UNIT 15: DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ASSAM

UNIT STRUCTURE

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15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the development of distance education for school education in Assam
- explain the development of distance education for higher education in Assam

15.2 INTRODUCTION

Distance education is characterised by a non-conformist and non-traditional approach which, in effect, questions existing norms of traditional education and seeks to provide a new orientation to educational processes. It assumes premises about the nature of learning that are vastly different from those governing the traditional system of education. Moreover, it has its own dialectic register which arises out of its endeavour to overcome the problems that are implicit in imparting instruction to students who are at a distance from the teacher and/or the institution. Distance education, in comparison with the conventional education system, is a wider system in terms of both connotation and denotation. Its connotation is wider because it works in a much larger learning situation: a situation in which many factors remain indeterminate and inchoate. It has a wider denotation in that it covers

a considerable distance in order to affect academic communication. Development of distance education in Assam is not very old. In this unit, we shall discuss the development of distance education in Assam.

15.3 DEVELOPMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR SCHOOL EDUCATION IN ASSAM

To provide open and distance education to the learner of school level in Assam, the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) formerly known as National Open School (NOS) was established in November, 1989 as an autonomous organisation in pursuance of National Policy on Education 1986 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India. NIOS is providing a number of vocational, life enrichment and community-oriented courses besides general and academic courses at Secondary and Senior Secondary level. It also offers Elementary level Courses through its Open Basic Education Programmes (OBE). Government of India through a gazette notification vested NIOS with the authority to examine and certify learners registered with it up to pre-degree level courses whether academic, technical or vocational. Association of Indian Universities, vide letter No. EV/11(354)/91/ 25 July, 1991 issued equivalence of Senior Secondary Certificate Examination of NIOS.

Vision of NIOS is sustainable inclusive learning with universal and flexible access to quality school education and skill development. The mission of NIOS are:

- To provide relevant, continuing and holistic education up to pre-degree level through open and distance learning system.
- To contribute to the universalisation of school education.
- To cater to the educational needs of the prioritised target groups for equity and social justice.

The Institute has been quite successful in its endeavour. With about 2.2 million students on its roll, NIOS is credited to be the largest open school in the world with significant popularity in the Commonwealth countries and in certain other developing and developed countries. NIOS has been offering

Secondary and Senior Secondary and Vocational Education & training (VET) courses through its study centres and Open Basic Education Programme through Accredited Agencies.

NIOS not only offers a wide spectrum of courses of study up to the pre-degree level for all categories of learners, but also works as a nodal institute for carrying forward the open school movement in Assam in order to achieve the objective of developing an inclusive learning society. This has been possible due to dedication and unstinting support from all faculty and staff of the institute and other stakeholders.

At present NIOS, Assam has the following academic and vocational courses:

- **Academic Programmes:**

NIOS offers three academic programmes to the learners according to their eligibility. These are:

  - Open Basic Education: This education is for all children (age group 6-14 years), youths and adults. This education is offered at three levels:
    Level A: Equivalent to standard III of formal school education.
    Level B: Equivalent to standard V of the formal school education.
    Level C: Equivalent to standard VIII of the formal school education.
  - Secondary education: This course of education is equivalent to 10th standard of the formal school system.
  - Senior Secondary Education: This course is designed for those who have passed 10th standard or equivalent examination and would like to continue education towards a Senior Secondary Certification, equivalent to 12th standard.

- **Vocational Programmes:**

At present NIOS offers 103 vocational courses keeping in view the needs of the target groups. Broad areas of the courses are:

  - Agriculture and Animal Husbandry
  - Business and Commerce

- Computer and Information Technology
- Engineering and Technology
- Health and Paramedical
- Home Science and Hospitality Management
- Teacher training

Apart from these, the vocational stream is also available at Secondary and Senior Secondary level. In this scheme, there will be three groups, that is, (i) language subject (minimum one), (ii) 3 core vocational subjects (National Skill Qualification Framework or NSQF Compliant) from one area and (iii) Elective subject (minimum one).

At present many children, young and adult people are benefitted from the varied courses offered by NIOS in Assam.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Open Basic Education covers all children, ...and adults. (Fill in the blank)

Q 2: In which year was National Institute of Open Schooling established?

.....

Q 3: What is the full form of NSQF?

.....

