

Chapter 60

Open Source for Higher Conventional and Open Education in India

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ABSTRACT

Distance Education in India has come a long way since the launch of correspondence courses in 1962 at the Delhi University. There have been many changes over the period of time, and thus, a transition was observed from print based correspondence courses to media supported distance education. With the advent of technology, expansion of telephone network, and lowering of tariff, there has been expansion of e-learning services, web based education, and mobile learning. Currently there are around 600 conventional (face-to-face) universities in India serving around 1.2 billion students. Starting with one Open University in 1982, now we have 15 open universities. There are single mode and dual mode distance education institutions. These provide instructions from print based to technology enabled means. All these developments transformed the teaching learning. Many of the institutions followed Open Educational Resources and Open Source movement. Reasons are varied for adopting open source. With the purpose to reduce the costs on software development, freedom to improve the software and freedom to redistribute to help neighbours has made individuals, institutions, and governments support open source. In this chapter, the author examines some of the initiatives of Open Source in the field of higher, open and distance education in India.

1. INTRODUCTION

India is the largest democracy in the world and population-wise stands next to China with more than 1.2 billion population. Indian education system is very big and has witnessed tremendous growth. After attaining independence in 1947, the government paid special attention to the educational provisions. From 18 universities

in 1947 and 496 colleges catering to about one hundred and fifty thousand students, now in 2012 we have more than 600 universities and around 30,000 colleges in all parts of the country. There are different types of universities in India: central (established by Act of Parliament); State Universities (established by a local legislative assembly act); Deemed Universities (established under section 3 of the UGC Act); and Private Universities

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(approved by UGC). These universities differ in some aspects like subvention by the government, status, service conditions of its staff, governance etc. Private Universities have their own funding mechanisms while Central and State Universities are provided grants by Central or State governments respectively. Deemed universities are institutions of higher learning and research, which may not be full fledged university, in the sense that Central and State universities have colleges affiliated to them for providing educational avenues to the learners. The University Grants Commission (UGC) of India, which is an apex body in terms of governance and funding to the higher education (non-technical) allowed the status of deemed and private university to the institutions fulfilling laid down criteria and quality measures who have their own funding resources. On the basis of kind of program and courses offered, India have traditional universities, technical universities, open universities and other research and development based educational institutions. With the purpose to further boost the higher education sector, the Prime Minister of India appointed National Knowledge Commission (NKC) in 2005 to suggest strategies, the road map, action plan and possible response for India to emerge as knowledge super power. The National Knowledge Commission (<http://www.knowledgecommission.gov.in/>) mandated to transform knowledge landscape of the country, focused on five key areas of knowledge paradigm—access to knowledge, knowledge concepts, knowledge creation, knowledge application and development of better knowledge services. Governmental and non-governmental agencies have taken adequate steps and the entry of foreign universities has also given a new dimension to the sector in terms of faculty access, international curriculum and new career pathways. However such initiatives require huge financial resources for implementation which becomes a difficult task in the times of global recession.

2. TRANSITION TO AND GROWTH OF HIGHER AND OPEN EDUCATION

After independence, the government of India prepared Five Year Plans for the development of the nation and thus planners made a reference to the alternative systems of education outside the formal system in the First Five Year Plan (1951-56) with the purpose to address the growing demand for higher education. Instructions through radio talks and printed course material were promoted, although the pace was slow till 1961. It was mostly during the Third Five Year Plan (1961-67) distance education was given a serious thought due to ever increasing pressure to provide more educational opportunities. The Third Five Year Plan (1961-67) proposed, “...in addition to the provision in the plan for expansion for facilities for higher education, proposal for evening colleges, correspondence courses and award for external degrees are at present under consideration” (GOI, 1961:589). To achieve this objective, a committee was set up by the Central Advisory Board of Education, highest education policy making body in India, (CABE) to suggest strategies for introducing correspondence education. After deliberations, the CABE Committee recommended:

A correspondence course should be a step designed to expand and equalize educational opportunity, as it aimed at providing additional opportunities for several thousand students who wished to continue their education and the persons who had been denied these facilities and were in full-time employment or were for other reasons prevented from availing themselves of the facilities at college (GOI, 1963: 3-4).

As an initial experiment, University of Delhi launched correspondence courses in 1962 through its School of Correspondence Courses where the

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