

A SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDY OF OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIA

Niranjan Manna

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Swami Vivekananda Centre for Multidisciplinary Research in
Educational Studies, University of Calcutta recognized Research Centre under Ramakrishna
Mission Sikshanamandira, Belur Math, Howrah

Prof. (Dr.) Swami Tattwasarananda

Professor, Ramakrishna Mission Sikshanamandira, Belur Math, Howrah, West Bengal

ABSTRACT

Open and Distance Education (ODE) is a significant medium of knowledge development. India is known for its biggest and largest democracy worldwide. India has tried to develop its education system for all communities so that there is no hindrance and everybody can access it easily. The country is now coping with all the challenges of knowledge upgrading through ODE system. It was 1985 since the Government of India established IGNOU at a national level. Open and Distance Education has now attained to a pride of place in the world. This mode of learning in today's world is not only an alternative to formal education but also a cost and time-effective way of getting knowledge too. A large number of students can acquire degrees like diplomas, under and post-graduation in various fields of education. In this paper, researchers have analyzed how this open distance education has become an investable and important part of our life and how to develop open and distance education programmes in India.

Keywords: Open and Distance Education, IGNOU, Blended learning, Synchronous, and Asynchronous.

INTRODUCTION

The pioneering effort was made by UK to start this Open University; soon this became an important model of education in India (Sharples et al., 2016). After IGNOU, in 1985 India established 14 state open universities and one national institute of open schooling. The open distance education method was used to empower rural masses and functionaries (Ambe-Uva, 2007).

Today the whole world is stressed on the agenda of learning for development. Professor

Amartya Sen also expressed that development will be possible with a goal of education for all (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009). Expanding the opportunities for human learning is very much needed for a highly populated country like India. Only the conventional teaching-learning methods cannot come up with the scale of educational challenges.

The rapid development and diffusion of information and computer technology (ICT) provided advancement in this field. In reality, families with low socio-economic status are less likely to have financial resources and availability of time to provide their children full academic support (Livingstone, 2012). ODE has reduced that stress by providing opportunities to all to get an education anywhere anytime, even while they are working. Some customs and traditions of the country do not allow the female population to attend the regular classes. This injustice is feeling an educational gap that can be filled with distance mode of education.

Nowadays education is not only the mode of acquiring bookish knowledge. It is a life-long process of self-development. ODE provides the learner that opportunity.

Also, elderly people usually hesitate to study with the younger students in a formal model of education. The open distance learning (ODL) mode provides them the enormity; it reduces the mental pressure and biasness of religion, custom, age, etc.

