UNIT 9: QUALITY ASSURANCE IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

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9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- define the concept of quality education
- explain quality assurance in distance education
- discuss the various means of quality assurance in distance education

9.2 INTRODUCTION

There is a close linkage between the human resource development and an all-round socio-economic and cultural development of a nation. In fact, the development and expansion of knowledge and skill, inter alia, is the key component of the human resource development. The qualitative improvement of education and training is estimated to have contributed about 20% of the national income of a country through the improvement in the quality of human resources.

Indian economy has been growing at a high average rate of 8 to 9 percent per annum during the last 7/8 years except in 2008, the year of global recession and it is moving towards a double- digit rate of growth in

the near future. But for sustaining such a high rate of growth of the economy, India needs to be transformed into a major knowledge economy having adequate and abundance of skilled .and trained manpower. The present trend and rate of growth of skilled and trained manpower in the country is not very encouraging to sustain a high rate of growth of the economy.

The literacy rates in the country have shown substantial improvement after Independence. It has come up from mere 16.67 percent (in 1950-51) to 74.4 percent (in 2011). But mere increase in the literacy rate does not necessarily lead to major knowledge economy unless human resource of the country is moulded in the right direction for the need of the economy to attain sustainable development. The country has to build up skilled and trained manpower and it is possible through the expansion of quality higher education - both general , vocational and professional. Keeping these things in mind, we will discuss the importance of quality, how quality can be ensured in higher education for enhancing the effectiveness of the education system in India, particularly in open and distance learning etc.

9.3 CONCEPT OF QUALITY EDUCATION

Quality indicates the degree of excellence of particular things. It may be a norm, a rank or a standard which comes out after assessing the performance of the functions of a particular institution. Quality assurance is a development mechanism that is designed to maintain and enhance the institutional effectiveness as a whole. The improvement of quality is essential to enrich the dimension like curricula aspects, teaching learning process, research consultancy and education, health practice and students support service, extensive publication and co-curricular activities of an institution.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What do you mean by quality? Why do you think that quality is important in an educational institution?

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9.3.1 Quality Assurance in Distance Education

The present scenario of higher education in the country is not very encouraging to achieve the goal of a knowledge economy with abundance of skilled and trained manpower. During the time of independence and as the latest data available, the number of universities has increased from 20 to 758, colleges from about 500 to 39,071 colleges. Out of 758 universities, 267 Universities are privately managed, 43 Central Universities, 1 Central and 14 State Open Universities, 69 Institutes of National Importance, 316 State Public Universities, 5 Institute under State Legislature Act, 37 Deemed Universities Government and 6 Other Universities. (AISHE, 2016). Over and above, there are 14 State Open Universities, one National Open University and more than 117Directorates of distance education in the conventional Universities functioning in dual mode to cater for the need of the knowledge economy.

Keeping in view the objective of strengthening the knowledge economy, the Government of India during the Eleventh Five Year Plan targeted to establish 30 Central Universities (14 already established), 8 IITs (6 already established), 8 IIMs (4 already established), 10 National Institute of Technology (NIT) , 5 Institutes of Science and Research, 2 Schools of Architecture, 374 model degree colleges etc, besides about 1000 polytechnics to build up trained and skilled manpower as demanded by the economy. Recently, HRD Minister, Government of India, has announced to establish 800 new universities in India.

Significantly, the present national GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) in higher education in India is exceptionally low when we look at the global scenario. It is about half of the world average GER (24 %) and 2/3rd of the average of the developing countries (18%) and far below the average of the developed nations (58%). Even compared with China, the GER in higher education in India was is lower than that of China by about 10% although it was

comparable about 10 years back. There is very wide variation in the GER even across the states

The access to higher education is denied to a large section of the population in the relevant age-group not only due to limited seats in the conventional education system, but also due to the increasing cost of education, particularly in the private sector - that is virtually unaffordable and is beyond the reach of a very large deserving section of the Indian society.

