A study of the Development of the State Open Universities in India

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a vast country like India with a large reservoir of talent, facilities for higher education for all aspirants do not exist in the formal conventional university system. The corollary is that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions must take up the challenge of providing opportunities to the bulk of the aspiring learners. ODL has now come to be recognized as a parallel mode in the field of higher education, rightly so because of its tremendous advantages, thanks to the induction of technology.

The State Open Universities in India reveal a picture of diversified growth. Being the first state O.U., the Andhra Pradesh O.U. (now called Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University or BRAOU) established in 1982 started off well with many programmes, and dynamic leadership during the first few years. Unfortunately, however, a situation of complacency and bureaucratic control has dominated the scene in the recent past.

In the years 1987 to 1998, eight state O.U.s were established in as many states, namely Bihar (1987), Rajasthan (1987), Maharashtra (1989), Madhya Pradesh (1991), Gujarat (1994), Karnataka (1996), W.Bengal (1997), and Uttar Pradesh (1998). Tamil Nadu (2002), Chhattisgarh (2004), Uttarakhand, earlier called Uttaranchal (2005), and Assam (2006) set up OUs after the turn of this century.

Several minor variations are seen among the Indian State OUs in matters like disciplines of study and delivery of courses, but along with this aspect, almost all the State OUs offer the regular degree (B.A./B.Com./B.Sc.) and P.G. (M.A/M.Com/M.Sc) courses. The reason seems to be the large number of youth aspiring to get a degree. To a certain extent, there is also duplication in course offerings. Some programmes like M.B.A. are highly popular.

Although the Indian State OUs have managed to register huge enrolment figures over the last two decades, a close look at the scene makes one feel that a lot more is to be done to improve the quality and tone up student services. A few of the state OUs, however, have done well in respect, of both courses and social reach by way of equity and access. This has much to do with political and institutional leadership also.

Almost all state OUs in India claim that they provide a better quality alternative to the programmes and courses offered by the correspondence course institutes run by conventional universities. Here also, a certain amount of divergence is seen between the OUs.

The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi, provides a good example of a national OU extending all possible aid to state OUs in matters pertaining to the academic and other crucial areas. The Distance Education Council (DEC) as a unit of IGNOU has formulated clear guidelines for encouraging and assisting state OUs in matters of training and

funding. But the dominant feeling among state OUs is that DEC must be made an autonomous body in order to fulfil its objective more effectively.

INTRODUCTION

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has now attained a pride of place in the world. The burgeoning population with millions of eager seekers of Knowledge has made it imperative. Indeed, this mode of learning is today accepted not only as an alternative to formal education but also as an efficient, cost effective process enabling huge student numbers to acquire degrees, diplomas and certificates in several areas of knowledge. For long, Distance Education (DE) was regarded as a poor cousin of the school and university system and the products from this stream were considered as "second class citizens" in the realm of academia and society at large. The pioneering and excellent efforts by the U.K. Open University have largely served to neutralize this concept and accord a respectable status to ODL. The model of this university in fact became the basis for the establishment and administration of many open universities in different parts of the world including India.

With the advent of Information Technology (IT) and the consequent networking of even remote regions on this planet, young and old learners everywhere have ample opportunities to equip themselves with knowledge and skills. There is, of course, the essential condition for educational institutions at every level to create the infrastructure. It is here that wide variations are found in a country like India where a large talent pool exists without the requisite science and technology (S&T) support in many parts of the country. Even in the places where a modicum of such S&T support is available, the mindset of the staff in charge unfortunately is not tuned towards taking things forward. This is not to say that these variations depict a bleak picture. Far from it. There are bright patches as well.

EVOLUTION OF THE STATE OUs IN INDIA

The setting up of the Andhra Pradesh Open University (now called Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University or BRAOU) in 1982 marked a milestone in the annals of ODL in India. Remarkable progress in the development of the university could be noted in the first decade and a half. This covered areas like staff recruitment and training, networking and partnerships through the use of technology, science education and induction of innovative practices. Also, the production of audio and video lessons received a stimulus. Yet, the deficiencies due to lack of physical facilities in study centers came in the way of larger number of students making use of the material. On the whole, it can be said that the dynamic leadership during the early years paved the way for further development. The establishment of Prof.G.Ram Reddy Academy of Distance Education (GRADE) served to stimulate research in ODL. It is unfortunate, however, that in the last few years, a situation of complacency has taken hold of the people in charge of the OU and bureaucratic control dominates. The campus and building along with infrastructure facilities are, however, quite impressive but red tapism is a worrying factor.

What keeps the BRAOU going is the dedicated team of competent academics. Celebrating its Silver Jubilee, BRAOU successfully organized recently an International Conference on Open and Distance Education.

The years 1987 to 1998 witnessed the creation of eight state Open Universities, namely Bihar (1987), Rajasthan (1987), Maharashtra (1989), Madhya Pradesh (1991), Gujarat (1994), Karnataka (1996), W.Bengal (1997), and Uttar Pradesh (1998). Tamil Nadu came up with its own OU in 2002 but good design of special programmes like livelihood education is already on. Of the nine SOUs mentioned above, YCMOU in Maharashtra and NSOU in West Bengal have registered remarkable progress, the former going far in giving a thrust to agriculture education and practices. The others reveal several minor variations in matters of disciplines of study and

delivery of courses. Except for the initial euphoria at the time of inauguration, nothing much by way of sustaining programmes seems to be in evidence in the case of a few SOUs.

On the national scene, one should mention the efforts that are being made to integrate the several components of learning with the help of information technology. Curriculum design, evaluation of assignments from the learners, student support services, and examination schedule are all being brought into this web by dedicated personnel. But alas, these efforts seem to be somewhat thwarted by lack of support or apathy from the levels above. Among the multitude of reasons for this sad state of affairs must be listed interpersonal relations, jealousy and beaurocratic ineptitude. All over the world, people are familiar with red tapism in the government offices and machinery. But in India, this negative trait seems to have made heavy inroads in the university and academic circles. This seems to be especially relevant in the case of India's state open universities where the academic leaders are expected to give a thrust to development of the learning system and make it vibrant and exciting. A crucial reason for the variability in the development of the State Open Universities in the country may be taken as this one.

The following aspects pertain to what has been stated in the preceding paragraph: 1. Despatch of printed material and information about broadcast of lessons to the students getting delayed and not going according to schedule. 2. Grievances and complaints from the students not being attended to in an earnest spirit but in a lackadaisical fashion. 3. Examinations not being held strictly according to the regimen laid down earlier. 4. Contact classes and sessions not being organized in a rational and sympathetic manner.

These are only a few of the areas where a lot of improvement is called for. No doubt, dealing with large numbers of students in a variety of disciplines is difficult but this is what the Open Universities are supposed to do efficiently and earnestly so that society ultimately gets the benefit. The learners can not be taken for granted and their innate desire to acquire knowledge and skills must be respected. Whether all the existing Open Universities in India manage to accomplish the avowed objective of their establishment is unfortunately open to question. Granting that difficult barriers exist one has a feeling that the performance in many cases could have been better.

The National Education Policy (NEP-1986) and the subsequent Programme of Action (POA) can be considered as two outstanding documents in the field of education. They covered almost all vital segments relating to education, science and technology, training of manpower etc. In fact, the NEP urged that every State in India must set up an Open University in order to provide access to the ever increasing numbers of aspirants for higher education. But what is the situation today? Only 13 States out of 29 have established Open Universities, there of them only recently. (out of the three, Uttranchal, now called Uttarakhand and Chhatisgarh were carved out of then existing larger States, thanks to political compulsions.) and Assam became a late entrant.

In spite of the push from above, several states have not set up Open Universities as envisaged in the NEP. This provides a clue to the functioning of the education system as a whole. The commitment from the political powers that be is not much in evidence in spite of the rhetoric flowing from the platforms.

Even where the Open Universities were set up, it looks as if there were compelling extraneous reasons for the act on the part of state governments. This bring us down to the question of institutional leadership. Here, the appointment of vice chancellors assumes a vital role. The V.C. as a leader must be a person of impeccable integrity and imbued with a spirit of total dedication to the cause of open and distance learning. Only then, reasonable progress in the

path of development of ODL can be made. Much depends on the leadership from above and the Vice Chancellor must be a person owing allegiance to the cause of scholarship and learning, not to any political power. Otherwise, how can one expect the Open University to become "a learning community based on reflective practice"? In the same breath, how can one expect the academic and non-academic staff to have "total commitment to institutional vision and plan"? Or for that matter, will it be possible to recruit and nurture "academic faculty with high academic integrity and a commitment to research"?.

