

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

The present chapter attempts to summarize the findings and analysis of the study and to make suggestions. The chapter at the same time re-examines certain issues that were addressed in the earlier chapters.

#### 8.1. SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS:

- Expansion of distance education in Assam

The enrolment trends in all the distance education Institutions, except the off-campus Institutions, have registered a growth pattern. The enrolment for all of the Institutions has been increasing recently, though Dibrugarh University and IGNOU had to face a negative growth rate down the line.

This trend reveals that the demand for distance education has grown up. This growth can be attributed to the growing social pressure for educated people and the economic need for jobs and services. The transition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century from a resource driven economy to knowledge economy has also led to the large growing demand for higher education. Assam has an enrolment of 15.16% in 2009, under the distance education mode from the total student's enrolled in higher education, which is significant. The expansion of distance education is also the result of the Government strategy to increase higher education participation.

From the institutional documents and reports, it is confirmed that the Distance Education Institutes have offered distance education not just to increase participation but also to contribute to the national mission of increasing the GER.

- Gender wise enrolment

The Dual Mode Universities have higher participation rate from the female learners than the male learners. While under the Open Universities, the male learners have higher enrolment.

- Programme wise enrolment

The enrolment trend records that though the learners choice for the programmes sway with the changing times and economic needs, yet for all the Distance Education Institutions in the state, one trend that has remain common is that the learners approach distance education for traditional subjects and programmes. The learners from IGNOU choose Under Graduate course to the other courses available while for the State Open University (KKHSOU), Institute of Distance and Open Learning (Gauhati University) and Directorate of Distance Education (Dibrugarh University), the learners prefer the Post Graduate programmes.

- Area wise enrolment

In yet another trend noticed amongst the learners is the fact that the urban population has more access to distance education institutions as compared to the rural ones. While the Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL) is the only Institute which marks a high enrolment in the rural areas, the rest of the Institutions have low rural participation.

The learners from rural areas are mostly males and prefer to opt for Under Graduate and Post Graduate courses.

- Social Group wise Enrolment

The enrolment of the deprived groups under the Open Universities and the Dual Mode Universities has been very low. In 2010-11, the enrolment of the SC/ST under Gauhati University (IDOL) was 22.73%, for Dibrugarh University (DDE), it was 19%. While in the case of IGNOU and KKHSOU, the enrolment percentage of the SC/ST learners were 22.8% and 24.98% respectively.

However, considering the fact that the population of the SC and ST population is low, the enrolment of these social group in distance education seems to be increasing.

- Programmes and Courses

The Open Universities offer more programmes than the Dual Mode Universities. IGNOU tops the list of institutions offering the highest number of programmes, KKHSOU leads next. The Dual Mode Universities offer limited programmes. As for the off campus Universities, the programmes offered are very negligible.

- Learners preference of programmes

The learners under the Open Universities and the Dual Mode Universities have shown a common trend over the course of time. While IGNOU, KKHSOU have been providing a wide range of programmes, the highest share of enrolment goes to the conventional courses. The preference for short term courses is very low.

- Mode of Delivery

The distance education Institutes have continued the use of self-learning or printed materials for the learners. The materials are written by the academic faculty of the Institutions and after strict supervision handed out to the learners. In recent times, the Open Universities and the Dual Mode Universities have begun using multi-media for the dissemination of learning materials.

The course materials for the learners are provided in CDs for the learners. The State Open University too has been offering study materials in CDs. The Dual Mode Universities have also started working in this matter.

Distance courses are also being offered by the Distance Education Institutions (DEIs) through mutual collaboration with other Institutes with the aim of offering practical and skill driven courses.

- Infra-structure

The infra-structural standards of the Dual Mode Universities have been rising off late, with their separate buildings rather than an attached department. In case of IDOL, the main office has been equipped smartly.

As for DDE, the progress in infra-structural development has been very slow. KKHSOU on the other hand tops the lists of Institutions that has better amenities in its office campus while also providing its study centres with computer desktops and printers.

- Student support

The Open Universities have managed to create a wide network of support services in the form of study centres, counsellors, staffs at the headquarters, use of technology, facilities like library etc. As for the Dual Mode Universities the support services have not been adequate with limited study centres and supporting staff.

## **8.2. CAUSES LEADING TO THE EMERGENCE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ASSAM:**

In Assam, Distance Education first began with the initiative taken up by IGNOU back in 1986, when it started with a few selected courses in Gauhati University. And gradually by 2011, Assam had a State Open University, two regional centres of the National Open University, three Dual Mode Universities along with the private enterprises. While analyzing the causes that led to the emergence of Distance Education in Assam, a few points can be made:

- ❖ IGNOU: IGNOU, after its establishment in 1985, began opening its Regional Centres throughout the length and breadth of the country and it was this initiative of IGNOU that Shillong was chosen as a Regional centre for the North East and a study centre was established in Guwahati (Assam).

