Chapter-I

Introduction:
Distance Education and Student Support Services
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Introduction

Distance education is a relatively new field of study and gaining prominence off late. However, different terms are used to refer to open and distance learning system. Some of them are: "correspondence education, home study, independent study, external study, continuing education, distance teaching, self instruction, adult education, technology-based or mediated education, learner-centered education, open learning, open access, flexible learning and distributed learning".¹

"Distance Education is a generic term that includes the range of teaching/learning strategies variously referred to as correspondence education or correspondence study in both developed and developing countries; as home study or independent study in the Unites States of America; external studies in Australia; 'Tele-Enseignement' in France; 'Femstadium' or 'Fernunterricht' in Germany; education a distance or 'ensenanza a distancia' in Spanish speaking countries and 'teleducacao' in Portuguese".²

Given the numerous terms in practice for education imparted in a distance mode in different countries also contributed to lack of clarity or confusion about this form of education and became a topic for debate for some time. However, now distance education has been proposed as a general term for this whole area of education encompassing both distance teaching and distance learning. "Distance teaching refers to the role of educational institution in providing education at a distance, whereas distance learning refers to the role of the student in the learning process of education at a distance".³
"Distance education is a fairly new term. It denotes the form of study not led by teachers present in class-rooms but supported by tutors and an organization at a distance from the student".⁴

Conventional and Distance Modes of Education: Differences

The present education system can be broadly divided into two categories. The most prevalent one is conventional / formal system of education. The second one is non formal system of education. The regular schools, colleges and universities fall under conventional / formal system of education, whereas the open universities and directorates of correspondence courses fall under non formal system of education. The differences between the two are better explained by Prof. Kulandai Swamy as, "conventional system caters to the needs of the learners from a specific age group of the primary, secondary and tertiary education system, provided they could become full time students and fulfill certain requirements on-campus preparations. For those in and out side these age groups, unable to fulfill the on-campus requirements and those that need education and training to gain competence in the jobs and those who need to upgrade, update and broaden their skills, the conventional system does not provide opportunities".⁵

Prof. Kulandai Swamy further stated that, “it is in this context that distance education emerged on the horizon. Distance education is neither a supplement nor a complement to the conventional system. It is not even an alternative. It is a new mode in its own right and meets new demands and cater to new target groups. It has very high potential for transcending all barriers-economic, social, cultural and geographical-and reach its clients”.⁶ The following table very aptly indicates the differences between the conventional system of education and distance system of education.⁷
Table 1.1. Difference between Conventional and Distance Education Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventional Education System</th>
<th>Distance Education System</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning is a full time and major activity.</td>
<td>Learning is a part time secondary activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learner remains in one role and continues the membership of a learning institution.</td>
<td>The learner returns to a role he had some time ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learner 'belongs' to an institution.</td>
<td>The learner is a member of many institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learner is usually young.</td>
<td>The learner is an adult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learner is in easy contact with fellow learners.</td>
<td>Contact with fellow learners may not be easy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learner has easy access to the institutional resources.</td>
<td>The learner's contact with the institution is infrequent and often takes place across a distance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: B.N.Koul and Anita Bhatt (1989), Academic Counselling. p.6

After knowing the differences between the conventional educational system and distance educational system, an attempt is made to find out the definitions of distance education.

**Definitions of Distance Education**

The following are some of the important definitions given by eminent thinkers and practitioners of distance education system. They have highlighted very important and crucial issues in distance education and helped the growth and development of distance education as an academic subject. The definitions can be classified as one group, which highlighted the separation of teacher and the student while imparting education. The other definitions have emphasized on different aspects of distance education like, division of labor, role of organization, industrial form of education, self study, independent study, learner autonomy, guided didactic conversation and two-way communication.

Moor defined distance education as "the family of instructional methods in which the teaching behaviors are executed apart from the learning behaviors, including those that in a contiguous situation would be performed in the learners' presence, so that communication between the teacher and the learner must be facilitated by print,
electronic, mechanical or other devices." Wedemeyer defined distance education as an "independent study consists of various forms of teaching-learning arrangements in which teachers and learners carry out their essential tools and responsibilities apart from one another, communicating in a variety of ways." 

Otto Peters, very eminent thinker of distance education highlighted different aspects of distance education, stated the distance education is "a method of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes which is rationalized by the application of division of labor and organizational principles as well as by the extensive use of teclincal media, especially for the purpose of reproducing high quality teaching material which makes it possible to instruct great numbers of students at the same time wherever they live. It is an industrialized form of teaching and learning." Important components of his definition are division of labor, role of organization in imparting education, use of teclincal media and industrial form of education.

According to Holmberg, distance education includes "the various forms of study at all levels which are not under continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organization." Dohmne has defined the distance education as a "systematically organized form of self-study in which student counselling, the presentation of learning material and securing and supervising of students, success is carried out by a team of teachers, each of whom has responsibilities. It is made possible at a distance by means of media which can cover long distances."

Some of the practitioners like Perraton, Dodds, Kulandai Swamy and Mehrotra gave much emphasis on the separation of teacher and the student in their simple definitions of distance education. According to Perraton distance education is an "educational process in which a significant proportion of teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and / or time from the learner." Dodds defined distance education as "any system of teaching and learning in which the students are at a distance from their teachers for most of the time they are studying." Kulandai Swamy on the
same lines stated that "distance Education in simple terms is a mode of education where a student is separated from the teaching in space and time."\textsuperscript{15} Mehrotra and others defined distance education as "any formal approach to instruction in which the majority of the instruction occurs while educator and learner are not in each other's physical presence."\textsuperscript{16}

The above definitions of various exponents of distance education and distance teaching have highlighted many important aspects in their definitions. If we examine each definition the following important aspects can be noticed. Moor in his definition has given central position to the separation of teacher and the learners and use of technical media. Wedemeyer who made efforts to popularize the term independent study for distance education in the United States and also in the world, has highlighted the separation of teacher and the learner and communicating in a variety of ways leading to the individualized learning. Peters has highlighted the use of technical media, mass education of students at a distance and industrialization of teaching process. Holmberg's definition also highlighted the separation of teacher and learner and the role of planning by an educational organization. Dohmen has highlighted organization of self study by an institution and use of media. Perreton has highlighted the use of combination of media like print, broadcast and face-to-face sessions for imparting education. Dodds, Kulandai Swamy and Mehrotra and others have highlighted the separation of teacher and the learner in the education process.

