

DOSSIER : OPEN UNIVERSITY

By Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic

The Dossier of this volume of Link/Lien is devoted to the Open University.

Having had two former Vice-Chancellors of Open Universities as Assistant Director-Generals of UNESCO of the Education and Communications Sectors, Sir John Daniel and Abdul Khan, we are pleased that both responded to the invitation of AFUS to write short contributions.

We are also indebted to Professor Ms. Tian Belawati, former Rector of the Open University of Indonesia, Universitas Terbuka, who has been instrumental in contributing to open universities development as Rector, Professor and scholar but also as President of the International Association of Distance Education and the Asian Association of Open Universities.

As Chief of the Higher Education Section at UNESCO, I had the privilege to work with the three authors in different capacities and extend my personal thanks to them.

Distance learning has a long history, with institutions reaching their students in different ways as communications media have evolved. The London University External Examinations System (1858) and the University of South Africa (UNISA) (1948) are examples of distance teaching institutions

that preceded the creation of open universities by offering correspondence education.

The creation of the Open University in the United Kingdom in 1969, however, heralded a revolution in the methods and philosophy of distance learning. Its name and its slogan: “open to people, open to places, open to methods, open to ideas” were radical. It aimed to open up higher education to all, no longer reserving it for a rigorously selected elite. The model has been widely copied around the world.

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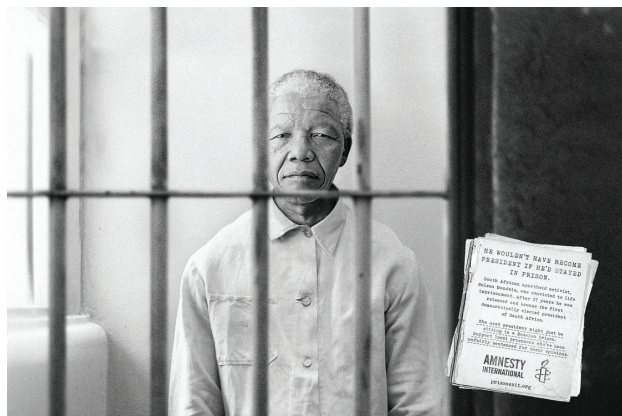


Open Universities: Access, Equity and Inclusion

Contact North, a community-based organisation in Canada, has published a searchable *Directory of 65+ Open Universities*¹, which demonstrates the huge diversity of the open universities institutions. Some of them, such as the Indira Gandhi Open University (IGNOU) in India, the Anadolu Open University in Turkey, the Korea National Open University, Iran's Payame Noor University, and the Open University of China (consisting of a network of distance teaching institutions previously called the China Central Radio and TV University, CCRTVU, and local radio and TV universities, RTVUs), enrol millions of learners. At the other end of the scale, some open universities count fewer than 50,000 learners (e.g. Netherlands Open University, the Hong Kong Open University, Athabasca University (Alberta) and the TÉLUQ (Quebec) in Canada, the Arab Open University or the Interamerican Open University in Argentina). Asia and Africa have the highest number of open universities, reflecting the use of these institutions to address the burgeoning demand for higher education.

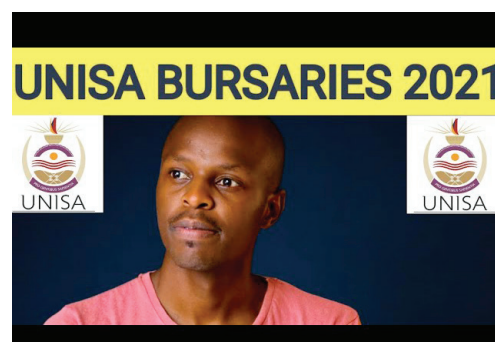
Widening access, promoting equality and lowering costs, which all contribute to social justice, remain the guiding principles of open universities. Most implement these principles in a perspective of lifelong learning, with a commitment to equity and the provision of higher education for all.

For example, the **University of South Africa** (UNISA), which is often cited as the oldest distance learning institution (founded in 1948), has had an impressive social impact. It opened up admission to all by removing barriers of gender, ethnicity and age and played a historic role in South Africa in the apartheid era. Nelson Mandela, who earned a UNISA degree in 1989 while in prison on Robben Island, is its most famous alumnus.



