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Research Paper Title: "**Effective Design of ODL Curriculum**"

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby would like to explicitly state that the write-up titled, **"Effective Design of ODL Curriculum"** is original and has not been published earlier, or that it is not under consideration for possible publication elsewhere.

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Effective Design of ODL Curriculum

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Abstract

The key purpose and intention of this paper is to discuss the loopholes in existing Open and Distance Learning courses curriculum and use of technological advancement to improve both the teaching–learning pedagogy as well as resource building and sharing aspects. The ODL system in India is almost 35 years old and the educational needs of millions of students in India and abroad are met with ODL system (Singh and Moumita, 2019). Because of COVID-19 pandemic, lot of reforms happened in regular and conventional academic engagements, and the entire education system is likely going to be revolutionized to a large extent in coming few years (van den Berg, 2020). Cost effective online education, learner-centric approach, synergistic blend of actual and virtual facilities, remodelling the existing framework, and fulfilling all the basic educational and performance evaluation requirements and designing a best-fit model for ODL systems is a key concern of this article.

Keywords

Open and Distance Learning, Curriculum design, learning resources

Introduction:

All over the world, it is observed that at least 30% population is finding it difficult to go ahead with regular academic full-time courses. Most of the organisations in the world realized this a long ago. The sector specific and application oriented courses are in tremendous demand for past 2 decades. Otto Peters, in his theory of industrialization, has described distance education as an industry embodying the characteristics of rationalization, division of labour, mechanization, assembly line, mass production, preparatory work,

planning, organization, scientific control methods, formalization, standardization, change of function, objectification and concentration and centralization (Singh and Moumita, 2019). There is a class in society which desires to upgrade their qualification from two perspectives: one is to keep themselves updated as per current technological upgrades and the second aspect is to update qualification to take the benefit of a higher cadre post and allied benefits. A large number of students who are geographically in remote areas and for whom joining universities for regular courses and upgrading their qualifications is still a dream (Rao, 2020). For such students, ODL is a blessing.

1. Curriculum Design: Step by Step Approach

Designing a curriculum and learning resources for Open and Distance Learning courses is always tough and challenging for obvious reasons: the appealing contents, covering recent technological upgrades, methods of engagement, teaching and learning pedagogy, well-defined learning objectives and learning outcomes, satisfying institutional and industry requirements, and above all the learner's satisfaction. In the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system, quality also matters a lot such as learner-centric and product, application and purpose centric, the value for money, and the ability to meet

the expectations of the stakeholders. The Figure 1 named "Requirements of ODL Curriculum" will highlight these aspects in a pictorial fashion.

Fig. 1

Requirements of ODL Curriculum

1.1 Sector Specific Approach:

The skill development concept always demands for your sector specific expertise. The content should be well researched, up-to-date and relevant to the sector of interest or domain area of learner, and should be flexible and well versed with key areas with upthrust for sector specific demand and growth. Under CSR schemes also, many industries are now offering very innovative ideas and undergoing tie-ups with reputed organizations to provide domain knowledge to a group of students who cannot afford the fees and cannot think of receiving such quality education.

1.2 Learner Centric Contents:

The relevant contents of the ODL system and availability on time when learner needs it. Similarly, the availability of resources to other stakeholders on time to review it well ahead of time to suggest corrective measures. Should also consider the need of the hour to blend the latest technological aspects smoothly to attract the learners and give them a clear vision about its effectiveness and usefulness for individual growth.

1.3 Creative Methods of Engagements:

When the thinking process starts while designing curriculum for distance learning, it becomes very much clear for the resource person to understand what distance learning is all about. The following points will give crystal-clear approach to take care of propagation of knowledge:

1. Special techniques of course design
2. Different approach for instructional techniques
3. Adaptive Methods of communication
4. Effective usage of Electronic media
5. Effective administration of interactions

The curriculum should be flexible and imbibed with use of as many inputs as possible and by structuring itself around the actual learning experience of the students. The recent development in the field of communication and computer technologies,

have made it possible for better teacher-student dialogues and peer group interaction. Through e-mail and internet facilities, collaborative learning has become a reality. A healthy two-way communication between teachers and students always leads to effective outcome.

1.4 Adaptable to Recent Trends

The growth and technological advances should be minutely observed and inputs from sector specific experts will definitely give insight to content designer for ODL to stay focused in the areas where a demand for skilled people will be high. Actually, it attracts the aspirants from career point of view as well. Distance or Correspondence education is treated as a subclass system of education and is always considered inferior than the traditional education. This image can only be changed when distance education develops trust about itself in society and ensures significant benefits to learners. The acceptability of distance education and its positive interpretation plays a very significant role. It is observed that over a period now, the society started accepting ODL but still there is a long way to go.

1.5 Quality and Value for Money:

At the time of admission itself, the aspirants usually perform a comparative study based on certain parameters. The most important

parameters are whether the content is appealing, whether the curriculum is in trend, the quality of training and its effective organization, the reputation of institute based on market survey, the ethical way of progression, the cost involved and where I will stand in market after completion of the course. Tutors' different backgrounds, expertise and experiences result in different ways of curriculum implementation, hence problems of quality arise (Muyengwa & Mubika, 2013). The quality always emphasize on the inputs, transformations over a period and end results. The evaluation methods also a play a very crucial and stringent role in quality assurance.

1.6 Skill and Competency Development:
Skill means ability of an individual to outperform a particular task or activity with his/her impact and it reflects expertise to display the competency of doing it. The curriculum design should take into consideration the skill gaps by comparing the contents with international standards. Organizing training programs with industry involvement and analysis of outcome by following well-defined evaluation methodologies will really prove significant to understand the skills achieved and developed in aspirants. The curriculum should take 360° review for inculcating skills like teamwork, effective and convincing communication, ability to work under pressure, problem solving, leadership qualities, self-motivation, positive thinking, confidence building and ability to accept failures and remedial actions to convert it into success.

