Indian Council of Social Science Research

PONDICHERRY UNIVERSITY
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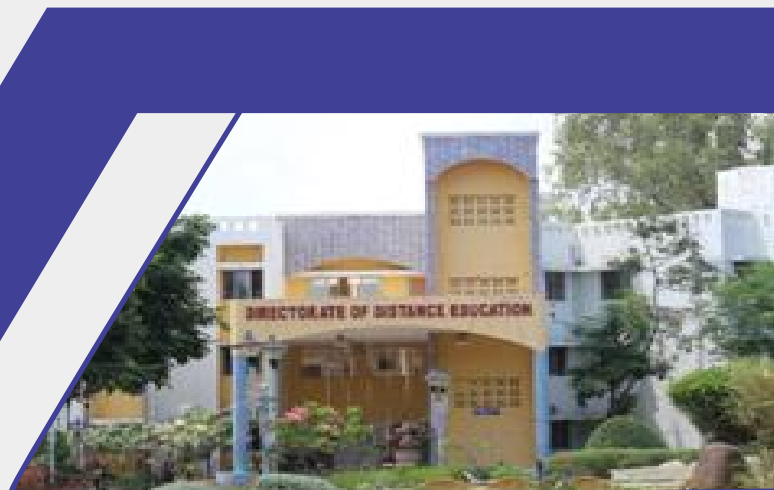VERS LA LUMIERE

Two-day National Conference
On
'Distance Education in India: Emerging Challenges and Prospects'

(Sept. 8 – 9, 2016)

A Brief Report with Recommendations

Organized by
Directorate of Distance Education
Pondicherry University (A Central University)
R.V.Nagar, Kalapet, Puducherry

Venue: Convention-cum-Cultural Centre
Pondicherry University (A Central University)

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Pondiucherry University
(A Central University)
R.V. Nagar, Kalapet, Pudcuherry - 605 014.

Prof. Anisa Basheer Khan, Ph.D.,FNEA,FNESA
Vice Chancellor (Officiating)

Message from Vice Chancellor

I am very happy that the Directorate of Distance Education of our University has taken the initiative to come up with a comprehensive report based on deliberations made by the resource persons and scholars in the Two-day National Conference on "Distance Education in India: Emerging Challenges and Prospects' held during Sept. 8-9, 2016. I am sure that the recommendations offered at the end of the report based on the suggestions given will be helpful for the Directorate of Distance Education of other Universities as well as the University Grants Commission for future policies related to the issue. Distance Education is reaching far concerns of India and spreading knowledge to a large community of learners. I wish to particularly appreciate the Directorate of Distance Education for inviting highly experienced resource persons in the conference and making all arrangements professionally.

I also acknowledge with gratitude the support and co-operation from the organizing team whose sincere and untiring efforts have made it possible for a grandeur success of the event.

Prof. Anisa Basheer Khan,Ph.D.,FNEA,FNESA

Pondiucherry University
(A Central University)
R.V. Nagar, Kalapet, Pudcuherry - 605 014.

Prof. M. Ramachandran, PhD
Registrar (I/C)

Message from the Registrar

I feel happy that the Directorate of Distance Education of our university has taken pain to come out with a report, compiling the valuable experiences and suggestions given by the resource persons, academicians, scholars and other administrative staff during the 'Two-day National Conference on Distance Education: Emerging Challenges and Prospects' held during Sept.8-9, 2016 in the Pondicherry University.

I am sure that the proposed recommendations would be immensely beneficial for the Directorate of Distance Education of other universities too for an effective implementation of the courses under distance mode for benefits of the students. This report really justifies the resources spent for the conference.

I thank the Director, Directorate of Distance Education and his colleagues for working together for a good cause and for organizing the conference successfully. I also thank all the resource persons, volunteers and researchers for attending the conference and sharing their valuable experience.

Prof. M. Ramachandran, PhD
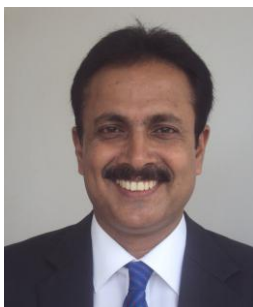
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Prof. Sibnath Deb, PhD,DSc
Organising Secretary of the Conference
Director (I/C), Directorate of Distance Education

Preface and Acknowledgements

Distance mode of education is becoming very popular these days internationally as well as in India. Rate of increasing enrollment of students under distance mode of education is clear evidence of its demand. Distance Education is playing an important role in India in achieving the objective of higher Education. Distance education ensures higher education for socio-economically and geographically disadvantaged group of population and/or for in-service people. Giving an equal weightage for courses under Distance Mode with Regular Mode courses our country further emphasized on equal opportunity to the students under Distance Mode. It is also helping a large number of students to acquire higher education despite several challenges in life. In order to make distance mode of education more popular and review the prospects and challenges, a need was felt to organize a two-day national conference on distance education.

On behalf of all the staff of Directorate of Distance Education, Pondicherry University, I extend my gratitude to Prof. Ved Prakash, Chairman of UGC, New Delhi, for accepting our invitation to attend the conference as Chief Guest despite his busy schedule. I also extend my gratitude to Prof. H. P. Dikshit, Former Chairman, Distance Education Council and Vice Chancellor of IGNOU, New Delhi, for giving consent to participate in the conference as Guest of Honour. From the very first day of conceptualization of the issue for organizing this conference, I received guidance from Prof. Vimala Veeraraghavan in planning and deciding the list of resource persons for the conference, which helped me to move ahead. I do not have any word to express my gratitude for her continuous support and guidance. I am thankful to all the resource persons, Chair Persons of the scientific sessions, Chief Guest of the valedictory session, scholar, academics, students and partner organizations for their overwhelming responses and significant contribution in the conference. It would be a lapse on my part if I do not convey my gratitude to Prof. Anisa Bhasheer Khan, Vice Chancellor (I/C), Pondicherry University, Prof. M. Ramachandran, Registrar (I/C), Prof. Malabika Deo, Finance Officer (I/C), and her unit, Controller of Examinations, faculty members of various departments of the University and colleagues in the Directorate of Distance Education, Pondicherry University. Without all of their wholehearted support, it would not have been possible to organize the conference successfully.

Support from the Electrical Wing, Media and Mass Communication Department, Horticultural Unit, PU Community Radio and Computer Centre of Pondicherry University is highly appreciable.

Prof. Sibnath Deb, PhD,DSc

1. Background

The costs in providing conventional or face-to-face mode of education being very high, the system remained severely deficient in terms of meeting the requirement of higher education for our youth in the country, leading to their frustration and disappointment. Any increase in intake of students requires more class rooms, more laboratories, and other infrastructure support and of course more qualified faculty. In this background emerged the requirement of an alternative system to increase access to higher education at low costs. Thus, in our country initially we started with the system of correspondence courses, where study material was made available to students at their place of stay and the Institutions of higher education conducted examinations and declared results. However, the growth of the systems has been very fast and it went through transformation from Correspondence Courses to Distance Education and on to Open and Distance Learning (ODL). The system being learner centric gradually became more competitive with the conventional system. The inbuilt flexibility of the system provided also an opportunity for working people to acquire additional qualification for career growth. Therefore, this is an excellent opportunity for a large number of students to take up higher education. This opportunity helps an individual in life in fulfilling their thirst and desire for higher education. Thus it leads to higher self-esteem and dignity, and finally shapes their future and enables them to gain and enjoy better quality of life.

Some of the advantages of distance mode of education are flexible admission process, lack age limit like regular educational programs, flexibility in terms of course completion, timings of class, and less cost. Thus distance education gives an option both for study and gain the desirable employment for their qualifications.

However, there are some constraints and challenges in running distance mode of education courses. First, obtaining yearly approval from the DEB (UGC) on time. Second, developing quality educational materials. Third, distribution of study materials, and maintaining overall quality of the programs/courses. Also, updating the curricula from time to time, lack of direct contact with the students, conducting examinations on time, evaluation of answer scripts and declaration of results on time, answering queries of the students and maintaining contact with partner organizations for ensuring smooth and effective implementation of the programs.

2. Objective of the Conference

Given the above situation, a need was felt to discuss about the prospect, opportunities and challenges in distance mode of education among the stake holders, by mutually exchanging the views about various 'pros and cons' and come out with reasonably better understanding for addressing the challenges and issues more effectively for the benefits of a large number of students community. Hence holding the conference is of paramount importance and rather the need of the hour.

## 3.	Sub-themes of the Conference

1.	Distance Education: A comprehensive analysis across the globe and in India
2.	Globalization of distance education and distance Education on line
3.	Present status of distance education in India, the needs and challenges: A diagnostic perspective
4.	The problems and challenges in starting distance education programme by a university
5.	Improving the quality and standards of distance education programme in India
6.	The problems and challenges to introduce professional courses as part of distance education programme
7.	Role of State and Central Govt. in promoting distance learning education and online use by distance education
8.	Procedural issues in conducting Distance Education Examination including coordination between MHRD, UGC, DEB and other educational institutions and Universities concerning distance education
9.	Challenges in maintaining quality and standards in distance education
10.	Subject preference, job prospects, opportunities for career growth and barriers in job market and challenges
11.	Challenges on the part of students
12.	Prospects for collaboration among educational institutions
13.	Success and failure of distance education

## 4.	Questions

Following questions were raised for findings out answer from the resource persons:

1.	Are courses under distance mode equally beneficial in imparting knowledge and skills like regular mode education?
2.	Do students face any challenge in getting the study materials and understanding the contents without personal contact support?
3.	Does online mode of education facilitate education for socio-economically backward students from rural areas?
4.	Are study materials developed by different institutes up-dated and student friendly?
5.	Are common people aware of the government circular about equal weightage of distance mode education?
6.	Are students from rural background benefitted by distance mode of education?
7.	How to motivate the students under distance mode in taking their studies seriously?
8.	Is there any social stigma attached with courses under distance mode?

9. Do examination and evaluation of answer scripts of courses under distance mode carried out with equal seriousness like regular mode education?

10. Do students with distance education background enjoy equal opportunity in job selection and career growth both in public and private sectors?

11. Is it necessary to monitor and evaluate courses under distance mode periodically?

5. Summary of Inaugural Function

Prof. Sibnath Deb, Organizing Secretary and Director (I/C), Directorate of Distance Education, Pondicherry University (A Central University), Puducherry, elaborated upon the purpose, scope and intent of organizing such a seminar in his Welcome Address. The presence of numerous Distance Education Systems in multiple Indian Universities is a well-established fact but, the lack of academic discussions or seminars on Distance Education was something he highlighted time and again in his address. Distance mode of education is another important mode of attaining higher education. The rural areas of the country suffer from a lack of educational infrastructure and the distance mode presents an opportunity for attaining a higher degree for the people living there. Prof. Deb also talked about the inclusion of more areas of study under the scope of Distance Education. He also expressed his concern for the partial treatment meted out to the regular modes of study. He further focuses on the important role played by Distance Education in the process of skill development. Certain questions were raised by him in due course of his address where he discussed the quality and accuracy of the study materials distributed to the students enrolled into the distance mode of education. He also questioned the methods employed in the corrections of answer scripts of the students and the relevance granted to the degree at the end of a distance course. He made a mention of the minimal research carried out in this field and urges scholars from management and education departments to take up the data generated by the distance mode as topics for their research. He finally emphasized on the quality of the education to be meted out and focussed on the primary intention of the seminar, where experienced people in this field have gathered together and share their experiences.

Prof. Ved Prakash, the Chairman of University Grants Commission (UGC), New Delhi, commenced his inaugural address by focusing on the fact that his organization is constantly under immense pressure exerted by all the different institutions. He focussed

on the important role of Universities in our society which performs the task of "preserving the intangible assets of the nations." He cited the example of the United States which has internationalized their system of higher education and has also established a bond between the industry and the university. He provided an approximate figure of 3.3 Crore, the number of people enrolling for higher education in the country. Out of this 3.3 Crore, about 12% enroll in the distance mode of education. He stressed on the fact that our universities must move from being a learning system to a knowledge system in order to create new knowledge. He also talked about the important role of institutions like NAAC and NIRF and other global ranking systems around the world. These have now becoming a seal of approval in branding the quality of the institutions. He talked about eight parameters by which a university is known. The quality of students, infrastructural materials, quality of teachers, assessment procedures, pedagogy, and quality of research, curricular provisions and learning environment are the eight parameters he focuses on.

Prof. Prakash also mentioned that the Open Distance Learning (ODL) system is highly regulated due to a trust deficit caused by the presence of certain players. The resources generated through ODL are not always used in its own development. It is often used in the functioning of the regular courses. He stressed upon the need to carry out a macro as well a micro analysis of the system to come to an approximate understanding of our position. The steps that had worked and also those that didn't work out must also be analyzed. He also endorsed the setting of small time goals of about five years and where we would be our position at that point of time. The guiding principles of achieving such goals must also be set. Improved academic excellence must be the goal for all of us. The weaknesses of the current system must be explored as well the methods of overcoming them. The framework for improvement as well as ensuring merit must also be looked upon. The method of governance and quality of research carried out are also important factors to be looked into. What he finally mentioned is that the sustainability of such a process must be ensured and he feels that Prof. H. P. Dikshit is the right person for looking after the ODL programme.