A Comprehensive Definition

After studying various definitions given by the proponents of distance education, Keegan has noticed that the definitions are not able to offer any single comprehensive definition for distance education. Hence he proposed and formulated a definition by synthesizing the important elements of definitions given by others. His definition has highlighted all-important elements of distance education. The main elements of Keegan's definition\textsuperscript{17} of distance education are:
Distance Education - Phases of Development

Many exponents have highlighted the various phases of development and growth of distance education system. Prominent among them are James Taylor and Prof. Prasad. Taylor has identified five phases of development of distance education considering the main methodology used for imparting education at a distance. Taylor's generations of distance education are given in the following table.
Table 1.2. James Taylor Models of Distance Education - A Conceptual Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models of Distance Education and Associated Delivery Technologies</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Generation - The Correspondence Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Generation - The Multi-media Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audiotape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videotape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer-based learning (e.g. CML/CAL/IMM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive video (disk and tape)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Generation - The Tele learning Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio teleconferencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videoconferencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio graphic Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast TV/Radio and Audio teleconferencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Generation - The Flexible Learning Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive multimedia (IMM) online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet-based access to WWW resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer mediated communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Generation - The Intelligent Flexible Learning Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive multimedia (IMM) online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet-based access to WWW resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer mediated communication, using automated response systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus portal access to institutional processes and resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The models identified by Taylor are based on the progressive developments in the field of technology. When the printing press was invented, it helped to print the material and the postal system helped to distribute the material to distance learners in different locations. Similarly video and audio technologies of second generation helped the institution to record the lessons for listening at the study centres during the counselling sessions and to broadcast them through radio and television stations. In the third generation, the interactive component was added to the existing technologies to bridge the distance between the teacher and the student. In the fourth generation flexibility in learning was incorporated adding a new dimension to the learning process through internet, web-based and computer mediated technologies which brought in the interactive online web based resources for the learners. Fifth generation is more advanced having automated responsive systems and providing access to computer portals of the institution to the learners. It contributed greatly for the learner flexibility as these technologies are
accessible to learners always. Taylor's frame work helped to understand the different phases of development of distance education.

In this regard it is not out of the context to find out the development of different phases of distance education in India. While tracing out the development of distance education system in India, Prof. Prasad has identified four generations of development in distance education while delivering Fifth Annual Prof.G.Ram Reddy Memorial Lecture.\(^\text{19}\)

Table 1.3. Generations of Distance Education in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generations of Distance Education</th>
<th>Delivery Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Generation</td>
<td>Print based system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Generation</td>
<td>Multi-media system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Generation</td>
<td>Interactive media system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Generation</td>
<td>Virtual learning system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Prasad ,V.S. (2001), Distance Education in India: Present Scenario and Future Horizons, IDEA-2001, Warangal, p.4

The first generation is based on printed course materials. In the second generation, multi-media components like audio and video lessons in the form of cassettes are provided at the study centre for students. In the third generation interactive media was introduced in the form of teleconferencing and radio phone-in counselling which gave an opportunity of talk back facility between the students and teachers. In the fourth generation, online support is introduced in the form of virtual learning system wherein web-based resources are made available through internet to the distance learners. Distance education in a short span of time emerged as a major form of education and training to large numbers. There are many factors, which contributed for its growth of distance education.
Distance Education - Contributing Factors for Growth

Factors contributing for the growth of distance education are explained by many practitioners in open and distance education system. Prof. Dhanarajan, President of Commonwealth of Learning, aptly summarized the major reasons for open and distance learning and its growth and development in developing countries are: "(1) political desire to increase the access, (2) economic desire to reduce the costs, (3) social desire to egalitarian society and (4) educational desire to improve the relevance and quality of curriculum."²⁰

According to Mehrotra and others, the factors which contribute for the growth of distance education, are many, however the following are worth noting.²¹

1. The increased requirements for higher education for career advancement
2. The demand for flexible scheduling by potential students whose daily routines are complex and do not mesh with rhythm of the traditional educational day
3. The growing market for personal fulfillment courses driven by increased personal income in some sectors of society
4. The general shift in the public attitude from one that views education as a youthful pursuit to one that values lifelong learning
5. The growing requirement in many professions that members take additional course work every year or two for license renewal (like refresher courses / programmes)
6. The emphasis that many employers today place on specific competencies, rather then degrees, in their working
7. The shift of educators from teacher-centered education to student-centered learning
8. The increasing awareness among educators that students vary greatly in their learning styles
9. The need for greater flexibility in providing education access to students with disabilities
10. The variation in students' willingness to participate in class
11. The increased pressure on public institutions of higher learning to develop cost-effective models of collaboration with other institutions of higher education

To provide higher educational opportunities, many countries established open universities. The first Open University came into existence in 1969 in the United Kingdom. It has brought recognition and credibility to open and distance education system in the world. Many countries since then continued to establish open universities for the following reasons.

