CHAPTER-VII

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS
7.1 Introduction

Distance Education (DE) is an emerging concept of modern education. It is an effective alternative system to formal education. It promotes not only higher education but the economic growth and social justice also. Now DE is actually the effective instrument of social change, progressivism, egalitarianism and justice. It throws open to the teeming millions of learners and has broken the barriers of caste, community, social status etc. It has emerged to meet the rapidly changing needs of the society.

In our country, besides the conventional education, DE (specially in higher education) is provided through various agencies like National Open Universities, state Open Universities and correspondence course provided by conventional Institutes by opening a directorate of DE. It has become popular in both developed and developing countries all over the world. The advanced countries like the UK, and the USA, even start to achieve the Universalisation of Higher Education (UHE) while our country has not achieved even the UEE. However, in a developing country like India DE system will be very helpful to those who motivate to learn towards achieving the UHE. In this regard, the Programme of Action (PoA) 1992 under Para No. 12.2.7 stressed the importance of establishing a state Open University in each state under the guideline of DEC which is as follows:

The CABE that each state should establish an Open University will be pursuit with the state government for implementation during the Eight Plan. The IGNOU will provide technical and consultancy support to the state governments for this purpose. The Distance Education Council will prepare guidelines for providing financial support to state open universities for their development. Such assistance will include support to develop new programmes and courses. The course materials already produced by the IGNOU and other Open Universities would be made available to new state Open Universities which could offer them through the languages of the region so that access to Open University
programme is widened. In order to promote the Open University system on a significant scale, the existing rules framed by the UGC for declaring Open Universities fit for central assistance will be reviewed.¹

As a result of it 9 (nine) state Open Universities were established. At present there are 10 (ten) Open Universities including one national Open University. However in the entire NER, there is no state Open University. In Manipur, there is not even a distance education directorate, let alone a state open university. In the NER, DE is provided mainly through the network of IGNOU; some conventional universities provide correspondence course by opening a directorate. They are Gauhati University, Dibrugarh University, North East Hill University, Sikkim Manipal University and Tripura University. However, none of them is functioning effectively and very few institutes have developed study centres with library facilities. They hardly provide properly organised media support to their students. Of course, recently some CCLs have set up a few study centres and they are fairly well equipped. In due course, the establishment of IGNOU network helps in developing systematic and properly organised media support DE programme in NER. Again, it will be great help to the people of NER who have high motivation to learn higher education and acquire more knowledge and skills of Open Universities are established in each state of the region.

7.2 Findings

This study is based on primary data from 150 distance learners, 40 Counsellors and 15 Coordinators from different study centres of the North Eastern States. The study design is based on the hierarchy of informants at different levels to highlight the aims and objectives of DE mainly given by IGNOU. The major findings of the present study have been made on the basis of the information and data.

collected from students, Counsellors and Coordinators, all of which have been closely analysed in Chapter VI. Attention may be drawn to the findings for the sake of convenience as in the following:

7.2.1 Students

The findings of the students help in the proper development or organisation of a systematic distance education programme in India in general and NER in particular because DE programme itself is a student centred education system.

i] Distance education helps to ensure gender equality in education at higher level. It also provides opportunity of education to all sections of people whether they may be employed, married, handicapped, or having family or financial problems.

ii] In north eastern region, for wider coverage, however, DE needs a focus on rural areas. Because majority of distance learners (74%) irrespective of state are from urban areas.

iii] In NER, the number of enrolment is high in the higher age. In Manipur, 33.80 percent distant learners are in the age group of 20 to 24 and 35 above. Whereas in the other states of NER, the enrolment number is higher in the age group 25 to 29 (26.3%) and above 35 age group (30%).

iv] The number of female distance learners in NER is higher (53%) than male (47.3%).

v] DE is a boon for employees who want to get higher level of education but at the same time encounter difficulty of attending conventional education at institutions but at the same time have the motivation of getting a higher degree. The
number of students is higher in working group (58%). In Manipur it is higher (50%) than the rest of other centres of DE in the NER.

vi] Majority of the persons admitted to DE belong to the low income group. In the case of Manipur people who get less than Rs. 5000/- per annum, are particularly interested in DE (64%).

