



DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIA: A HISTORICAL ACCOUNT, 1962–2022ⁱ

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Abstract:

Distance education has become an integral component of the Indian higher education system, providing opportunities for learners who cannot participate fully in conventional campus-based education due to various constraints. This article presents a historical account of distance education in India, drawing on existing research as well as official data. It traces the development of the field through the emergence and expansion of correspondence education during the 1960s and 1970s; the establishment of open universities during the 1980s; the national consolidation of distance education following the establishment of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in 1985; the growth of multimedia and information and communication technologies; and the subsequent development of regulated ODL and online education. It draws on the example of the Centre for Distance Education (CDE) at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), Hyderabad, subsequently associated with the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), as an important instance of the diversification of Indian distance education into specialized language education and professional development. The CDE/CIEFL experience illustrates the distinctive pedagogical demands of language learning at a distance and the importance of learner autonomy, mediated communication, interaction, instructional materials, and learner support.

Keywords: distance education, India, CIEFL, learner autonomy

Resumen:

La educación a distancia se ha convertido en un componente integral del sistema de educación superior de la India, proporcionando oportunidades a estudiantes que no pueden participar plenamente en la educación convencional basada en campus debido a diversas limitaciones. Este artículo presenta una reseña histórica de la educación a distancia en la India, basándose tanto en investigaciones existentes como en datos oficiales. Se sigue el desarrollo de este campo a través de la aparición y expansión de la

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educación por correspondencia durante las décadas de 1960 y 1970; el establecimiento de universidades abiertas durante la década de 1980; la consolidación nacional de la educación a distancia tras la creación de la Universidad Nacional Abierta Indira Gandhi (IGNOU) en 1985; el crecimiento de los recursos multimedia y de las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación; y el posterior desarrollo de la educación a distancia y abierta (ODL) y de la educación en línea reguladas. Se recurre al ejemplo del Centro de Educación a Distancia (CDE) del Instituto Central de Inglés y Lenguas Extranjeras (CIEFL), Hyderabad, posteriormente vinculado a la Universidad de Inglés y Lenguas Extranjeras (EFLU), como un ejemplo importante de la diversificación de la educación a distancia india hacia la enseñanza especializada de idiomas y el desarrollo profesional. La experiencia del CDE/CIEFL ilustra las exigencias pedagógicas distintivas del aprendizaje de idiomas a distancia y la importancia de la autonomía del estudiante, la comunicación mediada, la interacción, los materiales didácticos y el apoyo al estudiante.

Palabras clave: educación a distancia, India, CIEFL, autonomía del estudiante

1. Introduction

The history of distance education (DE) is fundamentally a history of overcoming educational disparities. Conventional education has traditionally assumed that teachers and learners occupy the same physical space, follow a common timetable, and interact through direct classroom communication. DE has challenged each of these assumptions through alternate arrangements where teaching and learning could occur when teachers and learners were separated by geography and, increasingly, by time.

Internationally, the development of DE has been closely associated with communication technologies. Correspondence education depended on printed materials and postal systems; later, it incorporated radio and television. Developments that followed employed audio and video recordings, telephone communication, satellite systems, computers, and the internet. Contemporary DE can incorporate synchronous and asynchronous communication, multimedia content, digital assessment, virtual communities, and online learner support. Yet the historical evolution of DE cannot be explained by technology alone. Questions of learner autonomy, interaction, instructional design, institutional organization, assessment, and support have remained central throughout the history of the field (Keegan, 2000; Moore & Diehl, 2019).

India provides an especially significant context for examining this development. The country has faced the challenge of expanding higher education to a large and geographically heterogeneous population since its independence in 1947. Conventional universities could not easily provide access to all prospective learners. Limited institutional capacity, employment, family responsibilities, socioeconomic circumstances, geographical distances, and the need for continuing and professional education have created demand for more flexible forms of educational provisions.

The organized history of modern DE in India is generally associated with the University of Delhi's establishment of the School of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education in 1962. The University Grants Commission (UGC) identifies this

initiative as a significant starting point in the institutional development of open and distance learning in India. Courses via the correspondence mode were thereafter offered by several other universities, including the Punjab University and the University of Rajasthan in 1968, as well as the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL) in 1973.