With sixteen recognized regional languages and over 1600 dialects and spoken languages, India faces formidable challenges in making higher education available to the lower down strata of society. Really good teaching material, if it undergoes transcreation from one language to another, can reach larger numbers of learners. In a way this also may be taken as a creative activity, almost like fresh writing on the subject. In the Open University system, the content creator, editor and media producer play a crucial role in transforming even a drab subject into an exciting one, able to rivet the attention of the learner. Course writing and development is as much valuable as scripting for audio-video programmes. There are other aspects requiring attention from the faculty, administrative staff and technical personnel engaged in the production of material. Indeed, in the open university system, the teachers are willy nilly made to perform several roles. The academic faculty posted to Open University from the traditional or conventional institutions has to adjust to this regimen so that the Open University system works fairly smoothly. It is here that the importance of periodical training of staff and refresher programmes for them gains in value.

Experts and keen observers of the higher education scene have been quick to draw comparisons between the distance teaching institutions like open universities and their conventional or traditional counterparts. The Open University system especially is forced to make course delivery through different channels like audio, video and now internet in contrast to the face-to-face teaching-learning process common in the traditional university. In the latter, eminent and gifted teachers have succeeded in sparking the interest of generations of students whereas in the open university system what counts is the course material and packages with intrinsically high academic merit. Thus, there is a vital need to expose the faculty to modern developments in the design and preparation of courses. The State Open Universities in India do not present a uniformly satisfactory picture when it comes to this area also.

Some peculiar features pertaining to the state open universities in India deserve to be noted. These include: 1. these higher education institutions trying to duplicate courses offered by traditional universities (B.A., B.Sc., B.Com etc in the undergraduate level and M.A., M.Com etc. at the postgraduate level) 2. hesitancy to experiment with latest technological tools for the broadcasting of courses and lessons. 3. funding from government sources tapering off and greater dependence of open universities on resources generated by themselves. 4. larger drop-out rates despite a reasonably long time frame. It has to be noted that the Indian government had made known its desire to cut down expenditure on higher education stating that universalisation of primary / elementary education is far more important for a developing country.

Here again, bright patches emerge in the case of open universities with good leadership at the top and a congenial environment for work. Vice chancellors with vision and belief in long range planning have brought about certain desirable changes. In such institutions, not only vocational and job oriented programmes but region-specific programmes are given prime place. For instance, courses relating to agriculture or some specific manufacturing industry; these are able to attract students in large numbers. What strikes one as very significant is the fact that a band of researchers instinctively follow the leader in making the academic enterprise purposeful.

Again, these employees of the open universities do not have any rigid staff roles or administrative or managerial functions. They find joy in doing multiple tasks which ultimately enhance the utility of the course offering. This aspect deserves to be underlined on account of the dearth of trained personnel; it is again crucial in the initial years of the functioning of the open universities. While much talk goes on about the spread of education in remote regions of the country, not all teachers in India are comfortable with modern technologies, so essential to achieve the goal.

The key to solving this problem lies in training and development of the staff, full time as well as part time. An avid desire on the part of open universities to enroll more and more students in a wide variety of courses has inevitably led to a situation of undue pressure on the system. The result is that it is difficult for the administration to spare the staff for training programmes and thus a vicious circle gets created. Ultimately, it all adversely influences the quality and efficiency of the work thereby impinging on the satisfaction of students. This impasse needs to be overcome.

In the Indian scenario, a wing of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), namely Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE) has been engaged in exposing the faculty and staff of Open Distance Learning (ODL) to modern practices of transmission of knowledge. In fact, STRIDE originated as the Division of Distance Education in 1985 to meet the training needs of various functionaries of IGNOU. This was upgraded into STRIDE, a training institute for distance education in South Asian region in 1993, thanks to the proposal by COL, Asian Development Bank and the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development. In addition to training the staff of IGNOU and the India's state open universities, STRIDE has been serving the needs of the Asian, African and the Caribbean Countries.

Two academic programmes developed by STRIDE must be mentioned here. (1) Post Graduate Diploma in Distance Education and (2) Master of Arts in Distance Education. The former of one year duration aims at a) promoting the concept and utility of distance education in India in particular and the developing world in general, b) developing the human resources for the existing open universities and DE institutions, and those which may come up in the near future. The latter, one year Master's programme, is designed to develop human resources in various specialized areas of distance education. In addition to these, STRIDE conducts short term training programmes covering academic, technical / professional, and non-academic staff of IGNOU, state open universities, correspondence course institutes etc.

While the work undertaken by STRIDE is commendable the question arises ; how far has it been able to influence the country's state open universities in the matter of training? The number is quite small, only ten till recently with three open universities coming up (Uttaranchal, Chhattisgarh, and Assam) very recently. The three fledgling OUs certainly need a lot of help in getting established as functioning organizations. Whether the other ten state OUs have taken full advantage of the facilities available in STRIDE is open to question. This again brings us to the question raised earlier – whether the state OUs are able to spare the staff (already meager in number) for training programmes on account of the pressure of work in their own campuses.

IGNOU AND ITS ROLE IN THE CONTEXT OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN INDIA

The role of the national open university in India, IGNOU in the development of State OUs in the country is significant and provides much of the context for the development of state OUs. With its considerable resources, both manpower and physical, IGNOU from its vantage position in the capital of the country has been providing a lot of academic support to the State OUs.

Indeed, IGNOU may be considered as a role model to the others in the Indian context. Administering 59 Regional Centres and over 1400 study centers in different parts of the vast country is not an easy task. And look at the student enrolment – in 2005-2006, it rose to 429,000 and students on rolls (cumulative) comes to 14,33,000. The academic counselors total upto 48,000 while the teachers / academics are 325 in number. IGNOU is indeed a mega-university. Quite a large number of audio and video lessons were produced in the past few years. The 125 academic programmes (and 1000 courses) cover a wide gamut of disciplines – Computers, Science and Technology, Engineering, Management, Health Sciences, Agriculture, Social Sciences etc. Thus, IGNOU with its expertise and resources has been in a position to provide guidance to the State OUs. Also, the Distance Education Council (DEC) in IGNOU is extending its help by giving funds to the state OUs. The learners who took IGNOU courses and successfully completed the programmes have benefited both professionally and socially, a study points out. It comes to the conclusion that the students are willing to invest in higher education and are devoted to their studies.

IGNOU has been helping the state OUs in other ways also. For instance, the Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE) under the aegis of IGNOU organizes training programmes for the staff of state OUs. The Electronic Media Production Centre (EMPC) is a state-of-the art facility which produces good video and audio programmes in different disciplines and makes them available to the state OUs. The Distance Education Council (DEC) is part of IGNOU's organizational structure and provides research grants to state OUs. It has also taken effective steps for promoting quality research in open and distance learning in India.

ROLE OF THE DISTANCE EDUCATION COUNCIL (DEC) IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOUs

The Distance Education Council (DEC) was established in 1991 under section 16 (7) read with section 5 (2) of IGNOU Act, 1985. The DEC is empowered under Statute 28 of IGNOU Act to be the apex body for the distance education system in India. It is responsible for the promotion, coordination and maintenance of standards of open and distance education system in the country. The Vice Chancellor of IGNOU is the Chairperson of DEC.

Explaining the role of DEC, an official publication points out: "It is the duty of the Distance Education Council to take all such steps as it may deem fit for the promotion of the open university / distance education systems, their coordinated development, and determination and maintenance of standards in Distance Education in the country." Expanding on this further, the publication says: "The DEC has initiated a number of activities to fulfill its objectives." These include : (a) Promotion Technical assistance to State Government for establishment of SOUs, (b) Provision of un-assigned grants to SOUs for staff development, organization of seminars / conferences, and publication of reports, (c) Travel grants to faculty of SOUs & DEIs for participation in national and international seminars, (d) Research grants for promotion of R&D activities in the priority areas of open and distance education, (e) Maintenance and regular updation of database on open and distance education system in the country.

On the maintenance of standards, several items are listed: 1. Provision of financial support to SOUs and DEIs to promote quality; 2. Training for development of technical and professional competence in the staff; 3. Provision of technical support in the use of information and communication technologies for effective learning, interactivity and development of multimedia courseware; 4. Provision of support to DEIs for transformation of course material into self learning material; 5. Formulation of norms and guidelines for offering professional programmes through distance mode, 6. Maintenance of quality through procedures for :

recognition of institutions, assessment of institutions, evaluation of programmes; 7. Restrain institutions from indulging in franchising; 8. Promote high quality systemic research in identified thrust areas in distance education.

