



ISSN: 2249-894X
 IMPACT FACTOR : 5.7631 (UIF)
 UGC APPROVED JOURNAL NO. 48514
 VOLUME - 8 | ISSUE - 8 | MAY - 2019



THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF ONLINE DISTANCE LEARNING AS PERCEIVED BY TEACHERS AND STUDENTS OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY COURSE IN DUAL MODE AT UNIVERSITY OF MUMBAI

Herman Coutinho¹ and Dr. Hemlata Chari²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Mumbai, India.

² Professor, Former Deputy Director Academics, Institute of Distance and Open Learning, University of Mumbai, India.

ABSTRACT:

Institute of Distance and Open Learning, also famously known as IDOL at the University of Mumbai has been the source of providing education to thousands of students across the region. The institute that began as 'Correspondence Education' in 1971-72 is now an independent entity with a

more flexible and open approach. Its primary function was to benefit students who were deprived of Higher Education. Although IDOL is an independent institution, it is an integral part of the University of Mumbai, and the responsibility is shared by the same management which administers the regular mode of education. The pedagogical processes like examination and instructions in distance learning are conducted using the same framework as regular education. Also, the delivery of the courses is predominantly through printed study materials, which is the first-generation delivery method. The present research studies the online course of 'Information and Communication Technology' (ICT) offered in the Master of Arts in Education degree programme. The study focuses on how the students and the teachers perceived the quality of the online distance education course based on course design, course development and course delivery.

KEYWORDS: *Online Distance Learning, Course Design, Course Development, Course Delivery.*

INTRODUCTION:

Quality education is no longer a privilege for the few who can afford it. Learning today is realised beyond barriers of cultures and societies. More and more people have realised that a good quality education directly translates to a secure and quality life. As the student numbers around the world are increasing, there is a greater need for tertiary education

(Wells, 2018). In recent years, it has been realised that good quality education is the right of every individual and as (Bill, n.d.) puts it, "Every child should have the opportunity to receive a quality education."

Quality in education has always been a topic of discussion, and there is no unified opinion on quality in education at the global level (UNESCO, 2005). According to (Parri, 2002) There is no general definition of quality that can be applied to all fields, including education. The concept of quality in higher education

can be approached in terms of exceptionality, excellence, zero-error, and fitness of purpose (Parri, 2002 p. 107). First, the quality assurance in higher education should aim to improve the standards and quality of education, to meet the needs of the students, employers and financiers (Lomas, 2002).

Countries around the world have a different education system and therefore have their standards to measure quality in education; whereby some emphasise that quality in education as continuous development, while

others set minimum standards to adhere to quality levels (Parri, 2002 p. 108). Thus, the researcher believes that the quality of education in any educational system should be studied in the context of its culture, people and environment. The present research highlights the learners' experiences of an online ICT Course offered at the Institute of Distance Learning (IDOL) University of Mumbai, India.

STATEMENT OF THE STUDY

"A Case Study on the Quality of Open and Distance Learning as Perceived by Teachers and Students of Professional Course(s) in Dual Mode at University of Mumbai"

Operational Definitions of the Terms

Quality of Open Distance Learning (ODL)

The definition of ODL from Harvey and Green as cited in (Ramdass & Nemavhola, 2018) works best for the present study which defines quality as exceptional, perfection or consistency, fitness for purpose, value for money and transformative. The present study focuses on students' and teachers' perception of the quality, based on course design, course development and course delivery, of the online ICT course in the Institute of Distance and Open Learning at the University of Mumbai.

Course Design

According to the definition from (Capital University, n.d.), "Course design is the process and methodology of creating quality learning environments and experiences for students." Course Design in 'Distance Learning,' takes into account the transactional distance between the teacher and the students. It is fundamental for constructing the online course. In the present study, the course design takes into account the instructional materials, learning activities and student-teacher interactions leading to critical and higher-level thinking.

Course Development

Course Development' is the process of building a lesson plan, creating the content by enriching it with different presentations like text and multimedia, formulating learning activities and developing resources. Also 'Course Development' in 'Open and Distance Learning' acts like a guide for the students to complete the course independently. The present study operationalises the development of the ICT course as usage of various multimedia tools and resources for developing the content.

Course Delivery

Course Delivery is a mode or a method in which course content and instructions are delivered to enable specific outcomes in a pedagogical process (Irerri & Omwenga, 2016). In the context of the present study 'Course Delivery' can be subdivided into two categories.