vii] In NER as a whole, graduate level DE programme is more preferable but in Manipur Master Degree and Post Graduate diploma are more popular. This gives hint that people like higher study under distance mode in Manipur in comparison with other NER states.

viii] There are various reasons for joining DE system in different states of NER. Reasons for joining the DE system in the state of Manipur are for securing job (34%), getting higher degree in CE (13.7%) and for fulfilling desire for higher education without attending classes (13.7%) whereas in the rest of other centres it is high in difficulty to continue in CE (27.5%), getting job (26.3%) and fulfil desire (16.3%).

ix] Lack of proper facilities is prevalent in the study centres as experienced by the learners. This can well be addressed by the IGNOU as a whole. Even if such facilities are available in various study centres the feeling is that they are at a level far from satisfactory. In Manipur facilities like library, audio and video cassette, teleconferencing are very poor in all the centres, whereas in other NE centres, the position is more better.

x] The mechanism of delivering of study materials and other information need to be improved. But this cannot be sole responsibility of the IGNOU centres, though they can dispatch well in advance. At one end, it is the delivery machinery or the postal service that is dealing with the deliver of the study material. Hence much
depends on improved service. However, under normal circumstances nearly 72 percent of the distance learners get study materials in time.

xi] About 60 percent of the DE learners, one of the opinions that the study materials sent by the IGNOU remain quite insufficient. It is more so in Manipur (61%) compared to rest of other centres (57%) in other states. Therefore additional source needs to be explored since the libraries in the study centres of IGNOU do not have adequate supplementary study materials. Also students invariably feel insufficiency of the study materials for their preparation of assignments.

xii] It is also found in NER that 73.3% of the learner in DE can submit assignment in time although more than half of them find difficulty in assignment preparation, the main reason of which is shortage of course materials (57%) and counselling (30.4%). This material shortage and improved counselling session need to be looked into.

xiii] Generally, in DE system the counselling session is conducted on Sundays and holidays. The practice stands good in NER for 89 percent distance learners who participate in the counselling session regularly feel satisfied with the duration of counselling.

xiv] Since substantial proportion of DE learners in continuing conventional education, it is imperative that they take up/pursue DE for knowledge (58%) and job prospect (43.1%).

xv] Flexibility is the main advantage (65%) of DE while inadequate study materials, inadequate counselling materials and interaction are its main disadvantages (49%).
xvi] Almost 80 percent of distance learners agree that DE depends on motivation of the learners and 42.6 percent of the learner agree with the view that distance education is a privatisation of education. This supports the fact that success of DE depends on the self-motivation of learners.

xvii] The present study also finds that almost all the students i.e. 95 percent agree with the point that DE is a democratic system of education. It is high in Manipur (97.14%) than the rest of other NE states (92.5%).

xviii] DE is more cost effective than the conventional education. This view is supported by 63.33 percent students in the entire NE region, but for Manipur only it is 68.57 percent of students and for other NE states, excluding Manipur, the students ratio is 58.75 percent.

7.2.2 Counselors

In the present study, the findings of students are supplemented by the findings of the counsellors. This helps in the effective functioning of the study centre.

i] In this region majority of the counsellors are males (85%) and their number is slightly less in Manipur (83%). Since counsellors are contacted for more than one course they organise counselling sessions for both bachelor’s and post graduate degrees and also they do the same for other courses which are within their own specialised fields.

ii] Majority of counsellors get the study materials to be used for counselling. It is found that 83% of the counsellors get study materials in NER as a whole, but excluding Manipur other centres of NE states get 88.0 percent. The percentage of getting study materials by counsellors in Manipur is 78.30 percent only.
iii] Counsellors who are using the facilities feel effectiveness of these available facilities in the region (59%). A greater number of counsellors (69%) in Manipur use the facilities more effectively than the rest of the centres in the NE (62%). This shows that facilities are better utilised in Manipur than her counterparts.

iv] On an average, the number of counselling sessions conducted is 4 days in a month and a few of the centres conduct even 6 days in a month. This indicates that counselling is a regular feature of all the study centres of the NER.

v] As regards the method of counselling on counselling days, 30 percent Counsellors follow the syllabus only whereas 45 percent Counsellors discuss the problem faced by the students when preparing assignment and 25 percent combine both syllabus and discussion.

vi] Counsellors observe that some of the students of DE regularly attend counselling. This reflects the quality of the counselling and the commitment of the students, too.

