

# Upgrading Distance Education System for National Development

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Distance Education System is recognised as a reformative system because of its

- capacity to provide need-based education to diverse categories of students in accordance with their choice of programmes, place, process and place of learning;
- potential to improve the quality and maintain uniformity in levels and standards of higher education;
- methodology of imparting education through the use of multi-media approach; and
- cost-effectiveness in comparison with the traditional system of main-stream campus based education.

Education, in general and Higher Education, in particular is crucial for the harmonious development of a society. How closely is the Distance Education System linked with this development? What is its special role in providing knowledge for wisdom, education for academic excellence and training for vocational dexterity? This paper deals with some issues related to these questions among others and explores a few feasible strategies to upgrade the Distance Education System for national development relevant to a developing and populous country like India.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since independence, there has been impressive expansion of higher education in India in terms of students' enrolment and in the number of educational institutions. While this is a great achievement in its own way, the educational system is far from satisfactory. Several education commissions and committees have been appointed to review the system of education. As a result of their recommendations, several changes have been introduced, yet the system is not considered to be fully conducive to the national development because of various factors. Apart from the planning and financial factors, there have been several other reasons responsible for deficiencies and inadequacies in the Indian Educational System.

According to the World Bank report entitled, "Education and Development : Evidence for New Priorities 1991" there is one-to-one correspondence between education and development. A weak educational system in a developing country like India hampers its economic and social development. The continued socio-economic crisis has badly affected the abilities of many developing countries including India to provide the basic educational services to their peoples. They are lagging far behind in providing education and training to create vocational opportunities for their students. There is an ever widening gap in knowledge and competence between the developed and the developing countries with serious implications for the socio-economic development of the latter. Even the quality of education is low in most of these countries. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that a good educational system is a key to the success of economic policies promoting international competitiveness and sustained social development. The role of education is not only central to economic growth but also

to the reduction of poverty and the effectiveness of the social welfare programmes.

The purpose of education in India during the British rule was to serve the colonial interests. The emphasis was on general and non-vocational education in order to serve the administrative requirements of the colonial rulers. Inequalities of various types on socio-economic basis, regional imbalances and open discrimination between rural and urban areas were also evident. Even after independence, although there has been a boom in education, the system continues to be dominated by the approach adopted during the colonial regime. No doubt there are several achievements to the credit of the Indian Educational System, particularly in the field of science and technology, yet it is neither fully relevant to the needs of the society nor does it adequately promote the much desired national development. In addition, population during the last few decades has created a serious crisis badly affecting the socio-economic system and moral values. This has generated growing demands on higher education and thrown up new challenges in the domain of national development. The challenge of growing unemployment, limitations of finances and inadequate availability of infrastructural facilities in the Higher Education System are some of the key reasons among others which led to the recognition of the relevance of distance education/system.

This paper attempts to diagnose the ailments of the Formal Higher Education System and highlights the relevance of the Distance Higher Education System as a remedy through socio-economic and value-based development. A brief overview has been sketched covering a few distance education institutions and their contributions towards this development. Also, an effort has been made to analyse the role of different distance education cultures/models involved in the educational

development. Finally, a few strategies have been explored for upgrading the Distance Education System for the overall national development and a few open questions have been raised which need a thorough investigation.

