

1 RESEARCH IN EDUCATIONAL BROADCASTING

An essential requirement for the success of any educational media project is appropriate research input.

Importance of Research in Educational Broadcasting

The use of broadcasting media in education has been a mixed experience all over the world. Several research studies point towards the instructional viability of the broadcasting media. An equally large number of studies give just the opposite picture.

There is no single answer to the questions: why do some educational broadcasting projects succeed while others fail? What are the ingredients of success or failure? What are the factors one must watch out for?

Varied and different factors in different situations influence the success or failure of the media projects. But what is clear is that one basic factor which contributes to the success of educational broadcasting is the investment in terms of time, resources and effort in collecting information through research, and integrating the results of such research into planning, production, utilization and other aspects of broadcasting.

In the present age of multiplicity of channels, viewers have a wide choice of selecting a channel. An educational channel has to compete with other channels in holding the attention of its potential audience. A successful research effort can go a long way in presenting programmes in such a way that viewers find them interesting, useful and relevant. Research can also help improve the system for optimum utilization of the media service at the receiving end.

Educational Broadcasting Has Many Advantages

- Educational broadcasting has the capacity to reach a very large audience simultaneously.
- It opens up a 'window to the world' enabling us to bring such rare experiences to the audience as may not be otherwise possible, except in some isolated cases. This includes doing experiments, showing demonstrations, visiting distant places and people, and meeting renowned persons. In this way broadcasting can function as an equalizer of opportunities helping to solve the problem of disparity in learning.
- The best teachers, the best resources and the most sophisticated educational processes can be pooled for effective and quality programming. Learners and audiences, no matter how far scattered,

Educational broadcasting has immense potential



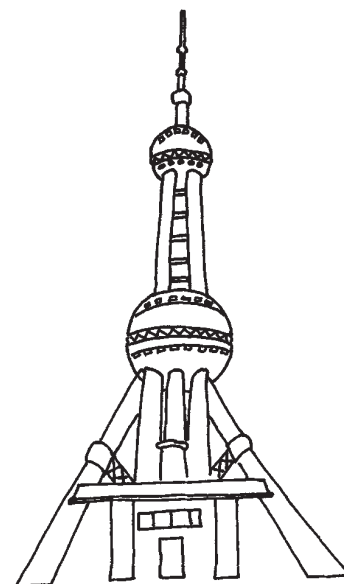
disadvantaged, and isolated, can have exposure to the best of teaching resources, laboratories, and knowledge that their more fortunate urban peers normally have access to.

- Educational broadcasting can be made versatile. Various production formats such as documentaries, lecture demonstrations, drama, among others, and production techniques, methods and materials such as animation, slow motion, graphics, effects, models, specimen, etc. can be used to make content not only informative but also stimulating and even motivational.

Thus, the potential of educational broadcasting is immense, but in practice this has been limited by other considerations.

Educational Broadcasting Has Many Limitations Too

- Educational broadcasting may be introduced more for prestige and political reasons than for educational compulsions.
- It may begin on an experimental basis leading to the development of the public broadcast system. Anxious to use the new medium in the service of education, policy and decision makers hurriedly require the production of programmes, which are only loosely connected with the requirements of the target audience.
- Even when educational broadcasting is initiated by the education sector, the service may begin without enough preparatory work toward effective planning and programming.
- The programme producers may not be the educationists. Coming from different backgrounds, the producers may not be conversant with the audience and the learning needs of audiences.
- Educationists and producers may not establish close working relationship necessary to pool their resources and knowledge necessary to exploit the full potential of the medium.
- Broadcasting media are essentially one way. The broadcaster cannot normally assess the response of the audience. Efforts may not be made to obtain feedback of the audience on a regular basis. Alternately, research inputs may come in too late, often after the programme is transmitted, leaving no opportunity for correction.
- Research reports, using sophisticated methods and jargon, which may be hard for producers to understand and use, increase the divide between researchers and producers.
- Programme effectiveness may not be regularly evaluated through pre-testing the materials with the audience.
- The heterogeneous nature of the audience may tempt the producers to pitch the programmes at the average mark, and in doing so they may introduce superficiality in the programmes, making them less precisely defined.
- Factors outside the producers' control, such as broadcast timings, channel reach and access, audience viewer ship patterns and commercial and managerial factors may reduce the effectiveness of educational broadcasting.



