

CHAPTER 6

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ASSAM (2006 – PRESENT TIME): THE AGE OF INNOVATION

6.1. INTRODUCTION:

The year 2006 brought in a paradigm shift in distance education. A dynamic change transformed distance education in Assam to a more mature term 'Open and Distance Learning'. The ODL phase of distance education was introduced to the learners of Assam. The variation noticed during this period under study in distance education is the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the teaching learning process. The other most crucial development of ODL was the establishment of a State Open University in the state. It was a testimony to the growth of distance education and the credibility it had earned after two decades of service.

Besides these achievements, this period saw the expansion of DE Institutes as a private initiative and under a conventional mode of Institution, or a Central University. The Downtown University which is a private enterprise had begun affiliating distance courses for the learners who are interested in medical and other related course since 2010. While in the same trend, Tezpur University, which is a premier Central University in the state, also established a Centre of Distance Learning (CODL) for the learners in 2011.

Distance Education (DE) has been evolving through different stages from the time of its emergence and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been playing an important role in it. There has been a tremendous explosion of ICT in the last five decades. The new era has shown growing interest and an emotional fascination with the use of modern communication media in DE. As DE cannot remain aloof from the

technological development, ICT has been incorporated within it making DE more flexible and accessible.

The National Policy of Education (1986) clearly recognizes the role of technology in ODL¹. A paradigm shift has been marked in the field of Distance Education with the blend of technology and distance education. Terminology of DE has changed due to its amalgamation of technology and hence a new term Open Learning or flexible learning. Open Learning implies the use of technology for removing every barrier to learning. Open Learning is a term to describe the teaching learning process where the courses are flexibly designed to suit the individual requirements, irrespective of space and time².

Technology had always been a part of DE, but with the use of technology like radio, television, internet and such other media, DE has become cost effective, the teaching learning process has become more interactive (due to teleconferencing, audio and video conferencing, etc.) and also more learner centric. ICT has been extending service to support the learners in many ways by facilitating communication, providing access to Open Educational Resources (OER), access to students with special educational needs, etc³.

Technology in DE delivery mode involves both one way communication and two way communications. The print medium involves one way communication, for there is no place for interaction. Audio/video conferencing, internet, e-mail, etc. can however lead to frequent interaction. Communication may also at the same time be synchronous and asynchronous. In a synchronous communication real communication between the learner and the teacher while the asynchronous

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1. Sharma, M. (1998) "Technology in Distance Education: Future and Issues" in Satish Rastogi (ed.) *Educational Technology for Distance Education* Rawat Publication, Jaipur, p. 27
 2. Rowntree, D. 1992 *Exploring Open and Distance Learning*, Routledge, New York, p. 52
 3. Perraton, Hilary 2004 *Aims and Purposes in Policy of Open and Distance Learning* Volume 4 by Perraton Hilary and Helen Lentell (eds.), Routledge, New York, p. 24

communication implies learning process which may take place when the learner and the teacher may be at different places and at different times⁴.

ICT has been extending service to support the learners in many ways by facilitating communication, providing access to Open Educational Resources (OER), access to students with special educational needs, etc⁵.

Technologies are again of two types- one which helps in fostering one way communication and the other involves two way communications. The print medium involves one way communication, for there is no place for interaction. Audio/video conferencing, internet, e-mail, etc. can however lead to frequent interaction.

Again, the communication may be synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous communication means real communication between the learner and the teacher while the asynchronous communication implies learning process which may take place when the learner and the teacher may be at different places and at different times⁶. The electronic mail is the classic tool of asynchronous distance learning and chatting, audio video conferences, etc are some tools of synchronous distance learning.

ICT's are user friendly and helps in providing prompt student support services. Technology is used in preparing study materials, as most of the DE Universities still deliver instructions through printed books. CD-ROMS providing curriculum based programme is also used. ICT has its uses in the learner support services like the digitization of library in the study centers of the Open Universities or DE institutes, providing support services in the face to face counseling programmes or contact programmes where the learners place their problems before the faculty members.

4. Bate, A.W. (Tony), (2005) *Technology, e-learning and Distance Education* 2nd edition Routledge, USA, p. 48

5. Perraton, Hillary (2004), Op cit., p. 64

6. Bate, A.W. (Tony), (2005). Op cit., p. 47

The boom in technology as well as the government's stress on the use of ICT in education has strengthened the position of distance education. This has led to the opening of a new dawn in education. ICT in distance education has been tried and tested in different countries and it has made many a positive impact not only on the learners but also on the community. The levels of ICT used imply the stage of distance education, as known from the generation table mentioned earlier.

6.2. TAMIL NADU STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY (TNOU):

The mushrooming of distance education institutes in Assam which have their roots outside the state have continued in this period too. This has been due to the acceptance of the degrees awarded by Open University or any distance education institutes by UGC and DEC. With the distance education been leveled at par with the traditional education/ face-to-face education, it has definitely given an impetus for the growth of distance education in every states and districts around the country.

Among the institutes that have made its presence in Assam is the TNOU, the parent body of which being located in Tamil Nadu. The study centres belongs mostly to the Open Universities based in South India.

The Tamil Nadu Open University was established by an Act of the Legislative Assembly of the Government of Tamil Nadu in 2002 to benefit those who have been deprived of and/or denied the access to higher education. Tamil Nadu Open University aims to make all such provisions that are learner-centred, seamless and are of high-quality by employing appropriate technologies to achieve equity in education, sustainable social transformation and composite national development.

The Tamil Nadu Open University (TNOU) situated in Tamil Nadu established its study centre in Assam in Guwahati in 2006-07. Housed in a temporary base, the study centre is presently located in the heart of the city and it is the only study centre in the state. The programmes that are being offered are at the Post Graduate, MBA, Under Graduate, PG

Diploma, Diploma and Certificate level. Despite the availability of a wide range of programmes, the enrolment of the learners is not very encouraging. The Co-ordinator in charge of the study centre present is Mrs. BalaMinakshiRajkhowa. The study centre of TNOU in Guwahati enrolls learners in the number range of 50-100⁷.

TNOU has been providing support services for its learners through printed self-learning materials. The materials for the learners are sent from the headquarters. The learners can also avail information regarding examination dates, assignment schedules through the University website. Despite the fact that TNOU has few drop outs (5%), the enrolment figure has not gone high⁸. The enrolment has been stagnant never exceeding the 100 mark. The reason behind it may be the medium of the study materials, which is Hindi and English.

6.3. MADURAI KAMARAJ UNIVERSITY (MKU):

In the previous chapter it was discussed that MKU was one of the earliest Universities to set up its branch in Assam. Since then it has continued with its services to the learners of the state. Though its significance has declined due to the establishment of new institutions catering to the distance learners, it still offers programmes.

However, the programmes are very few and so is the number of learners enrolled under MKU in Assam. The programmes have declined and the programmes under which the learners have enrolled most are: MLISc, BLISc, MA (English, History, Political Science and Sociology). BBA under MKU has the highest number of learners⁹.

7. Coordinator of TNOU study centre in Guwahati, Bala Minakshi Rajkhowa (During her interview on 4-12-12)

8. Ibid

9. Director-in-charge of MKU, (Guwahati study centre), Dr. J. N.Das (During his interview on 6-3-10)

The annual enrolment of the learners under all the programmes in MKU Guwahati is below 80. In regard to the learner's profile, the official documents portray the learners of MKU to be teachers, Christian nuns, regular students in few cases, etc. According to the Coordinator the enrolment has declined heavily since 2006¹⁰.

MKU has been functioning under problems, leading to its poor performance. It had begun with great hopes only to be shattered during the course of time. The learners who had come from different regions across the North Eastern states had begun to decline. The reasons are not too hard to find:

- The University could not keep up with the change that occurred with time. While other DEI's of the state had started taking innovative steps for the promotion of Distance Education. There was no expansion of support services particularly for the learners of the state.

MKU faced a huge competition from Open Universities and Dual Mode Universities in Assam. IGNOU along with Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University to be joined by the state Open University later gave a tough time to MKU. MKU ran short of wide networks in services and resources compared with the other DEI's.

- MKU had failed as a Distance Education Institute due to its irregularities and haphazard management tactics. The official reports show that there have been complaints filed by the learners related to academic matters. Most of the complaints were in regard to the delay in receiving of exam results, delay in delivery of study materials, the incorrect marking system, etc.

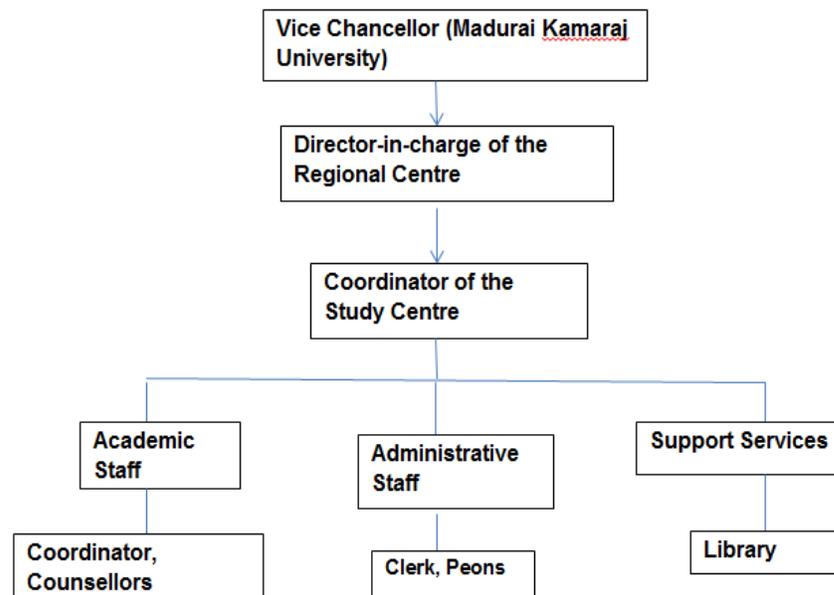
The complaints have been frequent. This implies that MKU has a loophole in its functioning. The Distance Education system survives in the success and satisfaction of the learners. The learners of MKU

10. Coordinator-in-charge of MKU, (Guwahati study centre), Vijayalakshmi (During her interview on 17-6711)

were however disillusioned with its functioning and their dilemmas took a heavy toll for the institution.

