



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

## Education

**A RETROSPECTION OF OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDY CENTRES OF RURAL KAMRUP WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KKHSOU.**
**KEY WORDS:** Open University, Study Centres, KKHSOU.

Dr. Alaka Das

Dept. of Education, Pub Kamrup College

## ABSTRACT

The open education system has come into field as an accepted mode of education and has been gaining wide spread popularity in recent years. The Govt. Of Assam has established the Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University, first of its kind in the entire North East in 1995. At present, KKHSOU is growing tremendously in terms of knowledge distribution through the use of various medium like print, audio-video programmes, use of information and communication technology among the public. Different conventional colleges are offering distance education programme through KKHSOU as recognized study centres of the university catering to the needs of diverse community level. As it is said, apart from good infrastructures, leadership and learner friendly approach is a necessary condition to achieve the objectives of open education. In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyse the existing structure of study centres, functioning, attitudes of the students and coordinators and to suggest a suitable framework for making these study centres an effective tool, to enable it to face the challenges of open education.

**Introduction** – The distance and open education system has become an accepted mode of education that gained wide spread popularity in recent years. The All India Survey on Higher Education observed that the percentage of students enrolled in higher education is 24.5% in (2016-17), while the target of Gross Enrolment in higher education has been set to increase up to 30% by 2020(MHRD, 2012). In the year 2005, the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) was established in Assam and that started it's academic programme BPP in 2008. The courses offered by KKHSOU is recognized by Distance Education Bureau, New Delhi and UGC, that are designed to create skilled and employable human resources. Besides study centres, learner support service is provided through 'University Website', 'Community Radio Service,' 'Ekalavya' a special education programme and inter study centre phone service. E – Bidya the online portal KKHSOU mobile application SMS alert facility, and Open journals Search Engine also some of the services of KKHSOU.

**Study Centres** of KKHSOU - For attracting students and to offer support services, the open universities have established Study Centres at different places in India and abroad. Also known as learning resource centres, a study centre is an important part of the support system. The study centres of Open University is established mainly to provide information to students from the university office, relating to programmes available, organize counselling sessions, verify receipts, give admission and transmit admission forms to head office, encourage students to utilize the facilities available in the centres, receive and distribute self learning material, arrange personal contact classes, distribution and evaluation of assignment. The study centres disseminate all types of information received from the head office, distribute and evaluate assignments and conduct examination in fair and transparent way. Thus, the study centres provide close contact between learners and teachers. However, very often these centres face severe criticism from the stake holders regarding the functioning of these study centres mostly on failure of providing regular contact classes, poor infrastructure, lack of library facilities, lack of multi-media equipment, lack of sensitivity to learner's problem, often engaging incompetent teachers, and service orientation false promise etc.

An attempt has been made in this paper to analyze the existing structure and functioning of these study centres of rural Kamrup with special reference to KKHSOU and to suggest a framework for making these study centres more effective. Therefore, the problem of the study has been stated as –**"A Retrospection of Open University Study Centres of Rural Kamrup with Special Reference to KKHSOU"**

**Objectives of the Study –**

- To study about the structure of KKHSOU study centres of Rural Kamrup.
- To know the functioning of KKHSOU study centres of Rural

Kamrup.

- To know the views of study centre co-ordinators on the extent of achievement of objectives of open education.
- To study views of learners on the extent of achievement of objectives of their education through open mode.
- To suggest a framework for ideal open education study centres.

**Significance of the study** - The capability to read and write and pursue higher studies of the people of rural areas are limited. In rural areas, both male and female busy in livelihood that result in complete withdrawal of education. The open universities provide these rural people the access of higher education, the effectiveness of which basically depend on proper functioning of the study centres of the open university. Though different studies on open and distance education has been conducted, particular focus on study centres and that too in rural areas are limited. Rural people have much to gain from the liberal admission policy and teaching learning mode of open education. In such context, it is felt significant to study the present status and functioning of KKHSOU study centres of the rural areas as other Open University have limited coverage in such areas than this Open University. Besides, strengthening of the study centres will be fruitful in achieving the mission of Quality Higher Education For All' and in this respect findings of the study will be helpful in policy formulation and implementation.

