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Open and Distance Learning Research Agenda for the 21st Century

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Abstract – Consumerism, quality and innovation, are to dominate in this millennium, thanks to the economic reforms ushered in developed and developing Nations and the several agreements signed under the World Trade Organisation. The transition will be from a predominantly 'Seller's Market' to a 'Buyers' Market' where the choice exercised by the consumerism. We mean the process of realizing the "rights of the right learning" as envisaged in "Open and Distance Learning".

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INTRODUCTION

There is some unethical, illegal and unilateral dedication in the light of the practice. In order to educate the term consumerism and customization, customer research is the stepping stone for this century revolution. In an increasingly competitive global education the only way for Institutions to survive is to match or excel the best practices of their competitors.

SIGNIFICANCE

The goal of Open and Distance Learning research is to enlarge the perimeter and scope of knowledge in respective field. The behavioral sciences, like the natural sciences, progress toward new understandings through refinement and closer study of more minute aspects of their specialties. However, the mere gathering of facts does not constitute a research. The task of research is the selection of facts pertinent to a specific problem and the reach for a pattern in these selected facts that will aid in the solution of the problem under Investigation. From selected facts and the uncovering of a pattern in those facts a premise can be formulated. Thus, in summary, gathering facts is only one part of research activity, the determination of relevance of these facts is the second step, and reflection upon and analysis, of the facts is the starting point of meaningful Open and Distance Learning research.

It is quite likely that the arguments over definitions will continue for a long time. However, there is a general arguments on at least two basic characteristics that differentiate scientific inquiry. These characteristics are the skeptical attitude and methodology. The scientific attitude is best characterised as an attitude of doubt. Because of this attitude of doubt, scientific investigation is engaged in with skepticism. The scientific convention dictates the use of methodologies which demonstrate validity and generality of findings. Rigorous standards of methodologies in scientific investigation have been in use since the early Seventeenth Century. Scientific convention demands that a hypothesis to be a considered meaningful, must be capable of support by public demonstration. The essential characteristics are prediction and verification.

Open and Distance Learning Research enables people to find answers to various questions raised by them. It helps to solve problem confined by individuals in their day-to-learning process life. Many people pursue research for the purpose of fulfilling the thirst of knowledge. Knowledge can be gained through different ways such as method of tenacity, method of authority and method of intuition. All these methods are scientific and open and Distance Learning research is the only scientific method of gaining knowledge.

The methods adopted for acquiring knowledge through the methods of enquring, analysis and interpretations have changed over a period of time. It may be noticed that the basic desire of a man to add more and more to his own knowledge will ultimately lead to knowledge of the world. At present, man acquires knowledge through a scientific method known as Research. Thus "ODL Research" has become an inseparable part of human knowledge today.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Advanced Learners Dictionary lays down the meaning of research as "a careful investigation or

enquiry especially through search for new facts in any branch of knowledge".

Robert Ross defines research as "research is essentially an investigation, recording and an analysis of evidences for the purpose of gaining knowledge".

Clifford defines research as 'defining and redefining problem formulating hyphothesis or suggested solution , collecting, organising and evaluating data, making deductions and reaching conclusions and at last carefully testing the conclusion to determine whether they fit the formulating hyphothesis".

PROFESSIONALISM

A code of ethics of professionalism is to set a standards which is a protection to the profession; a guard against unworthy behavior by its members. It sets up criteria by which it judges the competence of its members and the integrity of their work. It establishes the expectation that a professional has the competence to them what should be done and how it should be done and that he will do it such a way.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

* To find out the research management scenario in the recent past
* To identify expanding horizons of Information Networking
* To justify the cultivation of creativity and break the barrier on quality Open and Distance Learning education
* To investigates the infra structural facilities and prevention of intellectual obsolescence and
* to frame suggestions

RESEARCH MANAGEMENT IN THE RECENT PAST

The Kaiser Wilhelm Society had been once the most celebrated name in the scientific world, as it had built research institutes around great scientists. It was founded in the first decade of this century; but its functioning suffered setbacks during the Nazi rule, forcing several scientists to flee from Germany.

