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## **Professionalization of Lifelong Learning in Indian Universities**

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# Professionalization of Lifelong Learning in Indian Universities

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## Contents

1. Background.....	3
2. Lifelong Learning .....	3
3. Professionalization.....	4
4. Professionalization of Adult Education (Lifelong Learning).....	5
5. Current Status.....	5
6. Documentation and Dissemination.....	6
7. Institutionalization .....	6
8. Staff training.....	7
9. Financial support.....	7
10. Research in Andragogy.....	8
11. Strategies.....	9
11.1. Establishment of the Department of Adult Education (Lifelong Learning).....	9
11.2. Training .....	9
11.3. Documentation and Dissemination .....	10
11.4. Preparation of Directories .....	10
11.5. Allocation of financial resources.....	10
11.6. Special assistance.....	11
11.7. Seminars and symposia .....	11
11.8. Supportive systems .....	11

## **1. Background**

India is one of the populous countries in the world, second in terms of population and seventh in terms of area. Realizing that the pace of development of the country not only depends on the natural resources, but also on the human resources, it has launched a number of literacy promotion programmes such as Social Education, Farmers Functional Literacy, National Adult Education Programme, Mass Programme For Functional Literacy, Total Literacy Campaign, Post Literacy Programme, Continuing Education Programme and mopping up of literacy programmes etc., to convert the masses into literates and to provide opportunities for life long education. All these efforts have culminated in increasing the literacy rate to 65.14 percent. However, even now the literacy rate is lower in the case of women and socially excluded classes.

In order to institutionalize the literacy promotion programmes, the National Literacy Mission has been started Total Literacy Campaign, Post Literacy Programmes and Continuing Education Programmes were launched. In addition, it has also promoted and strengthened its other two flagship programmes viz., State Resource Centre and Jan Shikshan Sansthan. Further, in the higher education domain, the University Grants Commission has accepted the extension as third dimension and strengthened and established the Departments of Adult, Continuing Education and Extension and Outreach in about 100 universities. It has also taken measures for quality assurance in higher education by establishing Quality Assurance Cells and Academic Staff Colleges and re-structured the system of education leading to the equalization of educational opportunities through distance mode.

## **2. Lifelong Learning**

Lifelong learning refers to the acquisition of knowledge, abilities and skills by using all systems of education (formal, non-formal and informal) in the lifespan of an individual for socio-economic, cultural and political emancipation leading to the holistic development of the community.

Adopting the above as the essence of the development of the individual and community, all the adult education programmes that have been implemented have an orientation for lifelong learning. In order to manage the massive structure of the adult education programmes of various forms, the country has used both formal and non-formal systems of education with strong academic and administrative inputs. The Directorate of Adult Education acts as national resource centre for Adult Education and also acts as an advisory agency for implementation of various programmes under the aegis of National Literacy Mission. Parallel to it, the Universities have also pooled and extended their resources to the community. In this process, it has paved a way for equalizing educational opportunities for unreached through various forms. Those who want to continue their education were provided secondary opportunity to continue their education through part time and distance mode. Further, for those who are already in employment, opportunities were created to enhance their competencies exposing them to the pre-service and in-service training programmes. In order to manage the above, a good number of specialized professionals have been promoted. However, these professionals are working in isolation confining to their domain and there is a lack of interaction or communication among them. There is a need to promote such a mechanism to groom them as professionals and to professionalize lifelong learning.

### **3. Professionalization**

Professionalization refers to the attainment of certain standards through preparation and competencies. The elements of professionalization includes enhancing the quality of practice, standardized professional responses, enhanced communication within the area among a selected group of personnel representing the field of endeavour. In other words, professionalization is a process of acquiring a standard through education or training (pre and in-service) to improve the quality of practice and to respond to the needs of the profession. It is a collection of persons with similar expertise in the field of endeavour to meet the challenges in the area.

