

Unit 23

Education: Social Commitment vs. Commodification

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Learning Objectives

This unit deals with dichotomy between social commitment for and commodification of education. After reading this unit you should be able to:

- explain the various commitments made for the educational well being of the community by the state in India;
- examine the social commitment for the expansion of education by various international bodies and the conventions;
- analyze the emerging facets of commodification of education across the globe; and
- discuss the dichotomy between the social commitment for education and its commodification.

23.1 Introduction

Every society expresses its own commitment for the social development of diverse sections of the population through diverse means. These commitments are to be implemented through various institutionalized means. Education is one of the important means for the community, well-being and effective tool for social development. The Indian State has expressed its concern for educational well being and has framed various strategies towards this endeavour. Various international organizations have also expressed their commitment for educational well being of society and have directed member states to initiate actions to fulfill these commitments. This unit aims to highlight various commitments made for the educational well being of society both by the nation state and international communities. It begins with an overview of the constitutional and legal commitments made for educational development in India. It also looks into the various recommendations made by several important committees and commissions for education.

All heads of the State of the United Nations Organisation (UNO) have committed themselves to make education a tool for empowerment of the marginalized in the World Development Summit, 1995. They have also committed themselves for "Education For All". The Dakar Commitment (2000) has made it very explicit. The Millennium Development Goal of the UNO has pledged to eradicate illiteracy by 2015. Most of the member states of UNO have also signed General Agreements on Trade in Services (GATS) of WTO. This has paved the way for commodification of education by designating education as a tradable service. This unit also discusses the diverse facets of commodification of education and its implication

on the social commitments made by the State and international communities for the educational well being of the society.

23.2 Social Commitment for Education: Dimensions

Education plays the central role towards economic development, technological advancement, effective social and political participation of people by paving the way for human resource development, upward social mobility and collective conscientisation of society. Education as an enabling mechanism is a corollary to the processes of empowerment and an important component of power. As an emancipatory force, it has always been recognized as a means to improve personal and collective endowment and capacity, enhance human capital, and expand the bases of opportunities and choices of individuals and groups. The National Human Development Report of India (2001) recognizes that education “is not only a means to enhance human capital and productivity but also a critical invasive instrument for bringing about social, economic and political inclusion and a durable integration of people, particularly those excluded from the mainstream of society”(GOI 2001:48). Hence, according to UNESCO “The right to education is a fundamental human right. It occupies a central place in Human Rights and is essential and indispensable for the exercise of all other human rights and for development. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized, adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty, and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities” (UNESCO, 2006).

However, due to several social, economic and historical reasons all sections of population have not got equal access to education. Even among the literate or educated sections only a few have got access to higher, professional and technical avenues of learning. Consequently these vast sections of the population have remained deprived of the avenues and processes of human development and capacity building for upward social mobility. The state and the society have also remained deprived of the human potentials of these sections of society. Inequality in access to education has been historically rooted and socio-culturally circumscribed. In India, for example, traditionally only the upper castes have had access to education and the lower castes and the indigenous people were deprived of access to education at all levels. Such situations are available in many other parts of the world as well. For example, in the North American countries the Blacks and the indigenous people lag behind in their educational achievements.

It has long been realized and recognized that lack of education and unequal access to education has emerged to be a potential cause of socio-economic backwardness, poverty, ill-health and all forms of human deprivation. Since the significance of and disparities in access to education have widely been recognized, there have been several commitments to enhance access to education both by the state, international bodies and the civil society organization. Most of these commitments aim to:

- recognize education as the cornerstone of social and human development,
- enhance access to education to all sections of population,
- arrange special provisions for ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities,
- provide special attention for children, women and other vulnerable sections of society,
- arrange adequate resources for expansion of education,
- save education as a tool for national integration,
- use education as a tool for mainstreaming marginalized.

Let us now focus on the commitment to education specifically made in India through the constitutional and legal arrangements.

Why providing education to all shall be considered by the state as a social commitment to its people?

23.3 Constitutional and Legal Framework for Educational Development in India

India has recognized education not only as a tool for social and economic development, but also a force for social revitalization of human resources for all sections of the population. In the post independence period India has committed itself to the educational well being of all the segments of the society and has made several constitutional provisions towards this endeavour. The Constitution of India outlines general principles for guiding and governing educational development in the country. These provisions have tried to ensure educational interests especially of children, weaker sections and women, religious minorities, linguistic groups etc. The government of India has also appointed several committees and commissions towards these endeavours. Let us briefly explain the constitutional provisions first.

Constitutional Provisions

- Article 45 of the Constitution enjoins that the State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of 10 years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years. This constitutional obligation has been time and again deferred to 1970, 1980, 1990 and then to 2000. The Approach to the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) has set the target of all children completing five years of schooling by 2007.
- Article 29(1) provides that any section of the citizens, residing in the territory of India and any part thereof, having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.
- Article 29(2) lays down that no citizen shall be denied admission to any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.
- Article 31 enjoins that all minorities, whether based on religion or language shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- Article 32 lays down that the State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.
- Under Article 46 the State is obliged to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and, in particular, of the Schedules Castes and the Schedules Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (National Human Development Report 2001: 59).

Committees and Commissions: Overview of Social Commitments

The Government of India has appointed several commissions and committees on education from time to time. All of these committees have invariably suggested measures to improve the state of literacy and education among the marginalised sections of society. In pursuance of the National Policy on Education 1986, several schemes are made for the (a) abolition of tuition fee in government school at the primary and the secondary levels, (b) reservation of seats in higher education including IIT, IIM etc., (c) relaxation of cut points for admission

in the IITs, (d) special coaching (e) linguistic developments etc for the Scheduled castes and the Scheduled Tribes students. Several programmes have also been launched for the minorities. For example, (a) Area Intensive Programme for the Educationally Backward Minorities, (b) schemes for financial assistance for modernization of *Madrasas* etc. The Programme of Action (1992) of this education policy has suggested various proactive measures to be initiated for women, Scheduled castes, Scheduled Tribes, educational minorities, and the physically handicapped.

Box 23.1 : Higher Education as a social commitment

Higher education has always been assigned a special role to promote the cause of nation building, economic prosperity, expanding the base of highly trained manpower in the country. Several commissions and committees were set up over the last five decades to analyze and recommend the changing need of higher education in India. According to the Radha Krishnan Commission (1947) higher education in Indian society has to be committed to promote the 'social purpose we profess to serve', 'to produce community values and ideas', 'to promote human well-being, faith in reasons and humanity, democracy, justice, fraternity', 'to promote professional education to satisfy the occupational need of the society' (Radhakrishnan Commission 1947) The Education Committee on Higher Education emphasized that higher education should aim 'to promote self-reliance', 'economic growth, employment', 'vocationalisation through scientific and technical education' and to promote 'social and national integration' (Education Committee 1966). The Education Commission of 1966 widely known as the Kothari Commission viewed the role of education in India from a wider perspective. According to this Commission education in India must seek 'to seek and cultivate new knowledge', 'to provide leadership to help individuals to develop their potential', 'to promote social justice, 'to bring the individual closer to the community' (Education Commission 1966).

The National Policy on Education 1986 committed itself to enhance equity and relevance of education and also to make education a tool to enhance the pace of social change in India. It laid special emphasis on the removal of disparities and to equalise educational opportunity by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far. Let us highlight some of the important commitments this policy has made for women, SC, ST, religious minorities, physically handicapped and others.

- i) **Education for Women's Equality:** Regarding women's education, educationist say "education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of woman. In order to neutralise the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions.
- ii) **The Education of Scheduled Castes:** The central focus in the SCs' educational development is their equalization with the non-SC population at all Stages and levels of education. The measures contemplated for this purpose include:
 - Incentives to indigent families to send their children to school regularly till they reach the age of 14;
 - Pre-matric scholarship scheme for children of families engaged in occupations such as scavenging, flaying and tanning to be made applicable from Class onwards;

- Constant micro-planning and verification to ensure the enrolment, retention and successful completion of courses by SC students;
 - Recruitment of teachers from Scheduled Castes;
 - Provision of facilities for SC students in students' hostels at district headquarters, according to a phased programme etc.”
- iii) **The Education of Scheduled Tribes:** The following measures will be taken urgently to bring the Scheduled Tribes on par with others.
- Priority will be accorded to opening primary schools in tribal areas.
 - The socio-cultural milieu of the STs has its distinctive characteristics including, in many cases, their own spoken languages.
 - Educated and promising Scheduled Tribe youths will be encouraged and trained to take up teaching in tribal areas.
 - Residential schools, including Ashram Schools, will be established on a large scale.
 - Incentive schemes will be formulated for the Scheduled Tribes, keeping in view their special needs and life styles.
 - The curriculum at all stages of education will be designed to create an awareness of the rich cultural identity of the tribal people as also of their enormous creative talent.
- iv) **Minorities:** Greater attention will be paid to the education of these groups in the interests of equality and social justice. This will naturally include the constitutional guarantees given to them to establish and administer their own educational institutions, and protection to their languages and culture.
- v) **The Handicapped:** The objective should be to integrate the physically and mentally handicapped with the general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence.

In Indian national perception education is essentially for all and the state has a moral commitment to make education accessible to all. This is fundamental to our all-round development. The country paper of the government of India presented at the UNESCO conference on Higher Education, Paris (1998) suggests that 'there is a need to place greater emphasis on enrolment of students from underprivileged backgrounds such as the rural areas, the Scheduled Castes and tribes and other backward groups, minorities, the disabled and others who have suffered from discrimination which has existed for centuries. Hence, special attention has to be given to all these groups through various strategies to be adopted in the university system, especially for access to the system and qualitative development of performance (Govt. of India: 1998).

Notwithstanding such commitment a vast section of Indian population has not got access to education. They have mostly remained illiterate. These sections of the population mostly belong to the categories Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women, and the rural population. You must have realized that literacy rate in India has remained quite low. As per 2001 census the overall literacy rate is 65.2%, male 76%, female 54%, rural 59%, urban 80%, Scheduled Caste 37%, Scheduled Tribes 29%.

Hence besides adhering to several constitutional commitments, the Indian state has also been a partner of several commitments made by important international bodies collectively. Let us examine India's commitment to 'education for all' which is a global commitment.

23.4 India's Commitment to Education for All

Since the 1990s the commitment of the world communities towards the educational well-being of the society have been very explicit. This has widely been reflected in the formulation of a global view on "Educational for All", that emerged out of a World Conference on Education for All in 1990 whereby representatives from 155 countries and 150 civil society organization made World Declaration on Education for All pledging to provide education to all segments of population. In this conference at Jomtien, Thailand it was highlighted that children, youth and adult would benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning need; and that education would be flexible, tailor-made, adapted to the needs, culture and circumstances of learners.

In view of the above objective India has formulated an elaborate plan of action in achieving goals of the 'educational for all' specifically to increase the access, retention, achievement and monitoring of education. So far as the access is concerned the government of India has committed itself to ensure universal enrolment of all children, including girls and persons belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. To improve the extent of retention it has committed to the reduction of dropout rates between Classes I to V and I to VIII to 20 and 40 per cent respectively; and for the improvement of school facilities by revamping Operation Blackboard programme upto the upper primary level also. The state has also committed to achieve the minimum levels of learning by approximately all children at the primary level, and to introduce of this concept at the middle stage on a large scale. For the purpose of monitoring it has formed the local level committee, with due representation to women and teachers, to assist in the working of primary education to oversee its functioning; and improvement of the monitoring system for universalisation of elementary education (MHRD 1995 Govt. of India).

In India the programme of education for all has taken the form of a social movement. Several missions are attached to this movement. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is an integral part of this movement towards achieving the long cherished goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) through a time bound integrated approach, in partnership with State governments. SSA, which promises to provide useful and quality elementary education to all children in the 6 -14 age group by 2010, and to provide community owned quality elementary education in mission mode. It also envisages bridging of gender and social gaps. The main objectives of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan are as follows:

- All children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007;
- All children complete eight years of schooling by 2010;
- Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life;
- Bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary education level by 2010;
- Universal retention by 2010 (Govt. of India 2006)

It has been categorically noted that education of girls, especially those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, will be one of the principal concerns of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. There will be a focus on the educational participation of children from SC/ST, religious and linguistic minorities disadvantaged groups and the disabled children (Govt. of India 2006). To know more about the SSA you are advised to refer to the unit on Elementary Education.

Reflection and Action 23.2

Discuss the strategies adopted by Indian government to fulfill its commitment towards "Education for All"

23.5 International Commitment for Educational Well being

The international communities have committed themselves to espouse the cause of educational well being of humanity. Let us explain the nature of these commitments as expressed in the Social Development Summit 1995, Dakar Declaration 2000, and in the Millennium Development Goal 2001.

The Social Development Summit: Commitment for Education

In 1995 all heads of the states of United Nations Organization met in Copenhagen over the World Summit for Social Development and committed themselves to empower the people to maximize their capacities, resources and opportunities. In the wake of globalisation and initiation of new structural Adjustment Programmes they expressed their commitment to eradicate poverty, promote employment, social integration, human dignity and universal and equitable access to quality education. As indicated, in this Summit all the heads of the states committed themselves to ensure all the tools which are essential for effective human development. As education is one of the vital components of social development, their commitment to education was rather very elaborate. Let us depict in length the commitment the Social Development Summit on education.

The Summit declared: "We commit ourselves to promoting and attaining the goals of universal and equitable access to quality education, without distinction as to race, national origin, gender, age or disability". As a strategy the Summit committed that "at the national level, we will:

- a) Formulate and strengthen time bound national strategies for the eradication of illiteracy and universalization of basic education;
- b) Emphasize lifelong learning by seeking to improve the quality of education to ensure that people of all ages are provided with useful knowledge reasoning ability, skills and ethical and social values required to develop their full capacities;
- c) Ensure that children, particularly girls, enjoy their rights and promote the exercise of those rights by making education, adequate nutrition and health care accessible to them, consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- d) Take appropriate and affirmative steps to enable all children and adolescents to attend and complete school and to close the gender gap in primary, secondary, vocational and higher education;
- e) Ensure full and equal access to education for girls and women, recognizing that investing in women's education is the key element in achieving social equality, higher productivity and social returns in terms of health, lower infant mortality and the reduced need for high fertility;
- f) Ensure equal educational opportunities at all levels for children, youth and adults with disabilities, in integrated settings, taking full account of individual differences and situations;
- g) Recognize and support the right of indigenous people to education in a manner that is responsive to their specific needs, aspirations and cultures, and ensure their full access to health care;
- h) Develop specific educational policies, with gender perspective;

- i) Strengthen the links between labour market and education policies, realizing that education and vocational training are vital elements in job creation and in combating unemployment and social exclusion in our societies, and emphasize the role of higher education and scientific research in all plans of social development;
- j) Develop broad-based education programmes that promote and strengthen respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- k) Focus on learning acquisition and outcome, broaden the means and scope of basic education, enhance the environment for learning and strengthen partnerships among Governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, local communities, religious groups and families to achieve the goal of education for all;
- l) Establish or strengthen both school-based and community-based health education programmes for children;
- m) Expedite efforts to achieve the goals of national health-for-all strategies, based on equality and social justice in line with the Declaration on Primary Health Care;
- n) Promote, in all educational and health policies and programmes, environmental awareness, including awareness of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production.”

