Dr. Manishankar Roy
Associate Professor,
Barrackpore Rastraguru
Surendranath College,
Barrackpour, kolkata-120,
India

Some perspective of open and distance education in India

Manishankar Roy

Abstract
Emergence of the system of Open and Distance Education is an inevitable development in the evolution of education globally. As a consequence the Distance and Open Education mode was adopted by many universities in India. Among them Indira Gandhi National Open University, which is now rated as one of the best open universities in the world. In this paper an attempt is made to examine the various conceptual issues regarding Distance and Open Education in India.

Keywords: Access and equity, Open and Distance Education.

1. Introduction

The distance and open learning system adopts a flexible approach in respect of content selection, pace and place of study in an ever updating manifestation of modern communication technology. The distance mode allows the educational system to be open and flexible which is the most important characteristic of this system (Manjulika and Reddy, 1996). The new National Policy of Education, 1986 also emphasized the role of the Open University and distance education in the process of democratization of education in the country (Manjulika and Reddy, 1996).

Objectives of the study

The following objectives have been considered for the study:
- To study the term 'Distance Education' and 'Open Education'.
- To focus the need of Distance and Open Education.
- To find out the challenges of Distance and Open Education.

What is Distance Education?

The term is used to refer to the education of those who, for one reason or another, choose not to attend conventional schools, colleges, or universities but study at home.
More (1990) defines distance education, or distance learning as 'all deliberate and planned learning that is directed or facilitated in a structure manner by an instructor, separated in space and/or time from the learner.'
One of the most comprehensive definitions is by Keegan (1996:44) in which six basic defining elements of DE are suggested.
He observes that DE is characterized by:
• The separation of learner and tutor as opposed to face-to-face teaching.
• The influence of an educational organization which distinguishes distance education from
  Private study.
• The use of technical media, e.g. print, audio, or website to unite tutor and learner.
• The provision of a two-way communication so that the student may engage in dialogue with
  the tutor.
• The possibility of occasional meetings for purposes of interaction.
• The self-directed nature of the learner's involvement.
 "open access to education and training provision, freeing learners from the constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners" (UNESCO, 2002:7).

Correspondence
Dr. Manishankar Roy
Associate Professor,
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Kulandai swami (1992) refers to distance education as the third stage in the evaluation of education; the first stage being represented by the Gurukul system of ancient India, and the second stage by the conventional classroom system He believes that the distance education system symbolizes the transition of education from the stage of craft to the technology. Characterized by flexibility, high productivity and the capability to readily respond to market demands, an instrument can satisfy the requirements of equity and universal education.

Back-Ground Open Education
"An open learning system is one in which the restriction placed on student are under constant review and removed wherever possible it incorporates the widest ranges of teaching strategies ,in particular those using independent and individualized learning." (Coffey 1977).

"Open learning: arrangements to enable people to learn at the time, place and pace which satisfies their circumstances and requirement. The emphasis is on opening of opportunities by overcoming the barrier that results from geographical isolation, personal or work commitments or conventional course structure which have often prevented people from gaining access to the training they need."(MSC, 1984)

Open education has been described as "arrangement to enable people to learn at the, place and space which satisfies their circumstances and requirements'' (Man Power Service Commission 1984).

"Open learning' is a term used to describe courses flexibly designed to meet individual requirements. It is often applied to provision which tries to remove barrier that prevent attendance at more traditional cources, it also suggest a learner centered philosophy."(Lewis and Spencer 1986)

"………a wide range of learning opportunities that both aimed to assist learners in gaining access to knowledge and skills they would otherwise be denied and to give learners the optimum degree of control over their own learning."(Dixon, 1987)

"Open learning is not just about access alone, it is also about providing people a fair chance of success."(Holt and Bonnici, 1988)

Open learning tends to be delivered through distance education that characterized by separation of geography distance and time. In open education, more emphasis has been given on openess. Openess in open education is measured in terms it flexibility or lack of restriction. It advocates conscious removal of all those constraints or reduce that have imposed by formal education in terms of admission, attendance, examination, course duration, entry qualification, age, examination scheduled etc. The open system that reduces a large number of this constraint is more open than the one that does not remove as many as the formal. Open education is a relative term as institution A is more open than institution B. Institutional B is more open than institutional C.

