Chapter 4.10

Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development of Open and Distance Learning Programs in India: Marketing Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development of a country largely depends on education, which is one of the most important dimensions of development. Open and distance learning (ODL) means working towards achieving sustainability in human development by providing educational opportunities to people all across the country. Many significant measures have been initiated by the government in the direction of taking the education to the people of all segments of society.

The ODL institutions need to have a competitive strategy so as to provide quality education at an affordable cost. This makes India a special case of investigation, wherein a network of over 10 open universities and 104 institutes of open and distance education (IODE) are providing access and equity to education. Challenge and competition in the education sector have presented a new situation where institutions are now viewed as conglomerates and educational programs as educational products. To ascertain sustainable and quality oriented education in open and distance learning mode, the present chapter attempts to make an analysis of IGNOU, the premier national open university of India by Academic Program Life Cycle (APLC) and SWOC, and to suggest strategies for improving the continuance and survival of academic programs and quality assurance in support services.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important dimensions responsible for inducing sustainable development in a country. It is in fact the tool which not only enables the people to earn their livelihood but also makes them aware of their surroundings thus helping them to lead a more meaningful and healthy life. India with its population of more than one billion has been continuously making efforts to provide the people with adequate opportunities for attaining education and gaining expertise in various disciplines so that they can contribute in the overall development of the nation. Many significant measures have been initiated by the government in the direction of taking the education to the people of all segments of the society.

A result of these efforts has been growth in the number of literates in the country. Since independence, there has been a phenomenal growth in the literacy rate moving from merely 18.33% in 1951 to 64.84% in 2001. This has led to growth in the number of students at all levels including at higher education level. In the last 20 years, development in infrastructure of education and its related fields has also positively impacted on students who are more and more opting for higher education. So the number of educational institutions setup catering to all spheres of society has been rapidly increasing with this rise in number of students enrolled. As is evident from Table 1, the enrollment in these institutions of both the modes i.e. conventional and distance education has been increasing continuously, 2003 being the exception for Distance Education Institutions (DEIs). The table also demonstrates that this growth rate in the number of students is more in distance education mode as compared to conventional mode. As seen here, it is 6.16% for conventional mode universities whereas it is 11.74% for distance mode institutions in 2003. If we further analyze the percentage share of enrollment of Distance Education Institutions then we find that in 1999, total enrollment in Distance Education mode was 13.29% of enrollment in conventional mode and it increased to 15.48% in 2003. The above analysis clearly indicates the growing acceptance and reliability of distance education mode in India towards providing education which is affordable and convenient for the learner.

Table 1.