

# A Study on the Scope of Distance Education

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**Abstract – Nowadays, distance Learning system is becoming more popular in India and all around the world. Distance education is growing tremendously day by day. There is a huge scope of distance education in future. This mode of education attracts the people who are currently engaged in job and want to pursue higher education along with their career.**

**Formerly, Distance Education Council (DEC) coordinates the distance learning institutes and maintains the standard of distance learning. In December 2012, all the responsibilities regarding the regulation of distance education has been transferred to University Grants Commission (UGC).**

**Distance Education is inexpensive & provides opportunities to the students to enhance their qualifications. In the last couple decades, Distance Learning has evolved a lot. With the advancement of technology, distance learning is now also includes e-learning or online learning.**

**Keywords: Distance, Education, Online Learning**

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## INTRODUCTION

Due to growing demand of distance education, many educational institutions has started distance learning courses. Working class as well as millions of students opt this mode of education. In India, it is offered by many reputed institutions/Universities. Distance learning courses starting from certificate level to postgraduate level can be done by the students. Courses are offered in the field of technology, management, etc.

University Grants Commission (UGC) has set the target of enhancing the gross enrolment ratio in higher education from the present 11% to 21% by 2015. To achieve this difficult target Govt. of India is considering ODL system as alternative model with special emphasis from the 10th Plan. ODL system is the only system that can reach the door step of every section of the society irrespective of class, creed, gender, race and geographic location.

Since 1980, Open and Distance Learning educational methodology has been extensively used in India. Now it is evident that Open University Education in India is playing a vital role in respect of huge number of enrolled students in higher education from disadvantaged group of the society. However, different survey reports reveal that the number of students completing higher education with adequate quality is not satisfactory. To improve the quality Govt. has changed education policy time to

time. However, simultaneous improvement in quality and quantity will not be possible unless we consider the following real problems before implementing any education policy/ technique.

Distance learning degree, began to be offered in the world by the University of London in the year 1858. However, the Union Govt. of India had considered this methodology only after 126 years and established a Central Open University in the name of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the year of 1985. Within 28 years IGNOU has proved its potentiality, securing number one position in enrolment in the world. This university offers 310 degree programmes in arts, science, commerce, social sciences and information technology through different Schools in 36 countries around the world. Now this university is considered to be the world leader in distance education. This is one of the best achievements of the Indian ODL system.

The list of achievements of Indian ODL system has also been enriched by the contribution of Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) established in July 1989 in Nashik, Maharashtra. This university has been conferred „Award of Excellence for Institutional Achievement' for the year 2002 by Commonwealth of Learning (COL)" Canada. Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) founded in the year of 1997 in West Bengal, has been conferred Excellence in Distance Education Award (EDEA) from the

Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in the year 2006 for its brilliant academic performances.

## SCOPE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

The characteristic features which make the system so important are:

### 1) Flexibility:

The system is flexible in regard to modalities, timing, pace, place, age, admission criteria etc. Learners who are not able to continue their education through traditional system due to socio-economic or cultural reason are getting opportunities here.

Flexibility in age and qualification to enter in desired academic programs makes the system learners friendly. Here students are free to choose the subject of studies according their interest. Use of satellite, e-books/journals, audio-visual system in teaching learning process helps the learner to study their course materials in their own space and place. Again for better understanding, learners can attend counseling or personal contact program (PCP) in the nearby study centre during weekends/holidays.

### 2) Cost Effective:

Expenditure for higher education in the traditional system, both for public and private institutes, is very high. Education through distance mode is able to help the students by saving considerable amount of money by removing the cost of transportation and high-priced printed text books of high cost.

As the teaching learning process in this system adopts multimedia approach, students can avail digital study materials for a reduced price. Radio and television programmes also helps them to take classes at their own places. Apart from this, the system also permits learning while earning.

### 3) Learning satisfaction:

Unlike traditional system, students of ODL system attend online classes individually without any disturbance from others. When difficulties arise students review their lessons more than once and solve the problem. Students can also manipulate the coursework to fit their learning by focusing more on their weaker topics.

In this way students can build self-confidence and get higher satisfaction with their learning experiences. A survey report reveals that the technique is very much fruitful for the students enrolled for healthcare or mental health distance learning program.

### 4) Equal access:

In the traditional system, students of a certain age group are allowed. Again, for SC, ST and Physically Challenged students some reservation is there. It is very difficult for Trans-Genders to take education in the traditional system. Peoples who are in jail are unable to obtain any degrees through traditional system. Distance education may provide equal access irrespective of socioeconomic status, gender, race, age, or cost per student.

