Higher Education to Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime Through Open and Distance Learning in India

Gagan Singh, Deepak Paliwal

Higher Education to Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime Through Open and Distance Learning in India

Dr. Gagan Singh

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, School of Management Studies & Commerce, Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani-Nainital, Uttarakahnd-263139
Email: gagan_singh04@yahoo.co.in

Dr. Deepak Paliwal

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani-Nainital, Uttarakahnd-263139
Email: dipaksociology@gmail.com

Abstract
Open and Distance Learning system has tremendous potential of inclusive growth of education because of its distinctive nature of being a user friendly system. ODL system is not only cost effective but it can also contribute in the sustainable development through learning processes that transcend distance, gender, regional, cultural and socio-economic barriers. The distance education also has the potential to reach the un-reached and even marginalized and excluded groups such as tribal populations and women.

This paper attempts to study the importance of Distance Education in imparting education to the distance learners and its significance in making them independent in the present competitive world. This study also attempts to outline the opportunities which open and distance learning can provide to learners in India. This study aims at examining the role of Open & Distance Learning in providing flexible, accessible, qualitative and cost-effective education to women so that they can contribute to a more sustainable and prosperous society. Overall suggestions will be given on how the Open & Distance Learning can devise effective educational strategies for women that can bring about social change in the state.
Keywords: Distance Education, Learner, Empowerment

Introduction
Higher education plays the role of leadership in the society Education is a catalyst of social change and spread of education in a society is the foundation of success in countries that are latecomers to development. Distance education is playing an important role in providing higher education

to those who are unable to be part of conventional system. The main objective of ODL is to reach the unreached and provide education at the doorstep of the learners and according to their convenience.

Distance learning concept introduced in the country with a view to democratize education, so that it covers large segments of population, vocations and professions. The primary emphasis is on innovation, flexibility and cost effectiveness. It aims at the dissemination of learning and acquiring knowledge through distance education mode including the use of any communication technology to provide opportunities for higher education. It provides easy access to education to different sections of society, especially to those with seemingly geographical isolation & difficulty, and caters to the educational needs of the target groups through the open systems of learning. The Open and Distance Learning institutions aim at providing support and facilitate quality learning process in distance learners through interactive activities. According to Daniel (1992) Open and Distance Learning offers a number of advantages to learners one of which is to provide opportunities for learning. Over the past decades, there has been a noticeable growth in distance education around the world. This is very much evident from the increasing enrolment in Open Distance Learning (ODL) institutions (Cavanaugh, 2005). ODL institutions are not only imparting education as an alternative to the formal system i.e. education in conventional courses/programmes, but also in areas such as vocational and technical, and continuing education, teacher education and even in high technology based education(UNESCO, 2002 and Bourne *et al.*, 2005). Open distance learning has also made some contributions in vocational and technical education (Mehrotra and Sacheti, 2005).

Review of Literature

Pulist (2001) conducted a study on "Student Support Services in Correspondence/Distance Education in India: A Historical Perspective". In the study author highlighted the necessity of Open and Distance Learning in imparting quality higher education through optimum use of technology. According to the author the student support services eventually aim at compensating for the absence of live support from teacher for the benefit of the isolated individual learners and making the necessaries basic facilities available to them directly or indirectly.

Srivastava (2002) in his study "A Comparative Study on Current Trends in Distance Education in Canada and India" highlighted that the formal system was unable to meet the demand for higher education in India and distance education was adopted as an alternative mode at the University stage in 1962. In both Canada and India DE opportunities at the university level have increased enormously. Many trends are putting new pressures on the conventional education system, forcing many institutions to review and amend their existing policies and procedures.

History of ODL (Open & Distance Learning)

The first distance education program began in the 1830s with the advent of commercial correspondence classes. The rate of distance learning registrations has increased 2-5% each year over the last ten years. The Open University System was initiated in the country to augment opportunities for higher education as an instrument of democratising education and also to make

it a lifelong process. The first Open University in the country was established by the state government of Andhra Pradesh in 1982. In 1985, the central government established the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). The Open University programmes have proved to be highly cost-effective. The current indications are that their cost is much lower than the cost normally incurred by the traditional system on comparable programmes. The open universities arrive at lower costs through economies of scale since a part of its fixed cost will get distributed over a larger number of students. The open universities in the country have generally developed their programmes and courses with a view to ensure that they are relevant to the economic and employment needs. Most of their programmes are very different from those offered by the traditional universities. They are designed and developed in several modules to assist the potential students to choose such modules as they perceive, are relevant to their needs. On their part, the universities have also sought to diversify their course provisions and developed high quality multi-media open learning curriculum designed to meet the academic, technical and vocational needs of diverse student groups. A notable feature of these programmes especially those in the technical, vocational and professional areas is the close linkages with the industry and other employer groups, not only in designing and preparing the learning packages, but also in the delivery of various services to the students at the work place.

