IDENTIFYING THE NEEDS AND PROBLEMS OF STUDENTS PURSUING EDUCATION THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING MODE AND SUGGESTING SUITABLE MEASURES

DR. KANCHAN CHAUDHARY

Lecturer, Govt. Sr. Sec. School, Kamoda (Kurukshetra)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of teaching the future is to diagnose where students are, where they want to be and then provide them with the tools to get there. The swift evolution of knowledge and its swifter diffusion through the dizzying development of information and communication technology (ICT) have raised peoples' aspirations towards attaining a better quality of life amidst Globalisation and global competitiveness. In efforts to meet the new and changing demands for education and training, open & distance learning may be seen as an approach having a great potential of worth which indeed are significant. The Open & Distance Learning Mode has a great potential to increase the productivity and efficiency especially in developing countries like India. At present, the students getting education through ODL Mode are facing lot of problems due to which, their productivity is not of expected quality. To make this mode of learning more enriched & more productive, shortcomings have to be identified and it is essential to provide suitable remedial measures.

INTRODUCTION

Probably Dronacharya was the first GURU at a distance, known to the mankind, from whom only one student Eklavya acquired unparalleled skills in archery, without any face-to-face teaching and excelled the best Dhanurdhar Arjun because of his dedicated learning. However, ISAAC PITMAN of the UK may be recognized as the FATHER of modern Distance Learning, as he pioneered in the art of teaching shorthand by correspondence in 1840. Distance education has continuously evolved as technology has improved. Britain's Open University is the largest and most innovative educational organization in the world.

The importance of 'Higher Education' cannot be overstated enough. Governments made 'Basic Education' free & compulsory for all. But no such regulations could be levied about Higher Education for the simple reason that it is expensive, requires skilled teaching & the devotion of great many hours. While a privileged few avail of the opportunities of higher education, a larger chunk of the populace goes highly ignored in this regard. Hence the effort towards enabling the general public to get educated one way or the other! Hence the establishment of ODL-Open and Distance Learning!

Distance Education or Open & Distance Learning is a field of education that focuses on the pedagogy (science of teaching), technology & instructional systems design that aim to deliver education to students who are not physically 'ON SITE' rather than attending courses in person, teachers and students may communicate at

times of their own choosing by exchanging printed or electronic media.

Improvement of qualification and the desire to continue with higher education are major motivating factors for joining the correspondence courses. Non-availability of time, mental maturity, non-existence or less-existence of colleges in the locality, heavy expenses in formal colleges, age factor, employment, paucity of time, poor financial condition and poor performance in the last qualifying examinations are some other additional reasons.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

In the midst of the Post-Information Age, we are constantly challenged to do more in less time and our ability to learn what we need for tomorrow has become more important than what we know today. Major changes are occurring in the world economy, due to the expansion of new information bearing technologies, which have catalyzed the emergence of knowledge based societies. The swift evolution of knowledge and its swifter diffusion through the dizzying development of information and communication technology (ICT) have raised peoples' aspirations towards attaining a better quality of life amidst Globalisation and global competitiveness. In efforts to meet the new and changing demands for education and training, open & distance learning may be seen as an approach having a great potential of worth which indeed are significant. The Open & Distance Learning Mode has a great potential to increase the productivity and efficiency especially in developing countries like India. At present, the students getting education through Open & Distance Learning Mode are facing lot of problems due to which, their productivity is not of expected quality. Various researches conducted by researchers such as Valentine in 2002, Shachar in 2003, Tait in 2003, Allen in 2004, Shah in 2008, Guri in 2009, Panchabakesan in 2011 and Pozdnyakova in 2017 highlighted the shortcomings of ODL mode on one side and the potential of this mode as a powerful means of learning on the other side. Thus, to make this mode of learning more enriched & more productive, it is very much essential to provide suitable remedial measures of the shortcomings. In the present study, the researcher has tried to identify the needs and problems of students pursuing education through Distance Learning Mode and suggesting suitable measures. The investigator hopes that once the shortcomings are identified and provided with remedial measures, the "WORLD MIND" of both educators & students may excel in their respective fields.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.   To identify the problems of students pursuing education through Distance Learning Mode.

2.   To suggest suitable measures to overcome the problems of students pursuing education through Distance Learning Mode.