Prof. H. P. Dikshit, former Chairman of Distance Education Council (DEC) and Vice Chancellor of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), observed that in our country we have not been able to provide higher education to masses as per visionary

expectation of Swami Vivekananda who said that if the country had to rise again it had to liberate education from access to a few privileged to education of masses. Later referring to face-to-face education, which mostly continued to be the only option for higher education even after nearly two decades of independence, Dr. D. S. Kothari, observed in the famous Kothari Commission Report, that the Indian Education System needed a drastic reconstruction, almost a revolution. Since the conventional system of education was costly and funding for higher education was limited, there was a need to search for a cost effective system of education with increased access to ensure equity. Thus, emerged the Correspondence Course system in the country to facilitate higher education by providing learning material to the students at their place of stay or work and conducting examination and declaring results. However, for ensuring increased quality, soon it was realized that the Institutions of higher learning had to provide more academic inputs and other supports to the students like access to Library, condensed face-to-face contact and Laboratory work wherever necessary by sharing the academic and infrastructure resources with those available for the face-to-face mode. Thus we witnessed the transformation of the Correspondence Course to the Distance Education (DE) mode of education. This brought in a paradigm shift from regular teaching to condensed counseling face-to-face or even by employing Information and Communication Technologies (ICT); transformation of content from text mode to Self Learning Mode (SLM) in print and multimedia. Since in the DE mode, the learners did not have any regular access to teachers, as in the case of students in face-to-face mode, the design and development of SLM had to be significantly different than the usual Text Books for face-to-face mode.

SLM had to be learner centric to accommodate his or her level of understanding, time available with him or her and to supplement for no availability of regular access of teachers. Thus SLM consists of learning content divided into blocks and units with appropriate credit assigned to each component. In SLM the teacher is built in the content in the sense that the content is more in the form of a dialogue, followed by Illustrations / Examples and Assignments for self-assessment as well as external assessment. Thus, a carefully designed, developed and delivered DE is as effective as the face-to-face mode. In fact, DE and the face-to-face mode of learning complement and supplement each other. To realize this, there is a need for a change in the mindset of people who have received education only through face-to-face mode. Unfortunately the quality of both the system greatly varies from institution to institution in our country and it will not be reasonable to compare a weak education delivery system with a strong one.

There are of course operational problems and issues regarding receipt of learning material due to fairly well spread of learners but these could be easily addressed by an efficient management system. One important caution that must be taken invariably is that any new programme should be announced only after complete development of SLM. Instead of mailing the SLM to learners a more effective system being used in several ODL institutions is to deliver the entire SLM and all other necessary instructions, schedules etc., when the learners are invited once in the beginning for Induction Meeting.

Equity in access to higher education is a serious problem which perhaps cannot be solved by face-to-face mode only. One approach has been to setup a large number of Colleges in remote places. But this approach has encountered several difficult problems. For example, statistics about a few states shows that there is a great scarcity of faculty in Colleges in Rural and less developed areas. I had an opportunity to make a study about ten such colleges in Madhya Pradesh and one of the revealing outcomes of the study was that average expenditure per student for studying an undergraduate course was around Rs. 33,000 per year. This was only the recurring cost. Why not then send such students to some established colleges by reimbursing the entire expenditure and provide better education. The Governor of another State had desired me to formulate recommendations for improving quality of higher education especially for students in rural areas. We had invited Principals of more than 200 Colleges of the State to discover that there was acute shortage of teachers especially in Colleges situated in remote areas, even to the extent that Post-Graduate courses were being run with no qualified teacher in the subject. The purpose of these examples based on our study and experience is to suggest that opening of more Colleges cannot be a universal solution for education of any reasonable quality to students of less developed and remote areas.

It is clear from the foregoing observations that in spite of our best efforts we have not succeeded in ensuring availability of necessary qualified faculty for students in rural and less developed areas. The question then arises: why not enable access of quality faculty through synchronous and asynchronous use of ICT which has enormous and very extensive reach. It is very satisfying to observe that introduction of the credit based system and effective use of ICT and multimedia content and its delivery through ICT has preceded similar applications in the conventional mode. The foregoing considerations and developments resulted in a close collaboration of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) of the Department of Space and Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India (GOI) and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and a dedicated satellite for Education "EDUSAT" was launched in 2003 with a downlink earth station in IGNOU campus at New Delhi. Thus, IGNOU played a central role in the launch of Gyandarshan-I and II, Vyas and Eklavya and Kissan dedicated TV Channels for Education and Capacity building programmes as far back as 2004-2006. In parallel IGNOU launched the project of setting up of 40 FM Radio station under Gyanvani Radio Transmission for Education across the country. Two least

developed districts of the country: Sidhi in M.P. and Chamarajnagar in Karnataka were connected by point to point interactive networks for education using solar energy, due to non-availability of electric power. These were the pioneering initiatives for ICT applications to reach the unreached in the country.

Currently considerable emphasis for similar interventions in face-to-face mode is being given by the University Grants Commission (UGC) with e-pathshala scheme and swayam portal of the MHRD, GOI. These, developments will bring the conventional and ODL mode closer in approach, especially due to the Digital India Scheme of the GOI.

A new but important dimension of education which has emerged in recent years due to increased competitiveness caused by economic globalization is that of Lifelong Learning for capacity building or capacity enhancement for large target groups of learners which has to be delivered at the place of employed of such learners. The inherent flexibility of ODL, its delivery through multimedia and ICT applications and omnipresent access uniquely and distinctively suits the requirements for delivery of Lifelong Learning programmes effectively. A very successful intervention for a Lifelong Learning Programme is that in the area of Clinical Cardiology. Some very prominent Cardiologists presented a study according to which it was estimated that nearly 10,000 Physicians with training in Clinical Cardiology were urgently needed to meet the requirement of fast growing number of patients with Cardiac problems in the country. Against this approximately only 200 specialist were being trained by all Medical Colleges. In this background, countries top specialist in Cardiology collaborated with IGNOU to design, develop and deliver an ODL programme for Physicians holding MBBS degree with experience of 10 years in medical practice, by extending support of some of the best Research Hospitals in Cardiology for condensed practical training. This programme is still continuing for the last more than 10 years and has made a unique contribution to Health Care in the country.   There are several other initiatives made through ODL mode for Lifelong Learning.

Further he discussed in details the issues about developments concerning IGNOU-Distance Education Council (DEC)-UGC-Distance Education Bureau (DEB) and the present status.. The basic concept and approach in setting up a unique National Open University in the Country was significantly different than any other University in the Country not only in terms of difference in mode of delivery of higher education but much more than that. This was often not understood fully because IGNOU was new and there are always problems in accepting a change by different stake holders. Thus, it is important to analyze the Act of the Indian Parliament under which IGNOU was established as the unique National Open University in the country. Besides, the provisions for education through DE mode to reach the most unreached, the Act empowered IGNOU to promote and maintain standards of DE in the country. This mandate of the IGNOU Act was parallel to the mandate   given for Education, in general

to the UGC under the UGC Act. In the process of the development of IGNOU as the national educational Institution for DE mode, it got well recognized within the country and abroad for quality higher education through DE mode, and several countries entered into MOU's for using the content developed by IGNOU. In order to fulfill the other mandate of promoting and maintaining standards of DE in the country, similar to that of UGC, a Statute under the Act of IGNOU with due approval of the Visitor of the University, the President of India was introduced in the year 1992 constituting a Distance Education Council (DEC). The Apex Body of DEC consisted of members like Secretary Education, GOI, Secretary UGC, two Vice-Chancellors of State Open Universities, Director NAAC and a few eminent nominees of the GOI. The only similarity between management of IGNOU and DEC was that the Chairman of the two Apex Bodies was the Vice-Chancellor of IGNOU.

This was a fairly good arrangement with proper checks due to a well-represented Apex Body for DEC and availability of direct access to the unique expertise that existed in the national university IGNOU. Quality of course content which was being used by different DE Institutions was a matter of great concern and therefore DEC- IGNOU facilitated easy access to high quality SLM produced by IGNOU. DEC-IGNOU made special efforts in encouraging opening of State Open Universities and provided encouraging financial and professional support to ensure quality. Several programmes for professional development of faculty and those associated with student support services in State Open Universities and Institutes/Schools of DE in conventional mode Universities were organized periodically.

In the year 2004, at the initiative of DEC a very important joint effort was made by the Chairman UGC, Chairman AICTE and Chairman DEC by identifying some crucial steps necessary to ensure quality of DE in the country. After extensive deliberations it was agreed to issue a letter to all the Vice-Chancellors and other Institutional heads, Chancellors of State Universities jointly signed by the three Chairpersons. It seems perhaps this was unprecedented collaborative initiative effort at this level in the annals of the history of higher education in our country. Naturally, it made a lasting effect. For instance, as a follow up to this letter the Hon'ble Governor and Chancellor of State Universities in Tamil Nadu was pleased to convene a meeting of the Chairpersons of UGC and DEC with the Vice-Chancellors of State Universities of Tamil Nadu to emphasize strict implementation as per the contents of the joint letter. One of the outcomes of the meeting was one university which was providing an undergraduate degree within a period of one year had to drop such a programme.

In spite of the foregoing successful initiatives a strong feeling was growing in the country that DEC under IGNOU was questionable without realizing that the system of Management of IGNOU as a University and DEC as a Council for promotion and determination of standards in DE were different. These resulted in taking over functions of DEC and transferring them to Distance Education Bureau (DEB) in UGC. In the

period of this transfer a large number of unethical practices were undertaken by quite a few Universities and other Institutions which provided poor quality education charging high fees from learners. The UGC and the MHRD took a serious view of these developments and some strict measures were taken as remedial steps. Some Universities and other Institutions were debarred from delivering ODL programmes until such time that necessary corrections and improvement were assured. Currently a High Power Committee for DE (HPCDE), chaired by a former Vice-Chancellor of IGNOU and some Commission Members of the UGC, a former Director of NAAC, a Joint Secretary GOI and an Additional Secretary of UGC are overlooking the functioning of DEB in UGC. A message has gone across the Institutions about strict implementation of certain guidelines issued by DEB. A Regulation on ODL has been formulated and is under active consideration for approval by the GOI.

Prof. Dikshit emphasized on an important ethical issue concerning Conventional Universities and other Institutions delivering DE programmes. These dual mode Institutions provide education in face-to-face mode to students at very high costs and charge a very little fraction of these costs as fees from students, whereas students in DE mode are charged comparatively much higher fees in spite of the fact that learning facility extended to such students is nowhere in comparison to face-to-face mode students. Generally, there is a well spread concept where savings from the fees charged from DE students is considered as a resource generation and is diverted to support education for face-to-face mode. Can this approach be justified by any ethics or rationality? Ideally, at least 80% of the earnings generated from ODL must be used to improve the quality of SLM and student support services for learners and extending financial support to learners from rural and less developed areas.

Prof. Bimal Chandra Mal, Vice Chancellor of JIS University, commenced his speech by talking about the various difficulties he faced with the system. He also mentioned the partial treatment meted out to the conventional universities during his speech. He felt that the academic fraternity must work with a broad mindset. Some universities, according to him, provide the study material and also the degree, pretty conveniently. This is something which must not be allowed. The learners have their own limitations so the synchronous and asynchronous modes vary accordingly. The use of virtual labs and proper training in Distance Education are other important factors upon which he laid some amount of stress.

Prof. M. Ramachandran, the Registrar(I/C) of Pondicherry University in his address he shared his experience of gaining proficiency in mathematics. He doesn't find

much difference between the regular and the distance mode. He mentioned how the knowledge acquired outside the classroom was more than what was learned in the class. The introduction of Distance Education in 1962 helped those individuals who were already in service yet, they wanted to pursue their higher studies. He further went on to mention how technology had penetrated into the distance mode and the institutions must take that into account. He ended his felicitation address by focusing on the extensive use of technology in ODL.

Emeritus Prof. Vimala Veeraraghavan, initiated her keynote address by saying that at the level of higher education, the Distance Mode has proved almost equal to the Conventional Mode. Distance Education is imparted through various mediums. The evolution and sustained use of technology in the Distance Mode has made it a serious

competitor to the regular mode. With a current enrolment figure of approximately 4 million, ODL is vastly expanding, covering most of the nation. The recent proposal of MHRD to set up an autonomous body to regulate ODL was a noteworthy mention by Prof. Veeraraghavan. The suggestion of the Madhav Menon committee will be effectively put to use in this setup.

She even talked about five effective measures which must be pondered upon carefully. Firstly, she cited the need of good research to be done in this field as there are no good research theses on Distance Education in our country. She further made a mention of the production of high quality teaching/learning material which must be produced using various audio – visual means. Delivery of such materials must be done in time to the students. The study centers of Distance Education must also be improved. The course must also be monitored properly and updated in regular intervals. The faculties employed into the distance mode must be well trained in the use of technology. The

faculties for distance education must be separate from those of the conventional mode. The evaluation must also be objective in nature and the assistance of experts must be taken as and when required. The students must also be ensured access to academic materials as and when required. Academic honesty and integrity is absolutely essential. Placement facilities to practice what is learnt must also be introduced.

ODL must not be seen merely as a "cash cow" according to Prof. Veeraraghavan, employed to raise the finance. What is already there must be improved and greater effort must be put to retain good faculties. Each institute must develop their own models to integrate the various modes of imparting knowledge. She ends by talking about providing more opportunities to the students.