## 2. DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND VALUE-BASED DEVELOPMENT

India is passing through the last decade of the present century in a state of serious socio-economic and moral crisis. This crisis is causing tremendous sufferings to the people of the country overwhelmed by the effects of foreign debts, inflation, unemployment, poverty, disease, moral deprivation etc. There is large scale violence due to terrorism, social evils and political conflicts based on caste, region and religion. Even the most sincere welfare and developmental programmes have failed to uplift the society. There is a need to have purposeful education, useful scientific research and meaningful technological development on one hand and socio-political and economic progress on the other. The role of education as an instrument for social reforms, economic development and awareness about human-values has increased considerably. Since the formal system of education could not adequately meet the socio-economic demands and afford to correct the deficiencies in the educational development, a system of non-formal education was evolved in the sixties. The limitations caused by total dependence on the formal system and the complementary tasks performed by the non-formal education system were accepted by the planners and steps were initiated to use the non-formal system to offer educational programmes similar to those in the formal system. But proper priorities were not accorded to the programmes in the non-formal system. Adequate financial support and infrastructural facilities were not made available. Moreover, the programmes were strongly tied up with the formal system in terms of enrolments, course-structure, examinations, etc. Because of these constraints among others, the non-formal system of education became another channel for the production of graduates and post-graduates without vocation-based skills. **Open Learning System**, being the latest reformatory system of education (Kulandaiswamy, 1992) offers the greatest hope to overcome the crisis because of its capacity for educational innovations, its potential for reaching the vast population through various delivery modes and its aim of providing learning opportunities at the learners' door steps that too at costs lower than those of the formal system.

On its way to adopting the Open Learning System, a developing country, India for example, is beset with a number of problems.

— **The first common problem** of a developing country like India is the continued influx of people from villages and small towns to the big cities in search of work, employment and higher education. The dividing line between the rich and the poor continues to run deep in the socio-economic set up of the country despite several programmes of social welfare, economic development and eradication of poverty. This is because most of the economic and educational developmental

activities are concentrated in the already crowded areas. Most of the institutions of higher education and vocational training are located in big cities. Inadequate provision of vocation-based higher education in the rural areas has counteracted all developmental measures in the country. How to meet this challenge through Distance Education System ?

— **Another difficult problem** is that most of the educational centres are badly affected by the political conflicts. These centres are dominated by unacademic activities of the trade unions of students, teachers and others who derive their strength from their respective political mafias. Can the DES minimize this harmful politicization of higher education ?

— **The third problem** is that education is unproductive in most of the cases. It is treated as a process of stuffing the minds of the students with contents of books, enabling them to reproduce the same in the examination halls and return home empty-headed. An increasing number of persons are seeking education not for learning but for acquiring the means to gratify their desires and glorify their social status. This has badly affected the quality and standards of education at all levels. In what way, can DES help in reorienting higher education ?

— **The fourth problem** is that most of the educational institutions/universities have turned into centres of unhealthy environment and corruption. Drugs and liquor have invaded the campuses and the students have lost their direction. Total absence of objectives and academic leadership has further debased life and academic culture at university campuses. Can DES provide a remedy for such social evils ?

— **The fifth problem** is the lack of uniformity in higher education in respect of programmes and their course-structures. Irrelevant courses and syllabuses, over-crowded class-rooms, uninspiring teaching, marks-based employment opportunities, etc have all combined to make our educational institutions centres of commercial transactions. The mushroom growth of institutions have turned centres of educational excellence into those of mediocre mass production. What is the role of DES in providing an effective uniform system of higher education throughout the country ?

— **The sixth problem** is related to the financing of higher education in the country. The unbalanced expansion of higher education has diverted efforts and resources to a considerable number of educational and purposeless research programmes which have no utility for the society. As a result of the purposeless squandering of resources, most of the universities and educational institutions are in deep ferment and agitated, especially after the recent financial crisis due to the budgetary cuts effected by the government. Can the nation, which is already faced with a serious economic crisis, afford to spend hard-earned money of the tax payers for unproductive education ? What is the role of DES to overcome this crisis ?

— **The seventh problem** is related to the autonomy and accountability of the educational institutions. Many of these institutions are autonomous with regard their objectives,



educational programmes, course-structures, entrance and graduation criteria without any obligation to provide need-based services to the society. No doubt, some reputed institutions produce top-level professionals like doctors, engineers, managers, executives, scientists, academicians and teachers, and indeed, such professionals are very much needed in every country and greater emphasis will have to be continuously given to programmes related to these professions. But equally needed are the skilled workers, technicians, nurses, computer operators, etc. to assist these top-level specialists to enable them to do their work effectively and efficiently. In fact, trained and qualified persons with vocational competence are required in all spheres of national development including administration, health, education, engineering, technology, agriculture, industries and business sectors. However, most of the educational institutions of India including some distance education institutions do not offer the much desired vocation-based education. As a result, there is a big gap between what is being produced and what is needed by the society. Most of the educational institutions live in the world of their making which does not seem to be accountable to the society and it has no interaction with the trade, industry and technology to provide employment opportunities for their students. This is perhaps one of the greatest maladies in the higher education systems of several developing countries including India. How to resolve this dilemma? What is the commitment of the DES in this case?