At the international level, the heads of the states committed to

- “Ensure that international organizations, in particular the international financial institutions, support these objectives, integrating them into their policy programmes and operations as appropriate.
- Strengthen intergovernmental organizations that utilize various forms of education to promote culture; disseminate information through education and communication media; help spread the use of technologies; and promote technical and professional training and scientific research.
- Intensify and coordinate international support for education and health programmes based on respect for human dignity (UNDP 1995).

Dakar Commitment

The collective commitment for education achieved a new dimension in Dakar, Senegal in 2000. The Dakar framework for action entitled: *Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitment* stipulated clearly that “Governments have an obligation to ensure that EFA goals and targets are reached and sustained. This is a responsibility that will be met most effectively through broad-based partnerships within countries, supported by cooperation with regional and international agencies and institutions.”

The representative of Governments accepted ‘Education as a fundamental human right’ and collectively committed themselves to the attainment of the following goals:

- a) expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
- b) ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
- c) ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;
- d) achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;

- e) eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;
- f) improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills."

To achieve these goals, the governments, organizations, agencies, groups and associations represented at the World Education Forum pledged themselves to:

- a) mobilize strong national and international political commitment for education for all, develop national action plans and enhance significantly investment in basic education;
- b) promote EFA policies within a sustainable and well-integrated sector framework clearly linked to poverty elimination and development strategies;
- c) ensure the engagement and participation of civil society in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of strategies for educational development;
- d) develop responsive, participatory and accountable systems of educational governance and management;
- e) meet the needs of education systems affected by conflict, national calamities and instability and conduct educational programmes in ways that promote mutual understanding, peace and tolerance, and help to prevent violence and conflict;
- f) implement integrated strategies for gender equality in education which recognize the need for changes in attitudes, values and practices;
- g) implement as a matter of urgency education programmes and actions to combat the HIV/AIDS;
- h) create safe, healthy, inclusive and equitably resourced educational environments conducive to excellence in learning with clearly defined levels of achievement for all;
- i) enhance the status, morale and professionalism of teachers;
- j) harness new information and communication technologies to help achieve EFA goals;
- k) systematically monitor progress towards EFA goals and strategies at the national, regional and international levels; and
- l) build on existing mechanisms to accelerate progress towards education for all.

The Dakar commitment also emphasized our need of political will for the effective and successful implementation of the above strategies. It also affirmed that no countries seriously committed to 'education for all' would be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources. (UNESCO:2001). Towards this endeavour there would be concerted efforts for

- i) increasing external finance for education, in particular basic education;
- ii) ensuring greater predictability in the flow of external assistance;
- iii) facilitating more effective donor coordination;
- iv) strengthening sector-wide approaches;
- v) providing earlier, more extensive and broader debt relief and/or debt cancellation for poverty reduction, with a strong commitment to basic education; and

- vi) undertaking more effective and regular monitoring of progress towards EFA goals and targets, including periodic assessments (UNESCO 2001).

Education in the Millennium Development Goal

The United Nation has articulated the Millennium Development goal. In its goal No.2 it talks about education: To achieve Universal Primary Education by 2015, it aims to ensure that “by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary education.” The UNO recognized that better education is fundamental to the prospects for economic and social development and poverty eradication.

Reflection and Action 23.3

Discuss the various features of commitment for education as expressed in the Social Development Summit 1995. Also compare Social Development Summit’s commitment for education with those of the Dakar’s Commitment

All through these declarations and the goals the international communities have committed themselves for the educational well being of all sections of population irrespective of age, sex, caste, ethnicity, religious, language. They have also committed themselves to eradicate the problem of finance that may come in the way of ensuring the process of access to education by all sections of population. Several strategies are indicated towards these endeavours.

In the fast changing globalised world most of the nations’ economics are getting transformed into knowledge economy. In knowledge economy knowledge as an economic capital has acquired a commodity value. No knowledge economy can prosper without elaborate educational arrangement for that society. Against this backdrop, social commitment for educational well being is but a prerequisite for survival of the present state of a country’s economy, its transformation and integration with knowledge economy, with the process of globalisation and contemporary economic order.

Different segments of the population are having different educational needs. National and international communities have committed for the expansion of education at all levels (primary, secondary & tertiary), of all types (professional, vocational, liberal arts, science), at all stages of life (lifelong learning) and through all means (conventional, ICT based on line/web based etc.). This leads to more and more need of knowledge and education and thereby its commodification. Hence besides social commitment, commodification has become another aspect of education in the contemporary world. Education is not only a basic human right for the full expression of human potential; it is also a tradable service, a capital that can be sold and purchased in the market. Marketisation, privatization and commodification of education are considered important aspects of these endeavours. Thus in the social commitment for education, the significance of market forces are underlined. For example, the Social Development Summit highlights the significance of the linkages between the education and labour market. In the next section of this unit, we shall be discussing the issues of commodification of education.

23.6 Commodification of Education

In the previous two units of this block we have discussed the issues of privatization and trade in education through the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) of the WTO. We have also discussed the emerging socio-economic contexts of globalisation, proliferation of information and communication technologies, emergence of knowledge economy, which have in one way or the other contributed towards commodification of education.

In the era of globalisation, social commitment for education cannot be seen only as the commitment of the state and to be fulfilled by the state alone. The intervention of the international agencies, civil societies, and that of the private players in education are to be taken into consideration as a social reality. Simultaneously the revolution in the information and communication technologies has made a tremendous impact on education. In this complex situation the state should not remain a passive observer to the market take over of education. Rather, the state should commit itself to provide quality education not only through the conventional means as and where absolutely necessary, but also through all advanced means to match the knowledge requirement of society, hence there is a need to reformulate the educational policy in India.

Emerging Thrust of Educational Reforms

Societies in India are undergoing rapid process of social transformation specifically caused by planned development of the economy and industrialization in the 1950s, the Green Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1990s and penetration of ICTs in 1990s and thereafter. In response to these transformations education needs to meet the emerging requirements of the society. Against this backdrop, educational reform has been a serious concern in India. The committees and commissions on education (e.g. Radhakrishnan Commission on Higher Education (1948-49), Laxamaswamy Mudaliyar Committee on Secondary Education (1952-53), the Kothari Commission (1964-66), National Policy on Education (1986) etc.) have made significant recommendation pertaining to universalisation of elementary education, vocationalisation of secondary education and to strengthen higher education. However, most of these goals were not achieved due to the slow and haphazard and half-hearted implementation of the plan of action, decline in the allocation of resources to higher education, inadequate infrastructure and lack of coordination among various bodies.

The Policy Framework for Educational Reforms in India: A Guide to Commodification

In the wake of implementation of the structural Adjustment Programme, proliferation of ICT based knowledge economy in India, the government appointed a committee to suggest a framework for educational reforms in India. *The Policy Framework for Reforms in Education* known as *Ambani-Birla Report* highlights some of the crucial state of education in India. This report initially recognizes that education has become even more vital in the new world of information. "Knowledge is rapidly replacing raw materials and labour as the most critical input for survival and success. Knowledge has become the new asset. More than half of GDP in the major OECD countries is now knowledge based. About two thirds of the future growth of world GDP is expected to come from knowledge led businesses." According to this report India's education system is highly skewed. Her literacy rates are not only low, but also highly skewed on gender, state-wise spread and urban-rural spread.

While highlighting educational divides in India this report emphatically points out that as the larger world embraces the information age, the world of education in India encompasses different 'worlds' that live side by side.

- One world includes only a fortunate few with access to modern institutions, computers, Internet access and expensive overseas education.
- A second world wants to maintain the status quo Teachers, administrators, textbook publishers, students - all have reasons to prefer things to remain as they are or change only gradually.
- The third world struggles with fundamental issues such as no books, wrong books, teachers desperately in need of training, teachers with poor

commitment, rote learning of irrelevant material, classrooms with hundred students, dirty floors and no toilets. India cannot hope to succeed in the information age on the back of such three disparate worlds.”

According to this report as the developed world moves to forging an information society founded on education, India cannot remain behind as a non-competitive labour oriented society.

It suggests as against this backdrop that it is “imperative for India is to raise standards of the vast majority with poor education, break the education sector free from its inertia and forge a society that places knowledge as the cornerstone of its development. Thus, the vision for education in India would be “To Create A Competitive, Yet Co-operative, Knowledge Based Society”. Towards this endeavour this report has suggested several strategies:

- Provide quality primary education facilities to every citizen of India, preferably within a distance of one kilometre from his residence.
- Provide and support the private sector in the establishment of high quality, secondary education facilities in every taluka.
- Integrate education with information and communication technologies
- Market India as a destination for affordable, high quality education.
- The government should establish an education development fund for primary and literacy education with donations to this fund exempted from income tax.
- Government should also progressively reduce the funding for universities and make them adopt the route of self-sufficiency. Concurrently, a credit market for private finance of cost of higher education should be developed.
- A Private University Bill should be legislated to encourage establishment of new private universities in the fields of science and technology and management.
- Existing centres of excellence should be encouraged to establish international centres to attract overseas students. Foreign direct investment in education should be allowed, to begin with, limited to science and technology and management areas.
- All political parties should come to an understanding that they will keep away from universities and educational institutions.
- Any form of political activity on campuses of universities and educational institutions should be banned.
- Regional Engineering Colleges must be provided autonomy and resources and facilities must be upgraded.

According to this report the education sector in India needs a revolution that embraces information and communications technologies, fosters freedom and innovation and induces a market oriented competitive environment which is vital for progress and prosperity in the information era.

Social Implications of Commodification

The Birla Ambani Report though has been widely successful in capturing the imagination of the knowledge society, in articulating the role of education therein, and in establishing the prevalence of educational divide in India, its suggested strategies predominantly pave the way for the commodification of education. Its recommendations for encouragement of private sector in education, marketing India as destination of higher quality education, reducing funding for universities, private finance in higher education, establishing private universities, promoting foreign direct investment in education, banning of political activities in the educational campus, etc., not only encourages commodification and privatization of education, but also discourages the state

from fulfilling its social commitment for the educational well being the community. Can a developing country like India afford the state withdrawal from higher education? This report leaves primary education with the state. However, it does not spell out the obligation of the state to provide free quality primary education to all children. The private players are already there, in the primary sector to breed inequality in education at an early stage. Will the privatization of education or in that sense commodification of education be a panacea for all ailment, backwardness, inequality, inaccessibility and stagnation in education?

Argument in Favour of Commodification of Education: Commercialisation of education has been a contentious issue not only in India but all over the world.

Many are of the view that true competition in the education sector would improve the quality; that social accountability of education institution would be fixed by the conscious uses of these educational facilities; that the access of the marginalized group to education be increased by attracting them to the quality of education and by making education there need based and that private schools are more accountable than Government run schools. It has also been pointed out that in the spite of constitutional mandate the state has failed in last the 60 years in eradicating illiteracy and in ensuring the access of the marginalized groups in quality education. It has been suggested that the initiative of the state should continue in providing financial assistance, infrastructure etc. for educational development and the private sector should be encouraged to generate a creative and competitive environment to impart education.

You must have observed that in recent decades all over India the attraction towards private schools has increased. A careful scrutiny of facts would reveal that this has been mostly because of

- callous attitude of the bureaucracy towards Government schools,
- unsupportive and inadequate management in these schools,
- declining student-teacher ratio,
- lack of motivated teachers,
- lack of proper infrastructure,
- lack of accountability,
- proliferation of private schools with better management, better teacher-student ratio, good infrastructure and teachers and better accountability.

Such a scenario has helped only to breed inequality in quality of education and thereafter unequal access to education. While the private English medium schools have emerged to cater to the need of the elite segments of society, the vast sections of the students who are mostly from either the poor or the average economic background join the government run vernacular medium school.

It is important to mention that equal access to education is widely determined not by the progressive policy formulation of the state alone but by its democratic ideals and strong political will and commitment to ensure greater equity in education and its willingness to share power with all sections of the society. It is argued that commodification of education will help to ensure equality against the backdrop of the state's failure in providing quality education for all.

Arguments Against Commodification: A group of scholars are of the opinion that commercialization of education would lead to privatization and that as there would not be adequate control the quality will suffer, and in the process

of commercialization only market oriented academic programmes or courses would be given preference while other streams would suffer; that the commitments to enhance the marginalized groups' access to education would suffer and that the profit motive would get preference over social commitment.

