Is it Time to Adopt Alternate Teaching Strategy?

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Educational systems are changing gradually due to emerging demands for higher education among learners. Many educational institutions are addressing this challenge by developing Distance Education (DE) Programs within their own academic courses. In order to keep pace with the demands of the learners, the concept of "Distance Education/Open and Distance Learning (ODL)" came into existence. This teaching method gives more focus on self spacing learning process where opportunities are given to learners to manage their own educational aspiration within their schedule .

ODL adopts more liberal educational process and mediated by electronic as well as printed technologies often conducted in an institution with specific policies as open admissions, freedom of selection of what, when and where to learn. In this connection UNISCO has mentioned three distinct advantages of ODL (a) for the learners - it is learner centered approach, enrichment, higher quality and new ways of interaction; provides access and flexibility as well as the combination of work and education; (b) for employers - sharing of costs of training, time, and cost-effective professional development in the workplace for upgrading of skills; and (c) for governments - cost effectiveness of education and training systems to support existing educational structures in promoting opportunities for lifelong learning.

In these days, ODL is becoming more popular for continuing education related to updating knowledge and skills relevance to the learners for their personal as well as professional development. In this method, the teaching process includes verities of electronically supported resources including computer-based teaching, virtual education, digital collaboration and applications of Web-based teachings. Moreover, both the learners as well as virtual teachers can choose the methods of communication when, how and where they want to communicate which can be easily fixed via Internet/Email; Telephone/Mobiles/SMS etc .

Due to inherent eminent features of ODL, most of the prestigious institutes have incorporated the concept in their academic programmes. In most of the ODL courses, regardless of their age and status of the learner, one can seek desired course from any reputed institutes throughout the world either by correspondence (delivery centers on a printed study guide, often accompanied by audio and video components such as records and slides which is delivered by letters and other written or printed documents sent through postal systems), audiovisual educational technology (terrestrial, satellite, cable television and radio are used to deliver live or recorded lectures to learners in remote classrooms where face-to-face support might be provided), multimedia technology (audio and text files such as text, audio, video and computer-based materials), and the Internet based systems (multimedia text, audio, video and computer-based materials in electronic format are delivered to individuals through computers along with access to databases and electronic libraries .

As ODL adopts non-rigid modalities in teaching process it has limited prerequisite criteria for the learners, the interested learner can enroll in any university of the world for advancing their educational aspirations. The learners have flexibility to complete the assigned courses within the specified timeframe, as learning resources are attracted by the prescribed instructional design which enable learners to make their own decisions (as quickly you can, or as slowly as you want). In general, ODL learners' aim is to acquire dependable and service-oriented efforts which enhance them to retrieve the learning resources (printed/electronic) by adopting the principals: (a) collect, (b) relate, (c) create, and (d) donate . Nevertheless, there are some basic requirements for the learners: they must have motivation for self-directed learning; readiness to follow online protocol; interest in independent learning; willingness to cooperate and collaborate with other learners; in addition, they should have computer skills, knowledge on handling software, and network accesses.

In relation to the ODL operation, wide ranges of technological alternatives are available while providing teaching resources :

(a) Voice - Instructional audio tools include the interactive technologies of telephone, audio conferencing, and short-wave radio including (i.e., one-way methods - tapes and radio);

(b) Video - Instructional video tools include still images such as slides, pre-produced moving images (e.g., film,

videotape), and real-time moving images combined with audio visual conferencing (one-way or two-way video with two-way audio);

(c) Computer Based Data - Computers send and receive information electronically by various means: Computer-assisted instruction (CAI) - uses the computer as a self-contained teaching resource to present individual lessons; Computer-managed instruction (CMI) - uses the computer to organize instruction and track student records and progress; Computer-mediated education (CME) - computer applications that facilitate the delivery of instruction via electronic mail, fax, real-time computer conferencing, and World-Wide Web applications;

(d) Printed Materials - is a foundational element of distance education programs and the basis from which all other delivery systems are evolved). Various print formats are available including: textbooks, study guides, workbooks, course syllabi, and case studies.

ODL is also known as an identical to e-learning: a continuum of educational technology integration, which is often supplemented by the use of technology in the class room comprising a mix of face-to-face as well as fully online instruction, to fully online synchronous and asynchronous. The letter "e" in e-learning reflects for the word "electronic", which includes educational activities that are carried out by learners while working online/offline, and synchronously/asynchronously via network online electronic devices and the Internet (intranet/extranet), audio or video tape, satellite TV, and CD-ROMs, which can be either self-paced or instructor-led .