Reasons for Establishment of Open Universities

Distance education became mainstream form of higher education and is no longer a fringe activity in different parts of the world and many countries have established open universities for the following reasons.\textsuperscript{22}

1. The need felt in many countries to increase the offer of university education generally
2. A realization that adult people with jobs, family and social commitments constituted a large group of prospective part-time university students
3. A wish to serve both individuals and society by offering study opportunities to adults, among the disadvantaged groups
4. The need found in many professions for further training at an advanced level
5. A wish to support education innovation
6. A belief in the feasibility of an economical use of educational resources by mediated teaching
The above reasons have amply shown why open universities are established to provide distance education to large numbers. Distance education institutions can be broadly categorised as single mode and dual mode institutions.

**Kinds of Distance Education Institutions**

There are two major kinds of open and distance learning systems that offer education through open and distance learning mode. They are popularly categorized as single mode institution and dual mode institution depending upon their mode of establishment and nature of functioning.

1. Single mode institutions: Established to provide educational programmes at a distance, but face-to-face interaction also provided which is optimal for the learners. They follow multi-media instructional methods to impart education to the learners which include, print material, audio, video programmes, radio, television, teleconferencing etc., Open Universities like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Indira Gandhi National Open University and United Kingdom Open University fall under this category.

2. Dual mode institution: They are basically conventional educational institutions offering education through traditional class-room based methods as well as imparting education for some programmes through distance methods. Basically for imparting education in distance mode they follow print material only. The conventional universities like Andhra University and Osmania University which are offering some of their academic programmes through their Schools / Centres of Distance Education fall under this category. Irrespective of type of institution, distance education in general has many advantages.
Advantages of Distance Education

Distance education offers many advantages to the providers of educational opportunities as well as the beneficiaries. Problems like distance and time can be easily overcome. It has many advantages, which include: "(1) overcoming physical distances, (2) solving time or scheduling problem, (3) expanding the limited number of places available, (4) accommodating low or dispersed enrolments, (5) making best use of limited number of teachers available and (6) dealing with cultural, religious and political considerations."

Some of the other advantages identified by Perraton include: (1) distance teaching makes it possible for a few teachers to reach a large number of students, (2) it makes it possible for education to be expanded without building extra schools and colleges and use existing buildings when they would otherwise be standing idle, (3) makes it possible for students to learn while they continue to work, (4) distance teaching can achieve economies of scale and (5) once teaching materials have been produced and the system established the cost of enrolling additional students is relatively low". In spite of these advantages distance education has some disadvantages also.

Disadvantages of Distance Education

Every form of education system has both advantages and disadvantages. According to Perraton the distance education system has some disadvantages which include the following: (1) it can be old, remote, and didactic, (2) it lends itself to rote learning, (3) it has been marked by high drop-out rates and (4) it is more difficult to build a dialogue into distance teaching and stimulate the individual response.

The definitions of distance education have underlined many important aspects of distance education. They are, separation of teacher and the student, role of technical media, importance of organization and industrialization of education. In this connection distance education thinkers and practitioners felt the need to provide student support
services to reduce the isolation of the learner and provide channels for communication in the form of face-to-face personal contact programmes and use of media. A brief evolution of distance education system in India is given below.

**Distance Education System in India**

The present state of distance education in India has its origins in the earlier correspondence education in India. The need for democratization of education and equal opportunities for access to education has been recognized by the founding fathers of Indian republic. The first Five year plan envisaged the provision of education through private study through correspondence courses supported by radio talks organised by universities to allow the students to take examinations privately. But this vision did not materialize till the third Five year plan which realized and recognized growing number of students and thought of providing education through evening colleges and correspondence courses. With the realization of need to provide educational opportunities to the students and to give concrete shape to the correspondence education system, a committee under the chairmanship of Dr. D.S.Kothari was appointed by the Ministry of Education to prepare the blueprint for establishment of correspondence education programmes in the country. The Committee recommended, as a pilot project under the University of Delhi, starting of correspondence courses in 1962 with restriction to offer courses only in arts, commerce and social sciences at the undergraduation level. This is how the Correspondence Courses Institution came into existence in the University of Delhi.  

The next major step in the evolution of correspondence education was the appointment of Education Commission (1966), again under the chairmanship of Dr. D.S. Kothari, which has studied the pilot project in the University of Delhi and recommended expansion of correspondence education as widely as possible for the courses including sciences and technology at the degree and diploma level. The progress of correspondence education in the University of Delhi and the endorsement by the Education Commission have set the pace for further development and proliferation/expansion of correspondence...
education system in India in various universities. The development has influenced many universities like Panjabi University (1968), Meerut University (1969) and Mysore University (1969) to establish correspondence education programmes.  

The next phase in the evolution and development of distance education in India was the appointment of a working group and a committee, who felt the need to strengthen the gains achieved in correspondence education by giving proper shape to the concept and idea of open university in the country. The Ministry of Education and Social Welfare in collaboration with University Grants Commission and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation organized a seminar on open university in December 1970. The seminar felt that the situation was ripe for establishing an open university and recommended to setting up of a working committee to study the feasibility of cost and other aspects of establishing an open university by the Government of India. A Working Group was constituted under the chairmanship of G.Parthasarathi to study the idea of open university. The Working Group after taking various factors into consideration felt that the demand for higher education is very high, whereas the resources are limited to meet the higher education needs of the different sections of society. It recommended the establishment of an open university by an Act of Parliament as early as possible with national jurisdiction. However, the recommendation was not implemented. Again in 1982, the committee which enquired into the working of Central Universities under the chairpersonship of Dr.(Mrs) Madhuri R.Shah recommended the establishment of a national open university without any delay.  

During the same time the Government of Andhra Pradesh took a decision to establish Andhra Pradesh Open University at the state level as per the recommendations of the Prof. G.Ram Reddy Committee in 1982. Presently it is renamed as Dr.B.R. Ambedkar Open University and located at Hyderabad. However, the idea of open university gained momentum with the first public broadcast to the nation by the then Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi as a part of New Education Policy - 1985. Immediately in 1985 the Government of India commissioned the Educational Consultants of India to prepare a Project Report under the chairmanship of Prof. G.Ram Reddy, the
then the Vice-Chancellor of Andhra Pradesh Open University for establishment of a national open university. Armed with the report, the Government of India introduced the Bill in the Parliament to establish Indira Gandhi National Open University and the University came into existence on 20th September 1985.\textsuperscript{31} It took 15 long years to realize the idea of establishment of a national open university at the national level. It is also interesting to know that it took 20 long years after the establishment of first correspondence courses institution in Delhi University in 1962 to establish first open university in India.

