

Need for a Separate Independent Distance Education Center

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Abstract

Distance mode of education has tremendous potentials in instructional delivery for various levels and fields of learning particularly to the learners who cannot attend classes regularly in a formalized setting. Nepal has not been able to move beyond teacher education and very limited school education programs even though it had started distance education through Radio Education Teacher Training Project (RETTP) in 1978 (2033 BS). The dream of establishing Open University is also not materialized yet. Distance education, certainly, is one of the alternative approaches to educational delivery. Nonetheless, it is not a substitute to the School college based education. Therefore, it should not be over emphasized rather should go hand in hand with conventional mode of education for educating the unreached population groups of the country. The target population for this purpose has to be identified properly. The Program preparation, means of transmission and communication, contact sessions, supplementary study materials and investments have to be planned seriously in order to make this scheme effective

Background

Distance learning has tremendous potentials in educational lessons and message delivery. It can be used in wider spectrum of instruction and learning in the fields of school education, higher education, technical and vocational education and training, adult and lifelong learning, teacher education and training and training of managers and other professionals. Distance learning provides educational access to the learners who cannot attend classes regularly in a formalized setting. It is the mode of education in which students receive instructions remotely through electronic or print media without going to schools or colleges.

Nepal had started distance education since the establishment of Radio Education Teacher Training Project (RETTP) in 1978 (2033 BS). The first radio teacher training lesson was broadcasted on 20th August 1980 (Bhadra 4, 2037). In the later part of 1980s, RETTP developed its own radio studio and arranged necessary equipment with a view to initiate separate radio channel for educational purposes. However, it could not be possible due to lack of professional staff and due to confidence in the part of management of the Ministry of Education. Most of these equipment have been handed over to Radio Nepal with an understanding that it produces and runs separate educational program. The RETTP was upgraded into the Distance Education Center as an independent department of Ministry of Education in 1993 (2050 BS). Nevertheless, it could not run courses in any field other than teacher training. In 2003 (2060 BS), government further converted the Distance Education Center into an Open and Distance Learning Division (ODLD) of the National Council for Educational Development focusing it again to teacher training. There has been several efforts in establishing Open University but it is yet to be materialized due to lack of appropriate legal provision.

Present Status, the non-formal education policy of the Government of Nepal (GON), 2013 states open and distance mode as the major strategy in delivering adult education and lifelong learning programs. This policy also mentions to run higher education through

Open University in a non-formal approach (NFE Policy, 2063).

Similarly the Education Act (including 8th amendment), 2028 BS in its article 6 'Ka' states distance education as one of the delivery modes for education. The education Rules (including 8th amendment), 2059 BS in its article 56 mentions that the distance mode of education can be used in school education, teacher education and training, and other types of open education.

The Education Rules article “79” has made provision that the privately studying students can sit in the annual examination of different grades which naturally demands to help students to prepare for such examinations. In addition to the teacher training, Nepal is also operating secondary level open learning classes in association with thirty seven lower secondary and eighty five secondary schools across the country. In principle, these open education classes are supposed to be backed up technically by local Educational Training Centers or Lead Resource Centers. However, that has not been in reality rather they are left on the shoulder of single local contact teacher. Moreover, these classes are also restrictive with number of students which contrasts with the principles of open education. Distance learning is not common in higher education system of Nepal. Tribhuvan University, Faculty of Education has recently started B.Ed. in distance mode but the enrolment in this course is very low. Such a situation might have come due to unawareness among students or due to inadequate interest among teachers towards this mode of learning. Kathmandu University, School of Education has also started distance education B Ed course for the blind students but it has taken very small number in this course. Hence, KU’S program of distance education is also merely symbolic for very distinct type of students.

The TVET policy, (2067) aims to offer three months basic vocational training to all interested citizens of the country. However, such training to a large number of people in immediate future does not seem to be possible through the-conventional center based approach. In this context, the present arrangement of distance learning division under NCED does not seem to be adequate in emerging needs of various fields of education. In order to address the aforesaid needs in the country, it seems apparent to establish a separate independent distance education center in a departmental status with a mandate to run all fields of distance education courses as soon as possible. The present distance learning division of the NCED can be upgraded into this proposed center.

For legalizing its certification, the government needs to authorize the proposed Distance Education Center to run basic -lower secondary, secondary and higher secondary level school education courses.

All Regional and District Education Offices need to sign MOUs with this center to run such courses for their respective jurisdictions. Similarly, the Higher Secondary Education Board, and the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training need to provide affiliation to the center to run higher secondary education and basic vocational training courses respectively.

Distance education, certainly, is one of the alternative approaches to educational delivery. Nonetheless, it is not a substitute to the School college based education. Therefore, it should not be over emphasized rather it should go hand in hand with conventional mode of education for educating the unreached population groups of the country. Distance education may not be effective if it becomes merely one way communication. It always

needs to be lively and interactive to the extent possible.

