

Tutor-grading by Monitors in the Distance Education Scenario

LAKSHMI CHANDRA

Department of Distance Education, Central Institute of English & Foreign Languages, Hyderabad-500 007

In the Distance Education scenario in India, monitoring is a much-neglected process. The potential of this process has been adequately perceived but not realised in a commensurate way. In this paper Lakshmi Chandra compares the place of monitoring in the Department of Distance Education, Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL) with that of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU). She also depicts the status of monitoring at the Open University, Milton Keynes, U.K. and then suggests a scheme which could prove useful in the Indian context. Articles such as this, we hope, will induce further thinking on this much neglected area of monitoring in individual institutions and thus persuade the practitioners of Distance Education to give monitoring its due place. Some of the observations made by the author on monitoring at IGNOU and other institutions are her own which need not be treated as the stated policies of the institutions concerned.

INTRODUCTION

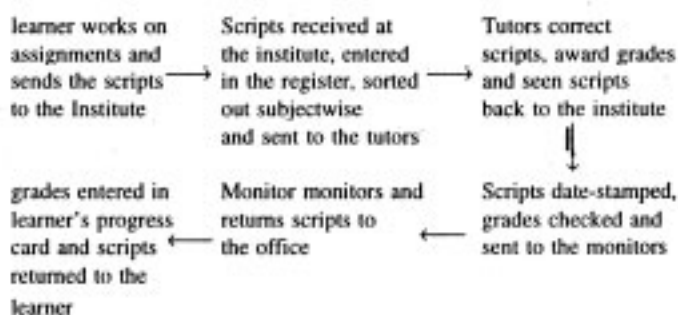
The difference between Correspondence Education (CE) and Distance Education (DE) can be seen in three aspects. First, for CE the medium of teaching is through print, whereas DE uses the multi-media approach, i.e., teaching through print, audio and video cassettes, radio broadcasts and television telecasts, and computers. Face-to-Face teaching is also organised in the DE system through personal contact programmes. Secondly, in CE, the orientation is, by and large, towards the imparting of information with no communication between the tutor and the learner. But, in DE, the teacher is built into the course, interaction between the tutor and the learner is encouraged and the tutors teach in order that learning take place. Finally, in CE the purpose of the course is to prepare students for standard examinations. But, in DE, the purpose is to democratize education, to ensure that education is a lifelong process, and to make education socially relevant.

In order that DE fulfil its goals, it needs to mitigate the loneliness of the learners, it needs to reduce their isolation. This is done through encouraging an active interaction between learners and their tutors. And here is where the monitors play a critical role. But first, who are the monitors? They are full-time members of the staff who are employed by the open universities, or distance education institutes/schools as the case may be. Then, who are the tutors? Tutors are off-campus, part-time staff who normally have full-time commitments to the regular universities to which they belong. Tutors are appointed usually on a short-term basis. They, normally, do not have a chance to have face-to-face contact with either the students or other staff members of the DE organisations. But, they represent the students' closest contact with the DE institutions where these tutors are employed on a

part-time basis. These tutors do not usually, design courses or mark papers in examinations. These tasks are normally done by the monitors. Therefore, monitors are the main link between the tutors and the learners. In this paper, an attempt is made to analyse and compare tutor-gradings in four distance teaching institutions, namely CIEFL, IGNOU, BRAOU and the UKOU. At the end, a scheme is suggested to make tutor-grading more meaningful in the Indian context.

TUTOR-GRADING AT THE CIEFL

The diagram given below illustrates how the system functions at the Department of Distance Education, Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), Hyderabad, India.



The above model is similar to Renee Erdos's description of the movement of a correspondence lesson (Erdos 1967: 26), but Erdos's description does not note the presence of a monitor.

In the CIEFL system, the importance of the monitoring process is shown by how it works. Students who have complaints regarding the grades given to them, or those who are dissatisfied with the comments on their scripts write to the institute or the monitors. The monitors go

through those letters and write back to the students justifying or changing the grades or comments as the case may be.