Difference between Open and Distance Education
Open Education is a term that has been used inter changeably with distance education. While distance education refers to the process of learning in which there is spatial, and usually temporal distance between the teacher and learner, on the other hand open education or open learning refers to the process of making learning available to a learner at a place and time of his/her choice, and at a rate suitable to the learner. Open education has obviously long term goals as in essence it is socio-educational change which can make its way only gradually. The pattern of Open University is same. Open learning together with flexible learning and distance learning seem to have formed the concept of open and distance learning (ODL). Maxwell makes the following distinction between open & distance learning.

"Open learning is defined as a student-centered approach to education that removes all barriers to access while providing a high degree of learner autonomy. Distance education refers to a mode of delivering a course of study in which the majority of communication between teachers and students occurs noncontiguous and the two-way communication between teacher and student necessary for the educational process is technologically mediated. Distance education may or may not be based on open-learning ideals." (Maxwell 1995, 43)

Maxwell (1995) regards open learning and distance education as two non-traditional learning approaches that might provide an option for reaching non-traditional students. He further argues that "distance education and open learning should be recognized as two distinct concepts. Distance education refers to a mode of delivery with certain characteristics that distinguish it from the campus-based mode of learning. Open learning refers to a philosophy of education providing students with as much choice and control as possible over content and learning strategies. A distance-education institution could be open or closed. An open learning course could be offered on campus or at a distance." (Maxwell 1995, 46)

The tools and software used in DE are often quite the same as in ODL, but there is a shift in emphasis from a more teacher-focused environment towards an open learner-centered and virtual learning environment with a focus on distributed expertise and cognitive tools.

Objectives of Distance and Open Education
The CABE Committee's report (1994) has listed the major objectives of distance education as:

- To provide an alternate, cost-effective, non-formal channel for tertiary education.
- To supplement the conventional university system and to reduce the pressure on it.
- To provide 'second chance' education to those who have had to discontinue their formal education or could not join regular colleges or universities owing to social, economic and other consideration.
- To democratize higher education by providing access to large segments of the population, in particular the disadvantaged groups such as those living in remote and rural areas, including working people like women and other adults, who wish to acquire and upgrade their knowledge and/ or skills.
- To strengthen and diversity the degree, certificate and diploma courses related to employment, and necessary for building the economy, on the basis of its natural and human resources.
- To provide continuing and life-long education to enrich the lives of the people.

To provide an innovative system of university-level education, which is flexible and open in terms of method and pace of learning, combination of courses, eligibility for enrollment, age of entry, conduct of examination and operation of the programmes with a view to promoting

learning and encouraging excellence in new fields of learning.

Factors of Distance and Open Education
Some factors that led to the establishment of Distance and Open Education system in developing and developed countries are:
- To compare for a deficiency in the number of qualified teachers.
- To provide a more cost efficient mode of operation.
- To provide flexible programming on difficult, demanding and rigorous subjects of a specialized nature where and when needed especially in remote areas.
- To provide very high quality educational services on an up-to-date basis.
- To provide educational opportunities for students who could not take advantage of conventional higher education programmes.
- To bring the educated masses in their fold of education.
- To achieve equal access to higher education for a large segment of the population including older employed persons who wish to upgrade their education as well as those of living in remote areas.
- To provide opportunities for life-long learning.
- To convey knowledge to society via new communication technologies.
- To promote the qualitative improvement of the country's human resources.
- To increase access to learning opportunities that serves the socio-economic needs.
- To link education with vocation as flexible as possible so as to ensure free tracking between two.

Features of Open and Distance Education
The important features of Open and Distance Education are as follows:
1. Learner centeredness rather than teacher centeredness.
2. Easy to access.
3. Flexibility/open entry.
4. Use of modern information and communication technologies/multimedia approach to education.
5. Resource sharing.
6. Socially relevant education.
7. Education for a learning society.
8. Course prepared by team of experts and academics.
9. Spatial separation of the teacher from learner.
10. Heterogeneous learner group.
11. Diversity in the nature of programmers offered.

