CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Distance Education (DE) has gained today a global status and is being accepted unreservedly as a means of access to higher / further / life­long education. It has taken around 160 years to reach this recognition and status, to win the academic credibility and social acceptance. It is no longer viewed with ‘suspicion’ as it used to be in its early stage of evolution.

Born out of compulsions to meet social needs, supported by political pressures clamouring for equality of opportunities and driven by the needs (caused by the dwindling resources) to find alternative means of educational provision, DE found its course of growth much facilitated by all these factors. It found favour with individuals who wanted to qualify themselves educationally without sacrificing their fulltime work commitments and with the welfare governments, which wanted to get more people educated with less expenditure. But at the same time, it had to provide for opportunities for sustained teacher-learner and learner-learner interaction which are considered so vital for any teaching/learning to occur and which were so conspicuously limited in the DE mode. Initially the distance teachers took recourse to packaging their instruction in the form of ‘simulated’ dialogue, building plenty of activities into the material, making liberal use of access devices, allowing alternative routes to a given goal, mixing visual and verbal representations and using any such other device that would render processing of verbal text easier.

The pace of growth of DE was further accelerated by its quick adoption of emerging Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). DE was faster in adopting ICT than the traditional system of education, as it had to make up its apparent limitation with respect to its scope for interaction.
Taylor (2000) summarises the extended use of technology and the resultant ‘emergence’ of DE into newer ‘generations’. A modified version of Taylor is given below to highlight the adoption of technology and corresponding evolution into newer generations and ‘models’:

Table 1.1 Evolution of DE models corresponding to adoption of technology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adoption of technology</th>
<th>Successive generations of DE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto tape</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video tape</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer-based learning</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive video</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio teleconferencing</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video teleconferencing</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio graphic communication</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast TV/Radio &amp; Audio teleconferencing</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive multimedia</td>
<td>✔ ✔ ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet-based access to WWW resources</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer mediated communication (CMC)</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMC, using automated response system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adoption of technology has not been uniform across the world and as a result the practice of DE has been at different stages of its evolution in different countries. The evolution of Indian practice of DE is summarised by Kiledar (2002) and presented in chapter 2.
1.2 THE EARLY PRACTICES OF D.E.

The earliest instances of Distance Education are traced back to the medieval Europe. Daniel (1997) points out to the presence of some key concepts of DE in the teaching methods of the early Christian Church. St. Paul who had the challenge of instructing a dispersed community, developed a 'method of DE'. He wrote letters to individual churches and the elders at the local church read them out to the mostly illiterate community which listened to and interacted among themselves in the process of interpreting and understanding the message of the letters. Daniel thus points to the analogous features in the practice of the modern DE concepts of tutors and their study groups and of 'remote' classroom approach.

Holstein (1992) refers to one Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) and his book *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Maimonides is referred to as the "greatest figure in the post-biblical Jewish experience" and his book is "characterised as a Correspondence Course". Maimonides explains in the 'Epistle Dedicatory' that the 'book' was necessitated, when his student abruptly left his presence, fleeing anti-semitic persecution.

"Your absence moved me to compose this treatise, which I have composed for you and for those like you . . . All of them that are written will reach you where you are ...."

What is more significant is that Maimonides goes on to elaborate on the differences between written and spoken words, the challenge of making one's written words 'speak' and the different strategies that can contribute to it – from spinning of parables to rendering of dialogues.
Reddy (1993) refers to a character by name, 'Ekalavya', in the Mahabharatha as an embodiment of the present day concept of a distance learner. "... his will and devotion made the Vidya he sought from his guru accessible to him even though the guru himself was inaccessible".

1.3 THE RECENT HISTORY OF DE

References such as the ones given above, resembling apparently the current concepts of DE, may be available perhaps in more cultures and countries. But documentation of recent history of DE generally begins with an account of how the mailing system was used to teach Sir Isaac Pittman's shorthand in the mid-nineteenth century in the U.K. The introduction of External Examination system at the University of London in 1836 created opportunities for commercial correspondence colleges to come up and offer academic help to those who sought to get a university qualification.