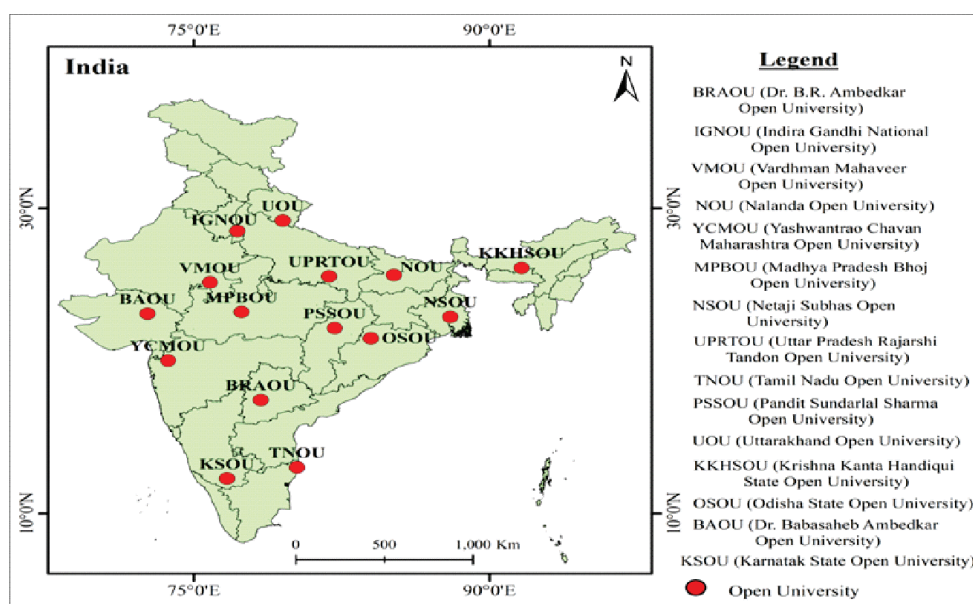
OVERVIEW OF ODE IN INDIA

In 1982 a committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Madhuri R. Shah, former University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairperson recommended that steps should be taken in establishing open universities at the national level. In 1982 the first Open University at the state level was developed on the recommendations of a committee, under the chairmanship of Prof. G Ram Reddy, (1991-1995) former UGC Chairman, and the legislature of Andhra Pradesh through the enactment of the “Andhra Pradesh Open University Act”. The university is now called Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU). Then 1998 eight more state open universities, namely Kota Open University (KOU), Rajasthan, in 1987; Nalanda Open University (NOU), Bihar, in 1987; Yashantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU), Maharashtra, in 1989; Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University (MPBOU), Madhya Pradesh, in 1991; Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU), Gujarat, in 1994; Karnataka State Open University (KSOU), Karnataka, in 1996; Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU), West Bengal, in 1997; and U.P. Rajarshi Tandon Open University (UPRTOU), Uttar Pradesh, in 1998 were established (DEB & M. B. Buch (Ed.), 1988-1992).

The Indira Gandhi National Open University is a pioneer in India. It has been ranked 17th among the Universities of the Indian subcontinent by web metrics ranking of world universities

(Jeyshankar, & Rao, 2010). Further, the Distance Education Council (DEC), a unit of the IGNOU, formulates guidelines and frames for state open universities (SOUs). In 1990, audio-video courses were first broadcasted by IGNOU via radio and television. Today, IGNOU is one of the most popular distance mode universities in India. It developed synchronous, asynchronous, and blended learning systems. Following that all the other state open universities also developed online modes and blended learning.

The State Open Universities in India (Made by researcher through Geographic Information System (GIS) Environment



Nowadays there are different types of online learning systems, synchronous (teachers and learners meet usually online), asynchronous (can study with recorded video), and also blended mode learning. Another type of distance education is Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), (Irvine, Code, & Richards, 2013). This format was introduced in 2006 and offers open online courses, available without any cost (Mester, 2016). It offers the distribution of knowledge freely through the internet where materials are being provided digitally, and students can complete course work at their own pace when they feel free. An educational opportunity by MOOC is also in demand for training and education (Alcorn, Christensen, & Kapur, 2015). Although in all these types of platforms, there are deadlines for submitting assignments. It seems that many ODE systems are simply expanding the existing traditional classroom system. Thus, virtual classrooms are reaching the marginalized sections of society very easily.

Total-2: Dual Mode/ Single Mode Open Universities in India from (1962 to 2020)

Year	Dual Mode (Universities or Institutes)	Single Mode OUs	Distance Education Institutions
1962	1	-	1
1975	22	-	22
1982	34	1	35
1985	38	2	40
1990	46	5	51
2000	70	9	79
2005	106	13	119
2010	242	14	256
2015	98	14	112
2020	110	15	126

Source: - Growth of ODL system-UGC (<https://www.ugc.ac.in/deb/pdf/growthDEB.pdf>), AISHE.

STATUS AND DEVELOPMENT OF OER AND MOOCS

Open Universities (OUs) have established the policies for systematically placing their content as Open Educational Resources (OERs). They have developed standards for ensuring the interoperability, accessibility, and reusability of Open Educational Resources through the use of LMS. OER through the public domain will certainly raise awareness and will make a qualitative difference in the provision of all kinds of education at all levels (Srivastava and Ramadevi, 2012, p. 9).