Its subsequent history has involved a major transformation from correspondence education to open university education. The establishment of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University in 1982 and the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in 1985 were important developments. IGNOU was established through an Act of Parliament and was specifically intended to extend higher education to sections of the population unable to access conventional institutions. Its original institutional objectives emphasized flexible entry, learner convenience, diverse educational media, and the use of educational technology.

The development of DE also required regulatory recognition. The UGC introduced the Minimum Standards of Instructions for the Grant of the First Degree through Non-Formal/Distance Education Regulations in 1985 and subsequently developed further mechanisms governing open universities and distance provision. The regulatory trajectory culminated, within the period considered in this article, in the UGC (Open and Distance Learning Programmes and Online Programmes) Regulations, 2020 and their amendments in 2021 and 2022. The 2020 regulations superseded the 2017 ODL Regulations and the 2018 Online Courses or Programmes Regulations and established a common regulatory framework for ODL and online programmes. The present article excludes regulatory and institutional developments after 31 December 2022.

The central argument in the article is that the history of DE in India is not merely a history of changing educational technologies; it is a history of institutional responses to the persistent problems of educational access, equity, flexibility, scale, and national development. Technologies have changed the means of communication, but fundamental pedagogical questions concerning autonomy, interaction, learner support, instructional design, and quality have remained continuous.

2. Objectives and methodological approach

This article has four objectives:

- to trace the historical development of DE in India between 1962 and 2022;
- to examine some major institutional, technological, pedagogical, and regulatory changes that shaped this development;
- to interpret the Indian experience through theoretical perspectives in DE; and
- to identify the continuities and tensions that have characterized Indian DE over six decades.

The article adopts a historical-narrative review methodology. It does not present new empirical data from a survey or institutional case study. Instead, it synthesizes established scholarship and documentary evidence to reconstruct a historical trajectory of the field.

The principal scholarly sources supplied for the study provide complementary perspectives. Keegan (2000) addresses theoretical principles; Johnson (2003) examines design, delivery, and improvement; Holmberg et al. (2005), Howard (1995), and White (2003) provide perspectives on distance language education; Veletsianos (2010) examines emerging technologies; Simonson et al. (2015) address foundations of teaching and learning at a distance; Moore and Diehl (2019) provide a comprehensive contemporary treatment of the field; and Cleveland-Innes and Garrison (2021) examine DE in the context of changing teaching and learning environments. Panda (2005) provides the principal India-specific scholarly account, particularly in relation to higher education and national development. The article also uses UGC, DEB, and IGNOU documents to establish institutional and regulatory chronology. This combination is important because the history of DE involves both academic shifts and formal institutional decisions.

The article includes mention of earlier educational and correspondence initiatives to offer context, but 1962 is treated as the principal starting point for organized university-level distance education in the modern Indian education system. Developments after 2022 are excluded in order to preserve a consistent historical endpoint.

3. Conceptual foundations of Distance Education (DE)

DE has developed through several overlapping conceptual traditions. Although definitions differ, most emphasize the separation of teacher and learner, organized instructional provision, mediated communication, and some degree of learner independence.

Early correspondence education is a simpler institutional response to geographical separation: universities prepared printed lessons and sent them to learners, who studied independently and returned assignments for assessment. The model demonstrated that organized university education could occur without regular classroom attendance. However, DE developed beyond correspondence teaching. Keegan (2000) emphasizes that DE involves distinctive organizational and pedagogical principles arising from the separation of teaching and learning. Moore and Diehl (2019) similarly present DE as a broad field involving instructional design, technology, management, policy, learner support, and quality.

A central issue in DE is the relationship between autonomy and interaction. Distance learners frequently have greater control over when and where they study. Such autonomy is a major advantage, particularly for working adults and other non-traditional learners. Yet autonomy can also produce isolation if institutions fail to provide adequate guidance and communication. Theoretical perspectives associated with dialogue and learner support are consequently highly relevant. Holmberg et al. (2005) emphasize communication and the evolution of interaction in DE, while White (2003) demonstrates the importance of learner autonomy, motivation, strategy, and support in DE learning.

The movement toward digital education has expanded the possibilities for interaction. Cleveland-Innes and Garrison (2021) situate contemporary DE within an

environment in which social, cognitive, and teaching processes can be supported through digital communication.

