

Orientation of the University and the College Teachers through Distance Mode : A Case for Self-Study Material

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Training School Teachers has been in practice for long in India. However, the need for training University and College Teachers is being felt only now. Various strategies for achieving the present goal are being discussed, and some are put into practice. Face-to-face orientation programmes for University and College Teachers are organised at the Academic Staff Colleges. Das argues that if the orientation programmes are offered through distance mode in the form of self-study material they will prove to be more effective and economically viable. We think the case merits serious consideration. Although some of the information given here is somewhat dated, the issues raised remain significant.

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1987, while attempting to put the National Policy on Education (NPE) — 1986 into action, the University Grants Commission wanted to do something about the professional orientation of the university and the college teachers. The Commission had two clear cut alternatives before it:

- (i) to implement the scheme of Academic Staff College (ASC) mooted out in the Education Commission — 1966, and
- (ii) to implement the recommendations of the Mehrotra Committee — 1986 and launch orientation and refresher courses through Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) by adopting Distance Education Methodology.

For reasons best known to itself, the UGC adopted the first alternative and launched the Academic Staff Orientation Scheme. It was probably due to the desire of the then Central Government to see its NPE being put into action immediately and the consequent pressure on the UGC, the UGC had no time to evolve a new model for the orientation of the university and the college teachers through distance education. Hence the already existing model of the ASC proposed by the Education Commission was implemented. As a consequence, ASCs were established. At present about 48 ASCs are offering regular orientation programmes to the teachers all over the country through traditional face-to-face teaching methodology. Which of the two alternatives, i.e. professional orientation through traditional face-to-face teaching or through distance education is academically more sound and economically more viable is a question that seems valid even today after the establishment of the ASCs.

The author of this paper is thoroughly convinced that, considered from the academic and economic point of view, the distance education mode, as it offers autonomy

and independence in planning and executing learning, will be much more effective than the formal face-to-face teaching and learning sessions offered at the ASCs now. The economic viability of the ASCs, on the other hand, can be questioned on the following grounds related to heavy direct costs:

- Payment of TA (Travel Allowance) and DA (Dearness Allowance) to the teachers deputed for the course.
- Payment of TA and DA and honorarium to the resource persons called to deliver lecture at the ASCs.
- Establishment and maintenance costs of the ASCs.
- Teaching gets disrupted in the parent department from which the teachers have been deputed and hence substitutes are appointed during the period of deputation of regular Teachers.

Above all, the academic viability of the face-to-face sessions organised in the ASCs for the orientation of university and college teachers depends, to a great extent, on the seriousness of the teachers with which they undergo these courses. Often the seriousness seems difficult to be ensured and ascertained.

As opposed to the running of orientation courses through traditional face-to-face sessions in ASCs, distance education methodology offers a non-traditional possibility for significantly reducing the above mentioned direct and indirect costs involved in the running of orientation courses through the ASCs. Economic viability of the distance education for offering certain courses in higher education is established beyond doubt. Hence this paper proposes that to launch orientation programmes through distance education would be viable

RATIONALE

The main purpose of having professional orientation

courses for university and college teachers is to enable them to have some access to academic and professional study at an advance level on a continual basis. Professional orientation thus implies widening and deepening of knowledge and insight related to the subjects and academic pursuits with which these teachers are preoccupied in practising their profession. Widening of the knowledge mainly serves purposes of updating, bringing new subject matter into focus and/or including entirely a new subject in the academic and professional competence of the teachers. Deepening refers to a specialised learning that leads to higher research or aims at bettering the competence of teachers to undertake independent research.

Such a course of study aimed at widening, updating and deepening of knowledge naturally has to differ from regular university courses of study because the maturity and the intellectual level of learners are different in the two cases. This difference and the difference in the very level of study implying greater demand and standard of knowledge, academic work and problem solving characterize the orientation of university and college teachers as a study of specialized type, i.e., the one which may lead to academic excellence. It is this difference that calls for teaching and learning approaches which are different from those adopted for regular study of students at Colleges and Universities.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION

University and college teachers, being adults having family and other private responsibilities, cannot be treated as regular post-graduate university students. For the former the traditional face-to-face teaching method adopted in a class-room situation may not prove to be as effective as it is for the regular university students. Being adults and already having acquired post graduate degrees or above, the university and the college teachers have the capabilities to read and understand the concepts contained in a written material. What is then required is to provide these teachers opportunities to utilize their leisure time to study in order to acquire knowledge at the frontiers of new knowledge in their respective subjects/areas of specialization. Orientation through distance mode is suggested not only because of the autonomy and independence it provides to the university and college teachers without disturbing their productive work but also the general economy that it offers has attracted the attention of the author. As regards the economic viability of distance education it has been found out elsewhere that "a successful teacher training project in mathematics for some 50,000 active teachers in 1969-71 proved to require only 3% of the cost of a parallel residential study programme with equal effectiveness" (Holmberg 1973).

