

Support Services to the Learners during Critical Times, with Case Reference to the Jnan Taranga Community Radio Station

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Abstract:

In this 21st century, with the aid of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), various means of support services have come up in the teaching-learning system and adopted by most of the Online and Distance Learning (ODL) providers. All these support services for learners are regular post-enrollment activities, in normal times. However, in a difficult and critical time too, the learner can never be, left alone. The ODL institutions, by incorporating ICT tool, must formulate more scientific & methodical approach so that the learner could tide over any crisis at ease.

Here in this paper, we are proposing a critical and difficult time approach to provide to the learner. The basic objective of such critical time approach would be multidimensional and we will discuss the whole format in the light of the programmes that are being broadcast through “Jnan Taranga” Community Radio Service, patronized by the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Guwahati, Assam, during the lockdown period to prevent the spread of COVID 19. In this context, we would like to develop a theory and practice of critical time support service to the learners who are suffering from stress and trauma.

Keywords: ICT tool, Critical time approach, Jnan Taranga Community Radio Services

INTRODUCTION

The electronic media like Internet, Intranets, Extranets, satellite broadcast, audio/video tape, interactive TV etc. makes the learning procedure more flexible and user friendly. Because of its facile and flexible nature of learning, most of the learner influenced towards this learning mechanism. This technologically enhanced teaching-learning mechanism became the new trends for today’s ODL learner. Giving value to the learner interest, many educational institutes and Universities now introduced multi-channel and multiple media teaching-learning mechanism as learner support services. Among all these means of services, the Radio plays a significant role in information dissemination in 21st century. According to a survey conducted in February 2000, radio was still popular with over 58% of the rural and 48% of the urban population in India. With such a huge listener base, analysts felt that radio was still one of the primary mass communication mediums in the country (Sharma, 2001).

From the advent of radio in 1890s, it is being used as the agent to communicate and to mobilize people of a society. Specially, the Community Radio (CR), the 3rd generation of radio in radio history, is considered as a good communicator between community and a society. It is the only media that can focus community voice and can reach directly to a community. Community radio has the power to reshape in development of a community.

By observing the advantages and easily accessible capacity of community radio services, many ODL institutes established Community Radio Stations (CRS) to disseminate their information, to share messages and to give education to their learner. Learner also prefer this media as they can directly communicate to their teacher can directly ask questions and can directly clear their doubts. ODL institutes now considered CR as one of the most essential and easily accessible means of support services.

The CRS broadcasting range is limited to 10-15km of distance from the location of the transmitter. However, in ODL mode of education, learners are not confined within a particular range. In this case, accessing the CR programme is a problem for learner staying beyond this limit. This can be overcome by connecting internet with live streaming facility. The exposure will be worldwide then. Learner can access on-air programme from their smart phone or tab too, if do not have physical radio with them. In this way, a learner from everywhere can access a radio programme, as well as can get their education.

In normal times, support service for the learners is a regular post-enrollment activity. Apart from print & audio-visual materials, which is a self-learning in nature, e-media both audio and video, teleconferencing, interactive community radio, television, computer mediated learning etc. are used. Any ODL institutes provide all these technological aided facilities to the learner usually in normal times. When it is not a normal, but a difficult and critical one, the learner can never be left alone, unlike normal situations, left alone. For example, today, the country i.e. India, like most of the countries in the world is reeling under an unprecedented crisis in the form of lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID 19 since late March 2020. The central and State Govt. as well as various health agencies including World Health Organization (WHO) and Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) have requested the people to be in quarantine, which seems to be the only alternative left to the human community to prevent the spread of the disease as no vaccine/medicine has been discovered till date. In this situation, learner counselling is more important as they may face in any difficulties, either in education or in health. Therefore, when a learner suffers from any stress and trauma during some unprecedented and unexpected situation, the ODL institutions must formulate more scientific & methodical approach so that the learner could tie over any crisis at ease. Any CR can play a significant role in this situation by introducing a learner friendly and interactive approach.

In the light of the above, a proposal is being made here to develop a critical and difficult time approach to provide to the learner through radio programme that are being broadcast through Jnan Taranga CRS of KKHSOU. It is in such a context that, it would be like a theory and practice of critical time support service to learners, suffering from stress and trauma.