Similarly, Madurai Kamaraj University, Himachal Pradesh University, and much later Tamil Nadu Open University opened its study centres in Assam. Though these institutions at present times have poor records in case of learners and other aspects of DE, yet it has been primal in contributing to the emergence of DE in Assam.

- ❖ Economic reason: The higher education in the country and state is under crisis due to the funding policy of the Government. With the increase in the growth of higher education there was an increase in the costs for running the entire system, but the public funds was shrinking making it difficult. The economic reforms post 1990 also made the situation worse, with the private sector entering the market and the Government backing off from its responsibility of providing revenue to the Institutions of higher learning.

While the shared expenditure of the Centre and the State Government in higher education started declining, the only option for making mass education a possibility was Distance Education. The Government soon realized the fact and in no time, and Distance Education was encouraged

- ❖ Failure of Higher Education: Distance Education became a reality in the wake of a weak traditional system of Higher Education in India. The failure of the conventional mode of education to meet the demands of the learners because of its “limited entry” only fueled the need for an alternative system of education.

In Assam, the Directorates of Distance Education came up in the Dibrugarh University, alongside the Institute of IDOL under Gauhati University. By 2011, Tezpur University, a Central University, had also begun a Centre dedicated to distance learners under it. The very reason behind its establishment has been stated as the failure in enrolling all the students who come for higher education.

### **8.3. FACTORS FOR THE GROWTH OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ASSAM:**

Distance Education in Assam has reached new heights with the establishment of the State Open University. From 1986 to this present times it is been more than two decades with still much hope tied to it. Not surprising that India figures among the top distance education providers, hence, the success in its own state need no explanation.

The growth of distance education in Assam has been remarkable and the main factors behind it are not hard to find. During the course of the study, the institutional data threw much light on their progress and the achievements and on the basis of it; the researcher could make an analysis of the reasons behind the growth of distance education. The factors are given below:

- ❖ The positive attitude of the common people towards distance education in particular has led to the huge response from them. This positive attitude in turn has been the result of the Distance Education Institutes which have been operating in the state. Both the Open Universities and Dual Mode Universities have to share the credits for making distance education a success.
- ❖ The next important factor is the offering of the programmes in regional languages. Apart from IGNOU, the other Distance Education Institutes provide study materials in the regional language. This has made the learners more comfortable as because in the conventional mode they are compelled under peer pressure or family pressure to opt for English as the medium of study. But under the ODL system, the learners are free to choose and hence, enabling them to pursue higher studies. The State Open University has indeed allowed the learners undergoing the Masters to write exams in Assamese, however, the course materials are provided in English. Dibrugarh University as well as IDOL offer programmes in English and Assamese.

- ❖ Besides the language, the other factor related to academic that has led to the growth of ODL in Assam is the programmes offered by the Distance Education Institutes. Programmes that have contemporary relevance and economic benefits have led to the increase in the enrolment. The enrolment trend has shown that the highest number of learners is enrolled in the conventional humanities and social science courses. Though off late the demand for professional courses have increased yet the rush for conventional courses have never died.
- ❖ The other important reason for the growth of distance education is the recognition of the degrees, diplomas and certificates given by the Distance Education Institutes. The Government's announcement that no discrimination would be made between regular mode degrees and distance mode degrees, and that the job market was open to all equally gave a great boost to the learners who earlier were very cautious towards distance education.
- ❖ Leadership quality is another important factor that has not often been acknowledged but which deserves credit. The achievement of any institution is the result of the conjoined efforts of the team and of the one person who had the vision to take it to the goal. Distance Education in Assam has been growing in recent times and with new innovations in the field, it can't be denied that it signifies the skills of the leaders.

#### **8.4. PROBLEMS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ASSAM:**

As mentioned earlier there has been an obvious growth of Distance Education in Assam, however, the growth is lopsided. The problems of distance learning is discussed below, which will be followed by some suggestions.

- ❖ Access and Equity:

While Open University like KKHSOU has tried to bridge every barriers faced by the learners in accessing higher education by providing free education to the jail prisoners since 2008, yet the enrolment figure reveals that there is a wide gap in the enrolment of male and female learners. Besides gender gap, the urban rural gap is also apparent along with the wide gap in enrolment of the deprived social groups (SC/ST).

