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Research Areas in Open Schooling: A NIOS Perspective

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Abstract: ***A National Institute of Open Schooling is a leading organization in the field of open schooling. The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) is the world's largest Open Schooling institute that believes in extending education to all unreached people and places. To continue successful operations for future growth, establishing its credibility and monitoring the progress it has to constantly develop, innovate and improve its services and courses through the insights provided by in depth research. This paper reports the findings of the study that had three main purposes: firstly, to develop a categorization of research areas in open schooling; secondly, to identify the most important research areas in open schooling; and thirdly, to identify the most neglected research areas in open*** **schooling.**

Keywords: Review of Distance Education Research; Research Areas

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Now days, people have become very conscious about education. Education takes the human being from darkness to light, it makes a person capable of earning his livelihood and develops social consciousness. As a protest against the formal system, a new concept of 'Deschooling" propounded by Ivan Illich and continuing education, highlighted by Paul Lengrand have emerged on the scene. A new system of education which can be a substantive alternative to the existing system of education has been thought and in the direction of this mission to provide education to all, at the school level, distance and open learning mode is considered as an alternative to the formal system. The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) is the world's largest Open Schooling institute that believes in extending education to all unreached people and places. The NIOS is a national board that administers examinations for Secondary and Senior Secondary examinations of open schools similar to the CBSE and the CISCE. The National Institute Open Schooling (NIOS) has a history of more than two decades in experimenting with Open Schooling in India and at a few select locations abroad. It offers a number of courses to a large number of the Indian population, which could not get the benefit of formal education for one or other reason. Open learning focuses on removal of the many restrictions and rigidities in opening the doors of education for the needy learners. Open learning system signifies flexibility in the opportunities of learning in terms of admission criteria, periods of study, duration of program or courses, choice of subjects by students and scheme of evaluation.Schooling through open and distance mode is not a very new concept. The history of correspondence education considered to be as old as the history of postal services. In this context "it is claimed that correspondence tuition started about 1840, when Mr. Pitman sent his students instructions, in shorthand, by post cards. In Germany a Frenchman, Charles Toussaint, in collaboration with Gastav, founded a school for teaching languages through correspondence in 1856.

The first correspondence school program was launched as early as 1914 in Australia by Victoria University at the request of a parent living in Beach Forest, Otway Mountains. By 1916, a special correspondence branch was established at Victoria University. The success of this school program led to the continual growth of distance education, both at the primary and at secondary level in Australia. It soon spread to all other Australian States and Territories. In 1919, distance learning centers were introduced in Canada and in 1922 correspondence schools came up in New Zealand. Alternative schools, whether we call them Correspondence Schools, Distance Learning Centres or Open Schools, emerged in the developed countries like Australia, Canada and New Zealand from concerns about how to provide a minimum level of education to all.

In India, the initiation of study through correspondence courses has been achieved through the efforts of Shri K.L. Shrimali, a former education minister of India. In the light of the successes achieved in several foreign countries, he focused that the alternative to formal education is the correspondence/distance/open education. Thus the Government of India appointed a committee on correspondence courses and evening colleges in 1961 under the chairmanship of Dr. D.S. Kothari. Thus, in pursuance of a recommendation of the expert committee, the University of Delhi started correspondence courses as a pilot project in 1963-64, for the B.A. Course. Encouraged by the response that these courses elicited and the results shown by the correspondence course students, the U.G.C. appointed a committee in 1964 to consider the question of extension of these courses to other Universities.

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The beginning of ODL operations at the school level in India may be traced to the introduction of correspondence courses at the matriculation level by the Board of Secondary Education, Madhya Pradesh in 1965. Some other states like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, etc. followed suit. The syllabus, the year-end matriculation examination and certification modalities in all the States were not different from those formal schools, i.e. this newly introduced system was a 'supplementary' system. Nothing significant happened for more than a decade, then in 1979, the Central Board of Secondary Education, New Delhi, set up an Open School as a project activity. It was an initiative to move towards an 'alternative system' that provided for open entry, flexible choice of courses and flexibility in the duration for course completion, etc. By this time both the Central and the State Governments had realized that alternative schooling system is the only answer to the three fold challenge stated in the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986/1992. Beginning with an experiment in 1979, the open school project of CBSE was upgraded as National Open School in 1989 by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, as an autonomous organization. The name was changed to National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) in the year 2002.

