



The Role of Open and Distance Learning in Commerce Education: A Study of Uttarakhand Open University

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Abstract

Distance learning caters to the educational needs of the target groups through the open system of learning and provides facility of study according to their own pace and convenience to the distant learner's. Open and distance learning provides easy access to education to different sections of the society. Commerce education is one of the oldest branches of Indian higher education system. But nowadays commerce education is competing with new streams for its existence because these streams are based on the practical knowledge and application orientation. Commerce education is a living discipline and it is considered to be the backbone of business. The need of the hour is to make a corresponding change in the role of commerce education so that it becomes purposive and practical-oriented. Distance learning makes education open to many people irrespective of age, sex, religion, location, qualification and time, and it provides opportunities for working people to combine education and their work. It helps in developing education as a lifelong activity to enable persons to update their knowledge. In other words, it provides access to higher education for large segments of the population, and in particular, the disadvantaged groups like people living in remote and rural areas.

Distance learning is an old idea with a new name. Its foundation goes back to the early 1700s when through correspondence students and instructors exchanged information through the postal system or other modes of communication. This paper attempts to study the importance of open and distance learning in imparting commerce education to the distance learners and its significance in making them independent in the present competitive world. This study also attempts to outline the opportunities which open and distance learning can provide to learners in India and especially in Uttarakhand for making them actively participate in stimulating socio-economic development of the country. This study aims at examining the role of Uttarakhand Open University in providing flexible, accessible, qualitative and cost-effective education to the distance learners so that they can contribute to a more sustainable and prosperous society.



Key Words: Accessible; Counselling; Correspondence; Distance Learning; Learners; Technology.

Introduction

Distance education provides opportunity of learning to those, who do not have direct access to face to face teaching. It also provides direct access of learning to the working persons, house-wives and marginalized section of the society. Distance education provides opportunity to working professionals to update their knowledge, enabling them to switch over to new disciplines and professions and enhancing their qualifications for career advancement. It helps in exploiting the potential of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the teaching and learning process. Open learning is a philosophy and distance education is the mode used for translating it into reality. Both of these are considered complementary to each other. Distance education is an umbrella term which describes all the teaching learning arrangements in which the learner and the teacher are separated by space and time. In fact it is a mode of delivering education and instruction to learners who are not physically present in a traditional setting of a classroom. Transaction of the curriculum is effected by means of specially prepared materials (self-study (learning) materials) which are delivered to the learners at their doorstep through various media such as print, television, radio, satellite, audio/video tapes, CD-ROMs, Internet and World Wide Web etc. Communication between the institution, teacher and learners is mainly through electronic media and also through postal correspondence and limited face to face contact sessions held at study centres that are set up by the distance education institutions as close to the learners' homes as possible. The popularity of the open and distance learning is increasing day by day because of its flexibility and learner friendly approach, particularly to those who could not get access to the formal education system. (Fozdar and Kumar, 2008)

Open learning, which covers a wide range of innovations and reforms in the educational sector that advocates flexibility to the learner with regard to entry and exit; pace and place of study; method of study and also the choice and combination of courses; assessment and course completion. The open learning system aims to redress social or educational inequality and to offer opportunities not provided by conventional colleges or universities. In the system of open and distance learning, educational opportunities are planned deliberately so that access to education is available to larger sections of the society. Distance and open learning may also mean a more learner-centred approach, allowing greater



flexibility and choice of content as well as more personal organization of the learning programme. (UNESCO, 2002)

Growth of Open and Distance Learning System

Distance learning is an old idea with a new name. Its foundation goes back to the early 1700s when through correspondence students and instructors exchanged information (assignments, notes, and tests) through the postal system or other modes of transportation. (Harper, Chen & Yen, 2004) The growth of distance education has been exponential over the last four decades in our country. With the establishment of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad in 1982, a new chapter in the distance education system began when full-fledged Open University with the mandate to provide distance education was established in India. This was followed by the establishment of Indira Gandhi National Open University in 1985. Five decades ago policy-makers realized the imperative need of distance education in order to expand the base of higher education. With the expanding base at the elementary and secondary education levels, the demand for higher education had increased. The University Grants Commission (UGC) suggested in its report for 1956-1960 that proposals for evening colleges, correspondence courses and award of external degrees should be considered. The Planning Commission took serious note of such a need and in its Third Five Year Plan mentioned the need for the introduction of correspondence education in the country. (UGC, DEB)

Table 1 Year-wise Status of Open and Distance Education Universities/Institutions in India

Year	Dual Mode Universities/ Institutes	Single Mode Open Universities	Total Distance Education Institutions	Percentage
1962	1	-	1	-
1975	22	-	22	2100
1982	34	1	35	59.09
1985	38	2	40	14.29
1990	46	5	51	27.50
2000	70	9	79	54.90
2005	106	13	119	50.63
2010	242	14	256	115.13

Source: Distance Education Bureau, University Grants Commission, New Delhi.