There is a remote possibility of attaining the targeted 15% GER in higher education by the end of the Eleventh Five Year Plan and 30% by 2020 through the conventional Universities - Central, State, Deemed and Private - and other educational institutions including the private players. This is mainly due to the fact that limited seats and high costs, particularly imposed by private players, are the main constraints for the access to higher education of a large segment of the population aspiring for it. This Herculean task of attaining the targeted GER can be made possible through an open, flexible and less expensive mode of education, which is provided by the open and distance learning (ODL) system. The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) also placed a pivotal role for the ODL system to build up the knowledge society in the 21st. Century. The provision of relevant and quality education to all the citizens can be provided preferably at their doorsteps by ODL system through its flexible, cost-effective and learners' friendly modes using information and communication technology (ICT). ICT enabled linkages through broadband and satellite network in the ODL system bring out teaching-learning process to "3As" scenario - Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere - making "Education Beyond Barriers". The NKC in its Report categorically stated "Open and distance education (ODE), enabled and delivered through information and communication technology (ICT) holds the promise to address the questions of access and provide new, alternative forms of capacity

building" (NKC, 2009, page 4). Considering the wide scope of the ODL system to provide flexible access to higher education - general, professional and vocational , the governments, both at Centre and the States, are giving due emphasis on horizontal and vertical expansion of quality education through open and distance mode since 1980s.. This has resulted in the establishment of 14 State Open Universities, one national Open University (IGNOU) and about 117 Directorates of Distance Education of the dual mode conventional Universities. In fact, ODL accounts for about 12% of the total enrolment in the segment of higher education, and thereby contributing substantially towards raising GER. Quality is the major concern in providing access to education to all and therefore besides the conventional education, the open and distance learning institutions should start the frontier from the very beginning to achieve the goal of quality education. Provision and maintenance of quality education at all stages - primary, secondary and higher - is the need of the hour. Highlighting the importance of quality, the National Knowledge Commission states "the biggest challenge faced in higher education, therefore, is the provision of quality higher education to the greatest number, at the lowest possible cost to the learner" (NKC, 2009, page 5). All the stakeholders of the ODL system of higher education - open universities, dual mode conventional universities, deemed universities and the private players should see that the quality of higher education is not compromised in the best interest of building a knowledge economy. But, unfortunately, there is a predominant feeling among the stakeholders that some Universities/ Institutions are compromising the quality of education provided through ODL mode for the obvious reason of maximizing profit ignoring the social responsibility of providing quality education. In fact, the additional resources generated by most of the dual mode universities through their Directorates of Distance Education are usually invested for the improvement of conventional teaching

programmes and a very little is left for investment on distance education, thereby adversely affecting the quality of education through ODL mode. For quality assurance through distance mode, the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) recommended the constitution of an External Quality Assurance Cell to assess and evaluate the ODL institutions at regular interval. Distance Education Council (DEC) , now known as Distance Education Bureau (DEB) also decided to have a Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA) in all the open universities of the country.

In open and distance learning, the application of quality has a unique character. We know that in ODL system, learners are generally physically separated in space and time from the teaching institution and the staff. Therefore maintaining quality is a great responsible on the part of the open educational institutions. It should be systematically and self-consciously maintained. In ODL, the application of quality means attainment of the expected levels of knowledge and skills which are tools for further learning by actual work experience necessary for managing the learner's personal and social transaction in day-to-day life. This quality is to be attained by all distance learners, in a given time-frame. Following are some areas where special focus should be given for maintaining the degree of quality:

- Curriculum design and preparing the module for the learners in locally, regionally, nationally and internationally,
- Teaching, learning and assessment
- Student performance, their progression and assessment
- Student support service and guidance



LET US KNOW

EQA: The External Quality Assurance (EQA) particularly in higher education is conducted for assessing the improvement of higher education and to provide reliable

information on the current quality of activities of higher education institutions in regard to both teaching, and research. In Indian higher education system it is generally assessed by National Assessment and Accreditation Council which makes the report and finalises the rank of the colleges and universities.

CIQA: The Distance Education Council (DEC), now known as Distance Education Bureau (DEB) has made the setting up of a Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA) mandatory for all open universities in the country. Ahmedabad-based Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University had been entrusted with the task of working out a methodology for the same. The directorate of Distance Education Council supports CIQA with the seed money. The DEB has developed various guidelines, norms, policies for strengthening the academic capabilities of the distance learning universities and institutions.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How is quality assurance in ODL system integrated with the creation of knowledge economy of a State? Explain.