It is tempting to believe that if an Institution/Organisation is running smoothly with remarkable achievements, it will continue to function in the same capacity. But sadly this is not the ultimate truth. Growth of any Institution/Organisation depends mostly on the results and recommendations of constant research, which are being taken up for the upliftment of the Institution/Organisation and as far as open schooling is concerned, research is an important component. Research plays an important role in strengthening any institution/ Organisation. Since last three decades the role of research has been deeply broadened. Research on the Institution/Organisation opens the door to identify the strengths, loop-holes and challenges to improve the existing system.

The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) is the world's largest Open Schooling institute that believes in extending education to all unreached people and places. To continue successful operations for future growth, establishing its credibility and monitoring the progress it has to constantly develop, innovate and improve its services and courses through the insights provided by in depth research. Hence, researcher conducted this study to find research areas in open schooling (NIOS-World's Largest Open Schooling Institute), so that the researches on the research areas can contribute in the upliftment of organization.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Research Areas in Open Schooling: A NIOS Perspective

III. OBJECTIVES

A. To develop a categorization of research areas in open schooling
B. To identify the most important research areas in open schooling
C. To identify the most neglected research areas in open schooling

IV. METHODOLOGY

Methodology deals with measures and procedures used for conducting the research. The present study is based on a literature review on the topic and responses of experts. A categorization of research areas in open schooling was developed based on a literature review on the topic. In order to identify most important research areas in open schooling, the experts were asked to rate the research areas on a scale of importance ranging from 1 to 20, with 1 labeled "very low importance" and 20 labeled "very high importance." They were also asked to identify the most neglected research areas. 20 experts with at least 5 years of professional experience in the field of open schooling and willing to contribute were requested to extend their help in study. The percentage is chosen as the measure to depict experts' ratings.

V. RESEARCH AREAS IN OPEN SCHOOLING

Over the years a number of reviews of distance education literature have been published in which the authors developed categorization schemes of research areas. The first attempt to describe the structure of the distance education discipline was proposed by Holmberg (1985). In the second edition of his book Status and Trends of Distance Education, his categorization system included (1) philosophy and theory of distance education; (2) distance students, their milieu, conditions, and study motivations; (3) subject matter presentation; (4) communication and interaction between students and their supporting organization (tutors, counsellors, administrators, other students); (5) administration and organization; (6) economics; (7) systems (comparative distance education, typologies, evaluation, etc.); and 8. history of distance education. Scriven (1991) used the following nine headings to classify research areas in distance education: (1) students and their characteristics; (2) specific programmes and courses; (3) telecommunications and media; (4) specific countries – practices and procedures; (5) theory; (6) course design and development; (7) economics and management; (8) counselling and student support; and (9) tutors, staff development, staff involvement. Panda (1992)

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reviewed 142 studies on distance education conducted in India under nine broad themes (1) concept, growth, and development; (2) curriculum, course planning, and development; (3) instruction and teaching; (4) Research Areas in Distance Education: A Delphi Study Zawacki-Richter 3 media and technology; (5) learners and learning; (6) institutional policy and management; (7) economics; (8) evaluation and programme evaluation; and (9) staff development. Mishra (1997) published an analysis of periodical literature in distance education (1991-1996) with seven major groups and 34 sub-groups of research topics. Rourke and Szabo (2002) applied nine categories for a content analysis of the Canadian Journal of Distance Education (1986-2001): (1) administration: budgeting, change, inter-institutional cooperation, staffing; (2) evaluation: judgment of the worth, value, success of a course, program, or courseware; (3) foundations: semantics, definitions, history, models; (4) instructional design: course, program, or product design, development, and delivery; (5) instructor characteristics: satisfaction, motivation, attitude, perceptions, teaching style, gender, demographics; (6) international perspectives: practices, procedures, role of distance education in specific countries; (7) learner characteristics: satisfaction, motivation, attitude, perceptions, learning styles, cognitive styles, attrition, gender, demographics; (8) technology and media: educational radio, educational TV, video, audio, computer conferencing; and (9) trends: discussion of the general direction or inclination of issues and topics in the field. Manoj (2016) concluded eight research areas in open and distance education: (1) Accessibility of Open Schooling System; (2) Courses of Study; (3) ICT and Media Research; (4) Teaching and Learning Strategies; (5) Student Support Services; (6) Evaluation of Learners; (7) Cost Effectiveness of ODL System; (8) Tracer Studies and Other Studies In contrast to the listings of research topics described above, this paper reports on an attempt to structure the research areas in the field of open schooling.

