



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF INDIA

ISSN 2454-8707 / IMPACT FACTOR 2.05 / VOLUME - II, ISSU -X, JUNE 2017

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL)

¹Dr. K.S. Premila

Associate Professor & Head, School of Education, Tamilnadu Open University, Chennai,
Tamil Nadu

ABSTRACT:

Higher education lays a significant role in human capital formation. The Indian higher education system has become the largest in the world. At present, there are over 350 conventional universities or institutions at the university level, 13 open universities and more than 100 dual-mode institutions in India. Improvement in the quality of ODL is certainly a thing of major concern at the moment in our country. Quality assurance and enhancement implies an operating practice where all the transactions of the ODL institutions are accomplished completely to make the educational goal successful. Learners are the customers who expect the quality service with less cost. The internal evaluation mechanism at ODL institution ensures such quality service delivery. As some formal educational institutions have obtained ISO 9001 to assure clientele (the learners enrolling in their institutions) the quality of education, the same phenomenon should be extended to distance education institutions also. Quality assurance is the need of the hour to search for excellence, create the right attitudes and prevent the defectiveness possible and optimize learner satisfaction by increasing efficiency and service delivery effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION:

The ODL system takes up the crucial role in the emerging educational scenario in India. The ODL aims at providing need based quality education to large and heterogeneous groups of learners at affordable cost. This system brings the adult learners who are unable to continue their education in formal stream for their higher education. The learners who are in-service or doing other jobs can also seek further studies or vocational training on specific field through ODL system. The reasons for opting ODL system, as per studies, are: age factor, employment opportunity, inadequacy of time, and non-availability of higher education institution, high expenses in formal colleges, poor financial condition, and low performance in previous studies. To meet such learners, the ODL system is introduced by government and non-governmental agencies by establishing IGNOU at the national level, 13 State Open Universities and more than 100 dual-mode institutions in our country.

The ODL system differs from formal learning system in many ways. However, learning outcomes are prescribed as the same for both formal and distance mode learning. The knowledge enhancement and skill development are equally concentrated in both systems. But, the method of transacting curriculum varies aiming at the target group of learners. The ODL system has taken up and utilized the developments of fast growing and emerging area of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). It has an advantage of producing self-instructional materials (SIM)



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF INDIA

ISSN 2454-8707 / IMPACT FACTOR 2.05 / VOLUME - II, ISSU –X, JUNE 2017

for self learning, arranging personal contact programs, conducting examinations, and offering student support services throughout the period of study. A systematic service delivery mechanism is essentially followed by the ODL system to cater to the needs of distance learners. Student accessible environment, resourcefulness, qualified personnel to guide and on-line transaction of curriculum are all set for the learners at the institution. Periodical assessment, assignment evaluation, term-end examination are done without delay. Incorporation of ICT, adequate training inputs, monitoring, and follow up activities are taken care of logically. Difficulties of the students, differences in service mode, deviations in schedule of activities etc are addressed immediately so as to bring successful learning. Guidance and counseling with regard to successful completion of the program, further study, and job avenues, are given to learners through reachable mode. All services rendered to the students are speedy and through vernacular language. The ODL system provides flexibility approach in learning schedule, curricular transaction, costs, and examination pattern. Of these criteria, the quality should also be assured along with quantity intake in ODL system.

CONCEPT OF CUSTOMER IN ODL:

One definition of customer is that of "a buyer of a product or service." Student certainly fits this definition of the word customer because he/she takes classes, buy print and non-print materials, and use many services for which they pay fees. The student is buying the University's course, and has the unmistakable right to expect certain things in return for his/her money: relevant course content, fairness, access, expertise, and a reasonable learning situation. If the ODL system views the student as a customer, it is likely that the faculty member will become more tolerant, more interested in implementing ways to improve the learning process, more accessible, and more student-friendly. The students as customers choose the best service providers according to their needs and wants. The ODL institutions should satisfy the requirements of the learners by a prompt service delivery, apt curriculum, and flexibility in approach, equality against formal programs, cost-effectiveness, and career opportunities. In ODL system, study materials, personal contact programs, learning support systems, examination and evaluation system are expected to be systematic. Drop-out rate of the distance learners should be minimized. As Khan (1982) points out, drop-out of the distance learners is due to several reasons such as family problems, illness, unfavorable service conditions, high tuition fees, less contact with teachers, poor service by the institutes and loneliness of the distance learners. To tackle these issues, the ODL should be designed in such a way for bringing successful completion of the learners enrolled.

QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) IN ODL:

The concept of quality assurance should not be left to the corporate world. It should extend its reach to educational institutions too. Now some formal educational institutions have obtained ISO 9001 to assure clientele (the learners enrolling in their institutions) the quality of education. This phenomenon should be extended to distance education institutions also. The governing body



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF INDIA

ISSN 2454-8707 / IMPACT FACTOR 2.05 / VOLUME - II, ISSU -X, JUNE 2017

awarding accreditations should review the status of the institutions periodically to ensure quality-learning instructions. The internal evaluation mechanism should function to know the impact of service delivery system through ODL. In ODL system, the role of educational technology gadgets should be supplementary to the traditional system so as to provide education to a large number of students. In order to improve open learning system, effective and meaningful use of various aspects of information technology like electronic publishing of course materials, computers and telecommunications has been suggested. Experience of the ODL institutions should match with enhancement of quality every year. If the University does not have a theory to provide a framework to understand its experience, it does not accumulate 10 years of experience; it merely repeats one year ten times. Therefore, every ODL providing institutions should go for quality assessment and accreditation from the quality national/international authority every occasion.

QA PRINCIPLES:

Philosophy, vision, strategy, technology, resources, organization and evaluation are the seven principles to be adopted for quality assurance in ODL institutions. Many people have their own definition of quality and restrict the concept of quality to some sectors only. Education is an obligation and quality should extend its reach to the fulfillment of Educational Objectives. The concept of quality instructions goes above and beyond innovation. Institution should design quality instruction planning program to optimize the learning situations. It has to define, design and deliver educational experiences in the context of quality provided.

The first principle is **Philosophy for Inspiration** where the presence of philosophy leads to inspiration but in the absence of philosophy, there are no followers. Application of QA principles to distance learning will inspire the learners. The second principle is **Vision for Lifelong learning**. A good vision leads to life-long learning where the absence of vision may lead to confusion. This is a long-term benefit through which learner will enjoy the benefit. The third principle is **Strategy for learning skills** which concentrates on the presence of a sound strategy to develop the learning skills. To achieve the objectives of learning and to have the desired learning outcomes, it is necessary to devise the learning instruction in such a way that learners learn to learn. The fourth principle is **Technology for Easy learning**. Inclusion of technological advancement to transact the curriculum is necessary which makes the learning effortless. The fifth principle is **Resources for Maximizing facilities**. The availability of appropriate resources leads to optimum usage of resources for development of facilities. Before going for procuring new resources for process of providing program in ODL, the existing resources should be used in an optimum manner for designing the program, producing the learning materials, and transacting the curriculum through innovative mode. The sixth principle is **Organization for Student support service**. For any innovative experiment to be successful, the intercommunication facility between the institution and student is necessary. This will help the students to get necessary assistance for undergoing the program throughout the duration. The seventh principle is **Internal evaluation for remediation and enhancement**. Internal evaluation



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF INDIA

ISSN 2454-8707 / IMPACT FACTOR 2.05 / VOLUME - II, ISSU -X, JUNE 2017

helps for finding the institutional lacunae in service delivery and it enhances the quality service. Therefore, quality in ODL can have these seven principles namely, Philosophy, Vision, Strategy, Technology, Resources, Organization and Evaluation, to be inbuilt in institutional structure.

