

MANAGEMENT EDUCATION THROUGH DISTANCE MODE OF LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF THE INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN SCHOOL

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Introduction

The distance mode of learning is considered as a necessity due to inability of the conventional university set up to cater to the need of higher education of the masses in developing and over populated countries like India. Irrespective of having a large number of universities and colleges in India only 5 to 10 percent of the youth in the relevant age group have an access to the facilities of higher learning as compared to so many other countries where 30 to 50 percent of their counterparts are having a reach to higher education (Gandhe, 1998). Within this content there exists an unprecedented pressure from students every year to increase seats in colleges and universities. On the other hand, institutions which are already having existence are unable to excel due to lack of adequate funds and resources to cater the needs. However, only increase in the conventional institutions of higher learning may not meet the requirements of ever rising need for higher education, hence it is required to explore other alternates, probably, the distance / open mode of learning is one amongst them.

The real strength of distance education, is in the two way communication which is effected through the use of multimedia, like self explanatory study material, audio-visual broadcast and packages, face to face problem solving sessions etc. A variety of student support services are being provided through the network of study centres which form part of the open system. Extended library and laboratory facilities, information about examination pattern, the modes of assessment and evaluation etc. are some of the needs precisely met by these centres.

Genesis of distance education in India

In India the distance mode of learning is not a very new concept. The genesis of this form of education is traceable to correspondence education which has been initiated for over 35 years in some selected universities (Swamy, 1992). These correspondence courses have began to open up the educational facilities to those - who were at home, involved in some vocation / profession, and who aspired to pursue further studies at their relative pace. Correspondence course at the tertiary level was introduced for the first time in 1962 by University of Delhi.

The concept of open university came to India when the Government of Andhra Pradesh took the lead and after consideration of a proposal in 1970, launched the Andhra Pradesh Open University (renamed as B R Ambedkar Open University), Hyderabad in 1982. The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi established in the year 1985 marks a watershed in the history of distance education in India.

At present there are seven open universities in India, offering varieties of degree post degree and diploma not only in social sciences and humanities but also in technical and professional disciplines. Besides a number of correspondence institutes under conventional university system cater the need of higher education. The National Open School serves as an apex institution to provide school education having a reach in the whole country.

The University

IGNOU was established by an Act of Parliament in 1985 having an all India jurisdiction to achieve the following objectives:

- democratising higher education by taking education to the doorsteps of the students
- providing access to high quality education to all those who seek it, irrespective of age, region or formal qualifications

- offering need-based academic programmes by giving professional and vocational orientation to the courses
- promoting and developing distance education in India
- setting and maintaining standards in distance education in the country as an apex body for the purpose
(Student Hand book,1998).

The university promotes interdisciplinary studies and to achieve this it operates through nine school of studies : computer and information sciences, continuing education, health sciences, sciences, social sciences, education, humanities, engineering, technology and management studies. Each school is functioning to offer a wide choice of elective courses at various levels.

Most of the programmes offered by IGNOU are modular in structure. The university has adopted a multimedia approach in imparting instruction to its students. The package carries:

- self instructional printed course material
- supporting audio and video programmes
- face-to-face interface with academic counsellors of study centres on weekends
- project work in some programmes
- assignments for appraisal and for providing feedback to learners
- national network telecast on television
- broadcast of audio programmes through some selected radio centres.
- practical at designated institutions
- work related field project / functional assignments as per programme requirements
- Interactive Satellite Aided Communication Network (Teleconferencing)
- case studies in some programmes.

Management education in India

Management education in India has grown phenomenally, both in terms of institutions imparting such education as well as the number of students taking these courses. The number of institutions offering management programmes in the country has increased from 4 in 1960 to about 500 in 1997(Joshi, 1997).

In future this trend is likely to be continued because of the following reasons:

- Growth in industry coupled with an increasing tendency of industries to be “manager- intensive”. Not only is the manager workers ratio is high in high tech industries but it is also increasing in some of the old technologies.
- The technological changes has shifted the emphasis in executive requirement, from sheer experience to qualification and training.
- There is an increasing realisation that it is more economic to develop “own managers” to take care of organisational growth than to depend on “outside consultants” and to get their services from market as and when required.