The invention of printing and the introduction of postal services came in handy to provide learning opportunities to aspirants at the doorsteps of their residence or workplace.

The credit for the earliest practice in the U.S. is attributed to James Stuart, the founder of university extra-mural adult education, who experimented with correspondence education for women in the 1870's (Jarvis, 1995). Efforts in Sweden, around the period, to teach English and efforts on teaching Mining Safety in the US are also referred to as the early versions of what later came to be known as correspondence education.

By the turn of the century Russia had developed a strong tradition of DE and school systems in Canada, Australia and New Zealand introduced correspondence courses to cater to the growing demands of the society.
In 1938, representatives of providers of Correspondence Education joined together to form the ‘International Council for Correspondence Education’ (ICCE) and had their first meeting in Victoria, British Columbia. ICCE membership was open to private institutions, military correspondence schools and correspondence branches of university continuing education departments.

Public sector institutions working side by side with commercial institutions brought in new dynamics of evolution. The former with a view to shielding their operations from the undesirable image given to ‘correspondence education’ by some commercial institutions, coined different terms to project their courses. Thus there came into existence a proliferation of terms (to refer to a more-or-less same practice) such as: guided study, home study, independent study, external study, distance teaching, learning at a distance, etc.

In the 1960’s and the 1970’s the growth of ‘correspondence education’ continued unabated. The Industrial Countries blended modern media technologies with older correspondence techniques to create open universities (OU’s) - independent, autonomous institutions to cater to the educational / training needs of adults. The setting up of OU’s brought distance teaching to a state of its social acceptance as a normal effective mode of educational provision.

During 1970-2000, DE moved from the periphery to the main stream of educational and training methods. In the 1990’s DE “came of age as a field of study” and this emergence was preceded by four distinct stages of growth (Harry, et al 1993).

i. clarification of terminology in the 1970’s
ii. precision of definition in the early 1980’s
iii. delineation of the field of study in the late 1980’s
iv. launching of ‘taught degree programmes’ in the 1990’s.
Formal research activities in DE are traced back to the 1960's. Practitioners of correspondence education engaged themselves around this period in research activities more to vindicate for themselves, as to whether what they were practicing was 'meaningful' and to convince the fellow practitioners of the rationality of their approach. In the 1970's with the establishments of OU's, institutional researches were undertaken to study correspondence education. The multiplicity of terms used to refer to correspondence education caused confusion among researchers and practitioners. The mid 1970's were rid with issues resulting from these confusions. However, by around 1978 a general agreement was reached to replace correspondence education and all other related terms with 'Distance Education'. As correspondence was no longer the sole means of communication, with the increasing adoption of tele-communication means side-by-side with printed material, 'correspondence education' was considered out dated and the new term came to be accepted. The resolving of confusion concerning terminology turned out to be a positive step ahead in promoting systemic research and practice.

Even after the confusion of terminology got resolved by the rapid acceptance of the new term 'distance education', there continued to exist till 1980 a haziness about the definition of DE. It was often found difficult among writers of DE to maintain distinction between flexible learning, educational technology, use of computers for instructional purposes, and distance education. Distance Education: An International Perspective by Sewart et al (1983) reflects this stage. Because of this confusion about definition little progress in research could be achieved.

By the late 1980's DE developed as a distinct field of study within education. Garrison's (1989) Understanding Distance Education and Holmberg's (1989) Theory and Practice of Distance Education set the boundaries of the new 'discipline' of DE. Yet the formal identification of the focus and nature of the discipline could not get accomplished till the mid 90's.
The introduction of taught degrees in DE at several universities in the early 1990's helped in resolving some of the persistent issues and today DE enjoys the recognition of being a discipline by itself.

In the 70's and the 80's developing countries of Asia took the OU concept and applied it on a huge scale. DE seemed to "find particularly fertile soil in rapidly industrializing societies" (Daniel, 1993). In Africa and in Latin America DE has been developing "in fits and starts", as conducive industrial and organizational traditions are lacking in most of the countries. The Commonwealth of Learning, established in 1988, has been helping poorer countries of the Commonwealth in capacity building for DE by extending support for staff training and the transfer / joint development of course materials.

