

Unit 26

ODL: Problems and Prospects

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Learning Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- articulate the state of distance education in the global context;
- appreciate the conflict between social commitment and market requirement; and
- understand the importance of study materials

26.1 Introduction

In the previous two units of this block we have discussed at length the social and philosophical foundations of open and distance learning. We have also discussed the critical issues of distance education today. In this unit we shall be discussing the emerging concerns of the ODL system. It has largely been pointed out that the ODL system has emerged to cater to the need of the socially disadvantaged, remote, second chance and part time learners. However, the ODL system has made a long journey and its interface with the mainstream conventional education system has rather been very obvious. In terms of the use of advanced technology for learning, flexibility in the curriculum development, promptness to accommodate the latest development in the learning process, the ODL system has emerged to be the provider of sophisticated form of education. In the wake of globalisation and introduction of the new structural development programme since the early 1990's, there have emerged several areas of concern for open and distance learning. In this unit, we have tried to place the ODL system within the ongoing socio political and economic processes and thereafter have identified several contradictions which are being encountered by this system. The issues of commodification of education, quality assurance in the course material, knowledge production, atomization of education etc. are discussed at length in this unit.

26.2 ODL System: The Context

The open and distance learning (ODL) system, as it stand today, has been evolved out of a long historical process. From the earlier stage of part time, casual, second chance, print-based correspondence learning it has emerged to be a viable alternative system of learning whereby a large section of the students of ODL are full time, first chance, achievement oriented, motivated and globally connected. It also simultaneously continues to save the interests of the marginalized section of the population. In terms of the modes of delivery it has evolved and transformed from the early system of penny beg, print-based singular modes to integrated modes of print, audio-video and e-learning.

Scholars have also identified significant structural transformation in the ODL system from the earlier system of Correspondence to Distance to Open Distance, to Virtual e-learning to Consortium-based learning. Recent decades have borne witness to the proliferation of dual mode educational institutions whereby the conventional educational institutions are patronizing and initiating distance learning from within their existing set up. Over the years ODL has emerged from a marginal to major and prime provider system of education all over the globe. The growing significance of open and distance learning in recent years has been widely circumscribed by:

- Expansion of the process of globalisation,
- Proliferation of knowledge economy all over the globe,
- Revolution in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs),
- Formalisation of the General Agreement in Trade in Services through GATS in WTO,
- Social commitments for Education as expressed in Dakar Declaration,
- Social commitment for 'lifelong learning' as pronounced in Social Development Summit 1995,
- Formulation of Millennium Development Goal by the UNDP for the eradication of illiteracy, hunger, unemployment, and AIDS,
- Popular and political mandates in the developing world to further the process of educational well being of the marginalized section of the population,
- Increasing thrust and demand for quality education all over the world,
- Increasing commercialization of education,
- Flexibility of the ODL system and its ability to accommodate a huge number of students without compromising with quality,
- Structural rigidity of the conventional system of education and its inability to meet the growing demand of education.

All these processes are indeed inter-related and at times have furthered the process of expansion of one another and they have a composite bearing on the ODL system. It is important to understand that globalisation and ICTs are co-constituents of the knowledge economy. A knowledge economy can't flourish without providing the space and provision of generation and trading of commercial knowledge through lifelong learning. In the market-driven state, in which introduction of structural adjustment programme is but an essential imperative, political commitments for lifelong learning through commodification of education and the use of ICTs rather have to be explicit. With the proliferation of knowledge economy the demand for education has increased across the globe. With this increasing demand, education is now traded across the borders by developing new structures like WTO and GATT. Along with these developments there have been the growing concern for quality, parity and recognitions for educational products. As against these backdrops, the ODL system of education has been encountering new problems, challenges, possibilities and prospects. In this unit we shall highlight some of the problems encountered by the ODL system in general.