The task of coordination is also explicitly spelt out as: 1. Funding for creation of infrastructure including uplink and downlink facilities. 2. Facilitating sharing of Courses and Programmes of good quality between institutions. 3. Facilitating joint development of courses / programmes between institutions. 4. Providing technical assistance to SOUs for adoption of Credit System and Common Grading Pattern. 5. Developing norms and guidelines for establishment of DEIs and harmonization of functioning of SOUs / DEIs with respect to personnel policy, payment of honorarium to resource persons for various activities, etc. 5. Dissemination of information on Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system and institutions to all those interested like government and other bodies, planners and educators, prospective students, etc.

In the Preamble to 'DEC-Guidelines – Establishment of ODL Institutions in India', the following observations are made: "Of late, it has been seen that there is indiscriminate proliferation of ODL Institutions in India. Even single-mode conventional universities are becoming dual mode by offering programmes in the distance mode…. What is disturbing to note is that distance mode has become purely a commercial venture with little or no attention being paid to the quality of education offered to the learners. Many universities awarding sub-standard certificate / diploma / degree programmes are not adhering to even the guidelines issued by the concerned regulatory bodies. In order to safeguard the interest of the students in India and to ensure the quality of education, the DEC has framed Guidelines, 2006, for regulating the establishment and operation of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Institutions in India".

These guidelines cover almost the entire gamut of the ODL scene with clauses dealing with such aspects like institutions that need approval, undertakings to be given by DEIs seeking approval from DEC, minimum requirements for establishment of DEIs, procedure to be followed by DEIs for seeking recognition from DEC and also for continuation of recognition.

The document goes on further to spell out guidelines for assessment of DEI by DEC and withdrawal of recognition status of DEI by DEC. Similarly, there are guidelines for DEIs to identify study centres which are focal contact points for distance learners and procedures to be followed by DEIs for opening study centres. Even the aspects relating to inspection of study centres by the parent institution or DEI, and closing of study centres by the parent institution or DEI figure at the end of the document. A careful reading of this document reveals the fact that the DEC has spared no pains in assembling a fool-proof mechanism for ensuring the quality of education in ODL institutions in India.

Among the institutions that need approval from the Distance Education Council are: (1) State Open Universities, (2) Distance Education Institutions (DEIs) in Conventional universities established by an Act of Parliament or State Legislature / Deemed to be Universities declared by the Central Government under section 3 of the University Grants Commission Act, 1956 and Institutions of national importance declared under Act of Parliament and (3) Other DEIs registered as societies / trusts and / or privately managed institutions / colleges which are well established and / or affiliated to a university for award of degrees.

While the DEC has its role and function with operational details spelled out in a comprehensive fashion, a spate of criticism from the main beneficiaries, namely state open universities has been particularly strident. This is perhaps due to, as educational experts in India

see it, the "big brother" or "overbearing attitude" of the DEC when engaged in the process of collecting vital information so necessary for disbursal of grants and funds. There is no doubt that the state open universities are all autonomous entities, not in any way beholden to IGNOU whose Vice Chancellor is the Chairperson of DEC. As s funding and accrediting institution, the current status of DEC is an overseeing body created by the Board of Management of IGNOU whose V.C. is in the same rank as other VCs but who is entrusted with some delicate responsibilities (as Chairperson of DEC) "Exercising even a semblance of authority over one's equal creates, in practice, delicate situations", points out an eminent educationist in whose opinion, a change in the statutory status of DEC is very much required.

Since its inception, the activities of DEC have become enlarged. The DEC has been giving financial support to distance education institutions for a host of activities such as improving the infrastructure, promoting academic quality, staff development and training, and student support services.

In addition, the DEC helps the State OUs and other distance education institutes in conventional universities in respect of computerization and networking. Thus, the DEC is obliged to engage in a multiplicity of tasks. Though these are related to each other, the onerous responsibility of executing them appears to be a daunting task, often provoking some resentment on the part of SOUs.

A large section of the academic community feels that by making the DEC an autonomous entity away from the aegis of IGNOU, a much more harmonious and efficient functioning vis a vis the state OUs can be achieved. The way in which the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) as an autonomous body within the University Grants Commission (UGC) operates in the Indian higher education system is cited in this connection. The DEC is in fact expected to play a role similar to the UGC in the country's higher education system, the only difference being the State OUs and correspondence or distance education institutes in conventional universities come under its ambit. There has not been any serious criticism of the functioning of NAAC all these years. On the other hand, NAAC has succeeded in creating an awareness of quality and the need for it among universities and colleges in India. The DEC can do a commendable job similar to this if only it is conferred an autonomous status – so goes the argument.

Another pertinent point to be noted here is with reference to the functioning of any organization which over a period of time gets willy nilly into a track different from what it was originally supposed to do. This aspect comes to the fore in the case of the University Grants Commission (UGC), the apex body in India charged with the responsibility of maintaining and coordinating standards in the field of higher education. True to its name, the UGC became a fund disbursing agency with not much attention being paid to the quality aspect. Luckily, the establishment of NAAC as an autonomous entity under the UGC helped to redeem the situation to a large extent. NAAC has laid down clear guidelines for the assessment and accreditation of universities and colleges in India. The Distance Education Council (DEC) in IGNOU has also prepared a well thought out set of rules, regulations and guidelines to cover all the institutions in the country operating in the area of Distance Education including State Open Universities and institutes of correspondence education attached to conventional universities. (Distance Education Institutes or DEIs). If, in spite of this, the DEC becomes the butt of harsh criticism, the remedy lies in making it a truly autonomous body whose head enjoys the status of a central university Vice Chancellor as in the case of NAAC. An objective look at the mechanism of DEC and its way of functioning would suggest the need for a lot of fine tuning in the collection of data regarding all the DE institutions in the country. There must be a continuous updating of the

database relating to the state OUs and other DEIs. This requires urgent attention in the context of the Central Government's thrust towards making Open and Distance Learning (ODL) a vital part in reaching out to large numbers of students. Now only about 20% of students in the higher education sector in the country are learning through the DE mode. The mandate of enlarging it to 40% by the end of the Tenth Plan period (by the close of 2007) is obviously not possible to implement. Yet the fact remains that greater numbers of people are now enrolling in the State OUs and other DEIs. It all goes to prove that ODL will be the education for the future.

And why not? During the Tenth Plan (2002-2007), against an approved outlay of Rs.510 Crore the grants received by IGNOU and ODL came to Rs.248.43 crore. The expenditure amounted to Rs.232.80 crore out of which the grants to State Open Universities (SOUs) and correspondence course institutes (CCIs) through the DEC totaled Rs.71.46 crore. But the Eleventh Plan (2007-2012) scheme wise outlay points to DEC and assistance to SOUs and CCIs with Rs.1050 crore out of a total of Rs.8116 crore. This is indeed a quantum jump from the earlier plan figure. The target for the Eleventh Plan is: ODL should share 40 percent of higher education enrolment and at the end of the plan, the ODL system should account for an enrolement of around seven million students. Though IGNOU on its own has a network of 59 Regional Centres and currently caters to 1.5 million students, the ambitious target mentioned (7 million students in the ODL system) can be attained only through the DEC extending mammoth assistance to State Open Universities and CCIs.

The DEC plans to accomplish this by putting into operation the following : 1.content generation with special focus on professional and vocational courses, digitalization of print material, and resource building for the national pool; 2. special schemes for open learner resource centre with ICT facility for the benefit of disadvantaged groups and regions; 3. setting up of ICT cell and centres for certification of skills; 4.creating Emeritus / Visiting professorship; 5.Research and Teaching Assistanceship; 6. Travel grants / Research.

What about the future of the DEC? Drawing conclusions from the earlier paragraphs, one may reasonably expect a reconfiguration of the council with the badge of autonomy and the head of DEC being conferred with a higher status than now. There can be no doubt that the DEC will be enabled to play a crucial role in the larger context of Open and Distance Learning in the country. The march of technology (especially, advances in Information and Communication Technology or ICT) will help in this process. Again, this will enable socially disadvantaged groups in society to reap the benefits of higher education. This must be viewed against the background of commitments and promises made by diverse political parties in India towards this objective. Social realities can not be ignored for long and the issues of access, equity and relevance are increasingly coming to the centre stage.

DUAL MODE CAMPUS-BASED UNIVERSITIES AND CORRESPONDENCE COURSE INSTITUTES FUNCTIONING UNDER THEIR AEGIS

It is indeed a staggering scenario when one looks at the numbers of students and the variety of course offerings. The 126 dual mode university distance education institutes / centres in India along with the 13 Open Universities and IGNOU are catering to the needs of 5 million students who have taken up nearly 4000 different courses among them. The latter come under a broad list of 430 academic programmes administered through a well distributed network of 110 regional centres and nearly 5000 study centres. Nearly 70,000 academic counselors / tutors are engaged in the task.