- As you have understood education has several important roles to play especially for social development, collective empowerment and in advancing social and economic well being of society, accumulating and sharing knowledge and cultural capital. It is also a means for individual development and expression. As education plays the critical social role it cannot be reduced to a mere tradable commodity. It is important that economic forces unclashed by the forces of globalization endeavour to treat education as a marketable commodity ignoring its social and national role.
- The National Union of Students in Europe (2001) points out that it is imperative for the state to ensure free education at all levels. However, in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Covenants on Social, Cultural and Economic Rights which has called for open access to higher education, many states in Europe introduced tuition fees to augment finances in higher education in the 1950's. This has resulted to an exclusion of student specially from disadvantaged backgrounds from the corridors of University education and where the elite students have got comfortable access.
- The structural adjustment programme of IMF and World Bank have let to extensive privatization of higher education in the post 1970's and after wards. The profit motive of the private providers has ignored the vital social, cultural and economic role of education and furthered the exclusion of learners from the disadvantaged groups from higher education.
- The liberalization of trade in education services under the GATS of the WTO imposed several binding obligation for specific sectors on the member states of the UNO. The most important obligation is that of "*most favoured nation principle*" which means service suppliers from different countries have to be treated equally. Again there are rules for unlimited market access and the so-called national treatment, which means all providers of education have to be treated equally with the to national one. The phenomena of transnational education in the form of on line education, internet-based universities, branch campuses or offshore education institutions, etc., have got prominence under the GATS regime.
- The expansion of transnational education undermining the significance of the social and national role of education have not only furthered commodification of education but have also ignored the fact that education is a basic human right and has to be made accessible to as many as possible. Such conceptualization jeopardizes the basic democratic, liberal, moral and social significance of education in all parts of the world. To them the process of commodification of education would lead to the expansion of an elitist, exclusive, profit-oriented education system. (The National Union of Students in Europe www.esib.org/issues/tne.php). In this context Stephen J. Ball (2004) says that in the process of commodification of academic labour the student explicitly becomes the consumer, degree becomes a commodity which can be exchanged for a job rather than preparing the student for a life. Again curriculum is recognized under the process of commodification as a sequence of knowledge goblets, which can be referred as credits with a cut and paste, repackaging mechanism. In this process the pedagogic relationship and values are marginalized and the student as consumer becomes a passive learner. To quote him "privatization is not simply a technical change in the management of the delivery of educational services – it involves changes in the meaning and experience of education, what it means to be a teacher and a learner. It changes who we are and our relation to what we do, entering into all aspects of our everyday practices and

thinking – into the ways that we think about ourselves and our relations to others, even our most intimate social relations. It is changing the framework of possibilities within which we act. This is not just a process of reform, it is a process of social transformation. Without some recognition of and attention within public debate to the insidious work that is being done, in these respects, by privatization and commodification - we may find ourselves living and working in a world made up entirely of contingencies, within which the possibilities of authenticity and meaning in teaching, learning and research are gradually but inexorably erased (J. Ball 2004).

- In the Indian context, the issue of commodification of education has several social economic and political ramifications. “Traditionally, investment in education was considered more of a social obligation, which the state had to fulfill. However, ever since economic reforms were introduced in India in the early 1990’s, resource allocation for higher education has consistently followed a downward trend. With the Government’s ability to finance higher education reaching a saturation level, it was argued that higher education might be considered as a ‘non-merit good’, as the benefits accrue more to individuals than to society in general.” As an implication of such formulation (a) the Government would stop providing subsidies to non-merit goods, (b) withdraw itself gradually from the pre-given social commitment of open access to higher education, (c) smoothen the way for privatization and commercialization of education. As a further ramification to such processes of commodification and privatization of education more and more attention could be paid towards the market driven courses, while the general courses like General Science, Social Science, Humanities, Art and Literature will be areas of least priority. It would become no longer appropriate to read Shakespeare, while courses like Communicative English, Professional writing or Business English would become the order of the day. The economic non-viability of certain courses cannot become a justification for their withdrawal (Sudha Sitaraman, 2004).

23.7 Conclusion

The right to education is a fundamental human right. The State, international bodies and the civil society have committed themselves to ensure this fundamental right. This unit has dealt in detail with the commitment made in the Constitution of India for the educational well being of all sections of population – women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, religious and linguistic minorities. However, in spite of such commitments the curse of illiteracy has been looming large on the horizon of Indian society. Several committees and commissions have recommended several remedial actions to ensure education for all and to enhance access to quality education by all sections of the population. The World Development Summit, the Dakar Conference, the UNO have categorically expressed and all the members States of the UNO have accepted the commitment for the eradication of illiteracy and promotion of professional education among all. All the member States of UNO have also committed towards the philosophy of commodification of education and have liberalized their market to introduce trade in education. The contradictory processes of commodification on the one hand and of social commitment on the other have severe implications for the members of society. In this unit we have discussed all these implications in detail.

23.9 Further Reading

Stephen J. Ball 2004 “*Education for Sale!*” *The Commodification of Everything*. King’s Annual Education Lecture 2004, Institute of Education, University of London.

The National Unions of Students in Europe 2006. *Transnational Education*.
<http://www.esib.org/issues/tne.php>

Unit 24

Social and Philosophical Foundations of Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

Contents

- 24.1 Introduction
- 24.2 Defining Open and Distance Learning
- 24.3 Philosophical Foundations
- 24.4 Historical Evolution
- 24.5 Different Forms of Distance Education
- 24.6 Emerging Models of ODL
- 24.7 Conclusion
- 24.8 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Define Open and Distance Learning (ODL);
- Describe the important theories of ODL;
- Trace the evolution of ODL;
- Identify the different forms of ODL; and
- Discuss the emerging models of ODL.

24.1 Introduction

Since you are pursuing your studies at an open university you must be familiar with the term Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and may have some knowledge about the ODL system. In this unit we will be defining the terms “Distance Education” and “Open Learning”. An attempt has been made to give you an overview of the major philosophies that underlie Distance Education (DE). We have also traced the historical evolution of DE through broadly three distinct phases namely, Correspondence Education, Open Education and Virtual Education. Lastly we have discussed the different forms of ODL existing today and also the emerging models in the light of the developments in communication technologies that have penetrated all over the world. After going through this unit you will get a deeper insight with regard to the ODL system.

24.2 Defining Open and Distance Learning

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) can be simply described as “learning/studying at a distance”. The teacher and learner are separated both in space and time. Bridging the distance and guiding the learning process is effected by means of specially prepared materials (self-study (learning) materials), which may be delivered through various media e.g., print, TV, radio, satellite, audio/video cassettes, CD-ROMs, Internet etc. Prof. Kulandaiswamy, former vice chancellor of Indira Gandhi National Open University maintained that Distance Education is the third stage in the evolution of education, the first two stages being the Gurukul system of the past and the Classroom system of the present.

A technological medium replaces the inter-personal communication of conventional education, as two-way communication is possible for both the student and the teacher. This form of education is known by a variety of names, viz., ‘Correspondence Education’, ‘Home Study’, ‘Independent Study’, ‘External Study’, ‘Off Campus study’, ‘Open Learning’, ‘Open Education’, etc.

In Australia, its official name is External System and Extra-mural System in New Zealand. This description carries the vibes of old London External system, which only provided examination but no teaching. The external exam system was introduced by London University in the second half of the 19th century to cater to the needs of higher education of people geographically distant from London. In such a system the learner was not provided any study materials and had to prepare for the exams on his/ her own.

Today two terms that are being used almost inter-changeably are 'Open Learning' and 'Distance Education' and they are often combined to be known as Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Let us understand the meaning of these terms and what they connote.

Reflection and Action 24.1

What do you understand by Open Distance Learning?

Distance Education

Distance education (DE) is an umbrella term, which describes all the teaching learning arrangements in which the learner and the teacher are normally separated by space and/ or by time. Such a form of education transcends the barriers of time, space, sex, creed community and religion, thus breaking the myth of elitism in conventional education.

The most complete definition of DE can be attributed to Keegan (1986; 1996) who characterizes DE as:

- **Separation of teacher and learner**

This is found in many definitions and is central to the whole concept of DE. But Keegan's definition allows for limited face to face contact between the teacher and the learner and among learners themselves and also through other technological media like audio / video conferencing etc.

- **Influence of an educational organization/Institution**

This characteristic has been emphasized by Holmberg (1981) in his definition of DE (which we will be discussing in the next section). Keegan also adopted it to include the influence of an educational organization / institution in the planning and preparation of learning materials that differentiates DE from private study.

- **Use of technical media**

Naturally the separation of the teacher and learner would require the process of communication to take place in some other way, i.e., by print, electronic, mechanical and other devices.

- **Provision of two- way communication**

Moore's (1973) and Holmberg's (1981) definitions of DE stress on this factor that Keegan incorporated in his definition (See 24.3.2 and 24.3.3 for details). DE must involve a significant amount of real non-contiguous two-way communication between teacher and learner for facilitating and supporting the educational process.

- **Separation of learner from peer group**

Obviously when the learner is studying at a distance at his or own place, there will be a separation of the learner from his or her peer group.

- **Industrialization of Education**

This concept stems from Peters (1967) definition of DE. Keegan accepted Peters' view that DE is the most industrialized form of education as compared to conventional oral education.

- **Individualization of Learning/Student Autonomy**

Wedemeyer (1981), like Keegan also emphasized DE to be a form of self-study, as it is based on personal work by an individual learner, more or less independent from the direct guidance of tutors. In other words, a quasi-permanent absence of the learning group throughout the length of the learning process, with the possibility of occasional meetings, either face to face or by electronic means.

Open Learning

Open learning covers a wide range of innovations and reforms in the educational sector. It is generally regarded as being a learner-centered system, which is far broader than distance education. Open learning systems aim to redress social or educational inequality and to offer opportunities not provided by conventional colleges or universities. Educational opportunities are planned deliberately so that access to education is available to larger sections of society. Hence there is flexibility with regard to entry, place, method, but also with regard to the choice and combination of courses, assessment and course completion etc. The larger the number of such restrictions left unobserved, the higher the degree of openness.

Thus DE stresses the means by which education is achieved, the latter the objectives and the character of the educational process. As Prof. Ram Reddy (1988) the founder of Indian Open Universities said, “the idea is to provide educational facilities to a larger number of people scattered all over, i.e., providing greater access to education”. Several countries of the world have adopted the open learning philosophy and have started open universities to provide innovative education and to strengthen distance education. The main features of open universities are:

- like conventional universities, they are autonomous bodies and are free to take their own decisions;
- they use multiple media for instructional purposes, and for supporting distance learners in their learning endeavours;
- they have a strong learner support system;
- high quality materials are prepared by a team of experts;
- entry qualifications are flexible and relaxed;
- the learner can study at his / her own pace, place and convenience;
- there is uniformity on the quality of education as students have access to the same high quality education from wherever they want to access it. (Reddy 1988).

Reflection and Action 24.2

Reflect on the main features of Distance Education. Compare the functions of conventional universities to that of Open Universities.

24.3 Philosophical Foundations

Several theorists have developed their own theory about ODL. Let us discuss some of the well known theories pertaining to DE.

Industrialized Form of Education

An influential theory is that of *Otto Peters* (1973) who described DE as rationalized form of industrial production: a division of labour with each individual in the course team having a different role in the production and dissemination of knowledge; mechanization, as the dissemination of knowledge was achieved through assembly line production; mass production, since there was theoretically no limit as to the number of copies of the same course that could be produced or students who could study the course once it was produced.

Independent Study

Yet another theorist who was influential in the 1980s was Charles Wedemeyer (1977) who regarded DE as an optimistic enterprise in the provision of lifelong learning in which learners are independent of teachers, which he defined as “independent study”.

Michael Moore (1973) also confirmed the notions of Wedemeyer (1977) and he further sharpened them by stressing on two critical characteristics of independent study, namely, dialogue and individual study. For Moore dialogue may be interpreted as academic interaction aimed at effecting teaching and learning. Individualization is a measure of the extent of the responsiveness of a programme to the objectives of an individual learner. According to Moore, the distance between a teacher and a learner should not be measured in spatial terms but in terms of the degrees of dialogues and individualization. The higher the degree of both these components the less they are distant pedagogically and conversely a low degree of both variables will make a course / programme greatly distant.

He further pointed out that a distance learner was an independent learner as he/she was relieved from the tyranny of attendance and could study at his/her own pace, place and time. This type of study could be described as self directed learning whereby the learner develops a sense of maturity. The focus of this type of education is more on learning than teaching. Hence, it is said to be a learner centered system.

Guided Didactic Conversation

Another significant theorist of DE was Holmberg (1981) who propounded the theory of teaching learning conversation in DE. The idea that he projected was that a DE course represents a communication process that is felt to have the character of a conversation, only then the students will be more motivated and successful than if it has an impersonal text book character. The conversational character is brought about both by real communication through tutor comments on students' assignments, or comments over the telephone/fax/e-mail/post etc. by the teacher and by adopting a conversational style in printed and recorded subject matter which attempts to involve the students emotionally and engage them in a development and exchange of views. Just as a lecturer in a class-room tries to provide instructions or deliver content in an understandable manner and so to say adopts a conversational approach with regard to presentation of content. It is exactly in the same manner Holmberg refers to adoption of conversational style in the development of self-learning materials for distance learners, what many refer to as building the teacher in to the text.

He regarded it as a form of guided didactic conversation and who considered seven postulates to DE namely: creation of personal relationship between teaching and learning parties; well developed self instructional materials, intellectual pleasure in the exercise, language and conventions should foster friendly conversation, message received by the learner should be conversational intone, conversational approach should always be used and lastly planning and guiding are necessary for organized study. Holmberg's approach is therefore more humanistic than Peter's analysis.

Cooperative Learning

Today with the onset of online learning (which is a subset for DE) we have cooperative learning propounded by Johnson and Johnson (1990) and Mc Connell (2000), wherein the learning process is not seen as an individual pursuit but as a part of a social process where learners help each other develop understanding of content in an enjoyable and stimulating process and at the same time construct knowledge which would not have been possible individually

but only in a group. This type of learning is particularly possible in computer supported learning environments or web based education/online learning/e-learning.

Thus DE is no longer a one-way transmission of knowledge as it was in correspondence education, that implied student passivity. Cooperative learning is the best example of how DE has evolved over the years and culminated into a dynamic interactive process with its focus more on the learner and his/her learning.

Reflection and Action 24.3

Describe various forms of transacting process of education. Which according to you is most suitable for India and why?

24.4 Historical Evolution

The history of the evolution and growth of ODE is closely linked to the growth and expansion of technology. It can be broadly divided into 3 distinct phases: Correspondence Education phase, Open Education phase and Virtual Education phase, that we have discussed below.

Bos 24.1: Quote

A forerunner: "Apostle Paul, who wrote the famous epistles in order to teach Christian communities in Asia Minor how to lead a life as Christians in an adverse environment. He used the technology of writing and transportation in order to do his missionary work without being compelled to travel. A technology based but a pre-industrial approach." - Otto Peters

Correspondence Education Phase (mid 19th century - present)

Correspondence study is the oldest form of ODL. Its origin can be traced to the 1840s when Sir Issac Pitman came up with the ignominious idea of delivering instruction through penny post. Thus ODL originated in the private sector as a means to provide teaching service to home-based students. Within a few decades (by the end of the 19th century) private correspondence colleges were established in many countries. For example, Skerrys College, Edinburgh (1878); Foulks Lynch Correspondence Tuition Service, London (1884); University Correspondence College Cambridge (1887) (taken over by the National Extension College in 1965); Diploma Correspondence College (1894) presently known as Wolsey Hall, are some of the well known institutions that came up in England (Dinsdale, 1953). The other famous correspondence colleges, were Hermods School, Sweden (1868) (now Hermods-NKI, in Skolan) (Gadden, 1973); Illionoise Wesleyan College (1874) (Correspondence University Ithaca, N.Y., (1883) and the University Extension Department of Chicago University (1890) in USA (Mathieson 1971).

