

DISTANCE EDUCATION – PRESENT STATUS

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ABSTRACT

Distance education is the mode of education of students in which they need not to be physically present at school, college or university. This paper studies the present status of distance education including framework for implementation and need of distance education in modern scenario. The framework of distance education clarifies the working procedure of distance education, a student has to go through from the time of enrolling to the end of his course in distance education. It analyzes different challenges faced by distance learners like financial inabilities, family restrictions, lack of study time, etc. Finally, this paper tries to provide a possible solution to these challenges that could help uplift the standards of distance education.

KEYWORDS: Distance Education, Correspondence, Open Education, e-Lectures and e-Learning

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INTRODUCTION

Distance education is a concept which is slowly gaining popularity all over the world as an alternative for those who cannot indulge in conventional education due to various reasons. It can be defined as a mode of education in which learning is imparted either through e-lectures or through correspondence. Distance education aims to break the shackles of time and place for the learner. It aims at providing more flexibility for both the tutor and the learner. Distance education has certain characteristics that distinguish it from conventional learning techniques. The element of face to face communication between teacher and student is missing in distance mode of education. In order to compensate for lack of interaction, counseling sessions may be conducted regularly. Distance education may also involve education through e-learning which involves study sessions online or through video conferencing methods. Distance education can be a boon for countries where there are limited infrastructure facilities or remote locations where conventional or orthodox education access is limited or not available at all. Also, it can prove fruitful to people who are busy with their jobs but still want to gain more education, for persons with weak economic condition as this mode of education is less expensive as compared to conventional education, for persons who have reignited their interest in education and want to gain knowledge.

FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

In order to discuss framework for implementation of distance education, we first have to understand the functioning of distance education. When a student enrolls for a distance education program either online or by being physically present at the institution, he is handed over his course work, syllabi and any other important document. He is informed about the upcoming counseling sessions, video conferencing sessions, availability of study material and various other types of related information. After his enrollment the student studies on his own, keeps in touch with the institution from time to time and attends interaction sessions as per his ease. Finally at the

end, the student is issued a Roll no. or Enrollment no. for examination on his mailing address. The student appears for the examination at allotted examination centre and finally the result is either uploaded online or sent to the student personally. Education through distance learning is conveyed differently by different institutions. Some universities or colleges conduct online lectures for the convenience of the students but it may be difficult for everyone to avail this facility as it involves resources like computer, internet and basic computer education. But this method of distance education can be highly effective for learners who have access to these resources. On the other hand, some institutions adopt a more traditional method. They print the required study material and send it to the student. This method is highly effective for learners residing in remote areas or for those who do not have access to computers and internet.

The current scenario of educational environment has completely changed from what it was 10 years ago. Everyone is equipped with smart phones, tablets etc. We can use these tools and utilities to improve the quality of distance education. These can help in bridging the geographical gap between teacher and student in distance education. Some institutions have tried these measures and the results have been positive. With continuously increasing access to internet and other information technology resources, quality of distance education can be improved. Distance education, if imparted and executed efficiently can be a powerful method for developing education resources in developing countries. Easy and open access to the online resources can enhance the acceptability of distance education. Also, it is very important for institutions implementing distance education to constantly review learners' needs. Various counseling or interaction sessions can be of great help in this respect. They give the student and the teacher an opportunity to evaluate the study already done and prepare for the study yet to be done. The students can clarify their doubts and improve their understanding of concepts. The current framework for distance education is becoming obsolete and needs constant improvement according to changing times in the educational environment.

NEED FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance education can be a good alternative for those people who can't get conventional education due to some reason. Basically, distance education is devised for people who have a great urge for acquiring knowledge but lack sufficient time. Consider an example where a housewife who cannot indulge in regular studies wants to gain knowledge about a certain subject. Now, due to different constraints she cannot go to a regular college and invest 8-10 hours daily into studies. Distance education is an option which can help her attain education without going the hard way. Same is the situation for working people who want to gain education but are constrained by their busy schedules. Another instance can be a college dropout with reignited urge for enhancing his education level. So distance education can come to the rescue of people who are in great demand of education but cannot opt for formal education methods.

Studies have found that students opting distance education were more aggressive learners as compared to students acquiring formal or conventional education as distance education learners have an inner urge to learn. These learners are equipped with much less facilities than conventional learners but they perform pretty well. Although the need for distance education is highly imperative but colleges, universities and other institutions implementing distance education have to ensure that this does not see the dead end. They have to constantly monitor different aspects and tools involved in imparting distance education. They must try to involve modern video conferencing and other facilities for better interaction with learners.