Now that online communication is becoming a key tool for distance learning, the digital divide is a significant obstacle to the success of open universities, particularly in developing countries. Writing about the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian sub-continent, however, Trines (2018)² reports that the spread of mobile broadband technology is

quickly penetrating even remote rural regions and providing Internet access to hitherto deprived populations. Governments in resource-poor countries are increasingly exploring online education as an option because, compared to building conventional university



campuses, digital learning promises a cheaper solution to ever-increasing demand that can be implemented rapidly. The growth potential for online education in developing countries is enormous. **Trines considers Africa “the most dynamic e-learning market on the planet”.**

Another challenge is the sceptical view that sections of the public still hold about open and distance learning, including open universities. Although open universities have been supported by governments (e.g. UK, South Africa, Indonesia) in many countries, in others open and distance learning (ODL) is compared unfavourably to conventional universities. This attitude was reinforced when the spread of the Internet facilitated the emergence of ‘degree mills’ and contributed to an increase in academic corruption generally. Awareness raising campaigns to combat such damaging practices are being implemented by international organisations, including UNESCO, national authorities, non-governmental organisations and the media³.

Three global events, however, have renewed interest in open universities and the broader role of ODL in higher education.

The first was the UN’s proclamation of the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, which acknowledge



the important contribution of higher education to development and place greater focus on social equity, inclusion and justice in post-school education.

The second was the celebration, in 2019, of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the UK Open University, which offered an opportunity to revisit the OU model in light of its evolution over half a century.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic forced campus universities to go online practically overnight, without prior planning, training or expertise. A number of open universities and experts in ODL generously shared their expertise with many higher learning insti-

tutions around the world to facilitate this precipitate move to online learning.

In their different ways these developments illustrated how open and distance education can add value to education systems. Campus universities may well continue using some ODL after the pandemic, which will contribute to its greater acceptance. On the other hand, it is difficult to predict how the specific model of the Open University will evolve in an era when use of ODL is much more widespread.

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1. <https://teachonline.ca/fr/tools-trends/universities/open-university...>
2. Trines, S. (2018), *Educating the Masses: The Rise of Online Education in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia*, in WENR (World Education News and Reviews) 2018.
3. <https://www.chea.org/chea-unesco-statement-to-discourage-degree-mills-higher-education>; <http://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/publication/advisory-statement-effective-international-practice-combatting-corruption-and-enhancing>.

UK Open University: Distance Education at Scale

Distance education aims to expand access to successful study. Historically, this implied operating at scale to reach as many learners as possible. During the Covid-19 pandemic, however, many schools and universities turned to Internet technologies to teach their normal classes at home. This emergency remote teaching required teachers and institutions to adapt some administrative and pedagogical practices, but they did not need to scale up their activities in the traditional manner of distance education.

Most schools will likely return fully to classroom teaching once the pandemic is over, but some universities may continue to combine classroom instruction and remote learning in their teaching programmes. This will hasten the bifurcation of distance education into two general approaches: online learning for normal-sized classes with a single teacher; and institutionally-driven distance education for very much larger groups.

Open universities are the best known manifestation of distance education at scale. To conduct it successfully requires the creation and implementation of teaching and learning systems that are quite different from those of conventional classroom-based institutions. To summarise the distinction: **in campus**



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Baroness Betty Boothroyd, Chancellor of the OU and the first female Speaker of the House of Commons, and Sir John Daniel, Vice-Chancellor.

universities the teacher teaches; whereas in open universities the institution teaches. This makes a radical difference to the operations of the university.

The early manifestations of distance education aimed to overcome the obstacles of geography as the technologies of printing and postal services made it possible to conduct education by correspondence. Until the mid-20th century correspondence teaching was offered mainly by commercial enterprises, although some public school systems (e.g. France & British Columbia) and higher education institutions (e.g. London University) offered correspondence courses alongside their classroom programmes.

The ambitions and the methods of distance education expanded dramatically with **the creation of the UK Open University (UKOU)** in the 1960s. The



1990 - Opening of the Wilson Building on the OU campus.
LtoR: John Daniel, Vice-Chancellor, Lord Asa Briggs, Chancellor; Lord Harold Wilson, who conceived the idea of the OU in 1963.

slogan articulated at its foundation ceremony “open to people; open to places; open to methods; open to ideas” (Crowther, 1969), captured its high aspirations. For as well as overcoming the obstacle of geography by teaching at a distance and being ‘open to places’, the UKOU determined to be ‘open to people’ by removing any academic prerequisites for admission. Applicants were enrolled on the basis of ‘first come, first served’, up to the capacity that the institution felt able to handle.

