QUALITY ASSURANCE IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

It is a prevailing truth that conventional education system is not able to cater the need of masses. There is also a debate that the education provided through distance and open learning is quality oriented or not? If, so, how they can satisfy the learner to attain their goal? It doesn't matter that what was the scion philosophy of the distance education but today everyone wants wall free quality education without too much burden. To satisfy the needs of the learner these universities are doing maximum efforts to maintain the quality of education and in process of learner-teacher interaction. Today the learner is not differentiating between conventional and distance education. Therefore, the ratio of learners in the open and distance universities is increasing rapidly in last years. This paper emphasizes on the quality maintaining process of the open and distance universities to assure the quality to give quality education.

Keywords: **Quality assurance, Quality maintenance, Open and Distance Universities, Best practices.**

The establishing thinkers of quality assurance have defined the open and distance education with the nature of its functioning over the periods, such as according to Wedemeyer (1981) *distance education is the teaching and learning of knowledge through various methods used when learners and teachers are at physical distance from each other.* He suggested the model of distance education where he described *two* important mechanisms in which one is *distance* (the separation of teachers from learners) and *medium of instruction* (way of teaching and learning). Moore (1994) affirmed that the real concept of open and distance education is purely separation of learners and teachers by distance and sometimes by period. Holmberg (1995) differentiate that open and distance education covers different exercise or practices of study with controlled or uncontrolled, continuous or discontinuous conditions occurred at all levels from the preparation, regulation and instruction of a supporting organization.

After the comprehensive survey Keegan (1996) established these main characters that must be incorporated to give the liberal definition of open and distance education as described below-

- Separation of teacher and learner all over the length of the learning method.
- The impact of a scholastic organization both in the preparation and planning of learning resources and in provider of learner support services.
- The use of ICT(Information and Communication Technology) medium like print-media, audio, visual or audio-visual or the World Wide Web to interact teacher and learner and to transmit the content of the course.
- Continuous evaluation of the learner so that individuals are usually skilled.

The rise of open and distance education is a predictable improvement but its development is an unbelievable, magical and changeable for the higher education system. Distance and open universities have

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expanded out-side conventional universities and grown-up into varied replicas reflecting the regularswithaim to appear, how they were introduced? How they are sponsored and the varieties of programmes they offer? First model open university was the United Kingdom Open University (UKOU) established in 1969 for a number of single mode open and distance universities have been developed in many countries representing approaches that focus on widening access to higher education provisions. Sallis (2002) felt that "*a comprehensive, systematic and regular review of an organization's activities and results…The self-assessment process allows the organisation to discern clearly its strengths and areas in which improvements can be made and culminates, in planned improvement which are the monitored for progress"*.(p. 148)

In India First Open University was Dr.B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU), formerly known as Andhra Pradesh Open University, was set up on 26th August 1982. Currently there are 14 open and distance universities in India. Dhanarajan (2010) and Moore & Kearsley (2012) reported that many of these Distance Universities are appreciating economies of scale agreeing for large admissions. They contain such examples as Allama Iqbal Open University which has 32 lacstudents, Indira Gandhi National Open University which has 30 lac students and Open University of China that has 27 lac students showing in graph.

year 2010

Source: http://linc.mit.edu/linc2010/proceedings/plenary-Dhanarajan.pdf.
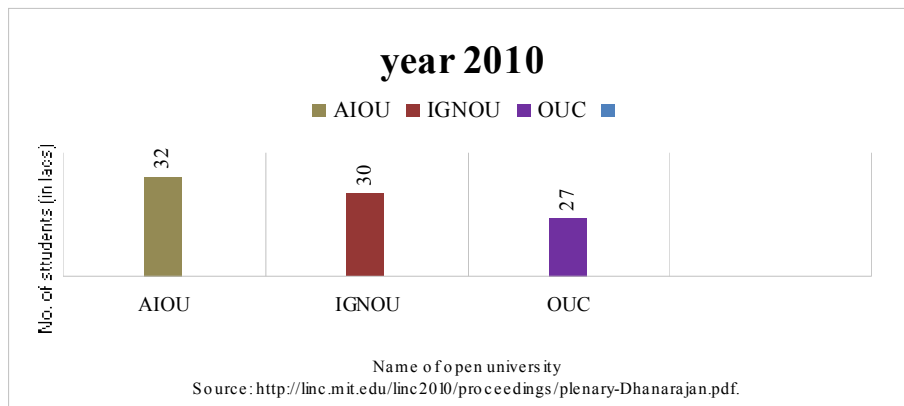
Table-1