2. Closed Loop ODL System Model:
To design and develop curriculum for Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system, it is always recommended to have a facility in the model to incorporate the changes based on the inputs received from various stakeholders. The model should be flexible enough to adapt to these changes smoothly. When considering all the meanings behind the two words, curriculum and design, curriculum design could then be described as a structure in which planning, problem and solution finding occurs and leads to the aims, intended learning outcomes, syllabus, learning and teaching methods and assessment, as well as other non-intended learning experiences of the learner (Chugh et al., 2017). Usually in industries, they follow PDR techniques, i.e. Plan, Do and Review. Reviewing is vital because it helps us take care of gaps, facilitates to adapt new methodologies or allow us to update the approach.

Figure 2 'Closed loop ODL system Model' will give us clarity about this closed loop approach.
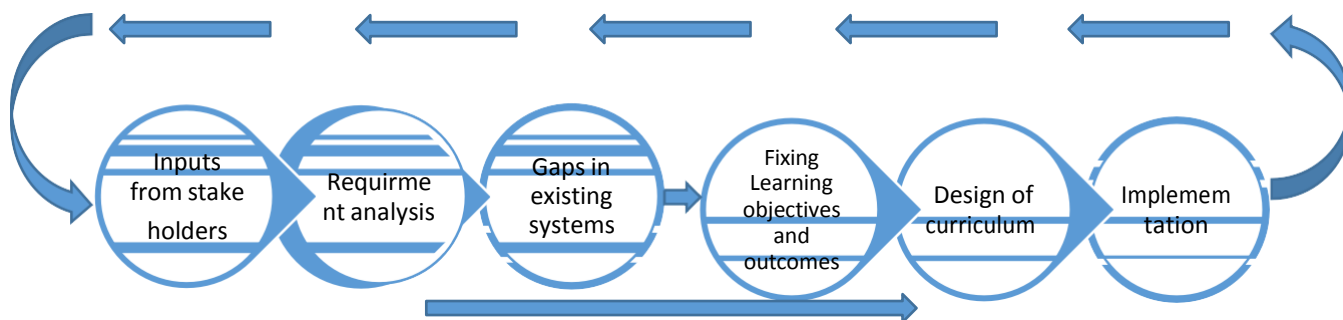

Figure 2 Closed loop ODL system model

2.1 Inputs from Stakeholders:

For an effective and successful curriculum, we should take inputs from following stakeholders:

1. Aspirants for their expectations
2. Industry experts for recent trends
3. Teachers for the challenges they have faced

Developing a questionnaire and propagating it to grassroot level to get the actual inputs will really provide an insight for the designer to take well-defined steps with proper justification.

2.2 Requirement analysis:

Which sector and topic the curriculum is targeted at? What are the lacuna in existing contents? What are the expectations of industries and society from the aspirants? Is there any need for some technological adoption to meet the changing scenarios? Change in methodologies and their consequences analysis, not only restricted to these, there are many virtues need to be considered lying a strong foundation. Although Social Networking media increases the potential range and scope for emergent learning exponentially, considerable efforts are required to ensure an effective balance between openness and constraint (Rani et al., 2013). It is possible to manage the relationship between prescriptive and emergent learning, both of which need to be part of an integrated learning ecology (Rani et al., 2013).

2.3 Gaps in Existing Systems:

Fixing the gaps in existing systems begins with the methods of screening, gathering and collating existing literatures and relevant literature to answer the questions through initial studies. The next step is sorting out irrelevant articles/papers for further simplification and analysing/re-evaluating shortlisted literature for critical analysis only by tabularising the parameters such as selection, interlinks, comparison, methodologies adopted, future scope and most important information with respect to conceptualisation of theories, opinions, outcomes and suggestions for future research.

2.4 Fixing Learning Objectives and Outcomes:

Regarding the specific course, the course designer puts enough thought process to decide the major intention behind it. Fixing the course objectives or learning objectives is usually viewed from instructor's perspective. What is to be accomplished? What is to be achieved? These are the questions that are expected to be answered during the course completion. It is as good as setting a target with clarity of intention and verifying it by analysing outcome to check where it stands. Focussing on outcome always provides us a great scope to analyse and improve our contents.

2.5 Design of Curriculum:

The following steps be strongly followed and recommended to have a full proof curriculum:

- Converting ideas to contents
- Overall blueprint of curriculum/course
- Mapping of objectives
- Addition of research components
- Imbibing project based learning concept
- List of skills and their evaluation
- Tie ups/MOUs for technological advances

Apart from these, there may also be some additional considerations based on the course we are planning and its specific needs.

2.6 Implementation:

The execution of contents through some trial runs and listing out lacunas and taking systematic measures in consultation with stakeholders and industry partners will prove useful to make the contents appealing as well as meeting the expectations of aspirants to take care of their wish lists. The sharing of contents by using technology and adding some multimedia components to it will also help serve the purpose.

Conclusion

In this article, we took a general review as to how an effective curriculum design helps create a win-win situation for aspirants and ODL offering institutes. The role of each member and their inputs make a systematic progression for creating new and acceptable options. This COVID-19 pandemic laid new normal of higher education and ODL has an opportunity to emerge as one of the promising learning culture with the blend of hybrid and innovative technological tools. The design of 'generation next' ODL education is our prime responsibility to shape our next generation's future and their careers.

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