The distance education system is emerging as a strong higher education system in India. The Distance Education Council has been established as a statuary body under IGNOU Act 1985 and to serve an apex body for distance education in India for promotion, maintenance of standards and coordination of open and distance education. According to Prof. Dikshit, the Distance Education Council has "adopted a pro-active approach and initiated measures for development of distance education and overall strengthening of institutions"\textsuperscript{32} in India. Regarding the present status of open and distance learning system, Prof. Dikshit commented that it "has now established its credibility, competence, capability and capacity to bring in a very successful revolution and transformation in our country."\textsuperscript{33} At present there are ten open universities at the state level and one open university at the national level. In addition, eighty six dual mode conventional universities are offering education through distance mode. Thus distance education is emerging as a credible educational system in India.\textsuperscript{34}

**Distance Education/Teaching System**

Distance education/university system consists of many divisions and sub-systems. Rumble stated that distance education system consists of two important sub-systems namely materials sub-system\textsuperscript{35} and student services sub-system\textsuperscript{36}. In addition to these, there are many other sub-systems or divisions in a distance teaching university such as academic faculties, schools and departments, administration, finance divisions, etc\textsuperscript{37}. 
Organisational structure of distance education system is basically divided on functional divisions of work among different sub-systems and divisions. The materials sub-system deals with course development, course production and course delivery/distribution. The student support sub-system deals with student admission and allocation, advisory and counselling services, assignment handling and correspondence tuition, face-to-face, telephone and two way radio tuition and residential schools use of technologies for student support services, examinations and local centres.

It can be said that student support sub-system is very important in the organizational structure of open university system which teaches through distance mode. While explaining about the role of student support services in open and distance education system Prof. Koul stated that "the entire gamut of open distance education as an exercise in student support services". Where as Wright felt that student support services are "essential to ensure successful delivery of learning services at a distance". Some of the definitions of student support services are explained below.

Definitions of Student Support Services

The definitions given by various practitioners of open and distance learning have brought some of the crucial and important components of student support services into forefront. According to Marian Craft student support services can be defined as the "services other than actual course material which institution provides to the learners to realize their learning objectives of the programme." Simpson stated that student support services are "all activities beyond the production and delivery of course materials to assist the progress of students in their studies."

Student support services are defined by Alan Tait as a "range of services [both for individuals and for students in groups] which complement the course materials or learning resources that are uniform for all learners, and which are often perceived as major offering of institutions using open and distance learning." Where as Nunan stated
that student support service "is not an 'add on' but 'an all pervasive' component of educational process which ensures that learning and teaching are approached from a learner-centered vision of education."

Thrope felt that the support for learners can be defined as "all those elements capable of responding to a known learner or group of learners, before, during and after the learning process." While Srivastava defined the support services as "the range of activities which complemented the mass produced materials." Mehrotra and others defined support services as "all the institution's interactions with students except those conveying instructional content." Kishore felt that the support extended by the distance learning institution to meet the varied needs of the learners can be called as student support services.

A careful look and critical analysis of above definitions of student support services will bring out some important aspects and components of student support services in distance education into forefront. They can be stated as: (1) they cover wide range of services and activities other than mass produced course materials, (2) essential for successful delivery of programmes, (3) they cover all pervasive areas of educational and learning process, (4) they are continuous exercise and (5) aimed to meet wide variety of learner needs.

Next an attempt is made to find out the different components which constitute part of student support services in distance education. The components identified by different practitioners will provide a frame work for formulating a questionnaire for the research study.

Components Constituting Student Support Services

Proponents of student support services have deliberated upon different components of student support services provided in distance education. Prominent among them are Sewart, Prof. Kulandai Swamy, Prof. Venkaih, Reid, Tait and Simpson who
highlighted some of the important and essential components invariably provided to the distance learners.

David Sewart has identified some of the student support services consisting of the following: "(1) class teaching at study centres, (2) individual tutorials at study centre or other locations, (3) annual residential schools (compulsory or optional), (4) study or self help groups, (5) social events, (6) counselling sessions at study centres (7) correspondence with tutors and counsellors, (8) telephone contact with tutor and counsellor, (9) group telephone tutorials (10) radio tutorials (11) audio cassette correspondence (12) computer mediated communication and (13) student news papers". 53

Prof. Kulandai Swamy considered the following as components of student support services in distance education. They are part of a multi-channel instructional system comprising, "(1) specially prepared self-instructional materials (2) audio-video cassettes with emphasis on distance method, (3) telephonic contact with the instruction and teleconferences, (4) interactive radio counselling, radio broadcast and telecast, (5) computer-aided instruction, (6) counselling sessions, (7) student group discussions and (8) hands-on experiences with practical component." 59

According to Prof. Venkaiah student support services consist of the following areas of support: "(1) record keeping, (2) information provision, (3) admission and registration, (4) library services, (5) placement information, (6) counselling, (7) audio-visual instruction, (8) electronic mail, (9) student news letters, (10) hands-on practicals, (11) mobile learning centres and (12) summer/winter schools." 60