The organizational structure of MKU has few amenities for the learners to choose from that may enable them to pursue their course. The structure points that there has been no attempt on the part of the institution to keep the learner engaged in the learning process or even close to giving them an environment of learning in a distance mode system.

Fig. 49 Organisational Structure of Madurai Kamaraj University



Source: Authors own creation based on observation

Hence, it comes to reveal that the growth of Madurai Kamaraj University in Assam has remained stagnant since 2005-06.

6.4. DDE (DIBRUGARH UNIVERSITY): 2006-2012

The progress of distance education under DDE from 2006 has been interpreted below. The developments within the education system and at the institutional level are fascinating because of the innovation and changes that have come along and made a heavy impact on the learners

as well as the general public. The table below is the enrolment figure of the DDE learners from 2006-2011.

Fig. 50 Enrolment in DDE (Dibrugarh University) from 2006-2012

| Sl. No. | Year | Enrolment |
|---------|---------|-----------|
| 1 | 2006-07 | 670 |
| 2 | 2007-08 | 794 |
| 3 | 2008-09 | 913 |
| 4 | 2009-10 | 1296 |
| 5 | 2010-11 | 2126 |
| 6 | 2011-12 | 4267 |

Source: DDE official records¹¹

The enrolment of DDE since 2006 to the year 2012 has been given above and the number though not high as compared to the Open Universities, has been increasing. The growth in the number of learners implies the fact that distance education had entered a phase of stability under DDE, Dibrugarh University.

Notably, the DDE has also focused on the expansion of study centres. The study centres can help the University not only to reach out far and wide but also allow equal distribution to all class of people. The growth indicates the influence of the University to far off places as well the people. Till last year, the study centres of the University were 32. But interestingly, as noted earlier the study centres are located mostly in the districts situated around Upper Assam. The geographical limits of DDE thus are still limited. The table below is the trend studied in regard with the growth of study centres under DDE.

11. Unpublished Official records, DDE, Dibrugarh University

Fig. 51 Number of study centres of DDE since 2006

| Sl. No. | Year | Number of study centre |
|---------|---------|------------------------|
| 1 | 2006-07 | 19 |
| 2 | 2007-08 | 24 |
| 3 | 2008-09 | 25 |
| 4 | 2009-10 | 39 |
| 5 | 2010-11 | 32 |
| 6 | 2011-12 | NA |

Source: DDE official records¹²

Study Centres are an important factor in the DE system. It not only brings the learners for interaction but also helps in retention. The lack of study centre may make the learner feel isolated ultimately leading to drop out or discontinuance of the studies.

However, on the brighter side, the establishment of study centres at close quarters may be seen as an encouragement for the distressed learners living in the remote areas. Besides study centre, in matter of support services in academics the DDE has been providing weekend counseling and personal contact programmes. Self-learning materials are provided in both English and Assamese.

While studying the general enrolment rate of the DDE learners, the gender factor within the enrolment trend too makes for an exclusive study. Women in regular form of education have a certain amount of advantages, while for those in distance education; they remain isolated form other learners and probably seldom have a chance to meet despite the counseling session.

However, there are also chances that distance education is preferred by women who like to pursue their studies all alone without any fear of competition, which makes them feel comfortable in their own space. There

12. Ibid.

are many factors that determine the enrolment of women in a distance education institute. The table below provides a look into the enrolment of the female learners under DDE.

Fig. 52 Gender wise enrolment under DDE (2006-2012)

| Year | Male | Female | Total |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| 2006-07* | 269 | 301 | 670 |
| 2007-08 | 270 | 523 | 794 |
| 2008-09 | 342 | 585 | 913 |
| 2009-10* | 520 | 676 | 1296 |
| 2010-11* | 986 | 1140 | 2126 |
| 2011-12 | NA | NA | NA |

Source: DDE official records¹³

In the table above, it is clear that the enrolment of the female learners is more than the male which is positive. The enrolment pattern gives the indication of the need of higher education amongst the female population. The trend restores the trust of the people in distance education as being fair and justified. The high enrolment of women under DDE for the programmes is also marked by the fact that all the study centres under DDE has revealed high enrolment among the female learners. The explanations for the rising enrolment can be the proximity of the study centres to their home. The growth of programmes has been another reason along with economic necessity. With the changing dynamic in the work culture, more women are engaged in jobs and other ventures that enable them to be self-independent. There has been a change in the mindset of the people and more especially of the women.

Distance Education can reach out widely, only when the network has been extended. Study centre, sub-study centres, special study centres in different places make up as the vital elements in spreading distance

13. Unpublished Official records, DDE, Dibrugarh University

education to the wide masses. The table below throws light on the study centres placed in areas; urban and rural.

Fig. 53 Urban Rural Enrolment under DDE (2006-2012)

| Year | Urban | Rural | Total |
|----------|-------|-------|-------|
| 2006-07* | 314 | 256 | 670 |
| 2007-08 | 505 | 288 | 794 |
| 2008-09 | 537 | 390 | 913 |
| 2009-10* | 984 | 302 | 1296 |
| 2010-11* | 1496 | 630 | 2126 |
| 2011-12 | NA | NA | NA |

Source: DDE official records, Dibrugarh University¹⁴

In this table above, the trend of enrolment has been more in urban areas than the rural areas. The demand for distance education seems to be coming more from areas that have better infra-structure and other such amenities. The problem of rural areas ranging from electricity, illiteracy, socio-cultural norms have led to low enrolment besides the lack of study centres in such areas.

Another reason for the establishment of the study centres in the urban areas may be because of the financial problems. A study centre in a rural area is a financial liability than the one in a sub-urban or urban town. This has a huge implication as it restricts the learner's access to the higher learning.

Similarly, access to higher education should not be limited by the social groups one belongs too. The enrolment of SC/ST has been very negligible in higher education in the state. With the highest concentration of SC population in Assam (18.26%) compared to the other states in North East

14. Unpublished Official records, DDE, Dibrugarh University

(24.86%), the role of Distance Education considerable rises¹⁵. The table below highlights the enrolment of the social groups under DDE.

Fig. 54 Enrolment by social groups (2006-2012)

| Year | General | SC/ST | OBC | Total |
|----------|---------|-------|-----|-------|
| 2006-07* | 117 | 83 | 380 | 670 |
| 2007-08 | 277 | 119 | 447 | 794 |
| 2008-09 | 278 | 153 | 496 | 913 |
| 2009-10* | 412 | 271 | 613 | 1296 |
| 2010-11* | 711 | 623 | 892 | 2126 |
| 2011-12 | NA | NA | NA | NA |

Source: DDE official records¹⁶

From the above table, it can be assumed that the enrolment of the SC/STs have increased from 83 in 2006-07 to 623 in 2010-11. However, the situation looks still grim due to the low enrolment of the SC/ST learner's as compared to the other social groups. The low enrolment of the SC/ST learner's in DDE can be assumed due to the economic disadvantages and lack of awareness about the distance mode of learning. Distance Education has been trying to grapple with the problem of learner retention, as the learners often discontinue their studies midway through the course. The success rate of the learners under DDE is mentioned below:

Fig. 55 Successful learners of DDE (2006-2012)

| Sl. No. | Year | Pass %age |
|---------|---------|-----------|
| 1 | 2006-07 | 64.16 |
| 2 | 2007-08 | 66.88 |
| 3 | 2008-09 | 85.18 |
| 4 | 2009-10 | 58.59 |
| 5 | 2010-11 | 40.62 |
| 6 | 2011-12 | NA |

15. Annual Report 2010-11, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India. Retrieved from <http://socialjustice.nic.in/pdf/ar11eng.pdf> on 09-11-12

16. Unpublished Official records, DDE, Dibrugarh University

Source: DDE Records¹⁷

While recording the achievements, it has been observed that the percentage of pass out students have been dwindling since 2009. Since 2009, the number of learners who have failed to clear their exam goes up to 41%(approx.) from 15% in the previous year. The next year (2010-11), the number of learners goes up to 59% (approx.).

The figure gives the indication, that there is a serious problem in the system that has failed to motivate the learners. In distance education mode of education, the learners may back out during the course period due to personal or other problems as the system due to its flexibility allows a maximum time limit to complete their courses.

Under DDE vocational courses were offered since 2005. Besides the traditional courses, courses that could fulfill the market demands as well as absorb the human capital were the focus in distance education. In 2005 the University launched PG Diploma in Marketing Management and statistics. Besides that the University also had launched PG Diploma in Journalism and Mass Communication and introduces some practical courses within the curriculum. The new programmes have been introduced in order to prepare the learners for the practical world and equip them with the necessary skills. Every educational institution has an administrative structure on which the whole system is based. It is arranged mostly in a hierarchical form. The structure gives hindsight into the functioning of the entire system.

