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A STUDY ON DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING SYSTEM: FUTURE OF ODL AND ITS POLICY PERSPECTIVES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

India is a fastest growing economy in the world and hence we need skill-based manpower to sustain economic growth. Conventional system of higher education alone cannot meet the huge demand of the country's economy. This study highlights the development and growth of open and distance education in India with reference to its policy perspectives, recognition /accreditation and quality control process of open and distance learning in the country. This paper also examines the policy strategies of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in India as how the quality control is monitored and maintained and also shed a light on future of ODL in India.

Keywords: Distance Education, Conventional Education IGNOU, ODL, State Open University, DEI, Policy.

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INTRODUCTION:

Open and distance learning (ODL) emerged in India as an alternative to reach the unreached with a mission to eradicate illiteracy. Now, open and distance learning has become the need of the hour, especially

in the Covid-19 Pandemic times. In India Distance Education started in the form of correspondence education in 1962 by Delhi University. Encouraged by its success, the Education Commission (1964-66) recommended its expansion and University Grants Commission formulated Guidelines

for the same. Establishment of Open University, in Milton Keynes, United Kingdom influenced University of Mysore and Andhra University to adopt open admission policies in seventies leading to the establishment Andhra Pradesh Open University currently known as Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University in 1982. The Government of India, through an Act of Parliament in 1985 established Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). This study is aimed to highlight the chronological development of the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) System in India. IGNOU began by offering two academic programmes in 1987, i.e., Diploma in Management and Diploma in Distance Education, with strength of 4,528 students. Today, it serves the educational aspirations of over 3 million students in India and other countries through 21 Schools of Studies and a network of 67 regional centers, around 2,667 learner support centers and 29 overseas partner institutions. The University offers about 228 certificate, diploma, degree and doctoral programmes, with strength of nearly 810 faculty members and 574 academic staff at the headquarters

and regional centers and about 33,212 academic counselors from conventional institutions of higher learning, professional organizations, and industry among others. The system has grown enormously in the due course of time.

Problem of the Study:

Conventional education system, dominating the entire world even today, increase in population, industrial growth, research and development paved a platform for technological inventions and development taken place in many parts of the world and thus demand for higher education increased. Four wall traditional system of education failed to accommodate huge number of aspiring higher education learners. Country like India, facing full of diversities, issues like difficult geographical terrains, demographical differences, and complex social matrix of the civil societies. Talented qualified teachers are available only in metros. Many countries tried their different ways to address the issue of higher education for aspiring learners. In the year 1962 India Delhi University, introduced correspondence education under the chairmanship of Prof. Bakshish Singh, later

realized correspondence education lacks quality based learning materials and no two way interaction between teacher and student. After twenty years, to remove the lacunas of quality, access and relevance in education, the first Open University established in India in 1982. After this many correspondence institutes simply renamed as Distance Education Directorates but their building premises and administration are being controlled by conventional administrators with traditional norms. Even after 39 years, the ODL system in India, getting rejections to offer practical courses practical in nature, and facing recognition and equivalence at par with conventional system degrees and diplomas. Government of India should support ODL system and allow formulating mechanism by ODL experts and also handled by separate ODL authority.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

This study portrays the chronological developments and achievements of ODL system in India. Study also illustrates how the distance education system bridged the gap between the teacher and students. How ODL system addressed, millions of ever-

growing needs of higher education aspirants of India. The study pointed out the how the lack of understanding by traditional educationists and policy makers creating bottlenecks for ODL system. Finally this study comes with corrective measures and suggestions to improve ODL system in India.

Objectives of the Study:

- ❖ To study the growth and development of ODL system in India.
- ❖ To study the bottles necks imposed by conventional policy makers on ODL
- ❖ To Analyse and give corrective measures for ODL system in India.

METHODOLOGY:

The Research study deals mainly with secondary data. The sources of information are available data from published and unpublished books, documents, scholarly articles, reports, research papers, research articles, and also information available on web pages were taken into consideration and carefully reviewed for the study and analysis purposes.

