

STAFF DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MULTIMEDIA TECHNOLOGIES: A PERSPECTIVE OF THE INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

Teaching through distance education is quite different from teaching in conventional education system. In conventional education face to face teaching is practiced in a classroom situation. In classroom teaching, student, motivation, classroom activities, feedback, proximity of the teacher and learner create an ideal environment for learning. The learners are full time and a homogenous group. However, in the distance education system, the situation is completely reverse. The students are a heterogeneous group with irregular habits in studies and often some of their entrance qualifications are less than the others.

Moreover distance learners are also part-time learners. The students learn at their own place and pace. The self-instructional materials (SIMS) which are highly structured and self-contained are expected to carry out the role of a teacher. Hence a number of learning activities are incorporated in the SIMs and that is why subject matter is presented in a simple conversational style. Wherever possible an appropriate pattern of media mix, using audio, video, broadcast, computer media along with printed SIMs is used. It is supported by distance tuition a mode of instruction through tutor comments on the learner response sheets given on assignments. It is also supported occasionally (depending on the nature and requirements of the course concerned) by face to face tutorial/counselling sessions and if necessary practical. Hence, distance, education is a highly specialised branch of education requiring a special set of skills and attitude on the part of the teachers who take to distance teaching and function at any of the different levels in the system, such as: course designing, course developing, course production, tutoring, counselling, evaluation etc.

In India the Open Universities (OUs) and Correspondence Course Institutes (CCIs) attached to conventional universities both full-time and part-time staff. In all more than 50,000 staff in OUs and 40000 staff in CCIs are working in different capacities. Of these around 900 are full-time faculty members employed in CCIs and 450 at OUs. In addition, there are around 12000 and 22000 part-time faculty (employed in the Support Services of the CCIs & OUs respectively throughout the country (Manohar, 1997 and IGNOU, 1997).

The situation in CCIs is totally different from the point of view of both structural framework of the organisation and recruitment of specialists. Unlike OUs, no uniform pattern is found, and each CCIs has its own form and framework, which has again not evolved out of any conscious approach or design. Except in the case of a few CCIs the remaining areas present a pathetic position and more or less presence a replica of staffing structure of a conventional university department. Specialised staff are almost absent in most CCIs and staff appointed in most CCIs carry out multiple tasks despite their unrelated backgrounds. However, in the case of staff recruitment, both OUs and CCIs rely mainly on conventional universities as most of their staff is drawn from established conventional universities. As far as recruitment of specialists at OUs is concerned, the staff are drawn from outside organisations with specialised experience. Thus, to a great extent the staff working in Distance Education Institutions in India are conventional in background and qualifications, with only a little or no experience in the field of Distance Education. This calls for an organised effort of training interventions so that the staff would be able to re-orient their work patterns and attitudinal traits.

Training of personnel in distance education institutions in India

The training of personnel working in OUs and CCIs was almost non-existent till IGNOU came into existence in 1985. Realising the need for staff development the Division of Distance Education (DDE) was set up in IGNOU in 1986. Using the expertise of Prof. B. N. Koul (the then Director, DDE) IGNOU has produced a diploma course in distance education (now upgraded to post-graduate diploma in distance education).

A few years later a Masters degree in Distance Education has been introduced by IGNOU. In IGNOU completion of PGDDE is compulsory for its academic staff. IGNOU has also offered incentives for its staff. To those who complete PGDDE one increment is given (Manjulika and Reddy, 1998).

Through the intervention of COL, the erstwhile Division of Distance Education (DDE) in IGNOU which was responsible for research, development and training in distance education, was upgraded to the Staff Training and Research Institute in Distance Education (STRIDE). Unlike DDE, which was concerned with the training of staff of IGNOU, STRIDE has been entrusted with the task of training the staff of not only all open universities but also all the distance education institutions in India and South Asia. IGNOU has been training programmes for -

- Course writers
- Core academic staff
- Professionals developing audio-video cassettes
- Academic counsellors/facilitators
- Other academics working in the support services
- Supporting staff

IGNOU has organised 14 training/development workshops initially by the DDE and later STRIDE. Through these workshops all the academic staff in the University have been trained. A few of these workshops (initially) were organised under IGNOU-ODA collaboration. Similarly, a few core academic staff from different disciplines were sent to International Extension College and Open University, United Kingdom in the years 1987 to 1989. The workshops were organised in the years 1987 and 1988 with the help of Janet Jenkins, Fred Lockwood, Ellie Chambers (British) and Chaiyong Brahmawang (UNESCO) IGNOU, 1988-1990. The remaining workshops were organised in house by IGNOU experts themselves.