15.4 DEVELOPMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN ASSAM

- In Assam, there are some single mode and dual mode higher education institutions through which open and distance education is provided. These institutions provide quality higher education to those people who face different kinds of barriers in pursuing higher education. In 1986, Indira Gandhi National Open University established its first study centre in the Gauhati University campus. Later on it was shifted to its own

regional centre. The institutions providing distance education in Assam are discussed below:

- **Guwahati Regional Centre of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU):** In 1996, IGNOU's Guwahati Regional Centre was established with a total of 6 study centres and 35 programmes with approximately 1100 learners. This regional centre was established as part of an active initiative to integrate the inaccessible areas of North East India with an overall vision to democratise education for grass-root development of India. Understanding that Education can be one of the most effective paths to equitable and sustainable development, by ensuring access and opportunity to the unreached and marginalised, Guwahati Regional Centre was envisioned to implement open and distance learning modules for this region. At this initial stage, the states of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim also fell under the jurisdiction of Guwahati until the year 2000.

  The main objective of Guwahati Regional Centre is to fulfil the overall vision of IGNOU and for those different initiatives have been taken by this regional centre of IGNOU. Initially, the jurisdiction of Guwahati Regional Centre was limited to a few study centres. With the passage of time Regional Centre Guwahati increased in terms of the number of Study Centres as well as number of academic programmes on offer. Hence, it was felt necessary to bifurcate and establish another Regional Centre in Upper Assam at Jorhat in the year 2013. It was considered to be beneficial both in terms of operation as well as outreach.

  At present, 18 districts of Assam are under the jurisdiction of IGNOU Regional Centre, Guwahati. Out of these 18 districts, IGNOU Regional Centre Guwahati has established Learner Support Centres in 14 districts till now. As on date Regional centre Guwahati has 30 learner support centres, 525 academic counsellors and 78 academic programmes on offer.

  The growth of the enrollment of learners of Guwahati Regional Centre prior and after the establishment of the second Regional Centre at Jorhat (2013) is as given below in the Table-15.1:

Table 15.1: The growth of the enrollment of learners in Guwahati RC

Academic Year (both Jan.,& July)	Total Enrollment of learners
2009	7888
2010	7854
2011	9159
2012	10742
2013	8932
2014	8027
2015	9328
2016	10115
2017	11,914
2018	13,766

Source: http://rcguwahati.ignou.ac.in

Regional Centre, Jorhat had a very modest beginning with 18 study centres and a handful of staff from C.K.B Commerce College premises. Presently, the Regional Centre is working from a rented building near Nehru Park, Jorhat. RC Jorhat is serving the educational needs of about 18000 learners by offering various Bachelors and Masters programme, Diplomas, PG Diplomas, Certificates and Bachelor Preparatory Programme through 26 Learner Support Centres spreading over thirteen (13) districts of Assam covering Jorhat, Golaghat, Sivasagar, Nagaon, Sonitpur, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Charaideo, Hojai, Biswanath and Majuli.

IGNOU as a National Open University always has a huge responsibility to promote and lead the road in making distance education system a success. IGNOU as an embodiment of an apex body in distance education always gave high value to the support services for the distance learners. Among the support services, IGNOU has a large number of study centres that caters to the need of the students. The study centres under IGNOU are sub-divided into the following types:

- Regular Study Centre
- Special Study Centre
- Programme Study Centre
- Sub-Study Centre
- **Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL), Gauhati University:** The Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL),

formerly known as Post Graduate Correspondence School (PGCS) was established in 1998. The main objective of this institute is 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. IDOL is mainly established for those learners who cannot enroll in the conventional system of higher education due to various factors like limited number of seats in Post Graduate classes, livelihood compulsion, etc. and aims to impart quality education in an intellectually challenging learning environment. The institute offers post-graduate programmes, post-graduate diploma programmes, under-graduate programmes, and certificate programmes.

The Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL) had completed its 20 years of successful existence in May 2018. Starting with 514 students and 6 courses in May 1998, IDOL now witnesses its growth in all capacities with an enrollment of more than fifteen thousand students several programmes in a learning environment equipped with latest technologies.

The Institute aimed to reach the wider audience as well as its learners. So, apart from providing self-learning materials and counselling services, IDOL had adopted some innovative steps to maximise its reach to the learners. The first campus based Community Radio- Radio Luit was launched in 2009. The first e-learning portal of the North-East is introduced in 2010. The learners are able to study, download and get answers to their academic queries through it. The portal was named as Bodhidroom. The University also makes use of bulk SMS for its learners. The application of mobile services for the learners has helped them to stay in touch with the latest developments in the institution. Besides ICT, IDOL also offers physical counselling and contact sessions for its learners as part of its student support services.

