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Research Paper Title: **Skills and Competencies needed for the Faculty members in ODL Format**

Name of the author: **Dr. Padmpriya Irabatti**

Designation**: Professor- Business Management**

Official contact address: **Symbiosis Centre for Distance Learning, Pune**

Phone Numbers:      Mobile: **9850550219**

                             Landline**:** Office: **+91 20 66211166** | Extn : **1066**

E Mail ID:   drpriya.irabatti@gmail.com

                     padmpriya.irabatti@scdl.net

# DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby would like to explicitly state that the write-up titled **"Skills and Competencies needed for the Faculty members in ODL Format"** is original and has not been published earlier, or that it is not under consideration for possible publication elsewhere.

Name: **Dr. Padmpriya Irabatti**

Signature:

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# Skills and Competencies Needed for the Faculty Members in ODL Format

**Dr. Padmpriya Irabatti**
Professor
Symbiosis Centre for Distance Learning, Pune.

## Abstract

This is a thematic piece of work on skills and competencies needed for the faculty members in ODL format. This paper starts with the discussion on the concept of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and proceeds explaining the differences in ODL and traditional education. Then the central theme section of the research paper elaborately explains various components such as roles and responsibilities of a faculty member in ODL format, skills needed to be an efficient ODL faculty member, orientation of ODL faculty member. This paper concludes with challenges before the faculty members of ODL format.

## Key Words:

Open and Distance Learning, Faculty Member, Role and Responsibilities, Skills, Challenges.

## Open and Distance Learning

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is becoming preferred and convenient Alternative Education System. The focus of this parallel education system is to provide an open access to education. It also provides freedom from the constraints of place and time. It is identified as a flexible learning opportunity especially for higher education.

The development of Internet based information technology is responsible for the growth of this new ODL system. The concept of ODL education evolved from an idea where the teachers and learners, despite being separated by geographic distance, can interact on a common platform.

The concept of distance education is not new in education sector. The distance education format was implemented by the University of Chicago for the first time in late 1800s. Today, except very few categories, it is possible to get education related to all sectors through distance education. All types of organizations, whether they are governmental, intergovernmental or non-governmental organizations, specialized institutions,

associations, industrial corporations, telecommunication companies, and others interested in this field can use the option of ODL education to meet their needs of upskilling and reskilling.

Due to its unique style of imparting education, ODL demands the unique skillsets needed at input level. Therefore, the faculty members engaged in the ODL education should be trained to excel in those required skills. Therefore, this paper reviews the skills and competencies needed for faculty members in ODL format.

## ODL vs. Traditional Education

ODL and Traditional education both deliver quality education to students, however ODL education format is getting wide acceptance due to its multiple advantages. There are many contradicting opinions regarding ODL education format. However, in last ten years the traditional ways of education are being replaced by ODL. The traditional education, wherein a teacher teaches with the traditional tools such as chalk and duster and the students listen, is vanishing. Education is radically changing. Advanced modes of learning such as use of computers, laptops and projectors are fast replacing the traditional blackboard. Here is the comparative analysis of these two formats.

**Convenience in Learning:**
In many Open and Distance programmes, students can take the exam as per their convenience. Due to technological advancement, many ODL courses are also providing live classes and evaluations. This feature of the ODL format makes the learning enjoyable and therefore students learn faster than the traditional learning. Also, there are many such short term programmes which cannot be offered in traditional format. With the option of ODL, a student can learn and earn simultaneously. Most of the ODL courses are job oriented, therefore they make the candidate employable.

**Technical Element:**
Unlike traditional education, ODL demands access to various advanced technical gadgets such as computers, webcam headset, etc.

**Cost Element:**
ODL education is less expensive as compared to traditional education. This is possible due to online study material, huge number of students enrolled, economy of scale.

**Location Advantage:**
In ODL mode the classes are conducted using online tools, therefore student can attend the classes from any location. This saves time, money and energy and thus provides the convenience in learning. This

liberty is not available in traditional education.

The above specific characteristics of ODL which differentiate it from traditional education demand equally special skills at the delivery end. Therefore, the faculty members involved in the process of imparting education in ODL mode need to excel in some special skills. This fact should be also taken into consideration during faculty recruitment and development processes.

**Responsibilities of Faculty Members in ODL Format**

Faculty members perform many complex activities in the ODL setup. They have to accomplish multiple functions such as:

1. New programme development which includes market research, preparing programme structure, getting it approved from various bodies, etc.
2. Programme/course co-ordination
3. Content development
4. Preparing self-instructional material
5. Delivering virtual/online lectures.
6. Student counselling
7. Resolving academic and operational student queries
8. Promotional assistance to the enrolment team
9. Mentoring the students
10. Evaluation of student performance
11. Record keeping related to program
12. Budgetary provisions for the programme specific activities
13. Question bank development

**Role of a Faculty Member in ODL Format**

The role of faculty members in ODL format is noticeably different from the faculty members in traditional format. The ODL faculty member should have the clarity of this difference while working as a distance educator. Imparting education through ODL needs innovative, experimental and creative mindset. The central role of a faculty member is to create knowledge and impart it to suite the learner's ability and pace. In traditional face-to-face education, the faculty member is at the centre but the ODL education format is student centric. The role of faculty member is to facilitate the self-paced learning from distance.