QA IN ODL THROUGH THE DEB:

Since 1970s, Indian Government has been establishing single-mode open universities to cater to the needs of the large numbers of adults and school-leavers who are unable to enter the conventional universities. The conventional universities have also started now offering their programs in both on-campus and off-campus modes. Thus, India has more open and distance universities and more distance learners than any other country in the world. This development is because of ever-expanding demand and increasing affordability of ICT which encourages governments to urge more institutions to adopt distance learning to serve more students. The ODL providers have to comply with national quality frameworks. QA in Indian ODL is checked through the Distance Education Bureau (DEB). DEB's Open and Distance Education Assessment and Accreditation Board assess the Open Universities and dual-mode institutions on a five-yearly basis. DEB's Guidelines for Regulating the Establishment and Operation of Open and Distance Learning Institutions in India prescribe the criteria for assessing curriculum, materials and delivery, staffing, infrastructure, student support service, study centers, technology and funding. The DEB is also providing funds to the open universities. Therefore, the DEB system is recognized as quality assessment mechanism to improve the standard in ODL system.

CHALLENGES IN ODL FOR QA:

In India, as discussed above, the number of Open Universities and dual-mode institutions is increasing periodically. Those institutions enroll considerable learners in the specific programs offered. While coming for the practicability, the newly established institutions are facing a lot of challenges in their service delivery which would question the quality assurance. Some challenges are listed as follows.

1. There are inadequate building facilities to accommodate all the faculties at the University.
2. Recruitment of staff is slow and inadequate. Outsourcing staff are engaged in the work which will affect the continuity and intensity of work.
3. Staff members are under trial basis of learning due to their inexperience in the distance education field.
4. As the staff members are newly appointed, their preparation of study materials in SIM format is not in expected quality.
5. Immediate production and dissemination of course materials are lacking.
6. Admission system does not cope with the increasing rate of admissions due to lack of advanced system and man-power.



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF INDIA

ISSN 2454-8707 / IMPACT FACTOR 2.05 / VOLUME - II, ISSU -X, JUNE 2017

7. Newly established study centers are not oriented fully about the functions which will lead to confusion and delay in service delivery.
8. Intercommunication mode between students and University gets troubled due to less communication gadgets and repliers.
9. Institutions are unable to produce e-learning contents and other non-printed materials to supplement printed materials due to lack of multimedia production centre.
10. Revamping of existing syllabi is not easy for the institutions due to problem in production of materials.

Therefore, let us think how these ODL institutions can assure and improve quality while enlarging the enrollment, poor infrastructure, inadequate staff pattern, non-availability of ICT, poor materials and dissemination, inadequate study centre facilities etc. Another question also arises when and how these variations are assessed and given accreditation. The ODL system goes with the globalization perspective to meet the international standard with cost-effective flexibility and cross-border ODL requirement. As observed, of all progressiveness in quantity increase in ODL system, quality assurance and enhancement have not been scaled with international standard of evaluation mechanism till. We have to go a long way for achieving the stamping of highest accreditation grade for our ODL system of India at the global scenario.

CONCLUSION:

Quality assurance and enhancement is essential because of the changes taking place in the global scenario, learner's expectations and increasing competitive pressures. To meet these challenges, all ODL providers should undergo the national/international assessment and accreditation every three years so as to ensure the quality and enhancement in service delivery. The present assessment and accreditation mechanism is also be revamped in line of international development and demand of cross-border ODL service. Let the country be progress in higher education by having innovative assessment and accreditation mechanism for ODL aiming at quality uplift with quantity elevation.

REFERENCES:

- Clare, M. (2008). Trend Analysis in Open Distance Education Research in India. University News, 46(16), 21-27.
- Jung, Insung&Latchem, Colin. (2007) Assuring Quality in Asian Open and Distance Learning. Open Learning. Vol. 22, No. 3.
- Mukhopadhyay, Marmar. (1998). Management of Change in Education: In Search of Indian Model. New Delhi: NIEPA.
- Williams, P. (1993). Total Quality Management: Some Thoughts. Higher Education, 25(3).