According to Reid the following aspects or areas are covered by the student support services: "(0) career counselling, (2) academic guidance, (3) student advocacy, (4) learning support (including study and exam skills seminars, access to formal study groups, and informal groups), (5) personal counselling, (6) support for special needs, (7) specific course and programme information, (8) financial advice, (9) library service and (10) specific one-to-one tutorial assistance." 61
According to Alain Tait the student support services include the following: "(0 enquiry, admission and pre-study advisory services, (2) tutoring, (3) guidance and counselling services, (4) assessment of prior learning and credit transfer, (5) study and examination centre, (6) residential schools (7) library services, (8) individual correspondence teaching, including in some cases continuous assessment, (9) record keeping, information management and other administrative systems, (10) differentiated services for students with special needs one sort or another, eg. disability, geographical remoteness and prisoners and (11) materials which support the development of study skills, programme planning and career development."\(^62\)

According to Simpson the student support services consisting of the following aspects: "(1) academic support, (2) non-academic support, (3) advising in developmental areas (vocational guidance, course choice, learning skills and general motivation and counselling), (4) problem solving areas (institution related, study, time and personal problems), (5) assessment (giving feedback to the individual on non-academic aptitudes and skills) and (6) action (practical help to promote study).\(^63\)

The above authors have touched upon wide variety of components, which constitute student support services. There are similarities as well as difference in their perceptions on student support services. It shows that there cannot be one unified approach to student support services. However, these authors have provided a broad framework for student support services. Based on their perceptions the following can be considered as components of student support services.

Careful study and analysis of different components of above practitioners on student support services will help to identify major components of student support services in distance education. They are (1) information support, (2) guidance support, (3) counselling support, (4) support through personal contact programmes, (5) self-instructional materials, (6) assignments, (7) library support, (8) provision for practicals, (9) study centre support and (10) media support services.
Proper dissemination of correct information, right guidance and positive counselling services are essential prerequisites for any sort of student support services in distance education. Once the student is admitted into a particular programme of study, self instructional materials are to be supplied, face to face personal contact programmes need to be organised and the students have to submit their assignments for evaluation. To meet the library needs of the students, a small library is also provided at the study centres, special arrangements need to be made to conduct practicals. All these support services need to be routed through and provided at the study centres, which are grass-root level organizational structures in distance education system. Media has been extensively utilized for teaching and supporting distance learners. Considering the relevance and importance of the above components in student support services, the research has been undertaken. While commenting about the need for student support services Sewart felt that "it is the richness and variety, the multiplicity of provision, which attracts and sustains our students. Study centres and what is offered in them are part of this richness of provision".64

Classification of Student Support Services

After the identification of different components of student support services it would be my endeavor to classify them into different groups. The broad classification will facilitate in analyzing the student support services. For the convenience of the present research study the components of student support services can be classified in to four groups. They are (0 individual based support services, (2) academic support services, (3) organizational support services and (4) media support services.

Individual based support services consist of components like information support, guidance support and counselling support services. They are basically individual based/targeted support services. Academic support services consist of components like self instructional materials, personal contact programmes and support through assignments. They are both individual and group based support services.
Study centre is the grass-root level organization established to deliver different student support services to the distance learners. Organisational support services consist of all the support services provided through and at study centre for distance learners. They are library support, provision for practicals and the role of study centre in providing the support services. The media is playing very active role in distance education for providing support and teaching. Media support services consists of all the media based support services provided by the institution. They are radio lessons, audio lessons, television lessons, video lessons, teleconferencing and radio counselling. Media support services are provided at study centre and some of them are directly available at the residences of the distance learners. They are both individual and group based support services.

Characteristics of Distance Learners

Student support services are provided in distance education system because of the peculiar nature and characteristics of students. The characteristics of distance learners are: "(1) they are isolated learners, (2) they come from diverse backgrounds-educational, economic, social and occupational, (3) they lack study skills and (4) they are highly motivated, committed, mature and responsible."65

Problems Faced by Distance Learners

Distance learners face a variety of problems while they pursue academic programmes. Common problems faced by distance learners include: “(1) isolation from the institution counsellors and fellow learners/peer group, (2) difficulty in organizing studies and finding sufficient time to study, (3) difficulty in balancing work, study and family responsibilities and commitments. (4) lack of motivation, (5) lack of resources and equipment and (6) lack of study techniques.”66 The problems faced by distance learners can also be classified as: “(1) study techniques, (2) learning difficulties, (3) difficulties arising in dealing with remote and impersonal institution and (4) personal problems.” 67
Typical problems faced by distance learners are identified as: "(0 family pressures, (2) worries about work and money, (3) lack of books and libraries, (4) lack of their own study space, (5) isolation, (6) lack of transport to get to tutorials, (7) lack of confidence, (8) no undisturbed study time, (9) low levels of reading ability and (10) too busy to attend tutorials." Further, an attempt is made to find out the special needs of distance learners.

Special Needs of Distance Learners

Distance learners have some special needs. They arise due to the problems they face in the open and distance learning system. Some of the special needs of distance learners are: "(1) information about programmes and institutional system, (2) whom to contact when they had academic and administrative problems, (3) dealing with an impersonal institution which is far away from them and (4) advise on how to study and whom to contact for support." The distance learners need support services at different stages of their studies.

Stages of Student Support Services

Support needs to be provided to the distance learners as per their learning needs at different stages in learning cycle. They are better explained in the following table:

Table 1.4. Stages in the Learning Cycle of Distance Learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages in Learning Cycle</th>
<th>Learning Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-enrolment</td>
<td>• Information about the institution and its courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Advice on which courses to choose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Advice on how to finance studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment and Starting study</td>
<td>• More detailed introductory about institution and study procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Advice on studying at a distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Advice on planning studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During study</td>
<td>• Support and motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assessment and evolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion and graduation</td>
<td>• Notification of exam results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Career advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Advice on further studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: COL & ADB, (1999a), An Overview of Open and Distance Learning, Chapter 5, page-3
According to Dodds the distance learners need four kinds of advice and support at three different stages of their studies. They are, pre course advise, tutorial advise on subject matter, non-subject counselling and follow up counselling. According to Mehrotra and others the distance learners need support services in three phases of their learning, which include before enrollment in a programme, the support in providing information to prospective students, admissions, financial aid, academic advising and registration. While enrolled, support covers the support for book stores and library services, technical support, tutoring and services for students with disabilities. After course or programme completion, support covers the transcript services, alumni association, continuing education opportunities and career services.