A. Objective 1

Based on literature review categorization of research areas in open schooling is as follows:

Table 1

S. No	Research Areas in Open Schooling
1.	Access & Equity
2.	Admission & Drop-out
3.	Courses of Study
4.	Curriculum development
5.	Self Instructional Material/Course Evaluation
6.	Media & Technology
7.	Learner Support System
8.	Teaching - Learning Strategies
9.	Learner Characteristics and Competencies of Learners
10.	Tutor Marked Assignment
11.	Examination and Evaluation/ Assessment
12.	Quality Assurance
13.	Costs and Benefits
14.	Tracer Studies
15.	Effectiveness of Open Schooling
16.	Reputation of Open Schooling
17.	Personal Contact Programme
18.	Communication and Interaction Between Students and Their Supporting Organization
19.	Comparative Study
20.	Management and Organization

B. Objective 2

Based on qualitative text analysis of the experts' responses and literature review categorization of the most important research areas in open schooling is as follows:

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Table 2

S. No	Research Areas in Open Schooling
20.	Quality Assurance
19.	Self Instructional Material/Course Evaluation
18.	Learner Support System
17.	Curriculum development
16.	Teaching - Learning Strategies
15.	Examination and Evaluation/ Assessment
14.	Personal Contact Programme
13.	Tutor Marked Assignment
12.	Media & Technology
11.	Communication and Interaction Between Students and Their Supporting Organization
10.	Comparative Study
9.	Learner Characteristics and Competencies of Learners
8.	Effectiveness of Open Schooling
7.	Reputation of Open Schooling
6.	Management and Organization
5.	Costs and Benefits
4.	Admission & Drop-out
3.	Courses of Study
2.	Tracer Studies
1.	Access & Equity

C. Objective 3

What are the most neglected research areas in open schooling? This question was addressed in the second round survey by means of an open-ended question. Based on qualitative text analysis of the experts' responses and literature review it was found that there is a great need for researches on Access and Equity; Tracer Studies; Admission and Drop-out in open schooling. These are the most neglected areas followed by Costs and Benefits; Management and Organization; Reputation of Open Schooling; Effectiveness of Open Schooling and Learner Characteristics and Competencies of Learners.

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study reports on an attempt to structure the research areas in the field of open schooling based on literature review and opinion of experts with regard to (1) categorization of research areas in open schooling, (2) most important research areas in open schooling, and (3) the most neglected research areas in open schooling Growth of any Institution/Organisation depends mostly on the results and recommendations of constant research, which are being taken up for the upliftment of the Institution/Organisation and as far as open schooling is concerned, research is an important component. Research plays an important role in strengthening any institution/ Organisation. Research on the Institution/Organisation opens the door to identify the strengths, loop-holes and challenges to improve the existing system. There was a high level of agreement on the importance of researches on Quality Assurance followed by Course Evaluation; Learner Support System; Curriculum development; Teaching - Learning Strategies and Assessment. Learner is the centre of any education system and all the system revolves around the learner. Hence problems of learners should be a concern of open schooling. Though, little research work has been done in this area augmentation and strengthening of student support services, improvements in the delivery system, decentralization of administration and extensive use of communication systems are being studied using the experimental and the case study approaches. Further, it has to take up more initiatives and research to equip learners for best student support services. Evaluation of any programme is very important aspect. It may be course evaluation, learner evaluation or organization evaluation to find strengths and weaknesses of particular area. Evaluative studies pertaining to organization, methods, procedures and results in terms of the learning outcomes of open learners, and the impact of open education on the socio-economic development of various target groups deserve special attention for planning and policymaking need to be

