SOCIAL JUSTICE AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

Dr. (Mrs.) G. Vijayeshwari Rao
HOD of Sociology
Sheth NKTT College of Arts & Commerce,
Kharkar Ali, Thane (W), Maharashtra

Abstract

Distance education is widely known as a significant dimension of the new educational technology. In view of the radical changes that have taken place in the socio-economic order of the world – mainly due to population explosion, industrialization, urbanization and information explosion, new instructional systems which are flexible, economical and effective are being planned by educational policy makers all over the world. Thus, the need for innovative system like teaching by distance has been felt not only by those countries having limited resources but also by the affluent nations of the world.

As traditional system of education cannot alone cope with the educational, social and economic problems which the countries are facing due to the recent advancements in industry and technology and the Industries require manpower and the traditional system of education has limitations of rigidity of attending lectures, admission requirements etc., therefore, the invention of new media of communication has made it possible to carry the education outside the walls of the traditional universities to the remotest corners. Distance education has come up to overcome the limitations of traditional education. It is no longer considered to be a mere substitute for conventional education, nor is it a competitor. It is rather an arm for the support of formal education. In this paper , an attempt is made how distance mode helps to bridge the gap between disadvantaged and higher education

Keywords:- Educational technology, Radical change, population explosion. Education policy, higher education

In the era of continuing lifelong education, a new class of learners has emerged for whom education does not terminate at the end of formal schooling. Hence we need a system that helps transcend these limits of formal system and satisfy the learners' immediate as well as long term needs.

The policies and practices of the Government try to reflect the present demands and needs of the society, the new policy on education provided due emphasis on strengthening the distance and open learning systems in the country. Para 3.11 of the National policy on Education (NPE) (1986) states that 'Life-long education' is a cherished goal of the educational process. This presupposes universal literacy. Opportunities will be provided to the youth, housewives, agricultural and industrial workers and professionals to continue the education of their choice, at the pace suited to them. The future thrust will be in the direction of open and distance learning.

> "The National policy on Education (NPE) (1986) states that, 'In our national perception education is essentially for all'. The Program of Action (POA) of the NPE (1986) further states that "The open learning system augments opportunities for higher education, ensures access, is cost effective and promotes a relevant, flexible and innovative system of education".

"Prof. G Ram Reddy (1992) had analyzed the present state of higher education in India and highlighted the potentialities of distance education. He states that "During the last 45 years, there has been a phenomenal increase in the number of universities and colleges in the country, yet only 5% of the youth in the relevant age group had access to the facilities of higher education. Any increase in the number of conventional institutions of higher education is not going to meet the requirements of ever increasing student population in the country. The need of the hour is to search for alternatives and one such alternative was the distance mode of education" (Reddy, 1992).

"Prof. Kulandai Swamy (1994) said that distance education no longer is a matter of choice but a compulsion of time. There are 11 to 20 per cent students in the tertiary education system in many of the developing countries like Egypt, Mexico, Brazil, etc., while it is only 6 to 7 per cent in India. Among the remaining 94 per cent who are outside the system, there are many who are highly motivated, academically talented, but could not go for higher education mainly due to social, economical and geographic constraints. The distance education system, besides other objectives, meets the aspirations of these persons" (Kulandai Swamy, 1994).

By establishing various directorates of distance education at the conventional universities and state and national level open universities, distance mode of education has earned its credibility as an effective alternative and parallel system of imparting education to the large number of learners in the country.

Learning at a distance will be the pattern of education in the future. The developed countries have progressed from correspondence education to what is today called 'distance education'. India's goal is no less ambitious than distance education with its inter-disciplinary courses and multimedia techniques, but she is even now to perfect the techniques of Distance education.

Distance learners: Indian Scenario
India being an ancient civilization provides most complex challenges as far as disadvantaged learners are concerned. Caste system is most peculiar kind of social formation which is being practiced in this country for thousands and thousands of years. In pre-independence era, there is hardly any step initiated to break caste system however, in post –independence era, number of steps have been initiated in this direction like reservation of seats in higher education for SC, ST, OBC free education to women etc. these steps have substantially increased the level of literacy rate amongst theses sections and that is why demand for higher education has also increased to a reasonable extent. Since 1970 onwards, there has been a tremendous expansion both in terms of quantity and quality in distance education in India (Rana, Sudarshana 1994). It has already passed the stage of infancy and entered a stage of maturity. In distance education institutes, there is no reservation like conventional universities, however, there has been a substantial increase in enrolment in distance education institutes as far as these disadvantaged section of Indian society are concerned (DEC 2004). Nevertheless, it has yet miles to go to fully benefit this section. In order to know the exact level the following categories have been identified in the category of disadvantaged section of the Indian society:

Women
Rural people
Scheduled Caste
Scheduled Tribe
Other backward Castes
Physically handicapped

Social Justice and Distance Education
The concept of Social justice is a revolutionary concept which provides meaning and significance to life and makes the rule of Law Dynamic. When Indian society seeks to meet the challenge of Socio-Economic inequality by its legislation and with the assistance of the rule of law, it seeks to achieve economic justice without any violent conflict. The idea of a welfare state postulates unceasing pursuit of the doctrine of social justice. That is the significance and importance of the concept of Social Justice in the Indian context of today. The idea of welfare state is that the claims of Social Justice must be treated as a cardinal and paramount to all the citizen of the state.

Social justice is a device ensure life to be meaningful and liable with human dignity. State has to provide facilities to reach minimum standard of health, economic security and civilized living to the workmen. Social Justice is a means to ensure life to be meaningful and livable.

