

## ROLE EXPECTATIONS OF DISTANCE LEARNER FROM THEIR DISTANCE EDUCATORS

### Abstract:-

Distance learners are enthusiastic for this learning environment because of the suitability that they expected and individual control degree. These students need dialogue with their teacher and with other students in order to consolidate and check on their own learning. Distance learners is different in many aspects from their counterparts in face-to-face education, therefore, in distance education, the teachers has to play the most responsible role. The present study was designed to explore the expectations of distance learner for the roles of their distance educators. It was found that the distance learners expected their teachers to play multifaceted roles such as Instructor, Facilitator, Constructor, Assessor, Counsellor and one who is available to them when so ever they need them.

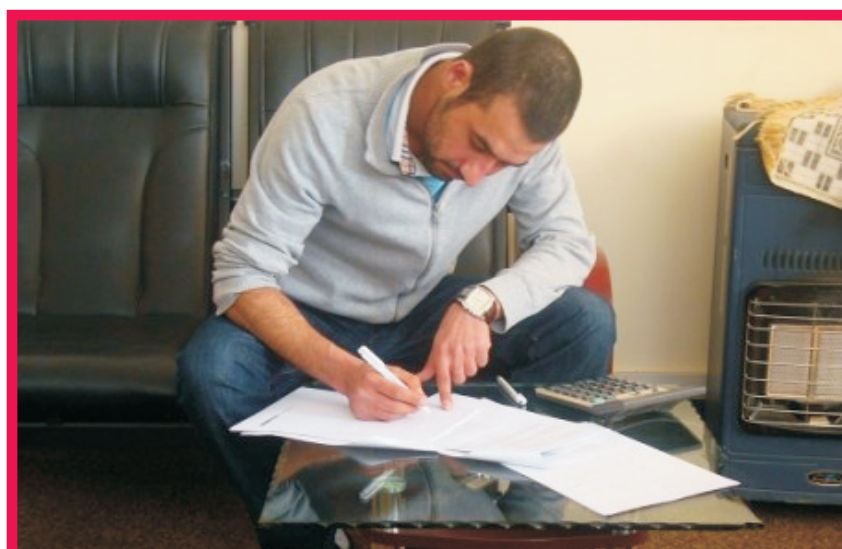
### KEY WORDS:

Distance Learner , Distance Educators ,learning environment , face-to-face education.



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## INTRODUCTION

Distance learning, like any kind of learning, can serve different ends, but it appears mainly to serve those who cannot or do not want to make use of regular classroom teaching. Demanding professional commitments and family responsibilities of many adults often make attending a conventional, full-time, face-to-face course with fixed timetables a rather unrealistic proposition, and the reasons why adults choose distance education are primarily "the convenience, flexibility and adaptability of this mode of education to suit individual students' needs" (Holmberg, 1989, p. 24). Distance education student register a distance education for various reasons such as for promotion in their careers, acquiring a second chance for university education, updating their knowledge, willing to overcome the geographical and physical obstacles. Through increasing access to distance education, students can meet their needs appropriately regardless of the present limitations and border lines (Verduin and Clark, 1994, p.7). Distance education helps lots of adults without discriminating between countries or cities, the young or the old, and the rich or the poor, which other educational systems fail to fulfill.

Distance education system and students are intimately related to each other as the existence of one without the other is not possible. But, learning at a distance is different from learning in the conventional classrooms. In a Distance education setting, the process of student learning may be even more complex than the conventional 'face to face' setting because perceived obstacles encountered by the learners may be different from one distance learner to another with varying degrees of complexity (Dazarkia, Razak, Mohammed, 2004).

Isolation from peer group, and irregular contact with faculty sometimes become hindrances in learning for distance learners who till now had been used to take 'on-campus' classes in their previous academic endeavor. The distance learners also face difficulties in meeting the challenges posed by new system of teaching and learning in respect of time management, autonomy and learning strategies (Moore, 1989). Learners who are able to study their courses at 'any time and at any place, at their 'own convenience' may also end up trying to fit their studies into odd corners of time in between trying to meet the continuing demands of families and jobs.

Distance learners are enthusiastic for this learning environment because of the suitability that they expected and individual control degree. Besides, the existence of some problem can be observed because of high non-completion rate (Scelese, 2001). The students complain about the lack of instant support, guidance and incentives although it is known that their isolated state requires more support than the student in normal condition (Keller, 1999).

