

**STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN OPEN AND DISTANCE  
LEARNING SYSTEM: A CASE STUDY OF THE INSTITUTE OF  
DISTANCE AND OPEN LEARNING (IDOL), GAUHATI  
UNIVERSITY**

**BORNALI DEKA\***

**Abstract**

Open and Distance Learning system (ODL) has made impressive growth in the state of Assam, in the last couple of years. The setting up of the IDOL, Gauhati University; DDE, Dibrugarh University; CODL, Tezpur University; and Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University have been playing the major role behind such impressive growth. As ODL system is a self learning system, therefore the learner support services plays a key role in this system. Therefore, each and every ODL institutions are trying their best to provide quality support services to their learners to achieve 100% success and IDOL, Gauhati University is no exception to this. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to study about the growth of IDOL, Gauhati University as a premier institution in Assam and the student support services provided by this institute.

**Key Words: ODL , Student Support Services, Assam, IDOL Gauhati University.**

\* Assistant Professor, Department Of Education, Bihpuria College, Bihpuria, Lakhimpur

## Introduction

Among the few innovations in the field of education, distance education ranks very high. Its importance is being realised because of its usefulness and potentials for providing greater access to education and making education available, flexible and innovative. Over the last few decades the revolution in communications has opened out vast possibilities for widening, strengthening and deepening the educational system. Right to education has revolutionized thinking of the education planners and administrators. Distance education has come into the educational scene as one of the most potent strategies to fulfill the demands of the mass education as well as individualising it (Rana, 1994).

In a huge country like India where the fruits of development are not equally distributed, the importance of ODL system is tremendous. ODL system is being adopted throughout the world as an important tool to ensure access, equity and quality in the realm of higher education. ODL in its organized form is one of the path breaking innovations in the field of education of the Twentieth century. The period between “1960-1985” has witnessed remarkable growth of distance education all around the world (IGNOU, 2001). Over the past decades, there has been noticeable growth in distance education around the world. It is very much evident from the increasing enrolment in ODL institutions (Fozdar, Kumar and Kannan 2006). Reddy (2005) stated that among the few innovations in the field of education, distance education ranks very high. Distance education is that mode of education which frees the student from the necessity of travelling to a fixed place, at a fixed time, to meet a fixed person in order to be trained. In this context, Rastogi (2007) said that distance education has provided openness to learning and students have a freedom to learn at own rate, pace and time. The growing population of a country demands a system of education which brings the education to the door steps of the learners. The need for such education which could be provided to an individual at his own place gave birth to the concept of ODL system. It has emerged in the developing countries to promote higher education and play a vital role in accommodating the aspirants, especially adult learners in getting accommodated in the higher education sector. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education in India is around 17% at present and this is well below the world average of 24%. It is opined that ODL system is the answer in the developing country like India to raise the GER in higher education and in this context ODL system gains much significance in the present

scenario. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), functioning at the national level for almost three decades, made considerable progress and gives equity and access to those who could not join the formal mode of higher education (**Kishore, 1998**). ODL worldwide has been established as an effective and innovative alternative system of education. This system can fulfil the educational needs of different categories of society, school dropouts, house wives, employed people who want to learn while earning some livelihood, people from rural areas and all these were denied access and opportunity for formal education due to geographical distances, socio-economic and cultural barriers (**Pandit, 2008**).

In the context of education for all, **Sharma (1997)** remarked that the ODL could be seen as an alternative and viable mode to cater to the educational needs of individuals who because of one or the other reason could not continue their education in the formal setup of education. The ODL is a new paradigm with some elements of shift such as:

- From classroom to anywhere.
- From teacher centric to learner centric.
- From teacher as an instructor to teacher as a facilitator.
- From mainly oral instructions to technology aided instructions.
- From fixed time to anytime learning.
- From you learn what we offer to we offer what you want to learn.
- From education as one time activity to education as lifelong activity.