There is no doubt that these figures have a significance that can not be lost sight of. In a developing country of over one billion (100 crore) people struggling to create conducive conditions for learning for the vast mass of youth is not an easy job. The fact remains that only a little over six percent of the relevant age group (18-23 years) are now in the higher education stream of ten percent student enrolment.

Whether the State Open Universities (SOUs) in India are able to offer a better quality alternative to the correspondence courses traditionally offered by some campus based Indian universities is a question that bristles with several strands. The traditional campus based universities took some time to start correspondence courses through their own institutes or directorates (ICEs). Thus they transformed themselves from a single mode to a dual mode set up. Unfortunately, the main objective of these universities at least in the initial years was to generate huge revenues by enrolling large numbers of students in these ICEs. One may be pardoned for saying that these universities considered the ICEs as a sort of "milchcow" for getting funds. The aspect of quality was not much in evidence, one reason being that the entire experiment was a sort of novelty with no reference for comparison. If one considers the institution growth of DE, one may note that during 1962 to 1975, 22 DE centres came up in as many conventional universities. The growth was somewhat uneven for the next few years – 12 during 1976-1982, 4 during 1983-1985, and 8 during 1986-1990. But during the decade that followed 24 cropped up and during 2000-2005, 36 were established bringing the total of ICEs to 106.

These correspondence course institutes in the dual-mode universities were not good examples of efficiency. A spate of complaints from the learners covering a wide gamut of activities (delayed despatch of lessons, examinations not being held according to schedule, delayed publication of results etc) continued to haunt the university administrators. The latter somehow smug with the filling in of the coffers tried to cope with the unending stream of grievances as best as they could. In the universities where some dedicated employees were posted to the ICEs, things were found to improve but in the others, it was a sort of merry go round. But students in spite of hardship continued to enroll and universities were happy with the large amounts of money flowing in.

What was done with the huge revenues? Many traditional and conventional universities, instead of using the money for improving the infrastructure of ICEs under their control turned the amounts to meet their own administrative expenses. Very little allocation got earmarked for taking care of the milchocow, the ICEs. In turn, the quality of work turned out by the ICEs suffered. Another negative development was the reluctance of state governments to maintain the block grants, leave alone enhancing them. This in fact was one of the reasons for the traditional universities starting correspondence courses.

Be that as it may, some state OUs in the country have no doubt been able to generate quality courseware and lessons in certain disciplines and this has helped the distance education and correspondence course institutes attached to the traditional universities. The latter have found that they can benefit by using this material with suitable arrangement with the OUs. In fact, IGNOU has provided a lead in this matter by producing high quality printed matter along with audio / video cassettes on several subjects. These are used by some state OUs also, especially the ones without much technical and infrastructure facilities for producing their own material. In this respect, IGNOU has been helping the state OUs in a commendable way.

Looking at the scene more closely, one finds that it is not as if the nuts and bolts for the production of academic programmes are completely lacking in state OUs. It is actually the paucity of competent personnel (academic, technical and otherwise) which hampers the task.

Hiring good academics is not easy and it costs a lot in these days of inflation. Almost all the Vice Chancellors of the state OUs who responded to the questionnaire from this COL consultant feel that the faculty strength is inadequate to fulfill the objectives of the OU. Those state OUs which maintain a good equation with the state governments concerned manage to wangle more funds for such components of their work. Again, the question of institutional leadership crops up here.

STUDENT SUPPORT AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

This vital function of any higher education institution, especially the open university, decides ultimately the way in which customer (here, learner or student) satisfaction is achieved. Here also, the Indian state OUs present a diversified picture with only a few doing really commendable work and the others just carrying on in a pedestrian fashion. There can be no doubt that the faculty and staff deployed for student support services should be people with zeal and a love for working with different groups of learners, the bulk of these being in the category of youth. Frequently, these learners / students approach the student support divisions of the OUs with their problems relating to course material, issue of hall tickets for examinations, doubts about results of tests, and so on. One may say that these problems are mostly routine in nature and capable of getting solved quickly. It is in this sphere, an earnest spirit of helpfulness on the part of personnel becomes crucial.

What can be the reasons for dissatisfaction among students? These include procrastination on the part of the staff to even entertain their queries, delayed responses to even urgent issues, rude beheviour and down right rejection. The Distance Education (DE) institutions cannot afford to neglect these matters. In the conventional or traditional university system, student unions take up several of these issues and force even an unwilling and unresponsive university administration (including Vice Chancellor and his team of officials) to act quickly. In the open university set up, this type of procedure is not possible simply because the students are drawn from different places and do not gather at one specific time for a class or lecture. Hence a lot of responsibility devolves on the university top brass to see that student satisfaction is not given the goby.

A few general observations may be in order in this context. The section or department for the student support services must be housed in an accessible part of the OU campus and not in an obscure or remote area. Here, the example of a national Open University, IGNOU, may be cited. Here the student support division in IGNOU, is very near the entrance in the campus. The ambience of the place must be such as to encourage the students to ask questions, not stifle them. Brochures and other material based on earlier experience of the students will also be useful in dispelling the doubts and apprehensions of the learners.

Learning outcomes must also be considered as an issue closely allied to student support services. It can not be denied that the students themselves have a great responsibility for learning and must make full use of the materials given by the institution (OU) for self-study in an earnest fashion. This apart, the open university is under immense obligation to see whether the writing of assignments by students is done at the stipulated intervals. Only by estimating or assessing the standard of these completed assignments, the learning outcomes can be gauged to some extent. There can be no doubt that ultimately desirable learning outcomes result when the minds of the students get enriched with more knowledge and a quest for knowing more is developed.

The state OUs in India are still experimenting with different models in this realm without coming to grips with the fundamental issue of crating the mechanism for measuring learning outcomes. The latter cannot be simply equated with results of the candidates appearing for the

examinations or the pass percentage in a discipline. However, it must be conceded that this is taken by educationists as one form of measuring learning outcomes. This picture is not encouraging : the university working as a tread-mill producing systematically products as if turned by a lathe in a workshop or factory.

By and large, the state open universities in India have succeeded in reaching out to a very large number of students who, due to various reasons, could not proceed with higher education. This number cuts across different categories as revealed by the enrolment figures. Men and women (gender aspect), locality (urban, rural and tribal), status in society (forward, backward class). Thus the issue of access and equity has been addressed to some extent. Again, the factor of flexibility inbuilt in to the OU system has helped different age-groups to pursue higher studies at their own pace. Indeed, flexibility is the bed rock on which the OU system rests and this has been an attraction to many learners who are already in employment.

Along with this, relevance of the course offerings to the society at large has claimed attention in a few state OUs. The latter have been able to design curriculum details for vocational, job-oriented courses at the certificate or diploma levels with success. Quite a number of takers have benefited by this. Here comes the importance of innovation in the methodology of teaching and training. Not all the state OUs have proved efficient at this task; very few exceptions do exist. This may be due to the reluctance on the part of the OU administration to depart from the beaten track and try out new techniques.

It is rather disconcerting to find a total ignorance of the OU system in many segments of society in India. The state OUs, at least a few of them, are trying to adopt several methods of publicity in print and electronic media with a view to popularize their courses and programmes. Events like the annual convocation addressed by dignitaries get a place in newspapers. Apart from such sporadic occasions, not much exposure to the concept of open and distance learning (ODL) is made available to the general public. This aspect calls for action inasmuch as the disadvantaged societal segments cannot otherwise derive benefits from ODL. Again, this must be viewed against the background of millions of aspirants to higher learning existing in the country without much chance of getting into the formal stream.

Another component to which the Indian State OUs must turn attention relates to a well structured feedback mechanism. At present whatever the OUs gather by way of reactions to their functioning is mostly desultory in nature. This concerns both the current enrolment and also the products who have passed out of the OUs. Perhaps a set up similar to the alumni associations in some well established institutions may help, though of course, the OUs have only now made a beginning.

SOME SIGNIFICANT RESPONSES

There has all along been a nagging doubt among the public whether courses in science and professional disciplines like engineering can be delivered through distance education (DE) mode. This is quite genuine because these courses require laboratories, workshops etc. for effective learning. However, spectacular developments in technology over the last decade are making it possible to deliver educational offerings in these fields as well. The question (Qn.18) addressed to the State OUs in this context is: Are science courses being offered in your OU? If so, what arrangements are made to conduct practical classes / laboratory experiments? What are the difficulties faced in implementing science practicals?

The following replies from some State Open Universities deserve to be noted:

YCMOU, Nashik (Maharashtra): "Several academic programmes in science as well as technology are offered the YCMOU. For these programmes, the study centres are recognized at colleges or institutions where the necessary equipments and facilities to conduct laboratory experiments and practical activities exist. This is ensured at the time of inspection carried out for recognizing a college or institution as a study centre. So far, no major difficulties have been faced in implementing this model, especially because the experienced faculty and staff of the college itself are providing services for the OU students. The practical sessions are conducted at the study centres".

