Chapter 5
India—Commentary

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Distance education (DE) in India can be considered as a good showcase of all generations of DE which have been identified by scholars like Jim Taylor, Tony Bates, Terry Anderson. Starting with the establishment of the School of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education at Delhi University in 1962, it has come a long way riding the MOOC wave by imparting courses through SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds)—an initiative of the Government of India (https://swayam.gov.in/) for providing opportunities for life-long learning. Distance education has covered all levels of education: primary, secondary, and higher tertiary and various disciplines from general to professional and technical in nature. The canvas of distance education in India is quite big, with having One National Open University, more than 15 State Open Universities as single mode universities, dual mode universities offering DE programs, National Institute of Open Schooling along with State Open Schools catering for school education, and private institutions etc.

The changing nature of DE has resulted in its management too. Distance Education Council (DEC) was established as a Regulatory Body, initially with Indira Gandhi National Open University, later on taken over by University Grants Commission. In addition, there are other regulatory bodies for technical, management, health and law etc. This has results in discussions and confusion over the jurisdiction of universities offering courses, which course can and cannot be offered by distance mode. To give a proper direction to the system in the country, work on National Educational Policy is in progress and ODL need to be an integral to this national policy. The DE system is facing the challenge of leadership with various open universities in different phases of development.

The role of open universities becomes very important in this current 4th Industrial Revolution when various sectors, industries, economies are being impacted by

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new technologies. The emergence of artificial intelligence, gamification, virtual and augmented reality, internet of things, micro-learning etc. are some of the technologies and trends already in place and use in industries like manufacturing, banking, transport, telecommunications etc. Education or Distance Education cannot remain aloof from these developments and thus following challenges needs to be taken care of at the earliest:

Learning paradigms/designs: With traditional jobs disappearing fast and new job roles emerging, it is pertinent to design courses and learning experiences which would enhance the digital literacy of learners. According to the predictions of World Economic Forum, by the year 2020, around 35% of the skills used in current market settings will change drastically. The learning designers for ODL courses (the course materials changed from being printed text to self-instructional to self-learning materials) need to plan for developing skills like complex problem solving, critical thinking, and cognitive flexibility etc.

Pedagogy: With various pedagogical models like cognitive or behavioristic or constructivist, Indian ODL system need to focus on how we can prepare our learner as creators of knowledge. Modern learners live, learn and work in a digital society. There is a need for new set of academic and professional practices to support their digital behavior, practices and identities. Perhaps the "Digital and Information Literacy Framework" of the UKOU can be a good lead for Indian Open Universities.

Recognition of Learning and acquired skills: Government of India launched SWAYAM, a MOOC platform. There are many other self learning platforms available from where learners enroll in the courses of their liking and interest. A mechanism needs to be put in place where such learning is given value or recognition for further admission to a program or employment.

Student support: E-commerce companies have changed the way the customer services can be successfully accomplished. The digital society needs different mechanisms and operations to provide services to its learners. The modern distance learner is 'always connected', thus academic or administrative support for ODL learners appropriate processes and products like we note services provided through Internet of Things enabled devices, robots and artificial intelligence applications.

Openness: There is a need to examine the extent of openness the system is following. This may be in terms of content, admissions, program offerings, pedagogy, technology, assessment and accreditation etc.

Accountability, Regulations and Quality Assurance: Currently there are challenges of coordination, jurisdiction, delivery and the nature of courses to be offered through ODL in the country. Various regulatory authorities add to this chaos. Differing policy decisions lead to confusion among learners, institutions and other stake holders. What can or cannot go in for general education, vocational or technical education needs to be settled as soon as possible.