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Professional Growth of Primary & Upper Primary Teachers through Distance Mode

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INTRODUCTION

It has been lately realised that the primary & upper primary education is the backbone of the socio-economic development of states in India. In spite of considerable efforts made by the Govt. of India since independence for the expansion and improving quality of primary & upper primary education. The national Policy on Education, 1986 (as updated in 1992) and the programme of Action, 1992 (POA) have emphasised the professional training of teachers teaching at the primary and middle levels on a continuous basis. The continuous training of teachers has been the concern for all those who are involved in formulating policies and executing the same at the primary & upper primary level. It is not a easy and simple task to reach out about 2.8 million primary & 2.3 million upper primary teachers in the country, at least once in their service time, through the existing infrastructure created for the purpose using only face-to-face mode. Sometime, it is also necessary that significant efforts may have to be made to develop all aspects of competencies necessary for a teaching profession on a continual and integrated basis, rather than attempting on the specific aspect through the short training programs in a sporadic and isolated manner. This would mean that input for professional development of teachers at primary & upper primary level will have to be attempted on a continuous basis through designing training programs of various duration in a modular and sequenced manner. It is also equally important to follow up other inter-program components to make sure that clientele retain those competencies developed through the training programs, transfer them effectively to the classroom situations. This is all the more a difficult task as far as such training programs are concerned when the comprehensive evaluation of any program is attempted. Perhaps, the effective use of multimedia, the proposed integrated approach for training design and networking of right kind of institutions committed for the purpose together can bring the answer to a great extent to all those component of a program committed for professional development of the clientele group, particularly at the primary & upper primary level.

IGNOU'S INTERVENTION ON TRAINING FOR PRIMARY AND UPPER PRIMARY TEACHERS

IGNOU which has a national jurisdiction and fairly well established student support services has been making constant attempts to launch few continuing education programmes for teachers at various levels. With the aim to cater to the training needs at the primary & upper primary sector. With the aim to cater to the training needs at the primary & upper primary sector, the School of Education, IGNOU went into a collaboration with the NCERT in 1992 for launching a programme titled 'Certificate in Guidance' (available both in English and Hindi).

In-service teacher education for practicing primary & upper primary school teachers is an area which has largely been neglected. Lately, district level training facilities, namely DIETs are being established mainly to take care of the continuing education needs of trained teachers at the primary and upper primary levels. It has been observed that those newly established network of DIETs left to themselves alone would not be able to cope with the pressure of number, considering that there are about 2.8 million practicing teachers, both at primary and upper primary levels are to be provided in-service training in the country. Distance education, therefore, becomes an important imperative in this direction. On the other hand the distance education system has the unique potential to intervene without taking the teachers away from their work, making it better suited to transfer of knowledge, understanding and skills in their day-to-day practices.

During the last two decades more than 40 developing countries have begun to use distance mode to provide training to teachers at different levels, in a reasonable quality, at their own work place and at prices that are affordable. Such programmes have the instructional components like some form of self-instructional material, which are supplemented by audio and video programmes and contact sessions. There are evidences to suggest that such distance teacher education programmes have proved to be workable and cost effective, especially those which combine self-instruction modules with tutor supported small group learning and suitable practical experience.

If one looks into the varied nature of socio-cultural context in the country one also observes the diversity in training needs of teachers at the primary & upper primary level. To meet such varied training needs and development of professional competencies IGNOU has been working out various strategies under its extension education programme targeted for primary & upper primary teachers. For the purpose, it is necessary to plan the multi-channel approach to instructional organisation and networking of the resource institutions to facilitate the effective implementation of the envisaged instructional inputs. Before one evolve the networking system, it is necessary to understand the possible instructional components being envisaged by IGNOU for developing professional competencies of primary & upper primary teachers.

MULTI CHANNEL INSTRUCTIONAL SYSTEM

During the last decade considerable development has occurred in the areas of distance education. From using just reading materials for education purposes, as done in correspondence programmes, distance education has developed significantly adopting multi-media strategies. Today several methodologies apart from print-media, radio and T.V. broadcast, audio-video programme, computer form instruction, teleconferencing, etc., are being used in distance education programmes for professional development of various target groups.

