Social Justice
Role of open and distance education institutions in scaling up quality education for all

Prof. Parameswara Rao Kondapalli
School of Distance Education, Andhra University,
Visakhapatnam, India.
e-mail: kparameswararao@yahoo.com

Introduction

In the World today, Open and Distance Education (ODE) system has been gaining widespread popularity over the years. The explosive growth of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions and their scale of operations has been facilitated by continuous experiments and technological innovation in the field of ODE. In the light of these developments there is a need to assess the quality of the ODL in Globalisation.

Quality Assurance plays a pivotal role for highlighting the quality of both the learners as well as the teaching process in ODL. The improved access and availability of educational technology has enabled more students to participate in the learning process. New Educational Technologies have paved the way to a new learning techniques unconstrained by time and space.E-Learning, mobile technolgogies, communication and information access, and personal learning environments are becoming mainstream and , as a result of the learning process is shifting away from teacher centred to the learner centred. Efficient delivery of such content may be carried out through Internet technology, Satellite or Microwave links as well as fiber optics.

The main objective of this Paper is therefore to look into the different factors that contribute to the use of various Instructional Technologies in Open and Distance Education Institutions to suit the learners' needs to continue life long education.

 In the context of globalization, the ODL institutions employ a variety of approaches in the teaching-learning process, especially designed to meet the needs of the ever-changing global scenario. Quality Instructional design is more accessible to the learners by offering a lot of flexibility in place and pace of learning and selection of courses. Learners will be exposed and provided with a holistic curriculum, which prepares them for the competitive employment market besides ensuring life long learning. Open and Distance Learning has witnessed significant importance in national policies of human resource Development. Enrolments in Open Universities have increased fast and its expected that Open and Distance Education would take up substantial share of the planned expansion of higher education.

Open Learning has an important role to play by exploring new frontiers and developments in Open and Distance Education.   The prominent users of this mode are world wide in general and Asian region in particular. The growth of the ODE system in India and throughout the world has been phenomenal, particularly during the last two decades.   Rapid changes have taken place in the practice of ODE, mainly driven by changes in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).   The revolution in ICT coupled with the social demand for education for all and the need for lifelong and continuing education have resulted in the new vistas of open learning for knowledge society.

Learner-centric approach plays a pivotal role in ODE. Learners' are heterogeneous group and their level of understanding differs from individual to individual and they are from different segments of the population from different places. To teach and learn, ICT facilitated in different ways; Print based learning is being supplemented by Electronic Media- based, Satellite net work multimedia digital learning. It is a multi-model, multilevel process and learns to coop up

with the new technology innovations. Learner is now able to obtain information quickly and efficiently to under stand the subject matter at any time and at place and any where. ODL system with its flexibility, cost effectiveness and time-tested methodologies, has passed through a long history resulting in democratizing of the educational opportunities. To provide access, equality and quality education to meet the growing needs of the Learners.

. These Open and Distance Education Institutions play a crucial role in promoting the education in a knowledge society by leveraging different methodologies.
1. Access and Reach
2. Equity and gender
3. Quality and effectiveness
4. Cost-effective education for all
5. Bringing quality education to the door step of millions.

In the present day world when sustained development has become a watchword, the systems approach to quality has gained utmost importance and relevance even in the area of open and distance education. Globalisation and increased domestic competition have brought a sense of urgency in introducing highly successful Total Quality Management techniques to Indian organizations. Quality is not an accident. It is always the result of high intention, sincere efforts, intelligent direction and skillful execution. It can be classified as an attitude or a characteristic. The concept of total quality management can be adopted to evolve all new Total Quality Management Education System (TQMES) which needs to encompass the following components:

Quality Planning:

Identification Needs: Identification needs include students' development, faculty development and development of processes. Quality being a complex issue can be referred to in terms of products, process and systems.
The search for quality has become the single most important force leading to organizational success and growth in both national and international markets in the new mille3nnium. The organizations that will succeed are those that can maintain a dedication to quality in each and every organizational function.

