

# Post Covid-19 Higher Education Scenario with Special Focus on Open Distance Learning : NEP 2020

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## **Introduction**

*"With old tools we cannot implement or repair new schemes, mechanisms & machines" a japanese management expert.*

In the light of our **New Education Policy** (NEP) of 2020 and its massive and holistic reforms agenda, it is time to have a relook at Higher Education & its agenda of enhancing present GER to 50 percent by 2035! It is also contextual to visualise, how in the post Covid-19, this NEP will be implemented, as it is a very Comprehensive and its trajectory goes beyond our present system of Degree oriented approach of imparting higher education, per se, though research and innovative/ skill development components are visible in recent years, due to the Interventions of technology and digital connectivities.

Can we consider India's NEP, 2020 as a blueprint for good governance and leadership in our Institutions of Education, including Higher Education?

To me, it looks like a welcome or paradigm shift to focus on our mostly outdated and traditional concepts of educational patterns and practices, which we have been witnessing till now. Then what are the new tenets of such package of reforms and its implications? Are we in for a new Structural- functional changes, though it will take 10 to 15 years

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from now, to put it on the right track with proposed landmark reforms of NEP 2020, after 34 to 36 years relatively?

Education, Particularly Higher Education, has been considered as the instrument of individual, societal and economic transformation. This is more relevant today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as a greater challenge now more than ever. Therefore, there is a greater interest and need for higher investment than what we accepted (routinely) earlier. Open Distance Learning (ODL) must be able to build a knowledge society through its tremendous reach in an innovative and creative manner, in the present era of Internet and technological support system.

If only 11 to 13% of the youth in the age group of 18 to 25 are in the Higher Education Sector, the target by 2020-2035 is estimated to be 50%. This is not an easy task to reach given fact the current tradition/practices in 903 and more universities, 40760 colleges in the country, 10,011,standalone institutions, Including 1 Central Open University-IGNOU,14 State Open Universities apart from two private Open Universities, will not be able to meet the increase in the enrolment rate without sacrificing ‘quality’ of the H.E.

If ‘access ‘and ‘equity’ have to be promoted to enhance the quantity and quality of Higher Education, all our universities including open universities, need to play an important and credible role with a down to earth approach.

## **Basis**

The current Scenario reflects the emergence of exponential growth of knowledge. As there are trends of increasing life expectancy and also there is increase in seekers of higher education, either as fresher’s or as working/employed persons to update their knowledge and skills further. In the context of such an emergence of a Learning Society, there is need for innovative and flexible structures. Now, higher education is performing its task through conventional/traditional

Universities and Open and Distance Learning Institutions. Without sacrificing 'Quality' Concerns, 'Quantitative' Expansion has to be encouraged and monitored to maintain Standards and market expectations.

During the period between 2004 to 2014, the focus of the UPA governments I and II has been very disappointing for Higher Education including Open and Distance Learning and other foundational sections.

This, I am stating in the context of the outcome of the higher education institutions and its refusal by the organized sector, industry, corporate and business- who considered them as unemployable, though Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) was extended to an appreciable level (Right to Education is plus point) many of the provisions are still under litigation.

Even the success story of Human Resource Development (HRD) looks like a patchwork type than holistic or commendable. The choice of first HRD Minister and the present one are equally responsible to cite lacklustre performance. NEP of 2016 suffered a setback of sorts. (Rejection of TSR Subramanian Committee). In the light of this we need to address the issues, lack of solutions and myopic performance of Higher Education and ODL in particular, today.

Dr. Garg and Dr. Feroz Ahmed have enlightened about the remarkable initiative with innovative approaches in implementing the excellent copy-paste work solutions, of high sounding techno-based spread of reforms, failure of co-ordinating agencies, with real connect to the crisis in Higher Education today.

As it is rightly observed by these two experts/opinion makers "misfortune of the world's largest child and youth population development the UPA I and II and NDA governments have failed to sufficiently comprehend the nurturing of the country's human resources as a pre-requisite of National Development". India's higher education has not reduced our iniquitous Socio-economic order, massive

unemployment and historical replicas of prejudices and building modern'/sustainable India of positive growth.