Development and Growth of ODL in India:

In between 1987 to 1998 years, eight state Open Universities were established in states, namely Bihar (1987), Rajasthan (1987), Maharashtra (1989), Madhya Pradesh (1991), Gujarat (1994), Karnataka (1996), West Bengal (1997), and Uttar Pradesh (1998). Tamil Nadu (2002), Chhattisgarh (2004), Uttarakhand, earlier called Uttaranchal (2005), and Assam (2006) set up OUs after the turn of this century. The Indian Open University act says there will be only one national level Open University in the national capital and rest will be state level open universities will be established in different states of India. The Jurisdiction of the national level Open University can offer distance education in the nook and corner of the country all India basis and also can establish overseas study centers in other countries with their request or approval. Whereas, state open universities are not allowed to offer academic programs in distance education mode beyond their states' jurisdiction. At present one National Open University and 14 State Open Universities offer Open and Distance Learning Programmes.

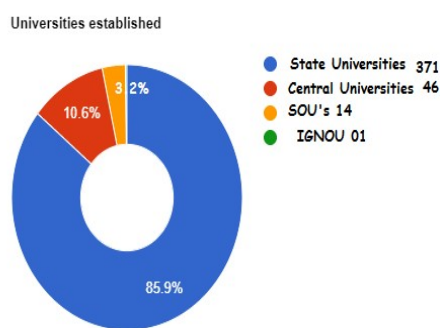
Table 1. Number of Open Universities and their years of establishment (source: MoE, GOI website and website of all 15 open universities)				
Sl. No.	Name of the Open University	Place & State	Year of establishment	Number of Programs on Offer
1	Indira Gandhi National Open University(IGNOU)	New Delhi	1985	226
2	Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU)	Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh	1982	38
3	Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University (VMOU)	Kota, Rajasthan	1987	62
4	Nalanda Open University (NOU)	Patna, Bihar	1987	110
5	Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU)	Nashik, Maharashtra	1989	93
6	Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University (MPBOU)	Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh	1991	40
7	Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU)	Ahmedabad, Gujrat	1994	68
8	Karnataka State Open University (KSOU)	Mysore, Karnataka	1996	420
9	Netaji Subhash Open University (NSOU)	Kolkata, West Bengal	1997	56
10	U P Rajshri Tandon Open University (UPRTOU)	Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh	1999	127
11	Tamil Nadu Open University (TNOU)	Chennai, Tamil Nadu	2002	95
12	Uttaranchal Open University (UOU)	Nainital, Uttaranchal	2005	94
13	Pt. Sunderlal Sharma Open University (PSSOU)	Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh	2005	32
14	K K Handique State Open University (KHSOU)	Guwahati, Assam	2005	16
15	Orissa State Open University (OSOU)	Sambalpur, Orissa	2015	64

As per table number 1 above, the ODL has seen tremendous rise during the years between 1980 and 2005 and the number of Programmes/ Courses on offer through ODL have also risen exponentially during the past 40 decades. The Indian State Open Universities (SOU's) have managed to register huge enrolment figures over the last two decades, a close look at the scene makes one feel that a lot more is to be done to improve the quality and tone up student services. However, a few of the state open universities have done well with respect to courses as well as social reach by way of equity and access. Apart from this there are 110 dual mode universities also offering education to cross section of the aspiring learners in the country.

From Graph 1, we can make out that the Government Universities established till the year 2019 offering ODL forms only 3% percent when compared to conventional system (graph drawn based on the data available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/660874/universities-by-type-india/>).

All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE)-2018-19 report mentions that the total enrolment in higher education is estimated to be 37.4 million with 19.2 million males and 18.2 million females. Female constitute 48.6% of the total enrolment. From table 2 and 3 below, it can be clearly seen that the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher education in India is 26.3%, which is calculated for 18-23 years of age group. Whereas, via distance mode learners enrolment constitutes only about 10.62% of the total enrolment in higher education, of which 44.15% are female students. Therefore, it is important to note that the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions not only greatly contribute towards the GER in India but also empower the female population. ODL proved to be the tool for empowerment to achieve the goal of

