

**A Comparative Content Analysis of Self-Instructional Course Materials Developed for the First Year Master's Degree in English by a Single Mode and Dual Mode University**

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**Abstract**

A new dawn in distance education, for India, is undoubtedly SWAYAM that indicates the efficiency, scope and hope of distance education. But, all these new ventures require people with knowledge, training and commitment and if not the new approach may go in vain as happening to many poor-quality distance education institutions. This article tries to analyse the quality of distance education materials and herein referred to as self -instructional materials (SIM). Due to the study's limited scope, the self instructional materials (SIM) of two distance education institutions (DEI) had been analysed at the block level and course level for a single course of M.A. English programme and compared to identify the structure and components. In this process, the lapses in designing and developing were identified and suggestions implied for improvement. In the new era of education, going alone with the convention education is inexpedient and every nation becomes so desperate to use distance mode and thus this paper emphasises training and developmental activities in distance education.

**Key Words:** Content analysis, Self-Instructional Course Materials, Single Mode, Dual Mode University

**1. Introduction**

Distance education, in its various metamorphoses, has been advancing by accommodating various philosophies, principles and practices and gaining better credibility than ever before. The change of nomenclature from 'correspondence education' to 'Open and Distance Learning' implies more emphasis on self-learning by the learners and removal of obstacles by allowing more freedom to the learners. These obstacles are plentiful and arising out of many factors and one such is 'self-instructional materials.'

The instructional materials provided by two or more distance institutions may have more or less the same contents for a particular course but the delivery of

contents through the instructional materials may differ. An array of studies reveals that teachers who have similar qualifications (e.g., degree, certification, year of experience) instruct differently in their classroom and vary significantly in their ability to help students grow academically<sup>1</sup> The primary difference between effective and ineffective teachers does not lie in the amount of knowledge they have about disciplinary contents<sup>2</sup>, the type of certificate they hold<sup>3</sup>, the highest degree they earned<sup>4</sup>, or the years they have been in teaching profession<sup>5</sup>; rather, the difference lies more fundamentally in the manner in which they deliver their knowledge and skills while interacting with the students in their classroom<sup>6</sup>. Thus

delivery is as important as the relevance of contents.

Distance institutions are constantly in the effort of reducing the transactional distance between the teacher and learner; increasing the 'human touch' and incorporating various devices and strategies for effective content delivery. To accomplish the above, Thorpe (1979) argues for the course materials to provide interaction of learners with the materials; Moore for facilitating communication by print, electronic, mechanical or other devices; and Keegan for the initiation of dialogue; provision of two way communication. But, are the theoretical guidelines for SIM development are adhered to by the instructional designers? Are the teachers successfully built into the materials for enabling self-instructional easy and encouraging? Are the materials designed incorporating effective devices and strategies into the self instructional materials?

For answering the above questions, <sup>7</sup>P.R. Ramanujam's (1993) observations obtained from the analysis of correspondence lessons of five different DDE departments located in the conventional universities in India are worth noting and given hereunder:-

- a. The lessons in general do not have self-instructional features and
- b. The contents are neither paced, nor presented in a logical order

The author recommends for the strict monitoring and evaluation and for him this mammoth task cannot be successfully and easily accomplished by the quality assurance agencies. But, contrary to the above, <sup>8</sup>Lalita S. Kumar et al(2009), evaluated a course in the BSc Programme offered by a open university (IGNOU)

