

— REPORT —

STATUS OF THE STATE OPEN UNIVERSITIES IN INDIA



Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia
New Delhi, India

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Status of the State Open Universities in India

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Abbreviations

AICTE	: All India Council for Technical Education
AIR	: All India Radio
AIU	: Association of Indian Universities
APOU	: Andhra Pradesh Open University*
BAOU	: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University
BRAOU	: Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Open University*
CABE	: Central Advisory Board of Education
CCTV	: Closed Circuit Television
CD	: Computer Disc
CEMCA	: Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia
CIQA	: Centre for Internal Quality Assurance
COL	: Commonwealth of Learning
DDK	: Doordarshan Kendra
DEB	: Distance Education Bureau
DEC	: Distance Education Council
DECI	: Distance Education Council of India
DTH	: Direct to Home
DTP	: Desk Top Publishing
DVD	: Digital Video Disc
EMPC	: Electronic Media Production Centre
ERP	: Enterprise Resource Planning
FM	: Frequency Modulation
GD	: Gyan Darshan
GER	: Gross Enrolment Ratio
GPS	: Global Positioning System
ICCE	: International Council for Correspondence Education (renamed in 1982)
ICDE	: International Council for Distance Education (ICCE renamed in 1982)
ICFE	: Indian Council for Flexible Education
ICOL	: Indian Council for Open Learning
ICT	: Information and Communication Technology
IGNOU	: Indira Gandhi National Open University
IRC	: Interactive Radio Counselling
IT	: Information Technology
IVRS	: Interactive Voice Response System

KKHSOU : Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University
KOU : Kota Open University**
KSOU : Karnataka State Open University
Ku Band : Kurtz-under Band
LAN : Local Area Network
LCMS : Learning Content Management System
LMS : Learning Management System
MHRD : Ministry of Human Resource Development
MOOCs : Massive Open Online Courses
MOU : Memorandum of Understanding
MPBOU : Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University
NAAC : National Assessment and Accreditation Council
NCTE : National Council for Teacher Education
NOU : Nalanda Open University
NPE : National Policy on Education
NSOU : Netaji Subhas Open University
NSS : National Sample Survey
OCW : Open Course Ware
ODL : Open and Distance Learning
OER : Open Educational Resources
OOU : Odisha Open University
OU : Open University
OUs : Open Universities
PLAR : Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition
PSSOU : Pandit Sundarlal Sharma Open University
RTI : Right to Information
ROTs : Receive Only Terminals
SAARC : South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SCORM : Sharable Content Object Reference Model
SIR : Student Information Repository
SLF : Self Learning Format
SLMs : Self Learning Materials
SLP : Special Leave Petition
SMS : Short Messaging Service
SOU : State Open University
SOUs : State Open Universities
TNOU : Tamil Nadu Open University
UGC : University Grants Commission

UKOU : Open University of the United Kingdom
UOU : Uttarakhand Open University
UPRTOU : Uttar Pradesh Rajarshi Tandon Open University
VCs : Vice Chancellors
VMOU : Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University**
VOD : Video on Demand
VSAT : Very Small Aperture Terminal
WAN : Wide Area Network
YCMOU : Yeshvantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University

Notes:

- * Andhra Pradesh Open University (APOU), established in 1982, was renamed Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU) on December 7, 1991.
- ** Kota Open University (KOU), established in 1987, was renamed Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University (VMOU) through a Gazette Notification by the Government of Rajasthan on September 21, 2002.



Foreword

The distance education system in India has played an important role in democratising higher education in the country. With a modest beginning in 1962 as the Directorate of Correspondence Courses under the aegis of Delhi University, the system has evolved with the growth of information and communication technologies as well as the growing demand for higher education. The establishment of an Open University in Andhra Pradesh in 1982 (later renamed as Dr. B R Ambedkar Open University) was followed three years later by the Indira Gandhi National Open University.

Parallel to the open university system, conventional universities also increased their intake by creating distance education directorates. These dual mode institutions cater to both campus-based and distance learners. Today, there are 17 open universities in India and these in addition to the over 220 dual mode institutions have contributed substantially to throwing open the ivory towers of higher education.

Brick and mortar institutions alone will be insufficient to cater to the educational needs and requirements of those aspiring to enter tertiary education. India has set a target of 30% gross enrolment ratio by 2020 as against the current ratio of approximately 20%. Over 40 million aspirants are expected to enter higher education by the year 2020. We will see a huge expansion in the ODL system, especially in developing countries.

In 1988, there were only 10 open universities in the Commonwealth, of which three were in Canada and one in the UK. Twenty five years later, that number has tripled and the growth has happened primarily in developing countries. Asia has over 70 open universities and the numbers continue to grow.

Open universities have traditionally built their reputations on the quality of their content. By making quality content free, Open Education Resources or OER have pulled the rug of 'quality courses' from under the feet of open universities. ODL institutions will have to focus on learner support rather than on their courseware alone.

OER seem to have been overshadowed in the past three years by the phenomenal growth of Massive Open Online Courses or MOOCs, a form of distance and online learning. With the MOOC platform, the world has become a connected classroom.

The new model that is emerging would require ODL institutions to do four things: one, the courses and programmes will need to be based on quality OER which can be adopted and adapted freely to suit our specific contexts. Two, the regional and study centres will have to be re-designed to support learners in smaller units in their neighbourhoods and in work places. These spaces must promote peer-to-peer interactions and provide social learning opportunities both face-to-face and online. Three, we will have to harness technologies such as mobile devices and learning analytics to personalise learning and improve outcomes. Four, we need to become relevant to the needs of the 21st century.

This report on the *Status of the State Open Universities* in India provides an overview of the growth of open education. It critically examines the recognition of qualifications, standards and regulations and the preparedness of ODL in India for the 21st century. The report makes recommendations, which I believe, will provide concrete guidelines for policy makers, administrators and other stakeholders in dealing with the issues and concerns facing ODL in the country.

For the last 50 years, ODL institutions have followed campus-based universities in replicating their programmes in order to build their credibility. However, it is time for ODL institutions to chart their own course and respond to the need of the hour. This means preparing learners for the 21st century – for employment, entrepreneurship and global citizenship.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

In the currently evolving information age, education has become a compelling necessity. Today, education has to have a much larger socio-economic relevance than ever before. It has to contribute to the development of a fast growing knowledge society, the creation of knowledge professionals of diverse hues and provide opportunities for lifelong-learning and education for all. In comparison with the conventional system of higher education, Open Universities (OUs) have shown a much greater potential to fulfil this multifaceted demand because of their inherent flexibility to expand the outreach of higher education to larger numbers at affordable costs. Open learning provides a vibrant and dynamic system endowed with capabilities of bringing high quality education to millions. At the same time, it ensures a superior learning experience anywhere anytime. Further, the applications of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have given a major fillip to the accelerated development of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) the world over. It is time we pondered over the question—*Where is the system heading in India?*

For this, a review of the State Open Universities (SOUs) is of importance. At a time when we should be making high quality learning content and experiences available anytime anywhere at increasingly affordable costs, the SOUs need to extend their reach far and wide with learner-friendly and learner-responsive material and services especially in unreached areas and for target groups not served or ignored so far. Today, learner target groups range from craftsmen to researchers; they comprise the employed and the unemployed and include the disadvantaged, the socially or physically constrained and the geographically isolated. It is with a view to cater to such a diverse clientele that the SOUs have to address issues pertaining to the enhancement of skills and the employability of their graduates. Their curricula, learning materials, the use of ICTs in student support services and various operations must reflect a high level of quality and commitment. This is the framework that guides the intended review as pointed to above. *It may be noted that in the main text of this document the terms students and learner like OUs (for Open Universities) and SOUs (for State Open Universities) have been used as free variants, except that the term OUs includes the National Open University, IGNOU, as well.*

I feel honoured to have been entrusted with this undertaking and must convey my gratitude to all those who have helped me in various ways in accomplishing this task. In the first place, I express my sincere thanks to Prof. Asha Kanwar, President, Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Vancouver, Canada, for giving me the opportunity to undertake this study. I feel highly obliged to Dr. Ramesh Sharma, Director, CEMCA, and Dr. Sanjaya Mishra (former Director, CEMCA) of COL, who reposing confidence in me invited me to take up this project. I am grateful to senior officials and colleagues at

IGNOU, particularly, Prof. Nageshwar Rao, Vice-Chancellor; Prof. Sushma Yadav, Pro-Vice-Chancellor; and Prof. C.R.K. Murthy, Director, STRIDE, for giving me the much needed encouragement.

I am deeply indebted to the Vice-Chancellors of the State Open Universities for providing me with the necessary information and the relevant academic inputs, and I put on record my special thanks to Prof. Manoj Soni, Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad; Prof. Chandrakanta Jeyabalan, Vice-Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Open University; and Shri Vikas Raj, IAS, Vice-Chancellor, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad, for promptly responding to the schedules and questionnaires sent to them. Further, I would like to place on record my gratitude for the pains taken by some of their faculty members, namely Prof. Hayat, Director, CIQA, BRAOU; Prof. Ami Upadhyay, Director, School of Humanities, BAOU; and Dr. Mahendran, School of Humanities, TNOU, in filling up the schedules and questionnaires in a timely manner.

I must also acknowledge the help given by Ms. Manjula Verma, Consultant, and Ms. Seema, both of the DEB, the UGC, by way of providing me with the documents that have helped me in preparing this Report.

I would also like to place on record the sincere efforts of my learned friends and former colleagues at the DEC, IGNOU: Prof. Swaraj Basu, IGNOU, and Dr. Devkant Rao, IGNOU, which they put in helping me finalize this report. My special thanks to Mr. Thyagarajan and his team at CEMCA for providing me with the necessary support to complete this task.

At the end I would like to acknowledge that the following two documents were used extensively in preparing Section 3 of this Report:

Srivastava, M. & Rao, D. (2015), 'Restructuring of Indian Open Universities: Need of the hour!', *University News*, 53(2), 13-22

Srivastava, M. (2012). *Open Universities: India's Answer to Challenges in Higher Education*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.

Background of the Study

In February 2015, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), New Delhi, India (the Southeast Asian Regional Office of the Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver, Canada), sought the services of a Consultant to develop an analytical report on the *Status of the State Open Universities in India*.

Terms of Reference

The report will discuss issues around access and relevance, equity and social inclusion, and quality, and refer to the previous study on the subject that was sponsored by the Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver, Canada and conducted by T. Rajagopalan (available at: http://www.col.org/Publication Documents/pub_A_study_of_the-Development-of-the-State-Open-Universities_in_India.pdf).

The Consultant shall:

- review the current status of the State Open Universities (SOUs) in India in terms of their growth and development, increasing access to the disadvantaged, gender equality and use of innovative teaching and learning methods including the use of appropriate technologies. This will include a study of their respective missions and mandates and to what extent they have been and are being achieved.
- address the wider question of whether the SOUs are achieving the goal of offering a better quality alternative to the Distance Education (correspondence courses) traditionally offered by some campus-based Indian universities. Is special attention being given to student support and learning outcomes?
- critique the institutional preparedness and availability of infrastructure at the SOUs to meet the changing needs of the learner of the 21st century.
- analyze the issues related to standards of open and distance education, recognition, accreditation and quality assurance.
- recommend steps to use Open Educational Resources, Massive Open Online Courses, and mobile devices for delivery of courses and services to learners in the Open Universities of India.
- propose recommendations that will enable the SOUs to take concrete steps to strengthen their credibility and improve the learning outcomes for employability and entrepreneurship.

With reference to the objectives detailed in the Proposal of CEMCA, the Consultant proposed the following research methodology for conducting the Study.

Research Methodology

At the outset, the Consultant referred to the (above mentioned) previously conducted study entitled: *A Study of the Development of the State Open Universities in India* (2007) conducted by T. Rajagopalan, Journalist and Former Education Correspondent of *The Hindu*. Thereafter, the Consultant developed the design of the study assigned to her namely: ***Status of the State Open Universities in India***. She followed the case study research method through and through. The data was collected using the general survey techniques. Schedules were administered to all the Open Universities (OUs) and questionnaires were sent to the Vice-Chancellors of all the State OUs. The primary data comprises i) responses to the questionnaires, ii) details sent online by the State Open Universities to the Distance Education Bureau (DEB), the UGC, for its database and also the details in the proposals, sent to the UGC, for the financial grants for 2015-16, and iii) the Annual Reports and the Vice-Chancellors' Convocation Reports published by the various Open Universities (OUs). The data thus collected and collated was subjected to descriptive analysis using appropriate statistical techniques. This in essence was the methodology followed to complete this study.

Work Plan and its Implementation

The Study was proposed to be completed by March 31, 2015. After obtaining the official permission from the Vice Chancellor of IGNOU, the Consultant commenced the Study on February 10, 2015.

- February 10, 2015, onwards: The survey schedule and the questionnaire were developed for obtaining the necessary information from the SOUs and their Vice Chancellors (VCs). Emails were sent to all the Vice-Chancellors of the SOUs requesting them to send the Annual Reports and also the Convocation Reports of their respective OUs. The schedule and the questionnaire were sent as attachments to the emails sent to the VCs. Further, the latest available data pertaining to the SOUs was procured from the DEB office of the UGC.
- February 20, 2015, onwards: The data obtained was systematically browsed and analysed. This was followed by the preparation of tables, graphics, etc. that helped in interpreting the data. Report writing and preparation of the first draft of the Report was also undertaken side by side.
- March 10, 2015: The 1st draft of the Report was submitted to CEMCA for review.
- March 15 - March 31, 2015: Incorporating the reviewer's comments and suggestions, the Report was finalized.

1 State Open Universities of India: A Review

1.1 Introduction

The establishment of the British Open University (UKOU) in 1969 was indeed a watershed moment in the evolution of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in the world. With the British OU, the United Kingdom (UK) gave the world the idea of a novel educational system/institution outside the rigid structure of the conventional university system and the undisputed success of this institution gave credibility to the distance education system all over the world. It proved to be a source of inspiration to many other countries including India, which in turn established Open Universities as a means of expanding educational opportunities for large sections of population and leading to national development. Most of these countries had large working populations, mainly the young looking for avenues to enhance their education and skills. Countries like India, with large numbers of aspiring learners who did not have access to the conventional mode of higher education, were grappling with the problem of providing quality education to all the aspirants. Open Universities (OUs) seemed to be *the solution*. Soon these countries started setting up OUs with the objective of expanding the base of university-level education. They realized that the adults with jobs, families and social commitments together with many professionals requiring further training at advanced levels constituted a very large population of prospective part-time university students. While the OUs were being established in some developed countries, certainly a greater need for them was in the developing countries, because quality educational opportunities were required to be expanded to cover large and economically diverse populations.

In India, the Open University System, as an instrument of democratizing education, was structurally and systematically initiated formally for the first time in the early 1980s to augment opportunities for higher education, to reach the unreached and also to make it a lifelong process with no restriction of age at the time of enrolment, prior educational attainments or pace and place of study.

1.2 Genesis and Growth

India was one of the first countries to warm up to the idea of 'Open Universities' soon after setting up of the world's first Open University by United Kingdom in 1969. The Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, in collaboration with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the University Grants Commission (UGC) organized a seminar in December, 1970, as part of a programme for the observance of the 'International Education Year'. Inaugurating the seminar, Prof. V.K.R.V. Rao, the then Education Minister, mooted the idea of establishing an Open University in India and

observed, *“It must cover not only the comparatively limited number of university students, but should cover dropouts from schools at various points, the neo-literates and eventually all adults who desire to avail these programmes of continuing education. The new interesting programmes of instruction, based on modern science oriented educational technology for students of higher education studying in the open university should be made available to this much larger body of population which remains outside the so called university system”*. The seminar strongly recommended the establishment of an Open University. In its report, the Working Group, appointed by the Union Government to look at the feasibility for setting up an Open University in India, stated, *“In a situation of this type, where the expansion of enrolment in higher education has to continue at a terrific pace and where available resources in terms of men and money are limited, the obvious solution, if proper standards are to be maintained and the demand for higher education from different sections of the people is to be met, is to adopt the open university system with its provision of part-time or own-time basis...”*. On the basis of the recommendations of the Working Group, a draft Bill was prepared by the Union Government for establishing a National Open University. There was, however, no follow-up action for several years.

In 1982, a Committee to enquire into the working of the Central Universities was appointed by the UGC under the Chairpersonship of Dr. Madhuri R. Shah who strongly reiterated the Parthasarathy Committee’s (Government of India, 1975) recommendation for the creation of a National Open University (UGC, 1984, p. 52). The national-level debate on setting up of an OU stimulated thinking on the subject in several States as well. While these efforts were on at the Union level, the Government of Andhra Pradesh took the lead and in 1982 decided to establish an Open University to provide *“access to higher education to the adult population of the State, for upgrading their functional capacities and improving quality of their life in the context of broader social and political objectives of equalization of educational opportunities and the emergence of a new concept of lifelong education”* (Govt. of Andhra Pradesh, 1982). Towards this end, the Government of Andhra Pradesh appointed a Committee. Based on its report the Andhra Pradesh Open University (APOU) (Prasad and Venkaiah, 2005) was established on August 26, 1982 by an Act of the State Legislature. Thus the dual structure of ODL emerged in India in 1982 as: I) independent single mode OUs like APOU, and II) Correspondence Course Institutes attached to conventional universities like Delhi University and other conventional universities.

The opening of the Andhra Pradesh Open University was hailed as a new chapter in the history of education in the country. With the establishment of APOU (renamed Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University-BRAOU in 1991), interest at the national level increased rapidly. With the publication of the document *Challenge of Education* by the Ministry of Education in 1985, the public debate focused on education in India in a critical and dynamic way. One of the major conclusions arrived at in this document was that the formal system could not cater to the educational needs of the country. Another significant conclusion was that all attempts should be made to use the most advanced technology available, in achieving the educational objectives of the country. This led to

the strengthening of the conviction that a quality national open distance learning institution was needed to cater to the emerging demands of higher education in India.

On January 5, 1985, the then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, announced that a National Open University was to be established and on September 20, 1985, the Indira Gandhi National Open University came into being by an Act of Parliament (IGNOU Act 1985). K.C. Pant, the then Minister of Education, while introducing the IGNOU Bill in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of the Indian Parliament) on May 21, 1985, explained its purpose in the following words:

Despite the tremendous expansion of the formal system of Higher Education since independence, the pressure on the system is continuously increasing. Indeed the system has not been able to provide an effective means to equalize educational opportunities. The rigidities of the system requiring among others attendance in classrooms for example have been a disincentive to many learners. Moreover the combinations of subjects are inflexible and are often not relevant to the needs of the learners. This has resulted in pronounced mismatch between the content of most of the programmes and needs of the development sectors (Rajya Sabha Debates, 1985).

K.C. Pant emphasized that the new methods of teaching-learning need to be advocated to replace the teacher-centred education being practised in the conventional education system. There was a realization of the need to democratize education and reach out to those sections of society which had remained neglected and ignored for long, and to provide continuing education to the working professionals in their leisure time. A national level OU was mooted to fill in the critical gap in our educational system and to provide an alternative approach to learning that was flexible. It was also pointed out that correspondence education was introduced in the past to absorb the ever increasing pressure of numbers, but even that did not create any significant impact as the said correspondence courses were not in any manner different from the formal programmes. In comparison with the formal education their effectiveness had suffered seriously. To quote the Minister's exact words:

The Open University system of distance education would, on the other hand, be vastly superior to correspondence courses and, in some cases, even to formal programmes offered by regular colleges. The multi-media delivery system that the Open University would adopt would make for greater efficiency and a package of services like counselling, guidance, summer schools, contact programmes and laboratory facilities it can offer could ensure more effective interaction between the system and the learners. Above all, the flexibility in its processes which transcends the limitation of time, of time-bound and space-bound education would provide the Open University system an advantage even over the formal programmes...

The proposal before the House seeks not only to establish an Open University to offer a variety of programmes, but also to assume a leadership role in promoting a distance education system in the country. The Bill provides that the National Open University will coordinate the functioning of various distance learning institutions in the country and ensure that they maintain a standard that commands respect and establishes a high level of credibility for this system in India. Besides, the National Open University will provide resource support to other institutions of distance learning through documentation, training, methodological backup, and so on.

The approach of the National Open University will be significantly different from that of conventional universities. Unlike the latter, the Open University does not have to rely on its own faculties. It can draw upon the best minds in the country and utilize expertise, wherever it is available, in preparing its educational material. It can also commission individuals and organizations to prepare and produce textual and supporting material and can exercise greater freedom in the choice of tutors, guides and summer course Directors without depending entirely on the in-house faculty. To the extent necessary this University can also draw upon the expertise and experience of people outside the university system...

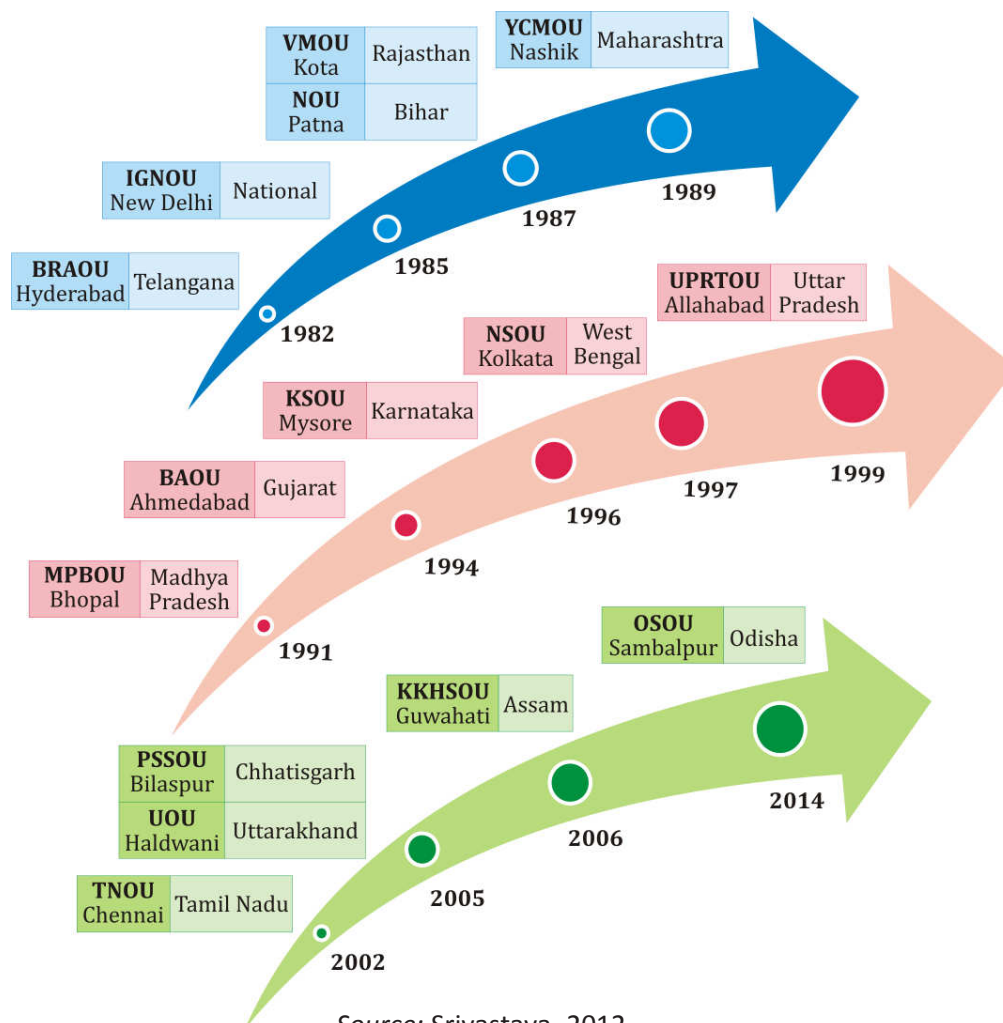
The Open University will usher in a new era in educational technology by providing not only models but also generating manpower trained in the application of such technologies ... (Lok Sabha Debates, 1985)

It is clear that the OU, at the national level, was envisaged not only to operate as a distance teaching-learning system, but also to function as a body for promotion, coordination and determination of standards in the *open university* and *distance education* systems in the country.

