French through the ODL Mode: Innovation and Inclusiveness at the IGNOU

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Abstract
Foreign language programmes in India have since long been integral parts of the university system. However, all courses were offered in conventional mode through face to face teaching. Methods remained largely stagnant and bred unspoken elitism, as foreign language classes frequently resorted to code-switching techniques using English and the target language (French). It created dual learner alienation for the adult non-Anglophone learner leading to frequent drop-outs or lower self-esteem and competence levels.

Post liberalization, one witnessed large scale changes in learner profiles and this, coupled with increasing mobility plus enhanced employability with knowledge of foreign languages, made Distance Learning models very attractive.

In 2007 IGNOU, the single largest National University of Open and Distance Learning in India started its School of Foreign Languages. Along with other languages, the Certificate Programme in French was launched in 2010. For beginners in India, this was the first model for French language to be put into practice through the ODL teaching/learning mode. The present study is a first-ever indepth overview of the programme and a critical analysis of the dynamics of teaching/learning process involved. Based on empirical research, it examines notions of innovation and inclusivity as seen within the programme structure and design.

Keywords: Open and Distance Learning, French, Inclusiveness, Innovation

1. INTRODUCTION
In India, following economic liberalization in 1991, the entire paradigm of education and learner focus underwent dramatic change. On the one hand the Open and Distance Learning models had already begun to tow new lines, on the other, economic liberalization coupled with forces of globalization had begun to define fresh learner profiles, demand larger adaptability in skill management and actively promote the spirit of lifelong learning. Emergent dynamics of global mobility and exchange implicitly brought countries and people in closer interaction with each other and demands of the job market brought in definitive changes in the way people perceived acquisition of foreign languages itself.

Combined with the increasing mobility within the country as also outside, and prospects of enhanced employability associated with knowledge of foreign languages, gave the much needed impetus suddenly making Distance Learning Models very attractive.

Looking at the ODL mode, the number of distance education academic programs offered through private and public educational institutions in India continues to expand each year. Despite this, there is almost no research and relatively little has been written about language teaching and
learning at a distance. Adult foreign language instruction, especially in the Indian context is one subject that seems to be facing a continuous dilemma partly due to the perception that a language can only be learned in the presence of an instructor. As a consequence, it does become important to identify what pedagogical factors and considerations educators need to have before them in order to facilitate their decision-making process when designing curriculum for language courses or programs in the ODL mode. Here, one cannot ignore either, issues related to-- **basic access to technology, gender specific traits regarding responsiveness to modes of delivery, learner isolation due to monotonous and impersonal course delivery patterns etc.** In the long run, these are central to examining teaching/learning of foreign languages (in present context, French) and need to be studied in detail.

The present study takes a critical look at the initiative that is now almost two and a half years into being launched. The research is the first to be undertaken in the context of the programme and largely exploratory in nature presenting an insider’s perspective into the strengths, weaknesses and challenges before it. Analysis and conclusions are based majorly on first hand data involving core participants---students, course developers, tutors/ counsellors and other support staff.

**2. OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN INDIA**

At the beginning of the present century, education system in India was poised at a critical juncture, at definitive crossroads of more than half a century of independent nation hood coupled with nearly ten years of economic liberalization. The entire gamut of changes were however, in no way limited to economic spheres only. Quietly but incessantly these carved out new realities within social, cultural and educational spaces too.

Post independence, educational reforms in India brought about huge changes in various levels of education, whether primary, or tertiary or higher learning. At the beginning of India’s independence, there were 20 universities and 591 colleges while students enrollment at the tertiary level of education was 0.2 million. However, by 2010, this number had reached to 504 universities and 25951 colleges across the nation\(^1\).

