# 3.3 IGNOU's: Challenges of Quality, Quantity and Equity
## -1996-
### (Source: ……………………………….. )

## Abstract

Open learning system started in India with the purpose of boosting the opportunities for higher education. It provided a 'second chance' education to those who missed the formal stream and making education a lifelong process. India requires a threefold increase in the number of students in the Indian higher education system to reach the level of developed countries. This is a challenging task when considering the numbers, our fast developing society and the need to provide quality education to millions who come from a very heterogeneous setting. To these are added the new dimensions that globalization has brought in. This paper considers the background of various developments in open and distance education in India and proposes broad strategies and programmes to be adopted for successfully tackling the concerns of quality, quantity and equity. (By : LA)

## 1. Introduction

Open learning system has been initiated in India to augment opportunities for higher education, as an instrument of democratizing education and to make education a life long process. **IGNOU** was established in 1985 for fulfilling a dual role: as an open university and as an institution for coordinating, promoting and determining standards of distance education in India[1]. During the

last few years IGNOU has grown in all its activities and is one of the five mega open universities in the world.

The expectation of *'democratisation of education'* in the Indian context assigns unforeseen responsibilities to the open learning system. The Indian formal educational system, with 220 universities, 8000 colleges and an enrolment of 6 million covers only 7% of the 17-22 age group, which is far less than in the developed countries. The existing enrolment of about one million in DE institutions forms about 13-14% of the tertiary enrolment. Any expectation to reach the level of developed countries would need a three-four fold increase in student numbers. Added to this are the adult groups at higher ages who need higher education in the modern fast developing and changing society. The challenge of quantity is in giving access to millions. The challenge becomes quite formidable if one considers the heterogeneity in socio-economic and educational background as well as the multi-lingual composition of the Indian population.

The process of globalisation is bringing in many new dimensions, one of which is the maintenance of high standards in educational materials and services, which are expected to be comparable and competitive at national and international levels. This is bringing in the concern for quality. Since knowledge is becoming, in the post-industrial scenario, a driving force for the engine of development, no country can afford to keep its people without education. In a country like India, faced with socio-economic and regional disparities, providing equity in access. and success in educating people becomes an important challenge.

Indian Distance Education System is therefore facing challenges of quality, quantity and equity. The challenges are quite formidable and need concerted national efforts to face them effectively. IGNOU as a *national'* open university with different types of roles is expected to lead the development of the **OU system** that could help in facing the problems successfully. The paper considers the background of various developments going on in India and proposes broad strategies and programmes to be adopted for successfully tackling the concerns of quantity, quality and equity.

## 2. Distance Education System

The Distance Education System in India consists of two types of institutions; dual mode universities having **Correspondence Course Institutions (CCIs)** and single mode universities - the Open Universities.

### 2.1 Correspondence Education

Started in the sixties in response to giving wider access to those who could not continue their university education, the correspondence course education has expanded considerably. In 1962, the first School of Correspondence Education was started by Delhi University. Most of the CCIs (Correspondence Course Institutions) offer courses in the areas of humanities, social sciences and commerce. Professional courses are mostly in teacher education, management and computer education. Some specialised universities like **BIT's, Pilani** and **J.N. Technological University** offer courses in engineering subjects. About 12 CCIs have relaxed formal entry qualifications for admission to their degree programmes of general nature[2].

### 2.2 Open University System

The open university system was established in India to introduce and develop open and distance education that is innovative, flexible in its offerings and open in terms of methods and modes of learning and evaluation. It is expected to be an alternative cost-effective non-formal channel of education, supplementing and complementing the conventional channel by offering a *Second chance'* of education to those who missed the formal stream. The open universities in India, though few in number, have created an impact on higher education by developing a wide range of programmes, by employing audio-visual technologies in instructional materials, and maintaining high standards. The learning material is self-instructional in nature and covers a wide range of subject areas usually not covered by dual mode universities.