Quality as such, has become one of the most important aspects in every profit and non-profit making organization. It is one such platform where the imagination of the organization meets the learner's expectations. In today's highly competitive market a big question mark hovers above the learners awareness.

Quality of the product or services offered is more important for dual mode institutions than Open Universities, as they are generally specialized courses and concentrate on specialized courses. N
It is also fairly easy for them to increase the quality of the products they offer as they usually have excellent know how about he product. But the main area where the small institution has easy to gathering customer feed back, especially if the institution sells the products at the market by itself. A frequently used definition of quality is "Delighting the customer by fully meeting their needs and expectations". These may include performance, appearance, availability, delivery, reliability, maintainability, cost effectiveness and price. It is, therefore, imperative that the organization knows what these needs and expectations are. In addition, having identified them, the organization must understand them, and measure its own ability to meet them.
Benchmarking: Various practices pertaining to management education need to be benchmarked.
Assurance: Provision of knowledge and ability to convey trust and confidence.
Setting Standard Performance: Setting standards for every activity in the field of management education against which performance can be measured. Quality awareness must begin at the inception of any system and then should transgress every stage so that the concept of TQM is

imbibed in the whole system.   Right from identifying the key players in the system to identifying the needs of the players and setting their performance standards is done in this stage.

Quality concept in Distance Education:
Purpose of quality improvement programmes at educational institution

- To ensure continuous improvement of total institutional performance
- To ensure stakeholders of institutional accountability
- To evolve mechanisms and procedures for effective and progressive performance
- Equitable access to benefits of higher education to all
- Optimization and integration of modern methods of teaching and learning
- Credibility of evaluation procedures
- Proper allocation of support and services and
- Research sharing though networks of collaboration.

Total Quality Management is a recent concept popular among management circles. TQM considers quality primarily as that perceived by the customer of the service or product. In education it means the meeting of the changing demands of students, employers, knowledge producers and society. It's a people driven process. It strives for empowerment and autonomy of the people involved in using the processes of production.   It asks people to continuously look for new ways to adapt to the changing environment.

Five components of TQM

- The customer is anyone, internal or external, who receives or is affected by the product, process or services.
- Continuous improvement is essential to reach the stage of zero defects.
- Faculty development should ensure diligent updating at par with state-of-the-art methodology
- Teamwork and stakeholder involvement are the key to achieve TQM
- Monitoring progress with review of objectives is a necessary corollary.

Challenges faced by the institutions

- Global competition
- Technological upgradation
- Quality upgradation
- Cost consciousness
- New combination of means of production

The features of the institution at maturity stage

- High quality teaching
- High quality research and publication
- Demand for consultancy
- Reliance of national and international centers on its expertise and leadership
- Continuous improvement to win recognition and awards.

Quality Implementation

- Implementation of standards
- Identifying the chasm between standard and actual performance level
- Reformulating the plans to eliminate the causes of deviation
- Implementation of the reformulated plans

This is the doing phase of the TQM system, no system can succeed until it is implemented in the right spirit and the right perspective.   To make this happen the support of all the players

of this system is required, for it will amount to their attitude change, skill change and knowledge change.

Quality Monitoring and Control
- Monitoring and evaluating quality system
- Redesigning and restructuring plans for increasing systems efficiency

The concept of Total Quality Management system, to complete a full circle requires proper monitoring and control. In this phase the processes that do not respond to the changing needs should be overhauled and deviations, it any, Should be ironed out so as to have an effective quality system. Eventually, it can be said that the future of ODE in India is very bright and looking beneath its surface one can find that the strengths are many and the potential limitless. The onus therefore, now lies upon the institutes to harness and develop it to the best of capabilities.

Learning Environment

To develop the individual's ability to manage his own learning needs. With the tremendous speed at which latest knowledge is replacing the old one it is impossible for standardize courses to cater to mass individual needs. Open and Distance Education Institutions are to raise more revenue. But quality should not be given up. The large-scale expansion in the number of ODL institutions offering Open and Distance Mode at various levels has been of varying quality during the last century. In the 21st centaury assuring the quality in higher education has become an integral part of the development of this type of education in India. The need of the hour is to ensure quality of education in the country for the cause of credibility of the entire system of Open and distance Mode. The huge quantitative expansion has taken place at the cost of quality, especially, during the 20th century. The period might be described literally as the" Era of Open and Distance Education" in the history of education in India.

