

A SURVEY OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES FOR NETWORKING AMONG VARIOUS OPEN UNIVERSITIES - A COMPARISON

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The open university approach has been quite different than that of conventional universities approach. Print material (Self Instructional Material format), Multimedia (preferably Audio/Video support) and Counselling (Human support) are the major characteristics of open university approach for meeting learners academic needs. On these lines, every open university in India has established its three tier infrastructure as 1. Headquarters, 2. Regional Centres, and 3. Study Centres. This three tier system with three type of supports, requires much financial support, quality human resource and other facilities. In fact, the application of new technology requires, provision of Man, Machine, Material and Money (4M). A blend of these 4M helps the organisation to manage, quality student support services with a flavour of openness and optimum learning to every open and distant learner. This target of providing openness and optimum learning to every distant learner has been accepted by every open university. Also, the concept of open university as an industry has raised an issue of quality service to its customers at a lower cost. The open university is such an industry which has human being as its raw material, and its product is also same human being which is registered as raw material. The whole process deals with a behavioural change according to certain predetermined objects, providing a need based human support for every individual who is a unique feature. It is a very difficult task. It is because no two individuals are unique and so, their needs are also different.

Networking among various functional open universities for utilizing their services among themselves, developing new strategies in the name of student support was felt a need of the hour, by the principal investigator of this project. He took up this project as a survey for taking a stock of the existing academic and non academic support and exploring various possibilities of networking for their optimum use. These supports may be Print, Audio, Video, Computer, Human, Registration, Examinations, Question Banks, Learning material supply, role of Regional and Study Centres etc.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The investigator after much discussion framed following objectives for this project.

1. To compare the potential and application of different media for various programmes offered by different open universities.
2. To examine the validity of print media used for achieving the instructional objectives.
3. To compare the role of non print media used by various open universities for meeting the instructional objectives.
4. To enquire various possibilities of networking among different open universities for optimum use of existing learner support for different programmes.
5. To examine the possibility of different media applications for developing learning strategies regarding difficult contents, if any,
6. To compare the support facilities provided at the study centres and their utility in achieving openness and optimum learning for the same programme by different open universities.
7. To explore the possibilities of making joint efforts for developing Question banks for various courses and their transfer to other open universities.
8. To compare non academic services offered as student support by different open universities for developing quality services.
9. To compare the quality of human support for providing better counselling services to students.
10. To examine the possibilities of networking for development and tryout of various academic and non academic support strategies.

RESEARCH ISSUES RAISED DURING STUDY

The investigator thought that during this survey he had to examine various student support available with different functional open universities. During this work he came across following issues –

1. To what extent is networking among open universities possible in practice ?
2. How can we meet the language barrier present before every open university?
3. Will the proposed networking for student support services affect the autonomy of an open university?
4. Can regional flavour be maintained for social acceptability while developing a common learning material?
5. What will be the strategy regarding financial sharing for developing common learning material and its use?

METHODOLOGY FOR CONDUCTING THIS PROJECT

This was a survey type research with the help of a Questionnaire and some meetings at various places. The investigator made thorough systemic analysis of various supports and divided them into two major areas as (a) 'Academic Support' and, (b) 'Non-academic Support'. He had developed about 65 questions in section 'A' and about 25 questions in section 'B'. This rough draft was sent to about 25 academics associated directly/indirectly with open university system. A one day meeting of these academics was organized on 19th March 1997. About 13 academics attended this meeting and interacted on each and every statement and finalizing the Questionnaire. There were, finally 37 questions in section (A) (Academic Support) and 10 questions in section (B) (Non-academic Support), in this questionnaire.

The Academic Support (Section A) had covered following sub- areas.

1. Description about Academic support.
2. Availability of Learning Material.
3. Nature of Personal Contact Programmes.
4. Application of Modern Technology.
5. Facilities of Library and other Media.

The Non Academic Support (Section B) had covered following sub- areas.

1. Student Services Division and its structure.
2. Examination Pattern.
3. On Demand Examination.
4. Computerisation of various Services.
5. Openness in Admission.
6. Other areas (if any) for Networking.

About 1200 co-ordination for various study centres of four Open Universities were sent this Questionnaire. These Open Universities were-

1. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi.
2. Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU), Nashik, Maharashtra.
3. Kota Open University (KOU), Kota, Rajasthan.
4. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU), Hyderabad.

The investigator received about 112 forms back these 112 duly filled in, forms were analyzed and it was found that everybody did not respond to each and every question. It normally happens in data collection through Questionnaires/Opinionnaires. The investigator also organized five meetings namely at **YCMOU**

(Nashik), **BRAOU** (Hyderabad), **YCMOU** Regional Centre, Nagpur, **IGNOU**, New Delhi, and, **YCMOU** Regional Centre Pune. Table (1) gives herewith the number of participants in these meetings. The findings of discussions during these meetings were analysed and stated in this paper.