- **Directorate of Open and Distance Learning, Dibrugarh University:** In the year 2001, The Directorate of Open and Distance Learning (DODL), Dibrugarh University was established. The main

vision of this directorate is to reach the unreached. From the very beginning of establishment of this University, it was observed that most of the departments and the centres of studies of the University received a large number of applications for admission into different programmes offered. Due to limited number of seats in post-graduate and under-graduate classes, a large number of students fail to enroll themselves as students of the University. Considering the necessity of enabling the youths who are either employed or self-employed and who are unable to pursue higher education due to economic or other reasons, the University has set the vision of taking Higher Education to the doorsteps of the learners. For that this directorate was established. The main objectives of this directorate are: (a) to provide access to quality higher education to the people of the region who are deprived of higher education due to various reasons; (b) to provide higher education to those who wish to upgrade or acquire knowledge through studies in various field; (c) to develop knowledge and skills in different areas which are hitherto covered by formal education system existing in the North-East region; (d) to promote research in different fields; and (e) to provide guidance and counselling to its students.

Keeping the vision in mind, the Directorate started its mission with post graduate programmes in Assamese, Commerce, Economics, Mathematics, Political Science, Education and Sociology. Post-graduate diploma courses in Marketing Management and Statistics were added to this list in 2005. PG Diploma in Journalism and Mass Communication have been introduced from the academic sessions 2007-2008 and M.A. in English Programme have been introduced from the academic session 2008-09. Moreover, Bachelor in Business Administration (BBA), Bachelor in Computer Application (BCA) and Post Graduate Diploma in Computer Application (PGDCA) have been launched from the academic session 2010-11. In 2011-2012 the Directorate introduced Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) programme in annual system through distance mode.

- **Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU):** We all know that education is the backbone of a society. In common parlance education is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual. In continuing with the aim of building a knowledge based society, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University was established in 2006 to provide quality higher education through the Open and Distance Learning system to reach the unreached sections of the society. KKHSOU, established under the provision of the KKHSOU, Act' 2005 enacted by the Govt. of Assam & published in the Assam Gazette (extraordinary) dated 29/9/05 has been recognised by the Former Distance Education Council, New Delhi (now DEB, UGC) vide letter no. DEC/Misc/07/5957 dated 03/10/07. The University Grants Commission vide its letter No. F.9-13/2008(CPP-I) dated 18th March, 2009 also has empowered the University to award degrees under Section 22 of UGC Act, 1956. This is the only State Open University in the whole of North East India. The headquarters of the University is located at Rani and Guwahati. The City Campus of the University is functioning from Resham Nagar, Khanapara, Guwahati. The University has a regional centre at Jorhat which was established in December 2013. The jurisdiction and activities of this Regional Centre are spread across seven districts of Upper Assam viz., Golaghat, Jorhat, Majuli, Sivasagar, Charaideo, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. There are 69 Study Centres functioning under Jorhat Regional Centre at present.

The main purpose behind establishment of this University was to promote education to reach the unreached through the Open and Distance Learning system. The main motto of the University is 'Education Beyond Barriers' of age, academic background and geographical boundaries. The main aim of the university is to develop and provide easily accessible modes of quality higher education and training with the use of latest educational inputs and technology. Because of the inherent flexibility in terms of pace and place of learning, methods of

evaluation, etc., the University holds the promise of providing equality of opportunities for higher education, bringing into its fold the deprived and denied sections along with the fresh learners.

The programmes of the University are so designed that it can cater to the needs of the learners of the region. The course structure of the university has been designed at par with the national curriculum. Along with the traditional programmes, the University offers various professional Certificate, Post-graduate diploma and Diploma programmes to enable the already enrolled students in various colleges and educational institutions of the state to pursue add-on studies simultaneously with their regular courses.

The University at present offers different academic programmes like Ph.D. & M.Phil. (in regular mode), Master's Degree. Bachelor's Degree, PG Diploma Programmes, Diploma Programmes and Certificate Programmes.

The Bachelor's Degree programme has been offered by the University since 2008. The Bachelor's programme include B.A., Bachelor of Business Administration, Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor of Computer Application. Apart from these graduate programmes, the University is offering Post Graduate Diploma Programmes in the area of Computer Application, Business Management, Broadcast Journalism, Mass Communication and Human Resource Management. Other Diploma programmes of the University include Journalism & Mass Communication, Creative Writing in English, Computer Hardware and Networking, Library and Information Science and Sanskrit Learning. To create entrepreneurs in the vocational areas, the university has taken a step to make the learners trained in the specialised areas by introducing Certificate programmes in Nursery Management, Tea Cultivation and Plantation Management, Security Personnel and Counselling Skills.

The University was started with 79 study centres at the beginning. Presently, the number of Study Centres has crossed more than 300.