Therefore, some safeguards are suggested below to make the proposed distance education system effective:

1) Target population

The distance education program needs to target people of all ages, sexes, geographical and income groups post literates and students dropped out from different grades of schooling and those left school after completing grade eight district level examinations can be the target group for distance education.

The poor people though may be residing in the urban areas, due to compulsion for wage earning or any other reasons may have missed conventional education opportunities. So, the distance education should reach them.

Even The well of people living in remote areas may have missed the school/college education due to being distant from such facilities can be targeted by distance education. The people holding jobs might have lost the study opportunities due to time factor, distance education should be the resort to them.

Sanskrit has deep influence in Nepali society. Almost all languages spoken in Nepal draw many words from Sanskrit. Similarly, most of the holy words "mantras" in Nepali religions cultures are chanted out in Sanskrit but majority of them are pronounced incorrectly. Therefore, Sanskrit education lessons can also be delivered focusing specially to preaches and prophets of these communities.

If we could complete the necessary arrangement for the affiliation, students wishing to participate in the higher secondary level open learning programs can be targeted by the distance education. As mentioned earlier, an Open University has been the aspiration of Nepali people for more than two and half decades. If we could make the necessary legal arrangement for this, higher education can also be expanded across the country through open and distance mode.

SLC coaching through radio and SLC support supplement in newspapers have been very effective programs of ODL. Therefore, the SLC preparing students should be the permanent targets of distance education.

Furthermore, the training of managers working in distance from such institutions can also be done through this mode incorporating face to face contact provision to supplement that.

If we could activate local trade schools and vocational training centers for face to face practical sessions, the theoretical lessons for youths and adults seeking basic vocational training can also be delivered from distance education after necessary preparation for this.

Likewise, the health and agricultural awareness packages can also be delivered simultaneously from this program.

2) Program preparation

The radio, TV and computer based video programs transmitted either through internet or through manual should not be only one way communication but need to be interactive, so that learners can apply and internalized the message successfully.

3) Means of transmission and communication

he radio studio of the DEC has to be upgraded and a new video studio needs to be added to facilitate the development of instructional lessons regularly.

The Radio Nepal and all the FM radios, as well as the Nepal Television and the entire TV channels operated in the country need to be sought in partnership for the delivery of instructional lessons and messages.

TV and Radio instructions need to be supplemented by internet based computer programs. Internet communications can also be complemented by individual verbal discussions through mobile or landline telephones, viber, Skype and other viable communication mediums.

4) Contact Sessions

In order to make the distance education program a credible one, face to face contact arrangement is very important part of these endeavors. Therefore, the TU and other university campuses, NCED teacher training centers, CTEVT public and private trade schools, higher secondary to lower secondary schools RCS and CLCs can be used as face to face contact centers. The qualified professors and teachers of such campuses and schools need to be trained in distance education approach and have to be designated as contact persons for the assigned areas and subjects.

5) Supplementary study materials

The designated ETC RC, campus, school and CLC libraries have to be equipped with necessary learning materials for the ready reference to the students of distance learning. The broadcasted audio and video materials and those materials which are prepared for supporting students but not broadcasted also need to be available in these contact centers. In addition, in the areas where the contact centers are also far from the student locations, some kind of mobile library facilities need to be developed to supplement the static libraries.

6) Investment

The per capita cost of distance education is much lower than that of center based mode of education. However, the initial cost of establishment of radio and video studio, installation of server, computer and other equipment's, arrangement of satellite and radio TV channels, development of professional staff, and development of basic building and other physical infrastructures need to be invested to start this program.

The Distance Learning Division of NCED already has radio studio and multimedia facilities. It may need cost for upgrading these facilities and establishing new video studio. Moreover, buying satellite and separate frequency for its radio and TV channels will also have some cost implications. The Government can initiate this process and call the international donors and I/NGOS to invest on this scheme. The private sector can also be called to join hand in these endeavors as a part of their corporate social responsibility.

After all, the things are not easy to do as they are stated. It needs intense preparation in every stage to move ahead. Therefore, the planners of the distance education have to prepare immediate, intermediate and long term strategies to implement this mode of education.

Conclusion

Distance education is certainly a viable option for educational delivery. It can be equally effective as school college based education if we could plans different aspects of it such as target population, program preparation, means of transmission and communication, contact Sessions, supplementary study materials and investment. It should be managed properly but should not be over emphasized as a substitute to the substitute to the conventional

mode of education. The present institutional arrangement is not adequate to impart such a diverse fields of distance education. Therefore the Government should think to upgrade immediately the open and distance learning division of NCED into a distance Education Center as an independent department of the government under Ministry of Education.

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