Figure 1

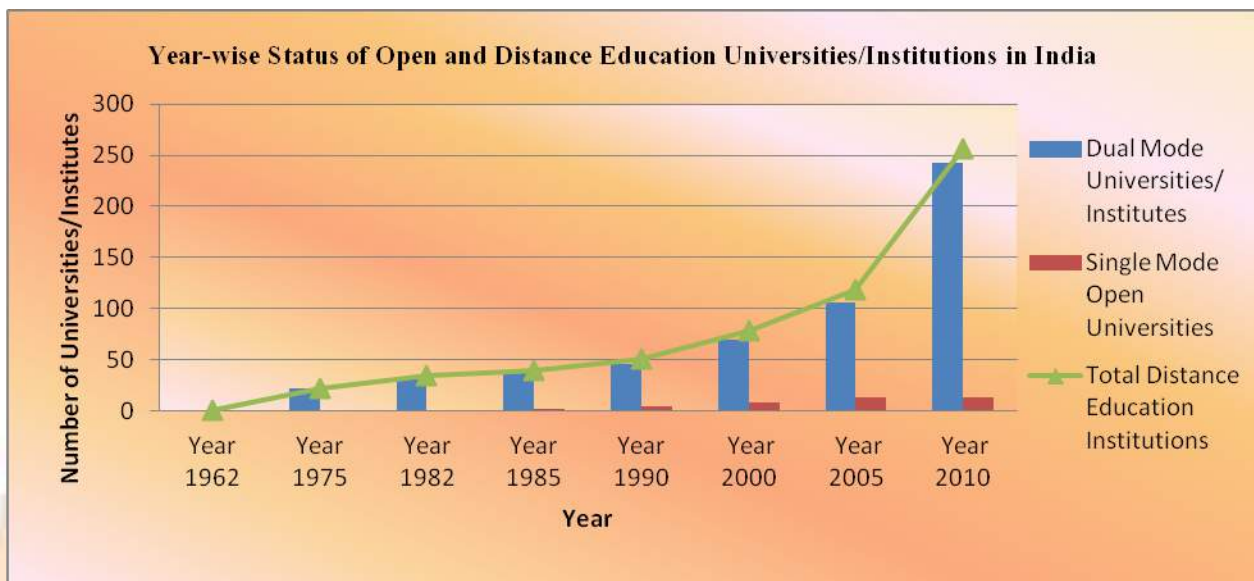


Table 1 exhibits that after independence there was only one dual mode institute in the country but as far as single mode institutes are concerned, there was no single mode open university in the country to impart the higher education through open and distance mode of learning. Till 1982 there was no single mode open university in the country. But in the year 2010 there were 242 dual mode institutes and there were 14 single mode universities in the country, which shows that conventional universities also realized the importance of distance mode of education in imparting higher education to the larger sections of the society. In the year 1975 there is remarkable increase in the number of institutes providing education through open and distance mode. In the year 2010, 115.13 percent increase in the number of institutions imparting distance education has been recorded. The increasing number of distance education institutes shows that distance mode of education has become more popular among the larger sections of the society.

Table-2 Year-wise Status of Enrollment in Conventional and Open & Distance Education Universities/Colleges/Institutions in India