The 20th century witnessed the continuing expansion of commercial correspondence education, which can be distinguished from the 19th century by the growth of interest in DE on the part of national authorities as a means to reach out to those students living in isolated places. Hence during the first half of the 20th century DE made significant development in countries like USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, France, etc. This form of provision suited countries with large national territories and sparse populations. It was therefore not surprising that initially European governments remained relatively uninterested with the exception of France, which took to it due to the disruption caused mainly by the outbreak of the Second World War (Rumble 1989).

DE took deep roots in several countries in the 1930s. The founding of the International Council of Correspondence Education in 1939 is indicative of the

fact that the idea caught the attention of educationist throughout the developed world. The first world conference of this council was held in Victoria, British Columbia, in August 1938 and 88 delegates mostly from Canada and the USA attended the conference. Australia, New Zealand and Scotland were also represented (Srivastava and Reddy 1998)

It was only a matter of time before the principle of egalitarianism was expanded to cover not just those who were unable to attend a normal college / college at the normal age but those who earlier in life lacked the opportunity to do so. Such concerns arose after the Second World War not only in developed countries but also in the developing countries as well, soon after they achieved their independence. In the developing countries of Africa and Asia (1960s - 70s) and South America (1970s - 80s) the problem was not only of numbers due to population growth but also that of increasing participation rates. Correspondence education emerged as a viable alternative to meet the enormous demand for access to formal education following de-colonization. This burgeoning demand created a consequential requirement for trained teachers, DE came to be seen as a way of doing both these things (Manjulika and Reddy 2002).

Reflection and Action 24.4

What was the most primitive form of ODL and where and when did it commence in India?

Open and Distance Education (1969 - present)

A century's worth of research into cognition gave birth to pedagogical method and the concept of providing effective support to distance learners emerged. The increased desire to use more media (specially radio and television) and also the desire to open up higher education to larger segments of the population by eliminating entrance requirements and offering higher education at affordable prices gave birth to the first open university namely the Open University (OU) of UK (1969). It introduced new elements in DE such as the use of course development teams; use of tutor counsellors; regional and study centers; and the inclusion of audio/video material into course materials. OUs employ media in many forms and to varying extents. It includes mail, fax, radio, TV, satellite broadcasts, video/audio tapes, teleconferencing, computers and recently the Internet. Since the 1980s more interactive technologies began to be employed.

The founding of the OU, UK was a major landmark in the history of ODL. It raised the profile of DE, bringing DE from the margins closer to the centerstage of higher education. As thenceforth DE institutions emulated the example of the Open University (OU), UK and provided distance learners with opportunities for interpersonal communication and feedback, which was almost absent in correspondence education. It was not only the course materials developed by OUs but also the learner support services and feedback provided by these universities that enabled ODL to come of age. In the two decades following the establishment of OU, UK, several such OUs were set up across the world. Today there are more than 50 Open Universities, of which the maximum are in Asia (Reddy and Manjulika 2000).

Thus the period from 1969 onwards has been the most progressive period for the development and credibility of ODL in the world. The list of Open Universities established in different parts of the world is given below in Table 1.

Table 1: Open Universities of the World

Asia

1. Allama Iqbal Open University (Pakistan)
2. Al-Qudds Open University (Palestine)
3. Anadolu University (Turkey)
4. Arab Open University (Kuwait)
5. Bangladesh Open University (Bangladesh)
6. Central Radio and TV University (China)
7. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University(India)
8. Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Open University (India)
9. Krishna Kant Handique Open University (India)
10. Hanoi Open University (Vietnam)
11. Indira Gandhi National Open University(India)
12. Karnataka State Open University (India)
13. Korea National Open University (Korea)
14. Kyong Open University (South Korea)
15. Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University(India)
16. Nalanda Open University(India)
17. Netaji Subhas Open University(India)
18. Open University Hong Kong (Hong Kong, China)
19. Open University Malaysia (Malaysia)
20. Pandit Sunderlal Sharma Open University (India)
21. Payame Noor University (Iran)
22. Shanghai TV University (China)
23. Sukhotai Thammathirat Open University (Thailand)
24. Tamil Nadu Open University, India
25. The National Open University (Taiwan, China)
26. The Open University of Israel (Isarel)
27. The Open University of Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka)
28. The University of the Philippines Open University (Philippines)
29. Tianjin Radio and Television University (China)
30. Universitas Terbuka (Indonesia)
31. University of Air (Japan)
32. University of Distance Education (Myanmar)
33. UP Rajarshi Tandon Open University, India
34. Vardhman Mahavir Open University, India
35. Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, India
36. Yunnan Radio & TV University of China

Africa

1. Nigeria Open University
2. The Open University of Tanzania (Tanzania)
3. University of South Africa (South Africa)
4. Zimbabwe Open University (Zimbabwe)

Europe

1. Consorzio per l' Universita a Distanza (Italy)
2. Fern Universitat (Germany)
3. Jutland Open University (Denmark)
4. Open Universiteit, (The Netherlands)

5. Centre National d' Enseignement a Distance (France)
6. The Hellenic Open University (Greece)
7. The Open University (UK)
8. Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia (Spain)
9. Universidade Aberta, (Portugal)

North America

1. Athabasca University (Canada)
2. Open Learning Agency (OU and OC)
3. Open University of British Columbia (Canada)
4. Tele Universite (Canada)

South America

1. Universidad de la Sabana (Sabana OU, Columbia)
2. Universidad Estatal a Distancia (Costa Rica)
3. Universidad Nacional Abierta (Venezuela)

Source : <http://www.icdl.open.ac.uk>

Reflection and Action 24.5

What do you think have prompted the development of open and distance system of education in India?

Virtual Education (1990s - present)

With the widespread availability of personal computers, two new forms of technology became viable for DE purposes: multimedia (specially CD-ROM) and computer networks. The rapid developments in information technology, specially the Internet, promises greater learner centeredness, facilitates more constructivist methods and better quality interaction (synchronous as well as asynchronous); the advantage of time space independence of asynchronous communication; and unlimited access to information. This computer-mediated communication (CMC) is providing an antidote to the main weakness of the correspondence as well as Open University systems of education.

The increasing diversity in demand for education from different quarters had made virtual education a popular model for the 21st century. Concepts of life long learning, individualized / personalized learning and time-free, space-free "just in time" learning arrangements are emerging to provide opportunities to learn on the job, professional upgrading of employees, staff development and training, teaching, extending classrooms to remote and rural areas, adult education, curriculum enrichment, and a convenient choice for full time learners. New alliances have emerged between education and industry and among universities and other educational institutions. Many new providers of higher education have entered the market, such as private enterprises (e.g., Phoenix University and Jones International University, USA; NIIT, Aptech, Zee Education, India), corporate training networks, specialized service organizations and textbook publishers (e.g., IBM Global Campus and McGraw Hill Learning Infrastructure); business corporations (e.g., 9 Universities have joined Next Ed on the online company in Hong Kong that produces technology for DE to form the Global University Alliance) (Manjulika and Reddy 2006).

The US is undoubtedly the world leader in the use of ICT in education and in demonstrating virtual education. Some 170,000 American students took online courses in 1998 and the number would have tripled by the end of 2002. USA also boasts of several new alliances between education and industry and consortia of universities offering virtual education (e.g., NTU Consortium of 51 universities; AT&T Learning Network, WGU, etc.).

The ICT boom has also enveloped Europe and Australia. The European Union has been a major driver of virtual education. However, the UK has led in the

way in Europe. Like in North America and Europe, in Australia too, a number of universities have set up virtual campuses to attract students from across the globe. In Latin America, ITESM is a private institution located in Mexico with 29 Campuses across Latin America and North America linked via satellite and digital integrated network.

In Asia and Africa, as compared to North America and Europe, the proportion of population participating in the Internet revolution is small, but the rate of growth is rapid. A few open universities namely, OUHK, Hong Kong, KNOU, South Korea and IGNOU, India have taken the lead. In Africa the World Bank has taken the lead in setting up the African Virtual University in 1997, which provides high quality education to countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (Reddy and Manjulika 2002).

Reflection and Action 24.6

What can be attributed as the major reason for the growth of Virtual Education? What is the future of virtual education in the context of aims of open and distance education?

24.5 Different Forms of Distance Education

The oldest form of distance education is the “correspondence education model”, i.e., a student studies in isolation from the other students and from his/her teacher/instructor, primarily through printed materials sent by post. (e.g., Correspondence Course Institutes attached to conventional universities in India)

The next form of distance education is “multi-media model”, wherein besides print other technologies such as audio/video tapes, radio and television broadcasts, telephone, teleconferencing etc., including limited face to face sessions, began to be used for instruction as well as for supporting the distance learner (e.g., UKOU (UK), IGNOU (India), Fern Universitat (Germany), etc.).

The third form is the “tele learning model”, where in institutions began to use TV to reduce campus space pressures by delivery of courses to students at home. The basic tele-learning model involves three elements, in text, a study guide and a series of video lessons and occasional on campus meetings (e.g., Central Radio and TV University, China).

The fourth form is the “distributed learning model”, which is greatly stimulated by the arrival of interactive telecommunications. This model is based on real time delivery system. Secondly the technological infrastructure is pre-determined by the sponsoring institution. This institution retains control over the time and pace of study, wherein the instruction is highly spontaneous, interactive with emphasis on instructor centered, lecture-based approach that characterizes most classroom instruction (e.g., Video based extension of face to face teaching at National Technological University, USA and a technology based distance teaching done at Project, Canada).

The latest form of DE is the “flexible learning model”. The primary technological agents that have led to this model are computer based communications – from electronic mail to the worldwide web and CD-ROM, with others already being used in DE, offer students the opportunity to study anytime anywhere. It also provides them a much richer environment for interaction both synchronous as well as asynchronous, but also greater control over the subject matter and over the pathways through that subject matter, creating a new kind of learning community. These key characteristics – asynchronous interactivity, resource-based, learner-centered, spontaneous and at the same time autonomous independent learning is reshaping the curriculum as well. It is giving rise to a new concept namely that of customized or personalized learning, allowing the

learner to tailor the curriculum in accordance with his or her own needs that the institution readily provides. The defining characteristics are no longer geographic distance, and learner autonomy, but learner control, an active learning environment that emphasizes learner interaction with resources, with other learners and with the instructor. (e.g., Virtual/Online Universities of the World). A list of some of the prominent Virtual Universities of the world is given below in Table 2.

Table 2: Major Virtual Universities of the World

1.	African Virtual University, www.avu.org
2.	Bool Virtual University, www.bool.tit.ac.kr
3.	British Aerospace Virtual University (UK), www.bac.co.uk
4.	California Virtual University www.california.edu
5.	Canada Virtual University
6.	Contact North, www.cnorth.edu.on.ca
7.	CU Online (Colorado University), www.cconline.org www.cuonline.edu
8.	Cyber ED (University of Massachusetts Dartmouth), www.umassd.edu/cybered/distancelearninghome.html
9.	Digital Think, www.digitalthink.com
10.	Edu.Com, www.educum.edu
11.	Knowledge Online (Mind Extension University), www.mcu.edu/meu/
12.	Korea Virtual University Consortium, www.knou.ac.ka
13.	National Technological University, www.ntu.edu
14.	Net Varsity, www.niitnetvarsity.com
15.	Online University, www.uol.com
16.	The Global Learning Network of NKI (Norway), www.nettakolen.com
17.	Virtual Online University (Athena University) www.athena.edu
18.	Virtual University Enterprises (Netherlands), www.vuc.com
19.	Virtual University of Hagan (Germany), www.femuni.hagen.de
20.	Western Governors University, www.wgu.edu

24.6 Emerging Models of ODL

What is emerging today is a very complex educational mosaic. Institutions offering distance education courses can be arrayed on a continuum from physical to virtual. The growth and development of virtual education is fostering the emergence of new organizational forms. Some of which are described below :

Model 1: Networked Model - Institutions that use digital networks synchronously / asynchronously for the delivery and tuition of courses. Learner support is also provided online. They draw upon the best resources wherever they are located. Examples: African Virtual University (Africa), Australian Universities overseas campuses, and all Virtual Universities of the world.

Model 2: Advanced Open Distance Education Model - Institutions that adopt Internet based instruction and support to strengthen the existing courses already being taught at a distance. Examples, UKOU, KNOU, IGNOU etc. Some of dual mode universities of Australia would come under this category that have adopted third generation distance education technologies for offering both instruction and support to their distance learners.

Model 3: Consortium Certification Model - Pooling together of distance education courses offered by different institutions. Such a consortium does not provide instruction but are authorized to award credentials and to provide a variety of services such as registration, assessment, learning records etc. Examples are Regents College (US) Western Governors University (USA) Open Learning Agency (Canada), etc.

Model 4: Consortium Service Provider Model - This is yet another consortium that offer a pool of courses offered by different institutions but do not have the right to confer certification / awards. Example California Virtual University (USA), etc. (Manjulika and Reddy 2006).

Reflection and Action 24.8

Keeping existing models and emerging models of ODL in view, what should be the focus of Open Universities?

24.7 Conclusion

From a near total reliance on print based courses, over the years, technology used in distance education expanded to include a plethora of technologies, shifting the emphasis from single technology delivery systems to integrated approaches. Also with respect to the teaching-learning methodology there has been a paradigm shift. Correspondence education totally lacked live communication or for that matter any type of communication besides the course material. Later radio and TV broadcasts offered lecture aspect of the classroom but not the interaction opportunities. The adoption of interactive technologies like audio conferencing, teleconferencing offered limited learner participation mainly through telephone communication, though two-way video conferencing simulates a class-room situation and real time synchronous interaction. The latest computer mediated communication provides “real time” multimedia interactive communication through the “virtual” equivalent of the regular classroom experience.