While distance education started in India way back in the 1967, it started in the Northeastern states of India in 1988, when IGNOU established its first North East Regional Centre at Shillong, Meghalaya. Initially, it looked after the educational needs of the entire region. Later, in 1996, the Regional Centre of IGNOU was established in Guwahati to look after the education needs of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim more attentively. By the year 2001, IGNOU had established one Regional Centre in each of the North-eastern states of India. Now, apart from IGNOU, Assam has three Directorates of Distance Education in three state universities, i.e. Gauhati University, Dibrugarh University and one central university, i.e. Tezpur University and one State Open University (Krishna Kanta Handiqe State Open University).

Open and Distance Learning is that type of instruction in which the student and the instructor are separated by physical distance. Distance learners are those who are pursuing their education

through the distance mode like Open Universities, Open Schools and Centre for Correspondence Institutes. Distance learners has to be depend more on his own initiative and motivation than anything else as distance education is a self learning method. Classroom teaching is absent in the system. The learner has to make progress according to his own capacity and everything has to be achieved by oneself. Distance Learners are categorized into manifold. They may be younger ones, middle aged and older ones. They might be belonging to literate, semiliterate, skilled, semi skilled and unskilled categories. They also may be employed, physically challenged and differently abled.

The growing population of a country demands a system of education which brings the education to the doorsteps of the needy learners, (Selvam, 1999). Distance education system is the only system which made it possible by including all groups of people particularly the disadvantage groups. Therefore, distance mode of education is increasing popular among the new generation learners. Since distance education is 'learner centered', the institutions of distance education mainly focus their attention on every strategy and practice that promote quality and excellence in relation to the intuitional performance on the one hand and enhancement of satisfaction of their stakeholders concerned on the other. Quality Assurance has been defined in the literature of distance education as continuing, active and integrative process for maintaining and enhancing quality. Singh and Paliwal (2012) stated that the distance education system is more learner-oriented and the learner is an active participant in the pedagogical (teaching and learning) process. Therefore, learning process plays a key role in ODL system. It is the heart of the ODL system without which it cannot function properly.

Therefore, this paper is an attempt to study the growth of IDOL, Gauhati University as an ODL system; academic support provided by the institute and learners satisfaction with the institution.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are to:

1. Study the growth of the IDOL, Gauhati University as an institution of ODL system in Assam,
2. Find out the academic supports provided by IDOL, Gauhati university; and

### Methodology of the Study

The present piece of research is a qualitative type of research, because, here the researcher made an in-depth study about the growth of the open and distance learning system of the Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL), Gauhati University. The study also falls under the area of documentary analysis research because in the study different documents relating to the growth profile of the open and distance learning system of the Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL), Gauhati University are analyzed. This research is also a descriptive type of research. This descriptive research is designed to obtain information on the current status and phenomena by analyzing the conditions that exist and also the description of the records and documents available for this case study. Present study is also concerned with studying the satisfaction of the learners in Open and Distance Learning System. The study broadly falls under case study type of research. The study is considered under case study type research, because, in this study in order to know about the satisfaction of the learners in Open and Distance Learning System, an in-depth analysis of the open and distance learning system of the Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL), Gauhati University is made. The methodologies used in the study differ from the objective to objective of the study. The methodologies used in the study for achieving the different objectives of the study are given below-

### 3. Table- 3.1 Objective Wise Methodologies

Objectives	Description of Objectives	Methodology Used
1.	To study the growth of the IDOL, Gauhati University as an institution of ODL system in Assam	Documentary analysis
2.	To find out the academic supports provided by IDOL, Gauhati University	Documentary analysis-cum-interview schedule

## PARTICIPANTS

Present study is conducted in Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL), Gauhati University. Present study is concerned with achieving three objectives. For achieving the first objective of the study the different document of Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL), Gauhati University is analyzed. For achieving the second objective of the study, the different

document of Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL), Gauhati University is analyzed as well as data is collected from selected number of administrators of Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL), Gauhati University with the help of an interview schedule.

