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ABOUT-DISTANCE-EDUCATION

The concept of 'Deschooling' brought to the fore newer forms of education such as correspondence education, open learning, vocational courses, distance education, contact-cum-learning etc.

Distance Education has become a way of life to all over the world and in India too. It is essential to know the historic background, philosophy, communication and evaluation of Distance Education before undertaking the present study.

HISTORICAL-BACKGROUND-OF DISTANCE-EDUCATION :

Formal education is learning within an organised institution, with time schedules established, curricula and syllabus taught by the teacher, and learnt by the student, followed by a system of examinations. Non-formal education is learning that is organised outside the formal system, with emphasis on its organised character, its hours of learning being flexible. Informal education is really incidental education through reading, attending lectures, participating in seminars etc. which can be either distance or non-distance education. Open education cuts across all these forms of education and can be expressed in formal, non-formal, informal and distance learning systems.

Since the last decade, because of the frequent changes in society, different educational systems have come into being.

Particularly because of the wide expansion of educational technology, there came the realisation of the inadequacy of conventional face to face system of education. Further due to incompatibility of accomodating the growing needs of the society, effective alternative educational system was born and out of these, 'Distance Education' system was one.

As a concept, distance education has recent origin. It has emerged as a result of rapidly changing national and international situation marked by new human needs and aspirations. The growing wealth of experience, increasing funds of knowledge and continuous explosion of information has changed the concept of education itself. The traditional model of education system is not sufficient to open the educational opportunities to every one who wants education - children and adults, men and women, urban as well as rural and tribal population. This demands a new view point to look towards education.

Distance education is a new form of education. Distance education is quite innovative flexible and less expensive. The National Education Commission (1964-66) has rightly pointed out that "good correspondence courses in thoughtfully indentified fields of service will create demand for themselves and can help participation by the people in introducing better methods of production. Further it helps to refresh the knowledge of the educated persons and enables him to keep pace with the new knowledge in the field of his interest. Not only this, there is continued incongruence between the reality of life long learning and institutional and system response. Distance

education learning is also useful to these who desire to enrich their lives by studying subjects of cultural and aesthetic values like art appreciation, literacy criticism etc. Thus the system not only helps to uplift economic standards of society but to enrich its cultural, intellectual and aesthetic standards of people."

Distance education, as a system is over 150 years old. But it reached its present form only recently. It became popular only after 1969. It got its official recognition as 'Distance Education' in 1982. But some form of distance education - the most prevalent form being the postal or correspondence mode of teaching has been in practice for quarter century, if we take the founding of the school of correspondence courses at Delhi University in 1962 as the starting point of distance education in India. But the actual beginning of distance education in its present form was made with the establishment of Andhra Pradesh Open University at Hyderabad, India in 1982. The culmination of this process is the establishment of Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi in 1985.

Distance Education : Stages of development -

a) Correspondence Courses :

The beginnings of today's distance education trace back to the world wide practice of correspondence courses which were introduced in various forms for the first time in the last century. The methodology of imparting education through this system in the main comprised four steps :

i) the courses were prepared in the likeness of the corresponding courses available at the conventional institutions, and sent to the registered students.

ii) the students studied the material, worked on the assignments, and sent the worked out assignments to the institution for evaluation.

iii) the institute got the assignments evaluated, the evaluated assignments were sent back to the student and the marks/grades scored by the students were recorded in official records.

iv) the students appeared at the end of the term examination and the process of certification followed.

b) Contribution made by Research and the Media:

The second stage of development was initiated partly through the researchers in the process of learning. By the middle of the present century considerable literature on the processes and principles of learning together with their implications for teaching and reforms in the systems of education in general was available throughout the world. Besides, electronic media had passed from their earliest experimental and hesitant stages to a stage of maturity, social acceptance and commercial viability. Improved understanding of learning processes and the availability of stronger, better and varied means of mass communication helped transform the traditional correspondence education into what we call distance education. The methodology of giving and receiving education had to undergo corresponding changes. The essential changes that have become the characteristics

of distance education are :

- i) Improved course design and
- ii) the use of multi-media delivery system.

The second stage of development is mainly characterised by the availability of courses in a pedagogically much improved design - these courses were/are self-instructional in nature.

c) The need for human support :

The third stage of development came with the realisation that a distance learner needs the support of a live teacher or tutor inspite of the high quality of self-instructional materials.

