Post Graduate Diploma in E-learning (PGDEL), an Online Programme

With the increasing use of web technologies in education, there is an increasing need for qualified human resources to design, develop, implement and manage effective e-learning programmes. Although a variety of online programmes are available, their quality remains an issue. It is in this context, the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has designed and developed a Post Graduate Diploma in E-Learning (PGDEL). The PGDEL programme is innovatively designed with special features that are offered to the learners in an online mode. This Programme was awarded the Gold Medal for Innovation in Open and Distance Learning by IGNOU in 2013.

Introduction

The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) designed the Online Post Graduate Diploma in E-Learning (PGDEL) Programme in January 2010 to develop the professional competencies in offering online Programmes in the country, and offered through the Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE). The PGDEL Programme is designed for both the theory and the practice of e-Learning. It is available at the website: http://pgdel.ignouonline.ac.in/pgdel.

The objectives of the programme are to develop human resource capabilities in planning, designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating e-learning programmes. The programme offers personalised online student support, and uses Open Educational Resources (OERs) and recommended texts, Moodle Learning Management. It employs synchronous delivery methods using online conferencing tools, and uses discussion forums extensively for both academic and personal support. It offers compulsory face-to-face practical sessions at the headquarters. It contains a mandatory project work component to facilitate hands-on work in online learning tools.

The PGDEL Programme aims that after the successful completion of the study, the learners are able to :

Analyse the theoretical foundations as well as concepts related to design, development, implementation and evaluation, online education and training.

Apply theoretical principles to design e-learning programmes.

Identify innovative practices and developments in the field of e-learning.

Use appropriate instructional design models for e-learning programmes.

Teach online courses to develop collaborative learning and maintain communities of learners.

Manage e-learning projects.

Choose appropriate technology and develop and implement content for e-learning.

From 2010 to 2013, the programme has several batches and each batch comprised of about 30-40 learners.

Background of the Innovation

Although the use of web technology in education is increasing and a wide variety of online programmes are available, their effectiveness and optimum use to improve student learning is mostly questionable as institutions tend to put static web pages and downloadable zip files as online learning without considering the need for interaction design and the need for having interactive learning materials. Further, no formal training programmes are available in India on "E-Learning", though many short-term training programmes are organised by different institutions from time-to-time. There are many virtual education initiatives in the country, and the need for having qualified human resources to design, develop, implement and manage effective e-learning programmes is growing manifold. It is in this context, IGNOU designed and developed a Post Graduate Diploma in E-Learning (PGDEL) and offered through the online mode.

The Creative Process

The creativity of this innovative Programme in inherent in its design, development and implementation processes.

a. Design

The programmes of IGNOU follow the credit system of the open distance learning system. While designing the PGDEL Programme, the experts designed it as a 24 credit online programme with 5 courses. Since, it is a professional development programme on e-Learning, each course covers academic and pedagogical aspects as well as industry aspects.

b. Development

The PGDEL Programme went through two different development phases, namely (i) Content development and (ii) Technology development.

(i) Content Development: One of the major objectives of this programme to use OER materials in the courses. Identification of suitable OER materials for the courses was the most changeling tasks. In this programme, various OER websites were used for searching the relevant materials for the courses.

(ii) Technology Development: The selection of technology environment is very import for an online programme. Accessibility and usability for both organiser and user should be considered while selecting the relevant technology. The PGDEL Programme uses open source software for its content and student access. After consulting the experts and based on relevant research, Moodle, an open source Learning Management System (LMS) was selected for the teaching-learning process of the PGDEL Programme.

c. Implementation

The PGDEL programme was deployed on Moodle LMS platform, which was hosted in eGyankosh of IGNOU. The PGDEL Moodle LMS, database and maintenance of all the aspects related to PGDEL is done by eGyankosh, the technical wing of IGNOU.

About the Innovation

a. Description

Online teaching encourages student-teacher interaction, peer to peer interaction, active learning, provides, prompt feedback and motivates the learner to complete the courses successfully. The PGDEL Programme is a professional development programme on e-learning. It helps the learners to become online teachers and e-learning manager/administrator. When the learners change their role to online teacher and administrator of an online course, the course teacher/programme coordinator of PGDEL has to monitor or guide them accordingly.

A. Programme Structure

The 24 credit* PGDEL Programme has the following five Courses :

1. MDE-001 : Introduction of E-Learning (4 Credits)

2. MDE-002 : Design and Facilitation of E-Learning Courses (4 Credits)

3. MDE-003 : Management of E-Learning Projects (4 Credits)

4. MDEI-004 : Technologies for E-Learning (4 Credits)

5. MDEP-005 : Project Work (8 Credits)

*(1 credit = 30 study hours by students)

Teaching-Learning Components

Besides self study of the recommended online/pdf resources, the following teaching-learning modes are used in the PGDEL Programme through the Moodle LMS :

1. Virtual Classes : Virtual classes were arranged for interaction between learners and course teachers through a virtual environment to clarify doubts and answer academic queries. These classes were normally held on weekends and hosted from STRIDE, IGNOU.

