

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIA - THE STATE OF ART.

- A Report on the III IDEA Conference -

by Prof. N. V. RATNALIKAR

The Distance Education in India is undergoing change - "From Correspondence Course, Distance Education, Open University, Open School, Networked Educational System". Distance Education has come to stay on the global plane as well as on the national.

The Third Annual Conference on Distance Education was organized by IDEA - The Indian Distance Education Association - at Madras on 12th & 13th October 1995. About 200 delegates attended the conference and 70 papers were presented and discussed. The Conference was inaugurated by Prof. Ponnuswamy, Minister of Education, Government of Tamilnadu; The Key note address was delivered by Dr. V. C. Kulandaiswamy, Ex. Vice Chancellor, "Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi" (IGNOU) and the Valedictory address was given by Dr. R. G. Takwale, the present Vice Chancellor of IGNOU.

The Key note address and the Valedictory address present the State of the Art of Distance Education in India. Hence, relevant portions from these addresses are presented herewith.

Editor

(1) Key Note Address :- By Prof. V. C. Kulandaiswamy

"We are aware that Distance Education has now more than a quarter century of history : there are in the world to-day in 103 countries 829 D.E. institutions offering 28295 courses. In India itself, there are to-day seven open universities, though three of them are in the beginning stages : there are more than 45 conventional universities offering correspondence education programmes. We have an admission strength of 200940 and an enrolment of

571880. It is estimated that by the end of the VIII Plan, enrolment in Distance Education will account for 16.5% of the total in higher education.

Notwithstanding the progress made and the fairly wide prevalence of this system, there is still considerable lack of understanding or misunderstanding of "Distance Education". A brief explanation of its emergence and inevitability is relevant.

The nineteenth century is known for

the transportation revolution : the twentieth century for communication revolution. The transportation revolution meant that you can move people and goods at a rapid speed, you can move them quickly. Communication revolution means that you can move information quickly. Previously we moved people to the place of knowledge; now we are in a position to move knowledge to the people wherever they are. Previously, people moved to the place of work; now we are slowly reaching the stage in advanced countries when we move work to where people are. To-day multinationals establish research centres wherever there are research workers; they get designs done wherever there are good designers. You are aware that numerous computer professionals do programmes in India for companies operating in the U.S.A. and send them, in a matter of 24 hours or less via satellite communication.

If you have efficient transportation and communication, you have all facilities at your command wherever you are, if you can afford it. No village is too far away; no town is too near. At the end of the 20th century, we realise that it is easier to move knowledge to the place of people rather than move people to the place of knowledge. The Distance Education is a by-product or result of this development.

It is not as though we have an option to choose or not to choose distance education : it is an inevitable mode because of the new challenges; new demands on education.

- ★ It is neither a supplement : nor a competitor to the formal system.
- ★ It meets those needs : serves those

target groups, not served by the conventional system or the needs which the conventional system was not designed to serve.

- ★ Even if Distance Education offers the same programmes like B.A., B.Com. that the conventional system offers, it does to meet the needs of different target groups. The programmes may be the same : but the learners are different.

The question may be asked as to what are the new demands that require the use of Distance Education system. They are :

1. Education for all;
2. Continuing education;
3. Equity in educational opportunities.

Education for all is essentially a 20th century phenomenon : this will need enormous numbers to be handled. You need a system with higher productivity.

We are aware that knowledge advances at an incredibly fast rate; the half life of knowledge in an area like computers is less than 4 years. Persons already employed have to be re-educated or retrained. In the modern world, re-education of employed persons is as important as new education of regular students. If the total work force in the country is to be put through a refresher programme every five years, you have to handle enormous numbers : neither the conventional system can handle this number, nor the employed people can go through full time programmes at places away from where they work. You need

a system that is more productive and more flexible.

Among the many demands that are now made, social justice is the foremost: this we see not only be made available; but they must be made accessible; all that are available are not necessarily accessible. Equity concerns with accessibility of educational opportunities. Education cannot be made accessible to the economically, socially and geographically disadvantaged persons with the present system which is rigid and limited in its capacity for adjustment and accommodation. A system more flexible than the conventional system which maintains a rigid structure is needed. Distance education has the advantage of high productivity and great flexibility.