— **The eighth problem** is that education is not treated as a part and parcel of the human environment. It has almost ceased to function as a vital human factor. As long as the degrees can be bought and sold, marks have their heyday and happiness gets equated with material success, till then, life-giving human values will remain unhonoured. Can DES provide a better alternative ?

To solve the listed problems, it is essential to evolve a system of distance education which is knowledge-based, value-based and need-based. It should provide knowledge for wisdom, moral-values for character building and vocational skills for economic needs. It should uplift the people by providing both the means and the goal of living (AIU, 1992). In order to meet the needs of the people working in the modern industrial sector and unidentified economic sector both in the rural and urban areas, distance education system will have to develop suitable educational programmes in collaboration with the employing agencies looking for talented and skilled man-power. This is the challenge which the experts in the field of distance education are faced with. One of the ways to meet this challenge is to develop vocational programmes in the system of distance education. Vocational programmes coupled with academic and value-based course offerings can serve the real aim of education, namely, the harmonious national development.

Our nation is marked with stark poverty and illiteracy, surrounded by various exploitative political, economic and social structures wherein a poor person is forced to live a sub-human life, where the basic minimum need like water is yet to be satisfied in some of the areas, and there is ignorance and

under-development all around. In such a distressing state of affairs, a nation cannot afford a formal education system which is more elitist and restricted to a few privileged ones, while the vast majority of students have to be content with the education being provided under substandard conditions. The Indian Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE, 1992) has rightly recommended shifting of 50% enrolment in higher education to the non-formal sector. One of the feasible ways to implement this recommendation is that the educational programmes pertaining to the non-technical and non-science areas viz humanities, social sciences etc. are transferred to the system of distance education. The teaching of arts, literature, languages, history, political science, philosophy etc. can be done more effectively in the distance teaching institutions. This will not only reduce the unrest and chaos on the campuses of the conventional universities caused by the dirty politics and vandalism dominating these institutions but will also help in overcoming the financial crisis being faced by the institutions in the formal sector. Various studies of financial and cost aspects of higher education have revealed that cost of education in the non-formal sector is much less than that in the formal sector. Programmes pertaining to sciences, medicines, engineering, technologies and other technical areas can be confined to the formal sector. This will be more economical and helpful in overcoming the socio-economic crisis being faced by higher education today. Total reliance on either of the systems of education — formal or non-formal will not deliver the goods particularly in the context of our keenness for productivity and national development.

The conventional educational programmes are not fully relevant to the developmental needs of the present society. Educational programmes will have to be linked with productivity and economic development. Unproductive educational programmes have to be replaced by useful and productive programmes. For this, the system of distance education has to bring in greater accessibility, flexibility and innovation to the form and content of education in general and higher education in particular. Higher education programmes should adopt a basic approach of generating employment avenues to bridge the gulf between education and work. The courses should be structured to enable the learners to absorb knowledge and develop traits essential for adaptability, proper leadership, abilities for negotiations, initiative for self-employment, etc. These programmes and courses should aim at developing capacity and dexterity among the students to solve practical problems related to industrial and economic sectors. Application of several discipline-based vocational programmes in the areas of economics, commerce, mathematics, science and engineering should be highlighted in the relevant course-materials in relation not only to trade and industry but also in other situations such as health, planning, defence, agriculture, rural sector and information technology. There is a need to find out what is happening in the work-related educational programmes in several other institutions inside and outside the country, to know about the responsibilities and achievements in this field, to seek information about recent

developments in vocational education and to formulate proposals in the light of their experiences suitable to the indigenous conditions. A properly blended and comprehensive system of academic and vocation-based distance education programmes can successfully provide a break-through to provide the much-desired quality-based and work-based education.