Wylie (1996) summarises eight characteristics of open learning
1. Who? (Flexible entry provision),
2. Why? (Responsive to learner needs),
3. What? (Learner can negotiate content),
4. How? (Resource-based, alternative strategies),
5. Where? (Home, workplace, study centre),
6. When? (Flexible start, pace, completion times),
7. How effective? (Learner participates in assessment),
8. Who helps? (Variety of advice, support available). (Wylie, 1996, 288)

Growth and Development of Distance and Open Education in India
The growth and development of distance education has been through several stages-from pure correspondence education towards multimedia distance education and maturing into open and distance learning and today moving towards online programmes of study through internet and computers. Thus the growth and development of distance education may be discussed in two phases namely-
- Correspondence education phase (1962-1982).
- Open education phase(1982-onward)

Correspondence education phase (1962-1982)
Distance education in India has been started by 'Ekalavya' when he studied the art of archery from Guru Dronachariya at a distance in Mahabharata Era'. Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore also made use of distance education as a tool continuing further education of the people through Loka Siksha Sambad (Council of people education) initiated in Viswa Bharati in 1937 (Mukherje, 1997). However formally distance education in India was started in 1962 in the form of correspondence courses by Delhi University at the under graduated level which attracted a large number of student. As a follow-up measure the UGC recommended the adaption of correspondence course by other universities. As a result of which the latter half of 1960's (3 universities) particularly the 1970's show a support in the growth of correspondence institute by various universities (19 universities). Punjab University established the second correspondence course institute (1965) of the country which was also allowed to run its programme in regional language (Punjabi) in addition to English. This was the first university to establish full-fledged directorate of correspondence courses in the country. In the meantime an open school was set-up in New Delhi in 1979 to provide education to out of school learners. However, the senior secondary course for class (xi-xii) was launched in 1988. By 1980, there were 25 universities which were offering correspondence courses at tertiary level and five Boards of secondary education providing correspondence course at school level (Mullick, 1986).Today more than 50 universities are offering correspondence education in the country making one of the largest dual mode system in the world.

The Open Education Phase (1982 onward)
U.K. established the first Open University in 1969 which prompted the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the ministry of information and broadcasting and the UGC to organize a seminar to consider the feasibility of starting an open university in India. The national progress towards a national Open University was slow and was overtaken by the state Government of Andhra Pradesh, which established the Andhra Pradesh Open University (APOU) in 1982. The APOU which is presently under as the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU) was an autonomous institution, using only distance education method for providing higher education. Thus the first autonomous single mode Open University came into existence; soon after the national Open University (IGNOU) namely Indra Gandhi National Open University, which is now rated as one of the best distance courses university in the world, came into existence by an Act of Parliament in 1985. Subsequently the state government of Rajasthan, Bihar, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, West Bengal and U.P. set up their own open universities namely the Kota Open University (1987). Nalanda open university (1987), Y.B. Chaban Maharashtra open university (1989), Madhya Pradesh Bhoj

open university (1991), Babasaheb Ambedkar open university (1994), Karnataka State open university (1996), Netaji Subhas open university (1997) and U.P. Rajarshi Tandon open university (1999) TAMIL NADU Open University(Chennai)2oo2. Presently there are 248 conventional universities including 42 deemed universities in India (AIU, 2000).As on January2005, there are eleven Open Universities in INDIA As many as 62 of them are imparting distance education through correspondence courses institute. A few private institutions have also started offering courses through virtual education. Recently the State Govt. of Tamil Nadu has set up a virtual university. All the state open universities have been established by ACTs of the respective state legislature. The maintenance and development of the state open universities is the joint responsibility of the centre and the concerned State Govts. Distance Education Council (1991) coordinates and maintains the quality and works as parallel UGC for open and distance learning system in the country. Distance education gets overwhelming response in India, the universities introduced many new distance-education job oriented courses according to the changing times and students requirements.