You are aware that the correspondence courses in conventional universities will come under IGNOU at the end of the VIII plan. The transfer has been endorsed by the parliament in programme of action 1992. The universities that offer correspondence courses should soon transform them into distance education mode. You will agree with me that the image of the correspondence programmes is not very favourable in the eyes of the public. It is your responsibility to change this image. The universities think of the correspondence courses as an income generating proposition. If you serve the students well and still make some profit, there may not be much complaint; but if you deny the students of the correspondence education programme the requisite service and thereby save money and utilise it to support the conventional system, it is, in my opinion, unethical, unfair and objectionable. The conventional universities - many of those that offer correspondence courses, must search

their conscience and see whether this culture should be allowed to continue.

It is of the many paradoxes in this country that in the public sector, industries are incurring losses and education is making profit. It is for the representatives assembled here to ponder over and if possible arrive at a consensus and make a beginning to rectify the existing practice and improve the situation.

From the theme given, I infer that you propose to use the opportunity in this conference to exchange your experiences. I am sure that in a relatively new field like open learning, there is vast scope for one to learn from one's own experience and also from the experience of others. I want to utilise this occasion to refer to a few things that you may have to do; but are not doing as yet. The suggestions aim at improving the quality and also saving in expenditure. I want to touch upon co-ordination and networking.

Formal system of education covers only a limited educational and training requirement. It is only the non-formal system that has to take over those needs not attended to by the conventional system. Distance learning constitutes a major component in the non-formal system.

The drop outs 5+: upto 8+: and upto 12+--many among them need further education or training to employ themselves usefully. Secondly, those that are employed at all levels -- craftsmen; technicians; professionals need re-education and training. The ancient society depended on the family background for skill; the Germans invented the apprenticeship programme; the Americans invented the training programme.

The distance education system can function more effectively and more

economically, if it pools its resources. I like to give one example. If you take Tamilnadu, the three giants in distance education are; Madras University; Madurai Kamaraj University and Annamalai University. All of them offer B.A. and M.A. courses in many subjects that are common. If you take for instance, History or Commerce, I do not think that there is any major difference in the curriculum and syllabi among the universities for the major subject, i.e.: history. To-day, each of the three universities writes, prints and produces its own course material. It is easy to see that the course material can be prepared at one of the Universities with participation from others and printed in large numbers and used by all the three. Similarly, another university can take up commerce. Each of them may be identified as a centre for the preparation of course materials for well-defined subjects. Australia has established what it calls Distance Education Centres (DEC) in which a few universities are identified as centres for materials preparation; others use them. This experiment, I learn, has not been very successful because no university would like to be fully dependent on another university for all the subjects offered. A participative arrangement like the one I have suggested will certainly work.

Distance Education has to use multimedia. Otherwise, it will not be able to compensate for the absence of interaction between the teacher and the learner that takes place or supposed to take place between the teacher and the learner in the class room in the conventional system. We need make use of the benefits of communication technology. We must develop programmes for communication through Radio and Television. The

Government of India have been long promising an education channel : we have time to-day in television for films : for music : for cricket and tennis; but not for education. To-day, our distance education depends only on print which was invented 500 years back and on postal services introduced at least 200 years back. There is no evidence of the use of communication technology. Most of the universities do not use T.V. : many do not use Radio. It is mainly because time is not made available in these channels. The Association must impress on the Government that education in the learning system in the languages of the State can succeed only if time is available in the media. Here again, television programmes are expensive and the universities must pool their resources in the production of audio-video programmes and broadcast them. The television will not make time available separately for the History programme of University of Madras; Madurai Kamaraj University and Annamalai University. Talented teachers have been and are rare in any society, at any period or time in history. Some of the best of teaching talents available must be made use of and the benefits must be available to all students. One of the major benefits of communication revolution in education is the use of Teleconferencing. It may take some time before video-teleconferencing can be used by the Universities; but a beginning can be made with audio-teleconferencing. For producing audio and video cassettes, the universities may avail themselves of the centres available in open universities and the AVRC and EMRC of the Universities Grants Commission. It is not necessary for every conventional university offering distance education programmes to establish a studio for audio, video

programmes. The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), the highest policy making body, has recommended that each State must have an open university. I am aware that Tamil Nadu announced its decision to establish an open university; the earlier it is done, the better. It will have to be sooner or later. If an open university is set up in a State, it must develop certain facilities that can be made available to the conventional universities.