Prof. Anisa Basheer Khan, Vice Chancellor (Officiating), Pondicherry University (A Central University), in her presidential address, expressed her delight to be part of such a seminar. Prof. Khan briefly talked about the history of correspondence courses

and Distance Education as well as about the plethora of Distance Education courses offered by Pondicherry University. She mentioned how the social perceptions about ODL have changed with its emergence and popularity in the West. She said that much needs to be done, in India, when the discussion concerned ODL. She cited some of the foreign universities like

Michigan State University as examples of better institutes. She mentioned that the universities in developing countries face greater challenges in addressing various issues concerning ODL. She ended her address by saying that, despite challenges and concerns, Distance Education had now become a part of the reality with greater number

of institutions emerging and more number of enrollment.

Vote of thanks was offered by Sk. Md. Nizamuddin, Assistant Professor of the Directorate of Distance Education, Pondicherry University.

6. Summary of Lecture of the Invited Speakers

6.1 Report of Parallel Session I held between 12.30 and 1.30 pm

The chairperson of the session, **Prof. Venkata Raghotham,** Dean, School of Social Sciences and International Studies, Pondicherry University, talked about his personal feelings in chairing the session. He drew the attention of the individuals involved in Distance Education towards the new policy which is, "on the anvil." Higher Education is poised to take a new direction and the distance mode is the way forward, providing solutions to the problems of higher education. He also talked about the role of technology and discussed the paradigm of Distance Education where materials are given out to the students. He informed the audience how the distance mode was pioneered in Canada where, much of the population lived in wilderness. According to him, IGNOU is the only institute which commands some respect when it comes to the distance mode.

Prof. Raghotham recognized technology as a solution to all the problems arising in this mode of learning. The brick and mortar universities are days of the past, according to him. Knowledge needed to deliver in an accessible manner in the present. He also made a mention of Swayam, an Indian platform which aims to create a virtual classroom across the country. Such platforms will help to connect across the globe. He mentioned how the universities are reluctant to adopt the possibilities, but, we must confront the reality in the present. He also glanced upon the role of proper training in the use of these modern modes. After this, he calls upon Prof. C. R. K. Murthy, IGNOU Delhi to deliver his presentation.

Prof. Murthy's paper was titled, "Distance Education: A Comprehensive Analysis across the Globe and in India." He introduced his topic of discussion by pondering upon his thirty years of experience in Distance Education. He is a trainer, visiting various directorates across the country. He mentioned how the concept of learning has changed in the present where the process of learning is lifelong and not limited to a certain number of years. He referred to the Delors Report, UNESCO, 1996 in this process. He talked about the role of ODL in augmenting the education of the disadvantaged and the marginalized. The traditional higher educational modes cannot cope with the distance mode in this context, which helps in planning and improving the learning process.

Prof. Murthy stressed on the importance of continuous education

in all sectors. He felt that the traditional institutes require drastic reforms and Distance Education is one alternative which can introduce these reforms. It can face the demand of lifelong learning. He talked about the factors of knowledge explosion happening in every sector. As a result, there is a need for continuous updates. He demonstrated that the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is not up to the mark. Global average GER is about 26% - 30% whereas in India, it is about 24%. As a solution, he suggested that India need to double their number of universities.

Prof. Murthy went on to talk about the different concepts of Distance Education by classifying them as, Correspondence Education, Distance Education, Open Education, Online Based Education, Technology Based Education and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC). He also mentioned how Distance Education started 175 years ago through shorthand courses. The speaker stated how Open Universities have seen a great percentage of growth since establishment. He also made a mention of the many experts involved in this field of study like, Michael Moore, Holmberg, Otto Peters etc. He further talked about the various features of Distance Education which needed some attention, like, increased enrolment and accessibility and also talked about the power of media, dealings with individual learners and expertise of academics in this field of study. This is followed by a discussion on the quantitative as well as qualitative aspects of Distance Education. The complexities of the ODL system is also discussed where several cultures get involved. He also made many references to the inaugural session, pointing to the major components of ODL, which he briefly touches upon. Access, relevance and quality are marked as the important components of Distance Education which must be taken care of. Collaborations are also to be taken care of as well as the delivery of the program and technology.

ODL depends heavily on inter personal relationships, so, keeping this in mind, a person who understands this system is the best choice. The leader of the system must be visionary and must ensure that the whole team moves with him in achieving goals. He even quotes a renowned distance educator, saying that, Dharma and Karma must be the goals of ODL. He ended his presentation with the mention of IGNOU being given the responsibility of formulating the policies of ODL. He is skeptical about how the comprehensive reviews presented by his institute will be dealt with by the higher authorities.

Prof. Anjaneya Swamy, Dean, School of Management, Pondicherry University, was the next presenter. He spoke on, "Jurisdiction for Distance Education: Realities of the Digital Era?" He began his presentation citing his limitations, being the last speaker of the session. He mentioned that borderless management and paperless officers are not acceptable, from the point of view of political jurisdiction, for a product like education. According to him, the question of jurisdiction arose because of excessive indulgence of some universities, like, Dravidian University, Kuppam and Rayalaseema University in Kurnool.

Prof. Swamy accused the various governmental bodies of freezing the funds of such universities. These universities generate funds by making excessive use of the distance mode, which the speaker terms as, "overkilling." All kinds of problems began to emerge when overkilling started. Prescribing jurisdiction to the distance mode is termed as ridiculous by the speaker. The product of Distance Education should be left to the market forces and, if the product is good, the market will decide its fate. He cites the model used by MIT where they provide open access to everyone, which is one of the more popular of models.

Prof. Swamy brands the classroom to be the broadcast mode of learning where only delivery is done. The other one is the enquiry based mode of learning. In this age of information, the speaker felt that the teachers are very often far behind in terms of their access to information. The students are better equipped digitally. He mentioned how the current generation feels that learning should be fun and interesting. It should open the mind to challenges. Students these days have more tendencies to converse and share. He further progressed to talk about technology as a game changer and cited the examples of Flipkart and Narayana Hridayalaya in this context.

Prof. Swamy further talked about disruptive technology and how new modules emerge in this model every day. He felt that education must make use of it too. He then moves on to talk about some of the immediate issues to be looked at. There is a need to be creative and explore other possible options. Digitization is another area given significant attention by him. The object of ODL is to take education to every doorstep, so, there is no need of boundaries. He ended his deliberations by citing the examples of the fate that befell upon our nation after Independence due to the pursuit of certain wrong policies. He hopes that the same fate shall not befall upon the education system.

After this, the two presentations were open to discussion for the august audience gathered in the lecture hall.

6.2 Report of Parallel Session II (Day-1) held between 12.30 and 1.30 pm

The chairperson of the session, Prof. A. Chellaperumal, Department of Anthropology, Pondicherry University, expressed his eagerness to hear the speakers of the session. He revisited all the issues discussed like, quality, delivery, jurisdiction etc, which had already been looked at to some extent. He said how new suggestions are emerging

because of such seminars, especially this conference, which is being organized in such a grand scale. Prof. Chellaperumal then invited Prof. M. Ravichandran, Director, Institute of Distance Education, University of Madras, to present his deliberations.

Prof. Ravichandran's paper was titled, "Distance Learning in India: The Role of Apex Bodies." He began by stating the history of the distance mode in University of Madras and the importance of such a conference. He mentioned current GER to be 23% while the government aims a GER of 30% by 2020. The gap between market requirements and supply was undermined there. He said that Distance Education must meet these demands. He went on to mention the various benefits of the distance mode after this. The distance mode continuously delivers online. It provides scope for special interest learning. It also aims at a more industrial mode of learning. He also talked about Open Learning, a subsystem of the mode of Distance Education.

Prof. Ravichandran further elucidated upon the various preconceptions that people have about this mode. It is seen to be less attractive and the degree is often undervalued in the job market as well as the public eye. There is another popular notion that people join this mode of education to get just another degree. There must be some amount of equivalence between the regular and the distance mode. The education system of yesteryears is obsolete for the present as well as the future, felt the speaker. He observed that many universities understand the importance of Distance Education and, certain adjustments need to be done for the betterment of this mode. He also illustrated upon the method in which the communication between the teacher and the taught happens.

He went on to make certain suggestions which, he thought, would greatly help the distance mode. The first of these was that of blended learning which, he mentioned, offers a richer experience of learning. Stepping outside the moulds of the traditional modes was also mentioned to be very important. He mentioned that the distance mode must adapt new designs as it is not merely mode of educational fashion. He mentioned a few questions faced by institutes of higher education. Some of them are:
    a)   Does Technology deliver the same results as the traditional methods?
    b)   The design of the instruction
    c)   The cost of education

The organizational framework is what differs the distance mode from other, said the speaker. The establishment of such systems will heavily depend on the policies at the

national as well as international level. He mentioned about the proposed model of "University at every Panchayat" at the University of Madras, which is due to be implemented from the next year. In the same context, he talked about the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) which is well networked in most regions. The government heavily invests in this model. PRIs can serve as links between the universities and the rural aspirants of a proper education.

Prof. Ravichandran also mentioned the great importance which Information and Communication (ICT) held for Distance Education. Distance Education for the disabled was another important issue the speaker raised during his presentation. He said how it had now become possible to provide accessible materials to the disabled but, on the other hand, most institutes focus on the "economics of scale" rather than customizing the courses from time to time. He made a list of possible suggestions for the higher authority to look into relating to the issue of Distance Education for the disabled,

    a)   Increasing accessibility to those programs which the disabled want.
    b)   Designing new programs to suit special needs.
    c)   Offering training to the disabled.
    d)   Enhancing current programs.
    e)   Expanding scope of current programs.
    f)   Designing programs for the trainers.
    g)   Organizing awareness programs for the public, parents and policy makers.

Prof. Ravichandran ended his talk touching upon the issue of jurisdiction mentioning how geography is becoming less relevant now for higher education. It is a major challenge to be looked at, especially after the court decisions against MHRD and UGC. The number of customers in the field of education is increasing day by day and providing them affordable education is the need of the hour, mentioned the speaker.

Prof. H. Venkateshwarlu, Director, Prof. G. Ram Reddy Centre for Distance Education, Osmania University, Hyderabad, was the next speaker to make his presentation. In his presentation, he talked about, "Open and Distance Learning: Employability." At the onset of his discussion, he mentioned that they required the permission of UGC to establish each of the 26 courses currently offered in their university. He maintained the stance of previous speakers that there is still a lack of awareness about Distance Education. Along with this, he also mentioned how the students, receiving Distance Education and securing good marks, fare better than the students learning in the regular modes. He

said that most jobs these days are skill based. There is a greater load on National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) in skilling India. He cited examples of e – commerce juggernauts like Flipkart and Amazon in this context, who are employing skill – based individuals. This exemplifies the emerging trend of newer job requirements.

Prof. Venkateshwarlu further talked about the challenges before the distance mode in this context of employability, saying that, there is a need for developing skill – based courses. In this context, he took up the example of Narayana Hridayalaya again from the previous sessions. He explained how Distance Education matches the one who needs education and the one who needs to educate. He followed it with a segmentation of the different types of students who come to get educated in the distance mode. There is a section which is already employed and seeks for an upgradation or promotion. Then, there is another section which comes for education with the sole purpose of gathering knowledge. This group includes professionals from various fields of work, like, doctors, priests, lawyers etc. In such a system, a segmentation approach is very necessary, feels the speaker.

This is followed up by a discussion exploring the various areas of concern. The availability of expertise in certain cases is very much necessary in the distance mode. The regional needs and variations are also certain factors which must be kept in mind. There is still a need gap, felt Prof. Venkateshwarlu and this gap can only be filled by the universities through the development of relevant courses needed by the society in the long run. He mentioned some of the recently flourishing areas of great job prospects like, Tourism and Hospitality, Retail Services, Entertainment sectors etc. He cited the example of a driver from Udaipur who earns 30,000 per month for his fluent English. He informed about some curriculums which NSDA is now developing like, duty management, sales associate etc. He ended his speech by talking about the importance of collaborations between the universities and the industries. This may help in the betterment of future prospects of employability.
The presentation was followed by a short discussion between the presenters and the audience.

6.3 Report of Parallel Session I (Day-1) held between 2.30 and 3.30 pm

Dr. N. Parthasarathy, Dean, School of Life Sciences, Pondicherry University, was the chairperson for this session. He invited Prof. Chandrasekhar Dubey, Director, DDE, Delhi University, to make his presentation.

Prof. Dubey's paper was on, "Success and Failure of Distance Education." He began the presentation by talking about the many faults in the system. He redefined the word "FAIL" as First Attempt in Learning. This was followed by a discussion of the prevalent structure of Distance Education in Delhi University. The distance mode is currently online and a great upsurge in intake was seen from 2013 to 2016. He followed it up with a brief discussion on the various management related issues found in the distance mode

in Delhi. Micromanaging, Centralized Power, Absence of Learning Management Software, Minimum use of Enterprise Resource Programs were some of the problems mentioned by him. From this, he jumped to discussing the problems in the offline process of admissions to the distance mode. Queues, Corruption, Backdoor Entries and Tedious Procedures were some of the problems noted by him. He also briefly mentioned about the problems related to examinations, where, the papers were often leaked or there were problems regarding scarcity of exam centres. In the same context, he mentioned how online evaluation may come in handy. Delay in the declaration of results and quality of study materials were some of the other issues raised in this context. He mentioned how some of the colleges in Delhi were used as study centres, like IGNOU, to tackle the increasing student – teacher ratio.

