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Training Needs For The Application Of Communication Technology
In Distance Education In India

By

Abdul Waheed Khan
TRAINING NEEDS FOR THE APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIA

by

Abdul Waheed Khan
Director
Communication Division
Indira Gandhi National Open University

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TRAINING NEEDS FOR THE APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIA*

INTRODUCTION

Before we proceed to examine the training needs for the application of communication technology in distance education in India, it is necessary to describe the present scenario of distance education in the country and the existing status of the use of communication technology in education in general and distance education in particular. I have divided this paper into three parts. In part one I have discussed the scenario of distance education in India. Part two discusses the application of Communication Technology in distance education. And, part three examines the training needs.

SCENARIO OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIA

Although distance education in its modern sense is of recent origin in India, the need for such a system had begun to be felt soon after the independence of the country in 1947. The increase in demand for higher education on one hand and limitations of the formal system of education on the other, led to the search for alternative educational system. In 1961, the Ministry of Education, Government of India, appointed an Expert Committee on Correspondence Courses and Evening Colleges. The Expert Committee

*by Abdul Waheed Khan, Director, Communication Division, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi
felt that "the Correspondence method admits of greater flexibility than class room education, particularly in the combination of subjects leading to a degree, and this is an advantage that should be fully exploited in the interest of sound education". It also felt that "Correspondence courses expand and equalize educational opportunity".

Distance education in its early form of correspondence education came into being in the country in the beginning of sixtees. The School of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education of Delhi University was the first institution in the country to introduce correspondence courses in 1962. Encouraged by the success of early experiments, the Education Commission of 1964-65 recommended "fuller exploitation of the method for a wide range of purposes". The Commission also sought to remove any apprehension that correspondence courses are an inferior form of education than what is given in regular schools and colleges. The Commission observed "Experience abroad and experiments in India have shown results which on balance tend to strengthen the case for correspondence education".

Recognizing the relevance of education through correspondence to meet the ever growing demand for higher education, several universities and institutes of higher learning started establishing separate centres or adopted the method as a part of their regular curricula. Today more than 30 conventional universities and institutes offer education through correspondence to the following categories of students:

(a) Students who had to discontinue their formal education owing to pecuniary and other circumstances;
(b) students in geographically remote areas;
(c) students who had to discontinue their education because of lack of aptitude and motivation but who may later on become motivated;

(d) students who cannot find a seat or do not wish to join a regular college or university department although, they have the necessary qualifications to pursue higher education;

(e) individuals who look upon education as a life-long activity and may either like to pursue their knowledge in an existing discipline or to acquire knowledge in new areas; and

(f) in-service persons

Today education through correspondence is relatively widespread and enrolments in correspondence institution stands at five per cent of the total enrolment in the conventional Universities. The courses offered under correspondence system are the same as under the conventional system. However, after 1970s vocational and employment oriented diploma courses in information science, journalism, tourism and hotel management, library science, broadcasting and office organisations, etc., are being offered by a few universities. The quality of education through correspondence varies considerably from one institution to another. But a close look at the working of these institutions would reveal that they are facing several problems and constraints. These include lack of qualified and adequate staff; lack of proper course planning and preparation; rigidities in the courses offered; lack of adequate laboratory and library facilities; and almost complete reliance on printed material. What is most disturbing is that most of the correspondence institutes are regarded as revenue generating centres rather than serving as an alternate system of education.
In recent years some of the correspondence institutes have begun to introduce such elements as study centres and use of radio and TV. Interestingly, some of the Directorates of Correspondence are changing their names to Directorates of Distance Education. Similarly by adopting some of the features of Distance Education in its modern sense, a few universities have started using the term "Open University System". If past experience is any guide this trend is likely to continue.