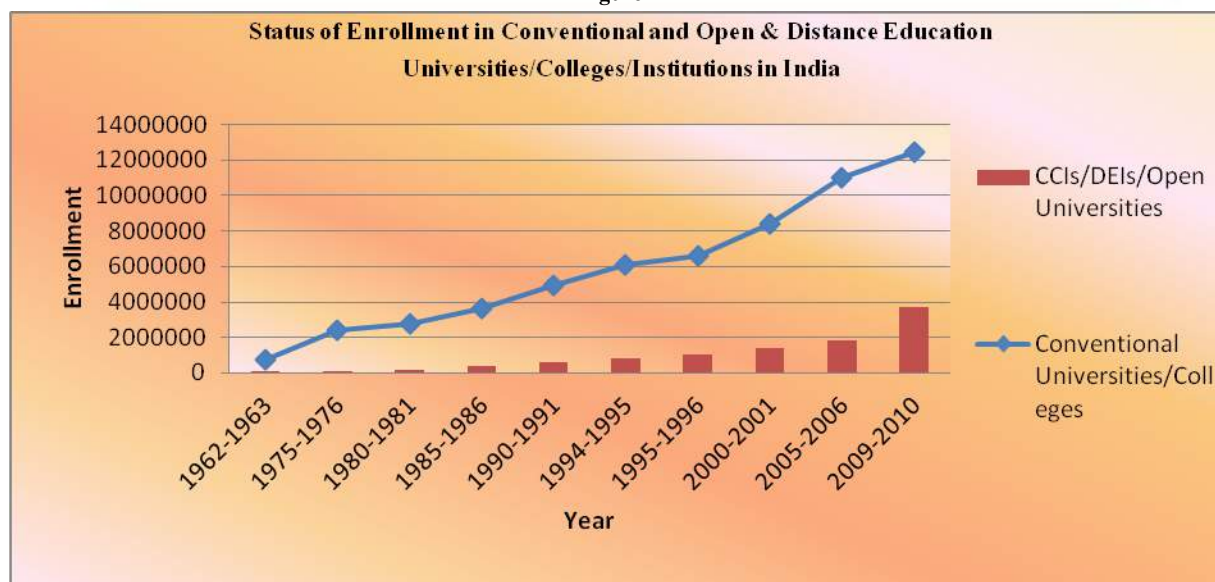
Year	Conventional Universities/Colleges	CCIs/DEIs/Open Universities	Percentage Share of DE	Total
1962-1963	7,52,095	1112	0.15	7,53,207
1975-1976	24,26,109	64210	2.58	24,90,319
1980-1981	27,52,437	1,66,428	5.70	29,18,865
1985-1986	36,06,029	3,55,091	8.96	39,61,120
1990-1991	49,24,868	5,92,814	10.74	55,17,682



1994-1995	61,13,929	8,03,176	11.61	69,17,125
1995-1996	65,74,005	10,03,000	13.24	75,77,005
2000-2001	83,99,443	13,78,000	14.09	97,77,443
2005-2006	110,28,020	18,33,524	14.26	128,61,544
2009-2010	124,68,560	37,36,744	23.35	16000000 (Approx)

Source: Distance Education Bureau, University Grants Commission, New Delhi.

Figure 2



During the initial years the student enrolment increased slowly from 1,112 students in 1962 to 29,500 students in 1970-71. It increased during the next two decades to about 6 lakh in 1990-91. In 2000-01, there were about 14 lakhs students studying through distance mode which further went up to about 18 lakhs students in 2005-06. In the year 2009-10 there is remarkable increase of 23.35 percent in the enrolment of the students studying through distance mode. Thus, with fresh enrolment in open and distance learning programmes at approximately 40 lakh annually, the share of distance education in the GER is about 22-23%, which is significant. Therefore, it can be said that open and distance learning can play important role in increasing the gross enrollment (GER) of the country.

Table-3 Gender-wise Status of Enrollment in Various Programmes of Open & Distance Education Universities/Institutions in India (2011-12)

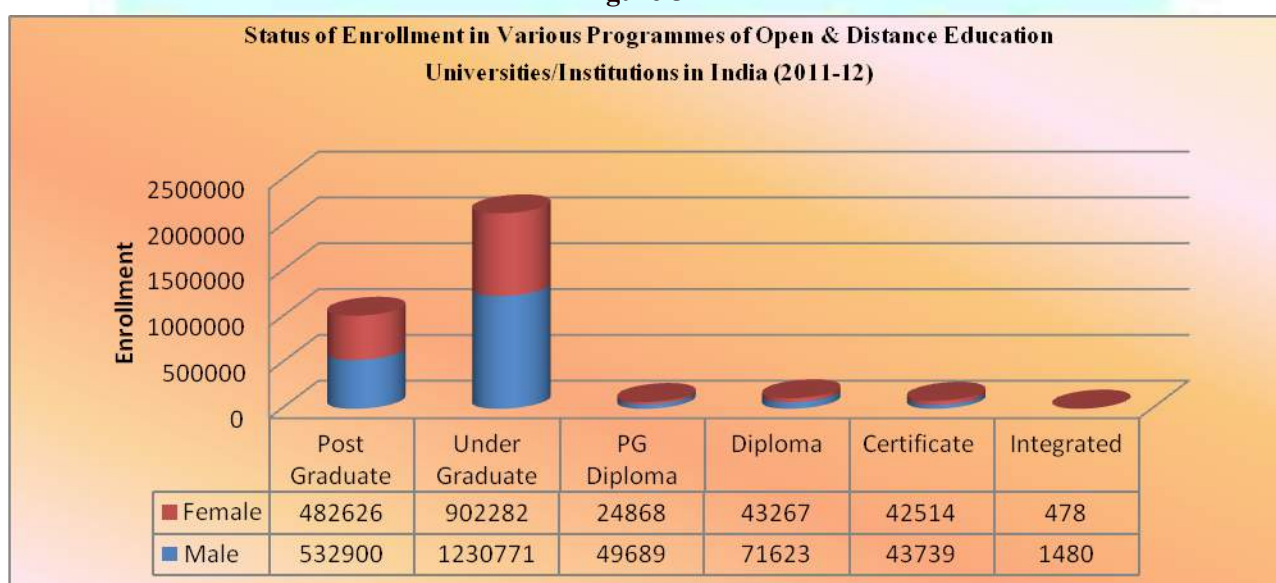
Level	Distance Enrollment		
	Male	Female	Total