Reflection and Action 26.1

Discuss the socio-cultural context of the functioning of the ODL system

26.3 Dilemmas between Social Commitment and Market Requirement

In the developed parts of the world, the ODL system has to respond to the need of the second chance learners and largely to the growing need of the market as the second chance learners have a specific educational requirement. To mention again most of the second chance learners are in-service students. It is not to say that ODL system in the developed countries has emerged to be market driven totally. In the developing world the ODL system has got the mandate to espouse the educational cause of the marginalised groups of society. However, ever since the inception of ODL in its modern form, it has been caught on the horns of a dilemmas between social responsibilities and market requirements. The process of globalisation, revolution the information technology, and a paradigm shift in the development strategy have obviously accentuated this dilemma of ODL as a function to an industry-vis-à-vis ODL as a force for imparting a transformative culture in society. Even though there has been a parallel development between these forces, the balance seldom tilts in favour of the liberating function of the ODL. There is no denying the fact that in a system of market economy where knowledge has acquired a commodity value, any knowledge industry would produce and disseminate those sets of academic packages which has a readymade market for its products, more financial return for its products and less risk involved in the producing and marketing of these products. Obviously with knowledge packaging in the areas of management and information technology, the existing skill upgradation of bureaucrats, managers and so on tends to be regarded as the areas of hot pursuit, as these initiatives provide easy returns and contribute significantly to the process of revenue generation of the academic institution. As the ODL system is posited with the challenge of getting integrated with these global phenomena, there has been a shift in emphasis towards the marketisation of knowledge.

26.4 Quality Assurance in the Study Materials

In recent years there have been growing concerns on the issue of quality of distance education course materials. Conceptually the notion of quality control in distance education has an industrial legacy. In the industrial sense “quality” is an error-free, totally reliable product or service that fulfils the expectation of the ‘customers’ at a given price (Holt 1990). Quality is also understood in terms of the fitness of the product in conformity with a set of expected standards (Guri 1987). Such a notion emphasizes the specialization of efforts and the division of labour. Strategically, to Sallis (1993), it involves the breaking down of work into narrow and repetitive tasks with the advent of mass production which took away from the workers the possibility of self-checking quality. A strict division of labour developed from it and necessitated the expansion of the system of inspection known as quality control (Sallis 1993).

It is important that the issue of quality assurance in distance education has been equated with the process of industrialization of education services by several scholars of distance education. To Otto Peter (1983) it to be the most industrialized form of education in view of the technology used, division of labour involved and adhere to quality ensured in the product of this industry.

a) **Academic Context:** In the distance education set up the concept of quality is frequently used with reference to the self-instructional course materials designed and developed by the ODL, and the student support services provided to the students in the following related activities:

- Dispatch of study materials (print, audio and video)
- Counselling (academic, personal, professional)
- Registration
- Evaluation (both continuous and term end)
- Monitoring (feedback collection and research reformation of policies)

There have been various processes leading to the systematization of these institutions for quality control and management. A host of activities are suggested by the scholars towards this endeavour: collaborative non-hierarchical course teamwork, reworking and redoing on the draft of the material with due consultation with subject experts, pre-testing of course materials, proper orientation of distance teachers and academic counsellors, monitoring of student assignments, collection of feedback from students, evaluation of the course materials by the experts, revision of the course materials at periodic intervals etc. There have been systematic reviews and inspections of the product and services of distance teaching in order to ensure quality.

b) Emerging Political Context

The concern for quality is widely related also to the emerging political scenario of the state. Tait (1993) has mentioned a political attribute to the issue of quality management in view of the facts that (a) national governments are interested in returns on public investments, (b) education and training are essential to economic recovery and growth, (c) conventional educational institutions have failed to achieve their mission, and (d) open and distance learning is now seen as the mainstream provider of learning opportunities in flexible ways without the full cost of the conventional delivery method'. Against this backdrop the "State has created a competitive environment so that the university takes on more and more of the characteristics of a company in a free market... customers (formerly students), who now pay more and more of the real cost of the services provided, come to the centre of the management's concerns... (and) in this context of a changing environment in many countries that quality assurance has gained a central place (Tait 1993).

In this emerging environment distance education institutions have accepted the challenge of quality assurance in the course material environment. There have been rigorous planning and action for "total quality control" which according to Holt implies a total involvement of the organization to provide the customers with reliable products and services that fulfil their needs (Holt 1990).

Let us examine the philosophy of quality assurance as executed in the Indian context. Here we shall present the case of Indira Gandhi National Open University as a study.

c) Strategy of Quality Assurance at IGNOU

In developing countries like India, political commitment for quality assurance has got an emphasis because of the fact that

- the conventional correspondence education failed to ensure quality in distance education in 1960s and 1970s.
- open universities have got the mandate of the state to provide quality education to distance learners
- in the free trade regime of GATS, quality education is essential to withstand the challenges from the new providers of education from across the border
- as the conventional education system is unable to accommodate all the aspirants of quality education, an alternative structure is immediately warranted to provide quality education to the vast masses.