Education was at this point, largely in the realms of general streams and stringent curricular and institutional constraints. It was at this point, that an alternative/progressive model of inclusive growth in higher learning entered the realms of educational reforms within the Indian system in the form of Open and Distance Learning institutions. The absolute boom in the number of students across the country wanting to go for higher learning was somewhere being seen as increasing pressure upon conventional universities. These institutions, bound by their structural and functional stringencies and constraints, were unable to cater to the needs of the new age learners who wished to participate in the learning process. For this group, along with other responsibilities at professional and family levels, learning was no more a process bound by limitations of age, place or time. **The learner was supreme and studentship acquired a whole new connotation under larger concepts of lifelong learning.**

**It was here perhaps that seeds were sown for what is termed now as “Inclusive Education”**.

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\(^1\) MHRD, Annual Report on Higher Education in India- 2009-2010.
In India, this began in the 1980’s with the Parliament in 1985 establishing the first National University of Open and Distance Learning. The University in its 25 years of stupendous growth, has managed to push the Gross enrolment ratio and presently enrolls more than 3.5 million students\(^2\). In the process, it also redefined the fundamentals of learning and pedagogy. There were steady efforts towards strengthening the logistical chain and processes including student support systems, expansions in relaxing eligibility conditions, modes of teaching and most importantly, flexibility in pacing of learning to suit needs of learners.

2. NEW DIRECTIONS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

In the face of new realities and challenges before the learner groups, communication in both written and oral forms constitutes now a very large part of acquiring skills in a foreign language. Naturally, teaching practices in conventional Indian universities, which were earlier more tilted towards teaching literature of the foreign language suddenly found newer principals guiding their pedagogical practices. These were centered around improving spoken language and “communicative competence” (Hymes, 1972) of learners.

With massive arrival of MNC’s and foreign collaborations plus boom in the tourism/hospitality industries, it is interesting to see that job prospects attracted a whole new group of personnel coming from varied backgrounds very often representing the non-anglophone. This change in profile of learners led to further changes in didactic practices and fresh methods and new techniques of teaching/learning foreign languages were imperative. It also meant that:

- The methods would have to be extremely learner centered,
- They would have to be inclusive in nature,
- They would have to be rooted strongly in the unique socio cultural linguistic realities of the Indian context.

With this background, in 2007 IGNOU, the single largest National University of Open and Distance Learning in India started its School of Foreign Languages. Along with other languages, the Certificate Programme in French was launched in 2010. For beginners in India, this was the first model for French language to be put into practice through the ODL teaching/learning mode.

The material prepared was a trilingual one with French, Hindi and English. Inclusion of the mother tongue as a formal pedagogical tool was aimed at developing a fresh model, with Innovation, Inclusivity and favourable Communicative Competence (Hymes, 1972) being core principles underlining structure and design of the Self Learning Materials.

3. THE NOTION OF INCLUSIVITY AT THE IGNOU

As a concept, inclusivity within an educational institution is an umbrella term which demonstrates equality and respect for varied and diverse categories of learners. The term inherently places a great amount of onus on the service providers—whether that be in the context of conventional classroom settings or in the ODL mode. In context of the latter, as rightly pointed out, distance learning embodies enormous heterogeneity in the learner profiles, and this

\(^2\) Indira Gandhi National Open University – Official Website.
in itself proves to be one of the biggest challenges in terms of fine-tuning the dynamics of the teaching/learning activities.

In the context of pedagogy of foreign languages in the context of India, this enlarges the problem manifold as in the presence of almost 30 full fledged regional languages and nearly 1500 dialects across the country, the point of departure often vascillates between playing a facilitator to being a hurdle in way of successful mastering of the foreign language in question.

When the IGNOU decided to include teaching/learning of foreign languages among its core schools of studies, it was with an aim to reach out to those learners who for some factor or the other, had little or no access to courses in foreign languages. These factors did not only mean geographical isolation or the oft-cited “missed-the-bus” category of learners. These were dynamic professionals, mid-career personnel, the regular student who wished to go abroad for higher studies, people in government service wishing to go on a foreign assignment or even the independent businessman wanting to expand business abroad. For these learners, learning the foreign language (in this case French), was a matter of skill enhancement. The minimum age for enrolment into the programme was 18 years and the learner needed to have a minimum qualification of 10+2 under the Indian school system. The six month programme was offered twice a year with a maximum period of two years allowed for completion.

**Inclusivity in such cases reflected in the structure of the programme, non-stringent eligibility conditions and possibility of pacing of his/her learning.**

The other category of learners was one comprising of the non-anglophone learner, moderately qualified and suitably motivated for joining the workforce. The greatest stumbling block for these learners was their non-anglophone background which often made them outsiders among their English speaking teachers and peer group. In the face of methods of teaching/learning of French as a foreign language which had remained largely stagnant over the years, it easily bred an unspoken elitism, as French classes frequently resorted to code-switching techniques using English and the target language (French). It created dual learner alienation for this group of learners leading to frequent drop-outs or lower self-esteem and communicative competence.

