

ROLE OF DISTANCE TEACHING IN PRIMARY TEACHER EDUCATION

by

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Introduction

The idea that education is for all the people and that it is a life-long process which can continue through adult life is being accepted more and more widely. The introduction of free and compulsory primary and secondary education in many industrialized countries in the late nineteenth century has increasingly by produced an adult population which has provided the base for the establishment of further education for its progressive extension.

The developing countries consider educational programmes a basic requirement for their economic development and political independence. The existing formal systems of education obviously cannot cope with the demands of education for all. In an effort to extend educational opportunities similar to the formal system to every age group and people from different social backgrounds, the nations have to look for alternative means. Distance teaching apparently appears to be answer to the growing needs of such nations.

As in other developing countries, education is a priority sector in Pakistan. On it depends, very largely, the economic development of the country and progress at present as well as in the future. Like most developing countries, Pakistan is expanding her 'educational system almost to financial breaking point and is committing vast amounts of money to provide the facilities of education to the common people'.¹

It is a two-fold problem :

- (i) Educating the masses, making them literate and providing them with basic skills;

- (ii) Adopting strategies to achieve this objective in as short a time as possible.

The national objectives have been set out in the Report of the Educational Commission (1959) and the Educational Policies (1972 & 1978). Considerable progress has indeed been made over the last three decades in the number of institutions of formal education established at various levels and in the enrolment of students. However, mass education remains a problem and literacy at the national level is still at 26%.² Immediately related to mass education is basic (primary) level education. At this level substantial expansion has already taken place as is indicated in table 1 below :

Table 1
Enrolment in Primary Schools³
(Enrolment in Lakh)

| Year | Enrolment in primary schools | |
|---------|------------------------------|--------|
| | Total | Female |
| 1973-74 | 48.1 | 13.6 |
| 1982-83 | 68.00 | 22.00 |

As is evident from table 1 that 41.32% enrolment has during the last decade in primary schools. A basic requirement at primary level is the provision of qualified and trained teachers. All measures aimed at expanding primary education largely depend on the success of teacher education at the primary level. Training is not a static phenomenon. In the fast developing modern world training for basic education needs to be geared to the latest developments in the techniques of instruction and to expansion in the various branches of knowledge.

This paper looks at this crucial aspect, *i.e.*, training teachers at the grass root (primary) level. The teacher, as it is observed, "is the central figure in all educational activities and can perform a vital role in spreading education and in reforming the society through dedication, perception and example".⁴ Existing institutions train teachers and provide them with basic instruction for primary and secondary levels. Their specific purpose is to

meet the shortage of trained teachers. Formal training, however, does not end with teachers passing out of training institutions. To keep teachers conscious of the latest developments in knowledge and teaching skills, and to develop "competency-based teacher's education particularly at the primary level, continued orientation of teachers is of vital significance".⁵ In Pakistan, the training institutions have, for some years, been arranging workshops and short-term courses periodically or in cycles. To these, however, only handfuls of teachers can be admitted. Orientation of the evergrowing mass of primary teachers has remained a gigantic problem.

Allama Iqbal Open University and in-service orientation

Allama Iqbal Open University, an institution promoting distance learning, is particularly suited to a task of this nature. The objectives⁶ of this institution have been spelled out in the Education Policy (1972). Thus the University was established to provide part-time educational facilities through correspondence courses, tutorials, seminars, workshops, laboratories, television radio broadcasts and other mass communication media. The institution has the Primary Teacher Orientation Course (P.T.O.C.) as a priority programme. It was initiated in 1976-77 and is conducted in cycles through such non-formal methods of correspondence and radio, tutorials and seminars. The University has developed this programme of distance teaching in the following specific areas relevant to the primary level and in keeping with the latest syllabuses :

1. General Science, including Population Education
2. Mathematics
3. Social Sciences
4. Arts and Crafts
5. Health and Hygiene
6. Adult Education
7. Urdu
8. Islamiat
9. Examinations and Evaluation.

The written material in each area consists of unit lessons, each a self-explanatory composition in which the theme has been developed in simple and informal language and in distance education style. Lessons have been set in a format that makes them distinct from the commonly used textbooks in formal education.