Human-values should become an integral part of everybody's personality. Morality must form an inseparable component of one's living and way of thinking. The devaluation of the moral values is no more an individual's problem. It is a social problem which has assumed global proportions. Education at home, in institutions and in the society can reinstate appropriate value-systems being concerned not only with knowledge for wisdom and vocationalisation for economic upliftment but also with values like academic honesty and integrity for an ideal social order. Educational system has to modify the educational programmes accordingly to make room for appropriate value-based inputs for character building. The system of distance education has a greater role to play because of its access to a larger population and its proximity to larger areas of activity.

### 3. DISTANCE EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

In both developed and developing countries, DES has become popular with the educationists and the planners because of its utility, high productivity, greater flexibility, cost effectiveness and innovative methodology. Today, more than 70 countries of the world are offering distance education programmes in several forms at various levels. In India, it began with the opening of the Directorate of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education in 1962 (presently known as School of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education, University of Delhi) on the recommendation of the Kothari Committee on Correspondence Courses and Evening Colleges appointed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) as proposed by the Central Advisory Board of Education 1961. The success of this system caught the imagination of the educationists and since then, several institutions of Correspondence Education have been started. Most of this expansion has been an integral part of the Main-Stream Education in the traditional university system to solve the problem of overflow in admissions. At present about 25% (AIU, 1992) of the total number of Universities and other institutions of higher education are offering various distance education programmes in the country. The beginning of Open University System with the establishment of APOU (Andhra Pradesh Open University now renamed BR Ambedkar Open University) in 1982 and IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University) in 1985 has changed the outlook of the DES in India. Subsequently, four more state level open universities namely Kota Open University (KOU) in Rajasthan (1987), Nalanda Open University in Bihar (1987), Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (1989) and Raja Bhoj Open University in Madhya Pradesh (1992) have been established. The National Policy of

Education 1986 (NPE 86) also strongly advocated the system of DE in India as an instrument to democratise education and to augment opportunities for higher education. The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE, 1992) has recommended an open university in each state. Under the Programme of Action 1992 (POA, 1992) for implementation of the National Policy of Education, IGNOU has to provide the necessary leadership for coordinating, monitoring and promoting distance education in India. The major areas of thrust, among others, in the 8th Five Year Plan (1992-97) are:

- **integrated approach** to higher education
- **excellence** in higher education
- **making the higher education** financially self-supporting
- **providing value-based and vocational education** to meet the changing socio-economic needs.

It is estimated that during the 8th Plan (1992-97), enrolment in distance education will increase from its 11% to 16.5% of the total enrolment in higher education in India (POA, 1992). It means in absolute terms an addition of about half a million students. In other words, 100,000 students are likely to get registered in the distance education system for various higher education programmes every year. Out of these at least 90% are going to be admitted for the usual Bachelor's Degree Programmes, namely, BA/B Com/B Sc in the absence of any vocational programmes. In other words, the educational system of the country is going to add an additional burden of a huge number of unemployed graduates.

In view of the above scenario, the DE system has to discharge a heavy responsibility both in terms of enrolling the overflow from the formal system and providing a meaningful and useful education in terms of vocational skills and academic competence. The planning, development and organisation of such educational programmes through DES will have to be done carefully and deliberately. It is in this context, that IGNOU, being a national university and an apex body responsible for distance education in India has to play a crucial and decisive role. It has to take all possible steps for the promotion of DE system, its coordination and maintenance of standards and make provision of adequate financial support to the distance education centres/institutes in India. To perform these functions/tasks successfully and effectively, IGNOU has set up a Distance Education Council and defined its role and terms of reference. The functioning of DEC in respect of the distance education institutions may look to be somewhat similar to those of the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India vis-a-vis the conventional universities and other institutions of higher education. However, DEC will have to

- evolve strategies to encourage, strengthen and increase awareness about the system of distance education as an alternative effective and useful system of education
- encourage educational programmes which are knowledge-based leading to advanced studies, vocation-based for work and employment, and value-based for providing the right directions to society



- promote systems to avoid duplication of efforts in preparation and production of the programmes and courses in order to save time, energy and money and avoid wastage of resources
- evolve a mechanism for the determination and maintenance of quality of distance education in India.