A democratic and more transparent system is preferred in any institution. The structure determines as well as influences the growth of the institution. In the diagram below, it must be observed that the Director heads the Directorate and he is assisted by the Deputy Director and other staffs.

17. Ibid

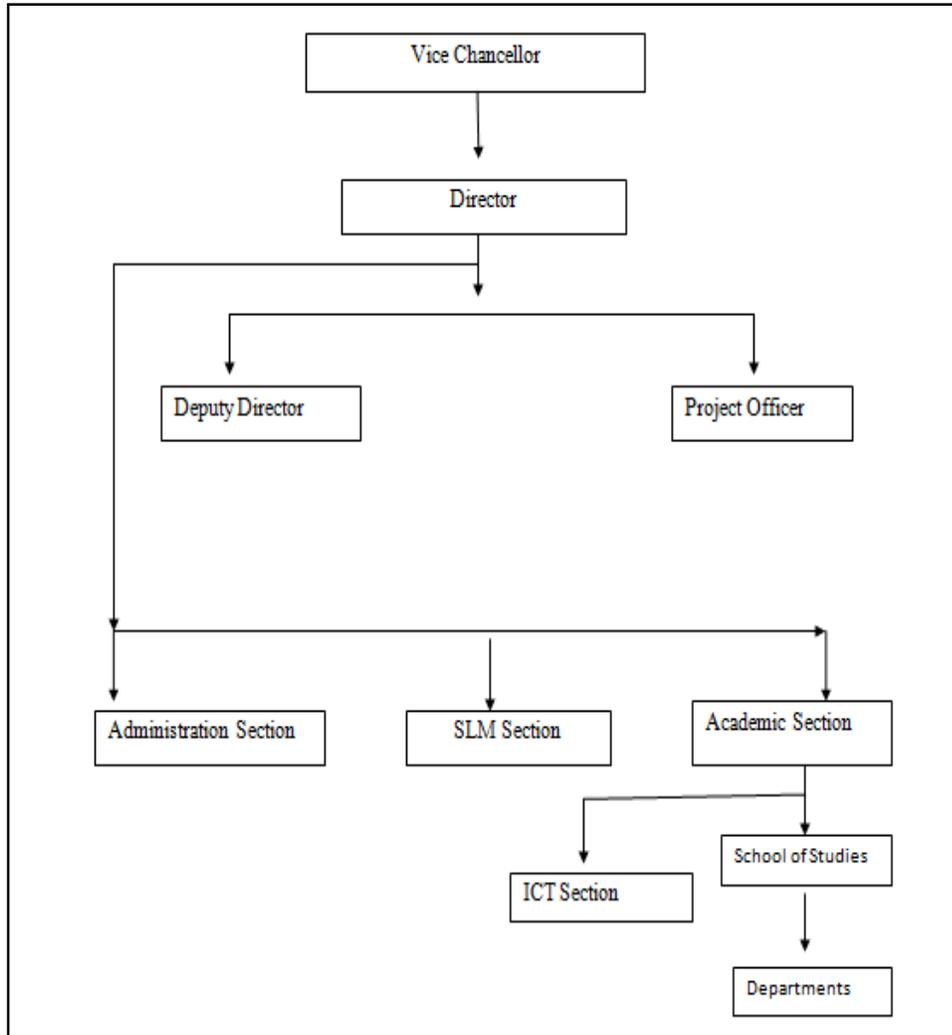
In dual mode University like Dibrugarh University, the Directorate only acts as attachment of the University. A DEI in a Dual Mode University has often been looked at with a critical outlook as the means of increasing the University revenue. While the Director acts as the head, the entire regulations and activities are planned keeping in mind the entire University education system.

There has been a slightly similar pattern noticed in the functioning of a Dual Mode Institution in the state of Assam. Both Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University have been offering higher education in distance mode for a long time and over the years, the functioning of the distance learning system within the conventional system have more or less become more visible.

The staff at the University DDE centre was 13 which included 7 academic staffs and 6 non-academic or administrative staff. The human resource in a DEI has an immense impact on the success of the distance learning system.

The diagram below gives a hazy interpretation of the working of the distance education system in a dual mode University.

Fig. 56 MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE OF DDE, DU



Source: Authors own depiction from the official sources of DDE, Dibrugarh University

In yet another major achievement the University has tied a close tie with Institutes that can boost the distance learner's self-confidence. These institutions offer courses as well as accreditation that enable the learners to look forward to a bright future. In such a move, the University started offering BBA in flying as well as a BBA in Hospitality & Tourism, Aviation. Similarly, a Diploma in Aviation, Hospitality & Tourism Management has also been introduced.

Towards the close of the year 2010, the University began exploring the varied use of technology for the distance learners under the University. The study materials had begun to be made available to the learners in CDs along with the printed books.

6.5. IDOL (GAUHATI UNIVERSITY): 2006-2012

The period since 2006 has a deep significance in the history of DE institutions and IDOL is not an exception to it. IDOL witnessed changes during this period and these changes have the potential to bring an impact on the distance learners.

Affiliated to the most prestigious University of Assam, IDOL has been able to bring many learners within the fold of distance education since its inception. The enrolment trend since 2006 has been given below.

Fig. 57 Enrolment of learners under IDOL (2006-2012)

| Sl. No. | Year | Enrolment |
|----------------|-------------|------------------|
| 1 | 2005-06 | 2743 |
| 2 | 2006-07 | 2923 |
| 3 | 2007-08 | 3823 |
| 4 | 2008-09 | 3832 |
| 5 | 2009-10 | 5393 |
| 6 | 2010-11 | 9444 |
| 7 | 2011-12 | 11515 |

Source: IDOL records ¹⁸

In contrast to the earlier decade, during 2006-11, the enrolment has shown a rising trend. The number of learners has grown from 2743 in

18. Official Records from IDOL, Gauhati University

2006 to 11515 in 2011-12. The increase in enrolment may have been due to the restoration of faith in distance education which implies that it is no longer considered as a supplementary form of higher education.

The increase has also been triggered by the fact that the learners have a newfound confidence in the degrees and certificates that are being awarded to them. The University took a major step in mitigating away the insecurity of the learners in regard to their degrees, by giving away the awards in a common format.

The certificates carrying the degrees and diplomas do not differentiate between a distance learner of IDOL from a regular learner from the University. This step has definitely given the learners a trust in the Institution, which has resulted in the growing number of learners.

The table below significantly makes it clear the above made remark that Diploma programmes have more calling amongst the learners.

Fig. 58 Programme wise enrolment (%) under IDOL

| Year | PG | PG Dip. | Cert. | MSc. IT | UG | Total |
|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|------|-------|
| 2005-06 | 70.90 | 29.09 | | | | 100 |
| 2006-07 | 66.06 | 33.93 | | | | 100 |
| 2007-08 | 60.94 | 39.05 | | | | 100 |
| 2008-09 | 62 | 37.99 | | | | 100 |
| 2009-10 | 69.34 | 28.64 | 1.14 | 0.85 | | 100 |
| 2010-11 | 69.40 | 27.68 | 1.09 | 0.63 | 1.19 | 100 |
| 2011-12 | 83.59 | 14.18 | 0.85 | 0.47 | 0.90 | 100 |

Source: IDOL records¹⁹

19. Official Records from IDOL, Gauhati University

The programmes offered by IDOL have gone up keeping in mind the needs of the changing times as well as the need of the learners in order to find a suitable place in the working world. The table below is the indication of the growing number of programmes

While the enrolment trend was catching up, the enrolment pattern seemed moving favorably for the female learners. As noticed earlier, the Dual Mode University had higher female learners than the males. The table below gives the hint of enrolment amongst the female learners.

Fig. 59 Gender wise enrolment (%) under IDOL (2006-2012)

| Sl. No. | Year | Female |
|---------|---------|--------|
| 1. | 2005-06 | 51.32 |
| 2. | 2006-07 | 50.05 |
| 3. | 2007-08 | 52.61 |
| 4. | 2008-09 | 57.14 |
| 5. | 2009-10 | 52.69 |
| 6. | 2010-11 | 52.42 |
| 7. | 2011-12 | 58.11 |

Source: IDOL records²⁰

IDOL has been successful in its endeavor to enrol learners from the deprived section of the society. Though the figure above suggests the growth of female enrolment has not been steady, yet it remains far above the male enrolment rates. This growth in female enrolment can be linked to the growing programmes introduced by the Institute. With the growing enrolment of women in general higher education, distance education too is not different presumable, considering the fact that higher education has been in high demand.

20. Official Records from IDOL, Gauhati University

Similarly, the enrolment of the social groups under DDE The accessibility of distance education to different social groups has been studied and the table below provides some interesting trend.

Fig. 60 Enrolment trend of social groups under IDOL

| Year | Gen | OBC/MOBC | SC/ST |
|---------|-------|----------|-------|
| 2005-06 | 56.11 | 27.46 | 16.17 |
| 2006-07 | 53.94 | 26.41 | 19.64 |
| 2007-08 | 51.45 | 23.13 | 25.35 |
| 2008-09 | 53.21 | 24.76 | 21.96 |
| 2009-10 | 52.87 | 24.99 | 21.92 |
| 2010-11 | 52.03 | 25.17 | 22.73 |
| 2011-12 | NA | NA | NA |
| Average | 53.26 | 25.32 | 21.29 |

Source: IDOL records²¹

According to the details of the table above, the learners who are making the most of distance education belong to the general class. Though OBC and ST do have a considerable share in it, it remains still a distant dream for an equal distribution of education for all the social groups.