NSOU, Kolkata (W.Bengal): "Our university offers science courses both at Bachelor Degree level and Post Graduate Degree level. The practical classes and laboratory experiments are conducted at selected study centres at a stretch during long holidays such as Pooja Holidays in West Bengal. There has been demand from learners for more practical sessions and the University is trying to find ways to meet this demand."

TNOU, Chennai (Tamil Nadu): "Yes, to a certain extent. We offer B.Sc and M.Sc in Mathematics as well as BCA, PGDA and MCA. In addition we offer M.Sc Psychology, M.Sc. Psychotherapy and PG Diploma in Psychotheraphy etc. All these have vibrant practical components. TNOU Centres identified for the purpose handle these practicals".

The U.P.Rajarshi Tandon OU (Uttar Pradesh): "Yes. Science courses are offered by this University through the Study Centres which have well equipped lab and library facilities in the Faculty of science. The University at present is not facing any difficulty in implementing the science programme".

Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University, Kota (Rajasthan):

"B.Sc. is being launched with effect from July 2007. We are in the process of identifying the study centres duly equipped with necessary infrastructure (labs and teaching resources). All rest is premature to comment upon at this stage".

Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University, Madhya Pradesh:

"Physical and Chemical science courses are offered. Practical classes are arranged in Government colleges where laboratory facilities are available. Most of these colleges are study centres of MPBOU, hence the students face no difficulty in practical classes".

KSOU, Mysore (Karnataka):

"Some science subjects like Micro-biology, Bio-technology, Food & nutrition, food preservation, M.Sc in Forensic science & Cyber Crime, BFA have been launched in collaboration with other reputed educational institutions ….. all facilities including lab facility available with them. The fee collected is being shared by KSOU & the partner institution (30% - 70% ratio)".

BAOU (Gujarat) and Uttarakhand O.U. have not yet started offering science courses.

On the matter of student support services (Qn.7), almost all State OUs which have responded state that these are well organized, but there is adequate scope for face to face counseling and also through mail, telephone etc. The networking of all the regional and study centres is also being done. Standing out as unique is the case of YCMOU, Maharastra, which is

developing a network of study centres linked through the satellite DVBS (digital video broadcast through satellite) system procured through the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). Discussion Forums are also encouraged. Similarly, NSOU, West Bengal, adopts video and tele conferencing. It is currently engaged in a dialogue to connect a few study centres through EDUSAT.

Again, the question "Is there a synergy between the printed lessons and those broadcast over radio or TV" (Qn.9) has elicited a positive reply. TNOU is "embarking extensively on computer mediated learning provision which could be used for digital broadcasting as well, when the need arises".

Responding to question 12 about the age group of students in the OU stream, YCMOU states. "The claim that the OU is for "people who missed the bus earlier" is to be viewed with a bit of caution. The OU system is not soley for this segment…. the demographic characteristics of the learners indicate the presence of a large numbe of young learners. There is also a trend among the students in the traditional mode to seek additional degrees from our OU. This is partly due to the availability of avenues (which were hitherto unavailable) and partly due to the requirements for multiple skills in the employment market". Out of 105280 students for BA / B.Com nearly 18,500 are above 31 years of age. This is a considerable proportion.

"How is faculty selected for preparing lessons and also for broadcasting?" (Qn.11). Content expertise, communication skills, and familiarity with course content are all taken into account. NSOU in West Bengal makes all the faculty members go through training programmes for this purpose. From the responses of the State OUs it becomes clear that the academic faculty strength (fulltime) is not at all adequate to meet the objectives but the OUs somehow manage with a large number of part time academic counselors and teachers. A few SOUs like YCMOU BRAOU and KSOU resort to outsourcing of certain types of work.

On the question of flexibility of programmes (Qn.19) almost all the State OUs point out they have ensured it in terms of duration and choice of subjects. The rigidity associated with the conventional higher education or university system is not present in the OU scheme of things. The Indian State OUs seem to have benefited learners in this respect inasmuch as the students, once enrolled, can complete the courses at their own pace.

Asked how the State OUs rate the level of leadership, both political and institutional (Qn.24), many of the respondents note that it is good, gratifying, satisfying etc. TNOU points out that it is excellent.

The question (Qn.25) "What, in your opinion, should be the role of the Distance Education Council (DEC) in promoting / influencing / expanding the activities of State Open Universities?" was posed to the Vice Chancellors. Dr.Rajan Welukar, Vice Chancellor, YCMOU, Nasik (Maharashtra) in his answer included the following points:

"The DEC may play a co-ordinating role between the university and professional bodies like the NCTE, AICITE, MCI etc. This is mainly in order to clarify to these bodies how the ODL system is a cost-effective, high quality model that can handle effectively any content domain. The DEC may also play a co-ordinating role between the State Open Universities and the conventional universities using the dual mode in an attempt to arrive at a convergent form of flexible education.

The DEC may develop the quality norms for the functioning of the open universities and the CCIs in the dual mode institutions. A major part of the DEC activities may revolve around playing a supportive role to all the SOUs in developing appropriate Quality Assurance mechanisms.

The DEC may continue to support the ODL system through financial support in the form of development funds and unassigned grants.

The DEC may offer a platform for the sharing of intellectual and learning resources etc. on a mutually beneficial basis. Policy making with respect to collaborative arrangements at the State, national and international levels may also fall within the purview of the DEC's sphere of activities."

Professor Surabhi Banerjee, Vice Chancellor, Netaji Subhas Open University, Kolkata (West Bengal), in her response says: "Apart from playing the role of a regulatory body, DEC can also ensure better coordination among the Open Universities. A body like DEC has become highly relevant as the number of institutions providing distance education courses is increasing rapidly".

In his reply, Prof. M.S.Palanichamy, V.C. of Tamil Nadu Open University, points out "The DEC should emerge as an independent, statutory body with its branches in each State to maintain standards in ODL". To the poser (Qn.26) "How more effective can DEC become if it is made an autonomous entity for ensuring coordination among the State Open Universities?", the reply is to refer to the response above. But according to the V.C. of NSOU, Kolkata, "the outcome of constituting DEC as on autonomous body, as proposed by many, can only be judged and evaluated with the passage of time". However, the V.C. of YCMOU, Nasik, gives a more elaborate answer: "Criticisms regarding the present status of the DEC, as part of the national open university and also as the agency entrusted with maintaining the quality of the ODL system as a whole, appear to be well founded. It is true that being part of one open university makes it difficult for the DEC to adopt a dispassionate stand with respect to its own university and at the same time be fair to the SOUs. If, on the other hand, the DEC is made a separate autonomous entity, there will not only be no role-conflict, but more importantly, it will also be able to contribute to the development of the ODL system in the country more effectively. Apart from ensuring coordination among the SOUs in the country, it will then be able to perform its expected role as stated in the answer to the earlier question".

The questions 25 and 26 elicited the following answers from some other Vice Chancellors:

Rajarshi Tandon Open University, Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh)

The role of Distance Education Council in promoting / influencing / expanding the activities of the Open Universities "should be the same as the UGC has in respect of other traditional universities in India. If the DEC becomes autonomous and independent body it may be possible for DEC to provide more and more assistance to SOUs in a better way like UGC."

Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar O.U., Ahmedabad (Gujarat)

"The role of DEC should along with promoting, influencing and expanding the activities of SOUs, be "monitoring quality of courses offered by different institutions…. It is difficult for

me to say that DEC would be effective if it is made an autonomous body. It would ultimately be dependent on the Act for this purpose. At the moment DEC is doing quite well".

Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani, Nainital (Uttarakhand):

"The DEC Should "support all genuine efforts made by the Open University, especially regarding the betterment of people residing in remote areas. Every independent institution likes to have its own identity. Therefore, it would be welcome if State Open University is not always clubbed with IGNOU".

Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University, Kota (Rajasthan):

"DEC's primary role is to set the standards, norms and procedures relevant to the growth of the OUs in India. Thereafter, it is supposed to monitor individual performances. DEC has to additionally balance the growth of distance education along with specific disciplinary developments.

DEC ought to be an autonomous entity for acquiring a wholistic view of distance education and better coordinating the human and non human resources at its command".

Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University, Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh)

"Because of the red tapism the DEC grants are often much delayed and some time our best endeavour are halted because the grants are not effectively utilized because of time constraint. If the grants given by DEC are released in time the SOU will surely expand its desired academic activities. The DEC should act more as a facilitator than as a controlling agency.