MOOCs are also required to make policies. They are developed with local needs and requirements keeping in mind. Prioritization has been given here in the use of the local and native languages with free access to all the resources. One can choose any course from a variety of courses offered at MOOC.

The incredible India campaign has come in handy by requiring the institution to identify

processes that can attract domestic and international customers. Also, local agencies and national agencies are established to identify such processes depending on the needs of the rural population or specific target groups residing in the hinterland. This is to meet the socio-economic needs of each Lord and different populations. These policies have provided a global perspective by emphasizing the actual need to focus the global market on certain areas. OERs and MOOCs are all about creating enormous educational opportunities that can meet the knowledge and technical needs of different communities, a group of learners who are unable to use more traditional teaching methods.

OER and MOOC allow professionals to use senior citizens and other underprivileged groups in home-based research for learning and training. This is a special educational tool that promises to qualitatively change our educational system. This distance learning is a complete readjustment of the learning process that can take the open universities in a new direction.

Education will be implemented with the successful use of OERs and MOOCs to seamlessly integrate the learning processes. It is necessary to develop a mechanism to authenticate students, based on what they have learned in OERs and MOOCs (Srivastava, 2014, p. 12).

NEW TECHNOLOGY AND ITS ADAPTATION

All institution units should provide services for three types of students-

- i) Digital system
- ii) Digital immigrants and
- iii) Digital illiteracy

The great challenge before them is to deliberately deal with all three groups of students. This digital literacy levels up very greatly. Nowadays, students should not only simply receive and memorize the information in the text, but need to be educated and trained with the application of more attractive new technologies.

Prensky (2001) correctly pointed out that today's students are no longer students in our existing education systems. They also believe in technology. According to Prensky, "They have been surrounded and used by computers, video games, digital music players, video cameras, mobile phones, the Internet, email, and instant messaging for their entire lives" (Prensky, 2001, p. 1).

Nowadays neither lectures nor texts alone are efficient to give students a real "feel" about the topic. Electronic content, delivered from a digital platform and supported by audio, video, and animation, gives students a multi-sensory perspective. They can experience the subject in a vivid

way, which is undoubtedly richer and more beneficial for teaching-learning. With the help of social media tools, teens and even children can immerse themselves in the digital environment at any time, any place. These new digital platforms allow a high degree of interaction and users can control the content. Learning is now more effective, collaborative, and informative. Also, with the digital delivery process, it takes some time to send and receive content.

Therefore, the learning packages provided by open universities should be both in online and offline mode for the advantage of learner. Open University needs to rethink and reshape the way it operates to provide contemporary students with a rich and successful learning experience. They need to create an enabling environment for the learner and adopt appropriate technologies to support it. To ensure success, Open University must make extensive and powerful use of Internet technology in addition to traditional technologies (print, face-to-face consultation, and audio, video, radio and CD, TV). Every Open University must have its unique website and provide dedicated LMS and LCMS for every course.

LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES FOR ALL TIME

Learner Support Services not only promises, but it also delivers high quality customer service on a scale and level, aiming for full customer satisfaction and a fairly high pass rate. All support services should actively encourage the use of technical solutions. These solutions need to be driven by the wide range of access. The support service network must be available to all types of learners registered in the process (rural and urban). There is a need for a mechanism for proficient student tracking and literacy improvement. The services should provide a network of several learner support centres, like regional centres and learning centres.

All open universities should develop a strong, skill-based option to provide learners with fast, accurate, and expeditious service. In addition, this technology-based education facilitates, two-way communication have facilitated the essential learner-teacher interaction to stay motivated, provide feedback, diagnose difficulties, and find solutions. However, spontaneous learners can maintain their commitment to education and ethics to improve their level of will and outcomes. Interactions between learners are equally important, and really successful teamwork skills are recognised as essential in functioning of today's business environment. The interaction of peer groups, both synchronous and asynchronous, encourages development. It also improves motivation. The activation platform for peer interaction is a very necessary feature and common operation. ICT can help open universities to provide this facility in most of the programs.