Lewis identified the needs of open learning students are in six stages of their studies which include before the course, entry to the course, early days on the course, mid-course, examination/leaving point and after the course. Rowntree stated that open learning's open door can easily become a revolving door that deposits the learners back on the pavement and at three stages the learners need help, before they even begin learning, as well as during and after a learning programme. All of them have emphasized the need to provide student support services at different stages of learning to the distance learners.

Justification for Student Support Services

David Scewart is one of the very important practitioners who has highlighted the human element/aspects of otherwise industrialized form of education. David Scewart believed that the crux of distance teaching is a "continuity of concern for students learning at a distance". The expression "continuity of concern" and "safety net" bring the human element into the forefront. While accepting the role of self-instructional materials in distance education, he couldn't agree with the notion that self-instructional materials could perform all the functions of the teacher in a face-to-face education. He believes that developing a "hypothetically perfect package of teaching materials" is unreliable and argues that just as in most complex bureaucracies an intermediary is
necessary to bridge the gap between the individual and the institution. So, in a distance education system an intermediary is necessary between individual student and the teaching package. The intermediary is a part of the system but works for student and individualises their problems when confronted with bureaucracy. Sewart gives more importance to the needs of students learning at a distance and urges for an interactive mode of system to attend the needs of the learners. He believes that the failure to recognize the necessity for support to learner needs has resulted in lack of esteem for distance education systems.

In spite of sophisticated design and versatility of the course material the learner will always need additional human support which alone can match the infinite variety of problems that non-contiguous teaching/learning give rise to. The distance teaching institutions will have to provide this advisory, guidance and counselling support through a human agency which alone can guarantee the continuity of concern for students learning at a distance. The need for human support assumes more importance due to the lack of immediate feedback and near total absence of peer group interaction of distance learners.

Sewart emphasized the role of human element in distance education because the self-instructional materials are not able to solve, (a) the infinite variety of learner problems (b) provide immediate feedback and (c) encourage peer group interaction. Hence Sewart strongly advocates the necessity of student support services. While justifying the need for student support services for students in distance education Perraton felt that "they lack the support from their peers and they lack an easy point of comparison with their peers."

The human element which Sewart has championed has been put into operation in the form of student support services in open universities. These student support services are provided through "a network of regional/ study centres in open universities. The academic programmes are delivered through the study centres and they give face value to
the open universities. Open universities acknowledge that their students need support beyond what is provided through the self-instructional materials.

While stressing the need for student support services Prof. Prasad stated that because of the provision of student support services the distance education is different from the private appearance. He further felt that there is a need to identify minimum services to be provided to the distance learners. While commenting on development of study skills for distance learners, Prof. Prasad felt that “some distance learners suffer from ‘Abhimanya Syndrome’, i.e. they know how to enter Open University but do not know how to come out successfully. The learners should be clearly informed of what is required from them as distance learners before they join the programme.”

The student support services are provided to the distance learners because of their characteristics, the problems they face with an impersonal educational system and the special needs they have. According to Prof. Venkaiah the student support services are needed for the following reasons: "(1) to minimize the negative effects of isolation and the lack of regular personal contacts, (2) to achieve tangible results with the introduction of specific services to special need/equity groups, (3) to solve administrative and learning/psychological problems of students, (4) to develop autonomy and independence among students and (5) to help students to overcome limitations of print medium."

While strongly advocating the student support services, Sewart expressed that "advise/support function cannot be supplied through the teaching package" in distance education. In this connection it would be interesting to note what Perraton stated about student support services in distance education. He stated that "most of us require some sort of human contact to make our learning come alive, to resolve difficulties with a text, to get encouragement". It is also not out of context to quote what Rowntree stated regarding the need for student support services and the consequences for lacking support. He stated that "learners without support are most liable to delay their completion of a programme or to drop altogether. They simply have no one to turn to when they run into problems". It is also essential to know that the institution also has very vital role to play
in providing student support services. Perraton expressed that "if students are to learn at a distance, they need effective educational and administrative support". Where as Dodds stated that "it is the responsibility of the institution to ensure that whatever support or facilities are needed in the course are available to the students".

The role of bureaucracy in distance education is very much visible for effective functioning. Prof. Prasad commented that “in conventional system the students create problems to the institution, but in distance education institution creates problems to the students”. The performance of distance educational institution is dependent on the staff working in them. Prof. Prasad has categorized the staff into four groups as (1) "the competent, but not committed, (2) the committed, but not competent, (3) neither competent nor committed and (4) competent and committed". He further felt that there is a need to recognize and encourage the fourth category, remove the third category, train the second category and motivate the first category.

Tait gave three important reasons for providing student support services in open and distance learning system. They are: (1) the majority students want support, (2) the support services help in reduction of drop out and (3) because of nature of learning at a distance. According to Tait student support in the form of guidance, counselling, tutorial, information and administrative support system contribute for "reinforcing the student sense of confidence, self-esteem and progress" and the support services aim in "assisting students learn successfully."

Sewart's concept of "continuity of concern" and Prof. Prasad's concept of “abhimanya syndrome" will help in understanding the student support services in proper perspective. Sewart's continuity of concern has highlighted the responsibility of the institution towards the distance learners in providing student support services in varied forms. Where as Prof. Prasad's abhimanya syndrome projected the situation of many distance learners who enter the open and distance learning system with enthusiasm and do not know how to come out of it. Here the distance learner needs to be empowered with skills and methods of distance learning. It means student support services should also
play the pro-active role in empowering the distance learner with required skills. Both these concepts are equally emphasizing the importance of student support services in distance education.

