Research Paper | **Tourism**

Learner Support Services for Effective Learning of Hospitality and Tourism Through Open and Distance Learning Mode

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ABSTRACT A few decades ago in India, the journey of open education started as correspondence courses. This system of education undergone very dynamic and effective changes and emerged as Open and Distance Learning (ODL), a method of teaching and learning through non-conventional and non-traditional way. The first Open University in India was established in the year 1982 AD in Hyderabad. The need of open education was felt by policy planners of education resulted in establishment of a National Open University in 1985 AD in New Delhi known as Indira Gandhi National Open University. This system of imparting education to learners provides courses in all field of study including professional studies like management, hotel management, and tourism. There is lack in this system of not having learners available on daily basis of face-to-face interaction. This situation is overcome using various methods known as student support services. This paper aims at familiarization about various student support systems like pre and post entry counseling, Self learning material, academic counseling services, multiple-media learning, community radio, satellite channels, assignments and evaluation and its role in effective learning of Hospitality and Tourism education.

KEYWORDS : learner support system, open and distance learning, student counseling, self learning materials, multiple-media learning, tourism and hospitality education etc.

Introduction:

Education is a process of spreading knowledge and inculcating values to prepare the learner for leading their life in such a way that, they are benefited by their knowledge and help in developing a better society. The erosion of essential values and increasing skepticism in society urges for concern over restructuring the education system in order to make education, an efficient tool for inculcating social and moral values among the learner and converting them into a responsible member of society. The stress is on developing an integrated personality for well being of the individual and the society at large. There are various methods of imparting education to learners. A method of imparting education where learners are assisted by a teacher at a specified place and time is known as traditional method of teaching. This method is widely used. Another method of imparting education, where the teacher and learner are separated by time and place is known as distance education or open education. The present paper examines the value oriented education provided by open universities. In open and distance learning the lack face-to-face interaction between educator and learner is mitigated using various techniques like counseling, self learning materials, multiple-media learning and audio-visual learning aids.

Open and Distance Learning:

In the early phase of twentieth century the idea of propagating higher learning among wide audience by use of new communication technologies like radio and television started surfacing. The term 'Open Learning' first appeared in one of the issues of Pitmans Journal in 1929(Rowntree, 1992). The evolution of Open and distance learning (ODL) as a popular form of education dates back to 1840, when Pittman sent his learners lessons in shorthand by post (Wallace, 1982).The first Open University of the world came in to existence by the royal charter in the year 1969 AD, named 'The Open University' in Milton Keynes in United Kingdom. The journey of open learning in India started in form of correspondence course few decades ago. This system of education is known as non-conventional and non-traditional system of education. This system have gone tremendous changes and now emerged as Open and Distance Learning and providing education to people who are deprived from higher learning due to constrains of time, place, money etc. Open learning is an organized educational activity, based on the use of teaching materials, in which constrains on study are minimized either in terms of access, or of time and place, pace, methods of study or any combination of these (Perraton, 1997). Open learning is also known by a variety of names such as Correspondence course, Off-campus learning, Home Study, Flexible learning, Distributed learning, Resource based learning etc. (Lockwood, 1998; Inglis, 1999; Lickwood & Gooley, 2000). Open Universities are open to people, place, methods and ideas in imparting education. In India, there is one National Open University (Indira Gandhi National

Open University, New Delhi) and thirteen state open universities engaged in imparting education to learners through ODL mode. These universities cater the needs of peoples who are deprived from education due to lack of time (working peoples), constrains of money, or were unable to get admission in traditional system.

Open and distance Learning (ODL) is gaining popularity and becoming an accepted and indispensable part of the mainstream of educational systems in both developed and developing countries as inequalities in opportunities is expected to continue, especially in view of projected population growth(Desai, 2010). According to G. Ram Reddy (1998), distance education is more suitable to country like India, as it is socially relevant, mass-based and can address inequalities in educational opportunities and decreasing quality of education. The ODL mode uses technologies like interactive audio/video discs, e-mail, real time conferencing, video conferencing, computer based training, web enabled learning, live satellite broadcasting, mobile technologies, computer based multimedia etc. to minimize the lack of face-to-face learning.