NEW-PATH OF E-GATEWAY

Open universities in which total work - teaching as well as learning is running through the ICT and also evaluations of science subjects are being taken through LMS, few courses are conducted through Web-TV, Web-Radio, MOOCs and also SWAYAM. Even the Ph.D. course work and distribution of certificates are done through the SWAYAM platform. The e-Gateway is currently equalised with the National Vision for Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) Education through ICT (MHRD 2009). India has vast resources for ODE. They are scattered now in the form of paper, books and journal published in magazines, minutes of meetings, newspapers or magazines, mimeo reports, manuals, etc. The idea behind e-Gateway is to consolidate, filter, organize, and systematically gather all information. It's about making it available for use and reuse by policymakers, administrators, researchers, teachers, and anyone else who wants to know about it. It also exists in India.

Today, all knowledge resources and skills based intellectual capital generated by the open Universities are available worldwide now. It is managed totally by the central government agency, state government agency and an independent autonomous body. That's why, it is the backbone of the country. This also provides an advanced network to reform India's Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system. It can also be connected to OERs around the world and provide all the intellectual resources available worldwide to the Indian population and vice versa. The building of an e-Gateway will help bring about major qualitative changes in the education system, which is one of the key social institutions. It is an area that develops an essential global perspective in the era of globalisation and internationalisation of higher education, and through this, teachers and learners will gain wider exposure.

DISCUSSION

We all know about the deadly views of COVID-19 quite well. Now, we are in a good position and imagine we will get back to our previous days. But in these lock-down days, ODE was like a boon. Through mobile and laptop-education, we overcame the academic challenges during the pandemic. However, the disparity in access to technology and the internet is always there. We can say, however, that we shared Ivan Illich's De-Schooling society during our pandemic days (Zaldvar, 2015). Ivan Illich argued that Deschooling society has a good education system, which has many purposes, like wanting to learn with access to resources at any time in their lives. We really need to make it possible for all who want to share knowledge to do so. Ivan Illich intends to promote flexible learning. He emphasised over any time with available resources for study. We

realised home-schooling with distance learning with the help of ICT and also the Government of India has to formulate such as NPE (National Policy on Education) where will be mention of making managements there all students from all over India can access the internet. The digital scope in distance education needs to be further enhanced. The government of India will provide the necessary electronic gadgets for these students. Thus, our country when is it possible to say students and teachers like online lesson? And open & distance education will be more increased on a global scale that one Illich is talking about in his De-schooling society.

Online Collaborative Learning (OCL) is composed of individuals with different levels of expertise. Interactions with more capable peers can facilitate individual cognitive growth. As an example, blog activities take individual cultural perspectives and make them a part of larger social interactions. Socio-cultural theory came from the work of the famous social cognitive psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who believed that family, parents, friends, and neighbours, as well as culture at large, were responsible for growing higher-order functions. According to social cognitive psychologist Vygotsky, "learning has its basis in interacting with other people." Once this has occurred, the information is then integrated on an individual level". As Lev Vygotsky said, the basic biological constraints will be developed with community interaction (Baerveldt, Cresswell, & Vygotsky, 2014). For example, the teacher can organise the class into groups where less skilled and highly skilled children will be paired up with each other for interactions.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The country is suffering from its long-term social problem of child labour. Open and ODE is a programme that can deliver literacy at home also. We need contributions from a number of different disciplines in different areas to ensure duality. ODE can be delivered with the help of local NGOs as well. Distance education programmes should be adopted with high competencies, local languages, and contextualisation, and with better ICT. Through the use of modern electronic technologies and to equip them with learning experiences, the students of the ODE system will be assumed to be prepared for the challenges of life in the same way as students of regular mode.

Disadvantages are also here, like isolating feelings and not getting immediate feedback. But these courses offer flexibility to accommodate both work and education. Against all backdrops, ODE provides the space for lifelong learning.

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