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Research Paper Title: Adapting to ODL in times of COVID – 19

Theme of the Paper: Faculty development in ODL

Author: Dr. Avani M. Mistry

Visiting Faculty, DTSS LAW COLLEGE (Affiliated by Mumbai University), MUMBAI,
India,

Email address: dr.avanimistry@gmail.com;

Correspondence address:


B-2, Vinayak, Kamala Nehru Cross Road no: 3, Kandivali (West), Mumbai - 400067

Mobile number: +917738088112, e-mail: avanimistry@gmail.com

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby would like to explicitly state that the research article titled “**Adapting to ODL in times of Covid – 19**” is original and has not been published earlier, or that it is not under consideration for possible publication elsewhere.

Name : Dr. Avani Mistry

Signature: 

Date : 28/06/2021

Adapting to ODL in Times of COVID-19

Dr. Avani M. Mistry

Visiting Faculty, DTSS Law College (Affiliated by Mumbai University), Mumbai, India

E-mail address: dr.avanimistry@gmail.com

Abstract

On a global scale, distance education is a bright vision in the field of education & knowledge. Online distance education is always a better option for students but before 2020 it was always under a suspicious eye about its validity. During the Pandemic, the whole perspective about Online Education has changed and it has created a very strong relation between Lockdown and all the stakeholders of the education system. The Changed Situation has made a major effect on the worldwide education system making the students

realize the importance of their mentors and their responsibility. Earlier, online education was a secondary option but, looking forward, nowadays it is the best and only way to acquire knowledge and education; however, there are challenges to be faced.

Keywords: Online Distance Learning - Necessity of online education – Lockdown - adaptability, and applicability - Impact on the students - Impact on mentors and teachers - issues and challenges.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

1. To understand how online lectures and seminars can play a vital role and the opportunities available.

2. To recognize the challenges faced by students and mentors.

METHODOLOGY

In the present study, secondary data have mostly been found from various journals, magazines, articles, e-newspapers, etc. The research is also based on various referred sources published, unpublished and electronic.

INTRODUCTION

*As envisioned and mentioned by Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam,*ⁱ half of our population

being in their 20s is one of the greatest strengths of our country. The minds of these younger generations will help us transform into a developed country. However, it will only be possible if quality higher education reaches each and every person of the young generation. Quality education will not only develop an individual's mental and physical intelligence but also provide skills to ensure his own as well as the country's well-being.ⁱⁱ

As we all are aware of our country's situation, most of the part of our country is not much developed, keeping in mind there is a lack of education institutes due to various reasons, Students have fewer options for universities and colleges, so couldn't have the knowledge and skill-based learning. Perhaps, Online Distance Learning (ODL) made it easy and possible

for students to learn and develop themselves without relocating. The reason why ODL is playing a crucial role in the development of the country's youth is by improvising their knowledge and skill with limited resources and making education within reach for everyone (Sheeja 2016).ⁱⁱⁱ

Two decades ago, online distance education was still in its neophyte stages; however now it is accepted and updated into technology-enabled learning environments, where e-Learning scenarios, ubiquitous technologies, Cloud Computing, simulation, gaming, and personal learning environments have become the best options for the education society which contributes towards productive knowledge and learning for the citizen of the country and also which brings rewarding changes in the life of young growing generation and country which resulted in strong economical and social improvement along with that cultural

and political advancement of the society and country.

The online education platform helped and empowered the learner without any hesitation and without affecting the usual lifestyle and their requirements. Hence, ODL is a ray of hope to learn positively and accepting with an open mind and without any kind of time restriction and money. It is also known as Flexible “Independent Learning,” “Flexible Learning,” and “Self-Learning.”^{iv}

In an era of lifelong learning, distance education has become a natural choice for millions of people who would like to upgrade their knowledge from time to time to keep up with the drastic and revolutionary changes that are occurring in every field of study. ODL is a fantastic option that allows participation of a vast majority of the society without any partiality

of gender discrimination or age factor, which made them equipped with the necessary prowess to possess the standard of comfort in all the sense. ^v

An unexpected pandemic led to a forced lockdown worldwide and has affected education institutes majorly. The lockdown that came in force more than a year ago has caused many issues for humans or say learners. In such a scenario, ODL was the only path left for all the stakeholders of the education society, which was the saviour system for the learning youth to grow in the circumstances and this pessimistic situation turned the table toward the continuation of learning. Online training offers a secure and convenient way to develop important skills for one's future. Professional development is nearly endless, and a wide range of online courses are a boon for them; it also adds benefits such as training at their place.

