E- everything in Open and Distance Learning of Higher Educational Institutions in Assam : A Case Study

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Abstract

The application of electronic media in open and distance education has made significant impact in India in imparting education to the deprived. This paper highlights the applications of different electronic system in the open and distance learning higher educational institutions of Assam. The different services like e-learning portal, community radio, toll free helpline numbers etc. of these open and distance learning educational institutions of Assam have been discussed here.

Keywords: Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Higher Education-Assam, e-Governance, e-learning Portal

1. Introduction

Education is essential for the socio economic development of a country. In India, the rate of literacy is 74.04% according to 2011 census. The formal education systems through schools, colleges and universities have not been able to fulfill the educational need of the large population in India. To cater the need of education, the concept of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) education has become popular in India. In ODL system reaching each and every student is quite difficult. But due to application of ICT and especially electronic media the task has now seemed to become simpler. The amalgamation of physical system with the electronic or digital system has made it easier and popular. From the step of admission to examination and publication of result electronic system can make the ODL system more open.

E-everything is a new concept where everything is desirable to be accessible online. In the ICT based society, everything is in electronic (e) form which makes a system or service smooth and smart. Michael R. Nelson described about the E- everything as, 'Applications of the Internet will be part of everyday life. Everything will have a little intelligence, and everything will be able to communicate.'

This concept of e-everything has touched every aspect of life including the higher education system. Betty Leydon, the Vice Provost for Information Technology and CIO at Duke University has mentioned about the E-everything in the present academic scenario as, 'Higher education is wrestling with the "e-everything revolution." Internet access and the web allow colleges and universities to do much of their business, administrative and academic, online.'

E-Governance is a part of e-everything where ICT can play a major role. G2C i.e. Government to Citizen is a form of e-Governance in which Government meets the people for the benefits of the common people. In the case of ODL, the students can be considered as citizen and the Institution can be considered as Government. To reach the students of distance learning the G2C model of e-Governance can be applied. To provide the different facilities and services to the students at their door steps G2C e-Governance model is found to be

fruitful. As in the ODL system of education there is less contact between the students and the institution, so in this regard wide application of e-Governance will be helpful for the students.

2.   E-governance and National Knowledge Commission

The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) is a high-level advisory body to the Prime Minister of India. The NKC was constituted on 13 June 2005 and started from 2 October 2005 for three years. This Commission has given some recommendation on different key areas such as education, science and technology, agriculture, industry, e-governance etc. The NKC suggested that investment in knowledge services will produce large-scale benefits for the common man. Technology has the potential to make government services and functioning more accountable, transparent and efficient. E-governance can change the way in which the citizens of India perceive and interact with the government. The use of knowledge services, more popularly known as e-governance, has the potential to simplify many different points at which citizens interact with the state. Traditionally these points of interaction have been vulnerable to unscrupulous activities and rent-seeking.

According to National Knowledge Commission the benefits of e-Governance consist of

♦ Reducing the cost and improving the quality of public services;

♦ Reducing transaction costs and transaction times;

♦ Empowering citizens and increasing transparency of government functioning; and

♦ Re-engineering of processes that result in greater efficiency and productivity.

A prominent recent example of good e-governance has been the introduction of the online reservation system of the Indian Railways. Similarly, the creation of portals on water resources, power, agriculture, business, etc. can provide the public with information that is useful and readily accessible.

In education sector also and especially in ODL system the concepts of e-Governance can be applied to give the students more information easily, more quickly, transparently and efficiently.

3.   Open and distance learning education

The website of University of Mumbai defines the open and distance education as 'a distinct approach to impart education to learners who are removed in space and / or time from the teachers or the teaching institution on account of economic, social and consideration.'