7.2.3 Coordinators

The findings of the Coordinator show the main features of study centres. They are given as follows:

i] Coordinators opine that the study centres are open almost on all working days including holidays except Mondays and Fridays.

ii] Almost all the study centres have library facilities however none of the centres has a sufficiently well equipped library to cater for the needs of the students under distance mode.
iii) Majority of Coordinators opine that in their respective study centres radio, TV and video-audio cassettes are available but computer, tele-conferencing facilities and other advanced technologies are seldom available except in two/three centres namely Guwahati, Shillong and Mizoram.

iv) The Coordinators give prior scheduled dates of counselling for students and also they contact professionals as counsellors as per requirement from various fields.

v) The number of counselling sessions in a month is restricted to 4 to 6 days as expressed by the Coordinators, but the decision is taken in consultation with the Counsellors.

vi) There is no hard and fast rule in attending the counselling session. It all depends upon the student. The student can appear in the TEE without participating in the counselling session. However, submission of assignment is more important than attending the counselling because without this the students are not allowed to sit for the examinations.

vii) Almost all the Coordinators agree that DE can compete with the conventional system of education. The reading materials of DE for various courses offered by IGNOU are of high standard. Hence, conventional universities are using these materials with great advantages.

viii) Majority of the Coordinators agree on the point that in DE system the dropout rates are very high, and this is mainly caused by the large gap of years between the admission and the course completion date. They dropout rates are very high in the BDP courses in comparison with other courses. But they cannot give the exact figure; the reason may be due to the negligence of students who do not have patience to wait for eight years to complete BDP course.
Almost all the Coordinators agree with the view that DE is a democritisation of education giving equal opportunities to all sections of learners.

7.2.4 **Problems and Suggestion given by the Students, Counsellors and Coordinators**

Problems and suggestions given by the students, counsellors and coordinators are listed as under:

i] The distance learners are used to face some common problems irrespective of the study centres in the different states of NER. Among them mention may be made of the following:

(a) postal delay or non-availability of study materials and information such as admit cards in time;

(b) poor/no library facilities;

(c) non-availability of other facilities;

(d) shortage of counselling session or timing of counselling (difficulty in getting the counsellors);

(e) tight schedule of examination and assignments;

(f) difficulty in preparation of the assignments; and

(g) insufficient supplementary study materials while writing assignment.

ii] To improve the situation or solve the problems two suggestions are given by the learners:

(a) availability of facilities in the study centre; and

(b) improving the counselling sessions.

iii] Some of the common suggestions made by counsellors notably are:

(a) development of infrastructure and laboratory facilities

(b) availability of library, books and study materials;
(c) availability of modern facilities;
(d) presence of more responsible Coordinator; and
(e) introduction of need based courses for sustainable development of distance education.

iv] Some of the important problems mentioned by the Coordinators are:
(a) casual attitudes of the host institution;
(b) non-availability of adequate number of counsellors;
(c) difficulty in contacting students; and
(d) not getting fund (resources) timely and shortage of staff.

v] Corollary of the problems cited by Coordinators also suggests a few points to consider which include –
(a) sufficient fund, infrastructure, facilities;
(b) quick and timely delivery of materials and information;
(c) more number of counsellors;
(d) adoption of participatory approach; and
(e) more courses and more facilities in the study centre.

7.3 Conclusion

From the above findings of the present study the major conclusion can be drawn as follows:

In NER there are no state open universities but DE programmes are conducted under the network of IGNOU by establishing Regional Centres and many study centres. Besides, there are five CCI s under the conventional institutes. But they are not conducted effectively, although some of them have study centres. In DE there is the need of effective infrastructures of student support services which are very
useful in the teaching learning process of DE. Under the network of IGNOU also the learners face a lot of problems like insufficient study materials, lack of library facilities, lack of student support services etc. For the proper development of DE there need to establish a full fledged state Open University in the region under the guidelines of POA 1992 as stated above. However, there is a decision to establish a State Open University at Wokha district of Nagaland. This will be the first state Open University in the region, and it is hoped that it will provide DE effectively and minimise the problems faced by the distance learners in NER. At present, there are 10 (ten) open universities including 1 (one) National Open University and 96 CCIIs centres in India. But in NER there are only five CCIIs and widespread network of IGNOU. Therefore, first hypothesis is fulfilled that development of DE in NER is at the initial stage compared to other regions.