The open universities use the course-team approach to develop multi-media instructional materials with in-built quality assurance dcviccs. The programmes are offered through **Study Centers (SC)** or **Work Centers (WC)** spread all over the region under the jurisdiction of the University. The SCs/WCs are coordinated and helped in the academic delivery by the **Regional Centers.** Academic counsellors are usually local experts working in and around the institutions where SC/WC is located. They are oriented to the **D.E. mode** and they encourage and assist students in their self-study, assess their assignments periodically. The assignments form a part of continuous evaluation and have a weightage of 25-30% in the final evaluation. The course end evaluation is carried out at the SC/WC under the supervision and control of the university.

### 2.3 IGNOU and its Apex Body Role

Indira Gandlii National Open University has been established to perform a dual role: as an open university for the whole country and as an apex body for the distance education system in India. The second role is performed by establishing a statutory body of IGNOU i.e. the **Distance Education Council (DEC) in** 1992. IGNOU is slowly acquiring the third role of the Resource Center through

(i)  **Staff Training & Research in Distance Education (STRIDE)** for training of all the functionaries in distance education in India and South Asia

(ii)  **Electronic Media Production Center** with state of the art facilities to be used at the national level for developing audio- visual support to learning materials; and

(iii)  TcIcconfcrcncing Facility with uplink at IGNOU to extended **C-band** transponder given by the **Indian Space Research Organisation** for training and developmental activities through distance education.

IGNOU has taken bold initiatives in developing and offering programmes in disciplines like computers, management, nursing, engineering, etc. by evolving innovative delivery methods.

### 3. Policies and Performance

**3.1** The National Policy on Education, I986"[1] states that the Open Learning System has been initiated in order to augment opportunities for higher education, as an instrument of democratising education and to make it a life-long process. The flexibility and innovativeness of the open learning system are particularly suitable to the diverse requirements of the citizens of our country, including those who had joined the vocational stream.

IGNOU is established in 1985 for fulfillment of the objective with a dual role of working as an open university and also for providing support to the establishment of Open Universities in the states.

**3.2** IGNOU set up a Distance Education Council (DEC) as a statutory body in 1992 for the promotion, coordination and determination of standards of the open university/distance education system[5]. DEC is expected to carry out the following activities:

*  The DEC will take steps for networking the State Open Universities and other distance education institutions, for sharing courses and programmes, and developing a pattern and structure for the open university programmes that would facilitate student mobility across programmes as well as institutions.

   *  The **Open Univcrsity**/distance education programmes would be structured on modularpattern with provision for transfer of credits. Students will have the facility of registering for courses of their choice which, in appropriate combinations, will enable them to obtain certificates, diplomas or degrees.

*  The DEC will encourage joint development of programmes and courses by IGNOU, State Open Universities and the Directorates of Correspondence Education of Conventional Universities.

*  It will also rccommcnd financial assistance from IGNOU to State Open Universities for their development and for undertaking specific projects.

*  It will initiate steps to organise programmes of training for the development of human resources for the Open University/distance education system especially in such areas as course development and production, organisation of support scivices, etc. The possibility of establishing institutional mechanisms lor litis purpose will be explored.

\*     The DEC will ultimately assume the responsibility for developing the existing correspondence education programmes on a selective basis and converting them into distance education programmes of an acceptable quality.

However, for the time being, the responsibility for the development of distance education programmes in the conventional universities will remain with the **UGC**. There would *be* close consultation between the UGC and IGNOU in the development of such programmes.
In response to the policy directives, IGNOU has established **STRIDE** for training and research in distance education. UGC has developed guidelines in consultation with IGNOU for transforming CCIs to the **DE mode**. A joint UGC-DEC Committee established in 1995 is promoting the transformation of CCIs to the DE mode. The CCIs may come under DEC jurisdiction from the 9th Plan period starting from 1997-98.

**3.3** A policy decision that each state should establish an open university was pursued but has met with little success. During the 7th Plan period (1987-92) four universities i.e. **KOU, NOU, YCMOU** and **BOU** were established. During the 8th Plan period (1992-97) **Gujarat OU** was established in 1994 and two more i.e. Kamataka and **Kerala OUs** are in the offing.

