

Distance Education: Origin and Development of Distance Education in India

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Abstract

Distance education is an umbrella term that describes all the teaching-learning arrangements in which the learner and the teacher are separated by space and time. Transaction of the curriculum is effected by means of specially prepared materials or self-study learning materials which are delivered to the learners at their doorstep through various media such as print, television, radio, satellite, audio tapes, video tapes, CD-ROMs, Internet, and World Wide Web, etc. Distance Education occupies a special place in Indian higher education system based on its major contribution to enhancing the gross enrollment ratio and democratization of higher education to the larger segment of the Indian population, particularly to reach out to the unreached and to meet the demands of lifelong learning which has become more of a necessity in the knowledge society. National Knowledge Commission appointed by the Government of India recommended several measures for radical reform of Distance Education to achieve its objectives of expansion, inclusion, and excellence in higher education. The fundamental objective of the National Education Policy-2020 is to provide quality education to all by making it affordable and equitable. It focuses on the holistic development of individuals and in turn, put India on a growth trajectory. It focuses on providing quality higher education without any discrimination on basis of caste, culture, gender, creed, or religion. It proposes a 'gender-inclusion fund' to involve girls and transgender students and provide them with quality education.

Keywords: Correspondence Education, Distance Education, Open Learning, Global Movement, Open School, and Open University.

Introduction

Distance Education is the education of learners who may not always be physically presented at a school or where the learner and the teacher are separated in both time and space. Distance education is an umbrella term that describes all the teaching-learning arrangements in which the learner and the teacher are separated by space and time. Transaction of the curriculum is effected by means of specially prepared materials or self-study learning materials which are delivered to the learners at their doorstep through various media such as print, television, radio, satellite, audio tapes, video tapes, CD-ROMs, Internet, and World Wide Web, etc. Also technological medium replaces the inter-personal communication of conventional classroom-based education. There are different forms of distance education. Some of these are (a) Correspondence Education (b) Distance Learning (c) Distributed Learning (d) Extension Education (e) External Education (f) Flexible Learning (g) Independent Study

((h) Online Education (i) Open Distance Education (j) Open Distance Learning (k) Open Education (l) Open Learning (m) Postal Education, and (n) Virtual Education.

Distance Education occupies a special place in Indian higher education system based on its major contribution to enhancing the gross enrollment ratio and democratization of higher education to the larger segment of the Indian population, particularly to reach out to the unreached and to meet the demands of lifelong learning which has become more of a necessity in the knowledge society. India has one of the largest Distance Education systems in the world, second only to China. There are several types of institutions offering Distance Education today: (1) National Open University (2) State Open Universities (3) National Open School (4) State Open Schools (5) Correspondence Institutes of Conventional Universities (6) Extension Directorates of Agricultural Universities (7) Distance Education Departments of Technological Universities (8) Distance Education Divisions of Medical Universities (9) Distance Education Divisions of Law Universities (10) Broadcasting Organizations (11) Private Education and Professional Organizations Recognized by Governments and (12) Private Education and Professional Organizations.

At present, about 26% of all enrolments in higher education are in Distance Education and it is still growing fast.

Objectives of Distance Education

The major objectives of Distance education system are:

1. To provide an alternative cost-effective non-formal channel for tertiary education.
2. To supplement the conventional university system and reduce the pressure on it.
3. To provide a second chance education to those who have had to discontinue their formal education or could not join regular universities owing.
4. To democratize higher education to a large segment of the population in particular disadvantaged groups such as those living in remote and rural areas, working people, women, etc.
5. To provide an innovative system of university level education that is both flexible and open in terms of methods and pace of learning; a combination of courses, eligibility for enrollment, age of entry, conduct of examination, and implementation of the programs of study.
6. To provide an opportunity for up-gradation of skills and qualifications.
7. To develop education as a lifelong activity to enable persons to update their knowledge or acquire knowledge in new areas.

Discussion

The following aspects can be considered for discussion regarding the present study.

Origin of Distance Education

Distance education is not a new concept. In 1800, at the University of Chicago, the first major correspondence program in the United States was established in which the teacher and learner were at different locations. Before that time, particularly in preindustrial Europe, education had been available primarily to males in higher levels of society. The most effective form of instruction in those days was to bring students together in one place and one time to learn from one of the masters. That form of traditional education remains the dominant model of learning today. The early efforts of educators like William Rainey Harper in 1890 to establish alternatives were laughed at. Correspondence study, which

was designed to provide educational opportunities for those who were not among the elite and who could not afford full-time residence at an educational institution, was looked down on as inferior education. Many educators regarded correspondence courses as simply business operations. Correspondence education offended the elitist and extremely undemocratic educational system that characterized the early years in this country. Indeed, many correspondence courses were viewed as simply poor excuses for the real thing. However, the need to provide equal access to educational opportunities has always been part of our democratic ideals, so correspondence study took a new turn.