World War II saw the loss of the scientific reputation of the Society which had contributed to the renown of German research. The Allies, on seeing what was left behind, considered dismantling the Society. But the German scientists rose to the occasion that demanded optimism and a renewed vigour in research management. This resulted in the proposal to the Allied powers British and American, to reconstruct the erstwhile famous institutes, literally on the concept of the Phoenix of Egyptian Mythology.

The Max Planck Society came into being on February 26,1948 to commemorate the memory of their legendary physicist Max Planck (1858-1947). Maintains 75 research institutes with a record of 10 Nobel Laureates since 1984. During the Diamond Jubilee Celebration, Hubert Mark I, the president of the Max Planck Society, gave more thought to its future than its past: the thinking centre around this, plan to shift their resources to the cutting edge of scientific work, name productive research. To meet the budgetary constraints in research funding, three institutes and 20 departments in other institutes had to be closed down. But Max Planck Society has to meet a, fresh situation that had arisen with the unification of GDR. Interest in the scientific growth of the lafter had to be displayed, which had meant opening up 17 new institutes in the former East Germany.

In Germany, the appointment (of directors) "carries life-time entitlement to (the society's) resources, which idea simply cannot be maintained in the future". At the same time, Mark I recognized the danger of putting scientists under a year-by-year evaluation for continuing in their posts, because that would go against taking on long term projects. Research involves taking risk and working on projects that do not augur immediate scientific return.

Mark I' s new management strategy is to offer more scientists short-term contracts, which will mean more turn-over and more renewal at the institutes, causing flexibility to shift resources to the most productive institutes and identify fields where research can be intensified. Although the critiques, Mark-I says 'there are seldom any hard consequences". There is a plan to put all Max Planck Institutes through a thorough evaluation every six years.' If an institute's work is faltering, the society should be able to interfere".

The Max Planck Society 2000 plus Projects will be published during this Year. While the changes proposed will help prepare Max Planck Institutes for the new century, Mark I recognizes that the key to their future success still resides in the quality of the institutes' scientists. We are only as good as our researchers'. (Science Vol. 279, Feb, 1998).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

The researcher has taken exploratory research because this study is particularly helpful in breaking broad and vague problems into more precise. The size of sample is 3 Open Universities and 100 respondents from the Tamil Nadu Universities. The researcher has taken non-probability sampling and

convenience sampling. A pre-test was conducted with experts and few respondents with a view to test the relevance and applicability. data were analysed with simple percentage method.

NEED FOR NETWORKING

The convergence of computer and communication technologies has expanded the horizons of the individual library to resources on a national scale. The computer Networking has opened the possibility of sharing the bibliographic system and the database of the libraries. The recent progress in telecommunication has been a major impetus to the development and expansion of the library network. The network functions are:

- Optimisation of collection in libraries with limited budget.
- To promote and support adoption of standards in the library operations
- To improve the efficiency of housekeeping operation.
- To generate new services and to improve the efficiency of the existing services.

Economic pressures, enormous growth of publications and emergence of subject specialisation have compelled the libraries and information centres, to think of sharing the information resources and optimising the use of the existing resources within India as well as from abroad through various Networking System. It was found that only 65% of the respondents have reached the satisfactory level; but still 35% didn't able to achieve the benefit. The influence of electronic network on the delivery of information is the biggest technologies have the potential to produce libraries without walls.

LACK OF CULTIVATION OF CREATIVITY

Literally, creativity means bringing into being by force of imagination to be the first to act. Some call it an inborn sacrosanct monument to the spirit. It is a1 flash of blinding insight, which seems to come from nowhere. It is a mental horizon-widening Eureka-experience. New ideas come like a raging tide that floods the mind.