DEC should safeguard the academic interest of the OU even if sometimes it has to take prudent risks. Political and Institute advisory is essential for DEC to facilitate the process of Academic and Institutional Growth of the OUs.

The effectiveness of DEC will surely be increased if the DEC becomes an autonomous entity like UGC. DEC should be physically shifted from IGNOU so that influence of IGNOU is minimized. At present sometimes, the SOUs feel that they are governed and directed by IGNOU authorities which hinder the spirit of ODL system".

CONCLUSION

While the enrolment figures of the SOUs in India reveal an encouraging picture as regards equity and access, the fact remains that a lot more of funding to improve student support services must be provided. The faculty strength is also seen to be inadequate, especially on the academic side although part time teachers / tutors and academic counselors are employed in the Regional and Study Centres. Also the SOUs must take efforts to update their websites. The Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007 to 2012) envisages a doubling of the student strength in ODL from the present 20 percent to 40 percent of the total Higher Education pie. Hence an accelerated pace of development on the ODL front may be expected during the next few years.

Almost all SOUs in India aver that they provide a better quality alternative to the correspondence course institutes in the dual mode campus based universities. It must be noted, however, that a few in the latter category have managed to offer quality programmes to their students. No formal, indepth study of the products / graduates from SOUs has been made

regarding their employment and job positions. The bias against the SOU and DE mode graduates entertained by many employers seems to be on the wane. This transformation is good for the ODL institutions.

Flexibility available to the learners in the DE mode, especially the SOUs, as regards both subject offerings and pace of studying, has been a great boon to the students. This factor coupled with application of technology (broadcast, audio/video lessons, telecasting through satellite etc.) has also served to draw many students to the SOU system. Here the national open university, IGNOU has been a role model to SOUs.

Political support to SOUs has been of varying degrees between state to state. Where this factor was dominant, the SOU concerned could develop fast. This is linked to institutional leadership and where the Vice Chancellor as the executive head of the SOU proved his/her commitment there was no lack of political backing. This aspect obviously impinges on the funding process as well.

Three SOUs, - YCMOU in Maharashtra, NSOU in W.Bengal and TNOU in Tamil Nadu have received special awards.

As regards the Distance Education Council (DEC) which is currently part of the organizational structure of IGNOU, many Vice Chancellors of SOUs, while appreciating its role, feel that DEC must be made an autonomous entity in order to ensure quality against the background of the growing number of DE institutions.

The following features deserve to be highlighted : Among the SOUs established prior to Year 2000, those in Andhra Pradesh (BRAOU), Maharashtra (YCMOU), Madhya Pradesh (MPMOU), and West Bengal (NSOU) appear to be doing well with large enrolments after registering good growth over the years. These SOUs have cited supportive political and institutional leadership as a contributory cause. However, in the case of BRAOU, only the initial momentum gained during the earlier years seems to be carrying it forward. Among the SOUs established after year 2000, the one in Tamil Nadu (TNOU) has been active in areas like livelihood education benefiting the poor and rural communities.

Considering the other SOUs, those in Rajasthan (VMOU), Gujarat (BAOU), Karnataka (KSOU), and Uttar Pradesh (UPRTOU) have not grown along expected lines. The reasons seem to be lack of sustained political support and institutional leadership. KSOU frankly admits that the political system is not treating Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as a priority area. UPRTOU looks to IGNOU for leadership. VMOU states that leadership and innovation are "currently gratifying".

Nalanda OU in Bihar (established in 1987) is making progress since 2003. The other three SOUs in Chhattisgarh, Uttarkhand, and Assam, established in 2004, 2005, 2006 respectively are too recent for any appraisal.

If one may draw a few lessons for the future, the portents are clear, namely ODL has vast potential in a country like India with millions of young aspirants eager to receive higher education and with conventional universities and colleges simply not being in a position to accommodate them. The infrastructure for the expansion of Open Universities is fairly good in the country, especially the mega OU, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) willing to help the SOUs.

Against such a background, there must be clear indications from the Government of India's Ministry of Human Resource Development about financial and administrative support to the State Open Universities, both already existing and those to be set up in the coming years. Again, the recruitment of faculty for the open university stream must receive greater attention and care. This is mainly because the ODL itself calls for commitment and dedication from the mentors in a greater degree than even in the conventional higher education stream. These are a few vital aspects which are adored in the abstract but ignored in the specific by the powers that be. Hopefully, ODL in India may overcome the hurdles and set itself on a path of continuous progress.

ANNEXURES

TABLE-1

S.No.	Name of State OU	Year of Establishment	Enrolment	Faculty Strength	Number of Programmes / Courses
1	BRAOU, Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh)	1982	1,50,474	48	Six Broad Programmes which include 31 courses.
2	Nalanda OU, Patna (Bihar)	1987	30,000	13	83
3	Vardhaman Mahaveer OU Kota, (Rajasthan)	1987	27,687*	18	8 Broad Programmes which include a number of courses
4	YCMOU, Nashik (Maharashtra)	1989	2,19,494	59 (full time)	154
5	Madhya Pradesh Bhoj OU, Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh)	1991	2,30,000	31	90
6	Dr.Baba Saheb Ambedkar OU, Ahmedabad (Gujarat)	1994	53,508	20	55
7	Karnataka State O.U., Mysore (Karnataka).	1996	100,000	65	68
8	Netaji Subhas OU, Kolkata (West Bengal)	1997	Over 1,00,000	31 (full time)	10 Broad programmes which include a number of courses.
9	U.P. Rajarshi Tandon OU, Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh)	1998	58,000	7 Regular 11 Contractual	76
10	Tamil Nadu OU, Chennai (Tamil Nadu)	2002	60,000	23	84
11	Pt. Sunderlal Sharma OU, Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh)	2004	15,000	21	7 degree programmes 8 PG Programmes Ph.D., Programmes
12	Uttarkhand OU, Nainital (Uttarkhand)	2005	2773	4	10
13	K K Handique State OU, Dispur (Assam)	2006			

* No. of students admitted from January 2006 onwards.

TABLE - II

S.No.	Name of State OU	Qn.5,6 Social Commitment Job Oriented Courses / Vocational bias	Qn.7 Student Support Services	Qn.8, 10 Broadcast Mode	Qn.9, 31 Synergy between printed lessons and broadcast technology for course delivery
1	BRAOU, Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh)	A number of programmes are job oriented.	OU has a website and e-mail contact is provided; OU has 203 study centers and 23 Regional Centres.	Regular broadcast / telecast of radio / video lessons	Technology support is provided.
2	Nalanda OU, Patna (Bihar)	No. of job oriented courses like para medical courses. Female students given 25% rebate in fees.	OU has 33 counselling cum study centers.	At present OU is using radio to reach students.	There is synergy.
3	Vardhaman Mahaveer OU Kota (Rajasthan)	A number of programmes are job oriented. All 10 short duration programmes with social commitment. No subsidy from Govt. for these courses.	Face to face counseling is well organized E-Mail counseling at nascent stage.	OU has access to IGNOU slot of radio counselling this is effective.	Yes; there is considerable synergy between printed lessons and the broadcasts.
4	YCMOU, Nashik (Maharashtra).	A number of programmes offered by our eight schools have vocational bias. Most of these designed with a social commitment.	A network of over 2000 study centers. University website supports discussion forums.	Radio transmission used for academic counseling TV used as supplementary support.	Yes. University has a hub for transmission of video programmes through ISRO.
5	Madhya Pradesh Bhoj OU Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh)	Five programmes are major vocational / job oriented university is committed to empower marginalized sections of society.	Contact classes at regular intervals. Queries through E-mail responded to students' satisfaction.	OU has its own FM Channel Gyanvani. Internet radio Bhoj Vani.	OU is planning to establish relationship between print material, e-content and radio transmission.
6	Dr.Baba Saheb Ambedkar O.U. Ahmedabad (Gujarat)	Thirteen Programmes are job oriented. Yes HIV/AIDS, human empowerment, Ghandian studies etc.	Counselling through tele cast from BISAG Bhaskaracharya Institute for Space Applications & Geo Informatics.	Radio Counselling through Gyanvani, Satellite Counselling also made available.	Yes. Live Telecast of lectures through Gyanvani by providing ICT facilities for its centers.