**3.4** On the use -of electronic media and new communication technologies in distance education, the **Central Advisory Board on Education. (CABE)** Report -19946 recommends in general:

a)     Creation of an educational broadcast system for sectors of education, particularly to support distance education, that includes dedicated **TV** and **Radio** channels serving both nation-wide needs as also local, language/region - specific needs.
b)     Greater use of communication technologies by DE institutions, and the creation of facilities for software development.
c)     Research and development in **communication technologies** by keeping in view future development and needs.

The next few years may witness a sudden increase in the extensive use of newer technologies of mass communication and personalised interaction, which may bring about a **paradigm shift** in open and distance education.

### 3.5   Enrolment & Programmes

The four OUs had an enrolment of around 118 thousand in 1992. By 1997, it w as expected to be increased by 400.000. In fact the open and distance education systems were expected to attract 50% of the school pass-outs and raise its total share from 11.5% of the total enrolment in Higher Education in 1992 to about 16.5% in 1997 [7]. Enrolment in OUs and CCIs is around one million and forms about 13-14% of the total tertiary enrolment.

### 3.6 Observations

1. OU enro.rient is more til the mature age group of 23-35 years. Students passing out of *hi*gher secondary in the age group of 17-21 find the conventional system more attractive. The total enrolment did not rise to the targets set for the 8$^{th}$ Plan.

2. Professiccal courses like management, computers and teacher education have a far higher enrolment and greater demand. IGNOU enrolment in management courses rise from 4300 in 1987 to 62.000 in 1996. Computer courses were launched _n 1992 and the enrolment in two Ous (IGNOU & YCMOU) has gone upto 25.00

3. IGNOU courses use English and Hindi as media of instruction. Only three other regional languages are covered by state open universities and eight major regional languages are yet to be covered. This has also affected the coverage

4. Features rich as range of courses, flexibility and modularity of the open learning system are not yet fully exploited. Short term, need-based and relevant courses fulfilling requirements of various target groups will have far more demand.

5. OU System is suffering from centralised structures, lack of quick communication to its students and reliance on formal system for academic services to students at the Study Centre (S.C) level. Various alternatives have to be evolved by developing decentralised system and employing communication technologies.

6. OU's are mil working in isolation and for wider access and diversity it will be necessary to adopt a partnership approach with many institutions and organizations which need training & education for their development. This will also ensure the relevance of courses offered.

   We are now at the stage c: preparation of plans and programmes for the 9th Plan period (1997-2002).

**4. Challenge of Quantity**

4.1 , After a decade of educational services, IGNOU has been recognised and respected for the quality and standard of iti programmes. The D.E methodologies offered by the OU System are being appreciated and are in demand by many ministries and agencies for solving their longstanding training nesis and for extending some of the developmental programmes like *'Panchayati Raj'* to the gnis-root levels. Such demands include

1. In-service training of primary and secondary teachers
2. Training of village level functionaries for implementing 'Panchayati Raj' (self government rule) programme.
3. Skill training and entrepreneurial development of youth in rural areas linked with programmes like **TRYSEM** and **JRY** related to training and employment of youth in rural and urban areas.
4. Training of health workers, police personnel etc.
5. Dissemination of recent agricultural scicnce and techniques to farmers through extension services and agro-sciencc centres.

In the examples cited above, the total target group in each case has a size of a few millions. In India, every delivery of a programme going to the people will have to be conceived in different regional languages.

4.2 IGNOU is trying to adopt the types of activities mentioned above as its extension and continuing education programmes. They are to be developed and delivered through collaborative efforts with the ministries concerned and public, private and non-governmental agencies. The role of the OU is limited to the development of successful methodologies and relevant materials to achieve the goals of the programmes.

4.3 The developed countries with their present coverage of 20-30% of potential learners at the tertian- level, arc already attempting to raise this figure by expanding their educational system. Trying to reach a comparable target in India will mean a manifold multiplication of the existing facilities. Resource limitations of a developing country will not allow large scale expansion of the formal system, and hence the OU system is considered a cost-effective alternative to absorb increasing enrolment.

