

## **COVER PAGE**

**Research Paper Title:** The changing face of ODL in India

**Theme of the Paper:** Online learning methodologies in ODL

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## **DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, hereby would like to explicitly state that the research article titled “The changing face of ODL in India” is original and has not been published earlier, or that it is not under consideration for possible publication elsewhere.

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## **The Changing Face of ODL in India**

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### **Abstract**

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) considers ODL as a system, which is free from traditional educational constraints where anyone can utilize it as an opportunity to learn new things at any age.

With a considerable increase in Internet usage in India and abroad, e-Learning is taking the next step every day. Banking & Travel sectors being ahead in the area of e-Business, the Education sector is closely following them. The current pandemic has changed the way the world

looks at Education and ODL has taken a front seat. We have a strong base of Educational systems in India and only the methodologies are changing.

### **Keywords:**

Education, Methodologies, ODL, Online Learning, Distance Learning, e-Learning

### **WAYS OF DELIVERING E-LEARNING**

Around 2001, many Universities and Institutes started Distance Learning courses

but many institutes followed a standard mechanism of taking admissions by submitting a DD (Demand Draft) and appearing for the exam in person at the nearest examination centre. The course material was sent through the post office earlier and then by courier.

UNESCO mentions four primary ways of delivering distance learning: Correspondence delivery, Educational television and radio delivery, Multimedia delivery (includes text, audio, video and computer-based materials) & Internet-based systems.

Let us see step-by-step how is it working for a student in India:

**Online Course Enrollment:**

Enrollment or E-Registration for Course & Exam is becoming common in

India along with e-payments (payment through Bank sites, Credit / Debit card, e-wallet or by electronic fund transfer – ETF), making it convenient to take admission as a first step. Payment Gateways are playing important role in these transactions. The Unified Payment Interface (UPI) which is developed by the National Payments Corporation of India has made it much easier to transfer online funds and has given a boost to Mobile Banking.

**Teaching/Learning:**

Educational Institutes (mainly concentrating on higher or professional education) and Corporates are working on Teaching or Learning Management systems where the student can take each course from the comfort of his or her home or office. Virtual Classroom is a new concept introduced for the same, where the teacher is

teaching somewhere in his own home/office/institute and the live video is broadcasted over the internet to the remote students. This is one way of e-learning.

Web conference and Webinar were familiar words in Corporates but now even School students are aware of these words. A Webinar is a web-based or Internet-based Seminar where a presenter presents some subject and also gives a live commentary simultaneously. Once the presentation is over, you can even ask questions through the tool provided for this session and the presenter or trainer can answer those questions.

Web sites like Khan Academy or YouTube are ready platforms for anybody to upload audio/video content over the Web and people can see those contents 'on demand' which means as and when they want to see them. These tools or sites can be

very effectively used in online or e-learning. Khan Academy provides subject-wise sessions on various topics including basic science, mathematics and so on, whereas YouTube is a collection of multiple videos and you have to browse through the same to find the content on a particular topic.

A well-prepared video is worth a hundred slides or pictures! Needless to say that these sites are becoming very popular day-by-day and are becoming a common source of sharing any kind of knowledge or information across the Globe!

As the Researcher has mentioned earlier, some websites which are storing these videos have a lot of material that may not be of interest to you. The World Wide Web or Internet has opened the doors of knowledge and a lot of information is available to us free of cost. Now, with such vast information available to us, it is a big

task to obtain the right information that we need.

Though Google search engine has made our job much easy, there are some tools used for 'Content filtering' which is one way to filter the information and access only the one that interests you. Most of the Organisations have implemented Content Filtering on their Gateway or Firewalls. Content filtering is done at multiple levels such as national level, browser level, network level, e-mail level or search engine level, etc. where only appropriate content is delivered to the users. It is also used as a censorship mechanism.

Queries can be resolved through the helpline, searching on Organisation portal for FAQs, sending a query to concerned departments and get a reply from them, online chat, etc.

**Assessment:**

After admission and training, student comes to the assessment and the 'Assessment Engine' softwares are readily available for the students to access and even certify them online. The online examination results can be delivered to the students via e-mail or can be displayed on the portals. The beauty of these online examinations also lies in the On-Demand mechanism! Online availability of Grade books can be viewed at any stage.

**Example:**

Let us take an example of how this works in real life today: I wanted to give my Project Management Professional (PMP) exam. This examination is conducted by Project Management Institute (PMI) which

has its head office in the US and also has country-specific offices.

The membership was taken through the website by filling up an e-registration form and making e-payment through a Credit Card. All that data was entered on the website and once you qualify for the exam, you are given options to choose for your exam centre. At present, if you are in any major city, the exam centre will be very close to you and you do not have to travel long distances to appear for this exam.

The exam cannot be given from your home as it is not an 'open book' exam and should be given in a monitored environment though it is online. Once you reach the exam centre, the supervisor at the centre provides you with a computer and enters his/her password to start your exam. Your online exam starts and a clock starts at the same time showing how much time is left! Once

you answer all the multiple-choice questions, you can still review/change your answers if time permits and then you need to click on 'submit.'

Here you have to wait for a minute with your heart rate increased while the computer assesses your paper and calculates the marks. After a minute or so, the result 'Pass' or 'Fail' is displayed on your screen and the result sheet is printed immediately and you are out of the centre with a happy or a sad face depending on your result. It is as simple as that with the technological evolution we had over the last twenty years.