TABLE – II

S.No.	Name of State OU	Qn.5,6 Social Commitment Job Oriented Courses / Vocational bias	Qn.7 Student Support Services	Qn.8, 10 Broadcast Mode	Qn.9, 31 Synergy between printed lessons and broadcast technology for course delivery
7	Karnataka State O.U. Mysore (Karnataka).	Job oriented programmes offered designed to empower rural people and women. Over 60% students are rural and 50% are women.	Over 100 study centers for UG programmes, weakened counseling; lab facilities.	FM Radio is used.	Yes. M.Sc., Software programme being launched in Dubai is an online education programme.
8	Netaji Subhas OU Kolkata (West Bengal)	Apart from vocational courses, nine PG Diploma Courses are designed with social commitment No Govt. subsidy for these	Student support services extremely strong. NSOU takes advantage of Video and tele conferencing.	Gyanvani FM, Kolkata, includes syllabus-specific subjects. In addition, daily one-hour live dial-in interactive session.	Yes. There is strong synergy video and audio cassettes prepared for students.
9	U.P. Rajarshi Tandon O.U. Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh)	OU offers job oriented courses. Some of these with social commitment so that learners may become self reliant in some trades.	Face to face counseling. Teleconferencing through radio interactive programmes.	Lessons delivered through Gyanvani FM Radio Channel.	Yes.
10	Tamil Nasdu OU Chennai (Tamil Nadu).	15 Certificate and 14 Diploma courses provided. Yes, courses designed to empower learners. Plans being made for subsidy.	Strong. TNOU is creating a state-of-the-art interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) to facilitate access to information.	Already a partner in IGNOU's Gyanvani	TNOU is evolving a full fledged educational broadcast agenda vis-à-vis its mission to achieve inclusive education.
11	Pt. Sunderlal Sharma O.U. Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh)	Many are job oriented; a few courses offered in Central Jail also.	180 Study Centres.	30 Centres have C Band Downlink facility.	-
12	Uttarakhand OU Nainital (Uttarakhand)	Most of the programme job oriented; will benefit the underprivileged to become self reliant in some trade.	Students given basic facilities. A number of centers are located in hill areas with no internet facility.	-	Not applicable Not yet.
13	K.K.Handique State O.U. Dispur (Assam)	-	-	-	-

TABLE - III

S.No.	Name of State OU	Qn.12 Age of Students	Qn.14, 15, 30 Govt. Support	Qn.16 Network for sharing course materials.	Qn.19 Flexibility of Programmes.
1	BRAOU, Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh)	-	-	BRAOU shares materials with other institutions.	There is flexibility. Nine years for UG and six years for PG programmes.
2	Nalanda OU, Patna (Bihar)	Over 70% of students are below 25 years.	Nominal Govt. support. NOU managers with internal resources and DEC grant.	Agreement with Kota OU for sharing study materials.	Flexibility available in choice of subjects.
3	Vardhaman Mahaveer OU Kota (Rajasthan)	Graduates cover a wide spectrum is terms of age social background etc.	OU receives block grants. This is deficient. Level of govt. support decreasing. Dependence reduced by self financing academic programmes.	VMOU study material is borrowed by some state OUs.	Assured in terms of duration as well as choice of optional subjects.
4	YCMOU, Nashik (Maharashtra).	Nearly 18,500 students out of 1,05,000 enrolled in B.A/B.Com (1.4.2006 to 31.3.2007) are 31 years and above.	Grants for particular projects given by state govt. No salary grant or block grant.	Sharing of course ware with other SOUs contemplated.	Available in admission, examinations, sequence of courses, delivery of progammes.
5	Madhya Pradesh Bhoj OU Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh)	Good number of students from higher age groups are enrolled in almost programmes.	No block grant from Govt. which has however, given 8.5 acre land for new building of the O.U.	MPBOU collaborates with five Ous.	Offers flexibility to students for learning at their own pace and place.
6	Dr.Baba Saheb Ambedkar O.U. Ahmedabad (Gujarat)	Large number of students in age group 18-35 years. About 2600 out of 16,300 students are above 35 years for admn. Year Feb.2006.	From this financial year, block grant raised to Rs.2 crore from Rs.1 crore OU launches courses, recruits staff on self sufficient basis.	BAOU aims at convergence between ODL and other conventional universities.	Flexibility is maintained by providing exit points to students in different courses.

TABLE - III

S.No.	Name of State OU	Qn.12 Age of Students	Qn.14, 15, 30 Govt. Support	Qn.16 Network for sharing course materials.	Qn.19 Flexibility of Programmes.
7	Karnataka State O.U. Mysore (Karnataka).	Nearly 50% of students are young, below 18 and 21 years of age.	Govt. treats KSOU with a step motherly attitude. No block grant level of state Govt. support pitiable. Programmes in collaboration and partnership basis being launched.	Our bridge course is sought by other OUs.	Lateral entry to some programme and lateral entry of students from other universities allowed.
8	Netaji Subhas OU Kolkata (West Bengal)	Students from 18 years admitted. Male / Female ratio is 2:1	Govt. support is in the form of block grants. Increasing. Special initiatives proposed.	NSOU at present has no understanding with any institution for sharing of course materials, audio / video tapes etc.	UG and PG programmes flexible in terms of years of completion.
9	U.P. Rajarshi Tandon O.U. Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh)	Students in OU are slightly in higher age group.	State Govt. gives recurring and non-recurring grants. Govt. support increasing.	Yes. This OU has a network for sharing course material, audio / video tape with IGNOU and some other state OUs.	Flexibility at both graduate and PG levels.
10	Tamil Nasdu OU Chennai (Tamil Nadu).	A total of 34,000 students in age group 25-35 and 12,393 students above 35 (AY 2003-04 to 2006-07) these numbers are out of a grand total of 80,000.	Budget allocation by Govt. covers salary of staff and miscell. Expenditure. Govt. Support neither increasing nor decreasing. Project grants and consultancy services in ODL.	The policy of resource sharing is being looked into.	Flexibility available.
11	Pt. Sunderlal Sharma O.U. Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh)	PSSOU trying to help higher age groups also.	Rs.376 lakh State Govt. Support; 70 acre land for new building. Projects for self reliance.	IGNOU has asked PSSOU to coordinate for Herbal Science Course material among OUs.	PSSOU adopting modular approach for all certificate and PG level courses.
12	Uttarakhand OU Nainital (Uttarakhand)	Many students fall under the category of those who missed the bus earlier.	State Govt. gives block grant which was increased in the second year.	OU now framing its own courses – hence no networking now.	Degree courses can be completed in maximum of six years.
13	K.K.Handique State O.U. Dispur (Assam)	-	-	-	-

TABLE-IV

S.No.	Name of State OU	Qn.23 State OU Vis-à-vis correspondence courses in conventional universities.	Qn.24 Leadership and Innovation	Qn.27 Employment of Graduates from state OU	Qn.33 Special Awards.
1	BRAOU, Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh)	Provides learner support through different modes.	Level of leadership / innovation is good.	Only random accounts from students.	No.
2	Nalanda OU, Patna (Bihar)	Quality of education from NOU is of higher standard.	Able institutional leadership and innovative approaches helped NOU to register remarkable progress from 2003.	No formal study conducted.	Nomination accepted by DEC for award of excellence in examination system.
3	Vardhaman Mahaveer OU Kota (Rajasthan)	Yes, multimedia packages to students.	Currently gratifying.	No study has been carried out.	No; not yet.
4	YCMOU, Nashik (Maharashtra).	Yes. Regular guidance from content experts in different study centers provided.	Supportive political leadership at Institutional level, successive V.Cs have encouraged innovative initiatives.	No systematic study so far done. Informal feedback shows professional advancement and improved career prospects.	Yes. A number of special awards 'Quality of Life' Award from ACU. COL Award for Institutional Excellence in DE (2002)
5	Madhya Pradesh Bhoj OU Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh)	Yes. MPBOU adopts user satellite based education, FM radio based learning modules and contact classes.	Through political advocacy and institutional leadership, the visibility of MPBOU is enhanced.	No study conducted.	MPBOU has not yet received any special awards.
6	Dr.Baba Saheb Ambedkar O.U. Ahmedabad (Gujarat)	Yes. This state OU provides better quality alternative to correspondence courses.	Level of leadership and innovation is satisfactory.	Yes; overall contribution by our OU to the work force is good.	In the past, V.C.s have received awards for contribution to ODL.
7	Karnataka State O.U. Mysore (Karnataka).	Definitely imparting better quality education than correspondence courses.	Level of institutional leadership is satisfactory. Political system is not treating ODL as a priority area.	No study made so far.	Not yet. KSOU has not approached / applied for the same.