The National Policy on Education (1986) of the Government of India stresses the importance of non-formal system of education to expand the educational facilities in the country. It is also proposed to strengthen distance education institutions and improve their quality of education. In order to do this in higher education, the Indira Gandhi National Open University has been charged with the responsibility of promoting the open university and distance education systems in the country.

THE-DISTANCE-EDUCATION-CONCEPT :

Distance education is described basically as any of the various forms of study which separates teachers and learners except for supplementary face to face contacts and where teaching is conducted through a range of media. Students in distance education are, therefore, responsible for their own progress, in the sense that they must make their own arrangements about where and when to study,

work without direct supervision, and basically develop skills in self pacing and self evaluation.

The distance education programme aims at educating those who for one reason or the other are not able to join a college or university. The essential aspects of distance education are well planned, corresponding materials that are self-instructional, set books, charts, posters, reading materials, television and radio-broadcasts, audio and video cassettes (pre-recorded), which provide academic support to learners.

Various definitions of distance education have been made. Some of them are as follows :

"Distance Education is any one of the various forms of study which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of teachers, present with their students in lecture rooms and it includes teaching through print and electronic devices." (Rao Usha, 1991).

Professor Holmberg (1981) has defined distance education thus : "The various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises but which nevertheless benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organisation."

It should be noted that distance education is seen by the Council for Educational Technology and the Scottish Council for Educational Technology as one type of open learning, and that open

learning systems are defined as "those which offer students a measure of flexibility and autonomy, to study the programmes of their choice when and where they wish and at a pace to suit their circumstances."

"Distance study is learning supported by those teaching methods in which because of the physical separateness of learners and teachers, the interactive as well as the preactive phase of teaching is conducted through print, mechanical or electronic devices" (Moore, 1975).

INFLUENTIAL-THEORIES-OF-DISTANCE-EDUCATION :

Whereas a theory of learning is descriptive in its attempts to explain how learning occurs, a theory of teaching is prescriptive in the sense that it sets forth rules concerning the most effective way of achieving knowledge and skill. Knowledge about how distant students learn is essential to distance educators and for this reason learning theories are a prime concern. However, it would be futile to believe that theories of teaching providing guidelines for action can be with certainty deduced from theories of learning.

Wedemeyers theory of independent study, Moore's notions of distance as a function of dialogue and individualisation and learner autonomy, Peter's characterisation of distance education as an industrialised form of teaching and learning, Holmberg's concept of guided didactic conversation, Boath's views on two way postal communication and Sewart's argument for the human element in distance teaching are the six theories of distance education.

Holmberg's (1981) theory of distance education as a method of guided didactic conversation, implies that the character of good distance education resembles that of a guided conversation aiming at learning and that the presence of a typical traits of such a conversation facilitates learning. The characteristics of guided didactic conversation may be said to be :

1) Easily accessible presentations of study matter, clear, somewhat colloquial language, in writing easily readable if the text is printed, moderate density of information.

2) Explicit advice and suggestions to the student as to what to do and what to avoid, what to pay particular attention to and consider with reasons provided.

3) Invitations to an exchange of views to questions, to judgements of what is to be accepted and what is to be rejected.

4) Attempts to involve the student emotionally so that he or she takes a personal interest in the subject and its problems.

5) Personal style including the use of the personal and possessive pronouns.

6) Demarcation of changes of themes through explicit statements, topographical means, or in recorded, spoken communication, through a change of speakers e.g. male followed by female or through pauses.

Having discussed the underlying influential theories of distance education it is essential to study the organisation and administration of Distance Education.

**THE ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION
OF DISTANCE EDUCATION :**

The organization of conventional universities and schools does not meet the requirements of distance education. Normally there are no students on the premises of the central body responsible for distance education activities except for occasional visits. Instead of lecture rooms, facilities are required for the development of course material, which normally means making provision for the work of authors, visualizers, AV specialists and editors-project leaders, for correspondence of different kinds, for tutorial service at a distance and for registration.

The course team approach originated from the belief that it was not advisable to leave the content, presentation and teaching of the open university courses to the idiosyncrasies of individual teachers as is the case with face-to-face teaching; nor could it be left to the whims of individual departments or schools within the university. There were two more reasons for course teams to come into being :

- i) interdisciplinary courses, which the university had decided to produce and give, could not be produced by individual academics or departments; there had to be some kind of cooperation among different departments and individuals from different disciplines.
- ii) if the multi-media approach was to be a success, the media men had to cooperate and work with the academics.