1.4 THE POPULARITY OF DE

The foundation of the Open University of the United Kingdom (UKOU) was greeted with "profound skepticism garnished with ridicule and hostility" (Perry, 1976). It was regarded as a "completely bogus institution" (House of Common's Debate quoted by Perry, 1976). But today it is seen "as one of the most successful and most admired innovations in Britain's post second world war educational history". (Rumble, 1992). Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) of Nov. 2003 reports that the OU has 10% of UK's UG Cohort, amounting to 16000 students, registered for its UG courses. About 50% of these students are less than 25 years of age and are eligible to a place at conventional universities. This points to the fact that OU has ceased to be the refuge of middle-aged learners without previous qualification.

The inception of IGNOU, which was beleaguered with a long procrastination from 1972 to 1985, was also looked at with askance in the beginning. But the popularity, the range of disciplines covered, the geographical extent reached, the operational complexities met (by virtue of
the size and number handled) have all made one wonder at the 'magic' behind the system of DE.

One reason for the popularity of DE in the West is that there has risen a need for continuous updating of knowledge and retraining of skills in industry and business. This itself may be the result of emerging technologies with low half-life periods as well as reduction in time lag between a major scientific discovery and its application. The examples are not far to seek – the rapid and complex growth of DE and the growth in ICT are prominent examples in the field of education and training.

The popularity of DE in the East may be attributed to the economic compulsions of the governments to 'spend less and gain more' and to the individuals' ambition for upward social and career mobility through further educational qualifications.

1.5 THE PRACTICE OF DE IN INDIA

The beginning of DE in India can be traced to the constitution of the Expert Committee by the Ministry of Education in 1961 to work out a scheme of correspondence education for the country. The committee suggested a pilot project of correspondence education to be undertaken by the university of Delhi. Accordingly, the university of Delhi established in 1962 its ‘School of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education’ with the major objectives of (i) providing less expensive education at higher level and (ii) extending access to higher education.

In 1968 the scheme was extended to the University of Patiala. Between 1970 and 1980, 19 more universities joined the 'bandwagon' in the chronological order given below.
1971 – Punjab, Himachal
1972 – Andhra, Shri Venkateswara
1973 – Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL)
1974 – Patna
1975 – Bhopal, Utkal, Bombay
1976 – Madurai, Jammu, Kashmir, Rajasthan
1977 – Osmania, Kerala
1978 – Allahabad, SNDT
1979 – Annamalai, Udaipur

The enrolment at all these Correspondence Course Institutes (CCI's) put together in the year 1988-81 was 1,47,720 which amounted to 5.37% of the total higher education enrolment for the year.

Initially only undergraduate courses were offered on an experimental basis. Later in the 70's postgraduate, diploma, and certificate courses were launched.

While the CCI's function as a dependent unit of conventional universities, independent dedicated DE institutions came to be established in the name and style of Open Universities (OU's) in the 1980's. The first of these was established at Hyderabad in 1982 and was known as Andhra Pradesh Open University – subsequently renamed as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU). Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was established in 1985 at New Delhi. The establishment of IGNOU is regarded today “a significant development as it gave the 'legitimacy' to DE in the national educational system of the country”. (Ansari, 2002).

To day DE is offered in the country by 108 CCI's and II OU's. (Gaba & Bhushan 2004) The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) has recommended that each state should have an OU and so far 10 states
have set up their own OU. Three more are planning to set up. The existing OU's are listed below with their year of inception.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>B.R. Ambedkar Open University</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Indira Gandhi National Open University</td>
<td>National OU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Kota Open University</td>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Nalanda Open University</td>
<td>Bihar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Yashwantrao Chauhan Maharashtra Open University</td>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Bhoj Open University</td>
<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Karnataka State Open University</td>
<td>Karnataka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Subhas Chander Open University</td>
<td>West Bengal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Rajarshi Tandon Open University</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Tamil Nadu Open University</td>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kerala, Assam and Orissa are expected to follow suit.

