

Open and Distance Learning (ODL): Manipulation of Telecommunication in Enhancing the Tribal Education in Tamilnadu

Dr. E. Iniyan

M.A., Ph.D., Assistant Professor, School of Social Science, Tamil Nadu Open University, Saidapet, Chennai – 600 015

Abstract - Open and Distance learning tends to be the classical framework in the present education system. People who are not able to access the conventional mode of education due to various circumstances make use of this comfortable mode of education. The students and teachers interaction transpires through self learning materials and various other modes of delivery systems. In recent years the telecommunication facilities, creates a greater opportunities to the Tribal people in accessing the higher education. It makes the possibility of interacting with the instructors and to communicate with mass participants gaining multiple knowledges on the subjects.

Keywords: ODL, Tribal Education, Telecommunication, Iphone, Android

INTRODUCTION

Tamilnadu being the moderately dominated tribal state compared to other neighbouring states in India, this article aims to delineate how the technologies could be provided to intensify higher education to students in tribal groups through open and distance learning (ODL). The study presents an account of how telecommunication may be used efficiently to promote higher education among tribal people and provides necessary insight into the use of telecommunication as a methodology for the Open and Distance Learning system.

Tribal societies are the only groups still existing today from which we may infer the way of life of early humans from the way they go about their daily lives and the older, more basic artefacts they use, etc. Indigenous and tribal peoples are often known by national terms such as native peoples, aboriginal peoples, first nations, adivasi, janajati, hunter-gatherers, or hill tribes. Given the diversity of peoples it aims at protecting, the Convention uses the inclusive terminology of

“indigenous and tribal peoples” and ascribes the same set of rights to both groups.¹ Similar to the Stone Age inhabitants, some tribes still live as hunters and gatherers today because the resources they need to survive are abundantly available in the form of bushes and herbs in the dense forests. Because the tribal community's habitation was located in a secluded area since antiquity, nothing was known about their way of life and how their culture had developed. Later, the emergence of modern inventions and their applicability had altered the lifestyle and societal infrastructure of the tribes, reflecting the changes in society that had formed in the plains.

Due to the developmental strategies introduced by various state governments in India, the tribal people had migrated from the deep gorges of hilly tracts to the small towns and cities where their education system has been restructured, which probably led to the socio-cultural and economic prosperity of their descendants. In particular, Tamilnadu is the state that constitutes heterogeneous group of tribal faction that is seen scattered allover the state. As per the 2011 census of India the total population of tribes in Tamilnadu 7,94,697, in which rural area accounts for 6,60,280 and urban area consists of 1,34,417.² There are nearly thirty six scheduled tribes in the state as given by the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 1976.³ Though the tribes were proliferated in all the regions of the state, six of them namely *Malayalis, Kurumbas, Kanikaran, Kammara, Koda* and *Todas* have been demarcated within certain limits. Malayali's had widened their presence in the regions of Dharmapuri, Vellore, Thiruvannamalai, Salem, Nammakkal etc. While Kurumbar were strewed in the Niligiri's, Kanikaran's are settled in the

Kanyakumari and Sengottai taluk of Tirunelveli district. Others like Kammara, Koda and Todas settlements are reported in different regions of the state.

Various procedures applied in the development process and the policies initiated to improve the basic life needs of the tribes have made them to get closer to the access of educational excellence which perhaps ingress them to be fulfilled with good employability. One of the factors contributing to the early dropout of indigenous children from school is their inability to comprehend the textbook and the teaching given in the classroom. Frequently, they also have a higher chance of dropping out of school. Government has taken strenuous efforts in escalating varied modes of educational schemes like starting panchayat primary, middle and high schools, tribal residential primary school in the tribal regions. Though various schemes have been initiated by the government in nurturing the primary education among the tribal community, it is the question of total aggregate of students in making use of those opportunities. It could be assumed that how the changing education systems and the accountability of their development have influenced the literacy rate in the state if we have a look at the census from 1991, 2001 and 2011. In 1991 the total literacy ratio of scheduled tribes was 27.9 and in 2001 the same ratio has increased to 41.5 which later jumped to 54.34 in 2011.⁴

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Though Tamilnadu is progressing forward in the infrastructural development in various departments, the accessibility of higher education for the major part of young tribal youth seems to be a nightmare. This may be due to the lack of consciousness about the necessity of higher education, economic deficiency, non - accessibility of transport facilities from the remote forests, unavailability of telecommunication facilities, boarding facilities etc. This is where the *Open and Distance Learning* (ODL) places a pivotal role in making a pathway for the tribal youth to secure their higher education which may be adopted by them due to flexibility in the system of pattern of study. In addition to the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), India has 14 other Open Universities in which Tamil Nadu Open University (TNOU) is the 13th ODL University.

