

Chapter 17

Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development of Open and Distance Learning Programs in India: Marketing Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development of a country largely depends on education, which is one of the most important dimensions of development. Open and distance learning (ODL) means working towards achieving sustainability in human development by providing educational opportunities to people all across the country. Many significant measures have been initiated by the government in the direction of taking the education to the people of all segments of society.

The ODL institutions need to have a competitive strategy so as to provide quality education at an affordable cost. This makes India a special case of investigation, wherein a network of over 10 open universities and 104 institutes of open and distance education (IODE) are providing access and equity to education. Challenge and competition in the education sector have presented a new situation where institutions are now viewed as conglomerates and educational programs as educational products. To ascertain sustainable and quality oriented education in open and distance learning mode, the present chapter attempts to make an analysis of IGNOU, the premier national open university of India by Academic Program Life Cycle (APLC) and SWOC, and to suggest strategies for improving the continuance and survival of academic programs and quality assurance in support services.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important dimensions responsible for inducing sustainable development in a country. It is in fact the tool which not only enables the people to earn their livelihood but also makes them aware of their surroundings thus helping them to lead a more meaningful and healthy life. India with its population of more than one billion has been continuously making efforts to provide the people with adequate opportunities for attaining education and gaining expertise in various disciplines so that they can contribute in the overall development of the nation. Many significant measures have been initiated by the government in the direction of taking the education to the people of all segments of the society.

A result of these efforts has been growth in the number of literates in the country. Since independence, there has been a phenomenal growth in the literacy rate moving from merely 18.33% in 1951 to 64.84% in 2001. This has led to growth in the number of students at all levels including at higher education level. In the last 20 years, development in infrastructure of education and its related fields has also positively impacted on students who are more and more opting for higher education. So the number of educational institutions setup catering to all spheres of society has been rapidly increasing with this rise in number of students enrolled. As is evident from Table 1, the enrollment in these institutions of both the modes i.e. conventional and distance education has been increasing continuously, 2003 being the exception for Distance Education Institutions (DEIs). The table also demonstrates that this growth rate in the number of students is more in distance education mode as compared to conventional mode. As seen here, it is 6.16% for conventional mode universities whereas it is 11.74% for distance mode institutions in 2003. If we further analyze the percentage share of enrollment of Distance Education Institutions then we find that in 1999, total enrollment in Distance Education mode

was 13.29% of enrollment in conventional mode and it increased to 15.48% in 2003. The above analysis clearly indicates the growing acceptance and reliability of distance education mode in India towards providing education which is affordable and convenient for the learner.

Moreover this also reflects that distance education mode is being more and more accepted as an alternative to conventional mode of education.

THE GROWTH SO FAR

At present Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and ten state open universities along with 104 other institutes of distance education are also offering a portfolio of academic programmes and courses in distance mode (DEC, 2004).

IGNOU, being the national open university having national jurisdiction, has been entrusted with the responsibility to promote, coordinate and regulate the standards of education offered through open and distance learning in the country. Presently with the enrollment of 366161 and 101 programmes, it is the leading educational institution in India (IGNOU, 2005). The growth in student enrollment at IGNOU which admitted its first batch of learners in 1987 with total enrollment of 4528 has been phenomenal. The University has registered growth rate of 7986% in a span of 18 years i.e. average growth rate of 443% per year.

The growth in student enrollment has been commensurated with the expansion of the network of learner support centers and the support services have also expanded in equal magnitude from 1987 to 2004, as for instance, with 77 learner support centers in 1987, it rose to 1098 in 2004 demonstrating a growth rate of 6000% and average students per learner support center being 58.81 in 1987 to 304.57 in 2004. This clearly denotes the quantum of work that has increased at each of these learner support centers. The magnitude of this tremendous increase in work and responsibility of support centers can be judged by analysing

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