CHAPTER - VII

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS
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7.1 SUMMARY:

The existing formal education system cannot provide education to all. An alternative arrangement is needed, which can provide educational opportunities to all those who wish to have education, but did not get a chance to join or complete formal education system due to some reason or the other and still want to continue their education. Distance education is the best alternative mode of teaching, which suits to our country’s socio-economical and geographical conditions.

For such a highly populated country, which is second in world has a best option for education is distance education only. Distance education is a mode of teaching, which can teach a mass population in one attempt. Which is based on “Cost effectiveness” principle.

Distance education is becoming more and more popular among the people as technology has given a new direction to education and the use of multi-media has made education more interesting.

In India the first Open University APOU - was established in 1982 and soon after IGNOU was established in 1985 by an act of Parliament. Today there are ten open universities and sixty-one other distance education directorates/correspondence institutes in all over the country. Some more are about to be started.

Distance education entered the North-Eastern region with the establishment of IGNOU Regional Centre at Shillong in 1987. In 1996, Guwahati was also made a
Regional Centre. Today we have total 11 study centres, 07 special study centres, 01 partner study centre, 03 programme centres and 02 work centres in Assam alone. In April 1998, PGCS, GU was also established by Guwahati University, which undertakes PG programmes in 07 different subjects.

Assam is socio-economically weaker and its geographical conditions are also not very convenient. It has maximum rainfall and which leads to flood situations in most of the parts of the State. This causes poor conditions in educational institutions. Acquiring higher education by desirous students living in the hill areas, in far remote places and in rural areas with poor transport and communication facilities, becomes very difficult. So, the distance education system has come up as the best alternative for such students, who do not get chance in formal education system due to these problems. These students can be benefited from the flexible policies of distance education.

Assam is the most developed State among the other North-Eastern States and it is a major educational centre for other neighbouring States also. More studies as well as job options are there compared to other North-Eastern States. So, student of other North-Eastern States are also more dependent on this State. For these students, distance education also opens a one extra way and option of learning.

Though, distance education has been around for some time so far no one has tried to examine distance education with different angles on the scenario of Assam. It is worth while making an analytical study of the present status of distance education as an alternative system of education in Assam. It is also felt that this study may help
in bringing improvement and will highlight the successes in this field. The study also attempts to identify the factors, which may help in strengthening distance education in Assam.

In the present work survey method has been employed and the data has been mainly collected by means of Questionnaires, Interview schedules, Check lists and Observations. These tools help in gathering real facts and picture about the present condition of distance education in Assam. In the present study, investigator has personally contacted respondents to collect data to make and ascertain authenticity of data. All the students who were investigated were asked to fill up the questionnaire and were also interviewed personally by the investigator to present a clear picture of distance education. The investigator has used Rank, mean and mainly percentage to find out the status of distance education in Assam.

The investigator adapted purposive sampling in selecting the study centres of IGNOU and Guwahati Regional Centre and the random sampling method was adopted to select the students. Four study centres of IGNOU, its Guwahati Regional Centre and PGCS, GU were selected for the present study.

There is a slight increase in the enrolment of distance education students in the year 2001. The increase is less than last years i.e. 2000. Enrollment number is however increasing every year. Even in 2002 data shows that enrolment number will increase.

It was found that 60.99 % of students belong to a urban background and 67.14% of males joined distance education mode. This, shows that among urban and
male students, distance education is more popular. 62.41% of students are from the General category and the second major category to get benefit from distance education is belongs to OBC, which is 24.35%. The SC & ST enrolment is very low.

56.03% of students were from the Assamese linguistic group. The rest belongs to other Indian language group.

45.86% students of distance education mode were employed. Among the distance education students 1.42% Farmers, 1.65% are House-wives and 5.44% of female distances education students are married.

Student from different educational backgrounds and having different qualifications come for distance education mode. They may have studied upto 10th or done Ph.D. belongs to Arts, Engineering or Science. But a majority of the distance education students are graduates.

Distance education has proved that age is no bar to study and acquire knowledge. It was found that people from 19 years to 55 years or even more wish to acquire knowledge. 56.50% of students belong to the 19 to 25 years age group. The second major age group is 26 to 30 year which contributes 24.11%.

45.15 % of students were employed and did not have time to attend regular classes in the formal education system. Therefore, they joined distance education mode 26.71% of students could not get admission due to less percentage as seats were limited, 26% could not join formal education, as their financial conditions were not very good, 66.43% of students said, their main motive in joining distance education was to save time. Other reasons like personal or family problems,
particular course or programme not being available at the nearby college/university, working in a transferable job, sickness (medically unable to join regular classes), distance from college, employment or studying some other course side by side, age factor or house work were also there.

It was found that 89.60% of students opted for a course for personal development, 85.58% for better job opportunities or promotions and 83.45% for self-satisfaction, means to acquire minimum required higher education. This percentage shows the great interest of individuals in distance education.