Having completed the task of training of IGNOU staff STRIDE has been conducting programmes on course development for the benefit of academic staff of distance education institutes in the country. STRIDE has conducted 18 workshops for teachers of OUs and CCIs on course development and 30 programmes for new academic staff (STRIDE data base) training programmes were also organised thrice for Regional Services staff, especially the Assistant Regional Directors who are posted at Regional Centres. The first such programmes were organised with the help of British experts from UKOU in 1993 using expertise of Prof. B. N. Koul, the then Director, DDE and the second and third ones as organised by the IGNOU using internal expertise. (Manjulika and Reddy, 1998)

In collaboration with the COL, it has organised an Asian Regional Working Groups workshop on training in 1994 in New Delhi in which training needs in distance education in the member countries of Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were discussed.

Training at IGNOU

The present training package for academic staff (full-time and part-time) for different levels in given below:

<i>Headquarters</i>	<i>Regional Centres</i>	<i>Study Centres</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course formulation • Course designing • Course editing • Print material development • Audio-video production • finance and accounts • Management of Regional Centres • Academic counselling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment and writing tutor comments • Handling finance and accounts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of Study Centres • Monitoring of organisation of academic counselling • Monitoring of handing and assessment of assignments • Monitoring of Study Centres • Management of study

The training package consists of workshops for full-time faculty posted at Hqs. (2 to 10 days) and two days training programmes for course-writers/editors (Part-time) in course preparation and development. The full time faculty of OUs posted at Regional Centres are also trained in managing Regional Centres and Study Centres especially in the area of student admission, pre-counselling, organisation of counselling, handling of assignments, assessment and writing tutor comments, oranisation of term-end exams, handling of accounts, general administration and monitoring of study centres. These training programmes are of three days duration in the form of workshops.

Two-day or one day training programmes are organised for part-time academic counsellors (posted at Study Centres). The training package covers Distance Education concepts, a brief about the University and the total delivery system (2 hours), academic Counselling (2 hours) in the first day. The second day completely concentrates on discipline based discussion. From this one can say that the training package and its converge on distance education concepts is too less in terms of exposure to the new system. The practical component in the areas of counselling (general and academic counselling) use of audio and video programmes, assessment and writing tutor comments is not being given much emphasis (Manjulika and Reddy, 1996 and 1998).

Impact of training on academic counsellors

Counselling:

1. Many counsellors still lecture at counselling sessions instead counselling distance learners.
2. A large number of counsellors are using only a few techniques in counselling sessions, mainly lecturing.
3. Students also fall into cultural trap and expect/demand counsellors to deliver lectures and conduct sessions in traditional classroom fashion.
4. Quite a few counsellors have not understood the integral role of counsellors and counselling in the teaching learning process.
5. The audio visual aids to be utilised are not being used effectively by the counsellors, as they are not familiar with using these aids.
6. Majority of the counsellors do not bother to know the type of clientele they are supposed to deal with and their expectations
7. Quite a large number of counsellors do not interact with distance learners except during counselling sessions. Thus the personal support within and outside the study centre is minimal
8. Many of them are not aware of the utility of teleconferencing/telecounselling

Assessment and Evaluation:

1. Many counsellors have not fully understood the methodology adopted for evaluation of assignments and the changes that have taken place over a period in different programmes.
2. Lack of practical exposure to assignment evaluation and writing tutor comments make evaluators to provide poor feedback.
3. Many evaluators do not write tutor comments, hence learners do not receive any feedback. The reasons for this are: lack of conceptual clarity, lack of skills on the part of evaluators in writing tutor comments.
4. Quite a few evaluators have not understood the integral role of tutor comments in fostering two way communication.
5. They are unable to differentiate between the teaching and non-teaching comments while writing tutor comments on assignment responses.

Strategy for Training of Academic Counsellors

Since the two-day orientation programme of IGNOU for academic counsellors is inadequate to deal with the complexities of counselling and evaluation of assignment to understand the crucial role of counsellors in open/distance education, therefore a five day computer based multi-media modular training programme would be developed which could be highly relevant to master the skills and knowledge required for performing the tasks of counselling and tutor comments on student assignment responses effectively. The collaborative agencies could be STRIDE, Distance Education Council (DEC), Regional Services Division (RSD) and Electronic Media and Production Centre (EMPC).