## Major Findings of the Study

### 1. Growth of the IDOL, Gauhati University as an Institution of ODL System

The Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL), formerly known as Post Graduate Correspondence School (PGCS), was established in May 1998 with the objective to ensure the opportunity to pursue quality higher education to the large number of learners who could not pursue higher education through conventional mode of education. The institute started functioning in May 1998 with 514 learners and 6 courses i.e., M.A. in Assamese, M.A. in English, M.A. in Economics, M.A. in History, M.A. in Political Science and M.Sc. in Mathematics. From the very beginning of the institute in 1998 with only 514 learners and 6 courses, IDOL now witnesses its growth in all capacities with an enrolment of more than twenty thousand learners and 29 programmes in various disciplines of science, arts and commerce in a learning environment equipped with latest technologies. Starting in 1998 as Post Graduate Correspondence School (PGCS), the institute is renamed as Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL) in the year 2008. The institute aims at using new and latest technologies to impart education to its learners. The first *E-learning Portal* of the North-East India ([www.bodhidroom.idolgu.in](http://www.bodhidroom.idolgu.in)) was developed by IDOL, Gauhati University. *Radio Luit*, the Community Radio Centre is latest mode in learners support services of the institute. At this moment, the institute has 10 study centres and other 83 contact centres at different corners of the state in order to help the needy learners.

### 2. Academic Supports Provided by IDOL, Gauhati University for the Satisfaction of the Learners

- IDOL has total 10 study centers and 83 contact centres; and these study centers and contact centres are spread all over Assam.
- Presently IDOL is offering 29 courses at various levels (master degree, bachelor degree, post graduate diploma etc.) referring to various disciplines (science, arts and commerce etc.). Out of these 29 courses, 16 are master degree level courses, 4 bachelor degree level courses, 8 are post graduate diploma level courses and 1 is

certificate level course. Among all these courses being offered by IDOL, 22 courses are theory based courses (courses having term end theory examination and submission of assignments) and 7 courses are practical based courses (courses having term end theory examination, term end practical examination and submission of assignments).

- The admission to different courses is generally done in the month of July / August. The admission for all courses is done one time in a year besides PGDCA, BCA, CCA and B. Sc. IT courses for which admission is done two times in a year i.e. January and mid June. The admission for different courses is done in both Main Centre (Headquarter) and Study Centers. The institute also provides the provision of lateral entry system for the courses like MCA and M Sc. IT.
- For all courses under IDOL, Gauhati University, study materials are available both in printed and online formats. The study materials are developed by the institute itself. The study materials are despatched to the learners in person or by hand, by post, by online and through contact centers /study centers. Besides the study materials, other type of supplementary materials like reference books, guide books, enrichment/ diagnostic materials etc. are also available in the IDOL, Gauhati University library.
- Assignment submission is compulsory for attending the Term-End Examination for all courses. The institute follows a certain time frame for submission of assignment. Time deadline of submitting assignments vary from the subject to subject/ course to course, and the assignment questions change from session to session. After evaluating the assignments, those are not returned back to the learners but marks/grades of the assignments are reported to them.
- In theory based courses, the counseling procedure is restricted to classrooms only. On the other hand, in case of practical based courses, the counseling is done in classrooms as well as in laboratories. The counseling session generally spreads throughout the session, for each subject minimum ten classes are held. Attending counseling session is not compulsory to appear the Term End Examination for the learners of theory based courses. But attendance in practical counseling sessions is compulsory for the learners of practical based courses. Along with Personal Contact Programmes (PCP), regular weekend tutorial classes are also conducted for the learners of Master Degree

(Arts and Science) and MCA courses on Saturdays and Sundays. Learners have to pay extra fees at the time of admission for availing this kind of facility.