In the light of the above considerations it is hypothesised that for the orientation of university and college teachers any academic programme which is based on traditional face-to-face teaching learning approach.

This hypothesis is theoretically substantiated by the fact that self-learning material designed as self-contained course will prove to be academically viable for teachers because it will provide them:

- (i) the possibilities for individualization of study pace, and
- (ii) the possibility of experiencing the study-cum-work on their own which is felt to develop independence and lead to greater autonomy of learning than other types of study.

Further, it will prove to be economically more viable because self-learning material in the form of a self-contained course can be used as distance study material. Once this material is used as distance education material, it would offer the teachers the following economic advantages which distance education offers in general:

- The applicability of distance education to large groups of teachers as a kind of mass communication.
- The economy of both the large group approach and the elimination of the need for residential teaching or a diminished component of it enables the study to take place during leisure time anywhere without disrupting the productive work (teaching) of the teachers.
- The feasibility of developing large scale projects by enlisting the services of the very best subject specialists and educationists. For example, they can be utilized to write the course materials.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are psychological bases that support the contention that learning and retention is enhanced through the study of written materials produced on the basis of certain psycho-educational theories. The strongest support for the written instructional material and its capability of influencing the learning and retention has come from the influential work of Ausubel (1968) on meaningful verbal learning and the notion of "mathemagenic behaviours" introduced by Rothkopf (1966).

Ausubel pointed out that in learning emphasis on cognitive process and structure is important. His emphasis on cognitive process and structure has shown the importance of controlling the presentation of instructional material and the influence of the knowledge that learners bring with them to the learning situation. In support of his argument Ausubel stated that "If I had to reduce all educational psychology to just one principle, I would say this: the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach accordingly". Thus, Ausubel's work drew attention to meaningful text learning. But it was Rothkopf who suggested that learners of specific subjects, while studying through written materials, not only learn the specific content but also acquire some general facilitative skills namely "inspection behaviours" which he later called "mathemagenic behaviours". So this notion reminds

researchers that what the learner does in the learning situation is an important pointer to how much he will retain.

Based on all these conditions, the author in this paper argues that the deliberate use of self-instructional material which will use the above psychological foundations could influence learning positively amongst university and college teachers who are adult learners.

EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS

Teaching through the distance mode (Self-learning material) is significantly more effective than traditional teaching in terms of better educational achievement, attitudinal changes, etc. It is not only supported by the theories of learning in general and adult learning in particular, as stated above, but is also supported by empirical researches. For instance, Das (1990) developed a package of self-learning material as a part of the course prescribed in module — II, i.e., "Science and Technology of Education" offered at the ASC, Banaras Hindu University and studied its effectiveness against traditional teaching method. The study revealed that self-learning material was significantly more effective in facilitating adult learning in terms of their achievement and attitude on criterion tests than the traditional method of teaching. Further the experimental findings of the studies conducted in India and foreign countries by Mullick (1964), Bhusan (1973), Chauhan (1973), Govinda (1976), Sansanwal (1978), Shah (1980), Pandey (1982), Singh (1989), Sheppard (1970), Johnston and Pennypecker (1977), Lee and McLean (1978), Dean (1981), Otto (1981), Edelman (1983), Grant (1983), Neuberger (1984), and Vataravigkit (1985) related to the effectiveness of individualized instructional strategies in terms of programmed learning material, self-learning material, personalized system of instruction and mastery learning, against traditional teaching method have revealed significantly better learning outcomes in the self-learning method than traditional teaching method.

Thus it is expected that orientation of the university and college teachers through self-learning material would result in positive transfer to new situations and deeper cognitive processing and hence better learning than traditional face-to-face teaching.

DISCUSSION

In the theoretical front we know that effective teaching occurs when active involvement of the learner in the learning process is ensured. In the traditional face-to-face teaching through lecture method, the learner's involvement in the teaching/learning process may not be active always. Because the learner may be physically involved but cognitively he may be totally absent. But in the case of self-learning material, either the learner learns, or he does not learn. He takes up the self-learning material only when he has time and is motivated to learn.