Post Graduate	532900 (27.61)	482626 (32.26)	1015526 (29.64)
Under Graduate	1230771 (63.76)	902282 (60.31)	2133053 (62.26)
PG Diploma	49689 (2.57)	24868 (1.66)	74557 (2.18)
Diploma	71623 (3.71)	43267 (2.89)	114890 (3.35)
Certificate	43739 (2.27)	42514 (2.84)	86253 (2.52)
Integrated	1480 (.08)	478 (.03)	1958 (.06)
All	1930202 (100)	1496035 (100)	3426237 (100)

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education, 2011-12, Government of India Ministry of Human Resource Development Department of Higher Education, New Delhi, 2014.

Figure 3



Study the gender-wise distribution at various levels reveals that male distance learners are more than the female learners enrolled in different post graduate, undergraduate, PG Diploma programmes. But in the case of certificate programme the difference between the male and female distance learners is less, which shows that the both the male and female learners have shown their equally interest in the certificate programmes. In the year 2011-12 the total number of distance learners enrolled in various programmes offered by the open and distance learning institutes is 34,26,237. It has also been observed that in undergraduate programmes the enrollment of students in both the cases is more than the enrollment of the students in the other programmes.



Table-4 Programme-wise Comparison Between Regular and Distance Enrollments in Indian Universities/Institutes (2011-12)

Level	Regular Enrollment	Distance Enrollment	Percentage Share of DE
Ph. D.	69527	0	0
M. Phil.	22933	0	0
Post Graduate	619076	1014702	163.91
Under Graduate	1198613	2131836	177.86
PG Diploma	80135	74557	93.039
Diploma	112986	102540	90.755
Certificate	16662	22821	136.96
Integrated	47944	1988	4.1465
All	2167876	3348414	154.46

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education, 2011-12, Government of India Ministry of Human Resource Development Department of Higher Education, New Delhi, 2014.

