



DYNAMICS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Proceedings of the
Third National Conference of IDĒA
held at Madras during 12-13 October, 1995

Editors
M. SHANMUGAM
K. MURALI MANOHAR

Conference sponsored by
Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Canada

Proceedings published by
INDIAN DISTANCE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
C/o S.D.L.C.E.
Kakatiya University
Warangal 506 009 INDIA

IDEA Publications No.5
DYNAMICS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION
by K. Murali Manohar (Ed.)
ISBN 81 - 900 611-5-1

November, 1996

No. of Copies : 200

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Price : Rs. 200/- £15 US \$ 25

Published by
Prof. K. Murali Manohar
Secretary General, IDEA
C/o S.D.L.C.E.
Kakatiya University
Warangal 506 009 INDIA

Printed at
Sindhoora Graphics
Hanamkonda 506 001

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RELEVANCE OF CONTINUOUS INTERNAL ASSESSMENT IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

M. SELVAN & M.A. AKBARSHA

Distance education has come to be accepted as a well recognised mode of higher education which is relevant to the existing demands of the society. There are about 45 Universities which are actively engaged in the promotion of education through distance education. Further, in India there are at present, 7 Open Universities and two more Open Universities are likely to be started, one each in the States of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

The standard in distance teaching and performance of the students in it are fairly high. Kage and Rumble argue that "credibility of distance education as a method no longer needs to be proved". In the same way Wilbur Schramm observes that "students will learn efficiently if the media content is designed for learning".

A University degree or diploma is the prime passport to secure a job. A degree or diploma is awarded, by most of the Universities till now, atleast in the distance stream, to the students after the evaluation made through external examination conducted at the end of the semester/year/course. The value of the degree or diploma differs from university to university. However, the fate of the student is decided at the end of the course by the terminal examination. The validity and reliability of university terminal examination is many a time questioned since, the usual systems of written examination has been found insufficient to evaluate the attainments of the students.

University examination assesses the abilities like reproduction of facts, principles, use of numerical data, coherent communications etc., but fails to bring forth the real talents and abilities of the students in all aspects like general learning, understanding capacity and personality development, through written tests, oral questioning, discussions, homework and the like. This is more true in the case of distance Education students who, as per regulations, may not attend any one of the classes and where there is no Continuous Internal Assessment (CIA).

In order to avoid these drawbacks, the introduction of a system of CIA has been suggested by educational experts and commissions. As a result, some universities have been following the system of CIA in the regular stream of education but, totally not in the distance education. Considering the standard and quality of distance education, Centre for Distance Education, Bharathidasan University is offering selected courses with CIA; the experience substantiate that CIA can be creditably practiced in the distance education.

Concept of CIA

By CIA we mean that the progress and skill of a student in every aspect should be assessed rather continuously. CIA may be regarded as a system of evaluation of student's knowledge, intellectual abilities, skills, interest, initiative, industry, discipline, attitudes, aspirations, etc. In the process of CIA, the teachers assess their students continuously. They are atleast will be mentally sorting out their students into good, bad and indifferent.

The term internal assessment denotes a course teacher to be responsible for the assessment of his students whom he teaches; external means the assessment is conducted by a third party or agent on behalf of the university examinations. CIA not only provides an assessment of the product but also provides a feedback to improve the teaching/learning process. If the degree or diploma with CIA is offered by distance education, institutions, atleast part of the evaluation can be made by the teacher who know the system of the concerned unit and the nature of the students.

Lack of CIA in the distance stream discriminates the students of this stream from those in the regular stream

In the developing countries, a degree or diploma is considered the gateway to a job. Even if it is not so, degree or diploma is testification of the level of attainment of intellectual there be a discrimination between students of distance and regular education and depriving the students of distance education, the assets and advantages of CIA which are available to their counter parts in the regular stream

Basic principles of CIA

Some basic principles of CIA for the distance Education shall be as under.

- * CIA is continuous, periodic and internal assessment as carried out through out the year in relation to certain level of ability and skill in the subjects. This is internal because no person other than the teacher who imparts education is involved in it.
- * Internal assessment does not necessarily replace the end examination; both have a part to play in a planned evaluation system.
- * Internal assessment does not mean a few mid-term examinations in the place of the end examination.
- * The purpose of introducing internal assessment is to integrate teaching and evaluation.
- * CIA should not screen the students, but only divide them into categories on a competitive basis.
- * CIA should help the students and teachers to know the extent to which the aims and objectives have been achieved. It is nothing but measuring the achievements of the students with regard to the goals of education.