One of the most common problems of many distance learning courses is the limitation of dialogue between teacher and learners and amongst learners themselves. As Kirkup and Jones (1996) state, "Students need dialogue with their teacher and with other students in order to consolidate and check on their own learning (P.278).

Chen (1997) supports this view, finding student-instructor dialogue an important factor in distance learning. Further more, dialogue allows students to assess their learning and develop a sense of community with other students (a measure that can counter the effects of isolation often experienced by distance learners. The students of distance education do not have same background as their teacher. These students have come from different social, cultural, economic and family characters. Therefore developing a close interaction between student teacher can take long-time. Besides, the students can feel uneasy during the learning period, because of the lack of face-to-face communication (Scalese, 2001).

Facing above mentioned problem, the students of distance education have some expectations from their administration and their faculty members so that they can get much more support from them. It can make the learning process more effective, more easy and more beneficial. As the group of distance learners is different in many aspects from their counterparts in face-to-face education, therefore, in distance education, the teachers has to play the most responsible role. The distance instructor has to perform many academic functions such as providing guidance in learning process, organizing the content in self-instructional form, interaction with students, evaluation of progress of learners and giving feedback to them, helping the learners in the use of technology, making aware about the challenges, developing self-confidence in them and motivating to learn independently.

The roles of teachers irrespective of the mode of teaching are: Curriculum design and development, Content presentation, Assessment of learner performance (continuous and term-end), Learner support, Research and publication (disciplinary and on learning technology), and Extension service and consultancy. So, it is only in the area of content presentation the method differs in distance education, as it uses media (print, audio, video, multimedia, web-based courses) to deliver teaching. These materials are designed with special care to facilitate learning, and are said to have the qualities of a teacher. In the face-to-face teaching, the teachers only deliver lectures and engage the class in various interactive methods.

To meet the needs and interests of distance learners and to make the distance learning a success and a powerful alternative to face-to-face mode, it is of utmost importance to know the expectations of the distance learners from their faculty. So this this study has great significance in the field of distance education system.

## PURPOSE

The present study was designed to explore the expectations of distance learner for the roles of their distance educators.

## METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey method was employed to carry out this study. To study the expectations of distance learner about the roles of their faculty members, a scale was prepared by the researcher herself. Role expectations of the distance learners were studied in relation to their marital status (married/unmarried), gender(male/female), course of study (professional/non-professional) employment status (employed and unemployed), age(below 20 and above 20. In present study, a sample of 111 distance learner was taken from University School of Open Learning, PU, Chandigarh. The convenient sampling technique was used to collect the data. The distance learners were approached during their Personal Contact Programme and also during their visit to department for official work. A scale was developed to study the perceptions of the distance learners about the roles of distance educators. The scale consisted of 45 items pertaining to different roles of the teachers.

## FINDINGS:

The data was collected on the scale constructed for the purpose to know the perceptions of the distance learners about the roles of distance educators. The percentages were calculated on items indicating different roles of teachers such as Instructor, Facilitator, Constructor, Assessor, Counsellor etc. On the basis of the analysis about perceptions of the distance learners on various item, following roles of their teachers were expected by these learners:

### As Instructor:

#### Use of teaching method according to the needs and learning styles of distance learners

More than half of the sample i.e. 54.95% of the total students said that teacher would not use one basic teaching method for all the distance learners. A small number of learners (38.73%) were of view that teacher may use one basic teaching method because most of the distance learners have similar learning styles. Majority of distance learners (91.89%) wanted that teacher would use other methods besides lecture method for teaching. 88.28% of learners opined that innovative methods of teaching would be used by distance education faculty specifically related with the needs of adult learners. More than half of learners (56.75%) also expected that the teacher might use individualized teaching strategies.

### Content to be taught during Personal Contact Programme (PCP):

A large number of learners (67.56%) reported that teacher would teach extra than whatever is already given in the study material. A few (27.02%) believed that teacher would teach according to the study material. 63.96% of distance learners were of the opinion that whole syllabus would be covered during PCPs. 32.43% of distance learners think that distance education faculty would not take-up only difficult topics during PCPs.

### Participation of students in class :

84.68% of distance learners reported that learners would be allow to participate in making decisions about the topics that is to be covered in class.

### Subject Mastery

Almost all distance learners (93.69%) agreed with this fact that distance education faculty would have subject mastery and up-to-data knowledge of his/her subject.

### Technological Orientation

A large number of distance learners (52.1%) who did not have any technological orientation wanted that the teacher would help them to learn the relevant technology useful in learning.