'A course produced by this method', claims Lord Perry (1976) 'will inevitably tend to be superior in quality to any course produced by an individual.' This method has been adopted, with various degrees of modification, by Open Universities in many countries - Canada, Australia, Asia and South America. Lord Perry (1976) rightly claims that 'the concept of the course team is the single most important contribution of the Open University to teaching practice.'

The distance student should be able to study, and make breaks, in his or her study at any time. To administer distance study, a supporting organization is required. The services that must under all circumstances be organized are :

- 1) the development and technical production of distance education courses.
- 2) the distribution of course materials.
- 3) the non-contiguous two way communication between students and tutors/counsellors.
- 4) record keeping.

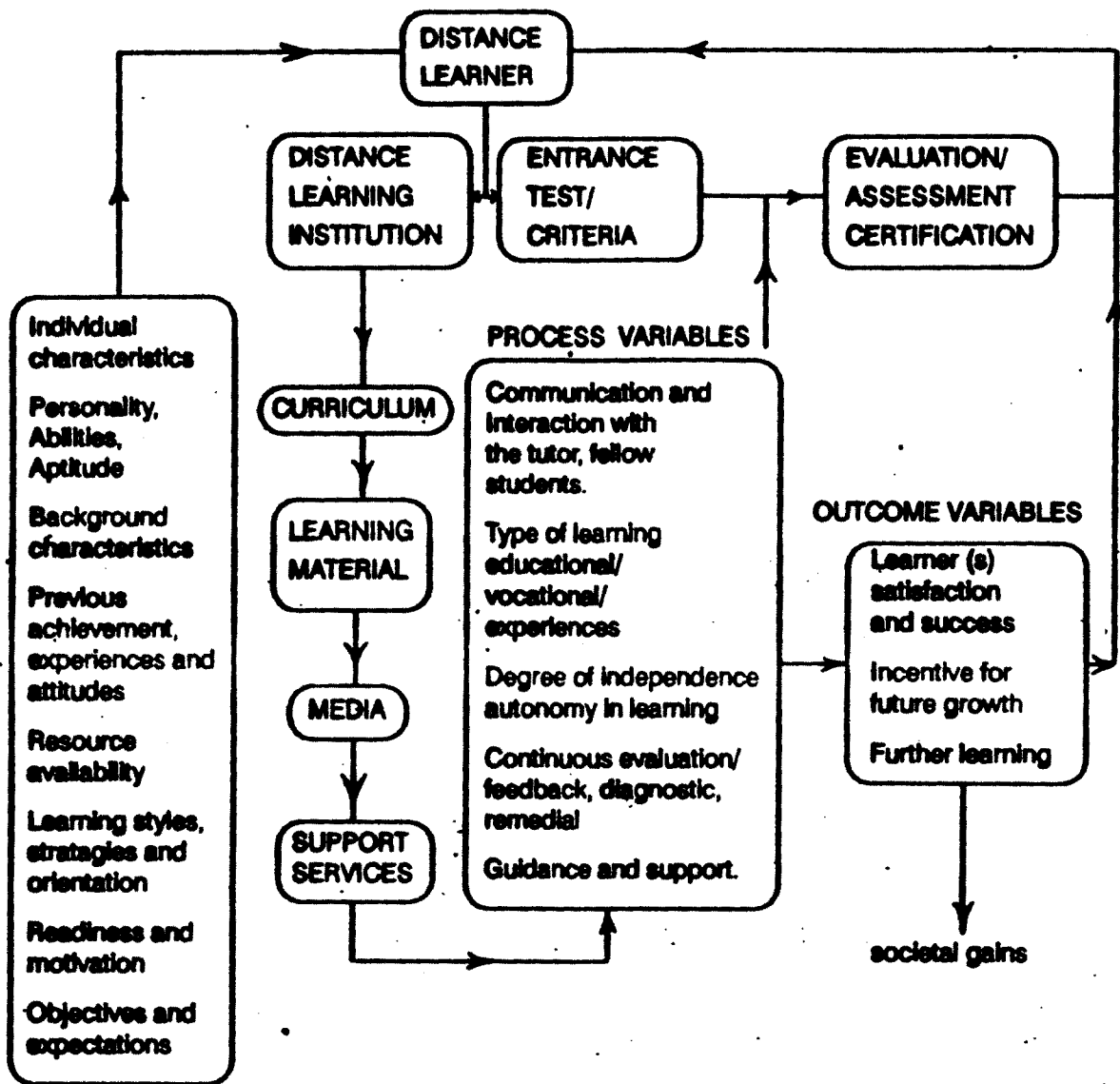
To be able to develop its own course material, a distance study institution must have an organization for educational editorial work. The development of course materials requires an establishment that is a combination of a research institute and a publisher's editorial office, providing facilities for course developers to work with various media, in some cases including radio and TV and, as a rule, arrangements for recording. Not only texts but also art work, laboratory activities and the production of experimental 'kits' are to be catered for. The organization can, but need not, include

faculties of specialist course authors. Such specialists can also be engaged externally. Further the technical production of print, audio-tapes or cassettes, films etc. can be provided for by external bodies.