Peters (2008) observed that there are about 50 independent single mode open and distance universities dispersed all over the world in which most of are working with the aim of offering distance education according to the regulations of the United State Open University and 16 of them are called *Mega-Universities*. Several scholars Holmberg (1995) and Keegan (1996) of distance education have argued that open and distance universities have the benefit of providing comprehensive access and settlement of the expanding hopes of people who would not be capable to attend traditional regular universities. In developing countries with large populations, such as India, open and distance universities offer a planned way to enroll a large number of students.

As these days Government of India tries to meet public demand to upgrade the skills for the coming generation and economic growth through the developing new NPE (National Policy on Education) with by taking suggestions of the educated civilians, policy makers, teachers, educators etc. Rena (2007) and

Hoosen & Butcher (2012)have confirmed with the dares that these new universities face like the shortage of support and comforts such as providing teachers, academic counselors, schedulers and official support, struggle in lapse of delivery of teaching, and transfer of student sustenance services including educational and logistical basics or establishing organization. Daniel (2012) found in his studies that open and distance education had been saddled with a blurred image problem of poor excellence and substandard. These dares have appealed to analyse the quality of open and distance universities particularly concerning the need for launching standard best practices and modifying standards of quality by which open and distance education can be adjudged.

Every institution has routine, honour and discipline in its functioning. In the same thing all open and distance universities of the world were established under the rules and regulations of various governing bodies as were existed. Therefore, it was the need of the hour to prepare, maintain and control the quality to stand up against the other conventional universities were with their strong reputation. In respect of the quality, the open and distance universities which established a system to post-operative check of services, maintain quality requirements and guarantee of quality has been developed his self-existence through his efforts. For examples *Allama Iqbal Open University, Indira Gandhi National Open University, Open University of China,United Kingdom Open University* and many others. The thought of quality is likely supposed to be diverse in form of *Quality Inspection, Quality Control and Quality Assurance*.

From the process of admission, distribution of self-learning material, held of examination, declaration of result, revolution of result and award of degree everything should be in its original procedural way and within given period. Every procedure should be evaluated by the quality control department of the university. Every grievance should be resolved as soon as possible. Quality can be seen as conformance to necessities, best for assured customer situations and appropriateness for use. Deming (1990) who is usually credited as the father of the modern quality movement was developed a **PDCA cycle** that means **Plan, Do, Check and Act**in his work **Out of the crisis**as elementary code to manage continuous quality improvement. Kramer (2007) opened facts about quality and authenticity of degree of open and distance universities that the degrees awarded by the open universities are seen positively in comparison to the degrees provided by the traditional universities.
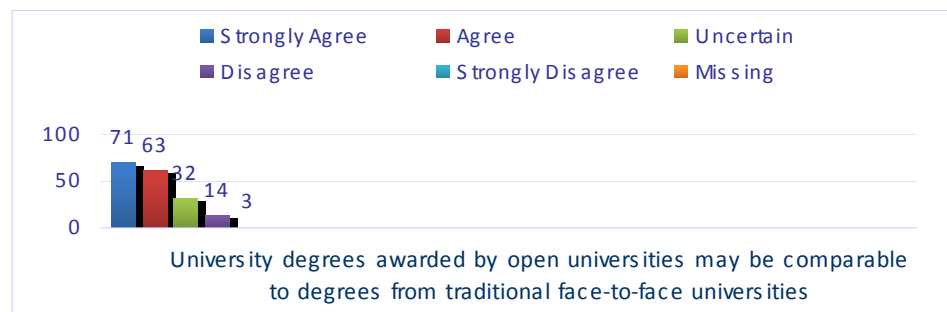
The modern concept of quality has evolved and became one of the prime theme tune in higher education policy discussions over the last three or four decades. Vlasceanu, Grunberg & Parlea(2007) opposed that "*Quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional, multi-level, and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual settings of an educational model, to the institutional mission and objectives, as*

well as to specific standards within a given system, institution, programme, or discipline. Quality may thus take different, sometimes conflicting, meanings depending on the understanding of various interests of different constituencies or stakeholders in higher education." Harvey and Green (1993) identified that quality in higher education can be classified into five extents as follows-