- The method of presenting the course to the students in a pedagogical context.
- The medium of delivering the content to the learner at a distance.

Course Evaluation

'Course Evaluation' is the students and coordinators feedback regarding the course. Questionnaire in the form of electronic or paper-based responses to evaluate the instructions of a given course is collected (Wikipedia, n.d.). In the present study, the students and the coordinators provided their input towards the end of the term by evaluating the different pedagogical aspects of the course.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The scope of the present study includes participants from the online ICT course offered in Master of Arts in Education Part-2 at IDOL (University of Mumbai).

The delimitations clearly define the boundaries of the study. Therefore, the present study focuses on the ICT course offered in Master of Arts in Education Part-2 at IDOL (University of Mumbai);

other courses that are offered in IDOL, in the University of Mumbai are not included. The study excludes individual academic achievement and learning style.

Research Question

What are the perceptions of the teachers and the students with regards to quality of the online ICT course based on the four constructs of Course Design, Course Development, Course Delivery and Course Evaluation? How are the concepts being addressed in order to successfully cater to individual's academic and professional growth?

Objective of the Study

With reference to Course Design, Course Development and Course Delivery in Open Distance Learning (ODL) the present study has set the following objectives.

- To study the teachers' perception of quality in ODL course(s).
- To study students' perception of the quality in ODL course(s).
- To study how teachers, cater to the quality of ODL course(s) for individual's academic growth.
- To study how teachers, cater to the quality of ODL course(s) for individual's professional growth.
- To study how students, endorse the quality of ODL course(s) for individual's academic growth.
- To study how students, endorse the quality of ODL course(s) for individual's professional growth.
- To investigate the quality of the professional course(s) offered through ODL in the dual mode system.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Methodology

The present study deploys complete Qualitative Case Study Research Methodology. IDOL is essentially a bounded system, and its pedagogical activities originate within its framework of disseminating education through distance-learning. According to (Merriam, 1998) it is appropriate to use a Case Study Methodology when individuals are directly involved in the environment of the study.

Interpretive Case Study Research

Humans are the best instruments for collecting, analysing and interpreting data (Stake, 1995). Since the study is related to social context, humans understand verbal and non-verbal communication without much effort. The present study takes into account the perception of the students and the teachers towards the quality of the ICT course offered online. Extreme care has been taken by the researcher to be non-intrusive while collecting and interpreting the data.

Participants

The participants in the study were the students and the teachers associated with the ICT course. The teacher-participants were experienced in distance learning course offered in IDOL. The population of the student-participants in the study were diverse in nature. Many came from vernacular backgrounds and were well-versed with conventional methods of distance-learning offered in IDOL. Most of the student-participants who had enrolled in the course were professionals working in various fields and from different regions of Maharashtra, India.

Data Analysis

Data from three academic years 2014-2017 was collected and analysed. A cloud-based analytical solution called Dedoose was used to process the data. Dedoose is designed to analyse data for quantitative as well as a qualitative study. The software had a wide variety of tools for qualitative analysis. Besides, it also provided efficient data management tools. Dedoose could import data from multiple formats like Microsoft Word, Microsoft PowerPoint, PDF files, Voice Notes and various other formats.

Comparing, Interpreting and Consolidating

Data was thoroughly scrutinised using constant comparison approach. Data acquired by one form was compared with data acquired by another form to find similarity, concurrence, duplication and meaningfulness in the data.

Data was carefully interpreted by the researcher, ensuring that it is done impartially. The researcher bore in mind that every participant had a different way of expressing their views on similar issues. Therefore, the context of the complete response from the participant was considered rather than single or fragmented sentences.

The data was then consolidated using chunking and coding techniques. Coding helped interpret the data based on the four categories that the study had set out to find. The coding process was done in two cycles that are First Cycle Coding and Second Cycle Coding.

Cycles of Coding

Coding is a process where data is labelled and tagged with a specific reference to the categories in the study. Coding is a subjective interpretation of the researcher, and as long as it fits the intent of the current study, the codes can be considered as valid (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). In the present study, data coding was done in two cycles, and the type of codes used in first cycle coding was Structural Coding, Descriptive Coding, In-Vivo Coding and Provisional Coding. In the second cycle coding, Pattern Coding was used.

DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS

The present research attempts to study participants perception on quality of the online course based on Course Design, Course Development and Course Delivery. With the focus on the objectives of the study, the following findings are discussed further.