and observed that the participants showed a strong agreement in their attitude for the presentation style of the course materials provided in all the blocks studied. Similar agreement like the aforementioned two studies one on the correspondence institutions and another on the Open University was found in a study by <sup>9</sup>Madhu Parhar (1999) on the pedagogical analysis of print instructional materials developed by the NCERT, NOS and a private publisher. <sup>10</sup>Madhu Parhar (1999), while reviewing the research literature for the above study found the five sequential surveys of research in education by Buch (1974, 1978, 1983, 1991) and NCERT (1997) not recording any research on analysis of text books and textual material from the angle of pedagogy. Despite revisions being done, as indicated by <sup>11</sup>Yeasmin. S & Murthy, C.R.K. (2011), the Open School SLMs created by the faculty for their students were often revised but limited to spelling mistakes, factual errors and page make-ups. Going further into the pedagogical effectiveness of self-learning materials, <sup>12</sup>Tejinder Singh (1994), in an experimental study on the SIM developed keeping in mind the guidelines for developing SIM (Kaye, A. Rumble G), found a highly statistically significant mean scores ( $p < 0.01$ ) between the pre-test and post test.

The available literature and the experience gained by the researcher in the remote past give an apprehension that many distance institutions, in spite of changing their nomenclatures from 'correspondence' into 'open and/or distance' institution, still do not adhere to the guidelines or recommendations for SIM development given by agencies like the Distance Education Council, the Commonwealth of Learning, the UK Centre for Materials

Education, etc. This apprehension stimulated the present research which is directed towards comparatively analysing the self-instructional course materials in print form developed by the two universities such as Indira Gandhi National Open University and the DDE of Madurai Kamaraj University for their M.A. in English Programme for identifying the pedagogically significant features incorporated in their SIMs.

In <sup>13</sup>Professor Ramanujam's words, "...The point being made here is that even established institutions offering courses through distance mode decades to thousands of students in the developing countries do not ensure the quality of their materials". Therefore, this study is a study for comparing the quality of the self-instructional materials in print form by analysing the contents to identify the pedagogically significant features with the criteria developed on the basis of the guidelines and recommendations provided by the various agencies.

#### **Definitions:**

##### **a. Content:**

Content denotes what is contained and analysis is the process of breaking a complex topic into smaller parts to gain a better understanding of it. Thus, content analysis is the analysis of what is contained in a message.

##### **b. Instruction:**

Instruction is a set of events that facilitate learning. Self-instructional materials are tutorials in print form, written by subject experts. The contents are developed in a systematic manner using general principles of learning and instruction to facilitate learning with less or no guidance from a tutor or faculty. This requires the SIM

having some important characteristics such as – self –explanatory, self-contained, self-directed, self-motivating, self-evaluating and self-learning. To embody the SIM with the above mentioned characteristics for facilitating learning, a course is divided into blocks and that is further divided into units designed with pedagogically features like a. learning objectives,) check your progress (CYP), MCQs (Multiple Choice Questions), diagrams, tables, overview, summary, references, illustrations, etc. The above features are scientifically proved to be effective in facilitating learning and recommended by various agencies such as the Common Wealth of Nations, the Distance Education Council, the International Rice Research Institute, etc.

## **2. Objective of the Study**

The present paper is aimed at realising the following objective:

To compare the quality of the self-instructional course materials developed by Indira Gandhi National Open University and Madurai Kamaraj University for their first year M.A. English programme on the pedagogically significant features and state recommendations for further improvement

#### **Delimitation of the Study:**

Here, the present study is directed towards identifying various components of the Self Instructional Materials and their structure at the course and block level with a limited scope that fulfils the purpose of this article. Thus, it is neither dealing with the relevance and adequacy of the contents nor with objectives – content – evaluation relationship. The list of the pedagogically significant features is not exhaustive but delimited to the scope of studies, objective

nature of them and the nature of subject matter. (Some devices are more suitable for and usable in mathematics and some others for history, etc. and thus omitted intentionally.)

The features listed here are extracted from the various sources indicated in the bibliography. But, some features are subject-specific and thus all of them may not be relevant to English literature. This is a descriptive analysis as it includes both quantitative and qualitative data... but some of the qualitative data may seem to appear subjective as it will be done by the subjective interpretation of the researcher but it can be subjected to verification.

**1. Methodology**

**a. Research Method:**

This study attempts to analyse the contents of the self-instructional course materials to identify the pedagogically significant features incorporated in the course materials using a check-list (provided in appendix) developed by the researcher and thus falling under ‘content analysis’. The present study, too, is embarked to identify the various pedagogically significant features listed in the check list developed for this purpose.