An increasing number of universities are offering distance learning programmes as an additional educational facility. Wikipaeida define the Distance education as **"**a field of education that focuses on the pedagogy and andragogy, technology, and instructional systems design that aim to deliver education to students who are not physically 'on site'". In this education system "rather than attending courses in person, teachers and students may communicate at times of their own choosing by exchanging printed or electronic media, or

through technology that allows them to communicate in real time and through other chatting ways.".
According to the Wikipaedia, the University of London was the first university to offer this type of education
system started in 1858. In India, the University of Delhi established the School of Correspondence Course
and Continuing Education in 1962. The Open University of United Kingdom is first full-fledged form of open
and distance learning university started in 1969. In India, the Dr BR Ambedkar Open University is the first
of its kind started in 1982. In 1985, a committee was constituted by the Ministry of Education to develop a
project report on Indira Gandhi National Open University. Prof. G. Ram Reddy was called upon to develop
the project document. On the basis of that project report, the Union Government introduced a bill in the
Parliament in 1985 and the National Open University came into existence in September 1985.

Now in India, there are 13 State Open University, one National University (IGNOU) about 200 Directorate of
Distance Education of the dual mode of university. The quality of the education system in these institutes
is not less than the regular courses. These universities are recognized by the Distance Education Council
(DEC) of India. Regarding the ODL system, the NKC gives prior importance on a radical reform of this
system as more than one-fifth of the students enrolled in higher education are in the ODL stream. For
another, ODL has an enormous potential to spread higher education opportunities beyond the brick and
mortar world.

4.   Open and distance learning educational institutions of Assam

The ODL system of education in Assam is not a new one as the IGNOU is pioneer of open and distance
learning in Assam as it started its study center in Guwahati in 1986. In Assam both the leading state
universities i.e. Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University are providing distance education under their
Directorate of Distance Education. Gauhati University started distance education through its Directorate of
Distance Education established in 1998. Post Graduate Correspondence School (PGCS) of Gauhati University
has been now changed to Institute of Open and Distance Learning (IDOL) from 2009.

In Dibrugarh University, Academic Council decided to introduce Distance Education in the University on
2000 and the Directorate of Distance Education (DDE, DU) was established in 2001. Both of these Universities
provide different courses including certificate courses, PG Diploma Master Degree Course on different
subject areas.

Now in Assam, Krishna Kanta Handqui State Open University (KKHSOU) is the first state Open University
of the North East Region of India has been established in 2006 and it started its academic programme from
January, 2008.

Tezpur University is one of the central univertsity in the Assam, entered in the open and distance learning
educatoin system. It has also started the distance education programme under the Centre for Open and
Distance Learning (CODL) in 2011. This University offers PG Diploma and Master Degree courses in six
subjects.

Table 1: Parent University and the ODL Institutions of Assam

Sl No	Name of the Parent University	Year of establishment	Name of ODL Institution	Year of establishment
1	Gauhati University	1948	IDOL, GU	1998
2	Dibrugarh University	1965	DDE, DU	2001
3	Krishna Kanta Handqui State Open University	2006	KKHSOU, Assam	2006
4	Tezpur University	1994	CODL, Tezpur University	2011

Besides these four, there are different open and distance learning institutions in Assam which are running as study centers of other private as well as some government universities.

5.   E- governance Tools and its Application

In e- governance environment, the academic institutions are now providing a more flexible and open learning environment to the students using different ICT tools which helps in breaking the traditional barriers of time and place associated with the delivery of education and helps the parent institutions to implement distance education in an easier way and makes the education a lifelong process in real sense.

The NKC also gives proper importance on the application of ICT in the ODL. In its report, the NKC mentioned, 'A national Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure must be set up through government support for networking all ODE institutions.'

Moreover, the Commission also recommends on creation of web-based repository of high quality educational resources. The report also mentioned 'Open Educational Resources (OER) must be created online through a collaborative process, pooling in the efforts and expertise of all major institutions of higher education. The OER repository would supply pedagogical software for various programmes run through ODE and be available for utilization by all ODL institutions.'