COMMUNITY RADIO CREATES A COMMUNITY

When a community radio station is set up, a community is created. It serve typically a local audience, a geographical community and community of interest. It can directly raise community voice, may be individually or in-group. The content broadcast are relevant to a local and specific audience and hence the popularity increased. Communities even use it as a vehicle to disseminate their information locally. When broadcasting power opened for any voluntary section, NGOs, private agencies, educational institutes etc., it became successful in covering a wide audience. Ezekiel & Peter (2014) on their paper stated that radio is very appealing because of some distinguishing features of interactivity, its capacity to provoke dialogue and to solicit the participation of local population with lower production costs and extreme versatility.

Community radio came with a new concept to cater the community with true information at right time and at right place. Due to the cost effective and easily accessible nature, no recurring cost for use, having

mobile phone with radio facility and many more advantages, community radio have more popularity in community's level. The main aim behind this type of radio is to educate a community through its entertainment programme by using their own idioms and language. Local selected community people can be called easily to the studio to take part to share their views. Either telephonic participation can also be done. Sur said that empowering the people at the grassroots and their capacity building are the major concerns for modern development. Community Radio can emerge as a major tool for doing both. Community radio can play a significant and effective role in modern concepts of development like the Human Development Index and Human Security. Community Radio can come forward to give development a human face. It can also be a platform for bringing accountability of the development process (Sur, 1968).

A CRS BASED ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION IN CRITICAL TIME

Community Radio is a much-needed component for dissemination information among masses during critical times. A CR offers variety of contents that generally not offered by other commercial radio station. Varieties of community related programme about health and sanitation, education, food habits and family system make a significant change in the lives of community.

Over the years, CRS based alternative radio communication have sprung up in different parts of the developing world. It is to be implemented by way of creating community's pride of ownership through regular involvement in decision making and planning. Once this feeling of ownership is created, all other requirements in terms of management, monitoring, supervision and providing support in critical times etc. could be easily worked out.

CRS are uniquely placed to make a difference to the society reeling under a different situation. It can deliver skills, boost community pride, boost the community image and standing and improve the delivery of services to those who need them the most in critical time.

A CR is an alternative communication in critical time because it can,-

- do detailed and systematic survey of the problem
- provide related and relevant information
- conduct talk shows and interviews with expert on community's interest
- involve them in different ways to minimize their stress and trauma

Apart from these, many other ways may be counted, which may be different for different CRS and will vary as per the issues that arising within a community.

MAIN PRINCIPLES OF PROVIDING SUPPORT IN CRITICAL TIME

Community radio meant for the community. It is 90% community and 10% radios. In other word, the community is taking the entire responsibility of the CRS, not only in normal but in critical time as well. This community orientation does not mean that the CRS will be crowded with people that will violate the fundamental norms of social distancing essential to fight COVID19. It is certainly not. Only one anchor is sufficient to conduct all these by establishing the link with the community, coordinate matters and convey messages. Anchor make them to feel that they are the part of the CR too.

There are many remote accesses broadcasting software like TeamViewer, Any Desk and Remote Desktop through which one can broadcast from home, where only the transmitter should be in one end. Desktop can be shared among a team. Video conferencing, online meeting; even file can be transferred from one computer to another very easily with this kind of software. This remote access software can be used to

broadcast essential information to the community in any unprecedented or unexpected situation, for example, the sudden outbreak of the pandemic caused by the COVID 19.

In normal times, the production of SLM is done by both an in-house or outsourced activity. However, in critical time, it should be mostly outsourced. This is because in the relevant field like agriculture, health and sanitation, psychiatrics and psychological problems, about which people need urgent information. The experts counselling and mentoring could prepare the self- instructional material more interesting. At the same time, the service support provision should be fixed on commitment, trust and scientific conversation. Self-instructional material production during critical time should be so learner friendly so that the people develop their interest in those radio programmes, even without knowing that they are the target audience of the programme. This can be done through CR as community handles it. They know their surroundings better. These are the main principles behind using CR at critical times.

