



## ROLE OF OPEN AND DISTANCE, EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### *Abstract*

In the World today, Open and Distance Education (ODE) system has been gaining widespread popularity over the years. The explosive growth of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions and their scale of operations have been facilitated by continuous experiments and technological innovations in the field of ODE. In the light of these developments there is a need to assess the quality of the ODL in Globalization. Quality Assurance plays a pivotal role for highlighting the quality of both the learners as well as the teaching process in ODL. The improved access and availability of educational technology has enabled more students to participate in the learning process. New Educational Technologies have paved the way to a new learning techniques unconstrained by time and space. E-Learning, mobile technologies, communication and information access, and personal learning environments are becoming mainstream and, as a result the learning process is shifting away from teacher centered to the learner centered. Efficient delivery of such content may be carried out through Internet technology, Satellite or Microwave links as well as fiber optics. Open Learning has an important role to play by exploring new frontiers and developments in Open and Distance Education. The prominent users of this mode are worldwide in general and Asian region in particular. The growth of the ODE system in India and throughout the world has been phenomenal, particularly during the last two decades. Rapid changes have taken place in the practice of ODE, mainly driven by changes in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The revolution in ICT coupled with the social demand for education for all and the need for lifelong and continuing education have resulted in the new vistas of open learning for knowledge society.

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 by providing flexible, accessible, qualitative and cost-effective education to women so that they can contribute to a more sustainable and prosperous society

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**Keywords:** - Distance Education, Learner, Empowerment.



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**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.

**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 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 democratizing 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 programs. 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 programs 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. A notable feature of these programs 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, 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

**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 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.

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

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GENDER	INDIAN CATEGORY		
	URBAN	RURAL	TOTAL
MALE	90.21	81.01	85.61

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FEMAIL	80.23	59.31	69.77
TOTAL	85.22	70.16	77.69

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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 attracted policy makers towards non-conventional modes of education for providing non-residential studies like correspondence courses. Therefore, in order to ensure 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, 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 are 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. The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) is launching a dedicated satellite for educational purposes. 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 person always tries to add value to his competence in his bid to advance his 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 and Suggestions:** - Distance education provides an opportunity to those who left the study in between and want to be part of the regular system and the part of the learned society. Through this system professional, vocational and practical courses are provided at less cost as compared to regular mode. It provides more access to education in rural areas. Adult education system is greatly felicitated by this system. The productivity of students is augmented as they do job simultaneously with their studies. 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. The women candidates who come from the families where parents spend more on their sons' education than daughters and the families where strict pardah is observed are greatly benefitted from this system of learning.

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