The application of ICT on ODL institutions of Assam is discussed here by analyzing four leading institutions i.e. IDOL-GU, DDE-DU, KKHSOU- Assam and CODL of Tezpur University.

5.1 Website

The website for an educational institution is a very important facility as it provides detail, official and authentic information of the institution worldwide. The information regarding these four distance learning institutions can be accessed through their following official website.

Table 2: Official website of ODL Institutions of Assam

Sr. No	Institution	Website
1	IDOL, GU	www.idolgu.org
2	DDE, DU	http://ddedu.org
3	KKHSOU, Assam	www.kkhsou.in
4	CODL, Tezpur University	http://www.tezu.ernet.in/tu_codl/

5.2 Course Material

In the ODL system, the course material (Self Learning Materials) is designed and provided by the university itself. Now in ICT based ODL the course materials are become available in electronic form along with the printed one.

The study materials of different course are now uploaded on website of the institutions. Besides the course materials, the sample question papers are also made available there. IDOL, GU makes available of its study material at the 'Bodhi Droom' where all the course materials are uploaded subject wise. This e-learning portal is available at http://www.bodhidroom.idolgu.org/
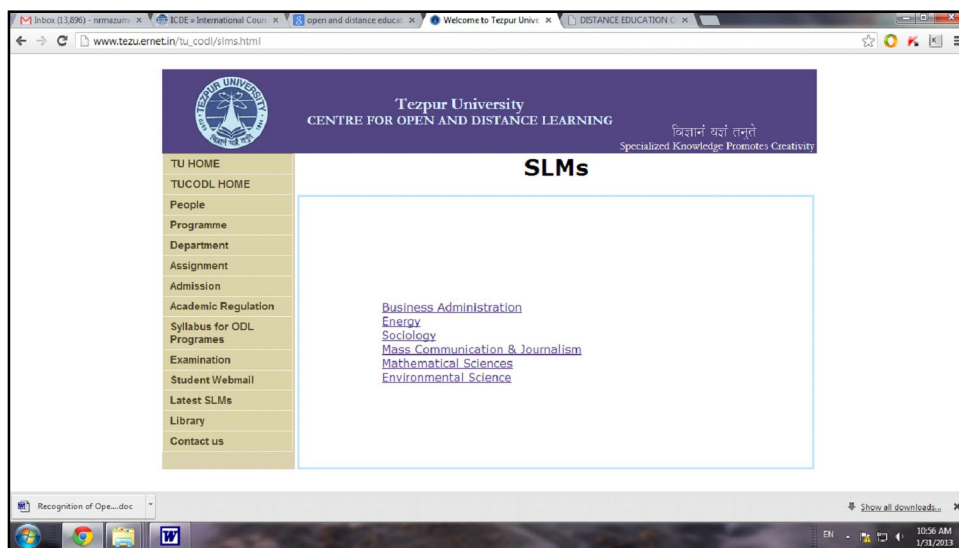

Figure1: Bodhidroom the e-learning portal of IDOL, GU

The 'E-Bidya' is the e-learning portal of the KKHSOU where the study materials of the University on various subjects are available for access.

Figure 2: E-Bidya e-learning portal of the KKHSOU

CODL, Tezpur University has their course content of different courses in soft version which are available and accessible from their webpage SLMs.

Figure 3: SLMs of CODL, TU

DDE, DU has yet to develop its e-learning portal.

5.3 Community radio

Community radio is one of the popular media to reach the unreached. The open and distance education center should have their own community radio station for providing the community as well course on air for the students at distance and dense.

In the North Eastern Region of India, KKHSOU took the first initiative to launch the first community radio service of the region. The Community radio service of the KKHSOU is named as Jnan Taranga (90.4 FM) which has been rendering its broadcasting service since 20 November, 2010.

