

Technology-Based Learning in Open Universities in India

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, technology-based learning has been described as adopted in the open-university system in India. Since open and distance education (DE) in India is offered at secondary, senior secondary, and higher levels, a current state for them has been spelt out. Since the main objective of this paper is to highlight various means of technology-based learning in the open-university system only, focus has been put on national and state open universities. This paper gives an overview of different technology-based learning components as are being used in various Indian open universities. Since Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is the apex body in the field of distance education in India, it has been explained in greater detail, followed by what is adopted by state open universities because they follow the IGNOU model in most of their learning operations.

OPEN AND DISTANCE HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

Indian universities have been facing some of the following challenges.

- Financial resource crunch
- Fast technological and social changes
- Need to educate masses through suitable mechanism
- Increasing globalization and commercialization of education

These challenges led traditional universities to transform into institutions of independent learning, open universities in several respects, either by offering courses through an open education system or

establishing centres of open and distance education under their premises. To achieve the democratization of education in India, open and distance learning (ODL) has been one of the most newsworthy developments. The Educational Policy of 1986 identified that the educational opportunities in the country were inadequate and unequal, and it recommended an open-university system as a cost-effective alternative to the present conventional system of higher education. It further emphasised that an open-university network be developed in the country to provide educational opportunities to those who were deprived of quality higher education in the country.

Education through a correspondence system came into existence in India in 1962 with the offering of courses by Delhi University at the undergraduate level. Soon the Punjab University's Correspondence Courses Institute (1968) started running its programmes in the regional language (Punjabi) in addition to English. Thereafter, after witnessing the success of this system, by 1980, there were 25 universities offering correspondence courses at the tertiary level and five boards of secondary education providing correspondence courses at the school level. The first open university of the country was established in 1982 at Hyderabad as Andhra Pradesh Open University, now renamed as Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU). The most significant development in the field of open learning in India was the establishment of Indira Gandhi National Open University through an Act of Parliament (No. 50 of 1985).

Currently, India has one national open university and ten state open universities like Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, Kota (1987); Nalanda Open University, Patna, Bihar (1987); Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Nashik, Maharashtra (1989); Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University, Bhopal, MP (1991); Babasaheb

Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat (1994); Karnataka State Open University, Mysore, Karnataka (1996); Netaji Subhash Open University, Kolkata, WB (1997); UP Rajarshi Tandon Open University, Allahabad, UP (1999); and Tamil Nadu Open University, Chennai (2003).

Open-Schooling Education in India

To make adequate provisions for school education for those above 14 years of age has been of prime concern of the authorities. In 1974, a working group of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) strongly recommended establishing an open school. This proposal was further strengthened by the thrust from the International Council for Correspondence Education (ICCE) conference held at New Delhi in 1978. Incidentally, the people involved in organising this ICCE conference were the ones who initiated correspondence education at the University of Delhi.

These efforts resulted in the establishment of the Open School in 1979 as a project of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to offer distance secondary education to those 14-year-olds who could not complete Grades 8 or 10. This Open School of the CBSE provided flexibility in studying and offered a wide range of courses, and thus paved the way later on for the government of India to establish the National Open School in 1989 as an autonomous institution (National Open School Society) under the Ministry of Human Resource Development. This has now been renamed and upgraded as the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).

By observing the success of this model of open schooling, some of the state governments also established state open schools like Andhra Pradesh Open School (1982), Tamil Nadu Open School (1982), Haryana Open School (1994), Rajasthan Open School (1994), Madhya Pradesh State Open School (1995), Karnataka Open School (1996), Punjab Open School (1997), and West Bengal Open School (1997). These offer vocational, awareness, and open basic education courses, besides the established courses in secondary and senior secondary streams. Student-enrollment-wise, they serve about 3% of total secondary and senior secondary students.

Modes of Distance Education in India

Distance education in India is offered through two modes, that is, one by correspondence-course institutes (CCIs) and the other by open universities. The open universities are single-mode, autonomous open learning institutions. However, the CCIs are the extended arms of the conventional universities imparting education through distance mode in the programmes already run by the mother university. Presently there are 250 conventional universities including 42 deemed universities in India, of which nearly 62 of them are imparting distance education through their correspondence-course institutes.

Indira Gandhi National Open University

The Indira Gandhi National Open University was established by an act of parliament in 1985. It is now ranked as one of the premier educational institutions in the world. The higher education system in India has been considerably benefited by the distance mode of education. Acting as a national resource centre for expertise and infrastructure in the area of open and distance learning, IGNOU is committed to quality in teaching, research, training, and extension.

Within 18 years since its inception, IGNOU has developed into a sustainable system, catering to the educational needs of modern Indian society. The university is making all efforts to extend the outreach of quality education even in remote areas where the facilities of higher education are scarce. Over the years, IGNOU now has 1,187,000 students on its roll. Keeping in view the success of IGNOU, the trend was followed by various state governments, and thus now India has 10 state open universities. Thus, the ODL system caters about 27% of the total enrollment in higher education in India (Dikshit, 2004)

Achievements of IGNOU

The following are some of the important achievements in the history of IGNOU.

- Recognition in 1993 as a “Centre of Excellence in Distance Education” by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

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