In May 1986, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) in its *National Policy on Education 1986*, gave prominence to the OU system as a means to “*augment opportunities for higher education and as an instrument of democratizing education*”. While the policy stated the Government’s resolve to strengthen IGNOU in every possible way, it also recognized the need for caution in developing an effective open learning institution. “*This powerful instrument will have to be developed with care and extended with caution*”. (NPE, Govt. of India, 1986, p. 15).

These two events – the establishment of IGNOU and the publication of the *National Policy on Education 1986* – marked a turning point in the growth of ODL system in India. The State Government of Rajasthan took a decision to establish an Open University soon after the Parliament adopted the new policy on education in 1986. The idea of establishing an Open University in Rajasthan came from the UGC Committee (under the Chairmanship of Prof. G. Ram Reddy) constituted for the Institute of Correspondence Studies, Rajasthan University, Jaipur, in the year 1985. It had recommended that the distance education system in Rajasthan was fairly developed, and as such, it had the

Table 1: Growth of the Open Universities in India



potential of growing into an OU. Subsequently, having held a series of preparatory meetings with the IGNOU authorities, the State Government announced the establishment of Kota Open University (KOU), for the creation of which the necessary ordinance too was formulated and promulgated. This ordinance was subsequently ratified by the Kota Open University Act (1987) on July 23, 1987. In order to achieve better coordination among the vast and scattered resources for distance education in the State, the Government of Rajasthan decided to transfer the Institute of Correspondence Studies and Continuing Education, Jaipur, and the College of Correspondence Studies, Udaipur, to Kota Open University along with their assets. Accordingly, strategies were developed to phase out the conventional courses and develop alternative courses on the basis of the OU system (KOU, 1995, p. 1-2). Later in 2002, the university was renamed Vardhman Mahaveer Open University (VMOU).

In the State of Bihar, a commission on higher education was appointed by the State Government of Bihar, which was headed by Professor V.S. Jha. The Commission strongly recommended the establishment of an OU in the State. It said, *“It would be unrealistic to hope that even the most affluent State would have human and material resources to establish traditional universities and colleges of even tolerable quality to meet the evergrowing demand for higher education.”* Further, it said, *“The present policy concerning education has to be re-examined critically. The only hope lies in a radical and innovative approach through the avenues of non-formal education.”* (Government of Bihar, 1983, p. 229-235). Consequently, Nalanda Open University (NOU), reminiscent of the famous Nalanda University of Ancient India, was conceived in March 1987 through an ordinance promulgated by the Government of Bihar. It was set up at Patna in Bihar in 1988. Subsequently, it came under the authority and jurisdiction of the Nalanda Open University Act passed in 1995.

The Government of Maharashtra appointed a Committee with Dr. K.G. Deshmukh, Vice Chancellor, Amravati University, as Chairman, to examine the feasibility of establishing an OU in the State. The Committee submitted its report in early 1985 with strong recommendations for the establishment of an Open University in the State and a detailed blueprint for the purpose (Government of Maharashtra, 1985). The Yeshwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) thus came into existence on July 1, 1989, through Act XX (1989) of the Maharashtra State Legislature. YCMOU, situated at Nashik near Mumbai, became the fourth State-level Open University in India (YCMOU, 1994, p. 1).

Following the recommendation of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), issued in 1992, that each major State should have an Open University, a few more State Governments set up OUs. One of the recommendations of CABE was to establish a Council of Open Universities to promote their coordinated development. The view of the planners and policy makers, at that time, was that there should be several Open Universities because of the multiplicity of languages in the country and also because the numbers to be reached/educated were inconceivably large. They also believed that the OUs should work as a networked system to avoid duplication of efforts on the one hand, and ensure optimum utilization of resources while assuring a high level of quality, on the other. Perhaps this vision was a little too idealistic and did not take into account the practical difficulties involved in translating this view into an effective working model (Manjulika and Reddy, 1996, p. 31; Srivastava, 2012, p. 15).

As outlined above, IGNOU had been entrusted with the dual responsibility of functioning as a National Open University and also as the *apex body* for open and distance education system in the country. Soon enough, however, apprehensions began to be expressed about the relationship between IGNOU and other OUs, and the efficacy as well as the desirability of one university (i.e. IGNOU) sitting in judgment over the quality and the standards of the academic programmes of another (i.e. any State Open University). The whole concept, it was argued, was contrary to the time-tested principle of the autonomy of universities. Most universities in the country would find it incongruous to be guided and possibly nurtured by another university. There were protracted discussions with

the OUs, that were already functioning, and also with the Government of India and the UGC. IGNOU itself had to move cautiously and take into account all the concerned interests. It also had to display exceptional administrative awareness and an academic vision to converge diverse interests to focus on a common goal. Eventually, towards the end of 1991, a consensus emerged among all the participating parties for the establishment of a statutory mechanism, under the IGNOU Act, to perform the functions of promotion and coordination of the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system in India. This mechanism, it was agreed, would be known as the Distance Education Council (DEC), which would function within the broad framework and policies laid down by the Board of Management of IGNOU, while enjoying a significant measure of autonomy in its operations (Srivastava, 2012, p. 15).

Thus, the DEC was established in 1991 under Section 5(2) of the Indira Gandhi National Open University Act 1985. And it was made responsible for the promotion, coordination and maintenance of standards in the ODL system in the country. Section 5(2) of the IGNOU Act 1985 stipulates:

Notwithstanding anything contained in any other law at the time being in force, but without prejudice to the provision of sub-section, it shall be the duty of the University to take all such steps as it may deem fit for the promotion of the Open University and distance education systems and for the determination of standards of teaching, evaluation and research in such systems, and for the purpose of performing these functions, the university shall have such powers including the power to allocate and disburse grants to colleges, whether admitted to its privileges or not, or to any other university or institutions of higher learning, as may be specified by the Statutes [IGNOU Act 1985, Section 5(2), p. 4].

The following powers and functions of the DEC are defined under Clause 4(a) of Statute 28 of the Indira Gandhi National Open University Act 1985:

It shall be the general duty of the DEC to take all such steps as are consistent with the provisions of this Act, the Statutes and the Ordinances for the promotion of the Open University/distance education systems, its coordinated development, and the determination of its standards in particular... [IGNOU Act 1985, Statute 28(4), p. 47]

After the establishment of the DEC, several new State OUs were set up by various State Governments. The IGNOU and the DEC would routinely interact with the concerned State Governments in the preliminary work of establishing new universities. In most cases, the DEC provided technical inputs in preparing project reports and also the initial financial support for setting up these universities. Many State Open Universities were set up after the inception of the DEC either directly by State Governments or through technical support from the DEC and IGNOU. The relevant details are as follows (Srivastava 2012, p. 16):

1. The Madhya Pradesh State Government established the Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University (MPBOU) under an Act of State Legislative Assembly in 1991.
2. The Gujarat Government announced the setting up of the Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU) in 1994, which was established by Act No. 14 of 1994 passed by the Gujarat State Legislative Assembly.
3. Karnataka State Open University (KSOU) was established on June 1, 1996, vide Karnataka Government Notification No. EDI/OUV/95, dated February 12, 1996.
4. Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) was established in 1997 by Act XIX of West Bengal State Legislature.
5. Uttar Pradesh Rajarshi Tandon Open University (UPRTOU), Allahabad, was established under Act No. 10 of 1999, passed by the UP Legislature.
6. The Tamil Nadu Open University (TNOU) was established by an Act (No. 27 of 2002) of the Legislative Assembly of the Government of Tamil Nadu.
7. Pandit Sundarlal Sharma Open University (PSSOU), Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, was established vide Notification No. 26/2004 by the Chhattisgarh Legislature and it became operational in 2005.
8. Uttarakhand Open University (UOU) was established vide Act No. 23 of Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly in 2005.
9. The Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), the first of its kind in the entire North-East region and the 14th OU to be set up in India, was established by the Assam Legislative Assembly by Act (XXXVII of 2005) and it became operational in 2006.
10. Beginning in 2010, with technical support from the DEC and IGNOU, the State Govt. of Odisha initiated the process of establishment of an open university in the State. These efforts showed fruits in November 2014, when Odisha Open University (OOU) was announced by the State Legislature of Odisha. It, however, has yet to become operational.

Today, second only to China, India with one National Open University and thirteen State Open Universities (currently in operation), has one of the largest networks of OUs in the world. IGNOU is India's largest distance education provider with an annual intake of more than 0.6 million students enrolled in various programmes at Regional Centres and attached to Study Centres across the country. Besides IGNOU, there are some other Indian OUs as well (like BRAOU and YCMOU, for example) that enjoy the mega OU status today.

The regulatory and supportive role of the DEC, however, came to its end in 2012, when the IGNOU Board of Management dissolved it. The authority of regulating ODL was given to the UGC by an administrative order, dated December 29, 2012, of the MHRD. It is just an *ad hoc* arrangement till an independent regulatory and coordinating body for ODL is created by the Parliament.

1.3 Mission and Mandate

It is obvious that the OUs in India emerged as a consequence of a careful consideration and genuine research pertaining to the issues facing higher education. They were set up primarily to meet the increasing demand for quality higher education and viewed as the effective means to provide education outside the existing structure of conventional education in India. IGNOU, the national OU, was entrusted with the responsibility to serve as a model for creating opportunities for higher education and to promote and set the standards for quality higher education through ODL.

Clearly, the vision was that OUs would be different from conventional universities. There was great expectation from the OU system – that it would in a substantial measure augment educational opportunities and democratize higher education to reach and benefit larger segments of the population, particularly the disadvantaged groups. It was also realized that unless we open educational opportunities to the deprived, unless we remove the structural rigidities in our educational system and unless we integrate the educational system with developments in communication technology, we cannot and will not make any headway in realizing the goal of educating the majority of the Indians and of catering to the diverse types of learner that a modern society needs and demands (Basu and Srivastava, 2012, p. 15).

The main objectives of the Indian OUs as laid down in the *National Policy on Education 1986* (Government of India, 1987, p. 10) are:

- to reverse the tide of admission in formal institutions;
- to offer education to people in their own homes and at their own jobs;
- to enable students to earn while they learn;
- to provide counselling and guidance to people; and
- to take education to remote villages, through radio, television and correspondence courses.

The idea was to provide an innovative system of university-level education with a view to promoting lifelong learning and encouraging excellence in new fields of knowledge related to the needs of employment and necessary for building the economy of the country. In its journey of over three decades, following the path of collaboration and sharing of resources, the OU system has succeeded, to a great extent, in developing a *dependable alternative mode* of education available for the diverse needs of learners and the country.

1.4 Learner Enrolment

Since the OU system was designed with the mandate to open up higher education to larger segments of the population by eliminating rigid entry requirements and offering

higher education at affordable costs, the OUs adopted a learner-centred approach and used innovative methods for the delivery of their programmes so as to reach out to larger segments of the deprived populations including those who had dropped out (or drop out) of the conventional system because of its multiple rigidities. The OUs, therefore, consciously introduced flexibility not only with regard to entry, pace, place and delivery options, but also with regard to the choice and combination of courses, assessment of learners' achievement and the modalities of course completion.

Unlike conventional universities that are highly selective at the entry level, the OUs are known for their openness or flexibility with regard to entry in terms of their criteria for eligibility and also the number of seats. Thus they cater to large numbers and reduce social exclusion by widening participation. Adoption of the credit system, as a component of openness, helps the OUs to allow learners the provision of lateral entry and also the facility to exit from the system on acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies as per their convenience and requirements. Thus, the OUs have made a beginning in democratizing higher educational opportunities for large segments of the population and for those who have been denied education through the conventional systems. The open door policy of the OUs is attracting large numbers of aspirants to higher education—a fact evidenced by the data (see Table 2) pertaining to the enrolment at the OUs in absolute numbers. In 1983-84, the first OU, namely the Andhra Pradesh Open University, started its operations with its first intake of 6,231 students. Enrolment at the OUs has been increasing by leaps and bounds since then. It grew *ten times* in a short span of five years with just three OUs in operation. Two decades later (i.e. in 2003-04), there were 10 OUs and their enrolment was 750,342, which doubled again in the next five years (i.e. in 2008-09). While in 2013-14 (i.e. ten years after 2003-04), with 14 OUs in operation, it nearly trebled to reach 2,104, 292. Such a phenomenal growth has made the OUs the fastest growing educational system in the country.

Table 2: Growth of Enrolment at the Open Universities

Years	IGNOU	BRAOU	VMOU	NOU	YCMOU	MPBOU	BAOU	KSOU	NSOU	UPRTOU	TNOU	PSSOU	UOU	KKHSOU	
Year of Establishment	1985	1982	1987	1987	1989	1991	1994	1996	1997	1999	2002	2005	2005	2006	TOTAL
1983-84		6231													6231
1984-85		18699													18699
1985-86		17009													17009
1986-87	4528	22795													27323
1987-88	16811	16587	14272												47670
1988-89	42324	16848	3751												62923
1989-90	48281	19656	18690		3757										90384
1990-91	52376	29593	14249		6602										102820

Years	IGNOU	BRAOU	VMOU	NOU	YCMOU	MPBOU	BAOU	KSOU	NSOU	UPRTOU	TNOU	PSSOU	UOU	KKHSOU	
Year of Establishment	1985	1982	1987	1987	1989	1991	1994	1996	1997	1999	2002	2005	2005	2006	TOTAL
1991-92	62375	34029	13156		11747										121305
1992-93	75666	36683	7853		24215										144417
1993-94	84180	35150	11109		39933										170372
1994-95	91399	41044	8879		43485										184807
1995-96	130228	55533	8557		56967		5457								256742
1996-97	163307	48966	15091		62728		4793	21695							316580
1997-98	163394	53802	6485		59936		4053	25367							313037
1998-99	172550	64360	7879		64204		2775	29440	236						341444
1999-00	196650	66636	5135	703	110721	98700	7013	31455	640						517653
2000-01	291360	55760	4356	495	113756	106890	9878	37037	1019	3341					623892
2001-02	301724	55369	5746	1464	110683	108545	11247	35656	1400	3297					635131
2002-03	316547	90205	9135	2085	113934	111048	8565	31666	2303	3104					688592
2003-04	334415	89087	10124	1906	102642	151353	7451	29929	9696	4246	9493				750342
2004-05	366161	97962	5999	1805	132132	192230	23462	34063	15412	8025	9361				886612
2005-06	429542	87833	15817	8448	170896	177602	33133	39016	25369	10331	17222				1015209
2006-07	468444	70091	20921	15945	219494	144076	72820	49218	24989	15626	12147	4016	2774		1120561
2007-08	550600	75141	16324	25501	260569	137073	61395	59474	49793	16668	22048	10742	3661		1288989
2008-09	608614	89416	28126	27312	307860	134580	37227	78325	62422	17779	49111	11032	4065	16510	1472379
2009-10	652946	179868	55879	30432	311408	93178	39799	106861	40214	22653	57150	16927	625	22452	1630392
2010-11	852740	191367	165805	42486	311408	102283	41690	131950	33179	30574	28330	10429	6749	37613	1916247
2011-12	993471	180000	38005	41343	425908	93604	31451	116720	1308	57604	50044	12995	15663	56394	2114510
2012-13	696753	183949	24663	26576	611949	103042	42110	116729	22928	62087	41722	19822	23336	69523	2045189
2013-14	722390	165805	20981	27023	618372	125000	34982	108769	55340	58897	21495	21600	21905	101732	2104291

Source: Srivastava, 2012, p. 29; DEB, 2014 (Compiled by the author.)

According to statistics provided by the UGC (see Table 3), the enrolment in conventional institutions of higher education, too has been increasing over the years. Between 1983-84 and 2013-14, enrolment in the conventional university system increased from 3.3 million to nearly 23.7 million (see Table 3), which shows that the number of students pursuing higher education in the conventional system increased just over *seven* times in three decades. On the other hand, the enrolment at the OUs was 0.006 million in 1983-84, and it went up to 2.1 million by 2013-14, which is indeed a meteoric increase of almost 338 times, even though the number of operational OUs as on date was only 14 as compared to 666 conventional universities and 39,671 colleges in 2013-14 (UGC, 2015).

The average annual growth of enrolment during the period 1983-84 to 2013-14 in the conventional system has been nearly 6.8%, while in the ODL system for the same period it has been 19% (ignoring the spike in 1984-85) to 25.0% (overall) per annum (see Table 3).

Table 3: Enrolment in Higher Education– the Conventional System and the Open Universities

Years	Total Enrolment in Higher Education in the Conventional System	Percentage of Increase Over the Preceding Year	Total Enrolment in the Open Universities	Percentage of Increase Over the Preceding Year	Share of OUs in Total Enrolment in Higher Education
1983-84	3307649	5.6	6231	-	0.19%
1984-85	3404096	2.9	18699	200.0	0.55%
1985-86	3605029	5.9	17009	-9.0	0.47%
1986-87	3757158	4.2	27323	60.6	0.72%
1987-88	4020159	7.0	47670	74.5	1.17%
1988-89	4285489	6.6	62923	32.0	1.45%
1989-90	4602680	7.4	90384	43.6	1.93%
1990-91	4924868	7.0	102820	13.8	2.05%
1991-92	5265886	6.9	121426	18.1	2.25%
1992-93	5534966	5.1	144519	19.0	2.54%
1993-94	5817249	5.1	170372	17.9	2.85%
1994-95	6113929	5.1	184807	8.5	2.93%
1995-96	6574005	7.5	256742	38.9	3.76%
1996-97	6842598	4.1	316580	23.3	4.42%
1997-98	7260418	6.1	313037	-1.1	4.13%
1998-99	7705520	6.1	341444	9.0	4.24%
1999-00	8050607	4.5	517653	51.6	6.04%
2000-01	8399443	4.3	623892	20.5	6.91%
2001-02	8964680	6.7	635131	1.8	6.62%
2002-03	9516773	6.2	688592	8.4	6.75%
2003-04	10201981	7.2	750342	8.9	6.97%
2004-05	11038543	8.2	886612	18.1	7.76%
2005-06	12043050	9.3	1015209	14.5	8.35%
2006-07	13163054	10.3	1120561	10.3	8.61%
2007-08	14400381	9.4	1288989	15.0	9.20%
2008-09	15768417	9.5	1472379	14.2	9.74%
2009-10	17243352	9.4	1630392	10.7	10.03%
2010-11	18670050	8.3	1916247	17.5	10.26%
2011-12	20327478	8.8	2114510	10.3	10.40%
2012-13	21501154	5.7	2045189	-3.3	9.51%
2013-14	23765000	10.5	2104291	2.9	8.86%
Averages		6.8%		25.0%	

Source: UGC, 2015; UGC, 2014, p. 62; IGNOU, 2014, p. 26-27; DEB, 2014 (Compiled by the author.)

1.5 Types of Programme

From the very beginning, all OUs in India have remained focused on developing and launching academic programmes at different levels and in diverse disciplines in order to provide education to large and differing segments of the population, including the disadvantaged. The distinctive feature of these programmes is their range and variety—from certificate level programmes that are skill-based or awareness related, to research degree programmes like M.Phil. and Ph.D.—together with the feature of flexibility in the process of learning provided through the distance teaching methods in order to meet individual requirements. Further, to promote the capabilities needed in contemporary society and to provide continual opportunities to those who miss the opportunity of pursuing higher education, all OUs have introduced most of the traditional academic programmes being offered by conventional universities. In addition, to reach out to new learner groups and to fulfil the ever-expanding national requirement, professional and functional need-based programmes too have been, and are being, introduced.

Table 4: Number of Programmes offered by the OUs

Years	IGNOU	BRAOU	VMOU	NOU	YCMOU	MPBOU	BAOU	KSOU	NSOU	UPRTOU	TNOU	PSSOU	UOU	KKHSOU	Total
1983-84		3													3
1989-90	7	22	11												40
1996-97	36	40	17					18							111
2003-04	78	48	26	20	65	65	11	32	11	43	23				422
2009-10	338	59	69	88	106	67	53	59	64	79	104	15	8	29	1138
2013-14	228	72	90	105	170	75	51	72	62	77	112	37	127	60	1338

Source: IGNOU, 2014, p. 23; SOUs, 2014; Srivastava, 2012, p. 33 (Compiled by the author.)

In 2013-14, IGNOU offered the largest number of programmes, viz. 228, followed by YCMOU (170) and TNOU (112) (see Table 4). Data presented in Table 4 shows that in 2013-14 the fourteen (14) OUs put together, offered 1338 academic programmes. As of now several diploma and certificate programmes in diverse areas related to life and societal needs, skill-oriented vocational programmes and continuing and professional upgrading courses are being offered by all OUs. At the post-graduate and undergraduate level, programme areas range from Liberal Arts, Humanities, Commerce and Science to professional areas like Business Management, Computer and Information Sciences, Architecture, Computer Applications, Information Technology, Teacher Education, Nursing, Insurance and Banking, Catering and Hotel Management, Tourism Studies, etc. Some of the OUs are offering Research degree programmes as well.

1.6 Pattern of Enrolment

In 2013-14, majority of the students (55.45%) at the OUs (see Table 5) were enrolled at the undergraduate-level in general Bachelor's Degree programmes, such as B.A. and B.Com.(75% of the total undergraduate-level students). Among the professional degree programmes, the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) attracted the maximum number of students followed by the Bachelor of Computer Applications (B.C.A). The number of students in B.Ed. could have been much higher because of the high demand for this programme all over the country, but due to the norms laid down by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), OUs can enrol only 100 students per study centre and the number of study centres allowed to be opened for the purpose is limited. They can be activated only at institutions approved by the NCTE for offering the B.Ed. programme through the face-to-face mode.

Around 24.36% of the distance learners are enrolled in post-graduate degree programmes. Of these, 50% are enrolled in post-graduate professional degree programmes, i.e. M.B.A. and M.C.A., and another 50% are enrolled in M.A. and M.Com. programmes. A very small percentage is enrolled in M.Sc. programmes. Barely 0.01% of OU students are enrolled in research degree programmes. The remaining 20.18% are pursuing certificate and diploma programmes (SOUs, 2014).

Further analysis of OU enrolments reveals that the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) programme attracts the largest number of learners at these universities even though they offer a variety of need-based vocation-oriented programmes. This reflects the Indian mind set—being a “graduate” is considered a stepping-stone to acquiring a “white collar” status. Interestingly, even those pursuing professional or vocational programmes at conventional universities, also want to acquire a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Commerce degree for the respectability that such a degree provides in our society. This shows that the demand for a traditional programmes, like B.A., is very high in our country.

Even though the formal system of education has expanded significantly over the years, it is unable to meet the growing demand for higher education. With the expanding base at the elementary and the secondary levels, the demand for higher education has increased significantly. The corresponding expansion of the conventional university system is not adequate, nor is it expected to be so for years to come. As a consequence, the number of students desirous of pursuing higher education through the OU system is very high and is increasing exponentially every year. They include aspirants who have completed their schooling, but are unable to get admission in the conventional system because of the limited number of seats, those who have taken up jobs after completing school education and want to pursue higher studies, and those who live in rural or remote areas where institutions of higher education do not exist. There are large numbers of them who discontinue their studies because of socio-economic reasons or lack of motivation and also those who seek continuing education options either out of interest or for career opportunities. They too constitute the clientele of the OUs (Srivastava, 2012).

Table 5: Level-wise Enrolment– the Conventional Universities and the Open Universities

Level	Conventional Universities			Open Universities		
	2003-04	2009-10	2012-13	2003-04	2009-10	2013-14
Under Graduate (Bachelor)	89.09%	86.55 %	85.90%	55.36%	54.62%	55.45%
Post Graduate (Master)	9.18%	11.49%	12.15%	13.99%	24 .18%	24.36%
Research (MPhil and PhD)	0.66%	0.89 %	0.84%	0.06%	0 .05%	0.01%
Diploma and Certificate	1.07%	1.15 %	1.11%	30.59%	21.17%	20.18%
	100 %	100 %	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: UGC, 2014; SOUs, 2014; Srivastava, 2012, p. 34; UGC, 2005, p. 56 (Compiled by the author.)

At higher levels, it is the Master of Arts (M.A.) programme offered by the OUs that is the most popular. It attracts large numbers mainly due to the limited number of seats available in the conventional system, and partly because of the flexibility offered by the OUs, that suits the needs and requirements of working people. In fact, a large number of in-service people are interested in pursuing a Master's Degree with the objective of improving their career prospects. Sometimes it is simply to acquire another degree or to improve their social status.