While considering the need for higher education, we should not forget the adults working in the rapidly changing world of work. In fact that is the main largest group of the open learning system. The development of a modern technological society, which demands quick changes in the skills of the work force, needs educational and training facilities on a large scale.
An overview of the total target groups clearly indicates that the OU system in India has to develop its structures and programmes to fulfil the higher edicational and used fo millions of people. IGNOU alone cannot cope with the challenge and the educational policies clearly indicate a collaborative and partnership approach for pooling resources and expertise of all the OUs and DE institutions for developing diversity in its programme offerings and extending outreach to millions.

**4.4 Strategies for Ensuring Quantity**
For facing the challenges of quantity and diversity IGNOU, as a leading university, is adopting the following strategies and programmes:

*4.4.1 Strategies*

**1)** To consolidate the existing OU activities and expand them by re-engineering university structures on the basis of decentralisation of operations and student service related activities at the **Regional Centres** and Study Centres.

2) Use **mass communication** media (broadcasting and tele-conferencing and computer network) for offering academic counselling, services and training over the network for large scale dissemination of educational programmes.

3) Develop Regional Centres and Study Centres as resource centres and promote establishment of **multi-media learning centres all** over the country through private and public institutional participation.

4) Ensure and encourage participation of public and private institutions for jointly developing and delivering educational programmes.

5) Offer a large number of short-term relevant learning capsules through continuing and extension education for allowing large scale enrolment. It will be essential to use modem technologies for ensuring flexible features of open education such as walk-in admissions, **on-demand examinations, credit accumulation,** academic upgradation, etc.

6) Cover wide areas of subjects and topics required in a wide variety of activities related to living and working at various levels in sectors such as services, industry, agro-industry, education, culture etc.

*4.4.2 Educational Networking of Open & D.E Institutions - (OPENET) :* The plans and programmes of DEC are evolving a model of sharing DE resources for strengthening the system and extending its outreach[8].

One of the major programmes undertaken by DEC-IGNOU is the development of Open Educational Network **(OPENET)** in India. The OPENET at the beginning will have the following components:

a)  Physical and **Intellectual Network** *of* 41 Regional Centers offering 79 Academic Programmes with *about* 800 courses, with 20,000 counsellors through 721 Study Centers from where five hundred thousand students will be served annually. The RCs and SCs will be developed as the Resource Centres of the Network.

b)  **Broadcast Network** for offering programmes of education and training on an interactive Communication Channel through national broadcast on education channel and Tele-conferencing network of Teaching End and Receiving End rooms. The Teaching End room is located at IGNOU headquarters with uplink to extended **C-band** and **Receiving End rooms** are located at 23 places covering RCs of IGNOU and some study centres. Plans are to reach all RCs and SCs in the near future.

c)  **Computer Network** that will link ail the open universities and their Regional Centers and in future all Study Centers for communicating voice, data and images.

Tire OPENET will be integrated to facilitate information flow through a network at the national level such as **NICNET, ERNET** or International network. It will also be expanded to include all the Distance Education Institutions.

**4.4.3 Programmes of DEC**
The DEC fulfills at present the Apex Body role of IGNOU through co-ordination, promotion (giving grants to State Open Universities and Distance Education Institutions for their

development) and maintenance of standards. The last function, in due course of time, may become assessment and accreditation of DE programmes and Institutions (OUs and CCIs).

**The DEC has now started developing the following programmes:**

(i)     **Common pool programmes** from IGNOU and State Open Universities (SOUs). Later on programmes from Correspondence Course Institutions (CCI) could be added to the common pool.

(ii)    Development of norms and criteria for judging standards and quality of programmes.

(iii)   Sharing of **Common Resources** by SOUs and CCIs. An MOU is being developed with Gujarat State OU to use Regional and Study Center facilities jointly.

(iv)    **Consortium of** IGNOU & state open universities on an equal basis for developing a common educational network (OPENET)

(v)     Common and Central data bases for all distance education institutions in India

(vi)    **Credit transfer** system amongst OUs and later on among other institutions.