The writings of above practitioners of distance education system have amply revealed what should constitute student support services in distance education. These writings have thrown up the need to provide wide variety of student support services to the students in distance education like variety of needs and students. The problems faced by the distance learners also highlighted the need for support services that are to be provided to the students to overcome their difficulties. The different stages identified by different authors also emphasize the need to provide student support services at every stage of their education from pre-admission stage to post-degree awarding stage.

Objectives of the Study

The present research study has the following objectives:
1. To study the evolution of distance education in India
2. To highlight the importance of distance education in general and student support services in particular
3. To study the social background of students of open university
4. To identify the important components of student support services
5. To classify the components of student support services
6. To collect and analyse the perceptions of respondents on identified components of student support services
7. To study the levels of satisfaction of respondents on identified components of student support services
8. To critically evaluate the administration and delivery of student support services based on the perceptions of the respondents
Research Methodology

The research studies on student support services are relatively less when compared to other areas of research in open and distance education. Robinson has identified the following as some of the reasons for lack of much research in student support services. The reasons are: "(1) the area of student support is perceived as a less glamorous activity, (2) it is often regarded as peripheral activity when compared to the real activity of developing course materials, (3) it is vulnerable to financial cuts and (4) it is basically/largely a pragmatic activity based on experience." Lack of many research studies on student support services is also another important reason which forced the researcher to undertake this study.

The research study is conducted by taking Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University as the case study. The reasons for selecting Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University are, it is the first Open University in India. It is a single mode distance education institution. It is also following multi-media methodologies for imparting education and student support services to its students. It has large network of study centres in Andhra Pradesh for providing student support services. It needs comprehensive study to understand various facets of student support services of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University with a learner's perspective. The researcher’s experience of working in the delivery of student support services also motivated to undertake this study to get first hand knowledge of how the student support services are provided at the grassroots level. It is an attempt to understand the student support services with learner's perspective. The operational reasons like proximity to the institution for collection of data during the field work and time constraints are some other reasons for selecting Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University for undertaking the present research study.

Two districts are selected for collection of data. One is Hyderabad and the other is Mahaboobnagar. Hyderabad is predominantly developed and urban district. Where as Mahaboobnagar is predominantly under developed and rural district. Discussions were held with the officials of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University before finalising the study area. The researcher had met the then Vice-Chancellor Prof. V.S.Prasad, who suggested
for selection of two districts. The researcher also held discussions with the Director, Student Services Branch and other officials of the branch. In Mahaboobnagar district undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are offered in one study centre. Where as in Hyderabad district undergraduate programmes are offered in one study centre and postgraduate programmes are offered in another study centre. Hence two study centres are selected in Hyderabad district. In all data is collected from three study centres. In Mahaboobnagar district the study centre is located in M.V.S. Government Degree College for undergraduate and postgraduate respondents. In Hyderabad district the study centre for undergraduate programmes is located in New Government College, Khairatabad, where as for postgraduate programmes it is located in Pragathi Maha Vidhyalaya, Koti.

The research methodology followed for undertaking the present study is based on both primary sources and secondary sources. The secondary data was collected from the books, research journals, conference papers, documents, manuals, Acts and Statutes and Vice-Chancellors Convocation Reports. The researcher has visited the library of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University and the library of Indira Gandhi National Open University Regional Centre many times for referring books, journals and other publications. The researcher has made regular visits to offices of Students Services Branch and Computer Centre of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University for data collection.

The primary data was collected with the help of a questionnaire from the respondents. Pre-testing of questionnaire for data collection was done on a pilot study at two study centres in Hyderabad. The sample of the pre-test pilot study was fifty students of final year undergraduate and postgraduate programmes of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University. The questionnaire used for the pilot study consists of open ended and closed ended questions. The respondents answered closed ended questions without any problem. It was noticed during the pilot study that the respondents are not answering the open ended questions properly. They told the researcher while administering the questionnaire that it would be better if all the possible options or answers for the open ended questions were listed under each question. An option of ‘any other’ to give their own answer if the respondents do not agree with the opinions or answers can be given for each question.
After the pilot study and collection of data from fifty respondents, the data was thoroughly scrutinised and the answers for each open ended question was listed out and analysed to know all the possible answers to the questions.

Before administering the questionnaire the respondents were explained about the objectives and purpose of the research study and the respondents were asked to give their free and frank opinion on each item in the questionnaire. The respondents were told categorically that their views and opinions will be used only for the research purpose and confidentiality will be maintained.

Considering the feedback received on the pilot study and after noticing several gaps in answers for some questions, it was felt that it is necessary to prepare a close ended questionnaire for final data collection with an option to the respondents to give their own answer if the listed out options are not acceptable to them for each question. Accordingly a structured and closed ended questionnaire was prepared for data collection. Pilot study helped the researcher in estimating the possible alternative answers for each question and the discussions held during the pilot study were found to be very useful in finalizing the questionnaire. Care has been taken to cover all the aspects depending upon the objectives of the present study. While finalizing the questionnaire care has also been taken to avoid ambiguity, duplication and repetition in different items of the questionnaire. Only one aspect has been asked in a question.

As the researcher wanted to study the respondents' perceptions on important components of student support services, the final questionnaire became quite lengthy with more than 150 questions in eleven sections. Each section has different questions specially related to one component of study. The major sections in the questionnaire are related to: (1) personal data, (2) information support, (3) guidance support, (4) counselling support, (5) personal contact programmes, (6) self instructional materials, (7) assignments support, (8) library support, (9) media support, (10) provision for conduct of practicals and (11) study centre support.
Initially it was felt that it is better to collect the data by mailing the questionnaire to the respondents to their correspondence address with a self-addressed stamped envelope of the researcher. When the researcher discussed with other fellow researchers who followed the mailing method for collection of data and came to know about the poor response for them, the idea of mailing the questionnaire was dropped. Alternatively it was decided to collect the data from the respondents who are attending face-to-face personal contact programmes on Sundays at their respective study centres. Another important constraint the researcher faced for data collection was, as the attendance to personal contact programmes was not compulsory, there is no guarantee that the same student will be attending the personal contact programmes on every Sunday or next Sunday. In some cases the students may not attend the study centre except for writing the examination.