Figure-4

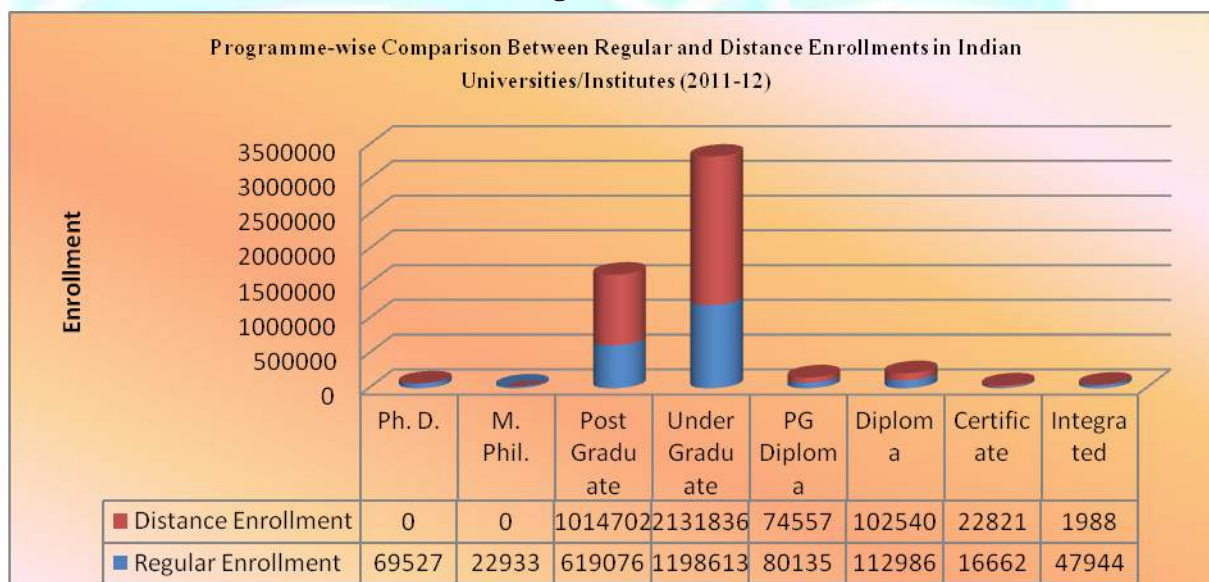


Table- 4 shows the comparison between the enrollment in the regular and distance learning system of education in the year 2011-12. In this year number of the students enrolled in research programme was nil. But on the other hand, the number of the students enrolled in the post graduate and under graduate degree programmes of distance mode of education were more than the conventional mode of education. It shows that the degree programmes are more



popular among distance learner than the certificates and diploma programmes. On the whole the percentage of the distance learners as compared to the regular students is 154.46, which shows that distance programmes are more popular than the regular courses of study.

Review of Literature

Reddy (2007), in his study “Revitalizing Commerce Education” made an objective introspection about the Commerce Education – its objectives, its problems, its job potential, its quality and its relevance to the present day needs of our country. In this study he emphasized on the re-designing of commerce education and suggested various alternatives available for re-orientation of commerce education.

Singh (2014), conducted a study on “Commerce Education in 21st Century: Prospectus and Challenges. The purpose of the paper is to understand and review various issues that influencing and related with commerce education. This paper indicates and concludes that there is a strong need to refine and define the commerce education in the global era and in the changing business scenario.

Kumar and Fozdar, conducted a study on “The Role Open and Distance Learning in Vocational Education and Training in India”. In this paper they have reviewed the present status of vocational education and training programmes in India. They have examined the role of open and distance learning (ODL) system in providing effective and dynamic vocational education and training in the country. They also included IGNOU’s experience in launching and effectively delivering of a vocational training programme developed for the work force working for footwear sector to improve their skills.

Pulist, conducted a study on “Student Support Services in Correspondence/Distance Education in India: A Historical Perspective”. In the study author highlighted the necessity of Open and Distance Learning in imparting quality higher education through optimum use of technology. According to the author the student support services eventually aim at compensating for the absence of live support from teacher for the benefit of the isolated individual learners and making the necessities basic facilities available to them directly or indirectly.

Srivastava (2002), in his study “A Comparative Study on Current Trends in Distance Education in Canada and India” highlighted that the formal system was unable to meet the demand for higher education in India and distance education was adopted as an alternative mode at the University stage in 1962. In both Canada and India distance education opportunities at the university level have increased enormously. Many trends are putting new



pressures on the conventional education system, forcing many institutions to review and amend their existing policies and procedures.

Need and Scope of the Study

Distance learning concept introduced in the country with a view to democratize education, so that it covers large segments of population, vocations and professions. The primary emphasis is on innovation, flexibility and cost effectiveness. It aims at the dissemination of learning and acquiring knowledge through distance education mode including the use of any communication technology to provide opportunities for higher education. Open and distance learning mode of education has been recognized as one of the effective tools of educationally empowering the sections of the society who could not afford to join the formal on-campus education due to various reasons. Presently, Open and Distance Learning institutions are not only imparting education as an alternative to the formal system but also in areas such as vocational and technical education and even in high technology based education. The distance education also has potential to reach to the un-reached and even marginalized and excluded groups such as tribal populations and women.

The main focus of the present study is to examine the role of open and distance learning in imparting commerce education to the distance learners. The universe of the present study is confined to Uttarakhand Open University. The area of the study aims at examining the role of UOU in providing flexible, accessible, qualitative and cost-effective education to the distance learners, so that they can contribute to a more sustainable and prosperous society.

Objectives of the Study

In view of the above discussion, the following objectives have been visualized for the present study:

- To study the role of open and distance learning in commerce education.
- To pin point the challenges before distance mode of learning.
- To suggest remedial measures for commerce education through open and distance mode of learning.