IGNOU being committed to launch vocational programmes at various levels in relation to the needs of employment and economic development of the country, has initiated a few educational programmes in this context, but it has a long way to go. Regional Centres of IGNOU and the State Open Universities can bring awareness about DE through pre-admission information campaigns, academic meetings, seminars and orientation programmes, periodic publicity through media viz radio, newspapers, television etc. The DEC has to take all suitable steps to streamline the distance education system in the country and make efforts to bring uniformity in the levels and standards of education. For this, it has to coordinate with the correspondence institutions through the UGC, the state open universities and other institutions of distance education.

#### 4. DISTANCE EDUCATION MODELS/CULTURES AND THEIR ROLE

In the distance education system, the process of teaching/learning takes place through the well-known basic components of self-instructional print materials, media programmes, periodic contact programmes through face-to-face intensive teaching/counselling and evaluation of the response sheets/assignments attempted by the students. Corresponding to various permutations and combinations of these activities, there are several models (Holmberg, 1986) of DES mainly classified as Segregated Models, Interlocked Models, Integrated Models and University Models among others.

The Indian system of DE is mainly confined to two principal models viz **Integrated models**, i.e., the correspondence institution as an in-built component of the formal system (these are also known as Dual Mode Models) and the **University models**, i.e., open universities, etc. (also known as Single Mode Models). These models are generally dominated by the four distinct cultures (Croft, 1992), namely, Collegial Culture, Faculty Culture, Managerial Culture, and the Negotiating Culture.

The Collegial Culture, being the basis of the Mainstream University System, is generally concerned with its traditional work mostly pertaining to teaching and very little discipline based research either as institutional or as individual academic activity. It is not involved in programme planning, curriculum designing, course development nor in the development of the system. Hence its major emphasis is on teaching alone. The faculty culture, on the other hand, more or less represents the Open Learning System. It deals with the theme-based curriculum designing and course development. It believes that self-learning should be the focus of attention for all the academic enterprise which might include some system based as well as discipline based research particularly related to autonomous learning. It provides for a dominant academic

role in the overall planning and decision-making process of the DES.

Managerial and negotiating cultures are mainly concerned with financial aspects and accountability, as well as with the management and the collective bargaining processes which may put the new approach to education in the right perspective for both the personnel and the clients involved in it as also the public. The DEC of IGNOU, to some extent, represents a mix of these two cultures.

There is a need to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the Collegial as well as the Faculty cultures in terms of the staffing pattern, programme structures, curriculum designing, course development, supplementary support inputs etc.

Experience has shown that in the domain of curriculum designing the faculty culture has a tendency to be ambitious and thus overload course materials because of the concern for standards and academic respectability both for the professional and the institutional reputation. The collegial culture has no such concerns. Academics in this culture are more involved in conventional classroom teaching miniaturised through the periodic intensive teaching-cum-personal contact programmes (PCPs) and in editing the study materials prepared mostly by their counterparts in the formal system. They have little role in designing the curriculum or educational programmes. The faculty culture being closer to the open university model stresses the relative importance of distance teaching/learning over advanced studies and research pursuits. This culture is supported by the distance education experts, professionals for instructional designing and educational technologists. And, the academics in this system have little direct contact with their students. If at all any they have some rapport with the tutors and counsellors which may educate them about the (?) grass-root realities of the system. The academics recruited and hired by open universities are usually from the traditional system. They are invariably in conflict with the core faculties who want to bring innovations in the course development.