> ➤ Exceptionality - Quality as something special, unique and exclusive.
> ➤ Consistency - Quality as perfect or zero deficiencies.
> ➤ Fitness for purpose - Quality as satisfying customer's requirements.
> ➤ Value for money - Quality as a return on investment.
> ➤ Transformation - Quality as boost and the improvement of new knowledge.

These five extents to quality replicate a wide range of significances ranging from the outdated idea of quality as quality to focusing on methods that it aims to meet perfectly (consistency), task orientation and user specification (fitness for purpose) and the transformative excellence, through enhancing and enabling the learner.

Interaction and communication in open and distance education are essential to fill the distance between the teacher and the learner. The instructive exchange is ordinary in learning. This communication is of two types-

1. One-way traffic – In this type of interaction the supporting material is sent by the responsible open and distance university and sometimes text based interaction takes place if needed that is described as simulated communication.

2. Two-way traffic – This is the active and didactic interaction was introduced in 1960 and in which the association between learner and teacher and other members of the responsible organization.

The course designers of open and distance education have to develop an attention on moralistic aspects rather than logical aspects when arranging a course. A combination of examples, theories with their applications should be recommended for learner to construct creative and significant ideas. Printed self-learning material in the form of text books for the learner must be prepared to support the availability of study material. The self-learning material are developed in a way to permit distance learners to get all facts desired to understand the concepts or subject problem under study without requiring supplementary materials. The open and distance learning courses are seen as the devices to encourage attention, motivate learner learning and guidance to provide opinion as well as facilitate retention. The latest teaching and learning exchange framework is based on six hypothesises as follows-

1. Approaches of personal associations between the learning and teaching individuals and groups promote learning, desire and inspiration.

2. Such moods can be nurtured on the one hand to another hand by interaction through a fully developed self-instructional material.

3. Logicalchoice and learning motivation are encouraged to the achievement of education goal and the use of proper study routes and methods.

4. The environment, linguistic and concordsof friendly conversation favourmoods of personal associations according to hypothesis(1).

5. Communications given and received in intimate forms are easily agreed and recalled.

6. The discussion concept can be positively applied to open and distance education and the means available to it.

As it is known that in open and distance learning there is a choice to learn through one-way or two-way traffic modes. As communication and interface have been considered as a perilous trait in developing active and independent distance learners. Communication through written learning resources or audio-visual documented guidelines can be considered as psychologically vital to support learner individuality. The core of open and distance learning is the liberation of the learner to establish instruction so that better choice in learning can be possible for the learner. In an open and distance learning atmosphere the learner and the teacher are associated to each other by a range of communication techniques. Distance is considered as a task of individualization and interchange when absence of physical closeness. It is also appealing to explore web-based instruction and other communicating technologies that are becoming more commonly used in open and distance universities will have extra impact on learner-teacher interaction and communication and they will strengthen independent and liberated learning. These questions will be significant for analyzing quality in open and distance universities. How can we implement, maintain and improve the quality of interaction and communication? What kind of ethics and potentials must be developed in order to coherent the balance between interaction and communication? Nunan and Calvert (1992) concentrated on two key areas to assure quality in open and distance universities–

1. The process and production of course.
2. Programme material and the distribution of open and distance education to learners.

According to Stella and Gnanam (2004) *The American Council on Education* (ACE) suggested the following mainscopethat focus more on learning support and results like learning scheme, learner care, administrative promise, learning products and skill. The more comprehensive evidence on quality assurance areas in open and distance universities has been disclosed by Jung (2004) after a survey of fourteen(14)universities as institutional quality and standards, academic framework, accountability to stakeholders, internal collaborative assessment at the *United Kingdom Open University* (UKOU) and honesty, springiness, quality sequences, support services at the *Athabasca University in Alberta*.