At the secondary level, the education programme through correspondence course was started by the Board of Secondary Education, MP in 1965. Delhi started 'Patrachar Vidyalaya' in 1968 (Manjulika and Reddy, 1996). This was followed by Rajasthan, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh. The first open school of the country was established in 1979 in Delhi for secondary and higher secondary courses. This was upgrade as National Open School in 1989. The states of Punjab, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal have also established their own State Open School.

For the promotion and coordination of the Open University and distance education system and for determination of its standards in India, the Distance Education Council (DEC), was constituted under the Indira Gandhi National Open University Act (1985). Its consistent with the duty of the University that takes all such steps as it may deem fit for the promotion of the Open University and distance education systems in the educational pattern of the country and for the coordination and determination of standards of teaching, evaluation & research in such systems; and in pursuance of the objects of the University to encourage greater flexibility, diversity, accessibility, mobility and innovation in education at the University level by making full use of the latest scientific knowledge and new educational technology, and to further cooperation between the existing Universities. It is considered necessary and expedient to establish a Distance Education Council as an authority of the University under Section 16 of the Act.

Need of Open and Distance Education
Open and distance learning offers a number of advantages to both learners and to providers of opportunities for learning.
 ➢ **Lifelong learning:** Distance education mode has become very popular and common in India, because it is catering to a wide range of aspirants (students), who are willing to upgrade their educational qualifications for various reasons. The Distance education system provides opportunities not only to younger students but also to those from the older age groups to achieve education throughout life. As the several restrictions and control over formal education are lenient in open and distance education (ODE), it is considered as boon to

those who like to enrich their knowledge throughout their life
 ➢ **Education for all:** As the name suggest, ODE is open for all learners who opt for education. This form of education caters the needs of every individual. It can also meet the needs of populations affected by violence, war or displacement. It has a crucial role in the universalization of educational opportunities.
 ➢ **Professional development or professional up gradation:** The main reasons for increasing interest in Distance education in India lies in the need for continuing education in today's competitive world. Every people always try to add value to their competence in their bid to advance their carrier further. Those who are already employed can make their professional competency upgraded with the help of ODE. As a result, a large number of in-service persons, professionals, entrepreneurs, job-less youth, school teachers, and old aged free persons made a beeline for admission to distance education study programmes.
 ➢ **Acquisition of higher qualification:** Higher Education is a very powerful agent of social change and Open University Education in India is playing a vital role in catering the higher education to the needs of diversified groups of students including socially disadvantaged sections. Problems such as distance and time, which are barriers to conventional higher education, are overcome in open and distance learning.
 ➢ **Solution of problem of Drop-out:** The students who could not complete their education in formal mode due to some hindrance or barrier, they can get an easy opportunity to continue their education through distance mode. It offers facilities for continuing education to those who need to out of the formal system in various stages. It both broadens the access to and helps the drop outs to get back to the main stream.
 ➢ **Girls and women education:** Due to the conservative attitude of parents girls and women cannot get easy access to formal education, especially in remote areas of this country. So the distance education can satisfy their educational needs. It widens women's opportunities to learn. This system of education is suitable for those who want to enhance their qualifications but are not in a position to attend classes on a regular basis. Such distance courses proved a boon for the girls and women, especially housewives for pursuing higher education.
 ➢ **Generating skilled manpower for national development through vocational course:** It also contributes to the economic development of a country by meeting human resources as per its needs. It can cater the requirement to those who are on the job. It helps in quantitative expansion of tertiary and professional education in the country. It can raise the employment opportunities, develops the necessary skills, aptitude and motivation to fresh job seeker as well as self-employment. The ODE has a contributing role in the economic development of India through imparting newly generated knowledge and training to the human resource.
 ➢ **Education for marginalized communities:** Marginalized communities in India are suffering with lack of access to education for generations. For a quite long time Dalits were not allowed to enter to the doorsteps of educational centers and institutions. With a

delightful slogan "Education at your doorstep" the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system in India brought education virtually to the doorsteps of several disadvantaged sections including Dalits and women. If this system has more accessible the marginalized communities especially Dalits will definitely emancipate themselves from traditional bondages, exploitations and humiliations.

