

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIA – A BOON OR BANE?

Dr.R.Jayaprakash Reddy M.Com,M.B.A,M.Phil,Ph.D*

ABSTRACT

Distance Education/Learning is the modern way of education in India and getting popular year after year and many universities are offering all degrees and diplomas starting from under graduation to post graduation and research degrees including Ph.Ds. Distance education is designed for learners who live at a distance from the teaching institution or people who do not have time to attend regular classes. It is also a good option if learners want to pursue education and gain work experience at the same time. Accessibility, affordability and flexibility are key drivers for distance education. Despite the advantages, distance learning suffers from several disadvantages like lack of interaction, non-suitability to all and to all courses, poor adaptability to modern technologies, employers disinterest etc. Some institutions and universities are exploiting the learners with high fee and misusing the distance learning system in the country in different ways. Fixing age limit, systematic conduct of classes and examinations and strict vigilance of Distance Education Council (DEC) go a long way in successful running of distance learning in India.

(Key words: Distance Education- Distance Education Council (DEC) – Positive side – Negative side – Ugly face of distance learning)

* * * *

* **Principal, SGHR-MCMR Degree College, Guntur-522 007**

Introduction:

Distance Education is the modern way of education in India and getting popular year after year and many universities are offering all degrees and diplomas starting from under graduation to post graduation and research degrees including Ph.Ds. In ancient times, education used to be imparted to the students at gurus ashrams. Later it is taught in schools, colleges and universities. Once a student leaves his/her studies and joins a job or does some business or otherwise, he/she could not go for further studies. Particularly for home makers it is not possible to pursue further studies. Keeping the interest of those people who want to continue their education even continuing their regular way of life, distance mode of education was introduced in our country similar with other countries in the world.

Positive side of Distance Education:

The following are some of the advantages of distance education:

1. **Flexibility:** With distance learning courses, learners can complete their course work from just about anywhere, provided there's a computer and internet connection. This allows learners to work when and where it is more convenient for them without attending regular classes in the busy life.
2. **Time and money saving:** Taking a course through distance mode can be one way to cut down costs. Since learners can often work from home to complete their class assignments, both time and money are saved.
3. **Multiple choices:** Distance learning allows the learners to choose from a wide variety of schools to complete their education. Distance learning institutes and colleges specialize in peculiar field or one that can provide a great general education distance education is best suited. Either way, the options for education will be greatly expanded.
4. **Low costs:** Fees for distance education courses are generally cheaper than on-campus colleges.
5. **Learn while working:** Generally distance education can usually be completed as per the learner's schedule, it is much easier to complete distance learning courses while working

than more traditional educational programs. Job provides income, experience and stability while completing the degree giving less to worry about and more time to focus on studies.

Negative side of Distance Education:

The following are some of the disadvantages of distance education:

1. **Lack of social interaction:** If the learner likes classroom environment distance learning is not suitable. In distance mode students may get some interaction in class rooms and through email, but the experience will be quite different than traditional courses.
2. **Not suitable for all learners:** Not everyone is an ideal candidate for distance learning. If the learner has problems with motivation, procrastination and needs lots of individual attention from an instructor he has to think long and hard before enrolling in a distance learning programme.
3. **Some employers don't accept distance degrees:** While a majority of employers will, there are some who still see a stigma attached to distance learning. Distance degree may not be the ideal tool for some job fields or for future learning.
4. **Requires adaptability to new technologies:** If the learner loves working with technology he may get a lot less out of a distance course than his tech-savvy counterparts.
5. **Not all courses suitable under distance mode:** It is true that some courses like medicine and nursing aren't offered or feasible under distance mode.

The Distance Education Council (DEC) is an apex body for the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system India. It is empowered, under Statute 28 of the IGNOU Act, to act as an apex body for the ODL system. It is responsible for promotion, coordination and maintenance of standards of the ODL system. As per Clause 4(a) of Statutes 28 read with Section 16 and Section 4 and 5 of IGNOU Act 1985(No. 50 of 1985), passed by the Parliament, the Distance Education Council (DEC) has prescribed the guidelines for determination of standards for the Distance Education systems in the country. It is therefore, necessary for all Centres/Institutions/Directorates imparting education through distance mode to get their Degrees/Diplomas/Certificates (Programmes) recognized and approved by the DEC.

IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University) is the pioneer in the system of education, starting number of regional centres, study centres in the country, introduced many courses both at UG level and PG level. Even research programmes were also introduced.

Besides the guidance given by the academic counsellors, the lectures through C.Ds, audio equipments were also introduced at a massive scale. Following the system and utilising the opportunity many universities and institutions came forward and established their own branches of distance education centres. Some universities were also established for distance education purpose.