These conceptual principles provide a useful lens through which to interpret the Indian historical experience. The technologies changed repeatedly, but the fundamental problem remained the same: how to create an effective educational relationship when teacher and learner are not continuously together.

4. The Indian context: Higher education and national development

The development of DE in India is inseparable from the expansion of higher education after independence. India's growing population and developmental aspirations required a suitably trained population through universities. Conventional institutions, however, faced limitations of physical capacity and geographical distribution. Higher education was also not equally accessible to learners who were employed, had family responsibilities, lived far from universities, or could not afford relocation. DE, in this scenario, offered a means of widening participation without requiring all learners to become residential or full-time students.

Panda (2005) provides an important interpretation of this relationship between distance higher education and national development. His analysis links Indian DE with access and equity, professional and workforce development, community development, women's empowerment, information and communication technologies, and human-resource development. This developmental context is essential as DE in India did not grow merely as a pedagogical experiment. It emerged partly because the country required mechanisms capable of expanding educational opportunities on a large scale.

The distance learner consequently became an important category within Indian higher education. Unlike the traditional school-leaving learner entering a residential university, the distance learner might be a working adult, teacher, parent, professional, rural learner, or someone seeking a second opportunity for higher education. The diversity of this population created a demand for flexible institutional arrangements and learning materials capable of supporting independent study.

4.1 1962: The emergence of correspondence education

The establishment of organized correspondence education at the University of Delhi in 1962 represents a foundational moment in the modern history of Indian DE. The initiative created an institutional mechanism through which university education could reach learners who could not participate in conventional classes. Printed materials constituted the principal medium, and correspondence through the postal system enabled communication between the institution and learners.

The model was appropriate to the technological conditions of the period. Printing allowed standardized course materials to be reproduced on a large scale, while postal networks made it possible to distribute them over considerable distances. Correspondence education therefore addressed an immediate problem of access. A learner did not need to relocate to Delhi or attend regular university classes. Yet the model also created limitations. Communication was slow compared with contemporary

standards. Feedback on assignments could take considerable time. Learners had limited opportunities for immediate clarification or peer interaction.

These limitations would later become central concerns in distance education theory. The correspondence model provided access to content, but access to content was not necessarily equivalent to a complete learning experience. The historical significance of 1962 therefore lies in more than the introduction of a new mode of delivery. It established the institutional principle that university education could be organized around learners separated from the conventional campus.

4.2 Expansion of correspondence education in the 1960s and 1970s

Following the University of Delhi initiative, correspondence education expanded to other Indian universities. UGC records identify Punjabi University and the University of Rajasthan as institutions that introduced correspondence education in 1968, followed by other universities in the subsequent period. This expansion demonstrated that correspondence education could become a systematic component of university provision rather than a single institutional experiment.

The growth of correspondence courses also reflected changing conceptions of the university student. Higher education increasingly had to accommodate people who could not attend regular classes. Employment and family commitments could no longer be treated simply as reasons for exclusion. However, correspondence education remained institutionally connected to conventional universities. It frequently functioned as an additional mode rather than as a comprehensive philosophy of flexible learning.

The distinction between correspondence education and open learning is important at this stage. Correspondence education primarily addressed physical separation. Open learning would later broaden the objective by attempting to reduce restrictions relating to admission, time, place, pace, and educational pathways. Thus, the 1960s and 1970s can be understood as the formative period during which the basic infrastructure and legitimacy of DE in India was established.

4.3 Centre for Distance Education, CIEFL, Hyderabad: DE for language learning

An important but comparatively less discussed chapter in the history of Indian distance education is the development of DE in the field of language teaching and learning. The Centre for Distance Education (CDE) at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), Hyderabad occupies a significant place in this history. CIEFL, established as a specialized national institution for English and foreign-language education, subsequently became the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU). The development of distance education within this institutional context illustrates how the Indian system diversified beyond general correspondence and open-university provision to address the particular requirements of language education and teacher development.

4.3.1 Teacher education through distance mode

The Centre offered a Post-Graduate Certificate in Teaching of English (PGCTE) and a Post-Graduate Diploma in Teaching of English (PGDTE) through the distance mode for

in-service teachers. The contribution of these two programmes can be understood within the broader development of professional and teacher education through distance modes. India's large and geographically dispersed population of teachers and language professionals created a substantial need for continuing education that did not require prolonged absence from employment. Distance education provided a mechanism through which teachers and other learners could undertake structured academic and professional development while continuing their existing occupational responsibilities.