We have in the world three models for distance education :

1. Single mode universities.
2. Dual mode universities with common academic staff and common academic programmes or,
Dual mode universities with an institute of Distance Education having its own staff,
3. Consortium of institutions.

The correspondence courses in many of our universities are offered by a separate Directorate or School; however, they do not enjoy much of autonomy. Mostly they offer only those programmes, available in the conventional system and that

imposes constraints. The distance education component, whether you call it a School or Directorate, must have a personality of its own and a certain freedom of action. The present arrangement, as far as I can see, is far from satisfactory. There is an urgent need for reorganization. For nearly two centuries, education has not seen any major change. We have in history instances where teachers have become social, political and economic leaders and brought about changes and revolutions : but, teachers unfortunately have not brought out any change, much less a revolution in the class room. The communication revolution has invaded all sectors : but has not entered the class room. A society which avoids mini-revolutions, must face a major revolution. As we stand at the end of the 20th century, we see an educational revolution on the horizon. We must be prepared for the change.

Distance education is a new tool. The power of the tool is not in the tool alone. It also depends on the imagination and ingenuity of the users. Your deliberations must help to pave the way for making the optimum use of this modern tool. I wish your deliberations all success.

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(2) Valedictory Address :- By Dr. Ram Takwale

Vice Chancellor IGNOU

Participating in the educational revolution

1. INTRODUCTION

I would like to compliment the organizers for selecting persistently the themes of IDEA Conferences that are the major concerns of distance educators and policy makers in the country. The themes of earlier conferences, i.e. widening access to and quality in distance education, and the current theme related to 'Sharing Resources and Experiences Towards a More Academic System in India' are vitally important to the development of the distance education system in India. In my valedictory address, I will, therefore, be touching upon these issues, which in fact, have become our main concerns in IGNOU. As we are developing our ideas and programmes and in turn our vision of IGNOU-2001, we are realising that we will be soon going through a great transformation process; the process I am tempted to call 'an educational revolution'. I have therefore entitled my talk as 'Participating in the Educational Revolution', which, at first sight, might appear to be either populist or pompous.

2. THREE PHASES NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

2.1 We are all aware of the development of non-formal education in the university system, since Independence. It all started with extra-mural education, continuing education, adult education

etc., with an objective of taking the knowledge confined within the four walls of the educational institutions to the common people through various programmes. All these activities of non-formal nature, were later on consolidated into 'Extension Education', which was given place of pride by the University Grants Commission in the University functions by according it equal status with teaching and research; the three often are called the three dimensions of university education. The development and use of communication media in various walks of life is having its impact on the patterns and channels of education. We may broadly categorise the transformation of the non-formal education through three phases depending on the use of communication technologies.

2.2 The facility of postal communication gave rise to the correspondence course institutions which is the first major addition of non-formal education to the university education system. The correspondence education heralding the first phase of non-formal education, relied exclusively on print medium, used mainly postal communication, and offered the class-room or face-to-face courses to off-campus or distant learning students. The expectation of the Education Commission that the correspondence courses should succeed in enrolling about 1/3rd of total students after two decades did

not materialise for various reasons, and could reach only upto about 5% by 1984-85.

2.3 The large scale use of radio television brought in the second phase in non-formal educational system leading to distance education. The Distance Education system started using multimedia. i.e. audio, video and print media as distinct and separate components, with print dominating the instructional materials and the learning process. The domination of print materials is obvious for its portability and personalised use. The other media are yet to achieve, that personalised use in our country; and the only media that can come closer to such an application in our socio-economic situation, is the audio cassette, which, unfortunately, is not properly exploited by the distance educators. At present, the concern is how fast can we use audio-visual media and raise their role and importance in the instructional materials, and make them appropriate and effective in the process of self-learning, which is the dominant skill expected to be mastered by the learners in open and distance education. In fact, UGC and IGNOU are jointly organizing a one-day seminar on 15th October, 1995 to consider the issues in transforming Correspondence Courses Institutes into Distance Education Institutes by identifying strategies and plan of action for such a transformation.