UNESCO led 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) designed to “ensure that all learners acquire knowledge and skill needed to promote sustainable development through education and, sustainable life-style, human rights, gender equality, promotion of culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of cultures constitution to sustainable development. x

The 2016 project review of this by UNESCO of 22 Asian Countries, has observed that the values or concepts, has come out with a dismal picture of education in most of these counties. It has observed that the prime objective has not been integrated to make educational products/ children- for competitive participation in the global economy, rather on preparing for exams and rote learning – to a large extent. Unfortunately, education is considered narrowly as economic and instrumentalist terms- rather to ensure sustainable, flourishing societies. Therefore, Both Equity and Quality are ignored.

### **Indian Higher Education Has to meet the Global Standards or quality Parameter.**

- Higher Education around the globe is being transformed by the set of powerful forces:
- Competition among traditional institutions.
- Changing Global economy
- Penetration of New Technologies in imparting education
- Concept of distance and online education system
- Privatization of education
- Increasing role of corporate giants in education

The impact has been Multi-Dimensional

- Need Changes in Methodology and a shift towards streamlining the Higher Education as a market force:
- Globalization is demanding an internationally competent workforce
- Changes in our basic structure of work require higher education to meet the demands, of a new knowledge economy.
- Today, when intellectual competence is increasingly prized, Post-secondary education has become ever more important not only for the individuals but also for the nation as a whole.

Higher Education is not just a purveyor of individual economic opportunity but also an engine for national economic growth. Due to the recent advances in technology and increases in globalization are expected to persist, and there is reason to believe that the demand for college-educated workers will continue. The majority of the fastest-growing jobs in the new knowledge-driven Economy will require some post-secondary education.

As Dr. Abdul Kalam has aptly observed, “Owing to the rapid global, social and political revolutions of recent years, the basic structure of higher education itself is changing and it is essential. Another important force behind this transformation stems from a new level of competition and market-orientation among higher education institutions. Higher education institutions are also undergoing organizational and behavioural changes as they seek new financial resources, face new competition, and seek greater prestige domestically and internationally.

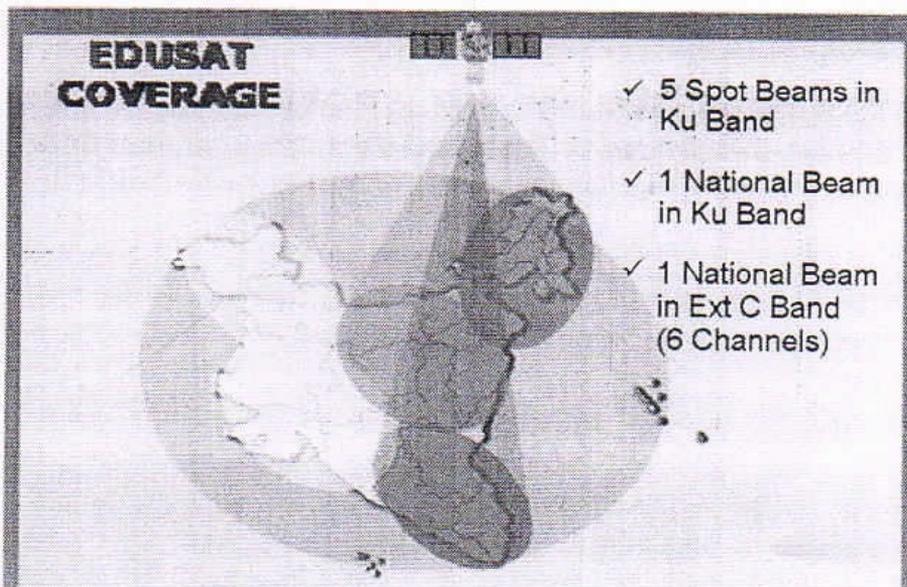
With this new perspective, the global networks and the marketplace for academic researchers have grown significantly. Efforts are being made internationally to converge and standardize undergraduate and post-graduate degree programs. International Collaboration between academic institutions and business are now commonplace. Universities are constantly seeking new avenues for funding and

promoting the commoditization of the knowledge production capabilities”.