**Review of Related Studies** – Research on different aspects of open and distance education have been conducted in India and abroad. However, studies conducted in North Eastern context and Assam can be mentioned here are - Kumar M(2002), D. Medhi (2005), M. G. Borgohaine (2008), Rimjim Borah (2014), B. Sarmah and Das K made studies in reference to Assam. However it has been observed that studies on study centres of KKHSOU particularly is limited. Therefore, the attempt was made to focus on the study centres that is one of the important factor of effective open and distance education.

**Delimitation of the Study** – The study is limited to the rural Kamrup and selected study centres only.

**Methodology of the Study-**

**Method** - In the study, descriptive survey method has been adopted with a case study approach for studying the KKHSOU's study centres of Rural Kamrup.

**Sample of the study** – The population of the study consists of 22 study centres of Rural Kamrup out of which 10 Centre coordinators and 100 learners from 10 study centres were used as sample of the study using simple random sampling technique.

**Types of Data** - Primary data have been collected from the coordinators and learners selected for the study and secondary

data have been collected from books, journals, theses, internet leaflets.

**Tools of Study** – For the present study the following tools are used-

- 1) Institutional Data Sheet
- 2) Interview schedule for Co-ordinators of study centres
- 3) Self Structured Questionnaire for students

**Mode of Analysis** – Collected data were analysed qualitatively.

**Procedure of the Study**- With prior communication, the primary data were collected from the study centre coordinators with the help of information data sheet and interview schedule. Students were contacted during counselling programme and data were collected on their views on extent of achievement of objectives of education through open education.

**Analysis and Findings of the Study** –

The analysis of data according to objectives is discussed in following –

- **The organizational structure of Study centres-** The study centres of KKHSOU are established as per the need and demand of the locality. The mode of establishing study centre is at the approved educational institutions. The regional study centres monitor the study centre of the respective region to maintain and enhance the quality of support services provided to learners. Head of the institutions are the centre- in charge of the study centres, and one coordinator of the study centre, and centre management committee.
- **Functions of Study Centres- KKHSOU** functioned through a chain system-Head Office, regional centres and study centres.
- From the study, it is observed that, all the sample study centres provide admission related information and collect forms and sent to the university office. However, pre-admission counselling is not in practice in the centres. Counselling sessions are held in the study centres but it is not regular due to student's poor attendance. Provision for Assignment distribution and submission is there in the study centres but most of the students are not punctual in submitting them on time. Examinations are also conducted by the study centres as assigned by the head office of the Open University.
- **Views of Co-ordinator on extent of achievement of objectives of KKHSOU.** The Open University is established with objective of providing access, equity, quality, relevance and affordability. The centre coordinators were requested to opine on achievement of open university in five aspects- access (providing access to outreach population), Equity (inclusiveness of under privilege), Quality (related to financial, evaluation, affordability, student support quality), relevance (provided social need based education), Affordability (from the point of view student in comparison to programme offered through formal mode) Availability (in terms of technology). The findings are presented below-

Table 1-Views of the Coordinator on the Extent of Achievement of the Objectives of Open University

Sr no	Objectives	Percentage of Achievement			
		21-40	41-60	61-80	81-100
1	Access	1	5	2	1
2	Equity	2	7	1	0
3	Quality	1	6	3	0
4	Relevance	2	5	2	1
5	Affordability	0	4	5	1
6	Availability	2	6	1	0

The opinion on whether the open university succeeded in reaching the socially disadvantages class of society, 50% of coordinators are of the opinion it has been achieved up to ( 41-60 %). There are 70% coordinators opined offering equity to under privileged sections of society is (41-60%). Further 60%

coordinators said that quality in terms of evaluation, affordability, students support' is achieved up to (41to 60 %). 50 % coordinators have expressed that relevance to providing need based education is achieved up to (41to 60 %). As regards affordability, 50% coordinators agree that it is achieved within (61-80%). There are 50% coordinators who have expressed that the objective of availability in terms of technology is achieved up to 41to 60% It can be said that as reaching the unreached and socially disadvantage class of people is a continuous process, the open university should made action plan to reach the downtrodden and promote them for education.