TABLE-IV

S.No.	Name of State OU	Qn.23 State OU Vis-à-vis correspondence courses in conventional universities.	Qn.24 Leadership and Innovation	Qn.27 Employment of Graduates from state OU	Qn.33 Special Awards.
8	Netaji Subhas OU Kolkata (West Bengal)	Courses offered by NSOU are definitely better.	Level of leadership and innovation at our OU is extremely high.	Being a new university no systematic records of employment are available.	Excellence in Distance Education Award (EDEA) in 2006 from COL.
9	U.P. Rajarshi Tandon O.U. Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh)	Yes	IGNOU provides leadership to this university.	No study conducted.	No.
10	Tamil Nasdu OU Chennai (Tamil Nadu).	Yes. TNOU does offer better quality alternative to correspondence courses.	Excellent	A full-fledged study is being evolved.	Yes. The French Award for Women Empowerment and LIBA Award for Vocational Education.
11	Pt. Sunderlal Sharma O.U. Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh)	Yes; PSSOU offers better quality courses compared to campus based universities.	Leadership and innovation go hand-in-hand with PSSOU.	Not applicable. Newly started OU.	Not applicable. Newly started OU.
12	Uttarakhand OU Nainital (Uttarakhand)	Some courses offered by us not available in other conventional universities.	-	-	-
13	K.K.Handique State O.U. Dispur (Assam)	-	-	-	-

TABLE - V

S.No.	Name of State OU	Qn. 35 Mechanism / agency for accreditation.	Qn.36 Percentage of ODL participation	Qn.38 Plan envisaged for future growth	
1	BRAOU, Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh)	DEC can evolve a mechanism or NAAC could have a sub unit for the purpose.	About 25% of the entire Higher Education pie	-	
2	Nalanda OU, Patna (Bihar)	There is need for an agency like NAAC for SOUs.	At present, 18 percent in country level.	NOU has a long term strategy for growth.	
3	Vardhaman Mahaveer OU Kota (Rajasthan)	DEC is capable of performing this role.	Still deficient and requires elevation.	Our plan is to reach the unreached and maximize skill based performance	
4	YCMOU, Nashik (Maharashtra).	NAAC and DEC have developed a scheme for this purpose.	According to knowledge commission, almost half the number of students in higher education are in distance mode.	Technology-mediated instruction will be a priority area. Thrust on employable skills among learners.	
5	Madhya Pradesh Bhoj OU Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh)	Independent, autonomous body, if created by the Govt., may assess the OUs.	About 20% of students enrolled in higher education are from ODL system.	MPBOU plans to connect all study centers, collaborate with other universities and strengthen special education programmes for cross border delivery.	
6	Dr.Baba Saheb Ambedkar O.U. Ahmedabad (Gujarat)	Like NAAC, there must be a statutory body to assess and accredit OUs.	The percentage needs to be increased.	To fill vacant positions at the earliest, to start new schools, improve student support system.	
7	Karnataka State O.U. Mysore (Karnataka).	Self-appraisal done by KSOU. There is need for a statutory body like NAAC.	-	-	
8	Netaji Subhas OU Kolkata (West Bengal)	At present, there is no agency that can assess and accredit OUs and other DE institutions.	Currently 20%	Our immediate aim is to enroll two lakh students from the present one lakh.	

TABLE-V

S.No.	Name of State OU	Qn. 35 Mechanism / agency for accreditation.	Qn.36 Percentage of ODL participation	Qn.38 Plan envisaged for future growth	
9	U.P. Rajarshi Tandon O.U. Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh)	NAAC is competent to assess and accredit the OUs.	It is much; it is growing fast and likely to reach 40% in near future.	Increase number of job oriented courses / programmes.	
10	Tamil Nasdu OU Chennai (Tamil Nadu).	An agency like NAAC may be created.	Currently 20%	Among other things, to reach rural communities through life-long learning programmes through livelihood improvement.	
11	Pt. Sunderlal Sharma O.U. Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh)	Independently bodies required having representation of DEC/IGNOU and other universities.	-	PSSOU has chalked out many courses as per the needs of society.	
12	Uttarakhand OU Nainital (Uttarakhand)	NAAC	Very low	This OU plans to adopt latest, state-of-the-art technology once it gets its own campus.	
13	K.K.Handique State O.U. Dispur (Assam)	-	-	-	

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<u>**QUESTIONNAIRE**</u>

1.   When was your Open University established ? What are the regulations, Act of Legislature, Operational date of functioning etc.?

2.   a) How many students are enrolled in the OU in different streams, courses etc. (discipline – wise)? What is the student strength on year by year basis?

     b) What is the faculty strength in your OU? Is this adequate to fulfil the objectives of the OU?

3.   What are the academic programmes offered? Which are the more popular ones?

4.   Could you enumerate the innovations already adopted or those being proposed to make the programmes purposeful and in tune with modern times?

5.   Which, among the programmes, can be called job – oriented or courses with a vocational bias?

6.   Are these courses designed with a social commitment – for instance, empowering learners from underprivileged classes to become self – reliant in some trade? If so, does the government give any subsidy for these?

7.   How strong are the student support services in you OU ? In particular, is there enough scope for student counseling, either thought e-mail or directly face to face in the course of contact seminars?

8.   The enlisting of the help of media, especially radio and television, will enable the learners to achieve more. In this contact, what broadcast mode is being used widely in your Open University? How many lessons and in what subjects are these being made available through the air waves?

9.   Is there a synergy between the printed lessons and those broadcast over radio or TV?

10. Taking the 'Countrywide classroom' broadcast over TV by the UGC as a reference, how would you place the broadcast lessons of your OU from the point of view of effectiveness? What arrangements for feedback from the learners are in place?

11. How is the faculty selected for preparing lessons and also for broadcasting?

12. The graduates from the OU system span a wide specrum and they are in slightly higher age groups, if the claim that OUs are meant for "people who missed the bus earlier" is to be taken at face value. How far is it true in your OU? Is it possible to furnish a table with segmented age group levels and courses which the students in these groups have preferred to study?

13. The alumni of any educational institution constitute a valuable asset and feedback from them about courses and learning materials will be useful in syllabi revision and restructuring of courses. Is there a mechanism in your OU for getting regular feedback from the alumni? If so, how successful has it been in the matters referred to above?

14.   What is the level of government support to your OU in any form – block grants, aid towards covering the deficit, grants for specific projects of the OU etc?

15.   Is the level of government support increasing or decreasing ever since the OU was established ? Please take into account both capital and recurring expenditure. Although the former may be considered as a one-time grant, additions and alterations for buildings, studio rooms and storage facilities for materials etc. may require capital expenditure in subsequent years also. Hence this clarification.

16.   Has your OU developed any network for sharing of course materials, audio/ video tapes etc. with any other institution/institutions?

17.   Are there periodical meetings of different State OUs to facilitate the exchange of experience relating to development of lessons/courses, student counselling etc.?

18.   Are science courses being offered in your OU? If so, what arrangements are made to conduct practical classes / laboratory experiments ? What are the difficulties faced in implementing science practicals?

19.   How is flexibility of programmes managed by the OU at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels ?

20.   What are the methods adopted to get assignment papers / sheets returned by the students ? How are the marked answer papers sent back to the students? Any remedial action suggested in the case of low achievers?

21.   What is the examination schedule followed by your OU? Is it possible to adhere to the schedule every year?

22.   Measuring / estimating learning outcomes requires an efficient mechanism. Examinations, per se, are not suitable indicators. How is this task carried out in your OU?

23.   Is your OU in a position to offer a better quality alternative to the correspondence courses offered by campus based universities in India?

24.   Leadership and innovation, both political and institutional, is necessary for the growth of any institution, more so for the OU. How do you rate the level of this crucial factor in your OU?

25.   What, in your opinion, should be the role of the Distance Education Council (DEC) in promoting / influencing / expanding the activities of State Open Universities?

26.   Now, the DEC is almost a part of IGNOU and the Vice Chancellor of IGNOU is the Chairman of DEC. There is a feeling among educationists that DEC will be more effective if it is not simply an adjunct/ component / part of IGNOU? How more effective can DEC become if it is made an autonomous entity for ensuring coordination among the State Open Universities?

27.   a) Has any study been conducted by your OU regarding the employment of graduates who came out of the institution.

b) What is the overall contribution by your OU to the workforce (This may cover Government, Public & Private organizations, entrepreneurship by individuals etc)?

28.   What innovative steps have been taken by your OU for developing close bonds with society?

29.   Have there been any specific marketing strategies adopted for creating an awareness of your OU among the general public?

30.   What special initiatives have been taken to reduce dependence on Governmental funding and to generate your own resources?

31.   Have there been any special attempts at using technology for programme/ course delivery?

32.   In what manner, if at all, has your OU established its international presence?

33.   Has your institution received and special awards for its contributions.?

34.   Has your institution made any systematic efforts at long – term planning of its development, in line with the needs of your State and those of the nation?

35.   Please suggest an appropriate mechanism and agency that can be employed to assess and accredit the Open Universities and other DE institutions.

36.   How would you estimate the percentage of ODL participation in the entire Higher Education pie?

37.   Are there many region – specific, and culture – related problems connected with your OU? How is the OU trying to solve them?

38.   What is the plan envisaged by your OU for future growth?