CHALLENGES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

The framework of distance education faces various challenges. These can be divided broadly into two categories namely *internal* challenges and *external* challenges. The former correspond to problems faced and created at learners' end while the latter are the ones on which learner has no control. Firstly, we discuss the internal challenges faced by the learner. We have also tried to suggest a possible solution to the given roadblocks.

Hesitation in Learning

The learner may be equipped with every possible resource for undertaking and completing his education but he could be hesitant in learning due to lack of interest, time or motivation. Further, the seclusion of the learner from the teacher may complicate matters more.

A possible solution to this issue can be, to organize constant monitoring and interaction sessions between the teacher and the taught. This will help the learner to sustain his interest in the subject and with doubt clearance being a part of these interactions, the learner will feel more comfortable and confident.

Socially Introvert

The learner in question may have lived in isolation socially before opting distance education. This hampers one's communication ability and the student fails to express himself freely. This can be a major hindrance in terms of acquiring education as well as overall development of the students.

This challenge can be resolved at institution level as well as at personal level of the learner. The institutions' responsibility is to make the learner realize that being socially inactive is a roadblock in acquiring education. There should be a provision of interaction with the student through mobile phones, conferencing etc. to monitor the situation constantly.

Learner Insecurity

A learner could be insecure about various factors such as future scope of study, job uncertainty, financial restrictions and family restrictions. This insecurity may lead to loss of interest.

As a possible solution, before opting for distance education the learner must be open minded and properly counseled while choosing the course and subjects. He must decide on keeping in mind all those factors discussed above. This will help him maintain his zeal.

Communication Barriers

Sometimes, a learner may face issues related to communication. One of the issues faced by most of distance education learners is non native language course work. This hinders the learner to understand the requirements of the course and creates further problems.

A possible solution can be to keep in mind the multilingual requirements of learners while preparing the course work.

Now we discuss certain external factors affecting distance education:

Content of Study Material

This problem is faced by students new to distance education or those who have no past experience of distance education. This leads to the student dropping out early with nobody to guide him and he is left in a situation searching for ways to develop studying skills.

The institutions must account for every student enrolled while preparing the study material for the students. Utmost care should be taken while including chapters into syllabi. The organization of the study material also holds the key. It should be devised in such a way that the students can understand concepts easily.

No Use of Modern Day Technologies

Some institutions may not realize the importance of mobile phones and multimedia to convey the instructions. This hampers the understanding ability of the students and is a lapse on the institutions' part for not making use of such important tools.

Although there is more stress on sending out printed study material, the institutions must update themselves to make use of modern day techniques for better learning experience of the learners.

Lack of Supporting Services

The colleges or universities providing distance education are sometimes hesitant to provide libraries, books and other supporting amenities to distance education learners. These are considered to be the amenities for students acquiring conventional education.

A distance education student has equal right to education as any other formal education student. So these institutions must realize that these facilities should be available to everyone without discriminating on the basis of mode of acquiring education.

Status Issues with Distance Education

It has been found that students who have acquired formal education are preferred over distance education students. In job interviews, promotions and other important milestones of one's professional life, distance education learners are not preferred.

The institutes need to uplift their educational standards in order to cope with standards of formal education so that distance students are considered at par with conventional students.

CONCLUSIONS

After a detailed analysis we conclude that distance education system has to be dynamic according to the changing education system. Steps need to be taken so that the system does not become stagnant. It could prove to be a useful resource for developing nations to impart education in every corner of the country. At the same time sincerity among the students and the institutions concerned with distance education is need of the hour. The framework of distance education has to be designed by professionals who have vast experience and can devise policies for coming generations. The challenges faced by those who pursue distance education can be overcome with a collective effort of students and the faculty involved. Also, the people and society should lend a helping hand to distance learners rather than criticizing them. The institutions must incorporate and conduct more and more of interaction sessions in order to maintain zeal and vigor

among the students. The future of distance education is very bright if we evaluate its performance regularly and make amendments in the system as per evaluation feedback. It may benefit our society to help create better citizens. It could help us achieve the motto of Education for All with its wide reach and acceptability. In the end we conclude that distance education can be a very good alternative to campus based education but not in any way its substitute.

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