Considering it as social responsibility, the University provides education free of cost to the jail inmates across the state of Assam. The last five years' enrollment and passed out trends of the University is presented in the following Table 15.2 and Table 15.3:

Table 15.2: Number of learners enrolled over the last five years

Year	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of enrolled learners	19640	24802	27335	9782	14339

Table 15.2: Number of learners passed out over the last five years

Year	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of passed numbers	10057	12121	9778	7010	8017

The University has a multi-media studio which is set up with the aim of producing audio as well as audio-visual programmes. The first Community Radio of the North Eastern part of the country- Jnan Taranga (90.0 MHz) has been started by the University since 2009. The Community Radio, being a platform for the community for taking up community issues, is also a platform to broadcast several educational programmes that includes debates, discussions and talk shows.

KKHSOU has implemented its Learning Management System (LMS) using an open source software-MOODLE. Self-Learning Materials in electronic format (eSLM), Audio Visual materials, Web Link, Discussion forum, MCQs, etc. have been provided through the LMS. Initially, KKHSOU launched the LMS for few courses but now this LMS is designed with four quadrants of online learning and is made ready for operation for all programmes/courses of the University from the academic sessions 2020-21. Further, the University provides variety of support services to the learners to facilitate their learning process.

The University has three-tier Learner Support Services i.e., at the Headquarters, at the Jorhat Regional Centre (JRC) and the Learner Support

Centres (LSCs) at the third level opened mainly in Higher Education Institutions of Assam:

- **Learner Support Services provided from the University Headquarters:**
  - Learners' Charter: The University has brought out a Learners' Charter pronouncing the basic rights and responsibilities of its learners, and the learners, in the varied Induction Programmes at the Study Centres, are especially sensitised about this Charter.
  - KKHSOU Mobile Application: This Android application provides learners an access to the University portal using mobile phones.
  - Distribution of Self Learning Materials (SLMs): The SLMs are sent by the University to the all the JRC and LSCs or to the learners directly through the dedicated SLM branch from where learners collect their SLMs.
  - Audio-Visual Lectures: Video classes and academic discussions are produced and uploaded in YouTube.
  - KKHSOU in Social Media: KKHSOU has incorporated social media sites like Facebook pages, WhatsApp group, and Twitter Account.
  - Digital Library at KKHSOU: The Central Library of KKHSOU has started the Digital Library initiative for the learners and scholars of the University.
  - Audio CDs for Visually Impaired Learners: The visually impaired learners are provided with free audio SLMs in CDs to overcome their difficulties of learning. The University has installed Braille printers for this category of special learners in the University SLM branch.
  - Face-to-face/Online Ticketing/Complaint System: Learners' queries are attended in the face-to-face mode, through telephone, SMS and emails. There is a dedicated online portal through which the queries received automatically move to concerned department for solving the same. Once the problem is solved, the learner will get SMS and email.

- Siksharthi Mitra: A few employees of the University have been engaged as Siksharthi Mitra in order to provide better technical support and assistance to the candidates during online admission process.
- Online Counselling: The faculty members of the University conduct regular counselling classes through different online platform like Zoom, Google Meet, Cisco Webex, Facebook, etc.
- Online Mentoring: Online Learners' Mentoring System is introduced from the later part of 2020 under which each faculty member of the University is assigned a specific number of learners to provide guidance and counselling through Telegram or WhatsApp groups.
- Walk-in Counselling: The University makes a provision of walk-in counselling in its City Campus for the learners.
- Face-to-face Counselling: The University organises face-to-face counselling on Sundays or on week days for the learners of its specially maintained city learner support centre located at the city campus.

- **Learner Support Services provided by the Jorhat Regional Centre (JRC):**
  - creating awareness through promotion and publicity of KKHSOU programmes
  - delivery of programmes
  - resource centre for the region
  - conduct pre-admission counselling
  - attending to learners' queries and grievance redressal
  - supervision and coordination of induction meetings at LSCs
  - monitoring conduct of counselling sessions (both theory and practical) at the LSCs
  - supervision of the conduct of term end examinations at exam centres
  - providing all necessary help during admission through the Admission Helpdesk

- **Learner Support Services provided by the Learner Support Centres:**
  - provide support services such as informing, advising and counselling for the learners
  - conducting pre- admission counselling
  - organising and conducting induction meetings
  - distribution of self learning materials among the learners
  - conducting academic counselling for theory and practical courses
  - evaluation of assignments
  - conducting term end examination, and
  - providing library support to the learners
- **The Centre for Open and Distance Learning, Tezpur University:** In the year 2011, the Centre for Open and Distance Learning was established in Tezpur University. Earlier it was known as Directorate of Distance Education. The main aim of this Centre is to disseminate knowledge and impart quality education through open and distance learning mode. The Centre offers various post-graduate, undergraduate, diploma and certificate programmes in emerging areas of science & technology, social sciences, management and humanities with a flexible system to cater to the needs of the learners who otherwise cannot avail the regular mode of education. The basic focus of the Centre is to prepare human resources of the region and the country by making them skilled and employable.
- **Centre for Open & Distance Education (Don Bosco University Global):** Don Bosco University was established in the year 2013 and this university has an online distance education portal approved by the DEC. The online education portal of the university offers programmes in management and computer applications. There are other programmes of this university in child rights, environmental science, financial markets management, teacher education, comparative religion, philosophy, social work, north-east India

studies, etc.