In the Indian context, an objective assessment of the strengths and weaknesses in both the models should help in taking some remedial steps to successfully exploit the DES for harmonious national development. Some of these are enumerated as follows :

One of the suggested ways is to merge one with the other accommodating in the fusion of the strong points of either of the models. The possibility of merging the open universities into the correspondence systems of the conventional universities is totally ruled out for obvious reasons. The merger of the integrated model into university model is often suggested on the grounds:

- that the course materials developed by the correspondence system, not being self-learning, are inferior to those of the university model both in quality and in presentation
- that the programmes and course structures of the integrated model are mostly relevant to the traditional system and are not application oriented

- that in the integrated model there is lack of adequate student support services and supplementary teaching aids in the form of counselling/tutoring and proper audio-visual programmes
- that there is shortage of infrastructural facilities in the integrated model because of its dependence on the conventional university system.

This merger of integrated model into the university model, however, is not an ideal option according to some experts because of some in-built problems and rigidities in the system. It is also argued that on account of its maladies, the integrated models should be closed down and all students opting for distance education system should be enrolled in the open universities. This may not be feasible at least in the immediate future. The enrolment in the integrated models is increasing every year due to the credibility and acceptability of their degree in the job market. The course structure followed in these models is that of a well-established conventional university system and is convenient for the students to prepare for the examination to get a degree.

The coexistence and convergence of the two models seems to be the most feasible and workable way in the present situation. The self-learning course-materials developed under the open university model are mostly superior to those prepared under the integrated model with a few exceptions. These open university materials can either be adopted as such, if possible or can be suitably modified and supplemented according to the requirements of syllabuses, while yet others if need be, can be written and developed according to the format and techniques used by the university model. Same procedure can be used with regard to the media programmes prepared by the university model. And at the same time, under the mutually agreed upon policy of give and take, the talent of the teachers in the integrated model can be adequately utilized both for course development and counselling sessions organized by the university model. The university model also can adopt the system of the contact programme classes coupled with the counselling sessions which seem to be more relevant to the Indian situation. The students enrolled in the integrated model prefer intensive teaching sessions from their own teachers to the counselling sessions conducted by the faculties drawn from the traditional system. The intensive teaching sessions in the form of the contact programme classes have been found to be academically more effective and useful both for effective learning and for satisfactory performance in examinations.

##### 5. STRATEGIES FOR UPGRADING THE DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM

To make an effective and meaningful contribution to national development, it is essential to upgrade the DES effectively. For this, some suitable norms will have to be laid down to be followed on a continuous and regular basis. The following suggestions may be useful:

1. Collaboration and interaction between the integrated and university models is one of the best ways to upgrade the distance education system in India. The prejudices

of one against the other should be done away with. An effort should be made to identify the areas of collaboration and collective working. Some of these areas are related to the methodology of distance education, staff training, professional development, course preparation, student support services and teaching skills. Mutual exchange programmes through visits and workshops between the two systems should be encouraged for interaction and development of their respective expertise to cope with the real demands on the system. This will pave the way for uniform staff development. It will help in reaching a uniform structure of educational programmes and providing an opportunity for the faculties to understand the two systems. The teachers in the Correspondence Institutions who are good at classroom teaching need to be trained in developing self-learning course materials. The Open University teachers who are good at course development for the distance learners need training in teaching skills and effective classroom techniques. This two-way communication will go a long way to raise the standards of distance education in the country.

2. Another suggestion to improve the distance education system is to look for areas of possible cooperation between the Distance Education System and the Mainstream (Campus-based) Education System (Smith and Kelly, 1987). It is assumed that the campus-based system mainly concerns itself with the teaching process while the distance education system is mainly concerned with the process of learning by the students. It is an acknowledged fact that teaching and learning are inseparable activities. Both are required to sharpen the mental faculties of the students. Exchange of academics between the two systems, in this context, will be helpful to both the streams for professional development. They will be able to develop their expertise, test their educational ideas and improve upon teaching/learning techniques. This will improve the quality, the benefits of which will be reaped both by the mainstream campus students and the distance education students. Mutual cooperation and close interaction between the two systems will lead to useful research into the teaching/learning methodologies need by both the systems.
3. The institutions in both the distance education and the conventional systems should generate a process of mutual understanding and collaboration for planning and development of various educational programmes conducive to national development. The perpetual financial crisis in the conventional universities can be resolved to a great extent if the educational programmes pertaining to humanities, social sciences etc. can be transferred to the DE system. The campus-based system can be mostly confined to the programmes related to sciences, medicine, engineering, technology and other technical areas. This will reduce the economic burden on the nation to a great extent.