Prof. Dubey voiced a major concern of actively involving the students in the ODL system. He went on to mention the most important parts of ODL as, Vision, Expertise, Distance Learning and ICT Infrastructure. The need of taking risks was voiced by the speaker in this context. Success would only come with innovation. Engagement with the students is also important according to the speaker and this could be done with the use of technology. The speaker also felt the need to teach various web tools to the faculties. He also talked about the implementation of the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) in the distance mode. This was followed by a short glance into the distance learning system of Delhi University and the various technological transitions used by the course over the years.

The discussion then moved to the various issues related to the SLMs distributed to the students. Self Learning Materials or SLMs were given out in three forms, printed, soft copies and audio – video lectures recorded by faculties. In this context, he talked about the model followed in Delhi University which could be used by other institutes too. He also mentioned about using the mode of Flipped Classrooms, where, all materials would be made available online and the classes would be meant for feedback and doubt clearances. It is the absolute opposite of the traditional model and lot of combinations are introduced in this system.

The discussion again shifted to various issues related to examinations. The online mode of examinations is seen as the next step. Prof. Dubey also mentioned how results were seen to be improving in the distance mode of Delhi University. After 2014, more than 50% of the students have scored 60% or above in the exams. The numbers of dropouts are also decreasing in this system. The major concern though, remained on the objective

that the students must pass with proper knowledge. This system was awarded in 2015 and the former Vice – Chancellor of Delhi University recognized this system to be the future of education.

Prof. Dubey stressed upon the need of a strategic vision of education. The presence of centres of excellence, global education, collaborative networking and experimental learning must for its vital components. An improved curriculum with links to career modes might work well. A project oriented curriculum may also work well in ODL system. Partnerships with companies are also needed. The needs of cross cultural and exchange programs as well as implementation of global exposure and simulation were also touched upon by the speaker. Collaborative work, group activities and multi – cultural learning were the other important needs focussed upon by the speaker.

Prof. Dubey moved on to his various suggestions about the distance mode after speaking about the various needs of the system. He stressed on the need to use globally acclaimed methods where, students would be treated as customers. The targets should be set in multiples of five years with big data goals. The innovation needs to be done in every level and someone must take the lead role in this regard. He ended his talk by talking about the future plans and prospects of Delhi University, which is ranked as the most hit OL site in India by Google Business. He ended by saying that DU had a high level roadmap for the future.

Prof. K. Chandra Sekhara Rao, Dean, School of Law, Pondicherry University, was the next speaker. He spoke of, "Teachers!! PL Don't Teach Us": Dynamics of Pedagogy for Distance Education." He began his presentation by praising the discourse presented by Prof. Dubey. He mentioned how the distance mode is picking inroads in Pondicherry University (PU). Student feedback is much respected in PU according to him. He mentioned that his paper was based on an online student feedback he conducted between 15th August 2016 and 5th September 2016. The students who responded were mainly belonging to the regular mode of instruction.

One of the sources to provide feedback was that of the former alumni of the university. Dr. Nandagopal, an invited member of the board of studies, was one of them. Prof. Rao mentioned about Mr. Nandagopal's talk at the board of studies meeting where he compared the board of studies to an assembly line. Mr. Nandagopal complained about the quality of students emerging from this system.

The July 2016 edition of Businessindia.com mentioned that only 7% of the MBA

graduates are employable. Prof. Rao then questions that the purpose of a course like MBA if it cannot fetch proper jobs to the graduates. MBAs are supposed to make students employable and sharpen their skills but, many of them are actually unaware of their future career destinations.

Prof. Rao felt that the resources of the teachers were not completely utilized. He/ She is asked to teach only one or two subjects. He referred to the examination system as a "King," surrounding which, the whole curriculum is designed. He further critiqued the CBCS system mentioning that it makes students pass, even if they "refuse to pass."

The attention span of the students of the present generation is not more than 15 minutes, so, teaching has to be made more interesting with the help of clippings or videos. What the student wants now is something different. He does not want advices, felt the speaker. The students of today have many other ways to learn outside the class, observes the

6.4 Report of Parallel Session II (Day-1) held between 2.30 and 3.30 pm

Dr. Shivaji K. Ambedkar, Director, DDE, Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University, was the chairperson of the session. He invited Dr. Madhu Madan, Dean, Academics and Head Evaluations, Symbiosis Centre for Distance Learning, Pune, to make her presentation.

Dr. Madan' presentation was titled, "Present Status of Distance Education in India: Issues and Challenges." She mentioned the important roles of ODL and Distance Education in increasing the GER of a young country like India. It is the only answer to

reach the unreached and the physically, economically and the locationally disadvantaged. According to her, the recent technological upgrades have greatly diminished the geographical barriers in ODL. So, raising the issues of territorial jurisdiction for such institutes would defeat the very purpose of their establishment.

Dr. Madan felt that a change in mindset is needed to improve upon the current ODL institutes and their learning management system. She suggested that the quality of ODL can be built by accreditizing the ODL program by an independent body, upgrading the technologies used by the ODL institutes and also defining the qualifications and skill sets for the faculty as well as properly training them.

Dr. Madan further stressed that the creators and disseminators had to rise above the issues of territorial jurisdiction and focus on the relevance and quality of education in

order to create the best quality of human resource by making education available to all. She made various other suggestions like, organizing need based programs at affordable rates, making use of technology in solving the needs of delivering instructions as well as that of evaluation. Having a set of trained faculties, in their required skill sets, is another suggestion she made. She mentioned, finally how these educated, trained and empowered youth would enable our country to be a global leader in knowledge.

The chairperson, Dr. Ambedkar, added to what she had to say after her presentation, mentioning his lengthy associations with the conventional mode for a long time. He talked about how the distance mode is flourishing in the present as the ratio of admission in this mode is now greater than that in the regular mode.

6.5 Report of Parallel Session I (Day-2) held between 10.00 and 11.40 pm

The chairperson of the session, Prof. Nalini J. Thampi, Dean, School of Humanities, Pondicherry University, commenced the proceedings of the day by talking about a very popular perception among individuals that, technology is not adopted because, it does not work. It is something that is not easy to use. With these few words, she introduced the first speaker of the day, Prof. Lalitha Ramakrishnan, Department of Management, Pondicherry University.

Prof. Ramakrishnan spoke about, "Distance Education: Role of Personal Contact Classes." She introduced the topic to the audience by talking about the history of Open Learning, in brief. She went on to mention how the distance mode provides quality education to people, especially to those individuals residing in remote areas, prisons etc. She talked about a research conducted in 1996 which said that learning had no age barriers.

Prof. Ramakrishnan took up the issue of the Personal Contact Programs (PCP) in the next part of her discussion. She talked about the issue of attendance here, mentioning that, attendance was about 70% to 80% when PCP was made compulsory, whereas, it

was only about 18% to 30% when the classes were made optional. Various studies have shown that, distance of the study centre and poor planning and organization were often cited as reasons for this kind of attendance. PCPs are most effectively used as sessions for doubt clearances but, the delivery of poor quality of materials often hinder this process as, the students cannot come ready with their doubts. The vast number of students is another barrier why individual tutorial help cannot be provided. The hesitation among the students is another factor hindering effective PCP sessions.

Prof. Ramakrishnan further mentioned that the students need some amount of motivation to carry out their tasks. Many of the teachers in this mode lack the essential teaching skills required here like, the skill of condensing the materials for the students. Another major drawback here is that, the teachers are often given such subjects to teach in which they are less informed. She further mentioned that, PCPs generally adopted the lecture cum question and answer method but, in the present, the PCPs seem to have degenerated into mere lecture sessions. Some other factors which contributed to this degeneration are accommodation problems, transport problems, lack of punctuality and sitting fir long hours.

Prof. Ramakrishnan also mentioned that there was a need to understand the failure and adopt new approaches. The need for one – on – one counseling and mentoring, are very important. Along with quality study materials, library support is also needed, felt the speaker. For the effective use of technology, computer literacy is very much important, yet, she mentioned that no amount of technical knowledge can fully substitute the effectiveness of human interactions. Face – to – face communication is something which will always remain important. There is a flipside to the use of computers which she mentioned in this context. The overuse of computers can lead to many health problems. She finally mentioned the results of many studies which showcase the necessity as well as the usefulness of PCPs. She also referred to the works of many individuals which she had used during her presentation. These works are Ushadevi 1994; Singh 1983; Mathur 1979; Kato 1992; Anil Pathak 1989; Rathore 1993 and Agboola 1993.

The next speaker of the session was Prof. S. C. Sahoo, Former Professor and Head, Department of Business Administration, Utkal University. His topic of discussion was, "Improving Quality of Distance Education in India." He began by talking about his own great experience in the field of education and also about his visits to multiple foreign countries. He found discipline in those countries which is why they were successful. He mentioned that, the peculiar situation with India was that, it is a diverse nation.

Prof. Sahoo exclaimed that, there is a vast market for Distance Education in India but, these sources have not been properly tapped. He said that the distance mode must not be used to earn money. It must be used to reach the unreached. Special attention is to be given here to those who don't speak. He said that it is difficult to integrate one particular standardized program, so the focus should be put on improving the quality of the programs. He mentioned another problem here, of the communication gap between teachers and students. He also felt that research work cannot be carried out in the distance mode. He ended his short talk by mentioning the two ends of quality management, delivery and receiving. In Distance Education, importance must be given to both these ends.

Mr. Karthik KS, CEO, AEON Learning Pvt. Ltd, Bangalore was the next teacher to make his presentation. He spoke about, "Online Education: Benefits and Challenges." He began by stating his experience of 20 years in the field of education. He said that blind acceptance or rejection of technology is never logical. He also mentioned the low GER of India (24% to be exact) and also the inferior global ranking of Indian Universities. He gave a few more statistics about the current educational scenario of India. To reach the targeted GER of 30% by 2020, we need another 40 million students as well as many more faculties. In such a scenario, the situation must be managed with whatever resources available. He further mentioned that our country spent about 7.1% of its GDP in education, yet, we have a very high unemployment rate of 9.8%. In the US, 22% of education is online whereas it is only 0.2% to 0.3% online in India. Along with this statistics, he also stated how India is the second highest users of Internet and Youtube in the world and the highest user of Facebook in the world, to mark the paradox. He also mentioned that India was the second largest use of MOOC which mainly consisted of video sections.

Mr. Karthik mentioned that people are discussing about this issue, so, a solution is just round the corner. He made the mention of certain foreign Universities who partnered with technology firms like, 2U, Pearson Embernet etc to trace the best way forward in the distance mode. Some of these universities are Rutgers, Norwich University, University of South Carolina etc. In this context, the speaker shared a success store that happened in Pondicherry University, where students accessed courses through their Smartphone. The use of technology makes the students traceable to the faculties where the activities of the learner can be tracked. He also gave a few more openings by suggesting the use of tablets for the faculties to conduct classes, discussing case studies

over cohorts etc.

At the end of his presentation, Mr. Karthik gives a further list of figures concerning the distance mode. 30% of the students enrolled in the distance mode have a pre – enrollment salary of less than 3 lakhs. About 18% have a salary of about 10 lakhs. Thus, technology reaches out even to working professionals who do not have time to study and who study only during the transit hours. At the same time, he also mentioned how 66% of the students are doing their courses on the weekdays, during their transit hours. Thus, he felt, technology had made a difference in India, catering to all social segments.

Mr. Kamal Sharma, FOSTIMA Business School, Delhi, was the last speaker of the session. The title of his topic was, "Learning via MOOCs: A PANDORA'S BOX or A CORNUCOPIA." He started his presentation with two quotations. The first one was by Bill Gates who predicted the dramatic change in the means of education, in 2010 and the other by a noted architect, Buckminister Fuller, who predicted that huge buildings of the universities would become useless, in 1961.

Mr. Sharma then gave a statistic related to MOOC, which mentioned how 25 million had enrolled for MOOC between 2011 and 2014 and only 4% managed to get a credential of some kind. MOOC offers a wide choice of selecting courses, faculty, fees etc according to the needs of the student, for academic or career benefits or for knowledge. He then talked about his own experience with his MBA students, whom he had informed about such courses and found that very few had the drive to obtain an additional credential. He suggested that MOOCs must be integrated and mainstreamed into general education, an endeavour towards which IIM Bangalore have already taken urgent steps.

Mr. Sharma further mentioned how all instruments of the electronic era have been primarily promoted as instruments of entertainment. There is a great need to use these modes of entertainment for educational purposes. The students must be made to realize the fact that the power of MOOC could empower them. The teacher's job here is to make the students realize the importance of MOOCs. The role of teachers, Universities, Authorities and other governing bodies is to collate, compile and keep the resources together. He suggested an increase in the access to materials. An internet learning of some sort must also be carried out, according to the speaker. Blended learning must also be made a part of the system and some kind of grading system must also be introduced, mentions Mr. Sharma.

He ended his talk by mentioning how MOOC can open avenues for the poorest of the poor. Yet, only the rich have taken advantage in this regard, of becoming better as, they have the advantage of a better access system. He informed his audience about how online entertainment had been influential in extending the adolescence to about an age of 21. This presentation was followed by an interactive session between the speakers and the audience.

6.6 Report of Parallel Session II (Day-2) held between 10.00 and 11.40 pm

Dr. R. Samyuktha, Librarian, Pondicherry University, presided over this session. She began by talking about how traditional education is taking a backseat and face to face teaching methods are getting reduced. Several materials are available online these days, which is one of the primary reasons for the increasing popularity of MOOCs and OL. Most of these materials are peer reviewed and have certified content available. She mentioned how IGNOU was becoming popular for their teaching methods and open learning. Professionals must reach out to the users and also ensure that the materials are available to the users. She also mentioned the role of such conferences like the one taking place, where the challenges would be discussed and rethought and perhaps the possible solutions might also be explored. She ended her brief talk by mentioning how the content produced and the user must be channelized. After this, she invited Dr. Ananda Reddy, Director, SACAR, Puducherry, to make his presentation.