Moreover, unlike subjects in which learning can be based predominantly on reading and written assignments, training in language teaching involves a practical component of classroom activities. The PGCTE and PGDTE programmes included regular contact classes and assignments through which the enrolled participants could work on their own as well as come together to stay on campus for specific durations. This allowed tutors to work with the participants on classroom practices for the development of several interrelated language competencies, including reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary, grammar, and communicative competence. It subsequently offered an MA in English from 2008 onwards. These experiences demonstrate how distance language education requires carefully designed materials and opportunities for interaction that can compensate, at least partially, for the absence of continuous face-to-face classroom communication.

This issue is reflected in the international literature on distance language education. Howard (1995) examines the implications of distance education for language teachers, while White (2003) emphasizes learner autonomy, strategy, motivation, and the distinctive requirements of teacher training and language learning at a distance. Holmberg, Shelley, and White (2005) similarly document the evolution of distance education in language teaching and learning and demonstrate the importance of communication and interaction. These perspectives are especially relevant to the Indian experience represented by CDE, CIEFL.

4.3.2 Significance of teacher education and ELT through distance mode

The CDE model is historically important for at least three reasons. First, it demonstrates the specialization of Indian distance education. The development of the sector was not limited to general-purpose degree programmes; institutions also adapted distance methodologies to particular disciplines and professional communities. Second, it illustrates the importance of self-learning materials and learner support in subjects requiring substantial independent practice. Third, it provides an early example of how distance education could be used for continuing professional development, a function that became increasingly important as higher education and communication technologies expanded.

The historical significance of CDE should also be considered alongside the larger institutional milestones of Indian distance education: it demonstrates the disciplinary diversification and pedagogical specialization of the field. Its inclusion also broadens the meaning of access. Access in distance language education is not simply access to a university qualification but can also mean access to teacher preparation and professional development.

The example of CDE at CIEFL also illustrates the changing technological character of distance education. Early distance language learning relied heavily on printed materials, supplemented where possible by audio resources and other mediated forms of communication. The subsequent development of information and communication technologies created greater opportunities for listening and speaking practice, interaction, feedback, and access to multimedia resources. Thus, the experience of institutions such as CDE and CIEFL can be viewed as part of the broader transition from correspondence education toward multimedia and ICT-supported distance learning. By 2022, the digital environment had considerably expanded the possibilities for language learning at a distance, but the fundamental pedagogical questions identified in the earlier literature—learner autonomy, interaction, motivation, feedback, communication, and support—remained central.

5. The shift towards Open Universities

The emergence of open universities in the 1980s marked a conceptual transformation. The model was not simply a correspondence department within a conventional university: it began with the idea of flexibility and distance from its initial moment. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University, established in 1982 in Hyderabad, Telangana, represented a major step in this direction. Its development demonstrated that an Indian university could be organized specifically to provide education through an open and distance framework.

The importance of the open university model was pedagogical as well as institutional. Courses had to be designed for learners who could not rely on continuous classroom interaction. Self-learning materials (SLM) became a central component. Learner support centres, counselling, assignments, examinations, and other mechanisms were incorporated into the educational system.

The UGC subsequently introduced specific rules concerning the fitness of open universities for grants, with the 1988 rules defining an open university as one that imparted education exclusively through distance education and identifying study centres as locations for advising, counselling, and other student assistance. This development illustrates the growing recognition that DE required an institutional architecture of its own.

5.1 IGNOU and the national consolidation of DE

The establishment of IGNOU in 1985 was an important institutional development in India's distance education history. Created through an Act of Parliament, IGNOU was intended to provide higher education to segments of the population unable to access conventional institutions. Its original documents explicitly emphasized diverse means of learning, flexible entry, study according to learners' own pace and convenience, and the use of educational technology. The university began its academic programmes in 1987 with two programmes and 4,528 students.

The significance of IGNOU extended beyond enrolment. It established a large-scale model of DE involving academic schools, study centres, regional structures, self-

learning materials, counselling, assignments, examinations, and multiple media. The university also contributed to the legitimacy of DE. Distance learning was increasingly recognized as a major mode of higher education rather than a secondary arrangement for students unable to attend conventional classes. Further, IGNOU's national character allowed it to experiment with standardization and scale. The challenge was to create educational experiences that could serve dispersed learners while maintaining academic consistency. This is a challenge that remains central to large-scale DE internationally.