Open University

The idea of establishing an open university was first mooted in early seventies. The Government of India appointed a working committee in the 1971 to examine the feasibility of establishing an open university in India. In its report the working group observed: "In a situation of this type, where the expansion of enrolments in higher education has to continue at a terrific pace and where available resources in terms of men and money are limited, the obvious solution, if proper standards are to be maintained and the demand for higher education from different sections of the people is to be met, is to adopt the open university system with its provision of higher education of part-time or own-time basis. The group, therefore, recommends that the Government of India should establish as early as possible a National Open University by an Act of Parliament".

The idea of establishing a National Open University received further impetus when the committee to enquire into the working of the central universities, appointed by the University Grants Commission in 1982 recommended: "that practical steps for creating a National Open University of Distance Education be taken up without delay". The Committee further recommended that "Mass media such as Radio and Television, which are already becoming to be used in conjunction with the correspondence education, and for
which greater potential is being created through the satellite, should be employed in a systematic manner to enlarge the scope and enrich the quality of distance education”.

While the proposal for establishing a National Open University was still under consideration, the Government of Andhra Pradesh decided to establish an Open University in India in 1982 to provide "access to higher education to the adult population of the State, for upgrading their functional capacities and improving quality of their life in context of broader social and political objectives of equalisation of educational opportunities and the emergence of the new concept of life long education”.

The establishment of Andhra Pradesh Open University marked the beginning of a new era in distance education in India. The country took a giant step in the field of distance education with the launching of Indira Gandhi National Open University on 20th September, 1985. While laying the foundation stone of Indira Gandhi National Open University, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi said "Our endeavour is that in India, the poorest, the most backward children receive the best possible education, and in this direction, today we have to take a step forward. The open university will extend educational opportunities to all the corners of the country…………".

The objectives of the Indira Gandhi National Open University is to "advance and disseminate learning and knowledge by a diversity of means, including the use of any communication technology, to provide educational opportunities for higher education to a larger segment of the population and to promote the educational well being of the community generally, to encourage open university and distance education system in the educational pattern of the country and to coordinate and determine the standards in such systems".
Apart from Indira Gandhi National Open University and Andhra Pradesh Open University, plans to set up open universities in Bihar, Kerala, Maharashtra, West Bengal, U.P., Rajasthan and Orissa are at various stages of preparation.

USE OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

One of the basic defining elements of distance education is the use of some form of mechanical or electronic communication such as audio cassettes, radio, video cassettes, television and films and provision of two way communication between the teacher and the learner. This element is common in the definition of distance education given by Keegan Dohmen Meckenzie, Peters and Moore. Importance of the use of communication technology has been emphasized in the definition of distance education given by Keegan. Synthesizing the definition of different writers, Keegan proposes the following definition of distance education.

Distance education is a form of education characterized by —

- the quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process; this distinguishes it from conventional face-to-face education.

- the influence of an educational organisation both in the planning and preparation of the learning materials and in the provision of student support services; this distinguishes it from private study and teach yourself programmes.

- the use of technical media; print, audio, video or computer to unite teacher and learner and carry the content by the course.

- the provision of two-way communication so that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogue, this dis-
tistinguishes it from other uses of technology on education. May benefit from or even initiate dialogue, this distinguishes it from other uses of technology on education.

- the quasi-permanent absence of the learning group throughout the length of the learning process so that people are usually taught as individuals and not in groups, with the possibility of occasional meeting for both didactic and socialization purposes.

That communication technology plays a very significant role in distance education system is evident from the fact that distance teaching universities are sometimes referred to as 'University of the Air'. Emphasising the importance of media of communication Anthony Bates observed: "without the early involvement of the BBC, it is almost certain that open university would not have been created. It was the potential of broadcasting which first led Harold Wilson to consider the establishment of the open university, the initial concept of which was significantly called the University of the Air. Further more, the relationship with the BBC gave credibility and responsibility to a project wishes many at the time considered to be a political gimmick. Perhaps most important of all, the link with the BBC provided the publicity and access to the public which led to over 50,000 applicants in the first and subsequent years of operation. Without broadcasting, it is very doubtful that the open university would have survived or prospered".