Dr. Reddy spoke about, "Future of Distance Education in India with Special Reference to Rural Population and/or Socially Background Population." He mentioned how he had come to share his own experiences in this field as his institute had collaborated with IGNOU for five years. He mentioned how freedom was the watchword of our times. Our country exercised freedom in various social, political as well as economic forms but, when it came to education, there was not much freedom, which is a very difficult question for a country like India. He spoke of three principles which Shree Aurobindo had suggested for proper education. They were, the teacher as the facilitator, the principle of near too far and the consultation of the student in his growth. Dr. Reddy felt that these principles shall become the future of our education as they might be better achieved in the distance mode.

Dr. Reddy went on to mention how the absence of the teacher removes fear from the students. They study on their own in the distance mode. In consulting the child about his/her education, he/she is given the freedom to learn and choose whichever form is likeable for him/her. He felt that the distance mode gave the scope for learn to all as, the learner goes to learn in this mode and not merely to attend. He mentioned further that one of the greatest aims of Distance Education is to instill the love for learning into the child. The very fact that the distance mode is student centric provides ample scope for free progress. This could very well be the future of education.

Dr. Reddy talked about the prevailing condition of rural education, which was far from ideal, according to him. Distance Education can help if the government steps up with the aid of technology. Shortage of qualified teachers in these rural areas is another problem. Establishing hubs in rural zones, where technology reaches the remotest corners, is one of the ways in which Distance Education can help the rural population. The government must help various NGOs in this process of reaching out to the unreached. He also talked about the curriculum to be introduced in these areas and specifically mentioned that it need not be same to the one used in urban zones. The syllabus must suit the needs of the rural people as much of our culture is still preserved in the villages.

Dr. Reddy mentioned how digital learning had brought behavioural changes in 58% of the students. This mode has almost become at par with the traditional mode, so, in his concluding remarks, he mentioned that the distance mode shall no longer be looked down. He mentioned how the situation in the west is much different where there is a certain amount of zeal in the mode of distance learning.

Prof. S. Albones Raj, Coordinator, Twinning Program, Loyola College, Chennai was the next speaker in this session. He mentioned his experience with the twinning, of over 9 years. He mentioned that the twinning mode needed an all round autonomy to flourish. The original intention of this program was to have a lot of built in advantages. It is a fast growing mode, catering to the needs of everyone in the system. He went on to talk about Loyola College and the variety of students studying there. He talked about the history of the twinning program at Loyola, which started with collaborations from Christ College, Bangalore and Pondicherry University. He also talked about the various programs offered under this scheme. He mentioned how no program can sustain unless it caters to the needs of all the stakeholders. Same is the case with the twinning program. 80% of the students, who joined the course to enhance their employment prospects, are already employed. In this context, he also mentioned the increasing participation of female candidates in such courses like, MBA Finance and HR, where 45% to 50% of the class consisted of female students.

He further mentioned how Pondicherry University gains a lot from this system. They frame the syllabus, conduct the exams and also publish the results. He talked about how Loyola goes about conducting the classes on Sundays, without a single missed class. The teachers here are facilitated with either LCD televisions or projectors. This was

followed by a discussion about the various challenges faced by the college in the twinning program. These concerns must be recognized and addressed. He mentioned how the syllabus for the twinning program is highly centralized by Pondicherry University and suggests that one member must be present in the board of studies from the twinning program to help in improvements. The curriculum must also not be far from the reality from that of the college. The supply of study materials was another area of concern. The material required a rigorous amount of scrutiny by a committee of experts who should approve it before it went to the press. The print quality and timely delivery of the materials was another area touched upon by the speaker.

Prof. Raj spoke at length about the various issues the students had to face regarding the inordinate delay of the declaration of results. It takes about two and a half months to declare the results and further time for the statement of marks to arrive. He also mentioned how delay in the issue of degree certificates occurred because of all such factors. He wanted the university to look for provisions to give out the certificates quickly. He ended his talk by mentioning the need for autonomy, to do more things without the tag of bureaucracy. Some amount of thought must also be put to the exam timetable.

The final speaker in this session was Dr. Kanishka K, Coordinator, Twinning Program, St. Joseph College, Bangalore. His topic of discussion was, "Twinning Programme and Distance Learning Model: A Comparative Study." He began his presentation by talking about the four major components higher education contributes to. These components are, Socio – Cultural Inclusivity/Quality, Economic Sustenance and Development, Political Stability and Technological Development. The rate of accessibility today is increasing but, in a global scale, India is not doing well in comparison to developed countries. He reiterated the fact that not even one university from India featured in the list of top 100 universities of the world. He mentioned here how significant has been the contribution of the twinning program and higher education in India. These modes have helped in enabling a greater momentum of education in the nation.

He further mentioned how Twinning program was an innovative educational concept that widened educational opportunity and provided access to working students. Tagging along with a reputed institute of higher education is always beneficial for the Directorate of Distance Education of any university. It would facilitate administrative as well as the academic aspects as per the standard academic procedures set by the parent institute, remarked the speaker. The twinning mode also provides a choice to the students to learn, assimilate and share the experiences of learned teachers on subjects through a well designed and executed teaching and learning process facilitated by the collaborating institute. He also felt that the twinning mode was a better option than the distance mode as it induced practical learning along with academic support and administrative help. Extended classroom sessions are provided in this mode. Twinning program offers the scope for counseling during the time of admission whereas there is no scope for any counseling in the distance mode. Orientation courses and interviews make the twinning

mode all the more student centric, as done in the college from which the speaker came. He mentioned that the distance mode needed to adopt the best practices.

Dr. Kanishka further described the structure of the twinning program in use in his college. The course is spread over four months and back to back classes are taken on Sundays. The teachers supply latest materials among the students via circulation. In some cases extracurricular activities are added to the main curriculum. This process often enables them to get a certain amount of competitive advantage. Twinning uses the help of many methodologies, teaching as well as learning, which provides a marked advantage over the distance mode. Continuous assessments are also carried out in the Twinning mode. The personal space of the distance mode is converted to a different yet wonderful space with proper infrastructure and quality teaching, added the speaker. Twinning also monitors the publication of research papers and projects whereas the distance mode gives no importance to these.

Dr. Kanishka also praised the control mechanism of the twinning mode; where learning, attendance as well as internal performances are continuously monitored till the exam and even after the exam. The stakeholders of this mode are highly benefitted by such practices. He ended his discourse by seeking further empowerment in terms of curriculum, administration, admission, assessment, monitoring and support of parent universities, to improve the quality of Distance Education. The presentation was followed by a brief interaction between the panelists and the listeners.

7.   Abstract Presentation

About 40 faculty, PhD scholars and students presented their work in different fields of distance education in different sessions. For example,

Session III

This session was a paper presentation session. There were six presentations in the session and Chairperson of the session was Dr. Pandu Ranga Narasimharao, Regional Director, IGNOU, Chennai. Chairperson inaugurated the session with a brief introduction of the presenters.

First paper was on the topic "Changing profile of distance learners in India: A case study of SOL, DU" and presented by Dr.Tapan Biswal. He pointed out that conventional system is a junk yard.

Next paper was on "Challenge on the part of student" presented by M. Oerndeila Guha. She was pointing out the problems and pressure on the students by the conventional system. She also pointed out that internet must be used for the distance education, but internet is not responsible for collisions and plagiarism.

It was followed by a paper presented by Dr.Lavanya on the topic "Distance education and E-learning: The challenge of change". She was talking about ODL in India, criticized the Technology and Pedagogy of distance education.

The next paper was presented by Dr. Shivaji K. Ambekar on "Improving the quality and standards of distance education programmes". He said quality is the most important factor to pursue education in today's world. Now-a-day's distance education is given by the conventional Universities.

The subsequent paper was on the topic 'Academic audit parameters to assure quality of ODL' presented by Mandar Bhanushe. He pointed out that quality assurance of ODL is necessary as conventional universities. And also he pointed out the importance of academic audit.

The last paper of the session was presented by Mr. Shinto Thomas on the topic "Regular student's perception concerning distance mode of education". He carried out the study among Pondicherry University regular mode of students and did appropriate analysis for interpretation of data. Results indicate that regular students support distance education but they think distance mode of education is second grade in terms of quality and its value. After the active interaction session, the session was concluded by the chairperson of the session.

Day 2

Few papers were presented by different professionals from different areas. The session was Chaired by Dr. S. Ganesan, Nodal officer, IGNOU, southern zone.

The first presenter of the session was Dr.Tirupathi Rao Padi, Department of Statistics, Pondicherry University. The title of Dr.Tirupathi Rao Padi's paper was "Exploration of benchmarking intra personality traits: An approach of data envelopment analysis". The discussion was about studying the intra personality traits from a set of around 35 well defined psychological behavioral aspects, and non-parametric study device of operational research entitled Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA). The paper also focussed on identification of influenced and influencing traits within an individual personality.

The second presenter of the session was Dr.C.Jaya Sankar Babu, Department of Hindi, Pondicherry University. His paper highlighted various challenges faced by the student community of the ODL system in India and the various possible solutions. His paper was justified with SWOT analysis of the ODL programme conducted from student's perspective.

Dr. J. S. Dorothy, Deputy Director, IGNOU Regional Centre, Chennai, presented a paper on "Proximity of examination centre as a learner welfare measure in a distance education system: A study". The study concluded that though the end-term examination conducted at small examination centre is expensive for the University, it is a Learner welfare Measure providing a venue to write the examination at the convenience of the examinees.

Shweta B., CogBooks Adaptive Learning, Bangalore, presented a paper on "Adopting the persistence adaptive learning to improvise, performance, and personalization". CogBooks being a winning finalist of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Courseware Challenge was funded to develop these courses. The findings of this study stressed the need for adopting the algorithmic adaptive learning in the existing learning environment.

Dr. Arvind Gupta, Assistant Director, Directorate of Distance Education, Pondicherry University presented a paper on "Twinning Programme: An innovative way for quality higher education through distance mode". His paper was highlighting about the twinning concept which gives a gamut of choices to the student community to learn and to assimilate the natty gritty of the subjects of the various programmes through a well-designed and meticulously executed academic rigor.

Session 3

Dr. S. Madhavan, Deputy Director, DDE, M.S. University, Tirunelveli Chaired this session.

Habeeb Mohammed Khan, presented his paper on "Challenges on the part of students of distance education". He discussed the problems of the distance education students in terms of (1) Dearth of awareness about the courses and relevance of it; (2) Deficiency of knowledge of accreditation and recognition at par with traditional campus based study; (3) Scarcity of continuous interaction and professional guidance; (4) Limited or no contact classes; and (5) Procrastination of assignments.

A. Malliga, Guest Faculty, Department of Philosophy, Pondicherry University presented his paper on "Success and failures of Distance Education". The author discussed about various challenges of distance education in addition to discussing about advantages.

The last presenter of the day was Dr. P. G. Arul, Assistant Professor, Department of International Business, Pondicherry University. He discussed about various dimensions of New Education Policy 2016 and further he put forward various questions on what and how we are going to address various issues related to ODL and MOOCS

Day 1, September 9, 2016, Hall 2

Session III

The session was Chaired by Dr. Basant K. Tiwari, Head, Centre for Pollution Control and Environmental Engineering Department, Pondicherry University.

The first presenter of the session Mr. G. Anbalagn emphasized the need for better coordination among different stake holders of distance education and in building partnership.

The next presenter was K. Bhuvaneswari. She stated that the number of juvenile delinquents and crimes against children are increasing in India and there are no courses available in distance mode on child protection. Paper justified the need for introducing child protection course under distance mode to encourage teachers and others involved in child welfare related activities to enroll for the same while working. This paper invited a lot of discussion due to the novelty and significance of the topic. She further stated that courses like child protection, children mental health under distance education will decrease the crime rate and improve the understanding of mental health of the children better among common people.

Nishant Bhardwaj presented the next paper which discussed about NGO's role in catering the educational needs of rural people with special reference to Dhatri Foundation.

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The next presenter was Ms. Alphonsa Jose K. She discussed the experience of distant education from student's perspective and highlighted students expectations, various challenges and possible solutions in the given situation.

Session II

This session was Chaired by Dr. Pramod Singh. The first speaker of the session Dr. N. K. Kumaresan Raja discussed about his own journey from a government office clerk to Central University Professor through distance education. He stated that education can be acquired at any stage in life if a person has a strong desire for leaning. It is not about the mode of learning. He quoted himself as an example for that.

Dr. K. Gulam Dasthagir and Ishal Ahammed Hudawi discussed about Islamic education in Kerala and stated that in the past it was more about religion based education. But now distance education has changed the perspective. Many Islamic community moves to different careers with modern education.

Er. Sudalai. S. discussed about the different social media like facebook, twitter, Watsapp, which can be used as junction to connect the world. He further discussed various facilities of modern technology for knowledge sharing in regional languages. Information communication technology allows people to connect the around world within a short span of time.

Shiba Prasad Mohuthy stated that distance education is a good opportunity for a large number of people to gain knowledge and higher educational qualification. He also discussed about other positive and negative aspects of distance education like proper assessment and regulator evaluation of student's performance.