For the distribution of course materials and particularly for the non-contiguous two way communication, a very special organization without parallels in traditional educational institutions is necessary. Both for the distribution of course material and for the handling of students assignments, inclusive of record keeping, the computer has proved a very useful and economical instrument. However valuable computer systems have been developed for the administration of distance education. What can be done by computer is, above all, to provide individual dispatch of study material and perfect record keeping for several different purposes simultaneously, to do it at very high speed and at very low cost.

The organizational structure for distance learning by and large is common and is shown in Fig. 1 as developed by Miller and Rice (1967).

Fig. 1



MODEL OF LEARNER CENTRED DISTANCE EDUCATION (Proposed by Miller and Rice)

COMMUNICATION IN-DISTANCE-EDUCATION :

Communication in distance study course is the two way communication. The purposes of two way communication are generally-

- 1) to support students motivation and interest by contact with an encouraging tutor and counsellor.
- 2) to support and facilitate student learning by having students apply the knowledge and skills acquired as well as by tutor's comments, explanations and suggestions.
- 3) assessing students progress in order to provide them with an instrument by means of which marks can be awarded.

As a rule, distance students are adults who have a job, social responsibilities and often a family. Hence counselling is usually provided by correspondence, on the telephone and where possible, face to face. The telephone plays an important part in counselling at a distance. The role of the distant tutor is undoubtedly of great importance. It is the tutors task to support the motivation of students by engaging them in thinking, reading and other activities that make sense and direct their attention to what comes later in the course. A pleasant atmosphere and feeling of friendly contact are important when the tutor contributes to his students learning by explanation, examples, suggestions and references. Most of this work consists of personal contributions by individual tutors who write, or record on tape, their comments on individual student work.

The main type of objective tests which have been used with success in distance study courses are (1) Multiple choice tests, (2) Re-arrangement tests (3) Completion tests. Tests of this kind are sometimes useful for checking factual knowledge, application understanding and even analysis.

Two way communication in distance study is an instrument for feedback and as Kulhavy (1977) states, 'there is little doubt that feedback works to increase what a person learns from an instructional unit. Kulhavy's research shows that the value of feedback can be endangered by too high a degree of difficulty causing students to guess and by having the answers too easily available i.e. presented in the course unit in such a way that they can be found without independent consideration or work.

GENERALIZATION -ON- DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS :

- Paulina Pannen

Learning is to occur in the distance education system regardless of any constraints. As a matter of fact, in distance education, learning is primarily in the hands of the students rather than being the responsibility of both teacher and students. That way the learners are to be active in making efforts so that learning does take place. It is also common knowledge that distance education students are mostly adult learners who come to the distance education as their second chance to return to school after being away for a while. Robinson (1981) asserted that adult learners in distance education are highly motivated and have a self concept of independence. In most

cases adults believes themselves capable of self direction and they are generally capable and willing to be self directed in their learning too. They mostly have a very clear goal to achieve in their course of action. Therefore they learn in the way and at the pace which is most suitable to them since they control their own learning situation and learning goals. Such high enthusiasm must be maintained by the distance education institution and not be discouraged by an institutional failure to provide support.

PRE-PRODUCED COURSES -- COURSE-DEVELOPMENT :

The course must be designed for the target population that actually exists. The major characteristics of the target population constitute the starting point of the course, the performance called for in the course objectives constitutes the finishing point, and the process of turning the incoming student into the skilled graduate constitutes the course itself.

As the basis for course development, it is usually felt to be necessary to translate the findings of analysis of existing curricula or other guidelines into communicable definitions of general aims and detailed objectives, to specify what standards of achievement are to be attained within each part of the study programme and generally to describe what the students should have learnt after they have completed the course.

The structuring of any contents presentation in a distance study course must necessarily be based on objectives, the character of the learning contents and the general types of learning aimed at.

A distance study course guides and teaches by giving complete explanations with elucidating examples by providing exercises of various kinds and by constantly referring to what the student has already learnt to master.

