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Role of Open Distance Learning in Higher Education: Needs, Strategies and Challenges

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Abstract:

Education is today considered to be the most effective instrument of Social Re-engineering and empowerment of people by imparting knowledge and skill and creating an informed citizen capable of setting agenda for good governance, great progress and harmonious socio-economic life. Education can alone reconstruct the world and the mankind. Education determines the level of prosperity, welfare and security of the people. Education in general and higher education in particular is the strongest instrument for the development and humanization of mankind. Expansion, access, equity of quality has become the concerns of higher education. Thus the changing social, economic, political and educational needs of the nation have made the administrators and policy framers to move away from conventional practices of education and have led to the emergence of Distance education all over the world.

1. Introduction

The world is transforming at a pace faster than anyone could imagine. The credit for this transformation goes to education and education alone. Education in India has played a vital role in this transformation process. The Gurukul system of education was confined to educate more or less the elite section of the society. However, the ruler of many countries slowly started changing their administrative processes applying the practices of the democracy. It is here the institutionalization of education took its roots and spread over to all sectors of education, changing the pedagogical practices. Thus the changing the social, economic, political and educational needs of the nation have made the administrators and policy framers to move away from conventional practices of education and have led to the emergence of distance education all over the world. Higher education is a very important sector for the growth and development of human resource which can take responsibility for social, economic and scientific development of the country. The principles of democracy further strengthened the role of public, higher education all over the globe to provide equality of opportunities for all sections of the society. In India, specially after independence, many steps were initiated to foster higher education. Distance education courses were considered to be the means of improving the learner's knowledge and enhancing the qualifications by home study.

2. Need And Importance Of Distance Education

Distance education is a very important instructional delivery for higher education in the 21st century. The open distance learning system was setup in India with a view to educate and empowered the immense human resource potential of the country. Higher education across the world enabled to respond to challenges and opportunities which emanated on a account of research and development in various fields of life, made several countries to realize the world over education as an Index for human resource development. Expansion, access, equity and quality have become the concern of higher education. The principles of democracy further strengthened the role of public higher education all over the globe to provide equality of opportunities for all sections of the society. In the process of providing equity of opportunities, many governments in the world have recognized the conventional system of education not only as a costly phenomenon but also less flexible system to meet the growing demands of the public at large. Despite tremendous growth in the number of educational institutions, the demands has far exceeded the availability of education provisions. Because of population explosion and limited financial resources of the state the formal system is unable to meet the needs of all learners. Thus the need was felt to establish distance educational system to provide education to all those learners who for the one or other reasons could not get formal education throughout his life.

3. Issues And Concerns In New Era

In India especially after Independence, many steps were initiated to foster higher education. Correspondence courses were considered to be the means of improving the learners knowledge and enhancing the qualifications by home study. Many conventional universities have started correspondence course institutes to offer academic programme through distance mode as the cost involved for running these programmes proved to be low due to the infrastructure already developed. Some of the correspondence course institutes were converted into Directorate of Distance Education. By adding distance mode as a part of conventional university they become dual-mode universities.

Open distance learning provide flexibility in combination of courses, age of entry, pace of learning and method of evaluation. It has potential to meet the challenges of present as well as the future. It aims at providing easy access of education to those who for one reason or other cannot avail the opportunities of formal education, those who in live in far-flung areas, those who belong to weaker and disadvantage section of the society. Their concern is to enroll more and more students so that they may get educated, to get employed with skills in hand. The success of these institutions depend of provisions of requisite learning inputs, adequate support services, timely conduct of examination and declaration of results. Any lapses in any of these facets ultimately would act on the quality of education.

4. Quality Concern In Open Distance Learning

Quality assurance in higher education, in general, and in the open end learning system, in particular in the latest trend in the field of educational development. During the last three decades there has been rapid development of the open and distance learning system. The quality in higher education is the biggest need of the hour as our country is progressing towards becoming the educational hub of the world. Quality assurance needs to respond to emerging new challenges. A number of institutions like UGC, AICTE, NAAC, NCTE, etc. have come up to understand the responsibility of maintaining and up keeping the standards of Distance Education. Hence continuous monitoring and evaluation of quality to maintain better standard of distance education is highly essential. An attempt is made to review and examine the various aspects of quality in distance education. Some of the problems enacted by the students in these institutions include low quality study material, inadequate support services, lack of infrastructure, ineffective delivery mechanism and so on. As a matter of fact quality is an integral part of strategy which should be never scarified in the pursuit of number.

5. Suggestions

A similar study maybe taken to compare the learners in the formal system with those in Distance education system.

An identical study can be taken in other Distance education institutions particularly in those which are more flexible and open in their functioning.

Problems faces by Distant learner with the courses, with the institutions and the staff need to be frequently studied to provide feedback to the system.

An intensive study about the autonomy and independence provided to the Distant Learner by different institutions can be undertaken.

6. Conclusions

The survival growth and prosperity of Open Distant Learning depend not only on widening the access to higher education but also on enriching the curriculum and strengthening the governance of the institution. Distance education system is an non-conventional, economical, flexible, democratic, academically viable, and forward looking teaching-learning process. It has potential to meet the challenges of the present as well as the future. Understanding the dynamics of higher education both on national and global fronts and providing solutions accordingly by the policy makers, administrators and practitioners may yield fruitful results by which the pace and face of Open Distant Learning System can be kept for continuance with standard.

7. References

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