As radio developed during the First World War and television in 1950 instruction outside of the traditional classroom had suddenly found new delivery systems. There are many examples of how early radio and television were used in schools to deliver instruction at a distance. Wisconsin's School of the Air was an early effort, in 1920, to affirm that the boundaries of the school were the boundaries of the state. More recently, audio and computer teleconferencing have influenced the delivery of instruction in public schools, higher education, the military, business, and industry. Following the establishment of the Open University in Britain in 1970, and Charles Wedemeyer's innovative uses of media in 1986 at the University of Wisconsin, correspondence study began to use developing technologies to provide more effective distance education.

1. Correspondence Study to Distance Education: In 1982, the International Council for Correspondence Education changed its name to the International Council for Distance Education to reflect the developments in the field. With the rapid growth of new technologies and the evolution of systems for delivering information, distance education, with its ideals of providing equality of access to education, became a reality. Today there are distance education courses offered by dozens of public and private organizations and institutions to school districts, universities, the military and large corporations. Direct satellite broadcasts are produced by more than 20 of the country's major universities to provide over 500 courses in engineering delivered live by satellite as part of the National Technological University (NTU). In the corporate sector, more than \$40 billion a year are spent by IBM, Kodak, and the Fortune 500 companies in distance education programs.

What, exactly, are the prospects and promises of distance education? Desmond Keegan (Keegan, 1980) identified six key elements of distance education:

- Separation of teacher and learner
- Influence of an educational organization
- Use of media to link teacher and learner
- Two-way exchange of communication
- Learners as individuals rather than grouped
- Educators as an industrialized form

Distance education has traditionally been defined as instruction through print or electronic communications media to persons engaged in planned learning in a place or time different from that of the instructor or instructors. The traditional definition of distance education is slowly being eroded as new technological developments challenge educators to reconceptualize the idea of schooling and lifelong learning. At the same time, interest in the unlimited possibilities of individualized distance learning is growing with the development of each new communication technology. Although educational technologists agree that it is the systematic design of instruction that should drive the development of distance learning, the rapid development of computer related technologies has captured the interest of the public and has been responsible for much of the limelight in which distance educators

currently find themselves. Although the United States has seen rapid growth in the use of technology for distance education, much of the pioneering work has been done abroad.

2. **Open Learning in the U.K.:** The establishment of the British Open University in United Kingdom in 1969 marked the beginning of the use of technology to supplement print-based instruction through well-designed courses. Learning materials were delivered on a large scale to students in three programs: undergraduates, postgraduates, and associate students. Although course materials were primarily print based, they were supported by a variety of technologies. No formal educational qualifications have been required to be admitted to the British Open University. Courses are closely monitored and have been successfully delivered to over 100,000 students. As a direct result of its success, the Open University model has been adopted by many countries in both the developed and developing world (Keegan, 1986). Researchers in the United Kingdom continue to be leaders in identifying problems and proposing solutions for practitioners in the field (Harry, Keegan & Magnus, 1993). The International Centre for Distance Learning, at the British Open University, maintains the most complete holdings of literature in both research and practice of international distance learning. Research studies, evaluation reports, course modules, books, journal articles, and ephemeral material concerning distance education around the world are all available through quarterly accessions lists or on line.
3. **Distance Education in the United States:** The United States was slow to enter the distance education marketplace, and when it did, a form of distance education unique to its needs evolved. Not having the economic problems of some countries or the massive illiteracy problems of developing nations, the United States nevertheless had problems of economy of delivery. Teacher shortages in areas of science, math, and foreign language combined with state mandates to rural schools produced a climate, in the late 80s, conducive to the rapid growth of commercial courses such as those offered via satellite by the TI-IN network in Texas and at Oklahoma State University. In the United States, fewer than 10 states were promoting distance education in 1987. A year later, that number had grown to two-thirds of the states, and by 1989 virtually all states were involved in distance learning programs. Perhaps the most important political document describing the state of distance education has been the report done for Congress by the Office of Technology Assessment in 1989 called *Linking for Learning* (Office of Technology Assessment, 1989). The report gives an overview of distance learning, the role of teachers, and reports of local, state, and federal projects. It describes the state of distance education programs throughout the United States in 1989 and highlights how technology was being used in the schools. Model state networks and telecommunication delivery systems are outlined with recommendations given for setting up local and wide-area networks to link schools. Some projects, such as the Panhandle Shared Video Network and the Iowa Educational Telecommunications Network, serve as examples of operating video networks that are both, efficient and cost effective.
4. **Distance Education as a Global Movement:** In Europe and other Western countries, a global concern was beginning to emerge. In a recent report, the 12 members of the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities proposed a European Open University to begin in 1992. This is in direct response to the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, and the European Community (Bates, 1990). In this report, articles from authors in nine European countries describe the use of media and technology in higher education in Europe and reflect upon the need for providing unified educational access in the form of a European Open University to a culturally diverse population.

