

Internationalizing Indian Higher Education Through Distance

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Abstract: *Globalization is by far the hottest subject today and education has emerged as one of the major issues in globalization particularly in the context of higher education. There are two main types of players in the game of globalization of education- the conventional universities and other is the open universities delivering courses at the door steps of students in their respective countries. Governments all over the world have realized the importance of open and distance education as a regular and necessary element of education system. This paper is an effort to flag major issues like Market Segment Assessment, Identification of Programmes, Instructional Delivery etc. in marketing IGNOU programmes outside India. The current experiences provide adequate indicators of a large potential of marketing of IGNOU programmes to international audience.*

Introduction

With developments in information and communication technology, distance is dying and the world is shrinking into a global village. The boundaries of the countries are steadily being marginalized and nominalized. Euro Currency, European Passports are early indications of the world to be. Accordingly, globalization is by far the hottest subject. Along with globalization several other terminologies like, Internationalization, Liberalization, Marketization, Commercialization, etc., are also being frequently used world over. Despite the beginning of such concepts, globalization was in the domain of economy and marketable products and services, it is slowly and steadily covering more and more grounds. Education has emerged as one of the major issues in globalization, particularly in the context of higher education.

“Higher Education is seen as a commercial product and its commercialization has reached the global market place. The World Trade Organization is considering a series of proposals to include higher education as one of its concerns (Altbach 2001).

Indeed, globalization of education is more of an economic activity than educational in the conventional sense of the term. It is seen as a major export item and source for generating forex.

Higher education has expanded both in the developed as well as the developing countries. Countries need to educate more of their young people to a higher standard – a degree is now a basic qualification for many skilled jobs. Higher Education is no longer a small cultural enterprise for the elite (World Bank 2000). This is a challenge mainly in the developing countries as half of today’s higher education students live in the developing world (World Bank 2000). In fact, the expert group appointed by the World Bank warns of

the peril of developing countries without substantial expansion of higher education in the globalized world.

In countries like India, enrolments in higher education are growing faster than expansion of enrolments at the elementary and secondary education. To accommodate this growing demand for higher education, the developing countries have to expand institutions of higher education. Opening of new institutions will be an expensive proposition; probably forbidding. Hence, aspiring students have to either move out of their countries for higher education, or they can access a course through distance education – either conventional print based correspondence course or through web based education from a virtual university sitting in their own respective countries. These are being increasingly possible due to revolutionary changes in the communication and information technologies.

There are several key players already in the game. There are two types of players in this game of globalization of education – conventional universities attracting and enrolling students from other countries, and open universities delivering courses at door steps of students in their respective countries. While there is a long such history for conventional universities, distance education is a new entrant and making inroads into the global educational market much faster. The Open University –UK offered programmes to 25,000 students in 94 countries in 1998 (Daniel 1998 as cited in Blight, Davis and Olsen, 1999). The Open University of Israel offered programmes to 17,000 Russian students (Victoria, Semion and Svetlana, 1999). Just as many conventional Indian universities attract students from the developing countries, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) also reaches out to students in several other countries with its distance education programmes. There is however, a wide gap between the potentialities and actual marketing of programmes by the Indian universities in general and IGNOU in particular. This paper discusses the prospect and modalities of Internationalization of Indian Education through distance, and the key role of IGNOU in this effort.

International Scenario

Understanding of student mobility and international co-operation in higher education is hampered due to lack of comprehensive documentation. The available data reveals that United States is the largest beneficiary receiving 32 percent of foreign students followed by UK, Germany, France and Australia. Students from China, Malaysia and India make up the largest proportion of foreign students from the non- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. International students generate a lot of revenue for the host countries, like US economy gains US \$ 6.1 billion, and British Universities contribute annually US \$ 1.5 billion to the countries economy. Appreciating the potential, Australia and France have entered the fray adopting aggressive marketing strategies to attract foreign students. The business competitiveness is based on the quality of the programmes, quality of program delivery, infrastructure and the overall reputation of the university.

Distance education has now brought an alternative opportunity. Students need not travel out of their country for obtaining a degree. By the use of information and communication technology, there is global transmission of information. This has led to the potential of treating entire world as a virtual campus. Also, courses in this mode cost less for the students.