### 5) Dual degree:

While studying under traditional system a student can simultaneously enroll for a degree of the same level in Open University. In such case credit transfer will be given due consideration through a MOU between Open University and the respective University.

### 6) Migration Problem:

Students taking admission for Master's degree in Open University do not need any migration from previous university where he/she obtained Bachelor degree. However, when a student graduated from Open University takes admission for Master's degree in a traditional university he/she needs migration.

### 7) Assignment Marks:

Apart from contact session or PCP there is also a provision of assignment in ODL system. Students are asked to collect question papers from study centers or directly from homepage of the respective Open University. Afterwards they submit the answer scripts in a limited time frame. This is then evaluated by subject expert and given back to the students for checking their mistake. Writing of assignment is must for the students willing to sit in the fourth coming examination. 20% of assignment marks and 80% of the marks obtained in Term-End-Examination is added to make the total. This kind of marks distribution directly helps distance learners to secure pass marks.

## DISCUSSION

The process of obtaining knowledge without attending any regular classes, and that too, at a fixed location may be considered as one of the definitions of distance education. The unique character carried by this type of edification is that the educational opportunities needed by any individual, anytime, and anywhere are fulfilled with relative ease.

The education as well as the employment highway are getting congested, and as a result, the move for higher education is facing intensification. The reader too, must have observed that there is an

increasing number of youngsters, who seek employment prior to even getting their graduation degree. *The reason being a ready availability of jobs, specifically in the IT enabled services, customer care services, retail outlets, and even more. Since this generation can continue the education routine with the help of distance education, the demand for the same has considerably gone up.*

The diversification of an individual's learning profile can again be provided by distance learning. One of the negative aspects that surrounds the distance mode of education is that a constant fear exists regarding the validity of degrees like these, and the return of investment. But you can make a credibility check here. *The Distance Education Council acts as the regulatory body for the distance education providers. It must also be seen that the university that is offering a program of distance learning has been recognized by the University Grants Commission.* In other words, any professional program referring to a particular field must be recognized by the respective regulatory authority concerned.

Distance or Open Learning is a methodology of imparting education wherein the direct physical interface of teacher and student does not transpire at a predetermined time and place but is flexible as regards to time, place and method of admission without diluting the qualitative content. Various terminologies are used to describe this mode of education viz., correspondence, open and virtual. This procedure of dissemination of education is gaining popularity as it allows the unhindered continuation of the education process, skill updation and up-gradation of the working class, thereby imparting quality education to the needy residing at educationally disadvantageous locale.

Distance education in India requires US \$200 billion to upgrade capacity in traditional infrastructure if we are to meet demand in the conventional manner. That is mammoth tasks to accomplish for a sector keeping in view the government spend and it's galloping popularity as compared to formal education system.

Those who thought that distance education was passé are in for a surprise as close to one-fourth of the country's students are getting educated through the distance mode. "At present, close to approximately 10% of all enrollments are in the ODL system because of the reach of this mode and the opportunities it gives to those who are already employed and seek to enhance their qualifications," Prof V N Rajasekharan Pillai, former vice chancellor of IGNOU and member of the committee told FE. Interestingly, the contribution of ODL to gross enrolment ratio (GER) in higher education has risen to about 22%. Numbers favour distance education despite the general mind block against it something

that experts say is developing a skilled labour force in the country.

Distance teaching distinct is perhaps the fact that educational technology plays a major role in distance education. Education technology itself is a developing field which today includes audio-visual, aids, the computer, the mass media, etc. It is this fact (i.e. educational technology is a developing field) that helps make distance education dynamic and exciting. Along with distance education, one can also list various other nontraditional forms of education. These are extension programmes which make available the expertise of a university or of a college to new populations; adult education programmes which provide non-traditional learning to adults in selected areas, and extended campuses that provide lectures at various locations which are far removed from the official campus. Nevertheless, following Keegan, one can use "distance education" as a generic term. It would then include a range of teaching/learning strategies referred to as correspondence education, home study, independent study, external studies or teaching at a distance.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that the Distance Learning system of education is being more popular around the world and in India day by day. Central Open University of India IGNOU by name is securing top position enrolling 7000 students per year from 36 countries around the world. Use of updated communication technology is making the methodology more attractive to the learners. In spite of its remarkable success, one can still find some constraints in this learning system. To remove these constraints probable suggestions are given. It has been suggested that Government should think such policy which will be able to remove technophobia from all students in school level. Suggestions are also given to open at least one State Open University through which learners can study in their own language. To encourage economically poor students, suggestions are given to arrange for financial help in the form of stipend / fee concession or one time gift to the students performing good result in the 1st semester. Finally to develop personality of distance learners it has been suggested to incorporate programs like NSS, NCC etc.

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