Graph 1 showing % percentage of Government ODL Universities established in comparison to Government Conventional Universities



literacy in India by fulfilling the objective of

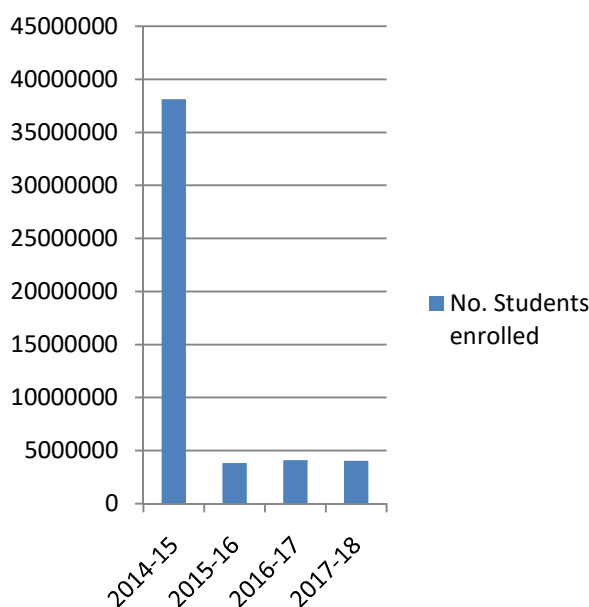
reaching the unreached.

Graph 2 showing no. of enrolment of Students in Distance Courses from the Year 2014-2018

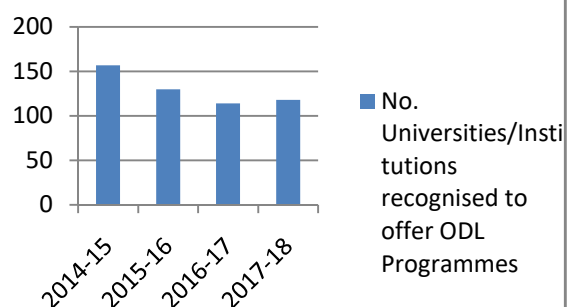
Graph 3 showing no. of Universities/Institutions recognized to offer Distance Courses from the Year 2014-2018

Source: <https://deb.ugc.ac.in/DEB/LearningTrends>

No. Students enrolled



No. Universities/Institutions recognised to offer ODL Programmes



The above Graph 2 and 3 shows steady growth in the enrollment of students to distance programmes from the year 2014 to 2018 almost ranging 40,00,000 students per

annum and great number of recognition of Universities/Institutions for offering ODL programmes on an average 130 institutions per annum.

Table 2. All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE)-2018-19 (source: MoE,GoI website)			
Level-wise Distribution of Distance Enrolment			
Level	Distance Enrolment		
	Male	Female	Total
PhD	28	25	53
Post Graduate	454640	544447	999087
Under Graduate	1616601	1083611	2700212
PG Diploma	57060	42331	99391
Diploma	70948	59246	130194
Certificate	20053	22765	42818
Integrated	234	79	313
All	2219564	1752504	3972068

Table 3. All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE)-2018-19 (source: MoE, GoI website)		
Enrolment in Regular and Distance Mode Universities		
Level	Regular Mode	Distance Mode
PhD	146420	53
Post Graduate	89649	999087
Under Graduate	2127421	2700212
PG Diploma	50740	99391
Diploma	132803	130194
Certificate	16473	42818
Integrated	131817	313
All	3496078	3972068

Policy perspective of ODL in India:

The IGNOU Act, 1985, of Statute 28 empowered IGNOU to maintain the Quality and Standards of Open and Distance Learning in India. Accordingly, Distance Education Council (DEC), was established in 1991 under section 16(7) read with Section 5(2) of the IGNOU Act, 1985. As per clause (2) (a) of the statute 28, the DEC was responsible for the promotion and coordination of the Open and Distance Learning system in the country. The DEC has been taking various initiatives to maintain the standards of Distance Education in the Country.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has become immensely popular in India in the last few decades. And in such a scenario, the role of DEC becomes very critical and necessary. DEC developed norms for recognition of ODL institutions and academic programmes and also formulated norms for offering ODL programmes and designed delivery mechanisms. DEC defined type of infrastructure, ICT/Audio-video studio facilities and manpower required for OLD institutions. However, the

Distance Education Council (DEC) was not entrusted with independent decision-making authority for policy making for the ODL system. The Government of India constituted another committee of a few officials from DEC, UGC and AICTE to take all policy decisions for ODL. The biggest bottleneck was even though DEC gives the recognition to all its distance education academic programs, these academic programs further have to get the approval from University Grants Commission (UGC) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). Parameters decided for DEC to approve the distance learning programs in terms of their infrastructure, qualified teachers, and other human resources, learner support system, and teaching methods in comparison with the same academic programs are offered through regular mode with prior approval of the respective Higher Educational recognition bodies like UGC and AICTE. To ensure the fulfillment of these requirements, DEC conducted expert visits to the Universities/Institutions seeking DEC recognition.