Many of the students (more than 45%) pursuing the certificate level programmes are enrolled in the six-month Bachelor's Preparatory Programme which is meant for adults (above 18 years of age) who may or may not have any prior educational qualification. Further, the Certificate and Diploma Programmes directly related to the world of work have large enrolments. For example, all the Certificate Programmes pertaining to Computer Applications and IT skills attract large numbers. On the other hand, a large number of Certificate and Diploma Programmes that are very specialized and are meant for particular target groups have very small enrolments (20.18%) (see Table 5).

In 2012-13, the situation in the conventional system was not much different from that in the OUs. Out of the total enrolment (21.501 million), 37.94% of the students were enrolled in the faculty of Arts, followed by 18.56% in Sciences and 17.50% in Commerce/Management. Thus, 74% of the total enrolment was distributed in the three faculties of Arts, Sciences and Commerce/Management. While the remaining 26.00% was in the professional faculties—the highest percentage in Engineering and Technology (16.05%), followed by Medical Sciences (3.52%), etc. Surprisingly, the enrolment in Agricultural Courses (in a country like India where Agriculture and the allied occupations are still the major engagements in vast rural areas) was just 0.48% and that in Veterinary Science, a miniscule 0.14%. It is evident from the faculty-wise distribution of enrolment in 2012-13 that the ratio of professional to non-professional enrolment was almost 1:3 (26:74 to

be precise). Therefore, there is a need for appropriate changes in our policies to rationalize and reduce the existing disparity and help shift the focus of the masses to vocational education (UGC, 2014).

Incidentally, the level-wise enrolment at the OUs in 2013-14 was not quite different from what it was in 2003-04. Even at that time (i.e. in 2003-04), the bulk of the distance learners were enrolled at the undergraduate level (55.36%), 13.99% at the post-graduate level, 0.06% in research degree programmes, 7.83% in diploma programmes and 22.76% in certificate programmes (Srivastava & Ramegowda, 2006). Today too, the majority of learners at the OUs, are enrolled in UG-level programmes (like B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc.).

Figures for 2012-13 show that, in the conventional system as well, , 85.90% of the students were enrolled in UG-level degree programmes, 12.15% at the PG level, 0.84% in research degrees and 1.11% in Diploma- and Certificate-level programmes (see Table 5).

1.7 Profile of Learners

The OUs can certainly claim success in terms of increasing access to higher education. They have attracted women students of all hues. For many of them OUs provided the first chance to pursue university education. They have also increased access for other disadvantaged groups including older students, those who may be geographically isolated or excluded from regular classes because of their job or shift pattern, seasonal or other kinds of work and family and community commitments. Some OUs have successfully targeted courses/programmes at isolated groups, such as aboriginal communities and prisoners and have provided greater access to them. Today the OUs meet 10% of the total demand (in terms of enrolments) for higher education in the country. (Srivastava, 2012, p. 26- 27).

If we compare the data of 2009-10 with that of 2013-14, we find that women's enrolment has been going up steadily. In the conventional system, women comprised 40.2% of the enrolment in 2003-04. This percentage went up marginally to 41.6% in 2009-10 and reached 43.28% in 2012-13 (UGC, 2014, p. 58; UGC, 2011; UGC, 2004). The data presented in Table 6 shows that at most SOUs, barring a few, the share of women learners in the total enrolment has been increasing steadily over the years. Based on an analysis of the data received from the SOUs, here are some highlights of women's enrolment in 2013-14 (SOUs, 2014):

- At the PG level women were mostly enrolled in Master of Arts, Master of Commerce, and Masters of Library Science programmes.
- At the UG level, the most popular programmes were Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Library Science and Bachelor of Home Science.
- The Diploma and Certificate programmes most popular with women were those related to Education, Early Child Care and Education, Food and Nutrition, Health Education, Maternity and Child Health, or areas like Interior Design, Tailoring, Fashion Design and Translation.

Table 6: Profile of Distance Learners Enrolled at the SOUs
(The figures in all the relevant columns are in percentages.)

SOU	Years	Female	Rural	SC	ST	OBC
BRAOU	2003-04	34.6	42.3	21.3	6.1	30.7
	2009-10	41.4	62.2	20.2	6.3	45.0
	2013-14	43.3	66.1	22.3	8.1	49.1
VMOU	2003-04	23.6	NA	10.6	6.2	-
	2009-10	35.7	45.0	13.2	11.0	31.0
	2013-14	38.0	54.4	13.1	11.1	37.9
NOU	2003-04	24.2	55.2	8.7	3.2	38.8
	2009-10	34.0	66.8	8.8	2.8	28.6
	2013-14	36.2	66.5	8.2	3.7	40.6
YCMOU	2003-04	33.0	47.0	14.9	4.9	25.9
	2009-10	39.3	48.4	10.5	3.5	27.0
	2013-14	35.5	63.0	15.1	6.2	28.0
MPBOU	2003-04	39.9	57.6	11.9	9.9	29.9
	2009-10	36.6	55.6	18.1	12.1	27.6
	2013-14	37.8	NA	11.2	12.4	37.1
BAOU	2003-04	32.3	49.1	12.4	5.6	-
	2009-10	43.1	46.9	19.9	6.9	-
	2013-14	47.6	64.4	25.2	15.2	0.1
KSOU	2003-04	52.1	NA	NA	NA	NA
	2009-10	46.5	51.0	12.5	6.0	8.3
	2013-14	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
NSOU	2003-04	44.8	50.7	20.1	4.8	-
	2009-10	41.2	NA	16.8	2.7	6.6
	2013-14	40.7	4.1	20.7	4.3	12.9
UPRTOU	2003-04	27.5	42.3	10.9	0.0	34.4
	2009-10	40.1	65.3	0.1	0.3	37.8
	2013-14	45.2	69.3	13.0	0.5	50.0
TNOU	2003-04	38.8	49.8	13.9	0.7	71.8
	2009-10	40.4	39.8	18.4	0.7	70.1
	2013-14	49.1	43.5	27.1	0.0	72.9
PSSOU	2003-04	-	-	-	-	-
	2009-10	40.7	61.9	16.9	17.7	34.4
	2013-14	38.9	NA	13.4	27.6	41.1
UOU	2003-04	-	-	-	-	-
	2009-10	34.4	60.1	7.8	2.6	12.2
	2013-14	46.4	60.2	16.0	8.3	3.6
KKHSOU	2003-04	-	-	-	-	-
	2009-10	44.3	41.9	11.0	12.2	31.0
	2013-14	43.9	42.4	4.1	11.3	35.9
Percentage of the total enrolment	2003-04	35.1	49.3	13.9	4.6	38.6
	2009-10	39.8	53.7	13.4	6.5	30.0
	2013-14	41.9	53.4	15.8	9.1	34.1

Source: SOUs, 2014; Srivastava, 2012; Srivastava & Ramegowda, 2006 (Compiled by the author.)

- Certificate in Computing and IT applications also attracted some women learners.
- Comparatively, the percentage of women was very low i) at the Master's level, in programmes like Master of Science (specially Agriculture Sciences), Mathematics and Computer Applications, Master of Business Administration, Law at the PG level; ii) at the UG level, in programmes like Bachelor of Computer Applications, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Horticulture, Bachelor of Information Technology; and iii) at the Diploma level, in Diplomas in Marketing/ Financial Management, Printing Technology, Agriculture Sciences, Disaster Management, Tourism, Hotel Management and Environmental Studies.
- Majority of the women opted for Arts, Humanities, Education, Food and Nutrition, Child Care, Maternal and Child Health and the like—subjects that have always attracted women, obviously to enhance their traditional roles of nurturing mothers, sisters, wives or of teachers. Science and Technology, Agriculture and Management programmes still remain men's preserve. However, Computer programmes and Vocational courses are attracting women. This is an indication of the changing times, and also of the fact that to survive in a *knowledge economy* women too, have to be equipped with tools required for the 21st century.

As for the learners from rural areas (see Table 6), their percentage increased from 23.3% in 2003-04 to 47.6% in 2009-10 and to 44.5% in 2013-14, which is indeed a major achievement. At some OUs, the percentage of rural students is significantly high—UPRTOU (69.3%), NOU (66.5%), BRAOU (66.1%), BAOU (64.4%), YCMOU (63.0%) and UOU (60.2%). These SOUs have indeed succeeded in democratizing educational opportunities for the rural populations of their respective States. The programmes that are attracting rural learners are mainly B.A. and M.A. together with Diploma and Certificate programmes in the areas of Child Care and Computing. Although agriculture is the main occupation in rural areas, Agriculture as a subject of study has failed to attract the rural youth, possibly because it does not provide them lucrative jobs, nor is it seen to have the potential to create new avenues.

OUs have also been able to reach out to marginalized sections of the society, namely the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes, as is evident from the data presented in Table 6 above. All three categories put together accounted for 45.3% of the total enrolment in 2009-10, this went up to 59 % in 2013-14. It is indeed a major success of the OUs in the process of fulfilling their mandate of taking education to the deprived sections of society. The relative rise in the enrolment of these categories put together is most noticeable in figures for 2013-14. At some OUs the percentage of marginalized groups is astonishingly high—TNOU (100%), BRAOU (79.5%), UPRTOU (63.5%), MPBOU (60.7%), NOU (52.5%) and KKHSOU (50.9%) (SOUs, 2014).

1.8 Learner Success

If the intake is high, so is the output. In just one year (i.e. 2013), 0.61 million degrees, diplomas and certificates were awarded by the 14 OUs put together (see Table 7). Unlike the conventional system, in which all the students have to appear at a single term end examination for their courses, at one time, obligatorily, the OUs declare learners successful or unsuccessful in different courses as and when they sit for the corresponding examinations. This system of obtaining ‘degrees by cumulative credits’ allows learners to earn the credits for all those courses which they complete successfully. They are given the opportunity to complete all the courses within a specific period of time. The minimum period allowed to earn a degree under the system corroborates with the conventional system. The learner also has the flexibility to exit from the programme after completing a specified minimum number of courses for which he/she is awarded a relevant certificate. Because of this flexibility built into the system, the exact annual pass-out rates, as are generally calculated in the conventional system, are not calculated by the OUs.

A variety of situations, however, would put a learner under the category of *attrition*, and term him/her as a dropout. Woodley (2003) has broadly classified them as “voluntary”, “involuntary”, “avoidable” and “unavoidable” dropouts. *Voluntary* dropouts are the learners who choose to leave as opposed to getting dismissed, for whatever reason, by the institution. These are learners who change their minds with a view to the costs and benefits of furthering their studies. This category includes those learners who enroll in a programme with no intention of completing the related assessment. They join in to study out of sheer interest and do not want/need to face the rigours of assignments and examinations. *Involuntary* dropouts are the learners who are asked by the institution to quit a programme because their academic performance was not satisfactory or because they had infringed upon some regulation. *Unavoidable* dropouts are the learners who, due to some crisis such as a serious illness, financial problem or some major domestic or occupational crisis, may not be able to continue with their studies. And *avoidable* dropouts are the learners who, for one or the other reason, lose touch with their studies, because of which they fail in the examinations and are not able to complete the course/programme. Such dropouts can be avoided, if the institution concerned makes special efforts to motivate learners at the right time in the right way to continue their studies. In spite of all the options (for course/programme completion) made available to the learners who enroll at the OUs, it is quite possible that many may not complete the full degree programme, and instead exit with only a related Certificate or Diploma. Some may exit even without that, as they may have enrolled themselves merely for purposes of enhancing their knowledge and/or skills. Further, as there is ample room for learners’ passivity in the OU operations, there is a relatively higher incidence of procrastination (on the part of learners) and so a higher incidence of *attrition* in this system as compared to the conventional one. Even then the numbers that pass out after pursuing their studies at the OUs are quite significant (Srivastava, 2011).

Table 7: Number of Learners who received the OU Awards

OUs	2012	2013
IGNOU	302,873	158,385
BRAOU	25,541	29,638
VMOU	22,707	24,504
NOU	15,654	14,690
YCMOU	73,393	94,211
MPBOU	82,650	89,491
BAOU	25,897	12,939
KSOU	26,108	21,447
NSOU	6,714	101,015
UPRTOU	10,232	7,213
TNOU	48,147	21,937
PSSOU	9,605	21,640
UOU	3,346	1,103
KKHSOU	8,099	12,783
GRAND TOTAL	660,966	610,996

Source: DEB, 2014 (Compiled by the author.)

1.9 Pedagogy and Technology in Pedagogy

Effective two-way communication is not just essential, but the very basis for the process of distance education. To make such communication possible and meaningful, the OUs use a variety of technologies and media. However, like most distance education providers, the Indian OUs rely on print as the major medium of instruction, since it is relatively inexpensive to develop and is also a preferred medium of distance learning. Print material is highly portable and convenient to use.

The quality of learning materials is the most important ingredient in the teaching-learning process of a distance education institution. Not without reason, therefore, the focus of the OUs is on the development of quality learning materials as per the norms and standards prescribed by the erstwhile DEC. Further, they rigorously follow systematic approaches to instructional design to ensure the quality of instruction through Self-Learning Materials (SLMs).

Over the years, the OUs have introduced various new and purposeful processes in their teaching-learning methodology. Some of these, for example, are *needs analysis* for deciding the content of a programme to be offered; development of rich curricula with the help of *in-depth analyses of the curricula of universities at the national and the international levels*; development of *learner specific instructional designs* keeping in view the target groups; development of high quality self-instructional material by *involving experienced academicians from all over India*; development of SLMs with *multimedia components* comprising print as the major medium supplemented with audio and video materials; *use of all the available information and communication technologies (ICTs)* for curricular transactions, course delivery and for supporting learning endeavours of learners; *appointment of academic counsellors* (faculty and professionals of other institutions on part-time basis) to provide individualized support to the learners; and *setting up chains of Study Centres and Regional Centres* with the objective of taking the university as close to the learners as possible (Srivastava, 2012, p. 48).

At the first Indian OU, namely BRAOU, initially the course material was developed in the textbook format. It was only later that these materials were put into the Self Learning Format (SLF) (Prasad, 1992, p. 13). IGNOU (the second OU of the country), however, developed study materials in the SLF from the very beginning, and in doing so drew upon the nationwide talent as a matter of rule. The course materials were developed together by internal as well as external faculty under specially designed arrangements. For example, editing of study materials was done at three levels—linguistic, structural (format related) and academic—by in-house faculty as well as with the support of outside experts. This came to be known as the *coordinator-editor model*. Over a period of time, another model emerged, namely the *non-IGNOU editor-coordinator model*. Under this model, the study material was written as well as edited by external experts. The internal faculty's role was limited to format editing and compilation according to the prescribed house style. In due course, yet another model of course development emerged, namely *the workshop model*, wherein the material was developed in a collaborative workshop involving some national as well as international organizations. In some cases, programmes were developed out of projects assigned to specialist institutions. Again, the role of the internal faculty was to see that the materials were transformed into the SLM format appropriately. IGNOU has also adopted what is popularly known as the *wrap-around text model*, where in textbooks are brought from the market and repackaged by IGNOU into a *self-study model* (Panda, 2000). Today, all the SOUs are following the IGNOU practices of course development.

Though the classical process of programme development, as mentioned above, has been adopted and is still followed by all OUs, the methodology has been changing with time. During the early years, the programmes were designed and developed by the in-house faculty and outside experts. Over a period of time, especially in the case of new OUs, the practices of *adoption* and *adaptation* of the programmes already developed by other universities came into vogue. The rationale for this approach was to avoid duplication of efforts and make the activity cost effective and less time-consuming. In recent times, when collaboration is the order of the day, joint development of programmes involving various institutions of repute is the most preferred option,

particularly in the case of developing highly professional, technical or academic programmes meant for developing specific competencies and skills, or in the case of such programmes as need to be developed jointly with the industry, wherein the industry concerned also plays an important role in the design and development of the programmes. In fact various work-integrated programmes are being developed for the benefit of the industry as well as for in-service people who would like to upgrade themselves or obtain certification for the skills and competencies required for their professional development.

All along, for purposes of materials preparation, considerable emphasis has been placed on following a proper curricular and related instructional design, i.e. designing a comprehensive curriculum, detailing its constituents, course writing involving subject experts from within and outside the institution, followed by thorough editing of content, language and format. Mechanisms for pilot testing and subsequent revision of the materials thus prepared are also in place. The erstwhile DEC (see Table 8 below) had i) prescribed procedures to be followed by all the OUs in the design and development of academic programmes in order to maintain uniform standards in the system, ii) laid down parameters to evaluate programmes and certify the preparedness of institutions to offer ODL programmes, and iii) developed guidelines for giving recognition to programmes offered by ODL institutions, including the OUs, to ensure quality of the programmes offered through the distance mode (DEC, 2009).

According to the procedures followed by the OUs, the number of face-to-face *counselling sessions* is specified according to the content of the concerned course. For example, in a *theoretical course* it covers 10% of the study time stipulated for the course, while in a practical course it covers 100% of that *stipulated time*. The erstwhile DEC had standardized the system by laying down norms which are given in Table 8 below.

Table 8: The DEC Norms–Delivery of Courses/Programmes and the Credit System

Programme-related Information			Course-related Information					
Level of the Programme	No. of Credits	Minimum Duration	Credit Value of the Course	Study Input (hours)	Size of SLMs Range (in terms of units ¹)	No. of Counselling Sessions Theory (10% of total study hours)	Practical Sessions (100% of total study hours)	No. of Assignments
Certificate	12-18	6 months	2 credits	60	6-8 units	6 hours	60 hours	1
Diploma/PG Diploma	28-36	1 year	4 credits	120	14-16 units	12 hours	120 hours	2

¹A Unit (of SLMs) comprises 15-25 printed (font size 11 or 12) pages (size A4) covering a sub-theme along with the required explanations, illustrations, self-check exercises, etc. A distance learner is expected to complete it in 5 to 6 hours spread over one or two sittings.

Bachelor's Degree (General/ Professional)	96-100	3 years	6 credits	180	20-24 units	18 hours	180 hours	2
Bachelor's Degree (Technical)	160-165	5 years	8 credits	240	30-34 units	24 hours	240 hours	3
2nd Bachelor's Degree	48	1 year						
Master's Degree (General)	64-72	2 years						
Master's Degree (Technical / Professional)	96-124	3 years						
M.Phil.	48	1 ¹ / ₂ years						
Ph.D. (without M.Phil.)	96-100	4 years						
Ph.D.(with M.Phil.)	60-64	2 years						

Source: DEC, 2009, p. 11

The time allotted for face-to-face sessions, though limited, has been systematically worked out in accordance with the nature and type of programme. A programme consists of a number of courses and each course is given a *credit* value. A *credit* is a measure of study inputs required to complete a course successfully. One *credit* is equivalent to 30 hours of study. These study hours may be distributed among different academic/learning activities required to earn that *credit*. The more significant of these activities are i) systematically working through the learning materials, ii) viewing the related videos and listening to the relevant audio programmes, iii) working on 'check your progress' exercises and assignments given in the SLMs or sent separately according to a set schedule, iv) consulting the suggested books and attending the specified academic counselling sessions. Normally, 2-credit courses have 3 counselling sessions, 4-credit courses will have 5 counselling sessions, and 8-credit courses 10 sessions, each of 2 to 4 hours duration for theory courses. For practical/lab work a different time allocation is allowed.

There is no doubt about the fact that through the design and development of SLMs, the OUs have extended the access to standard educational programmes to very large and diverse segments of the Indian population, which were otherwise deprived of the

benefits of higher education. A significant contribution of the OUs to the educational system in India is that they have not only differentiated distance education from correspondence education in tangible terms, but also given it the credibility vis-à-vis the conventional system of education. They have, from the very beginning, placed a premium on the use of the *available* technology in all their operations. From the data on the use of media and technology made by the OUs presented in Table 9, it is evident that they have relied heavily on print, as the master medium, coupled with audio and video programmes—SLMs in print which is supplemented with audio-visual aids and broadcasting.

Table 9: Media and Technology used by the SOUs

SOUs	Audio		Video		Radio Broadcasts & IRC		Television		Tele - Conferencing through EDUSAT		Internet (Web Based Support)		Online Programs		OERs
	2009 - 10	2013 - 14	2009 - 10	2013 - 14	2009 - 10	2013 - 14	2009 - 10	2013 - 14	2009 - 10	2013 - 14	2009 - 10	2013 - 14	2009 - 10	2013 - 14	2013 - 14
BRAOU	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	X	√	X	X	X
VMOU	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	X	X	X	√	√	X	√	X
NOU	√	√	√	√	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	√	X	√	X
YCMOU	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	X
MPBOU	√	√	√	√	X	√	X	X	X	X	X	√	X	X	X
BAOU	√	√	√	√	√	X	X	X	√	X	X	√	X	√	X
KSOU	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	X	√	X	√	√	X	√	X
NSOU	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	X	X	X	√	√	X	√	X
UPRTOU	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	X	X	X	X	√	X	X	X
TNOU	X	X	√	X	X	X	X	X	√	X	√	√	X	X	X
PSSOU	X	X	X	√	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	√	X	X	X
UOU	√	√	√	√	X	√	X	X	X	X	√	√	X	√	X
KKHSOU	√	√	√	√	X	√	X	X	X	X	√	√	X	√	X

Source: SOUs, 2014 (Compiled by the author.)

Further, the evolving ICTs have taught the OUs new ways to communicate, process and distribute knowledge/information, and even to create new learning tools, products and environments. Thus there has been an exhilarating shift from passive methods of instruction and communication through print, audio and video tapes towards more interactive media and technology such as interactive radio counselling; two-way audio and one way video through teleconferencing; two way audio and two way video through video conferencing; two-way communication through email—synchronous as well as asynchronous interactive sessions; interactive voice recorder system networking through Local Area Networks (LANs) and Wide Area Networks (WANs); Short Messaging Service

(SMS) alerts; web-enabled learning through Learning Management System (LMS), Learning Content Management System (LCMS), repositories, and the like.

The data presented in Table 9 reveals that most SOUs are developing SLMs in both audio and video formats except for TNOU and PSSOU. Though, PSSOU has lately commenced making video programmes to supplement its printed SLM. Radio is a low cost and effective means of reaching out to learners dispersed/ scattered however TNOU, PSSOU, BAOU and NOU are yet to explore its potential. Even television is being used by only one SOU namely BRAOU. BRAOU has been making use of the radio as a medium for instructional purposes extensively since its inception. Even other OUs like YCMOU, VMOU, MPBOU, NSOU, UOU and KKHSOU are making use of the radio as an interactive medium. During 2013-14, BRAOU conducted 52 Interactive Radio Counselling (IRC) sessions and 365 broadcasts; YCM OU 72 IRC sessions and 7 broadcasts; MPBOU 15 IRC sessions; VMOU 20 IRC sessions; NSOU 300 IRC sessions and 750 broadcasts; UOU 10 IRC sessions and KKHSOU 71 IRC sessions and 796 broadcasts (SOUs 2014).

In fact since 2002, BRAOU has been delivering tele-lectures three hours a week through the interactive channel of Mana TV, a Kurtz-under Band (Ku Band) channel on INSAT-3C owned by the Government of Andhra Pradesh, for which the uplink is located in the university premises. BRAOU is also organizing teleconferencing through the regional transmission of Doordarshan Kendra (DDK), Hyderabad, for five days a week, ensuring longer presence and deeper penetration. The response to and participation in teleconferencing on DDK is very encouraging for both the target viewers asking the concerned subject-related questions and the secondary audience, i.e. the general public asking questions and giving inputs based on their experience and knowledge (Venkaiah 2005). During 2013-14 BRAOU organized 261 such telecasts for the benefit of all the groups concerned (see Table 9 above).

Nearly 50% of the SOUs have their own Electronic Media Production Centres (EMPCs). BRAOU, YCMOU, MPBOU, UPRTOU and KKHSOU are equipped with state-of-the-art digital audio and video production facilities, video studios, edit suites, audio-editing suites, duplication facilities and graphics facilities. Earlier, the erstwhile DEC used to fund all the media and technology related initiatives of the SOUs; now it is being taken care of by the DEB of the UGC.

As per data given in Table 9 only one SOU is extensively using teleconferencing. Although, most of the OUs have created the facility of Receive Only Terminals (ROTs) at selected Study Centres and interactive terminals at selected Regional/Study Centres in order to receive the programmes of GyanDarshan (GD) from IGNOU via EDUSAT. In order to incorporate interactivity in ODL, one-way video and two-way audio teleconferencing facilities are offered through GD-2 that is beamed all over the country via EDUSAT. In addition, using the existing network of All India Radio (AIR), one-hour Interactive Radio Counselling (IRC) on Sundays was introduced, and the SOUs were given a slot on every fourth Sunday in a month. Further, Gyan Vani was launched in November 2001, and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting reserved 40 FM channels at different places across the country for the Gyan Vani network. Presently, however, both GyanDarshan and Gyan Vani are not operational due to some policy issues.