**Inclusivity in such cases represented itself through innovative pedagogical techniques that took cognizance of learners’ resources in terms of their prior cognitive knowledge and linguistic/cultural background.**

The third aspect which was incorporated strongly in the curriculum design was the structure of the content and the progression in the Self Learning Material provided to the Learners. The syllabus was designed according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)ii.

**Inclusivity here was showed in developing the study material which had larger global acceptance and pertinence in terms of skills imparted.**
Apart from these core ideas envisioned during development of the programme, the typical exigencies of distance learning pertaining to greater and regular access to student support system was also incorporated. Besides the support created through the study material, academic counselors were appointed to supervise the oral language competence of the learners which otherwise would have remained unsupervised. The face to face contact classes were incorporated into the course design to cater to:

A) Promoting acquisition of oral skills including pronunciation, intonation etc.,
B) Troubleshooting sessions related to the problems the learner might have encountered during self study,
C) Introducing affective support system for the otherwise isolated learner through presence of the tutor/counsellor;
D) Encouraging peer interaction and learner-learner dialogue.

It is interesting to note that despite possibility of introducing ICT for synchronous interaction, this aspect was consciously kept out of the teaching/learning process. The idea again was adhering to the principles of inclusivity which understood well the constraints of many learners across the country who would have irregular or almost nil access to internet or computers. In fact, the sole audio-video support along with the books was in the form of a CD that the learners could use if they wanted to, or if they had a CD player. However, this too in no way was made compulsory as it was possible that a learner in some remote corner of the country might not even have access to regular electricity.

As concerns the actual content of the study material prepared, there has been conscious attempt to draw examples from the culture/context of the Indian learner. Often in the new space created by the foreign language, the debutant adult feels lost and needs “a cognitive pull back” into his own space where he/she feels more secure. However, apart from the affective filter provided through references to the learner culture, it in its own way prepares ground for cross cultural dialogue and linguistic comparisons. On pg. 203 of the English-French learning material, in discussions on “les Jeux des Francais” (Games Played by the French), there is a specific activity where the learners are supposed to speak about the games in India. Similarly, on pg.151 in discussions on favourite pastimes of the French, Activity 24 asks the learners to conduct a mini survey in the class about their pass times and present it. Again, pg. 79 and 80 have fill in the blanks exercises where names of Indian actors (Abhishek Bachchan) from Bollywood feature, followed by pictures of the Indian leaders Indira Gandhi and Pratibha Patil. Such structuration is conscious and creates favourable cognitive and affective bridge between the mother tongue and the target language.

5. INNOVATION WITHIN THE MAINSTREAM

The ODL model to teach French to adult beginners was being used for the first time in India at such a large scale within a university curriculum. Earlier attempts at having French programmes at the English and Foreign Languages University at Hyderabad remained at the Masters level and were discontinued after a certain period.
At the level of course designing, there were huge number of possibilities and examples of other universities internationally. However, the principle of inclusive education and regional pertinence within the country formed the core philosophy guiding every decision regarding the programme. It is important to understand here the unique linguistic background of the Indian learner in terms of didactics of a foreign language (French in the present case). In the presence of nearly 30 regional languages and more than 1500 dialects across the country, all foreign language teaching/learning, whatever be the mode of delivery, operates in an essentially bi/multilingual context. In other words, with India’s colonial past under the British rule, English in the larger sense has evolved in the present day to a second language, rather than a foreign language. All other foreign languages (French, German, Japanese or Chinese etc.) fall anywhere from L4 onwards to L5 or more. In such a situation, it would not only be difficult but erroneous to negate the influence of the preexisting cognitive structures “les connaissances préalables” of the learners. It was felt in fact, that this needed to be optimally used to teach the foreign language. In the ODL terminology, it is what one terms as “scaffolding” ((Vygotsky, 1978). This is what has been developed using Hindi as well as English creating a “zone of comfort” for the distance learner.