The monitors also communicate with various tutors. They tell the tutors if they are too strict or too lenient; they ensure a high standard of tutor comments — they inform the tutors of the kind of comments they should write. The tutors are asked to avoid harmful comments and are told to encourage learning in their students. If there is a delay in returning assignments, the monitors write to the tutors to find out why. Telegrams, sometimes reply-paid, are also sent. Thus, we see how monitors are an important centralized link between students on the one hand and tutors on the other, basically showing how the process of monitoring takes place.

Why is there a need to appoint tutors? Every DE institute or organisation has limited numbers of full-time faculty members and a large number of students. To help this full-time faculty, part-time faculty members are appointed with the main purpose of evaluating the assignments and helping the institute arrive at a grade while assessing the performance of students throughout the course. In the Department of Distance Education, CIEFL, at any given time, there are about 1500 students registered on the rolls for the Post Graduate Certificate in the Teaching of English (PGCTE) and for the Post Graduate Diploma in the Teaching of English (PGDTE). For the PGCTE, the participants are expected to do six courses and submit 11 assignments per course, which means a total of 66 assignments per student. For the PGDTE, the participants have a choice — (1) out of six courses they can choose any five; or (2) they can choose any four courses and do a project instead of one course. For the courses chosen, they have to do 10 assignments for each course. This means a minimum of 50 assignments or 40 assignments plus a project per student. Out of the 1500 students, if 1000 are registered for the PGCTE and 500 for the PGDTE, and if 50% of these are "active", then the minimum number of scripts that the department should receive would be $500 \times 66 + 250 \times 50$ which is 45,500.

The department at present, has 11 faculty members, i.e. 11 monitors. Therefore, the need for "External Faculty Members" or tutors is self-evident. The selection of tutors is done on a rigorous basis (at present, there are 150). And the qualifications prescribed for tutors are: (a) a PGD from CIEFL (b) a research degree (M.Phil./Ph.D.) and (c) five years teaching experience. All the faculty in the DE Department, CIEFL, monitor at least one course each, in addition to other academic administrative work. It is mandatory for every monitor to look through at least 20% of the scripts of each tutor. The monitors have the freedom to delete a tutors' name from the panel if they find that the tutor, in spite of being told how the system works, consistently writes no comments, or even inappropriate comments, or is inconsistent in the grades given, or delays in returning assignments. But, there is no system of grading the tutors.

THE IGNOU PRACTICE

What does the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) do? IGNOU has 16 Regional Centres co-ordinating the work of about 230 Study Centres, with a total enrollment of about 1,80,000 students. IGNOU uses the term "Academic Counsellor" for "Tutor". The Study Centres handle the assignments of the students. The person incharge of the Study Centre is known as the Coordinator. The assignments and materials are sent to the student directly from Head-Quarters by the concerned School/Division, and this schedule is sent to the coordinator. The students work on the assignments and send them to the Study Centre allotted to them. The coordinator receives these assignments, enters them in the register and sends these to the "Academic Counsellors". After evaluating these scripts the Academic Counsellors return them to the coordinator. The coordinator then selects 5% of the scripts of each tutor and sends them to the Regional Centre for monitoring. This is a recent addition to the IGNOU system. In the past, 2% of scripts, randomly selected by the Study Centres were sent to Head-Quarters for monitoring. Now, IGNOU has also developed a proforma for monitors. It is called an "Assignments Monitoring Form" which asks for details regarding the kind of comments made, besides the names of the tutors, the programmes and the assignments that are evaluated. This could, gradually, lead to a grading of the tutors concerned. The fault in this system is that monitoring is not done by subject specialists. So, these monitors can check the format but not the content.