Research Methodology

The present study has been conducted to examine the role of open and distance learning in imparting commerce education to the distant learners. The data required for the study is collected from secondary sources. In the light of above objectives set forth the



information has been collected from records of Govt. of India, Govt. of Uttarakhand and Uttarakhand Open University. The learner includes both rural and urban. The data drawn from various sources has been analyzed with the help of mathematical test as percentage etc.

Commerce Education Through Open and Distance Learning

Commerce education is that area of education which develops the required knowledge, skills and attitudes for the successful handling of trade, commerce and industry. Commerce education can be expected to continually adopt to meet the needs of people but as we encounter the challenges of the 21st century and negotiate the complexities of the information age, their needs will only become more and more demanding.

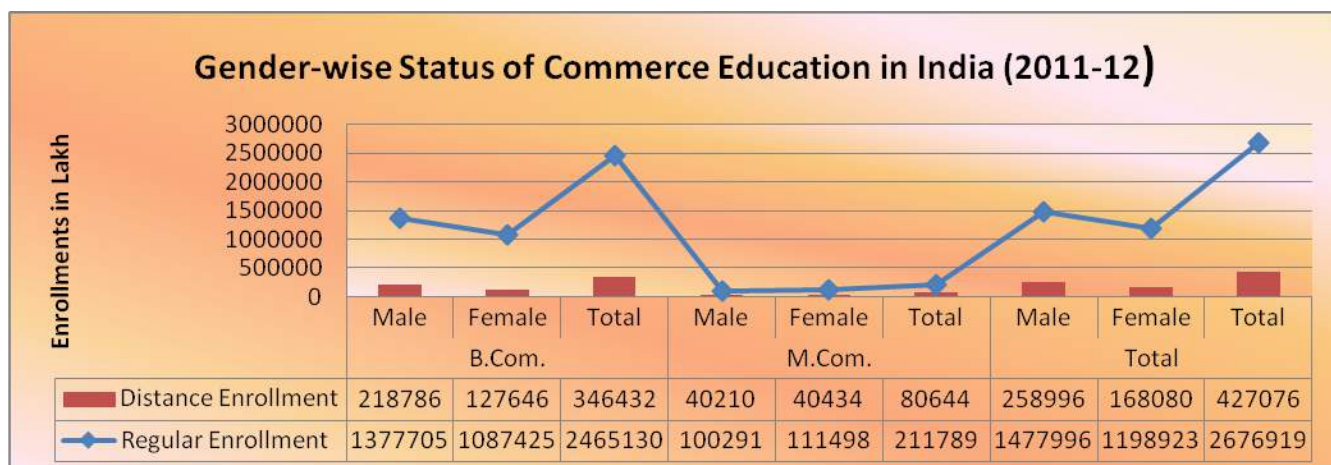
The main objective of commerce education is to provide knowledge and skills related to commerce related activities. In post independence period, the growing phenomenon of globalization, liberalization and privatization has been influencing the commerce education. Commerce has grown from a subject to a multi-faceted discipline in most of the universities and had acquired a pride of place amongst different academic disciplines.

Table-5 Gender-wise Status of Commerce Education Through Regular and Distance Mode in India (2011-12)

Programme	Gender	Regular Enrollment	Distance Enrollment	Percentage Share of Distance Education
B.Com.	Male	1377705	218786	15.88
	Female	1087425	127646	11.74
	Total	2465130	346432	14.05
M.Com.	Male	100291	40210	40.09
	Female	111498	40434	36.26
	Total	211789	80644	38.08
Total	Male	1477996	258996	17.52
	Female	1198923	168080	14.02
	Total	2676919	427076	15.95

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education, 2011-12, Government of India Ministry of Human Resource Development Department of Higher Education, New Delhi, 2014.

Figure 5



Study the gender-wise status of commerce education in India (2011-12) reveals that the number of the distance learners enrolled in the post graduate degree programme (38.08 percent) is more than the learners enrolled in graduate programme (14.05 percent). On the whole the comparison of the regular students with the distance learners reveals that the male students enrolled in distance mode is more than the female students, which is 17.52 percent and 14.02 percent respectively. In other words, we can say that male learners are more interested in the distance mode programmes as compared to the female learners. It has been possible due to the limitations of the formal system of education.