This study conforms to the basic tenets of the distance education that it caters for all sections of the society for imparting higher education giving more emphasis to the employees and the women who do not have access to the formal education irrespective of their social class. Every eligible person can get admission to the courses whenever they like to. There is no seat limit except in a few professional courses. It has its own entry level flexible rules. There DE is a democratic way of education because every learner can get the equal opportunity whether person may be in urban or rural, hill or plain. Hence hypothesis number D is also fulfilled.

In addition to the view, that is democratisation of education one more view is that DE is more cost effective than the conventional university system. As stated in the finding that this view is also supported by 63.33 percent learners in the region. Only this could not prove it. This needed study of cost effectiveness and cost efficiency is concerned with the relationship between the achievement of objectives and the cost involved in achieving them. It will be meaningful if it compares the costs
for a given programme in the Open universities and conventional universities. Notwithstanding, an attempt has been made to compare the cost of Bachelors degree programme, MLIB, BLIB, MBA, MA in English and Hindi offered by open university i.e. IGNOU with other similar programmes offered by the conventional institutions i.e. Manipur University and its affiliated colleges, like D.M. College of Arts. It is given in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1
Comparison of Annual cost offered by Open University with similar programme offered by conventional institution (Rs.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Course cost in Open University</th>
<th>Course cost in conventional institutions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA/B.Com.</td>
<td>3900.00</td>
<td>8345.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA Eng./Eco.</td>
<td>5400.00</td>
<td>7280.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA History.</td>
<td>5400.00</td>
<td>7280.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLIS.</td>
<td>3400.00</td>
<td>10180.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLIS.</td>
<td>6100.00</td>
<td>10180.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>14700.00</td>
<td>36035.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IGNOU: Students prospectus 2005, Manipur University and D.M. College of Arts.

The above table shows the cost of different courses under two streams of education. It is found that in every course, the cost of course is much higher in the conventional institutions compared to Open University. Therefore it can be concluded that the cost of a course in an Open University is more cost effective than the conventional institution. The hypothesis No. B is fulfilled.

The study also brings out the inadequacy of the facilities available to the students, coordinators as well as counsellors. However, the facilities available among the users are found to be very effective. This calls for immediate attention for the expansion of the IGNOU network in NER. In addition to this, a special attention is also to be given to the correspondence course provided by conventional universities. In this connection, the coordinators point out that modern equipment – computer,
teleconferencing, video conferencing and other related facilities is not available to the study centres. Insufficiency of study materials and library facilities is also found to be one of the big problems being faced by the majority of distance learners in NER. Therefore, additional sources need to be explored since the libraries in the study centres dos not have adequate number of books and journals. The print materials sent by the centre fall short of the need of the heterogeneous groups of learners. It needs many support services to the print materials. Of course, DE is a multimedia approach. Hence, hypothesis No. E, the success of DE depends upon the utilisation of multi-media approach, is also fulfilled.

More than half of distance learners of NER face difficulty in the preparation of assignments due to shortage of supplementary reading materials, counselling etc. This emphasises again adequacy of the study materials and frequent counselling. The distance learners all over the NER except a few students, who are staying in the city area, face acute problem of delivery of the study materials and other important communication. This highlights the need for looking out for alternative means of communications besides the postal services.

Dropping out phenomenon is a serious problem in DE. Dropout means to discontinue the course before completing the course. It is found in respect of most of the courses. There are several factors that are responsible for the students' discontinuation of their studies such as instructional factors, management factors, utilitarian factors, personal factors etc. In many cases, a number of students could not cope with the instructional system, hence they dropout. Other related cases of dropout are non-attendance of PCP, lack of study materials and library facilities, not submission of required number of assignments within the scheduled time and language problem. Therefore, dropout cases come out very often in the DE system.
Supporting these points, all the coordinators are of the view that the cases of dropout are very high in DE system without giving proper data.