The blessed recipient witnesses the pristine beauty of things; and the most complex puzzles are solved, usually in a salutory fashion. Bright new ideas, creative concepts, original thinking or even a rush articulation of truth may make the inventor a memorable pioneer, trendsetter or modemiser. He may give birth to a classical renaissance, It is observed that only 15% of the respondents have creativity, but the rest 85% are still on the marginal level.

Why do we need creativity? What is its role, relevance, utility, and importance today? Essentially, it is a measure of human development. Higher the number and quality of the creative people in a country, more evolved it becomes. It is a passport for dazzling global leadership.

It changes the gears for accelerated national growth and development; and ensures educational, scientific, economic, social and cultural global superiority. As an example, a scientist, who discovers a new creative breakthrough, has the right coin new word or terminology for the phenomenon like the Raman Effect. It enriches a particular language. Others have no choice; but to follow it later. A new scientific discovery like the Einsteinian equation, may revolutionise the whole face of the planet, It has aptly been summarized that excellence is not democratic but democracies thrive on excellence.

How do we snuff out creativity from our educational institutions should be understood. Generally, we have preserved the age-old feudal academic and administrative structure intact. Schools stifle creativity. Over-emphasis on submission to authority or overdose of vigour and discipline block imagination and inhibit creativity. They produce conformists, types and incomplete individual rather than original and creative thinkers. Our college-bred has been compared with a loaf, made from the parents' dough, kneaded badly over the years. Therefore, most of our students move on without really moving up on the academic ladder. We have plenty of academic dead wood in our curricula, which inhibits creativity. It should not be strait jacketed in a manner that will daze, mask or blind the pupil to finer nuances of true education.

A large number of our "Open Universities" suffer from huge inertia. It has been compared with a storehouse of knowledge because when students enter its portals they deposit their knowledge and take back nothing.

Many of the brightest brains in our "Open Universities" are in fact engaged in resisting something or the other rather than creating a unique and original thought or discovering a new item or phenomenon, which may be a boon to mankind. In addition, all sorts of rigid ideals and beliefs also limit their achievements. Creativity often dawns when we escape from the tyranny of reason and boredom of conformism. Rigidity in thinking and perception leads to a state of atrophy. Wisdom lies in not allowing governmental borders to calcify. Keep them supple. Otherwise, we fall, get entrapped and become extinct in our own cerebral crevices.

When we float free from our rigid props, stilts or supports, we become aware and conscious of our

unique potentials. This is why we acquire true learning by wide reading, exploration, experimentation, consultation and brain-storming through Open Distance Learning Education Research

BREAK THE BARRIER ON OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING EDUCATION RESEARCH

Deteriorating quality of education in institutions poses a serious threat to the Indian youth of today and tomorrow As it ,directly affects about 65-70% of the students-those who use publicly funded institutions- it is imperative for them to question the political leaders in their constituencies, especially now when the electoral battle has just begun. Moreover, even though the rest-roughly 30% of students - do not have a direct stake in these institutions, they should be equally perturbed as they pay taxes and a poorly educated workforce is a national loss of human productivity.

Teacher absenteeism accounts for the loss of up to one-quarter of Open Distance Learning Education Research spending. A World Bank Report estimates this loss to be About $2 billion a year in India, just at the primary level. 50% of Absenteeism of teachers at all levels in Open Distance Learning Education Research contact programmes and institutions hurts students from disadvantaged backgrounds the most, are the only avenue for their social and economic advancement. Reduction in teaching time negatively influences the overall quality of education. Moreover, this is a problem that can be tackled with political will of administrators / directors.

Deterioration of quality in publicly funded educational institutions is a serious issue and definitely calls for a greater public push. The same set of political leaders who bring up employment or underemployment, hardly ever talk about the deteriorating education system. This discrepancy is even more glaring as the same set of netas are interested in campus politics and engaging youths in their own development. They do not, however, take interest in improving the quality of education on the same campuses.