Apart from the CCI's and OU's there is a National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) set up by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), functioning since 1979.

The Programmes of OU are not confined to traditional Arts, Social Science and Commerce streams. They offer programmes in Management, Sciences, Engineering, Agriculture, Medicine and such other disciplines too.
As of today 27% of the national higher education enrolment is catered to by the 11 OU's and 108 CCI's. It is expected that this would rise to 40% by the end of the tenth five-year plan. (Kulandaiswamy, 2003)

The advances in ICT have made the imagined potential of new DE Technologies become apparent and attractive. The OU's in the developed countries which have the state-of-art technological resources have moved on to the fourth and the fifth generations of DE. In India, the practice of DE is by and large in the third generation only. Stray reports about experiments in setting up virtual campuses do appear now and then. The ‘Tamil Virtual University’ (TVU), set up by the Government of Tamilnadu in 2000, has launched a certificate level course in teaching Tamil language (2002) and is in the process of developing courses leading to the award of Diploma and Degrees in Tamil language, literature and culture. The learners are provided access to TVU's digital library which contains as of today about 90000 pages of print turned into hypertext. The facilities are used mostly by Tamils and others outside the country. For Virtual Education to become popular in India, it may take a few more years. Powar (2002) expects this to happen by 2010.

1.6 TEACHER EDUCATION THROUGH DISTANCE MODE

Teacher education sought the distance mode as a preferred means to meet the demands of teacher training in the developing world – particularly in Asia and Africa. Neilson (1991) and Perraton (1993) review application of DE to Teacher Education in the Commonwealth countries, evaluating the achievement and the cost involved.

In India the idea of teacher education through distance mode was mooted by the Education Commission, 1964-66. The Commission visualised DE's role for in-service and pre-service training for teachers particularly for clearing backlog of untrained teachers. The National Policy on Education (1968) upheld the recommendation of the Education
Commission for promoting teacher education through correspondence and willed that education through part-time and correspondence should be given the same status as full-time education (NCERT, 1977).

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) introduced Correspondence courses in 1967 to offer B.Ed at Regional Colleges of Education at Ajmer, Bhopal, Bhubaneshwar and Mysore. The emphasis was on providing opportunities for untrained teachers to get trained. Around the same time UGC delegations, which visited the USSR to study its part-time and correspondence courses, recommended adoption of correspondence courses for in-service training.

In the early 70’s universities in Mysore, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir offered B.Ed (correspondence) for in-service teachers. The 80’s saw massive enrolments in the B.Ed. correspondence programme. In 1995-96, 16 traditional universities and 3 open universities were in the business of offering B.Ed (correspondence).

The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) was set up in 1995 (following the Parliamentary Act passed in 1993) in the wake of sharp, persistent demand to regulate the uncontrolled growth of teacher-education institutions at the cost of quality. It came down heavily on the B.Ed (correspondence) course and enforced strict instructional and infrastructural norms to maintain quality. Subsequently several of the universities had to suspend the offer of B.Ed (correspondence) courses.

1.7 IGNOU AND THE B.Ed PROGRAMME

It was when the NCTE started enforcing rigid norms to maintain quality of teacher education through distance mode that IGNOU came forth with its proposal of B.Ed in the late 90’s. IGNOU had, by then, stabilized itself as a quality-oriented, norm-setting distance teaching institute in the
country. It had many first-features to its credit — a national jurisdiction, a large network of centres for student support services, use of satellite-based one way video two way audio teleconferencing facility across the country, besides use of radio and television, and state-of-art studio facilities for audio and video production. Above all these features, IGNOU had successfully developed by then a student-centred, activity oriented self-instructional approach to course material development.

IGNOU's proposal to NCTE, strengthened with its network of support services, state-of-art technology enrichment and learner centred approach to course materials, naturally met with the latter's approval.

The IGNOU B.Ed is a two-year study programme for practicing untrained teachers. Admission is regulated by a nationwide common entrance test.