2. Discussion Forums : Students are required to participate in two discussion forums in each of the three courses, MDE-001, MDE-002 and MDE-003. The discussion forums have been designed and placed in the Moodle LMS. Each student is expected to express his/her views in the discussion forums and other fellow students are expected to give their views. Wherever required the course tutor intervenes in the discussion forums. The discussion forums are assessed by the course tutor for 10 marks each and the score is included in the continuous assessment for each course.

3. Assignments : Assignment is an important component of the study. Each course of PGDEL has compulsory assignments. The assignments carry 45 per cent weight in the final result. It means the learner has to submit the assignment per course before their term-end examination.

4. Computer Marked Assignment (CMA) : A quiz for MDE-001, MDE-002 and MDE-003 was placed in the Moodle LMS for 10 marks each and it was automatically evaluated and the scores were included in the continuous assessment.

5. Tutor Marked Assignment (TMA) : An assignment for MDE-001, MDE-002 and MDE-003 was placed in the Moodle LMS for 10 marks each and it was evaluated by the course tutor. The tutor comments and evaluated assignment had been sent to the students through Moodle LMS. The scores were included in the continuous assessment.

6. Face to Face (F2F) Session : There was a one-week compulsory fact-to-face workshop at the IGNOU headquarters (preferably in August) to provide hands-on experience on the Moodle LMS, audio and video content, social media (Blog, Facebook), etc. so that the learner could design and develop their own online course related to MDE-004 and MDE-005.

7. e-Portfolio : The students were expected to develop an e-Portfolio precisely mapping the processes that each one goes through, starting from the first course till last course (in about 6000 words). The structure of e-portfolio had been provided at the beginning of the course when a pre-study online survey was conducted. Submission and pass marks in e-Portfolio were mandatory, although the scores were not counted towards overall student assessment and certification. Besides, there were interactions in a specially created Google Group.

B. Term-End-Examination

The term-end examinations of MDE-001, MDE-002 and MDE-003 were conducted in the month of June and term-end examination of MDE1-004 and MDEP-005 were conducted in the month of December every year. All the term-end examinations were conducted through Adobe Connect online.

C. Successful Completion of the Programme

The minimum standards for completion of a course and also the PGDEL programme were the following :

1. Minimum 45 % of marks in Continuous Evaluation i.e. assignments in each course.

2. Minimum 45 % of marks in the Term-End Examination in each course.

3. Final marks in a course (Assignment+Term-End-Examination) should be minimum 45%.

D. Certificate

The final completion certificate was issued after the convocation ceremony for the year in which the learner completed the Programme. However, immediately on completion of the Programme, the learner was issued a provisional certificate.

b. Novelty

As descirbed above the novelty of the Programme was in the design, the use of virtual classes and role play. Virtual classes were arranged through a virtual environment for interaction between learners and course teachers to clarify doubts. Role play is one of the instructional strategies that help the learners to get involved and solve real-life problems. Role play can simulate real-life situations and help learners to gain learning experience to understand and solve the problem. The PGDEL Programme provided an opportunity for the learners to play different roles during their academic year. Learners enrolled themselves as students. After gaining experience to design online, they played the role of a content developer, online course coordinator, online teacher, and the instructor of their own online course on Moodle LMS. This programme facilitated the learners to experience all sorts of roles in designing and delivering an online course.

c. Usefulness

The Programme facilitated the learners in developing competencies in design, development, implementation and management of online education and training programmes at all levels of education, including corporate training.

d. Reach

This programme motivated the learners to become self-directed and independent learning and collaborative learning. The successfully completed learners of the PGDEL online Programme expressed their satisfaction with accessibility, content, collaboration and support provided by the course teachers and facilitators. This programme created an opportunity among the learners irrespective of their discipline to update their knowledge and skills in e-Learning.

e. Cost effectiveness

Since this programme uses open source resources and software, this programme is cost effective.

f. Scalability

Yes, this Programme is scalable. As of 2013, the intake of this Programme was 50 students. This can be expanded as the programme coordinators had gained experience and can handle more students.

g. Sustainability

This Programme was sustained for 4 years, now this programme is on hold because of the formulation of new regulations for online courses by the University Grants Commission (UGC).

h. Implementation and impact

As can be observed from Table 1, the total number of students enrolled from 2010 to 2013 was 138, out of which 66 completed the Programme successfully.

Table 1. Number of students enrolled in the PGDEL online Programme from 2010 to 2013.

Year	No. Students Admitted	No. of Student Successfully Completed
January 2010	27	14
January 2011	33	15
January 2012	47	18
January 2013	31	19

In January 2013, CEMCA sponsored 10 women candidates for the PGDEL Programme. A proposal has been submitted to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to offer the PGDEL Programme through the PAN Africa project.

Future Application

After the implementation of online regulation by UGC, this Programme will be resumed as the demand for this programme is high from the prospective students.

An important aspect

The course MDE-002 (Design and Facilitation of e-learning Courses) has been converted into a Massive Open and Online Course (MOOC) and is being offered through the SWAYAM platform of the MHRD, Government of India.

About the Innovators

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