The enrolment for the SC/ST has grown from 16.17% in 2006 to 21.29% in 2011. The average enrolment for the General stood at 53.26%, for the OBC/MOBC it was 25.32% and for the SC/ST it was 21.29%. The enrolment of the SC/STs has been low due to the lack of their access to sources that can enable their participation in higher education.

The Institute has been successfully awarding degrees to its learners. The number of degrees awarded is mentioned below. The table below gives a detailed look into the degrees awarded according to the subjects or programmes. In the table, it is revealed that the PG Diploma have more

21. Official Records from IDOL, Gauhati University

pursuers than other programmes. The PG programmes have retained the majority though, the PG Diploma shown immense scope of toppling the PG subjects.

Fig. 61 Programme wise degree awarded:

| Progs./Year | Master | PG Diploma | Certificate |
|-------------|--------|------------|-------------|
| 2005-06 | 56.61 | 41.03 | |
| 2006-07 | 66.06 | 33.93 | |
| 2007-08 | 60.74 | 39.05 | |
| 2008-09 | 62.52 | 37.46 | |
| 2009-10 | 71.35 | 27.14 | 0.85 |
| 2010-11 | 57.56 | 37.19 | NA |
| 2011-12 | NA | NA | NA |

Source: IDOL records²²

The pass out rate of the learners has been high in the traditional courses. This explains the trend that in distance mode of learning, the learners are still not moving away from the conventional courses, which is very disappointing keeping in mind the fact that the opportunities for professional course is immense. From the figure below it is clear that the programmes have increased and the trend is given below:

Fig. 62 Growth of Programmes under IDOL

| Sl. No. | Year | No. of Programmes |
|---------|------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2005 | 12 |
| 2 | 2008 | 18 |
| 3 | 2011 | 24 |

Source: IDOL records²³

The programmes initially offered by IDOL were in Masters and then it expanded to PG Diploma courses and professional courses.

22. Official Records from IDOL, Gauhati University

23. Ibid

As with the programmes the number of study centres needs to grow to fulfill the demands of distance education for the learners living in towns and villages. The study centres of IDOL had increased to 102 but it came down to 87. This decrease may have been resulted due to the ineffective functioning or due to the low response from the particular district or learners. Interestingly even with a limited study centre, the IDOL has successfully enlisted more learners in recent years than earlier.

Fig. 63 Growth of study centers:

| Sl. No. | Year | No. of study centers | Contact Centres |
|---------|------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | 2005 | - | 56 |
| 2 | 2008 | 10 | 79 |
| 3 | 2011 | 10 | 87 |

Source: IDOL records²⁴

In regard to the internal administration of the Institution, the role of academic and administrative staff is very important in the distance education system. The DDE has employed staffs for the support of the students at the Centre based in Guwahati. However, the number seems hardly adequate to meet the multiple requirements of the learners who come to the Centre from all over the state. The table below provides a figure into the increase in staffs.

Fig. 64 IDOL Staff growth:

| Year | Academic staff | Administrative staff | Others |
|------|----------------|----------------------|--------|
| 2005 | NA | 14 | NA |
| 2008 | 8 | 23 | NA |
| 2011 | 14 | 24 | 3 |

Source: IDOL records²⁵

A look into the trend of enrolment according to the area of the learners below reveals a new trend as noticed earlier in DDE, DU which is that enrolment in the rural areas far exceed than the urban areas. This trend is

24 Official Records from IDOL, Gauhati University

25. Ibid

an encouraging sign for more learners to come up from such remote and backward areas. The growth in rural participation has been ignited by the widespread success of IDOL. Moreover, the enrolment has been higher because they want to fulfill their dream of higher education and they have less inhibition towards IDOL as a distance education Institution because of the fact that it is attached to the legendary Gauhati University, which probably gives them a sense of security in terms of their academic career. The enrolment trend according to the urban and rural areas is given below.

Fig. 65 Enrolment Trend Area wise under IDOL

| Sl. No. | Year | Rural | Urban |
|---------|------|-------|-------|
| 1 | 2005 | 76.1 | 23.4 |
| 2 | 2008 | 69.4 | 29.3 |
| 3 | 2011 | 70.3 | 28.9 |

Source: IDOL records²⁶

ICT under IDOL:

Student support services under IDOL Gauhati University took a significant leap when in 2009; Radio Luit was launched as the first campus based Community Radio. The University aimed to reach the wider audience as well as its learners.

In 2011, the e-learning portal of IDOL was launched, which serves as a digital repository. The learners are enabled to study, download and get answers to their academic queries through it. The portal was named as *Bodhidroom*.

The University also makes use of bulk SMS for its learners. The application of mobile services for the learners has helped them to stay in touch with the latest developments in the institutions. Besides ICT, IDOL also offers counseling and contact sessions for its learners as part of its student support services. These sessions are meant to alienate the feeling

26. Official Records from IDOL, Gauhati University

of loneliness and give them constant support for their studies and assignment.

6.6. KKHSOU (Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University):

The genesis of KKHSOU can be rooted to a meeting that was held at the Chief Ministers residence on November 4, 2004²⁷. Under his chairmanship, and 8 other dignitaries which included the then Minister of Higher Education (Dr. Bhumidhar Barman) and Principal Secretary (Shri. P.P. Verma), Planning and Development Department.

In this meeting the Chief Minister stressed on the need of distance learning in the present contexts and it was discussed that distance education system in the lines of IGNOU should be established in Assam at the joint initiatives of the State Government and IGNOU.

The philosophy of setting up a State Open University was to strengthen distance education and prevent exploitation of student by substandard education providers. The target of the system was to reach “people living in rural remote and less developed areas, people who live at very low subsistence levels with minimal opportunities of education, healthcare and means of improving their capabilities and income and village level development functionaries”.

The concept also include that the system will work as a n extension of IGNOU until a stage is reached where it can take off as deemed University. The underlined project of the SOU would become financially self sustainable on the lines of IGNOU.

It was decided in the meeting that:

- The Government of Assam may accord a principle approval to set up a SOU in Assam

27. Minutes of the Meeting held under the chairmanship of Hony Chief Minister, Assam (2004), Guwahati

- The Government of Assam will also initiate steps to pass an act for SOU on the lines suggested by IGNOU

Thus the KKHSOU, Act of 2005 was passed and the first state Open University in the state KKHSOU started functioning in 2006²⁸. The Open University is devoted towards the cause of distance education which is revealed in the objectives. The aims of the University is to provide access to higher education to a large section of the people, to strengthen and diversify the courses keeping with needs of the time, to use communication technology for the distribution of knowledge besides improving the educational system in the state.

The motto of the university is "*Education beyond Barriers*". In keeping with the motto the university has provided for many programmes. The target groups are the prisoners, people living in remote areas, working people, people from backward classes, people with disabilities, etc.

Thus it ensures that education is within the reach of the most deprived section of the society, irrespective of their gender, ethnic race, religion and socio economic background. The establishment of an Open University could not have been better and at the right time.

By 2006, an ardent need for an Open University fully dedicated to the distance learning system was felt in Assam. This predicament was proved true with the sky high growth of the State Open University as also the new dimensions that it brought with its growth.

The Stat Open University is basically funded by the three sources mentioned below:

1. State Government
2. Distance Education Council (DEC)
3. Internal Resources (Student Fees)

28. Horizon (2008) Vol. I No.I

The State Open University has also taken innovative steps in matters of curriculum reform and also exam related reforms. Bachelor Preparatory Programmes were initially offered for 6 months but it was soon extended to one year.

The University also took steps to integrate practical training for the learners through various collaborations. The institutional collaborations with Institutions are:

1. Assam Agricultural University for agriculture based programmes
2. Directorate of Employment Craftsmen's Training for engineering based programme
3. Directorate of Technical Education for technical education
4. Uttarakhand University for sharing self-learning materials

The University also took steps to maintain the quality and standard of the self-learning materials through an internal cell established for the same purpose. Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA) was established in 2010 under the Dr. M. C. Sharma as the Director.

The number of learners has increased many folds under KKHSOU. The enrolment through 2007-08 to 2011 has been depicted in the tables below.

Fig. 66 Learner Enrolment under KKHSOU

| Year | Enrolment |
|-------------|------------------|
| 2007-08 | 3490 |
| 2008-09 | 18533 |
| 2009-10 | 28910 |
| 2010-11 | 40658 |
| 2011-12 | 31103 |

Source: Horizon²⁹, Annual Report KKHSOU³⁰

29. Horizon (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011)

30. Annual Reports, KKHSOU, 2007 and 2008

The Open University has been received with open arms and the enrolment number only seems to justify the fact that distance learning is no longer a supplementary form of education or a “second choice” for the learners. It was like they had been waiting for this chance and once they got it, there was no way they could lose it. The increase in the enrolment since its establishment has been more than tenfold since its establishment.

Fig. 67 Programmes under KKHSOU are given below:

| Sl. No. | Programmes |
|---------|---------------------------------|
| 1 | PhD |
| 2 | BPP |
| 3 | BA/B.Com/BMC/BBA/BCA |
| 4 | Certificate courses |
| 5 | Diploma/PG Diploma |
| 6 | Vocational/Professional courses |
| 7 | Master Degree Programme* |

Source: “Horizon”³¹

KKHSOU as an Open University system has tried to add variety in its programmes and hence, it has not stuck to the conventional courses alone. This variation may have resulted in the increase of learners.