24.8 Further Reading

Reddy, G. Ram 1988. “Distance Education, What, Why and How?” In B. N. Koul., B. Singh and M. M. Ansari (eds.) 1992. *Studies in Distance Education*. Association of Indian Universities and IGNOU: New Delhi

Reddy, Venugopal and Manjulika S. (eds.) 2000. *The World of Open and Distance Learning*. Viva Books Pvt. Ltd.: New Delhi

Srivastava, Manjulika and Reddy, V. Venugopal 1998. “Distance Education: A Global Perspective”. In Tilak R. Kem and Rubi Esirgen (eds.) *Reengineering of Distance Education*. Aravali Books International: New Delhi

Unit 25

Critical Issues in Open and Distance Learning

Structure

- 25.1 Introduction
- 25.2 Equity and Access
- 25.3 Cost Effectiveness
- 25.4 Integration of Technology
- 25.5 Networking and Collaboration
- 25.6 Quality Concerns
- 25.7 Research in ODL Systems
- 25.8 Apprehensions Regarding ODL
- 25.9 Conclusion
- 25.10 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- Understand the importance of ODL in bringing about equity and access in the field of higher education;
- Comprehend that ODL is an economic mode of providing education;
- Appreciate the contribution of technology ODL;
- Internalise the need for networking and research in ODL;
- Understand the need for maintaining quality in ODL; and
- Comprehend the apprehensions regarding ODL.

25.1 Introduction

In Unit 24 you have studied the social and philosophical foundations of ODL. In this unit we shall discuss certain critical issues that affect the functioning and growth of ODL systems. Earlier, distance education was considered to be an alternative to the conventional system of education that provides instructions in a face-to-face manner. However, now it is no longer merely an alternative or the second choice but a system in its own right that is gaining popularity as the first choice of thousands of people seeking higher education. Since it started in 1962 in India as correspondence education, it has covered a long way. Mainly due to the great degree of flexibility and openness attached to it, it is today popularly known as Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system. The popularity of this system lies in its ability to reach out to people from geographically different places, remote areas and to those with varying social and academic backgrounds. The thousands, who for a variety of reasons find themselves unable to enroll in institutions requiring physical presence of the learners find in the ODL system the answer to their problem.

The term 'Open' in ODL implies greater access to educational system, greater flexibility within the system and greater independence of the learner studying through this system. Although learners may or may not be at a distance from the institution offering ODL, the greatest advantage for the learners is that they need not be physically present in at institution. This is the main reason why ODL as a system is undergoing rapid growth and expansion. For ensuring that the growth of this system is not only rapid but also healthy, there are certain critical issues that need to be addressed appropriately. In this unit, we shall study some of the critical issues pertaining to ODL such as equity and access, cost effectiveness, use of technology, networking, quality, need for research and apprehensions as to the impact of the rapid growth of ODL.

These issues are considered to be critical because they have a direct bearing upon the healthy growth of the ODL system and its ability to achieve its goals.

25.2 Equity and Access

In this section we shall discuss first the role of ODL in bringing about equity in educational opportunities and thereafter about access to such opportunities. First let us discuss the need for equity and the means for achieving it. The system of ODL as we know, emerged mainly to equalize educational opportunities and thus democratise it. It was being increasingly felt, the world over that the conventional system of education can cater to the educational needs of only some of the aspirants seeking higher education while the rest are left out. At the same time it was accepted that education is the only means of ushering in social development and that more than the erstwhile important land, labour and capital, knowledge is becoming the driving force of the economies of the world. Therefore, for the progress of the individual and the prosperity of the nation, ODL is the only potential means of bringing in equity through educational opportunities for one and all. As we know, the barriers to admitting huge number of students in the conventional system are their limited infrastructure and the limited teaching force. But in the ODL these barriers can be easily overcome and the benefits of the infrastructure and the teaching force already available can be multiplied several times to serve a huge population of students simultaneously. Therefore, in a situation with ever escalating demand for enrolment along with the paucity of human and financial resources, one practical choice was to opt for open universities in order to provide higher education (Yadav and Panda 1999).

The rising popularity of the democratic form of governance all over the world during the last century resulted in national policies that led to the democratization of educational opportunities too. With the realization of the potential of distance education, state policies were framed in this regard, as a part of the national policies on education. It was felt that the needs pertaining to egalitarianism, modernization, rural development, continuing education for providing training to those in-service, economic means of providing education, etc. that are directly related to social development could be fulfilled to a great extent by resorting to ODL (Rumble 1986). These needs are mostly the needs of the nation and its masses. Hence, ODL while attempting to fulfill these needs purports to uplift the masses through equalizing educational opportunities.

There are people in our country who live in geographically remote and isolated places like difficult hilly terrains, remote border areas, isolated islands, etc. where people are deprived of proper educational facilities due to the lack of institutions offering higher education. Such people can benefit through the educational opportunities brought to their doorsteps by ODL. There are also many people who had to drop out of the formal system of education and discontinue their studies due to a number of reasons. They may find it too late or inconvenient to rejoin the conventional system of education with its too many rigidities. Distance education, which is more flexible, can be the choice of such people. Also the people, who are in-service and require professional development will constantly need to update their knowledge and skills, undergo orientation programmes and other sorts of training, with the demands placed by the changing economic and technological scenario and the ever-expanding knowledge base. ODL happens to be the viable means for providing training and fulfilling the educational needs of the in-service people.

Access to education

We have discussed that ODL is the means for bringing about equity in the field of education and making it accessible to a wide cross section of the people. However, accessibility in the true sense means not only the availability of

educational opportunities but also that following enrolment in the educational programmes the learners are not deterred in any way by the complications of learning from a distance. This requires adequate student support services. Moreover, the nature of the programmes should be such that they fulfill the divergent and dynamic needs of the learners.

Let us discuss the first issue, i.e., necessity to provide student support. It is well known that the dropout rate in distance education is quite high and there is also the allegation that quantity (huge enrolment) is not matched by quality of student support, leading to high attrition rates. It is not enough to provide educational packages to the adult learners, especially those who may be new learners. It is more important that they are provided with adequate student support so that they remain motivated and do not drop out. Student support in the form of adequate academic and non-academic counseling, tutoring, face to face contact programmes, wherever necessary opportunities for practical training, etc. should be an integral part of the educational programmes so as to improve the accessibility of available educational opportunity.

Now let us discuss the second issue, i.e., need for socially relevant programmes. It is important that through ODL, educational programmes that would fulfill the educational needs of the masses in the true sense are provided. Unlike the earlier practice which emphasized that educational programmes are mainly of academic value, ODL has to be treated as the channel that would provide education which is not only of academic value but is also need-based and caters to the diverse requirements of the learners. For instance, there are today pressing social problems like illiteracy, female foeticide, AIDS, etc., that require mass education programmes. There is also the need to provide educational programmes that would bring about rural development and women empowerment. Programmes for adult education, for training those in-service and for improving the functioning of those pursuing different occupations like farming, running poultries, etc. are required for mass education, continuing education and above all for making education a guarantor of social and economic development. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and several other open learning institutions of our country have educational programmes of academic value as well as those that can fulfill these requirements. Teacher education programmes that are training thousands of teachers at different levels of education every year, programmes for generating awareness about AIDS, and for empowerment of women, those catering to the needs of farmers, engineers, doctors, nurses, are some such programmes that have social relevance.

Accessibility has yet another connotation. While offering programmes it is to be seen if the technologies integrated keep the programme within the reach of the target group. Hence, while designing educational programmes, whether the expenses incurred for purchasing the hardware and the software is within the means of the learners needs to be considered. Also whether the infrastructure generally available permits their use has also to be seen. A course with softwares integrated into it that requires heavy financial investment by the learners can adversely affect accessibility.

Therefore it has to be ensured that ODL not only makes education accessible to many but also fulfills their diverse needs so as to bring about human resource development in diverse areas. Then only would the social development brought about by education spread out evenly throughout the country and not just in urban areas.

Reflection and Action 25.1

How can ODL democratize educational opportunities? How can ODL opportunities be made accessible in the true sense to the adult and in-service learners?

25.3 Cost Effectiveness

Since independence, with increasing demand for higher education, the conventional system of education has undergone great expansion. There has been tremendous increase in the number of institutions as well as in the enrolment at the tertiary level of education. Due to the priority accorded to elementary education, the government is finding it difficult to contribute adequately towards higher education. Therefore, it is becoming necessary for educational institutions to exercise economy without sacrificing the quality of education. There have been studies indicating that ODL is cost effective and in the long run it turns out to be the more economic means of providing education. As we know distance education can use the physical and human resources already available with it for increasing enrolment without incurring significant additional expenses.

There have been studies that reveal that the unit cost of teaching is lower in the distance mode than in the conventional mode. Greater number of learners can hence be educated by spending less amount of money through the distance mode. As underlined by Rumble, (1986) a cost analysis carried out in institutions offering distance education in different parts of the world reveals that they incur less cost per student, per graduate and per credit. Also when we consider the cost incurred in distance mode and conventional mode, the per capita expenditure for providing instructions is found to be lower in the distance mode. The average annual recurrent cost incurred for providing instruction to a learner of an open university has also been found to be significantly lower than that of a conventional one. It has been found that in open universities, following an investment of a certain amount of capital the recurring expenses get lower in the successive years if the enrolment figures can be maintained at a high level.

Education offered by ODL is cost effective mainly because it adopts a sort of industrial approach with mass production and distribution of learning material with the help of the infrastructure already established to a much larger student population that has been enrolled. The need for a bigger campus, buildings, and more classrooms and more teachers does not arise. Teachers are inbuilt in the pedagogically designed learning materials. There is thus substitution of teachers or labour of conventional systems with media i.e. capital in ODL systems. Also, a small group of teaching and non-teaching staff can operate the entire network of headquarter, regional centers, sub regional centers, study centers and programme centers with the help of information and communication technology.

In ODL the initial investment is quite heavy with expenses being incurred for establishing the infrastructure, which requires facilities for telecommunication through the electronic media and even satellites. Thereafter significant costs are incurred in designing, developing and launching academic programmes by producing learning materials in the print and electronic media. But it has been experienced that the initially high investment, is overcome by subsequent high enrolment mainly because reproduction of learning materials requires comparatively less cost. It has also been found that ODL systems become financially self-supporting earlier due to the regular income generated from fees, sale of forms, etc. and lower recurrent expenditure. In this regard certain instances have been cited by Ramanujam (2000). The Open University of Hong Kong became self-supporting within a span of just four years from its establishment. IGNOU, established in 1985, could meet 93.7% of its recurring expenditure through government funding in 1986-87. Within a decade it attained a financial position whereby it could meet 80% of its recurring expenditures from the fees paid and other sources and received Government grants only for the development of its infrastructure. Key to such financial self-sufficiency lies in the greater enrolment in ODL systems.

Now let us have a further discussion on the impact of enrolment on the various types of costs in ODL systems. We know that budgetary allocations are required for activities relating to academic functioning, for instance development of learning materials in the print form and software where a multimedia approach is adopted for imparting instruction. Related activities such as counseling, training and orienting staff for their professional development, conducting seminars, workshops, etc, undertaking research based activities, development and maintenance of the infrastructure, providing student support services, administrative functions, etc. also require budgetary allocations. According to Pillai and Nanda (1999), among the various operational costs in ODL, the fixed costs on development and production of self-learning materials do not change significantly with increase or decrease of enrolment. Variable costs on the other hand that include expenditure on student support services, delivery of learning materials, counseling, term end evaluation, etc. vary with enrolment. However, higher enrolment generates greater income and helps in recovering these costs and even in generating surplus funds for the institution. Therefore, having a large number of academic programmes, unable to attract significant student population, will enhance the unit cost.

We thus see that ODL is an economic option of providing education. Rumble (1986) has suggested certain guidelines that could further cut down costs. Some of them are discussed below:

- In ODL, a higher proportion of the costs such as those incurred for developing learning materials are in no way related to the student strength. Such developmental costs cannot be recovered if enrolment is low or for some reason if the courses are not allowed to run for a reasonable duration. Reducing expenses and managing costs being difficult in the distance education system, it is necessary to carry out a cost analysis of developing the courses, taking into account the fixed and variable costs. Instead of lowering the fixed costs that could affect the quality of the programmes, the individual elements of a course can be considered and some of them like the tutor marked assignments could be reduced. Also, instead of frequent replacement of old courses with new ones, the old ones should be allowed to run for a reasonable duration to save money.
- Choice of media is also important for reasons of economy. For instance, it has to be seen whether offering CDs would suffice or over the air transmission is also required for a particular topic.
- Purchasing the rights to adapt and use academic content developed by other institutions could also be economic.
- Appointing temporary staff for tutoring, counselling, etc., as and when required, can bring down costs.

Besides following these steps, it is necessary to base practices on principles of financial management such as subjecting proposals and plans to a cost benefit analysis, zero-based budgeting, etc. to efficiently manage the financial resources.

Reflection and Action 25.2

Explain any two ways that help in cutting down expenses in ODL systems.

important role in revolutionizing distance education in its present form. Since the last century, technology has developed a lot. There have been new inventions and their integration in different fields such as medicine, defence, etc. The field of distance education too depends heavily on technology today and its functioning is becoming more and more dependent on technology.

Today almost every aspect of distance education is supported by technology. In the teaching - learning process, technology is becoming an integral part. Also the development of learning materials, their delivery through different media, evaluation of learners, and many other things related to the academic processes depend on technology. In distance education, technology is resorted to for preparation, maintenance, revision, storage and rapid exchange of academic and other types of documents and information. It goes without saying that administration becomes easier when it is supported by technology. In ODL since the enrolment figures are quite high therefore manually preparing and maintaining records is difficult.

In the field of distance education the faculty being involved in the process of material development needs to be provided with the necessary technological facilities and know-how for the preparation and transaction of the curriculum. In India, in most of the programmes offered through the distance mode, the print medium still happens to be the master medium and students rely on this medium the most. Later on usually in a supplementary mode, along with the print medium learning materials are provided through other media. Nowadays with the availability of facilities for desktop publishing with the help of computers, the process of preparing learning materials through the print medium is easier. Also the availability of the Internet in ODL institutions provides facilities such as online libraries, online encyclopedias, scope for discussions with experts, etc. that help the process of course preparation.