Since distance education is 'learner centered', the institutions mainly focus its attention on every strategy and practice that promote quality and excellence in relation to the intuitional performance. On the one hand and enhancement of satisfaction of its stakeholders concerned on the other. Quality Assurance has been defined in the literature of distance education as continuing, active and integrative process for maintaining and enhancing quality.

In order to strengthening the quality assurance in Distance Education in India. The Quality assurance at the national level and to enhance international competitiveness Distance Education institutions trying to establish their own standards to changing needs of the learners.

To meet the changing needs of the learners the concepts of **'quantity conscious Vs quality conscious'** has been applied in these institutions now in various directions, viz.
1. Quality assurance in Open and Distance education
2. Learners' need-based education
3. Empowering the teaching-learning talents and
4. Assessing the quality and standards by various organizations which introduce new courses with quality assurance like
   a. The Distance Education Council (DEC)
   b. University Grants Commission (UGC)
   c. National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)
   d. All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)
   e. National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)
   f. The Andhra Pradesh Council of Higher Education (APSCHE)
5. Service quality to the learners' satisfaction.

1. Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Learning:
Quality Concept in Open and Distance Education

Purpose of quality improvement programmes at Open and Distance Learning Institutions
- Equitable access to benefits of higher education to all
- Optimization and integration of modern methods of teaching and learning
- To ensure continuous improvement of total institutional performance
- To ensure stakeholders of institutional accountability
- To evolve mechanisms and procedures for effective and progressive performance
- Credibility of evaluation procedures
- Proper allocation of support ant services and
- Resource sharing through networks of collaboration.

In Distance Education, there are a number of notions of quality, such as quality as a minimum threshold level to be achieved, or that of quality as an ideal to which the organization must aspire; or quality as a means of acquiring and sustaining a competitive advantage. It is not only the philosophy behind the assurance of quality in distance education setting there is also the difficulty in designing a standard to suit all. At the moment there is no consensus on what should be 'quality assured'. For some institutions it is a course or courses, for others it may be assurance of the quality of the whole institutions.

Empowering the Teaching – Learning talents:

The Teaching – Learning talents for imparting education to learner as chosen by various CCIs and Open Universities vary from institutions to institutions. The print material is the master media, which is supplemented and complemented by audio, video lessons, Radio and Television programmes. To provide education to the heterogeneous learners the multi-media is inevitable in distance learning. Globalization and today's Information and Communication Technology have given a new expression to Open and Distance Learning. In order to strengthen the Distance Mode sharing of information among the Open and Distance Learning institutions and maintenance of the quality study material and quality audio/video programmes is in vogue among the institutions. For example the Indira Gandhi National Open University's MBA Study Material is shared by the other Open Universities and CCIs in India.

In a competitive environment, to provide access to education through innovations ,flexibility in pace and place and multimedia technolgocial support to all sections of the community, to provide quality education,to ensure learners satisfaction, and the performance of the learning resource centers (study centres)is crucial besides, instructional activities and learning programmes.In the emerging knowledge society ODL institutions well equipped to use new innovative teaching- learning methods, process the materials with the new ICT tools for learning. Learners will be exposed to knowledge based society, which prepares them for the competitive employment market besides ensuring life long learning environment.

The major considerations to recognize quality in ODL

Institutions	Faculties	Learners
High ranking, good accreditation status	Motivated faculties Excellence teaching performance with satisfactory feed back of learners.	Good education experiences
Prestige, reputation, public perception	Well defined curriculum design and periodic review, clearly defined teaching and learning strategies	Good academic ambience
Attraction and retention of quality faculty and students	Good institutional/ industrial consultancy, sponsored research, patents Good research publications	Value addition
Centre of excellence Student Support Services	Organization and attendance of good number of conferences, workshops, seminars, expert lectures etc.,	Good employability after graduation
Excellent physical facilities	Awards, Fellowships	High reputation and prestige
Infrastructure facilities E-library, excellent IT,	Peer respect and recognition	Better job opportunities
Modern and well equipped library, Modern teaching aids	Good mentors and counselors for students	
Mission and Vision for Academic Excellence	Practical orientation in teaching, Field visits and training, state-of-the-art syllabus	