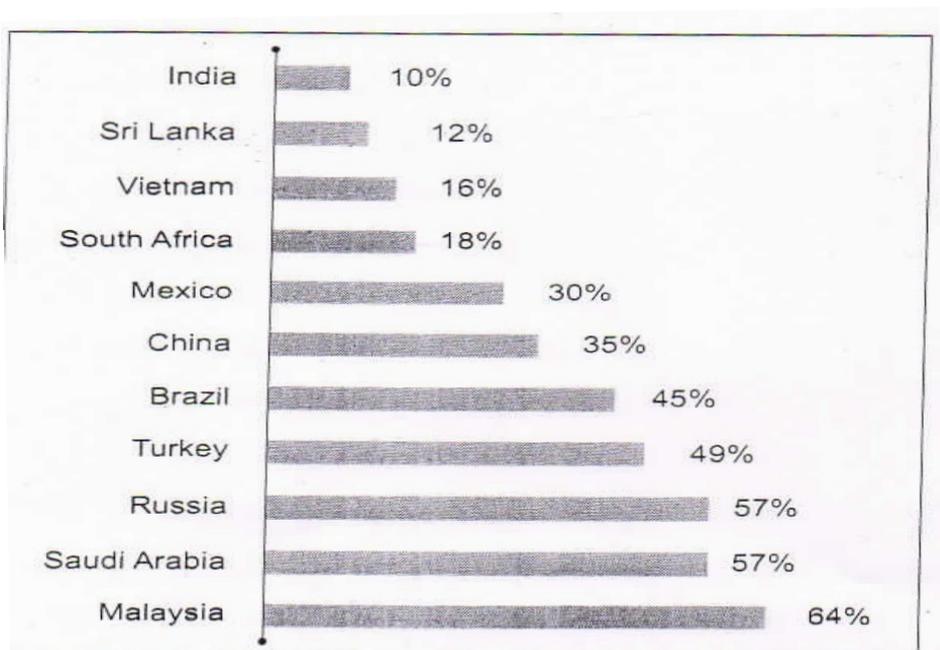
Today, this is entering into almost every aspect of higher education including. Student services, course Management System for ON-SITE and Distance Courses, the increase in communication with student via e-mail, laptop in classroom, hybrid classes, faculty/teaching in Indian institutions. It should be faster and greater access to all aspirants of higher education to be provided. Therefore, ‘Technology’ is thus influencing higher education as a whole, & there is a growing need to keep pace with the new developments.

### **Dr.Garg and Dr. Feroz Ahmed. Higher Education in Knowledge Era-2015**

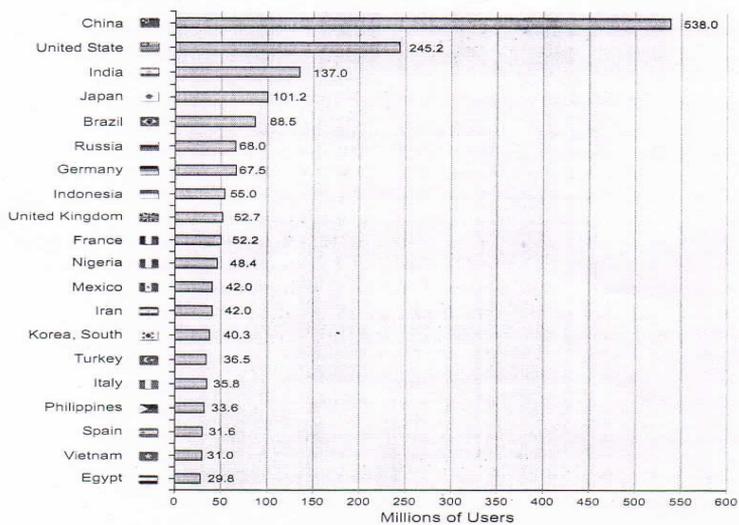
#### **New Technology/Tools**



### Use of Technology



### Internet Penetration



Source: Internet World Stats – [www.internetworldstats.com/top20.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/top20.htm)

Fig. 6.7 Highest number of users for top 20 Internet countries.