Uttarakhand Open University being in education field for anew has taken initiatives to offer an opportunity to those students who are unable to get on-campus education and those who have limited access to education resources. The Uttarakhand Open University was established in 2005 to promote education through open and distance learning system, with introduction of flexible and innovative methods of education to ensure ‘independent learning’ to anyone, anytime and anywhere. The programmes of Uttarakhand Open University also envisage providing an opportunity to women of Uttarakhand who by and large has been left out in educational efforts of our nation. Uttarakhand Open University’s study programmes are selective and customized to meet the learning requirements of knowledge seekers as well as to ensure that they learn at their own pace and convenience.

Keeping this goal in view, the Uttarakhand Open University has made concerted efforts to offer professional and job oriented courses with regular updates of curricula and study material and introduction of tools of Information Technology. Uttarakhand Open University has been contributing to the development and training of qualified human resource



capital for the state. It has also signed Memorandum of Understanding with several leading research institutes, companies and professional bodies for the training of the students.

Table-6 Status of Student Enrollment in Uttarakhand Open University (Session 2006-07 to 2013-14)

Year	Programmes						G. Total
	Master Degree	Bachelor Degree	P.G. Diploma	Diploma	Certificate	Bachelor Preparatory	
2006-07	-	2774	-	-	-	-	2774
2007-08	-	806 (-70.94)	-	81	-	-	887 (-68.02)
2008-09	-	243 (-69.85)	-	48 (-40.74)	-	-	291 (-67.19)
2009-10	-	80 (-67.07)	15	81 (68.75)	-	-	176 (-39.51)
2010-11	1815 (100)	1136 (1320)	218 (1353.33)	858 (959.25)	975	1619	6621 (3661.93)
2011-12	6300 (247.11)	3364 (196.13)	245 (12.39)	719 (-16.2)	651 (-33.23)	1056 (-34.77)	12335 (86.30)
2012-13	12685 (101.35)	9320 (177.05)	265 (8.16)	891 (23.92)	1178 (80.95)	519 (-50.85)	24858 (101.52)
2013-14	12421 (-2.08)	9905 (6.28)	217 (-18.11)	675 (-24.24)	477 (-59.51)	254 (-51.06)	23949 (-3.65)

Source: ICT Cell, Uttarakhand Open University.

It has been observed from the above table that in the initial years there is a declining trend in the enrollment of learners in various programmes offered by the university. But in the 2010-11 there is remarkably increase in the strength of the distance learners in Bachelor Degree as well as Diploma and Certificate Programmes. In this academic session university launched various Master Degree Programmes i.e. MBA, M.Com. MSW, M.A. in Education, History, Political Science and Hindi etc. In the academic session 2013-14, there is again decline in the number of the students in all the programmes except Bachelor Degree Programme. It is a matter of great concern and to achieve the target of reach the unreached, university has to popularize and familiarize its programmes among the distance learners of the state. University should launch more profession and job-oriented programmes as per the need and requirements of the local aspirants.

Table-7 Status of Student Enrollment in Commerce Programmes of Uttarakhand Open University (Session 2006-07 to 2013-14)

Year	Programmes		Total	Increase / Decrease (%)
	M.Com.	B. Com.		
2006-07	-	403	403	-
2007-08	-	101	101	-74.94
2008-09	-	38	38	-62.38
2009-10	-	14	14	-63.16
2010-11	42	114	156	1014.29
2011-12	389	426	815	422.44
2012-13	760	840	1600	96.32



2013-14	671	767	1438	-10.13
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Source: ICT Cell, Uttarakhand Open University.

