

THE ROLE OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Teacher education program refers to the policies, procedures, and provision which is designed to equip the prospective teachers with the upcoming knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school, university and any other wider community. Teacher education is a continuous process and its pre-service and in-service components are complimentary to each other. Teacher education is a program related with teacher proficiency and competence level that would make them competent enough to face new challenges in the latest education trend. The role of education whether in regular or distance mode but remain instrumental and inevitable in the preparation of prospective teachers. Now a day, the field of education has broadened in various new horizons for which we also need to train teachers with new trends of education. The maintenance of standards and quality in teacher education programmes has become more challenging in view of the demand for training a mass number of teachers. This demand cannot be fulfilled by only formal teacher training institutes of our country, but can be met through open and distance learning. Thus the mode of teacher education programs needs to be up graded in the latest century. The aim of the present paper is to analyze the role of open and distance learning in Teacher Education Programme in India.

Keywords: Teacher education, open and distance learning, teacher, initial teacher education, prospective teachers

INTRODUCTION:

Teachers have an important role to play in making education relevant according to the needs of the emerging modern society. Only competent and emancipated teachers can meet the needs of society by providing quality education to learners. This can only be possible, only if teachers are well trained through effective teacher education programmes. Teacher education programme is a rigorous and skill oriented programme in our country. The maintenance of standards and quality in teacher education programmes has become more challenging in view of the demand for training a large number of teachers in our country. This demand cannot be fulfilled by only formal teacher training institutes, but can be met through distance education. Variety of the teacher education programmes were being offered by various universities through open and distance learning mode. Open and distance learning system emerged as a new system through integration of various technologies. The National Curriculum Framework

for Teacher Education (NCTE, 2010) also found that open and distance learning as a powerful instrument for providing professional support to the teacher, particularly with a view to overcoming the barriers of physical distance.

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL):

Distance education has been an older concept, but has evolved in a number of ways. Open learning is a more recent phenomenon in the latest century. The combination of distance education and open learning is often referred as open and distance Learning (ODL). Open and distance learning is often used as synonymous of e-learning. Open and distance Learning is considered as the most viable means for extending educational access while improving the quality of education, advocating peer-to-peer collaboration and giving the learners a greater sense of autonomy and responsibility for learning (Calvert, 2006). The term ODL is an umbrella term to cover educational approaches to provide learning resources, to qualify without

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attending college in person and open up new opportunities for keeping up to date no matter where or when one wants to study (UNESCO, 2002).

According to the European Commission (1995):

“Open and distance learning (ODL) is concerned with the use of new resources (technical and/or non-technical) for rendering the learning process more flexible in terms of space, time, content, selection, access qualifications and teaching resources and/or for improving distance access to education systems. In this way, educational opportunities are extended to people who, because of their geographical, economic or socio-professional situation or because of a handicap, do not readily have access to the mainstream system of education. Open and distance learning can help overcome barriers to transnational mobility and develop a kind of virtual mobility.”

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system is a system wherein teachers and learners need not necessarily be present either at the same place or same time but is flexible in regard to modalities and timing of teaching and learning. ODL system of our country consists of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), State Open Universities (SOUs), Institutions and Universities offering education and includes Correspondence Course Institutes (CCIs), etc. Open and distance learning has opened the doors to education to disadvantaged population such as unemployed, disabled people or ethnic minorities. Open and distance learning often makes use of several different media. Students may learn through print, broadcasts, the internet and through occasional meetings with tutors and with other students. ODL may use print, broadcasts, cassette recordings, computer-based materials, computer interaction, videoconferencing, and face-to-face learning.

Teacher Education:

The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has defined teacher education as—A programme of education, research and training of persons to teach from pre-primary to higher education level. Teacher education is a programme that is related to the development of teacher proficiency and competence that would enable and empower the teacher to meet the requirements of the profession and face the challenges therein. Teacher education encompasses teaching skills, sound pedagogical theory and professional skills. Pre-service teacher education is the education and training provided to student teachers before they

have undertaken any teaching. Whereas in-service teacher education defined as, “a programme of systematized activities promoted or directed by the school system, or approved by the school system, that contributes to the professional or occupational growth and competence of staff members during the time of their service to the school system”.