It was found that 88.89% of students were found satisfied with the admission procedures adopted for distance education. 89.36% of students were satisfied with the examination system and 82.03% of students were of the opinion that the evaluation system was good and effective and helpful in acquiring knowledge. 92.67% of students felt that their completion of course would help in improving their working efficiency, which is a main objective of education. 81.32% of students are found satisfied from the overall functioning of distance teaching institutions. Dissatisfaction was about very few matters.

71.39% of students were satisfied with study materials and 36.64 % accepted it as good and 28.13% felt that it was satisfactory. Only, 8.51% felt that the study material was unsatisfactory. 46.81% of students said that they received the study material always in time. The rest complained that they received it very late.

88.89% of students felt that course (design and contents) was helpful in acquiring knowledge. It was not inferior to a regular course. 56.74 % of students
were satisfied with the available number of courses. Other demanded courses like L.LB, B.A., M.A., Computer Courses, B. Ed. and some vocational courses as at some of study centres and PGCS, GU these were not available.

61.23% of students were satisfied from available student support services like counselling, Counsellors and library etc. in overall whereas about 37.59% of students were not satisfied with the available library facility.

74.94% of students accepted that they attend counselling session, but not regular, as and when time permits to them, they attend counselling session. 39.01% of students felt that counselling sessions are good, 26.71% felt that it is satisfactory and 14.18% felt that it as very good. 72.34% of students responded that counselling session should be made compulsory for few number of days.

79.67% of students accepted that distance education is more economical then formal education and 62.88% of students opinion is that distance education system is better than existing formal education system, as distance education is cost effective, time saving and technological based.

The counsellors available in distance education are highly qualified and experienced. IGNOU counsellors were not satisfied with their remuneration. Part time office staff and full time temporary staff is not satisfied with their remuneration in both IGNOU and PGCS, GU.

The students were not clear with the concepts of distance education. In their opinion distance education is a second category education system as compared with formal education.
35% of student has shown their interest in Assamese as a medium of instructions. They felt that they can prove better in Assamese medium.

The result of distance education is very poor. The output is even less than 6%. If we see the output of distance education, then it is totally wastage of money, time and manpower. The purpose of distance education is not served, if it can not provide us a good output in terms of quality and quantity both.

IGNOU is making the use of the assignment system for giving the feedback on student’s progress and so far PGCS, GU has not adopted this system.

IGNOU Regional Centre has full time permanent staff, and study centres has part time staff, whereas PGCS, GU office has full time but temporary staff and PGCS, GU did not have any study centre.

PGCS, GU’s infrastructure was found better than IGNOU study centers. It has a good specious building, Computer, Photocopier machine and furniture etc., whereas IGNOU did not have a good and specious building, Computer, Photocopier machine and furniture were also not sufficient in IGNOU study centres.

PGCS, GU is a full time institution, where as IGNOU study centres are part time institutions.

It was found that PGCS, GU’s fee is more than IGNOU. Still students like to join PGCS, GU as it is a part of local university.

All students demanded that PGCS, GU should have the same paper in exams and it should conduct its exams as per regular college schedule.
The findings of the present study shows that the open learning/distance education system helps in upgrading the knowledge and skills of the students. It provides the equal opportunities to all sections of the society irrespective of their caste, colour, creed, language and age. It acts as a best alternative of formal education for needy persons and a successful mode of educating a mass in one time. But it fails in giving a required output. Which is a great setback to distance education.

In view of the findings of the study, a number of suggestions, remedial measures are suggested for the better future prospects of distance education in Assam to achieve the goal of providing an best alternative education system to formal one for the needy persons who is good in studies and want to continue education, which he/she could not continue due to one reason or other.

7.2 Scope for Further Research:

The observation and analysis of the present study recommends some agenda, which can be undertaken for further studies on distance education to improve and extend distance education in Assam. This study is a start of a chapter of research in distance education in Assam. A short list of what the investigator of this study believes to be the most essential areas for future studies are listed below:

7.2.1 A comparative study is needed on formal education and distance education, for betterment of distance education, and also a comparative study between IGNOU, PGCS, GU or any other distance-teaching institute available.
7.2.2 Cost-effectiveness of distance education with formal education system is needed. That how much it is economical in comparison with formal education.

7.2.3 A study on counselling sessions conducted by distance teaching institutions is needed.

7.2.4 There is a need of study on developing a self-instructional study material for institutes like PGCS, GU. In this field more and urgent requirement is felt for research work as to what type of study material will be useful for distance learners.

7.2.5 Effectiveness of a mass-media and use of audio-visual aids for distance learners is required to be studied in context of Assam and how it can be made useful in Assam, as it has got its own limitations.

7.2.6 A study is on the needs of employed students of distance education and special attempt on Defence students is needed as State has many-many Armed Forces units deployed in borders and number of defence students is also quite good in IGNOU. So, it is felt that there should be a study needed on students from defence background, on their needs and requirements etc.

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