While IGNOU has an enrolment of 59.66% of male learners, the figure for the female enrolment is 40.34%. As for KKHSOU, the female enrolment was 39.18% and for the male learners it was 60.8% in the case of the Dual Mode Universities, IDOL has achieved a balance in the male female enrolment trend. The enrolment of the female learners was 50.6% and for the male, it is 49.4%, while for DDE the enrolment was 44.56% of male learners in comparison with 55.44% of female learners.

As for the urban rural gap, it is worth mentioning that IDOL and DDE had high rural enrolment with 70.9% and 57.8% respectively. IGNOU had just 39.2% of the total enrolment in the urban areas. In the case of enrolment amongst the SC/ST learners and the general category, there is a marked gap in the Distance Education Institutions. All the Distance Education institutes had low enrolment of the disadvantaged groups. The enrolment of the SC/ST for the distance education Institutes has been 22.8% for IGNOU, 22.15% for IDOL, for 21.24% for DDE and 20.83% for KKHSOU.

However, the enrolment amongst the SC/ST in distance education has increased in proportion to their total population in the state of Assam. As per the Census of 2001, the percentage of the SC and ST were 6.9 and 12.42 in Assam.

❖ Lack of Comprehensive Policy:

Way back in 1964, when distance education had made its first beginning in India, it was an experimental measure by the Government and today more than four decades later, distance education has turned itself into a phenomenon rather than an experimental piece. As Tilak (2005) in his

paper says that higher education has been plagued by the “laissez faireism” policy (with the state starting to withdraw from its responsibilities).

The Government support for distance education has been the main reason behind its success in huge scale, in the national arena. The Centre has come up with policies for the comprehensive growth of distance education. The policies have enabled for the multi-dimensional development of ODL. There has been an effort on the part of the Government to bring more credibility towards the ODL system.

The role of DEC has been immense in facilitating the policies for ODL. In May 2007, an MoU was signed between UGC, AICTE and DEC wherein they agreed to work together cooperating with each other to offer excellent technical and general education in distance and mixed mode<sup>30</sup>.

The situation in North East especially Assam is not encouraging enough. During the interview for this study, it was learnt that there was no special policy of the Government towards the development of distance learning. However, the State Open University has been able to bring the attention of the state government towards ODL. But the dual mode universities have still to be benefitted.

This attitude of the Government is detrimental to the growth of ODL system in an inclusive manner as there is a fear of unlimited cropping up of distance learning institutes in huge numbers, if there is no regulation and checks. Such mushrooming of distance learning institutions will only create doubt in the mind of the people and lower the credibility of ODL.

❖ Financial Constraints:

Open and Distance Learning Institutes depend funds for its functioning. The main sources of the funds come from the student's fees and Government funds like DEC.

During the interview conversation, the respondents from the Dual Mode Universities claimed that funding was not adequate and hence, it was a barrier limiting the growth of distance education.

❖ Lack of awareness among the learners:

During the study it was revealed that the enrolment of the learners from rural areas was very low and this must be due to the ignorance of the people about the system of distance learning. In the interview with a key informant, it was made evident that there were many learners who were yet unaware about the distance education system. This ignorance has been resulting in low enrolment among the dual mode Universities.

**8.5. SOCIO-ECONOMIC RELEVANCE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ASSAM:**

Education is the most important agent of social, economic and political transformation. Education is the most powerful tool for the socio-economic mobility and a key instrument for building a society based on equality. Education provides skills and competencies for economic well-being. With an unprecedented focus on the expansion of education, and its equitable distribution to all segments of the society, the Government in its Plan documents has made it obvious that distance education is the hope.

The process of development had been slow in Assam for many reasons. Isolated for a long time, the state has been troubled with problems that have broken its social integrity and economic competence.

The literacy level of Assam as per the Census of 2011 was 73.2%, and this was below the national average, marked at 74.04%. Though Assam recorded a 9.95% increase in the literacy level since 2001, the state had not done any better. With a large section of the population living without education, distance education can open wide prospects for the people of the state.

The census of 2011, also reports that the majority of the people in the state live in the rural areas thus giving them only a limited opportunities to

live a better life. Distance Education has a bright scope in this arena. Poverty level has also increased for the state of Assam, according to the press bureau of the Government of India. At the same time, Assam ranks among the low ranking HDI states, as per the Human Development Report of 2011. This state of affairs gives a very gloomy picture of Assam. Moreover, the industrial growth in the state hasn't yet caught speed as a result of which the pace of development has been rather slow.

Distance Education has the advantage of reaching a wide population in a short time and hence, it will be able to educate the whole mass of the people. The enrolment chart of the Distance Education Institutes proves that distance education has the scope of reaching more people in a short period of time in comparison to the conventional mode of learning. At the same time, it also enables the wide participation of the deprived sections of the people.