IGNOU went into a collaboration with the NCERT in 1992 for launching a programme titled 'Certificate in Guidance' (available both in English and Hindi; Assamees and Marathi is in the process of development) for primary & upper primary school teachers and parents. It is also in the process of developing a comprehensive programme for training the untrained primary & upper primary school teachers especially for North-Eastern States, Sikkim and West Bengal. There is a plan to extend this programme in other states in subsequent years. To meet the specific needs of primary & upper primary teachers, particularly in the areas of Mathematics and English language, the School of Sciences, and School of Humanities respectively are launching Certificate programmes for teachers at that primary & upper primary level. The University makes use of audio and video programmes, theoretical and activity oriented assignments, tutorials and academic counseling, contact sessions and internship, radio and T.V. broadcast and most popular media teleconferencing (one way video and two way audio channels) for its programmes. The following diagram shows the instructional system that is being followed in IGNOU for its various professional programmes. Such a multi-channel approach to instructional organisation can be adopted and used effectively for the continuous training of primary & upper primary school teachers to meet their training needs in the varied context.

INTEGRATED APPROACH

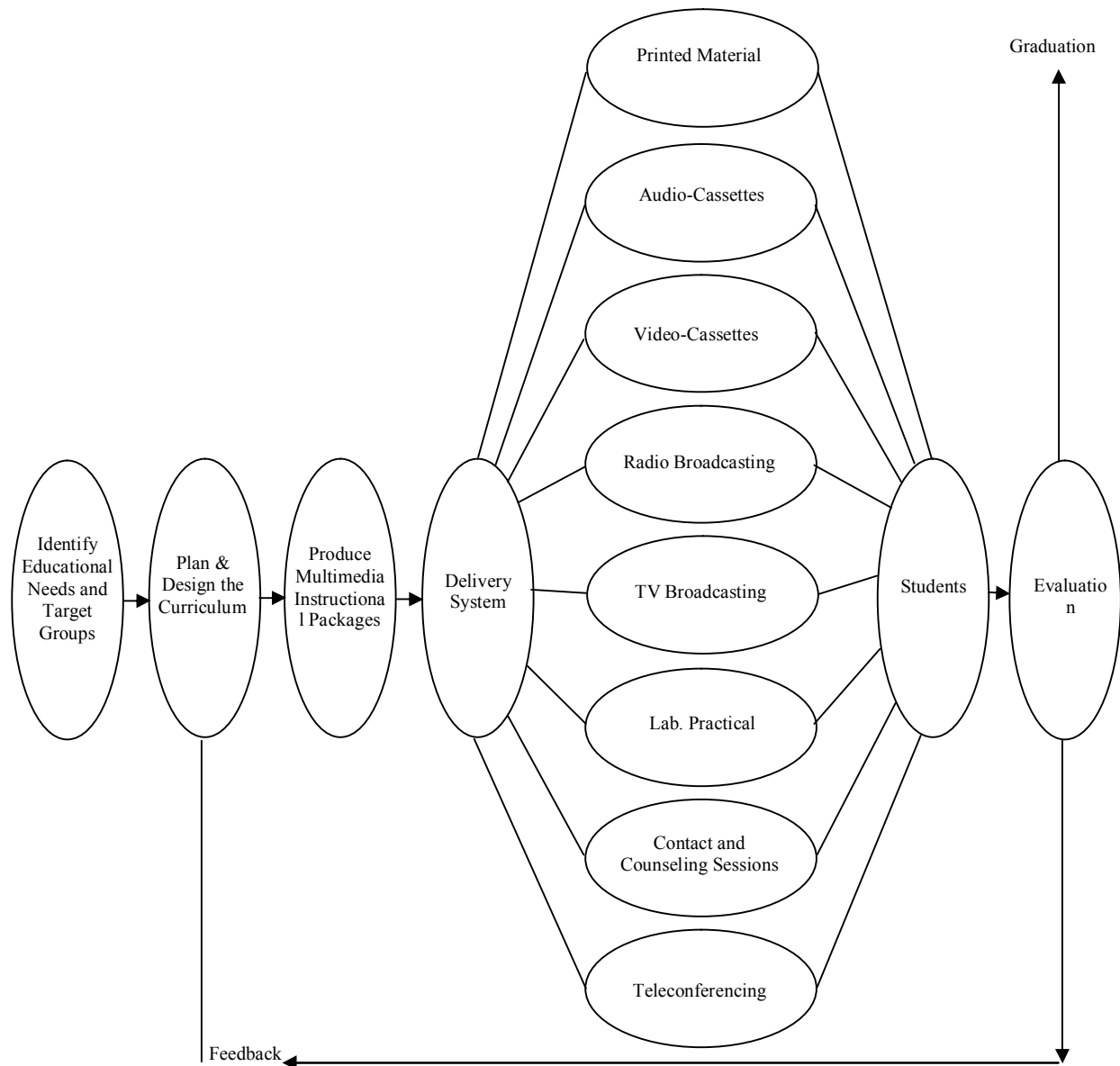
All programmes of professional development for primary & upper primary school teachers have been initiated either as centrally sponsored schemes or developed and organized by the national level organizations like NCERT and NIEPA. There are few programmes conceived at state level by the government missionary or by the NGOs.