As far as recognition of Open and Distance Learning programmes is concerned, MHRD, Dept. of Education vide gazette notification it is declared on 1st March, 1995 No. 44, F.No.18-15/93-TD.V/TS.IV – “on the recommendations of the Board of Assessment for Educational Qualifications, the Government of India has decided that all the qualifications awarded through Distance Education by the Universities established by an Act of Parliament or State Legislature, Institutions Deemed to be Universities under Section 3 of the UGC Act, 1956 and Institutions of National Importance declared under an Act of Parliament stand automatically recognized for the purpose of employment to posts and services under the Central Government, provided it has been approved by Distance Education Council, Indira Gandhi National Open University”,

However, in the case of some Institutions/Universities, DEC also provided post facto recognitions for institutional recognition instead of program-wise recognition; this had led to several judiciary and legal complications. It is argued that the DEC was not an independent decision-

making authority, as it required a participatory and governing role of UGC and AICTE. Several complications arose in the matters regarding ‘territorial jurisdiction,’ some of the state universities started offering their programmes beyond their states’ jurisdiction. Keeping in view of these issues, Ministry of Human Resource and Development, Govt. of India, currently renamed as Ministry of Education (MoE) repealed the Statute 28 of IGNOU, Act 1985 through a notification dated May 1st, 2013 (In terms of the provisions of IGNOU Act, read with decision of 40th Council meeting of DEC and 115th Board of management of IGNOU, the Visitor approved the repeal of Statute 28 of IGNOU, Act 1985). Later, the University Grants Commission was entrusted with the role of DEC and Distance Education Bureau (DEB) at UGC is looking after regulatory responsibilities of ODL. UGC through public notifications dated 27th June, 2013 and 28th August, 2013 brought territorial jurisdiction, restricting the State Universities/State Open Universities, Private Universities and deemed to be Universities. As per the territorial jurisdiction policy:

“A Central or State Government University can conduct courses on its own departments, its constituent colleges and/or through its affiliated colleges; a University established or incorporated by or under a State Act shall operate only within the territorial jurisdiction allotted to it under its Act and in no case beyond the territory of the state of its location; the private universities and deemed universities cannot affiliate any college or institution for conducting courses leading to award of its diplomas, degrees or other qualifications; no university, whether central, state, private or deemed, can offer its programmes through franchising arrangement with private coaching institutions even for the purpose of conducting courses through distance mode....”

As such it is seen that, till the notification of ODL regulations by UGC’s first amendment on 23rd June, 2017 and further on 4th September, 2020 vide gazette notification ...No. F. 1-1/2020(DEB-I).—In exercise of the powers conferred by sub-sections (1) and (2) of section 26 read with clause (j) of section 12 of the University Grants

Commission Act, 1956 (3 of 1956) and in supersession of the University Grants Commission (Open and Distance Learning) Regulations, 2017 and University Grants Commission (Online Courses or Programmes) Regulations, 2018, there were several violations of DEC norms for offering ODL programmes by various institution due to non-existence of ODL regulations. Higher Educational Institutions having NAAC score 3.26 and above or having rank in Top-100 in University category of National Institutional Ranking Framework, at least twice in three preceding cycles were given exemption from these Regulations. The UGC ODL regulations stressed up on the Quality Assurance of ODL Programmes along with Learner Support Services. IGNOU was exempted from these Regulations.