The approach adopted here could be seen largely reflecting the essence of the Transactional Distance Theory of Moore & Kearsely (1996) the Guided Didactic Conversation theory of Holmberg (1989) and the Iceberg Theory of James Cummins (2000). The first two theories have special significance in the context of Open and Distance Learning, reflecting upon the dynamics of establishing dialogue and facilitating communication between learners and teachers.

The third theory of Jim Cummins, is especially relevant for the Indian context as it talks about bilingual/multilingual learners and builds upon the cognitive/linguistic base offered by mother tongue as well as other languages learnt prior to the foreign language in question. This theory is relevant also as it is more inclusive in approach and uses the ‘pre-existing resources’ of the learners.

Learner centric methodology reflected in the acceptance of the learners’ profile and led to the formal adoption of the trilingual approach to learning French where learners had options of using Self Learning Material prepared either in Hindi or the English medium.

This represented in itself the very first instance of formal acceptance of linguistic diversity of the Indian learner and its direct pedagogical reflection in the course material developed for teaching French in the ODL mode. More importantly this set a fresh self generational model that could be possibly adapted similarly into other regional languages of the country in later years.

As mentioned in the sections above, the material developed on the one hand kept the Indian learners’ profile well in mind but on the other, based it upon the recommendations of the CEFR also. The level of the course material developed was A1/A2 as per the guidelines of the CEFR and a significant part of pedagogy included what is called “l’Approche actionnelle”, or the Action Approach. The 360 hrs. programme of 12 credits spread over approximately 26 weeks.

As explained in the introduction, the learner is made aware of what he/she would be learning in

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3 Data procured during personal interviews and discussions with course experts and programme developers.
the programme. “Its objective is to develop your communicative competence in French by honing your skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking”

At the end of each section, there are activities indicated that the student has to undertake either during self study or during the contact classes in presence of the tutor and other learners. Activities are suitably designed to hone listening, reading and writing competence of the learners. The CD included in the study material is strategically linked to many of the exercises given in the text so that it hones the listening and writing or reading competence of the learner. At the same time, activities are also specifically mentioned if they would be handled during the contact classes.
The mix of activities attempts to hold the attention of the learner who in most cases is studying on his/her own, and physically separated from the teacher and the peer group.

The third aspect of the programme which was envisaged with unique pertinence for the Indian learner was developing the main study material around the French method “Connexions” (Merieux, R; 2004). In the ODL domain, this is referred to as a “Wrap-Around Model”. With a particular method of teaching that is already there, this kind of adapting emerges into developing a parallel pedagogical material that develops around the main text book. In this case, it was the IGNOU Self Learning Material that adapted modeled itself around “Connexions” whereby every unit of the former corresponds to one unit of the study material. It is indicated clearly to the learner that both have to be studied simultaneously.
Especially with regard to highlighting aspects of French culture, history and civilization, the main text book Connexions presents valuable information and interesting graphics and illustrations which add as a strong motivating agent for the adult learner. As explained, “The textbook Connexions, is richly supplemented with graphic illustrations to facilitate comprehension, following which a learner acquires linguistic, referential and discursive skills required for accomplishing written and oral tasks such as writing a cheque, and responding to concrete situations such as participating in a rally, conducting a survey on reading habits etc. Every unit is accompanied by a table of concepts covered during the class including phonetics, grammar and vocabulary “(Chaudhry, K. 2009)

Apart from innovations at the level of developing pedagogical material, a very crucial aspect was added on to the running of the programme, involving training of academic counsellors. The IGNOU having a national presence, was slated to have regional centres across the country and counsellors were supposed to be handling a crucial link in the teaching/learning of the French language. However, it was important, to make them understand that their role was not teaching, but facilitating the learning of the content laid out in the study material or the CD. Out of the 360 hours allotted to the programme, 72 hrs. were allotted to weekend contact classes where attendance was compulsory. In a sense, these 72 hours were supposed to concretize the learning process, fill in gaps and clear doubts and develop oral competence in French.
Tutoring was to be significantly different from teaching and this meant skilful coordination of time as well as developing a sense of autonomous learning for the student.

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6. EVALUATION AND ASSESMENT

One of the most strategic aspects of any programme is the evaluation methodology adopted and this being all the more delicate as this was supposed to be a programme with almost no precedent in the Indian context.