Word-processing the units, editing, preparing and inserting necessary illustrations are all aided by technology. Thereafter proof reading, for errors in spellings, grammar, computations, etc. are all aided by computers. Networking of the computers at the local and wider level facilitates teamwork through computer conferencing facilities. Soft copies unlike hard copies are also easy to exchange. Computerized typesetting can be used in conjunction with word processing systems (using direct electronic communication or optical scanners for both texts and graphics). Laser printers also aid in the preparation of camera-ready copy from discs on which texts and graphics have been merged (Rumble 1986).

ODL systems today impart instructions through multimedia approach. Apart from the print medium, audio and video cassettes, computer discs, telephone, programmes on radio and television, many of which are interactive in nature, satellite mediated teleconferencing, computer conferencing, etc. are used for providing instructions and counselling. Virtual universities with provisions for online learning are also becoming popular. In India IGNOU too offers online programmes in certain areas.

We thus see that technology is indispensable for the smooth and efficient

investment being made in a particular technology is worthwhile. Instead of succumbing to the pressure to go for the latest technology, those already available have to be put to full use. Heavy investment in technology can be justified only through its regular use. Softwares produced for the electronic media and teleconferencing if not used by the learners lead to waste of resources. The pedagogic value of a technology is also to be deliberated upon before it is integrated into a particular course. Therefore, investment in technology calls for adequate planning and budgeting. Another aspect that calls for caution in technology driven ODL systems is that today through the Internet many virtual universities are trying to attract students from all over the world. Such cross border provision of education requires monitoring for its operation, accreditation, quality, curriculum and other aspects. The student community has to be aware that foreign education providers should have credibility and abide by certain norms established by the Government of the recipient nation.

We thus see that technology is indispensable for the functioning of the ODL systems. Academic activities as well as administration are aided by technology. Moreover for the multimedia approach to imparting instruction, technology is used by the ODL systems. However, while integrating technology caution has to be exercised to avoid waste of financial and other resources.

Reflection and Action 25.3

What are the benefits of using technology for developing self-learning materials?

25.5 Networking and Collaboration

Nowadays it is being increasingly realised that an organisation cannot function successfully in isolation. It has to develop and nurture linkages with other institutions and thus be open to the environment in which it is operating. Interchange of academic and other material resources, information and human resources help in invigorating the organisations. Therefore, in the field of distance education too, ODL systems are developing linkages with each other to form a network. Such networking can be at the regional, national and even international level.

ODL systems are nowadays developing collaborations with not only each other but also with institutions of other types, such as institutions offering conventional education and organisations sharing common interests with the ODL system. An ODL system can enter into collaboration with an industrial organisation, or a hospital or a college that teaches through the conventional mode. Such collaborations are usually formed for specific purposes. For instance, an ODL system with educational programmes related to an industry can collaborate with that particular industry and the two can jointly function in certain areas. Then ODL systems can collaborate with hospitals and clinics for programmes on health. The participants are bound by certain rules and regulations that govern the collaboration and they stand to benefit from each other as a result of the collaboration. Networked collaborations today provide greater flexibility to the students who enjoy the option of learning from different institutions and interact with peers and teachers from these institutions. Learning thus gets a wider perspective.

As underlined by Rumble (1986), networking and consortia formation provide a forum for diverse participation and reduce territoriality and competition. In addition, there are several other benefits that are encouraging modern trends of network formation by open universities. In Europe there is a European Association of Distance Teaching Universities. In Asia there is the Asian Association of Open Universities. Such associations of open universities also

exist in the other parts of the world. The Commonwealth of Learning, an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning/distance education knowledge, resources and technologies too undertakes activities that encourage partnerships and networking for the sharing of resources and joint functioning. There are also multinational regional universities that promote regional cooperation in the field of distance education by linking their campuses and centers. In India, IGNOU and other open universities of the states are functioning together in certain areas and a network committee set up by the Coordination Council of IGNOU in 1988 identified broad areas of cooperation such as institutional development, material development and student support services (Singh 1999).

Networking, consortia and collaboration formation bring different institutions closer and there are several benefits such as the sharing of infrastructure, with buildings and equipments that may be pooled for joint use. Study centers and programme centers can also be used on a shared basis. There can also be the exchange of faculty members among different institutions offering ODL. Then programmes for the professional development of teachers, orientation programmes for counselors, tutors can also be held jointly. Procuring learning materials from one institution and then adapting/translating by others can also be done. All these steps not only help in economizing but also in accessing the best that is available in the different institutions. It thus widens the perspective of functioning. The learners have a greater choice of courses and facilities for credit transfer and student mobility brought about by networking add to the flexibility of the ODL system. The institutions as well as the learners both stand to gain through networking as there is access to a wider choice and resources.

Reflection and Action 25.4

State any two benefits of networking among ODL institutions. Collect information about the main objectives of any consortium that has been developed in the field of ODL

25.6 Quality Concerns

Today terms like quality assurance, quality control, total quality management, etc. earlier used in the field of industries are gaining popularity in the field of education. It has been realised that as with goods and other different services, in the field of education too quality is important and has to be maintained. Earlier providers of educational services often considered students to be their beneficiaries who were supposed to remain obliged to them for the services received. But today, with rising cost of higher education and the growing importance of the need for professionalism in every field, it is being felt that students too, like consumers, have certain rights and expectations that have to be fulfilled to ensure the growth of the organisation. In this regard it has been pointed out by Tait, (1997) that students are no longer in a subservient position, accepting poor services or care from the teachers and administrators. Thus there is widespread concern regarding the quality of education provided by educational organizations.

What does the term quality mean? Quality has been defined by Harvey and Green (quoted by Mohan 1999) as being synonymous with several things such as being exceptional or of strikingly higher levels of perfection with consistency, being a well designed process with zero defects, having fitness of purpose indicating that the institution is capable of fulfilling the stated objectives, providing value for money that translates to accountability and satisfies the needs of the customer, etc. From this definition we do get an idea about the concept of quality but at the same time it has to be noted that in the field of education unlike in industries, it is difficult to develop specific and

measurable criteria for assessing quality since human beings and not goods and services are the focal elements of educational institutions. Nevertheless in the field of distance education, which adopts an industrialized approach with mass production of learning materials, transportation, need for timely delivery of the right type of materials, criteria for assessing the quality of the educational services can be developed.

Quality is to be maintained in every aspect of the functioning of institutions offering distance education. Development of learning materials and as we have discussed earlier, their production, timely despatch and delivery, student support services, evaluation, etc, are the major areas that are required to maintain quality. The concerns regarding quality are not merely to satisfy the users or the beneficiaries of the educational institutions but also to continuously improve the functioning of the institution. In the industrial sector quality is often maintained by checking the finished goods but in the field of education, the entire process is important because there is no such well-defined finished product. Therefore, quality assurance, which takes care of the entire process rather than quality control that is more concerned with the finished goods, is more important in the field of education.

Quality assurance, is important in the field of education but it all the more so in the field of distance education. Why is it so? In several countries, distance education is yet to fully establish its credentials as an educational system, which is at par with the conventional system. Still there are questions as to its credibility and it is often considered to be the second choice of learners. Therefore, any compromise regarding quality would aggravate such doubts. Therefore, practices related to quality assurance are important in distance education institutions. Moreover there is another issue, which happens to be related to the target group of distance education programmes. The target group comprises learners from heterogeneous socio- academic backgrounds and could be highly dispersed not only with in the country but also internationally. They are adults and many of them are in-service. Therefore they are mature enough to be aware of their rights and assert them. They may not hesitate to seek legal recourse if they feel that they have not got the full value for their money. Also study materials of distance education programmes reach far and wide and are subject to much greater and wider scrutiny by adult learners.

Let us try to explain certain elements of the definition of quality that we have given earlier. When we say that quality refers to the fulfillment of the intended purpose, in the ODL system, it can be equated to the students graduating being in demand in the fields of further education and jobs and also the educational needs of those enrolling are fulfilled. Value for money can refer to the students being satisfied with the services provided to them as well as the programmes being quality ones and getting popular following the investment made in developing them. But can we emulate the standards maintained in the reputed institutions at the national or international level? Bo (1977) has rightly pointed out in this regard that quality assessment system that has been adopted by one institution cannot be transported to another because of the varied socio cultural and organizational differences. Again standards are not fixed but dynamic and this has to be taken into account. Then maintaining consistency in the standards achieved is also a challenge in ODL and calls for dedicated efforts on a continuous basis.

Reflection and Action 25.5

Why are concerns regarding quality all the more important in ODL?

John Daniel (quoted by Ramanujam 2000) has highlighted the main aspects within distance education that demand quality. Let us discuss some of these aspects:

Learning materials: In distance education the learning materials produced are very important as they substitute the teachers and in places without the facilities of libraries and other such resources are the only printed materials available for studying. Therefore the quality of the content in terms of its richness, adequateness and pedagogy is important. In this respect Koul (1999) has also specifically underlined that quality is to be maintained in the designing and development of the course materials. Quality needs to be assured in every step in the academic inputs, in editing, formatting, proof reading, preparing camera ready copies, quality of paper, print, illustrations, timely despatch of materials, adherence to schedules handling assignments, counselling services, revising the courses, etc.

Student Support Services :It has been found that ODL systems have greater number of dropouts than the conventional system. To check this it is necessary to improve the quality of the student support services so that the morale of the distance learners is maintained.

Logistics: Quality of the logistics is required so as to ensure the proper delivery of the learning materials to the widely dispersed student population.

Research base: A sound research base is to be maintained to use it for future developmental activities of the institution. For instance, a record of the feedback collected on a continuous basis helps during the revision of courses.

With the growing demands for higher education there has been mushrooming of institutions offering ODL and many directorates with thousands enrolling in them have been opened in conventional educational institutions. However it is alleged that in spite of the huge funds collected through them they are accorded neither the status nor the recognition they deserve. Consequently the quality of the learning materials and student support system both suffer. Hence the drop out rate is also quite high. In some of these directorates there have been efforts towards revamping the delivery system, student support services and revising the course materials. Still there is a concern that there are hardly any integrated efforts that are essential for total quality management. Nowadays for maintaining quality in distance education, the Commonwealth of Learning, the University Grants Commission (UGC) and mainly the Distance Education Council (DEC) are functioning actively (Manohar 1999). It is therefore, important to ensure through quality assessment measures that the allegation that ODL caters to quantity at the cost of quality does not arise.

Reflection and Action 25.6

Go through the provisions of GATS that pertain to the educational services and consider the impact of foreign education on local culture. Also deliberate upon whether education through ODL is the only threat to the local culture or if cultural exchange is an ongoing process and is caused by other agencies too.

25.7 Research in ODL Systems

Institutions offering higher education have two main functions - knowledge dissemination and knowledge generation. Educational institution at the tertiary level especially universities under the conventional system of education are actively involved in carrying out research work. For adding to the corpus of existing knowledge, testing theories and principles developed earlier under new circumstances, finding solutions to the problems existing in the concerned field are some of the major objectives for carrying out research work. In distance education institutions, apart from research in the disciplines taught, that in the area of distance education is indispensable for strengthening the system since it is a relatively new area, which is still developing. There are several areas in this field that need in-depth study to sort out the pressing problems.

We shall now discuss some of the areas that merit research in the field of distance education:

Learners: The socio- economic and academic background of students who enroll in distance education, their learning styles, constraints, level of motivation, etc.

Educational programmes: Pedagogic aspect of the content, integration of technology, etc.

Media: Use and integration of different types of media in the educational programmes so as to have a multimedia approach, use of media by learners, etc.

Enhancing cost effectiveness: Studying the expenses incurred in different areas, devising means to make the system cost effective and making optimum use of funds.

Student support services: Improving student support services not only for the learners who are enrolled but also for those who have graduated for their placement.

Assessing achievement: Assessing achievement of those graduating as far as their further education and placement are concerned.

Unlike some of the open universities of the western world where research is a regular activity, in the open universities of India it is yet to gather momentum. Therefore, it is necessary for these institutions to formulate definite and comprehensive policies so as to encourage and regulate research work. Research in distance education institutions as in others can involve both the qualitative as well as the quantitative methods. Therefore, experimental studies, historical studies and descriptive studies such as case studies, surveys, causal correlation studies, etc. can be carried out. There have been some descriptive studies such as surveys and some empirical studies too but it is still not enough as a development oriented exercise (Koul quoted by Ramanujam, 2000). As research is an important tool for the development of the discipline as well as the system, it has to be taken up earnestly in distance education institutions.

Reflection and Action 25.7

Why is system-based research important in ODL systems?

25.8 Apprehensions Regarding ODL

We have been discussing in this unit some of the critical issues in ODL. Let us also discuss some of the apprehensions regarding ODL such as the commercialisation of education through ODL by certain institutions and the cultural impact of ODL from abroad.

a) Commercialisation of Education

The ODL system is today indisputably the means of democratizing educational opportunities. One of the reasons for this is its ability to enroll huge numbers simultaneously. But today not all such institutions operate with the altruistic motive of bringing about equity in the field of education. There are instances when the potential to enroll huge numbers has been grossly misutilized to earn money through the fees collected. For instance, in India teacher education programmes through the distance mode were once used to enroll a huge number of learners but these institutions possessed neither the necessary infrastructure nor the student support required. This was adversely affecting the quality of education provided. The prime motive of these institutions appeared to be to make financial gains. This continued till the National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) clamped down on such institutions.

As per certain estimates, the business of education the world over runs into trillions of dollars. More and more ODL providers are joining the fray. It is seen that huge profits earned through ventures in the field of distance education are bringing entrepreneurs from the western world to the developing nations with huge student population eager to possess degrees from abroad. There is the emergence of a global market where education especially that provided through the distance mode is being traded. There is the allegation that the claims of education anywhere, anytime, is becoming like edibles that are prepackaged and delivered at home by the multinational companies. The prepackaged educational services are produced through mass production techniques, whereby the students become the customers and the teachers the workers. Hence, it is felt by some people that more than altruism, profiteering is the motive of some ODL institutions. According to Greville (2000) the commercial approach of some ODL institutions with less concerns for student support is responsible for the high dropout rate.

As we know several distance education institutions are adopting a multinational approach in providing educational services. This trend is further facilitated by the General Agreement in Trade and Services (GATS). It is feared that as in goods and other services, the developing nations would find it difficult to compete with the developed nations because of their inadequate infrastructure and poor economic development and the agreements for globalising educational services may not work in their favour. The educational scenario of these countries would then be captured by the technologically advanced developed countries and their educational services would thus flood the markets of the developing world.