In today's highly competitive environment ODL Institutions have to strive for enhancing Quality Assurance. Quality has been recognized as the key factor in determining long-term success and survival of any institution. The Open and Distance Education produces the human resources has a pivotal role in the quality movement. ODE has a vital role in national building as the education sector has the prime responsibility of producing the basic input for development of human resources. The major consideration to recognize quality in ODL institutions clearly explained in Institutions, Faculties and learner wise to attract the new learners in the ODL system. cases it is the quality of the materials provided, and finally it may be some aspect such as the counseling and career Guidance provision. Currently there is no one set of guidelines suitable for all, and students are still left with the perplexing problem of not knowing when something is of good or high 'quality' and when it is not.

The assurance of quality in ODL institutions is a challenging task. More and more institutions are engaged in offering courses of all types and levels to a large and heterogeneous group of learners. They adopt different teaching - learning strategies and the extent of use of media such as printed materials, audio/video aids, computer mediated learning, reliance on web/internet based learning, etc. widely differ across the institutions.

In the initial stages to attract learners open system is adopted at the entry level as many as possible through conducting entrance tests. In the case of professional courses intake of unlimited number in a few Correspondence Course Institutions has lead to think about the quality in Distance Mode. Every institute was interested in about quantity (Learners) to raise the enrollment and to mobilize resources as much as possible and at the same time the institutions

are not providing the Student Support Services to that extent. Hence, there is every need to monitor distance education institutions to strengthen not only in rise enrollment but also in upgrade quality aspect. In order to stream line the Distance Education Institutions the Distance Education Council came into existence to safeguard the interest of learners and to upkeep the standards in Distance Education in India.

Quality assurance in higher education has, in fact, become a global issue with many countries calling for international standards. This aspect is particularly relevant in India where the quality of institutions is variable, ranging from the excellent to poor, with a long tail of mediocrity. In view of the increased student mobility, and the need to provide international experience to both faculty and students, quality assurance should be a priority concern. All institutions must reach a certain minimum standards, and even the best must strive for continuous improvement.

To maintain quality in Distance Education one can broadly classify the facilities into the following:

  i). Admissions
  ii). Academic Standards
  iii). Quality of Teaching
  iv). Quality of Educational Inputs and
  v). Student Support Services

i) Admissions:

The degree of openness is in the case of admission only. According to set of norms recommend by the NCTE for the B. Ed., Programme, and the AICTE for MBA and MCA programmes and remaining programmes by the UGC. Open Universities prefer their own rules. To maintain standards there is no compromise in the case CCIs to maintain standards and norms prescribed by the respective authorities.

ii) Academic Standards:

Concern for quality is 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. In order to maintain the academic standards at university level board of studies play an important role in maintaining the standards and safe guard the prescribed instructions from various academic bodies from time to time. After approving the syllabi. These institutions prepare guidelines for the course/programme to suit the heterogeneous learners.

iii) Quality of Teaching:

Quality of teaching in distance education plays a pivotal role. The learner is more attracted by the teaching methods adopted by the CCI's/Open Universities.

1. **Medium of Instruction:**
   Learner can choose his/her choice to learn in his own medium of instruction. One of the important recommendations of the Education Commission (1964-66) was that regional languages be used as media of instruction in universities and colleges instead of English. State Open Universities following the regional languages as medium of instruction in various Courses.

2. **Learning Material**
   Self Learning Material specially prepared for learners. This material is inbuilt lecturer.

3. **Multimedia Approach in Teaching and Learning**
   Distance learner can choose his choice to learn Print Material, audio, video, radio, television and computer aided instruction through e-mail, www, online education

4. Learner-Centered Teaching

Open and Distance education institutions are different from that of the conventional Universities in Teaching – Learning process. This system is more learner-centered and the learner is an active participant in the process. Most of the instructions are imparted though various multimedia approaches to the different learners and their choice to choose and use the media mix in the learning process.