The IDOL, GU has started its radio station known as Radio Luit (90.8 FM) the second community radio of the region, was launched on 1st March, 2011. The DDE, DU has also taken initiative in using this type of radio service for the benefit of the distance learner. It has launched its Radio Programme on 15th March, 2012 which is broadcasted every Thursday from 8.00 pm to 8.30 pm in All India Radio Dibrugarh. CODL, Tezpur Unuiversity has yet to launch this valuable service for their student community.

5.4 Assignment

The assigning and submission of Assignment is a very important aspect in open and distance learning education system. Now the ICT has brought changes in this aspect of ODL system. In ICT based ODL system, the assigning and submission process of Assignment to the student community is expected to be in digital form or online.

IDOL, GU used to upload the Assignment to the student in its official website at 'Student Corner'.

The DDE, DU also has a separate page naming Assignment where details of the Assignments are uploaded course wise. The marks of Assignment are also declared in this particular page.

The KKHSOU also uploads the assignment course wise in their website.

In CODL, TU website, a separate page is there for the Assignment where the students are instructed to submit the same via email/ webmail.

5.5 Alert services

Now a days SMS alert service has become a popular and important services in different sector and in distance education also it is very important as it can alert and inform the maximum number of user within a limited time. Email alert facility is also become very important and authentic alert service. This service alerts the members of the institutions about the day to day news on submission date of assignment, date of form fill-up, examination date, result etc.

The official news from the KKHSOU can be subscribed by sending SMS writing 'ON KKHSOU' to 9870807070. The IDOL, GU also provides the SMS alert to its community. Both of these centers provide the Email alert facility also. DDE, DU and CODL, Tezpur University has not started this type of service yet.

5.6 Declaration of result

The result of the open and distance education center is generally declared and announced online and the result and the mark sheet (provisional) can be viewed online and downloaded. Now the results are made available over the mobile phone also.

The IDOL, GU, DDE, DU and KKHSOU provide this facility to the user. CODL, Tezpur University has not started this service.

5.7 Toll free number

Toll free number is also very important tool for open and distance learning institution which can provide educational interactive voice response for meeting the educational need of the students.

IDOL, GU has a toll free number 1800-345-3614 and it also installed Interactive Voice Response (IVR) System.

KKHSOU starts this service from 1st January 2011 and is the first educational toll-free system Interactive Voice Response (IVR) System in NE India region. The toll-free number is 1800-345-3613. DDE, DU and CODL, TU have no toll free number.

5.8 Other facilities

Now social networking sites are more popular among the folks specially among the student community and are very important for the open and distance learning institutions as this gives the learner a platform for discussing their problems, queries online through chat, group, forum etc.

KKSHOU developed and has launched its social networking site in 2011.

In IDOL, GU also facilities like online chat, group, forum etc are there through which the student can contact with the Subject coordinator as well as other course-mate online.

In CODL, TU the Student Webmail facility is there for the learner which is very much essential in open and distance learning. DDE, DU has not linked with this facility.

6.   Conclusion

In the present e-everything environment, a tremendous and continuous change has been occurred in the ODL system that brings various chances and challenges to the student as well as to the staff. In open and distance learning processes, the learners are far away from the physical learning environment, but the application of ICT provides the maximum opportunity both to the student and teacher community for academic interaction using different ICT tools. In Assam, the scenario of application of ICT in ODL is not ignorable, though DDE, DU is lacking behind in this race. IDOL, GU and KKHSOU are very active in this area. CODL, TU is a central Govt funded institution; they are expected to be more sophisticated particularly in this aspect. We hope in the coming days all these ODL based institutions will link with more ICT based teaching-learning-evaluating system so that the real fruits of e-everything can be enjoyed by everybody. Specially, the separate e-library facility is a demand of time for the ODL learner with a facility to access journal, books and other reference sources online. The workshop/ short term training programmes on application of ICT on education system specially on ODL system arranging for both the teacher & student community are very essential. The National Mission for Education through ICT (NME-ICT) is the bold step of Government of India for implementation of Information & commutation technology in educational sector.

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