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9.3.2 Various Means of Quality Assurance in Distance Education

The term quality usually denotes the standard of something where it is compared to something else. Quality also means excellence of performance in any human action. So when we talk of quality assurance in relation to distance education, we mean achieving a certain level of excellence in performing the tasks involved with dissemination of education and knowledge through that particular

mode of teaching-learning process. The credibility and success of open and distance learning system depend on a number of factors, some of which are highlighted below:

- Curricula of ODL system should be well thought-out, need-based, employment oriented and learner friendly. Contrary to the conventional education system where learners are young having sole objective of entering into job market, the learners in the ODL system belong to all groups. Some of them are fresh and young targeting jobs, some of them are already employees targeting enhancement of qualification for promotion, while some of the learners are housewives and senior citizens targeting for life-time learning and enrichment. Hence, the curricula of the ODL system have to be framed carefully to make them learner friendly. Innovative course curriculum as well as need based courses like spoken English, Computer Application and Office Management, Cultural History of the country, Environmental Studies and Disaster Management etc. should be adopted and designed for the learners to gain them a better prospect of employment.
- Self learning materials (SLM) both in print and audio-visual forms are the heart and soul of ODL system and they should be of high quality. All SLMs in print form should have standardised house-style using simple and unambiguous languages and the learners should feel the presence of a teacher in front of them while going through the SLMs. National Knowledge Commission recommended the creation of "Open Educational Resources" to make them available to all for capacity building in a knowledge society. DEC and IGNOU guide the ODL institutions in the preparation of standard SLMs with certain level of uniformity.
- Adequate and effective counselling sessions should be provided through face to face interaction as well as through audio-visual form by using information and communication technology (ICT).

As per the DEC norm, counselling session of 3 hours should be provided per credit point of a programme. Besides arranging the counselling sessions through the Study Centres, Open universities and other directorates can produce audio and audio-visual SLM for the use of the learners and can also plan live telecast of counselling classes in the form of lectures and discussion.

- Timely and adequate learners support services (LSS) should be provided for success of ODL system. Timely provision of SLM, regular counselling, library facilities including e-library, provision of ICT facilities like audio-visual SLM, radio and television programmes, teleconferencing facilities, on-line programme etc. are some important ingredients of LSS that need to be provided timely and effectively. The educational radio and television channels like Gyan Darshan, a fully digital 24 hour exclusive Educational TV channel, GyanVani, a unique Radio Service of IGNOU, have played a prominent role in disseminating knowledge and information among the learners of the country. The recently established State Open University in Assam, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University has the distinction of providing the first Community radio programmes in the entire North East of India "Jnan Taranga", followed by "Radio Luit", which has so far been the second Community radio Station in the North East set up by Gauhati University under the Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL). KKHSOU has another educational programme "Ekalabya" which is transmitted through All India Radio (Guwahati and Dibrugarh Centres) initially twice in a week for providing educational information and for arranging discussion on some educational programmes.
- Quality of ODL system is immensely improved with the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and in fact, ICT drawn ODL system only makes it possible to provide

education with 3As - anyone, anytime and anywhere.

User friendly ICT in the form of radio, television, audio-visual SLM, internet broadband, teleconferencing, on-line courses etc. makes it easier to provide effective teaching-learning process in the ODL system. In fact, the National Knowledge Commission recommended the setting up of a national ICT infrastructure through state support to meet the technology demand of the ODL system. This recommendation of NKC has led to the constitution of a National Knowledge Network (NKN) which takes the responsibility of connecting the institutions of higher education (particularly the ODL institutions) for common sharing of knowledge through national networking.