According to the NSSO survey 2007-08, only 0.2% from the rural areas students receives vocational education while only 0.3% from urban areas goes for it. The table below gives a hint to it:

**Fig. 136 Percentage distribution of students in vocational education**

Area	Male	Female	Total
Rural	0.3	0.1	0.2
Urban	0.4	0.3	0.3
Rural + Urban	0.3	0.2	0.3

Source<sup>1</sup>: Education in India: 2007-08

The above data table only reveals the pathetic state of vocational education in India. While vocational education is duly emphasized by UGC and the Government, yet the situation remains grim. However with the growth of Distance Education and its due focus to vocational courses and

<sup>1</sup> Participation and Expenditure, NSS 64th Round, Accessed on 10-1-13 from [http://www.educationforallinindia.com/participation\\_and\\_expenditure\\_nssso\\_education.pdf](http://www.educationforallinindia.com/participation_and_expenditure_nssso_education.pdf)

development of entrepreneurial skills, the problem of unemployment will be to an extent diminished. Such vocational skills can help in boosting the economic development of the state which heavily depends on agriculture with industrialization taking place at a slow pace.

Higher Education is accessible to a mere 4.8% population at the Graduation level and 1.4% at the Post Graduation level, as per the NSSO Report of 2007-08. While at the rural level it is 2.2% at the Graduation level, at the urban areas, it is 11.4%. Similarly in the PG level, the urban areas (3.5) exceed the rural areas (0.5). The attendance of person in higher education is comparatively very low in Assam than the rest of the country. While a major proportion of the population are left out of any form of education. In the table below, the scenario of higher education gives an insight to the problem:

**Fig. 137 Per 1000 distribution of persons of age 5-29 years by current attendance and current enrolment status in North East:**

Sl. No.	States	Current attendance in Post HS education level	Not enrolled
1.	Arunachal Pradesh	12	306
2.	Assam	22	415
3.	Manipur	20	337
4.	Meghalaya	21	303
5.	Mizoram	29	361
6.	Nagaland	33	457
7.	Sikkim	22	400
8.	Tripura	19	413

Source<sup>2</sup>: NSSO Report 2007-08

<sup>2</sup> Education in India: 2007-08, Participation and Expenditure. Government of India, 2010. Accessed from [http://www.educationforallinindia.com/participation and expenditure nssso education.pdf](http://www.educationforallinindia.com/participation_and_expenditure_nssso_education.pdf) on 13-04-13

From the table above, it becomes evident that even though Assam is demographically rich yet the accessibility of education is still a big question.

Distance Education in a wider scale could be a solution and enable to bring education to the doorstep of those derived. Expansion of education promises greater social mobility and income equality.

Distance Education under the Open Universities and Dual Mode Universities has been able to provide courses that are not just traditional but also vocational.

The DEIs are offering skill based courses for the learners of the state in order to prepare them for jobs and other career ventures. This attempt has been specially made in order to put ODL at par with the conventional mode and to motivate the learners to embrace the alternative educational system. Distance education in the state has been responsive to the social as well as the economic needs of the time.

The relevance of distance education is acclaimed internationally, nationally as well as locally. The recent emphasis by the Government as understood through the Plan Documents, Annual Reports of UGC, MHRD, the National Knowledge Commission all point to the need of distance education.

#### **8.6. SUGGESTIONS:**

- ❖ With the rise in inequality in distance education, reforms must be initiated so that the problem is not aggravated. Increasing support services for the learners and a learner friendly approach by every distance education institutions can help in bridging the gap. ICT can be another medium to widen the access of distance education to the people of Assam.
- ❖ State funding for the purpose of improving the ODL scenario is very much necessary. From the secondary research works and the

interview, it was found that there was not enough funding as a result of which the distance education was not making much headway.

- ❖ The state should be active in the policy front too. The time has come for the state to take decisions for the support of the distance education and make necessary policies for the advancement of distance education in the state.
- ❖ In a democratic country like India, the role of the Government in education has been very crucial. Hence, the withdrawal of the Government support towards education would be detrimental for the development of the state.
- ❖ Though the State Government has slowly turned its interest towards distance education, yet for the consistent development of DE there has to be a dedication from the authorities. Mere implementation of national policies cannot be the ideal solution.
- ❖ The Distance Education Institutions must take all active measures to reach out to the public. Media should be used for creating awareness amongst the youths and adults of the state.
- ❖ The distance education institutes should make provision for scholarship. Even though the basic idea behind distance education was to reach out to the weaker section of the society, yet there are as many drop outs under ODL. Whatever the reason behind it, the power of retention lays with the institution.
- ❖ Technology can offer a solution though. Yet when the question arises as to how to bring out the learners from the deep remote areas for higher learning through distance mode, the only solution seems to be the option of providing scholarships.
- ❖ The ODL staff whether at the headquarters or the study centres should be definitely trained and given instructions in matters relating to communication skill.
- ❖ Communication in ODL is of the utmost priority as because the learners depend on it very heavily. Hence the staffs and officials

should be an enthusiastic communicator and must be ready to help the learner in every possible way.