It is encouraging that all the SOUs have embraced ICTs whole heartedly in their operations in order to improve their learner support services. Some instances—UOU has established an ICT Division which plays a key role in learner support; VMOU has set up its own e-platform, namely e-Acharya, and BAOU has also proposed to set up its own e-platform, namely OMKAR-e, to offer online multilingual courses and provide open access and interactive forums to its students (SOUs 2015).

All SOUs have dynamic websites and have uploaded all vital information on their websites in order to offer some kind of web based support to their learners (see table 9). Many of the SOUs have commenced digitizing their courseware which is also uploaded on their websites. YCMOU, TNOU and KKHSOU too have developed e-learning modules. VMOU is in the process of developing Open Educational Resources (OERs). Some SOUs like YCMOU, KSOU, NSOU, UOU and KKHSOU are conducting Internet based interactive sessions with their learners. Further, the websites of BAOU, NSOU, UOU and KKHSOU provide the facility of Video on Demand (VOD) for their learners (SOUs 2014).

Again, online programmes have been launched by VMOU, NOU, YCMOU, KSOU, NSOU, UOU and KKHSOU (see Table 9). KKHSOU is also providing its online learners with tablets, which are preloaded with the relevant complete courseware (SOUs 2015). Recently, in 2015, BRAOU also launched an online programme (SOUs 2015).

Further, BRAOU has initiated an Inter-University Consortium in Andhra Pradesh (APIUC) for mutual sharing of relevant information and electronic content (including audio-visual aids) for which a one-stop portal too has been designed and developed on the lines of the national portal, namely *Sakshat*. So far 11 universities of the State, which are offering ODL programmes, have joined the Consortium under an MOU signed by these institutions. The content generated by BRAOU and the eleven distance education institutions attached to the conventional universities within the State is planned to be digitized and uploaded onto the Portal.

BAOU, Ahmedabad, has taken many new initiatives by adopting ICTs in order to contact, communicate and interact with the masses and learners alike. Some of these, for example, are the five indigenously designed android mobile educational apps for providing vital information about the university. All these apps can be downloaded from the Google Play Store at no extra cost and Internet connection is not required once the apps are downloaded and installed (SOUs 2015). They are:

1. *Info@BAOU*: It provides general information about the university.
2. *Courses@BAOU*: It provides detailed information regarding the courses offered by BAOU.
3. *StudyCentre@BAOU*: It provides information about the location and the contact details of Study Centres across Gujarat.
4. *Study@BAOU*: It provides information helpful in identifying the relevant courses based on the age and educational qualifications of the prospective learners.
5. *GyanBindu@BAOU*: It provides information related to unfamiliar terms or words as an SMS reply with minimal cost involved.

In addition, the following five initiatives in ICT applications taken by BAOU too are worth mentioning here.

- i) *Open Matrix Knowledge Advancement Resources for Empowerment (OMKAR-e)* is a digital repository of all the study materials, covering all the courses offered by BAOU that are available on its website. Each course on OMKAR-e has clearly defined learning outcomes with pedagogical components that consist of text, videos, self-assessment exercises and discussion forums. It also has the facility to map the learner's progress in the course concerned. Another, learner friendly initiative by BAOU is its *ASK-ME kiosk* which is an Internet enabled digital touch screen device displaying detailed information about the university free of cost. The enrolled learners can also view their current details from Student Information Repository (SIR) available on the website.
- ii) *Jyotirgamay*, a first-of-its-kind initiative in the history of higher education in India, facilitates any student, who fulfils the requisite eligibility criteria, to take examinations related to select courses offered under this category, on the basis of her/his self-study and preparations pertaining to a knowledge domain in the concerned area.
- iii) *Kamdhenu* is the first of its kind ICT enabled Classroom on Wheels. It is a GPS enabled air-conditioned van with 16 Internet enabled work-stations networked through a LAN. It is equipped with an LCD projector, a screen, a white board and a public addressing system. *Kamdhenu* Project earned for BAOU, the prestigious Enterprise Driving Growth and Excellence (EDGE) award in 2012. It is an important initiative from BAOU to spread digital literacy in rural and remote areas.
- iv) *Swadhyaya TV and Swadhyaya Radio* are the other two innovative initiatives from BAOU that facilitate web based learning through video and radio. A state-of-the-art High Definition TV and Sound Recording Studio with post production facilities supplement these initiatives to ensure the production of high quality educational content. This facility and the related initiatives will certainly work towards enriching the archival system for OMKAR-e.
- v) *Virtual Classrooms*, yet another initiative, facilitate web based learning in an interactive mode. A distance learner gets the feel of face-to-face interaction like in a conventional classroom setting with options like *raising hands* to ask questions, chatting and use of PowerPoint presentations. A group of learners can benefit by interacting with a domain expert present at any remote location of the world. And the related software facilitates easy recording, retrieving and archiving any meaningful details or materials.

The SOUs have yet to initiate the systematic development of Open Educational Resources (OERs) (see Table 9) or for that matter have their own OER policy. SOUs need to have their own e-platform which could be used for registration, documentation, hosting courseware, repositories, OERs, MOOCs, 24X7 help desk services student tracking, institutional updates, conduct of induction/ training programmes, online tutoring and counselling services, conduct of online events such as webinars, discussion forums,

webcasting, library facility, virtual labs, e-learning modules, assembling and delivering of online programmes, providing online assignments and feedback on performance, online examinations, declaration of results etc. Only they would be able to adapt to the changed scenario and cater to the needs and requirements of the new millennial learners who think and process information differently.

1.10 Learner Support

A major challenge before the OUs is the delivery of academic programmes to distance learners spread across their respective jurisdictions. Initially, the OUs relied completely on the postal system for the delivery of learning materials. Delays in the receipt of SLMs by the learners became a major issue for all the OUs. To overcome this, OUs gradually developed their own distribution systems by decentralizing the process of dispatching materials. In order to reduce their dependence on the postal department, they arranged to transport the materials by road to their Regional and Study Centres, from where students would collect their packets themselves. This process of dispatching materials reduced many of the problems related to the distribution of materials, such as late receipts, non-receipts, receipt of materials in damaged condition and even wrong receipts, as all these problems could be solved on the spot. BRAOU and VMOU, were the first OUs to adopt this alternative others followed. This system, however, had its own problems—truck loads of material would disappear, or would reach Regional Centres and/or Study Centres in damaged condition. As a result, the institutions incurred losses and the learners continued to suffer delay in the receipt of material. Again, alternative schemes were worked out. For example, VMOU, MPBOU, YCMOU and KSOU introduced the system of spot delivery of study material at the time of admissions at the Regional Centres. In 2009-10, IGNOU decentralized the printing of study materials to reduce the distance between the source and the destination of material. On a pilot basis, IGNOU's Madurai Regional Centre was asked to print material to facilitate timely dispatch to the southern states. Newer strategies were evolved and followed—NSOU uses courier services to dispatch the material directly to the Study Centres for distribution; BAOU sends its study material to its Study Centres by road (SOUs, 2014).

It is the responsibility of the OUs, not only to provide the teaching material and learning experience to their learners, but also to communicate with them as and when required, provide regular academic guidance and counselling, create avenues for interaction with teachers and peers, provide regular updates about the university, evaluate learners' progress, provide feedback on their performance, facilitate reference work at libraries and develop (among them) the necessary skills and competencies for the programme/course. In order to perform these activities satisfactorily, most OUs have adopted a three-tier service network consisting of the Headquarters, Regional Centres and Study Centres.

Regional Centres are the branch offices of an OU set up to expand the outreach of the university. They are manned by full-time staff of the university. They are responsible for student registration, distribution of materials, identification and opening of Study

Centres, monitoring the academic and administrative functioning of Study Centres, serving as local resource centres of ODL, finalizing internal assessment of learners, answering student queries, and also for the identification and monitoring of examination centres. Further, the appointment of counsellors/tutors and monitoring of their performance, their training and staff development, translation and printing of SLMs into regional languages, maintenance of student records, scrutiny and settlement of bills received from Study Centres, organization of entrance tests, university term-end examinations and evaluation of assignments are the various activities entrusted to Regional Centres. They function as mini-universities in the region concerned and are able to serve quite effectively all the Study Centres attached to them. Among the SOUs, BRAOU has the oldest and the maximum number of Regional Centres (see Table 10). Some SOUs, namely TNOU, NOU, KKHSOU and UOU, did not set up Regional Centres till 2009-10, while UOU set up its Regional Centres only in 2010-11.

Table 10: Growth of the SOU Regional Centres

Years	BRAOU	VMOU	NOU	YCMOU	MPBOU	BAOU	KSOU	NSOU	UPRTOU	TNOU	PSSOU	UOU	KKHSOU
1989-90		4											
1996-97		6		7									
2003-04		6	Nil	8	10		6						
2009-10	23	6	Nil	8	9	2	7	1	5	Nil	4	Nil	Nil
2014-15	23	7	Nil	10	10	4	21	1	5	4	4	8	1

Source: SOUs, 2014; Srivastava, 2012 (Compiled by the author.)

Depending on the programme requirements, Regional Centres identify suitable educational institutions, industrial units, skill development centres, primary health centres, hospitals, etc. as Study Centres to serve the learners on day-to-day basis. They are the nerve centres of the university and also the face there of as far as the learners are concerned. Their identification is a systematically planned operation which the OUs have developed for accessing both the infrastructural and the academic facilities required to transact their academic programmes effectively. Another major consideration in identifying a Study Centre is the proportion of learners that can make use of it. Usually, a typical Study Centre comprises a few leased/rented rooms, laboratories and work centres on the premises of the identified institutions. They are used by the OUs outside the normal working hours, i.e., in the evenings and on weekends. The staff posted at Study Centres work part-time, and the majority of them are drawn from the host institution. It is supposed to serve as a resource centre for learners as well as a meeting place for them to interact with their subject experts/teachers and their peers. Generally, Study Centres are equipped with SLMs, reference books in a library and audio-video facilities. They also provide enquiry/information services for the prospective and the

registered learners and arrange induction programmes for new entrants. Internal assessment and term-end examinations too are organized and conducted at Study Centres. In other words, a Study Centre is a one-stop service centre for all the services offered by the university—information services, academic support in the form of face-to-face counselling sessions for theory as well as practical courses, library facilities, audio-visual aids, evaluation of assignments, various other ways of internal evaluation and arrangements for term-end examinations.

All OUs have established Study Centres in order to take the respective universities as close to the learners as possible. Through their respective networks of Study Centres, the OUs have been able to adequately address the issues of access and equity, so crucial for all the OUs. Over the years, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of Study Centres to meet the demand of increasing programme offerings and the corresponding rise in the enrolment of learners. Further, the diversity of programmes requiring differing delivery mechanisms and support inputs has resulted in the emergence of a variety of Study Centres. Besides regular Study Centres, there are Programme Study Centres for specialized professional programmes; Work Centres for laboratory programmes; Special Study Centres for women, physically challenged and the like; and more recently Partner Institutions to further widen the network of Study Centres. Being State Universities, the SOUs are allowed to operate only within their respective States. Accordingly, they have opened Study Centres and Regional Centres within their jurisdictions only. There is, however, one exception—KSOU has Study Centres outside the State, which is not permissible. At present, YCMOU has the largest number of Study Centres (see Table 11).

Table 11: Growth of the SOU Study Centres

Years	BRAOU	VMOU	NOU	YCMOU	MPBOU	BAOU	KSOU	NSOU	UPRTOU	TNOU	PSSOU	UOU	KKHSOU
1982-83	26												
1989-90	58			15									
1996-97	111	24		896		28							
2003-04	144	46	7	2173	1013	68	96	55	47				
2009-10	219	86	32	3743	606	440	804	192	474	1027	166	30	196
2014-15	216	359	40	4528	224	501	127	321	574	599	128	284	319

Source: SOUs, 2014; Srivastava, 2012 (Compiled by the author.)

Generally, all the programmes, unless available online, have a component of face-to-face academic counselling organized at Study Centres or at the headquarters, mostly on weekends and holidays, and sometimes even on weekdays, but mostly after office hours.

Attendance at the academic counselling sessions may or may not be compulsory in theory-based courses. However, in science and technology-based programmes such as pure sciences, engineering and technology, agriculture science, computer science, library science, medical science, nursing, etc., there is a practical component for which attendance is compulsory. Also, in professional and competency-based programmes, there is a compulsory component for the development of the required competencies and skills. Depending on the nature of a programme, this component takes the form of seminars, workshops, practice sessions, field work, etc. It is compulsory for the learners enrolled in such programmes to attend these practical sessions and secure 70 to 80% or more attendance in order to be eligible to appear for the term-end examinations.

Providing academic support in hands-on areas is a major challenge for the OUs, and they address this issue in various ways. NOU, for example, has set up a state-of-the-art computer lab at their headquarters with 300 computers. BAOU is also planning to follow suit (SOUs, 2014).

Providing face-to-face academic-counselling to distance learners is a major responsibility of Study Centres. Normally, the OUs utilize the existing infrastructure—classrooms, laboratories, etc.—of the conventional universities, when not in use for the regular students of the host institution. To materialize and manage this arrangement, the OUs sign MOUs with universities, colleges, high schools, private computer institutes, non-governmental organizations, various trusts, societies, vocational centres, prisons and whatever other institutions that may serve the purpose. Some OUs, such as BRAOU, for example, have opened their own Study Centres. As per the norms laid down by the erstwhile DEC (DEC, 2009, p. 17), all the Study Centres are to be managed directly by the OUs concerned, without franchising their operations to any institution whatsoever.

The purpose of counselling sessions is to ensure academically purposeful interaction between the students and the counsellors. In most cases, however, counselling sessions are reduced to mere lectures defeating the very purpose of such sessions. The fact is that academic counsellors find it difficult to break away from the lecture method of teaching, as they are drawn mainly from the conventional system. They find it difficult to switch over to practices that constitute academic counselling. Secondly, the time allowed for counselling sessions does not allow course completion following the technique of *lectures*, resulting in learner dissatisfaction and a high dropout rate. Learners also fall into the same cultural trap, as they expect counsellors to deliver lectures and conduct sessions as in a traditional classroom. As a result, generally, attendance at counselling sessions is thin and varied. Distance learners frequently skip sessions, frustrating the counsellor who cannot maintain appropriate links between the sessions and the activities undertaken. It appears that the learners do not appreciate the rationale behind the counselling sessions. They do not recognise the integral place of the academic counsellor in the ODL system. Instead, a counsellor's role is looked upon as marginal and not essential for their success.

Moreover, all the Study Centres are not activated for all the programmes on offer, as getting qualified counsellors to work at Study Centres is quite a problem, especially for the specialized, technical programmes. Again, Study Centres located in semi-urban

areas may not be equipped with technical facilities like labs, etc. Students residing in such areas, therefore, have to forego the benefit of counselling sessions. Evolving an effective learner support system remains till date one of the most challenging tasks in the ODL system. As a result, majority of the OUs are yet to open Study Centres in the interior, i.e. at the Block level. Some SOUs, however, have made inroads into the hinterland by opening Study Centres at the Block level—YCMOU, BAOU, UPRTOU, TNOU and UOU, for example (SOUs, 2014).

As an alternative mechanism, YCMOU has institutionalized the creation of self-help groups for its agriculture related programmes. It is known as the Prayog Parivar System wherein the student farmers form self-help groups with a maximum of 30 farmers in one group. Further, YCMOU has introduced coaching teams for effecting transfer of teaching skills among students who are registered in the B.Ed. programme. The student-teachers work in pairs and try out various skills and discuss their experiences, and five such pairs constitute a coaching team. Such examples of peer learning have proved to be very beneficial to distance learners (Deshmukh, 2008).

Audio-video material developed by all the SOUs are placed at Study Centres to be used by the learners, but often they do not get used appropriately because no effective system seems to be in place for their purposeful utilization. These materials are being used rather indifferently or not at all, either because they are not available when looked for, or because counsellors do not realize their importance. The reason for this situation is lack of technical support to keep the necessary equipment in working order and in certain cases the supply of electricity is erratic or not available when needed (Srivastava, 2012, p. 56).

As mentioned earlier, OUs keep looking out for new technologies to improve the *support services* for their distance learners. The easy availability of Internet technology has prompted them to develop dynamic websites. The SOU websites provide information about the respective university, their academic programmes, addresses of their Study and Regional Centres, telephone links, details of their academic staff, etc. Most of them provide a host of information through FAQs in addition to details of scholarships available, latest updates, results, examination schedules, counselling schedules and the details about the alumni to help prospective learners as well as those on rolls. Other online services, like admissions and payment of fees, are also available. Many SOUs have started a job portal each on their websites for their learners. Some of them, like KKHSOU and KSOU, have a presence on social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook (SOUs, 2014). Another proactive service, adopted by SOUs, like BRAOU and KSOU, is SMS alert through mobile phones to keep their learners posted about their schedules, results, etc, thereby keeping them on track every moment of the day (SOUs, 2014).

In many cases, the Study Centres located in major cities have become over-crowded in terms of programmes as well as the number of learners. This makes it difficult for a small group of part-time faculty to manage such Centres. As a result, the staff at such Study Centres is sometimes indifferent to students' queries and requirements. In the

absence of full-time support staff at Study Centres, accountability appears to be a casualty, as many important and routine activities are often postponed. Further, centralization of almost all activities at the headquarter has an adverse effect on Study Centres too, affecting the learners in turn. A few examples may be cited here—there are delays in receiving (by the learners) the printed materials which disturbs the whole schedule of operations at the Study Centres. Sometimes examination result sheets, hall-tickets, intimation regarding the change of Study Centres, results of entrance tests, receipts of assignments, etc., are not sent on time. As a result when the learners approach the Study Centres for clarification, information or assistance, the Study Centre staff is unable to help.

1.11 Learner Evaluation

The OUs have adopted a three-tier evaluation system, i.e. self-evaluation, continuous evaluation and terminal evaluation. Self-evaluation is a part of learners' work on the SLMs in all programmes. A learner evaluates him/herself through self-assessment exercises given in each *unit* of a course. A course is divided into a few *blocks*, and each *block* is divided into a few *units*, each of which is expected to be worked through in one or two sittings. Self-evaluation has no bearing on the overall assessment, but helps the learner to interact with the study materials more effectively and also motivates him/her to improve his/her progress through the course materials. Continuous evaluation in most of the courses is implemented through assignments, which may be included in the course materials, but are usually sent separately to all the learners according to a set schedule. All the learners are expected to work on these assignments and submit their responses to their respective universities according to pre-set schedules. Some of the OUs provide online tests with immediate feedback that ensures active involvement of the learners. Besides, in courses having practical components, learners are evaluated on the basis of their performance in their practical work, workshops, seminars, or project work. Such continuous assessment accounts for thirty percent of the overall assessment. At the end of the session/semester a learner has to appear for written examinations, which is considered term-end assessment with a seventy percent weightage in the overall result. The OUs organize term-end examination every six months. This facility is supposed to provide the much needed flexibility to learners in their studies. It has, however, proved to be a daunting task. In order to reduce the chances of wide deviations in assessment due to variability among evaluators and also the courses/subjects, the OUs have introduced a five-point grading system (a preferred way of evaluation in most developed countries today) instead of the marking system followed in the conventional system.

It may be pointed out here that printing, distribution, assessment and return of evaluated assignment-responses to the learners are operations that entail massive investments. Continuous assessment requires that the assignments are prepared at regular intervals. The SOUs, with limited resources in terms of money and manpower, find it difficult to manage these operations satisfactorily. To overcome this, either the number of assignments is reduced, or all assignments are scrapped in favour of term-end

examination for each course. For the sake of expediency and convenience, the ethos and purpose of continuous assessment is thus sacrificed. Delays in the return of evaluated assignment-responses are reported frequently. It is not unusual to send back the evaluated assignment-responses to learners after the counselling sessions are over. In some cases, they are returned even after the term-end examination is over. This defeats the very purpose of the submission of assignments-responses, as the feedback reaches the learner for too late to benefit from it. Further, assignment-responses may not be handled promptly or with appropriate care by the Study Centre staff or the assessor, or both. This flaw alone may result in dropouts. Also, an assessor's comments may de-motivate the learner and lead him/her to dropout. This can be attributed to the lack of skills on the part of evaluators, lack of training required by the evaluators to write purposeful tutor comments, and ineffective monitoring of the process by university authorities.

It is an irony that the distance learners are evaluated through a system of examination which is very similar to that of the conventional system. The evaluation in the context of distance education needs to be innovative and need-based. It should be non-formal, diagnostic and continuous in approach. Although (as detailed above), continuous evaluation has been introduced in the form of compulsory assignments, which carry a weightage of 25-30% in the overall assessment, it does not seem to work well. Maybe it should include other tools of continuous assessment contributing to at least 50-70% of weightage in the overall assessment. Further, the grading system adopted by IGNOU and other OUs has been posing difficulties in working out precise equivalences between the grades awarded by these universities and the marks awarded by the conventional universities. Such equivalences are needed as OU graduates have to compete with those from conventional universities for admissions to higher education where even a point's difference matters. In view of such experiences, for the benefit of their graduates, some of the OUs have started converting grades into marks.

As stated above, the SOUs conduct examinations two times in a year and to declare the results of the distance learners they have to take both the continuous evaluation and the term-end examination grades into account. Since Study Centres are spread across the State in the case of the SOUs and throughout the country in the case of IGNOU, collection of grades from various points within the available time is a gigantic task. Timely collection of the assignment related grades depends on many variables, particularly the dispatch of course materials and assignments. With regard to the term-end examination, some OUs follow a centralized system of evaluation and some go by a decentralized one (by sending term-end examination-responses to the residences of evaluators). In the latter case again, timely receipt of grades is equally crucial. Here also, collection of grades depends upon timely identification of examiners, timely dispatch of examination-responses to individual examiners, efficient coordination of their inputs and timely processing of such inputs. The reality is that only a few OUs, like IGNOU (that too only recently in 2011), can boast of declaring the results within two months of the term-end examinations as is expected of all the OUs, while most of them leave the learners in the dark and impair their future progress.

To simplify the process, some SOUs have taken new initiatives. For example, NOU has established a well equipped air conditioned examination hall at its headquarters. It can accommodate 1000 examinees at a time. It is fitted with electronic cameras and Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) and a public address system. Every examinee is continuously video-graphed and monitored from the control room. This has led to reduction in malpractices and has brought a good name to the university. Further, NOU has introduced an innovative tamper-proof certificate to confer degrees to its graduates. Further, there are some other developments to note. For example, NOU and BAOU have developed question banks and plan to set examination papers electronically using computers. YCMOU is even planning to set up online examination centres at its headquarters and Regional Centres (SOUs, 2014).

1.12 Staffing

As Indian OUs have been modelled on the lines of the British Open University, all of them have adopted the three-tier structure of the British OU. Except NOU, all SOUs have set up Regional Centres as the second tier at major cities of their respective States for the purpose of coordinating and supervising the work of Study Centres and also to serve as links between the Study Centres and the Headquarters. To manage this three-tier structure, there are three categories of staff working at the SOUs, namely *teachers*, *other academics (including technical staff)* and *administrative staff*.

Table 12: Staffing at the SOUs—Headquarters and Regional Centres (2013-14)

Staff Strength of SOUs	Academic		Technical		Administrative		Total
	Permanent	Contractual	Permanent	Contractual	Permanent	Contractual	
At Headquarters							
BRAOU	59	14	2	26	369	5	475
VMOU	30	0	11	0	167	0	208
NOU	9	29	0	1	4	2	45
YCMOU	38	15	44		182	3	282
MPBOU	14	2	0	5	14	70	105
BAOU	9	5	1	4	13	115	147
KSOU	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
NSOU	12	22	1	2	42	37	116
UPRTOU	35	20	35	5	55	41	191
TNOU	45		5	49	53	53	205
PSSOU	0	0	4	0	2	127	133

UOU	21	29	0	4	5	87	146
KKHSOU	17	18	2	2	38	43	120
At Regional Centres							
BRAOU	12	11					23
VMOU					92		92
NOU	NOU has no Regional Centres.						Nil
YCMOU	4		1		37	9	51
MPBOU	10	6				20	36
BAOU		3				14	17
KSOU	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
NSOU	1		1			3	5
UPRTOU		5		2		25	32
TNOU			1	11		14	26
PSSOU						32	32
UOU						16	16
KKHSOU	1				3	1	4

Source: SOUs, 2014 (Compiled by the author.)