IGNOU has taken a lead in this context. It has already effected a Memorandum of Understanding with Pondicherry



University for collaboration in various education programmes, exchange of the staff, recognition of their respective degrees, transfer of credits and interaction through seminars, workshop etc. in the academic areas of mutual interest. Another similar MOU between IGNOU and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has been effected to promote joint academic and research projects of national relevance, to share each other's expertise and facilities for curriculum and course development, as well as for other collaborative projects for vocational education.

4. Assessment and evaluation of an educational system, whether traditional or distance, are essential for education and training. They assist the learning process by providing feedback to the learners, teachers and educational administrators to facilitate improvement of quality and maintenance of standards. This helps in evolving a mechanism whereby education can be made effective, meaningful and attuned to the needs of national development. To upgrade the DES, a comprehensive process of System Assessment and Academic Auditing will have to be undertaken with special emphasis on

- evaluation of the educational programmes for their academic excellence and their relevance to socio-economic needs, vocational opportunities and real-life situations;
- review of the curriculum, its linkages with pre-university, co-university and post-university structures of courses for uniformity in standards and levels of higher education;
- devising a mechanism to determine the quality of the self-learning course-materials and supplementary support inputs;
- organising efficient services to the students in terms of the delivery of the course-materials and other necessary facilities at the study centres;
- provision of staff-development and training-cum-orientation programmes and system/discipline-based research facilities;
- efficient management of information systems including data collection, its organisation, analysis, presentation and utilization;
- preparation of survey reports on various educational programmes on the basis of personal interviews, postal communication and field studies, and use them for making forecasts about their need and relevance in the DES;
- conducting studies for suitable qualitative and quantitative changes in policies through workshops, study circles, group discussions, and suggesting suitable strategies for their implementation;
- involvement of professional institutions and expert bodies, for their independent and objective views, to

identify the gaps in the various systems and subsystems and suggest suitable remedial steps;

- credibility in terms of accreditation and acceptability of degrees and diplomas for employment and advanced studies;
  - having system-based career advancement schemes for the faculties and staff involved in the system.
5. There is yet another way in which DES can be effectively upgraded. This is related to collaboration between DES and the employment sector viz industry, trade, financial institutions and other agencies which provide work and employment to the people. The two sectors can share resources, use the latest technology, design the vocational programmes and create employment opportunities for the students.

## 6. A FEW OPEN QUESTIONS

Finally, there are a few open questions among others which need to be examined by the DE system.

- There are a few constraints in the process of the convergence of the DE and the conventional systems on the one hand and within the DE system itself on the other. These are related to the constitutional/administrative structures of the respective institutions, the financial barriers, the technical obstacles, the roles and responsibilities of the academics as well as their appointments and promotional procedures, the attitudes of the staff and the policies of the respective governments among others. **How to overcome these constraints, barriers and obstacles ?**
- Should the DE system keep on growing by expanding enrolment through the traditional educational programmes like BA/B. Com./BSc and MA/MCom./MSc rather than by providing productive education on the basis of programmes that are academic, professional and value based ?
- Should there be an open university in each state as recommended by the CAGE ? If so, on what bases and what should be the objectives and functions of these universities ? What, then, shall be the role of the state-based regional centres of IGNOU ?
- What areas of educational/developmental programmes are likely to offer potential for collaboration with other institutions both in the non-formal and the formal streams ?
- Vocation-based education is not only central to the economic development of a country but it is also instrumental in the reduction of poverty and eradication of social evils, disease and ignorance. It is crucial for the overall development of a country as rapid technological changes and astounding scientific advancements influence its economy positively. What type of Vocational Education and Training is suitable to meet the requirement ?

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