

Can Open Schooling enable Inclusion at Secondary level education: An analysis of Potentials and Barriers in India

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Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode has recently been proposed as a supplementary means for achieving universalisation of secondary education in India, especially for those belonging to disadvantaged sections and living in remote areas. This is expected to be realised through the public institutions such as National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), and State Open Schools (SOS).

The paper is based on an extensive research in India using mixed methods leading to analyses of raw student data, field based survey of currently enrolled students, consultations with stakeholders and case studies. The analysis of student data suggests that there is a larger concentration of male students from urban and semi-urban learners defying the objective of reaching girls and other disadvantaged groups in rural areas.

The primary survey covering 2,000 learners of ODL stream reflected that the system designed to directly reach students primarily through the use of technology and printed materials is in reality highly dependent on intermediaries of different kinds. The intermediaries include a wide range of individuals and institutions: unscrupulous agents charging high prices for facilitating the internet-based processes: admission, subject-choice, fee payment, examination registration; experimental schools using innovative pedagogy wanting to avoid rigid regular Boards; NGOs working with children coming from disadvantaged circumstances; and coaching centres who coach students to enter the highly competitive engineering and medicine courses in need of a flexible board for helping students clear their senior secondary examinations, an eligibility to enter the professional courses.

The paper argues that ODL at secondary and senior secondary level needs to be redesigned in India considering that the pre-conditions of self-motivation and access to technology is absent in the real scenario. It is, at present, functioning as a flexible option for *certification* at these stages, with no indication of this mode facilitating a flexible *learning* process, as intended.