In India only a very thin layer of students (6.2%) gets the opportunity of higher study in regular universities. Keeping in view the educational need of a large section of the society correspondence education was introduced in conventional universities in the sixties and it attracted a large number of students. However, there was a visible decline of standards of correspondence education for various reasons viz. lack of proper planning, total dependency

on print materials and conventional textbooks, inadequacy of funds, and lack of political commitment for the promotion of this system. In the background of increasing demand for distance education, the revolution in the mass communication and increasing social and political awakening in the country on the one hand; and the decline in the standards of correspondence education on the other, the open education system was established in the eighties as the feasible answer to provide quality education through the distance mode.

IGNOU was established by an Act of Parliament in 1985 to promote the educational well being of the largest segments of the population with diversity of means and to set the standard of open and distance learning in India. To use the diversity of means, IGNOU has adopted a multi-media approach (full self-instructional print material supplemented by audio-video inputs) of course development; and is in the process of integrating ICTs with its programmes. Management of its high quality has been the prime concern from its very inception and has initiated several measures. Towards the process of management of quality in course materials, teaching Faculty has initiated the following steps:

- a) Forming Expert Committees with nationally and internationally reputed experts available in India organizing societies of workshop, core group, brainstorming sessions to frame and design the most elaborate, advanced and up to date syllabus,
- b) Involving reputed teachers, and experts in the writing of course materials, and in editing the content of the course materials,
- c) Organizing workshops of course writers and course editors to acquaint them with distance education pedagogy and to ensure quality,
- d) Besides recruiting young and well-qualified academics, IGNOU organized a series of workshops to orient these academics in distance education and provide them the required skill for the development of self-instructional course materials, assessment and evaluation of students' performances. Various international agencies like Overseas Development Administration (ODA) of U.K., Open University, U.K., Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Japan, and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), have also extended support to IGNOU for the development of quality educational material. IGNOU has been extremely successful in tapping the best resources of diversified academic pursuits available in India for the planning and development of multi-media course packages,
- e) Initiating regular training programme for faculty to equip them with distance education pedagogy and the style of presentation of the self-instructional course material,
- e) Undergoing training for audio-video production,
- f) Transforming the draft course materials by trained faculty in Self-Instructional Mode (SIM),
- g) Interacting frequently with the subject experts to avoid confusions and provide greater clarity to the students,
- h) Writing and rewriting of course materials according to one's area of specialization and interest,
- i) Collecting feedback from the subject experts on the already produced course materials,
- j) Undertaking correction and revision of course materials based on feedback collected from subject experts,
- k) Undertaking pre-testing of selected course materials among the students before these are made available for wider distribution,
- l) Collecting comments on the course materials from distance education and

language experts and preparing the final draft in accordance with the comments received from the above mentioned subject experts,

- m) Regularly preparing and monitoring assignments,
- n) Orienting the Academic Counsellors in the distance education pedagogy and on the Course materials of IGNOU,
- o) Collecting feedback from the students on the course materials, and
- p) Taking academic counseling sessions in the Study Centre of IGNOU. The faculty has also introduced various learning aids in print materials – for example, pictorial illustration, boxes with related concepts or information, biographical sketches of the thinkers, activities for the students to learn the subject of study from daily experiences. Indeed, the faculty's efforts have been to avoid the mechanical approach in transforming the self-instructional material; rather it tries to make it essentially creative and sensitive to the academic need of the students.

All these concerted efforts have helped IGNOU achieve wide recognition both in the country and abroad within a short span of time. Many open universities of the world have adopted course materials produced by IGNOU. Most significantly, undertaking rigorous review of course materials of IGNOU and the delivery of the IGNOU Programme the COL has declared IGNOU as the COL Centre of Excellence in 1993.

Action and Reflection 26.2

What do you mean by quality assurance? How can quality assurance be ascertained in the ODL system?

26.5 ODL and Knowledge Production

The ODL system plays a very significant role to disseminate knowledge among learners through state of the art technologies. It is important that an advanced learning system should not only disseminate knowledge but also generate new body of knowledge. Knowledge is not only a part of one's intellectual heritage, but also an asset of a particular stage of society which is being generated, evolved and constructed through various processes of validation, criticism and creative engagements. In the developing world ODL has got the mandate to be the tool for the empowerment of the hitherto neglected sections of society. Knowledge of all concerns are generated, transmitted, preserved and even reconstructed through certain structural arrangements of society. Should knowledge be a function to the construction of a praxis for empowerment of the marginalized there is an emergent need:

- a) To recast the existing body of knowledge that would question the various institutional arrangements and bases of legitimacy for subordination of the marginalized groups. The processes of social construction of caste ethnicity, gender etc. in Indian society may be cited as cases to this point.
- b) To document the regular struggle and resistance of the marginalised groups that challenge the dominant order as part of cultural heritage. The alternative institutional structure(s) emerged out of these processes to break the barriers of subordination are required to be reorganized as organized endeavours of redoing social construction.
- c) To enhance the accessibility of knowledge through all possible means for the marginalized section of society.
- d) To recognize and document the indigenous knowledge and social practices of the marginalized in the course curriculum; and
- e) To popularize science, vocational and professional programmes among the marginalized by modifying them as per their need and requirement.

All these need flexible systemic arrangements that have the capacity of contemplation, absorption and appreciation for an alternative body of knowledge. There lies the significance of ODL to sensitise the understanding by creating an alternative body of knowledge that could be used as praxis for empowerment of the marginalised. The best possible ways of producing this alternative body of knowledge are to promote research activities at the ODL on the issues of the marginalised groups and to integrate the knowledge emerged out of this research to the course curriculum, and encourage collaborative learning by integrating ICTs with the learning process of the marginalized.

ODL in the developing country's context and as it stands today provides more scope for reproduction of the existing body of knowledge than for creation of alternative one. Curriculum development based on research, and collaborative learning and action project need a longer gestation period. In a competitive market economy any ODL system seldom gets such a space for the generation of alternative body of knowledge and then to integrate them to the curriculum.

Teachers in the ODL have a moral responsibility for shaping an alternative body of knowledge. A proactive strategy of the teaching community is as essential for their professional empowerment as for the fulfillment of the commitment of ODL to the nation and society. It is only through the proactive initiatives of the teachers of ODL that an alternative body of knowledge is produced that would contribute towards the formulation of praxis for empowerment of the marginalised through demystification of knowledge. The structural flexibility of the ODL system provides enormous opportunities to initiate new and innovative academic curriculum. Several certificate, diploma and degree programmes are framed which are not conventionally available elsewhere. These opportunities are required to be fully utilized by the teachers of the ODL system.

Reflection and Action 26.3

How can the ODL system be a tool for empowerment of the marginalized? Suggest a few strategies based on your experience.

26.6 ODL, ICT and Market: A Critique

In recent years a lot of discussion has taken place on the interface of ODL with market forces and ICT. There are social, economic and political implications of the extensive use of ICTs in the ODL. In the following sections of the unit, we shall examine some of these issues

a) ODL, E-learning and Automation

In the wake of globalisation and the revolution in the ICTs there have been tremendous efforts both by the ODL institutions and by the regular universities to integrate the learning process with e-learning in particular and ICTs in general. These processes, while they have unfolded several new opportunities of learning; have also produced new challenges for society, academic institutions, teachers and for learners. Scholars have tried to understand this phenomenon with diverse perspectives.

Noble (1997), in his famous work *Digital Diploma Mill* has highlighted the commercial, pedagogical, and ethical implications of online educational technology. He demonstrates the significant correlations between the commercial capital and expansion of e-learning in the ODL system. To him, the high-tech transformation of higher education is being initiated and implemented from the top down, either without any student and faculty involvement in the decision-making or with it. It is also pointed out that getting technologically transformed the educational campuses are now functioning as a significant site of capital accumulation by 'converting intellectual activity into intellectual

capital'. To him, this process has started with the process of commoditization of the research function of the university and thereafter transforming commoditization of the educational function of the university, transforming courses into courseware, the activity of instruction itself into commercially viable proprietary products that can be owned and bought and sold in the market. The corporate and political leaders of the major industrialized countries, to retain their supremacy, now turn towards "knowledge-based" industries. This has led to the unprecedented collaboration between corporate and academic boardrooms and the foundation of joint lobbying efforts. The foremost promoters of this transformation are: (a) the hardware and software vendors who view education as a market for their wares, (b) corporate training advocates and (c) the university administrators, (who see it as a way of giving their institutions a fashionably forward-looking image, and view the computer-based instruction as a means of reducing their direct labour and plant maintenance costs and believe in undermining the autonomy and independence of faculty supported by a number of private foundations, trade associations, and academic-corporate consortia) and (d) techno zealots who simply view computers and e-learning as the panacea for all elements of education.