5.2 Regulations and institutional recognition

The expansion of distance education created an increasingly important need for quality assurance and regulatory oversight. The UGC had already issued regulations concerning first degrees through non-formal and distance education in 1985. The establishment of the Distance Education Council under the IGNOU Act in 1991 represented another major institutional development. The Council played an important role in the promotion and coordination of distance education.

Over subsequent decades, the regulatory system evolved. By the 2010s, UGC was increasingly central to the regulation and recognition of ODL institutions and programmes. The UGC (Open and Distance Learning) Regulations, 2017 represented a significant attempt to establish minimum standards for degrees awarded through ODL. The regulations explicitly described themselves as establishing minimum standards of instruction for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees through ODL. The 2017 framework was subsequently amended, including provisions concerning the status of standalone institutions previously recognized under the Distance Education Council framework. This regulatory development is historically significant because it indicates that distance education had moved from an experimental mode toward a mature sector requiring formal mechanisms of recognition and quality assurance.

6. Distance language, learner support, and learner autonomy

Learner autonomy has been one of the defining characteristics of distance education. A distance learner typically has greater freedom to determine when and where learning occurs. However, autonomy can also become a source of difficulty. Learners may lack effective study strategies, time-management skills, motivation, or confidence. Distance education therefore requires a balance between independence and institutional support.

Study centres were identified as an important element in the Indian model because they provided a physical point of contact for geographically dispersed learners. Counselling, academic guidance, assignments, and examinations provided additional forms of institutional structure. The UGC's regulatory framework explicitly recognized the function of study centres as locations for advising, counselling, and other student assistance. This is consistent with the theoretical literature. Keegan (2000) and Holmberg et al. (2005) demonstrate that distance education requires mechanisms through which the learner can remain connected to the educational institution.

The history of Indian distance education thus challenges the simplistic idea that distance education means "learning alone." The experience of DE at the CIEFL/EFLU

moreover amply demonstrates that effective learning requires structured autonomy supported by institutional communication.

7. Multimedia and the expansion of educational communication

The development of Indian distance education may not be understood exclusively through print technology. Radio and television introduced the possibility of reaching large numbers of learners simultaneously. The movement toward multimedia education also reflected an important principle in distance education: different technologies provide different educational affordances. Print permits detailed independent study. Audio can support listening and language development. Video can demonstrate procedures and provide visual explanations. Broadcasting can reach large populations. Interactive technologies can support dialogue.

Veletsianos (2010) shows how emerging technologies have repeatedly altered the possibilities of distance education. Yet technological innovation is not synonymous with pedagogical improvement. Technology becomes educationally valuable only when its use is aligned with learning objectives. The Indian experience therefore developed systemically, rather than as a sequence in which each new technology simply replaced its predecessor.

7.1 Information and communication technologies (ICT) and online education

During the 1990s and 2000s, information and communication technologies began to transform distance education. Computers and networked communication reduced some of the limitations of postal correspondence. Email accelerated communication. Websites provided access to institutional information and educational resources. Digital libraries expanded access to scholarly materials. The Internet also created possibilities for asynchronous discussion and eventually synchronous interaction.

This period represented a major conceptual change. Earlier distance education was largely concerned with delivering educational content across geographical distance. Networked technologies allowed institutions to construct more interactive learning environments.

The digital transformation reinforced the principle that effective distance education requires systematic design and delivery rather than simple content transmission because online courses could not be effective merely by placing conventional lecture notes on a website (Johnson, 2003). The Internet made it possible to design activities, discussions, feedback systems, multimedia content, and collaborative learning environments.

The rise of online education introduced a new relationship between distance and technology. The UGC's Online Courses or Programmes Regulations, 2018 formally recognized online education within the regulatory landscape. In January 2020, UGC amended those regulations before introducing the comprehensive ODL and Online Programmes Regulations later that year. The 2020 regulations represented an important institutional milestone because they superseded the 2017 ODL Regulations and the 2018 Online Courses or Programmes Regulations and established minimum standards for

degrees and postgraduate diplomas through both ODL and online modes. This convergence reflected the changing boundaries between distance education and online education. By this stage, distance learning could no longer be understood exclusively through printed materials or physical study centres.