Indian Scenario

Indian Government has been supporting the education of international students through conventional universities. More than 95 % international students in India come from the developing countries of Asia and Africa like Kenya, Malaysia and Sudan followed by Nepal, Jordan, Ethiopia, Iran, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Tanzania, Thailand and Yemen. Data available shows that there is steady decline in the inflow of foreign students in India since 1993. Even students from Africa, Middle East, South Asia and other developing nations have been shifting away from India. This is because India is not taking the advantage of the high academic reputation enjoyed internationally by the institutes like Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) in the conventional system and IGNOU through distance mode. India has several Centers of Excellence in different subject specialties with internationally comparable standards.

Distance Education: IGNOU

Potential of Distance Education

During the last three decades, distance education has expanded phenomenally both in India and abroad. Distance Education Institutes have been established in about 115 countries either dual mode or single mode. Though the expansion of the institutes are phenomenal, the expansion has been much more in the developed countries. Many of the developing countries which constitute more than 95% of the world population still do not have distance education institutes and programmes. On the face of globalization, the developing countries need for continuing education for capacity building is unquestionable. Hence, people who can afford are looking for courses from other countries.

In this context there is a definite case for IGNOU making a serious stride to export its programmes.

IGNOU as a Mega University

IGNOU, established in 1985, has been a pioneer in distance education and emerged as one of the Mega Open Universities in the world. (others are - China, France, Indonesia, Korea, South Africa, Spain, Thailand, Turkey and UK). Mega University, according to Daniel (2000) is a University that teaches at a distance and has atleast one hundred thousand students.

Following are some of the salient features of IGNOU:

- IGNOU at present is offering 50 programmes comprising 604 courses.
- Number of students enrolled in 2000-2001 are 750,873.
- The University has been conferred upon the Award of Excellence for distance education materials in 1999 by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL).
- Programmes designed by IGNOU are of high quality.
- IGNOU is using space technology to promote interactivity between learners and resource persons.

- Compared to the cost of programmes offered by Universities in UK, Australia, Canada etc., IGNOU can afford to substantially reduce the price. For example, for the prestigious management course IGNOU charges approximately Rs. 10,000 or US \$ 250. Similar course from a developed country will cost about ten times to that of IGNOU.

Hence, IGNOU is a major player in the developing world in distance education and can offer high quality relevant courses / programmes at an affordable price to the students in the developing countries.

Market Segment Assessment

The vast expanse of the countries in Africa, Middle East and some of the Asian and Pacific countries can be the major beneficiaries and the potential market for IGNOU programmes. Generally speaking, the industrializing developing countries with large populations are emphasizing on human development. If these countries do not have distance education institutions IGNOU may not have to compete with the National programmes in the respective countries. Explorations from this angle need to be made in countries like Egypt, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Tunisia etc. Before actually fixing the countries for target marketing, detailed socio-economic and educational studies have to be carried out. For example the composition of the middle class population of a country will be an important determinant of the success of distance education programmes marketing. Within the countries, specific targets can be set up, initially with a modest target scaling up with years. Like France launched its educational efforts in India in 1998 with a modest target of enrolling only 2500 students. These students were only in management, computer and engineering courses. IGNOU can select two or three specific countries and try to market two or three of its prestigious programmes which are already world class. The target in the first year should be 2500 raising to about 10,000 within five years.

Some of the other guiding parameters in selecting the countries can be :

- Size of the Tertiary Education population
- Socio Economic development scenario
- English language facility among the potential learners
- Kind of Distance Education programmes available within these countries and
- Diplomatic relations of the country with India.

In the table (see page 346) are listed a few countries that have large tertiary education population without distance education institutes and facilities within the country.

The list given in the table is not an exhaustive one. These are just examples which show that countries like Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Yemen etc. have large tertiary education population without distance education institutes and facilities within the country. Such countries can be identified by IGNOU.