## **STANDARDISATION**

As the scope of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is increasing day-by-day, various technical ways are being invented to conduct online/off-line teaching and get

more and more students attracted from different parts of the world. Similar to any other sector, the fear which the educational sector has over the increasing use of technology in ODL is the Quality of Education. We will talk separately about the quality of e-Learning but the question raised is the standardization of teaching methodology for e-Learning. Though this is not across the globe yet, some organizations are moving ahead in this direction.

For example, ‘Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunication’ (WCET), USA, is a membership cooperative of institutions and organizations dedicated to advancing access and excellence in higher education through the innovative use of technology. Its goals are to meet the growing need for higher education institutions across the 15 Western states to integrate distance learning and educational technology into their academic services.

Slowly, many organizations would join such standardization moves so that some standard well-proven methods and technology are adapted by these institutes to provide good quality teaching to their students.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

You must have seen surveys such as – ‘Can e-learning be an option for traditional learning’ or ‘Can teachers get completely replaced by smart computers?’ The answer so far is ‘No’ because of the major concern raised by everybody all over the world as Quality of Education. Can a video prepared by somebody unknown be a replacement for a professor teaching the same subject for thirty years? Can the session be as interactive as a classroom? Can the sharing across a physical classroom happen over a virtual classroom?

The expressions and body language contribute today a lot to the traditional teaching; can that be replaced by the presenter's expressions in the video? Because the answer to all these questions is not necessarily in favour of e-learning, there are some limitations to the growth of e-Learning and use of technology, but in future, just because of 'demand' the 'supply' could be in the form of e-training although some aspects or required features may not fully available.

## **ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES**

Concepts such as Flexible Learning, Work-Life Balance, and Earn While You Learn are a reality with ODL. The traditional educational system will normally have an age limit and strict criteria for admission, whereas ODL does not have this

type of criteria and you can learn several new things with no age bar. Time and resource utilization are at their best because of ODL as your travel, fuel, and money can be saved which you otherwise would be spending for taking a traditional education. ODL is always considered inexpensive compared to traditional ways. Modular or short-term courses to suit the need of an individual student is yet another advantage.

Quality of education, as mentioned earlier, is of some concern. Human touch to the education profession, gestures, body language, physical proximity are also some other concerns raised on ODL. Technology Infrastructure is also a major factor in providing good quality e-Learning. Hardware equipment, software, network, Internet bandwidth could be the limiting factors for increasing the use of e-Learning

in India, especially in semi-urban and rural areas.

## **LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (LMS):**

LMS is a comprehensive way of conducting online learning. As years passed, LMS is advancing in terms of look and feel (User Interface), User Experience (UX) as well as the content. The content delivery has become very smooth with a single solution and the user experience has become very good. Technology platforms such as Moodle, WordPress and custom-developed platforms in recent years have contributed to this development. The use of Open Source Software has given a boost to this development.

A modern LMS has multiple features such as:

- Multi-lingual Support including local languages
- Involves different views for Admin User, Faculty, Student & Parent
- Personalized Dashboard for each Student
- Lecture Calendar & Class booking
- Conducting Virtual Classes with automatic attendance marking
- Making Archived classes available to students
- Provision to upload e-content, e-Library
- Student Progress Tracker for Faculty
- Discussion Forum
- Facility to take poll during lecture, Quiz & Assignment

## **FUTURE TECHNOLOGIES**

Mobile Applications, Playback of recording on mobiles, Tablets, pre-recorded lectures, On-line lecture archives, Game-based learning, TV Applications, Internet-based online and offline learning, Virtual Classrooms & Chat, Web portals, Blogs, On-line Video library, Message boards, e-Mentoring, Virtual campus including e-Library are already being used as COVID-19 pandemic has given a hard push to e-Learning! The next big thing which is getting implemented in ODL is the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

## **ODL IN INDIA**

Though ODL is offered by multiple universities & institutes in India, you can refer to the website for Distance Education Council formed by the Government of India.

The ODL system is divided into two major categories: The National Open University which is also known as IGNOU (The Indira Gandhi National Open University) and the State Open Universities listed below\* (SOU) where the Central Government & various state governments have taken initiatives in promoting Open and Distance education for anybody and everybody in India.

These universities offer multiple courses and they are getting well known day by day. Though almost every University has started promoting Distance Learning, institutes like SNET, Symbiosis, and MIT are promoting ODL on a large scale and students are getting the benefits of taking courses of these universities from their homes. Premium institutes like IIMs have also started few e-learning courses.

Some of the well-known Open Universities  
in India:

- The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)
- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad, A.P.
- Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, Kota, Rajasthan
- Nalanda Open University, Patna, Bihar
- Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Nashik, Maharashtra
- Symbiosis Centre of Distance Learning, Pune, Maharashtra
- Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University, Bhopal, M.P.
- Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat
- Karnataka State Open University, Mysore, Karnataka
- Netaji Subhas Open University, Kolkata, W.B.
- U.P. Rajarshi Tandon Open University, Allahabad, U.P.
- Tamil Nadu Open University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu
- Pt. Sunderlal Sharma Open University, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh
- Uttaranchal Open University, Haldwani, Uttaranchal
- K. K. Handique State University, Guwahati, Assam
- SNDT Women's University, Mumbai, Maharashtra
- M.I.T. School of Distance Education, Pune, Maharashtra

**CONCLUSION:**

Despite all the concerns raised, ODL is moving ahead with the increasing advantages of technology like tablet PCs, Laptops, Tablets and Smart Phones. Taking corporate advice or collaboration between Educational Institutes and IT Industry can take the ODL in India to new heights.

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