Figure 6

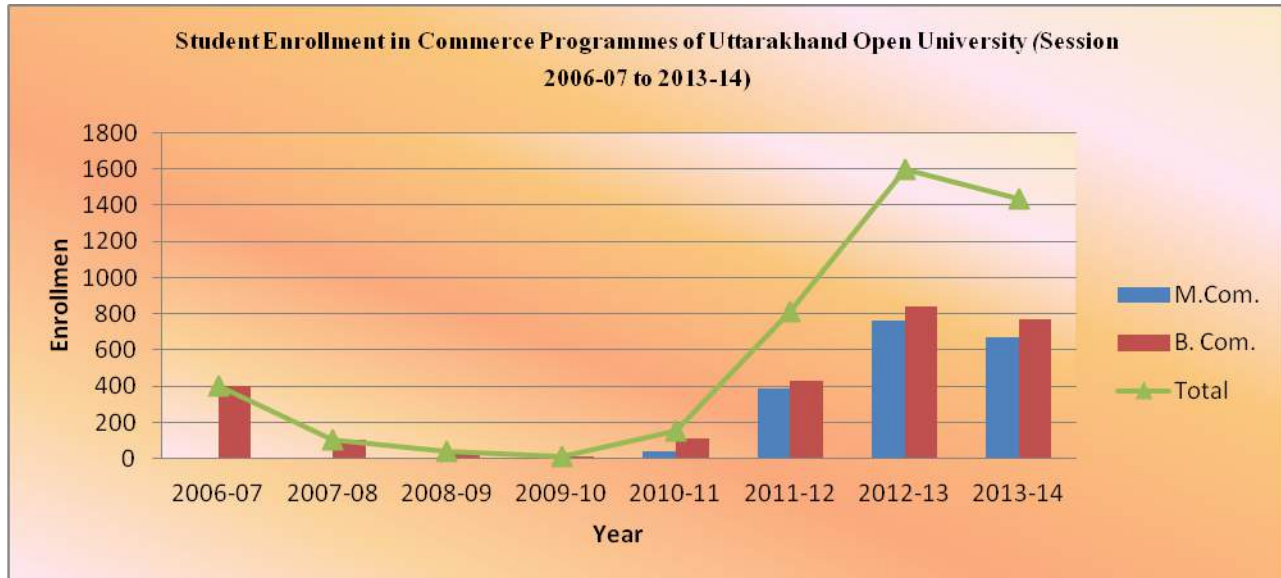


Table-7 exhibits that in the academic sessions 2007-08, 2008-09 and 2009-10, there is decline in the number of the students enrolled in the Bachelor of Commerce Programme offered by the university. In the year 2010-11, Master of Commerce programme was offered by the university. As a result, there is remarkable increase of 1014.29 percent in the total number of the students enrolled in the M.Com. and B. Com. Programmes of the university. It has also been found that in the academic session 2013-14 there is a decline in the number of students enrolled in M.Com. and B. Com. Programmes. To increase the number of students in these programmes, there is need to update the curriculum of commerce and linked it to the needs of day to day life of the students.

Limitations of the formal system of education were attracted policy makers towards non-conventional modes of education for providing non-residential studies like correspondence courses. Therefore, in order to insure access and education of a reasonably good quality, we must think of some alternative system capable of supplementing the role of conventional system, and distance education is one of such alternatives. As a result, the distance education mode was adopted by many universities to meet the ever-growing demand of those students who lacked means to pursue higher education through the regular stream.



Conclusion and Suggestions

Commerce education is one of the oldest branches of Indian higher education system. It is regarded as the base of many streams of education such as management, accounting, insurance, banking, taxation, finance, marketing and business law in India. But nowadays commerce education is competing with these new streams for its existence, as these branches are following practical based or skill oriented pedagogy. In other words, it is losing its sheen as compared to the other practical based disciplines. Moreover, in the present scenario, due to globalization and advancement of information technology, competitive marketplace is emerging and education systems are changing. Distance education is mode to provide an opportunity to those who left the study in between and want to be part of the regular system and want to be part of the learned society. The main objective of distance education is to democratize higher education to large segments of the population, in particular the disadvantaged groups such as those living in remote and rural areas, working people, women etc. It also develops education as a lifelong activity to enable persons to update their knowledge or acquire knowledge in new areas. Open and distance learning occupies a special place in the Indian higher education system because of its major contribution in enhancing the gross enrollment ratio and democratization of higher education to large segments of the Indian population particularly to reach out to the unreached and to meet the demands of lifelong learning which has become more of a necessity in the knowledge society.

Commerce education is facing multiple challenges in the present scenario. As we know it is a living discipline and needs to keep pace with the changes happening locally as well as globally. To bring back the dignity and glory of commerce education as it had in the past, a new orientation requires to be given to the discipline of commerce education.

- There is need to update the curriculum of commerce and linked it to the needs of day to day life of the students or with the needs of the industry.
- There should be more focus on the practical aspects rather than theoretical aspects. Computerized accounting has been introduced as compulsory part of the course.
- Commerce curriculum needs revision and it should be design to develop skills such as communication, decision making, problem solving, leadership etc. Keeping in view the changes in business environment, the syllabus needs to be redesigned at regular intervals.



- To update themselves with the ever-changing business environment, there is need to encourage the faculties of colleges or universities to participate in various training programs.
- The interaction with the industry and linkages with the professional bodies and the recruitment agencies should be encouraged.

Therefore, it is the need of the hour that more emphasis must be given to distance learning so that the left out and those who enable to carry on their study through regular mode of education can get a chance of learning through distance mode of education and be a part of learned society.

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