The Programme requires the student teachers to work through 5 core courses, 2 optional method courses and 1 specialisation course. The core courses are all compulsory, while an option of 2 method-courses can be exercised out of 5 offered and an option of 1 specialisation course can be exercised out of 4 offered. The details of course offering and their scheme of year-wise distribution are presented below (Table 1.2).
Table 1.2 IGNOU B.Ed: Scheme of year wise Course Distribution

First Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Course Group</th>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Credits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Core Courses (1, 2 &amp; 3)</td>
<td>(i) ES-331</td>
<td>Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>3 + 1 = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) ES-332</td>
<td>Psychology of Learning and Development.</td>
<td>3 + 1 = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) ES-333</td>
<td>Educational Evaluation</td>
<td>3 + 1 = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Content-based Methodology courses (Any Two to opt out of the five listed)</td>
<td>(i) ES-341</td>
<td>Teaching of Science</td>
<td>3 + 1 = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) ES-342</td>
<td>Teaching of Mathematics</td>
<td>3 + 1 = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) ES-343</td>
<td>Teaching of Social Studies</td>
<td>3 + 1 = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(iv) ES-344</td>
<td>Teaching of English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(v) ES-345</td>
<td>Teaching of Hindi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Workshop-I</td>
<td>ES-382</td>
<td>12 Days</td>
<td>0 + 2 = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Practice Teaching</td>
<td>ES-383</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 + 2 = 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Credits: 15 + 9 = 24

Second Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Course Group</th>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Credits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Core Courses (4 &amp; 5)</td>
<td>(i) ES-334</td>
<td>Education and Society</td>
<td>3 + 1 = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) ES-335</td>
<td>Teaching and School</td>
<td>3 + 1 = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Special Courses (Any one to opt out of four)</td>
<td>(i) ES-361</td>
<td>Educational Technology</td>
<td>3 + 1 = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) ES-362</td>
<td>Computer Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) ES-363</td>
<td>Guidance and Counselling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(iv) ES-364</td>
<td>Distance Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Practice Teaching</td>
<td>ES-383</td>
<td>0 + 6 = 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>School based practical</td>
<td>ES-381</td>
<td>0 + 4 = 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Workshop – II</td>
<td>ES-382</td>
<td>12 Days</td>
<td>0 + 2 = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total Credits</td>
<td>9 + 15 = 24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Th. – Theory

Pr.– Practical
Apart from working on these 8 courses, a student teacher has to do practice teaching and other practical work comprising practical oriented assignments (Fig.1.1) school-based activities and workshop based practical assignments. Practice teaching requires every student teacher to handle 20 model classes in Optional - I and 20 model classes in Optional - II. Practice teaching is expected to commence after Workshop - I in year – 1 and to be over before Workshop - II in year – 2. The venue for Practice teaching will be the work centre, an identified High / Higher / Senior Secondary School (usually the school where the student-teacher is employed), and the activity will be performed under the supervision of a Mentor (Head Master / Principal / a Senior Teacher of the School concerned) and a Supervisor (an identified Teacher-Educator).

School-based practical activities will be performed under the supervision of Mentors, who would authenticate the reports of student teachers on these activities. The student teachers may be guided by the academic counsellors in their practical assignments based on theory-courses. The Workshop-based practical will have to be carried out during the two Workshops.
The two 12 day-log workshops held in year-1 and year-2 are intended to enable student teachers to interact with experts and peers, exchanging ideas, raising issues, discussing themes and problems and to engage in group activities. The workshops will include plenary sessions on various practical aspects of education, discussions, presentation of micro lessons in simulated / real conditions, audio/video inputs, group work, etc.

The student progress is monitored continuously through evaluation of assignment responses. Each student is expected to submit 4 assignment responses in each course. Three of these assignments are theory-based
and the fourth one is application oriented practical assignment. Out of the three theory-based assignments, 2 are of essay-type and one comprises short-answer questions. A word limit of 600 is set on each of these assignments. The score on two of these assignment responses (the better ones) will be taken into account for continuous assessment.

The application oriented practical assignments are compulsory. The questions under this category will expect the learner to apply the theoretical input received through course material to the practical classroom situations they encounter in their practice. These assignments form part of the Practical Activities (discussed in earlier pages).

