

Chapter 17

Open and Distance Learning in India: A Practitioner's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Rise of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) systems in India is largely a 20th century phenomenon. The ODL systems have taken up responsibilities to identify the educational needs of diverse segments of people and accordingly plan innovative and flexible systems to meet their requirements. Though ODL systems have been on the priority of the Governments in India for a long time, Post 2015 Development Agenda of United Nations has given a renewed policy thrust for it. Despite their tremendous potential to address the problems in Indian Higher Education, the functioning of ODL systems is constrained by low reach of technology, poor infrastructure and sharp socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural variations in targeted areas. This chapter gives an account of gaps in theory and practices of Open and Distance Learning systems. Recommendations have been made to optimise the practice of ODL to suit Indian context. Existing research studies have been put in to perspective and recommendations have been made for practitioners of Open and Distance Learning systems.

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BACKGROUND

Role of the education in any society has to be guided by the socio economic conditions in which it works. Whereas in ancient “Gurukul systems” of education in India it was primarily guided by the human quest for enlightenment, the modern educational systems are designed to fulfil state’s responsibility to bring about inclusive economic development (Unnat Bharat Abhiyaan, Web Site). Open and Distance Learning systems therefore have gained prominence in policy making circles primarily due to its potential to enhance reach at affordable cost and within limited resources. However, the practice of ODL systems in India has been full of challenges primarily due to its special socioeconomic and cultural setting. This chapter looks in to challenges which Indian ODL systems have been facing and gives an account of how they have been trying to cope up with those challenges.

This chapter is arranged as below

1. To review the research literature to examine how different scholarly studies have viewed the purpose of education and to examine the inevitability of Open and Distance Learning for India.
2. To identify the issues which impinges on the practice of Open and Distance Learning in India.
3. To customise the Open and Distance Learning in Indian conditions, identify the issues and make recommendations.

The authors of this chapter have been involved in Open and Distance Learning systems of India in various capacities. The arguments presented here are based on the authors’ experiences and research literature available for the practice of Open and Distance Learning in India.

Open and Distance Learning -A Compulsion of Our Times

Different scholars have viewed the purpose of education in different ways. While Herbert Spencer believed in the ‘complete-living aim’, in which Herbert advocated the moral aim. The complete living aim signifies that education should prepare us for life. This view had also been supported by Rousseau and Mahatma Gandhi. They believed in the complete development or perfection of nature. Pestalozzi is of the view “Education is natural, harmonious and progressive development of man’s innate powers.” Education enables us to control, give the right direction and the final sublimation of instincts. Sophists says- “Knowledge is progress”. One has to be worldly wise and achieve certain position in society to gain wealth and respect. Perfection denotes the ability to address various aspects of life human beings

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