## New Challenges

Demands	Traditional System	Knowledge Society Needs
Preparing the graduates for the workplace	Teaching and scholarship sustaining academic disciplines and professions	Bringing both scientific knowledge and professional skills to the workplace knowledge management, connecting to real-world problems
Integrating knowledge from Different disciplines	Knowledge (Degree) based Discipline boundaries Scholarship in the subject	Knowledge and Skill based Integrating disciplines Innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship, leadership, team work
Developing Skills and competencies	Critical thinking, analysis, moral reasoning, and judgment, comprehending and acquiring knowledge	Needs of workplace - Using tools interactively (cognitive, socio-cultural and physical tools); social capital (interacting in heterogeneous groups); ability to act autonomously <sup>2</sup> , Lifelong learning capabilities
Evolving new Educational methods	Teaching, disciplinary research, passive classroom lecture courses, well-defined degree programmes	Use of digital media, information technology, Distributed learning, telecommunication, interdisciplinary research
Involving all stakeholders in the development of program	Curriculum development by the Universities as per their experience and knowledge with a focus on academic excellence Universities as the only place where knowledge creation and dissemination takes place	Higher education institutions as active partners with parents, teachers, principals, community advocates, business leaders, community agencies and the general citizenry Exploit the tacit and explicit knowledge available outside universities

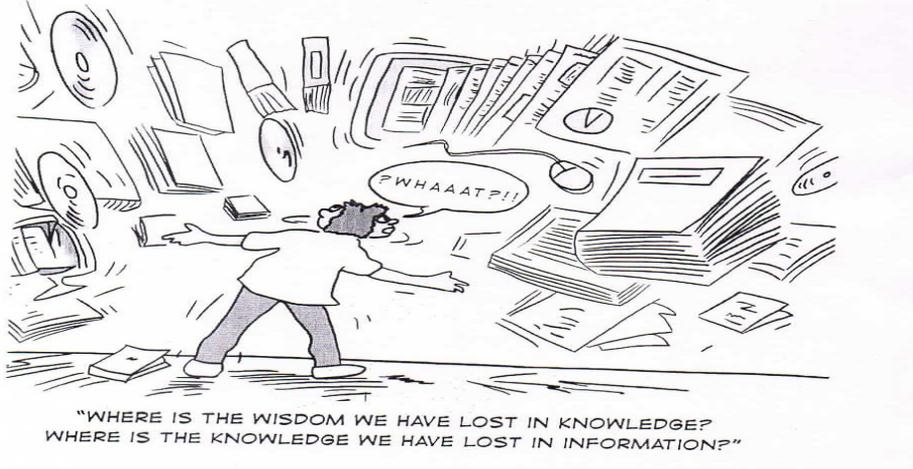
**Source: Beyond Open Distance Learning- B.P.N.Rao**

Demands	Traditional System	Knowledge Society Needs
Preparing the students for professional approach	Students as scholars in a particular subject field Focus on certification	Creating science-educated (or any other discipline) professionals Amalgamate non-academic sector requirements into discipline-based programmes
Courses for different professions	Rigid boundaries of disciplines Considering science and industry as different entities Discipline-based programmes	Curricula specific to professional practice with no disciplinary boundaries Fulfil the needs of students who require different graduate experience
Orienting tertiary education	Each stage of education treated as the preparation for next stage Universities as Ivory towers of knowledge	Lifelong learning Professionalising all disciplines Dynamic and flexible courses with more collaborative and interactive learning experiences. Blurring of various stages of learning – K-12, UG, PG, professional, job training Integrating developments like mode 2, triple helix, corporate education, community colleges, and open distance learning