PATICIPANTS IN MEETINGS (TABLE : 1)

Sr.No.	Place	Date	No. of Participants
1.	YCMOU, Nashik.	26-09-1997	15
2.	Regional Centre YCMOU, Nagpur.	22-10-1997	17
3.	BRAOU, Hyderabad.	10-11-1997	14
4.	Regional Cebtre YCMOU, Pune.	25-11-1997	33
5.	IGNOU, New Delhi.	31-03-1998	13
Total		----	92

SYSTEMIC ANALYSIS OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

NON-ACADEMIC SUPPORT

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Development & Production of Course material. | Student Services Division and its structure. |
| 2. Availability of learning material. | Examination Pattern. |
| 3. Availability & use of A/V aids. | On-demand Examination. |
| 4. Broadcasting/Telecasting. | Procedure for learning material distribution. |
| 5. Counselling at various stages. | Computerization of various services. |
| 6. Use of other study material. | Openness in admission. |
| 7. Application of modern technology. | Short-deputation of workers at different levels. |
| 8. Facilities of library & other media. | ---- |
| 9. Training of resource persons. | ---- |

The investigator made a personal visit of various sections like Print Production Centre (PPC), Audio Visual Centre (AVC) and various sections of three universities (**YCMOU**, **IGNOU** & **BRAOU**). He noted down the facilities available there for networking among various open universities. The investigator took a stock of potential of these two open universities in developing the learning material in Print and Non-print form. He also made a thorough study of some unforeseen areas in which networking was found essential.

FINDINGS :

The investigator enquired the existing student support on the lines of objectives laid down in this project. The contribution of four open universities for networking may be as below –

SUPPORT BY YCMOU, NASHIK, MAHARASHTRA, (INDIA) :

Question Banks development is an area with YCMOU. A big number of Objective type and Descriptive type questions have been developed by this university. Other open universities may opt this Question Bank for courses which are common after due translation and modification. Apart from these, exchange of counsellors/academics, exchange of study material are other various factors in networking among various open universities. All the open universities may contribute in this field. YCMOU has taken a lead in the area of Programme Evaluation and researches related to systemic quality improvement. Also, the task of 'On demand examination' has been in progress. Some specific programmes like B.Ed/M.Ed., PGR in the field of Subject Communication, Educational Communication, Distance Education, Agriculture courses, In-service teachers training and continuing education programmes have been found much popular. Training of counsellors through distance mode is an innovative approach. Other open universities may opt for these support after due translation.

SUPPORT BY IGNOU, NEW DELHI (INDIA) :

This open university is largest and biggest central open university having good quality Human resource, Financial resources and a good link with other open universities at the global level. It can provide staff training and initiate systemic researches in the field of distance education. It may involve resource persons of other open universities for this purpose. Programmes like PGDDE & MADE are training programmes for distance education purpose. The Material Production Division of this university is potent enough for producing a good quality low cost learning material. Some programmes stated in this report are specific programmes which can be adopted by other open universities after assessing their demand and market value. Exchange of staff with other universities for a shorter period (3 to 6 month) may be an important area for Networking. The Reference material, Journals, Bulletins, Newsletters received from COL or other foreign universities may be circulated among other Indian Open Universities. IGNOU may get a separate channel on Doordarshan for educational Telecasting/Broadcasting. This channel may be used by other state open universities through after time adjustment.

SUPPORT BY BRAOU, HYDERABAD, ANDHRA PRADESH, (INDIA) :

The first ever open university of India has a good quality academics, as a regular staff. The services of these resource persons in the form of staff exchange for shorter period, may be used for material development, training programmes development, as well as for developing guidelines regarding networking. They may start joint researches, with other Open Universities academic their services regarding Manual developments for co-ordinators and, Programme guides for students may be used by other Open Universities. Study skills and conduct of examination are innovative tasks in which BRAOU may contribute to other Open Universities. Subsidized community based technology and its development is also an area for networking with other open universities. Framing common rules and regulations for all Open Universities by Distance Education Council, may be successfully done with the help of BRAOU academic in consultation with their counterparts from other Open Universities.

SUPPORT BY KOU, KOTA, RAJASTHAN, (INDIA) :

This open university has some resource persons with much experience of organizing training, conducting researches, material development etc. Their services may be utilized by other open universities under academic exchange programme for a shorter period for quality improvement in the field of Training,

Research and Development. The Distance Education Council may take up an initiative for networking among various universities in the areas stated above.

CONCLUSION

This survey was an unique feature in open university system. It gave an opportunity to the investigator for an assessment of Students Support Services both academic and non-academic. The issue of Andragogy in place of Pedagogy cannot be implemented by one Open University alone. It requires a joint effort by all open universities. Also, a freedom of selecting a learning strategy of his own choice by the student is possible only when a wide variety of strategies are developed and its multiple copies are produced. This task also cannot be done by any one Open University alone. A joint effort by all open universities may be an answer to this problem of openness in selecting a learning strategy. The problem of optimum learning would remain an imagination so long as learning strategies are not in a position to answer various queries by the students for their academic problems. A joint effort for managing a training to various type of academics may meet the objective of optimum learning. Networking among various open universities for various activities may reduce the cost per student and bring quality in various activities.

It is expected that this project would throw some light for managing collective wisdom in the area of learner support at a cheaper rate by utilizing joint efforts of various academics as resource persons. It would meet an urgent need of co-operation and co-ordination among all open universities for an unavoidable challenge of learner support. The present status of student support and possibility of networking among various open universities for raising its quality was an outcome of this survey type research project. It has also opened new ways for developing common strategies for a quality support and thus suggested for reducing the cost of production. It has opened new horizons of co-operation and co-ordination among all open universities for meeting their common problems in the field of student support. The outcome of implementation of findings may explore the possibility of such networking in other areas like staff training, assessment of educational needs of various social groups framing curriculum etc. Thus, the present survey type research was an important and essential project financed by Distance Education Council, New Delhi. As the investigator in the field of Student Support Services for Networking among open universities in India.

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