- Individualized self-paced e-learning offline can be initiated without Intranet facilities, where the learner works alone in the hard drive, CD or DV; and the individual learner can use learning resources such as a database/computer- assisted learning package.

- Individualized self-paced e-learning online refers to situations where an individual learner can access learning resources such as a database/course content online via an Intranet, which is often use in conducting research activities on the Internet or a local network.

- Synchronously e-learning, refers to text-based conferencing via one or two-way audio and videoconferencing. In this method, groups of learners can work together via Intranet facilities in a real-time chat/audio-videoconference.

- Asynchronously e-learning can be conducted where groups of learners are working over an Intranet in different places where online discussions via electronic mailing lists and text-based conferencing can be undertaken within learning managements systems.

In most of the ODL courses, all of these or some of these processes are incorporated. Furthermore, for the effective use of ODL via online education, seven principles of good educational practices can be applied: encouraging student-faculty communication; encouraging cooperation among students; encouraging active learning; giving prompt feedback; emphasizing time on task; communicating expectations; and respecting diverse talents & ways of learning . These seven principles found to be effective in delivering online instruction in higher education as well as in online education.

Perhaps, the time has come for the Institute of Medicine (IOM) to adopt the concept of ODL within the existing academic programmes, if above mentioned educational processes as well as effective methods of delivering teaching recourses are managed well within existing facility. At the initial stage, it would be better to incorporate the concept of ODL in non-academic short term courses for providing in-service education or training to update the knowledge and skills related to advancement in contemporary biomedical and allied subjects such as in applied research, communication skills etc. After ascertaining the backup support system, it can move on to formal academic courses; such integration of ODL in the existing biomedical including nursing education will certainly expand the horizon of the modern medical education in Nepal.

Since several decades, Institute of Medicine has endorsed a program called "IOM to Heath Post" which is conducted through radio program (started before inception of televisions or mobiles in Nepal). This programme is initiated to full fill the medical queries of health personnel from periphery health posts situated at the remotest areas of the country. Currently, soon after the establishment Department of Information and Technology (2011), "SMART HEALTH HOTLINE" programme has been started. The Smart Health Line subscribers are allowed to make an enquiry to get guidance on their any medical queries from a specialized medical doctor within working hours (9 - 5 pm). In near future, this programme is expanding its services to all the time and will also have options to direct face to face communication via video conferencing in near future. Similarly, video conferencing, Tele medical teaching, Tele medical consultation and mobile services have been started via Department of Information Technology.

In this perspective, Nursing Campus Maharajgunj has initiated a distance education project entitled "Developing Competencies in Conducting Qualitative Research Approach via Distance Education" which is abbreviated as "QLRA

via DE". This project is commencing with the financial and technical support from World Health Organization. The ultimate aim of this project is to enhance competence in conducting qualitative research among nursing academics via distance education. This project is designed to produce competent nursing academics in conducting qualitative research from their own respective residential areas (during their free time without impeding in dispensing their assign responsibilities).

This QLRA via DE project has two distinct phases, I phase was successfully initiated in meeting targeted objectives: in identifying the contents (the stake holders and the perspective respondent) to be included in qualitative research teaching modules, and to develop teaching modules on QLRA to be delivered via DE. Before initiation of the phase, a feasibility study was conducted in three nursing campuses: Nursing Campus Maharajgunj, Nursing Campus Pokhara, and College of Nursing (Chitwon Medical College) which have commencing Masters Level Nursing Programmes. All together 20 nursing academics were selected (i.e. 12, 4, and 4 respectively). Based on the suggestions made by the respondents, employers and employee, eleven modules have been developed related to methods of data collection including data analysis in qualitative research approach.

The II phase of this QLRA via DE is in pipeline. In this II phase, the developed modules are going to be delivered via DE by utilizing multimedia technology. In this DE project individualized self-paced e-learning offline (the learner works alone in the hard drive, CD or DV; where the individual learner can use learning resources such as a database/computer-assisted learning package) as well as asynchronously e-learning (where groups of learners can work over an Intranet in different places and will have privilege to exchange their ideas among participants via virtual transmission) methods will be used in coordination with the Department of Information Technology (DIT) within IOM complex.

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