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Abstract

Distance education is an empowering vehicle and provides access to higher education to a large segment of society. The need for distance education is felt due to the information explosion, population explosion and its in-built characteristic of cost effectiveness. Distance learning system is a boon for the learners who are self-motivated; belong to the marginalized or unprivileged groups and residents of remote places, physically impaired people, drop outs but willing to continue their study. It offers flexibility, autonomy to learners, and application of modern technology, cultivates the habit of independent learning in the absence of peer learning group and caters to the needs of heterogeneous group of learners. Thus, it could be concluded that this century is full of competition and there is lots of demand for interdisciplinary skills. Distance Education is boon to this era as it helps in continuous skills up gradation using latest technology.

Key Words : distance education, informar education, education

When it comes to distance education system, one is reminded of our epic hero "Eklavya". He studied archeries in absence of a teacher through self learning - no regular classes, no formal teacher. He became one of the best archers of his time by self learning and dedication. Distance education system offers the opportunity of self learning and is considered to be the need of the hour and it needs to be popularized more to cope up with emerging educational demand. Distance Education has been defined by several thinkers and Educationists, some of the most popular definitions are by Peters and Holmberg, according to them.

Peters (1998) says that distance education is a method of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes which is rationalized by the application of division of labour and organizational principles as well as by the extensive use of technical media, specially for the purpose of reproducing high quality teaching material which makes it possible to instruct great numbers of students at the same time wherever they live. It is an industrialized form of teaching and learning.

According to Holmberg (1982) the various forms of study at all levels which are not under continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms on the same premises, but which nevertheless, benefit from planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organization.

In a nutshell distance education is an instrument to provide quality education to masses at all level irrespective of geographic, economic or other barriers.

Why Distance Education : Distance education is an empowering vehicle and provides access to higher education to a large segment of society. The need for distance education is felt due to the information explosion, population explosion and its in-built characteristic of cost effectiveness. Distance education further provides an opportunity to undergo parallel study and inter-disciplinary studies.

For Whom: Distance learning system is a boon for the learners who are self-motivated, belong to the marginalized or

unprivileged groups and residents of remote places, physically impaired people, drop outs but willing to continue their study. And above all, distance education is also preferred for parallel learning in this era of competition. Distance education has provided a ray of hope for the Indian women as they undergo a career cycle with lots of break for home making, child rearing or change and transfer of jobs by husbands, now they can go for further studies after long breaks due to marriage etc. There are many families which do not prefer to send their girl child to college due to various social reasons or non-availability of colleges in immediate vicinity but with the advent of distance education they can pursue higher studies irrespective of all the social obstacles and barriers.

Why distance education system should be preferred? As a matter of fact distance education unlike formal education offers flexibility, autonomy, application of modern technology, cultivates the habit of independent learning in the absence of peer learning group and caters to the needs of heterogeneous group of learners. In distance education system learners get flexibility with respect to time, place and pace as well as relaxed entry level to a larger extent. Distance education system is also flexible with respect to interdisciplinary choices of courses by learners. The learner enjoys the freedom of place, time and pace, within a given time frame learners can complete their assignments and other course related works at their own pace. Distance education system uses modern technology for the teaching-learning purpose, which has intension to reach many at a time with qualitative content. Use of modern technology makes it cost-effective and reachable by masses. It cultivates the habit of independent learning in the absence of peer learning group. It promotes self learning and development of problem solving skills in absence of regular face to face meeting with teacher. However, the self instructed study material of distance education system offers the in-built teacher in the various forms. The face-to-face counseling sessions offer the opportunity to in-

teract with counselors and peers. Distance education caters to all groups of learners as it believes, it is never too late to learn. It is suitable more to those who can not afford full time courses of the regular university or college system.

Does distance education system work as a facilitator ? Again observing the distance education system, it has multifaceted benefits. It offers learning while earning, lifelong education, enables to establish relationship, and friendly evaluation system, proves to be friendly for Indian women, boon for rural area, generates self confidence and self management, and provides opportunity for parallel learning. Distance education provides an opportunity to continue studies while earning which is quite essential in this era of competition. It works in two ways, one can upgrade the skills for updating one self or can continue with further studies e.g. if a person is graduate and employed, he can opt to do post graduation for better prospect. It offers lifelong education: It is said, "Learning starts the day a child is born and continues till he dies." The system of distance learning is very convenient to any age group and there are cases when people of age rang 60 to 70 have enrolled for distance learning courses and completed successfully. There is no barrier of age and there are many multidisciplinary options available to quench the thrust of learning. Distance Education System has potential to establish relationship with industries by designing need based programs for the up gradation of the skills of their employees. In distance education system one can schedule the assignments according to his own time frame within the broadly given time frame. The nature of distance education offers different flexibility to the learners, suitable to one's own group-e.g. time, freedom to working groups, housewives etc., multi-media approach for equal opportunities and useful to impaired people. Again it is very friendly for Indian women. In our country, most of the women undergo following pattern in the career graph- study, short career, marriage, Break, career, break for children etc and so on. Apart from this, they also undergo other problems like non availability of colleges in the village or within the reachable distance, non- suitability of timings of conventional colleges. Further, it is boon for rural area. In our country more population resides in rural areas. Distance learning has wide reach at an affordable cost. Moreover, distance education system offers the quality education without any barrier of distance- be it a city or a remote village, quality of education with parity is ensured. It adopts student friendly evaluation system: Distance education system does continuous evaluation of the learners to keep their learning updated. The learners are evaluated in terms of assignments, projects, etc. Term end examination also has the factor of time-suitability. Distance education generates self confidence and self management. Acquiring further knowledge and degree makes the learner more confident and more equipped to stand in the competition. As distance learning is based on the philosophy of self learning, it creates awareness about the time management, career management etc. It provides an opportunity for parallel learning. Distance education is most suitable for

parallel learning of multi discipline. It has wide range of courses as well as no barrier of attendance, which makes it more attractive.

Conclusion: To conclude, it can be said that this century is full of competition and there is lots of demand for interdisciplinary skills. Distance Education is boon to this era as it helps in continuous skills up gradation using latest technology.

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