

## **Management Education Through Distance Mode : Current Status and Emerging Scenario**

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*Some of the most attractive programmes of open universities have been the management programmes all over the world, including India. However, if the programmes fail to update or reorient themselves fast in response to the rapidly changing global economy, trade, technology etc, the institutions offering the management programmes will lag behind in their business. Kamal Yadava's observations would prompt those who are in the management education to take note of the need for responding to the changing global scenario in the management field.*

In 1971, the United Kingdom's Open University (UKOU) began teaching students through distance mode. After the formation of the UKOU, a number of other 'open' or 'distance' universities have been established in both developed and developing countries. This has created a revolution by making higher education more accessible and less costly. In recent years in India also there has been an increasing realisation of the importance of distance education to meet the growing needs of the society. The four functional open universities in India, namely Indira Gandhi National Open University, B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Yaswanthrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University and Kota Open University are offering altogether 104 programmes and 841 courses in conceptual, diploma, degree, post graduate and research levels. IGNOU is today one of the ten mega distance teaching universities (universities with over 1,00,000 students in degree programmes) in the world.

In spite of great attention paid to the 'Distance Universities' in the 70's, it is worthwhile to note that distance education is not a recent phenomenon. Programmes using distance teaching methods have existed for almost the last 150 years. In India, the Delhi University had started its correspondence courses way back in 1962. As per International Council for Distance Learning (ICDL), as of April 1995 there were 835 distance learning institutions in 95 countries offering 35,511 courses out of which approximately 21% are business management and allied courses (Manjulika S; Reddy V, 1996).

The distance taught management education has been a recent phenomenon with large number of initiatives having been taken in early 80s. Deakin University of Australia was the first university in the world to offer a Master of Business Ad-

ministration (MBA) entirely through distance education. This programme was first offered in 1981. The open University, UK, and the Henley Management College, UK, launched their distance taught managements programmes in the year 1983. Within a couple of years of its launch of the first distance education Management courses in 1983, the Open Business School of the Open University became the largest business school in Europe (in terms of the number of students) (Northcott, Paul, 1986). The rapid growth in the number of students and the number of institutions offering distance taught management education thereafter testify to the increasing acceptance of distance learning by the industry and individuals as an alternative to the more traditional methods of management education and training. The potential benefits of distance learning to managers and their companies or organisations is clear : the managers can continue to work while studying and the organisations can get their managers trained without having to forego their services or to appoint new managers. In this context, the slogan of the Open Business School - *management courses that leave time for managing* — is very appropriate.

### **Management Programmes of IGNOU**

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) took a lead in India in offering Management programmes through distance education. The School of Management Studies, IGNOU started its operations in 1987 by offering 'Diploma in Management' and has been offering MBA programme since 1992. Subsequently Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Yaswanthrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University and Kota Open University have also been offering their MBA programmes. IGNOU today offers a number of programmes in management to cater to the varied needs of students. These are:

- Master of Business Administration
- Diploma in Management
- Post Graduate Diploma in Management
- Post Graduate Diploma in Human Resource Management
- Post Graduate Diploma in Financial Management
- Post Graduate Diploma in Operation Management
- Post Graduate Diploma in Marketing

The popularity of these programmes has increased tremendously over the years. Table 1 gives the details of students admitted to Management programmes of IGNOU from the year 1987, when the first diploma programme was launched.

**Table 1: Enrollment of students in Management Programmes of IGNOU during the period 1987-96**

Year	No. of fresh students admitted
1987	4,840
1988	5,226
1989	6,528
1990	6,653
1991	11,393
1992	12,413
1993	20,257
1994	23,314
1995	32,413
1996	33,600

The quality of work being provided by the School of Management Studies is proved from the fact that the Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver (Canada) has adopted the IGNOU's management curriculum as the model curriculum for distance learning institutions of the Commonwealth offering management programmes. Also one of the courses of the programme has been bought by the Open Learning Institute, Hongkong on payment of royalty. Number of distance learning institutes within India are also using the management course material of IGNOU for their management programmes.

The main objective of these Management programmes is to provide opportunities to serving managerial/supervisory personnel as well as the self employed to develop their professional competence in a phased manner through programmes which have a flexible structure. The potential management students are mainly junior and middle level managers who are either unable or unwilling to attend programmes offered in traditional ways or those who find attending regular classes incompatible with their professional commitments, family responsibilities and personal study preferences. An analysis of profile of IGNOU Management Students (1994) reveals the following classification.

i) Gender	Male	:	92.4%
	Female	:	7.6%
ii) Age	21-35 years	:	76.1%
	36-50 years	:	20.6%
	Above 50 years	:	3.3%
iii) Geographic distribution	Urban	:	88.3%
	Rural	:	11.7%

### Major Issues

The spread of distance education management programmes and their growing popularity among working executives have opened new opportunities and at the

same time posed a number of challenges. Today we are witnessing a fast changing environment wherein the requirements of business world are changing rapidly, and new developments in technologies and communication facilities are taking place faster than ever. The providers of management education, therefore, have to keep pace with the developments and have to address themselves to these changing situations. Some of the major issues to be looked into are highlighted below.

1. **Use of Technology:** We are witnessing an exciting period regarding technological developments which have relevance to distance education. Today, it is virtually impossible in distance education to have a curriculum without technology to present or mediate the materials to students. This was not the case earlier, when correspondence teaching relied almost exclusively on printed material. The Distance Teaching Universities, by their emphasis on the use of new communication technologies, have thrown off the correspondence image which characterised most of the mixed mode institutions providing university level education at a distance.