Identification of Programmes

Once IGNOU identifies the target countries, the most important activity is to identify the

programmes that can meet the educational needs of the concerned countries. An analysis of the trends of the course offerings in the developing countries indicate the success of programmes like Management Science, Information Science and Computers, Teacher Training, Health related programmes like Nursing, Nutrition and Agriculture. Before launching the programmes one can carry out a market survey and feasibility study of these courses in select countries. One strategy for marketing the programme would be to avoid competing with the programmes which are locally available. The second strategy could be to complement and supplement the programmes that are need based for the concerned country. For example, in the present scenario-countries like Nepal, Vietnam, Kenya, Ethiopia, Seychelles, Mauritius etc, will require trained managers, information scientists, health and agriculture managers, trained teachers at various levels and experts in distance education. Presently besides the Gulf region – Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Doha, Muscat and Kuwait, IGNOU's courses are being offered in Mauritius, Maldives, Seychelles, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE), IGNOU has also collaborated with the International Institute of Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA), Addis Ababa an organ of UNESCO, to provide distance education programmes to students in Ethiopia and Liberia. Also, under Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship Scheme sponsored by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), students from the developing commonwealth countries have been offered IGNOU programmes through distance mode. These countries include Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago and Caribbean and Pacific Islands. The scheme was evaluated by both external and internal and was found to be useful.

Instructional Delivery

There are two key components of instructional delivery namely the Instructional Material and the Student Support Services.

Instructional material used by IGNOU are one of the three types – printed self instructional material, audio-video programmes, CD ROMs and instruction through web (Web Based Courses). The content and quality of the printed material of IGNOU is comparable internationally. The university was conferred the Award of Excellence for Distance Education Materials in 1999 by the Commonwealth of Learning. But if IGNOU programmes have to be internationalized on a large scale, more care has to be taken as far as structuralization (application of educational technology; instructional design in particular) and printing and production is concerned. The programmes can be revised and updated keeping the international students in mind. An effort in this regard has been done by the faculty of STRIDE at IGNOU recently where Post Graduate Diploma in Distance Education (PGDDE) and Master of Arts in Distance Education (MADE) courses were revised to make them more international in character. Similarly audio and video programmes should be re-examined for improving the quality.

Communication Technologies have created a new revolution in education. Web Based Courses have added a new dimension to internationalization. Students do not have to leave their home country to access the educational opportunity. Interaction takes place through e-mail, newsgroup and bulletin boards. Hence students have an opportunity to interact with tutors and fellow learners. IGNOU has launched its two web centric programmes in Bachelor of Information Technology and Advanced Diploma in Information Technology. Some of the management courses are also online. IGNOU can develop more online programmes which should be specifically for a global market.

Student Support Services comprise counseling, tutorials, extended personnel contact programmes etc. IGNOU already has a large and complex Student Services Network within the country operating through face-to-face mode. This strategy has to be examined against the enrolment figure since cost effectiveness will depend upon the size of enrolment. The alternative mode of counselling can be Interactive Television, telephone, internet and E-mail. The developing countries are also using space technology in domestic systems. By using space applications, the entire country can be covered in one go. The Foot Print of the Indian Satellite covers a large part of South East Asia and a large segment of the Middle East. IGNOU just needs a clearance and the programmes can be delivered through interactive television to several South East Asian Countries, SAARC countries and the Middle East.

The International Transoceanic Telecommunication Service has been provided since 1965 by the International Telecommunications Satellite Organization (INTELSAT) – an intergovernmental organization with 109 members and 14 satellites in geosynchronous orbit over the equator. It offers number of services and many countries have leased some capacity from the INTELSAT. For example, the Indonesian system serves Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand.

Cost and Course Pricing

The financial implications to market IGNOU programmes to International audience will be as follows:

- Since IGNOU will not enter into a barren land, it will face stiff competition with other universities from the developed world in marketing its programmes abroad, significant investment will have to be made in advertising and programme marketing, at least in the initial stage.
- The enhancement in the quality of instructional material- both the print and electronic media will also increase the unit cost of the material.
- Further, should the support services have to be delivered through Internet and Interactive Television, the cost has to be included.
- IGNOU has to undertake short term, medium term and long term cost projection exercise. The programme or course pricing will depend upon IGNOU's policy on revenue generation- price the programmes or course at 3-5 times the cost but 20 to 50% less than the cost of comparable programmes offered by universities in Australia, UK, USA, Canada, etc. IGNOU should not see one or two years as profit years but treat these years as years of investment.

Conclusion

IGNOU, all by itself is unlikely to succeed in this competitive marketing of programmes. It must be adequately backed up by diplomatic support. Almost all countries leading in education marketing have set up separate agencies as wings of their Embassies to support educational marketing. USEFI for USA, British Council for UK, AUSAID for Australia and partially CIDA for Canada are some of the important examples. Recently French Embassy in India set up an Education Unit for promoting French educational programmes

in India. Although there are diplomatic staff as educational attaché in few Indian embassies abroad, that is far too inadequate. If India has to market its programmes abroad, there is hardly any other choice but to setting up a unit in Indian embassies in select countries on the lines of USEFI or British Council.