BPP was the first programme that was introduced by KKHSOU and it was meant to be a “bridge course” for those who could not complete their high school and completion of BPP programme would enable them to enrol in Degree courses. This programme has been the highest grosser of all the enrolment number of learners.

Bachelor Degree was introduced in five subjects initially only to be introduced with more in the following years.

31. Horizon (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011)

The Vocational programmes or the short term certificate courses are basically aimed to drill the learners in practical hands on work and training. The courses under the Certificate programmes are mentioned below.

The State Open University for the first time introduced short-term certificate courses almost a lump sum amount through the polytechnics and ITIs of Assam. The certificate courses are mainly vocational courses. The courses are as follows:

Fig. 68 Certificate courses under KKHSOU

| Sl. No. | Certificate Course | Sl. No. | Certificate Course |
|---------|---|---------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Basic Welding | 7 | A/C, D/C Motor Rewinding |
| 2 | Electrical Housing Wiring | 8 | Computer Application |
| 3 | Repairing of Domestic Electrical Appliances | 9 | Basic Automotive Servicing |
| 4 | Beautician Course | 10 | Electronics Appliances Mechanics |
| 5 | Plumbing and Pump Installation | 11 | 4 wheeler servicing |
| 6 | Repair and Maintenance of 2/3 wheeler | | |

Source: KKHSOU Newsletter "Horizon"³²

It was in 2010, that Post Graduate programmes were introduced for the learners of KKHSOU. The PG programmes were mostly under three respective disciplines – Master of Business Administration (MBA), Master of Computer Application (MCA) and Master of Mass Communication (MMC). This initial approach was aimed to understand the learner's choice of subjects. At the same time, the University made a competitive move ahead from the other institutions.

The University gave a huge impetus to research activities by the launch of the PhD programme since 2009. It was to serve the purpose of building the research environment in the University and promote the cause of Distance Education.

32. Horizon (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011)

There are two types of PhD Scholars: in-house and part time researchers. The PhD full time students or the in-house students are termed as the RTAs (Research and Teaching Assistants). There are part time scholars as well, who pursue PhD while continuing their jobs or other ventures of theirs. The enrolment for PhD under the University is given below:

Fig. 69 PhD enrolment under KKHSOU

| Year | Part-time PhD scholar | RTA's | Total |
|------|-----------------------|-------|-------|
| 2009 | 11 | 3 | 14 |
| 2010 | 11 | 3 | 14 |
| 2011 | 10 | 2 | 12 |

Source: KKHSOU Office³³

The enrolment under the various programmes under KKHSOU will help in throwing a new light on the learner's academic choices and their aspirations for their future. In the table below are given the enrolment number.

Fig. 70 Programme wise enrolment in KKHSOU (2006-2012)

| Year | BPP | BA | Voc. | PG | Dip. | PG Dip. | Cert. | Total Enrolment |
|---------|-------|-------|------|----|------|---------|-------|-----------------|
| 2007-08 | 3434 | | | | | | | 3434 |
| 2008-09 | 7657 | 5516 | 119 | | | | | 13292 |
| 2009-10 | 9234 | 9495 | 686 | | 41 | 54 | | 19415 |
| 2010-11 | 10360 | 15061 | 121 | 55 | | | 159 | 25597 |
| 2011-12 | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |

Source: Annual Reports, KKHSOU³⁴

BPP: Bachelor Preparatory Programme
PG: Post Graduate Programme
Dip. : Diploma Programme
BA: Bachelor of Arts

Voc.: Vocational Programmes
PG Dip.: PG Diploma Programme
Cert.: Certificate Programme

33. Official Records, KKHSOU

34. Annual Reports, KKHSOU (2007 and 2008)

In the above table, it is hard to ignore the fact that the BPP programme has been by far the most sought after programme under KKHSOU. This has been due to the rising drop outs in the high school and the colleges. While many are not able to clear their exams, there are many who have below average marks for which they join the course. IGNOU too has BPP course.

The BA courses similarly have been growing in demand and it is hardly surprising that the number of learners keep increasing. However, it is disturbing that the effort of the University in giving a vocational training programme begins in a high note and then suddenly drops down. In the year 2009 it was 119 and went high next year with an enrolment of 686, coming down the very next year simultaneously in a very odd fashion with the enrolment of just 121 learners.

This definitely means that distance education is still not considered a proper Institution to provide practical skill driven programmes. The University has tied up with ITIs and the Polytechnics for the learners.

The University has laid down in its objective of bringing distance education to the doorstep of the people. Thus it aims to make inclusive education a possibility within the state. The table below describes in detail the enrolment of the female learners under the University.

Fig. 71 Female Enrolment (%) under KKHSOU

| Year | Female enrolment (%) | Total |
|---------|----------------------|-------|
| 2007-08 | 35.26 | 100 |
| 2008-09 | 36.82 | 100 |
| 2009-10 | 41.33 | 100 |
| 2010-11 | 39.13 | 100 |
| 2011-12 | NA | NA |

Source: KKHSOU official Records³⁵

35. Official Records, KKHSOU

The enrolment of the female learners has increased quantitatively in the years but they are considerable falling behind with the enrolment of their male counterparts.

The low enrolment under KKHSOU of the female learners is a very disturbing trend, as because KKHSOU has a wide network of study centres around the nook and corner of the state. Indeed KKHSOU has the highest number of study centres in comparison with other DEIs. A look into the BPP enrolment alone gives a hint into the learner's profile. The table below illustrates the point.

Fig. 72 BPP Enrolment under KKHSOU

| Academic year | Female | Total |
|---------------|--------------|--------|
| 2007-08 | 1211 (35.26) | 3434 |
| 2008-09 | 3166 (41.34) | 7657 |
| 2009-10 | 4208 (45.57) | 9234 |
| 2010-11 | 4007 (38.67) | 10,360 |
| 2011 | NA | NA |

Source: KKHSOU records³⁶

The participation of women in the BPP is very encouraging. The number of women learners has increased substantially from 35% to 39%. The enrolment under BPP Arts records the highest of all the others. This means that the learners intend to go for higher education in future in the Arts stream. In the table below, the enrolment of the Bachelor degree learners have catapulted to new heights.

36. Official Records, KKHSOU

Fig. 73 Enrolment in BA under KKHSOU

| Progs. | 2008-09 | | | 2009-10 | | | 2010-11 | | | Total | | |
|--------|---------|------|------|---------|------|------|---------|------|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| | M | F | T | M | F | T | M | F | T | M | F | T |
| BA | 2785 | 1465 | 4250 | 4556 | 3524 | 8080 | 7933 | 5738 | 13671 | 15,274 | 10727 | 26001 |
| BMC | 193 | 112 | 305 | 196 | 121 | 317 | 167 | 96 | 263 | 556 | 329 | 885 |
| B.Com | 194 | 16 | 210 | 334 | 47 | 381 | 441 | 56 | 497 | 969 | 119 | 1088 |
| BBA | 232 | 49 | 281 | 214 | 38 | 252 | 157 | 32 | 189 | 603 | 119 | 722 |
| BCA | 383 | 87 | 470 | 377 | 88 | 465 | 352 | 89 | 441 | 1112 | 264 | 1376 |
| Total | 3787 | 1729 | 5516 | 5677 | 3818 | 9495 | 9050 | 6011 | 15061 | 18,514 | 11558 | 30072 |

Source: Official Reports of KKHSOU³⁷

Fig. 74 Female participation in Bachelor Degree Programmes under KKHSOU

| Category | 2008-09 | 2009-10 | 2010-11 | Total |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| Female learners per 100 males | 46 | 67 | 67 | 62 |

Total enrollment in degree programmes increased from 5516 in 2008-09 to 9495 in 2009-10 and has crossed 15,000 mark in 2010-11, thereby significantly contributing towards enhancement of the gross enrollment ratio in the higher education sector in Assam.

The cumulative enrolment under the different BA programmes, it is revealed that the drive for traditional courses still remains among the learners. BCA and B.Com follows with the next highest enrolment. B.Com alone has increasing learners every year. While for the rest of the courses like BBA, BCA and BMC, the enrolment over the three years have fallen down. For eg., the enrolment for BMC was 305 in 2008-09 and in 2010-11 the enrolment had dropped to 263. Likewise, the BBA and the BCA

37. Official Records, KKHSOU

courses had an enrolment of 281 and 470 respectively in 2008-09, and in 2010-11, the enrolment was 189 and 441 for the courses. As for the enrolment under the Masters programme, the table below gives in details the figures.

Fig. 75 Master Degree Programme Enrolment (2010-11)

| Name of the course | Number of learners |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| MBA | 21 |
| MCA | 22 |
| MMC | 12 |
| Cumulative total | 55 |

Source: KKHSOU official records³⁸

The first batch of PG students were 55 in number. Within a period of a year, more courses under the PG programme were introduced in 2011-12. The enrolment under Master Degree has been but very few.

While looking into the achievement of the Open University, the pass out rate of the students could give a rare insight.