It is very important to identify the criteria for deciding on the potential of new technologies. Cost, learning effectiveness, access, user friendliness, and acceptability are obviously some of the important factors to be considered (Bates, A W 1988, Far, Charlottew and Shaffer, James H 1993). There would also be major variations from country to country in the speed at which various technologies are likely to be available. For example, Open Universities in developed countries are moving towards a phase in which students will use personal computers and telephone lines to communicate with each other, with their tutors and with a rich pool of learning resources (12,000 students of UKOU are expected to be linked with the University and with each other through computers by 1996. The number will increase to 20,000 by 1997 and a majority of the students early in next century would be linked in this way). This is termed as 'Supported Open Learning' or 'Home Based Open Learning' and most of the advanced countries are moving towards this (Daniel, John, 1995). In India, IGNOU has been making efforts to move in this direction.

The School of Management Studies, IGNOU for example uses a number of learning resources for imparting an effective management education. These include

- Self-instructional materials in print
- Audio and Video Cassettes
- Telecast on *Doordarshan* (Indian Television Network)
- Broadcast on All India Radio (AIR)
- Face-to-face Counselling at the study centres of IGNOU

- Project/Field Studies
- Teleconferencing

Teleconferencing (2 way audio and one way video) was started by IGNOU in October, 1993 in collaboration with Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). The School of Management Studies, besides other Schools, today uses it on a regular basis for interacting with students and academic counsellors. Some of the other technologies/media which are finding increasing use in distance education include electronic publishing, satellite cable TV, video disc, electronic mail, computer conferencing etc. The effective use of these current and emerging communication technologies will provide a main competitive advantage to the institutions using them and will reduce the gap between conventional and distance education modes.

2. **Collaboration with Business Organisations:** One area of great importance for distance education management institutes, which has not received much attention so far in India, is the collaboration between the institutes and the business organisations. This would require designing and packaging of management courses/programmes specially as per the needs of managers of a particular organisation. The Open Business School (OBS), U.K. had started undertaking such collaborative ventures way back in mid 80s, which included organisations like Rank Xerox (U.K.) Ltd., and Prudential Corporation and IBM (U.K.) (Asch, David and Smith Rosemary, 1988). One feature cited by the OBS in increasing its market has been its ability to cope with an individual organisation's training needs. Such an arrangement would require greater flexibility and innovativeness. The use of the latest communication technologies can play a major role in this area, since problems of availability and access which would otherwise be there for individual students, would not be a constraint in these cases. Also financial support from private and public sector companies could be sought for developing certain courses which would be of direct or indirect interest to these companies (e.g. OBS received financial support from Williams and Glyn Bank for developing the course on International Marketing and from Barclay's Bank for developing a course 'Start up your own business' which focused on small business).
3. **Flexibility and Openness:** Since the basic premise of distance education for managers is that they could study at their own pace while remaining in job, the management programmes should be as open and flexible as possible (e.g. admissions throughout the year, examination on demand etc.). Of course, there is a limit to the openness of the programmes, depending on administrative and financial constraints.

- 4. Co-operation between conventional and distance education institutions of management:** The current decade (i.e. 1990s) has been marked by a tremendous growth in the number of management institutions in India, most of which are from the private sector. A record number of 222 new management institutions/programmes were approved by AICTE in 1994. Next to the U.S.A, India has the largest number of management institutions. With the popularisation of management education through distance mode, institutions offering management education through conventional mode may also like to expand their activities in this area. However, such a step would require careful planning and resource mobilisation. It would be extremely difficult for such institutes to be cost effective as compared to open universities especially the mega open universities. Also, since distance learning requires large network and effective communication facilities, some sort of cooperation between open universities and management institutions offering programmes through conventional mode could be more fruitful wherein strengths of both could be used in a mutually beneficial manner. For example, the conventional management institutions could function as local resource centres for open university providing good teaching resources which are already available with them. Conventional management institutions could also make use of materials produced by open universities which utilise the expertise of the most competent specialists drawn on national and international basis in preparing quality courses and supporting material. IGNOU is making considerable efforts in order to have participation of conventional management institutions which would be beneficial to both students of distance education programmes of IGNOU and the regular students. This would result in most effective utilisation of resources at both the ends.
- 5. Globalisation:** The distance education institutions especially the big ones, should look beyond their national border. Already a number of open learning institutions from Europe, North America and Australia are operating their distance-education management programmes in a number of other countries including India. Indian distance education institutions have also to look ahead in terms of going global. A number of factors would influence the outcome of such an effort. These include:

  - Quality and cost of service
  - Marketing and publicity
  - Relevance to local needs
  - Worldwide access to telecommunication and media

## Conclusion

In view of the growing demand for management education from working executives, the use of new communication technologies in distance education, flexibility offered by such courses and the possibilities of networking, we can be certain that there are exciting and challenging times ahead for distant education institutions offering management programmes. IGNOU, which is the flag bearer of distance education institutes in India should gear itself to these opportunities and challenges. Effective steps must be taken in the direction of developing of new courses and programmes to cater to the changing needs through greater use of emerging communication technologies for better two way communication with students, globalisation of its programmes and tie-up with conventional management institutions as well as business organisations.

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