Learner support Services:

Learner Support Services are backbone of distance learning. Learner Support Services encompasses services like pre and post entry counseling, Self Learning Material, Academic counseling sessions, Multiple-media Learning, Personal Contact Programme, Community Radio, Satellite Channels, Assignments and Evaluation (Satyanarayana R., 2008). These activities abridge the gap of face to face interaction between university and learner. The discipline like Tourism, Hospitality and Hotel Management requires development of skills. There should be some specialized way to enhance the skill of the learner as compared to the learners who do not need skills development as compared to learners of professional programmes. Keeping in view of the program specific need of Tourism, Hospitality and Hotel Management, there should be mandatory Personal Contact Program (PCP), where the learner is subjected to rigorous practical exercise in the area of front office operation, Accommodation operation, Food and Beverage Services, kitchen training, soft skill training etc. to enhance the practical skills of the learner and creating employable people for needs of industry. Open universities provides various student support services like Study Centers, assignments, evaluation, multiple-media etc. where academic counseling of the subject is arranged and doubt of the learners are cleared by learned faculties at study center.

Study Center:

The courses of open universities are run through study centers, which is the contact point between university and learner. Academic counseling is arranged at study centers where the learners may clear their

doubts about their course of study by well versed faculty member available at study center. This is the contact place where learner can submit their assignments for evaluation. All the information from the university is made available among learners through study centers.

Self Learning Material:

Learner in conventional system ge most of their instruction through face-to-face interaction with faculty and their peer group by attending regular classes where as in ODL mode this loss is compensated by especially designed learning material known as Self Learning Material(SLM). SLM is a self-explanatory, self-contained, self-directed, self-motivation, self-evaluating and self-learning material produced with aim to stimulate thinking and writing ability of the learner(Murthy, 2005). The course materials are presented in very simple way that an average learner can also learn from the SLM independently as it carries out all the functions of a teacher, like guiding, motivating, explaining, provoking, reminding, etc.

Academic counseling Session:

Counseling is defined as "the process involving interpersonal relationships between a counselor and one or more clients by methods based on systematic knowledge of the human personality in attempting to improve the mental health of the later" (Patterson, 1959). The primary emphasis in counseling is development, with secondary emphasis on redemption and prevention (Wampold, 1985). Term academic counseling is used in a broader sense of providing advice to learner, both academic as well as non-academic. The academic counseling is provided to learners through study centers. The learners are provided advice from the experts of area of study on course related topics as well as non- academic area like specific difficulties related with course (Srivastava, 2001).

Personal Contact Programme:

Personal Contact Programme (PCP) is one of the most important components of learner support where skill training is one of the most important components of the programme of study like Hospitality and Tourism. The skill training requires face-to-face interaction which is achieved by PCPs component of curriculum. This is very important and should be made mandatory for completing the programme of study by learners. The learners are trained in communication and soft skills, cooking dishes from various cuisines, baking various items, table laying, order-taking, serving in restaurants, buffet setting, handling guest complaints, cleaning various surfaces, public area cleaning, spring cleaning, guest room cleaning, laundry operations, reception, registration of guest, registration of groups (domestic and Foreigners), preparing form-C, billing, creating and maintain guest accounts, etc. The PCP component is one of the most effective session in imparting practical training and skill development among learners of programme like Hospitality and Tourism where practical component is more important in developing employability skills of learners.

Community Radio/Satellite Channels:

Technology plays an important role in improving the learning skills of learner. The facilities like Audio-Video, interactive CDs, radio channels and satellite channels abridge the gap of face-to-face learning of traditional system in ODL mode.

Conclusion:

The area of study like Hospitality and Tourism requires skill training along with theory component of curriculum. Skill training needs face to face interaction between trainer and learner; therefore, there should be few mandatory Personal Contact Programme (PCP) sessions so that practical aspect of study is achieved. The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode is ideal for people already working in the industry. The various learners support services provides by open universities like pre and post entry counseling, Self Learning Material, Academic counseling sessions, Multiple-media Learning, Personal Contact Programme, Community Radio, Satellite Channels, Assignments and Evaluation enhances the effective learning of Hospitality and Tourism through open and distance learning mode.

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