1. **S**elf **I**nstructional **M**aterials (SIMs)
   The printed study materials (written in teacher in-built style)
2. Counselling sessions
3. Practical/ Project work
4. Gyan Darshan / Doordarshan (Video Programmes)
5. Gyan Vani/ All India Radio (Audio Programmes)
6. Interactive Radio- Counselling.

iv) Quality of Educational inputs:

Quality Educational inputs such as Self Learning Material, Audio, Video, Radio, Television and Computers i.e., W.W.W. e-mail, and e-learning, Virtual Education through virtual class rooms etc., IGNOU has attained an international stature due to the high quality of its course materials, the University today had an enrollment of 2 million spread over 33 countries in the world. (IGNOU at a glance). Quality education through television programmes plays an important role in distance education. In the education sector Gyan Dharsan (GD) is India's first truly educational channel with a mission to carry knowledge to households of students, teachers and public, to bridge the knowledge and information gap and to provide the same quality of higher education to all. Of the four channels the third channel is Eklavya (The technology channel) brings quality education to students pursuing engineering education through out the country and the fourth channel i.e., Vyas (the higher education channel) brings quality education to the students pursuing higher education throughout the country. eGyankosh: a national digital repository to store, index , preserve, distribute and share the digital learning resources developed by the ODL institutions in India.

v) Quality of Student Support Services:

The image and reputation of the distance education institutions largely depend upon the quality of student support services.
- To establish the missing link of direct contact between teacher and pupil
- Efficient and well experienced teachers' participation in the above programmers.
- In the case of Science and Engineering and Computer courses practical were imparted during the Personal Contact Programmed Cum Practical.

2. Learners' Need Based Education

Any learner who would like to pursue a career in Open and Distance Institution can join the programmed of his choice. Learners explore the knowledge and skills required for success in the changing economic situation. Distance Education Institutions enable learners to specialize in a particular area of their interest through counseling.   It provides for learner-centered education creating interest to pursue further studies by way of new Information Technology. With a view to increase the opportunities for higher education to a wider section of the community, the CCIs and Open Universities introduced the job-oriented courses besides various other courses to suit the ever-changing needs of the Society.   This is related to interaction with the community, linkages with industry, educational extension and innovations and other welfare activities.

DISTANCE EDUCATION TOWARDS GLOBALISATION

New technologies have enormous possibilities and potential to serve the distance learners. The time has come for collaborative effort to establish multilateral cooperation to further strengthen and consolidate the distance education system. Education should improve their qualification, have been employment opportunities and in turn facilitate the country's progress. Open and Distance Education has been foregoing a head in the path of progress and dynamism, offering a variety of courses and research contributions.

Online Learning:

Online resources vary widely, from minor enhancements of the printed material to fully-online learning activities. The level of online enhancement is usually determined by the nature of the target group, the unit learning objectives and the teaching interests of staff. Online resources frequently take the form of discussion forums, self tests and quizzes. Fully online units where all teaching and learning resources and activities occur online are becoming more popular.

With a large number of developing multimedia being used in the present days, a lot of tools are use to aid e- Learning such as TV programmes, radio programmes and web casting to broadcast the contents of the classes studied, web boards for students to exchange ideas and opinions, web forums for gurus to answer questions by those who needed help, e-Library for students to search for information, etc.

The Internet is also a large pool of information which offers knowledge to students in their own free time so that they can work while studying, students can work at their own pace while having personal mentors to help them through the process.

Use of Technology:

The use of technology in the 21st century is very crucial for competitiveness of ODL Institutions. The usage of the Internet to their advantage is also one of the key factors which determine the success of an institution. There are many models suitable for adopt one that best suits their characteristics. The adoption of technology is generally due to external pressure rather than perceived benefits by the learners.

Today, technologies can help in quality assessment of the learners using online learner ratings and surveys. This helps not only generating the learner feed bak but also in getting awareness about the changing market trends.