On the other hand, being the prime stakeholder of a deteriorating educational system, students will have to come forward and stop following the politicians on the basis of caste, religion and other such affiliations. No affiliation works when they start applying for jobs, when they actually compete with students who are better qualified and have better skills. It is mostly merit which works in jobs and growth within the chosen career. There is no question or fruitful debate during the parliament session on Open Distance Learning programme by the members of parliament.

Research education, particularly in ODL education has many dimensions. It plays a strategic role in the economic development of the developing and the developed countries alike. Research is a constant source of learning all along in life and is directly linked to human capital. Human capital is the nation's most precious and dynamic resource, indispensable for sustained growth and attaining targets. Sincere efforts for spreading education, knowledge and technical knowhow for enhancing skill and efficiency have been subjected to analysis and appraisal, keeping in view the increase in the production of physical capital. Thus, research education has a significant bearing on the creation of income and wealth for improving the quality of life. The beginning was made in India by establishing the Indian Institute of Technologies (IITs), Regional Engineering Colleges (REC) State run engineering colleges, colleges run by private managements and polytechnics, to name a few.

INFRASTRUCTURE FACILITIES

Added to the dearth of infrastructure facilities, provision of latest facilities is rather beyond the reach, since much management have started these colleges as resource generation centres for personal gains. Even with the liberal attitude for updating the institutions, non-availability of suitable manpower and resource crunch together mar the ongoing process of improvement .on research and development.

The corpus of knowledge today is very vast and complex and it is further growing in a multi-dimensional manner. It is worthwhile to note that as of 1965 there were only two scientific journals and by 1996 over 50,000 journals in the field of science and technology exist. The escalating subscription rates of periodicals have further exerted pressure on the limited resources.

The system of ODL research education cannot be improved unless financial inputs are increased in direct proportion to their requirements which should be worked keeping in view the futuristic academic programmes of growing demand for generating human capital throughout the world.

The Globalisation and liberalisation have paved the way for new inputs in the technological institutions. The trump card of globalization is the communication and 'information revolution. The World Wide Web through internet has been transforming our lives constantly. 88 % of internet users belong to the industrialized nations, constituting about 17 per cent of the world population. Only below 10% internet uses in India. The internet facility in the Open Distance Learning Education Research Universities / Centres should be accessible to every student and staff at throwaway prices. Otherwise, it would be difficult to keep track of the growing repository of knowledge.

QUALITY TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Professional development is an integrated lifelong plan of earning a living. Adapting to changing demands in the career path and acquisition of extra skills and new learning techniques are essential.

INTELLECTUAL OBSOLESCENCE PREVENTION

Continuous training and development efforts are needed so as to keep individual abreast of the current improvements in their respective fields of work, whether they are mechanical or general or managerial. Training and development programmes foster individual initiative and creativity and thus help to prevent intellectual manpower Obsolescence in Institutions.

Intellectual/Managerial obsolescence is often analysed by the concept of "half-life". The half-life idea describes the situation that exists when half of the relevant knowledge in a particular area or expertise has eroded away or become obsolete because of newer scientific innovations and discoveries. Intellectual/managerial half-lives are lessening in all fields; but at different rates.

Various Open Distance Learning Education Research institutional policies and programmes can be initiated in an attempt to control intellectual obsolescence. Institutional/ Corporate officers must deal with the need for managerial upgrading as well as the recruitment of new skills. 'Greater attention must be paid to individual development and training.

Intellectual obsolescence can be controlled through continuing and sophisticated attention to the forecasting of manpower needs, monitoring technological changes in terms of their caliber/employment impact, and altering individuals to appropriate as well as to the hazards of technical change.

CONCLUSION

In nutshell, the indispensable importance of Open Distance Learning is of such of magnitude that the modern World is deemed to be bereft of any technological advancement in the absence of Open Universities. The study unequivocally proves that there is much scope for the development of Open Distance Learning, thanks to the increasing demand worldwide.

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