Another objective of the study was to know the opinion of students about the achievement of objectives of education through open and distance education in terms of knowledge development, skill development, development of values and attitude, career development and personal development. Response of students on attainment of objectives of education through ODL are presented below-

Table-1 Views of students on the Extent of Achievement of the Objectives of Open University

Sl N	Components	Yes		Partially		No	
		Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%
1	Knowledge development	57	57 %	43	43 %	0	
2	Skill development (application of knowledge)	35	35%	61	61%	4	4%
3	Development of Value	41	41%	57	57%	2	2%
4	Career Development	46	46%	32	32%	21	21%
5	Professional Development	54	54%	21	21%	25	25%
6	Personal Development	61	61 %	34	44%	5	5%

From the table we can observed that most of the students (57%) students opined that open education helps them in acquiring knowledge. 35% students reported that they acquire the skill to apply the knowledge practically in different life situation gained through open education. 41% students opined that open education helped them in developing proper attitude and valued towards better living. 46% students admit that education gained through open education will be helpful in career development. 54 % students reported that open education will be helpful in job promotion. 61% students are of the opinion that open education helped them in personal development in the form of confidence building.

**Problems of the Study centres** – In India and Assam as well, the media of open education is mainly paper and pencil even today. In the study centres, there are three parties – centre coordinator, the tutor and the learner. All the three have to face barriers that prevent distance learner being more effective. Let us observe these before suggesting the ideal framework.

**Problems faced by Learners-**

- As there is no face to face contact with teachers, students have trouble in self-evaluation.
- Students found open courses not much beneficial for subject having practical.
- Open learner feels isolated as they miss collaboration of larger college community.
- Felling of insecurities about learning due to perceived irrelevance of their studies and lack of support from employers.
- Though different techno based instructional measures have been taken for disseminating knowledge, learners are not aware about that and facilities remains in paper only.
- Sometimes students find design of the study materials provided do not fulfil the special needs of the students.
- The students face Technical barriers, as they are used in mobile only for making phone calls and entertainment.
- For the teachers, catering the diverse need of adult learners and adjusting the teaching style is difficult.
- Some teachers themselves have not positive attitude towards open education and do not have motivation and interest in open and distance learning.

**Challenges faced by the Centre Coordinator-**

The study centres and the coordinators also face some inbuilt problems that hinder them in rendering full services towards the profession.

- Attitudes of people towards open courses reduces the motivation of the centre in-charge.
- Lack of proper infrastructure and internet connectivity and other IT facilities make browser based education delivery difficult.
- Non availability of trained staff is another problem of the study centres.
- Lenient attitude of the learner towards learning and examination also sometimes create problems for the coordinators.
- Availability of cheap notes in the market forms an attitude of ignoring contact classes.

**Suggestive Framework for a Ideal Study Centre-**

**Creation of more Regional Centres** – For effective and better management of study centres, parent institution should create more regional centres that can accept the responsibility of monitoring the study centres located in the region. A regional centre can be assigned approximately 15 to 20 study centres for better and effective management. Coordination between regional centre and study centres requires to be strengthened.

**Academic Function of the Regional Centres-**

Regional centres should create awareness of the programmes offered by the OU among the public of the region, besides developing coordinating and monitoring support services rendered by the study centres and pass on the information to the parent institution. Regional centres should make provision for necessary training and development programme for personnel of the study centres. Efforts should be made to have liaison with other institution for administrative support and identify uncovered area for establishing study centres in the region. Such centres can also scrutinise the application of admission and make admission that reduces the burden of parent institution. It have to pass the guidelines of parent institutions to study centres and ensure its implementation in study centres. Another function of such centres is to organize timely workshop, seminar relating to contemporary issues of open education.

**The regional centres act as a liaison between study centres and the parent institute.**

Activities for promoting such as advertising in different media, press release, interviews, exhibition, placement and managing finance also are the administrative responsibility of such regional centres. It should keep record of student registered, student support service record, Record of furniture and equipments, study centres, resource persons, counsellors and library record.

**Location Of Study Centres** – The study centres should be located in places approximately 2 lakh population and cover rural and remote areas. Establishing more than one study centres in the same area may lead to conflict and not economically viable.

**Approval of Study Centres –**

There must be well-defined system and procedure for allotting study centres to aspiring institutions. Besides recognized college or institutions, registered societies engaged in educational activities and exhibit the initiative and commitment may be considered for study centres experimentally and conditionally. Appropriate format for this purpose specifying minimum requirements expected should be used to scrutinise the proposal for study centres. It should consider different aspects like-location of proposed centres, Building space, Infrastructure, Library facility, Financial position, Enrolment potential. Basic requirements include Space for front desk, admission office, computer lab with latest configuration, classroom, library, storeroom, Basic office equipments, notice board, multi-media equipment such as television, audio-video player, LCD, Over head projector etc. Staffs required are study centre in charge, co-ordinator, subject specific counsellor, IT expert, public relation officer and office assistant and cleaner.