Telecommunication networks now circle the globe, linking people from many nations together in novel and exciting ways. As the borders of our global community continue to shrink, we search for new ways to improve communication by providing greater access to information on an international scale. Emerging communication technologies and telecommunications in particular, provide highly cost-effective solutions to the problems of sharing information and promoting global understanding between people. In today's electronic age, it is predicted that the amount of information produced will increase exponentially every year. Since economic and political power is directly related to access to information, many educators like Takeshi Utsumi, president of GLOSAS (Global Systems Analysis and Simulation) have worked to develop models of the "Global University" and the "Global Lecture Hall" which provide resources allowing less-affluent countries to keep up with advances in global research and education (Utsumi, Rossman & Rosen, 1990).

In the developing world, since the 1950, the population has doubled to over 5 billion people, most of whom want to be literate and want greater educational opportunities for themselves and their children. The majority of this expanding population is in Asia, where there are massive problems of poverty, illiteracy, and disease. In most developing countries, such as Bangladesh, distance education offers the promise of a system of information distribution through which new ideas, attitudes, and understanding might begin to ooze through the layers of the disadvantaged environments (Shah, 1989). Drawing upon the well-known model of the British Open University, countries such as Pakistan, India, and China have combined modem methods of teaching with emerging technologies in order to provide low-cost instruction for basic literacy and job training. Turkey has recently joined those nations involved in large-scale distance learning. Only 12 years old, their distance education program has enrolled almost 1 million students and is the sixth largest distance education program in the world (Demiray & Mclsaac, 1993).

Because of the economies of size and distribution, both industrialized and developing countries have embarked on distance education programs. In the early 1980, record numbers of students in developing countries have gained access to higher education through distance education programs (Rumble & Harry, 1982). In many cases, local experts are not available to develop original programs in the language and culture of the people. For this reason, the majorities of educational programs are either used intact from the host country or are superficially translated with very few adaptations to the local culture. When this is done, the results are often unsuccessful. The cultural values of the program designer become dominant, desirable, and used as the standard. There are many examples of programs from North America, Australia, Great Britain, and Europe that were purchased but never used in Africa and Asia because the material was not relevant in those countries. Because the appropriate design of instructional material is a critical element in its effectiveness, the issue of "who designs what and for whom" is central to any discussion of the economic, political, and cultural dangers that face distance educators using information technologies (Mclsaac, 1993). There have been a variety of efforts to identify theoretical foundations for the study of distance education. Thus far, there has been little agreement about which theoretical principles are common to the field and even less agreement on how to proceed in conducting programmatic research.

Historical Development of Distance Education in India

The list of Distance Education Institutions in India is presented in table-1. India is the only country in the world that has 17 independent open universities as shown in table-2.

Table-1: Distance Education Institutions in India

Sl. No.	State	Number
1	Andhra Pradesh	19
2	Arunachal Pradesh	01
3	Assam	07
4	Bihar	06
5	Chhattisgarh	04
6	Delhi	12
7	Gujarat	05
8	Haryana	08
9	Himachal Pradesh	01
10	Jammu & Kashmir	02
11	Karnataka	13
12	Kerala	04
13	Madhya Pradesh	09
14	Maharashtra	25
15	Meghalaya	02
16	Mizoram	01
17	Nagaland	01
18	Odisha	07
19	Pondicherry	01
20	Punjab	06
21	Rajasthan	12
22	Sikkim	04
23	Tamil Nadu	27
24	Tripura	02
25	Uttarakhand	06
26	Uttar Pradesh	19
27	West Bengal	07