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Table 1 : Country wise Population, Enrolment and Programmes

S.No	Country	Development type		Population*		DE System		Enrolment* (Tertiary Level)					Courses		
		LDC	DC	1996	2010	OU	DEC	All Inst.	Univ.	DE Inst.	Other Third Level Inst.	Language	Educational Level	Courses and Programmes	
1.	East Asia Korea Republic of		X	46	50	X		2225092 (95-96)	1143037 (90-91)	196175 (95-96)	347772 (90-91)	Korean	Four year BA Degree Programme (Undergraduate)	Agriculture, Humanities, Languages, Educational Studies, Engineering Medical and Health Science, Mathematics, Law, Social Science	
2.	South Asia Maldives Nepal Bhutan	X X X	X X X	.. 22 ..	.. 31 ..		X X	102018 (93-94) ..	102018 (93-94)			English, Nepali	Complementary to Primary Education	Social Studies, Nepali, English
3.	South East Asia and the Pacific Cambodia Malaysia	X X	X X	10 21	13 26		X	.. 191290 (94-95)	82971 (93-94)		87174 (93-94)	Malaya	First Degree, Pre Degree, Continuing Education	B.A, B.Sc., in Humanities, Physical Science, Mathematics, Social Science	
	Myanmar	X	X	46	55		X	..							

S.No	Country	Development type		Population*		DE System		Enrolment* (Tertiary Level)				Courses		
		LDC	DC	1996	2010	OU	DEC	All Inst.	Univ.	DE Inst.	Other Third Level Inst.	Language	Educational Level	Courses and Programmes
	Vietnam		X	75	94			297900 (95-96)	..	..		Vietnamese	Secondary, Pre Degree, Diploma, Continuing Education	Engineering (Few), Finance and Account, Computing Information Technology, Languages (English, Japanese, French), Open and Distance Learning
	Sub Saharan Africa													
	Botswana		X	1	2			..						
	Congo Decm Republic		X	45	69			13806 (92-93)	13806 (92-93)					
	Ethiopia	X	X	48	89			32671 (94-95)	26415 (94-95)		6256 (94-95)			
	Ghana		Z	18	24			..						
	Kenya		X	27	36		X	31287 (89-90)			6447 (89-90)			
	Mozambique		X	18	25			..						
	Seychelles		X	..	..			..	
	South Africa		X	38	46		X	617897 (94)	380184 (95)		263929 (94)			
	Tanzania	X	X	30	42	X		12776 (95-96)	5881 (95-96)	2836 (95-96)	4059 (95-96)		Education Law, Science Technology and Environmental Studies	

S.No	Country	Development type		Population*		DE System		Enrolment* (Tertiary Level)				Courses		
		LDC	DC	1996	2010	OU	DEC	All Inst.	Univ.	DE Inst.	Other Third Level Inst.	Language	Educational Level	Courses and Programmes
	Uganda	X	X	20	27		X	27586 (94-95)	10869 (94-95)	117 (94-95)	16600 (94-95)			
	Zambia		X	9	12		X	..	..	..	..
	Zimbabwe	X	X	11	14		X	..	..	..	..
5.	Arab Countries													
	Algeria		X	29	37		X	298767 (94-95)	267142 (95-96)	24063 (94-95)	..			
	Egypt		X		59	74		628233 (90-91)	696988 (94-95)	..	107737 (90-91)			
	Jordan		X	4	6	X		..	..	..	..
	Kuwait		X	2	2			..	..	..	..
	Saudi Arabia		X	19	31			..	..	..	..
	Sudan	X	X				X	60134 (89-90)	59824 (90-91)	..	5576 (89-90)			
	UAE		X	3	3			..	..	..	..
	Yemen	X	X	16	25			53082 (91-92)	53082 (91-92)	..	..	

LDC : Least Developed Countries

DC : Developing Countries

Source : Statistical year book 1997

OU : Open University

DEC : Distance Education Centers

Other Third Level : Other Education at the third level in Non-University Institutes (Teacher Training Colleges and Technical Colleges)

* : Figures in Millions

.. : Data not Available