INSTRUCTIONAL SYSTEM OF IGNOU

The centrally sponsored programmes, such as PMSOT and SOPT, have been adopting cascade approach for training of teachers. In this approach, the organisations or the institutions responsible for launching the programmes, at the beginning provides training to key resource persons drawn mostly from state hierarchy and in turn these key resource persons are responsible for training to the resource persons to be actually involved in the training of teachers at the district block levels. In this process, it has been observed that a great amount of transmission loss takes place at each stage with respect to training contents and its strategies.

It is quite evident, if one looks into the materials developed for the purpose, most of the programmes are concentrating on uniform inputs, except for language variation in transacting the materials, to all teachers in the country irrespective of the differences observed in states and districts. Therefore, the programmes, in spite of being adequately funded and supported by the best available expertise in the country, have not shown expected results in terms of developing necessary professional competencies in the teachers in

carrying out their functions effectively. On the other hand, the state/local initiated programmes have been designed according to the needs of the state and, hence, are more relevant to the context. However, it is found that in many cases these programmes lack adequate resource support for development of training inputs as well as evolving scientifically designed delivery mechanism and system of implementation. It appears that systematic and concerted efforts have not been made till now to integrate the efforts made at the state and central agencies for training teachers at primary & upper primary level in the programme development and delivery stages.



Communication networking has become an important element and the integral part as far as distance education institutions like IGNOU and other open universities are concerned. Due to advancement of technology, it has become more easier and cost effective to reach out large target groups through broadcast/teecast mode. In this context, the IGNOU's experiment on using teleconferencing mode for direct interactions with students and other functionaries involved with IGNOU's instructional system has greater relevance. The IGNOU headquarters at Maidan Garhi, New Delhi has been linked to about 21 centres (all 6 regional centres and few remote study centers in Northeastern states) spread over through out the country by one way video and two-way audio facilities. The TV signals containing the educational programmes are, transmitted by the satellite uplinking facility through the INSAT-2B in a broadcast mode and have been received at different 'learning end' spread over the country. The educational programmes have been generated at the 'teaching end' in a studio with an uplink Transportable Remote Area Communication Terminal (TRACT) facility at the IGNDU Campus at New Delhi. The studio is equipped

with required teaching aids; and also the telephone and fax for direct communication from the 'Learning end' through STD facility. Perhaps, this is the most viable mode which can be used for training a large group of professional, particularly the primary & upper primary teachers, throughout the country in most cost effective and strategic way. If all block/district head quarters can be provided with the facility of one dish antenna and a telephone and are connected with the 'teaching end', be at state/national level training institutions, the training can be imparted effectively and taking care of the problems arisen due to transmission loss in cascade model.

This does not mean face-to-face interaction in a real class-room situation does not have any merits in the context and the above mentioned teleconferencing methodology can replace the face-to-face interaction. Face-to-face interaction has its own advantages which the distance mode may not have. But it may be noted that face-to-face interaction is one of the teaching-learning strategies followed through the distance mode. Therefore, for effective implementation of such in-service training programmes for teachers at the primary & upper primary level, it is necessary to evolve the integrated strategies using both distance-based and face-to-face based methodologies. Such an integrated approach will expect various institutions-at apex, regional and grass root levels to come together, so that one could evolve networking of resources in these institutions for planning the programme, development of learning materials and their implementation. Such networking has been envisaged for the purpose of sharing the resources on a partnership manner. The second important aspect to be kept in mind, while formulating and launching the programme, is to follow the decentralized approach from the beginning i.e., from programme planning till its implementation, where the state/district level institutions should take more responsibility in terms of need assessment, material development and effective implementation of the programme under the overall supervision of IGNOU. In the process, the potentially of these institutions can be used more effective way and gradually their capacity for designing various programs could be built. IGNOU has been making constant efforts in this direction which designing its various extension programs particularly the programs related to teacher training. Hence intervention of IGNOU can have a landmark in the context to meet the educational need of the institutions created at the grass-root level.

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