns its title as in it; the printed material and assignment were dispatched and received at both ends (teachers and learners) by postal service. Many conventional universities till today follow the same method. The difference between correspondence education and distance education lies in their aims, methods and orientation. The former



may be taken as extension of the conventional education as far as its aim of imparting prescribed knowledge and issuing certificate is concerned.

Distance education has many more aims than imparting knowledge and issuing certificates. It includes personal growth, training for better job prospects, and enhancement. Distance education may employ all the aspects of correspondence and open education, and multimedia means with human contact additionally.

In brief, in correspondence education, the delivery and evaluation take place with the help of post, while open education aims at freeing the learners of all the restrictions observed in conventional mode of education. Distance education, on the other hand, incorporates possible openness in approach and uses all the means of communication including the latest ones. The distance education and open education share most of the characteristics.

Distance Education: The Need of the Hour

Today India is the largest country of the young population in the world. The policy/nation makers need to take up measures to convert this traditionally speaking baneful factor into modernistic blessing in disguise. It is imperative to render this young population into human resource. Needless to explain, despite the constant demands and concerns expressed to increase the infrastructure, the socio-economical factors in India have confined the higher education to 26.3% of the education-able youths. The conventional setups of the universities in India have failed to offer career-oriented courses to the youths in India. There appears a promising success in the last decade to bring more youths in the field of higher education. It has to be admitted that the present rigid set up of conventional higher education has proved its inability to take the higher education to the masses/laymen that are pivotal in the democratically developing India.

To overcome the limitations/failures conventional higher education set up in India, distance education has emerged as the most viable, successful and effective means and mode of expansion of the higher education in India. Not only in India but also all over the world, the distance education has emerged as a viable alternative to the conventional campus-based teaching-learning. In the words of Nalin K Shastree (2002), "In order to augment opportunities for higher education as an effective instrument of democratizing education and make education a lifelong process, distance education has emerged as an important component of the National Policy on Education in our country".



Though the Kothari Commission had recommended an organization of correspondence education in 1961 and first Directorate of Correspondent Courses was started in University of Delhi in 1962, Distance Education is not new in India. It was prevalent there known by various names like—External Study, Part Time Study, Off-campus Study, Private Study, Independent Study, Home Study, Correspondence Study, Open Education or Distance Learning, etc. Distance Education is as old as the higher education in India. Distance Education is an institutionalized name/system lately baptized. Today more than 100 correspondence institutions and Nine State Open Universities along with the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi at the national level and Distance Bureau (DEB) of UGC are working in the distance mode of learning.

The distance education stream was introduced to provide access of education to those who had desire for study but could not pursue higher studies due to personal, financial or official reasons. To N. K. Shastree (2002) today, the maximization of the component of flexibility, deliberate planning of educational opportunities and increasing the access of knowledge to individuals by using all modes or media ignoring the barriers such as geographical distance are the characteristic objective of the distance education.

Having realized the limitations of the conventional educational setup, the governments, both at national and state level have fully encouraged and motivated distance education mode by establishing distance education universities/institutes, as this mode lessens and shifts the burden of higher education from the shoulders of the governments to a large extent lessening the monetary load as in the distance mode. The governments have to set up a central unit and the staff at the central unit in case of universities, the execution of the programs is done through the faculty and physical infrastructure of the conventional institutions on remuneration basis.

These DEIs (distance education institutes) serve the state purpose of democratizing the education from the select few to the masses. To quote R. P. Singh (2002), "It can accommodate much larger number of students in comparisons to conventional system. The governments have realized that the conventional system of education as such can no longer hold the commanding position in the society as well as in the court of ideas". The former Vice Chancellor of Yeshwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Nasik (M. S.), Prof. Ram Takwale holds (1996), "through innovation, the open university system adopted many features and reforms



that the formal system had struggled over three decades to absorb often with little success". On the other hand, the distance mode with its flexibility in entry rules, learner-oriented courses and specially prepared study material, and with advanced technology has outdone the conventional campus-based education universities/institutes.

Enrolment in Distance Mode

Distance education has become a useful mode of obtaining degrees for a large number of students who are staying in far off and remote areas and for whom accessing universities on regular basis is still a dream. Distance enrolment constitutes 10.62% of the total enrolment in higher education, of which 44.12% are female students.

