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Information and Communication Technology and Its Impact on Open and Distance Learning

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1. Introduction

The open and distance learning education is now an inseparable part of our education system as it covers a large number of people for imparting education. This education is beneficial for those who are unable to attend at the regular class room programme. The science and technology is now entered into all the field and sectors of society from agriculture to art and culture, from economics to entertainment. The education system is also now benefited with the wide application of IT tools and techniques. The IT enabled open and distance learning education system is now become so sophisticated that one can get his or her desired education just with a click away. The rapid use of internet and other communication facilities have brought the open and distance education closer to the student community.

2. Open and distance learning

The website of University of Mumbai defines the open and distance education as ‘a distinct approach to impart education to learners who are removed in space and / or time from the teachers or the teaching institution on account of economic, social and consideration.’

An increasing number of universities are offering distance learning programmes as an additional educational facility. Wikipedia define the Distance education as “a field of education that focuses on the pedagogy and andragogy, technology, and instructional systems design that aim to deliver education to students who are not physically ‘on site’”. In this education system “rather than attending courses in person, teachers and students may communicate at times of their own choosing by exchanging printed or electronic media, or through technology that allows them to communicate in real time and through other chatting ways.” According to the Wikipedia the University of London was the first university to offer this type of education system started in 1858. In India, the University of Delhi established the School of Correspondence Course and Continuing Education in 1962. The Open University of United Kingdom is first full-fledged form of open and distance learning university started in 1969. In India, the Dr BR Ambedkar Open University is the first of its kind started in 1982.

Now in India, there are 13 State Open University, one National University (IGNOU) about 200 Directorate of Distance Education of the dual mode of university.

The quality of the education system in these institutes is not less than the regular courses. These universities are recognized by the Distance Education Council of India. In this regard Swaraj Basu, former Director, DEC, Delhi, says, “The council maintains the standards and organises the activities of distance learning. It ensures that the quality of teaching is maintained in all
universities”. About the quality of the open and distance learners, R. Reddy, former Vice-Chancellor, Dr B.R. Ambedkar Open University says, “By proving their capabilities, distance learners have shown that they are in no way inferior to students of regular formal institutions”.

The National Knowledge Commission is a high-level advisory body to the Prime Minister of India. The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was constituted on 13th June 2005 and started from 2nd October 2005 for three years. This Commission has given some recommendation on different key areas such as education, science and technology, agriculture, industry, e-governance etc.

Regarding the ODL system, the NKC gives prior importance on a radical reform of this system as more than one-fifth of the students enrolled in higher education are in the ODE stream. For another,

ODE has an enormous potential to spread higher education opportunities beyond the brick and mortar world.

3. Open and distance learning & globalization

The present age is the age of globalization where the world is becoming more uniform as different countries are coming together and share ideas, finances, capital, information technologies, services etc. Globalization gives an activity a world wide scope.

According to Wikipedia, ‘Globalization refers to the increasing unification of the world’s economic order through reduction of such barriers to international trade as tariffs, export fees. The goal is to increase material wealth, goods, and services through an international division of labor by efficiencies catalyzed by international relations, specialization and competition.’

The wave of globalization brings revolutionary changes in the world economy as well as in other socio-cultural aspects. The field of education is not free from the touch of changing hand of the globalization. The wide application of information and communication technology in different sectors, is nothing but one of the impact of globalization.

Knowledge is power and it is treated as the valued commodity in global economy; the generation and utilization of new knowledge leads a society higher in the competitive global economy market. It raises the concept of knowledge economy.

As the education is one of the main factors for the proper development of the society in the modern world, therefore all the modern countries follow the concept of right to education for all. To face the demand of time, now the all countries are giving prior importance in educating the children and young adults with latest trend of education with a global perspective through conventional as well ODL system. Globalization of education is natural as the uniformity in education becomes essential and need of hours to cope up in the knowledge-based economy and technology-driven economy. The use of ICT in ODL system is nothing but one the latest trend of education system and service influenced by globalization which makes possible to deliver education anyone, anytime, anywhere.

4. ICT based open and distance education

With the advent of the information and communication technology (ICT) revolution, the academic institutions are now providing a more flexible and open learning environment to the students. Along with the print material, the audio audio/video broadcasting, audio/video teleconferencing, computer aided
5. Open and distance education in Assam:

In Assam both the leading state universities i.e. Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University are providing distance education under their Directorate of Distance Education.

Gauhati University started distance education through its Directorate of Distance Education established in 1998. Post Graduate Correspondence School (PGCS) of Gauhati University has been now changed to Institute of Open and Distance Learning (IDOL, GU) from 2009.

In Dibrugarh University, Academic Council decided to introduce Distance Education in the University on 2000 and the Directorate of Distance Education (DDE, DU) was established in 2001. Both of these Universities provide different courses including certificate courses, PG Diploma Master Degree Course on different subject areas.

Now in Assam, Krishna Kanta Handqui State Open University (KKHSOU), the first state open university of the north east region of India has been established in 2006 and it started its academic programme from January, 2008.