Rahila Raj K.M. discussed about the need for distance education in regional languages since India is a multilingual country. Courses of distance education in regional languages will benefit a large number of students.

Anamike Srivastav emphasized the need for mobile learning keeping rural population in mind.   Mobile mode will be helpful since 970 million mobile users and 200 million android users are in India and it is increasing. She further stated that in the rural areas internet connectivity is very poor.

Session III

Vijay Kumar R. talked about integration of Multimedia resource for quality distance education. He discussed about how to increase the quality of distance education through multimedia resources. He quoted out that multimedia has become a powerful driving force in the field of teaching these days. He mentioned about some online library websites such as Next vista, sang learning, Khan Academy, School tube, Teacher tube, Watch know, Blossoms, Media literacy in his discussion and stated the benefits of the

same websites.

The next presenter Radhika discussed about the role of ICT in improving quality of distance education. She told that skillful education requires advanced method of teaching. She said that there are some drawbacks in distance education but those drawbacks can be overcome if we use Information Communication Technology (ICT) and that ICT develops active teaching which helps students to develop their self-confidence.

Pandu Ranga Narasimba Rao emphasized the need for Kuhonian Revolution in open distance learning in India. He explained how to introduce Kuboinan revolution in distance education and open learning. He further explained Kuhn cycle and stages involved in Kuban cycle like Normal science, model drift, model crisis, model revolution and paradigm change.

Neethu presented her paper on 'Opportunities and challenges at distance education'. She told that distance education plays an important role in meeting the educational requirement to the rural people and those who are socio-economically backward. She told that the main problem in distance education is related to study material. Another main problem is insecurities in learning. She also discussed different advantages and disadvantages of distance education.

Dr. S. Indira in her paper discussed about the significance of Multi-cultural Education. She told that the knowledge gained through the multicultural education lead to effective communication which strengthens the interpersonal relationships. She also mentioned that it is helpful for understanding the diversity existing in the world in terms of values, belief and views.

N. Nirmala Saravanan presented her paper on challenges of distance education. She briefly discussed about challenges faced by various individuals involved in distance education and offered some solutions.

Lata I. Shukle talked about advancement in Biotechnology knowledge dissemination by distance education mode. She discussed about the present and upcoming advancements in the field of biotechnology. She discussed about various advantages if Biotechnology is introduced in distance mode. She also mentioned that it will be economical if we include these fields.

8.   Summary of the Valedictory Function

Prof. Sibnath Deb, Organizing Secretary and Director (I/C), Directorate of Distance Education, Pondicherry University, delivered the welcome address and presented the Report of the Conference in the Valedictory Function. He began by talking about the discourse of the previous two days and mentioned that he had achieved at least 80% of what he aimed to achieve. He gave a few facts and figures about the seminar after this. There were 17 invited speakers to the conference who were involved in the ODL system or the Distance Education system for a long time. There were representations from Central, State and Private Universities. A total of 15 Universities and nine colleges of India participated in sharing all the valuable experiences related to the distance mode. There were a total of 62 abstracts submitted out of which, 54 were presented. He called it a good presentation but he expected a little more. There were a total of seven parallel sessions spread over 2 days which were not just interesting, impressive and thought provoking but, they also raised a number of issues. He also felt that a lot of knowledge and experience were exchanged. The issues were understood holistically and a network was developed with other professionals over this period of two days. In these ways, the primary objective of the seminar could be achieved, felt Prof. Deb.

He suggested that a further follow up was needed with the organization of further conferences which would hopefully carry forward such similar activities as carried out in this conference. This would help in creating a stimulating academic environment in the field of Distance Education, which is perhaps the only future option for achieving higher education for everyone. The individuals thus educated would contribute to the development of the nation as well as their own quality of life. The modes of delivery of the materials were discussed critically in these two days and a lot was learnt about the best method of delivery, felt Prof. Deb.

Prof. Deb mentioned his own experience of eight months in this field before he talked about the various issues and challenges which needed to be addressed,

   a)   Challenges to be Addressed at Directorate Level : Institutional support and a positive outlook is absolutely necessary here to upgrade the quality of output. Job security for staff members working for a long time,

without any promotions, is important to help them engage meaningfully into the work. Regular revision of curriculum is also needed. There is a need to form boards of studies for every subject to make them equally competent to the regular mode. There is also a need of offering more undergraduate courses, keeping in mind the needs of the rural population. Some other procedural issues like, Study Materials, PCP Classes, Delivery of materials etc must also be looked into.

b) Challenges to be Addressed at University Level: Identification of the right partners and reviewing the relationships with these partners is also needed so that, there is no compromise in the quality of the delivery of materials.

c) Challenges to be Addressed at Policy Level (With UGC and MHRD): The issues of jurisdiction must be looked into and discussed.

Examinations, evaluations and the distribution of certificates were other important issues which Prof. Deb mentioned. He further promised that a proper report of the proceedings of the two days shall be soon published which would be of great use to the UGC while framing policies. He again mentioned the need of such conferences in the future and its benefits to the distance mode. He thanked everyone for their overwhelming response and active participation. He also thanked all of them who attended the conference and also those who worked hard for the success of the seminar. He ended his address here and followed it up by honouring all the guests on the stage.

This was followed by the feedback session. Dr. Joseph Philip Raj, Professor of Urology, M. G. Medical College and Research Institute, Pondicherry and also student of MBA in the distance mode of Pondicherry, was the first man to provide his feedback. In the positives section, he mentioned how the ambience, arrangement and hospitality of the conference were wonderful. In the section for negatives, he mentioned how the contents of the speakers were too long and most speakers exceeded their time limit. He felt that the sessions should have been more interactive to incorporate the views of the learners as well. Prof. Sahoo from Utkal University was the next to give a feedback. He heaped praises on Prof. Sibnath Deb for successfully organizing such a seminar in such a great manner. He mentioned how the seminar themes as well as the delegates were all excellent. The cultural show was also praised by him. Dr. J. S. Dorothy, Deputy Director, IGNOU Regional, Chennai maintained that the conference had managed to sustain her interest, before, during and even after the proceedings because of multiple reasons.

Mr. J. Veeraraghavan, Former Secretary, MHRD, Government of India, delivered the address as the Chief Guest. He began by expressing his pleasure to be there and also congratulated Prof. Deb in the process. He talked about the Madhavan Nair report, where many experienced personalities in the distance mode had examined all issues related to Distance Education. This report is yet to be acted upon. Two other reports, one by MHRD and the other by Subramaniam Committee wait for public response. He mentioned how, many of the ground level aspects related to the distance mode have been

touched upon in this seminar. He also mentioned the importance of the report of the conference as the UGC chairman waits for this report before taking any decisions about the distance mode. He talked about the great role that education must play in the undeveloped and the underdeveloped countries and the distance mode has a crucial role to play in such a scenario, particularly in India. Only 10% to 11% of the education in India is in the distance mode.

Mr. Veeraraghavan also mentioned that the growth in the distance mode will be faster because the conventional modes are facing a scarcity of funds. The distance mode on the other hand is less costly yet, more effective. He also mentioned about the new developments in technology and the new changes in the higher education system. He exclaimed that the distance mode will improve must faster and it will have a rather exclusive growth, yet, along with this growth, certain qualities and standards are needed. There is also the need to absorb new technologies. He further mentioned how many universities are offering it as a free online course with any problem whatsoever.

Mr. Veeraraghavan mentioned how Distance Education is changing into an effective alternate mode of education which is bound to affect the traditional mode as well. He ended his address by talking about the timelines and opportunities provided by the conference and also mentioned its great significance in the process.

Prof. Malabika Deo, Finance Officer (I/C), Pondicherry University, delivered the felicitaitons. She mentioned how her job of a felicitator was that of self – appraisal. She made the mention of Prof. Murugeshan, faculty member in the department of commerce, who started the DDE in this university in 1995. She felt that the directorate has been growing into a palace. She talked about the humble beginnings of the directorate in this university and how people came to know of its existence. She went on to mention, how the directorate had been able to facilitate the university in many ways, through funds and finances.

She went on to mention how the DDE in Pondicherry University enjoys a different position and status. Things have changed though with the directorate, with change in administration. It had gone through various stages and has now come to the stage of reforms. She mentioned the importance of the outcome of the conference as it will be put forward to the national policy makers. She took the opportunity to congratulate Prof. Deb on his success as a coordinator. She went on to talk about the certain amount of

ambiguity still persistent among the givers as well as the takers of the system.

She explored all the possible challenges and even suggested possible remedies for them. The students often do not have time for the classes and the quality of the materials is very often unacceptable to them. The teachers are not always able to give what the students want. There is also another tendency among some institutes which prefer to use this mode to generate funds. In some cases, the drive to successfully market a certain course leads to the degeneration of the process of learning and the students are made to pass. Prof. Deo even cited an example in this regard of how a student is made to pass an exam in spite of the fact that he had not completely answered the questions. She suggested that a comprehensive thought process is needed to make things work in this mode, as, she feels, the distance mode has the potential to given a higher education drive. She enquired about the possible ways in which the quality of education maybe improved in this mode. She ended her address by mentioning how the DDE of Pondicherry University has been able to make a mark as a premium institute imparting Distance Education, for which, she again congratulates Prof. Deb.

Prof. K. R. Iqbal Ahmed, Former VC and Presently Director, Directorate of Distance Education, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, delivered the valedictory address for this conference. He began his address with a note of gratitude towards the organizing authorities. In the process, he mentions Prof. Deb's contribution in bringing him two days earlier to the conference. Prof. Ahmed's university is the only one which offers Urdu as a course in the distant mode. He mentioned how they are offering courses also to the marginalized and, in the process, performing both Dharma and Karma. He talked about his 15 years of involvement with this mode in the ensuing discussion.

He discussed the difficulties of organizing such a grand conference and in the process mentioned how Pondicherry University is a happening university, which must continue its good work. He mentioned how difficult it was for the people associated to the distance mode to come from the humble beginnings of correspondence to the modern

standards of MOOCs. He also saw high hopes for the distance mode in the future. The distance mode is there for those who do not have money or hope. In the address, he also told that Distance Education was the only mode for a federal state like India. He identified the fact that there are always many problems but, he trusted the UGC to always come out with some solution. This was followed by a brief discussion on the variety of papers presented over the period of two days.

Prof. Ahmed mentioned that the primary approach must be to reflect on the weaknesses and reform them. The importance of creative minds and merit is further stressed in this discussion. He requested the concerned authorities to include the initiative of allotting research or creating quality research centres. He also reiterated the concerns about examination and evaluation, mentioning that it remains an area of concern. He also talked about the repetitiveness of some of the study materials across the country, in terms of their content. He mentioned that lot of paper could be saved if the study materials are properly prepared. He also voiced his grievance against NAAC, who were not reflecting upon the achievements of the DDEs across the country, in their upgradation process. In this context, he also talked about the establishment of a new authoritative body, which would only evaluate the performance of the Directorates of Distance Education (DDE). He ended his address by mentioning that all should think in terms of the betterment of the nation as well as that of humanity, which would help in the process of nation building. Prof. Ahmed praised and thanked everyone and returned to his seat.

Dr. Aravind Gupta, Assistant Director, DDE, Pondicherry University, delivered the vote of thanks. He thanked Mr. J. Veeraraghavan, former Secretary, MHRD, Govt. of India for his august presence. He thanked Prof. Iqbal Ahmed, Director of DDE, Mulana Azad Urdu University, Hyderabad for his inspiring speech. He also made a mention of

Prof. Sibnath Deb's guiding principles and participation as absolutely valuable. He thanked Prof. Nalini Thampi for adding the cultural essence to this educational programme. In the end, he thanked the Vice – Chancellor of Pondicherry University, the various Chairpersons of the different session, the visiting dignitaries, the Education and Multimedia Research Centre of Pondicherry University, the print media, all university officials, the many colleagues of DDE, the student volunteers of various committees and also to all of them, who were missed out in this process of thanking.

9.   Feedback from the Participants

Dear Prof. Deb

Thanks for your mail. The conference on Distance education set the tone and trend for many more such conferences in the future.   Your constant touch with almost all the delegates on a one-to-one basis and giving them timely information and attending to almost all details regarding their papers and presentations is something very few really care or do. As stated by one of the speakers, through phone calls you made friends with persons whom you did not know personally. That is a feather in your cap. You had seen to every detail regarding the comfort of all the delegates from the time they landed at the airport, escorting them (giving one escort each) to Pondicherry University guest house. Such personal attention is rarely seen in any professor in any university. Your personal touch has made the difference and endeared you to all the delegates and participants including your teachers and students.

Coming to scientific sessions and papers, each session was well organized and the papers presented really highlighted some of the basic problems especially at the grass root level while implementing the distance education programme in terms of delivery of materials, the printed materials itself, and the lack of dedicated faculty and poor student support etc.

On the whole the academic aspects were rich in deliberations. You succeeded in getting many experts in DE together on one platform which is a fantastic achievement. The stay arrangements were excellent and I and my husband are very appreciative of the excellent arrangements and the personal care you took for our comfort. We are at a loss to find words to express our gratitude and appreciation.

All we can do is to give your our best wishes and wish you a great successful furture in academic and all other tasks that you are taking up now and will undertake in future.