In ODL format, a faculty member needs to undertake several activities. Apart from subject expertise, the ODL faculty member should also be good at using the tools for delivering the distance education. Teaching in ODL format involves designing a learning module, developing and delivering

the appropriate and latest content and evaluating the learners to guide them further. To make it relevant, the tools such as debates, discussions, critical analysis from experts need to be practised frequently to make education continuous and borderless.

Efficiency of ODL faculty member is tested at individual and at team level. Unlike traditional education where excellence of the particular faculty member is recognised, in ODL format the excellence of the entire team is recongnised because in ODL format the learners identify the entire team of faculty members as a unit, they generally do not know the individual faculty members. Therefore, teamwork plays very important role in ODL format. Thus the ODL faculty members should not restrict themselves to specific domain or stream. If needed, they should also be able to help and guide the students of other faculty members. At the end of the day, resolving the student query is the prime responsibility of the entire team. Consequently, there should be good interactions among the faculty members to be able to guide all type of students.

Similar to traditional education, communication skills are also important for the faculty members in ODL format. However, the communication skills needed for delivering ODL education should be more illustrative, expressive and interactive. Effective use of body language and voice modulation is essential when delivering the lectures. The distance barrier in communication should be balanced by adding comparatively more energy and enthusiasm. The communication skills when delivering ODL education are also tested through the efficiency of the faculty member to communicate using the technical tools. Unlike traditional education where students and faculty member are face-to-face, in ODL the faculty members have the challenge to create the virtual classroom wherein every individual student will always feel connected and being attended by the faculty member.

**Skills Needed to be an Efficient ODL Faculty Member**

- Passion to teach in ODL mode
- Good teamwork skills and interpersonal skills
- Aspiration to update knowledge from time to time and positive attitude towards changing requirements from institute and students
- Elastic mindset to accommodate innovative and experimental approach

- Technical skills and media skills to conduct the online session effectively
- Knowledge of legal provisions related to copyrights and IPRs
- Exceptional command over language.

**Orientation of ODL Faculty Member:**

During their tenure, the ODL faculty members are oriented in following four stages.

**Designing stage**

In this stage the faculty members generate new programme ideas considering the changing learning needs of the students from various streams. The ODL faculty members should continuously research for generating such new programme development ideas. They may get these ideas during the student counselling and student interactions. All new programme ideas need assessment on the ground of operational and market requirements. The final programme selected should justify a need to launch the programme and the additional efforts and inputs invested in that new programme initiation.

**Development stage**

Once the programme idea is selected for implementation, it's the time to convert the idea into action. This stage include big list of activities staring from programme structure preparation, getting the programme structure approved from the BOS and Academic councils, making the correction based on the recommendations, initiating and co-ordinating content development task with in-house and outsourced subject matter experts. This follows by getting the final content edited and proof-read, keeping the study material ready and the development of question bank of all relevant courses of the program.

**Delivery stage**

In this stage, the faculty co-ordinator should design the course delivery strategies. These could be hard copy study material, e-books, e-Learning, etc. This should be followed by identifying the delivery channels such as live virtual/online classes, recorded sessions, archived videos, etc.

**Evaluation stage**

This is the last stage in the process of imparting ODL education. The faculty members should derive appropriate methods to evaluate the learners' performance. After successful completion of these evaluation rounds, a degree/diploma/certificate should be awarded to the student. This stage also includes the important task of obtaining feedback from the student after successfully completing the program. This feedback helps the faculty members to make further developments in the existing course of action.

## Challenges Before the Faculty Members of ODL Format

- The biggest challenge is to teach remotely: The faculty in ODL mode has to teach remotely which itself is a significant challenge in the process of imparting education due to its several limitations.

- Engaging student in virtual class: Engaging a student in online/virtual class is not easy for the faculty member. Due to distance barrier, the students lose interest in the class. Therefore, using various tactics to keep him engaged is really challenging for the ODL faculty member.

- Unlike formal teacher training programmes for traditional educators, ODL faculty members do not have an option to develop themselves to excel as distance educator. They have to learn these skills during their job and learn through experiments.

- The proportion of academic and administrative responsibilities of ODL faculty member is equal. Due to the overburden of administrative responsibilities, they can spare comparatively less time for academic developmental activities.

- Due to detached nature of learners, keeping track of learners' progress is difficult for ODL faculty member. Thus these faculty members also face the challenge of losing control on students.

- The ODL education is delivered using various technologies. These technologies have their own limitations and challenges. In addition, these technologies keep changing very frequently. Therefore, ODL educator should continuously learn and unlearn the various technical skills.

- The ODL education is not a 'one-size-fit-all.' Therefore, ODL faculty member need to continuously derive innovative teaching methods to suite the requirements of the individual learners.

- It is observed that the ODL faculty members do not get an equal dignity that conventional teachers get. There is lack of motivation and less growth opportunities for ODL educators.

## Conclusion

Thematic Study on 'Skills and Competencies Needed for Faculty Members in ODL Format' concludes that, due to its unique style of execution, ODL

faculty members need different skill set to excel as effective ODL educator. These skills mainly include the skills such as interactive communication skills, team skills, interpersonal skills, administrative skills, technical skills, passion for teaching in distance mode, innovative and experimental approach, accommodative skills, and positive and flexible mindset.