A MORE SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONAL MODULE FOR THE LEARNERS IN CRITICAL TIMES

Here we are approaching a more specific format on special instructional module for the learners in critical times. They may be:

Formation of a Team and Job Description: Formation of a team with generalist in various field are essential in critical time, so that they can aware the community in critical time by explaining about the pandemic cause and their prevention. Team job description have to be specified properly.

Inducting People and Orienting: The instructional module should include the provision of inducting and orienting people to listen to the radio programmes by way of developing a sense of utility among the listeners.

Subtle Mentoring and Counselling: Although counselling & mentoring is meant for various target groups, the program should be presented in the generous format so that the listeners find more interest in such programs.

Preparation of Scientific Instructional Materials: The instructional material should be prepared scientifically, should be more specific. If needed, experts in the relevant field should be outsourcing as much as required. The material should be in various format like interview, discussion, announcement, information sharing, sometimes through drama, reciting poem, by song and preferably by local folk song etc.

Effective Dissemination of Information, Counselling and Mentoring: There may be needed proper counselling and mentoring in critical time to minimize the stress occurred due to COVID 19. The information dissemination should be right to the right people at right time through field experts to target groups.

SHARING THE JNAN TARANGA CRS EXPERIENCE DURING COVID 19

When COVID 19 infected first at China, since then “Jnan Taranga” started sharing news on this virus. After that when this virus spread in countries like US, when people of that countries were suffering in lockdown, since then “Jnan Taranga” is playing a vital role to give voice to the voiceless. In India when lockdown announced, this station was trying its best to disseminate information despite facing many challenges. Though this station was broadcasting programme on COVID 19 since January 2020, this study considering the most emergency period happened in Assam, which is March and April 2020. In this period, this station was airing all COVID 19 related programme on local Assamese language, so that the messages

can reach directly to the local community. COVID 19 related programme were broadcast in different format, sometimes with community intervention. In pandemic situation also, the station broadcast programme for 8 hours from 9am to 5pm by nearby anchors, one per day. One anchor physically present at the station, whereas the other 14 anchors sharing their views, programmes and related information through WhatsApp or e-mail or through any electronic means. This restriction is follows as a measure of maintaining the social distancing, which is the only solution to prevent spreading the virus that instructed by Government advocating research bodies like WHO, ICMR and other governing bodies. The station airing special live programme on Yoga tips, meditation, psychological problem, and health related issues, which are important in any critical situation. Station is trying to convey messages about Dos and DON'Ts in this critical time by different radio formats, trying to make people aware on the importance of social distancing, isolation, quarantine, lockdown etc. through various programmes.

Apart from all these, the station gives tips on how to spend quality time in this lockdown period. The station broadcast different entertainment programme to make learner busy, which is very much necessary to minimize their stresses and unnecessary tensions that may occur due to sudden lockdown. The phone line keep open for discussion for learner as per demand, which was before for two hours, one hour each for morning and evening hour. Like this, the station tries to inducting and orienting people and tries to increase learner involvement through various innovative activities like writing article and poem on CORONA, reciting, singing etc. People from different corner and from different background coming willingly to broadcast their programme, sending messages, requesting slots, giving feedbacks etc. are the positive sign for the station.

In this lockdown period, till writing this paper, the station outsourced more than 70 experts from different fields like health expert, doctors, academicians, writer, poet, teachers, social workers from NGOs, cultural background, artist, chef for directing knowledge of preparing food item with usually available item, entrepreneur, children writer, psychiatrist, physician, Yoga and Meditation expert etc.

Few instructional format prepared by the station are Information bulletin, Story-telling, Drama, Poem recitation, Radio spot etc. Effective dissemination of information, counselling and mentoring to target group is the main objective of the station, in normal as well as critical time too.

Station prepared five awareness audio drama in collaboration with Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) on Coronavirus pandemic, symptoms and causes, necessary precautions etc.

CONCLUSION

From the study, it has observed that CR can increase the community as well as learner connection for both conventional and ODL mode of education. CR can serve community, located both in urban and remote areas. Therefore, educational especially the ODL institute may choose this means of media for dissemination of their learning module more scientific way in normal and critical time too. In this pandemic situation that take place due to COVID 19, a fact-based broadcasting through CR can serve the society in a better way, can minimize their stresses and other sufferings.

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