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**New Paradigms for ODL Based Higher Education Sector in the  
New Millennium : A Case for India**

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**CONTEXTUALITY OF THE ISSUE :**

Indeed, isolation is history where as adaption is a reality. In the modern age through technological revolution the world has become a global society. In higher education sector rapid advancements are being introduced resulting to substantial changes in ODL system. In this process of evolution advancements of varied nature have been taking place which have mobilized us to rethink about the possession of stock of knowledge we have and how it could be updated with assistance of digital - education technology which is applicable to conventional as well as distance learning irrespective of difference in nature of the systems. Contextually, we are concerned with the stream of ODL; the means is technology and growth in stock of knowledge is the end.

It is admitted that today, higher education is no more a privilege left for a few who are richly blessed with resources. The ODL is a strong device for wide spread of mass access to education that forms a prodigious social phenomenon towards globalized education. With introduction of ODL higher education has approached at the doorstep of distance learners through wide network of ICT.

While adopting the strategy for DE system Professor Sir John Daniel has suggested the following three key issues : firstly, identity the real problem, secondly, do not promise more than distance education can deliver, and finally, take a broad view of distance learning.

It is admitted that support services form the core component of ODL. They concentrate on academic and personal problems of learners with the objective as how to solve their difficulties and to provide them regularly the feedback of their performance. On merit, the distance education system has gained more popularity so as to cater to the needs of ever increasing number of learners. In fact, correspondence institutions hardly provide any properly organized media support to their students. It is also true that as a consequence of revolution in education technology, a change is imperative in mental attitude towards communication as education is not limited to bookish knowledge rather the dimension of education has multiplier effect.

As a distinct feature of open learning there is no regular and direct contact with learners as the clientele is at distance. How to provide them facilities for open learning, needs a strong support system. Although the support services are numerous but the important ones may be listed as follows :

- (i) Counselling and evaluation of learners through contact classes.
- (ii) Distribution of course materials.
- (iii) Availability of other media (except distribution of print material) to distance learners, and
- (iv) Problems faced by learners and their solution etc.

Hence, for making the higher education viable and useful to learners structural and organizational changes are to be initiated in the advent of digital education technology, poses a grand challenge to distance education. In a changing scenario the stereotyped education technology has become obsolete in nature, a relic of the past now being substituted by digital education technology. It calls for a complete switch over from conventional higher education to digital one which requires mass structural change over in a globalized society.

## **NEW PARADIGMS THE ODL NEEDS**

The old practices prevalent in distance education may form a solid background rather they are not be regarded as instrumental for the excellence in distance learning in reference to fast changing education technology. Hence, modern higher education calls for a change of attitudes towards communication. In place of organizing traditional contact classes, they are to be replaced by frequent educational camps based on digital communication device. A profound computer connectivity has to be encouraged. Teachers and learners should establish a congenial network for digital habit. A new mind- set with a creative environment is essentially imperative. To make use of the modern education technology it is of paramount importance that modern work-stations cum cyber parlour be established leading tremendously to the use of computers.

Besides, more and more close access to IT be sought as it has taken a big leap. Teachers and students should work closely to form a network for enhancement of digital habit enabling them towards more and more use of digital messages. We do not have a magic band rather this change over would not take place spontaneously; overnight change over night is not possible, hence more efforts have to be mobilized so as to make it a reality. A creative environment for open meeting in open world would be conducive for higher ODL system and to give a concrete shape it requires huge investment towards establishment of modern work stations.

The higher education contains a number of inputs. Introduction of laptop has brought with it a portable technology in education and this mobility factor has a tremendous bearing on educational practices. Similarly, these days electronic mail systems have gained popularity; thus internet device has revolutionized in the field of communication. It has been observed that printing technology and micro-electric revolution are offering new electronic media of storing and retaining information, which are more economical and accessible to larger section of society. This has registered a tremendous break through in communication and information technology. Further, CD-ROM has proved effective to the new pillars of intelligence and for multimedia. To illustrate, a

single CD-ROM has a capacity to contain an entire course beginning from primary to university level; thus it has tremendous preservation capacity.

In fact, compartmental education practice approach cannot be considered useful today. To this effect, the pedagogic experts talk about three specific degree of generations or evolution of educational technology. The first generation involved printed material and the despatch of course material by postal services. The second generation comprised of sending of videos, radio programmes, open TV and Cable TV, and finally the third or the current generation involves video conferences plus networks i.e. intra-net/internet. Now in practice the synthesis of the three could prove a better presentation in ODL and the most common and practical form viewed thus, a mix of all the three generations would be towards a change in the nature and coverage of distance education, consequently, leading to form a data base to become the nodal source of intelligence.