Table 1: Demands on Preparing Graduates

**Source: Beyond Open Distance Learning- B.P.N.Rao**

**ODL Learner V/S Disjointed/Dazed situation**



**ODL Learners Expectations**



### **Overall Recommendations to Improve the Quality & Access for Higher Education, Open & Distance Learning in India:**

1. ODL System urgently needs to transcend itself beyond structured learning to meet the region-specific challenges and percolate down to respond to the Learner-Sensitivity in holistic/ decentralized perception with pragmatism than stuck in prescriptive heavy dose and delivery as it is today!
2. The environment of ideal ODL System is yet to meet the challenges of excellence and innovative Inputs and Outputs today, as it is obsessed with static standards of content and deliverables only. It has to promote active and relevant Learner-centric motivation by being truly open and accommodate the emerging dynamics of pedagogical strategies.
3. Nearly six decades of ODL practice in India – needs to shed its heavy format to meet the emerging challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learner! Not only we practitioners have to de-learn, but also to relearn from the past/present to respond realistically to the more complex and ever-expanding World of large number of learners, who aspire to obtain a credible and capacity consolidating education than mere degree/diploma mills. ODL must be able to build a knowledge society through its tremendous reach in an innovative and creative manner, in the present era of Internet and technological support system – leading to un-tapped /tremendous potential of Virtual Vistas.
4. There is a need to establish a National Council for Open & Distance Education (NCODE), at the National Level, independent of UGC's bureaucratic clutches:
5. The present Distance Education Board (DEB) should be free from interference by the Bureaucrats or Vested Interests. It should function as an **Autonomous Body**- to uphold the quality and

global standards for the benefit of lakhs of students. Later the above suggestion of NCODE should be established.

6. Central/State Government Universities should explore the possibilities of Twinning, Participatory and Collaborative Joint Venture of offering Skilled/Professional Programmes of study.
7. Private Institutions which have demonstrated Quality and Equity concerns in ODL – should be permitted to offer Participatory, Out-reach and Community Service - oriented professional programmes.
8. Such innovative approach to higher Education reforms and in particular, Earn-While You - Learn Programmes should be promoted.
9. As ODL covers more than 26% -28% of Higher Education enrolment, apart from out-reach & Skill related Programmes, Evening Colleges also should be started to expand Gross Enrolment Ratio.
10. Unemployed youth, second-chance higher education aspirants/ already employed, Women & Other Unaffordable group of men & women should get the benefits of ODL.

### **Emerging Trends in ODL and Digital Input:**

ODL, though it is a replica of conventional Universities to start with, today it has to be offered in more and diversified formats – by using ICT – mainly to bring the learner and teacher inbuilt into the text (SLM) and other support systems to create a virtual option. The Learner-Centric ODL has to enable him to learn at his own Space and Pace. If this is not implanted strategically/pedagogically, then it is only a pool duplication of the traditional pattern, just add numbers, not answer quality concerns!

I end with the wise and apt advise of Adnan Qayyum and olaf Zawacki – Richter, in their latest (2018) but brilliant book “OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION in a Digital Age”: As the World is

increasingly connected to the internet via various devices, online education in multiple formats has captured the interest via various devices, online education in multiple formats has captured the interest of students and educational institutions. The increased use of “blended”, “flipped”, “massive”, “distributed”, “flexible”, and “non-formal” learning or education are often manifestations of different DE formats. The shape of DE continues to broaden”.

I would, rather, conclude my Considered views that ‘numerous terms of new ODL based on terminologies like – *Online Learning, e-learning, distance Learning, Open Learning, blended Learning and flexible Learning* – may cause Conceptual Learning and Operational problems. Sometimes, they overlap, but *not all distance learning is online and not online education is via distance Learning*.

While ODL is collaborative Learning, Online Learning is focussed Learning should be debated and sorted out, by we stake – holders.

As we can observe, globally the picture of ODL vis-a-vis Conventional System of HE – has witnessed the Following Challenges.

