

Distance Education for the Rural Masses: Recommendations of a National Seminar Held in Gujarat State, India, 1986

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Introduction

In January 1986, a National Seminar on "Distance Education for the Rural Masses" was held at Gujarat Vidyapith, an educational institute in Gujarat State, India, which was founded in 1920 by Mahatma Gandhi and recognized as a university by the Indian Government in 1963. The seminar's director was Professor Ramlal Parikh, Vice-Chancellor and Professor of History and Peace Education at Gujarat Vidyapith, and its inaugurator was Professor Ram Reddy, Vice-Chancellor of Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi.

Recommendations: Subgroup 1

Subgroup 1: *An Open Learning System* was chaired by Professor Guntant Shah (of Gujarat University). A summary of the recommendations of this subgroup follows.

1. An *open learning system* should not be equated with an *open university*, though it might begin there. An open learning system goes beyond the formal infrastructures of universities. Although TV has its own place in any open learning system, it is not the only possible medium of transmitting learning to the common people. However, the Madras experiment of using TV for adult literacy should be studied in-depth.
2. An *open university* should use all possible media, including the non-electronic media, to send out messages to people on a massive scale. A message, for example, should be selected every week for the whole nation and all possible channels should be used. The message should be such that it appeals to all the people. These weekly messages, on agreed priority areas, should be carefully prepared to be projected through TV, radio, newspapers, posters, wall papers, and other forms of communication.
3. In order to be an effective agency of mass education, an *open university* should give thought to prioritization of the following areas of immediate concern.
 - i. Population education;
 - ii. Literacy & post-literacy programmes;
 - iii. Health education;
 - iv. Development of agro-industrial skills; and
 - v. Socio-cultural awareness for good citizenship.

4. The centralized mechanics of the *open university* can come up with common visual materials with universal appeal by simultaneously dubbing these in regional languages.
5. An *open university system* can develop a library of audio and video cassettes and also act as a clearing house for the following agencies:
 - i. Door Darshan (TV);
 - ii. Akash Vani (radio);
 - iii. NGOs;
 - iv. State Resource Centres for Adult Education;
 - v. Universities; and
 - vi. Other educational institutions.
6. All possible effort should be made to enhance the complementarity between the existing university infrastructure and an *open university system*. The procedures of admission should be flexible enough to enable a large number of students to move between the two systems.
7. Distance education should reach out to the most remote corners of our society where the disadvantaged millions work in unorganized sectors. These include landless labourers, marginal farmers, hawkers, daily wage earners such as Coolies, bonded labourers, scavengers, maid servants, rag sackers, street vendors, field workers, child labourers, tribal population (men and women), and village artisans.
8. An *open learning system* should not be confined to *open universities only*. There are many other ways in which open learning can be encouraged through conventional universities. Traditional modes of communication such as puppet-shows, street corner dramas, Jamashas, Bhavais, Kata Kirtans, folk dances, folk songs, folk fairs, and so forth, should be integrated into the open learning systems.
9. Every state must have an *open university*, to cater to the regional cultural moorings of the people. All open learning systems in the country should be coordinated.
10. The national *open university* should constitute task forces to prepare course banks for the need-based programmes.

Recommendations: Subgroup 2

This subgroup, chaired by Dr. Jay Gopal of the University of Madras, discussed the role of the existing conventional universities in educating the rural masses through distance education. Its recommendations follow.

1. The issue of utilizing the resources of the traditional universities in educating the Rural Masses through distance education should be fully explored. In this regard the three components of "Rural Masses," "Con-

- ventional Universities" and "Distance Education" should be considered as points of triangulation.
2. The University Grants Committee of the Government of India (UGC) should insist that all universities open on-going Adult/Continuing Education and Extension Centres by the end of 7th Five Year Plan.
3. The universities should encourage all departments of education and colleges to get involved in the education of rural masses.
4. The universities should encourage the students of various faculties to get involved in the conduct of bench-mark surveys, rural area planning, development of distance learning material, training of functionaries, and so forth.
5. Extension education should be given equal importance to that given to teaching and research and the "extension culture" should be developed in each university. Some extension work should be made compulsory for all students and teachers. The UGC should further stress the importance of extension work.
6. The Ministry of Human Resource Development should adopt policy measures so that extension activity becomes mandatory for attaining degrees.
7. In order to motivate students and teachers to shoulder their responsibilities, some incentives may be evolved.
8. Every university having a Department of Adult and Continuing Education must get involved in some distance education supporting activities through the *open university* or *open learning system*.
9. University departments could play a vital role in developing varied curricular frames for different target groups located in rural areas.
10. All EMRCS and AVECS should be involved in at least one form of Education intended for the rural masses through the distance education approach.
11. Establishment of rural educational complexes should be encouraged. The conventional universities should act through the rural universities.
12. The existing universities should adopt the following target groups for developing appropriate packages of (hardware and software) video technology:
 - i. Tribal women;
 - ii. Landless agricultural labourers;
 - iii. Marginal farmers; and
 - iv. Rural artisans, etc.
13. The existing universities should develop distance education programmes for educating the following workers of unorganized sectors on a priority basis:

- i. Dhobi-washermen;
 - ii. Artisans;
 - iii. Vegetable vendors; and
 - iv. Others occupied in service sectors.
 14. The existing universities can support the functionaries of the development sectors in terms of their training needs, specifically in the context of the programmes of the Department of Agricultural Research and Education, and of the Department of Rural Development, as listed in the publication of the Directorate of Adult Education, Government of India (Adult Education Components in the Development Schemes of Govt. of India, 1978).
 15. The Ministry of Human Resources, as a part of the new education policy, should support all departments of the universities, involving them directly or indirectly in rural development activities.
 16. Multi-media kits and course banks for literacy, post literacy, continuing, and non-formal programs in the areas of Population Education, Environmental Education, and so on should be developed to facilitate access to education by the rural masses.
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