Teachers are posted at the Headquarters and are appointed to plan, design and develop courses and programmes in accordance with the mandate of the university concerned. They have traditional designations like other university teachers, namely Professor, Associate Professor and Assistant Professor. The second category, *the other academics*, comprises the academics posted in the operational Divisions at the Headquarters and Regional Centres. They have designations like Assistant Director, Deputy Director and Regional Director. They work as *academic administrators* and also as the technical staff involved in electronic media production and ICT operations. At present, only teachers and the administrative staff of the SOUs have clear-cut promotional avenues as laid down by the UGC. The *other academics*, have promotional avenues only up to the middle level, i.e. the level of the Deputy Director. This is a major drawback in the system that demotivates *the other academics (to be understood in the sense and context explained above)* working at the SOUs, and it needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

The Headquarters and Regional Centres have permanent staff both academic (including teachers) and administrative (see Table 12). It is said that the backbone of any university is its teaching (academic) staff. The data presented in Table 12 reveals that the size of

faculty at most of the SOUs is meagre, except a few older SOUs, namely BRAOU, YCMOU, VMOU and UPRTOU. The recently set up OUs, namely UOU and KKHSOU have made a good beginning. Some of the older SOUs too, NOU, BAOU and NSOU, have a comparatively smaller permanent faculty, whereas PSSOU has none. Getting permanent posts sanctioned by the State Governments is a herculean task for the SOUs. Yes, most SOUs have established Regional Centres, but manning them with permanent staff has proved to be a challenge. Only YCMOU and VMOU have adequate permanent staff at their Regional Centres. On the positive side, some SOUs (BRAOU, YCMOU, MPBOU, NSOU and KKHSOU) have been able to post permanent *academic* staff at their Regional Centres. Overall, due to the apathetic attitude of the State Governments towards the OUs, staffing is a major issue that needs to be addressed considering the pressure for accommodating increasing number of learners. At present, OUs have to depend mostly on contractual staff, who have no official bonding and lack commitment to serve the system well—not a happy situation at all. In any case the total staff strength at an SOU is generally comparable to that of a conventional degree college in India, even though the prescribed staff strength for the SOUs is three faculty members per discipline plus supporting staff as per the entitlement of the posts in place. Generally, the ratio between teachers and administrative staff at an OU is 1:2 (DEC, 2009).

Overall most of the OUs do not have the required staff strength. This is so at the headquarters too. The situation in the Study and Regional Centres is even more dismal. They depend generally on under-qualified and inexperienced contractual staff. Further, there is no proper monitoring done by the headquarters, there by indirectly contributing to the dilution of all standards. As mentioned above, Study Centres of the SOUs are run mainly by contractual staff. Generally, fifty percent of them are the permanent employees of the host institution engaged by the SOU and specified in an MOU agreed to with the host institution. Academic counsellors are appointed at Study Centres for specific programmes based on the laid down eligibility criteria as per the requirement of the programme. The total number of academic counsellors appointed by the SOUs is given in Table 13. Their number is linked to the number of programmes on offer at a particular Study Centre and also to the number of students enrolled in each of those programmes.

Table 13: Staffing at the SOU Study Centres (2013-14)

SOUs	Academic Counsellors	Administrative Staff	
		Permanent	Contractual
BRAOU	6368		216
VMOU	273		
NOU	57		
YCMOU	6752		11360
MPBOU	240		480
BAOU	0		2004

SOUs	Academic Counsellors	Administrative Staff	
		Permanent	Contractual
KSOU	NA		
NSOU	5396		1133
UPRTOU	2566		
TNOU	0		
PSSOU	164		
UOU	904		

Source: SOUs, 2014 (Compiled by the author.)

1.13 Income and Expenditure

The OUs are regarded as self-supporting institutions and, therefore, the cost the Governments bear for the OUs is very low and comes mainly by way of operational expenditure, though substantial capital investments have to be made initially. The OUs are able to procure relatively more funds from non-government sources, namely student fees, receipts from publications and interest on deposits that (put together) ranged from 60% to 92% in 2013-14 (see Table 14). The increase in student enrolment has resulted in increased fee income and other related charges which help in meeting the operating costs of these universities. The grants received from the governments are primarily of two types—the Central Government provides *development grants* to the OUs, and the State Governments provide *block grants* to their respective SOUs.

Table 14: The SOUs—Sources of Income (2013-14)
(in million Rupees)

SOUs	Grants from State Governments	Grants from the MHRD	Student Fees and Other Charges	Total
BRAOU	144.52(19.84%)	55.50 (7.62%)	528.37 (72.54%)	728.39
VMOU	22.59 (7.27%)	45.80 (14.75%)	242.21 (77.98%)	310.60
NOU	0	27.50 (21.40%)	100.99 (78.60%)	128.49
YCMOU	0	55.50 (30.01%)	129.45 (69.99%)	184.95
MPBOU	1.50 (0.36%)	30.00 (7.25%)	382.99 (92.39%)	414.39
BAOU	25.00 (9.29%)	20.55(7.63%)	223.65 (83.08%)	269.19
KSOU	NA	Nil	NA	NA

SOU	Grants from State Governments	Grants from the MHRD	Student Fees and Other Charges	Total
NSOU	39.55 (8.26%)	33.00(6.90%)	406.13 (84.84%)	478.68
UPRTOU	12.98 (3.00%)	52.96 (12.22%)	367.35 (84.78%)	433.29
TNOU	13.79(3.33%)	30.00 (7.25%)	369.94 (89.42%)	413.73
PSSOU	16.00 (7.48%)	29.47(13.78%)	168.40 (78.74%)	213.87
UOU	58.05 (23.73%)	38.70(15.82%)	147.84 (60.45%)	244.59
KKHSOU	51.65 (18.36%)	46.00 (16.35%)	183.70 (65.29%)	281.35

Source: SOUs, 2014 (Compiled by the author.)

As mentioned above, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) provides the *development grants* every year to all SOUs. These grants were disbursed by the DEC/IGNOU. Since the dissolution of the DEC, they are being disbursed by the DEB of the UGC. The grants are meant for introducing new programmes and also for revising, redesigning, updating, adopting and/or adapting the existing programmes. Special assistance is also made available to SOUs for collaborating in joint development of programmes for the development of vocational, competencies related and skills development programmes and also for conducting training programmes for skills development and procurement of tools and equipment for this purpose.

Further, the *development grants* are being utilized by the SOUs for almost every activity they are engaged in—developing self-learning materials (SLMs) in print, audio and video programmes and Computer Discs-Read Only Memory (CD-ROMs) and web-based materials; transforming all learning materials into SLMs; digitizing materials; designing and developing multimedia materials, online resources, question banks and assignments; computerizing student and financial data; introducing automation of various processes and support services, including development of databases, e-governance, technology-driven student evaluation and introduction of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP); using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for providing information, counselling and technology-enabled learning; adopting broadcasting networks using the FM radio channel, Gyan Darshan, etc; creating down-link facilities, distributed classrooms and one-stop educational portals; networking through LANs and WANs, Ku Band, VSAT, etc.; procuring computer hardware and licensed software; designing and developing websites; installing teleconferencing facilities using EDUSAT; procuring and installing dish antennas, Direct to Home (DTH) systems, etc.; procuring the equipment (for studios) for producing multimedia programmes; developing and installing Interactive Voice Response Systems (IVRS); installing information kiosks; setting up Wi-Fi campuses/networks; implementing SMS alert services; introducing multimedia mobile Study Centres; creating infrastructure for setting up information cells and Regional Centres and for providing pre-admission

counselling; preparing brochures required for the purpose and conducting induction meetings.

The SOUs are also permitted to use this grant for the purchase of books, journals, e-journals, e-resources, library software, audios, videos, Computer Discs (CDs), Digital Video Discs (DVDs) and other educational resources together with other equipment such as computers, photocopiers, binding machines, vacuum cleaners, lamination machines, air conditioners and furniture (display stacks/racks, chairs, tables, cupboards, etc.) for libraries.

Other developmental activities such as staff development programmes ranging from pre-induction orientation to regular refresher and advanced training programmes (in distance education methodology), educational technology and its application, development and delivery of multimedia learning packages, technology-driven student assessment systems, etc., for the faculty members and other academic staff are also supported by these grants. In addition, there is focused attention on systemic research, so that the much needed dynamism in the ODL system may be built into it successfully. In house research is encouraged and supported through these very grants, which may also be utilized for providing fellowships/scholarships to researchers pursuing research pertaining to Distance Education and to those who are engaged by the SOUs at their campuses. These funds may also be used for setting up Research Centres/Units. At one time (during the period 2007-12) grants were allocated to the SOUs for construction, renovation and extension of buildings and also for appointing academic consultants. Since 2012, however, this practice has been discontinued.

The *block grants* are allocated to the SOUs by their respective State Governments. Generally, the salary component constitutes the largest slice of these grants. The SOUs, however, are designed to have a small core faculty as compared to the faculty size in conventional universities, and it is also true that due to various reasons most of the SOUs do not have even the sanctioned staff strength. As a result, the total staff strength is very low at some SOUs, namely NOU, BAOU, NSOU, UOU, TNOU, PSSOU and KKHSOU. Expenditure on salaries at these SOUs is thus much lower than otherwise expected. Contrarily, the SOUs that have larger staff strength at their HQs, RCs and SCs put together, namely VMOU, BRAOU and MPBOU, show the highest expenditure on salaries, ranging from 58.34% at VMOU, 40.48% at BRAOU to 35.88% at MPBOU (see Table 15).

The *operating* costs of the SOUs include the expenditure on development and production of learning resources such as study materials, support services and institutional overheads. For the development and production of learning resources, the costs covered are the salaries; wages and allowances of the faculty, supporting technical and administrative staff; expenditure on the creation of new schools, research chairs, development and production of print and non-print materials, orientation and training workshops; honorarium and travel costs of course writers, editors and course team members; etc. The expenditure under support services includes that on admissions

related material and its distribution, maintenance of Regional and Study Centres, support for partner institutions, honorarium to academic counsellors, conduct of face-to-face sessions, teleconferencing, radio counselling, EDUSAT, practical and laboratory work, evaluation, examinations and convocation. The major expenditure under institutional overheads includes general administration, common services, general charges, transport and campus maintenance and expansion. As already stated, the salary component in the operating costs of an OU is very low.

There is, however, no set pattern of expenditure at all the SOUs, as they are at different stages of development and there are variations in their staff strength, number of programmes they offer, number of learners they serve and the levels and range of technologies they use, as is evident from the data presented in Table 15.

Generally, a major expenditure is incurred on maintenance and recurring costs, which have been included under the category 'Others' in Table 15. As the OU system is driven by technology the world over, all SOUs have to regularly upgrade their technology-based infrastructure and also expand their network of support services to provide effective support services to an increasing number of distance learners. The costs incurred on the adoption of new and replacement of outdated technologies is also included under the head 'Others'. As a result, the expenditure under this head is substantially large, particularly at those SOUs that are adopting new technology applications in their operations, namely TNOU (92.50%), UPRTOU (90.58%), UOU (81.26%), NSOU (81.03%), BAOU (66.12%), KKHSOU (62.79%) and VMOU (31.95%)—percentages as calculated from the figures presented in Table 15.

Table 15: The SOUs—Expenditure Patterns (2013-14)
(in million Rupees)

SOU	Salaries	Construction of Building	Development of Infrastructure	Development of Programs and courses	Student Support Services	Staff Training and Development	Vocational Education and Training	Research and Development	Library	Others	Total
BRAOU	257.54 (40.48%)	3.01	3.83	9.02	238.45 (37.48%)	3.06	0.59	5.32	0.07	115.38	636.27
VMOU	156.67 (58.34%)	0	0	10.42	5.89	.02	2.61	3.63	3.51	85.79 (31.95%)	268.54
NOU	28.52	0	9.50	20.00	12.00	0.02	15.00	0	0.89	35.0	120.93
YCMOU	10.39	0	0	15.03	9.00	3.00	5.00	2.50	6.22	9.00	60.14
MPBOU	22.33 (35.88%)	0	0	7.93	5.78	0	0	0	0	26.20	62.24
BAOU	14.86	43.83 (25.30%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	114.54 (66.12%)	173.23
KSOU	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

SOU	Salaries	Construction of Building	Development of Infrastructure	Development of Programs and courses	Student Support Services	Staff Training and Development	Vocational Education and Training	Research and Development	Library	Others	Total
NSOU	36.18	7.50	4.95	8.25	4.13	1.38	0	0	0	266.45 (81.03%)	6 328.84
UPRTOU	16.49	0	0	9.19	3.11	0.03	0	0.30	0	279.99 (90.58%)	309.11
TNOU	5.66	0	4.50	7.50	4.50	1.50	3.00	3.00	3.00	402.75 (92.50%)	435.41
PSSOU	7.96	0	0	20.55	4.76	1.69	4.13	2.3	1.72	2.44	
UOU	7.97	0	5.02	7.52	4.01	1.0	2.48	1.67	3.98	145.90 (81.26%)	45.55 179.55
KKHSOU	35.60	0	35.00	4.79	8.16	1.29	3.64	4.77	4.73	165.36 (62.79%)	263.34

Source: SOUs, 2014 (Compiled by the author.)

The component of expenditure on staff training and development is generally low at all SOUs because of their small staff strength. Training is generally a one-time affair and often, against the established and expected norms, the staff is not provided any opportunities for retraining through refresher programmes or any other means. The research component, too, is almost insignificant and not assigned priority—a major flaw which the OUs share with all the conventional Indian universities. It is because of this fact, among others, that none of them figure in the top hundred universities of the world. Expenditure on vocational education and training, even though meagre, is a positive development taking place at most of the SOUs (see Table 15).

It is only at BAOU that construction of buildings is a major head of expenditure (25.30% during 2013-14), as this SOU is constructing its own buildings at its newly acquired land in Ahmedabad. Expenditure on learner support services constitutes a major portion of the total expenditure only at BRAOU (37.48% during 2013-14), as it is the only SOU that has its own permanent fulltime staff at its Study Centres and Regional Centres, which (unlike other OUs) are owned by the university (see Table 15).

2 A Critical Appraisal

2.1 Introduction

Despite the appreciable growth and spread of the ODL system in India, as well as the world over, it is still looked upon as a second rate system of education. This stands in the way of the OUs in creating *brand equity* despite being in existence for more than thirty years and the DE system overall for over 60 years in India now. Even today, employers have reservations in employing graduates who have passed through the ODL mode. The OUs are struggling to establish their credibility even though they are offering systematically designed programmes with proper instructional designs and learner support systems. Success in establishing the status and value of ODL programmes depends, to a great extent, on the policies and follow-up actions of the Central and the State Governments, and on the personnel who run them. The OUs have demonstrated how to propagate and manage distance education programmes successfully at a scale unprecedented in this country. It is not surprising, therefore, that many conventional universities are now moving to a dual mode model by adopting technology-mediated methods of distance teaching and learning, as practiced by the OUs, to meet the challenge of educating millions.

Even though the OUs have provided and nurtured a robust system of education breaking the myth of elitism associated with conventional universities, their impact is not what it ought to have been. It is partly because of the educational conservatism we suffer from in India, and partly because of the weaknesses which the ODL system, in India, has yet to overcome. Because of the primacy given to the formal system, by and large, the OUs pass as “poor cousins” of the conventional universities. Despite its contribution to the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for the last three decades, the OUs are being used as an *alternate* mode of higher education to provide education largely to the leftovers of, or those rejected by the conventional system, and to some extent, the disadvantaged groups. Despite being the focus of research and development in the higher education system the world over, the Indian OUs have not been able to contribute in the areas of research and development, neither systemic nor discipline-based. As a result, the academic growth of the OUs and also the acceptability of the ODL system remain adversely affected.

The distinct issues that emerge from the scenario presented above are outlined and discussed in the three subsections that follow.

2.2 Recognition of Awards

Paradoxically, there is a rising scepticism regarding the value of the degrees obtained from the OUs. This is not the case with regard to the degrees obtained through the

distance mode from conventional or dual mode universities, as nowhere on their degrees is there a mention of them having been *obtained through the distance mode*. On the other hand, graduates passing out from the OUs feel that they are getting marginalized. Often, they are faced with the challenge created by the poor acceptability of their awards. The employers, including government undertakings, do not treat the degrees/diplomas of distance learners at par with those obtained from conventional universities. In fact, quite often, advertisements, clearly notify that candidates with degrees obtained through the distance mode need not apply. This has led to legal battles and thrown thousands of OU graduates into uncertainty regarding the value and *recognition* of their degrees. On the other hand, those who are already employed and pursue higher education through an OU to upgrade their skills for career advancement or lateral movement, are much better off as compared to fresh OU graduates who are not treated at par with their peers from conventional universities. Of course, there are exceptions. Many fresh OU graduates have succeeded in the toughest competitive examinations and qualified for the prestigious Civil Services and even in the coveted Information Technology (IT) sector.

It is worth mentioning here, that the UGC regulations regarding the requirements pertaining to degrees are strictly being adhered to by all the OUs; their curricula are scrutinised and approved by their statutory bodies as is the case with the conventional universities; there is a major involvement of a large number of academics from conventional universities in the design and development of the curricula and course materials of the OUs and also in academic counselling and evaluation of the OUs' distance learners. It is, therefore, on this sound academic basis that the UGC through a circular dated May 5, 2004, clarified that the Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees awarded by the Open Universities are to be treated equivalent to the corresponding awards of the conventional universities in the country. A similar circular was once again issued by the UGC in October 2014 to reiterate the fact and remove doubts in the minds of stake holders. Earlier, vide its circular dated January 14, 1994, the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) also has accorded equivalence to the degrees obtained from the OUs vis-à-vis those obtained from the conventional universities.

Why then are the OU graduates facing a crisis of identity in India? In a recent article, the issue of *equivalence* was raised by Prof. Swaraj Basu of IGNOU urging the concerned authorities to intervene in the matter to safeguard the interests of the thousands of learners who are pursuing various programmes through the ODL system (Basu, 2015, p. 5). But there are reasons to the contrary—two recent judgments, one by the Supreme Court and the other by the Calcutta High Court, related to the degrees obtained through the distance mode and awarded by two different universities, have put a major question mark on the credibility of degrees awarded by the OUs. According to these judgements degrees obtained from an OU or through the distance mode of learning cannot be treated equivalent to the with degrees granted by conventional universities.

In yet another judgment, passed on September 18, 2013, a Division Bench of the Calcutta High Court held that a Ph.D. degree obtained through a Distance Education Programme

of an Open University or otherwise cannot be equated with a similar degree obtained through a conventional university. The question being addressed was whether or not the holders of Ph.D. qualifications obtained through a Distance Education Programme have been wrongly deprived of making their claims to Lecturership under the College Service Commission. The judgement stated:

“We have to come to an age when even degree of law is granted via distance education. Bearing in mind the method of obtaining such degree, such degrees are not recognised for practising as an advocate, as that would be compromising with quality of Bar. Such degrees by way of Distance Educational Programmes may be obtained for the purpose of acquiring knowledge but not for entering legal profession. On similar footing, appointment as lecturer is altogether different from the concept of recognition of a degree for acquiring knowledge through Distance Education Programme. When College Service Commission has decided not to appoint anyone who is holding Ph.D. degree from distance education the same cannot be said to be arbitrary as it is in consonance with UGC Regulations,” the bench held.

Further, in a recent judgment passed on December 24, 2014, the Calcutta High Court elaborated on the above judgment in the following words:

“As such we have no hesitation to hold that be it a graduation degree, a Master degree, Ph.D degree or M.Phil Degree which is granted by an Open University either through Distance Mode of Education Programme or through any Informal Education Programme cannot be equated with the gradation degree, Master degree, Ph.D degree or M.Phil degree granted to a candidate by Formal Conventional Recognized Universities after conducting a conventional course on regular basis.”

The decision to hold a degree awarded by an OU as ‘inferior to or not at par with’ a similar degree awarded by a conventional university has to be necessarily based on the premise that the academic rigour required to qualify for the degree has not been built into the OU system and therefore the degree awarded by an OU is ‘inferior’. Notwithstanding the fact that there is no evidence for such a premise, there is a tendency to think that any method of education other than the conventional one is inferior. Thus the awards obtained through the distance mode are treated as different from (nay, inferior to) those obtained through full-time face-to-face learning at conventional institutions.

Both the judgments mentioned above are based on the well-known judgment of the Supreme Court of India delivered on February 25, 2009, against the Civil Appeal No. 4173 of 2008. It stated that a degree obtained after attending regular classes would stand at a higher footing than that obtained through the ODL mode pursuing courses offered through the *open university system*. The issue was whether or not a post-graduate degree offered by a dual mode university, under the *open university scheme*, to a person

without his/her having obtained the first degree (the basic graduate qualification) was legally valid. The UGC Regulations regarding the minimum standards for both the formal and the non-formal degree courses issued in 1985 stated that a student, who has not completed a first degree course of three years duration, shall not be eligible to seek admission to a Master's Degree Programme. It was decided that the requirement of a three year degree course as a prerequisite should also be notified and communicated to all the universities. In the case before the Supreme Court, the question was the legality of a Master's Degree obtained by a person in one sitting under the '*open university system*'; without his/her having obtained a Bachelor's degree. What seems to have led to the confusing judgment is the mistaken equation of '*open university system*' followed by certain conventional universities in the past with the ODL system evolved and followed by the OUs in India today. This confusion is now feeding the notion that the degrees awarded by the OUs are inferior to those awarded by the conventional universities.

The ODL system adopted by the OUs, it needs to be noted, is a complete departure from the earlier '*open university system*' that was followed by certain conventional universities in accordance with the UGC norms for *non-formal education*. Some conventional universities had adopted that '*open university system*' under which they were offering Bachelor's and Master's Degree Programmes (either of which could be cleared in one sitting) to mature adults without their having obtained any formal qualifications. The said mature adults under this system did not have to pursue a three year undergraduate programme or a two year post-graduate programme as offered in the regular system.

The UGC worked towards discontinuing this scheme during the late 1990s. Vide its Letter No. F.II-4/92 (CPP-II), dated March 14, 1997, the UGC informed all the Vice Chancellors that:

The degrees of the candidates enrolled for one time Bachelor's degree programme, upto the year 1995-96, may be treated as valid. The degrees of the candidates declared valid may be treated at par with other degrees of the same university for all purposes including admission to higher degrees and employment.

And then, vide its Letter No. F.I-30/96 (CPP-I), dated February 1, 1998, the UGC informed the Registrars of all the universities that:

No university may be allowed to enroll candidates for one sitting of M.A./M.Sc./M.Com. from the academic year beginning in 1998.

Subsequently, vide its Letter No. IG/VC/566-68, dated March, 5, 2004, the DEC also issued instructions to the universities offering programmes through the earlier '*open university system*' to discontinue the practice immediately.

It should be clear, as explained above, that the confusion referred to above lies in the fact that the Supreme Court judgements have equated the earlier '*open university*

system', followed by some conventional universities under the provision of *non-formal* education, with the open university system as practised by the OUs of today.

The said judgments have thus, erroneously though, put a big question mark on the future of the ODL system having grave implications for the degrees awarded by the OUs. This is a grave situation that affects thousands of learners enrolled with the OUs. In the light of the growing concern of our nation regarding the expansion of higher education for the benefit of the majority in our country and a large number of stake holders associated with ODL, there is an urgent need to take serious note of the developments resulting from the court judgments and plan and initiate correctives measures.

Unfortunately, the damage done by the Supreme Court judgments outlined above has remained uncontested till date. It must be mentioned here that in March 2009, immediately after the Supreme Court judgement was given, the National Open University (IGNOU), in fulfilling its role of promotion, coordination and maintenance of standards in the ODL system of the country, had brought all the OUs together under the aegis of the then Distance Education Council to deliberate and discuss the remedial steps to undo the harm done thus far. After intense deliberations, a Special Leave Petition (SLP) Review Appeal was filed in the Supreme Court to address the issue. This appeal, however, had to be withdrawn following the directions that a fresh petition be filed at the appropriate level. That has not been done so far, and the matter remains unresolved even today.