At present IGNOU forms the major resource center for DEC in all its programmes. In the development of the DE system in India, market motivation is going to be a major attraction and some DE institutions may offer programmes without adequate attention to their quality and standards (e.g. Management courses through DE). DEC has to play an important role in such a situation.

### 4.4.4 Programmes of Continuing and Extension Education
In a country like India, with great disparities in economic status and educational background, the university system has adopted extension education as its third dimension, teaching and research being the other two. Extension has been perceived as extending the knowledge possessed by the few and concentrated in some places to people at large who need it for their **sustainable development**. IGNOU is adopting this function and proposes to offer its network support along with services in giving education and training to empower people and their organization i.e., **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).** The delivery will be through private and public organizations. The programmes are being conceived in response to the needs of the people as assessed by the developmental agencies and organizations and delivered through close collaboration with these agencies, NGOs and others. *The* programmes of continuing and extension education may form a major thrust of expansion of the open university system to large numbers. IGNOU has the plans and programmes of extending education in *Panchayati Raj* **(Self-Government Rule)** to the village level functionaries, **computer education, technical & vocational education** etc.

It is hoped that the networking of open universities and D.E Institutions may lead to an increase in access from the present size of one million to two in the degree/diploma programmes and to a

few millions in continuing and extension courses by 2001. Developing educational technologies for large scale education is the major task of the OU system.

## 5. Challenge of Quality

Concern for quality is a concern of recent origin. So far, it was accepted that the quality and standards of educational programmes are to be judged and decided by the academic community in the University; and the **autonomy of** the university does not allow outsiders to interfere in any way in this function. The picture has changed substantially during recent times. For maintaining quality and standards in professional education in India, various national councils such as **All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Medical Council of India (MCI), National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE),** Distance Education Council (DEC), **National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)** have been established. Expansion and proliferation of education associated with societal and political pressures obviously lead to dilution of standards in university programmes and lead to the creation of **'**outside' authorities for ' the maintenance of standards.

Recently a new shift in providers of education is taking place. Besides the conventional university institutions, unconventional institutions, often originating from various sectors such as industry, banking, etc., are becoming providers of education partly to fulfil their sectorial needs. Some are entering into the *'educational market'* to offer *'marketable'* programmes in the areas of management, computers etc. This diversity requires institutional structures and mechanisms for assessing quality and accrediting the institutions for the benefits of the customers i .e. students.

DEC has the responsibility of the maintenance of standards in D.E programmes. It is, therefore, working closely with similar institutions (NAAC, NBA of A1CTE, NCTE, etc.) in establishing quality assurance mechanisms. The following activities are being planned[9].

1. Establishment of norms for the maintenance of standards in programmes such as in management, computer and teacher education through D.E

2. Transformation of CCIs into DE mode by following the guidelines evolved by the UGC.

3. Development of Manuals for assessing and accrediting DE courses, programmes and institutions.

4. Development of a system for ensuring/assessing the quality of programmes provided by DE institutions.

In a country like India where diversity, heterogeneity is great and the majority are disadvantaged due to their location in rural areas, socio-economic conditions and lack of educational access to better equipped institutions, there has to be a radically different approach to the maintenance of quality.

One of the approaches being developed is die national support through networks, particularly through broadcasting and teleconferencing, by offering counselling, teaching/training in common

pool programmes. At present IGNOU-DEC has receiving-end rooms at 23 places and proposes to cover 200 locations within a year.

**6. Challenge of Equity**
India is a country with a large population (900 million) and with wide **disparities** in socio-economic and educational backgrounds. One of the major programmes undertaken by the Government is the **Literacy Mission** aspiring to eradicate of illiteracy (48%) and offer **functional literacy** and skills to **neo-literates**. Nearly 25% are still below the poverty line and the recent policies of liberalisation and globalisation have increased the pace of development and substantially reduced the number below the **poverty** line. All these factors lead to the adoption of policies to eliminate disparities. Some of the major steps already adopted are:

1) **Reservation of** seats in admission to educational programmes, in positions of teaching and non-teaching staff of institutions.
2) **Free education** to socially backward students. No **tuition fees** for economically **backward** students and free education to girl students in some states.
3) Provision of facilities such as hostels, books to disadvantaged students.