Approval of study centres can be given initially for a period of three years through agreement that is to be extended on the basis of performance.

**Administrative and Academic Functions of Study Centre –**

- Study centres should be kept open on Sundays and all holidays for working persons. Proper arrangement of effective and adequate number of personal contact programme is important. Qualified and competent faculty to teach should be engaged. Provision for distributing course materials should be there. Collecting examination application and fees and transmitting to regional or head office should be systematic and on time. Feedback on the services offered by the institute should be considered. Maintaining records of enquiry, admission, PCP attendance of learner, faculty attendance, fee collection register, SLM distribution register, library book record,. Considering the rate of expansion of open education, the learners support service need to be strengthened and also the study centres in terms of physical, academic and administrative resources. From the study it has been observed that, the service and infrastructure rendered by the study centres are not uniform. Study centres may provide 'admission on phone' to the potential learner.
- New Approach to Curriculum Design and Development- There is need for curriculum to be progressive, application and skill oriented so knowledge gained can be applied to the work. Employability has to be considered as a key factor in curriculum design that has the capacity to generate sizable proportion of entrepreneurs.
- New Pedagogical Approach- The learning content packages offered by open university's should be available in various format both online and off-line to suit different types of open learners. Each study centres should have connection with the website of the OU that must have learning content management system offered by it.
- ICT in Programme design and Delivery- All existing learning resources irrespective of the medium should be converted into e-content, preferably in the form of e-learning modules, which should be SCROM compliant so that they can be re-used, revised, re-mixed and redistributed. Special Lectures, instructional materials should be uploaded in you tube and mobile devices so that learners can avail them at their convenience. In charges of ICT should be oriented for that purpose.
- Introduction of OER and MOOCS - In keeping with the time, the OU must place their e-content as Open Education Resources (OER) and introduce Massive Open Online Course (MOOCs) by free sharing of knowledge with the objective of expanding the access to knowledge to all types of learners pursuing non-formal, formal and informal education.
- Tools to Certify Prior Learning-As it is the mandate of OUs to cater the needs of diversified learners who are looking for certification of their learning and integrate with the mainstream higher education, OUs should develop an educational framework to assess and recognize competence gained outside formal learning and gain credit on demand from various institutions and lead to acquisition of degree/ diploma or certificate.
- Technology Driven Governance- OU should create a separate full fledged Department of e-learning with a view to adopt ICT in all their operations.
- 24 x7 Learner Support Services- An online learner help-desk should be set up to provide both academic and administrative support services to the learners.

**Implication and Suggestion** –Education is the backbone of any economy. Open education can give us the desired benefit only if it is able to maintain the quality and also being career oriented. In rural areas open and distance education can bring education at door step. The lacunae here is the lack of participation of the rural people in IT and the restricted access to the technology, basically lack of skill in using computers. More efforts need to be given in generating awareness and acquiring IT skills. As long as tutors feel the open mode classes and learners as a burden, there will be little support for improving open mode education. So counsellors do

need counselling for motivating themselves for a humanitarian approach rather than commercial. While open education study centres have expanded at a rapid rate, these need an up gradation in their standards and performance as there is a proliferation of courses covered by distance mode with adequate infrastructure, both human and physical. Open education needs a compulsion of practical field experience. The 'easy going' attitude of students make education leisure in most cases.

**Conclusion** – Despite the growth in the ODL system, the stigma of being second grade education system still exist that hurt the open education system despite being in existence for more than thirty years in India. Even today, employers have reservation in employing graduates who have passed through the ODL mode. Open Universities are facing ongoing struggle to establish their credibility even when it is offering systematically designed programmes with proper instructional designs and learner support system. It can be observed that most conventional universities are also moving to a dual mode by adopting technology-mediated methods of distance teaching. In the coming years, the Open University system should be redesigned for lifelong learning-making higher education more accessible, diverse and flexible by helping people to learn what they want, when they want and where they want. The study centres should realise that they have taken up a noble profession of offering educational service to thousands. Hence, more than the supervision and monitoring by the regulatory bodies like OUs, DEB, etc; what is required is self imposed discipline, dedication and commitment to the profession, commitment to the learners. Only then, the notion of 'second best' will be changed and quality higher education will be available to diverse social groups that will only bring the desired change in our economy and society.

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