### **EVOLVING A NEW UNDERSTANDING AMONG TEACHERS AND LEARNERS:**

In the new dawn of digital based education, it is highly desirable that teachers should fulfill the following basic qualities for furtherance of Q-distance education/ learning in the higher education sector.

- (i) Teachers will have to be fully familiar with all distance education technology along with their socio-economic feasibility.
- (ii) They should have proper training for using new technology with specific reference to electronic mail and video conferencing.
- (iii) They should get their homes and work places well equipped with new technology.
- (iv) Teacher's homes to be supplied with standard communication sets, besides equipments must be checked up, repaired and updated periodically.
- (v) They should form new digital habits, courses are to be designed on web-sites. On-line info is still to be popularised.

- (vi) As far as possible, teachers should decline/ eliminate the use of printed information depending upon the circumstances and should encourage replacement of paper by bits.
- (vii) They must become accustomed in practice by establishing a daily routine for electronic correspondence with their colleagues and students. It requires a well maintained a catalogue of e-mail addresses by them, and
- (viii) They should develop net criteria for converting remote learning into a creative environment.

It is also essential that distance-learners should be provided with regular tutorial care. Since digital device helps in maintaining a permanent connection between teachers and taught, the learners can be evaluated and assessed more frequently and that too on a more regular basis.

#### **THE INDIAN SCENARIO:**

India primarily an agricultural country which depends on vagaries of monsoon. During the VIII and IX Five Year Plan period on an average the GDP was at 6.5%. Average Annual rate of growth of value addition during 1990-99 had been 3.8 (agriculture), 6.7 (Industry) and 7.7 (Service sector). A negative growth being -0.7 was registered in agriculture.

On the other, Human Development Index (HDI) in 1998 ranked as 128 in the world. According to the Population Census 2001 the literacy is 65 percent. More than half of children 1-5 years old in rural areas are under nourished and infant mortality rate is about 72 per 1000. On Current Daily Status (CDS) the incidence of unemployment is above 7 percent. Population living below poverty line (BPL) during 1999-00 was 26.1 percent and in terms of standard of living indicator it recorded just 2496 calories in 1997. As many as 60 per cent rural households and about 20 percent urban households do not have a power connection. Only 60 percent urban households have taps within their homes and far fewer have latrines inside the house.

Similarly, with regard to environment indicator, in 1996 carbon dioxide emissions per capita was 1.1 (metric tones) corresponding to 19.7 MT in US. In fact, deterioration in environment especially in urban areas increases in slum population. Besides, pollution in air, river and water has vastly affected the quality of life of the urban poor. Land and forest degradation in the rural areas and over exploration of ground water had been seriously threatening substantially of food production. Besides, in many states of India, we have engineers but no fund for construction or maintenance, doctors but no medicines, teachers but no school building. Very little capital expenditure and asset creation, little funds for maintenance or repairs of assets.

India a developing country lacks adequate infra-structure due to paucity of resources which poses a limit to adoption of digital technology in higher education sector. As a result, distance learners in the country are still close to chalk and black-board devices. For sending messages to their respective homes, postal services are extensively used. Majority of students lack connectivity to computers, and ownership of personal computer is still far away, may be a day dream and utopain idea due to financial crunch, lack of technical knowledge and availability of other basic facilities. In ODL manual practices are still prominent, print material is widely used and quite popular among distance learners. For evaluation annual examination/ periodic tests are conducted. In general, printed question papers are distributed to them and they are required to answer those questions on answer books supplied to them by open institutions - on line computer education is not in vogue. However, in certain universities such as IGNOU, Delhi, VM Open University, Kota, APOU, Hyderabad etc. have been gradually switching over to modern education technology, but the change is not rapid, quite slow which does not cope with modern advancement in education technologies. Through widening infra-structural facilities the extensive use of digital education platforms could be possible.

**FINAL REMARKS:**

The ODL system has to travel faster so as to compete internationally. Today in ODL thrust has been for use of multi-media approach but the switch over by the

nation is very slow. It is also admitted that in distance education system the digital network forms the nervous systems. Indeed the education that is restricted to classroom will have no future. Besides, how to provide support services more efficiently poses a big challenge to higher open learning institutions. The situation is delicate which has to be handled with full precautions In the globalized society of today, open learning will include inter connectivity, inter changeable element and multi cultural tissues. The ODL has become the necessity of day which should be purposeful and functional to the community. We can not show miracles through ODL system, rather we have to base our expectations on ground reality.

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