### **8.7. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:**

The present study has been somehow limited to the unavailability of the primary sources of information. However, various aspects of Distance Education in Assam could make for an interesting and ground breaking study. Some of the broader areas of research could be:

- ❖ Quality Assurance Mechanism (QAM) in ODL (Open and Distance Learning) system
- ❖ Management Strategies in the ODL (Open and Distance Learning) system
- ❖ ODL (Open and Distance Learning) through the stakeholder's perspective
- ❖ Innovation and Creativity in the ODL (Open and Distance Learning) system

While the emergence of Distance Education was marked with concern and critical outburst of opinions, its growth has somehow subdued the fuzz and opened up new horizons of opportunities.

### **8.8. CONCLUSION:**

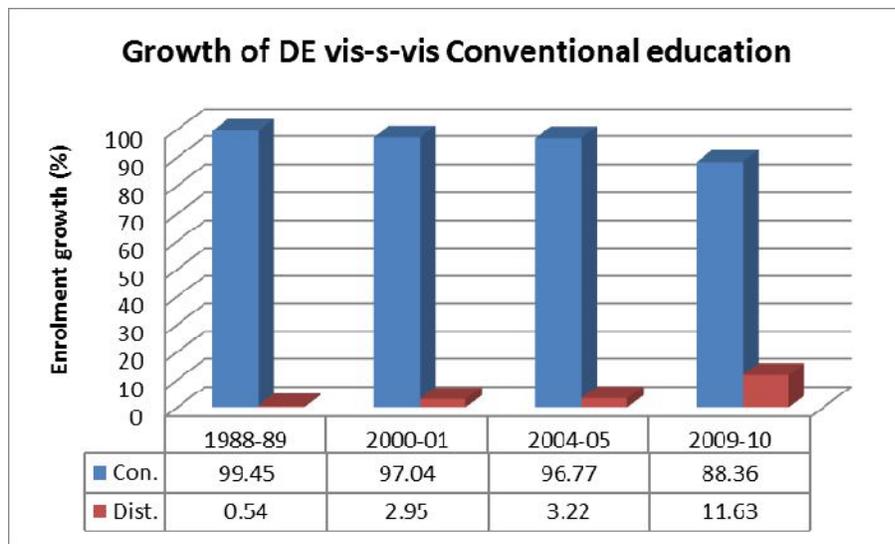
With the focus shifting towards the creation of a knowledge society and the Government initiative during the Eleventh Year Plan (2007-12) to provide inclusive education to all, Distance Learning provides the best solution to build a human resource capital for a developing nation like India and a state tucked away in a corner like Assam.

In Assam, ODL has the chance to succeed and grow due to the fast growing population and the growing economy of the state. ODL can be a bridge amongst the community for enlightenment and spread harmony

amongst the people. A creative and cautious design of programmes for the people can help in accelerating the pace of the development of the state.

While conventional system shall continue with its values and ideals of creating a humane society, the attitude of the people towards ODL should change and be accepted as an opportunity. The ODL system has much to give and its potential should not be underestimated. In a state like Assam, both the conventional mode and distance mode should continue side by side as it is essential for the success of distance learning.

**Fig. 138 Growth of Distance Education in Assam**



In the figure above, it is obvious that the enrolment under distance education institutions have grown. In 1998, the enrolment under distance mode was a mere 0.54% of the total higher education enrolment which increased to 11.63% in 2011.

Distance Education in Assam has been stabilized and is far from reaching the point of saturation. It has become more widely acceptable and people do not choose it as an alternative over the traditional system. They choose it and are very confident of their choices they have made courses either for their academics or career. Distance Education in Assam has evolved over time from a correspondence model to a more technology driven distance learning or open learning model. However, the use of technology is still

very limited. Distance Education is a success story in Assam and has an immense potential to grow in future. The study indicates the problems of the Dual Mode Universities in Assam but also at the same time the fact that for the success of distance education, Dual Mode Universities must exist along with the Open Universities.

The growth of Open and Distance Learning in the state is the story of endearing grit of the DEIs towards social commitment and academic excellence.