There are three main objectives of this training course. Firstly, to familiarise the primary teachers with new elements of the revised primary school curriculum. Secondly, to increase their knowledge in the appropriate subject areas and help them to develop their teaching skills. Thirdly, to provide them with an opportunity in terms of improving their qualifications by counting the primary teacher orientation course as one course credit for the intermediate certificate. There are 18 radio programmes of 15 minutes duration spread throughout the course which elucidate and expand some of the concepts and other content of the written material. The programmes give instruction in science, history, sociology, languages, Islamiat, arts and crafts, with emphasis on the science of teaching. They familiarise the teachers with new approaches to transmitting or imparting knowledge to their children.

Course assessment takes the form of four written assignments during the period of the course. These are marked and commented upon by the student's tutor. The examination is held at the end of the course at examination centres according to the location and distribution of students. The overall grades for continuous assessment and for the examination are combined to produce a final course result for each student. The course assessment consists of :

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| (a) continuous assessment : | 40% |
| (b) end of course examination : | 60% |

Tutor student contact is provided throughout the course. Normally 30-35 students are allotted to a tutor. The tuition is of two kinds. Firstly, through the comments and suggestions made by the tutor on student's assignments. Secondly, by means of a programme of tutorials, at which student groups can meet their tutor and receive help with any study difficulties.

Registration of primary teachers for this course is done through nomination by the District Education Officers. They inform students concerning registration for a particular cycle. Then course material is despatched to the students when the course starts. By the end of 1984, the University had run fourteen cycles of the course and total enrolment reached 77,205. However, 39,000 teachers completed the course during this period out of whom 27,808 teachers passed.

Components of distance teaching and their use

Distance teaching is a composite or combination of the effective use of mass-media such as radio, T.V. correspondence material and a variety of audio-visual aids and study centres. Let us examine the utility of various media for the Primary Teachers Orientation Course.

Radio

No doubt radio as an educational medium can reach over as wide a distance as reception will allow. It is also economical for material can be prepared and recorded and used as many time as required, with the cost of further transmission only. High quality content and well written scripts can be used with a very wide coverage. The programmes can be heard inside the home if necessary, thus making them more convenient and can be used as complete teaching courses or can be integrated with face-to-face teaching courses or used in conjunction with correspondence courses. Radio programmes can not provide visual help and there lies their limitation, so there is a variety of subjects which cannot be taught. Similarly, the lengthy regular radio programmes unsupported in other ways produce difficulties of monotony and students lose their motivation.

Television

Television is proving to be one of the most versatile audio-visual aids ever developed. Television is appealing to the eyes as well as to the ears. Therefore, a much wider range of subjects can be taught. This involves a wider range of teaching methods and aids. Teaching by demonstration makes instruction effective particularly in the applied and physical sciences. Some limitations are also there, however, in the use of T.V. Firstly, it can never replace face-to-face classroom teaching as it lacks the personal touch that exists between a teacher and a student. Secondly, questions and answers and discussion which makes good teaching cannot be reproduced on T.V. Thirdly, it is costly also. The pace of teaching is also fixed and can proceed neither more slowly nor faster than the machine. But some of these disadvantages are overcome when the T.V. is supplemented by some face-to-face teaching. In the Primary Teachers' Orientation Course, this medium has however, been excluded for the time being for the reason that it is more costly and has less coverage than radio.

Correspondence material

The printed material, forms the bulk of the distance teaching programme. Such material can provide a cheap but practical way of educating a wide range of people who cannot attend or do not have the opportunity of attending regular classes. Instruction is individual and each student can move at his own pace. It can also provide thorough teaching. The students move systematically through a field of study going on to new material only when the previous material is mastered. Education can be continued while students are working and earning.

Study centres

Study centres are the places where students meet their tutors and fellow students. These centres provide additional opportunities for learning. Study centres are usually based in local educational institutions. They are open in the evening and on specified days and times. The tutors are appointed on a part-time basis. Their work is supervised by the full-time Regional Director of the area concerned.

Audio-visual aids

Audio-visual communication enables teachers to reach a great number of external students when used as a component of distance teaching. But the response to such methods and the individual follow-up can be given by correspondence material. Film strips, films and slides, recorded cassettes, photographs, diagrams and sketches and demonstration are the audio-visual elements which can be and are used by Allama Iqbal Open University.