Experience shows that timely and meaningful research, as an active policy and operational input, can play a crucial role in strengthening the potential and overcoming the limitations of the broadcasting

media to a great degree. The research investigations can also guide improvement in the implementation of the project.

What Does Media Research Involve?

Ideally, any research effort should begin before plans for media policy and programming are made. However, a new media service is usually tempted to postpone research in its early stages of development, with the argument that the system should be allowed to stabilize before research can be taken up. When a media service delays using research, it misses out on the answers to a number of questions about policy decisions that are necessary for proper planning and implementation. As a result, there may be *ad-hoc* planning, and avoidable expensive mistakes made by the broadcaster.

A comprehensive research plan should cover the following different activities:

- Policy planning research
- Programme planning research
- Channel management research
- Pre-production research comprising previewing and testing of scripts and programmes
- Prototype production research
- Mapping of resources for programming
- Feed-back research
- Monitoring the broadcasts
- Monitoring utilization of the broadcasts at the receiving ends
- Determining audience availability
- Reviewing the programme materials vis-à-vis the project objectives
- Studying the impact and effectiveness of the project



These various research activities can be grouped under the following three broad categories:

- Formative research
- Process research
- Summative research

Formative Research

This is done at the formative stage or beginning of the project, sometimes even before a project is launched. Data collection at this stage should help formulate general and specific objectives, strategies of broadcasting, develop prototype materials, and improve upon the programmes during their formation. The salient components of formative research are:

- Feed forward research
- Pre-production research
- Prototype production research, and
- Resource mapping

First know
your audience!



Feed Forward Research

The evidence collected here should help in understanding the audience, their characteristics, needs and constraints. Based on such information, relevant goals, specific themes, topics and contexts of the programmes can be determined.

Pre-Production Research

The purpose of research at this stage is to improve the programmes during their initial planning and design. This includes previewing of the scripts and the programmes in a team mode including subject experts. This also includes testing of the scripts and the programmes with the audience. Revision of scripts and programmes on the basis of previewing and field-testing at this stage ensures greater acceptability of the programmes by the audience, and also proves cost effective and time saving.

Prototype Production Research

Here, a pilot programme with a given set of pre-determined objectives is produced in different formats such as drama, feature, documentary, magazine etc. The different formats are tested with the audience to find out which format works better with them in holding their attention as well providing instruction with respect to the given objectives. The selected programme format is then revised and retested before prototype production comes out.

Resource Mapping

It may be worth exploring and identifying institutes and their resource persons having the expertise in the academic content, and the production centers, production facilities and the appropriate software already available with them. This information can be of great use in establishing linkages and building up experiences for enhancing production quality.

Process Research

Process research is aimed at determining the progress of the project so that mid-course corrective measures could be taken. This comprises the following kinds of researches:

- Feed back research
- Monitoring the broadcast of the programmes
- Monitoring the utilization of the programmes at the receiving ends
- Audience availability
- Critical review of the existing materials

Feed Forward vs. Feed Back Research

Knowing about audience first before deciding upon the content and treatment of the programmes is feed-forward research as opposed to feed-back research which is done after the communication has taken place.

Feed Back Research

This involves obtaining feed back about the materials and the system.

Feed back obtained consistently and regularly in a variety of ways from a number of sources (such as audiences, extension workers, NGOs etc) should go a

long way in assessing the value of what and how we are doing. Based on the feed-back we can bring about continuous improvement in the materials and the system.

Monitoring the Broadcast of the Programmes

Monitoring broadcasts provides information about the sequencing of different series of programmes, capsuling of the programmes, scheduling with reference to audience segments, frequency of repeats, quality of broadcasts, transmission and reception and the like. This information should help rationalize programme scheduling and capsuling pattern.