The assignments are treated more as a teaching-learning tool than as a means of assessment. The Academic counsellors who evaluate them are expected to give detailed comments on the positive aspects as well as on the weaknesses of the response so that the learner can reflect upon the content of his/her submission or the approach of his/her response.

The study-input of student teachers is governed by the number of 'credits'. A credit is a unit of study hours expected of a student teacher in performing a given teaching / learning activity. A credit corresponds approximately to 30 hours of study.

1.8 TEACHER LEARNER INTERACTION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF TUTOR-COMMENTS

Traditionally DE is viewed as a "somewhat lesser form of instruction"; reservations and apprehensions persist about its quality, when the potential for critical interaction between teachers and learners is taken as the essential feature of education. But the fact is that the contiguous presence of the teacher and the learner is only a factor that facilitates interaction and cannot be equated with the occurrence of interaction. Distance or face-to-face, whatever be the mode, an institution or a teacher
can provide prompts and facilities for interaction. It is for the participants to use the facilities and prompts to the best of their advantage. If this is agreed, then DE as a system of education has continuously been striving to improve upon the possibilities for teacher-learner interaction and has thrown open different channels for it. The channels of teacher-learner interaction available with IGNOU B.Ed Programme are represented in the diagram below: (Fig.1.2)

Fig 1.2 IGNOU B.Ed: Channels of teacher-learner interaction
While it is the responsibility of the institution to build in enough 'prompts' or say 'charm' into its channels of interaction to engage the attention and interests of the learner, it is for the learner ultimately to see them as opportunities to his/her advantage and to take the benefit of them. (Just as in a captive classroom situation it is for the learner to stay 'mentally' present or to mark just the physical presence).

Among the different opportunities for interaction, it may be noted, the ease of access is varied. Synchronous interaction makes it mandatory for learners to be physically present at a given place and for a given duration. If it is mediated synchronous interaction it entails on the learner further conditions such as availability of power (electricity) and access to equipment (radio/telephone; teleconferencing unit).

Simulated and asynchronous means of communication do not impose any of the above pre requisite conditions on the learner. The learner can enjoy the freedom of place and time, and of pace too. But the overarching condition is that the learner should be 'mature' enough to 'use' this freedom!

Between the means of Simulated and Real-asynchronous interaction provided by IGNOU, the Self Instructional Materials (SIM's) offer a one-to-many communication (in spite of intended 'simulation' of individualised address), while the assignments provide scope for a one-to-one interaction.

Thus assignments as a means of interaction have the following advantages:

i. they do not set rigid time/place/pace boundaries for their use

ii. they do not lay down conditions of technological prerequisites.

As a result, assignments are the only means of one-to-one teacher-learner interaction, which also offer an unrestricted access to every learner.
1.9 CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL ASSIGNMENT-TUTOR COMMENTS INTERACTION

Having laid out the significance of teacher-learner interaction through tutor comments one need to look into the prerequisites that ensure success in such a communication.

As a learning interaction, the communication from and to the learner should primarily be characterised by a sense of commitment and genuineness. If these traits are ensured in both the parties (the teacher and the learner), it will be an ideal situation. If it is found in the teacher and is seen lacking in the learner, some efforts may be taken consciously to inculcate the traits in the learner. By and large, the distance learners are presumed to have high intrinsic and extrinsic motivation urging them on to fare well. The teacher-educators, since they are relatively few in number and as they are already over burdened with various responsibilities, may need help in organising their work so that the traits of commitment and genuineness are not infringed upon.