E-learning increases access to learners world wide by way of instruction. Dramatic changes have taken place in instructional design to the distance learners. Instructional design is gaining movement in recent years. Distance teachers to teach impressively to learners in different difficult subjects eg. Science courses etc., by way of diagrams, cartoons not only helps lesson teaching but also to easily understand purpose to include, animation, graphics and mixed with light music. This will facilitate to the learner to learn and understand the subject matter easily. Lessons Designed by animators, web-designers is to suit the varied distance learners in mind. Prepared lessons are in such a way to learners to learn with joy. This will induce the learner to go for life long learning.

Instructional design consisting of the following stages Analysis, Designing, Strategy, Story boarding.

Analysis: Student retention capacity will be estimated after instruction to what extent
Learner learned can be estimated.

Designing: How to teach lessons to suit the heterogeneous learners will be planned.

Strategy: Teaching methods adopted to teach particular lesson.

Story boarding: Diagrams and graphs added to the lessons in order to learner to learn
easily.

Developing models of effective and meaning learning in an Open and Distance Learning environment using multi mode technologies for selected subjects. Develop innovative methods for e-content.

E – Learning

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E-learning is useful particularly for Open Learning and Distance Education Institutions in which large number of study centers is distributed in remote areas and there is a wide network of study centers. E-learning is collaborative as student's learning from one another.   In E-learning the content material is delivered through electronic media including internet, intranet extranet, satellite broadcast, interactive TV and CD Rom.(Ashok K.Kalia, Sanjeev Tomar, 2004) E-learning is the ideal mode of imparting education in open learning. E-learning has some added advantage as it is cost effective and it cuts the duplication of efforts.

Web-Based Learning:
In Distance education, in web-based learning, the distance learner is interacted through web. The Web-based learning has an advantage to the learner has the freedom to learn anytime, at any place and at his own pace and convenient to him. The major thrust of flexible learning is the use of the World Wide Web to support teaching – learning in the form of Web-based, Web-supported and web-enhanced ways.

Asynchronous Learning
An asynchronous learning network is a form of computer-based instruction, taking place without the confinement of location and time. The central focus of an asynchronous learning network, according to Hiltz and Willman (1997), is a teaching and learning environment, designed for any time /place use through computer networks.

Virtual Learning
Virtual learning is relatively the unique distance learning operation in the world today, utilizing a wide variety of technologies, students to interact internationally, even globally, with faculty members and other students through internet, Video via satellite or fiber optics broadcasts important learning techniques.   Institutions are actively involved in instructional technolgoy by creating, adapting, or evolving new ways of instructional delivery to suit the multi dimentional courses to varied learners to suit the changing global scenario.

m Learning

Instead of the computer, mobile phone may be use for learning and, hence the term mLearning for mobile learning. So while traveling or waiting for something, you can use a mobile phone to connect to the Internet and continue learning(Srisakdi Charmonman and Natanicha Chorpothong, 2005).Accesibility to communication is becoming much easier, cost of these communication is being reduced rapidly. Mobile communications are being spread out quickly. IGNOU started planning for programme delivery to its learners using mobile phone technology.(Dikshit, H.P.,2006) Learners are more attractive to the m learning in years to come.

Satellite:

With the progress made in the area of communication satellites both at the national and international levels, it has been possible to operationalise the concept of distance education. It is more effective among dispersed population and vast physical dimensions. It can be used in two ways: telecast or pre-recorded educational programmes and the live telecast of programmes with two-way interaction i.e., through teleconferencing and the telephone mediated instruction.