#### **4. Professionalization of Adult Education (Lifelong Learning)**

As Adult Education was viewed as vehicle to attain the goal of equalization of opportunities, promotion of human resources, social competencies and the economic empowerment requires a strong team of professionally qualified, competent people with an aptitude to serve the community. The country is in the process of promoting human resources in the field of Adult Education in an adhoc manner with isolated efforts. These efforts have got strengthened with the launching of National Literacy Mission and the various flagship programmes associated with it. To man these programmes and institutions, the functionaries have been drawn from various sources with varied backgrounds and mainstreamed them through effective pre and in-service training programmes. These programmes are being organized at the formal institutional levels and through adopting non formal approaches.

#### **5. Current Status**

The activities relating to promotion of education of the adults are being organized at various levels and in different areas. These activities are not co-ordinated at any level. But the process is being promoted for attaining the goals for which these have been formulated. In spite of the heterogeneity in the activities, the resource building mechanism has been initiated through basic education followed by a specialized training in the area. In India, Adult Education normally refers to the adult literacy promotion activities and these activities have been professionalized after launching of the National Literacy Mission by conceiving a standardized training curriculum for the functionaries acting at various levels in terms of content, duration, certification etc., The human resources in the area have been promoted through exposing them to the regular courses leading to the certification, graduation, post graduation and doctoral level in adult education in the form of full time and part time education by the selected

Universities. This process is conceived for promotion of basic standards for the adult education professionals. The Universities are pioneers in this process. The second level of competency building is being done by the institutions and programme implementing agencies such as State Resource Centres, Jan Shikshan Sansthan, the Directorate of Employment and Trainings through their short term training programmes with or without standardized certification allowing the people to practice in the area.

## **6. Documentation and Dissemination**

The other area of professionalizing adult education is sharing and storing of the knowledge in the area of adult education. The documentation of knowledge generated through various experiments conducted in the field and disseminating them through regular newsletters and journals is required. In this regard, the National Resource Agency for Adult Education at the National Level and the State Directorate of Adult Education at the State Level, the State Resource Centres, selected Universities, the Non-Governmental Agencies and other professional bodies are involved in this practice. The NLM newsletter, IAEA Newsletter, newsletters of State Resource Centres, Regional Documentation Centres, Journals of Adult Education such as Indian Journal of Adult Education, Jan Saksharatha, Adult Education and Development, Kolkata and Journal of Adult Education and Extension, S.V. University, are some of the notable efforts made in this area.

## **7. Institutionalization**

In order to institutionalize the adult education programmes, after recognizing extension as the third dimension of higher education, the UGC has taken the initiative to establish the Adult and Continuing Education Departments on a regular basis. About 20 percent of the Universities have established the Departments of Adult, Continuing Education and Extension and are being supported by their respective State

Governments. The major function of the Departments is to organize regular courses in Adult Education leading to the awarding of degree and diploma in adult education and conducting research at three levels viz., individual, institutional and research degrees and to organize regular training programmes for the field functionaries to monitor the adult literacy programmes. They are organizing both short term and long term courses on full time and part time basis for catering to the needs of the field.

## **8. Staff training**

The staff of the adult education both the functionaries of the programme, administrators of the programme and academics are being exposed to the training in the form of in-service training programmes. These are mostly adhoc and need based programmes and no effort has been made to standardize the training curricula required for promoting the competencies of the personnel.

## **9. Financial support**

The professionalization of any field requires adequate financial assistance. It is also so in Adult Education but, it has been viewed as an adhoc programme to attain the immediate needs of the governance. Till date, the field has not evolved to demand a separate budgetary provision for professionalization. Ofcourse, under the aegis of National Literacy mission, a separate provision has been made for training the lower level field practitioners which is also inadequate.