Earlier many universities and colleges were conducting online courses but there was always a doubt about its validity, but now-a-days online education systems or distance learning are helpful not only for professionals and college students but also for school-going students. After almost a year of shutdown, schools and colleges were finally reopened not for the lectures but for the professional exams and physical exams conducted in October and so on. With no access to face-to-face training, dispersed workforces have shifted their attention to the web, with health, safety, and wellbeing courses topping the agenda. As businesses return to work, this trend is set to continue. ^{vi}

Today Education, right from junior KG to the highest degree, is available online. Also, the teachers and mentors are learning to teach online. This is a necessity or can say compulsory qualification and

quality for them. Online study cannot be imagined without Learner Support.

Learner support plays an essential role to support the learners. All the traditional supports have now been replaced by functions such as multimedia, audio, video, radio, e-book, software for distance education, interactive portal, telephonic and video conferences, etc. Especially for a new learner or user who needs constant guidance from scratch to access the classes and study, these functions prove to be vital.^{vii}

As mentioned by Sheeja (2016), "These types of innovations in mainstream education may even have effects beyond the realm of education itself. In this age of globalization, institutional and intergovernmental cooperation is growing, and the concept of a 'global classroom' has become a reality." The democratic governments have adopted mass education as their motto. Distance education, in this

context, plays a critical role in the global knowledge-based society. Distance Learning takes on added significance in a country such as India, where traditional educational institutions with limited seats frequently fail to meet the rising demand for higher education.

E-learning is now much more accessible as a result of our significant investment in making our platform as user-friendly as possible. People whose mother tongue is not English, profoundly deaf or physically challenged people, can use ODL with comfort at home.

The development of information and communications technology is playing a vital role in today's scenario. It is not only providing high standard education for the Learner but also helping them stay armed to survive in this competitive world, and has opened choices to select subjects as per convenience.^{viii}

Massive open online educational courses (MOOCs) are only a small part of the long-established distance education and online course delivery landscape. The pandemic is refocusing attention on the potential for MOOCs to democratize higher education by making it affordable or free to anyone on the planet. As rightly said by Gabriel Kabanda, “Traditional Higher Educational Institutions can question the merit and validity of degrees or MOOCs or such micro-credentials but the reality is that employers are gradually shifting their recruitment preferences for proven skills without any particular bias on the source of certification of those skills.”^{ix}

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Online distance education has become very necessary given the impact of the current situation on the education system and its effect on all the stakeholders, especially on the students. There are many research papers reported in this area.

Kabanda (2014) mentioned the strategy for massive enrolments and e-learning is developed and this includes mobiles and ICT and has become an important pillar in open and distance learning. E-learning encompasses supported learning, blended learning, and learning that is delivered entirely online. The emergence of massive open online courses (MOOCs) has changed the landscape of quality assurance.

Bordoloi (2018) observed that ODL is the best option that prepares the students to be skilful and get affordable education at their own pace and place. In addition, ODL provides a wide option to select the subject and entitles them to the degrees and education which transforms and empowers the nation’s youth.

Chattopadhyay (2019) showed the case study of IGNOU, and analysed many factors and effects on all the stakeholders,

especially how students are facing the issues along with their whole team or say many people's involvement.

Verma (2020) explored how the new way of education changed everyone's perspective and way of learning, and also that along with this people adopted technology and the English language with very ease. Earlier they used to be scared but now it has become an important part. He explored how the mobile became a boon for all the students.

David (2020) revealed how online learning is important at a time when COVID affected the students, teachers as well as everyone's family. He focused on the impact on student life and also how a student should try to be 'atmanirbhar' and try to be a support for their family in this horrible situation. Along with that, they should be more focused on the academics and also he agrees online teaching is no easy task for anyone but if students should

take it as a challenging opportunity, it can lead them to a bright future but with a condition that they should cope-up with this and should become a good survivor.

Thomas (2020) observed online education is useful for any kind of disability, so technology is the biggest boon for all and especially people with special ability who give lectures and interaction at their place and make it possible to continue to study in this weird situation.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF ODL

Online distance learning, like all other things, does not come without its set of limitations. Some of the major limitations are as follows:

Ø In India, we don't have proper infrastructure for the internet and electricity, especially in the interior parts.

The connectivity issue is the biggest hurdle for online education.