At the UKOU’s inauguration the statement ‘open to methods’ also supported the ambition of widening access, because broadcasting on the BBC’s public radio and television channels was part of the teaching strategy. For **Harold Wilson**, the British prime minister who launched the idea of the Open University, enabling the general public to join the enrolled students in observing university teaching through TV and radio also broadened access and symbolised openness. The UKOU’s formal launch occurred in the historic week of the first moon landing in 1969. Crowther exhorted the university to be ‘open to ideas’ with these words: “*What a happy chance it is that we start on this task in this very week when the Universe has opened! The word has a new meaning henceforward. The limits, not only*

of explorable space, but of human understanding, are infinitely wider than we have believed.”

The fulfilment of these lofty ambitions required a new approach to **offering quality higher education at scale: for scale** was essential to the success of the enterprise. In his entertaining account of the UKOU’s creation the founding Vice-Chancellor, Walter Perry, records how the university stood firm on its intention to admit a first cohort of 25,000 students, despite pressure from the UK’s cautious minister of finance to begin with a pilot project of only 5,000. During its planning phase the UKOU faced widespread scepticism, not to say downright hostility, in much of the press and the country’s other higher education institutions. Perry referred to: “our overwhelming desire to achieve economy of scale. We felt that if our costs per student were as high as those of other universities we would be very vulnerable” (Perry, 1977, p.139).

Scale helped the UKOU in other ways. In only its second year of operation, with 40,000 students already, it became the UK’s largest university. By broadcasting TV and radio programmes into the nation’s homes it soon became a household word – and also the butt of jokes in the media! Above all, the enthusiasm of its large student body quickly made the project politically unstoppable. By the beginning of the 21st century student enrolments had risen to 200,000 and when the British referred to ‘the OU’ they meant the Open University, not Oxford University!

Over the remaining years of the 20th century the concept was widely imitated. By 2010 there were some 50 higher education institutions around the world called ‘open universities’. All were designed to operate at scale and even those serving low-population jurisdictions, such as the Canadian provinces, adopted the scalable organisational arrangements pioneered by the UKOU.

Sir John Daniel

Former Assistant Director-General
for Education

Chancellor, Acsenda School of Management,
Vancouver & former Vice-Chancellor,
UK Open University (1990-2001)

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Indira Gandhi National Open University



Abdul Waheed Khan, IGNOU, 2012

While distance education or correspondence education was in practice since 1962, the idea of an open university in India emerged in 1970s after the establishment of the Open University in the United Kingdom. In 1982, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University was established as a state university. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was established by the central government through an Act in the Parliament of India in 1985. I joined IGNOU in 1986 and served in two different capacities. First, as Founder Director, Communications Division/Professor of Communication and second as the Vice-Chancellor.

Beginning with two diploma programmes in Management and Distance Education, the university now offers over 275 programmes and 1,200 courses. It is **now one of the largest universities in the world** with over three million learners contributing to democratization of education in India. The university was established on the foundation of technology-mediated teaching and learning and network of a learner support system created all over the country. Today, there are over 65 Regional Centres and a network of Work Centres, Programme Study Centres, Skill Development Centres and Special Study Centres spread all over the country, reaching the remote corners and making education accessible to all.

IGNOU: an innovation

Since its inception, media and educational technology played a significant role in the delivery of teaching at IGNOU. Its erstwhile Communication Division (now, the Electronic Media and Production Centre), with the help of Development and Educational Communication Unit/ India Space Research Organization (DECU/ISRO) started production of audio and video programmes and over the years has grown into one of the leading educational media producers in the world. Initial support from the Overseas Development

Administration (UK) and later from the Japan International Cooperation Agency strengthened its capacities. In the 1990s, with the support of the Commonwealth of Learning, it started experimenting with audio conferencing and with the support of DECU/ISRO started the Training and Development Communication Channel for two-way interactive video communication. **The use of EduSAT (Educational Satellite) in 2004** further enhanced the extensive network of two-way video conferencing at IGNOU. Radio has always been part of its pedagogical system, and currently it uses a network of FM radio stations (*Gyan Vani*), and a 24-hour educational television channel (*Gyan Darshan*), along with a range of online media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook Live for supporting teaching and learning.