1. Global growth in demand for ODL and Digital revolution is increasing, but proper integration is yet to emerge – as there are no studies to obtain feedback, though each Nation or region in the globe has different perceptions of its potential and impact.
2. While ODL is still a National Movement, the absence of borderless economic and social exchanges needs to be networked globally!
3. Advanced Countries like Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, UK, and US are ahead of Asia-African Countries for obvious Compulsions.
4. Also Private & Public Institutions are entering to profit from it.
5. In developing Countries, for Non-Profit but sustainable Development Perspective goals, Government funding is a must.

6. There is an increasing Competition in Higher Education to invest by the developed world, the developing ones are very slow and hesitant.
7. ICT and ODL are potentially changing the Higher Education. Sector in terms of Private & Public good.
8. In ODL students/Learners are made to Pay due to digital impact.
9. Existing/established conventional Universities are trying to take advantage of ODL/Digital Connectivity, because of brand value.
10. ODL & Digital/Virtual mode will change the shape and spread of Higher Education, enormously in this Country- due to demand and supply Compulsions.
11. This convergence of campus/ODL/online education is bound to cover large number of aspirants/professionals/working Force – in the coming decades.
12. But ODL with or without Digitals support will continue to be more predominant in Countries like India, where conventional Universities are under – serving.
13. Due to quality educational experience under the brand of conventional Universities, ODL will stay Firm and demands for its recognition and monitoring may be a big challenge before us.
14. Hence, there is a need for a better framework to permit, monitor, access and expand ODL as an extension of traditional system with **‘Competitive Strategies’**.

In the draft NEP of 2019, under Part 2 of Higher Education--section12, it had emphasized on " Optimal Learning Environments and Support for students title, in 12.3 sub-section, the policy has specifically recommended the need for promoting OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING : CURRICULUM AND PEDOGOGY FOR ENHANCING ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIFE-

LONG LEARNING (Point 12.3.1 to 12.3. 12), very pointedly. It had further elaborated.

- a. To transform the quality of Open Distance Learning,
- b. Leveraging ODL for improving access to quality learning experiences,
- c. Both traditional and open and distance learning modes to be offered by Institutions-(both Type 1 & Type 2).
- d. Ensuring quality of ODL. Finally, it had suggested that "ODL must play a significant role in increasing GER to 50 percent, innovation and expansion of ODL must be encouraged, while ensuring quality.

Further in the latest policy document of NEP 2020 announced on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020 the details of earlier draft are reduced, but the emphasis on role and relevance of ODL is reiterated in part 12.5 under the pruned heading called as 12-Optimal Learning Environments and Support for Students, it is brief but the spirit of the draft proposal on ODL is clubbed with ONLINE / Technological Interventions, with focus on all Programmes, Courses. Curricula, and pedagogy across all subjects, including in- class, online, and in ODL modes as well as student support will aim to achieve global standards of quality.

Hence ODL has to play a crucial role along with on- campus teaching and learning to build a Knowledge Society. The old discrimination is removed and the NEP final policy document has blended this with the conventional system of rejuvenated Higher Education goals envisaged as revised road map for revamping the present system to be more progressive and futuristic, with academic autonomy and accountability to make a successful transition by upholding the role of ODL as a genuine partner of dual mode player and as a promoter of access, equity and quality of both Tertiary and

Higher Education under new pattern NEP 2020. It should be with interchangeable option for students to pursue the subjects of their choice, removing the old rigid barriers of limited options and dead-end like regulations which prevented the students to opt for Science, Arts, Commerce or other subjects offered by the Universities and Institutions!

### **Conclusion**

The NEW EDUCATION POLICY is a very good comparative coverage of the best in Finland, good and creative in US, structured and centrally controlled Chinese system and India's anarchic plus rote learning & marks or rank-oriented Indian Education! In Canada also Education system is very good, where I have studied and seen it several times. Our NEP 2020 should work-out a sincere action plan and prepare/train, really competent and dedicated teachers to lay good and sound foundation of school/Higher Education to avoid heavy dropouts, as we have been witnessing. It is a big challenge and hope we will be sincere in our proposed action plan and its preparations, to achieve the goals of GER as specified in the NEP.