Teacher Education through ODL:

There is shortage of eligible teachers in our country and still large numbers of under qualified teachers. At the same time there are many individuals who need further professional education and training as they work as teacher. Unless we get more qualified teachers, we will not reach the target of making quality education. Conventional approaches to teacher education have not met all the demands upon the profession and this has led to an interest in open and distance learning alternatives (UNESCO, 2002). There are two distinct important areas of teacher education. First is the initial teacher education and second is the continuing professional development of teachers. It is recognized that ODL can be strategically employed in continuing professional development of teachers, particularly with a view to overcoming the barriers of physical distance. ODL is a strategy which can be a powerful instrument for providing continued professional support to the teacher practitioner (NCTE, 2010). The importance of ODL system in initial teacher education and as well as continuous professional development of teachers are as follows:

- | It allows finding out ways of using existing resources.
- | It allows to access learning opportunities at affordable cost.
- | It allows for alternative pathways to initial teacher training.
- | It allows attracting new unreached population to work as teachers.
- | It allows use of technologies to enrich teaching and support practice.
- | It allows stimulating and supporting teachers' active learning.

ODL Used In Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Programme:

ODL approaches to ITE have been identified as having major advantages over conventional programmes that require residency in terms of cost, scale and access. Moon and Robinson (2003) said that there are three areas of advantage:- i) resource efficiency (buildings, teaching staff and funds), by reducing the overall cost of producing a qualified

teacher; ii) supply, in drawing in new constituencies of teachers and producing more trained teachers in a shorter amount of time; iii) curriculum and training, through offering greater opportunities to strengthen the relationship between theory and classroom practice (e.g., using real-life teaching on video; having teachers discuss their experiences on radio; and assessing classroom-focused activities, such as requiring trainees to integrate their learning from ODL materials with specific activities undertaken on placement. (Moon and Shelton Mayes 1995; UNESCO 2002)

Teacher Development Through Open And Distance Learning:

Teachers across the world have pursued the opportunities offered by open and distance learning. According to Perraton (2010), 'open and distance learning has been widely used for initial teacher training, for students who enter the profession with a background in primary, secondary or tertiary education, but has often been organized on a one-off basis rather than as part of the established structure of teacher education'.

Open and distance learning has gone through a rapid evolution in the past centuries and embraced a changing trend of technologies. These have been used for two purposes: to distribute teaching material to learners, and to allow interaction between learners and facilitators or among learners. Open and distance learning has also been used to support changes in the curriculum for each subject. It has played an important role in making teachers familiar with information and communication technologies. It has also been used to support teachers' professional development through structured programmes designed for specific groups of teachers, as well as provide opportunities for teachers to upgrade their skills.

Open and distance learning for teachers' professional development needs an integrated support system. According to Leach (1996):

- n Support should provide model learning environments.
- n Support should build on existing frameworks as far as possible and be consonant with the culture in which it is developed.
- n Support should be developmental and exploratory providing experience of a wide variety of teaching and learning opportunities.
- n Support should recognize and build on the variety of professional experiences of its Participants.

n Support should acknowledge both the private and professional aspects of learners' experiences and their interconnectedness in the development of learning.

n Support should have a firm base in schools and classrooms; it should be seen as an ongoing process across initial, induction and ongoing phases of teacher education.

Challenges in ODL with Respect to learners:

It is observed that the problems and barriers encountered by the student teachers in teacher education programme through ODL can be categorized into followings:-

- l Costs and motivators.
- l Communication.
- l Feedback
- l Student support services.
- l Isolation.
- l Lack of experience in distance mode learning
- l Lack of training.
- l Trouble in self-evaluation.
- l Lack of ICT knowledge.
- l Technical barriers

Challenges in ODL with Respect to faculty:

There are certain challenges observed related to the faculty are as follows:-

- l Lack of staff training
- l Lack of expertise in course designing, development and delivery
- l Lack of knowledge of technology
- l Lack of support for distance learning
- l Inadequate faculty selection for distance learning courses
- l Inappropriate courseware
- l Programme implementation
- l Evaluation strategy
- l The use advanced technologies suitable for distance courses

Challenges in ODL with Respect to organization:

The challenges in ODL with Respect to organization are as follows:-

- l Infrastructure and technology problems
- l Funding to create an administrative unit
- l Commitment of the Institutional leaders
- l Technology problems includes financing new technology
- l Inadequate telecommunications facilities
- l Hardware issues, course production and delivery, and Internet problems
- l Course content, course standards, curriculum

development and support,

I The quality of the material presented in distance courses.

I Assessment

CONCLUSION:

Open and distance learning has been widely applied to teacher education. ODL will create opportunities for the large number of teachers who require further and continuous education. By realizing importance of teacher education, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC, 2007) developed quality indicators in teacher education for assessment of teacher education programme offering through on campus mode or ODL mode. Good quality of distance education programs provision will be another key factor of successful implementation because, if achieved, it will demonstrate that distance education methods can provide courses and programs of good quality and, in some cases, it can provide better quality than in face to face programs. Open and distance learning (ODL) has played an important role in initial teacher education and training since the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)/UNESCO Institute of Education was set up in the 1960s. Therefore to train mass number of initial teachers and as well as for the professional development of teachers, the programme of teacher education have to conduct through formal and ODL mode.

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