With all our appreciation and good wishes and personal regards

Yours sincerely
Vimala Veeraraghavan

Professor Deb,

There is no word to testify your effective leadership.in respect to hospitality, food, volunteers' attention to delegates, taking all care, theme selection, participants mix, invited guests from experienced bureaucrats, senior teachers and administrators of DE, food service, accommodation, transport etc. I have learnt a lot from this conf. I will put

my sincere efforts make a case study on this which will be discussed in the class. Guest management and cultural function were superb.

Congratulations again and again,

Sincerely yours

Prof.S.C.Sahoo
Department of Management, Utkal University, Orissa

Dear Prof. Deb,

I thank you very much for your nice mail. I reached Kolkata safely and comfortably yesterday. Immediately after my lunch at 3:30 P.M. I rushed to the office. Although I am not an expert in Distance Education, I enjoyed your conference and learned quite a bit from the deliberations. If you add all the deliberations, they covered almost all aspects. The selected papers after editing may be published in the form of a booklet. That will be a document for further future works.

As far as logistics are concerned, they were fine. One or two very minor things were pointed out to Dr. Tiwari. He informed that it is very easy to take care of those things in future.

With Best Regards,
Prof. B. C. Mal
Vice Chancellor
JIS University, Agarpara, Kolkata, India
Tel: 09425 292 411, 09432 011 487
Former Vice Chancellor,
Chhattisgarh Swami Vivekananda Technical University, Bhilai
Former Professor and Head,
Agricultural and Food Engineering Department, IIT Kharagpur

Dear Prof Sibnath Deb,

I don't think I can add to the praises that were already showered on you and your team on the day of the seminar by eminent persons coming from different parts of India. To do so would be poor imitation!!

I can only add my emotions to it...to tell you that the Seminar organization / arrangements were beyond our expectations.on every level and in every manner. And all this you did in the first 5 months of your joining the Dept, incredible indeed. By any academic standards, it requires years of experience and administrative rigor to conceive

and to conduct such an event.
All praises and congratulations to all for the lovely atmosphere of harmony, perfection and wisdom during the two days of the national seminar.
Regards,

Dr. Ananda Reddy
Director, Sri Aurovindo Centre for Advanced Research, Puducherry
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Forwarded message ----------
From: Joseph Philipraj<josephphilipraj@gmail.com>
Date: Sun, Sep 11, 2016 at 3:05 PM
Subject: Conference
To: ddepuconference2016@gmail.com

Sir,

 Thank you for the wonderful conference. It was nicely planned and executed. It was really an eye opener for a novice like me in DE. Conferences and workshops, Seminars addressing issues of concern for students and administrators will be of immense importance.
Thank you once again
Salubriously,

Philip
Dr.S.Joseph philipraj
MBBS, MS,DipNB,Mch,DipNB,MNAMS
GSMC FAIMER FELLOW
 professor- Department of Urology
Mahatma Gandhi Medical college and Research Institute
PONDY-CUDDALLORE MAIN ROAD, PODICHERRY- 607402, Ph-
07094012857

Forwarded message ----------
From: Suman Bh<suman.bh@tcs.com>
Date: Mon, Sep 12, 2016 at 12:08 PM
Subject: Re: Thanks for attending conference
To: DDE PU <ddepuconference2016@gmail.com>

Dear Prof Deb,

It was indeed a nice experience to attend the conference. I enjoyed each and every topic of discussion and good part is that even if I could not get a speaker slot, I have participated in all discussion and lot of value addition and knowledge sharing happened. After so long I could attend such a serious conference. I hope the input that all shared

will be incorporated in policy level.

Looking forward to meet you soon.

Thanks & Regards
Dr Suman Bhattacharya
PhD (Comp Sc.), TOGAF 9.0
iON Education
Tata Consultancy Services
Ph:-   07538093809; Cell:- 09437222321

Dear Prof. Deb,

Reached safely back to Delhi after meeting and enjoying such a wonderful people and their hospitality, in a lonely place. I thoroughly enjoyed the conference and interactions with your colleagues and team members. I don't know what I have contributed back to the conference!!

As a trainer in ODL conducted about 300 workshops/seminars and two dozens of national and international conferences, I really can understand the efforts put by your team under your dynamic leadership.

Heartiest congratulations to you and your team on successful completion of conference.

A small suggestion – Conference Recommendations focusing need for ODL policy and independent regulator for ODL can be sent to the MHRD Committee which is receiving suggestions on National Policy; of course sending apart to UGC.
Once again I express my sincere thanks and heartiest congratulations. For any help in Delhi and from me you are always welcome.

With Warm Regards,

Prof.C.R.K.Murthy, MA,Ph.D.
Professor of Distance Education & Director
STRIDE, IGNOU Maidan garhi
New Delhi-110068; Ph-(O) 01129535904, 01129572626
Fax- 91-11-29533073; E-mail- crkmurthy@ignou.ac.in

Dear Prof. Deb,

Thank-you for your inviting me to your esteemed university as a speaker at your prestigious conference It was indeed nice meeting you and your team at the conference. The journey back home was comfortable. It was kind of you to have made arrangements to have me dropped to Chennai airport at an unearthly hour in the morning.

The selection of the Conference themes and subthemes, your warm hospitality and arrangements par excellence speak volumes about your leadership skills. The atmosphere was charged with academic vibrancy and the discussions that followed the presentations provided food for thought and useful take away from the conference. Do send us a copy of the suggestions that you are forwarding to UGC and MHRD basis the deliberations at the conference.
Kindly also thank your Vice chancellor and your team members on my behalf. Thanking you once again and wishing you all the very best in your future endeavors.

Warm regards,

Madhu
Dr. Madhu Madan
Dean Academics & Head Evaluations
Symbiosis Centre for Distance Learning,
Pune

Dear Prof. Deb

Thank you very much for your mail and wonderful hospitality extended to me at Pondicherry. I also wish to congratulate you and your colleagues for a very successful conference.

Warm regards

Prof. H.P.Dikshit
Prof. H.P.Dikshit, (Ex-VC, IGNOU & Ex- DG, School of Good Governance, Govt. of M.P.)
69, Naya Gaon, Rampur, Jabalpur 482 008, Tele.+ 91-761-2663266

Dear Prof. Deb,

It was indeed a great pleasure being with you for the conference. The conference was organised effectively, the presence of dignitaries, Chairman, Prof. Dixit, Vimala Veeraraghavan, was superb, they gave wonderful inputs to the ODL education. I deeply appreciate your efforts in organizing so many people from so many organizations, which resulted in a great synthesis on the subject. The arrangements were fantastic, not even a small trouble, and your boys girls worked extraordinarily well, making the program a grand success. Please convey my special thanks to your vice chancellor madam, and madam vijaya raghavan. hoping to see you in near future. Wishing you all the best.

Yours sincerely,

Prof H Venkateshwarlu
Osmania University

---- Forwarded message ----------
From: Shweta B<shwetab@india.cogbooks.com>
Date: Fri, Sep 23, 2016 at 2:05 PM
Subject: Re: Thanks for attending conference

Hello respected members,

I express my deep gratitude for every aspect that was a part of the conference right from the day communication about conference began.

Sorry for the delayed response due to unavoidable reasons.

It was a privilege to get exposure to the realities of the distance education field and hear the wisdom of the eminent educationists. The humbleness of the highly qualified organizers and the delegates was really touching and the warmth will hold in memories forever. It is amazing to know how each one is contributing to the system with plans to make it better.

Being a corporate e-learning professional, understanding the perspectives of real academicians holds a great value to make better contribution. The conference bridged many such gaps.

My heartfelt thanks to Dr. Sibnath Deb and the organization committee for the thoughtful initiative. Many thanks to Prof. Aneesa Basheet Khan and all other authorities of the Pondicherry University.

Dr. Nalini's words taken the events to an extremely high level of presentation. Special thanks to Dr. Md. Nizamuddin for his great contribution and being helpful in extraordinary ways. Each and every volunteer had been an example of individual and team excellence.

The arrangement, hospitality, and organization have been agreed as at par with the best organization standards. The knowledge shared by each member and further steps of the conference are going to surely impact our education system positively.

Thanks and regards,
Shweta B.
Courseware Collaboration Lead
CogBooks Adaptive Learning, + 91 988 08 29 325

10. Media Coverage

THE HINDU

PUDUCHERRY

A platform to discuss challenges in distance education

PUDUCHERRY: SEPTEMBER 05, 2016 00:00 IST
UPDATED: SEPTEMBER 22, 2016 17:23 IST

The Directorate of Distance Education, Pondicherry Central University, is hosting a two-day national conference on 'Distance Education in India: Emerging Challenges and Prospects' from September 8.

Ved Prakash, Chairman of the University Grants Commission (UGC), New Delhi, is scheduled to take part as chief guest while H.P. Dikshit, former V-C of IGNOU, will be the guest of honour. According to Sibnath Deb, Director-in-charge, Directorate of Distance Education and organising secretary of the event, while distance education presented a wonderful opportunity for a large number of students to attain higher education and eventually lead a higher quality of life, there were some constraints and challenges in this mode of education – the most glaring lacuna being the absence of a platform to discuss various issues and challenges concerning distance education. The conference's objective is to fill this gap by offering a platform for mutual learning and emerge with better understanding for addressing the challenges. The sessions would focus on a comprehensive analysis of the distance learning experience across the globe and India, globalisation of distance education and virtual learning problems and challenges in starting distance education programme by a university.

Printable version | Feb 16, 2017 12:12:05 PM |
http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/puducherry/A-platform-to-discuss-challenges-in-distance-education/article14624774.ece

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THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

'Accord primacy to academic excellence'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Puducherry

UNIVERSITY Grant Commission (UGC) chairman Ved Prakash on Thursday called upon educational institutions to accord primacy to academic excellence as quality should never become secondary.

Inaugurating a two-day national conference, 'Distance education in India: emerging challenges and prospects', organised by the Directorate of Distance Education at Pondicherry University, he said no country could afford to fall behind in the global educational ranking, in which 15 international agencies are involved. Similarly no educational institution could afford to fall behind in the Na-

tional Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), he added.

In his view, a university is identified based on eight parameters - quality of students, quality of teachers, circular provision, quality of structural material, better coaching, assessment procedures, learning environment and quality of research. "Without improving the quality of research, we can never make progress," he said and urged the institutions to share their research ideas for the benefit of everyone, since the resources were limited.

Resources generated from ODL programmes, he said were not used for improving the quality of instruction material but instead to run reg-

ular programmes for want of enough support from the state.

India has around 846 degree awarding institutions including State and Central universities apart from around 40,000 colleges affiliated to different universities. Around 33.3 crore students enroll in higher education out of which about 10 per cent account for Open Distance Learning (ODL) mode.

Former Vice Chancellor of IGNOU in New Delhi H P Dikshit, Vice Chancellor of JIS University in West Bengal Bimal Chandra Mal, and former professor of Delhi University Vimala Veeraraghavan were among thos who participated in the event.

THE ✺ HINDU

INDIA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER SINCE 1878

Varsities must transit to knowledge system: UGC chief

S. SENTHALIR

PUDUCHERRY: University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman Ved Prakash on Thursday called on universities to graduate from the 'learning system' to 'knowledge system' to compete at the global ranking level.

During his inaugural address at a two-day national conference on 'Distance Education in India: Emerging Challenges and Prospects,' held in Puducherry on Thursday, Mr. Prakash said that most of the universities fell under the learning system, which implied that knowledge created elsewhere was translated and certified on the campuses of the universities.

"But, we need to graduate from the learning system to knowledge system to create new knowledge, besides disseminating and certifying this knowledge," he said.

Mr. Prakash underlined that global ranking system had become the seal of approval for quality. At a time when none of the Indian universities figured in the first 100 in the global ranking, the UGC Chairman said: "There are questions as to why Indian universities are not in the first 100 in the global ranking. We are under enormous pressure to compete at the global level where 15 international agencies are involved in ranking. Global ranking has become near universal. It has become a seal of approval for quality. No country can afford to fall behind in global ranking."

Mr. Prakash underlined that even at the national level, the institutions were under pressure for the assessment and accreditation of NAAC and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) and National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF).

Stating that Indian universities had been relegated to the background in the past 159 years after being pioneers in education, the UGC Chairman said that when

DISCUSSING IDEAS: Anisa Basheer Khan (right), Vice-Chancellor (Officiating), Pondicherry University, has a word with Ved Prakash, UGC Chairman on Thursday PHOTO: S.S. KUMAR

the universities entered the Humboldtian era in the 19th Century, it created structures of disciple like history, physics etc. "This system was accepted and embraced at a greater speed by the U.S. and Japanese universities. The U.S. universities outranked European universities at that time because of effective governance of the university system and nationalisation of higher education. They were able to establish a strong linkage between university and industry."

He added that since Independence, the number of educational institutions and students enrolling for higher education had increased.

Bimal Chandra Mal, Vice Chancellor, JIS University, West Bengal; Vimala Veeraraghavan, former professor, Delhi University; H.P. Dikshit, former IGNOU VC; Anisa Basheer Khan, Vice Chancellor, Pondicherry University; M. Ramachandran, Registrar-in-charge and Sibnath Deb, Director-in-charge, Directorate of Distance Education, Pondicherry University, also participated.

ODL system

Talking on the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system, Mr. Prakash stated that there was trust deficit among people due to some players in the system.

"The resources that are generating through the ODL programmes by way of carrying out massive recruitment of the students are not used for improving the ODL material or the quality of instructional material or faculty development. In many universities, the resources that are generated through ODL programme are used to run the regular programmes of the university because they are not getting adequate support from the state. Therefore, we are suffering from several of problems," he said.