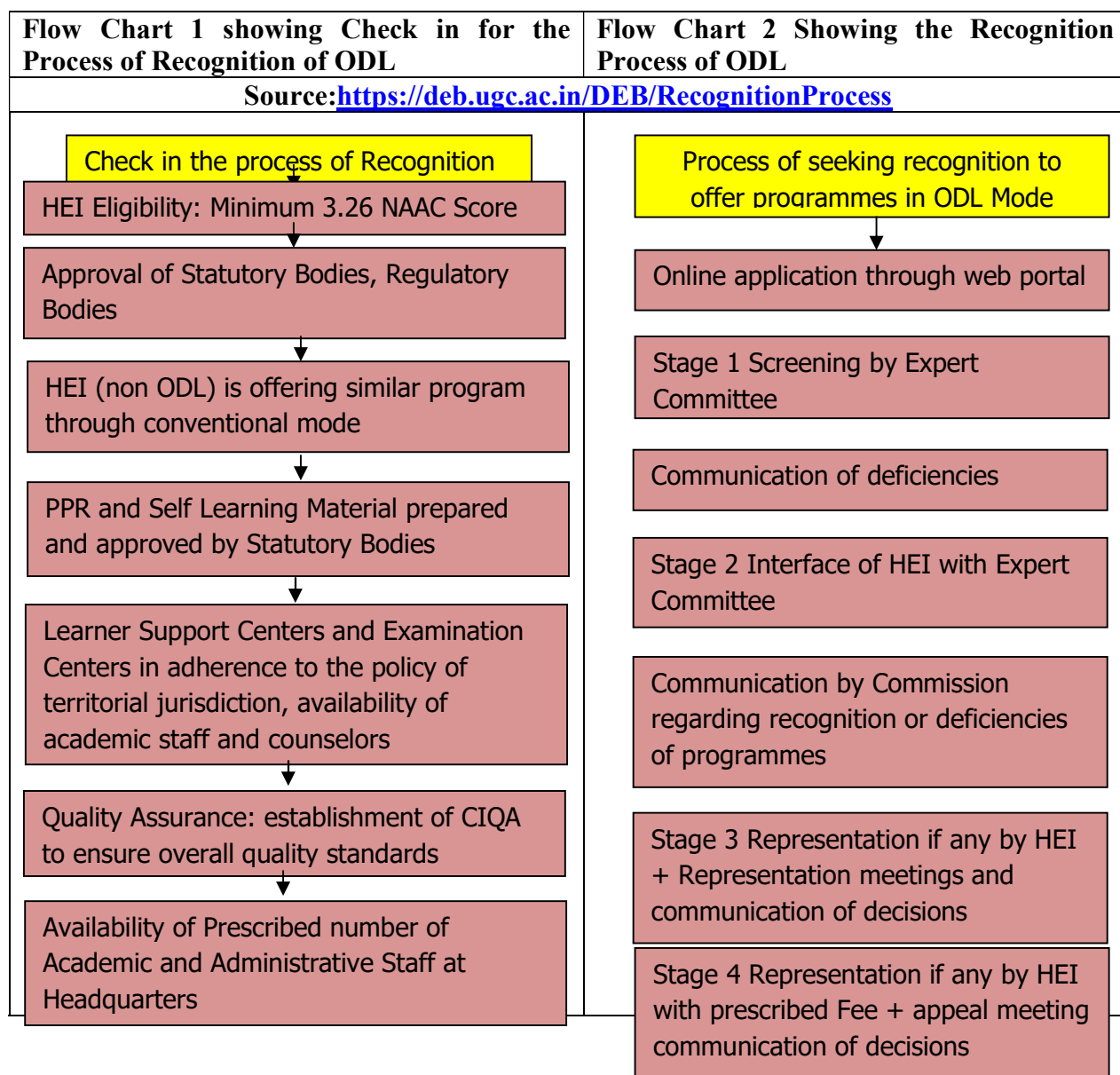
This led to the strict monitoring of ODL institutions to curtail the mushrooming of institutions but it also created a lot of confusion among learners regarding validity of their ODL programmes already acquired. UGC also brought ODL Regulations as a policy for governing the ODL system but lacks vision and mission on ODL. When it

comes to Research, the ODL institutions as per UGC (Minimum standard and procedures for awards of M.Phil. /Ph.D. Degree) Regulation, 2016, no institution is allowed to offer M.Phil. and Ph.D. through distance mode. Students are advised not to take admission in any M.Phil. /Ph.D. program, being offered by any ODL University/Institution through distance mode.