Corrective measures at the level of policy formulation and implementation are needed to address the crisis (created by the court judgments) of credibility being faced by the ODL system. Authorities in the OUs, educational policy makers at the national and the state levels and other stakeholders should work in tandem to dispel the misconceptions about the ODL system. The OUs need to highlight their immense potential for removing illiteracy, ignorance and dearth of skill. The immediate need is to bring to the notice of the judiciary and all other bodies concerned, the meaning, scope and potential of the OUs, and the fact that they adhere to the norms and guidelines prescribed by the UGC and other regulatory bodies. It needs to be emphasized that OU degrees should be recognized at par with those of conventional universities and the Supreme Court judgement is reviewed in the interests of the country as a whole, not to speak of the thousands of learners pursuing education at the OUs (Basu, 2015).

Indifferent in its thrust, the notification of the MHRD on its website pertaining to the recognition of awards obtained through the ODL system does not provide any clarity either. It reads as follows:

The Distance Learning Division in the Ministry of Human Resource Development receives a number of queries from the general public seeking clarifications in respect of recognition of academic qualifications acquired through distance mode and their acceptance for the purpose of employment in Central/State Government service. The position in this regard is clarified as under:

It is up to the concerned academic institution/university to recognize the qualification including certificate, diploma, degree, etc. for the purpose of academic pursuit, i.e. continuing education for acquiring another academic qualification, with it. As regards recognition of academic qualifications for the purpose of employment, it is the prerogative of the concerned employer to take a view on the recognition of the degree, diploma, etc. Central Government, as an Employer, had made its position clear in respect of academic qualifications acquired through distance mode of education, for the purpose of employment under it, vide Gazette Notification No.44 dated March 1, 1995.

*The Gazette Notification referred to above is equally applicable to the qualifications acquired from private as well as public institutions/universities.
(<http://mhrd.gov.in/print/distance-learning-4>)*

2.3 Standards and Regulations

The responsibility for the promotion and coordination of the ODL was vested with the IGNOU instead of the UGC which regulates quality and standards of higher education in the country. The creation of IGNOU and a network of State Open Universities (SOUs) was intended to bring about qualitative changes in ODL. This objective, however, has not been achieved. *“The main reason is that the Distance Education Council, which was meant to ensure... quality assurance of ODL offerings in all institutions, was placed within the IGNOU structure. This creates a conflict of interest which prevents any serious quality assurance of ODL in either the private or the public sectors.”*(Daniel, John & Colleagues, 2010, p. 1)

IGNOU established the Distance Education Council (DEC) in 1991 under Sections 5(2) and 16(7) of the IGNOU Act 1985, as a Statutory Body for the promotion, coordination and determination of standards of the Open University and distance education system in the country (IGNOU Act 1985). The DEC in its limited capacity, functioning as it was within an Open University (a player was also doubling up as an umpire), did try to streamline and strengthen the DE system. It is pertinent to mention, here, that *IGNOU through the DEC* performed the role of promotion, coordination and maintenance of standards in the DE system efficiently for more than 20 years. During this period *the two together* played well the multiple roles of assisting State Governments in *setting up their* respective State Open Universities, providing developmental assistance to DE Institutions and State Open Universities, promoting systemic research at the national and international level, devising policies relevant to the DE system, disbursing grants to DE institutions, developing norms and benchmarks for higher levels of DE operations, providing funds and expertise for the adoption of ICTs by DE institutions, providing capacity building and *training to personnel working at other DE Institutions*, sharing courseware with other *DE Institutions* to prevent duplication, and evaluating all types of universities and institutions for recognising them to offer programmes through the

distance mode. It would be pertinent to say that *IGNOU and the DEC* have all these years played the role of torch bearers at the national level and served together as a laboratory where ODL experiments were conducted—these experiments were then replicated/emulated in/by other DE institutions within the country as well as in other developing countries, especially in Africa, the Middle East, SAARC countries and the Pacific region.

The Madhava Menon Committee, appointed by the MHRD to explore ways of regulating the standards of education imparted through the distance mode, submitted its Report (MHRD, 2012) in 2012. Based on its recommendations, the MHRD transferred the authority and functions of the DEC to the UGC and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) through an administrative order, dated December 29, 2012. Consequently, IGNOU dissolved the DEC on May 1, 2013, to pave the way for setting up of the Distance Education Council of India (DECI) as proposed in the Madhava Menon Committee Report. Pending the creation of the DECI, however, as an interim measure, the MHRD entrusted the UGC with the responsibility of regulating the ODL system. All SOUs supported the decision for the creation of an independent regulator for the ODL system, but were not in favour of handing over the responsibility to the UGC, even if temporarily. They desired that the DEC continue working till the DECI came into existence.

The present ad-hoc arrangement to regulate the ODL system through the UGC has further weakened the cause of ODL and is giving credence to the view that ODL is not a mainstream system and can therefore not be an *alternative* for the formal conventional system of education. Further, among the masses, it is now increasingly seen as a *non-formal system* of education, even though all the OUs including the ODL institutions are offering formal degrees.

As per the orders of the MHRD, dated December 29, 2012, the UGC and the AICTE were required to create the necessary physical infrastructure and qualified personnel to discharge the regulatory responsibilities of the ODL system efficiently and effectively in their respective areas. The AICTE did not undertake any activity in this direction. The UGC, created the Distance Education Bureau (DEB) to carry out this function. No structure or guideline/regulation were created by either the UGC or the AICTE. Instead the guidelines developed by the DEC were adopted by the UGC to regulate the ODL system. The UGC was using the same infrastructure, manpower and norms as used by the DEC to discharge this major role assigned to it by the MHRD. In March 2015, however, all the staff of the DEC were repatriated to IGNOU, and the MHRD has directed the UGC to run the regulatory functions of the ODL system through the services of contractual staff. Thus, the system, which was being managed by an institution having more than 40 permanent members on its staff, is now being managed by a team of 5-6 contractual consultants within the UGC. This situation has continued for more than two years now. The degree of indifference regarding such crucial issues, as outlined above, is simply unthinkable.

At present, there is no effective coordinating body to address the problems of the ODL system and initiate actions to redress the grievances of the thousands of affected

learners. There is an urgent need for an effective apex body, vested with statutory authority, to regulate this system. The Government of India should, on priority basis, create an autonomous body directly under the MHRD, on the lines of the UGC, namely the Distance Education Council of India (DECI), for the promotion, coordination and maintenance of standards in the ODL system. The DECI should effectively co-ordinate the efforts of the National Open University, the State Open Universities and the DEIs attached to the conventional universities. The silver lining is that the DECI Bill is said to be ready for the forthcoming session (i.e. Monsoon Session—2015) of the Indian Parliament.

The DECI should be able to give the much needed credibility to the ODL system in India and help it be accepted as a mode of education capable of providing a framework as good as that of the formal system to promote access to education and also fulfil the mandate of expansion, inclusion and excellence. This national body should look at not only the new technological options available, but also pay attention to the new learning needs and environments corresponding to emerging demographic and cultural changes. It should plan proper strategies for better utilization of the strengths of the ODL system.

2.4 Preparedness for the 21st Century

India has a favourable demographic profile in terms of the availability of human resources, yet the Indian labour market is facing shortages when it comes to the availability and supply of appropriate talent. Under-employment is as widespread and massive as is unemployment. The prevailing unemployment and non-employability of the youth could blunt India's global edge not only at present but also in the future. There is a significant skills gap that blunts supply against the demand for employable and industry-ready people. The present situation, to a great extent, is due to high dropout rate at schools, inadequate skills training capacity, and low employability of even those holding professional qualifications. For example there is a serious skill gap among India's engineers, who, according to employers, lack the 'all important' *soft skills* and higher order *thinking skills* (Blom and Saeki, 2011, p. 11). According to *The India Skills Report-2014*, two-thirds of the skill pool is not employable (Confederation of Indian Industries, 2014, p. 19). If India does not create enough jobs and her workforce is not adequately prepared for those jobs, her *demographic dividend* (see Sub-section 3.2) may turn into a *liability* that will adversely impact both her society and economy. According to the National Sample Survey (NSS) Report No. 554: *Employment and Unemployment Situation in India, 2011-12*, 16.3% of urban males who are graduates and under 29 years of age are unemployed. If certificate and diploma holders are included, the figure rises to 28.8%. The report indicates that the better qualified have lesser chances of obtaining satisfactory employment (Sanghi and Srija, 2014). Therefore, there is a need for OUs to devise courses that impart suitable skills and training for employability and prepare more and more youth entrepreneurs.

Skill and competency-based education needs to be provided to the masses to make India the largest talent pool in the world. The OUs can be harnessed to work together to make this a reality. The government's new slogan "Make in India", seems to be motivated by the same thinking that made China earn the epithet "factory of the world". A combination of an educated skilled workforce and a "can do" attitude has transformed China from a mainly agricultural society to the world's factory. These days, everything, from toys to cars and highly sophisticated electronic goods, are made in China. With the expansion of the manufacturing base in India, the rate of savings is likely to go up and thereby the investments. For the success of the "Make in India" campaign, there is a compelling need to make our workforce more competent and skilled. The OUs are certainly in a position to give a fillip to this campaign by providing skill-oriented and competency-based courses. To succeed in achieving this objective, they also need to create mechanisms for recognizing, evaluating and certifying prior learning.

Most of the OUs have introduced the traditional programmes, being offered by conventional universities, to meet the general demand for education and to provide opportunities to those who missed their earlier opportunities of pursuing higher education. Further, some innovative and skills-oriented programmes, including professional and functional need-based programmes, have also been introduced to fulfil the national requirements and to reach out to new customers and aspirants. In general, the curricula, as of now, are mostly past-directed and present-oriented. There is hardly any element of the futuristic, out-of-the-box orientation in such curricula. As a result, a learner may get a degree and do well in his/her profession, but his/her qualifications may not be good enough to be competitive in the open market where he/she could generate employment for himself/herself or others on his/her own.

Against the backdrop of what has been stipulated above, even if the OUs want to introduce professional and technical programmes, they cannot do so, as all the apex bodies have restricted the offering of professional degree programmes through the ODL mode. The Gazette Notification of the UGC banning research degrees through the distance mode in India has had a further dampening effect on the OUs (UGC, 2009). A UGC notification banning newly established universities from offering programmes through the ODL mode for five years is yet another road block. While some of these restrictions are claimed to be punitive measures against the so called *degree mills*, most of them, in fact, operate as rearguard actions to prevent the erosion, so to say, of traditional methods of instruction and the accompanying loss of institutional income.

It is also important to consider that the OUs were cast in a mould created more than three decades ago when the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) were not available, or were at a nascent stage in the education sector. There is hardly any significant or noticeable change in operations as a result of their having adopted ICTs—clearly the OUs can do a lot more in harnessing and using the ICTs available today. Similarly, even the methods of evaluation used today by the OUs are outdated and are designed mainly to test the learners' skills to memorize rather than testing their ability to apply the taught/learnt concepts for problem solving.

The only exceptions in this regard are VMOU and BAOU, that have charted out a proper plan of action for the adoption of ICTs in their operations and these are being executed systematically. The rest of the SOUs are still functioning on lines characteristic of the second and third generations of distance education (Taylor, 2000). Just like any other Distance Education Institution, attached to a dual mode conventional university, most of the SOUs depend mainly on printed study materials for providing instruction to their learners. Although they are supposed to adopt a *multiple media* approach (which is different from the conventional notion of *multi-media* content) to distance education, none of them have actually integrated the media-inputs in their instructional design. Print continues to be the dominant medium of instruction and the other media are being used to supplement or complement it. The learners are not encouraged to use others mediums since the entire course content is provided to them in the form of print materials. Making use of audio/video programmes is not compulsory. As a result, the latter are generally ignored by most of the learners, which explains why there is low participation in teleconferences and video-conferences and even face-to-face counselling sessions which are not compulsory.

The OUs need to revisit and review their operations in order to provide a stimulating learning environment and also enriching learning experiences for the present generation of learners. This is possible only if appropriate technologies are adopted to enrich and diversify the learning experiences.

2.5 Leadership Role

Leadership plays an important role in the growth and development of any system. In fact only experienced and good leadership can usher in quality in the system. Deficient leadership is another issue confronting the OU system. Leadership deficit, resulting in governance issues is one of the serious concerns in the Open University system. Vice Chancellors appointed to the OUs need not have any experience of working in the ODL system. Therefore they need to first develop an understanding of the system and before they actually settle down the three year term is over.

Leadership development initiatives at all levels from top to bottom, of personnel holding leadership, management and administrative positions, within the SOUs is also lacking. Most functionaries learn on the job. Professional development is not organised periodically and systematically as it should be. Usually, the functionaries are given orientation just once at the time of entry, whereas for a dynamic system like ODL which keeps on changing with the adoption of new technological interventions the staff needs periodic orientation/training to keep up with the latest developments.

3 Reforming the ODL System in India: Recommendations

3.1 Introduction

Indian OUs have succeeded in expanding the base of higher education by providing opportunities literally to millions of Indians. This was achieved by espousing flexibility with regard to the entry requirements and exit conditions, and allowing a relaxed pace of study that enables learners to learn at their own place and pace and to possibly work and earn while they are engaged in learning. With the variety of programmes that the OUs are offering to meet the socio-economic needs of the masses, of the total demand for higher education in the country today, nearly 9-10% (in terms of enrolments) is met by the OUs. This was less than 7% a decade ago, and less than 3% two decades ago (see Table 3). With the extensive use of electronic media, the learning opportunities for diverse segments of the population can be further augmented in the foreseeable future.

A tidal wave of young and not-so-young aspirants is lapping the shores of higher education. Over the next 20 years, India will desperately need mass providers like the OUs that offer lifelong learning and make higher education more accessible, diverse and flexible by helping people learn what they want, when they want and where they want. *To serve the needs of Indian society and growing economy, restructuring of the OUs on a sound basis is the need of the hour. Most of the OUs have been cast in the mould created more than thirty years ago. They are functioning at a primitive level following the norms of the second and third generations of distance education. They are still catering to an old by gone era—an era when what the country required was a workforce suitable for a production-based economy. Today's knowledge-based economy requires the development and preparation of a differently, but highly, skilled and knowledgeable workforce. Our OUs have to cater to this need of the hour and they have the potential to meet the challenge—they need restructuring with this objective at the forefront.*

3.2 The New Agenda for the OUs

With one of the youngest populations in the world, India is projected to have 64% of its population in the age group of 15–59 years by 2021 (Government of India, 2012). This fact is regarded as a *demographic dividend*, as it gives India the potential to become a global production hub as well as a large consumer of goods and services. India will remain a young nation and also the largest contributor to the global workforce over the next few decades against the rapidly ageing population in the Western countries as well as China. India is expected to enjoy this benefit until 2040 (CRISIL Centre for Economic Research, 2010, p. 4). Accordingly, the Government of India, in line with its forecast of a significant requirement of skilled manpower over the next decade, has set the target of imparting the necessary skills to 500 million people by 2022.

This objective, however, cannot be achieved unless the OUs play their role effectively in imparting training and skills to this target group. The OUs, therefore, need to rededicate and energise themselves to achieve this objective.

3.3 India's Economic Goals and ODL

In the coming years, India needs to become *one* of the largest, if not *the* largest, talent pool in the world. To achieve this objective, skill and competency-based education needs to be provided. The OUs seem to be the only available mechanism that, used effectively and efficiently, can deliver the goals. For the “*Make in India*” campaign to succeed, there is a need to make our workforce more competent and more skilled. The OUs can give a definitive fillip to this campaign by providing skill-oriented and competency-based courses along with a mechanism for recognizing prior learning and certifying it as well.

The OUs can contribute significantly to materialize the government's slogan of “*Make in India*” by changing the face of higher education. To supply suitable manpower to industries, they should design and develop curricula for the needed skills-oriented courses in collaboration with the concerned industries, so that the programmes change from being theory-based to more practical and application-oriented. Such programmes will be more suited to the world of work and ensure employability of the graduates.

3.4 Mainstreaming the Ignored Target Groups

As of now, the main target group of the OUs, is largely urban and includes those who find it difficult to attend regular conventional universities/colleges because of one or the other reason. Sizeable ‘unreachable’ and ‘otherwise reachable’ populations are, therefore, yet to be drawn into the higher education system. For example, a large proportion of housewives who quit education because of early marriage, or due to family commitments, or any other reason, remain unreached, as far as higher education is concerned. Similarly, those who are self-employed or go for their *family* vocations also remain unreached. How to bring these and many others into the mainstream of education is a concern that the OUs should attend to.

According to the Census of India, 2011, roughly 69% of the Indian population resides in rural areas. Though a marginal increase in population has been noticed in urban areas during 2001 to 2011, rural population constitutes a major proportion of the Indian population. The rural-urban literacy gap which was 21.2 percentage points in 2001 came down to 16.1 percentage points by 2011 (Chandramouli, 2011, p. 5). But even a gap of 16 percentage points is alarming and needs to be bridged. The OUs, therefore, need to extend their outreach to the rural populations and bring them into the mainstream.

Significantly, the bulk of the labour force in India, about 93%, work in the unorganised

sector largely untouched by any kind of formal training (Chenoy, 2013, p. 1). The OUs should make concerted efforts to tap the vast majority of the labour force and upgrade their skills to help improve their productivity. In the process they will, also, prepare more people with higher skills needed in the organized/formal sector.

Another target group left untapped comprises the soldiers of the Indian Armed and the paramilitary forces despite the isolated efforts made by some universities. Many of these defence personnel in the *short service commission* retire at the age of forty years and need to be trained in order to re-enter the job market. Additionally, as the in-service defence and paramilitary personnel are frequently transferred to new locations and difficult terrains, the OUs are suitably equipped to devise strategies to reach out to them and empower them educationally and in a cost effective way.

As per the Census of India 2011, the youth account for 28% of the population (Sanghi and Srija, 2014, p. 1). Of these, the unemployed constitute yet another major target group to be tapped by the OUs. They remain unemployed as they lack the skills and competencies required for the job market. Lack of decent employment opportunities forces them to take up low-paid contractual jobs with no job security. This is evident from the fact that more than 93% of the workforce is employed in the unorganized sector. Unemployment rates across different age groups have been increasing significantly with the urban women having the highest unemployment rate according to NSS Report No. 554: *Employment and Unemployment Situation in India, 2011-12* (Sanghi and Srija, 2014, p. 35).

The remodelled OUs should, therefore, aim at the development of human and knowledge resources as envisioned by the Planning Commission in its *“India Vision of 2020”* document (Planning Commission, 2002). In this document, the Planning Commission has envisaged that *“by 2020, the people of India will be more numerous, better educated, healthier and more prosperous than at any time in our long history”*. True it is, today we find healthier and more prosperous people around and larger numbers of educated people who have completed their schooling and are ready for higher education. We are, however, faced with a disparity—while on the one hand the population has increased exponentially, on the other, the growth in the number of conventional higher education institutions has remained inadequate. This has left a large proportion of young population outside the reach of higher education. The ODL system, therefore, needs to extend its access and reach far and wide for target groups left ignored and unattended.

3.5 Certification of Prior Learning and Allied Credit Transfer

The OUs are mandated to cater to the needs of diversified learners who are looking not only for the certification of their learning, but also for their integration with the mainstream of higher education. To achieve this dual objective, the modular approach, that the OUs are already following, needs to be coupled with a lateral entry approach

supported by a mechanism for smooth *prior learning assessment and recognition* (PLAR), which will facilitate the entry of those who have no formal education and training, but have acquired usable and productive skills without obtaining the related certification. Such a mechanism will also benefit those who have discontinued their formal education midway for one or the other reason. The OUs should develop an evaluation framework to assess and recognize competencies gained outside the formal system, assign credit values to such competencies, accommodate (on demand) credits gained at other institutions, and aggregate them appropriately to award relevant degrees, diplomas or certificates. This can very well be achieved through of ICTs-based delivery of education together with the acceptance of certification and qualifications obtained using MOOCs and OER.

A separate Board for Prior Learning Assessment may be required to be set up by all OUs in order to assess and certify those with usable and productive skills and competencies. Such a mechanism can help the most marginalized sections of the society, particularly women and the poor living in rural areas, to effectively participate in the growth and development of the nation. It could also foster community learning and knowledge sharing that can help communities develop networks to disseminate and share knowledge and skills in an organized manner. This would promote knowledge-based livelihood and income generation opportunities for the marginalized, and thus create opportunities for building *social capital*, which is seen as a missing link in the process of development today—the OUs can thus function as tools of social reformation.

A choice-based credit system (that allows learners free choice of courses according to their needs and those of the job market) and a credit transfer scheme to facilitate learner mobility are already in place. This scheme, however, needs to be revisited, improved and implemented systematically. There is a need to encourage the development of flexible modular programmes, and uniform and standardized core curricula with elements of flexibility to take care of local and regional contexts across all OUs, so as to make credit transfer easy and operational. A major thrust should be to institute a *common credit allocation system* for programmes and courses offered through both the distance and the conventional modes. This would smooth out the difficulties being faced by distance learners desirous of migrating from an OU to a conventional university to pursue further studies and vice-versa.

3.6 Adoption of New Pedagogies

The OUs have to cater to three types of learners—digital natives, digital immigrants and digital illiterates. The challenge before them is to deal purposefully with the three groups of learners, whose levels of digital literacy vary significantly. Today learners, rather than simply receiving and memorizing information from texts, are demanding education and training through more engaging *means*, read *new technology*. Prensky (2001) rightly points out that today's students are no longer the people our existing educational system was designed to teach. *Gen Next* represents the first generation to grow up with this *new technology*.

“They have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, the Internet, email, and instant messaging. It is now clear that as a result of this ubiquitous environment and the sheer volume of their interaction with it, today’s students think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors.” (Prensky, 2001, p. 1).

Accordingly, today lectures or texts alone do not give the learners the actual “feel” of the subject-matter to be studied, whereas e-content delivered digitally and supported by audio, video and animation provides a multi-sensory perspective to learners who in turn experience the subject-matter in a vivid manner, which undoubtedly is more enriching and rewarding in pedagogic terms. With Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and the likes of social networking tools, the youth and even the children remain immersed digitally at all the possible times. Blogging, podcasting, YouTube, Wikipedia, and real time audio and video screen tools have added to the ways users interact with each other.

These new digital formats allow a great degree of interaction and user control over the content. Learning has become more collaborative, and information is available from multiple sources. Further, through the process of digital delivery, no time is lost between the dispatch and the receipt of the content. As learning becomes more visual, there is greater retention of what is learned. Learning packages offered by OUs should, therefore, be available in various formats both online and offline for benefit of different types of distance learners. The OUs need to rethink and remodel their operations to provide an enriched learning experience for the present generation of learners. For this, they need to create a learner-friendly environment and adopt the appropriate technology to support it. To ensure their success, besides using the traditional technologies (print, audio and video CDs, television, radio and face-to-face counselling) the OUs should make extensive use of the Internet technology. Each OU should have its own dynamic website with a dedicated LMS and LCMS for each programme offered by it. Further, each OU should have its own e-platform to host all its learning resources on the Web and provide online services for its tech-savvy learners.

3.7 Adoption of Economically Relevant Curricula

The OUs need to envision new approaches to providing instruction to meet the challenge posed by the new agenda outlined above (see Sub-section 3.2). They should provide for “learning on demand” and “learner-centred instruction” by adopting appropriate technologies for transacting the curriculum and also for supporting the learning endeavour of the learners.

There is a need for the curricula to be progressive and application and skills-oriented so that the knowledge and skills gained can actually be applied in the world of work. There

is also an enormous gap between the demand and supply that only the OUs can bridge, if permitted to offer degree programmes in professional, technical and skills-oriented areas. The OUs need to revisit all their programmes and modify the curricula in tune with the requirements of the industry and the job market in general.

