

Networking of Indian Open Universities :A Proposal

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Abstract

This paper discusses the objectives and the programmes offered at YCMOU. The contributions of Library and Resource Centre (LARC) and its feedback from the students have engineered an idea in the mind of the author of having a network of all the Open Universities in India.

I. Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU):An Introduction

The YCMOU was established on 29 April 1989. The major objectives of the University are as follows.

To make higher vocational and technical education available to large sections of the population.

To give special attention to the needs of the disadvantaged groups like people in rural areas and the women.

To relate all courses to developmental needs of individuals, institutions and the State.

To provide an innovative, flexible and open system of education by using distance teaching methodology and by applying modern communication technologies to education.

To provide continuing adult and extension education to retraining adults in new skills to enable them to adjust to a changing technological environment.

To provide post-graduate studies and research opportunities especially in educational technology, distance education and development communication.

The goal of the University is to become a “Mass Varsity” or the “Lok Vidyapeeth”. Most of its programmes are offered in the regional language (Marathi). The programmes lay a major emphasis on vocational/technical and research level courses. The structure, functioning and philosophy of the University is different from conventional universities. It has relaxed entry rules, flexibility in courses combination, flexibility in choosing the place and pace of the study, provision of individualised study etc. Their basic endeavour is to extend the University outreach so as to carry knowledge to the doorsteps of every aspirant. The open university plugs innovative path by supporting print material with audio-visual supplements and thereby making the message more effective and enduring as it reaches the deprived and disadvantaged.

2. YCMOU University Programmes

2.1 Research Programmes

Ph. D Subject Communication, Educational Communication and Distance Education

M Phil Subject Communication, Educational Communication and Distance Education

2.2 Post Graduate Programmes

M A / M Sc / M Com / M B A / M Ed Subject Communication, Educational Communication and Distance Education

2.3 Degree Programmes

Preparatory B A / B Com

B A, B Com, B Ed, B Lib & Inf Sci, B H Sc

2.4 Diploma Programmes

Diploma in School Management

Diploma in Applied Electronics

Diploma in General Electronics

Diploma in Advanced Electronics

Diploma in Computing Office Services

Diploma in Computer Operating

Diploma in Horticulture

Diploma in Industrial Electronics

Diploma in Communications Engineering

Diploma in Educational Management

2.5 Certificate Programmes (CP)

CP in Service Teachers Training, Lathe Operator, Fitter, Mechanic Two Wheeler, Domestic Wireman, Mason, Plumber, Mechanic : Radio and Tape Recorder, Journalism, Word Processing, PC Database, Spreadsheets, Computer Basics.

3. LARC - Library and Resource Centre of YCMOU

LARC, Library and Resource Centre is playing an important role in fulfilling the objectives of YCMOU (Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University) by housing printed and other non-conventional materials like Audio, Video, and specially prepared course materials for its distant learners.

Like other Information Centres opting for automation, LARC started its automation program in 1992 and today its a fully computerised. Probably, it will be the first of its kind to get fully automated. It houses around 15000 printed books alongwith non-conventional study materials like Audio, Video Cassettes, etc.

3.1 LARC Resources

No	Resource Type	Number
1	Printed Books	16000
2	Periodicals	210
3	Newspapers	15
4	Audio Cassettes	225
5	Video Cassettes	250
6	(CD-ROM)	98
7	Paper Clippings	665
8	Project Reports	1200
9	Foreign Prospectuses	350
10	Photographs	950
11	Misc Reports	100

3.2 LARC's Observation :

LARC has established a tradition of interaction between the its staff and the distant learners. The following paras will summarise the feedback which the staff received from the distant learners regarding their expectations from LARC:

Library should be a key agent in enabling students / learners to prosper in the information society - helping them acquire new skills for employment, use information creatively and improve quality of their lives;

Library should play a central role in the lifelong learning projects, and in support of any individual who undertakes self development;

Library should be integral component of education system - facilitating homework clubs, support knowledge acquisition, and helping learners to access and interact with information resources worldwide;

Libraries should remain open to all, without pre-condition, whether for material in printed form or access to the wealth of resources available online;

Library and information Centres should make information about every emerging subjects in the universe;

Library and Information Centres should also be at the leading edge of change and maintain their place at the hub of community like other commercial institutions;

Libraries should be the central point, networked, equipped with new technology, provide learners with the opportunities for group discussions (Chat) on the common area of interest. By that way new ideas will take birth;

The Library should be powerful agent for change : accountable to and trusted by people, and integral to education, industry, government and the community;

The Libraries should adopt new technologies and retain their spaces for books, study, exhibitions and events, but also they should gain new learning spaces, new services and new users;

The rapid spread of high performance communication will mean that even the most remote rural library will offer access to the same facilities as a large urban library, providing a means to draw in these people, who, through geography are furthest removed from the opportunities offered by the Information Age;

Librarians should add new skills to their current capabilities. They will help people overcome their anxieties about new world of networked and digitised information and assist them to navigate through it.