7.2 COVID-19 and the acceleration of digital learning

The COVID-19 pandemic represents a major turning point in the recent history of education. The closure of educational institutions required universities and colleges to adopt forms of remote teaching at unprecedented speed. Digital communication became essential to educational continuity. However, the pandemic also revealed an important distinction between planned distance education and emergency remote teaching. Planned distance education involves systematic course design, prepared learning materials, established learner support, assessment systems, and institutional infrastructure. Emergency remote teaching frequently involved the rapid transfer of existing classroom teaching into online environments. The two therefore cannot be treated as synonymous.

The pandemic nevertheless accelerated the acceptance and adoption of online educational practices. It also exposed the importance of digital equity. Learners without adequate devices or connectivity faced greater obstacles. For distance education, the pandemic provided both validation and warning. It demonstrated the usefulness of flexible digital learning while revealing that technology cannot eliminate inequalities in educational participation.

7.3 Digital divide and the problem of equity

The digital transformation of distance education created new opportunities but also introduced new forms of inequality. Panda (2005) identified access, equity, quality, and ICT use as interconnected issues in Indian distance higher education. These concerns remain relevant as the system moves toward more involved digital learning.

Access to online learning requires more than admission to a programme. Learners need suitable devices, connectivity, electricity, digital literacy, and an environment conducive to study. This creates a paradox. Digital technologies can reduce geographical barriers while simultaneously creating technological barriers. The problem is especially significant in India because of socioeconomic and regional disparities in access to digital infrastructure.

The historical lesson of Indian distance education suggests that multimodality remains important. Print, offline resources, broadcast media, learner support centres, and digital technologies can complement one another. A fully digital model may be highly effective for some learners but inappropriate for others.

8. DE and national development

The developmental significance of distance education is one of the strongest features of the Indian experience. Panda (2005) argues that distance higher education contributes to national development through expanded access, workforce development, professional

education, community development, women's empowerment, and human-resource development.

The flexibility of distance education allows individuals to remain economically active while studying. This makes education potentially compatible with employment and professional development. Distance education also supports lifelong learning. Education need not be confined to the early years of adulthood. Learners can return to education to obtain additional qualifications, change professional direction, or update existing knowledge. This function became increasingly important as India's economy and labour market changed. The history of distance education can therefore be understood partly as a history of the changing relationship between education and working life.

9. Conclusion

The history of distance education in India between 1962 and 2022 demonstrates a sustained effort to expand the boundaries of higher education. The establishment of correspondence education in 1962, its expansion to other universities during the 1960s and 1970s, and the establishment of open universities during the 1980s strengthened distance education as a recognized form of university provision. The subsequent decades brought further technological transformation. Radio and television expanded reach; audio and video enriched presentation; computers and the Internet increased communication; and digital platforms created new possibilities for interaction and online learning.

Yet technological change did not eliminate the fundamental problems of distance education. Learner autonomy continued to require institutional support. Increased access continued to raise questions of quality. Digital connectivity created new possibilities while also creating new inequalities. The regulatory changes reflect these challenges. UGC's 1985 regulations established early formal recognition of non-formal and distance education, the 2017 ODL Regulations introduced a more comprehensive minimum-standard framework, while the 2018 online regulations recognized the emerging significance of online provision. The 2020 ODL and Online Programmes Regulations brought the two modes within a common regulatory framework, followed by amendments in 2021 and 2022. By the end of 2022, therefore, distance education in India had undergone a fundamental transformation. It had moved from correspondence education based primarily on printed materials to a complex educational ecosystem combining print, multimedia, physical learner-support structures, information and communication technologies, and online platforms.

The historical evidence nevertheless cautions against interpreting this trajectory as a straightforward progression from "traditional" to "modern" technology. Print did not simply disappear when digital technology emerged. Study centres did not become irrelevant when online communication expanded. Instead, successive technologies were layered onto existing educational arrangements. The history is therefore best understood as a process of institutional, pedagogical, and technological accumulation. The central contribution of distance education to India has been its capacity to expand educational

opportunity beyond the spatial and temporal limitations of conventional institutions. Its developmental significance lies in its ability to support adult learners, working populations, professional development, lifelong learning, and broader participation in higher education.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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