Distance education gets overwhelming response in India, the universities introduced many new distance-education job oriented courses according to the changing times and students requirements. However, in this process, the actual motive of providing quality education to all took the backseat as the main focus of universities slowly shifted to making more and more money. Currently in India, the Distance Education departments are generating the maximum revenue for their universities, in many cases more than even the professional and self financing courses. This system of education is suitable for the persons who wanted to enhance their qualifications but were not in a position to attend classes on a regular basis. Such distance courses proved a boon for the service persons as well as others desirous of pursuing higher education. As a result, a large number of in-service persons, professionals, entrepreneurs, job-less youth, school teachers, housewives and old aged free persons made a beeline for admission to distance education study programmes. (Ahmed, Asif, 2010) The distance education mode was adopted by many universities to meet the ever-growing demand of those students who lacked means to pursue higher education through the regular stream. Also, there were economic constraints.

Urban and Rural-wise Male and Female Literacy Rate in India

Gender	India		
	Category		
	URBAN	RURAL	Total
MALE	89.67	78.57	**82.14**
FEMALE	79.92	58.57	**65.46**
TOTAL	**84.98**	**68.91**	**74.04**

Source: Govt. of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Census of India, 2001.

It is revealed from the above table that literacy rate of India is 74.04%. But on the other hand, literacy rate of urban population is much more than as compared to the rural population of the country. To achieve higher literacy rate there should be more efforts to educate the rural population of the country. Open and Distance learning can play an important role in this direction.

Support Services and Programme Delivery

In order to provide individualized support to its learners, the University has a large number of Study Centres, spread throughout the country. At the Study Centres, the learners interact with the Academic Counsellors and other learners, refer to books in the Library, watch/listen to video/audio programmes and interact with the Coordinator on administrative and academic matters. The methodology of instruction in this mode is different from that of the conventional mode of education. The distance education system is more learner-oriented and the learner is an active participant in the pedagogical (teaching and learning) process. Most of the instructions are imparted through distance education methodology and face-to face mode as per the requirement. The distance education system follows a multimedia approach for instruction, which comprises:

a)   Self Instructional Written Material: The printed study material (written in self-instructional style) for both theory and practical components of the programmes is supplied to the learners.

b)   Audio-Visual Material Aids: The learning package contains audio and video CDS which have been produced by the University for better clarification and enhancement of understanding of the course material given to the learners. The video cassettes are screened at the study centers during specific sessions which are duly notified for the benefit of the learners.

c)   **Counselling Sessions:** Normally counselling sessions are held as per schedule drawn by the Study Centres. These are mostly held outside the regular working hours of the host institutions where the study centers are located.

d)   **Teleconferences:** Live teleconferencing sessions are conducted via satellite.

e)   **Practical's /Project Work:** Some Programmes like MBA, Tourism Studies and Journalism have practical/project component also. Practicals are held at designated institutions for which schedule is provided by the Study Centres. Attendance at practicals is compulsory.

Need and Scope of the Study

The growth of the Indian economy in the recent past and the compulsion to sustain it is also forcing the Indian government to accelerate the process of developing all the branches of the Indian education system. Therefore, it would be very interesting to understand and analyze the various structures of education in India, its present condition and future developments. Efforts are also being taken to improve the access to higher education among the women of India by setting up various educational institutes exclusively for them or reserving seats in the already existing institutes. Higher education is the most critical element of growth in this era of knowledge economy. We need to at least double the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) to remain active contributors to growth in this era. In this context, role of Open and Distance Learning System becomes significant and unique. The growing acceptance of distance learning courses and expansion of the Open University system is also contributing a lot in the democratization of higher education in India.

The main focus of the study is to study the role of open and distance learning in imparting knowledge and skills through distance education. The area of the study aims at examining the role of open and distance learning in providing flexible, accessible, qualitative and cost-effective education to women so that they can contribute to a more sustainable and prosperous society.

Objectives of the Study

The following objective has been visualized for the present study:

To study the role and importance of the open and distance learning in imparting higher education and also examine the facilities provided by the open and distance learning institutes to their distance learners.

Research Methodology

The present study has been conducted to study the role of open and distance learning in imparting higher education to anyone anywhere, anytime in the country. In the light of above objectives set forth the information has been collected from records of Govt. of India and literature published by the national and various state open universities in the country. The data required for the study is collected from secondary sources.

Results and Discussions

Limitations of the formal system of education were attracted policy makers towards non-conventional modes of education for providing non-residential studies like correspondence courses. Therefore, in order to insure access and education of a reasonably good quality, we must think of some alternative system capable of supplementing the role of conventional system, and distance education is one of such alternatives.