2.4 We are, however, facing currently a new change brought about by the communication technologies through the use of communication satellites and versatile new-generation computers. I am referring to the information communi-

cation networks that can transmit data, voice and images, and the development of multi-media, rather digital multi-media to distinguish the term from its conventional use in Distance Education. The modern computers and technologies are enabling us to develop digital multimedia in which text, voice, pictures, simulations etc. can be integrated and learning materials can be offered through computers as an interactive learning package. The new communication technologies and networking are slowly enabling us to develop what is often called, virtual class-room, virtual conferencing, virtual laboratories, virtual field-work etc. Though these ideas are at present at the initial stage and appear vague, they reflect the application of artificial intelligence and may soon become a virtual reality in the field of education. Though not an expert in computers, but as a student of science, I can visualize a great change and transformation that is coming up in the field of education within the next few years. We are certainly marching towards the next change i.e. the third phase of non-formal education i.e., networked educational system.

3. GLOBALISATION - CHALLENGE TO INDIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

3.1 Look at this little ad. in a newspaper. "I welcome all the Indian youngsters who will soon be a part of our family of the Open University of British Columbia". This is an invitation by the Director of the Columbia University published recently as an advertisement in partnership with APTECH, a private computer education company. The university is offering B.Tech. degree in information technology and assures

of high quality education and bright future. Internationally renowned London School of Economics is offering its Programme in partnership with an institution in Bombay. Many universities in developed countries are trying to find partners for offering their programmes in many Asian and African universities. The National Technological University of USA is offering engineering and technology courses at master's level on their electronic information system through International Network (INTERNET). Students of this University are spread all over the world. This is just a beginning.

3.2 Broadcast is also being used for offering educational courses. ZEE TV has started an educational channel called 'ZED' (Zee Educational) offering a computer education programme. There are plans by Doordarshan and Ministry of Human Resource Development to use TV channel for education through satellite. It should be noted that satellite is being used both for open transmission on TV as well as for network communication.

3.3 India has a legacy of and great fascination for an education from the great universities of the west, such as Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, etc. Many aspirants for higher and quality education went to and are still going to western universities for their higher studies. Now many universities from the developed countries are offering in India their degree programmes through satellite and internet. The attraction of foreign degrees which may be preferred by multinationals and also by our institutions in India, is posing a challenge to the Indian education system.

3.4 In general, the current transformation that is sweeping all walks of life, is described variously as transformation to post industrial society, information society, third wave society, twenty-first century society, scientific & technological society, etc. So far the societies were separated by national boundaries. Now globalisation has become the major direction of change. Automation and artificial intelligence will be used in all walks of life. According to Daniel Bell "Knowledge and information are becoming the strategic resource and the transforming agents of the post-industrial society". We are and will be experiencing explosive changes in our personal working and social life during this period.

3.5 We are all passing through epoch making changes. Education System will obviously be experiencing the impact of the technologies that is changing the total nature of society. It is, therefore, a golden opportunity to all of us to participate in the educational revolution and contribute to developing that system of education which will help in shaping universal man and appropriate society in the third millennium.

4. DIRECTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT OF OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIA

4.1 India is having at present one National and seven State Open Universities out of which two are non-functional. Government of India has adopted a policy of establishing one state open university in each major state. With the enrollment of two lakh students in open universities and nearly 5 lakh in 46 Correspondence Course Institutions

forming nearly 13-14% of the total enrolment, the Open and Distance Education system has already acquired a major size and role in the university education.