## **10. Research in Andragogy**

The professionalization of Lifelong Learning will be successful if it was able to generate a theoretical base based on the research inputs. Though, Adult Education is in vogue in the country for a long period, but no attempt has been made to develop a theoretical base for it. This is largely due to the adhoc practices involving people with different backgrounds and aptitudes. Hence, concerted efforts are required to promote research in Andragogy through instituting the research grants, fellowships, research methodology training programmes, dissemination of research findings through journals etc., In India, on regular basis, there is one research journal in Adult Education, i.e., Indian Journal of Adult Education. It requires many more journals. As on date, only five universities are offering Post Graduation courses in Andragogy with different nomenclatures. Further, inter-disciplinary research connected with lifelong learning is being promoted in about 66 universities of the country. Hence, there is a need to organize post graduation and research leading to M.Phil and Ph.D. in lifelong learning in all the universities in a phased manner so as to lay a foundation in research in lifelong learning

## **11. Strategies**

In order to professionalize lifelong learning in the Indian Universities, the following measures are required.

### **11.1. Establishment of the Department of Adult Education (Lifelong Learning)**

India is a country with 340 universities including deemed universities catering to the needs of the 128 crores of people. The majority of the people are illiterate and low educated. In order to mainstream them, a number of programmes have been implemented and institutions have been operationalized. To man these programmes and institutions requires a large pool of human resources trained in adult education. The formal training in adult education will be possible through establishing Departments of Adult and Continuing Education departments at the university level for organizing the long term, short term, full time and part time courses leading to certification. The existing 20 percent of the universities with the Departments of Adult and Continuing Education may not be able to serve the purpose. The major obstacle in establishing the departments is lack of support from the respective state governments in supporting the departments and personnel after cessation of the UGC funding. Hence, the UGC should rope in the State Governments to support these programmes by linking them with financial assistance as it has been done during the X th Five Year Plan.

### **11.2. Training**

The faculty recruited for Adult Education is from various backgrounds and with different specializations, with adhoc / no training. In order to promote their efficiency and productivity, the University Grants Commission should design training programmes with standardized curriculum of training for the faculty working at various levels and encouraging them to participate in the training programmes.

### **11.3. Documentation and Dissemination**

As the field of Lifelong Learning is vast, functions at various levels and caters to the needs of the innumerable groups, the knowledge gained in this process has to be documented. The documentation should form a base for developing the theoretical models of Lifelong Learning and become the source for interaction and exchange of information. No doubt, the existing documentation centres are inadequate and not equipped for the above purpose. Further, these documentation centres should also produce newsletters and periodicals for regular dissemination of the information and research findings among the field functionaries so as to equip them to use the relevant skills in the area of occupation.

### **11.4. Preparation of Directories**

There is a need to prepare directories of institutions and individuals and centres catering to the needs of Lifelong Learning. The directories will enable the stakeholders of the Lifelong Learning programme to use them as per their requirement and to extend and share information and ideas to strengthen the cause of Lifelong Learning.

### **11.5. Allocation of financial resources**

The policy of adult education has been shifted from plan to plan, with different levels of financial allocations affecting the professionalization of adult education. Further, the financial assistance provided to the Universities is adhoc in nature and based on year allocation. There is no long term planning which should have enhanced the competencies and quality of the functionaries in particular and the programmes as a whole.

### **11.6. Special assistance**

In order to professionalize lifelong learning at University level, the University Grants Commission should recognize Lifelong learning as one of the priority areas to provide special assistance on a par with the other disciplines.

### **11.7. Seminars and symposia**

In order to professionalize Lifelong learning, the Universities should be provided with liberal grants for organizing the seminars, conferences and symposia not only to create an opportunity for the professionals to meet, share and exchange information but also to evolve the strategies required to meet the demands of the society.

### **11.8. Supportive systems**

One of the important bases for the professionalization of lifelong learning is promoting and strengthening the professional bodies of the functionaries working at various levels. An association of Adult Educators like in Sweden, will enhance the quality of the Adult Educators by regular exchanges. Further, all the functionaries at various levels should have a separate association so that they can fight for standardizing their own status in the profession.