Course Design

Course Design is the fabric that weaves the whole course together. It is the master blueprint that guides other aspects of the course. The course designers envisioned the course holistically based on the expected outcome. Some factors to consider while designing a course is to understand the learning capacity of the learners; their fluency in the language of instruction; their previously acquired skills and their foundation (Team, n.d.).

Figure 1 shows the codes in the category of Course Design.

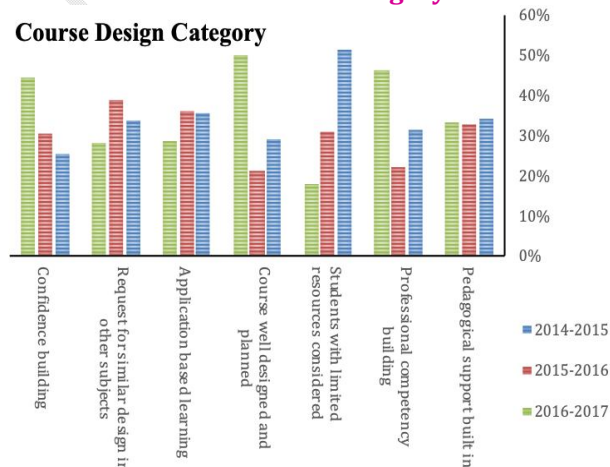


Figure 1: Code illustration in the category Course Design

One characteristic that has been consistently communicated by the respondents of all the three academic years is the **'Pedagogical Support'**. As per the coordinators, the pedagogical support was built into the programme right from the design stage. As per the data, the course provided support to the students whenever they needed it; unlike personal contact centres organised by IDOL, the students could communicate with the coordinators whenever they wanted. Peer-tutors were also available to support the students online.

One of the crucial outcomes of the course was to build **'Professional Competence and Confidence Building'** in the students. As per the data, **'Application-Based Learning'** was integrated into the course. The students from every consecutive year felt that the course helped them achieve professional competence and confidence through the hands-on learning activities and assignments. Also, the course was designed around the idea that the students may have **'Limited Resources'** like time, tools and knowledge on using the computer software. Therefore, participation without any deadline helped the learners to overcome the limitation of the resources.

COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Course Development influences how the learners experience the content. Therefore, the perception of quality based on course development cannot be disputed. As per the coordinators' response, the course was developed based on the pre-designed modules during the design stage. Also, it was developed based on the general template that comprised of an introduction, the objective of the study, topics for discussion and summary. Figure 2 shows the codes in the category of Code Development.

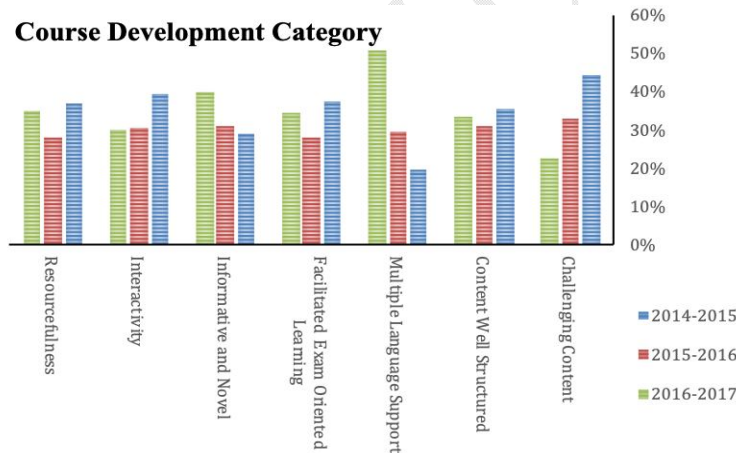


Figure 2: Code illustration in the category Course Development

The content was developed in English and Marathi (Regional Language). As per the data, **Multiple Language Support** facilitated the students to access content in any of the two languages. Also, the Moodle's built-in language support allowed the students to participate in the discussion in English, Marathi or Hindi.

Another attribute considered by the coordinators, during the development stage was **Interactivity**. Interaction is one of the essential elements of online learning. As per the data, the course provided interaction between (i) Learner and Content (ii) Learner and Learners (iii) Learner and Coordinators. The students felt a strong sense of classroom community and appreciated the immediate feedback from the coordinators during the session or immediately after the session.