TELECOMMUNICATION IN ODL SYSTEM

TNOU provides education to the down trodden and suppressed people who are unable to proliferate in the education system more particularly the Tribal communities. The system of education provided by the Tamil Nadu Open University to the students has included all the technological advancements like online learning, SWAYAM, I Radio (Internet Radio), Youtube Channel, Twitter, Whatsapp groups, Mobile App etc. These telecommunications infrastructures support the distribution of self-learning materials and student support services, which in the beginning helps to disseminate higher education in tribal areas and empower those communities. But, Sujana Shrestha⁵ stresses upon that in many developing countries lack of infrastructure facilities in terms of internet connectivity is non-existent in rural areas whereas the urban population is well equipped with the network facilities to access the tools of ICT enabled learning. Bordoloi too argues that inclusive growth demands establishment of greater access in addition to equality, quality, and expansion – highlighting further the need for the ODL institutions to be comfortable with the use of ICT in the present technology-based era, further stressing the significance of ODL in facilitating and strengthening the Indian higher education system, given its capability to provide quality and affordable education at the doorstep of the learners in addition to encouraging people for transferring knowledge and innovative ideas using ICT. A variety of issues have arisen as a result of the newfangled pandemic period that spied the Covid-19 virus, forging it intricate for tribal students' education to incubate. But in this epidemic period, it is this kismet that has braced the way for online learning or virtual education to become a buttress of learning for all demographics. The prerequisite of learning from home has caused virtual learning, also known as online distance education, to receive a lot of attention recently. Being appreciated throughout the globe and India, particularly in Tamilnadu, virtual or online learning has attained its peak in urban areas in this pandemic period despite being lacking with good network facility in the rural areas. However, with realizing the necessity of virtual education, especially in the COVID-19 pandemic, some research works have been conducted worldwide in the past on distance e-learning which is a combination of distance education and e-learning which is illustrated

by the use of internet and web technology in the delivery of education and in such a way online communication makes the bridge between the temporal or spatial constraints.⁶ Taking prerogative of the pandemic moment, Tamil Nadu Open University has embarked to disseminate its wings in the higher education system by manumitting online counseling classes to adapt students with amenable information in their subjects by supplying them with web links. The students were able to gain useful perspicacity on their subjects, the process of external assessment works to be carried out, the method to be incorporated in the field study, and eventually one of the major benefits been accomplished by the students is writing exams in online which made them expounding through their degree in the part despite, the head-on articulation with the students being logical due to the connectivity issues raised in the rural areas particularly the tribal pockets. The ICT-enabled communication capabilities provided by TNOU give all tribal pupils the opportunity to learn as individuals rather than as a single, uniform group. Using ICT to instruct and apprehend in a way that concede a tribal student to start at any time they crave, reckoning on their extant knowledge rather than always in a strategic modality, helps to sustain nobleness and coherence in the ODL system. The government of Tamilnadu had groomed many hilly tracts with a substantial population with telecommunication edifices, and the omnipresent service by the private sector companies, but they face the problem of low network speed which was also built for voice and not for data transmission. This is in defiance of the fact that the money-spinning livelihood gravitates to be the most primordial quagmire in popping in the handsets or computer facilities for the Tribal students. In order to promote prolonged growth, tenable, and benefit sharing, the government must hierarchize domestic Internet and IT perspicacity. People must exploit data processing in order to reap its benefits, as the more they do so, the better able they are to comprehend its potential and tap into it. Regardless of spirited and long-running related debates on the cost of providing information and communication technologies to the unreached society, in our case Tribal community, a low cost technological innovation on educational arena with intrusive positive impact in Tamilnadu emerges namely I Radio (Internet Radio). It is a digital audio service provider been telecasted via internet. Broadcasting on the Internet is usually referred to as webcasting since it

