

Teleconferencing in Distance Mode of Education

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The concept of life long education is associated with a learning society. In the present day world, the end of formal education does not mean the end of one's education. It is obvious that old knowledge becomes out-dated and therefore the individual continues to learn throughout his life time. Open learning system including distance education mode provides life long education to the learners. In this regard, the various devices of communication technology including computer and teleconferencing render excellent service both as a tutor as well as a tool. One of the sophisticated devices of communication technology which is at the stage of experiment in distance education mode is teleconferencing. In this paper an attempt is made to discuss the possibility of using teleconferencing in distance mode of education.

Device of Teleconferencing

Educational teleconferencing can be a valuable medium for distance education mode. Teleconferencing is electronic means which can bring together three or four people from two or more locations to discuss or share the experience/ideas through the use of two-way or one way communication. The most essential part of all forms of teleconferencing is to help immediate interaction among the participants for information exchange. This most sophisticated device is at present in use (experimental stage) in the distance mode of education.

Types of Teleconferencing

There are at present three types of teleconferencing which are being used in distance mode of education :

1. Audio Teleconferencing,

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2. Video Teleconferencing, and
3. Computer Teleconferencing.

Audio Teleconferencing : When we use the audio medium as a two-way communication, the teleconferencing is known as audio-teleconferencing. The use of audio-teleconferencing is rapidly becoming a preferred instructional medium in advanced countries.

Video Teleconferencing : Video-teleconferencing has advantages over audio-teleconferencing because of its visual component. This type of teleconferencing is arranged by combining two-way video media. It increases the quality of intereaction because the teachers/experts and the students can see each other and share their feelings and experience. But the problem is involvement of high cost on installation.

Computer Teleconferencing : Though it is one of the effective devices, it involves heavy cost and infrastructure facilities rather than the other two. With the adequate facility of hardware, information can be sent and received at the convenience of the teachers and students with the use of computers.

Advantages of Teleconferencing

The followings are the important advantages of teleconferencing while used in distance mode :

Support for Remote Learners : Teleconferencing is useful for the potential learners widely scattered at the nook and corner of the country particularly remote areas.

Cost : The cost for starting and operating audio-teleconferencing system is relatively low while comparing this with other methods of teaching to the remote learners.

Flexibility : The system used is adjustable quickly to serve large or small group of learners.

Familiarity : The mode of instruction is similar to that of seminar/conference/group discussion.

Feedback : It provides the facility to the learners to form immediate feedback and to convey their interaction to the tutors.

Limitations of Teleconferencing

Each device of communication technology has its own limitations. In the same way, teleconferencing has the following limitations :

- * It requires a huge investment.
- * It requires efficient telephonic, radio and television network throughout the country.
- * The chances of technical breakdown are quite high.
- * All educational institutions cannot afford telephone charges.
- * It requires sophisticated technology.
- * The willingness of each participant is essentially required, but it is generally low among the participants.

Experiments in Teleconferencing

The mode of teleconferencing is being experimented all over the world in the field of education particularly distance education.

The United Kingdom Open University (UKOU) experimented with this system of teleconferencing called CYCLOPS.

University of Calgary is involved in the creation of a system using audio-telephone conferencing strictly as a teaching tool, known as 'educational teleconferencing'. Similarly some universities in developed countries have started using audio-teleconferencing for educational purposes.

In India teleconferencing is being used. A few experiments in teleconferencing have been successfully carried out by Indian universities/ educational and other bodies for educational purposes as detailed below :

1. The Space Applications Centre, Ahmedabad has undertaken these experiments.
2. Classroom 2000+, was conducted jointly by CIET/NCERT.
3. IGNOU and ISRO have undertaken joint teleconferencing project.

In the above experiments, a media mix of television, telephone and computer was used to establish two-way communication.

Conclusion

In the developing countries like India, teleconferencing is not a cheap and easily affordable medium. Even educational institutions find it difficult to provide teleconferencing-based education to the students due to huge investment and non-availability of infrastructure facilities. However, at the globalisation of education, educational institution will be forced to use the various devices of communication technology. Otherwise, they cannot attract the learners and their survival will be at stake.

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"If a man empties his purse into his head, no one can take it from him."

—Franklin