**b. Sampling:**

The entire course materials developed by IGNOU and MKU for the first year M.A. in English programme in print form constitute the population of the study. There are four courses each for the first year M.A. programme in both the universities (tabulated below).

Courses offered for the First Year M.A. in English					
IGNOU			MKU -DDE		
Course Code	Course Title	No. of Blocks	Course Code	Course Title	No. of Blocks
MEG-01	British Poetry	10	S-205	The Elizabethan & Augustan Ages	2 nos
MEG-02	British Drama	9	S-206	The Romantic & Victorian Ages	1 no
MEG-03	British Novel	9	S-207	Modern & Post-Modern Literature	2 nos
MEG-04	Aspects of Language	9	S-208	American Literature	1 no

The sample of the present study constitutes, the entire materials of a course from Indira Gandhi National Open University with a course title – BRITISH POETRY (Course Code: MEG-01) and which are compared with all the study materials provided for a course titled The Elizabethan and The Augustan Ages (Course code: S 205) from Madurai Kamaraj University. The various courses

prescribed for the M.A. degree programme has been elaborately illustrated in the given tables.

Here, the sample constitutes one fourth or 25% of the course materials as there are four courses in each of the universities for the first year M.A. Programme, the self-Instructional Materials of the first course are chosen from each. Thus, it constitutes one fourth of the total materials covering

approximately 25% of the total. The IGNOU course materials consist of 9 blocks whereas the MKU DDE course materials consist of two blocks.

### Findings

1. Course Structure
  - a. Both the SLMs of the two ODL institutions prescribed for the course under this study were structured into blocks.
  - b. The two blocks of the MKU-SLMs blocks resembled the text books in volume rather than blocks but IGNOU SLMs followed the principles of block construction in this regard.
2. Block Structure
  - a. It could be discerned from all the blocks (100%) of IGNOU-SLMs structured into three distinctive parts but only two as in the case of MKU-SLMs.
  - c. The blocks of the IGNOU-SLMs were found more self-contained, informative than that of MKU-SLMs.
  - d. The blocks of the IGNOU-SLMs were found more informative than that of the MKU-SLMs.
  - e. At the instructional part of the block, IGNOU-SLMs contained an average of 5 instructional units per block and in MKU-SLMs 10 instructional units per block.
  - f. The blocks of IGNOU-SLMs contained the prescribed works in all the blocks(100%), supplementary texts in 5 blocks (50%), errata in a block (10%), model term-end examination question and guidelines to write session essays or assignments each in a block(10%) but feedback format was not a part of the block. For MKU-SLMs ended with the

instructional part and there was no supplementary part in the block.

- g. The units from all the blocks of the IGNOU-SLMs and MKU-SIMs could well be discerned with a structure consisting of major parts, viz. the introductory part, the body part and the end part.

### Implication and Conclusion

Time is drawing near for looking the mode education into a new perspective that has no demarcation or clear boundaries between face-to-face mode and distance mode. The diaphragm is gradually disappearing and the quality of education could be and would be enhanced by the distance mode. Therefore, distance education, in all its aspects, should be approached systematically. But, this simple study reveals a lot of inadequacies in the self instructional materials at the course level and block level.

Distance education is different from conventional education and has different characteristics. Therefore, management of distance education required specialized knowledge, skills and attitude that require training. Still, many institutions are yet to meet with the demand for trained personnel in this field and as such, continuous evaluation of quality of different components is required. This evaluation is a mammoth task and that needs to be undertaken by researchers too for the development of this field. The functioning of Distance Education Bureau seems to be not reaching the need. The SWAYAM platform seems to be one of the best in providing education through distance mode but when it brings out so many programmes and courses, it should not go as many distance education

institutions without quality. Therefore, every distance education should be manned by trained and committed people

for structuring and designing the self instructional materials.

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