

## Evolution of Distance Education in India: From Pre Mordial to Contemporary Epoch

Jaspreet Kaur<sup>1</sup>, Vandana Aggarwal<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> JRF, Research Scholar, Panjab University, Chandigarh.

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Government College of Education, Chandigarh

### Abstract

The present paper focuses on the historical development of distance education in India. It begins with the antiquity of education from symbolic to the advent of scripts. It depicts the gradual progress in the existing education system along with the altering phases leading to emergence of novice and varying conditions of diversified learners which eventually paved for the emanation of distance education. In India, its beginning was conceived as a concept at primary level in schools but later on it was adapted for to the tertiary level also. Consequently, several courses and departments of distance education started in different universities of India .The paper<sup>1</sup> describes the chronological expansion of distance education, emphasizing on the present status particularly in India.

**Keywords:** Antiquity, Distance Education, Phases, Chronology, Status.

### Introduction

The historical roots of Education system of India can be traced back to the Indus valley civilization period wherein it was deciphered in the form of signs and symbols to the advent of scripts of Brahmi and Kharosthi further advancing to the Aryan Age. Henceforth, it advanced and became more formal. With the new emerging educational needs of modern learners, many alternate systems such as traditional education system (imparted in schools and colleges), distance education, virtual education (E-learning) and many came into existence.

The four major epochs in which education system was classified: the foremost being the ancient epoch; education was primarily based upon religion and caste being rigid and non versatile proceeding to the medieval epoch, it broadened a bit in scope but the base remained the same and then followed by the colonial period which was open ended and secular in nature but that too only for a privileged few; the post independence epoch where education was considered as a key for human development and progression. This led to formulation of policies, establishment of a number of schools along with higher educational institutions further breeding the ground for specialized and technical institutions. But despite such progression, a large proportion of population was devoid of education due to plethora of reasons may it be social, economic, cultural, familial etc.

Aftermath of a lot of brainstorming and viable discussions gradually to fulfil the needs of these distressed students; distance education as a concept emerged. This system especially in India emerged as the most versatile and utilitarian system that promised to provide a new orientation perspective to the existing educational system in India. In comparison to India, distance education in developed part of the world, evolved much earlier for instance distance education in England which was started by Issac Pitman in the 1840s developed into a full time programme in



the University of London by 1858. Later, countries like Japan, Germany, also initiated distance education in United States (Interactive Media Lab, University of Florida).

### Meaning and Concept

Distance Education (DE) is a canopy elucidating teacher and learners dissociation which is primarily dependent upon the space and time wherein there is no conventional classroom. The system employs virtual means wherein knowledge to the learner is disseminated with the help of different mediums such as print, audio, visual, etc (UGC, n.d., p. 1).

Bates (2005) describes “distance education as less a philosophy and more a method of education. Students can study in their own time, at the place of their choice (home, work or learning centre), and without face-to-face contact with a teacher. Technology is a critical element of distance education.”

The most comprehensive explanation of the term done by Keegan (1986) (as cited in George, 2014, pp.24-25) encompassed all the essential elements and was concluded into seven chief features which depict that distance education as a mode of education was characterised by segregation of teacher and student, the effect of an education organization, utilization of technical media, the facility of dialogue, individualized learning, a technical form of education and the privatization of learning.

Distance education is a contemporary terminology, but the notion is fairly as old as it was 150 years ago. It was formally recognised in 1982 when the forty year old International Council for Correspondence Education (ICCE) renamed it to the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE). This highlighted the fact that distance education was no longer a term in the dictionary or thematic concept but was practically infused in the teaching- learning process. Distance education stands synonyms with several similar terminologies such as distance learning, open education, E- learning, correspondence studies, etc. so it culminates the entire historical progress concerning the above terminology.

### Evolution of Distance Education in India

According to Kumar (2015) distance education in India has its age old roots. It was started by ‘Ekalavya’ when he studied the art of archery from Guru Dronachariya at a distance in Mahabharata Era’ (Kumar, 2015, p. 1).

The evolution initiated with the thought that if a student cannot go to the school then the school reaches the student itself which emancipates the conceptual development of distance education. Its evolution is traced from school level to intermediate and then onto tertiary level.

#### School Level

- It started in India through the use of radio in schools from the primordial fifties as included in the existed curriculum. It was originally employed as educational medium on January, 1929 in Bombay on a unique way to be followed at Madras next year in April, where transmission was initiated with a view to educate the unprivileged pupil. In November, 1937 All India Radio, Calcutta took up educational broadcast in a conventionally organized way on the requests from University of Calcutta and Education Department of Bengal Government. Perceiving the desired outcome then Controller of Broadcasting issued a directive to follow it on other stations from October, 1938(Das, n.d., p.3).
- The application and importance of television for fulfilling of instructional objectives can be envisioned since 1959 till date (Vyas & Sharma, 2002, p. 2).