- Transparent and foolproof examination system is another very important ingredient for credibility and quality of ODL system. Malpractices in the examination halls are quite common in the conventional educational system. Examination reforms need to be carried out in the ODL system so that examination system is transparent and there is no scope for malpractices. There are some provisions that can be adopted and followed for certain examination reforms to minimise the incidence of malpractices and errors in assessment. These are:
  - photograph of the candidate is scanned and printed on the admit card and pass certificate;
  - question papers are printed in the answer-book and adequate space is provided for the answers ;
  - no provision of extra (additional) answer-sheet which is one of the sources of malpractices ;
  - multiple sets of question papers of the same objective type questions are being mix-matched ;
  - provision of re-scrutiny of answer-book;
  - the learners can get the photocopy of his/her answer-script on request;

- ❍ if a learner is not happy with the marking even after getting the photo-copy of the answer-script, he/she is entitled to apply for complete re-examination of the answer-script by a second examiner;
- ❍ complete computerisation of the process of the declaration of examination results to avoid personal biasness ;
- ❍ Good governance is also a very important ingredient of quality assurance.

- ➢ Quick and timely delivery of learners support services, timely holding of counselling classes, timely holding of examination and declaration of results etc. hold the key for good governance and the credibility of the ODL system. The open universities and institutions should provide and deliver the study materials and hold the counselling classes timely and effectively. Besides the websites that are developed by each university for their educational purpose, mobile phone alert can be used for transmitting the relevant information like date of examination, date of admission, declaration of examination results etc. to the learners and the functionaries of the study centres or any member of the public from time to time. Even some universities and institutions following the ODL system have live phone-in programme where the top officials of that universities and ODL institutions can deliver some interactive sessions and directly talk with the learners on various issues and clear the people's doubts regarding the curricula of the Open University or its academic programmes, and get the ways and means for solution of their queries.
- ➢ The future development of ODL system depends on the new innovation and research to improve the quality. Innovation in the ODL system is utmost necessary and so the promotion of research is to be given due priority to develop ODL into a well-grounded discipline of learning. Ph.D. programme on ODL

related issues and various research projects can be provided to the learners in order to encourage innovative research in ODL system.

In fact, quality and credibility in ODL to build up quality human resources depends on the SLMs, both of print and audio-visual variety; ICT based radio, television, audio cassette, audio-video materials, tele-conferencing, computer based learning technology, on-line learning, web portal, internet-based learning, mobile and Learner Support Service, including Counselling. So, the ODL institutes need to concentrate on the quality and credibility of various academic programmes. What is needed not only the promotion of the ODL system but also to provide quality education for all through that mode.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Write some ways or means that can ensure quality in education, particularly in open and distance mode.

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9.4 LET US SUM UP

- The qualitative improvement of education and training is essential for human resource development in a country.
- For sustaining a high rate of growth of the economy, India needs to be transformed into a major knowledge economy having adequate and abundance of skilled .and trained manpower.
- The country has to build up skilled and trained manpower and it is possible through the expansion of quality higher education - both general, vocational and professional.
- Quality indicates the degree of excellence of particular things. Quality

assurance is a development mechanism that is designed to maintain and enhance the institutional effectiveness as a whole.

- The present national GER in higher education in India is exceptionally low when we look at the global scenario.
- The present scenario of higher education in the country is not very encouraging for achieving the goal of a knowledge economy which can be ensured by an abundance of skilled and trained manpower.
- This Herculean task of attaining the targeted GER can be made possible through an open, flexible and less expensive mode of education, i.e., the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system.
- ICT enabled linkages through broadband and satellite network in the ODL system can bring the teaching-learning process to the "3As" scenario - Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere - making "Education Beyond Barriers" in attainable goal.
- Quality is a major concern in providing access to education to all and, therefore, besides the conventional education, the open and distance learning institutions should strive from the very beginning to achieve the goal of providing quality education to the learners.
- Highlighting the importance of quality in education, the National Knowledge Commission states that "the biggest challenge faced in higher education, therefore, is the provision of quality higher education to the greatest number, at the lowest possible cost to the learner"
- For quality assurance through the distance mode, the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) recommended the constitution of an External Quality Assurance Cell to assess and evaluate the ODL institutions at regular interval.
- Distance Education Bureau (DEB) also decided to have a Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA) in all open universities of the country.
- Curricula of ODL system should be well thought-out, need-based, employment oriented and learner friendly while ensuring the quality.
- Self learning materials (SLM) both in print and audio-visual forms are the heart and soul of ODL system and they should be of high quality

- Adequate and effective counselling sessions should be provided through face to face form as well as through audio-visual form by using information and communication technology
- Timely and adequate learner support services (LSS) should be provided for ensuring the success of ODL system.
- Quality of education in the ODL system can be immensely improved with the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and in fact, ICT drawn ODL system only makes it possible to provide education with 3As - anyone, anytime and anywhere.
- Research should be conducted and new areas should be explored for improving the quality in ODL system.
- Quality and credibility in ODL to build up quality human resources depends on - SLMs - print and audio-visual; ICT based - radio, television, audio cassette, audio-video materials, tele-conferencing, computer based learning technology, on-line learning, web portal, internet-based learning, mobile and Learner Support Service, including Counselling and so on.