Monitoring the Utilization of the Programmes

The data should help the broadcaster know about the extent of utilization of the medium, and the factors influencing its utilization.

Several factors affect utilization, and all need to be taken into account. It may, therefore, be meaningful to determine the availability of the hardware with the audience, problems encountered in its safe custody, operation and maintenance, quality of reception, timely availability of power to operate the hardware, additional requirement of hardware vis-à-vis size of the audience, distance from home, and seating and other conditions at the receiving end.

It may also be essential to study the dynamics of social factors influencing the listening or viewing behaviour of the audience. For example, people of different sexes, communities and economic strata may not like to mingle with each other under one roof for the purpose of receiving broadcasts.

Audience Availability

It may also be desirable to include studies to find out the optimum time/ season when different segments of the audience (children, male adults, female adults etc) are generally available to receive the intended messages.



Summative evaluation helps you see if you have done right



Feed-back helps you improve

Critical Review of the Existing Materials

Available materials are reviewed to determine the themes and topics, and the behavioural objectives already covered by these materials. Such an exercise should help determine as to which of the stated goals/objectives, themes and topics are over emphasized, under emphasized and neglected; and what more need be done to make the materials more comprehensive. The scope of the review exercise may be expanded to determine coverage of audience segments (for example, marginal farmers, small farmers, big farmers etc.) use of different techniques of programme presentation, programme formats, locales, sets, characters, conceptual loading, level of language difficulty, values, attitudes and ideologies etc.

Summative Research

Over a period of time, it is advisable to study the impact of the educational media on the intended audience. Such studies should aim at the nature and effects of the media exposure not only in respect of the stated educational objectives, but also the unintended outcomes, if any.

To be useful, studies should include determination of the factors that contribute towards the success of the media exposure or limit its impact.

It would, however, be necessary to start the media project with the collection of baseline data with respect to the stated educational objectives, so that the impact can be measured more precisely. By comparing baseline data to that collected after exposure to the media, it is possible to determine the extent of impact and the effectiveness of the medium and the content in meeting the stated educational objectives.

If the media project is of a longer duration and continuous in nature, it may be desirable to undertake research at reasonable intervals in the form of a longitudinal study.

At the end of the summative research, it should be possible to put forward definite recommendations for the improvement of not only the materials but the system as a whole for maximizing the impact of the media project.

The research areas mentioned above are not exhaustive or exclusive by themselves. This is a suggestive list only. Depending upon the need of the situation, and human and material resources in hand, necessary and relevant research studies may be planned. It is, however, important that research activity should be regular and comprehensive covering different phases and aspects of the project. The progress of the project usually suffers due to lopsided or inadequate research inputs in a programme.

Researchers and programme producers, work as a team!



In-house vs. Commissioned Research

It is often argued that media research is best done by an external agency for greater objectivity. Research conducted by an external agency often adds credibility to the project effect, and identifies areas of importance that might have been missed by those deeply involved in the project.

But there is an equally valid argument in favour of in-house research. For knowing the audience, understanding the scope and intention of the programmes, appreciating the difficulties faced by the media producers and answering the day-to-day problems, research should be an in-house activity.

The best thing would, therefore, be to arrive at a compromise. A study of the long time effect of the programmes in actual use (i.e. summative research) may be entrusted to an outside agency. Studies to know about the interests and psychology of the audience, audience needs, the way to serve these needs, how best to achieve message understanding and comprehension, the requirements to enhance programme utilization at the receiving end, and the like (i.e. formative and process research) should be done in-house.

The media producers themselves can very well take up in-house research. Where researchers and programme producers are different persons, it is important that they work in a team, plan the research and production inputs together and discuss the research findings in a cordial atmosphere with an attitude of give and take. The idea, after all, of all media research effort is to initiate possible changes and improvements in the programming and the system on a continuous basis for overall quality improvement and effectiveness.

Continuing with the above discussion, the next chapter focuses on the different kinds of information needed at different stages of a media project.