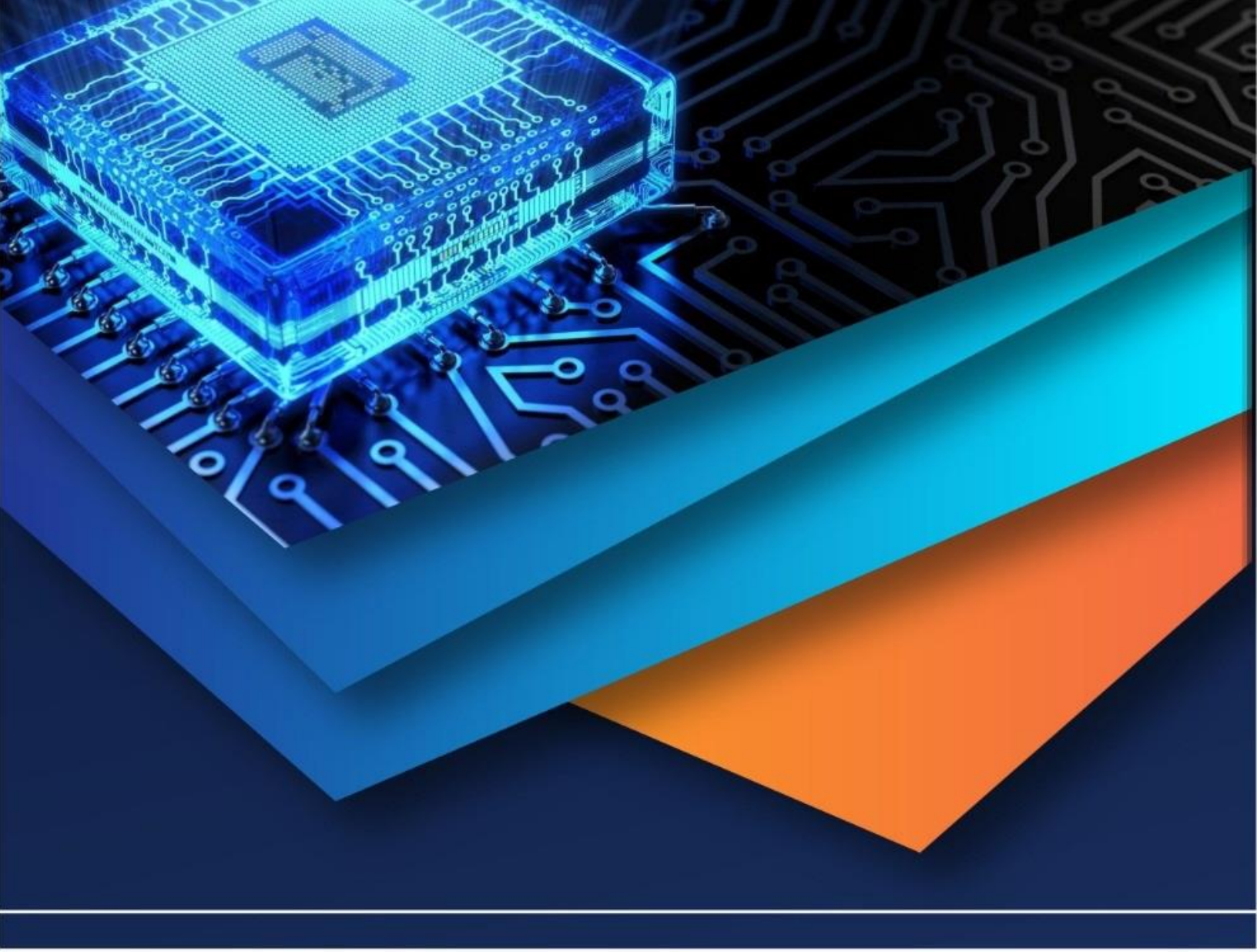
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studied. Based on qualitative text analysis of the experts' responses and literature review it was found that there is a great need for researches on Access and Equity; Admission and Drop-out and Tracer Studies; in open schooling. It is observed that large number of needy persons are left behind and number of dropped out students after enrolment is again a big question under the existing system of open schooling. Hence research studies on accessibility of open schooling should be taken up to improve existing accessibility of open schooling for learners. Tracer studies should be encouraged to find out how the pass outs are employed and, in general, what they are doing. These are the most neglected areas followed by Costs and Benefits; Management and Organization; Reputation of Open Schooling; Effectiveness of Open Schooling and Learner Characteristics and Competencies of Learners. However, there are also new fields or key areas that are, or should be, on top of the research agenda such as media & technology and new innovations. A possible interpretation for this imbalance is that the selection of research areas might follow practical considerations, especially with regard to the availability of data. However, the dearth of researches dealing with issues especially on the management, organization, and technology is disappointing. In order to guide practice, practitioners in the field should not rely on under-informed trial and error, but on sound research and empirical investigation on the effectiveness of managerial interventions for education innovation, diversity management, student and faculty support, quality assurance, course design, and intercultural communication. Based on the review of research areas on the topic, the results can be used to explore the body of knowledge in open schooling and to identify priority areas for future research projects. Prospective researchers can use the results to identify gaps and priority areas and to explore potential research directions.

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