Once the basic traits are ensured, the question will be how to reflect these traits in performance – i.e. in formulating learners’ response to the assignment tasks set and the teacher’s concern for teaching represented in writing out the comments. While the assignment responses should mirror the learners’ level of understanding of the concepts concerned and the ability to use them in given situations, tutor-comments should reflect ‘an active mind of a teacher at work’ in a personal kind of written communication. Vocalisation of a teacher’s active mind is a regular part of a teacher-educator’s job in a classroom situation, whereas ‘tutor-comments’ are not. The tutor comments have to be pedagogical in content, but ‘personal’ in presentation; they need to be in written words, but have a semblance of direct talk. They need to be reassuring in tone, but should not compromise with the expectations of the discipline of study. To be short, teachers need to be familiar with the new genre of writing tutor comments.
Ability to use a medium is a precondition to success in employing the medium for communication. In the matter of assignment-tutor comments, mastery over the mechanics of writing is essential.

The turnaround of assignments (the term explained in figure 3.1) and the monitoring of tutor-comments are the other essential factors that would contribute to success in the teacher-learner interaction through tutor comments.

1.10 THE PRESENT STATUS OF ASSIGNMENTS-TUTOR COMMENTS INTERACTION

Assignments, the vital means of teacher-learner interaction in the DE system, calls for a closer attention and more careful nurturing than what could be seen in practice. The learners, most of whom are extrinsically highly motivated but not lacking in intrinsic motivation, seem to be reproducing in their responses the text material verbatim with a false notion that it would fetch higher grades in assessment. The teachers who are apparently under the “unconsciously induced cultural bias” focus not so much on teaching as on assessing, while working through the learners’ responses. The result is that the very purpose of interaction for which the assignments have been ‘instituted’ in the system seems to get defeated.

The submission schedule stipulated by the School of Education, IGNOU possibly devised to accommodate a number of other learning activities within the two year academic calendar – does not visualize provision of a temporal space between the receipt of teacher feedback on the assignment and the submission of the subsequent assignment (discussed in detail in 4.8). This seems to flout the very idea of using teacher feedback for improving the subsequent submissions, which amounts to sort of a denial of value of tutor comments.
The preparation of teachers and students to engage themselves in a dialogue through assignments is also found inadequate. Responding to assignments needs to be dealt with in an exclusive session, directing learners' attention to how to understand a given question or issue, how to collect relevant information, how to organise and structure them to suit the question, how to take care of the mechanics of writing, etc. But in current practice, the students do not get inducted into thinking on these lines. Similarly the teachers are normally expected to attend an 'orientation' before they take up their assignment as an academic counsellor. The orientation may be of 4 to 8 hours duration spread over 1-2 days. Normally a span of around one or one and a half hours is devoted to 'handling assignments' (A typical schedule of 'orientation' as it is being held is given in Table 4.2. The duration assigned is used generally to explain the 'why' of tutor comments followed by some illustrations of 'how'. As such the presentation, at the most, can give a theoretical exposure but not any practical experience. If the assignments evaluated by the academic counsellors are regularly monitored and appropriate monitoring feedback is given to the academic counsellors, such feedback may in a way complement the theoretical exposure given during 'orientation'. But no such efforts seem to be in practice.

As a result of the facts described above assignments in the IGNOU B.Ed Programme do not seem to serve the vital purpose of providing a learning dialogue between the teacher and the learner.

1.11 THE PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study proposes to design a remedial course of action in relation to one aspect from the above namely preparation of teachers for the academic dialogue through tutor comments. As a dialogue may not succeed unless both the parties involved are 'prepared' for it, in the course of the experiment, necessary attention has been paid to the preparation of students also.
The purpose of the present study is, thus, set out as the development of the training package, implementation of the training and the assessment of the effect of training.

1.12 CONCLUSION

While the present chapter sets the background for the research undertaken, the next chapter reviews the studies conducted and the theoretical explications published thus far on staff development and tutor comments. Chapter III lays down the research framework, identifying details of research methodology adopted for the present study. The objectives, assumptions, hypotheses, delimitations, limitations, definition of terms, the population and the sample, the research method, the designing of the tool-set, etc, are dealt with in this chapter. Chapter IV describes the training offered in phases. The effect of the training is assured in Chapter V, using the data compiled on tutor comments before and after training. The process of data compilation, analysis and interpretation is reported and the findings are listed in the Chapter. Chapter VI gives a summary of the entire report along with its implication for the providers of the B.Ed (distance mode) programme and suggestions for further research.