Communication Technology Supports the Distance Education System in a Variety of Ways:

- It increases the opportunities for higher education by enabling large number of people to learn in their own social and physical environment and at their own pace.

- The benefits of higher education can be extended to those who cannot receive college education because of their social and professional obligations.

- It enables the institutions to extend the benefit of new knowledge which is being generated and accumulated at a
rapid pace. Dissemination of knowledge through face-to-face interaction between teacher and learner is time-consuming, resulting in diffusion of outdated and obsolete factual information. Education via communication technology can offer people the opportunity to learn the latest information.

- It enables the learners to receive information from sources who are most knowledgeable and have the expertise in presenting the information effectively. Thus, the learner is not bound down to one teacher as in case of formal and conventional system of education.

- Unlike the formal system of education where the benefit of education is restricted to only those who attend classes, the use of communication technology, particularly the broadcast media, benefits even those people who may not be enrolled as a student.

- It can motivate people to enrol as a student. Exposure to information presented through media may act as a catalyst to convert a latent desire to learn into a felt need.

- Time spent on learning can be reduced by using communication technology.

- It can help to develop the sense of belonging and fellow-feeling with the institution, teaching staff and the students.

- Communication technology, particularly television or video plays an absolutely vital role in science courses through the provision of demonstration and mathematics course, through the illustration of principles.

In the higher education the use of radio and television is perceived by the Ministry of Human Resource Development as an important means of furthering the objectives of democratisation of higher education and maintenance of higher quality, covering larger segments of population, vocations and professions, encouraging and strengthening the open and distance educational systems in the country and in providing teacher’s training.

The National Policy on Education, 1986 has emphasised the use of communication technology in formal and non-formal educa-
tion programme. The policy paper states :

"Modern communication technologies have the potential to bypass several stages and sequences in the process of development encountered in earlier decades. Both the constraints of time and distance at once become manageable. In order to avoid structural dualism, modern educational technology must reach out to the most distant areas and the most deprived sections of beneficiaries simultaneously with the areas of comparative affluence and ready availability".  

One of the major recommendations of the Working Group on Higher Education as well as by the Working Group on Distance Education and Educational Technology for the Seventh Plan is that the use of mass media in formal and non-formal open learning programmes should be greatly enhanced. By the turn of the century, the student enrolment in higher education would almost double itself and reach the 5.5 million mark. Even with enhanced allocation of resources for higher education, the country would not be able to provide adequate facilities for face-to-face education for little more than three million students. It is imperative, therefore, to make use of communication technology and distance education system to cope up with the growing demand for higher education.

The experience of using communication technology for higher education in India is rather limited. Some of the universities like Delhi, Madurai Kamraj, Punjab etc. have been using radio for higher education but the evaluation of these programmes done by the Audience Research Unit of All India Radio shows that there are several short-comings, particularly in the area of planning and training which makes the programmes less effective.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has been broadcasting science programmes through TV for under-graduate students. Indirectly the programmes also benefit the teachers and the general
public. The feedback received on these programmes shows that the programmes enjoy popularity among students, teachers and the general public.

The UGC has already set up a few Audio-Visual Research Centres and Educational Media Research Centres in different universities to create the infrastructure and to develop human resources required for exploitation of the potential communication technology for higher education in the country. A proposal to set up a National Centre for Educational Media Research and Development in universities is under active consideration. This shows that UGC is fully committed to promote the use of communication technology for higher education in the country.

The experience of Farm School on the AIR and SITE shows that used imaginatively, radio and television can prove to be very effective educational tools.

The Andhra Pradesh Open University has been broadcasting radio programmes to its students right from the start. There is proposal also to broadcast television programmes.