Fig. 76 Pass out rate of the learners for all the programmes of KKHSOU

| Sl. No. | Year | Pass out Rate (%) |
|---------|---------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2007-08 | 65.92 |
| 2 | 2008-09 | 81.50 |
| 3 | 2009-10 | 83.80 |
| 4 | 2010-11 | 72.19 |
| 5 | 2011-12 | NA |

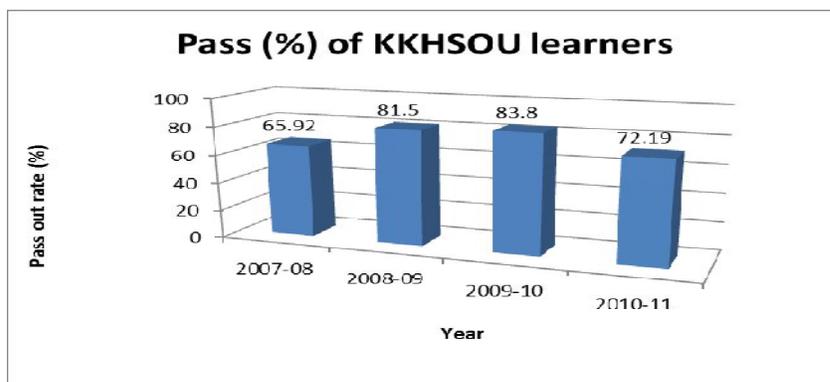
Source: Official Reports KKHSOU³⁹

It must have been clear from the above table that the pass out percentage of the students under KKHSOU has been very high. The programmes

38. Official Records, KKHSOU

39. Ibid

were appreciated by the learners. However, in 2010-11, the number dropped low to a 72.19%. The graphical presentation of the number of learners awarded degrees are given below.



In order to make sense of the fluctuating pass out trend, a look separately into the pass out rate of the programme will definitely be of help. As seen from the table below, the pass percentage of the Bachelor Preparatory Programme exam over the last 3 years is very encouraging. The BPP exam was in the initial period a six monthly course where the exam was held every 6 months. Since 2010, it has become a yearly programme.

Even though the pass percentage has not remained stable due to the failure of the learners in appearing for the exam, yet the overall pass percentage which stands at 75.6% is satisfactory.

Fig. 77 Pass out rate in BPP

| Session | Appeared | Passed | Passed out (%) |
|----------------------------|----------|--------|----------------|
| June-July, 2008 | 2623 | 1729 | 65.9 |
| December 2008-January 2009 | 3902 | 2714 | 69.55 |
| June-July, 2009 | 3209 | 2904 | 90.49 |
| December 2009-January 2010 | 4217 | 3648 | 86.50 |
| July 2010 | 3783 | 2961 | 78.27 |
| Annual BPP 2010-11 | 7498 | 5132 | 68.44 |
| Cumulative total | 25232 | 19088 | 75.6 |

Source: KKHSOU Official records⁴⁰

40. Official Records, KKHSOU

In the table below, the number of appeared candidates seems to remain stable. This trend speaks of the rush for the BPP course and its success rate which is due to the fact that there have been very few dropouts.

Fig. 78 Appeared Candidates in BPP

| Year | Enrolled | Appeared | Appeared (%) |
|------------------|----------|----------|--------------|
| 2007-08 | 3434 | 2623 | 76.38 |
| 2008-09 | 7657 | 7111 | 92.86 |
| 2009-10 | 9234 | 8000 | 86.63 |
| 2010-11 | 10360 | 7498 | 72.37 |
| Cumulative Total | 30685 | 25323 | 82.52 |

Source: Official Records, KKHSOU⁴¹

The table below highlights the pass out rate of the students under the Bachelor Degree programmes.

Fig. 79 Pass (%) Bachelor degree programmes

| Year | Appeared | Passed | Pass Percentage |
|------------------|----------|--------|-----------------|
| 2009 | 4495 | 3836 | 85.33 |
| 2010 | 9984 | 9328 | 93.42 |
| 2011 | 3568 | 2930 | 82.11 |
| 2012 | NA | NA | NA |
| Cumulative Total | 18047 | 16094 | 89.17 |

Source: KKHSOU records⁴²

In the Table given above, the pass percentage of all the bachelor degree courses has been given in an annual basis. The pass out rate in Bachelor Degree too remains stable.

41. Official Records, KKHSOU

42. Ibid

Fig. 80 Pass (%) in Dip./PG Dip. course

| Courses | Session | Appeared | Passed | Pass Percentage |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------------|
| Diploma Courses | 2009-10 | 34 | 31 | 91.17% |
| Post Graduate Diploma Courses | 2010-11 | 38 | 31 | 81.6% |
| Cumulative total | | 72 | 62 | 86.11% |

Source: KKHSOU records⁴³

PG Diploma courses started from 2010 onwards. The pass percentage of the learners in the diploma and PG Diploma courses are satisfactory. For the short term courses, the table highlights the pass out rate in the Certificate course.

Fig. 81 Learners who completed Short Term Course

| Year | Appeared | Passed | Pass Percentage |
|-------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------------|
| 2010-11 | 59 | 54 | 91.5% |

Source: KKHSOU Official Records⁴⁴

Introduced since 2009 onwards, the four different short term certificate courses are – Certificate in Mobile Phone Repairing, Certificate in Computer Hardware, Certificate in Computer Application and Certificate in Computer Network. The pass percentage for the certificate course is 91.5% which is very high compared to the rest of the courses. The reason behind it may be the preference of the learner for a short term courses which can be finished in a short time.

Student Support Services: experience of KKHSOU:

The Learners' Support Services (LSS) in the ODL system encompasses the various services extended to the learners throughout the whole teaching-learning process, right from admission to declaration of examination result. Such LSS include the pre-admission counseling,

43. Ibid

44. Official Records, KKHSOU

admission process, provision of study materials both in print-media and audio-visual forms, subject specific academic counseling, audio-visual viewing facilities, participation in teleconferencing, ICT facilities for e-learning, library services, laboratory support facilities, academic career guidance, information services related to rules, regulations, procedures, schedules, etc. of the University, submission of assignment-responses for tutorcomments and grading / marking and term-end examination etc. Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University offers a wide range of learners support services for the distant learners. Such services help the learners in pursuing his/her education smoothly.

Besides the print materials the university has started to make new experiment of using broadcast technology. The University recognizes that in the 21st century education cannot be only delivered through books. Moreover in a transitional economy and the opportunities that come along with it, distance education cannot tend to remain static but move ahead new challenges.

For this purpose the university has set up a well-equipped studio, meant for the purpose of producing audio and audio visual programmes. Equipped with cameras of high broadcast quality and latest technological tools like Mac Pro which helps in online editing has only made the production of high quality of audio-video CDs for the learners. DEC (Distance Education Council) has provided financial support for the setting up of the studio and the production of CD's and DVD's⁴⁵.

SLMs besides in printed form are now available in an audio-visual format. The study centers have been provided with radios, LCD screens, DVDs in order to benefit the learners. The University has made arrangements for the provision of counseling sessions for the distant learners every Sunday at the study centers.

The medium of instruction is both in English and Assamese. There are at least three counseling sessions per credit for each of the papers offered

45. Horizon (2011). Vol. V, No.II

as may be notified by the respective study centers. The counseling sessions are provided for academic and administrative purposes.

The University launched its own web portal (www.kkhsou.in) in 2011. The website offers academic news in details, as information regarding date of exams, courses offered, contact details of faculties, for the learners, announcements update, etc. Various links are provided in the official website for the users in order to get the required information regarding the University. Learner can also get access to the programmes of the community radio of the university '**Jnan Taranga**' which have been uploaded⁴⁶.

"E-Bidya", an important highlight of the web portal of the State Open University provides access to the study materials of the university to those learners who fail to receive printed study materials on time due to some unavoidable circumstances. The website also has detailed information's about the Central Library of the university, its services, collection of books and journals etc. which can be accessed by the learner.

The University also offers a social network site (www.kkhsou.org), a blog (www.kkhsou.net) for better interactions among the learners and learners and the University faculties⁴⁷. The University can also be followed at Twitter, Facebook and Orkut. The first educational interactive voice response system of the North Eastern Region in the form of a toll free phone service (1800-345-3613) has been made available for the learners as well as the general public. The educational service has been termed as 24 x 7 Learners Support Services launched in 2011.

The study centers of the University are connected with free phone services. There is an interactive hourly programme- 'VC Online'⁴⁸ in which the Vice Chancellor of the University answers the queries of the students as well as the general listeners. The University also officially launched a

46. Horizon, Vol. V, No. II, 2011

47. Ibid

48. Ibid

special educational programme, named 'Ekalavya' through Akhashbani Guwahati and Dibrugarh, on 23rd May 2011⁴⁹. The contents of the programme include various topics on different courses under the University, which would benefit the learners of both rural and urban areas.

6.7. IGNOU GUWAHATI (REGIONAL CENTRE): 2006-2012

During the period from 2006-2012, the growth and progress of IGNOU took new heights in the light of new changes that were brought in along with the stiff competitions among the other ODL institutions. The progress of Distance Education in Assam under IGNOU during this period reveals very crucial trends that have shaped distance education. The enrolment trend under IGNOU has been discussed in details below.

Fig. 82 Enrolment under IGNOU 2006-2011

| Year | Enrolment | DA (inclusive) |
|------|-----------|----------------|
| 2006 | 3841 | NA |
| 2007 | 4881 | NA |
| 2008 | 4748 | 30 |
| 2009 | 5257 | 15 |
| 2010 | 4747 | 10 |
| 2011 | 5897 | 4 |
| 2012 | 6607 | NA |

Source: IGNOU RC records⁵⁰ *DA: Differently abled Persons

The enrolment of the learners of IGNOU has been calculated taking into consideration only the fresh candidates and not inclusive of the re-registered candidates. While going through the enrolment trend under IGNOU it has been revealed that the enrolment number with every increasing year has been fluctuating. Though it may not be increasing yet it still remains the most sought after Distance Learning Institutions.