Components of CIA

The components of CIA and the marks allotted for each component may differ from institution to institution; hence it is necessary to spell out the total marks allotted for CIA., titles of its various components and the distribution of marks to each one and it must be intimated to the students well in advance. To bring uniformity in the standards among the various courses of the distance education the following shall be the basic components;

- * For theory papers-tests & assignments,
- * For practicals- practical skill, record, practical test & viva-voce.

It is worthy to note that irrespective of the titles of the components, the success of CIA depends mainly on the mechanics of its implementation.

Attendance as a component in the CIA in Distance Education

It is generally believed that Distance Education is meant for those who can't make it to the regular stream; in other words the Distance Education stream is considered meant only for those who are employed and therefore, can't make it to the regular stream. In reality, the latest trend is that students take to Distance Education stream for any one of the following reasons.

- a) They are already employed, and, therefore, can't attend the regular stream.
- b) Education in the regular stream has become highly expensive on several grounds (The grounds are beyond the scope of the present paper). Those who can't afford to the expensive education in the regular stream, naturally prefer the distance stream. Atleast 50% of the students in the Distance Education belong to this category.
- c) There is a general trend towards an apathy for studies in the regular stream, particularly in 'humanities and languages'.

- d) For several bright students the doors of higher education are closed in the context of the reservation and certain other policies.

Thus, statistics will show that hardly 20%-25% of the students coming into the Distance Education stream are employed and others are not employed, and therefore, are to be considered as full time learners. Even in the case of those who are employed, as the contact classes are conducted only during the holidays (that is what is to be done in the distance stream) attendance should be practicable in the distance stream and should form one of the components of the C.I.A.

Recording of the CIA

Marks awarded in the CIA should be properly recorded; it helps to have the whole picture of the performance of the students throughout the semester/year. It is necessary to follow a uniform recording procedure; there are two types of records commonly followed:

Individual Student Record : Individual student record will contain a record of the students' performance in respect of every component tool of internal assessment, like written test, assignment, etc. The individual record is convenient for storing and retrieval. Such an individual record will help to prepare the cumulative assessment of the individual.

Cumulative Record : This will contain the format for recording the cumulative assessment of all the students in a class. It is suggested that whatever be the type of record, it is better if computerised.

Steps to be taken for successful implementation of CIA in Distance Education Programmes

Introduction in the curriculum : CIA has to be planned at the time of curriculum development, syllabus interpretation and

clarifying the objectives of learning. Weightage for various components of CIA may also be decided.

Preparation of lesson assignment material : Preparation of assignment is one of the components of CIA. Each student has to submit minimum number of papers on each subject. Most of the students will not take pains to refer to text books leave alone reference books, but will refer only to the teaching material issued to them. Therefore, teaching material must be prepared properly and more effectively.

Involvement of the teachers: The CIA, by nature, will involve a large number of teachers who are guest faculty to the distance Education. They should be ready to undertake the additional work in connection with CIA. Their commitment to CIA should be ensured before they are appointed as resource persons.

Additional remuneration to the teachers: As of now teachers working in the colleges/universities, are drafted to handle the classes on adhoc basis for one and half hour/two hour sessions for a honorarium: there is no guarantee that the same teacher will be utilised for a sequence of classes for the same batch of students. Such a system must be changed to one where-in the same teacher handles all classes in one particular subject for a particular batch of students, through out the semester/year, as is practiced in the Center for Distance Education, Bharathidasan University.

Further, a teacher has to undertake the additional work of evaluation of CIA answer scripts, assignments etc. Hence, suitable remuneration, commensurate with the quantum of the work involved, must be paid to the teachers, in addition to that paid for handling the classes.

Training to teachers: The faculty involved, being invariably guest faculty, they are not involved in designing the CIA. It is likely that they come from different kinds of institutions (Government Colleges, Private Colleges, Grant-in-aid Colleges/Self-financing Colleges Autonomous Colleges/Non-autonomous Colleges, etc.)

therefore, there is every possibility that the assessment may vary from teacher to teacher, Hence proper guidance must be issued to all the teachers; besides before the commencement of classes each year/semester, a one day orientation training must be given to all the teachers concerned with the CIA.

Provision in the time table: It is practiced that date and time of the contact seminar classes are intimated then and there; this should be changed, and a time table for full semester of year should be prepared provision should be made in the time table for tests.

Intimation to the students: It is practiced that date and time of the contact seminar classes are intimated then and there; this should be changed, and a time table for full semester or year should be prepared and provision should be made in the time table for tests.