Roles of Collaborative Agencies

STRIDE

- to develop the training toolkit (printed modules and video programmes)
- to train master trainers
- to identify master trainers
- to conduct extended contact training (ECT) through teleconferencing(using local/headquarters academic expertise)
- to award certificates

DEC

- to identify counsellors from Correspondence Course Institutes (CCIs) and State Open Universities (SOUs)
- to distribute training materials
- to depute counsellors for ECT based on recommendations of the institutions
- to fund the ECT and course-ware production

RSD

- to identify and depute counsellors from IGNOU
- to organise ECTs at TC receiving end locations(IGNOU has installed 163 teleconferencing nodes at its regional centres and study centres)

- to identify master trainers(local expertise)

EMPC

- to help in production of video programmes
- to provide teleconferencing facility for conducting ECT (five days per programme)

Target Group

The proposed training programme aims at training all untrained counsellors of IGNOU and State Open Universities (8) and faculty members of CCIs (58) involved in personal contact programmes. It will also include academic counsellors who have already undergone some training, as most of them require refresher training.

Programme objectives

The following shall be the objectives of training

- 1) To provide knowledge and understanding of Distance Education/Open Education in general and students support services in particular.
- 2) To understand the new role of a teacher as a facilitator in the learning process.
- 3) To develop and sharpen inter personal and communication skills.
- 4) To develop competencies for using individualized and group learning skills and activities.
- 5) To adapt to the vital role played by instructional technology as a learning resource.
- 6) To develop capabilities of counselling (informing, advising and guidance).
- 7) To develop the capabilities of providing distance tuition through assignment responses (ARs).
- 8) To train in the skills of writing positive and constructive comments on ARs.
- 9) To develop a positive attitude towards distance education in general and learners in particular.
- 10) To sensitize on problems of distance learners with special emphasis on special groups such as women, old persons, disabled persons, prisoners, etc.

Training toolkit

It is proposed to develop a training toolkit. The toolkit will comprise of the following media:

- Printed-self-instructional materials
- Video programmes to supplement the print materials
- Teleconferencing for extended contact training for skill development,
- Group based learning and peer group learning.

Methodology

Print would be the major medium. The printed materials would be self-instructional. In addition to SIMs, videotapes would be developed covering skill development in specialised areas such as counselling, group learning, writing tutor comments and attending to student queries etc.

The print material and visual aids would be provided to the counsellors well in advance. They would go through the materials before they attend ECT through teleconferencing which would be a compulsory component of the training programme. The ECT would be conducted at the identified TC receiving end locations already existing all over the country.

A few master trainers would be identified for each location, which would be trained by STRIDE before the conduct of ECT. The training of trainers would be of 3 days duration at various locations throughout the country.

Duration

The training programme would be of one-month duration. The trainee would require one month to go through the SIMs and videotapes provided. At the end of the month he/she would attend a 5-day training which would be compulsory

STRIDE would be conducting ECT once in 4 months. During vacation period in between April-May, September-October and December-January.

Eligibility

- full time faculty working with OUs, SOUs, CCIs
- Part-time faculty engaged as academic counsellors in OUs

- Part-time faculty engaged for personal contact programmes (CCIs)
- Other interested faculty members from conventional universities/colleges.
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Credit

The programme could be a Certificate Programme of 3 credits (2 credits SIMs, audio-visual aids and 1 credit-ECT).

Course contents

Module 1

- 1 Dimensions of distance/open education
- 2 Understanding multiple media for instruction
- 3 Teachers changing role in distance education
- 4 Development of communication skills

Module 2

- 1 Needs of distance learners
- 2 Methods of counselling
- 3 Evaluation and Assessment
- 4 Two way communication through assignments

Video programmes

- 1 Genesis and Growth of distance/open system
- 2 Learner support system
- 3 Media in counselling
- 4 Distance tutoring through Assignments

ECT (Print)

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|--------|----------------------------|
| Unit 1 | Manual for Master Trainers |
| Unit 2 | Guidelines for Trainers |

Teleconferencing

Exposure to development of skills in the areas of

- counselling (personal and academic)
- writing tutor comments
- communication with distance learners
- individualized and group learning techniques
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Certification and Completion

The participation in the 5 days ECT shall be compulsory for obtaining the certificate of completion. IGNOU would award certificates.

Programme development

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|----------------|---|---|
| <i>Stage 1</i> | - | Development of project/proposal |
| | - | Identification of academic counsellors/faculty members engaged in counselling and evaluation of ARs at IGNOU, SOUs, CCIs. |
| <i>Stage 2</i> | - | Discussion with STRIDE faculty meeting with DEC, RSD, EMPC. |
| <i>Stage 3</i> | - | Finalisation of project proposal and submission of final proposal for approval. |
| <i>Stage 4</i> | - | Preparation of questionnaire for counsellors/faculty members |
| | - | Sending of questionnaires to reader |
| | - | Analysis of Data |
| <i>Stage 5</i> | - | Expert Committee meeting |
| <i>Stage 6</i> | - | Development Toolkit (6 months) |
| <i>State 7</i> | - | Pilot Testing |
| <i>State 8</i> | - | Commencement of Training |

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