49. Horizon, Vol. V, No. II, 2011

50. Office records, IGNOU Guwahati RC

In the table below, the enrolment under IGNOU during this period gives the indication that despite the effort of the institution to bring gender parity in distance learning, yet education still remains the male's domain.

Fig. 83 Female Enrolment under IGNOU

| Year | Female Enrolment |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| 2006-07 | 1770 (46.08%) |
| 2007-08 | 2193 (44.94%) |
| 2008-09 | 2094 (44.10%) |
| 2009-10 | 1813 (38.19%) |
| 2010-11 | 2502 (42.24%) |
| 2011-12 | 2747(41.57%) |

Source: IGNOU RC records⁵¹

The gender distribution of learners under IGNOU is quantitatively very less in comparison with the male learners. In the Open Universities the male learners have always overshadowed the female learners.

While looking into the pattern of enrolment it has also come into light that the learners of the rural Assam have yet to get access to higher education. The table below highlights the number of enrolment under Urban, Rural and Tribal areas.

Fig. 84 Area wise enrolment of IGNOU learners

| Year | Urban | Rural | Tribal | Total Enrolment |
|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------------|
| 2006 | 2263 (58.91) | 1261 (32.82) | 237 (8.25) | 3841 (100) |

51. Office records, IGNOU Guwahati RC

| Year | Urban | Rural | Tribal | Total Enrolment |
|------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 2007 | 2814 (57.65) | 1214 (24.87) | 553 (11.32) | 4881 (100) |
| 2008 | 2481 (52.25) | 2242 (47.21) | 932 (19.62) | 4748 (100) |
| 2009 | 3035 (57.75) | 1647 (31.32) | 531 (10.10) | 5257 (100) |
| 2010 | 3353 (70.63) | 1132 (23.84) | 261 (5.49) | 4747 (100) |
| 2011 | 3300 (55.97) | 2007 (34.04) | 589 (9.98) | 5896 (100) |
| 2012 | 3716 (56.24) | 2388 (36.14) | 503 (7.61) | 6607 (100) |

Source: IGNOU RC records⁵²

The accessibility of higher education to the remote places seems questionable with the people living in urban areas. The enrolment under urban areas has indeed gone down from 58.91% to 56.24% but interestingly, the learners from urban areas have higher enrolment than the rural areas. On the other hand, the rural learner participation has increased from 32.82% to 36.14% which is definitely a good sign but their participation over the years have remained unstable. The enrolment in the tribal zones have also more or less remained unaffected with a participation of 88.25% in 2006 which came down to 7.61% in 2012. The highest marked enrolment in tribal areas was in the year 2008, when the enrolment was 19.62%.

As for the learners belonging to the deprived categories, the trend of the SC/ST enrolment was far from satisfactory. The table below highlights the enrolment of the SC/ST learners.

52. Office records, IGNOU Guwahati RC

Fig. 85 Social Group wise enrolment of IGNOU learners

| Year | General | SC/ST | OBC | Total Enrolment |
|------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 2006 | 2181 (56.78) | 838 (21.81) | 742 (12.28) | 3841 (100) |
| 2007 | 2624 (53.75) | 1086 (22.24) | 1171 (24.05) | 4881 (100) |
| 2008 | 2697 (56.80) | 997 (20.99) | 1054 (22.19) | 4748 (100) |
| 2009 | 2995 (56.97) | 1078 (20.50) | 1114 (21.19) | 5257 (100) |
| 2010 | 2735 (57.61) | 951 (20.03) | 1060 (22.32) | 4747 (100) |
| 2011 | 3198 (54.24) | 1345 (22.81) | 1358 (23.03) | 5896 (100) |
| 2012 | 3348 (50.67) | 1584 (23.97) | 1675 (25.07) | 6607 (100) |

Source: IGNOU RC records⁵³

Similarly in the table above the coverage of distance learning under IGNOU still caters to the General category of the students. As per the NIRD Report, in 2009-10 the SC and ST population in Assam was 11.55% and 14.75% respectively.

This indicates that more serious thoughts need to be given in this matter. The trends as understood through the enrolment rate over the years have only brought into light the fact that education still remains under those who are able to afford it. In a category wise division, it was revealed that the minority religious community had lower access to higher education than the other communities.

Enrolment under religious groups also helps in understanding the access of higher education by the minority groups based on religion. In general

53. Official Records, IGNOU Guwahati RC

education, the religious groups like the Muslims and other minority groups have very less access to education. In the table below, the enrolment pattern according to the religious groups have been discussed and analysed.

Fig. 86 Religious Group wise enrolment (%)

| Year | Hindu | Muslim | Christian | Others | Total Enrolment |
|-------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------|---------------|------------------------|
| 2006 | 3160 (82.27) | 353 (9.19) | 259 (6.74) | 69 (1.79) | 3841 (100) |
| 2007 | 3925 (80.04) | 487 (9.97) | 365 (7.47) | 104 (2.13) | 4881 (100) |
| 2008 | 3402 (71.65) | 356 (7.49) | 621 (13.07) | 234 (4.98) | 4748 (100) |
| 2009 | 4279 (81.39) | 415 (7.89) | 390 (7.41) | 73 (1.38) | 5257 (100) |
| 2010 | 4220 (88.89) | 275 (5.79) | 211 (4.44) | 40 (0.84) | 4747 (100) |
| 2011 | 4834 (81.98) | 498 (8.44) | 453 (7.68) | 111 (1.88) | 5896 (100) |
| 2012 | 5448 (82.45) | 590 (8.92) | 463 (7.00) | 106 (1.60) | 6607 (100) |

Source: IGNOU RC records⁵⁴

The majority of the learners belonged to the Hindu religious group with 82.45%, while the Muslims had 8.92% and the Christians had 7% enrolment in IGNOU.

The enrolment trend of the learners from different religious groups has remained static with more or less no changes. IGNOU offers many programmes for the learners. The table below gives a hint into the enrolment by programmes under IGNOU

54. Official Records, IGNOU Guwahati RC

Fig. 87 Programme wise enrolment under IGNOU

| Year | BPP | UG | PG | Dip. | PG Dip. | Cert. |
|------|-----|------|------|------|---------|-------|
| 2006 | 577 | 1768 | 1068 | 52 | 154 | 142 |
| 2007 | 712 | 1942 | 1714 | 164 | 102 | 247 |
| 2008 | 964 | 3461 | 1599 | 123 | 265 | 207 |
| 2009 | 844 | 3133 | 1649 | 93 | 201 | 137 |
| 2010 | 610 | 2031 | 1630 | 82 | 180 | 213 |
| 2011 | 517 | 2723 | 2300 | 64 | 173 | 117 |
| 2012 | 845 | 2849 | 2497 | 63 | 142 | 208 |

Source⁵⁵: IGNOU RC records

It is not hard to miss that the enrolment in the programmes has shown the same trend. The preference of the learners for Degree Courses at the Under Graduate level has remained during this period (2006-2012). The BPP courses under IGNOU have not been successful in attracting learners. In yet another turn, it was noticed that the learners demographic seemed to change a lot with the change in time. This change reflects the change in the attitude of the people towards ODL. The table below hints at this particular trend.

Fig. 88 Enrolment (%) of the learners as per their characteristics

| Year | Married | Employed |
|------|---------|----------|
| 2007 | 21.63 | 26.23 |
| 2008 | 18.07 | 19.30 |
| 2009 | 23.06 | 23.60 |
| 2010 | 18.85 | 7.26 |
| 2011 | 26.11 | 16.94 |

Source⁵⁶: Office Records, IGNOU Guwahati RC

Married learners under IGNOU comprised of 26.11% of the total learners which was higher than in 2007 when the married learners were only 21.63%. However it must be understood that the major chunk of the learners was unmarried which was 73.89%. This definitely lays down the fact that distance learning is seriously pursued for higher achievements.

55. Office Records, IGNOU Guwahati RC

56. Ibid

Similarly, the number of employed learners has also gone down to 16.94% in 2011 in stark contrast to 26.23% in 2007. This drop in the number ensures the point that distance mode of education is preferred more by non-professionals.

IGNOU initiative in North East India is another crucial turning point in the development of distance education. One such initiative was the Convergence Scheme. As per this scheme, dual degree programme were introduced in partnerships with conventional educational institutions. The scheme enabled a learner to get a degree from a creditable Institution undergoing a distance learning programme⁵⁷. In Assam the initiative was launched in 2009. As per the Vice Chancellors Report of 2010, IGNOU had 62 partner Institutions (PIs) in Assam. The list of PIs in the North East is given below.

Fig. 89 Convergence Scheme under IGNOU in North East India

| Sl. No. | State | Partner Institutions |
|---------|-----------|----------------------|
| 1 | Assam | 62 |
| 2 | Manipur | 6 |
| 3 | Meghalaya | 2 |
| 4 | Mizoram | 11 |
| 5 | Tripura | 14 |
| 6 | Total PIs | 95 |

Source⁵⁸: IGNOU VC Report, 2009

The above table reveals that IGNOU had the highest number of PIs in Assam, which implied the success of DE. The table reveals that Assam had the highest number of PIs with 65% of the total number of PIs in North East India, to be immediately followed by Tripura and Mizoram with 15% and 12% respectively.