The above factors has created more and better career prospects for individuals having management qualifications. The degree and diploma holders in management discipline are enjoying easy marketability along with higher emoluments for executive positions.

Hence, during last four decades the cost - benefit analysis of management education programmes gave impetus to the demand for this education and today there are as many as 50 aspirants per seat for most of the prestigious management programmes. This has resulted into two developments:

1. Management programmes of the reputed institutions has become elitist. Restricting this education to only ‘princely heiress’ or ‘crowned boys’ seems unfair to the large number of meritorious and capable students who can give results by acquiring such education.
2. A great many institution with grossly ill and inadequate infrastructure facilities have come up to cater to an increasing demand for management education. This has given rise to a sub-standard education which has only marginal value in generating the skills and capabilities of the aspirants.

Within this back ground the educational policy makers have formulated the future strategy. The objectives of such strategy are:

1. To broaden the concept of management education and to recognise the need for management education by taking care of 'functional' and 'level specific' approaches.
2. To increase opportunities for acquiring quality management education by utilising the services of 'proven professionals' and to disseminate it by utilising multimedia.
3. To increase avenues of high quality management education through the use of reputed institutions active in the distance / open mode of learning.
4. To prepare qualified managers not only for business sector but in all spheres of life as it is felt that problem is not that the country is 'under developed' but it is 'under managed'.

The IGNOU School of Management Studies (SOMS)

The school started its operation in 1987. It is headed by a Director who arranges to plan, organise, supervise, and develop its academic programmes and courses in co-ordination with the school staff and the different wings of the university, such as, academic, administrative and service. The emphasis is on providing a wide option of programmes and courses. The school offers course-wise registration for its management programme. Each programme has been divided into two semester in a year : January to June and July to December. Consequently there are two examinations every year one in June and the other in December. At present the school offers 42 courses (a list of courses is given in Appendix). Successful completion of specific combination of above courses would lead a student to:

1. Master of Business Administration (M B A) Degree : This consists of 21 courses in all which comprise first eleven core courses, five courses from the specialisation stream, two core and one elective course from integrative programme courses and a project course which is equivalent to two courses.
2. Diploma in management (DIM) : This programme comprises three core and four elective courses out of which a student is required to opt for two.
3. Post Graduate Diploma in Management (PGDIM) : This programme carries all eleven core courses from MS - 1 to MS - 11.
4. Specialisation Diploma Programme in Functional Areas : At present the school offers courses in four streams of functional area diplomas. They are Post Graduate Diplomas in : Human Resource Management (PGDHRM), Financial Management (PGDFM), Operations Management (PGDOM) and Marketing Management (PGDMM). To qualify each specialised programme a student is required to successfully complete five courses in all from the particular specialisation stream.

The SOMS is all set to launch its Ph.D. Programme, which would be a course based programme, where in the learners would have to complete a few courses to acquire eligibility for admission. The school follows the "credit system" for its programmes. For successful completion of degree / diploma /certificate programme one has to clear both the assignments and the term end examination for each course in a programme.

All the students enrolled for management programme may attend counselling facility at the study centre. The centre also assists them on behalf of the university and act as an examination centre. At present 124 study centres are offering counselling facilities for management programmes. Each student is required to submit 'tutor marked assignments' to the study centre co-ordinator. All the study centres are having audio-video aids along with basic library on management books. These centres are being monitored and co-ordinated through regional centres.

The academic counsellors for the study centres are being appointed on a part time basis by the headquarters for which bio-data of the local teachers and practising managers are being invited and forwarded by the study centre co-ordinators.

Programme instruction

The IGNOU- SOMS faculty follows a multimedia system for instruction. It carries written course material, audio visual aids, counselling sessions, tele counselling etc. The school has planned to conduct 40 percent of the counselling through satellite based interactive counselling. The receive sites for this purpose have been set up all over the country. All the regional centres, few study centres and 50 centres of all India Management Association are the receive sites. In addition the school has planned to conduct a two -day update seminar per month through teleconference in various specialisation programmes.