The motivation in the case of self-learning material comes basically from within and is not required to be aroused by the teacher as in the case of traditional teaching although strategies to motivate the learner are used while developing the self-learning materials. Through self motivation learning is expected to be better, because while reading self-learning material the learner's (i.e. teacher's) cognitive involvement would be complete.

Further, the Academic Learning Time (ALT) for each individual is different as the learners vary in their intellectual abilities, memory, endurance for work, aptitudes and their level of educational achievement. Self-learning strategy takes this point into consideration as it allows learners to make decisions and assures responsibility for their own education. It helps learners to make decisions about what to study, when to study, how much to study and thus it involves the learners in evaluating the effectiveness of their efforts and progress. Since this strategy makes use of clear and defined goals, promotes active participation in the learning process and involves self evaluation and feed back, it is expected that orientation of the university and college teachers through self-learning material would lead to better learning outcomes.

Another factor that seems to act in favour of self learning material is the autonomy that it offers to the learners in planning their learning activities. This factor is more important in the case of teachers who are adults and have many personal and family responsibilities besides their professional duties. Because of the rigidity that habits acquire at the time of adult-hood, many of the teachers would not like to be guided or governed by others as far as their own learning is concerned. For example, there may be teachers who would like to undertake self-study in a cosy-armed easy chair, say after dinner; there may be others who would find free time for self-studies in the early mornings; there may still be others who would do self-studies in the office-free periods and so on. This implies that teachers can learn effectively when they have freedom to plan their own study schedules and not compelled to attend a formal classroom teaching.

Since self-learning material provides autonomy and independence to the learners to go through it according to their own time and pace, and since it offers freedom of responsibility for regulating their own learning, it is therefore expected that self-learning strategy will prove to be more effective for the teachers than traditional classroom teaching. It is self-directed learning (Moore, 1977) that is important for teachers and not the traditional classroom teaching where they are directed to learn from persons they may not like to be directed.

Besides, the observations made in favour of self-learning material in this paper, also find support from the theoretical writings in the field of distance education. For example, the theory of autonomy and independence in adult learning propounded by Wedemeyer (1983), in the context of distance education, suggests that autonomous

and independent learning through the self-learning material is effective because

- (i) the normal process of teaching and learning is carried in writing,
- (ii) the teaching is individualized and learning takes place through the learners' activity,
- (iii) learning is made convenient for the learner in his own environment, and
- (iv) the learner takes responsibility for his progress, with freedom to start, stop and pace himself at will.

SUGGESTIONS

From what is already known about the effectiveness of self-learning material and the observations made in this paper the following are suggested which may be helpful in directing future thinking of the policy-makers involved in the orientation of the teachers through distance mode:

- The important suggestion for the practitioners and planners is that they must review their decisions regarding the further expansion and establishment of Academic Staff Colleges in the country and consider launching of orientation programmes through distance mode.
- The use of distance mode for the orientation of the university and college teachers is also suggested because, in a country like ours with paucity of funds and resources, it is going to be an economically viable mode.
- Thus if economy and efficiency in the orientation of university and college teachers are desired to be achieved then the suggestion of this paper is significant as it has shown the way for a re-thinking and re-consideration of the suggestions given by Mehrotra Committee to launch professional orientation programme of the teachers through the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU).

Besides this, launching of orientation programmes through distance mode is also advocated because of the following practical benefits:

- (i) It will result in the non-payment of TA/DA to the teachers while undergoing training.
- (ii) It will not affect the regular teaching/learning process in the parent departments from where these teachers are deputed to be oriented as they can learn while working.
- (iii) It will minimize the expenditure involved in the payment of TA/DA to the experts called for delivering lectures to the participants at the ASCs all over the country.
- (iv) Heavy expenditure in establishing a number of ASCs all over the country will be saved as teachers can train themselves wherever they are according to their time, pace and capacity through self-learning material.
- (v) It will ensure the academic viability of teacher orientation because teachers would train themselves only when they are really motivated to learn at their will.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this paper would help to identify if distance mode, i.e. teaching through self-learning material could be effectively used for the orientation of university and college teachers. Such information could assist policy-planners and university administrators concerned with the professional orientation of university and college teachers to re-think and re-plan the strategies adopted for the orientation of the teachers at the tertiary level. This paper, therefore, brings home the role of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) to impart orientation programmes to teachers at the tertiary level by preparing pedagogically sound self-learning material on the content intended to be delivered to these teachers.

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