- The most crucial advancement in this area particularly was the introduction of the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) and it assisted in making available exclusively pre recorded television programmes to several villages in six states. These were mainly concerned with primary education along with direct instruction by teachers (TET MHRD, n.d. p. 7).
- Thereafter INSAT programme came into existence on which educational programmes were available for primary school children and area specific programmes for rural people in selected areas or the states (Bhartiya and Borah, 2017, p. 371).
- Correspondence courses at secondary level were initiated in 1965. These came into existence only after the recommendation of the Central Advisory Board of Education accompanied by the intent of enhancing the quality of education exclusively of the learners studying in private institutions (Murthy and Mathur, 2008, p. 176).

### Intermediate Level

- Board of Secondary Education in the state of Madhya Pradesh was the pioneer of distance programmes in 1965 which is nowadays known by M.P. Open School. The Patrachar Vidyalaya, Delhi was set up in 1968 simultaneously the Boards of Secondary Education of states like Rajasthan, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh started providing distance programmes starting from classes VIII extending till class XII (TE, MHRD, n.d., p.7).
- The pioneer institute was started in New Delhi in 1979 so as to impart correspondence curriculum to facilitate the student who leave the school in the midway for Class X lessons. This institution in the year 1988 began providing modules for Class XII students (Murthy and Mathur, 2008, p. 177).
- This school advanced in the year 1989 and was identified as National Open School (NOS), a self governing body belonging to the Central Government fulfilling the purpose of imparting apt, systematic and progressive instruction to the interested learners as a substitute to the conventional education (NIOS Blog, 2012).
- The states like Punjab, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal have off lately set up the Open Schools. Along with this there are 8 states namely Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Assam, Chattisgarh, Uttranchal and Bihar who are in the process of establishing State Open Schools (NIOS SOS, 2012). This gradual development is depicted in the further table,

State Open Schools (SOS)			
State	SOS Status	Year of Opening	Courses Offered
Andhra Pradesh	Autonomous Registered Society	1991	Open Basic Education(OBE), Secondary
Delhi	Autonomous Registered Society	2005	-
Haryana	Integral Part of the State Board of School Education	1994	Secondary, Sr. Secondary
Jammu & Kashmir	Private Trust as per Government Order (JSS Mahavidyapeetha, Mysore from 2001)	2001	-



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Karnataka	Autonomous Registered Society	1996	Secondary
Kerala	A wing of the State Council of Educational Research and Training(SCERT), Kerala	1999	Secondary
Madhya Pradesh	Registered Society	1996	Open Basic Education(OBE), Secondary, Sr. Secondary, Vocational
Punjab	SOS is a branch of Punjab School Education Board	1991	Secondary, Sr. Secondary
Rajasthan	Autonomous Registered Society	1999	Secondary
Tamil Nadu	Integral part of DTERT	1982	-
West Bengal	A wing of the School Education Department A Statutory Organization (from 2001)	1997	Open Basic Education(OBE), Secondary, Sr. Secondary

(NIOS SOS, 2012)

Along with the other developments also Distance Education at intermediate level is with the efforts of the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) provides prospects to interested learners by offering various courses of study through open and distance learning (ODL) mode. Open Basic Education (OBE) Programme for an intermediate student provides courses like Secondary Education Course, Senior Secondary Education Course, Vocational Education Courses/Programmes and Life Enrichment Programmes (NIOS Profile, 2012).

### Tertiary Level

With the expansion in the base of elementary, secondary and senior secondary levels the demand of further in higher education also escalated five decades ago then the policy-makers understood the importance of Distance Education. With the gradual development and progress, distance programmes were started at tertiary levels i.e. a number of courses were started at several universities keeping in mind the aspect of diversity of the learners (UGC DEB, n.d., p.1). So the development can be seen alongside in different stages:

#### Correspondence Education Period (1962-1982)

- Rabindranath Tagore also employed distance education as a tool continuing further education of the people through Loka Siksha Sambad i.e. Council of people education started at Viswa Bharati in 1937 (Roy, 2105, p.503).
- The University Grants Commission (UGC) proposed in its report for 1956-1960 that suggestions for evening colleges, correspondence courses and award of external degrees should be reflected upon. The Planning Commission took notice of this requirement and in its Third Five Year Plan cited the need for the introduction of correspondence education in India (DE, n.d., p.1).
- The Central Advisory Board on Education taking into account the suggestions made by planning commission recommended the establishing of an Expert Committee under the chairmanship of Dr. D.S. Kothari constituted in the year 1961. The Chairman of UGC



then considered the proposal of initiating correspondence courses. The Expert Committee approved the institution of correspondence courses envisioning the adjustability, economic feasibility and versatility in methods of imparting education (Ramaiah as cited in Jayalakshmi, 2016, p.13).