Monitoring is not done in some Open Universities like the B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU) where internal assessment of the student's performance is not normally a part of the evaluation of the student's progress. BRAOU has, today, about 60,000 students on its rolls and 92 Study Centres, with a Central Academic Staff of about 50. BRAOU employs about 3000 part-time faculty, called Counsellors, to help run its Study Centres, where classes are held on weekends or holidays. Here, only "administrative" monitoring, (which Counsellors should teach where and when) takes place.

TUTOR-GRADING AT THE UKOU

The U.K. Open University (UKOU) employs about 5800 tutors and counsellors. There are about 13 regional centres (divided according to the density of the population) throughout the U.K. This university has a target figure of student enrollment, and admission of new students is done on this basis. The target figure is about 50,000 students and the number of new students to be admitted will depend on the number of students who have completed their courses.

Monitoring is the duty of staff tutors, assistant staff tutors or sometimes the members of the course teams. There is an Assignment Handling Office in the Examinations Office. This office selects a certain number of each

tutor's assignments according to a pre-specified monitoring scheme, photocopies these assignments and sends them to the monitors. David Sewart says:

Monitoring should correct any deviance in the tutoring service before any serious hardship or concern is caused to students, and it is for the monitor to take steps to correct any tutor whom he feels is not performing satisfactorily. (Sewart 1978 : 98).

At the British Open University monitors grade tutors — there is a four level scale to grade them, depending on the tutors' competence. The scheme is as follows :

- Level A : One marked script per three Tutor Marked Assignments (TMA) is randomly selected starting with the first TMA. Tutors who served satisfactorily in the previous year start at this level. Tutors may be recommended to this level by a monitor, and remain at this level until notified to the contrary.
- Level B : One script for each TMA is randomly selected. Tutors are automatically placed at this level after two TMAs have been monitored at level C, or on request by a monitor (from Level A).
- Level C : Three scripts from each TMA are selected, if possible one 'F' (Bare fail), one 'R' (Bad fail) and one other grade (A,B,C,D). New tutors on any course start at this level. After two TMAs have been monitored at this level, the tutor is placed in level B. The monitor may request that the tutor be placed in level D, but after one TMA has been monitored at level D, the tutor returns automatically to level C.
- Level D : Six scripts with varying grades are selected from each of the TMAs. After one TMA has been monitored at this level, the tutor returns to level C. Tutors may be placed in this level at the request of the monitor. (Sewart 1978 : 98-99)

Thus this system shows the importance the British Open University gives to the monitoring process.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING TUTOR-MONITORING

Monitoring, if done properly can add more meaning to the DE System. It can lower the drop-out rate; help in uniformity in marking; maintain high standards of tutor comments; prevent delays in returning assignments; gauge the difficulty levels of lessons and assignments; give students access to re-evaluation and it can reduce student-tutor isolation.

Therefore, to ensure that monitors can do all the above, I feel, a system of grading tutors, suitable for the Indian system should be evolved. Here are my suggestions:

- Level I : At this level, monitors could place all those tutors who have proved their competence. For Level I tutors monitors could look into at 5% or less of the scripts of these tutors. At times, these scripts could be returned unmonitored — it happens in the Department of Distance Education, CIEFL, during the final-contact-cum-examination time. At this time, most of the faculty teach four hours a day, six days a week and therefore have no time to monitor. Therefore, the administration — the section office — can receive instructions that at times like these, e.g. towards examination time, scripts be sent only to Level I tutors.
- Level II : Monitors could place tutors at this level, after the tutors have done a reasonable amount of work and yet may not have achieved the standards of the Monitor. The monitors can then look into 20% of the scripts of these tutors and give their suggestions on how to improve tutor-marking.
- Level III : All new tutors could be placed at this level. The monitor should look into all the scripts corrected by a Level III tutor, when the correction has been done for the first time. After this, the monitor can decide at which level to place the tutor and give the section office appropriate instructions.

If monitors and tutors work in harmony, the distance students will definitely benefit. If the students benefit, the entire system of DE will get the accreditation it deserves.

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