In distance education, media decisions must be made both for the pre-produced courses and for the two way communication element. The most important medium in distance education courses is the printed word. Other 'distance' media used, such as radio, TV, audio and video tapes, film strips, are usually supplements which are introduced for special purposes or on special points to support motivation to provide illustration etc.

BASES OF EVALUATION :

1) Objectives, performance standards and achievement :
How well students achieve in relation to the purpose of the course is a common basis for the judgement of the merits of the course.

2) Consulting experts : An entirely different basis for the judgement of distance study courses is the opinions of experts.

3) Consulting future employers and/or teaching bodies :
Those employers or teachers in universities or institutes of further training who are to receive students may also be used as evaluators. It is then their task to relate the course and what it teaches to the requirements of the job or the further study that the student is aiming at.

4) Students attitudes : Students may be asked what they think about the course generally, how motivating and interesting it is, they may be requested to comment on a particular method.

5) Cost benefit : An evaluation criterion of an entirely different type is the relation of teaching/learning effectiveness to cost.

EVALUATING-DISTANCE-EDUCATION :

The term 'evaluation' denotes different things in different contexts. Sometimes it refers to the assessment of students for the purpose of awarding marks; sometimes to the judgement of complete educational systems.

The assessment of students progress is needed both to give students feedback so that they know how they succeed, and in all the cases when diplomas or graded certificates are required to provide the bases for marks. In all examination systems it is important that tests should be both valid and reliable.

Educators may be interested in evaluating a distance study course in order to be able to describe it properly, to provide a kind of product declaration which could serve as a guide to people considering taking a course on the subject concerned or serve as a guide to study counsellors looking for detailed information about study opportunities that might be useful to students whom, they are advising. This type of evaluation is called summative.

Educators concerned with evaluating how well the course helps students to attain their objectives of study and how it corresponds to their

requirements and expectations. This is what is known as formative evaluation.

THE ECONOMY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION :

If we compare the costs of reaching a particular educational goal, for instance a degree, by distance education with the cost of attaining the same qualification by conventional study, we should be able to draw societies as well as developed and undeveloped countries. The barriers of conventional system do not permit the under privileged and oppressed weaker sections to take the education of choice education useful to their jobs and making their life more meaningful.

In comparison with the modern system of open education, there are various limitations of the conventional system.

COMPARISON OF CONVENTIONAL AND DISTANCE LEARNING SYSTEM :

Dimensions	Conventional system	Distance Learning system
1. Students	Relatively homogeneous Same location Dependent learners Controlled situation	heterogeneous Scattered at a distance Independent learning relatively uncontrolled
2. Students records	do not need to be highly developed not very detailed	accurate student records essential (addressed, allocation to tutors, assessment grades, correspondence etc.)
3. Student support	Built in face to face teaching	need for special provision of local counselling services to help students with learning problems so as to minimise drop outs. To

Dimensions	Conventional System	Distance Learning System
		design a proper set up to bridge a gap between students and Central Institute
4. Student assessment and accreditation	Problems of reliability and validity are minimal	assessment at a distance increases problem of validity. Use of large number of tutors decreases reliability.
	relatively cheat proof	Impersonation and cheating is a potential problem (credibility)
5. Media/ Methods	essentially face to teaching. teaching skills needed fairly well defined. Labour intensive	essentially media teaching. media/method skill needed is generally not available. Capital intensive.
6. Courses	well defined, few, relatively simple.	More complex course creation.
		Production and distribution processes with specialised staff.
	Many options/courses with few students in each high cost. Initial start up costless.	Tendency for few options initial cost high reduces with increase of students.
7. Organizational set up	Majority of teachers in schools and colleges are available little administrative support required.	strong administrative framework needed to link together student support and record functions, course creation functions, course production and distribution functions need to be carried outside DLS (e.g. - Printing, broadcasting).

Dimensions	Conventional System	Distance Learning System
8. Control and regulation	Conventional problems of planning, evaluation, decision making.	These problems are magnified in certain cases qualitatively different e.g. multimedia nature, integration of multimedia production - distribution teching systems impose production control.
9. Cost structure	Basically labour intensive, related to number of students per year do not vary significantly with number per course.	basically capital intensive, related more to course creation and production. Unit cost per student per year drop out significantly with increased numbers per year.

Factual material or data unknown or untapped so far is essential in every study. They can be obtained from many sources. It is necessary to adopt or evolve a systematic procedure to collect essential data. To know which method of research is used ? How data is collected ? Which method is used for analysis ? The next chapter is 'Plan and Procedure'.