57. Sudarshan, R. (n.d). *Convergence of Open and Distance Learning and Conventional Education Systems : Need of the Country*, Available Online Retrieved on 23-04-13 from <http://www.indiaeducationreview.com/news/ignou%E2%80%99s-convergence-scheme-enhances-ger-prof-pillai>

58. Vice Chancellors Report 2009, Twentieth Convocation of IGNOU, New Delhi. Accessed from <http://issuu.com/imsf/docs/vcreport20> on 18-07-12

Student Support Services under IGNOU:

IGNOU as a National Open University always has a huge responsibility to promote and lead the road in making distance education system a success. IGNOU as an embodiment of an apex body in distance education always gave high value to the support services for the distance learners.

Among the support services, IGNOU has a large number of study centres that caters to the need of the students. The study centres under IGNOU are sub-divided into the following types:

1. Regular Study Centre
2. Special Study Centre
3. Programme Study Centre
4. Sub-Study Centre

Though there have been some difference in the number of study centres under IGNOU as reported by the Annual Report and the Regional Centre records, there has been a growth of the study centres under IGNOU, which is most essential due to the role it plays in the Distance education system.

In 2009, during the 20th Convocation of IGNOU, Vice Chancellor Prof VN Rajasekharan Pillai announced the setting up of a Regional Centre at Jorhat, Assam due to the increasing number of learners and the effective management and supervision⁵⁹.

**Fig. 90 Growth of Study Centres under IGNOU Regional Centre
Guwahati**

| Sl. No. | Year | Study Centre |
|---------|------|--------------|
| 1 | 2006 | 31 |
| 2 | 2007 | 34 |
| 3 | 2008 | 46 |

59. IGNOU Jorhat Regional Centre website, <http://rcjorhat.ignou.ac.in/aboutus/1> retrieved on 3-12-12

| | | |
|---|------|----|
| 4 | 2009 | 51 |
| 5 | 2010 | 56 |
| 6 | 2011 | NA |
| 7 | 2012 | NA |

Source⁶⁰: Official records, Guwahati RC IGNOU

The table above definitely records the growth of study centres in Assam. This growth can be linked to the growth in the enrolment of the learners under IGNOU.

With the introduction of *Gyan Vani* Guwahati radio station in 2006 (source: Mr. Sanjeev Katakya, December 3, 2012), the Open University has opened new gates of learning to the learners of this state. It was in a meeting under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister in 2004 that he stressed for adequate arrangement in order to set up FM Radio station at the disposal of IGNOU only for the local students⁶¹. In a meeting (June 2004) of the Chief Ministers of the entire states of the North East India convened by the Honourable Union HRM Minister, Shillong, and recommendations were made in this regard. The Central Block building (front Block) of the Housefed Complex presently functions as the *Gyan Vani* station.

In the case of IGNOU, the learners had many options open to them. The information and communication technology as support services offered to the learners are (a) Teleconferencing, (b) SMS service, (c) Library services, (d) *Gyan Darshan*, (e) *Gyan Vani*, (f) EDUSAT, etc. besides printed SLMs.

Surprisingly in an assessment study it was found that in Assam only 9% of the students were aware of teleconferencing in the state⁶². About 91% of the learners preferred telecast in English language and a small share of

60. Office Records, IGNOU Guwahati RC

61. Minutes of the Meeting held under the chairmanship of Hony Chief Minister, Assam (2004), Guwahati

62. Kumar, Sanjay & Rai, Praveen (2007-08). "*IGNOU EDUSAT, GD and GV Assessment Study*". Lokniti, Delhi. Available Online. Accessed from www.ignou.ac.in/upload/news/Final-Report.docon 6-07-12.

9% preferred in Hindi. Only 13% listened to *Gyan Vani* under the Guwahati Regional Centre of IGNOU. As for the viewership in IGNOU programmes in *Doordarshan* for Assam it was just 19%.

Despite the adequacy of the infrastructural facilities in the state, there was very little response for teleconferencing and telecast that were broadcast by IGNOU. The IGNOU website was used by many students (81%) and basically for checking on general information, filling up exam form, checking the exam result etc.

The reasons behind the low interest of the participation of the learners in such innovative pedagogical tools were due to the lack of time (52%) and lack of interest (34%) as per the Report.

6.8. SUMMARY:

Thus the growth of Distance Education in Assam under different phases leaves undoubtedly no space for speculation that it has come over a long way and accomplished many milestones. The growth in the phases clears the fact that DE is more acceptable today than a decade or more earlier and there is no inhibition in the minds of the learners.

MKU started as a correspondence institution playing the role of an agent of the main institution situated in a place far away in Madurai. The number of faculties in MKU at present now is 38. These faculties are not permanent but hired and paid an honorarium for their services. According to the Director, there are permanent staffs in administrative sections.

Though the staff claims that classes and counseling are conducted on weekends, yet there seem to have no such amenities. What is surprising is that the learners of MKU do not prefer counseling sessions nor do they attend classes. Some sort of counseling perhaps prevails but it does not make difference on the retention or attrition of the learners. The learners under MKU were mostly school teachers or college lecturers, apart from a few executives and Officers.

The instructional medium is mainly in English and printed materials form the most crucial element in the instructional delivery mechanism of the University. The students can collect their study materials from the study centre. As far as the use of technology goes, MKU as the oldest University in providing correspondence education has been the least developed institution in using ICT either in matters of academic or administrative purpose. The centre of MKU at Guwahati offers library services. But, in most cases the learners of the University hardly make any use of it.

In matters of finance, the centre has to bear the burden of expenses through tuition fees of its learners. The headquarters also share a part of it notwithstanding the fact that irrespective of the monetary transaction, there has been hardly any innovation in the centre. The infrastructural facilities

The learners who were presently enrolled preferred MKU because it served their purpose of not having to take weekend classes nor take leave from their office for being present at the counseling sessions. As most of the learners under MKU were employed hence, they preferred to enroll themselves and sit for their examinations without having to go through the face to face counseling.

The period (1986-1996) in the history of distance education in Assam, could be well termed as a period of awakening. Distance education was at its nascent stage, and yet the participation of the learners could not have been more encouraging. This brings us to the conclusion that the demand for higher education had soared high and the positive sign was the growth of institutions in Assam, specially Guwahati and Jorhat, Dibrugarh, etc that attracted many learner's from place far and wide.

Even, though the study centre of MKU has been active since the last 18 years, yet it has not made much progress and the growth rate is very low. Looking into the official records, the learners have made complaints in regard with the following:

- The delay in the delivery of the study materials to the centre. A majority of the learners have lamented that they do not get their study materials on time
- The holding back of result mark sheet and mostly the delay in delivering them also is a deep concern amongst the students. There were complaints from learners who were tensed as they could not avail their pass certificates and other documents on time.
- They complained about the assignments and projects which hardly arrived on time and also the holding back of the results of the projects/assignments.

The following problems which have aroused raises question on the headquarter-centre relationship. There seems to be a lack of apathetic attitude on the part of the University towards the centre. In a conversation, it was found that even the officials felt the indifference from their parent organization.

And the reason that may have led to this could be:

- The enrolment of the learners may not be encouraging enough
- The Centre may be more of a liability than an asset. The expenses of the centre may have taken a toll during the initial years which may have resulted in the attitude. In the interview, it was revealed that the centre had to raise its own funds through the student fees, which explains it all;
- Situated far away from the parent organization, the Centre was probably isolated with no support from the parent Institution

During this period, innovative measures were taken up in the field of using ICT in the distance education system and hence, it cannot be denied that

distance education in Assam had entered the phase of Open and Distance Learning or Open Learning.

With the establishment of KKHSOU brought into fore the commitment of the state towards the distance education system. Similarly, the use of technology by all the Distance Education Institutions in Assam was a big step in the transitioning of the distance education system to the ODL system.

Distance Education has evolved from a mere correspondence based course to the use of advanced multi- media for disseminating knowledge. The first generation used print materials for instructional delivery. At this level Distance education was known as correspondence education, home based study, distance education, etc. Slowly with the invention of radio and television, distance education began to use it to reach a wide populace.

The second generation used radio and television along with the print media. The third generation saw the use of teleconferencing, audio conferencing, video conferencing, etc.

The fourth generation is the flexible learning model which uses technologies like interactive multimedia (IMM), internet based access to www resource, and computer mediated communication (CMC).

The fifth generation model in Distance Education is known as the Intelligent Flexible Learning model, which besides using IMM, WWW and CMC uses automated response system⁶³.

The above model reveals that technology had always been a part of DE, but with the use of technology like radio, television, internet and such other media, DE has become cost effective, the teaching learning process has become more interactive (due to teleconferencing, audio and video conferencing, etc.) and also more learner centric. These days we talk of

63. Reddy, V.V. and Srivastava, M. (2000)The world of Open and distance learning, Viva Books, New Delhi

virtual learning, virtual classrooms, virtual conferencing, online education, e-learning which are related to the use of ICT in DE.

The achievement of an educational system lies in its adaptability to the changing times and needs of the learners. Though the technology used under DEIs has yet to be utilized fully, but it can be hoped that the learners will be able to integrate the use of technology in their learning process.

The period from 2006-2012, has been challenging with all new experiments and this comes at a time, when it was found fit to understand the needs and the learners.