However, the process of removal of socio-economic disparities is quite slow and painful and India is struggling to establish a society based on equity and justice. As the education expands with a quantum jump due to the paradigm shift brought about mostly due to the communication revolution, access to education will be necessary to take advantage of development processes to improve the standards and quality of life. The rich can have such access easily, but not the poor. This may lead to a widening disparity between rich and poor. While considering the quantity and quality of education, equity therefore acquires equally great, if not higher importance, in the process of development of a just and humane society.

Modern communication technologies are costlier and may not be available and accessible in rural and hilly areas and to poorer people. However, with a little political will and appropriate national policies, communication technologies have a great capability to reach the unreached and to bridge the gap of disparities. The process of education with a conventional approach is dominantly of a *diffusion'* or *cascading nature*with best educational facilities being available at **metropolitan cities** and lesser and poorer facilities available in towns, districts, blocks and, villages, in that order. Now with the employment of CTs, the best expertise and learning facilities could be made accessible and available to all the disadvantaged learners wherever they might be located. The following approaches are proposed:

1) The use of mass communication media for reaching all in English, Hindi and in each major regional language. **Community learning centres** equipped with TV and other learning facilities could be established in every village school.

2) Develop computer networks that could reach every place with a telephone receiver and give access to educational resource centres. Private and public institutions and organizations may establish such education facilities and the nation can provide **toll-free educational services** to **disadvantaged learners**.

3) Establish multi-media learning centres with public and private supports and offer free or economic use of facilities to disadvantaged learners.

4) Promote partnership with Non-Governmental Organisations for empowering peoples' organizations and people by offering appropriate and relevant education and training programmes.

5) Identify and adopt best **indigenous models** of **mass education** appropriate for adopting them in the D.E. system aimed at achieving sustainable development.

## 7. IGNOU's Challenges

The open and distance education system is best suited to face the challenges of quantity and quality. The vision of IGNOU-2002 proposes to establish OPENET that may have a consortium of all open and distance education institutions. All the policies and programmes outlined above may lead IGNOU to be an institution of a completely different nature. It will play various roles such as open university, agency for coordinating, promoting and maintaining standards in D.E. (DEC), a catalytic and promotional role to develop the open university system in the country.

To sum up, during the next five years the OU system should try to :

1. Develop OPENET providing access and a information caommunication network to all educational institutions in India as a national facility.

2. Jointly develop high quality multi-media programmes useful for multi-channel learning in all areas for knowledge and in particular in professional, technological and vocational areas.

3. Promote CT use and develop of 'Resource Centers' and Multi-media Learning Centers in all parts of India for giving wider access to all learners.

4. Establish partnership with industries and various organisations and institutions for offering training and retaining of personnel in and around the industry and institutions.

5. Undertake programmes of transforming existing print knowledge into user-friendly electronic storage to be made accessible through nodes of network.

6. Undertake training and development programmes to develop expertise to use and maintain CTs.

7. Undertake research and development to promote application of CT education and development of educational technologies.

8. Adopt policies and programmes for ensuring equity, access and success for ail. particularly for the disadvantaged learners.

9. Develop DEC and NAAC to function as **Accrediting and Quality Assessment** bodies for ail programmes/courses put in the OPENET.

10. Adopt and implement all measures initiated by DEC such as Credit Transfer. **Grading System,** Common Pool Programmes. Sharing of 'Resource Centers' (RC. SC) etc. for network development.

11. Take the support of the **Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to** ensure the quality of programmes for their recognition at the international level.

Since the technologies are changing rapidly, it will be rather difficult to have long-term programmes. But the strategies proposed above may help in making the open university system in India capable of facing the challenges of quantity, quality and equity and help in laying down the foundation for developing a **knowledge based society.** IGNOU is destined to play a vital role in all these changes and developments.

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