Chapter 15
Applications of E–Tutoring at Indira Gandhi National Open University

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The education system in India has witnessed various transformations: from ancient system of Gurukul (where the teacher and the taught used to attain educational objectives living in proximity) to online or virtual education where the teacher or students interact through Internet technologies only. There have been a lot of improvements in telecommunications and educational facilities. The country as a whole has noticed developments in many areas of social, economical, scientific and infrastructure sectors. Therefore educational systems need to be integrated with such sectors so that the investment in building human capital results in overall national growth. The open and distance learning (ODL) system is one such tool which can help in addressing local, regional and national needs. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) with more than two million learners in 2009 and a country-wide reach with over 60 regional centres and over 2000 learner support centres catering to remote and tribal areas has been a leader towards the democratization of education with social responsibility. IGNOU offers a large number of vocational and employment-oriented courses in the area of health, agriculture, retail, tourism, hospitality, and so on. The university has the challenges of managing the convergence (of formal and ODL stream) and to serve large number of students spread across the breadth and length of the country. Three vital areas of education (i.e., inclusion, expansion and excellence) need to be addressed as priorities. Thus to address these, new mechanisms of e-tutoring have been introduced by IGNOU. This chapter discusses the applications of e-tutoring and its implications in the context of Indian National Open University.

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BACKGROUND

During 1947 when India attained her independence the majority of the population lived in villages and most of them were illiterate. There were 20 universities and 590 colleges (Thorat, 2007). These all were traditional educational institutions. As the demand for education increased, diversified educational opportunities in the form of formal, non-formal and informal were devised.

Mukhopadhyay (2000) identified that the Indian open and distance education has passed through six generations starting from classical correspondence print material mode as the first generation with assignments as the supporting medium. This correspondence print material mode was further strengthened by personal contact programmes in the second generation. The electronic media (radio, television, audio and video cassettes) came into scene in the third generation. Currently by trends in the developments in field of information and communication technologies, we are passing through the sixth generation where web-based education delivery is the main factor.

The early foundations for distance education (in those days as correspondence education) were laid under the 3rd Five Year Plan (1961-67) of the Planning Commission to the Government of India (GOI). With a purpose to meet the increasing demands for higher education (but not through the traditional educational system), the 3rd Five Year Plan proposed, ‘…in addition to the provision in the plan for expansion for facilities for higher education, proposal for evening colleges, correspondence courses and award for external degrees are at present under consideration’ (GOI, 1961:589).

As a follow up, then a committee was set up by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) to look into the establishing of correspondence education. CABE is the highest education policy making body in India. The committee reported that:

A correspondence course should be a step designed to expand and equalize educational opportunity, as it aimed at providing additional opportunities for several thousand students who wished to continue their education and the persons who had been denied these facilities and were in full-time employment or were for other reasons prevented from availing themselves of the facilities at college (GOI, 1963: 3-4).

Organizational Context

These developments led to the offering of bachelor degree programme in the area of arts, commerce and social sciences only in the form of correspondence courses at Delhi University on a pilot project basis in 1962 enrolling 1172 students (Delhi University, 2007). For this a School of Correspondence and Continuing education was established at University of Delhi. Then in the late sixties departments of correspondence courses were established in Punjab University (1968), Meerut University (1969) and Mysore University (1969). This trend gained momentum in the seventies with many universities adopting correspondence education programmes. But soon the correspondence education programmes started inviting criticism also, giving the impression that they are no more different from traditional programmes, lessons being just sent by post only.

To induce greater flexibility to the system, major milestone was observed by the establishment of first Open University of the country in 1982 at Hyderabad as Andhra Pradesh Open University, which now stands renamed as Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU). It was established as a single mode autonomous State Open university. The kind of success BRAOU received in terms of student enrollment and certification, persuaded the Government of India to establish a National Open University with national jurisdiction through an Act of Parliament (No. 50 of 1985), named as Indira Gandhi National
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