Intimation to the students: As we discussed in the earlier part of this paper, all aspects of CIA should be informed to the students well in advance. With regard to assignment, the topics should be changed every year so as to avoid copying. It is also experienced that students take their own time to send in the assignments. Hence, last date must be fixed to submit the assignment, with provision for penalty for late submission. Instruction regarding how to prepare the assignments, titles of the topics, pages to be written, style of preparation, details of reference books, covering page to be enclosed, etc., may be sent to all students without fail.

Gaining the confidence of the students and the parents: The students of Distance Education and their parents must be informed of the justification and advantages of the CIA well in advance. The goodwill of Distance Education depends on the confidence of parents and the students.

Administrative Agency: Middle level officers of the Directorate should act as middlemen. Their duty is to collect the marks from the teachers, stage by stage, from the various study centres, and to consolidate and despatch them to the Controller of Examinations

of the University.

Constitution of "Appeal Committee": The students who are living in different parts of the state/country cannot meet the Director/his middle level officers in person for redressal of their grievances. However, their problem must be attended to properly. Further the middle level officers of the Directorate shall not be regarded as subject experts. Therefore, an "Appeal Committee" consisting of the subject experts and educational administrators as members, should be constituted at each centre under the headship of the Director to look after the complaints, if any, lodged by the students.

Periodical review and modification of the system: The CIA system should be reviewed annually in the light of the feed back obtained during its implementation.

CIA of the Distance Education stream shall be more credible than in the regular stream

One basic question often raised as regards CIA in the regular stream is its genuinity and credibility. It is a fact that CIA in the regular stream varies in deapth, approach and analysis in relation to the commitment and seriousness of the course teachers. Further, however much the various components of CIA are really practiced, the final consolidated CIA awarded is very rarely the true reflection of the CIA. This is particularly true in the context of the teacher developing personal intimacy and likes and dislikes with the students. Particularly, it is true that a poor CIA is considered a reflection of the performance or calibre of the teacher. Naturally, he is inclined to introduce yardsticks of moderation, so that in the final award the highest is near 100% and the lowest is near say 75%. A critical analysis of the marks recorded by candidate in the CIA and University Examinations will reveal them to be incomparable and unrealistic. It is unimaginable to find a candidate securing anywhere between 80% and 100% in the CIA scoring 0% to 20% in the University Examinations. Such vagaries in the CIA can be overcome in the distance mode as the correspondence education does not specifically belong to any college or even department; the teachers in general

have no specific reason to boost the CIA marks to any unrealistic levels. It is our experience that in the case of MCA students of Centre for Distance Education, Bharathidasan University, the CIA marks awarded are realistic, and comparable with the marks students secure in the University Examinations.

Problems in implementing the CIA in Distance Education

In spite of its many advantages, the implementation of internal assessments in Distance Education leads to the following problems.

Misuse of internal assessment: The students, parents and other may bring pressure on the teacher educational administrators to award more marks in CIA; the teachers, in some cases, can be very subjective in assessment.

To avoid this, the following will be the workable remedies:

- a) CIA is open and not secret. Marks and grades obtained are made known to the students for each assessment as soon as it is made.
- b) The valued scripts of tests and valued assignment papers must be returned to the students properly so that they can compare the grades/marks; if necessary, they can approach the teachers to explain how a particular grade/mark is awarded.
- c) In case a student is not satisfied with his mark, and the explanation given by the respective teachers, he can appeal to the "Appeal Committee" for redressal.
- d) Two copies of mark statements should be submitted to the study centre, so that, the teacher do not have second chance to modify the evaluation.

CIA as practiced at Centre for Distance Education, Bharathidasan University

The academic programmes of Centre for Distance Education are of both short term and long term, and belong to the area of general education, management, computer science, etc. The

programmes lead to diplomas and degrees at under graduate and post graduate levels. Centre for Distance Education offers MCA, MBA and PGDCA with CIA to maintain the quality of education in these courses. As per university rules and norms, the students have to earn 50 marks in aggregate of University Examinations plus CIA as minimum to pass the subject; the CIA carries 25 marks (25%) while University Examination carries 75 marks (75%) of the total being 100 marks. The name of various components of CIA, marks awarded, and percentage of weightage given to each of them are given below:

Particulars	Marks	Percentage
Tests	15	60
Assignment	10	40
Total	25	100

The students have to take three written tests, among which the best two performances are taken into account. To earn ten marks meant for assignments, they have to submit two assignments out of the three topics.

The scripts of written test and assignment are valued by the respective guest faculty; it is for this reason that Centre for Distance Education, Bharathidasan University appoints the same teacher for all the contact classes for one subject.

One batch of Post Graduate students have completed the Course successfully; the feedback is infact encouraging.

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