Apart from the instructional activities and learning programmes in a competitive environment, in order to ensure learners satisfaction and the performance of the learning resource centers (study centers) is crucial to ensure quality education. These Open and Distance Education Institutions play a crucial role in promoting the education in a knowledge society by utilising different methodologies. This will induce the learner to go for life long learning. Learners vary widely in their abilities to learn the skills and knowledge.   To suit the needs of different learners, quality Open and Distance Education is more accessible to the learners by offering a lot of flexibility in place and pace of learning and selection of courses. Learners will be exposed and provided with a holistic curriculum, which prepares them to meet the demands of the competitive employment market besides ensuring life long learning

. **Empowering the Teaching – Learning talents:**

This is the most important parameter dealing with the quality of student's intake, the standard achieved by the students, the mode of teaching and learning, use of new technologies in teaching. The Teaching – Learning talents for imparting education to learner as chosen by various CCIs and Open Universities vary from institutions to institutions. The print material is the master media, which is supplemented and complemented by audio, video lessons, Radio and Television programmes. To provide education to the heterogeneous learners the multi-media is inevitable in distance learning. Globalization and today's Information and Communication Technology have given a new expression to Open and Distance Learning. In order to strengthen the Distance Mode sharing of information among the Open and Distance Learning institutions and maintenance of the quality study material and quality audio/video programmes is in vogue among the institutions. For example the IGNOU's MBA Study Material is shared by the other Open Universities and CCIs in India.

The role played by various organizations to maintain the quality and standards in Open and Distance Learning institutions in India.

a) University Grants Commission (UGC):
b) Distance Education Council (DEC):
c) National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC):
d) All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE):
e) National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE):
d) All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE):
f) The Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education (APSCHE):

a) University Grants Commission (UGC):

The University Grants Commission (UGC) was established in 1956 under an Act of Parliament to take measures for promotion and coordination of university education and determination and maintenance of standards in teaching, examination and research in universities.

b) Distance Education Council (DEC):

This is the apex national level statutory council for the promotion and coordination of the Open Universities and Distance Education system and for the determination and maintaining standards in distance education and its promotion. The DEC constituted a high power committee of educationists and distance education specialists for developing mechanism for assessment and accreditation of Open and Distance Learning system in view of its unique characteristics such as dynamic and effective resource sharing approaches scattered locations of student support delivery points, multi-faceted target group of learners, multiple media instructional packages etc.,.

For the assessment of a unit, the NAAC follows a three stage process, which is a combination of self-study and peer review.   The three stages are
1. The preparation and submission of a self-study report by the unit of assessment.
2. The on-site visit of the peer team for validation of the self-study report and for recommending the assessment outcome to the NAAC.
3. The final decision by the Executive Committee of the NAAC.

In this context, NAAC criteria for self-evaluation for Open and Distance Education mainly focus on international guidelines for promoting best practices. The NAAC has standardized a comprehensive model to measure the quality and relevance of the educational process in colleges and universities. The NAAC is a founder member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), which has 120 international agencies as members that are engaged in quality assessment, accreditation, and academic audit. It is an external Quality Assurance Agency like the Higher education Quality Control Council of United Kingdom.

d) All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE):

Technical education plays an important role in the overall development of a nation. Technical education is imparted at different levels – certificate, diploma, degree, post-graduate etc.,

The quality of engineering education within the Country must be maintained at the highest possible level. The AICTE continuously tries to achieve this objective.   The National Board of Accreditation (NBA) of the AICTE aims to bring standards of some of the programmes offered in technical institutions on par with programmes offered in Institutions across the USA and Europe, by introducing a quality auditing system and establishing a datum for measuring the quality and excellence in engineering education.   The National Board of Accreditation will periodically conduct evaluation of technical institutions and programs on the basis of guidelines, norms and standards specified by the Board and recommend to the Council regarding recognition or de-recognition of the institution or programme.

Realizing the value of accreditation, several institutions have volunteered to go through the rigorous process of audit the uniqueness of the process is that the duration for which any programme or Institutions will have to maintain the quality and standard, if they wish to retain their accredited standard.   The accreditation exercise is designed to be rigorous with several inputs

such as quality of teaching, level of research, faculty expertise, evaluation of teachers, standard of infrastructure available in the campus etc. These are taken into consideration in order to help the visiting accreditation team of experts to have holistic approach and arrive at rational evaluation.

e) National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE):

The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) was established in August 1995 with a view to achieve planned and co-ordinate development of teacher education system throughout the country and for regulation and proper maintenance of norms and standards of teacher education. Some of the major functions of NCTE are laying down norms for various teacher education courses, recognition of teacher education institutions, laying down guidelines in respect of minimum qualification of appointment of teachers surveys and studies, research and innovations, prevention of commercialization of teacher education etc.