Evaluation system

This consists of two components:

1. Continuous evaluation in terms of periodic assignments having weightage of 30 percent. Out of three assignments for each course two are tutor marked (TMAs) and one is computer marked (CMA). Best two scores out of three are being counted.
2. Term - end examination : it is having a weight of 70 percent. The term end examination comprises analytical and conceptual comprehension through descriptive questions along with cases or problem solving exercises. For both the evaluation components letter grades are being awarded.

Problems encountered

The quality of education of any distance learning programme is maintained by various ways, such as : quality of study material, internal and external evaluation, student support methods and so on. At present SOMS is using printed text, television, radio, audio - video cassettes, satellite and face to face counselling to teach its students. It has not adopted computer media for obvious reasons of cost and lack of access.

Course Material

Print material are the back bone of all open universities and distance education institutions. The main advantage of print material is that these books can be read and reread at convenience by the learners. The unique character of IGNOU management programme print material is due to the involvement of the team of experts preparing each course keeping in view the interest of the target learners. Each management course has a 'course design committee' headed by the Vice Chancellor involving other experts and professionals and a 'course preparation committee' of the course concerned. All aspects of courses are discussed in detail by the subject and language experts and decisions are arrived at in consultation with the School of Distance Education and Communication Division. The Overseas Development Administration (ODA) consultant have rated the printed material of the school as high.

The operational problem in this regard is pertaining to delay in delivery of study material. Often assignments are received after the expiry of last date of submission. In such a situation there is no use of induction meeting in the beginning of the session. As it loses its meaning because of no follow up is possible without study material in learners hands.

Television and Radio

Management programme of IGNOU is on the air presently from All India Radio Hyderabad, Bombay and Shillong centres at fixed times. The use of radio is declining due to broad cast in odd hours and increased use of audio cassettes which are usable in the controlled conditions. Television has several advantages over print material and radio. However, lack of adequate transmission facilities and dissatisfaction with the time slot available are some of the factors responsible for using the television sparingly.

Broadcast Hours on Television and Radio		(Daily One Semester)		
Programmes	T.V.	Radio Hyderabad	Radio Shillong	Radio Bombay
Bachelor Degree Programme	26 hrs	26 hrs	17 hrs 20 mts	26 hrs
Management Programme	26 hrs	26 hrs	--do--	--do--
Other Diploma & Certificate Programmes	26 hrs	26 hrs	34 hrs 20 mts	--do--
Total	78 hrs	78 hrs	69 hrs	78 hrs

Source : V.C's report, IGNOU Seventh Convocation May 11,1996.

Audio - video cassettes are made available at the study centres where playing equipment are also available. The cassettes are also available on price. The SOMS has produced 65 audio and 79 video cassettes till the year 1997-98. The use of video enables a good speaker interaction and live example to be seen and heard all over the country. However, the draw back at the moment is the video player is a costly equipment and is not within the reach of most of the students.

Transaction

Study centres play significant role in terms of support services. Counselling programme is supposed to be the key transactional function of study centre is not considered satisfactory with respect to management programme. Non availability of qualified academic counsellors, puts the students in difficulty. Lack of induction and refresher training to management programme counsellors and absence of interaction of counsellors with the faculty at head quarter may harm the purpose and may prove to be a missing link. In certain courses (MS-8, MS-10, MS-95 and MS-100) students are facing lot of difficulties. In such a situation the academic counsellors should not only update their knowledge but also should have a genuine and sustained interest in the students.

Regarding audio video supplements, the problem of maintenance is a hurdle. Sometimes study centre staff is reluctant to extend these facilities to the students. In such a case multimedia system is virtually non-existent.

In most of the cases use of library facility is negligible. Students are required to make use of the books at the study centre only. After hectic counselling sessions on weekends, students feel exhausted and find it difficult to refer supplementary readings. They are not permitted to get the books issued even till the next weekend.

Evaluation

Term-end examinations are being conducted by the SR & Evaluation Division at the head quarters. On the other hand tutor marked assignment evaluation work takes place at study centre level. The evaluation of assignment at study centre is a difficult task due to three reasons. First, because of late receipt, most of the students are unable to submit their assignment in time which delays the entire process of evaluation. Second, there is a dearth of approved evaluators for various courses. Third, when evaluators are available they often remark that in comparison to the paper work involved in evaluation of assignments the financial reward is negligible, especially in those courses in which the number of assignments is few.