According to Latchem and Ali (2102) the World Bank and UNESCO also supporting the quality assurance due to it the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) including the Asian Quality Assurance Network (AQAN) and the Central Asian Network for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (CANQAA) are trying to develop the quality assurance in regulated open and distance universities by them.

As it is indicated that the most of open and distance universities has approved the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) prepared by the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) to assistance fellow institutes. For the implementation of framework of Asian Association of Open Universities, the Open and distance universities used these five criterion-

1. Advancement of quality assurance policy guide.
2. Self-evaluation and pre-planning and setting for quality manage.
3. Development of the quality assurance career instructions.
4. Enactment and amendment of the quality assurance job manuals.
5. Continuous and comprehensive evaluation of quality assurance operation.

Advancement of Quality Assurance Policy Guide

Adapting Asian Association of Open Universities Quality Assurance Framework as a monitor the open and distance universities are need to change best practices and operate following programmes to improve quality assurance –

- Strategy and scheduling
- Social source employment and expansion
- Administration and supervision
- Apprentices
- Program proposal and progress
- Course scheme and change
- Education provisions
- Valuation of student knowledge
- Broadcasting for education

Self-Evaluation and Pre-Planning and Setting for Quality Manage

In instruction for open and distance universities to appreciate the existing quality. It is vital to self-evaluate observed ideas of quality in all sub-processes within the organization's operations with best performances as expressed and verbalized in the quality assurance career instructions. To affect quality assurance, implementation must be done with new changes in the policy modification or policy amendment through harmonious approaches step by step.

Development of the Quality Assurance Career Instructions

Open and distance universities quality assurance career instructions are pronounced as reference standards. They hold exact and clearly specified schemes and events, accounts of deeds and vital instructions to monitor staff in their regular activities. The quality assurance career instructions define responsibilities and indicate the co-relationship between unit and within units charged with performance explicit activities. The techniques termed in quality assurance career instructions show in detail the phases of each movement and ordered analytically to shape a vision of what the whole system should look like and how it should optimally operate.

Enactment and Amendment of the Quality Assurance Job Manuals

The then grave phase is enactment and amendment of the quality assurance Job Manuals. Firstly, everybody desires to identify "where they are going?" then a rough road line describing "how they should get there.". To support staff, circumnavigate the road line to open and distance universities' cooperative future, recognized selected clearly pronounced their idea of open and distance universities' future in a specific period to ensure everybody so that everyone realizes "what is expected of them in performing their daily tasks.?".

Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation of Quality Assurance Operation

Actual application of quality assurance needs substantial modification in the united mind-set and scion philosophy of the institution. Quality assurance wants everybody within the institution growing, regarding, and supporting every day. The role of human assets is important in executing quality assurance,

therefore goal of open and distance universities is to offer the means to permit its persons to recover the university's complete performance and care its energies in comprehensive and continuous quality improvement operations. The open and distance universities can increase performances by -

- providing exact guidelines for teachers and learners.
- arrangement of sufficient number of qualified teachers for running courses.
- providing proper training to teachers for the course.
- giving constructive feedback to the teacher and learners.
- monitoring learner's and teacher's progress.
- providing easily accessible modes for teaching and learning with varieties.
- providing counseling guidelines for the teachers and learners with the synchronous and asynchronous routes according to the needs of the learners.
- active mechanism for observing and assessing learning and learner support services.

Conclusively the open and distance learning has been rapidly renovated as a result of the progression, growth and the new types of communications. It was started with the aim to provide education for the community that was not able to attend regular and traditional universities. But there were many problems about norms and regulation, admissions and interaction with the learner. It was not so easy for the open and distance universities to grow with the conventional system of education. It was also a problem to conveyance and influence the learner to connect with them. But finally the miracle efforts to strengthen the quality were made by the open and distance universities to standup and to develop a unique area to provide education with distance and to satisfy the learner. Today by paradigm shift in distance models, open and distance universities can assure the quality through following changes-

1. Technology - Interactive-community building, empirical, information-interchange, computers based learning experience, self-motivated media presentation.

2. Instruction - Learner centered, open, flexible, any time-anywhere, constructive

3. Role of teacher - Co-learner, evaluates and supports route, growth, and products of learner

4. Role of learner - member, promote

5. Learning - active and multichannel based

6. Knowledge – self based, empirical, application based, summative and formative

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