is not transmitted broadly through wireless means. It can either be used as a stand-alone device running through the Internet, or as software running through a single computer.⁷ Service providers accorded by the Ministry of Broadcasting, Govt. of India broadcasts the I Radio with low cost and it gives greater freedom. The ICT credentialed edifice like I Radio helps the Tribal students to embrace education through ODL mode at ease by harkening to on a Smartphone been illimitable as an ineludible segment in the day to day life via an inculcated player program located on the respective station's website. Narrative audio files of the self learning materials (SLM) recorded can be uploaded on the service provider portal later whose web-link can be anchored on the website of the ODL institutions enabling the Tribal students to ingress these materials for self-study via smart phones, computer facilities etc. Students can access and listen the subjects several times and supply of SLM creates a great impact in broadening of knowledge and the way the students acquiring the contents strengthen. Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds is how the Human Resource Development Ministry's programme is known (SWAYAM). It provides hundreds of courses that are taught at the high school, college, and university levels. It is Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds is how the Human Resource Development Ministry's programme is known (SWAYAM). It offers a huge selection of courses offered at the high school, college, and university levels. The three key tenets of the Education Policy, access, equity, and quality, are what it is intended to achieve. Being an online course rather than being a online platform, the courses were interactive, prepared by renowned professors and making it free for the learners. Offering online course would be great benefit for the Tribal students to enrich their learning with the help of audio-video learning with the multimedia assistance. The first quadrant is direct teaching, which means that there is no much extra work by students. It could include teaching video, animation, PowerPoint presentation, Podcast and so on. All these depend on what the subject is and what the strategy adopted by the teacher to teach the students.⁸ Second process involves e-content preparation that includes e-books, illustrations, case studies, reference link etc. Next forum is the discussion part in which students can interact with the teachers and get clarified for the doubts. The fourth quadrant is self-assessment to check

what a student has studied and whether they are eligible to get a certificate. It could be tests in the form of Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs), quiz or short answer questions, long answer questions, etc. The fourth quadrant also has Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and their answers to clarify common misconceptions among students.⁹ The better availability of net connectivity and the presence of necessary handsets in the form of smart phones and computers makes the Tribal students of Tamilnadu to grab the predominance of the higher education. Youtube being a 2nd largest searching platform next to google helps the users search for videos and watch it. The videos of the ODL content can be created and could be uploaded in the platform which could be liked, commented and shared to mass population. A natural addition to the contemporary learning process is the availability of independent, unique, and educational ODL self learning material videos on websites like YouTube. Scholars, students and other educationists concede that the online videos are the effective teaching and learning mechanism. A recent development in the ODL education sector is the use of video to help students learn and comprehend difficult ideas and concepts. Youtube may be the part of ODL learning mechanism because it is easy to incorporate, can create a community, eLearning videos are beneficial for analysis and debates and making ensuring that difficult procedures and specific skill demonstrations are presented in a way that broadens the student's knowledge and solidifies their foundation is a goal of micro-learning films. As today, being one of the exceptional social media forum, the use of whatsapp application has become an inevitable component among the public more specifically within the student community, as a free messaging app, it could be accessed via iPhone and Android smart phones. WhatsApp, makes the possibility to send multimedia messages like photos, videos, and audio messages in addition to standard text messages. Whatsapp has following features like group chat that supports to interact with the mass population, cross platform engagements in which the user with different devices can message one another through various media. Geniality in teaching and learning is abetted via WhatsApp groups. Students can scoop out and ask questions about lessons that they might not have in a usual classroom situation because of the familiarity.

DISCUSSION

Though there are enormous qualities of advantages in accessing the telecommunication in adopting the open and distance learning by the Tribal students there also exists various disadvantages in making use of the technologies on behalf of the tribal students are concerned. Learning in class rooms creates an opportunity for the students to meet and interact with the teachers. Distance learning only limits students to classes and learning materials that are based online. Those enrolling in an online programme may find it difficult to stay on top of their course work and assignments as there is no face-to-face connection with instructors and other students. This is as a result of the absence of ongoing notifications of due dates for upcoming assignments. To successfully complete a course, all one needs to be is self-motivated and devoted. A computer, webcam, and a steady internet connection are the technologies must be purchased. One significant problem with distance learning is this excessive reliance on technology. The class session will come to a complete stop in the event of any software or hardware issues, which could impede learning. Furthermore, only students who are computer and tech aware can take advantage of online education due to how sophisticated the distance learning technology is. Upon going beyond averting the flaws, mentioned above there are reasonable factors in adapting the telecommunication benefits to enhance the Tribal Education in Tamilnadu. Open and Distance Learning and teaching have both been given new openings by the progression of technologies in the field of Tribal education. Open and distance learning is now viewed as a plausible system and as a competent substitute for tete-a-tete education in order to attain the goals of delivering Tribal education and training to meet the new and varying requirements of community. Also it is very much pertinent to mention here that the government should take utmost care in enhancing the telecommunication systems in the tribal villages with necessary computer facilities including quality internet connectivity for the perfection of Tribal education. The framework like installation of mobile network tower, wi-fi facility etc should be made easily accessible to enhance the education among the Tribal youth and making the community more knowledgeable.

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