Table-2: List of Notable Universities in India to Offering Distance Education:

Sl. No.	Universities in India to Offering Distance Education	Establishment Year
Andhra Pradesh		
1	Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur	1976
2	Andhra University, Visakhapatnam	1926
3	Dravidian University, Kuppam	1997
4	Gitam University, Visakhapatnam	1980
5	National Sanskrit University Tirupati	1956
6	Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam, Tirupati	1983
7	Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati	1954

Arunachal Pradesh		
1	Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar	1984
2	Venkateshwara Open University, Itanagar	2012
Assam		
1	Assam Down Town University, Guwahati	2010
2	Assam University, Silchar	1994
3	Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh	1965
4	Guwahati University, Guwahati	1948
5	Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University, Guwahati	2006
6	Tezpur University, Tezpur	1994
Bihar		
1	Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar Bihar University, Muzaffarpur	1960
2	Lalit Narayan Mithila University, Darbhanga	1972
3	Magadh University, Bodh Gaya	1962
4	Nalanda Open University, Patna	1987
5	Patna University, Patna	1917
Chhattisgarh		
1	Dr. CV Raman University, Bilaspur	2006
2	MATS University, Raipur	1956
3	Pandit Sundarlal Sharma (Open) University, Bilaspur	2005
4	Pt. Ravi Shankar Shukla University, Raipur	1964
Delhi		
1	Delhi University, Delhi	1922
2	Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi	1998
3	Indira Gandhi National Open University, Delhi	1985
4	Institute of Management and Development, New Delhi	2004
5	Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi	1989
6	Jamia Milia Islamia, New Delhi	1920
Gujarat		
1	Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad	1920
2	Saurashtra University Rajkot	1965
3	Sabarmati University Ahmedabad	2009
Haryana		
1	Chaudhary Devlal University, Sirsa	2003
2	Guru Jambheshwar University, Hisar	1995
3	Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra	1956
4	Maharishi Dayanand University, Rohtak	1976
5	Manav Rachna International University, Faridabad	1997
Himachal Pradesh		
1	Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla	1970
Jharkand		

1	Jharkhand State Open University, Ranchi	2021
Karnataka		
1	Bangalore University, Bangalore	1964
2	Gulbarga University, Gulbarga	1980
3	Kannada University, Hampi	1991
4	Karnataka State Women's University, Bijapur	2003
5	Karnataka University, Dharwad	1949
6	Kuvempu University, Shimoga	1987
7	Mangalore University, Mangalore	2021
8	National Law School of India University, Bangalore	1986
9	Tumkur University, Tumkur	2010
10	Visvesvaraya Technological University, Belgaum	1998
Kerala		
1	Kannur University, Kannur	1996
2	Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam	1983
3	Sree Narayanaguru Open University, Kollam	2021
4	University of Calicut, Kozhikode	1968
5	University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram	1937
Madhya Pradesh		
1	Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore	1964
2	Dr Harisingh Gour V V, Sagar	1946
3	Jiwaji University, Gwalior	1964
4	Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University, Bhopal	1991
5	Maharishi Mahesh Yogi Vedic Vishwavidyalaya, Katni	1995
6	Rani Durgawati University, Jabalpur	1956
Maharashtra		
1	Bharati Vidyapeeth University, Pune	1964
2	International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai	1956
3	Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, Wardha	1997
4	Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies, Mumbai	1981
5	Sant Gadge Baba Amravati University, Amravati	1983
6	Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University, Nanded	1994
7	Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai	1936
8	University of Mumbai, Mumbai	2013
9	Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Nashik	1989
Meghalaya		
1	Mahatma Gandhi University, Khana Para	1983
2	NEHU, Shillong	1973
Mizoram		
1	Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India (ICFAI), Aizawl	1984
Odisha		