Further, the UGC has brought four amendments to ODL Regulations on 23rd October, 2017 (recognizing stand alone institutes approved by DEC for offering ODL programmes), 6th February, 2018 (on applicability of NAAC grade points of 3.26 for offering ODL programmes), 6th September, 2018 (on applicability of NAAC grade points of 3.26 for offering ODL programmes and deployment of manpower and other support at learner support centres) and 6th June, 2019 (exempting IGNOU from the application of ODL regulations) respectively. Also, the courses in Law Education, Health Education, Agriculture Studies and Technical Education are banned from offering through ODL mode by the

respective regulatory bodies of Government

of India.



Flow Chart 1 and 2 above shows that, UGC has adopted erstwhile DEC's recognition process. It may be also noted that UGC has further revised the process with substantial

improvisation of process of recognition of ODL programmes with full proof mechanism ensuring quality and standards.

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION:

On an average 40,00,000 number of students enrolled in Distance education per annum during past four years and average 130 Universities/Institutions are seeking recognition for offering OLD programmes per annum. This shows huge demand of ODL programmes in India. Bordoloi, R. (2018) felt that “ODL can be raised as an alternative way for creating and making education as accessible as possible and for providing the scope to get skill-based education at a minimum cost. However, the reasons behind the emergence of open universities and ODL institutions are manifold. Some of these reasons are population overgrowth, deprived sections of society, geographical constrained demographic zones, economic liberalization and globalization, popularity of global-lifelong learning as well as blended learning, quick expansion of multimedia technology, inclusive growth, and need of manpower planning for creating knowledge enabled population and so on, with these facts, along with a National Open University, the State Open Universities have emerged in India for

catering to the needs and demands of the people of the respective states in which they are established.” Moreover, entire world shifted to Online Education as last resort of imparting education during Coivd-19 pandemic times has opened a new door of possibilities to explore, adopt and recognize Open and Distance Mode of Education as a mainstream mode of learning.

The Self Learning Study Materials encompassed the needs and characteristics of teachers and students. The SLM designing mechanism emerged as a strong tool for catering ODL goals and provided a major boost to the ODL system. However, a lot of importance is given for infrastructure and ICT development to reduce the gap between DE teacher and DE students. India is a country of diversities for its socio-economic and geographical reasons. Therefore, responsibility of an ODL system for disseminating education to a large section of diversified groups, fulfilling their demand for customized knowledge, is only possible through distance learning mode. Open and Distance Learning is the only mode which makes it possible to reach the

unreached (Dash, 2018; Majumdar, 2005; Sharma, 2005; Gaba & 2015; Kumar, 2008). Presently, there is no single regulatory authority to monitor the ODL system in India. Different ODL regulatory authorities also failed to understand the ODLs' academic approach and its objectives. The conventional regulatory authorities look ODL via the glasses of conventional system. Many such regulatory authorities denied the grant of permission to ODL courses which required lab practices and field-based activities. Adding to these problems, the lack of permanent regulatory authority for ODL manifested confusions for educators and caused insecurities among distance learners. It is strongly suggested that the Ministry of Education, Government of India should immediately create a dedicated ODL regulatory authority as a single window system.

It is well taken since the 2019 Covid-19 pandemic times, the entire globe right from corporate sector, government organizations and all educational institutions switched over to online mode of teaching and learning activities whether they are theoretical courses or practical nature of courses. All

Teachers and learners from primary, secondary and higher educational levels, innovated their own ways and means of sustaining teaching learning activities without any formal training to operate available interactive media tools and gadgets and thus laid a platform for online education with a slogan "The Future is Online" for higher education and ODL. Now, it is the need of hour that, Government of India should recognize the importance of the Open and Distance Learning System. Policy makers need to pay special attention to strengthen the ODL in all aspects including its recognition, equivalence, quality, regulations and accreditation. This study strongly recommends bringing ODL to the front foot of education system with establishment of stable and dedicated regulatory body for ODL with inclusion of ODL experts to entrust the work of framing ODL policy documents. There should be unwavering and well-established regulations ensuring formation of appropriate policies suiting the ODL system and facilitating the DE learners. The role of IGNOU has to be further strengthened by the Government of India extending complete autonomy to

IGNOU enabling it to offer Higher Educational Programmes in all domains of studies/disciplines. IGNOU has to be also strengthened in the areas of Law studies, Health Studies, Science and Technological studies with ample avenues of funds and grants to carry out quality research and development activities in ODL system.

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