f) The Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education (APSCHE):

The APSCHE was established in 1988. Is the first of its kind in the country, setup as per the recommendations of the National Education Policy 1986, is primarily a coordinating body between the University Grants Commission, the State Government and the Universities. It is the general duty of the council to co-ordinate and determines standards in institutions of Higher Education or Research and scientific and Technical Institutions in accordance with guidelines issued by the UGC from time to time. The APSCHE Act envisages the following three distinct functions. Planning and Coordination, Academic and advisory functions.

Besides these councils, to start new distance mode courses in law one must obtain permission from Bar Council of India and in case of Medical courses ODL institutions need to obtain permission from Medical Council of India.

In the process of globalisation is bringing in many new dimensions, one of which is the maintenance of high standards in educational material and service, which are expected to be comparable and competitive at National and International levels. This is causing concern for quality. Recently, a new shift in providers of education is taking place. Besides the conventional university institutions (Dual mode distance education institutions), unconventional institutions, often originating from various sectors such as industry, banking etc., are becoming providers of education partly to fulfill their sectoral needs. Some are entering into the educational market to offer marketable programmes in the areas of management, computers and mechanisms for assessing quality and accrediting institutions for the benefit of the learners.

In view of the expanding opportunities to learners, ODL institutions to enabling to reach out, regulate and maintain standards, and meet the challenges of diversification to enhance access and maintain the quality and standards of Open and Distance Education.
Providing education for all the people i.e., rural and urban, female and male across barriers of caste, class and creed and socially, physically challenged persons

5. SERVICE QUALITY TO THE LEARNERS' SATISFACTION

The UGC, AICTE and DEC have taken a serious view of these deteriorating standards in some of the programmes conducted through distance mode by some institutions. They also have started exercises to identify the programmes with quality-oriented delivery systems. The DEC has the mandate for promotion of Open and Distance Learning and maintenance of standards in distance education, which is really a challenging task, especially when distance-learning courses are cropping up with rapid speed. The DEC has already approached all the Universities and institutions to submit their distance education programmes for quality assessment. Information about such programmes is also paring in directly. Their approach would be to facilitate the use of quality course material developed by different institutions on mutual exchange basis on agreed terms and conditions discarding low standards in distance education., but at the same time, they

would not like any sub-standard distance education programmes to continue any more.   The UGC has already issued a circular advising all the universities to desist from the practice of granting franchising.

IGNOU with the National jurisdiction and several State Open Universities are also functioning with a view to offering well-structured and academically well-supported distance education programmes.   With these developments in distance education in India, it is desirable that the distance education programmes run by different institutions are limited to a reasonable neighborhood of their locations to maintain quality delivery programmes.ODL has witnessed significant importance in national policies of human resource development. Enrolments in Open Universities have increased fast ant it is eted that distance education would takeup substantial share of the planned expansion of higher education.

Application of modern Information and Communication Technologies and adoption of the distance education methodology strives to develop an innovative, flexible and open system of education. The Open and Distance Education Institutions use technology, not just to attract a wide range of learners but also to provide sustained academic support to retain them in the system, to provide easy access to good quality Higher Education to "all" in general and "the disadvantaged" in particular, by delivering the same at their door steps.

Conclusion

To sum up, the process of globalisation is bringing in many new dimensions, one of which is the maintenance of high standards in educational material and service, which are expected to be comparable and competitive at National and International levels. This is causing concern for quality.

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 fulfill their sectoral needs. Some are entering into the educational market to offer marketable programmes in the areas of management, computers and mechanisms for assessing quality and accrediting institutions for the benefit of the students.

To fulfill the learners' desires to continue their education lifelong one must provide the necessary quality education and inputs through Distance Education Course for sharing educational information and exchanging educational services worldwide. . Learners' choice is the order of the day. Higher Education at any time and pace anywhere can provide by Open and Distance Education Institutions through Information and Communication Technologies in a changing global scenario.

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