Ø Many students can't afford gadgets and don't even have mobile phones which are compatible with the software which is used by the institutes and universities. Due to this, the students can't attend and participate in the same or if they can attend then maybe missing important features of the application which is used for online education.

Ø Many universities and institutions are yet to select the right pedagogical approach and the selection of support tools for effective learning with well-developed IT infrastructure is of great relevance.

Ø Lack of research about factors that affect the learning of students through ODL and the role of technical support systems in it.

Ø People are still habitual of traditional ways of learning and due to that, they expect interpersonal relationships. Due to lack of personal attention, face-to-face learning, and teaching system, both students and teachers face issues in monitoring and observing body language, verbal response, eye contact, etc.

Ø In a distance learning setting, instructors have little or no knowledge or contact with the audience when they prepare and deliver instructional lessons. Online instructors also experience limited interaction with students whether the class is taught synchronously or asynchronously. Most of the faculty members are generally trained in 'hand to hand' teaching, so it has become difficult for them to adopt to ODL.

Ø Large enrolment was considered as the goal and achievement of distance education institutions while the question of quality was not given as much attention as

it deserved. This kind of attitude deteriorated the quality of many distance education institutions.

Ø Increase in the number of dropouts is a very serious problem experienced by most distance education centres. Many students complain that it is difficult to stay motivated without having to attend a class every day. Since most online programs are self-paced, it can be easy to lose motivation, and dropout rates tend to be higher for distance education.

Ø There is a lack of motivation and follow up and, as a result, ODL is taken for granted. Hence, education becomes the last priority due to a lack of monitoring or push to them, which is neither beneficial for the student nor the teacher.

Ø As compared to the courses of traditional colleges, the degrees obtained through Programmes offered by some

leading distance education institutions are not well recognized by the employers.

Ø For teachers, it is very difficult to find out a student's work authenticity, i.e. to confirm whether students have submitted assignments honestly or fraudulently. Just as in other fields of social life, the emergence of fraudulence impedes the effective delivery of education and a great threat to our higher education system.

Ø Another concern for teachers and institutes is the copyright of the course and material. Due to this concern, course material is given in such a way that it can be installed or read in a specific software and on only one gadget where the student installs it and not on their other gadget or not in mobile. It should not be like that because it creates a difficult situation for the students to study wherever they want.

Ø Many times, teachers or the institute are not equipped with technical support, not even aware of the issues faced by the students while studying and accessing the study material. Distance education institutions are more satisfied with administrative support services than with interactivity-related support services.

CONCLUSION

Distance between human beings is the only way in which this universe can wipe out the virus known as coronavirus, which has created a “pandemic.” The most important question here is how one will cope up with the knowledge and learning process. The answer to this question would be through technology that can make wonders. The only requirement is the foundation of incorporating the said architecture in such a way that it can reach everyone worldwide. Although distance learning would be preferably advantageous

because students would have the access to the entire world by seating at home in their comfort zone. In this way, along with the students of their own country the Foreign Universities would be able to interact with students of different countries, and even students can pursue their dream career through this route by connecting to Foreign Universities.^x

For ODL, the main arm is the technology that should be adopted by everyone in this pandemic situation, which is the most important need for online work and online education. Adoption of technology is very much beneficial as it makes work more efficient, perfect, and easy and also can help reach the largest audience effectively. For the virtual meeting and virtual education, it is important to connect with the students, keeping them engaged with the lectures and also making them understand the subjects and increasing their participation in the

lecture. In order to help students and teachers cope with the changed education scenario, various tools and softwares have been developed. Google Classroom is one such tool, which helps in almost all aspects of learning and teaching, from giving an assignment to grading them and from sharing notes to solving student's doubts. Students are using various tools of MS-Office such as PowerPoint, Word, etc. to present their assignments. Teachers are conducting classes on applications such as Zoom, MS teams, WebEx, and many more. Due to this pandemic, all the exams are conducted online, therefore it leads to learning technology very much in detail and fluently so everyone can access the exams and appear well-mannered. ^{xi}

The outcome of ODL is to bring a positive transformation in society, to the nation, and by not judging any casteism of an individual. However, to spread the benefits of education, differences have to

be reduced to a certain amount in the Indian Education Society. As a result, ODL should present more innovative ways such as reaching all over the world. Positively speaking, ODL is a platform where our nation can stand lifted and students can grab and approach more and more possibilities of learning.

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