4.2 IGNOU was established to perform two roles, the first as an open university for the whole country and the second as an apex body to coordinate, promote and monitor standards in distance education. During the last few years IGNOU is changing its roles. Besides being an open university, it is acquiring a role of Resource Centre through its activities and facilities such as STRIDE (Staff Training and Research Institute in Distance Education) for training functionaries in D.E., Electronic Media Production Centre with its broadcasting facility on extended C-band, Computer Networking and by contributing all its programmes in the common pool for their use by other open universities.

4.3 Consortium of Open Universities

Distance education in India is getting organized under the Distance Education Council (DEC) of IGNOU. DEC is currently developing a consortium of all the open universities in India for :

- (a) developing common pool of programmes well assessed for their quality.
- (b) establishing norms for sharing common pool programmes by the members of the consortium and maintaining their quality in delivery to students.
- (c) developing common credit system, so that student's mobility is easier

and they may take programmes of their choice simultaneously from more than one university.

- (d) maintenance of standards and quality assurance in open and distance education in India.

The consortium of open universities will be expanded to include 46 correspondence course institutions in its fold from the 9th plan period.

5. OPEN EDUCATION NETWORK (OPENET)

5.1 One of the ambitious programmes envisaged is the development of a network for open and distance education institutions.

Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) has established for IGNOU and other distance education institutions, a tele-conferencing system with one-way video and two-way audio, whose teaching-end conference room is located at IGNOU Campus in Delhi and the receiver-ends are located at nearly 100 places in India, out of which 23 belong to IGNOU and its sister universities. At the receiver end students can see and listen to the experts and teachers on TV Screen and ask questions simultaneously through telephone or fax. This is a virtual class room now getting established in India. Common pool courses as in management, education etc., would be learnt by hundreds and thousands of students through virtual class-room spread all over the country. The present facility is a broadcast network and can be extensively used for training and developmental activities.

5.2 Physical network is also get-

ting established by sharing the facilities and educational services of the open universities through their regional and study centres which number around 1,000. Computer network is also proposed to be established by linking all the open universities and their regional and study centres in a phased manner, so that students can be served academically and administratively with efficiency and promptness.

5.3 There are, however, many deficiencies in the present set-up of the Network, which we are trying to establish with our limited resources :

- (a) The network has to use existing telephone lines. By considering their present reliability and cost, a common student will not be able to pay the cost of the network use.
- (b) Talk back at the user ends will be located only at the district places or in big cities where our Regional and Study Centres are located. The geographically disadvantaged students living in rural or hilly areas will not be able to use this knowledge or education network.
- (c) We are using the extended C-band transponder which needs special dish antenna. At present they are installed at 100 places. Even if they are multiplied 10 times, the whole country will never be covered. What, therefore, needed is a dedicated educational channel available 24-hours and accessible on general TV channel to every viewer.
- (d) Teaching-end facility is now located

only at one place and needs uplink facility which costs around Rs. 3.00 crore. If education is to be made accessible on mass scale, such uplinks and teaching-ends have to be established in every state in every major Indian language.

- (e) The total cost of establishing the network is quite high and cannot be borne by the educational institutions. Initial investment by the Government to create infrastructure is therefore necessary. Later on, commercial use of the network can be generated in such a way that it can be made operationally self-supporting.

5.4 By considering the global competition in which outside universities are likely to swarm the Indian educational scene, particularly for higher end courses in the areas of management, technology and communications, it is very essential for the survival and development of the Indian educational system, to have national educational network that will allow flow of data, voice and images. Over the years, the Indian educational system has proved its quality and standards, easily seen from the contributions our graduates are making in developed countries. Now it is a competition of quality education on our soil. Every university has now to come up with high quality assurance in all its educational programmes. The modern communication technologies are enabling us to transmit a wide range of courses of high quality to reach students separated from the university campuses. The communication technology edge for better competitiveness and quality, therefore, needs

to be acquired by the Indian education system. Open and distance education institutions are struggling to get it.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS :

I have broadly indicated the direction of development planned by IGNOU for developing OPENET in partnership with open and distance education institutions

in India. Successful development and implementation of OPENET will require participation and contribution from all and may lead to a network of rich and wide-ranging educational resources, capable of fulfilling educational needs of millions. Let us all participate in this great transformation process by contributing our best for developing the open and distance education system for all.