As such, IGNOU has been an **innovative experiment in Indian higher education**. Apart from extensively using media in the delivery of teaching, it also pioneered the open education movement to allow anyone to join its under-graduate programme after completion of a bridge course. It used well-designed self-learning materials in print, with supplementary use of audio and video as the foundation of asynchronous learning for anyone, anywhere, anytime, creating an ecosystem for lifelong learning for all. The system also integrated innovative use of learner support and ‘teaching through assignments’ as pedagogical innovation to foster connection between the learner and the teacher/tutors. The methodology of teaching and learning, including design and delivery of the teaching materials was new and challenging, which the University successfully mitigated by short training programmes for thousands of teachers through its Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education, and by offering professional courses on distance education.

IGNOU: a centre of innovation excellence

Over the years, IGNOU continues to innovate in terms of new programmes and methodologies to remain relevant and deliver excellence in teaching and learning. It offers programmes from certificate to doctoral degree in almost all disciplines (including agriculture, languages, health sciences, and visual arts). While it also offered programmes in Engineering and Technology, these were suspended after a regulatory change in the country. In late 1990s, IGNOU started its journey to experiment with online education offering two computer science programmes through its Virtual Campus Initiative. In 2001, it started an online certificate programme on “Participatory Manage-

ment of Displacement, Resettlement, and Rehabilitation” with the financial support of the World Bank. This programme offered some unique innovations in teaching and learning and included interactive online exercises, online computer marked assignments, online diary submissions, e-counseling (Chat), and an e-library. The use of participation in discussion forums as a peer evaluation mechanism and learner generated resources as additional reading were innovative pedagogical designs that has the potential to rethinking assessment in practice.

Today, it has a full-fledged Centre for Online Education that intends to use digital technologies for affordable education for anyone, anywhere and anytime. Several online programmes are already on offer, and uses learning management system, web conferencing, mobile app, and digital repository to support teaching. It also uses the national platform, such as the SWAYAM¹ (India's Massive Open Online Learning Platform) and SWAYAM PRABHA² (India's 34 rFee to Air Direct-to-Home Educational Channels). IGNOU's digital repository, eGyanKosh³, is used to share the copyrighted content of the university. This also serves the students and public at large to access learning resources for personal use.

While IGNOU has been recognized as a **centre of excellence** in training in distance education by the Commonwealth of Learning way back in 1993, quality assurance role was ingrained in the initial statutes of the University, and it used to play the role of quality assurance agency for distance education in the country. This role was shifted to the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 2012, and later new regulations were developed for both online and distance education in the country. IGNOU has its own standard for achieving excellence in design, development and delivery of distance and online learning.⁴ In 2020 a combined regulation was notified by UGC, and subsequently, IGNOU was assessed by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), which graded the university as A++ with an overall score of 3.56 in a

scale of 4. Thus, it continues to be a centre of excellence in democratizing higher education for all.

IGNOU: a unique educational institution

What makes IGNOU a unique place? As an educational experiment, it has been able to fulfill the needs and aspirations of a growing and young population by providing them knowledge and skills. While the existing educational infrastructure is not able to cater to everyone in the country, IGNOU provided the youths a unique opportunity to learn, while they can also earn by taking any job. Of course, IGNOU initially catered to those who missed higher education and provided them the **second chance**, they deserved. As such IGNOU courses were highly popular in public sector enterprises, helping them to learn while on the job and grow in their career. IGNOU's education at the doorstep approach helped women and girls and the marginalized access higher education from the comfort of their homes. Its network of student support centres, that are located in existing educational institutions, use their spare capacities and leverage the good will and support of people (teachers and administrative staff) in the field. It is a system that follows the principles of educational communication, systems theory (every component of the system significantly contributes to the overall success of the system), and networking (human and organizational partnership and collaboration) to contribute towards national development.

Abdul Waheed Khan
Former Assistant Director-
General for Communication

1. <https://swayam.gov.in/>
2. <https://www.swayamprabha.gov.in/>
3. <http://egyankosh.ac.in/>
4. http://www.ignou.ac.in/userfiles/Notification%20on%20Standards%20of%20Excellence%20in%20ODL_September%202019.pdf

Indonesia Universitas Terbuka : Making Higher Education Open

Indonesia is the largest archipelago in the world, stretching more than 3,500 miles (81% of which is water) and consisting of over 14,000 islands. It is the fourth most populous country in the world with almost 60% of its 270.2 million people living on the densely populated islands of Java, Bali, and Nusa Tenggara (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021), and 70.72% of it is in the productive age (15-64 years old). Economically, the country's gross domestic product (GDP) is only around

USD 4,135.57 per capita, 31% of which is contributed by the manufacturing industry (World Bank, 2019). Indonesia has made enormous gains in poverty reduction, cutting the poverty rate by more than half since 1999, to 9.78% in 2020 (World Bank, 2021), making the Gini ratio at 0.399 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021).