7.4 Suggestions of the Study

On the basis of the present study, a number of problems faced by distance learners as well as coordinators in NER already have emerged. Some of these problems are general and they are faced by distance learners within the purview of the present study area as well as all over India. However, to overcome the problems faced by the distance learners in NER in particular and India in general the following suggestions have been made:

i] Proper infrastructural facilities should be provided to all the study centres.

ii] An integrated multimedia approach should be applied to the system of DE in all the courses, by making use of emerging communication technologies wherever appropriate.

iii] Need based courses should be developed on priority basis.

iv] Personal contact programme should be made compulsory to reduce problems in assignment writing and to clarify the doubtful areas. If so, it will reduce the dropout percentage to a great extent.

v] The study centres should have their own laboratory and laboratory equipment for the courses which require laboratory practical.

vi] Special attention should be given in selecting the counsellors. Specially trained tutors and counsellors should be appointed at the study centre because he/she should guide and motivate the student in the right and proper way.

vii] Proper awareness should be created among distance education learners regarding the availability of video cassette and audio cassette services. Also the arrangements can be made to show these cassettes during counselling session.
In case of library services, it needs to arrange for adequate number of books to be provided in each study centre to overcome the insufficiency of supplementary study materials.

The study materials should be reviewed to remove all sorts of repetitions which create problems in self-study by distance education learners.

The study materials should be periodically reviewed and updated with the changes occurring in the environment as well as new emerging areas in various subject areas.

Unnecessarily lengthy explanations should be avoided in the study materials because they are likely to make confusion to the learners. However, while framing the contents of the study materials due care should be taken to explain each and every term clearly. Lack of such arrangements often makes obstacle in the learning process because in the case of DE it is the media whether print or electronic that take the place of teacher.

In NER there is need to expand the services of study centres with proper facilities, and also necessary arrangements should be made to provide regular counselling through these centres.

The Regional Directors should visit once in a month to each study centre to find out the requirements and needs.

Special attention should be given from the headquarters to each study centre to check whether the study centre uses the sanctioned facilities properly or not.

In every state of NER there should be one state open university for proper development of DE in the region as per the stipulation of POA 1992 as is done in Nagaland state.

Right to Information Act 2005 is likely to help to a great extent towards the proper development of DE in India in general and NER in particular as the region is having serious problem for lack of information and latest development all over India even in this 21st century.

Each state government of NER should have proper plan for the development of Information and communication technology within the
state because it will help not only the distance learners but also the all round development of a state.

The above suggestion of the present study can be supplemented by the following suggestion for further research work in DE and its allied fields. An attempt has to be made to use profitably the immense opportunity to be provided by EDUSAT in the field of education in general and DE in particular specially in NER of India as most of the states of NER are included in the list of 10 (ten) educational backward of India.

7.5 Suggestion for Further Research

The present study has opened up some new areas. It will help the later researchers in this field. The universe of this research work is macro level. So it is difficult as well as not possible to cover all the important aspects and areas as to find out the problems of DE, state-wise, regional centre-wise and study centre-wise minutely and in detail due to shortage of time and resources at the disposal of the researcher. Hence the researcher is not in a position to cover all the data and information in the present study. There are a number of burning problems for further study connected with the present research work. The following are some of the emerging problems for further research work:

a] A case study of cost comparison between DE and conventional higher education.

b] Role of IGNOU in DE system and development of its network in Manipur.

c] Role of Coordinator in the DE system in the North Eastern Region of India in the 21st century.

d] Evaluation system of DE for various programme so far taken up by IGNOU.
c) A comparative study of dropout case in DE at both school level and higher education level in the NER.

f) A critical study of teacher education programme under distance mode in Manipur.

g) Development of information and communication technology in Manipur and its role in DE programme.

h) Development of Distance Education: A Comparative Study between Manipur and Assam.

I) Impact of EDUSAT on the Distance Education programme in the NER in the 21st Century.

If the above areas connected with various research topics related to DE will have to be taken up on priority basis, Distance education will be in a position to develop effectively in the north Eastern Region of India. It will be a means for the democratisation of higher education in the various states of the NER having serious problem for admission to various courses run by the conventional university system due to limitation of seats. Hence, research work in DE will have to be taken up in the right to help in the Educational development of the NER by all possible means.