It is therefore necessary to check such commercial motives and formulate norms to regulate the operation of ODL institutions. In India the DEC, UGC, NCTE and other professional educational councils are monitoring distance education institutions to check profiteering and commercialisation.

b) Cultural Impact of ODL

As we have discussed earlier, owing to globalisation and agreements like GATS, educational services including ODL from across jurisdictional boundaries are expected to enjoy steady growth in coming years. The former would be the provider while the latter would mainly be the receivers. We know that education is the means of preserving and transmitting culture. Therefore, there is an apprehension that educational services from abroad would bring along with them, the cultural influence of the service providers. If there is one-way traffic of education from the technically and financially rich western countries towards the developing nations, there could be cultural hegemony whereby the western culture would dominate that of the developing world, resulting in a new kind of imperialism-neocolonialism. In case there is exchange of educational services among different nations, there would be a cultural homogenisation with the loss of the richness and uniqueness of different cultures. It is also feared that the curriculum designed by foreign nationals may not reflect the ethos, values, traditions and aspirations of the local people.

The apprehension regarding the cultural influence of ODL is, however, only for ODL from abroad. Because of the several benefits of ODL, especially that it allows learners to access the best educational services from any part of the world coupled with the fact that globalisation as well as ODL from abroad cannot be wished away, a pragmatic view has to be adopted. ODL services should not weaken national initiatives and their accreditation, entry and operation should be regulated by norms prepared by the government for foreign education providers. If necessary the curriculum may also be adapted as per the local needs. It is to be ensured that the curriculum takes adequate care to preserve and transmit the local culture and is sensitive towards it.

Reflection and Action 25.8

How can ODL bring about cultural hegemony? Do you think ODL can be misused for commercialising education? Why?

25.9 Conclusion

In the modern world, education is the key to allround progress. In the globalised economy only knowledge-based societies can thrive. Hence, it is necessary to ensure that education reaches one and all. The conventional system, because of its inherent rigidities and limitations cannot take education to one and all. Hence, ODL is the only recourse which can overcome all barriers imposed by geographic isolation, social problems, etc. For ODL to achieve its goals there are certain critical issues that merit our attention. These issues, if adequately addressed, can help the ODL system in the attainment of the goals that have been set. The issues discussed here are equity and access to educational opportunities through ODL, cost effectiveness in ODL, integration of technology that may facilitate the overall functioning of the ODL institutions, networking and collaborations that facilitate the sharing of material and human resources quality concerns of distance education, research in ODL, and apprehensions regarding the impact of ODL.

25.10 Further Reading

Tait, A. (ed.) 1997. *Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Selected Case Studies*. The Commonwealth of Learning: Vancouver

Rumble, G. 1986. *The Planning and Management of Distance Education*. Croom Helm: London

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Unit 26

ODL: Problems and Prospects

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- 26.1 Introduction
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Learning Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- articulate the state of distance education in the global context;
- appreciate the conflict between social commitment and market requirement; and
- understand the importance of study materials

26.1 Introduction

In the previous two units of this block we have discussed at length the social and philosophical foundations of open and distance learning. We have also discussed the critical issues of distance education today. In this unit we shall be discussing the emerging concerns of the ODL system. It has largely been pointed out that the ODL system has emerged to cater to the need of the socially disadvantaged, remote, second chance and part time learners. However, the ODL system has made a long journey and its interface with the mainstream conventional education system has rather been very obvious. In terms of the use of advanced technology for learning, flexibility in the curriculum development, promptness to accommodate the latest development in the learning process, the ODL system has emerged to be the provider of sophisticated form of education. In the wake of globalisation and introduction of the new structural development programme since the early 1990's, there have emerged several areas of concern for open and distance learning. In this unit, we have tried to place the ODL system within the ongoing socio political and economic processes and thereafter have identified several contradictions which are being encountered by this system. The issues of commodification of education, quality assurance in the course material, knowledge production, atomization of education etc. are discussed at length in this unit.

26.2 ODL System: The Context

The open and distance learning (ODL) system, as it stand today, has been evolved out of a long historical process. From the earlier stage of part time, casual, second chance, print-based correspondence learning it has emerged to be a viable alternative system of learning whereby a large section of the students of ODL are full time, first chance, achievement oriented, motivated and globally connected. It also simultaneously continues to save the interests of the marginalized section of the population. In terms of the modes of delivery it has evolved and transformed from the early system of penny beg, print-based singular modes to integrated modes of print, audio-video and e-learning.

Scholars have also identified significant structural transformation in the ODL system from the earlier system of Correspondence to Distance to Open Distance, to Virtual e-learning to Consortium-based learning. Recent decades have borne witness to the proliferation of dual mode educational institutions whereby the conventional educational institutions are patronizing and initiating distance learning from within their existing set up. Over the years ODL has emerged from a marginal to major and prime provider system of education all over the globe. The growing significance of open and distance learning in recent years has been widely circumscribed by:

- Expansion of the process of globalisation,
- Proliferation of knowledge economy all over the globe,
- Revolution in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs),
- Formalisation of the General Agreement in Trade in Services through GATS in WTO,
- Social commitments for Education as expressed in Dakar Declaration,
- Social commitment for 'lifelong learning' as pronounced in Social Development Summit 1995,
- Formulation of Millennium Development Goal by the UNDP for the eradication of illiteracy, hunger, unemployment, and AIDS,
- Popular and political mandates in the developing world to further the process of educational well being of the marginalized section of the population,
- Increasing thrust and demand for quality education all over the world,
- Increasing commercialization of education,
- Flexibility of the ODL system and its ability to accommodate a huge number of students without compromising with quality,
- Structural rigidity of the conventional system of education and its inability to meet the growing demand of education.

All these processes are indeed inter-related and at times have furthered the process of expansion of one another and they have a composite bearing on the ODL system. It is important to understand that globalisation and ICTs are co-constituents of the knowledge economy. A knowledge economy can't flourish without providing the space and provision of generation and trading of commercial knowledge through lifelong learning. In the market-driven state, in which introduction of structural adjustment programme is but an essential imperative, political commitments for lifelong learning through commodification of education and the use of ICTs rather have to be explicit. With the proliferation of knowledge economy the demand for education has increased across the globe. With this increasing demand, education is now traded across the borders by developing new structures like WTO and GATT. Along with these developments there have been the growing concern for quality, parity and recognitions for educational products. As against these backdrops, the ODL system of education has been encountering new problems, challenges, possibilities and prospects. In this unit we shall highlight some of the problems encountered by the ODL system in general.

Reflection and Action 26.1

Discuss the socio-cultural context of the functioning of the ODL system

26.3 Dilemmas between Social Commitment and Market Requirement

In the developed parts of the world, the ODL system has to respond to the need of the second chance learners and largely to the growing need of the market as the second chance learners have a specific educational requirement. To mention again most of the second chance learners are in-service students. It is not to say that ODL system in the developed countries has emerged to be market driven totally. In the developing world the ODL system has got the mandate to espouse the educational cause of the marginalised groups of society. However, ever since the inception of ODL in its modern form, it has been caught on the horns of a dilemmas between social responsibilities and market requirements. The process of globalisation, revolution the information technology, and a paradigm shift in the development strategy have obviously accentuated this dilemma of ODL as a function to an industry-vis-à-vis ODL as a force for imparting a transformative culture in society. Even though there has been a parallel development between these forces, the balance seldom tilts in favour of the liberating function of the ODL. There is no denying the fact that in a system of market economy where knowledge has acquired a commodity value, any knowledge industry would produce and disseminate those sets of academic packages which has a readymade market for its products, more financial return for its products and less risk involved in the producing and marketing of these products. Obviously with knowledge packaging in the areas of management and information technology, the existing skill upgradation of bureaucrats, managers and so on tends to be regarded as the areas of hot pursuit, as these initiatives provide easy returns and contribute significantly to the process of revenue generation of the academic institution. As the ODL system is posited with the challenge of getting integrated with these global phenomena, there has been a shift in emphasis towards the marketisation of knowledge.

26.4 Quality Assurance in the Study Materials

In recent years there have been growing concerns on the issue of quality of distance education course materials. Conceptually the notion of quality control in distance education has an industrial legacy. In the industrial sense “quality” is an error-free, totally reliable product or service that fulfils the expectation of the ‘customers’ at a given price (Holt 1990). Quality is also understood in terms of the fitness of the product in conformity with a set of expected standards (Guri 1987). Such a notion emphasizes the specialization of efforts and the division of labour. Strategically, to Sallis (1993), it involves the breaking down of work into narrow and repetitive tasks with the advent of mass production which took away from the workers the possibility of self-checking quality. A strict division of labour developed from it and necessitated the expansion of the system of inspection known as quality control (Sallis 1993).

It is important that the issue of quality assurance in distance education has been equated with the process of industrialization of education services by several scholars of distance education. To Otto Peter (1983) it to be the most industrialized form of education in view of the technology used, division of labour involved and adhere to quality ensured in the product of this industry.

a) **Academic Context:** In the distance education set up the concept of quality is frequently used with reference to the self-instructional course materials designed and developed by the ODL, and the student support services provided to the students in the following related activities:

- Dispatch of study materials (print, audio and video)
- Counselling (academic, personal, professional)
- Registration
- Evaluation (both continuous and term end)
- Monitoring (feedback collection and research reformation of policies)

There have been various processes leading to the systematization of these institutions for quality control and management. A host of activities are suggested by the scholars towards this endeavour: collaborative non-hierarchical course teamwork, reworking and redoing on the draft of the material with due consultation with subject experts, pre-testing of course materials, proper orientation of distance teachers and academic counsellors, monitoring of student assignments, collection of feedback from students, evaluation of the course materials by the experts, revision of the course materials at periodic intervals etc. There have been systematic reviews and inspections of the product and services of distance teaching in order to ensure quality.

b) Emerging Political Context

The concern for quality is widely related also to the emerging political scenario of the state. Tait (1993) has mentioned a political attribute to the issue of quality management in view of the facts that (a) national governments are interested in returns on public investments, (b) education and training are essential to economic recovery and growth, (c) conventional educational institutions have failed to achieve their mission, and (d) open and distance learning is now seen as the mainstream provider of learning opportunities in flexible ways without the full cost of the conventional delivery method'. Against this backdrop the "State has created a competitive environment so that the university takes on more and more of the characteristics of a company in a free market... customers (formerly students), who now pay more and more of the real cost of the services provided, come to the centre of the management's concerns... (and) in this context of a changing environment in many countries that quality assurance has gained a central place (Tait 1993).

In this emerging environment distance education institutions have accepted the challenge of quality assurance in the course material environment. There have been rigorous planning and action for "total quality control" which according to Holt implies a total involvement of the organization to provide the customers with reliable products and services that fulfil their needs (Holt 1990).

Let us examine the philosophy of quality assurance as executed in the Indian context. Here we shall present the case of Indira Gandhi National Open University as a study.

c) Strategy of Quality Assurance at IGNOU

In developing countries like India, political commitment for quality assurance has got an emphasis because of the fact that

- the conventional correspondence education failed to ensure quality in distance education in 1960s and 1970s.
- open universities have got the mandate of the state to provide quality education to distance learners
- in the free trade regime of GATS, quality education is essential to withstand the challenges from the new providers of education from across the border
- as the conventional education system is unable to accommodate all the aspirants of quality education, an alternative structure is immediately warranted to provide quality education to the vast masses.

In India only a very thin layer of students (6.2%) gets the opportunity of higher study in regular universities. Keeping in view the educational need of a large section of the society correspondence education was introduced in conventional universities in the sixties and it attracted a large number of students. However, there was a visible decline of standards of correspondence education for various reasons viz. lack of proper planning, total dependency

on print materials and conventional textbooks, inadequacy of funds, and lack of political commitment for the promotion of this system. In the background of increasing demand for distance education, the revolution in the mass communication and increasing social and political awakening in the country on the one hand; and the decline in the standards of correspondence education on the other, the open education system was established in the eighties as the feasible answer to provide quality education through the distance mode.

IGNOU was established by an Act of Parliament in 1985 to promote the educational well being of the largest segments of the population with diversity of means and to set the standard of open and distance learning in India. To use the diversity of means, IGNOU has adopted a multi-media approach (full self-instructional print material supplemented by audio-video inputs) of course development; and is in the process of integrating ICTs with its programmes. Management of its high quality has been the prime concern from its very inception and has initiated several measures. Towards the process of management of quality in course materials, teaching Faculty has initiated the following steps:

- a) Forming Expert Committees with nationally and internationally reputed experts available in India organizing societies of workshop, core group, brainstorming sessions to frame and design the most elaborate, advanced and up to date syllabus,
- b) Involving reputed teachers, and experts in the writing of course materials, and in editing the content of the course materials,
- c) Organizing workshops of course writers and course editors to acquaint them with distance education pedagogy and to ensure quality,
- d) Besides recruiting young and well-qualified academics, IGNOU organized a series of workshops to orient these academics in distance education and provide them the required skill for the development of self-instructional course materials, assessment and evaluation of students' performances. Various international agencies like Overseas Development Administration (ODA) of U.K., Open University, U.K., Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Japan, and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), have also extended support to IGNOU for the development of quality educational material. IGNOU has been extremely successful in tapping the best resources of diversified academic pursuits available in India for the planning and development of multi-media course packages,
- e) Initiating regular training programme for faculty to equip them with distance education pedagogy and the style of presentation of the self-instructional course material,
- e) Undergoing training for audio-video production,
- f) Transforming the draft course materials by trained faculty in Self-Instructional Mode (SIM),
- g) Interacting frequently with the subject experts to avoid confusions and provide greater clarity to the students,
- h) Writing and rewriting of course materials according to one's area of specialization and interest,
- i) Collecting feedback from the subject experts on the already produced course materials,
- j) Undertaking correction and revision of course materials based on feedback collected from subject experts,
- k) Undertaking pre-testing of selected course materials among the students before these are made available for wider distribution,
- l) Collecting comments on the course materials from distance education and

language experts and preparing the final draft in accordance with the comments received from the above mentioned subject experts,

- m) Regularly preparing and monitoring assignments,
- n) Orienting the Academic Counsellors in the distance education pedagogy and on the Course materials of IGNOU,
- o) Collecting feedback from the students on the course materials, and
- p) Taking academic counseling sessions in the Study Centre of IGNOU. The faculty has also introduced various learning aids in print materials – for example, pictorial illustration, boxes with related concepts or information, biographical sketches of the thinkers, activities for the students to learn the subject of study from daily experiences. Indeed, the faculty's efforts have been to avoid the mechanical approach in transforming the self-instructional material; rather it tries to make it essentially creative and sensitive to the academic need of the students.