As per the students, the course was **'Informative and Novel'** and helped in providing information that would be useful in their professional life. The students in their excerpts mentioned that they learnt new things throughout the course.

Resourcefulness was also another attribute of the course that the students felt was useful. As per the student participants, the course warranted seeking information, using computers and screen recording software or creating presentations; the skills which would be useful in their day to day life.

COURSE DELIVERY

Technology in education has transformed the way teaching, and learning occurs and has brought the content to the users at their fingertips through instruments like portable computers, tablets and smartphones. The Internet has made it possible to deliver the content in asynchronous or synchronous modes. Content delivery for the ICT course was done through Moodle.



Figure 3 Code illustration in the category Course Delivery

The delivery of the online ICT course began with '**Orientation and Induction**'. As per the students, it helped them to understand the expectation of the online course. The coordinators affirmed that at the orientation, the users were informed about the interface of Moodle, and how assignments should be uploaded. As per the data, the induction meeting helped the students to overcome their anxiety and fear about the course.

The course also made '**Use of Multimedia**' tools to deliver the content. As per the coordinators, the content was developed and delivered through formats like video, audio, infographics, Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation and text. Using multiple content delivery formats helps in multi-sensory learning. Research shows that multi-sensory learning helps in retention (Syed, 2001). Coordinators believed that multimedia facilitated learning and developed critical thinking abilities in the learner; which was evident from the discussion forums.

Although, during the initial days of the present study, the students were battling with limited resources; in the consecutive years, the students felt that the course was '**Time and Space Independent**'. As portable devices and cheaper data packages were readily available, the students could access the course content while they were on the move or whenever they had the time.

As per the coordinators, as this was the first time that IDOL was offering an online course, they faced some teething problems. The data revealed that the students and the coordinators faced '**Technical Difficulties**' related to network, bandwidth and server down issues. In some instances, the students who were first-time users found it challenging to create assignments using screen recording software.

As per the data, '**Course Start Delay**' was another issue which the students had to face. As the course started late, consequently, it ended with a delay, which affected the students. The students mentioned that they were in haste to submit the assignments and faced a time crunch towards the end.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that Course Design, Development and Delivery when tailored to the learners' abilities and needs, will facilitate learning and improve the quality of the course. Irrespective of the mode of learning, education should be for life, and therefore, the institutions should strive to help the students grow academically as well as professionally. Thereby making educational institutions as incubators for the future citizens of the world. Thus, good quality education enables individuals to develop their capabilities to live in harmony and work for the betterment of the individual and society. This has been further corroborated by UNESCO which promotes good quality education as a human right for all individuals (UNESCO, 2005).

REFERENCE

- Auerbach, C., & Silverstein, L. B. (2003). *Qualitative data: An introduction to coding and analysis*. NYU Press.
- Bill, F. (n.d.). Bill First. Retrieved August 3, 2018, from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/bill_frist_167699
- Capital University. (n.d.). About Course Design.
- Ileri, B. N., & Omwenga, E. I. (2016). Mobile Learning: A Bridging Technology of Learner Entry Behavior in a Flipped Classroom Model. In I. Management Association (Ed.). In I. R. Management Association (Ed.), *Blended Learning: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications*. Retrieved from <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/mobile-learning/51560>
- Lomas, L. (2002). Does the Development of Mass Education Necessarily Mean the End of Quality. *Quality in Higher Education*, 8(1).
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education: Revised and Expanded from Case Study Research in Education [E-book]* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Parri, J. (2002). Measuring Quality in Higher Education. In *Vadyba Management.*, 2(2006), 107-111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1353832960020306>
- Ramdass, K., & Nemavhola, F. (2018). Quality practices: An open distance learning perspective. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 19(1), 234-246. <https://doi.org/10.17718/tojde.382806>
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Team, T. (n.d.). Course Design Vs. Course Development – What's The Difference? Retrieved June 15, 2018, from <https://www.thinkific.com/blog/course-design-vs-course-development/>
- UNESCO. (2005). Understanding education quality. *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005*, 27-37. Retrieved from http://www.unesco.org/education/gmr_download/chapter1.pdf
- Wells, J. W. (2018). The Role of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Challenges, Developments and Trends Speakers and Moderators. Retrieved August 3, 2018, from https://iite.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Piter-Uells_-UNESCO_angl.pdf
- Wikipedia. (n.d.). Course Evaluation. Retrieved November 4, 2018, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Course_evaluation



Herman Coutinho

Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Mumbai, India.