4. Networking of All the Open Universities in India :A Proposal

The biggest change in the field of Library and Information Centres of the organisations conducting distance education programs will arise from the intrusion of information technology in administering these programs. These revolutionary changes will bring about hitherto unused media in disseminating information and knowledge in terms of quality , quantity and speed to the distant learners. For organisations, whatever the technology, there will be a central role for library and information centres (LICs).

Education technologies and communication media are the key to the world of open and distance learning. Their effective implementation will shift the way in which we view education and roles of educators and media personnel. Modern technology has opened up new possibilities for education . Most of us still feel dazzled and bewildered by the sheer volume of options and possibilities afforded by the emerging technology.

The introduction of information and communication technology presents a challenge and opportunity for the educational institutions. Today as the prices of IT products are falling down and ownership of suitable systems are spreading, the day will not be far where the learners will seek the study material at their locus and on the desks.

Electronic access to information services is technically feasible and should be seen as one option in resourcing distance learning although ideally used in combination with other features like Inter Library loan (ILL) or postal loans. What is more important especially in the **Indian scenario** is the level

of individual motivation and need, availability of alternative resources, access to computing equipment and costs incurred. This is vital because in India studying through Open Universities is a taboo. This notion is fast changing as the Open Universities are having all the infrastructures equivalent to all the established Universities offering regular programmes. This is further proved by the fact that large number of students and working professionals are enrolling for distance learning either to supplement their existing qualifications or gain a degree at their doorsteps. There is a growing realisation in the Indian community that the promises of new technology have not been realised by the Distance Education community and nor have the distance Education Practitioners provided leadership in innovation application. One way to fulfill the promises is to have a Network of all the Open Universities in India.

4.1 The Following Open Universities in India Can Participate in this Exercise:

Dr. B R Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad - 500 033

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad - 380 003

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi - 110 068

Kota Open University, Kota - 324 010

Nalanda Open University, Patana - 800 001

Karnataka State Open University, Mysore - 570 006

Madhya Pradesh Bhoj University, Bhopal - 462 204

Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU), Nashik - 422 005

The following facilities and be made available to the students who wish to enroll/ who are already enrolled :

a. Easy Access to University Programmes

By touch of a button the following questions from a potential student can be answered :

- The complete profiles of the Universities
- Variety of different programmes offered by them
- Subject- wise listing of the University programmes
- Comparative study of the programmes being offered on the basis of cost, duration, date of commencement of the courses, faculty etc.,
- Application forms can be accessed and submitted online . The response to whether he received the admission can also be done online by the Administration Departments of the Universities.

b. Study Material

Once a student enrolls into a University, he can access the study material online. He can also submit his assignments , projects through e-mail or using a ftp protocol. This saves a lot of time and money involved in postage thereby resulting in faster assessments. The Universities

can make available their Ph.D thesis, Research Reports, publications, dissertations submitted by students. This prevents duplication of research work.

c. Assessing the Students Online

Students can be assessed immediately if they have to answer multiple choice questions(MCQ's). The projects and assignments which are subjective in matter can be downloaded by the student through e-mail or ftp .

d. Interaction

Interactivity is regarded as being even more important in distance learning, in which the teacher and the students are separated by distances large enough to require some more advanced technologies like teleconferencing, video conferencing etc,. Interaction can be continuous basis. At the postgraduate level students may be attached to a teacher/professor who will continuously evaluate and summarily assess a student progress, including assignments. The study material should be structured in such a way that if a student gets stuck at any point in the syllabus, the tutor should know his problems immediately and respond to any queries by the student.

e. Database of Alumni

Universities can maintain a database of the students who have completed their programmes successfully. Students applying to any of the courses can have their addresses so that they can correspond to them and have a better idea of the quality of the programmes being administered. This in a way will boost the morale of the student and can give a good opinion regarding the credibility of the University.

f. Open to All

The very essence of the Open University is that it is not residential, but open to all, no matter what age or experience. Commitment to 'second chance' to have access to education for adult learners is commendable. The idea that the community and the university has changed this is because we see that what has become good for few is also good for many.

5. Conclusion

The above are my views on initiating a network of all the Open Universities in India. The major hindrance in materialising this network in India is finance. These Universities should justify that their is a huge demand for their programmes and convince the concerned authorities of the quality standards being followed.

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