1	Asian School of Business Management, Bhubaneswar	2006
2	Berhampur University, Berhampur	1967
3	Fakir Mohan University, Balasore	1999
4	North Orissa University, Mayurbhanj	1998
5	Odisha State Open University, Sambalpur	2015
6	Sambalpur University, Sambalpur	1967
7	Utkal University, Bhubaneswar	1943
Puducherry		
1	Pondicherry University, Pondicherry	1985
Punjab		
1	Chandigarh University, Gharuan, Mohali	2012
2	Desh Bhagat University, Fatehgarh Sahib	2012
3	Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar	1969
4	Lovely Professional University, Phagwara	2006
5	Panjab University, Chandigarh	1882
6	Punjab Technical University, Jalandhar	1997
7	Punjabi University, Patiala	1962
8	Thapar University, Patiala	1956
Rajasthan		
1	Bhagwant University, Ajmer	1999
2	Birla Institute of Technology and Sciences, Pilani	1946
3	Institute of Advance Studies in Education, Sardarshar	1950
4	Jain Vishva Bharati Institute, Ladnun	1991
5	Jaipur National University, Jaipur	2007
6	NIMS University, Jaipur	2008
7	Suresh Gyan Vihar University, Jaipur	2008
8	Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, Kota	1987
Sikkim		
1	ICFAI University, Gangtok	1984
2	Sikkim Manipal University, Gangtok	1992
Tamil Nadu		
1	Annamalai University, Chidambaram	1929
2	Bharath Institute of Higher Education and Research, Chennai	1984
3	Bharathiar University, Coimbatore	1981
4	Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapalli	1982
5	Gandhigram Rural Institute, Gandhigram	1956
6	Karpagam University, Coimbatore	1956
7	Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai	1966
8	Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli	1990
9	Meenakshi Academy of Higher Education and Research, Chennai	1983
10	Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal	1984

11	Periyar Maniammai University, Thanjavur	1988
12	Periyar University, Salem	1997
13	Shanmugha Arts Science, Technology & Research Academy, Thanjavur	2001
14	Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Viswamahavidyalaya, Kanchipuram	1993
15	St. Peter's University, Chennai	1872
16	Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore	1906
17	Tamil Nadu Dr. Ambedkar Law University, Chennai	1997
18	Tamil Nadu Open University, Chennai	2002
19	Tamil University, Thanjavur	1981
20	University of Madras, Chennai	1857
21	Vinayaka Missions University, Salem	1981
Telangana		
1	Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad	1982
2	Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Hyderabad	1972
3	Kakatiya University, Warangal	1976
4	Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad	1988
5	NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad	1998
6	National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad	1964
7	Osmania University, Hyderabad	1917
8	Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University, Hyderabad	1985
Tripura		
1	ICFAI University, Agartala	1984
2	Tripura University, Agartala	1987
Uttar Pradesh		
1	Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh	1920
2	Amity University, Noida	2005
3	Indian Institute of Carpet Technology, Bhadohi, UP	1994
4	Integral University, Lucknow	1998
5	Jagadguru Rambhadracharya Handicapped University, Chitrakoot	2001
6	Swami Vivekananda Subharti University, Meerut	2008
7	Teerthankar Mahaveer University, Moradabad	2008
8	University of Allahabad, Allahabad	1887
Uttarakhand		
1	Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, Haridwar	2002
2	Gurukul Kangri Vishwavidyalaya, Haridwar	1902
3	Himgiri Zee University, Dehradun	2003
4	ICFAI University, Dehradun	1984
5	Kumaun University, Nainital	1973
6	Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani	2005

West Bengal		
1	Jadavpur University, Kolkata	1906
2	Netaji Subhas Open University, Kolkata	1997
3	Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata	1961
4	University of Burdwan, Burdwan	1960
5	University of Kalyani, Kalyani	1960
6	University of North Bengal, Darjeeling	1962
7	Vidyasagar University, Midnapore	1981

Instructional Methods in Distance

Broadly, the instructional method of a distance education system is presented in table-3.

Table-3: Instructional Methods in Distance Education

1	2	3	4	5
PRINT	BROADCAST AUDIO- VISUAL	NON- BROADCAST AUDIO-VISUAL	PRACTICAL/PRO JECT WORK	INTER- PERSONAL COMMUNICAT ION
- Self-Instructional texts or lessons - Set texts - Supplementary material	- Radio - TV	- Audio-cassettes - Video tapes - Discs - Filmstrips/slides - Computer systems	- Home Kits - Laboratory experience - Field work - Computing	- Correspondence tuition - Telephone contact

Student Support in Distance Education

Student support in distance education varies from institution to institution. The student support system in distance education is unique. It depends on the market, the package which is employed, the delivery form, the status of the organization, and the socio-economic educational culture in which it operates. Student support services in most distance education institutions include some or more of:

1. Class teaching at the study centre
2. Individual tutorials at study centres or other locations
3. Annual residential schools (compulsory or optional) study of self-help groups
4. Socio events
5. Counselling sessions at study centres
6. Correspondence with tutor and counsellor
7. Telephone contact with tutor and counsellor
8. Group telephone tutorials, radio tutorials
9. Audio cassette correspondence

10. Computer-mediated communication

11. Student newspapers

The popular forms of student support services are presented in figure-1.