SAMPLE

In the present study, the sample consists of 150 post graduate students pursuing education through Distance Learning Mode from Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra.

TOOLS USED FOR DATA COLLECTION

In the present study, a structured questionnaire (self-prepared) was used to collect the necessary data.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

There are two way of getting the questionnaire filled by the respondents. A questionnaire is either administered personally to a group of individuals or it is mailed to them. In the former situation, the person

administering the tool has an opportunity to establish rapport with the respondents and to explain the purpose of the study to the respondents. A mailed questionnaire lacks the personal introduction by the investigator. Sometimes, the mailed questionnaires are not returned to the researcher in time.

In the present study, the questionnaires were distributed personally to the respondents. The questionnaire was thoroughly discussed with the respondents to clarify doubts if any, required for the study.

SCORING OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

After the collection of data, scoring was done. There were three options of questions in the questionnaire which were: Yes, No, Undecided. Tallies were marked for responses of each item of questionnaire.

TABULATION OF DATA

The responses of questionnaire filled by the respondents were tabulated according to the options given for the questions. Percentages were calculated for each question.

STATISTICAL TECHNIQUE USED FOR ANALYSES OF DATA

Percentages were calculated for analyses and interpretation of data.

MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings based on the results of analysis are as follows:

- 92 per cent respondents agree that in Open & Distance Learning Mode, the students are provided INCOMPLETE STUDY MATERIAL.

- 92.67 per cent respondents agree that the students are NOT PROVIDED THE STUDY MATERIAL IN TIME.

- 89.33 per cent respondents agree that it is not possible to cover the ENTIRE SYLLABUS IN 12-15 days.

- 94 per cent respondents agree that in O.D.L. Mode, the ADMISSION FEES is much more than it is in Regular Course.

- 90.67 per cent respondents agree that the study material should be provided in BOTH HINDI AND ENGLISH LANGUAGES IN O.D.L. Mode.

- 92 per cent respondents are of the opinion that in O.D.L. Mode, the GUIDE in M.Phil. & M.A. (Edu.) for DISSERTATION WORK should be provided by the Directorate of Distance Education (D.D.E.).

- 96.67 per cent respondents agree that the students are NOT PROVIDED SUFFICIENT GUIDANCE IN O.D.L. Mode.

- 100 per cent respondents agree that the TEACHER-STUDENTS RATIO should be reduced during Personal Contact Programme (P.C.P.) for providing ADEQUATE GUIDANCE to students.

- 95.33 per cent respondents agree that the students should be provided ADEQUATE HOSTEL FACILITY DURING P.C.P. & EXAMINATION DAYS.

- 90.66 per cent respondents agree that in O.DL. Mode, the students should be provided ADEQUATE HOSTEL FACILITY AT CONCESSIONAL RATES especially during P.C.P. & examination days.

- 75.33 per cent respondents agree that in O.D.L. Mode, 75% ATTENDANCE (i.e., minimum required attendance during P.C.P. as per rules laid by D.D.E.) SHOULD NOT BE MADE COMPULSORY.

- 98.67 per cent respondents agree that the CENTRES for conducting P.C.P. should be made at NEAREST LOCATIONS of students.

- 94 per cent respondents agree that in ODL Mode, the SYLLABUS of a course should be COMPARATIVELY LESS than the syllabus of same class in Regular Course.

- 98.67 per cent respondents agree that in O.D.L. Mode, the students should also be provided SUFFICIENT LIBRARY FACILITIES.

- 100 per cent respondents agree that the ADMISSIONS of students in O.D.L. Mode should also be done IN TIME as in case of Regular Course.

- 98.67 per cent respondents agree that the study material for students pursuing education through O.D.L. Mode should be in SIMPLE LANGUAGE.

- 98.67 per cent respondents agree that the D.D.E. should appoint PERMANENT STAFF for preparing QUALITY STUDY MATERIAL.

- 95.33 per cent respondents agree that the D.D.E. should appoint PERMANENT STAFF for conducting P.C.P.

- 100 per cent respondents agree that the students should be provided prescribed syllabus WELL IN TIME.

- 94 per cent respondents agree that the students pursuing education through O.D.L. Mode should be allowed to ATTEND REGULAR CLASSES in Department according to their convenience.