Providing access to education has always been the priority of the Indonesian government, including in tertiary level of education. One of the strategies

used is to employ distance education system. Despite its strong oral traditions, **Indonesia started using distance education system in 1955** with the establishment of a correspondence diploma program for upgrading teachers. However, it was not until 1981 when two distance education projects were started to give in-service training to secondary and tertiary level teachers that distance education system was widely utilized. These programs were established as crash programs for teacher training to keep up with the demand for additional teachers. Subsequently, the skills of those teachers who needed upgrading could only be met with distance education, since regular training was too expensive and replacing teachers for further training was difficult. It was these programs which later formed a part of the Indonesia Open University or Universitas Terbuka.

Universitas Terbuka (UT) is a state university and the only university in Indonesia that is entirely using distance education mode of teaching. It was established in 1984 with missions to widen access to higher education and to upgrade primary and secondary school teachers who graduated from the short-term programs to enable them to obtain the full-teacher training degree. UT was intended to be a flexible and inexpensive university focusing on serving people who do not have the opportunity to attend conventional face-to-face higher education institutions for various reasons, including lack of funding, living in isolated and rural areas, and working full-time.

UT is now one of the mega universities in the world with over 300 thousand students scattered all over the country and has graduated more than 1.7 million people (Universitas Terbuka, 2021). The university offers more than 1,000 courses through its four faculties (Faculty of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Law, Social and Political Sciences, and Faculty of Science and Technology) and one Graduate Programs. While the other three faculties are open for high school graduates as well as working adults, the Faculty of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences offers only in-service training programs for practicing primary and secondary school teachers. Starting in 1990 when UT was appointed by the Indonesian government to upgrade primary teacher qualification to Diploma II level then to Bachelor level, the Faculty of Teacher Training has been the biggest faculty within the university.



2017 Wikipedia training session in Indonesia targeting educators in Indonesia Open University



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UT started as a conventional distance education institution offering the courses with printed based learning materials supported by face-to-face tutorials held and organized by its Regional Offices throughout the country. However, starting in 2001 when I was serving as Vice Rector of Academic Affairs and then as the Rector (from 2009 until 2017), **UT has evolved to become a modern ICT-based open university.** The whole administrative and academic system were converted into online system so that all process from registration to examination, can be done online. The printed materials are made available in digital forms and the face-to-face tutorials were converted into online tutorials using a Moodle-based learning management system. The only tutorials remain to be conducted as face-to-face meetings are the compulsory tutorials for students in the Primary School Teacher Training Program. To maintain its flexibility, attending online tutorials at Bachelor level is not compulsory and therefore up until 2019, only about 30% of students took advantage of the online tutorials. The situation changed drastically after the Covid-19 outbreak. Limitation to physical mobility forced UT to convert the compulsory face-to-face tuto-

rials for the teacher's program into online as well. This conversion has increased the number of online tutorial classes from only around 4,000 every semester into over 16,000 every semester starting 2020.

All the efforts to modernize the university were done simultaneously with a systematic development of a quality assurance system to enhance both the quality itself and the acknowledgement of the university by the national and international community. The consistent commitment to work toward quality distance education has resulted in many acknowledgement including the ISO certifications, ICDE Quality Review certification, the National accreditations, and the appointment of UT's Rectors as President of the Asia Association of Open University (three UT Rectors were elected as President of AAOU) and myself as President of the ICDE from 2012-2015.

Prior to the pandemic, although UT has been existing for more than 35 years, many Indonesian people including those in education sector did not believe in distance education. Regardless of the many graduated that UT has produced and the significant contribution of UT to the national higher education participation rate, only a few people were interested in learning and implementing online education system. This however, changed drastically during the pandemic. UT plays a vital role in sharing its experience on how to conduct online learning and its digital learning materials. Together with the Ministry of Education, UT provides many trainings to lecturers of other universities. UT also opens up its digital materials to be used for free by students of other universities. Finally, several universities even send their

students to take courses from UT to replace their own cancelled classes during the pandemic. In other words, Covid-19 has helped UT in promoting online learning in Indonesia and in increasing people's belief in online learning itself.

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Dr Tian Belawati, Rector
Open University Indonesia - Universitas Terbuka

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