Given these reasons, it was decided to collect the data only from the second and final year undergraduates and the second and final year postgraduate students. The reasons for selection of majority (more than 90 percent) respondents from second and third years of study are that they have long experience in availing the student support services and dealing with the institution. They are also better informed when compared to first year students to give their opinion about various components of student support services. Out of the total sample respondents, 53 percent are studying third/final year respondents and 38 percent are second year respondents. However, a few respondents who did their undergraduation from Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University and presently studying first year postgraduation programmes are also covered in the present study because they have long experience in availing the support services and are in a better position to answer the questionnaire. The respondents were asked to give their free and frank opinion on different items of questionnaire. They were promised that the confidentiality of the data will be maintained and the data will be used only for research purpose.

The questionnaire was personally administered to the respondents, in a majority of cases in an informal environment at the selected study centres. The sample size of the
respondents is 343*. Purposive sampling method was followed for collection of primary data from the respondents of the study centres. Interview method and observation are also followed during the field work. Discussions were held with officials of the Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University. Care has been taken to collect data from different social status groups, gender and the programmes of study. The detailed profile of the respondents is explained in the third chapter.

**Limitations of the Study**

The present research study has the following limitations.

1. Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University has been offering more than twenty five academic programmes of study in different faculties of study. The sample respondents are drawn from the second and third year of B.A., B.Com., and B.Sc, and the second and final year students studying M.B.A and M.A. Hence, the study does not cover all the programmes of the university.

2. The respondents of the study are drawn from Hyderabad and Mahaboobnagar districts only. The first one is predominantly urban district and the second one is predominantly rural district. Hence, the study findings may not be generalized to the whole state of Andhra Pradesh, which is the jurisdiction of the Dr. B.R.Ambedkar Open University.

3. Though the study centres have large enrollments, due to lack of time and other constraints the sample size is restricted to 343 only. The findings of the study are drawn from the responses of the selected respondents.

4. The present study accorded greater importance to the perceptions of the respondents, as the students constitute the base of the support services in Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University.

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*In fact the data was collected from 350 respondents. The seven questionnaires were incompletely answered and have deficiencies were deleted from the study. Hence, the effective sample for the study is 343 only.*
5. The study is confined to a single mode distance education open university system, and the findings can't be generalised to the dual mode conventional education university system.

Chapterisation

The research study has been organised into eight chapters. The first chapter is about “Introduction: Distance Education and Student Support Services”. It deals with the distance education, its definitions, comparison with the conventional form of education, phases of development, factors for its growth, kinds of institution, advantages and disadvantages of distance education. It also covers the role of student support services, definitions of student support services, components of student support services, characteristics and needs and problems of distance learners. A brief account of growth of distance education system in India is also given. At the end, objectives of the study, research methodology, limitations of the study and chapterisation of the study are explained.

The second chapter is about "Review of Literature". It contains extensive review of literature related to the present study. Relevant books, reports, documents, conference documents and research articles published in professional journals are covered.

The third chapter deals with the "Profile of the Study Area" in three parts. First part deals with the profile of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University, covering the circumstances of its establishment, objectives, functions, organizational structure of divisions and branches with special focus on student services branch. It also highlights the learners charter, vision and mission of the university. Instructional methodologies, academic programmes, growth and development of the university in two decades are explained. In the second part, profile of study centres, common support service, common infrastructure and common staff at the study centres are explained. In the last part, the profile of the respondents selected for the study is explained. It highlights the profile of respondents in terms of age, marital status, social status, place of stay, programmes, year
and medium of study, prior educational qualifications, occupation, income if employed, parental occupation and educational background and the reasons for study in the open university.

The fourth chapter is on "Individual Based Support Services: Perceptions of Respondents". It broadly deals with the three important components of student support services, namely information support, guidance support and counselling support. First part is on information support, covering pre and post entry information support, channels of information and problems faced in getting information are explained. The second part is on guidance support, covering need for guidance support, type of guidance required and available at present. The last part is on counselling support, covering need for counselling support, who is providing counselling support at present. The level of satisfaction and the respondent’s suggestions for improvement are explained at the end of each part.

The fifth chapter is on "Academic Support Services: Perceptions of Respondents". It is divided into three parts. First part is on face-to-face personal contact programmes. The second part deals with self-instructional materials and the last part is on assignments support. The level of satisfaction for personal contact programmes and assignments are also explained.

The sixth chapter is on "Organisational Support Services: Perceptions of Respondents". The chapter is further divided into three parts. First part deals with library support covering need for library support and reasons for requiring library support. Second part deals with the provision for conduct of science practicals. In the last part the role of study centres in providing support services in terms distance, accessibility, reasons for inconvenience, number of visits made during the last year, problems they face when visited and special facilities to be provided, problems faced by female respondents, advantages for studying are explained. The levels of satisfaction and the suggestions of the respondents are explained for each part.
The seventh chapter is on "Media Support Services: Perceptions of Respondents", which studies the role of media in providing student support services. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University has been using audio and video lessons, radio and television lessons, teleconferencing and radio counselling. In this chapter an attempt is made to find out the awareness about the media support services, availability of media infrastructure at home of the respondents and their knowledge about the availability of media infrastructure at the study centre. It further studies the listening or watching of media lessons and reasons for non-listening or watching of media lessons. Finally the levels of satisfaction for media programmes and the respondent's suggestions for improving media lessons are explained.

The eight chapter is on "Conclusions" of the research study.

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