To achieve social justice and equity, the learners should be educated according to their needs. In this context the role of open learning system cannot be minimized.

Principles of education for learners with special needs are as follows:
There are mainly two principles which may determine an institutions philosophy towards the establishment of social justice to the learners.
- ❖ Principle of Rights Approach to learners with special needs and governance of the ideological stance of the institution towards the disadvantaged.
- ❖ Need for a greater interface between the open learning system and the conventional system / central/ state department, the private sectors and the local self government.

Principles of Right Approach
There have been paradigm shifts in the global approach towards the disadvantaged during the second half of the last century. The 'charity' and the 'welfare' orientation dominated the 1950s and 1960s. They focused and providing a range of services to ameliorate the condition of the disadvantaged. This was replaced by the development prospective wherein the street was on integrating the special groups into the development process. Then in 1980s and1990s it shifts to the "empowerment perspective" wherein the goal of development was seen as that which led to the empowerment of the disadvantaged. In the later part of last decade, the issues and concern related to the disadvantaged are being looked at the 'rights' perspective. This shifting approach can be diagrammatically represented as –

Trickle Down Approach
^
Development Perspective
^
Empowerment Perspective
^
Rights Approach
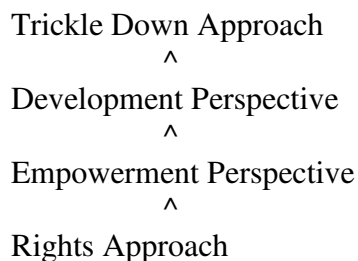
The shift to 'rights approach' completely changes framework of roles and responsibilities of the educational institutional and the learners. It is now not a matter of choice but it is an imperative. So the system of the institution in general and open distance institutions in particular has to be equitable in its approach and accessible to the learners. The management needs to enunciate proactive policy decisions and translate them into concrete and tangible outputs through responsible course design and development. The courses developed after the adequate needs assessments of the learner groups should be made accessible to them. This involves issues related to the delivery programmes of study. Finally appropriate evaluation procedures need to be put into place.

74

Institutional Policy:

Institutional policies should be pro active in intending to reach out to learners with special needs. The Open University's Acts should unambiguously states that the university shall provide higher education to the disadvantaged segments of society joint efforts should be made in promoting & implementing extension, training & education programmes for the empowerment of the learners with special needs is consisting a target group.

Responsive course design & development.

A multi pro aged approach in programmed design and development is essential to address the needs of all learners. The needs for the special learners like blind and deaf require special methods of providing instruction. Therefore as for as adaptation of the instructional system is concerned, use of Braille texts, audio cassettes, narrative videos, titled video cassettes may be developed for visually impaired & impaired hearing. Using community radio for non-formal education, using tele centres or tele cottages to allow the disadvantaged to log onto a world of opportunity. Audio or Audio conferencing is a well established teaching technology that is inexpensive, flexible and accessible. It builds learning communities, even where the community is physically dispensed and made up of students from a wide range of backgrounds. Online learning is the new generation in the evolutionally growth of open, flexible & distance bearing. Delivery mechanism:-

Diversified delivery mechanisms are necessary for different types of special learners. For example for the disabled, there is a need for more individualized student support.

Evaluation strategy:-

For the disadvantaged learners, the evaluation strategy may need to be adapted or alternatively, more innovative strategies have to be devised. Online, on-demand examination is more desirable. In the existing provision, the evaluation strategies live extending time for the examination, use of the writer, evaluating on the smaller portion of the tent & increasing the frequency of evaluation may be included. Priority should be given to theory & practical components depending upon the learners' capabilities.

For the open learning system to fulfill its policy, it is necessary to enhance its access to ensure equity and social justice in educational opportunities to the disadvantaged learners. In the knowledge era, education is a resource & for the development of disadvantaged, a Right approach and right attitude of the institutions will enhance their esteem & confidence.

It can be concluded that distance education in India (According to DEC, Data base; 2004, Distance Education Council, New Delhi) have achieved new heights and it has successfully spread into various disadvantaged sections of the Indian society. The women have come forward in a big way to acquire higher education through this mode by seeing their low level of literacy in the overall population of India. Further the rural population needs more attention of these institutions through opening more study centres in rural, tribal and backward areas as this will help them in enhancing the awareness of the privileges and also efforts need to be made to introduce more number of courses which should be designed especially for the people which have more practical relevance and job potential to motivate all the sections of learners of the Indian society.

References

Anand Satya Pal: 2000, University without walls. The Indian perspective in Correspondence Education, Vikas Publishing House,New Delhi: 1979.

Dikshit, H.P. et al (Eds) (2002). "Access & Equity: Challenges for Open & Distance Learning." New Delhi, Kogan Page.

G. Ramreddy (1992). "Distance Education, The Only Alternative, University News, 30(22)."

Garg, Suresh. et al (Eds) (2006). "Open & Distance Education in Global Environment." New Delhi, Viva.

Horn Thomas. D (ed). Reading for disadvantaged, Har court Brace and world inc. san Francisco 1971 pp 1-2

Kulandai Swamy (1994). "Facing New Challenges Through Distance education", Yojana, 38(1&2), 42-46.

Latchem, Colin (2001). "Using Telecentres in Support of Distance Education: The Common wealth of Learning, Knowledge Series. Vancouver, Canada.

Paul, Macmullen (2001). "Audio/Audio Conferencing in Support of Distance Education: The Common wealth of Learning, Knowledge Series. Vancouver, Canada.

Satyanarayana, R. (2006). "Content Development in Learning Material: University News Vol. 44, No. 39.