The OUs should set a new trend that would help in churning out knowledge workers. Instead of emulating the conventional degree awarding universities, they should focus on designing market-oriented and industry-integrated programmes. Employability of the graduates has to be considered as a key factor in curriculum design. Further, curricula can be strengthened by enriching them with purposeful components such as content for a set of skills in the areas of communication, problem solving, IT, technical and vocational, entrepreneurial capabilities required for employment. Again, the curricula of the new generation programmes should be designed and developed in collaboration with the concerned industry, so that the programmes are not purely theory-based, but practice and application-oriented and above all, need-based (in terms of the employability of the graduates), with clear cut avenues for the appropriate placement of the graduate in a related industry. These programmes should serve as models of 'work integrated learning' leading to awards that clearly state the skills and competencies acquired. The OUs should adopt the policy of providing stipends to the new apprentices to encourage the learners and facilitate the sharpening of the skills acquired. The depth and the duration of the programmes must determine the types of award, namely certificate, diploma or degree. The proposed new programmes should be designed in ways that can promote entrepreneurship among the learners/graduates, who by taking advantage of the policies of the Government for micro and small scale industries could set up their own enterprises. This way, the OUs should orient themselves to create more *job givers* than *job seekers*.

The *online retail upsurge* has made the big malls and neighbourhood market outlets jittery, the online retail is eating the pie of actual sales of the physical market outlets, there is a noticeable fall in retail in the malls and other retail outlets, and shops are being used as display centres mainly while shopping is being done online because of better deals available there. In the same manner, it is reasonable to emphasise that the need for the acquisition of skills and competency requirements have overtaken the demand for traditional degrees. Higher education institutions will have to cater to this new demand instead of simply producing degree holders without any employable skills. Even if such degree holders succeed in entering an industry, they soon realize that what they were taught at the university is obsolete or not relevant to their world of work. This situation necessitates that all the universities, certainly the OUs, should design and develop curricula for various disciplines and/or skills in collaboration with the concerned industries, so that the programmes change from purely theory-based to being more practice-based, application-oriented and above all need-based (in terms of employability).

3.8 Twenty-four Seven Support Services

Learner support services need to be revamped in order to provide them at a scale and a level, which not only promise, but also offer high quality customer services with the objective of complete customer satisfaction and significantly high pass-out rates. The use of technological solutions should be encouraged in all the support services. Such solutions should be driven by the needs of learners together with the range of access they provide and promote. The network of support services should be accessible to all types of learners enrolled in the system. There should be mechanisms for efficient student tracking and improving the retention rates. Apart from the services provided through the network of various Learner Support Centres, namely Regional Centres and Study Centres, all OUs need to move on to technology-based options, so as to provide instant, accurate and timely service to their learners. Further, technology-based solutions should also promote two-way communication. In other words, they should promote learner-teacher interaction which is essential for maintaining motivation, providing feedback, and for diagnosing difficulties and finding solutions for them. Whatever the self-directed learners may do by themselves, whatever the level of their self-motivation and the nature of their interaction with the content provided in the form of SLMs, they remain vulnerable at the point of application. Moreover, interaction among learners themselves is equally important and is recognised as an extremely valuable resource for learning. In fact, skills of successful teamwork are regarded so essential for functioning in today's work environment. Peer group interaction, whether synchronous or asynchronous, encourages the development of expertise and competencies, and also enhances stimulation and motivation. An active platform for peer interaction is a much required facility, which the usual ODL operations have not been able to activate. ICTs can help the OUs in providing this facility for most of their programmes and learners.

All OUs need to reorganize their operations pertaining to learner support in the light of the above discussion. They need to integrate all the available media in the process of programme delivery. As long as the non-print media continue to be treated as complementary or supplementary to the print medium, their appropriate use by the learners cannot be ensured. For want of time because of various preoccupations, learners are generally not inclined to use add-ons. In-depth programme-wise research needs to be done to develop a suitable instructional design, in which (based on the level of access to media and technology in a particular area) the relevant media should remain integrated. Such an approach is likely to ensure proper utilization of the various media by the learners.

An Online Learner Help Desk (24X7), handled by a Call Centre, should be set up under the supervision of the *Department of eLearning* (see Sub-section 3.13) to provide academic and administrative support services to the learners. This department should also be responsible for coordinating the design and development of all types of services to learners, from online registration to online convocation—dissemination of information, admissions, collection of student fees, maintenance of learner records,

counselling and tutoring services, vocational guidance, multimedia support, library services, evaluation of assignments, feedback, guidance for project work, organization of seminars, conduct of online examinations, award of degrees and placement services.

Further, using the latest technology driven interventions, all OUs should also cater to the special needs and requirements of diverse online learner groups including women, physically challenged, economically weaker sections and other deprived and denied groups by adopting a diversified approach to course/programme delivery. To succeed in this endeavour, appropriate guidelines need to be developed for first identifying and thereafter handling learners with special needs to ensure that those with physical and/or communication impairments are not disadvantaged. While framing these guidelines and norms, the underlying objective should be to encourage the use of appropriate media which could save time, effort and cost of delivery as well as prove to be effective for providing independent learning, interaction and feedback.

3.9 ICTs in Programme Design and Delivery

The next logical step would be to convert all the courseware or the major portions of the courseware into e-content. All the existing learning resources, irrespective of the medium they are in, should be converted into e-content, preferably in the form of e-learning modules, which should be Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM) compliant so that they can be reused, revised, remixed, and re-distributed. Further, it is necessary for the OUs to adopt the Creative Commons License and open, standardized end-user-learner oriented architecture through LMS and interactive Web.2 tools. This would ensure pliancy of the learning resources being used and reused as per the design of programme delivery. Also updating and revisions can be effected easily at frequent intervals as per the requirement. Further, this will make it possible for the OUs to allow choices to their learners, who opt to study for a programme fully online, partly online and partly offline, or just offline.

The e-learning modules should not be passive but interactive in design. Each module should be a judicious media mix of text, audio, video and animation. The e-content should be designed in a manner that would allow integration of content with relevant learning activities, so as to enable learners to master the content and develop critical thinking, creativity and decision-making skills. Learners should be engaged in authentic learning through real-life simulations, examples and experiences. The said activities should deepen learners' involvement in the process of learning by engaging them in sound pedagogic activities—answering questions, interpreting different cases or situations, or solving relevant problems. This will make the e-content engaging, motivating and enlightening and, as a result, it will promote active learning. Evaluation of learner achievements could be managed through formal or informal tests, or through self-assessment strategies.

Talking of evaluation, the methods of evaluation, in use today, are often outdated and

are designed to test learners' memory regarding the concepts taught, or supposed to have been learnt, instead of testing their ability to apply the learnt concepts in problem solving activities. Consequently, most of the concepts learnt during the academic year are forgotten once examinations are over. Evaluation should help the learners to reflect on what they have been doing and derive useful insights as well as skills in relation to the topic or content. In e-learning the modules should demonstrate a balance among the three components of effective instruction, namely content, practice and feedback.

3.10 Digitization of Courseware and Creation of Repositories

In the changing scenario accelerated by technological change and global competition, two new powerful thrusts have emerged during the last decade—'Knowledge Resources' and 'Knowledge Management' devices. It is well known that learners are accessing digital learning resources over the Internet openly and freely—they are not required to pay for such rich and varied resources. Even before the dawn of the knowledge era, various OUs, the world over, had started creating voluminous repositories of educational assets, not available earlier. These repositories of knowledge are in the public domain, available mostly in textual format, but not easily accessible to all. It will be a positive step forward to have the courseware of all the Indian OUs digitized and placed as Open Course Ware (OCW) that could be available to all. This initiative will help the indigenous accumulation of both 'knowledge resources' and 'knowledge management' devices. These repositories can serve as legitimate alternatives to expensive books that can be accessed free of cost anywhere by anybody—school children, college/university students and their teachers, working professionals and all those pursuing lifelong learning for purposes of enrichment, to improve their academic competency, social mobility or for career advancement.

3.11 Creation of an e-Gateway

The purpose of creating an e-Gateway is in tune with the MHRD's *National Mission for Education through ICT* (MHRD, 2009). There is a vast body of literature on Open and Distance Education in India, scattered in the form of books, articles published in journals, conference proceedings, newspapers and magazines, mimeos, reports, manuals, etc. The idea behind the e-Gateway is to consolidate all that knowledge, filter it and arrange it systematically, so that it may be used and reused by policy makers, administrators, researchers, teachers and anyone anywhere interested in knowing about the ODL system as it operates in India. Further, the distributed repositories available at all the OUs should be linked to this e-Gateway, so that all knowledge resources as well as the whole range of intellectual resources, created by the OUs, are available to the world. It should be managed by a Central Government Agency, i.e. an independent autonomous body which can serve as a national backbone that provides advanced networking

capabilities through high bandwidth connectivity. Further, it should be linked with OER worldwide, which can bring the complete range of intellectual resources available in the world to the Indian population and vice-versa. Keeping in view the challenges that the ODL system is facing today, the creation of an e-Gateway will help in making a qualitative change in *education*, an important social institution. Teachers as well as learners will get wider exposure to develop a world perspective so essential in this age of globalisation and internationalization of higher education.

3.12 Introduction of OER and MOOCs

In keeping with the times, the OUs must develop a policy to systematically place e-content as Open Educational Resources (OER). To achieve this objective, they need to develop standards to ensure interoperability, accessibility and reusability of the OER through the adoption of Creative Commons Licence and open, standardized end-user-learner oriented architecture through the adoption of LMS and interactive Web 2.0 tools, as pointed to earlier.

Open sharing and reusing of resources will speed up the development of new learning resources required to serve the needs of the ever growing diverse groups of learners. This will also reduce and prevent duplication of efforts and indirectly save unnecessary expenditure and effort in reinventing the same or similar type of content that is already available. Further, reuse of learning resources developed using public funds is definitely a better return on investments of tax payers' money. Being in the public domain, OER will promote quality consciousness among the content developers and also bring about qualitative changes in educational offerings at all levels and of all types (Srivastava and Ramadevi, 2012, p. 9).

The OUs also need to introduce Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Their policy on MOOCs should be contextualized keeping in mind local needs and requirements. In developing MOOCs priority needs to be given to extensive use of the local or vernacular languages; their relevance to the cultural milieu needs to be ensured; the quality of knowledge and the accuracy of information contained therein should be unquestionable; and, above all, free and easy access to them needs to be ensured at all costs. Selection of courses to be offered as MOOCs should be done with definite objectives in view, very much on the lines of the *Incredible India Campaign*, by asking institutions to identify courses that would attract both national and overseas clientele. Secondly, local institutions, state-wise, could be asked to identify such courses as would serve the needs of the rural populations living in the hinterland, or any specific target groups as per their needs and requirements. This would suit the socio-economic needs of each state and its diverse population. Further, the said policy should also display a global perspective by highlighting the need to focus on such areas that have a global market as well.

Undoubtedly, both OER and MOOCs will create unprecedented educational

opportunities to serve the knowledge and skill needs of diverse communities and both the traditional and the non-traditional groups of learners who are unable to use more conventional methods of education. OER and MOOCs can also be used by professionals for in-service training and by older people and other disadvantaged groups for home-based studies. These are the educational tools that promise to help in making a qualitative change in our educational system and can steer the OUs in a new direction by completely recasting the process of distance teaching-learning. To succeed in using OER and MOOCs after and by integrating them with the teaching-learning process seamlessly, the OUs also need to develop mechanisms for certifying students based on their learning from OER and MOOCs (Srivastava, 2014, p. 12).

3.13 Technology Driven Governance

It should be mandatory for all OUs to go for ICT applications in all their operations. They should each create a separate fully-fledged *Department of e-Learning* with a Director, who should be competent enough to initiate and coordinate the adoption of diverse technological (ICTs based) solutions for the OUs' operations. It will enhance their effectiveness in reaching and serving the diverse and dispersed learner populations, improve the quality of interaction and learner participation in the educational transactions. This will bring about operational transformation in the processes of student registration, support services and learner evaluation.

The said department should be managed by technically qualified personnel including web developers and web designers to administer the technology efficiently, and also provide support in various ways. The major areas of support can be: instructional design, development of new e-content, conversion of the existing learning resources into e-learning modules, development of OER, launching MOOCs by the faculty members and uploading them all onto the web platform of the concerned OU. Secondly, it should also be responsible for adopting and developing policies and their execution related strategies relevant to the concerned OU. In the process, it should develop a skilled workforce in order to improve and fully exploit the available ICTs for institutional purposes. Training the faculty and staff in the use of ICTs in all the operations by organizing faculty and staff development programmes to support, sustain and maintain the above mentioned e-learning initiatives will have to be integrated into the organizational structure, work pattern and norms of such departments at all OUs. This Department must also serve as the ICTs related *institutional coordinating body* to control spending on ICTs and advise departments for selecting appropriate ICT solutions.

3.14 Vibrancy of Faculty and Staff

There is a strong need for a vibrant faculty and staff at all the SOUs. In addition, there should be well defined paths for promotion and career advancement for the teachers, other academics (including the technical staff) and administrative staff working at the

SOU's in line with those available in the higher education system of the country. The SOUs also have *other academics*, who function as academic administrators and technical staff involved in electronic media production and ICT operations. This is a category of personnel which is nonexistent in the conventional universities. Their equivalence with the faculty (i.e. the teachers) and the administrative staff should be clearly spelt out so that i) they are not deprived of any benefit and, ii) they do not drag along their jobs indifferently.

It should be mandatory for the faculty and the rest of the staff to periodically undergo training for up-grading their skills and know-how, and acquainting them with the latest technological possibilities as well as familiarizing them with e-learning options, not only for purposes of promotions, but also to improve the functioning of the OUs and their services to the learners. Faculty members should be entitled to attend an international conference, a seminar or a workshop once in two years, and a national level conference, seminar or workshop once in a year. Similarly, their visits to regulatory bodies and/or other ODL institutions at regular intervals should be ensured to promote cross-pollination of ideas and purposeful practices and the consequent growth. The administrative staff, too, should be entitled to attend national conferences, seminars and/or workshops pertaining to e-Governance, Management, Right to Information (RTI) related themes and the like.

Further, the faculty should be encouraged to undertake research activities for which the SOUs should allocate funds annually for teachers as well as for other academics. To make this thrust meaningful, mechanisms should be in place for research-based outcomes to be ploughed back into the system on a regular basis.

With the unprecedented growth in ODL networks, nationally and internationally, there needs to be a corresponding growth in the academic exchange programmes for the faculty and the other staff. Such programmes may be implemented by giving opportunities to them to spend short periods of time (two weeks to two months, for instance) at reputed institutions of their choice in order to improve and update their research, pedagogical skills and/or ICTs related technical know-how.

Further, a Visiting Fellows Scheme could be introduced in the SOUs, as a part of which experts and practitioners from India or abroad, who have successfully developed and implemented useful applications of ICTs in the ODL system, may be invited as visiting fellows. This will appraise the SOUs about the latest developments in the adoption and use of ICTs including new pedagogical and support devices.

The SOUs may also introduce an ODL Emeritus Fellowship Scheme for outstanding faculty who retire as senior functionaries in the ODL system. Besides keeping such people motivated throughout their careers, such a scheme could provide the SOUs with experienced and expert hands to help and guide them.

3.15 Accreditation of OUs and their Programmes

The time has come to adopt a transnational approach to quality assurance and accreditation and international benchmarking of standards and practices in the emerging borderless world.

The erstwhile DEC did this work and currently the DEB, through its policy regarding the recognition of ODL institutions and their programmes is, in a way, enhancing the quality of the system. The evaluation of quality, as effected under this policy, is more like an external review, which is not enough to ensure quality in all respects. The immediate need to internalize the process of qualitative evaluation is to insist on self-evaluation practices that would account for internal self-audit alongside the external assessment of quality. The creation of a Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA) at each of the OUs during the Eleventh Plan period (2007-12) was the first step taken in this direction. It was mandated to facilitate the OUs to raise awareness about quality assurance in general and initiate internal review practices that would gradually become embedded in the routine and regular conduct of work. The next logical step is to introduce systematic accreditation of all the ODL providers. It is time to revisit the said first step, ensure that the related operations are in place, and move on to the suggested second step, alongside.

Accreditation of institutions offering higher education has already been made mandatory by the Government. According to the Mandatory Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Educational Institutions Regulations, 2012, issued by the UGC in January 2013, all institutions of higher learning (in existence then), other than those involved in technical and medical education, were asked to compulsorily take accreditation from an accrediting agency within six months starting from January 2013 (recently this period has been extended to December 2015), if they fulfilled certain conditions (UGC, 2013). Further the UGC notification, dated December 27, 2013, related to the Regulations, made it clear that no university or college would be eligible for grants from the Central Government unless it was accredited. It was further notified that if any unaccredited institution was actually getting any grants, the UGC would issue relevant notices and stop the allocation.

In addition to the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), there are several other accreditation agencies/councils that accredit higher education institutions and their programmes. Some of these, are the National Board of Accreditation of the All India Council of Technical Education, the Accreditation Board of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, the erstwhile Distance Education Council (now dissolved and replaced by the Distance Education Bureau), the Medical Council of India and the National Council for Teacher Education. But there is no mechanism to coordinate the functioning of such a multiplicity of agencies. It is time that the MHRD framed a *national quality assurance framework* that would coordinate and integrate the functions of the various bodies engaged in assuring the quality of a diverse range of educational programmes offered under the banner of higher education by a very large number of institutions—more than 40,000 today. There were 666 universities and 39,671 colleges in 2014 (UGC, 2015).

There is an urgent need for a National Accreditation Board specifically for the ODL system in India, as the DEB under the UGC is only an interim arrangement awaiting the creation of an apex body for the purpose by an Act of Parliament. Since the UGC does not have the mandate to accredit institutions other than the universities, all ODL stand alone institutions (that are not universities) are outside the ambit of the DEB, and have no authorised agency to ask for recognition either of their institutions, or their programmes. All conventional universities apply to NAAC for accreditation, but the OUs have never applied to NAAC, as NAAC has not developed any parameters to accredit the ODL institutions.

Ideally, the MHRD should notify all the accredited programmes and display the related comprehensive list on its website. This will provide the much needed transparency, so crucial for all stakeholders and particularly for students and for employers. In the process, no distinction should be made between the conventional and the ODL institutions. As a consequence, the awards obtained through the distance/ODL mode will not be discriminated against.

3.16 Need for a National Policy and an Independent Regulator

The Central Government needs to come up with a National Policy on Open and Distance Learning, which visualizes a robust national system of ODL in India. This document should address the concerns of all the sectors and all the levels of education, including basic education, vocational and skills development, continuing professional development in all sectors of the economy, and research and development among other areas. It should outline the operations of the ODL system and its various sub-systems as per defined norms and standards. It should look at not only the new technology-supported options available, but also pay attention to the new learning environments in the context of ongoing demographic and cultural changes, and outline proper strategies for better utilization of the ODL system over the next twenty years. Further, it should provide for the creation of an *autonomous regulator*², responsible for the promotion, coordination and maintenance of standards in the ODL system. Like the

² There seems to be a certain degree of vacillation with regard to the name of this body. At one stage the body was proposed to be called the Distance Education Council of India (DECI). But the Committee constituted by the MHRD in November 2014 to finalize the related bill has recommended to the MHRD that DECI may be renamed as Indian Council for Open Learning (ICOL) so as to drop the word distance from the proposed name. For whatever reasons, if the terms like 'distance' are seen as suspects impacting standards, it may be appropriate to use terms with broader connotations. It was in 1995, at the ICDE Conference, Birmingham, UK, that the term 'open distance' was sought to be replaced by the term 'flexible', but the change was not agreed to. It was argued that it was too soon to jump to a new term—the term 'distance education' had been formalized in 1982 at the ICCE/ICDE Conference, Vancouver, Canada. It may be that we should choose a term that suits our mass psyche and connotes a specific meaning as well as a sound purpose. We may use the term '**Indian Council for Flexible Education**', to be abbreviated as '**ICFE**'.

University Grants Commission, the *proposed autonomous regulator* should function directly under the MHRD so as to effectively co-ordinate the efforts of the OUs, the Directorates of Distance Education attached to the conventional universities and the stand alone ODL institutions (that are not universities). The regulator should also concretize the required benchmarks for infusing quality in the system. This mechanism will help in introducing and sustaining the culture of self-accountability, ensuring mandatory accreditation of all ODL providers based on international benchmarks, bringing credibility to the ODL system in India, and also in investing it with the recognition it deserves. The system will then stand out as an accepted mode, alongside the conventional formal system, capable of providing not only extensive access, but also of fulfilling the mandate of expansion, inclusion and excellence.

The said National Policy should insist on the *autonomous regulator* instilling a culture of quality in the ODL system, from its top to bottom, by initiating the following steps:

- Discipline-wise norms and standards for offering programmes through the distance mode need to be developed by the *autonomous regulator* in collaboration with the existing statutory bodies working in various sectors of the country. These norms should cover all levels and types of programmes ranging from awareness and certificate level to doctoral degree programmes. All major disciplines including professional and technical must be covered, while priority should be given to the latter as there is a great demand for professional and technical education.
- Research and development are crucial activities in an era that is essentially driven by knowledge and information. The advancement of systemic research is essential for bringing about improvements in and credibility to the system. The *autonomous regulator* should prepare guidelines on how to provide an environment conducive for such research and development. Innovations and innovative ideas need to be institutionally facilitated with structures like incubation centres, research chairs, recognition and awards for the faculty who make tangible contributions to research and development.
- The *autonomous regulator* should be given the mandate to sanction posts and fund them too. Further, staff development activities (encouraging innovation in curriculum design, instructional design, programme delivery, learner support and evaluation), involving academics and non-academics alike, should be yet another area of concern for the *autonomous regulator*. For this purpose, clear-cut policies need to be established for the faculty and other staff of the OUs with a view to promoting and fostering a student-centred system.
- The *autonomous regulator* should promote and ensure transparency in admissions, development and delivery of academic programmes, student evaluation and declaration of results. Broad guidelines have to be drawn up for good governance of different types of ODL institutions.

- The time has come to adopt a transnational approach to quality assurance and accreditation and international benchmarking of standards and practices in the emerging borderless world. This is an imperative now, as we need to bring under the umbrella of our national regulations even those foreign ODL providers who are operating in India. The *autonomous regulator* should frame guidelines and policies to cover them and monitor their work and contributions.

All the initiatives outlined above, and proposed to be undertaken by the *autonomous regulator*, will require tremendous collaborative efforts in terms of critical thinking, software development, human resources and funding, which the Ministry of Human Resource Development would need to organise and provide in order to restructure and strengthen the ODL system in the country.

Ultimately the role of the *autonomous regulator* should become that of a “facilitator” rather than that of a typical ‘regulator’. It should be able to stimulate both public and private providers to establish their own self-regulatory mechanisms to weed out bad and indifferent practices and promote excellence and quality in the system.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Introduction

A close scrutiny of the first three sections of this Report will compel a reader, to conclude that India is still in a state of *hesitation*, if not that of absolute slumber, as far as the much-needed educational reforms are concerned. The reasons are not far to seek: vested interest, convenience syndrome, misplaced fears, lack of information, lack of experience and required expertise and work culture/ethics. In order to elucidate the point and comprehend the situation, it would be instructive to consider a few illustrative cases.

1. Though printing technology must have been commonplace by the end of the 18th Century, *a treatise on public health, published in Germany in 1795, warned that excessive reading induced "a susceptibility to colds, headaches, weakening of the eyes, heat rashes, gout, arthritis, asthma, apoplexy, pulmonary diseases, indigestion, nervous disorder, migraines, epilepsy, hypochondria and melancholy". People were warned not to read immediately after eating, and only to read when standing up, for the sake of good digestion. Fresh air, frequent walks, and washing one's face periodically in cold water were also prescribed for habitual solitary readers. Most of all, it was feared that excessive reading would make people socially dysfunctional, would take the place of direct human contact, and could well lead to a society composed of certified misfits* (Rudenstine, 1996, p. 17).
2. At times there are misconstrued economic reasons for resistance and opposition to new approaches, systems and/or technologies, as their impact and implications for the future, the society and economic growth are not appreciated at all. *The turf-conscious chief engineer of the British Post Office, testifying before a committee of Parliament, was asked if the telephone merited attention. "No sir," he said. "The Americans have need of the telephone, but we do not. We have plenty of messenger boys."* (Neuman, 1996, p. 25).
3. Contrary to what we are given to understand, politicians are not always proactive, as they are not comfortable with public empowerment and the enlightenment of the masses. *Soon after the Russian Revolution, Stalin rejected a proposal from Trotsky to build a modern telephone system. "It will unmake our work," he said. "I can imagine no greater instrument of counter-revolution in our time."* (Neuman 1996, p. 25).
4. Intellectuals and the academia fear the dilution of curricula, standards and quality of education, as was available and given in their own times. As the custodians of the educational purposes, assets, and processes now, they come up with one voice to oppose changes that are not in line with their upbringing,

training and mind-set. But the notions of substance, standards and quality have to change with the changes needed in the content and modes of education, which in turn must be responsive to changes in social, physical and technology environments. *As the saber-tooth tigers do not exist anymore, saber-tooth curriculum cannot be an eternal verity* (Benjamin, 1939).