All these concerted efforts have helped IGNOU achieve wide recognition both in the country and abroad within a short span of time. Many open universities of the world have adopted course materials produced by IGNOU. Most significantly, undertaking rigorous review of course materials of IGNOU and the delivery of the IGNOU Programme the COL has declared IGNOU as the COL Centre of Excellence in 1993.

Action and Reflection 26.2

What do you mean by quality assurance? How can quality assurance be ascertained in the ODL system?

26.5 ODL and Knowledge Production

The ODL system plays a very significant role to disseminate knowledge among learners through state of the art technologies. It is important that an advanced learning system should not only disseminate knowledge but also generate new body of knowledge. Knowledge is not only a part of one's intellectual heritage, but also an asset of a particular stage of society which is being generated, evolved and constructed through various processes of validation, criticism and creative engagements. In the developing world ODL has got the mandate to be the tool for the empowerment of the hitherto neglected sections of society. Knowledge of all concerns are generated, transmitted, preserved and even reconstructed through certain structural arrangements of society. Should knowledge be a function to the construction of a praxis for empowerment of the marginalized there is an emergent need:

- a) To recast the existing body of knowledge that would question the various institutional arrangements and bases of legitimacy for subordination of the marginalized groups. The processes of social construction of caste ethnicity, gender etc. in Indian society may be cited as cases to this point.
- b) To document the regular struggle and resistance of the marginalised groups that challenge the dominant order as part of cultural heritage. The alternative institutional structure(s) emerged out of these processes to break the barriers of subordination are required to be reorganized as organized endeavours of redoing social construction.
- c) To enhance the accessibility of knowledge through all possible means for the marginalized section of society.
- d) To recognize and document the indigenous knowledge and social practices of the marginalized in the course curriculum; and
- e) To popularize science, vocational and professional programmes among the marginalized by modifying them as per their need and requirement.

All these need flexible systemic arrangements that have the capacity of contemplation, absorption and appreciation for an alternative body of knowledge. There lies the significance of ODL to sensitise the understanding by creating an alternative body of knowledge that could be used as praxis for empowerment of the marginalised. The best possible ways of producing this alternative body of knowledge are to promote research activities at the ODL on the issues of the marginalised groups and to integrate the knowledge emerged out of this research to the course curriculum, and encourage collaborative learning by integrating ICTs with the learning process of the marginalized.

ODL in the developing country's context and as it stands today provides more scope for reproduction of the existing body of knowledge than for creation of alternative one. Curriculum development based on research, and collaborative learning and action project need a longer gestation period. In a competitive market economy any ODL system seldom gets such a space for the generation of alternative body of knowledge and then to integrate them to the curriculum.

Teachers in the ODL have a moral responsibility for shaping an alternative body of knowledge. A proactive strategy of the teaching community is as essential for their professional empowerment as for the fulfillment of the commitment of ODL to the nation and society. It is only through the proactive initiatives of the teachers of ODL that an alternative body of knowledge is produced that would contribute towards the formulation of praxis for empowerment of the marginalised through demystification of knowledge. The structural flexibility of the ODL system provides enormous opportunities to initiate new and innovative academic curriculum. Several certificate, diploma and degree programmes are framed which are not conventionally available elsewhere. These opportunities are required to be fully utilized by the teachers of the ODL system.

Reflection and Action 26.3

How can the ODL system be a tool for empowerment of the marginalized? Suggest a few strategies based on your experience.

26.6 ODL, ICT and Market: A Critique

In recent years a lot of discussion has taken place on the interface of ODL with market forces and ICT. There are social, economic and political implications of the extensive use of ICTs in the ODL. In the following sections of the unit, we shall examine some of these issues

a) ODL, E-learning and Automation

In the wake of globalisation and the revolution in the ICTs there have been tremendous efforts both by the ODL institutions and by the regular universities to integrate the learning process with e-learning in particular and ICTs in general. These processes, while they have unfolded several new opportunities of learning; have also produced new challenges for society, academic institutions, teachers and for learners. Scholars have tried to understand this phenomenon with diverse perspectives.

Noble (1997), in his famous work *Digital Diploma Mill* has highlighted the commercial, pedagogical, and ethical implications of online educational technology. He demonstrates the significant correlations between the commercial capital and expansion of e-learning in the ODL system. To him, the high-tech transformation of higher education is being initiated and implemented from the top down, either without any student and faculty involvement in the decision-making or with it. It is also pointed out that getting technologically transformed the educational campuses are now functioning as a significant site of capital accumulation by 'converting intellectual activity into intellectual

capital'. To him, this process has started with the process of commoditization of the research function of the university and thereafter transforming commoditization of the educational function of the university, transforming courses into courseware, the activity of instruction itself into commercially viable proprietary products that can be owned and bought and sold in the market. The corporate and political leaders of the major industrialized countries, to retain their supremacy, now turn towards "knowledge-based" industries. This has led to the unprecedented collaboration between corporate and academic boardrooms and the foundation of joint lobbying efforts. The foremost promoters of this transformation are: (a) the hardware and software vendors who view education as a market for their wares, (b) corporate training advocates and (c) the university administrators, (who see it as a way of giving their institutions a fashionably forward-looking image, and view the computer-based instruction as a means of reducing their direct labour and plant maintenance costs and believe in undermining the autonomy and independence of faculty supported by a number of private foundations, trade associations, and academic-corporate consortia) and (d) techno zealots who simply view computers and e-learning as the panacea for all elements of education.

To Noble, there are several implications of the commoditization of university of education:

- a) teachers as labour are made subject to all the pressures of undergoing rapid technological transformation from above, reduce their autonomy, independence, and control over their work. Once faculty put their course material online, the knowledge and course design skill embodied in that material is taken out of their possession, transferred to the machinery and placed in the hands of the administration.
- b) The process of the commoditization of instruction involve the transformation of the university into a market for the commodities being produced. He points out that administrative propaganda routinely alludes to an alleged student demand for the new instructional products and thus try to create a market by fiat, compelling students and faculty to become users and hence consumers of the hardware, software, and content products as a condition of getting an education, whatever their interest or ability to pay.
- c) Students enrolled in courses using virtual software are in fact formally designated "experimental subjects."
- d) Commercialized higher education research thus has become a means to serve commercial ends by bringing universities and industry into close partnership. 'Faculty becomes producers of commodities for their employer'. Gradually the universities are emerging stronger by securing the patent rights of the intellectual capital. Here the instructional process, classroom teaching, is converted into marketable products, such as a CD ROMs, Websites, or courseware, which they may or may not themselves 'deliver'.

Noble also points out that as the universities are going into business for themselves, the issue of copyright has acquired a place of central significance. But the universities are now undertaking to undo such traditional faculty rights in order to capitalize on the online instruction. "In the wake of the online education gold-rush, many have begun to wonder, will the content of education be shaped by scholars and educators or by media businessmen, by the dictates of experienced pedagogy or a quick profit" (Noble 1997)

b) Market Drive, ICTs and ODL

Latchem and Hanna (2002) while identifying the major challenges encountered by open and flexible learning points out that in general 'higher education is experiencing a shift from supply driven to demand driven pressures. This has

been mostly because of the challenges encountered by the ODL from the forces of globalisation and Information and Communication Technology (ICT), competition from new providers, and the increasing drive for self-sustaining education. There have been growing demands for relevant accountability. Universities are increasingly seeking solutions to these challenges in the open and flexible learning and ICT. You have observed the proliferation of distance education institutes all over the world. There has emerged a trend to market the education through the distance education mode even in the conventional universities. In many cases ODL is getting transformed from quality driven and marginal to commercially-oriented and mainstream. There are both the opportunities and dangers in these developments. It is apprehended that in the move to internationalize and commercialize open and flexible learning, the need of the disadvantaged and the marginalized may be overlooked and in the blurring of distinction between the on-and-off campus teaching and learning, the particular needs of the distance learner disregarded (2003:203).

As education has emerged to be a tradeable commodity, many educational institutions use ODL as an important platform to facilitate trade in a competitive environment. Evans and King are of the opinion that the politicians and administrators of the developing countries use the produce packages of learning materials as a “quick fix”... readily to trade in market. They have also highlighted the aspect of academic imperialism as spread through ODL.

c) ODL, Technological Changes and Leadership

Starting from the *pre paid post* based correspondent education of mid nineteenth century to the *web based* open and the virtual learning institutions of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries distance education institutions have been responding to the kind of learning technologies which function to serve new markets, ‘improves with growing demands, achieves the quality expectations of the mainstream market and finally brings revolutionary changes in the industry displacing the established providers and the products’. As the market is becoming very competitive and the leading universities and colleges increasingly investing in ICT to develop web based programmes there have emerged several new forms of higher educational organisations. The process of formation of such alternative structure of higher education have not only ignored the existing the institutional, geographic, political and other contextual realities, these have also challenged the culture and the functioning of the conventional educational set ups. Christensen (1997)

Otto Peters (1967, 1983) has always visualised distance education as the most industrialised form of education which shares a host of characteristics of the modern industrial production process and that these distance education institutions are essentially bureaucratic in character. To him (2002) the history of distance education has been a history of its growing importance which is related to the technologies used in each period. He highlights that distance education has entered its fourth phase with a pedagogical revolution caused by the increasing use of digitalized learning processes that has taken distance education to hitherto unknown territory; the virtual learning space. Peters (1998) is of the belief that the demand of the post-industrial service economy will force a change in distance education to develop structures that post industrial society demands.

Many scholars recognized that as the economy is shifting its orientation from industry to knowledge, universities are also acquiring the corporate style of structure and function. Technological forces in the distance learning system call for new capacities in the leaders and staff, multiple specialist collaboration and new visions. It is suggested that the ODLS needs transformational and entrepreneurial leaders who can create and change culture than ordinary managers who live for a compromise. These new leaders are now required to create an optimal environment for innovation, reform organisation, motivation and inspiration for others. In the open learning system there are now

opportunities for new organisational models and strategies. The challenging working environment, need for introduction of advance technology and new academic programmes, expansion of the process of globalisation immediately invites rigorous transformation in the ODL institution with enlightened and the transformative leaderships.

Box 1 Otto-Peters observation in future ODL

What should be the nature of the universities in future? Otto-Peters (2002) is of the opinion that the university of the future will use and integrate a large number of forms: face to face, distance and digital and will thus develop new pedagogical configurations, which will no longer resemble traditional forms of teaching... These universities of the future will also be variable adaptive and flexible enough to provide tailormade programmes for all kinds of students, as well as for persons who want to continue their educational at the tertiary level (35).

What should be the role of the teachers in this changing environment? To him, the “Teachers not only be aware of these changes, but of the necessity to become active agents of these changes. At the same time they have to assume responsibility because they must function as protectors of their students against those technological forces which undo the mechanisation of education just in order to make profit. Teachers must be on the alert as they must protest and react when unnecessary exaggeration of technological enthusiasm dehumanises the process of teaching and learning and thus becomes detrimental to education. He also points out that the view of the critics of the digitalised learning are hardly heard in the prophecies of the distance education because of the fascination of the computer and euphoric frame of mind of the computer users. To him the central idea of establishing virtual universities must be to innovate learning and teaching at the university in order to adapt them to the requirement of the post industrial and the post modern knowledge society”. Here he emphasises on the flexibility of teaching and learning which can be maximised by self-directed and autonomous learning whereby the universities are to be flexible to give students more choices to provide the more intensified and enhanced support to fit it to the changed educational requirements of the post-industrial knowledge society (Peter, 2002 :155-156).

26.7 Transformation of ODL

In the previous section of this unit, we have discussed the challenges and possibilities encountered by the ODL system in course of its interaction with the ICTs, and market forces. In this section, we shall be discussing the process of transformation of the ODL system and its social, economic and pedagogical ramifications. Alan Tait (1995) points out that the ODL was framed as a progressive ideology, marginal system to serve the educational interest predominantly of the marginalized population. It stood for individual learners autonomy. However, over the years it has emerged to be a market driven mainstream educational institution, which is amenable for political maneuvering of the state. To him ‘the ODL is being reviewed to put an end to in representing the society in its own terms. The age of innocence for the ODL has ended’ (1995: 27). To him the process of the adoption of ODL as a mainstream method of delivery is acting to isolate and marginalize populations, whereas previously it provided for their inclusion. In the wake of globalisation and introduction of the structural adjustment programme the control of the government over ODL has rather been stronger.

Consequently, there has been a shift from the ideology of education for the marginalized population to mainstream Government-driven initiatives in ODL. Due to regular political intervention, the system of distance education is used increasingly to discharge functions in a narrower interest. In the name of

technological improvement, the universities have now emerged to be a market for techniciation of education (Harris 1987: 146). In recent years scholars have observed the Fordist and Post-Fordist tendency in the Open University. Edwards points out that the ODLs are predominantly Fordist in nature characterized by standardized products, mass production plants and with little scope of consumer choice. In the face of competitiveness faced by open universities there has been a move towards post Fordist course production models by which small scale quickly produced courses to meet particular needs of segments of the market are encouraged.

26.8 Conclusion

The ODL system has emerged to be an important, viable, mainstream and alternative mode of learning for large sections of student population in the country. It has widely been recognized that the conventional education system, due to its structural rigidity will not be able to accommodate all the aspirants of secondary and higher learning in the country. At present more than 21% of the learners in the country are enrolled with the ODL system. It is expected that by the end of the Tenth Five Year Plan the share of ODL system in the total education system will increase to 40%. Such voluminous increase in the student population in the ODL system would ask for several kinds of interventions on the part of the providers of ODL learning in the areas of social commitment, increasing access, quality assurance and democratization of the learning process. The ODL itself has undergone a process of transformation from part time, correspondence, casual to mainstream, integrated, web based and virtual learning. Such transformations have produced diverse varieties of challenges and opportunities for the ODL system. In this unit, we have discussed all these issues in detail.

26.9 Further Reading

Batliwala, S. 1993. *Empowerment of Women in South Asia: Concepts and Practices*, ASSBAF and FAO Freedom from Hunger Campaign, Action and Development. New Delhi

Scheffler, I. 1999 "Epistemology and Knowledge". In R. McCormic and C. Paechter (eds) *Learning and Knowledge. The Open University: London*