The growth of higher education in India has been phenomenal. Starting with 1950-51, there were only 263,000 students in all disciplines in 750 colleges affiliated to 30 universities (Kaul, Sanat, 2006). Open Universities can be highly cost effective as the cost of teaching through distance education comes down to a third compared to the traditional system. They also maintain a close relationship with the industry and is especially helpful to those who cannot afford a regular university degree due to high cost or lack of time as they are already employed. Distance education with new information and communication technology promises to expand the frontiers of Higher Education as never before. This is because it costs 66 per cent less and the students need not leave their homes or profession. The internet and satellite technology are being put to use to further the cause of distance education. (Kaul, Sanat, 2006) The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) is launching a dedicated satellite for educational purposes. According to the results of a special survey '*Higher Education: Free degrees to fly*' (*Economist, February26th-March 4th, 2005, pp63-65),* higher education is already a global business. The days when higher education was a matter of national policy and government regulation are rapidly fading. Higher Education provisioning is now globalised and in many ways, a commercialized affair and the way that the State had in the goings on is vastly diminished. India's higher education policy of the 1950s, which envisaged schools of excellence, especially in technology and sciences, has finally paid off rich dividends. The creation of IITs, IIMs, Schools of Science, Schools of Law, a large number of advanced training and research institutions have now been well and widely accepted.

Distance Learning Courses in India are increasingly becoming popular. The availability of distance learning courses has assured that a person can pursue education from any state or university that he or she desires. It may be possible due to the technology used in this mode of education. As the course fee of these courses is much lesser than the regular courses, distance-learning courses in India have also become popular in the rural areas. Thus the distance learning institutes are serving a very important cause by enabling the less advantaged sections of the society to pursue higher education of their choice.

Open universities and distance learning initiatives, mechanisms are in place to upgrade skills at regular intervals and develop new competencies. People's needs of lifelong learning are constantly expanding. Higher education institutions are offering learning opportunities to satisfy these diverse demands. Ready access and flexibility are the hallmarks of these initiatives.

Distance learning caters the education need of the target groups through the open system of learning and provide facility of study according to their own pace and convenience. Thus we can

say that distance education mode has become very popular and common in India, because it is catering to a wide range of aspirants (students), who are willing to upgrade their educational qualifications for various reasons. The Distance education system provides opportunities not only to younger students but also to those from the older age groups. The main reason for increasing interest in Distance education lies in the need for continuing education in today's competitive world. Every people always try to add value to their competence in their bid to advance their carrier further. Distance Education is also very cheaper to compare with regular mode of education. Distance education has greatly reduced the wall of distance between education and a normal student beyond the long distance of home or work place to university. Now just a little need to increase the need to make it professional and employability part of education community.

The only thing to check here that the authorities of the universities running distance education courses should sharply ensure that these institutions of higher learning do not get reduced to degree distributing institutes. So universities and distance institutions higher authorities keep ensure that only quality education should be provided through distance learning programmes.

Conclusion

Distance education is mode to provide an opportunity to those who left the study in between and want to be part of the regular system and want to be part of the learned society. Through its various professional, vocational and practical courses distance education is playing an important role in the overall development of the students. There is no doubt that distance learning is playing a vital role in imparting higher education through distance mode. But the need of the hour is that more emphasis must be given to distance learning so that the left out and those who enable to carry on their study through regular mode of education can get a chance of learning through distance mode of education and be a part of learned society.

References

Ahmed, A. (2010). *Importance of Distance Education in India.* Retrived October 2011 from http://toostep.com/insight/importance-of-distance-education-for-india

Bourne, J., Harris, D., & Mayadas, F. (2005). Online engineering education: learning anywhere anytime,*Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, *9*(1). www.slogan.org/publications/jaln/u9n1/v9nl_bourne.asp

Cavanaugh, J. K. (2005). Are online courses cannibalizing students from existing course. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Network*, 9(3) (2008), http://www.sloanc.org/publications/jaln/v9n3/v9n3_cavanaugh.asp

Kaul, S. (2006). *Higher Education In India: Seizing The Opportunity*, WORKING PAPER NO. 179, May. Retrieved from http://www.icrier.org/pdf/WP_179.pdf

Mehrotra, V. S., and Sacheti, A. K. (2005). *Integrating vocational education and training with open learning system: taking skills training to door step. ICDE* International Conference, New Delhi.

Pulist, S. K. (2001). Student Support Services in Correspondence/Distance Education in India: A Historical Perspective. *Journal of Distance Education*, New Delhi

Srivastava, M. (2002). A Comparative Study on Current Trends in Distance Education in Canada and India. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE* , 3 (4).

UNESCO. (2002a). *Open and Distance Learning: Trends Policy and Strategy Consideration.* Paris UNESCO. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/oo12/001284/128463e.pdt