5. In our mythical past, aspirants had to go in search of a *guru*, next they were to prove their worthiness for what they sought, only then the *guru* would accept them under his fold. Obviously, education was for only a select few. Our historical past, however, talks of Nalanda and Takshashila, evidenced, of course, by ruins today. Then we read of Pathshalas and Makhtabs of the Mogul period, which were overtaken by the universities and the related schools and colleges introduced by the British. As Sanskrit and Persian lost their place of prominence, English Language became the most significant component of the curriculum—the British needed English knowing clerks of various hues and levels to govern and administer a country so vast as India. In our own times, we saw great promises in *The Report of the University Education Commission (December 1948 – August 1949)*. Things changed, but only a bit—curricular time and space together with State funds are still devoted to the teaching of British History in schools in some States; rote learning is still the hallmark of our success at school or college and even that of scholarship; research of any tangible consequence is still a far cry for our institutions; our graduates are generally said to suffer from wide gaps in the repertoire of skills needed in the job-market; and so on and on.

It is interesting, and instructive as well, to find strong echoes of the above cases in the data, details and scenarios presented in the first three Sections of this Report. What the above cases point to, and we seem to lose sight of, is the fact that socio-educational evolution records significant transformation only periodically—i) when a significant political change occurs, ii) a momentous social change or resurgence takes place, or iii) a groundbreaking technology comes into being and people succeed in harnessing it to serve educational needs. Fortuitously, all the three factors weaved into our socio-educational canvas beginning the second half of the last century. Beginning with our independence in 1947, the vision of a resurgent new India and the appearance of ICTs, almost simultaneously, the *institution of education* in India entered a significant phase of transformation, as i) issues that had not been even thought of came to the forefront seeking solutions, and ii) the *solutions* appeared in various forms—correspondence courses, open universities, distance education, open distance education, virtual institutions, on-line courses, OER, MOOCs, and the like. None of these *solutions* per se constitutes *education*. Instead, they provide the mechanisms and dependable means to provide relevant education with speed, variety, access and affordability—the very imperatives imposed on the system by the selfsame process of transformation. These *solutions* will not show us how we may ensure quality in education, improve the quality of life, or create a learning and just society. Ultimately, it is how we address our social and economic issues, how we manage and monitor our educational enterprise, what choices we make and how successfully we project their consequences to work for, and how relevant we make our system of education to the process of socio-economic

development. If we subordinate these *solutions* to constraints, restrictions, regulations, practices and conventions that had their origins in a different era, we will be throttling them untried. Such *solutions* (read systems) do not ensure the quality of their products, be they material or human; it is *the men and women* behind *the systems* who are responsible for what *the systems* yield—if, for example, we choose to eliminate *assignments* and *the handling of assignment-responses* as they are too cumbersome to manage, we should not question the potential of the ODL system, rather we should point at the personnel who, for want of adequate will and lack of a sense of purpose, truncate the process and so *the system*. We have the structure, but it has become shaky. How may we modify it and make it fully functional?

4.2 Key Recommendations

With a view to the above deliberations, given below are the recommendations the Report leads us to. What is presented here does not mark any deviations from the content of Section 3, instead the presentation is in the nature of an *executive summary*.

1. **The Projection and the Objective** (*for details see Sub-sections 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3*): If India wants to benefit from her *demographic dividend*, and become a global production hub, she needs 500 million people with market-relevant skills by the middle of the 2020s. The conventional universities, with the limitations of their concrete walls and those of the voice of a teacher in the classroom, can serve the purpose, but only in a limited way. Given the possibilities which their pedagogies can materialize, the OUs are well placed to help in achieving this objective. To do so successfully, they should get together and form a *National Forum of the OUs* to engage in purposeful deliberations so as to collectively plan and devise strategies for i) undoing the existing legal dampers they are faced with, ii) harnessing and utilizing ICTs to their fullest potential cost-effectively, iii) sharing their resources (material, spatial and human) and research outcomes on a regular basis, and iv) working together towards building a *learning society* that is enabled to work for our economic growth and global security.
2. **New Target Groups and Certification of Previous Learning** (*for details see Sub-sections 3.4 and 3.5*): In order to materialize Recommendation 1, the OUs have to extend their reach to new target groups, apart from the New Learner—the target group that became the focus of ODL operations in the mid 1980s. There are other groups that have remained ignored so far, though they contribute to national economy in their own meager ways. A significant proportion of these groups are the workers who work in the unorganized sector. Unlike here in India, a carpenter, a mason or a nanny in the USA has to have an appropriate license to practice their trade or profession. Such licenses are obtained formally after one displays the requisite knowledge and expertise in one's field and also satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the federal and the State laws/regulations pertaining to one's trade/profession. It is time that the OUs in India extended their efforts to such workers too, partly to improve their know-how to make

them more productive and partly to open the gates for their growth along the mainstream of education. To materialize this possibility, it is necessary to i) develop approaches and mechanisms to certify previous learning of all sorts including the skills, various competencies, arts and crafts passed on from generation to generation within families, and also ii) workout equivalences of the credentials gained by such worker-learners with those available in mainstream systems, so as to allow credit transfers across the diverse learning domains. This would open new horizons of growth and development as a consequence of satisfactory engagements, which in turn would contribute not only to a better quality of life and economic growth, but also to national and international security and peace.

- 3. New Approaches to Pedagogy** (for details see Sub-section 3.6): Given the myriad levels and characteristics of the New Learner as well as the sought after new learner groups—workers of all kinds in the unorganized sector, craftsmen/women, those engaged in family trades or crafts, digital illiterates, digital immigrants and digital natives together with the qualified (in the conventional sense) university entrants at different levels, the dynamic institutions of higher education have to adopt unconventional pedagogical approaches to meet the challenge of imparting education to such a diverse and dispersed clientele. We have to evolve a pedagogical approach that provides the country with the means to cover the unreached; deliver education and training in all the known fields of human endeavour (languages, philosophy, liberal arts, humanities, sciences, technology, medicine, productive skills and competencies) at all the known levels; provide study and training material, learning experiences and teaching-learning transactions in different formats, in different ways on different occasions on demand. If this sounds utopian it would help to recall the pedagogical approach, namely *transmodal education/pedagogy*³, adopted by the University of Southern Queensland, Australia, to cater to its diverse learner populations

³Transmodal pedagogy provides for switching modes of learning depending on learners' learning environment, access to technology, learning abilities, etc. It is a system that is capable of catering to all kinds of learners everywhere. Study/course materials are prepared and formatted with the help of electronic tools, digitized in the form of repositories and stored electronically. Depending on where the learners are and what technologies are available to them, relevant bits of the study materials are picked from different repositories (in accordance with the prescribed syllabus), put together, and sent to them in the form that suits them most—printed booklets, CDs, online texts, video tracks and/or various combinations thereof. Quite a range of practical activities, as required in the case of Sciences or Technology Courses are provided in the form of online simulations, as also in actual labs where necessary. Besides, in person tutor/counsellor support too is made available wherever needed. The notion as well as the term 'transmodality' implies that i) education (in the sense of teaching-learning transactions) is available in multiple mutually replaceable modes, ii) a learner (depending on his/her learning environment) may choose any of those forms according to his/her convenience at a given time, and iii) move from one form to the other as and when required. For example, a learner may complete his/her first term working with printed materials while he/she is at a place, where ICT support is not available; and then move on to online courseware in the second term, when he/she is in a metropolis. The system allows him/her to move across the modalities of teaching-learning transaction depending on his/her convenience—that is transmodality materialized.

dispersed nationally as well as internationally. To materialize Recommendations 1 and 2, the Indian OUs need to revisit their approaches to pedagogy. Many aspects of *transmodal pedagogy* are promising and relevant to our needs, provided its prerequisites are appreciated and put in place before taking the plunge.

Talking of the prerequisites, *pedagogy* (transmodal or otherwise) hinges on i) the content and skill or competencies to be imparted and learnt, and ii) the form they are put in for presentation to learners. The first of these points to *curricula* (see Recommendation 4) and the second to *technology* (see Recommendation 5).

4. **New Approaches to Curricula, Instructional Design and Support Services** (*for details see Sub-sections 3.7 and 3.8*): Considering our educational objectives (see Recommendation 1) and the diverse target groups (see Recommendation 2), we are in dire need of i) filling the knowledge and skill gaps in bulk of our education in general and the technical education in particular, ii) providing market-oriented and industry-integrated courses/programmes, iii) satisfying the rising demand for ‘learning on demand’ and work-integrated learning, and iv) merging and mixing the conventionally distinct disciplines, across their lines of distinction, giving credence to new branches⁴ of learning. To satisfy these needs, it is not just desirable, but crucially necessary to develop i) *new curricula* that are socio-economically relevant, ii) new approaches to *instructional design*—for some of such curricula and the courses they lead to, one may visualize, classroom teaching could be their undoing. Such new learner-centered curricula and the related innovative instructional design alone will not serve the desired purpose, unless they are strongly supported by flawless learner support services twenty-four seven. Positive efforts on the suggested lines alone can ensure India’s position as a *production hub* in the next few decades. And the OUs, free as they are from the *legacy* curricula and the related staff and structures, are well placed to meet this challenge.
5. **Extensive use of ICTs** (*for details see Sub-sections 3.9, 3.10, 3.11, 3.12 and 3.13*): In pursuit of the contemporary technology driven reformative agenda, one cannot but take recourse to the extensive use of ICTs in order to materialize Recommendations 1 and 2. Again, their use is at the very core of Recommendations 3 and 4 as well. To make any headway in the process of achieving our objectives, in line with the strategies proposed above, the only option we have is to harness ICTs extensively. We have to depend heavily on their multiple applications—for purposes of governance, implanting varieties

⁴Some six decades back we did not hear of Management Studies, Bio-chemistry or Bio-technology—in many cases, the teachers who started teaching Management Courses to begin with had their specialization in Economics, not Management. More recently, how many of us know what Mechatronics or Animatronics mean and cover!

of instructional design, creation of course materials, programme delivery and learner management (registration through certification), i.e. to incorporate e-governance, e-management as well as e-support for learners to take care of all the operations involved in the process. At least one SOU, namely BAOU, Ahmedabad (see Sub-section 1.9), has made courageous strides in the process of adopting ICTs for its varied services—other OUs must follow the example. Facilitating cooperation and collaboration in the process of utilizing and managing ICTs could be one of the major responsibilities of the proposed *National Forum of the OUs* in India (see Recommendation 1).

6. **Vibrancy of the Faculty and other Staff** (*for details see Sub-sections 3.14*): The distinction made between *the teachers* and *other academics* within the OU staff structure (see Sub-section 1.12) has created more problems than it has solved—worst of all it has infused indifference in certain sections of the staff fraternity. It is time that the related nomenclature and the corresponding responsibilities as well as the related perks are revisited and a reasonably workable structure is agreed to and implemented. Besides, we should not lose sight of so stark a fact that each person who joins an OU as staff, whatever the category, is a novice, and should be treated as such. To make such personnel productively functional, all the OUs should provide opportunities for the older staff to upgrade their skills and know-how, as the system they are working in has to be dynamic. The staff development activities, covering all the levels of staff everywhere within the operational structure of an OU, should be trained as part of policy. It needs to be recognized that it is crucial for the success and growth of the system. It must be emphasized here that most of the existing and emerging weaknesses of the ODL system in the country cannot be attributed to the system itself; they often originate with, spread from and take roots through those who run the system. Creating a *culture of quality* in the system is the function of those who manage it—grooming them for the purpose and monitoring their inputs to ensure accountability, have to be ensured, not only to develop the system, but also to sustain that development.
7. **The Regulator and the Authority for Accreditation** (*for details see Sub-sections 3.15 and 3.16*): Creation of an independent regulator to implement the National Policies pertaining to the OUs and ODL operations is already on the cards. The process should be expedited to eliminate the prevailing ad hoc arrangements as soon as possible. This is a significant task, though outside the domain of the OUs, it impinges them most. The MHRD, needs to intervene immediately to stop them aligning with the ODL. With unquestionable authority to work with, the tasks which the new regulating body needs to undertake expediently are i) overhaul the existing regulations, remove all the cobwebs therein and streamline them in purposeful consultation with the *National Forum of the OUs*, ii) address the confusion and disarray caused by the judgments issued by various courts, iii) streamline the staffing structures for the OUs, iv) ensure appropriate funding

patterns, while streamlining the existing ones, to have the burden shared proportionately by the Centre and the respective States, and v) make sure that the spirit as well as the purport of the seminal documents pertaining to ODL system (see the citations in Sub-section 1.2, for example) are brought to fruition. These tasks can be addressed effectively with long-lasting impact only and only if the related solutions are grounded in a clearly outlined context. This could be provided by means of a well thought out and clearly stated *National Policy on Open Distance Education*, or should we say *National Policy on Flexible Education!* The said policy, for obvious reasons, should precede any action on the tasks listed above.

Here we need to make a special mention of the issues related to the *recognition* of the OU credentials and the *accreditation* of their courses/programmes. Given the confusion and the state of uncertainty created by recent pronouncements of various regulating authorities and courts, it is advisable that the issues pertaining to i) the *recognition* of the credentials awarded by the OUs and other ODL institutions which are not constituents of any conventional university, and ii) the *accreditation* of the courses/programmes conceived, prepared and launched by the OUs and other ODL institutions should remain a major responsibility of the proposed regulating body. It should also be responsible for the promotion, coordination and maintenance of *standards* in the ODL system. This responsibility should entail the authority i) to provide recognition to the credentials awarded by the OUs as well as other ODL institutions, and ii) to work out and legalize multi-level equivalence of the OU credentials with those of the conventional universities and those obtained on the basis of *prior learning*. Further, it should function as the regulating authority for the ODL operations organized in India by the foreign ODL institutions as well.

4.3 Epilogue

Considering the interests and the thrust concerns of CEMCA as far as University/Higher Education is concerned, this Report should provide timely inputs of reasonable importance, as it has identified, among other areas, the following areas that need facilitation and support in order to reform and energize the system of Open Distance Learning in India.

1. Higher Education,
2. Teacher Education,
3. Technical and Vocational Skills Education/Development, and
4. Technology Enabled Pedagogy and Courseware.

In whatever efforts are put in to revisit and reform the system, we should be guided by the following citation through and through:

'Our results indicate that distance education, when properly planned, designed, and supported by the appropriate mix of technology and pedagogy, is equivalent to, or in certain scenarios more effective than, traditional face-to-face classroom instruction. This highlights the importance of instructional design and the active role that institutions play in providing support structures for instructors and learners. ...' (Sankey, 2006). This conclusion is reinforced from various angles in the details presented in another link:
<http://linkresearchlab.org/PreparingDigitalUniversity.pdf>.

And while making those efforts, it is worth reminding ourselves and all concerned-politicians, bureaucrats, judiciary, educational administrators, researchers, educators, trainers, employers, learners and the masses—that like any other area of human enterprise and endeavour, Open Distance Education System, as a means of preparing people for their appropriate roles and rightful places in their respective socio-economic environments, will serve us only as effectively and successfully as it is managed and served by those who run it. The weaknesses of the system cannot be eliminated by curbing and squeezing it; instead, the human engine driving it needs to be overhauled. Of course, we have come a long way, but farther we must go, lest posterity finds us wanting!

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The Schedule sent to the SOUs to collect the Data

1. **Name of the University:**
2. **Date of the establishment of the University:**
3. **Status of UGC/DEC recognition:**

Institutional Recognition period:

Regular recognition period and list of programmes recognized by the DEC:

4. **Infrastructure at Headquarters**

Postal Address for Communication: Details of the Main Campus:	Area in acres:	
No. of buildings: Specify whether rented or owned:	Total built-up area in sq. ft.	
Specify the no. of buildings constructed utilizing the DEC grants and the quantum of funds:	Total Depts./Units	Number and Name
	Academic units	
	Support services units	
	Administrative units	
	Technical units	
	Electronic / Mass Media units	
	Any other unit	

5. **Delivery network**

Type	
Regional Centres:	
Study Centres:	
Sub-Study Centres:	
Work Centres:	

Mobile Centres:	
Partner Institutions:	
Centres outside the country, give details:	
Any others, specify:	

Note: Kindly enclose separate updated lists, as Annexures, with complete addresses.

6. Staffing

1.	Staff Strength at the Head Quarters	Academic		Tech.		Admin.	
		Perma- nent	Contra- ctual	Perm.	Contr.	Perm.	Contr.
	Professor and Equivalent						
	Associate Professor/Reader/ Equivalent						
	Assistant Professor/Lecturer/ Equivalent						
	Consultants						
	Others						
2.	Staff Strength at the Regional Centres	Academic		Tech.		Admin.	
		Perma- nent	Contra- ctual	Perm.	Contr.	Perm.	Contr.
	Professor and Equivalent						
	Associate Professor/Reader/ Equivalent						
	Assistant Professor/Lecturer/ Equivalent						
	Consultants						
	Others						
3.	Staff Strength at the Study Centres	Academic		Tech.		Admin.	
		Perma- nent	Contra- ctual/Part Time	Perm.	Contr. /PT	Perm.	Contr. /PT
	Professor and Equivalent						
	Associate Professor/Reader/ Equivalent						
	Assistant Professor/Lecturer/ Equivalent						
	Consultants						
	Others						

- a. Give details about Institution's own and hired facility and services and staffing pattern for:
 - Developing of course materials
 - Production of print materials
 - Production of multi-media materials
 - Interactive teleconferencing, broadcasting
 - Interactive Internet based teaching-learning
 - Any other activity
- b. Specify details regarding the staffing of the Electronic Media Production Centre and the quantum of production at the Media Centre for the last three years.
- c. Give details about the training programmes conducted for the staff in the last three years.

7. Programmes on Offer

a. Level-wise details of the programmes on offer in the 2014-15 academic session

Certificate	Diploma	UG (GEN.)	UG (PROF.)	PG (DIP.)	PG (GEN.)	PG (PROF.)	M.Phil.	Ph.D.	Total

b. Details of all the programmes on offer in the 2014-15 academic session

Sl. No.	Name of Programme	Eligibility Criteria for Admission	Duration	Medium of Instruction	Self developed/ adopted/ adapted/ outsourced (Mention Source)	Whether in Self-Learning Format (Y/N)	Programme Fee

8. Student Enrolment

a. Furnish data about the number of students enrolled (programme-wise) in the Institution for the year 2014-15.

Programme Name	Total	Female	Male	Rural	Urban	SC/ST	BC/OBC	Handicapped/Physically Challenged
1.								
2.								
3.								
Grand Total								

b. Level-wise Enrolment at the SOU: 2013-14 and 2014-15

	Certificate	Diploma	UG (GEN.)	UG (PROF.)	PG (DIP.)	PG (GEN.)	PG (PROF.)	M.Phil.	Ph.D.	Total
2013-14										
2014-15										

9. Number of students who were awarded degrees, diplomas or certificates

Furnish the details of students who have successfully completed their courses.

Total number of students who were awarded degrees / diplomas/ certificates in the convocation held in that year	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
1. Certificates					
2. Diplomas					
3. Degrees					
4. PG Degrees					
5. Research Degrees					

10. Media used for the delivery of instruction for each programme

Media	Programmes for which the media was/is being used

11. Method of Student Evaluation- programme-wise

Programme	Continuous Evaluation (Specify the various components like: workbook, assignments, project report, practicals etc.)	Weightage in overall assessment	Term-end Evaluation (Specify the various components like: examination, viva voce, etc.)	Weight in overall assessment

12. Learner Support Services

- a. Give details about the services provided to distance learners at the Headquarters, the Regional Centres and the Study Centres. Specify the services provided by each one of them.

Services	Headquarters	Regional Centres	Study Centres
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

- b. Growth of Study Centres

2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15

- c. Growth of Regional Centres

2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15

- d. What media is used for attending to student queries?
 e. How do you dispatch the study materials?
 f. Do you have a placement cell? Give details.
 g. Do you have an alumni association?
 h. Do you have any mechanism for obtaining feedback/monitoring the functioning of Regional Centres and Study Centres?
 i. Do you have any mechanism for student tracking?

13. Financial Details of the SOU

Income

1.	Major Sources of Income	2013-14	2014-15
a.	State Government		
b.	UGC		
c.	DEB/ DEC		
d.	Student Fees and other charges		
	Total Income (a+b+c+d)		

Expenditure

1.	Major Heads of Expenditure for the SOU	2013-14	2014-15
a.	Salaries: Teaching and Non-academic Staff		
b.	Infrastructure Development		
c.	Development of Programmes and Courses		
d.	Student Support Services		
e.	Staff Training and Development		
f.	Others (please specify)		
	Total Expenditure (a+b+c+d+e+f)		

Questionnaire sent to the Vice Chancellors of the SOUs

1. Innovative Practices

1. Please record the various innovative practices introduced by the Institution in curriculum design and development of SLMs.

Sl. No.	Name of the Programme	Target Group	Specify the innovation introduced

2. Please outline the innovative practices adopted with respect to:
- Learner support services
 - Programme delivery mechanisms
 - Use of Information and Communication Technology with respect to the following
 - Admissions _____ A
 - Support services _____ S
 - Examinations _____ E
 - Declaration of results _____ D
 - Research activities
 - Human resources development
 - Extension activities
 - Any other, please specify
3. What innovative measures have been taken in the programmes and courses for
- SC/ST/OBC learners _____ S
 - Gender Equity _____ G
 - Differently abled learners _____ D
4. What special measures have been taken by your institution for learners with special needs?

5. Outline the inclusive practices adopted by your institution to reach the unreached (Rural/Tribal regions).
6. Does your institution have a mechanism to involve stakeholders in planning, implementing and the evaluation of its academic programmes?
7. Has your institution taken up any special measures to elicit the support from and work for the development of its neighbouring communities?
8. Has your institution made any special efforts to promote social responsibility and citizenship amongst its learners?
9. Describe the innovative efforts made in relation to the following:
 - i. Admission Process _____
 - ii. Technology mediated Teaching–Learning _____
 - iii. Examinations and the Process of declaring Results _____
 - iv. Networking and Consortia for Collaboration _____
 - v. Automation of various processes _____
10. What is your future plan and the related strategy for the adoption and use of ICTs? Please give details about the following:

Curriculum Design and Development	
Transaction of Curriculum	
Learner Support	
Student Admissions	
Governance and Administration	
Student Evaluation	
Library Facilities	
Staff Training and Development	
Research and Development	
Measures for Quality Assurance	
Any other (please specify)	

2. Mission and Vision

1. Does your institution have *vision* and *mission* statements defining ODL? If 'yes', give details.

Yes/No _____. If 'Yes', please specify. _____

2. Are the said *vision* and *mission* statements in tune with your institution's future plans?

Yes/No _____. If 'Yes', please give details (attach any relevant documents).

3. How are the *goals* and *objectives* of your institution made known to the various stakeholders?

3. Other Healthy Practices

1. Has your institution adopted any mechanism/process for internal quality checks?

Yes No

If 'yes', please give details.

2. Is your institution sensitized to the well established managerial practices such as strategic planning, team-work, collective decision-making and computerization?

Yes No

3. Does your institution have

- Twinning programmes
- MOUs with
 - => Industries
 - => Research organizations
 - => Student exchange programme

4. How does your institution strengthen the regular academic programmes through other complementary systems like self-financing courses and non-formal courses?
5. What are the practices of your institution to impart value-based education?
6. How does your institution inculcate civic responsibilities among the students?
7. How is your institution geared to achieve its specific goals and objectives?
8. What are your institution's efforts to bring in "community orientation" in its activities?
9. Please indicate the efforts being made by your institution to promote the general/transferable skills, listed below, among the students:

- a. Capacity to learn
 - b. Communication skills
 - c. Numerical skills
 - d. Use of information technology
 - e. Work as a part of a team and/or independently
 - f. Development of employable skills
 - g. Development of skills for self-employment/livelihood
10. How does your institution use *the distance education system* for offering non-conventional type of programmes for masses?
11. Please give details about *research, consultancy* and *extension* activities of your institution.
12. Please outline any other innovations, specific to your institution, that have contributed to its growth.

4. Please outline below any other highlights you may like to present.



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