To Noble, there are several implications of the commoditization of university of education:

- a) teachers as labour are made subject to all the pressures of undergoing rapid technological transformation from above, reduce their autonomy, independence, and control over their work. Once faculty put their course material online, the knowledge and course design skill embodied in that material is taken out of their possession, transferred to the machinery and placed in the hands of the administration.
- b) The process of the commoditization of instruction involve the transformation of the university into a market for the commodities being produced. He points out that administrative propaganda routinely alludes to an alleged student demand for the new instructional products and thus try to create a market by fiat, compelling students and faculty to become users and hence consumers of the hardware, software, and content products as a condition of getting an education, whatever their interest or ability to pay.
- c) Students enrolled in courses using virtual software are in fact formally designated "experimental subjects."
- d) Commercialized higher education research thus has become a means to serve commercial ends by bringing universities and industry into close partnership. 'Faculty becomes producers of commodities for their employer'. Gradually the universities are emerging stronger by securing the patent rights of the intellectual capital. Here the instructional process, classroom teaching, is converted into marketable products, such as a CD ROMs, Websites, or courseware, which they may or may not themselves 'deliver'.

Noble also points out that as the universities are going into business for themselves, the issue of copyright has acquired a place of central significance. But the universities are now undertaking to undo such traditional faculty rights in order to capitalize on the online instruction. "In the wake of the online education gold-rush, many have begun to wonder, will the content of education be shaped by scholars and educators or by media businessmen, by the dictates of experienced pedagogy or a quick profit" (Noble 1997)

b) Market Drive, ICTs and ODL

Latchem and Hanna (2002) while identifying the major challenges encountered by open and flexible learning points out that in general 'higher education is experiencing a shift from supply driven to demand driven pressures. This has

been mostly because of the challenges encountered by the ODL from the forces of globalisation and Information and Communication Technology (ICT), competition from new providers, and the increasing drive for self-sustaining education. There have been growing demands for relevant accountability. Universities are increasingly seeking solutions to these challenges in the open and flexible learning and ICT. You have observed the proliferation of distance education institutes all over the world. There has emerged a trend to market the education through the distance education mode even in the conventional universities. In many cases ODL is getting transformed from quality driven and marginal to commercially-oriented and mainstream. There are both the opportunities and dangers in these developments. It is apprehended that in the move to internationalize and commercialize open and flexible learning, the need of the disadvantaged and the marginalized may be overlooked and in the blurring of distinction between the on-and-off campus teaching and learning, the particular needs of the distance learner disregarded (2003:203).

As education has emerged to be a tradeable commodity, many educational institutions use ODL as an important platform to facilitate trade in a competitive environment. Evans and King are of the opinion that the politicians and administrators of the developing countries use the produce packages of learning materials as a "quick fix"... readily to trade in market. They have also highlighted the aspect of academic imperialism as spread through ODL.

c) ODL, Technological Changes and Leadership

Starting from the *pre paid post* based correspondent education of mid nineteenth century to the *web based* open and the virtual learning institutions of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries distance education institutions have been responding to the kind of learning technologies which function to serve new markets, 'improves with growing demands, achieves the quality expectations of the mainstream market and finally brings revolutionary changes in the industry displacing the established providers and the products'. As the market is becoming very competitive and the leading universities and colleges increasingly investing in ICT to develop web based programmes there have emerged several new forms of higher educational organisations. The process of formation of such alternative structure of higher education have not only ignored the existing the institutional, geographic, political and other contextual realities, these have also challenged the culture and the functioning of the conventional educational set ups. Christensen (1997)

Otto Peters (1967, 1983) has always visualised distance education as the most industrialised form of education which shares a host of characteristics of the modern industrial production process and that these distance education institutions are essentially bureaucratic in character. To him (2002) the history of distance education has been a history of its growing importance which is related to the technologies used in each period. He highlights that distance education has entered its fourth phase with a pedagogical revolution caused by the increasing use of digitalized learning processes that has taken distance education to hitherto unknown territory; the virtual learning space. Peters (1998) is of the belief that the demand of the post-industrial service economy will force a change in distance education to develop structures that post industrial society demands.

Many scholars recognized that as the economy is shifting its orientation from industry to knowledge, universities are also acquiring the corporate style of structure and function. Technological forces in the distance learning system call for new capacities in the leaders and staff, multiple specialist collaboration and new visions. It is suggested that the ODLS needs transformational and entrepreneurial leaders who can create and change culture than ordinary managers who live for a compromise. These new leaders are now required to create an optimal environment for innovation, reform organisation, motivation and inspiration for others. In the open learning system there are now

opportunities for new organisational models and strategies. The challenging working environment, need for introduction of advance technology and new academic programmes, expansion of the process of globalisation immediately invites rigorous transformation in the ODL institution with enlightened and the transformative leaderships.