### As Facilitator

#### Foster productive desk-work related to real-life

A large number of learners (88.28%) wanted that their teachers would encourage a search for real-life examples by developing the assignments related to real-life (field experience). 65.76% of distance learners' expected that teacher would use method that fosters productive desk work. They expected that the learning episodes would be planned according to the problems that the students encounter in the field of work. Most of the distance learners (67.56%) admitted that distance education faculty would act as resource person

rather than knowledge provider.

#### Flexibility

Distance learners wanted flexibility in time frames. A large number of distance learners (67% ) wanted that teacher would provide extra time to students who have family responsibilities to complete their assignments etc. Only 14.41% distance learners were disagreed with to give extra time provision. Teacher would allow the students to work at their own pace regardless of the amount of time. They (77.41%) did not want their teachers to control the whole schedule, curriculum and their work. Distance learners (81.08%) wanted to have need-based and ability-based assignments.

#### As Goal setter/Constructor:

Majority of distance learner (79.27%) had an expectation that the their teachers would determine the educational objectives for each of his/her student. 92.79% of distance learners were of the view that the healthy competition would be encouraged among distance them. They also opined that teacher would plan such activities that encourage learner's growth from dependence on others to greater independence. Almost all the distance learners (92.79%) wanted the opportunities so that they could explore and exhibit their hidden talents. These learners expected that their teachers make them aware about the challenges and help in developing self-confidence and motivate them to learn at their own pace.

#### Assessor:

#### Assignment Evaluation

Majority of learners (86.48%) reported that creativity, originality and innovations in assignments would be given proper credits. 81.08% of distance learners expected that internal assessment by teacher be transparent.

#### Diagnosis

A large number of learners (94.59%) expected their faculty to be helpful to them for diagnosing the gap between goals and their performance and its reasons. They students (71.17% ) want their teachers to measure the long-term educational growth of students by comparing their total achievement in class to the expected performance as well as with their counterparts in formal setting i.e. on-campus students.

#### Feedback

93.69% distance learners wanted timely and fast feedback from distance education faculty members.

#### Counsellor

A large number of students (90.99%) were opined that teacher would have enough knowledge of guidance and counseling so that the teacher may help students to solve their problems. These students wished that their teachers guide them about further studies so that they could capture the opportunities for further educational growth according to their ability and qualification.

Majority of them (89.18% ) expected that teacher would be helpful in developing their personality by giving constant motivation and reinforcement. They also expected that teacher would have understanding and empathetic attitude so that student may share their problems with teachers and get help to solve them. 80.18% of distance learners wanted that teachers would be helpful in their placement.

#### Availability

These students (87.38%) opined that distance education faculty would be available to the learners throughout the year. Teacher might be available either personally at department or online. Most of the learners (83.78%) expected that their teacher would provide extra time (after PCPs) to them to solve their academic problems. Those students who could not attend PCPS due to some personal problems, teachers would give them extra time to them also.

On the basis of the results drawn from the analysis of the data following responsibilities are expected by distance learners from their faculty:

- The distance learners opined that teacher would help the them to diagnose the gaps between their goals and their present level of performance.

The distance learners were of view that distance education faculty would use innovative methods besides lecturing for teaching.

The students wanted that distance education faculty would provide more time to students who have family responsibilities to complete their assignment etc. whenever required.



They expected from their teacher to give a better learning support to the students.  
 The distance learners were of view that the teacher would give guidance to them to solve their problems.  
 The learners wanted that the teacher would be available to them throughout the year either personally, online or telephonically.  
 The student expected that their teachers would have enough knowledge how to use modern technology for educational purpose.  
 They expect from their teacher to plan such activities that will encourage learner's growth from dependence on others to greater independence.  
 The students want timely and fast feedback to the assignment would be given by the faculty and innovations and originality in assignments would be given proper credit.

## CONCLUSION

It may be concluded that the distance learners have very high expectations from their faculty. They look upon them for their academic growth and development. The distance learners want to have continuous support from their faculty and also like to have some relaxation/flexibility in terms of time etc. They perceive their teachers as good instructors who help them to understand the curriculum, facilitators who help them in self-paced learning, goal-setters and constructor who help them to achieve their educational motives, assessor who continuously evaluate their progress and help them to improve and last but not the least, as counselor who is always there for them to solve their educational, vocational and personal problems. Garrison (1990) states that, "the majority of distance education is concerned with meeting the educational needs of adults".

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