- To begin with, Distance Education in India commenced with open learning in the year 1962, in lieu of increasing requirement of instructions at the college and university level which were devoid in the conventional system. Delhi University in 1962 set up a School of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education (Rathore, as cited in Jayalakshmi, 2016, p.14).
- The Education Commission (1964-66) proposed the development of distance learning for several reasons consequently the University Grants Commission (UGC) devised certain instructions for starting open learning programmes in the universities of India. In the late sixties three more Institutes of Correspondence Studies were established. In the seventies more than twenty one universities initiated correspondence programmes during the seventies and in the early eighties additionally seven universities started institutes of correspondences studies (Suri, 2013, p.3).
- In 1968, distance education department was set up Punjabi University, Patiala and in 1988, correspondence course in B.Ed too was initiated (Nistha, Abrahan and Bijesh, 2016).

India also reviewed the prospect of setting up an open university in the early seventies. Consequently in the mid seventies the approval of admission guidelines alongwith necessary qualifications in the for undergraduate and post- graduate courses in distance education universities were made flexible specifically in University of Mysore and Andhra University (TET, MHRD, n.d., p. 9).

- In the year 1971 Directorate of Correspondence Courses was established at Panjab University, Chandigarh (USOL, Website).
- In the year 1971 itself Shimla University started the Correspondence Courses similar to the former one (ICDEOL, Website).
- School of Distance Education started in Andhra University in the year 1972 (SDE, Andhra University, Website).
- Distance education both at Jammu University and Kashmir University started off in the year 1976 (Directorate of Distance Education (University of Jammu), DDEKU, Website).
- Andhra Pradesh government predominated by establishing its Open University which in the year 1982 came to be known as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University situated presently in Hyderabad (Bhatnagar, as cited in Jayalakshmi, 2016, p. 14).

Presently, more than 50 universities are providing correspondence education in India accomplishing as one of the greatest dual mode systems in the world (Roy, 2015, p. 503).

#### **Open Education Period (1982-onward)**

- Tamil Nadu Open School established to cater the needs of needs of disadvantaged children students on formal basis in 1983(as cited in Sujatha, 2002, p.46).
- Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was set up by the government of India through an Act of Parliament in the year 1985. It was considered as the leading institution responsible for collaborating distance education establishments, regulating and integrating their activities, entailing the open universities all over India along with functioning as University for distance learning courses. The creation of IGNOU at New



Delhi was the most significant development in the field of distance education particularly in India (Suri, 2013, p.3).

- It contributed to the progress of open learning system thus establishing three state open universities in the eighties i.e. Nalanda Open University, Patna (Bihar) in 1987, Kota Open University, Kota (Rajasthan) in 1988 and Yashwant Rao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Nasik (Maharashtra) in 1989. States like Madhya Pradesh (1991) and Karnataka (1996) have also set up Open Universities (Rajagopalan, 2007, p.1).

IGNOU became an exclusive institution as it was assigned a dual role of functioning like an Open University by providing programmes of education and training through distance mode along with persuading and collaborating the Open and Distance Education system in the country and setting examples in such systems. To further persuade this order the Distance Education Council (DEC) was initiated by IGNOU in 1991 as a statutory mechanism under IGNOU Act which became functional in February 1992. According to the order of the DEC and the NPE 1986, reviewed in 1992, the DEC started communicating with the State Governments for setting up the SOUs in the respective states. Thus, with DEC along with several State governments set up Open Universities. As highlighted in the NPE of 1986 and subsequently Programme of Action in 1992, the open universities embraced a radically diverse approach to reach the unprivileged by using varied modes of communication for delivering the content of media (HD, n.d., p.3).

#### Present Status

CBSE and Ministry of Human Resource Development, jointly in 1989, initiated a self governing body i.e. the National Open School which offering education upto HSC level i.e. class 12<sup>th</sup> and many other vocational courses for adults too (NIOS, 2012).