However, education continues to occupy the lowest rank in the ladder of priorities in All India Radio and Doordarshan. The Working Group on Software for Doordarshan observed that only fourteen percent of the television time is being used for development programmes as against twentyone percent devoted to films and film-based programmes. This clearly indicates that this powerful medium is not being properly used for development efforts in the field of education, agriculture, health, family planning etc. A similar observation was made by Working Group on Autonomy for All India Radio and Doordarshan, headed by Mr. George Vergese in 1977.
ture for production of audio and video programmes. By the end of the decade about 2000 personnel will likely be engaged in educational media work. The decade of 90s is likely to experience prolific growth in the educational media organisations and the number of people working for these organisations.

In order for the personnel to contribute effectively to designing, development and production of educational material for the electronic media (audio, video, radio and television) they would require specialised training in software and hardware.

At present Film and Television Institute of India, Pune and Space Application Centre are the main organisations providing training in television production. The Staff Training School of All India Radio caters to the training needs of its own staff. These institutions have not been able to cope up with the training needs of Doordarshan (Television India) and All India Radio due to rapid expansion of television and radio in the recent years. Although Mass Communication Research Centre, at Jamia Millia University, has facilities for training in electronic media, it is basically an academic programme. Besides, their training facilities are very limited.

Apart from limited training facilities, the existing training institutions are not necessarily geared to training people in educational radio and television programme production.

Personnel working directly in the educational media organisations and the academics associated with the production of educational programmes would require training in the following areas:
Considering large number of personnel already working in educational media organisations and projected growth it is necessary to develop training facilities at the following institutions:

- Central Institute of Educational Technology for CIET and SIET personnel.
- National Centre for Educational Media Research and Development in Universities for the personnel of EMRCs and AVRCs.
- Indira Gandhi National Open University for personnel of IGNOU and other State Open Universities.
- Staff Training Schools of All India Radio and Doordarshan for training of its own staff.

Apart from developing the training facilities within the country certain specialised international training programmes may also be necessary.
Based on these observations, the Project Report on Indira Gandhi National Open University suggested that "Efforts should be made, therefore, to develop separate and independent educational channels on T.V. and Radio. Only then National Open University can make use of these channels for educational purposes effectively."12

The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), the first federal distance education institution in India, which was set up in September, 1985 has adopted multi-media instructional system i.e., printed material, audio cassettes, video cassettes, radio, television, tutorial system, contact classes and summer schools. IGNOU has established a Communication Division with the following objectives:

- To strengthen and enrich quality of instruction through creative and imaginative use of communication technology.
- To provide communication materials for training of various categories of staff of IGNOU, State Open Universities and other distance education institutions.
- To motivate adult learners to obtain higher education through distance education system.
- To create favourable environment for distance education system through change in the attitudes of educationists, planners, administrators and professionals.
- To serve as a focal point for promotion of the use of communication technology in distance education system.
- To serve as a national centre of excellence in communication for distance education.
- To promote innovation and research in communication technology for distance education.
- To disseminate speedily, instructional messages to a large number of adult learners spread all over the country.
- To advise the University in respect of framing of policy
and planning for use of communication technology in its programmes.

- To coordinate communication related activities with communication agencies such as AIR, Doordarshan, AVRCS, EMRCs ISRO, State Open Universities and similar agencies.

- To develop academic programmes in communications.

The communication Division works closely with the facilities to design, develop and produce audio and video programmes for various courses offered by the University. It has been organised into following functional units:

- Programme Production Unit.
- Technical Operation Unit.
- Research and Development Unit.
- Teaching and Training Unit.
- Administrative Unit.

TRAINING NEEDS

The present decade has witnessed the emergence of a number of educational media organisations. Today some of the major educational media organisations in the country are:

- Central Institute of Educational Technology (CIET)
- State Institute of Educational Technology (SIET)
- University Grants Commission (UGC)
- Educational Media Research Centres (EMRC)
- Audio Visual Research Centres (AVRC)
- Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)

Most of the organisations listed above have already developed or are in the process of developing basic infrastruc-
References


7. Excerpt from Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's inaugural speech on November 19, 1985.