He instructed the institutions to reflect on the weakness of the current system and deliberate on how to overcome it. "They have to prepare a framework for the improvement what kind of framework should you come up with for qualitative improvement, sustainability and ensure merit, governance and quality of research," he said.

Staff shortage

When asked about the shortage of faculty in Pondicherry Central University, he said that the UGC had sanctioned the requisite number of posts and it was up to the university to fill up the posts.

11. Recommendations

After reviewing the deliberations of all the resource persons keeping the interest of the students as well and overall quality of distance education, a range of recommendations for efficient functioning of the Directorate of Distance Education (DDE) are offered under different heads.

General

1. The Directorate of Distance Education (DDE) of every university should set small time goals for five years and develop strategic plan for achieving the goals as suggested by the UGC Chairman and as per UGC Guidelines and Regulations as issued from time-to-time. Improving academic excellence must be the final goal for all DDE.

2. Open and Distance Learning has become a highly specialized area. Therefore Directorate of Distance Educations (DDE) requires adequately trained and skilled manpower at different levels for efficient functioning and quality assurance of Programme Delivery in all respects. Some of the essential capabilities required are indicated in the following points 3-5.

3. The Programme Design should be in modules and sub-modules with appropriate credits assigned to each module with flexible system of credit transfers to suit the requirement of learners.

4. Programme Content has to address the important issue of limited access of teachers to the Distance Education learners. Therefore, the content should be in the form of Self Learning Material (SLM), not in the usual Text format and DDE faculty must be trained for handling Strategies and Processes involved in development of SLM.

5. Ever growing power of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in terms of speed and omnipresent access has to be effectively blended to increase access and facilitate the DE learners through ICT tools and Interactive sessions. Learners should be facilitated and encouraged to use MOOCS.

6. The number of DE learners is very large with fairly well spread location covering remote rural and less developed areas. Therefore to ensure accountability and efficiency appropriate permanent staff for academic transactions, student support services, admissions and evaluation should be engaged.

7. Internal Quality Assessment System should be developed to review and monitor periodically and to ensure corrective measures wherever required to support self-learners and continuous efforts to maintain quality.

8. Yearly academic calendar should be developed and provided in the university website for the students.

Courses under Distance Mode and Up-gradation of Curricula

9. DDE should introduce new courses keeping the job market and need of the society in mind and following the UGC guidelines.

10. Some of the courses like psychology, Social Work, Physiotherapy, Teacher Training (B.Ed and M.Ed) programmes, Hospital Management etc., require placement and internship facilities. The Directorate of Distance Education in the University must establish contacts at different regional centres the concerned institution heads and work out an MoU to collaborate in the DE programmes in the concerned subject. They could be given due recognition, reasonable remuneration and association with the university concerned in a dignified way. They could also be involved in evaluation, syllabus modification, conducting of viva voce etc. This would motivate them to give excellent professional training to the students placed in their agencies and under them.

11. Keeping in mind the educational needs of rural India, it was recommended that the universities should introduce under graduate courses in as many subjects as possible along with post graduate courses and degrees.

12. The UGC should promote distance education for reaching to disabled population. The possible suggestions for the higher authority to look into this aspect include :
    *   Designing new programs to suit their special needs.
    *   Accessibility to the study Centers which should have special devices and instruments that could enable them to make full use of the offered courses.
    *   Offering training for suitable occupation keeping in mind the specific disability.
    *   Enhancing certain aspects in the current program appropriately so that the latter could also opt for the various courses.
    *   Organizing awareness programs for the public, parents and policy makers regarding the support the disabled require.

13. All distance education universities should design skill-asked distance

education courses on Tourism, Hospitality, Retail services, Entertainment sectors etc., keeping in mind the job prospects for the disabled. In addition to the conventional courses, the DDE should also offer courses that ensure employability for the disabled.

14. In case of existing courses, curricula should be revised periodically at least every five years and update study materials accordingly.

15. DDE should also think of on-line mentoring of students.

16. The study Centers should be in such areas and places where maximum students can attend the POP classes. Attendance in POP should be mandatory for benefit of the students.

Printing of Study Materials and Dispatch to Student

17. DDE should ensure publication of books/study materials on time. Quality of printing should be given the highest attention.

18. DDE should think of providing quality study materials and video lecture on different subjects on-line for the benefit of the students in addition to providing online reference materials. The audio-visual study materials in addition to printing materials should be prepared in simple manner that they are real substitute for teachers in the classrooms. Small modules will be more efficient in drawing the attention of the learners instead of materials developed for regular mode of students.

19. DDE should ensure dispatch of study materials to all enrolled students on time ensuring that students will get minimum four and half month time for study in a semester.

Addressing Students Issues and Grievances

20. All queries of the students should be clarified over phone and through e-mail. For the same purpose, phone lines of DDE should be in order and DDE designated staff should be active in responding to all e-mail queries promptly. Name of the designated persons should be mentioned in the DDE website.

21. Efforts should be made by all the universities for placement facilities of the students under distance mode.

22. Grievance Redressal Cell for addressing all issues and concerns of the students should be in place.

Question Paper Setting, Conduction of Examination, Evaluation and Timely Results Declaration

23.   Question paper should be set by experienced Faculty. Evaluation of large number of scripts makes many teachers evaluate the scripts inadequately. So, orientation to teachers for evaluating in reasonably justified manner would help. This aspect could also be covered during faculty training that is organized.

24.   Examination Centres should be arranged in convenient location so that students do not find it difficult to reach to the examination centres.

25.   Every care should be taken to maintain the secrecy about question paper and to conduct the examination following standard code of conduct of regular mode of education. For the same purpose, DDE should have proper coordination and interaction with the examination centres. Observer from the University should be deployed in every examination centre.

26.   The evaluation must also be objective in nature and the assistance of experts must be taken as and when required.

27.   DDE examination results should be published on time and mark sheets and final consolidated certificate should be issued on time at least within a month of publication of the results.

Faculty Development

28.   DDE should organize at least "a seven day" workshop on manpower development for all faculty engaged in personal contact programs every year or every alternative year which will ensure teaching skills to teachers, use of ITC, starting of online courses and preparing materials for the same, training them in video and interactive video conferencing, making them committed and dedicated to their subjects and teaching the students and rendering them through training by a duly trained professional teacher in DE to teach at the Study Centers, etc.

29.   Skill is another area where ODL can make a difference and bringing a change is a very difficult process but such a change must be implemented at some point of time.

30.   Every university should make use of their excellent video and documentary production unit. They can help in preparing many audio-

visual materials for training the faculty. This would go a long way in overcoming the lack good dedicated teachers to conduct the programme.

31.   This apart, academic staff should be allowed to undergo staff orientation program in other universities for gaining updated information in different fields.

Development of Study Centres and DDE

32.   It is very important to focus on improving of the study centers. They need considerable, consistent and sustained monitoring and evaluation only in getting the learning materials on time but also delivering them to students on time. The success of the study centers depend on dedicated faculty, timely scheduling of classes with adequate prior intimation to students, excellent library and ITC facilities, etc. There should be a system by which the study center staffs are able to inform the director concerned about the teachers and students attending the classes whenever scheduled. A feedback on dropping out by students from some courses, poor performance on some courses, genuine grievances of students etc., must be reported to the Director by all the study centers. These are some of the points that could also be taken up during training of teachers and faculty.

Study Centres are the main contact point for learners. Therefore, strict Monitoring of all functions and processes at Study Centres like Admissions, Induction Meeting, Providing Content to learners with a firm schedule, organizing Counseling Sessions in Theory and Practical, facilitating access to Library and conduct of examinations. Learners' Feedback should be analyzed for improvements. Use of ICT tools will be very useful.

For Programme delivery under distance mode, Study Centres should be strictly located under the territorial jurisdiction of the University concerned. The Study Centres should be located in recognized institutions, preferably those imparting similar programmes in face to face mode.. Academics engaged for counseling should fulfill the minimum educational qualifications prescribed by the concerned statutory Bodies like UGC, NCTE etc.

33.   There is a need to invest at least 50% of the revenue earned through distance education programmes for development of Directorate of Distance Education in terms of quality of manpower, quality study materials, training, research and logistic arrangements for the benefits of students.

34. DDE should receive an equal attention from the authority of a university in terms of granting fast approval for starting different issues.

35. Every care should be taken to appoint skilled manpower in DDE instead of considering DDE as rehabilitation place.

36. University should give autonomy to DDE for better and efficient functioning and in case of recruitment/transfer of DDE staff; the authority of university should do the needful based on feedback of the Director as he/she knows the situation and need of DDE better.

37. In order to publicize about the courses, DDE should take appropriate measures to give proper information to all students about MHRD, UGC, circulars so that there is no room for any misinformation to learners.

38. Periodic meeting of all the examination centres, spot admission centres and personal contact program classes should be organized at least once a year to review the work progress and challenges and finding out solutions.

39. More research should be undertaken on different dimensions of distance mode of education for further qualitative improvement. For example, if a common research topic could be given with a uniform questionnaire and methodology and ask the study Centers to take up the research, the collected data would give rich information for remedying the problem and also the positive areas in which the DE is doing well.

40. For implementing courses under distance mode, collaboration with potential institutes should be made.

41. Franchising content design, development, student support services conduct of Examination etc. are strictly restricted.

42. Those courses which require skill training must have facilities in the community where the students can be placed for training. For instance if the student is studying for Masters in Psychology specializing in clinical psychology, there must be a psychiatric clinic or a hospital for the mentally ill or a general hospital with a psychiatric department catering to the mentally ill persons.

43. Application to the UGC for any professional programme requires prior approval of the concerned statutory Bodies / Councils like NCTE, AICTE etc. Technical Programmes like B. Tech., M. Tech. etc are not allowed for delivery by ODL mode.

Role of UGC

44. Programmes with component of hands on experience / practical training should be encouraged by UGC This should be at par with that required face-to-face mode. Of course condensed practical sessions could be organized instead of day to day training. Centres identified for hands on experience should be in an Institution recognized for imparting the concerned programme under face-to-face mode.

45. Granting approval of courses by the UGC within six to eight months of submission of all required documents related to courses would be encouraging.

46. UGC may think of organizing expert committee meeting thrice a year for ensuring timely approval.

47. In case of any deviation by any university for implementing courses under distance mode, UGC should take immediate measures and penalize the respective institute. There are several instances where thousands of students have been misled about recognition of the UGC and by the time complaints are received in the UGC-MHRD, a few batches already pass out or are in second or third year of a course. Even B. Tech. and M. Tech. degrees have been given.

48. Perhaps the question of jurisdiction is in order because of the possibilities of malpractice by some universities for earning revenue. The issue of jurisdiction for implementation of courses under distance mode came up in the discussion of some resource persons. The issue requires further debate and discussion for better understanding keeping quality of education and students interest in mind

49. UGC can think of implementing the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) in the distance mode also.

12. About Pondicherry University

Pondicherry University established under an Act of Parliament in the year 1985 is located in Puducherry. The university has 15 Schools, 37 Departments and 10 Centres offering 175 Post Graduate and Research programs. The university has all the state-of-the-art facilities in all the Schools and Departments paving the way for the students to have a student-friendly, result-oriented academic environment with green ambience. The University has four campuses. The Main Campus is located at Puducherry and the other three off-campuses are located at Mahe, Karaikal and Port Blair. The University has made a giant leap in promoting usage of Information & Communication Technology (ICT) products/ services in the areas of teaching / learning, research and administration. The Ananda Rangapillai Library at the University has a collection of more than 2-lakh books and over 25,084 e-journals, 7,455 e-books, 36 e-databases and 620 e-thesis.

It offers rent-free accommodation to all girl students and provides totally-free education to all the differently-abled students. The campus has 100% power back-up to all the Departments and Hostels of the University. A 24-hour-hospital with fully-equipped Ambulance is yet another facility on the campus. The University has over 450 faculty and 5000 students from across the country in addition to about 45,000 students in its 87 affiliated colleges.

13. About Directorate of Distance Education and its Vision

The University entered in the field of Distance Education in the academic year 1995 – 96 to cater to the needs of the aspirant students who otherwise could not pursue higher education in the on campus academic programs. To reach out to all those sections of students who are away from the main stream academics, the University has conceived several innovative and job oriented academic programs. To be precise, the prime motto of the university is to 'reach the unreached' and thus taking higher education to the door steps of all the citizens of the nation.

Broadly three types of courses offered
      1. Conventional Mode with Online Admission
      2. Online Mode
      3. Twinning Mode

It has been the approach and policy of the University to focus on sector specific need based and job oriented professional programs. The Masters Programs in Management (MBA), among others, offered by the Directorate of Distance Education have made a mark of their own among the quality conscious of unemployed youth and working people in the corporate India across the country. Thus, the Pondicherry University 'DDE' has made a mark in the field of higher education.

Vision of Directorate of Distance Education, Pondicherry University

To attain leadership in sphere heading qualitative and responsible academic programs relevant to the society through cost effective off-campus distance mode of education. Another mission is to produce the quality and skilled manpower in the fields concerned with a view to bridge the gap of 'demand supply' of manpower by imparting quality education, hassle free and with affordable cost and with supreme quality of students support services.

A Glimpse of the Conference

Distance Education in India: Emerging Challenges and Prospects - A Brief Report

Distance Education in India: Emerging Challenges and Prospects - A Brief Report

A Glimpse of Cultural Program