Suggestions

The IGNOU - SOMS may take cognizance of following suggestions to improve its strategy for the future:

1. In the context of our present stage of development we need not managers of a generalist nature but require 'techno managers' and 'specialist managers'. Hence the school would find it more useful to offer courses looking into the need of small and moderate undertakings, rural sector and specified areas like banking, insurance, tourism, transport, health, education etc.
2. The school should enlarge its scope to make its presence in managerialising the central and the state administrative services, political processes, media and public sector undertakings.
3. To extend its role and services the SOMS should make use of professional and other institutions. These institutions have acquired a good reputation in imparting education like National Productivity Council, All India Management Association, Y.M.C.A., Indian Society for Training and Development. By signing memorandum of understanding and with adequate guidance such institutions can impart management education of a reasonable standard and thus help to limit the role of commercial mills providing sub standard management education.
4. With the spread of management education through open learning two masses there is a greater necessity for monitoring its quality. Without having the requisite academic and physical facility at the head quarter and at study centres no new course should be offered. It is a great responsibility on the part of the faculty to up date and develop the academic counsellors who may prove a big asset for the school in the long run.
5. The course design committee and the course preparation team should keep in mind that what we require in India is to develop our own system of management, based on our old age culture and tradition. Such traditions as are built over the ages are the result of deep study of human behaviour and expectations. To brush them off in the glitter of new technology only shows that we lack independent judgement and confidence in our ability.
6. Presently SOMS courses are overemphasising on the theory of neglect of practical aspects of subject taught. One way out to increase practical bias in this field is to improve more practising managers in the task of academic counselling. Furthermore, emphasis on project assignment as part of study and sharing of cost with industry etc. may be taken as major action plans.

7. Last but not the least, the procedural constraints given in problems encountered like delay in delivery of course material and assignments extending library and audio video equipment facilities. Quick handling of student grievances, development and upgrade of academic counsellors should be taken care of. Otherwise it would give an impression of a school which itself is required to be managed first. Hence, the school should run its business with an emphatic feeling and by utilising zero defect approach.

Conclusion

IGNOU - SOMS has made commendable efforts in making an access to management education for all. The present public image of availability of management education for elite has been weakened due to the reach of the university to the masses. However, the resources and infrastructure availability of this kind of set up are different as compared to well established schools of management studies. The threats for management education through distance mode of learning may suitably be converted into opportunities by using technological advances and media mix to strengthen management education in a developing society.

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APPENDIX

Courses Offered by SOMS IGNOU

- MS-1 Management Functions and Behaviour.
- MS-2 Managing Men
- MS-3 Economic and Social Environment
- MS-4 Accounting and Finance for Managers
- MS-5 Management of Machines and Materials
- MS-6 Marketing for Managers
- MS-7 Information Management and Computers
- MS-8 Quantitative Analysis for Managerial Applications
- MS-9 Managerial Economics
- MS-10 Organisational Design, Development and Change
- MS-11 Corporate Policies and Practices
- MS-21 Social Processes and Behavioural Issues
- MS-22 Human Resource Development
- MS-23 Human Resource Planning
- MS-24 Union Management Relations
- MS-25 Managing Change in Organisations
- MS-26 Organisational Dynamics

MS-41 Working Capital Management
MS-42 Capital Investment and Financing Decisions
MS-43 Management Control Systems
MS-44 Security Analysis and Portfolio Management
MS-45 International Financial Management
MS-46 Management of Financial Management
MS-51 Operation Research
MS-52 Project Management
MS-53 Production Operations Management
MS-54 Management of Information Systems
MS-58 Management of R&D and Innovation
MS-61 Consumer Behaviour
MS-62 Sales Management
MS-63 Product and Advertising Management
MS-64 International Marketing
MS-65 Marketing of Services
MS-66 Marketing Research
MS-68 Marketing Communication and Advertising Management
MS-91 Strategic Management
MS-92 Management of Public Enterprises
MS-93 Management of New and Small Enterprises
MS-94 Technology Management
MS-95 Research Methodology for Management Decisions
MS-97 International Business
MS-100 Project Work (Equivalent to two Courses)