Figure-1: Common Forms of Student Support Services



Weaknesses and Deficiencies of Distance Education System

In spite of its several accomplishments, the distance education system in India exhibits the following major weaknesses and deficiencies:

1. Distance education system is thinly spread.
2. Spread of distance learners is uneven.
3. Distance courses are liberal and general in nature.
4. Professional, vocational and technical courses are a few and are limited to Diploma and Certificate levels.
5. Majority of distance learners are men.
6. Learning materials are not fully self-instructional.
7. Distance teaching is mostly print-based and not multimedia based.
8. Student support services are inadequate, insufficient, and uneven.
9. In many institutions sufficient academic staff is absent.

Suggestions of National Knowledge Commission for Reforms of Distance Education

National Knowledge Commission appointed by the Government of India recommended several measures for radical reform of Distance Education to achieve its objectives of expansion, inclusion, and excellence in higher education. Some recommendations of National Knowledge Commission are:

1. Create a national ICT infrastructure for networking Open Distance Education institutions.
2. Set up a National Education Foundation to develop web-based common open resources.
3. Establish a credit bank to effect the transition to a course credit system.
4. Establish a National Education Testing Services for assessing Open Distance Education students.
5. Facilitate convergence with conventional universities.
6. Set up a Research Foundation to support research activity in Open Distance Education.
7. Overhaul training programmes for educators.

8. Increase access for learners with special needs.
9. Create a new Standing Committee for the regulation of Open Distance Education.
10. Develop a system for quality assessment.

National Education Policy – 2020 and Distance Education

The NEP-2020 in vision for restructuring of the Open Distance Learning delivery mentioned that all institutions will have the option to run Open Distance Learning and online programmes, provided they are accredited to do so, in order to enhance their offerings, improve access, increase GER, and provide opportunities for lifelong learning (SDG 4). All ODL programmes and their components leading to any diploma or degree will be of standards and quality equivalent to the highest quality programmes run by the HEIs on their campuses. Top institutions accredited for ODL will be encouraged and supported to develop high quality online courses. Such quality online courses will be suitably integrated into the curricula of HEIs, and a blended mode will be preferred.

The fundamental objective of the National Education Policy-2020 is to provide quality education to all by making it affordable and equitable. It focuses on the holistic development of individuals and in turn, put India on a growth trajectory. It focuses on providing quality higher education without any discrimination on basis of caste, culture, gender, creed, or religion. It proposes a 'gender-inclusion fund' to involve girls and transgender students and provide them with quality education. The policy envisions providing good infrastructure, a better learning environment, and improved co-curricular and extracurricular activities. By increasing the percentage of GDP on education from 4% to 6% the policy claims to enhance the infrastructure and increase the level of education.

International Commission and Education of Tomorrow

The International Commission on the Futures of Education established by UNESCO in 2019 recommended nine ideas for concrete actions to advance the education of tomorrow.

1. Commit to strengthening education as a common good. Education is a bulwark against inequalities.
2. Expand the definition of the right to education so that it addresses the importance of connectivity and access to knowledge and information.
3. Value the teaching profession and teacher collaboration.
4. Promote student, youth, and children's participation and rights.
5. Protect the social spaces provided by schools as we transform education.
6. Make free and open source technologies available to teachers and students.
7. Ensure scientific literacy within the curriculum.
8. Protect domestic and international financing of public education.
9. Advance global solidarity to end current levels of inequality.

Conclusion

Distance education is an umbrella term that describes all the teaching-learning arrangements in which the learner and the teacher are separated by space and time. Transaction of the curriculum is effected by means of specially prepared materials or self-study learning materials which are delivered to the learners at their doorstep through various media such as print, television, radio, satellite, audio tapes, video tapes, CD-ROMs, Internet, and World Wide Web, etc. Distance Education occupies a special place in Indian higher education system based on its major contribution to enhancing the gross enrollment ratio and

democratization of higher education to the larger segment of the Indian population, particularly to reach out to the unreached and to meet the demands of lifelong learning which has become more of a necessity in the knowledge society. National Knowledge Commission appointed by the Government of India recommended several measures for radical reform of Distance Education to achieve its objectives of expansion, inclusion, and excellence in higher education.

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