According to Prof N R Madhava Menon, the legal educator and founder-director of National Law School of India University (NLSIU), for the distance education system in the country, there is deadly need to have an independent legislation like the UGC on an independent statutory basis. The distance educations, if properly organized, can almost double or treble higher education enrolment than at present.

To give a fillip to distance education in India, the HRD has decided on a new mechanism which will enable faster and transparent clearance to new distance education institutes and courses. The ministry last week decided that all distance education proposals will be discussed once every month by a joint committee of the University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), the three higher education regulatory bodies. Proposals regarding distance education are cleared by Distance Education Council (DEC) under IGNOU but the UGC and AICTE have been opposing several decisions citing regulatory flaws. No distance education institute or course is allowed without a mandatory no-objection certificate from UGC and AICTE but still approvals have been given.

Here started the dilution. Many universities and institutions started all types of courses with huge propagation and advertisements and started making money exploiting the large masses on a large scale. Even Ph.D degree is offered by some universities under distance mode. The case of Dravidian university of Andhra Pradesh can be cited as the suitable example.

Quality through distance mode of education became a big question mark. For example, some employers are openly declaring the distance mode degree holders are not eligible to apply for their jobs. Though the syllabi and courses structures look sound, the examinations, evaluation levels and results are questionable.

After knowing the recent developments and unwanted behaviours of certain distance education institutions and universities, the distance education council started imposing restrictions very late.

It is surprising that many youngsters, those who are supposed to study in regular colleges are opting distance mode just because of easy way out. Poor quality in education spoils the younger generation and future of the country.

Ugly face of Distance Learning:

In India there are many universities and institutions offering different degree and diploma courses under distance mode. Some facts need to be accepted while discussing about distance education. It seems that many such institutions are running distance education centres just to earn funds. They are sacrificing the quality, norms and future of the learners. Some of the features of some distance education institutions are as follows:

1. They charge high fees.
2. They do not supply quality study material and some universities do not revise the material even after a decade.
3. They even hire material of other universities.
4. Counselling sessions are not conducted or conducted just for the sake of fulfilment of norms without commitment which includes inexperienced and unqualified faculty appointment for counselling sessions at certain study centres.
5. They encourage copying, or mass copying are the practice of certain study centres.
6. They ask the evaluators to evaluate easily and see that more students get through in the examinations.
7. They offer all types of courses even without infrastructure and lab facilities in the concerned study centres.

After discussing the advantages, disadvantages and some of the facts about distance education in India, the researcher suggests the following for betterment of distance education in the country.

Suggestions:

1. No person is allowed to study under distance mode unless he or she completes 25 years of age. This suggestion is given keeping in view the enrolment in distance learning hampering the enrolment in regular colleges and youth without job doing courses under distance learning may miss discipline and systematic learning.
2. Examinations should be conducted in regular colleges rather than at study centres, if possible along with regular students.
3. The distance education council need to continuously monitor the distance education system in the country and take appropriate steps and see that dilution at any stage should be stopped.
4. The institutions and universities offering courses under distance mode should supply updated study material as the learners feel it difficult to acquire with the latest developments in the respective fields of study.

References:

1. Prabir Kumar Biswas and G. Mythili, "an analytical study of student attrition and completion of distance education programmes of Indira Gandhi National Open University"
2. "Inclusive and qualitative expansion of higher education, Compilation based on the deliberations of the working group for Higher Education in the 12th Five-Year Plan(2012-17)", University Grants Commission.
3. Dr.Vibhooti Shukla, Chair Professor, "Some Essays on Higher Education in India", Department of Economics, University of Mumbai.
4. "Higher Education in India at a glance", University Grants Commission, February, 2012.
5. Prof.V.R.Mehta, "The Killing of Higher Education" UGC golden jubilee lecture series, University Grants Commission.
6. Justice J.S.Verma, "Significance of Ethics in Education", UGC golden jubilee lecture series, University Grants Commission.
7. Justice Mhmd. Shamim, "Importance of Value-based education", UGC golden jubilee lecture series, University Grants Commission.
8. Prof. Ram Takwale, "Challenges and Opportunities of Globalization for Higher Education in India-Alternatives through e-Education", UGC golden jubilee lecture series, University Grants Commission.
9. Prof. Yash Pal, "Reinventing Education for an inclusive world", UGC golden jubilee lecture series, University Grants Commission.
10. International Association for Distance Learning-www.iadl.org.uk
11. Terry Anderson and Jon Dron, "Three Generations of Distance Education Pedagogy", International Review of research in open and distance learning, March, 2011.