Within the existing pattern of Continuous Assessment and Term End Examination, both represent 50% weightage (24th ACSC Ignou Minutes 2007). Assignments and their evaluation is handled at the respective regional centres, and includes 30% to written exercises and 20% to oral competence. The assessment of both these components is managed by the tutors/academic counsellors. Learners are free to take end term examinations at the end of six months (the minimum duration of the programme), or can extend it up to a maximum period of two years.

This notion of flexibility and option of pacing one’s learning as per convenience, provides a massive support alternative to the adult learner who may often be constrained by professional or other commitments. Also, if a learner was not feeling up to the mark for taking exams after six months, he/she could defer it up to a later time as per convenience.

7. A CRITICAL OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

Academic programmes in the Open and Distance Learning operate within their own framework of targets, infrastructure, economies of scale and overall vision of the institution. To understand the real implications of the material developed it was important to gather some basic information from the enrolled learners so far and to discuss and find out field realities from the stakeholders including subject experts, course writers, academic counselors and associated staff.

From the data resources at the Student Registration Division (SRD) IGNOU, information was compiled for 267 learners who had registered at different regional centres in the country for the beginners’ programme in French language. The period was from July 2010 when the programme was first launched to January 2013. The six month programme has two sessions a year—-in January and July. Out of them 65% were males and 35% females. The average age groups ranged from 40yrs to 18yrs. As per the records procured, regions showed nationwide enrolments from states including Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Kerala, Assam, Gujrat, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

Questionnaires were also sent to learners from the address records available. Out of total sent, I received only 81 filled in. From collected information, I compiled data on certain aspects depicting satisfaction levels related to the following parameters:

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5 Students Registration Division database; Certificate in French Language; July 2010- Jan 2013.; Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi.
Table 1. STUDENT SATISFACTION LEVELS REGARDING VARIOUS PARAMETERS OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE PROGRAMME (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Very satisfactory</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfactory</th>
<th>Not Satisfactory</th>
<th>Can’t Say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Course Material</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Number of Contact Classes</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Role of Academic Counsellors</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Evaluation Structure</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fee Structure</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Knowledge of French Culture</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Duration of the Programme</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source: Primary data procured from 81 respondents through distribution of questionnaires.**

The data compiled from learner respondents was an effort to evaluate various aspects of the programme developed and its performance so far. In a period of two and a half years, the programme is still in its stages of expansion and adjustment. However, certain figures are indicative of typical trends which can in themselves be powerful indices to evaluate actual inclusivity and innovation and how far they have responded to learner expectations. Satisfaction with Course material has shown a lower average rating where the highest percentage of learners rated it as “somewhat satisfied”. Number of contact classes showed a more or less even distribution of ratings. However, an almost equal percentage marked them as “Satisfactory” as also “Unsatisfactory”. Academic Counsellors and their role was shown as largely satisfactory, indicating learner-tutor transactional distance as well minimized and interaction maximized.

Compiled data with regard to fee structure represents a near-unanimous satisfaction level, indicating that nearly all respondents were in agreement with the fees structure of the university. It indicated a positive trend towards developing an ethos of accessibility and inclusivity towards all learners. The last two parameters indicate some interesting trends where “knowledge of French culture shows high ratings in “Very Satisfactory” and “Satisfactory” categories. As opposed to this, the satisfaction levels with “course material” show lower average ratings. What seems is that the graphics and illustrations in the “Connexions” text book have managed to attract the learners’ attention vis a vis monotonous presentation of written text.

The next response again shows near unanimity in terms of duration of the programme. 62% of respondents felt the duration was not satisfactory. Although theoretically 360 hours worth of study time was envisaged during the designing of the programme, it is obvious that for some reason, learners felt the length of the time period insufficient for learning the language. There have been beginners’ level programmes of the same duration in the conventional face to face
teaching mode. But the Open and Distance Learning seems to impose its own exigencies and needs to rethink upon the overall time allotted to the learner. As indicated in some other responses, there emerged a strong opinion from the learners which included suggestions on increasing the ICT component in the teaching/learning process.