- 98.67 per cent respondents are of the opinion that the students pursuing education through O.D.L. Mode should also be provided ADEQUATE OPTIONS for choosing subjects as these are provided in REGULAR COURSE.

- 94 per cent respondents agree that the RANKS (I, II, III) of students should be DECLARED SEPARATELY from RANKS in Regular Course.

- 95.33 per cent respondents agree that the students in O.D.L. Mode should also be provided FREE HEALTH SERVICES (HEALTH CARD) in the concerned university.

- 92 per cent respondents agree that the D.D.E. should have their OWN INFRASTRUCTURE (e.g. own building) for conducting P.C.P.

- 95.33 per cent respondents agree that the STATUS OF DEGREES in O.D.L. Mode should be considered AT PAR with the Regular Course degrees.

- 92.67 per cent respondents are of the opinion that the D.D.E. SHOULD BE OPENED ON SUNDAY and closed on any other week day.

- 100 per cent respondents agree that WELL QUALIFIED COUNSELLORS SHOULD BE APPOINTED by D.D.E. to provide TIMELY & QUICK SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS/ QUERIES OF STUDENTS.

- 100 per cent respondents agree that REGULAR INSPECTIONS of working of D.D.E. should be organized by U.G.C. so that QUALITY EDUCATION can be provided to students.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The study has its implications for University Grants Commission, Directorate of Distance Education and Teachers.

Educational Implications for University Grants Commission

UGC should organize regular inspections of working of Directorate of Distance Education so that the quality education can be provided to students. Regular inspections will assure the timely implementation of rules and regulations in Open and Distance Learning institutions.

UGC should make it compulsory that the teachers in Open & Distance Learning Institutions should be appointed on regular basis so that they work with full dedication and devotion. Appointments should be adequate in number. For preparation of SIM (Self Instructional Material), experts should be appointed. Directions should be given to DDE for timely production and dissemination of course material.

Educational Implications for Directorate of Distance Education

Directorate of Distance Education should take suitable and timely measures so that quality education can be provided to students. The students should be provided complete study material. The study material should be provided in time. The admission fees in Open & Distance Learning Mode should be less than it is through Regular Mode. The study material should be provided in both Hindi and English languages. The guide in M.Phil and M.A. (Edu.) for Dissertation work should be provided by the Directorate of Distance Education. The students should be provided sufficient guidance. The teacher-students ratio should be reduced during P.C.P. for providing adequate guidance to students. The students should be provided adequate Hostel Facility during P.C.P. & examination days. This facility should be provided at concessional rates. 75% attendance (minimum required attendance during P.C.P. as per rules laid by Directorate of Distance Education) should not be made compulsory. The degree (certificate of completion of course) provided to students of ODL mode should not contain the phrase – Directorate of Distance Education. The centres for conducting P.C.P. should be made at nearest locations of students. The curriculum of a course should be comparatively less than the curriculum of same class in Regular Mode. The students should also be provided sufficient library facilities. The admissions of students should also be done in time as in case of Regular Mode. The study material for students should be in simple language. The Directorate of Distance Education should appoint permanent staff for preparing quality study material. The DDE should appoint permanent staff for conducting Personal Contact Programme. The students should be provided prescribed syllabus well in time. The students should be allowed to attend (join) regular classes in Department as per their convenience. The students should also be provided adequate (sufficient) options for choosing subjects as these are provided in Regular Mode. The result / ranks (I, II, III) of students should be declared separately from result/ ranks (I, II, III) in Regular Mode. The students should also be provided free health services (Health Card) as it is provided only to those students who are pursuing education through Regular Mode.

The Directorate of Distance Education should be opened on Sunday and closed on any other week day. Well qualified counselors should be appointed by DDE to provide timely & quick solution to queries of students. The DDE should have their own infrastructure (own building) for conducting Personal Contact Programme.

Educational Implications for Teachers

Teachers should provide solution to queries of students in timely manner. Internal Assessment should be provided on fair basis. Appropriate guidance should be provided to students. Teachers should check the

assignments of students in time and appropriate feed-back should be provided to students.

CONCLUSION

In efforts to meet the new and changing demands for education and training, open and distance learning may be seen as an approach having great potential of worth. It is a cheaper and cost-effective alternative to pursue a course. It enhances the international dimension of educational experiences.

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