➢ **Overcoming physical distance:** Open and distance education can overcome problems of physical distance for learners in remote locations who are unable or unwilling to physically attend a campus. Though learners and teachers are geographically separated, teachers in urban settings instruct learners in rural settings.

➢ **Education of physically challenged student:** The students suffering from any physical deformities can achieve the same educational qualification with others through distance education.

➢ **Providing Bridge Course:** It can bridge up the gap of knowledge and qualification by allowing individual to acquire knowledge through bridge course.

➢ **Solving time or scheduling problems:** ODE can solve time or scheduling for those client groups unwilling or unable to assemble together frequently.

➢ **Expanding the limited number of places available:** Open and distance learning can expand the limited number of places available for campus-based institutions few in number; and stringent entrance requirements.

➢ **Making best use of the limited number of teachers available:** Open and distance learning can make the best use of the few teachers available when there is a lack of trained teaching personnel relative to demand or teachers are geographically concentrated.

The medium has changed from pencil and paper correspondence courses to real-time Internet courses.

The acceleration in distance education brought on by the development of sophisticated computer network tools is pushing discussion and action on a variety of challenges faced by distance education. The challenges faced right now are as follows:

• **Quality with Quantity:** Quality education should be provided through distance learning programmes. In case of research based higher studies or some other professional courses being run through distance education, provisions should be made for the proper library, laboratory and required study related essential equipments and materials for the students in coordination with other related universities running similar programmes or located in the same region.

• **Technological Literacy - Including Computer Literacy:** The target population will require training in the use of the tools, and so will the providers. Instructors will need focused training in order to make effective use of the technologies involved.

• **Programme Evaluation and Accreditation:** Care must be taken to ensure that distance education programmes are as well developed as their in-house counterparts. Mechanisms need to be developed for faculty evaluation of programmes originating at their institutions. There need to be standards for course evaluation and programme accreditation. Successful programs need to be reevaluated before implementing them in a different

cultural environment in this increasingly global village. (Mugridge 1991)

• **Losing the Content in the Technology:** There is a need to avoid simply providing information, rather than instruction; or of simply transmitting lectures through this new medium. This would be a disservice to the learners, and a *reduction* in content and functionality over the intended result. Avoid focusing on the technology rather than the instructional design and support. (Douglas 1993)

• **Alienating Instructors:** Faculty should be involved in the whole process, and should understand that while one goal may be to reduce costs, this will not be at the expense of faculty jobs. Distance education technologies are not alternatives to teaching. Failing to address these issues can lead to significant faculty rejection of the proposals, and may include Union confrontation. (DeLoughry 1995)

• **Non-Native Language Instruction:** Many of the tools available, whether on the Internet or not, have severe limitations in their ability to accommodate non-native language instruction. 2-byte character systems like Chinese are especially problematic. This is slowly becoming less of an issue on the Internet as standards begin to coalesce.

• **Institutional Support for Distance Learners:** Academic institutions must remember that course content is just one element of the education they provide. If distance learners are being sought, they will need to be provided with similar support to that received by on-campus users. This includes everything from *full* library support to academic counseling in addition to more mundane administrative assistance.(Jacobsen1994)

• **Increasing Regional Focus:** It is not credible to expect that learners who are a dozen time zones apart will be interested in participating in live programs when they would normally be asleep. As interactive programs develop, we may see an increase in two alternatives. First, institutions seeking to market their educational products beyond their shores will offer sessions tailored to the needs of students in specific areas. Second, regional consortia or education hubs may begin to form. There is a danger of becoming isolated from the more global learning environment. In most cases there will be benefit in designing programs which include challenge and stimulation, and which involve the learner in discussion and collaboration with those outside their immediate circle of fellow 'classmates'.

• **Copyright Issues:** While few researchers raise the issue explicitly, all are aware that many questions of copyright in an electronic environment remain unanswered. It is important to examine the goals and intentions of the program, and make sure that the necessary clearances have been obtained as needed.

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