During interviews carried out with Academic Counsellors in the programme, they expressed their desire to assist learners more and more but felt constrained due to weekend classes only. Three of them said that the learning material prepared was bulky and learners often felt intimidated by the thought of having to complete the book in six months. They also felt that including a greater component of ICT in the pedagogical process and mixed delivery modes with print and multimedia or Computer Assisted Learning (CAL) might show improved results and higher student retention.

Continuous assessments through assignments was one thing most counsellors appreciated since this gave learners a chance to see and self assess their own progress. However, the oral expression aspect was seemingly ignored due to hesitation by many adult learners and fear of ridicule by peer group. Most counsellors expressed desire to have more training programmes to train them and also increase the number of contact class hours.

8. IN CONCLUSION

Many aspects linked to didactics of French at the IGNOU have been highlighted in the paper and attempts were made to evaluate critically important facets of the programme in keeping with the larger spirit of the ODL mode as also the philosophy and mandate of the university. Within discussions on inclusive practices and innovations, there were crucial pedagogical concerns that came to the fore—*Is it uniquely the modalities of course design, or the flexibility offered that promotes learner motivation and competence? Are specific linguistic competencies (speaking, listening, writing and reading) each suited to particular modes of instruction to deliver maximum advantage? Is it finally just a question of finding the perfect blend of pedagogical techniques and innovative practices directed at the right learner group in the right social setting?*

Looking at an institution that has evolved and grown around the basic philosophy of innovation and inclusivity in education, and development of learner-centric course models, there are three crucial axes on which conclusions can be drawn with respect to these aspects in the French language programme here: Integration, Interrelation and Performance. It is to be understood that the Indian context due to its multilingual structure does present a rather challenging task for effective teaching/learning of French or for any other foreign language as such.

This then highlights the indispensability of dealing with the multitude of “Pre-existing Corpus” of knowledge, language skills and meta-cognitive structures of the adult learner as well as “Certain Gaps” related to access to ICT facilities and infrastructure, basic digital literacy of learners as well as teachers, inhibition/inability to attending classes in person etc. which may influence strongly the acceptance / non acceptance of the mode of instruction. An effective blend of contact classes, self study or teleconferencing sessions etc. would form the crux of exploring
the first aspect mentioned above, that of **Integration** of the learner with the learning situation/context. This in itself would draw the learner into the learning process where inclusivity would become a constant process rather than a one-time prefixed target.

The other aspect, that of **Intercommunication** should be strengthened and used strategically to maximize learner autonomy at the same time minimizing the transactional distance in the didactic dialogue that exists between a) learner-teacher, b) learner-content, c) learner-learner and finally d) learner-self.

The third parameter defining success of a language programme should be linked to **Performance**, often considered the ultimate test of competence acquired. The famous didactician Merrill Swain brought this out in great detail when she discussed the Output Theory way back in the 80’s. It is here somewhere that the learner begins to negotiate meanings and becomes an autonomous learner.

The case of French language programme for beginners at the IGNOU is in a still nascent stage where solid conclusions about efficacy or failure of any teaching technique will need a longer gestation period to settle. What is imperative in the given situation is to remain conscious of actual performance and empowerment of the learner through strategic blending of modern tools of pedagogy and optimum space for developing autonomous learning.

In an age of cooperative learning and increasing mobile and varied learner groups, global interaction between peer groups, teachers and the larger context is what imparts effectively designed distance education high potential in the educational arena. Language instruction delivered in a distance education format can be just as effective as any other type of instruction and at this juncture when the world is looking at the emerging power of Asian countries it is upon us as educators to find, compare and evaluate existing strategies in pedagogy which help in what is called a “sustainable didactic approach” tailored for instruction of a European Language within an Asian context.

**Notes**

1. The term “missed the bus” was often used to describe the typical profile of the learner enrolled at the University. It implied that the learner in question had earlier missed the opportunity of higher education and thus later in life was looking for alternative modes of learning.

2. This point was elaborated in detail by the programme developers and course experts who designed the entire programme at the university

3. In the IGNOU system, each credit is accorded 30 hrs. of study which includes self-study, contact classes and audio/video/teleconferencing sessions.

4. This was discussed with the course experts during personal interviews related to future trends and acceptability of method evolved.
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Students Registration Division database; Certificate in French Language; July 2010 - Jan 2013.; Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi.


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