At present there are 41 institutes of correspondence/distance education in India joined to the formal universities including 4 deemed universities. The total enrolment in these institutes was 481,305 which are approx. 84% of the enrolment of 572,533 in distance education at the tertiary level in the country. Ten correspondence institutes have an individual registration of more than 10,000 each. The course wise distribution of students in correspondence education depict that 68% are at undergraduate level, 24% are at post-graduate level and 8% are in Diploma/Certificate courses. Currently there are 6 open universities including IGNOU. Karnataka and Gujarat are in the process of setting up Open Universities. These universities offer certificate, diploma, graduate degree and post-graduate degree programmes of regular and non-formal types. IGNOU and the state open universities are self maintaining institutions which have fabricated a variety of informal courses keeping in view of the perceived employability of the students. Depending on the dispositions and needs of courses, these universities have flexible requirements associated to age, qualifications etc. These universities also provide adaptability in the synthesis of courses, duration of study collection of credits, etc. They employ contemporary communication equipments i.e. radio, TV, audio and video cassettes to supplement print material. Chances for dialogues between learner and teacher are being made available at the study centres during weekends and through personal contact programmes. IGNOU has set up established 16 Regional Centres and 220 Study Centres in all States and Union Territories of India (TET, MHRD, n.d., pp. 12, 13 & 26).

Recently IGNOU presently fulfils the educational choices of approximately 3 million students in India and abroad through 21 Schools of Studies, a network of 67 regional centres, about 2,667 learner support centres and 29 overseas partnership institutions. The University provides nearly 228 certificate, diploma, degree and doctoral courses, with existing staff of nearly 810 faculty members and 574 academic personnel at the headquarters and regional centres



and about 33,212 academic counsellors from already established institutions of higher learning, professional institutions, and industry, etc (IGNOU, Profile, 2014).

The Distance Education Council (DEC) made efforts for promotion, collaboration and maintenance of standards of distance education system in India. DEC has developed guidelines for regulating the setting up and functioning of these institutions in India (HD, n.d., p.2).

In August 2010, the Ministry of Human Resource Development established a Committee under the Chairmanship of Prof. Madhava Menon in lieu of regulation of patterns of education instructed through distance mode. In view of the approval of the Report submitted by the Committee by MHRD and its recommendations for setting up of a novice regulatory body for this system i.e. the Distance Education Council of India (DECI) (HD, n.d., p.3).

In 2012, India had 1 National Open University, 14 State Open Universities, about 180 Correspondence Course Institutes / Directorates of Distance Education connected to Conventional Universities. Other than this, there are additional 50 government/private institutes operated by private enterprises providing ODL programmes (HD, n.d., p.4)

The recent development is that apart from Open Universities trend of Dual mode Universities is also catching upon. Conventional Universities provide distance learning program by creating Distance Education Institutions (DEI) and Correspondence Courses Institutes (CCIs) along with the conventional campus based program called Dual Universities. The leading ones include Delhi University (1962), Mumbai University, Annamalai University, Acharya Nagarjuna University etc (Kundu, 2014, p.4).

As per the All India Survey on Higher Education (2015-16), In addition to 1 Central Open University, 13 State Open Universities and 1 State Private Open University, there are 118 Dual mode Universities, which offer education through distance mode also. Out of 118 Dual mode Universities, 19 are located in Tamil Nadu. In Jharkhand, neither there is any Open University nor any Dual Mode University (AISHE, Report, 2015-2016, p. iv). As depicted in the table,

State-wise Dual Mode Universities (No. in each State)	
Tamil Nadu	19
Andhra Pradesh	9
Rajasthan, Telangana	8
Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh	7
Karnataka, Maharashtra, West Bengal	6
Delhi	5
Assam , Bihar, Haryana, Kerala	4
Panjab, Uttrakhand	3
Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Odisha	2



Chhatisgarh, Chandigarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Puducherry, Sikkim, Tripura	1
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(All India Survey on Higher Education, 2015-2016, p.5)

Another crucial development in higher education is the establishment of Mixed Mode Universities. As their number is defined still they exist and provide education with plethora of methods. The most prominent ones include Amity University in Noida and Lovely Professional University (LPU) in Jalandhar (Kundu, 2014, p.4).

### Conclusion

After partition education system in India witnessed a series of reforms in order to make education accessible to people of all strata's of the society. Despite the concerted efforts by the government and private agencies the goal of educational masses in a formal set up could not be attained. The major factor remained ever growing population and related socio – cultural problems like poverty, gender disparity, lack of awareness, etc. Moreover, due remote geographical locations, many people remained deprived of education due to lack of schools and other educational facilities. This led to the emergence of need to find some alternative ways of providing education. Therefore, to meet the educational needs and expectations of the common people distance education gained momentum in the form of open schools at secondary level, higher secondary and senior secondary levels. This further stimulated distance education at tertiary level i.e. into colleges and universities in the form of correspondence courses, external and private appearances, open and distance learning, etc. Several states simultaneously contributed to the growth of distance education institutes with the establishment of separate correspondence departments, open universities and diplomas, etc. Presently, distance education in India is developing into a dual as well as mix mode approach.

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