- For some Master level courses annual examination and evaluation system is practiced; and for some other courses semester system of examination and evaluation is followed by the institute. Both the study centers and main centre are responsible for conducting the Term-End examination. All courses are certified with division including percentage of marks. The result of TEE is always declared in time and the learners are reported the results through institutional notice board and website and also through bulk 'SMS'.
- All categories of records like learners assignment record, achievement record, service record, study centre record, attendance in counseling record etc. are well maintained both manually and electronically by the institute.
- Different types of study materials like reference books, guide books, journals, magazines and periodicals etc. are available in the library. The library is well equipped with about 6525 books, 12 Journals, 14 Magazines, 14 news papers, 164 dissertations and about 60 other non book items like CD/DVD/Question bank etc. The library materials are fully computerized. E-Study materials are also available in the institute website. The library is not e-governed.
- Almost all kind of multimedia accessories are available in the institute. The institute has facilities of computer and printer, xerox, radio, television, loudspeaker, multimedia projector, smart digital classroom etc. Apart from self-learning materials and counseling services, IDOL aims to maximize learning opportunities through new modes or multi media.
- The institute organizes different programmes like seminar, workshop, discussions etc. from time to time for both learners and counselors.
- The total number of faculty members in IDOL, Gauhati University is 5 and the number of academic consultant is 9.



## Conclusion

The study shows that ODL has made impressive growth in the state of Assam, in the last couple of years. The setting up of the IDOL, Gauhati University; DDE, Dibrugarh University; CODL, Tezpur University; and Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University have been playing the major role behind such impressive growth. As ODL system is a self learning system, therefore the learner support services plays a key role in this system. Therefore, each and every ODL institutions are trying their best to provide quality support services to their learners to achieve 100% success and IDOL, Gauhati University is no exception to this. This institute has adopted the help of technological tools to provide quick and quality support services to the learner community. IDOL, Gauhati University has also developed Online support service system for the learner community along with other electronic media services. We are of the view that every institution should concentrate on learner complaints, continuous training of the staff, introduction of new techniques, and development of communication channels. With the appropriate use and minimum modifications the ODL institutions can make the programmes also accessible to all.

## References

- Chander, J. (1998). Towards a Better Student Support System in Distance Education in Ramaiah, P and K. Murali Manohar (eds): *Student Support Services in Distance Education*, IDEA 1998, pp. 11-18.
- Fozdar, B.I., Kumar, L.S., & Kannan, S. (2006). A Survey of a Study on the Reasons Responsible for Students Dropout from the Bachelor of Science Programme at Indira Gandhi National Open University. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 7 (3).
- IGNOU.(2001). The International Scene -1. Course Material of PGDDE Course (ES – 311, Block-3). New Delhi:IGNOU.
- Kishore, S. (1998). Student Support and Quality Indicators in Distance Learning. *Indian Journal of Open Learning*, 7(2), 205-212.
- Official database of IDOL, Gauhati University .
- Pandit, V.P. (2008). Expanding the Scope of Open Distance Learning for Development in India. *University News*, 46 (4).

Rastogi, S. (2007). Meeting Challenges of ODL System in India. *University News*, 45(15).

Reddy, S.V.S. (2005). Students Problems in Distance Education. *Journal of Adult Education and Extension*, 1 (2).

Selvam, M.(1999). Corelation between Level of Dissatisfaction and Dropout of Distance Learner: A Case Study. *Indian Journal of Open Learning*, 8 (3).

Sharma, O.P. (1997). Attendance in Personal Contact Programmes and Performance of Open Learners. *Indian Journal of Open Learning*, 6 (2).

Singh, G., & Paliwal, D. (2012). Higher Education to Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime Through Open and Distance Learning In India. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 1(1).

Sweet, R. (1986). Student Dropout in Distance Education: An Application of Tinto's Mode. *Journal of Distance Education*, 7(1), 201-213.

.....

I J M R A