From the above analysis it appears that the existing training institutions are hardly adequate to meet the requirements of the nation so far as the in-service training of teacher is concerned. Allama Iqbal Open University fills this gap by providing the much needed orientation programmes which are conducted in cycles. Thus distance teaching has acquired a great significance in the development of teachers' training programmes at the grassroot level. Mediawise, the future of T.V. is limited both on account of economics and the limitations of existing T.V. ownership in Pakistan. Therefore, the material in print and the spoken word are going to play a vital role for a long time to come. However, it has to be seen how far these media have been effective.

Critical appraisal of the media used

From the thirteen cycles of the course that have been completed, certain weaknesses and limitations of distance teaching have emerged. Thus we have to see how far this new experiment of non-formal distance teaching poses a challenge for our society. The limitations are of two types, (a) administrative, (b) social. The influence on the implementation of the course is significant. Administration covers the transmission of written correspondence material to students, the working of study centres/tutorials and coverage of radio. The social problems are rooted in the attitudes of teachers. Some aspects of their cumulative effect are explained below.

In a large part of the country, especially the hills and remote parts, means of communication are poor (in many high ground areas even non-existent). Added to this are the vagaries of weather, particularly in the hilly areas. These limitations hamper transmission of written material to students. At times in rainy and snowy seasons the printed material, which is the most important and basic component of the course does not reach a large number of students. Also, students do not have regular contacts with the study centres, which are at present located at the district/tehsil level and they are, therefore, unable to avail themselves of the academic facilities and guidance provided there.

Two factors work against the operation of the radio component :

- (i) People are poor and their level of income is very low ;
- (ii) Large parts of the country are underdeveloped.

The University conducted a survey⁷ in 1984 for assessing the effectiveness of the Orientation Course. Results on the different aspects of the programmes were calculated from 1200 replies received. The following Table 2 shows the position of the radio programmes.

Table 2
Attitudes towards Radio programmes
No. of teacher—students: 1200

| Item | Category of assessment | |
|---|------------------------|----|
| | n | % |
| (a) Possession of radio and access to it: | | |
| (i) Have radio | 492 | 41 |
| (ii) Do not have radio but have access to | 240 | 20 |

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| (iii) Do not have radio and also not access to | 468 | 39 |
| (b) Those who heard radio programmes : | | |
| (i) Social Sciences | 696 | 58 |
| (ii) Mathematics | 648 | 54 |
| (iii) Urdu | 672 | 56 |
| (iv) Islamiat | 648 | 54 |
| (v) Arts and Crafts | 684 | 57 |
| (vi) Science including Population Education | 720 | 60 |
| (c) Usefulness of broadcasts, as rated by those hearing them : | | |

| | Useful | | Not useful | |
|--|--------|----|-------------|---|
| | n | % | n | % |
| (i) Social Sciences | 517 | 82 | No Response | |
| (ii) Maths. | 518 | 80 | —do— | |
| (iii) Urdu | 628 | 84 | —do— | |
| (iv) Islamiat | 620 | 76 | —do— | |
| v. Arts and Crafts | 716 | 84 | —do— | |
| vi. Science including population education | 614 | 80 | —do— | |

From (a) and (b) it is evident that a large part of the clientele of the course are deprived of the benefits of this component and cannot avail themselves of the University's programmes. A little over half of the students heard radio broadcasts, but most of these teachers are conscious of the value of these programmes (c).

Table 3 reflects the views of teachers about the correspondence materials. These give some idea as to how far the content of the printed material is attractive and comprehensible and how much interest it evokes in them.

