

DISTANCE EDUCATION

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Education is considered the key to advancement, modernisation and intellectual achievements. In India, majority of the needy missed the chance to pursue their higher education due to various reasons. The Indian education system suffers from the following major problems.

- the expenditure on and the cost of education are increasing.
- the access to the disadvantaged learners from rural areas is limited.
- the quality of education is low with the result that the learners acquire less cognitive skills?
- school education is characterised by high rates of drop outs
- education system fails to achieve the goals of social and economic development of the country, and
- the existence of inequality in educational opportunity.

A radical and innovative method in the form of D.E. has been introduced as one of the major reforms to remedy the situation. In the same way, the National policy on Education - 1986, has emphasised on DE. Some forms of Open DE already exist in India and they are outlined below.

- national level autonomous body - IGNOU
- State level open universities in Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bihar and in Madhya Pradesh.
- Many Campus-based Universities are offering extension services to off-campus students
- @ conventional universities have distance - open education units.

All these have the common objective of offering education to as many people

as possible in different areas of the country in a cost-effective manner. It is in this context that the importance of educational planning particularly the use of DE for the development of manpower has become an important area for research which could lead to policy initiatives.

Human Resource Development

Human Resource Development is a function of both individual's personal growth as well as organizational development through successfully coping with the internal and external environments. Effective human resource planning and policy extend beyond the conventional technology for presenting future needs on the basis of quality of manpower supply and demand. Manpower planning provides merely an opportunity to determine current and future manpower requirements. But human resources planning links with the successive planning process which provides an opportunity to develop individuals with potential for future positions. Modern industries use a high level of technology which is also changing fast. Hence, they require all manpower trained and endowed with different skills. Such manpower can be generated only by the educational system on par with international standards both in quantity and quality.

Human Resources Development is not an isolated societal activity concerning education alone. It includes provisions for better education, improved conditions of health and nutrition and reduction of fertility. Each of these makes its own important contribution to the quality of life. HRD in India is at present characterised with imbalance of all kinds in terms of region, gender and level of education. The level of literacy varies between rural and urban areas and man and woman. There are

disparities in the standard of the higher level of education as well as the level of educational attainment of different populations. The planners can probably place high emphasis on well designed instructional programmes through distance education to take care of this kind of imbalance.

The Seventh Five Year plan of India laid special emphasis on HRD. As stated earlier the major components of HRD includes education, health, social welfare, science and technology. It was emphasised that by the year 2000 AD, the quality of life in India would considerably be improved by eliminating illiteracy through effective elementary education for all children upto the age of 14 reducing the dropout to insignificant levels and providing continuing education. For this purpose, use of modern communication technology will be emphasised and non-formal education will have to be adopted, using a variety of means and methods including the video technology and computers. In this context, distance education creates the possibility of and has the potential to provide large scale multi-media education for the development of the human resources.

Distance Education and Development of Human Capital Formation

Distance Education provides equality of educational opportunity by creating access to all. This is especially relevant in India which removes imbalance in terms of level of education. Distance Education provides education at minimised opportunity cost. It is possible for any one to study through distance mode while in employment in any field. This mode of education also helps in raising employment opportunities in many ways since it helps to develop skills and attitudes.

Distance education influences quality of manpower in many ways. The open learning system imparts awareness among people not only in the field of education but also in the field of health, nutrition etc., which are major components of HRD. Disadvantaged group especially women get benefitted from this. The programmes through distance education call for interaction among people belonging to different categories - teachers, technologists, learners, administrators, managers and other functionaries. It provides quality education at the door step of the learners which is a reality in India. While considering the quality of human resources, the quality of education cannot be ignored.

It is no doubt that in the process of stepping up the human capital formation, Distance Education assumes special importance with the help of mechanisms like the use of radio, self-learning materials, counselling classes, audio, video cassettes, computers etc., Further Distance Education is useful to develop human knowledge and various skills.

Growth of Human Knowledge

Human knowledge grows fast and the existing knowledge becomes obsolete quickly. Distance Education caters to educational requirements of those already employed. Through

Distance Education programmes, their knowledge can be upgraded and updated to cope with technological changes. With the help of multi-media mechanisms, Distance Education expands the frontiers of knowledge so as to reach a large number of clients at a low cost.

Development of skills

By using the strategies of DE properly the skills of individual can be developed. The physical participation and involvement play a vital role in the development of human skills. They are generally available in different kinds of industries which can be demonstrated to target groups of learners through appropriate media. With the help of technological gadgets and mass media, individual can update the existing skills and generate new skills. In order to develop the skills of learners the programmes like HRD, Financial Management, Operation Management, Marketing Management, Computer Applications etc., are popular and are operated in the distance mode.

In support of the above discussion, it is appropriate to record the findings of a survey conducted at the Chennai Regional Centre during 90-92 which reveals that the learners of the management programme of IGNOU had the following skills.

- Communication skill.
- Decision-making skill
- Analytical skill
- Public relations skill and
- Negotiation skill etc.

In Distance Education, one can study even while employed in the field or in an office or in an industry. Hence, one does not have to forego one's earning while continuing one's education. Distance Education helps the process of lifelong learning and continuous development of the individuals.

Conclusion

Developing countries like India face the problem of abundance of unskilled human power in various fields. Provision of good education and effective training will overcome this problem to a great extent. They should be expanded in all sectors. Further on- job training should also be provided. The education and training programmes should be so designed as to develop a variety of skills. A silent revolution in the field of education is taking place through the DE mode which will go a long way in developing the human resource needed for a developing country like India. □

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