Tezpur University is now also entering in this arena of open and distance learning education system. Now the Tezpur University, one of the central universities of Assam also has decided to start the distance education programme under the Directorate of Distance Education in 2011. The information regarding the Directorate of Distance Education, TU is available at http://www.tezu.ernet.in/tu_dde/.

Besides these four, there are different open and distance institutions in Assam which are running as study centers of other private as well as some government universities. It should be
mentioned that the pioneer of open and distance learning in Assam was the IGNOU as it started its study center in Guwahati in 1986.

6. Open and distance education in Assam and impact of ICT on it

To provide the best services among the student community of the institution/university, they are taking different initiatives. Among these, they also provide different ICT based services/facilities for the up dating students any time any where.

Here, the application of ICT on open and distance education of Assam is trying to show by discussing the three leading institution i.e. IDOL, GU, DDE, DU and KKHSOU, Assam which are running under State Government of Assam.

a) Website

The website for an educational institution is a very important facility as it provides detail, official and authentic information of the institution world wide.

The three distance learning institutions have their own website.

The IDOL, GU is available on web. The site is www.idolgu.org

The website of the Directorate of Distance Education, DU is http://ddedu.org

KKHSOU, Assam is available on www.kkhsou.in

b) Course material

In the ODL system, the course material (Self Learning Materials) is designed and provided by the university itself. Now in ICT based ODL the course materials are become available in electronic form along with the printed one.

The study materials of different course are now uploaded on website of the institutions. Besides the course materials, the sample question papers are also made available there.

IDOL, GU makes available of its study material at the ‘Bodhi Droom’ where all the course materials are uploaded subject wise. This e-learning portal is available at http://www.bodhidroom.idolgu.org/

DDE, DU has not yet developed its e-learning portal.

The ‘E-Bidya’ is the e-learning portal of the KKHSOU where the study materials of the University on various subjects are available for access.

c) Community radio

The open and distance education center should have their own community radio station for providing the community as well course on air for the students at distance and dense.

In the north eastern region of India, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University took the first initiative to launch the first community radio service of the region. The Community radio service of the KKHSOU is named as Jnan Taranga (90.4 FM) which has been rendering its broadcasting service since 20 November, 2010.

In Assam, the IDOL, GU has started its radio station known as Radio Luit (90.8 FM) the second community radio of the region, was launched on 1st March, 2011.

d) Alert services
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Now a day SMS alert service has become a popular and important services in different sectors and in distance education also it is very important as it can alert and inform the maximum number of user within a limited time. Email alert facility is also become very important and authentic alert service. This service alerts the members of the institutions about the day to day news on submission date of assignment, date of form fill-up, examination date, result etc.

The official news from the KKHSOU can be subscribed by sending SMS writing ON KKHSOU to 9870807070.

The IDOL, GU also provides the SMS alert to its community.

Both of these centers provide the Email alert facility also.

e) Result

The result of the open and distance education center is generally declared and announced online and the result and the mark sheet (provisional) can be viewed online and downloaded. Now the results are made available over the mobile phone.

The IDOL, GU and KKHSOU provide this facility to the user.

f) Toll free number

Toll free number is also very important tool for open and distance learning institution which can provide educational interactive voice response for meeting the educational need of the students.

IDOL, GU has a toll free number 1800-345-3614 and it also installed Interactive Voice Response (IVR) System.

DDE, DU has not their toll free number.

KKHSOU starts this service from 1st January 2011 and is the first educational toll-free system Interactive Voice Response (IVR) System in NE India region. The toll-free number is 1800-345-3613.

g) Other facilities

Now social networking sites are more popular among the folks specially among the student community and are very important for the open and distance learning institutions as this gives the learner a platform for discussing their problems, queries online through chat, group, forum etc.

KKSHOU developed and has launched its social networking site in 2011.

DDE, DU has not linked with this facility.

In IDOL, GU also facilities like online chat, group, forum etc are there through which the student can contact with the Subject coordinator as well as other course-mate online.

7. Conclusion

In the present electronic knowledge environment, a tremendous and continuous change is there ODL system that brings chances and challenges to the student as well as to the staff. In open and distance learning processes, the learners are far away from the physical learning environment, but the application of ICT provides the maximum opportunity both to the student and teacher community for academic interaction using different IT tools. In Assam, the scenario of application ICT in ODL is not ignorable, though DDE, DU is lacking behind in this race. IDOL, GU and KKHSOU are very active in this area. We hope in the coming days all these ODL based institutions will link with more ICT based teaching-learning-evaluating system. The workshop/ short term training programmes on application of ICT
on education system specially on ODL system arranging for both the teacher & student community are very essential and it may make this application more fruitful. Moreover, it makes education easily available as well as accessible for all. The National Mission for Education through ICT (NME-ICT) is the bold step of Government of India for implementation of Information & commutation technologyin education system.

**REFERENCE**

1. The Telegraph(Careergraph) dated August 7, 2008