Level Wise Distribution of Enrolment in Distance Mode

| Level | Distance Enrolment | | |
|---------------|--------------------|---------|---------|
| | Male | Female | Total |
| PhD | 28 | 25 | 53 |
| Post-graduate | 454640 | 544447 | 999087 |
| Undergraduate | 1616601 | 1083611 | 2700212 |
| PG Diploma | 57060 | 42331 | 99391 |
| Diploma | 70948 | 59246 | 130194 |
| Certificate | 20053 | 22765 | 42818 |
| Integrated | 234 | 79 | 313 |
| All | 2219564 | 1752504 | 3972068 |

(Source: AISHE report 2018-19)

Here it is to be taken note that in PG courses and certificate courses the female enrollment in distance mode is higher than their male counterparts in these courses which is quite promising one.

Distance mode is mainly conducted by universities and majority of the students (53.1%) enrolled in Universities and their Constituent Units are studying under distance in the following table given in the AISHE report 2018-



19. This is about the universities functioning in dual mode (regular/ face to face/campus-based learning and distance/open learning through their constituent and affiliated colleges).

Level wise Comparison between Regular Mode and Distance Mode Enrollment

| Level | Enrolment in Universities and its constituent Units through Regular & Distance mode | |
|---------------|---|---------------|
| | Regular mode | Distance Mode |
| PhD | 146420 | 53 |
| M Phil | 18649 | 0 |
| Post-graduate | 890404 | 999087 |
| Undergraduate | 2127421 | 2700212 |
| PG Diploma | 50740 | 99391 |
| Diploma | 132803 | 130194 |
| Certificate | 16473 | 42818 |
| Integrated | 131817 | 313 |
| All | 3514727 | 3972068 |

(Source: AISHE report 2018-19)

Since 2009, research programs in distance mode have been closed, therefore there is no enrollment to M Phil program and little enrolment to PhD programs, may be earlier ones before the 2009 amendment. It is to be noted that in the dual mode universities, the enrollment to all courses except PhD, M Phil, integrated courses is higher than that in the enrollment to this courses available in campus.

Though the distance mode of education has been playing a significant role in democratization of the meaning education to the masses; it is still considered to play a secondary/supplementary role to the conventional and formal mode of education. Both these systems are expected to play complementary roles to each other. R. P Singh views (2002) "It will be



erroneous to view the distance education system in opposition to the conventional formal system. Education for the people and further to facilitate them in the process of acquiring education of their choice is the major concerns of the State. In this context, the capacity to accommodate, to standardize, to economize and to maximize the coverage and the credibility of particular system in question will play a significant role”.

It is surprising to note that the total budget allotted to distance mode of higher education is less than 1% of the total budget of the higher education of the country. It may be inferred the central agencies like MHRD have not been exploring the potentials of distance mode in higher education to the full. If done so, it can surely bring fruits to the attempts of meeting the targeted GER of 30% by 2022.

Summing Up

Providing access of higher education to all eligible youths (18-23 age groups) is a highly challenging task for the government of India. Though the growth of HE in last 70 years has been remarkable and commendable having 993 universities, 39931 Colleges and 10725 Stand Alone Institutions (<http://currentaffairs.gktoday.in>), it is inadequate to include all of them in the mainstream of HE. The statistical data published by NITI Ayog based on AISHE for 2017-18 is 21.1 at the national level, Tamil Nadu topping among the states with 42 and Chandigarh among the union territories with 51.3 (<http://niti.gov.in>). The target set by the government is 30% by the year 2022 which is still far behind the countries like USA with 85.8 % and China 43.39%. (<http://currentaffairs.gktoday.in>). In the given number of institutions and infrastructural constrains, the conventional mode (campus based/ regular/ face to face) of HE will be unable to meet the challenge of the growing young population of the country. The policy makers in the country have been exploring and devising other modes of HE to achieve the target. In the recent times, Distance Education may emerge as a more competent viable complementary to the conventional formal mode of HE in the country if its potentials are used to the full by allocating required funds.

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "R. Warpudkar".

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