Table 3

Level of difficulty of the units⁸

| Unit No. | Unit title | No. of teacher—students : 1200 | | | | | |
|----------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------|---------|----|------|-------|
| | | Difficult | | Average | | Easy | |
| | | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| 1. | System of education in Pakistan | 192 | 16 | 672 | 56 | 336 | 28 |
| 2. | Teaching of Urdu | 60 | 5 | 828 | 69 | 312 | 26 |
| 3. | Urdu reading | 72 | 6 | 804 | 67 | 324 | 27 |
| 4. | Urdu writing | 108 | 9 | 840 | 70 | 252 | 21 |
| 5. | Set theory (Maths) | 236 | 19.66 | 684 | 57 | 268 | 22.34 |
| 6. | Geometry and Graphs | 216 | 18 | 636 | 53 | 348 | 29 |
| 7. | Arts and crafts | 144 | 12 | 744 | 62 | 312 | 26 |
| 8. | Adult education | 204 | 17 | 612 | 5 | 384 | 32 |
| 9. | Ideology of Pakistan | 252 | 21 | 636 | 53 | 312 | 26 |
| 10. | Plants and animals (sciences) | 216 | 18 | 564 | 47 | 420 | 35 |
| 11. | Matter and energy | 288 | 24 | 528 | 44 | 384 | 32 |
| 12. | Earth and the universe | 180 | 15 | 588 | 49 | 432 | 36 |
| 13. | Evaluation and examinations | 144 | 12 | 480 | 40 | 576 | 48 |
| 14. | Physical health and hygiene | 120 | 10 | 540 | 45 | 540 | 45 |
| 15. | Methods of teaching | 168 | 14 | 624 | 52 | 408 | 34 |
| 16. | Social studies | 198 | 16.5 | 684 | 57 | 318 | 26.5 |
| 17. | Islamiat | 180 | 15 | 636 | 53 | 384 | 32 |
| 18. | Population | 120 | 10 | 552 | 46 | 528 | 44 |

Emphasis on the 'average' in response is understandable as distance teaching is a new experiment in our country and people are not familiar with it. Moreover, experience and clarity of conception on the part of authors are weighty factors. More than a third of the teachers found unit 13, 14, 18 to be easy while almost an equal proportion had difficulty in comprehending science unit 11. Teachers' response on the degree of interest they found in written material is given in table 4.

Table 4
Teacher's interest in the written material

| Subject/sample unit | No. of teacher—students: 1200 | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|---------|----------------------|
| | Interest- ing | Average | Not interes- ting |
| Social Sciences | 52.9 | 39.7 | 7.1 |
| Science | 50.0 | 40.0 | 10.0 |
| Urdu | 55.2 | 38.2 | 6.6 |
| Islamiat | 57.3 | 40.1 | 2.6 |
| Mathematics | 49.9 | 31.1 | 19.00 |

Apart from the quality of content of the unit, which results from the way it was used and the way concepts were understood, its attractiveness also depends on the quality of lay-out, print, paper and binding. More than 75% of teachers were satisfied with presentation and related attributes of the printed course material.

Conclusion

The final question, therefore is that of whether education is only an investment or a luxury? This can only be understood if the quality of teaching and the curriculum is relevant and (adaptable) to our social needs. The question of the acceptance of new techniques and their uses is often as important as their efficiency. The close involvement of the teachers themselves in developing the programmes is fundamental. Courses must be adapted or specially designed to meet the requirements of the prevailing socio-economic circumstances. Particular attention must be paid to the feedback from the audience so to understand their needs and thus re-building the programmes on the basis of responses received from them.

The costs and economic viability of a programme of distance teaching vary with the size of the size of the student population and its ability to pay. It is normally true, that the larger the student enrolment, the cheaper the cost per student. Distance teaching media play their part most effectively as instruments of mass-education of teachers. However their effectiveness depends more on other important aspects, *i.e.*, the efficiency of the postal system, timely despatch of materials to the students, appropriateness of exercises and the feed-back system. They should all click together and succeed. Allama Iqbal Open University is correct in not adopting T.V. as a medium for this course, due to the high costs involved. It does not hold

promise at least for the near future. But certainly distance teaching through radio is within the reach of the nation and its network should be expanded. Before embarking on this, several connected issues have to be well thought out and answered; the first being how effectively radio can be used in supplementing or strengthening the existing correspondence programme. Connected with this are the questions of having proper coordination between these two media of print and radio, their timing and sequencing. Another important factor is the supply of listening devices and their location.

The experience at Allama Iqbal Open University has shown that distance teaching media have a very definite advantage not only in strengthening the existing in-service programmes but also by making them more effective means of communication. It would be well advised to make similar use of the media for B.Ed. training in support of the training colleges. Such a use, by exposing the students to varied classroom situations and problems and by organizing seminars and group discussions on radio, can be provided with more intensive experience. This will thus go a long way to improving the regular B.Ed. training programmes as well. While doing so the deficiencies pointed out in the preceding paragraph need to be well taken care of.

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