

Chapter 13

Using Web for Delivery of Open and Distance Learning Programmes: A Case Study for Introspection

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study focuses on the usage of Web as a delivery mode for open and distance learning programmes in India. It describes the designing and delivering of a postgraduate level academic programme at Indira Gandhi National Open University. The university has been struggling with teething problems tied to the initial stage of acquisition of an online learning platform. It is a bit of an extensive chapter, as it documents academic and administrative policies being practiced by the largest university in the world to overcome these problems. The objective of this case study is to reflect on the evolution process and to identify conducive factors for successful delivery of online programmes. The interpretative case study methodology also facilitates distinguishing the evidence-based best practices. Access to technology and its robustness are the main constraints in delivery of education through online platforms for any developing country. The online programmes are able to attract a good number of foreign students. The institution has to concurrently put in place a

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policy framework covering aspects like: friendliness to the online interface; standardization of design, delivery, and assessment of the online programmes; recognition to the teachers and administrative staff involved in online programmes; and the use of open educational resources. This case study provides valuable insight for foreign universities ready to plunge into the vast higher education market in India and other developing countries without crossing political borders. It is also very helpful for universities, which are either planning or in the initial stage of acquiring online learning platforms.

INTRODUCTION

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has made its own identity in the education sector. The ODL is an approach to education that seeks to remove unnecessary barriers to learning, while aiming to provide students with a reasonable chance of success in an education and training system centred on their specific needs and located in multiple arenas of learning. Openness and flexibility over choice of place, curriculum, time, pace, and mode of learning are the important features of the open learning system. The key principles are: learner centric, flexible, lifelong learning opportunities, and recognition to prior learning. The scope and functioning of the ODL is likely to increase manifold with penetration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education and its ability to meet educational requirements of all formats of education. Open Distance Learning (ODL) is considered the most viable means for broadening 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). Distance education has been defined by Valentine (2002) as a method of instruction using various methods for delivery of courses and facilitation of learning, and some of these methods are technology driven. Technology facilitates home based education and reduces administration overhead without expanse of physical space requirements (Andy, Pamela, & An-najtle, 2003). These authors have professed that uses of computer technology would continue to increase as a result of expanding demographic diversity among students, rising education costs, and the advent of new technology(ies). The penetration of Internet is continuously increasing in all aspects. The dimensions of distance education would also change with the increasing influence of Internet. Now, Web has become an integrated component of the distance education.

The uses of Web has brought paradigm shift in the delivery of distance education. Owston (1997) claimed that no other technology has ever captured the imagination and interests of so many educators around the world than Web. Earlier technology acted as supplementary to traditional delivery mode without bringing major change

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