9.5 FURTHER READINGS

1) Jadhav, Narendra, (2010): "Higher Education in India: In Retrospect and Prospects", Fourth Foundation Day Lecture, KKHSOU.
2) National Knowledge Commission, (2008) "Recommendations of the Working Group on Open and Distance Education" Working Group on Open and Distance Education.
3) Srivastava, Manjulika and Swaraj Basu, (2010) " Distance Learning in North East : An Overview ", University News, 48 (38) September.
4) Thorat, Sukadeo, (2007), " Higher Education in India : Emerging Issues Related to Access, Inclusiveness and Quality", Nehru Memorial Lecture, University of Mumbai, 2007.



9.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q N. 1: The term quality usually denotes the standard of something

where it is compared to something else. Quality also means excellence of performance in any human action. So when we talk of quality assurance in relation to distance education we mean achieving a certain level of excellence in performing the tasks involved with dissemination of education and knowledge through that particular mode of teaching learning process

Quality assurance is a development mechanism that is designed to maintain and enhance the institutional effectiveness as a whole. The improvement of quality is essential in an institution to enrich the dimension like curricula aspects, teaching learning process, research consultancy and education, health practice and students support service, extensive publication and co-curricular activities of an institution.

Ans to Q N. 2: The present society is considered a knowledge society where members should be acquainted with some need based skills that will help them to get better livelihood. Education is the only way through which knowledge and information can be disseminated among the learners and thus it helps in developing manpower in a society. To make higher education accessible for all is still a big challenge for the Government of our country. Open and distance learning is the most effective alternative way through which people can have access to education at their own doorstep. Quality is a major concern while providing access to education to all and therefore in addition to the conventional system of education, the open and distance learning institutions should try from the very beginning to achieve the goal of quality education. For quality assurance through distance mode, the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) recommended the constitution of an External Quality Assurance Cell to assess and evaluate the ODL institutions at regular interval. Distance Education Bureau(DEB) has also decided to have a Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA) in all open universities of the country.

Ans to Q N. 3: There are some ways through which quality can be maintained in an open and distance learning institutions. These are as follows:

- Curricula of ODL system should be well thought-out, need-based, employment oriented and learner friendly for ensuring the quality.
- Self learning materials (SLM) both in print and audio-visual forms the core of the ODL system and they should be of high quality
- Adequate and effective counselling sessions should be provided through face to face form as well as through audio-visual form by using information and communication technology
- Timely and adequate learners support services (LSS) should be provided for success of ODL system.
- The quality of the ODL system can be greatly improved with the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and ICT drawn ODL system only makes it possible to have an education with 3As - anyone, anytime and anywhere.
- Research should be conducted and new areas should be explored for improving the quality in ODL system.
- Quality and credibility in ODL to build up quality human resources depends on - SLMs - print and audio-visual; ICT based - radio, television, audio cassette, audio-video materials, tele-conferencing, computer based learning technology, on-line learning, web portal, internet-based learning, mobile and Learner Support Service, including Counselling and so on.



9.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions (Answer each question in about 50 words)

Q 1: What do you mean quality?

Q 2: What do you mean by quality in education?

Q 3: What is the importance of distance education?

Q **4:** What is the present status of higher education in India?

B. Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Do you think that CIQA is important for assuring quality in an open and distance learning institution? Discuss.

Q 2: Why is quality education important for making knowledge economy

of a state?

Q 3: How is quality education related to human resource development in a country?

C. Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Do you think quality can be improved in an educational instruction? If so how will you suggest for that?

Q 2: Discuss the ways or means that can ensure the quality in education particularly in the open and distance mode.

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