The University has adopted a rolling pattern of admission right through the year to give maximum flexibility to applicants to enable them to juggle the demands of work and study at their convenience. The centre is designed to make higher education available to anyone, at anytime, anywhere.

Thus the growth of Distance Education in Assam under different phases leaves undoubtedly no space for speculation that it has come over a long way and accomplished many milestones. The growth in the phases clears the fact that DE is more acceptable today than a decade or more earlier and there is no inhibition in the minds of the learners.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What is the full form of IGNOU?

.....

Q 5: The first open university of North-East India is .....(Fill in the blank)

.....

Q 6: In which year, IDOL of Gauhati University was established?

.....

Q 7: What type of courses is provided by KKHSOU?

.....



15.5 LET US SUM UP

- The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) formerly known as National Open School (NOS) was established in November, 1989 to provide a number of vocational, life enrichment and community-oriented courses besides general and academic courses at Secondary and Senior Secondary level.

- It also offers Elementary level courses through its Open Basic Education Programmes (OBE).
- In 1996, IGNOU's Guwahati Regional Centre was established with a total of 6 study centres and 35 programmes with approximately about 1100 learners. The main objective of Guwahati Regional Centre is to fulfil the overall vision of IGNOU and for those different initiatives are taken by this regional centre of IGNOU.
- The Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL), formerly known as Post Graduate Correspondence School (PGCS) was established in May 1998. The main objective of this institution is to ensure the opportunity to pursue quality higher education to the large number of students who could not pursue higher education through conventional mode of education.
- In the year 2001, the Directorate of Open and Distance Learning (DODL), Dibrugarh University was established. The main vision of this Directorate is to reach the unreached. In 2011-2012 the Directorate introduced Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) programme in annual system through distance mode.
- Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) was established in 2005 to provide quality higher education through the Open and Distance Learning system to reach the unreached sections of the society.
- The main purpose behind establishment of KKHSOU was to promote education to reach the unreached through the Open and Distance Learning system. The Bachelor's Degree Programmes were being offered from the year 2008.
- In the year 2011, the Centre for Open and Distance Learning was established in Tezpur University. Earlier, it was known as Directorate of Distance Education. The main aim of this centre is to disseminate knowledge and impart quality education through open and distance learning mode.
- Regional Centre Jorhat of IGNOU was established at Jorhat in March 2013 bifurcating Regional Centre Guwahati and had a very modest

beginning with 18 study centres and a handful of staff from C.K.B Commerce College premises. Presently the Regional Centre is working from a rented building near Nehru Park, Jorhat.

- Don Bosco University was established in the year 2013 and this university has an online distance education portal approved by the DEC. The online education portal of the university offers programmes in management and computer applications.



15.6 FURTHER READING

1) Kalita, Utpal (2014). Abirata Siksha Aru Duratta Siksha. Guwahati: Shanti Prakashan.



15.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Youth.

Ans to Q No 2: 1989.

Ans to Q No 3: National Skill Qualification Framework.

Ans to Q No 4: Indira Gandhi National Open University.

Ans to Q No 5: 2006.

Ans to Q No 6: 1998.

Ans to Q No 7: The University at present offers around forty academic programmes in Humanities, Social Sciences and Professional areas which include - Ph.D. & M.Phil, Master's Degree, Bachelor's Degree, PG Diploma Programmes, Diploma Programmes, and Certificate Programmes.



15.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in around 150 words).

Q 1: Write the objectives of the Directorate of Open and Distance Learning, Dibrugarh University.

Q 2: Write a note on distance education of Assam Don Bosco University.

Q 3: What type of courses is offered by the Distance Learning Centre of Tezpur University?

Q 4: Discuss the need for distance education in Assam from your own point of view.

Long Questions (Answer each question in around 300-500 words)

Q 1: Describe the role of the first state university of Assam in the development of distance education.

Q 2: Trace the development of distance education at secondary stage of education in Assam.

Q 3: Discuss the development of distance education at higher level by dual mode university system.

Q 4: Explain the growth of distance education in Assam.

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