According to me, the biggest challenge will be:

- a. best faculty, Researchers & Teachers' training
- b. Resources to be made available, despite 6% of GDP and earmarked in NEP 2020 for the entire Education sector, it should go beyond mere a historic/unprecedented policy proclamations,
- c. All sections of India's vast population to be covered to reach the goal of 50 percent GER target,
- d. To have check on Private Players, who are ready to hijack it for greed and exploitations through fee & other elitist strategies,

- e. National Institutions/Regulatory bodies should not curb, regional aspirations in a federal system of our diversity and variations,
- f. every product of our Tertiary level should be employed to add to Man-Power of our Country, with minimum support or Sustainable income, as an Insurance
- g. All should have equal opportunities to get the benefits of the proposed policies and of the new policy, to reduce economic and social inequalities in our Country today.

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Appendix A

Appendix – A  
Open Universities in India

S. No.	Name of the University	Year of Estd.	Main
<b>A</b>	<b>National Open University</b>		
1	Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)	1985	New Delhi
<b>B</b>	<b>State Public Universities</b>		
2	Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU)	1982	Hyderabad
3	Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University (VMOU)	1987	Kota
4	Nalanda Open University (NOU)	1987	Patna
5	Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU)	1989	Nashik
6	Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University	1991	Bhopal
7	Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University (BOU)	1994	Ahmedabad
8	Karnataka State Open University (KSOU)	1996	Mysore
9	Netaji Subash Open University (NSOU)	1997	Kolkata
10	Uttar Pradesh Rajarshi Tandon Open University (UPRIOU)	1999	Allahabad
11	Tamilnadu Open University (TOU)	2002	Chennai
12	Uttarkhand Open University (UOU)	2005	Haldwani
13	Pandith Sundarlal Sharma (Open) University (PSSOU)	2005	Bilaspur
14	Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University (KKHSOU)	2006	Guwahati
15	Odisha State Open University (OOU)	2015	Sambalpur
<b>C</b>	<b>State Private Universities</b>		
16	The Global Open University (GOU)	2006	Nagaland
17	Venkateshwara Open University (VOU)	2012	Arunachal Pradesh

(Source: Open universities in the commonwealth: At a Glance, COL, 2017 and UGC website 2018)

From: N.S. Prasad, Higher Education and  
ODL Trajectory in India - 2018.

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Dr. B.R. Ambedkar open University, Hyderabad

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Appendix II  
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Table 6.1 Media options available in Open Universities in India

Open University	Instructional support	A/V	Radio and IRC	TV	CD-ROM	Internet	Tele-conferencing	Videoconferencing	Online programmes
IGNOU	Print, multi-media mix, online	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
BRAOU	Print, multi-media mix, online	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
YCMOU	Print, multimedia mix, online	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
MPBOU	Print, multimedia mix, online	√	√	X	√	√	X	X	X
KSOU	Print, A/V radio	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√
VMOU	Print, A/V	√	√	X	X	√	X	X	X
BAOU	Print, A/V CD, radio	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√
NSOU	Print, Audio radio	√	√	X	X	√	X	X	X
UPRTOU	Print, Audio radio	√	√	X	X	√	X	X	X
TNOU	Print, Audio radio	√	√	√	X	√	√	X	√
PSSOU	Print	√	X	X	X	√	X	X	X
UOU	Print	√	X	X	X	√	X	X	X
NOU	Print	√	√	X	X	√	X	X	X
GMOU	Point	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Broadly speaking, e-media such as radio, audio-vision and video are classified as little media, whereas tele- and videoconferencing and computer based instruction/interaction (WWW, online and mobile teaching-learning, MOOCs, etc) constitute big medium. We now briefly discuss the roles played by these in the evolution of curriculum transactions.

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 Dr. Feroze Ahmed.