Box 1 Otto-Peters observation in future ODL

What should be the nature of the universities in future? Otto-Peters (2002) is of the opinion that the university of the future will use and integrate a large number of forms: face to face, distance and digital and will thus develop new pedagogical configurations, which will no longer resemble traditional forms of teaching... These universities of the future will also be variable adaptive and flexible enough to provide tailormade programmes for all kinds of students, as well as for persons who want to continue their educational at the tertiary level (35).

What should be the role of the teachers in this changing environment? To him, the “Teachers not only be aware of these changes, but of the necessity to become active agents of these changes. At the same time they have to assume responsibility because they must function as protectors of their students against those technological forces which undo the mechanisation of education just in order to make profit. Teachers must be on the alert as they must protest and react when unnecessary exaggeration of technological enthusiasm dehumanises the process of teaching and learning and thus becomes detrimental to education. He also points out that the view of the critics of the digitalised learning are hardly heard in the prophecies of the distance education because of the fascination of the computer and euphoric frame of mind of the computer users. To him the central idea of establishing virtual universities must be to innovate learning and teaching at the university in order to adapt them to the requirement of the post industrial and the post modern knowledge society”. Here he emphasises on the flexibility of teaching and learning which can be maximised by self-directed and autonomous learning whereby the universities are to be flexible to give students more choices to provide the more intensified and enhanced support to fit it to the changed educational requirements of the post-industrial knowledge society (Peter, 2002 :155-156).

26.7 Transformation of ODL

In the previous section of this unit, we have discussed the challenges and possibilities encountered by the ODL system in course of its interaction with the ICTs, and market forces. In this section, we shall be discussing the process of transformation of the ODL system and its social, economic and pedagogical ramifications. Alan Tait (1995) points out that the ODL was framed as a progressive ideology, marginal system to serve the educational interest predominantly of the marginalized population. It stood for individual learners autonomy. However, over the years it has emerged to be a market driven mainstream educational institution, which is amenable for political maneuvering of the state. To him ‘the ODL is being reviewed to put an end to in representing the society in its own terms. The age of innocence for the ODL has ended’ (1995: 27). To him the process of the adoption of ODL as a mainstream method of delivery is acting to isolate and marginalize populations, whereas previously it provided for their inclusion. In the wake of globalisation and introduction of the structural adjustment programme the control of the government over ODL has rather been stronger.

Consequently, there has been a shift from the ideology of education for the marginalized population to mainstream Government-driven initiatives in ODL. Due to regular political intervention, the system of distance education is used increasingly to discharge functions in a narrower interest. In the name of

technological improvement, the universities have now emerged to be a market for techniciation of education (Harris 1987: 146). In recent years scholars have observed the Fordist and Post-Fordist tendency in the Open University. Edwards points out that the ODLs are predominantly Fordist in nature characterized by standardized products, mass production plants and with little scope of consumer choice. In the face of competitiveness faced by open universities there has been a move towards post Fordist course production models by which small scale quickly produced courses to meet particular needs of segments of the market are encouraged.

26.8 Conclusion

The ODL system has emerged to be an important, viable, mainstream and alternative mode of learning for large sections of student population in the country. It has widely been recognized that the conventional education system, due to its structural rigidity will not be able to accommodate all the aspirants of secondary and higher learning in the country. At present more than 21% of the learners in the country are enrolled with the ODL system. It is expected that by the end of the Tenth Five Year Plan the share of ODL system in the total education system will increase to 40%. Such voluminous increase in the student population in the ODL system would ask for several kinds of interventions on the part of the providers of ODL learning in the areas of social commitment, increasing access, quality assurance and democratization of the learning process. The ODL itself has undergone a process of transformation from part time, correspondence, casual to mainstream, integrated, web based and virtual learning. Such transformations have produced diverse varieties of challenges and opportunities for the ODL system. In this unit, we have discussed all these issues in detail.

26.9 Further Reading

Batliwala, S. 1993. *Empowerment of Women in South Asia: Concepts and Practices*, ASSBAF and FAO Freedom from Hunger Campaign , Action and Development. New Delhi

Scheffler, I. 1999 "Epistemology and Knowledge". In R. McCormic and C. Paechter (eds) *Learning and Knowledge. The Open University: London*