

SHIKSHA VICHAR

PERSPECTIVES • INSIGHTS • IMPACT

THE
SECOND
EDITION

OPEN FUTURES UNBOUND

The Open Learning Revolution:
Access, Accountability & The
Architecture Of Tomorrow's
Education

THE RISE OF OPEN UNIVERSITIES IN INDIA

THE FUTURE OF OPEN LEARNING: IGNOU'S JOURNEY TOWARDS AN AI-ENABLED UNIVERSITY



WALLS WITHOUT WALLS: THE CENTURY-
LONG RISE OF OPEN UNIVERSITIES



ASSESS TODAY
Build Credibility



ASSURE TOMORROW
Strengthen Systems



EMPOWER ALWAYS
Transform Futures

Beyond Marks. Beyond Academics.

myATHI

Building Future-Ready
Learners



A future-ready ecosystem
connecting assessment,
guidance, development
and opportunity.



INSIGHT

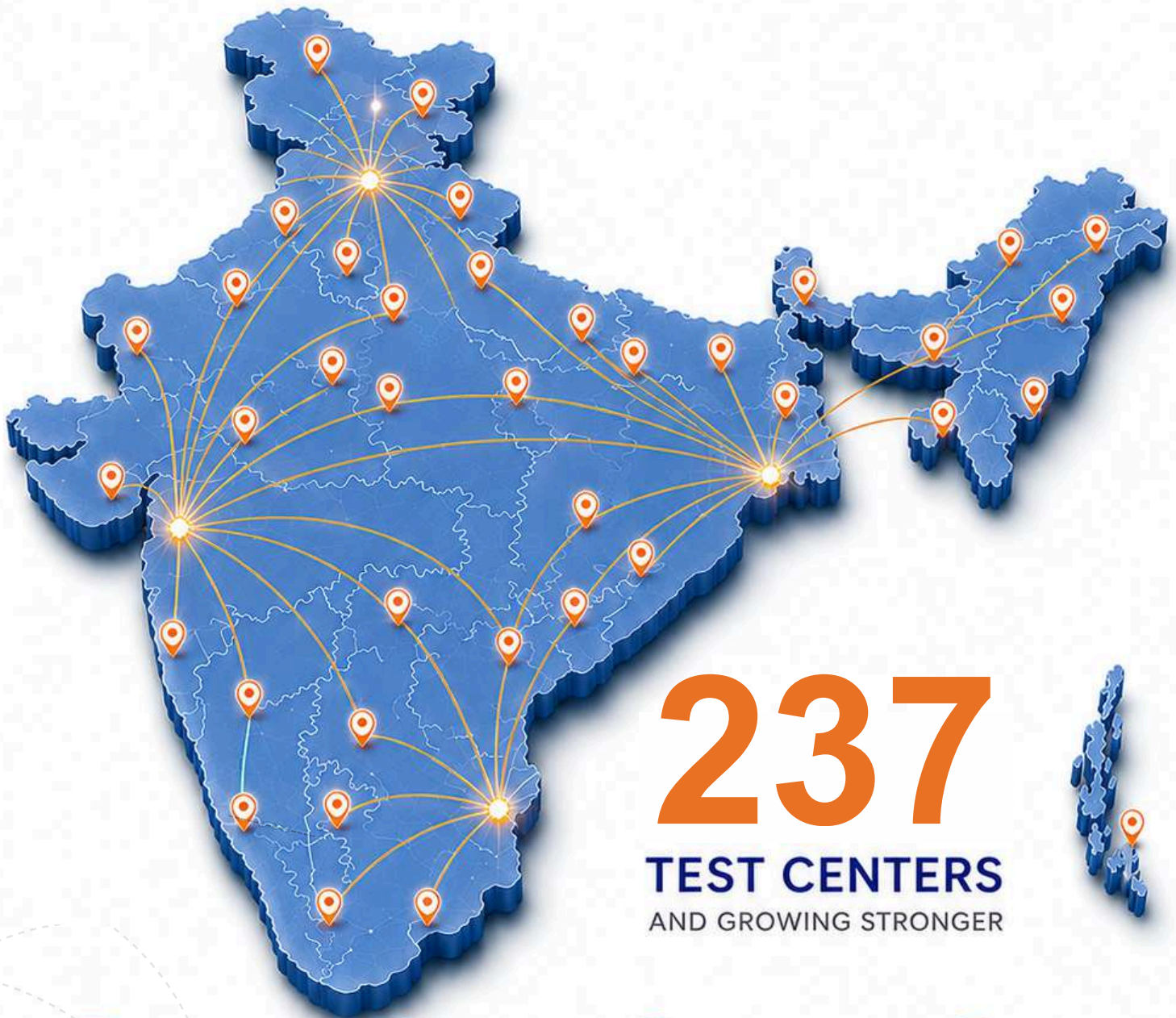


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From the Governor's Desk

An Encouragement for the Journey Ahead

Every meaningful publication begins with a purpose. Receiving words of encouragement from **Smt. Anandiben Patel, Hon'ble Governor of Uttar Pradesh**, for the inaugural edition of Shiksha Vichar was both an honour and a reminder of the responsibility that accompanies this initiative.

As we present **Edition 2 – Open Futures Unbound**, we remain committed to creating a platform where policy, technology, institutions, and educators come together to advance the conversation on the future of learning.

आनंदीबेन पटेल
राज्यपाल, उत्तर प्रदेश



पत्रांक-पीएस/जीओवी/३७९/जीएस

जन भवन
लखनऊ - 226 027

३० जून, 2026

प्रिय महोदय,

आप द्वारा प्रेषित दीक्षित ग्लोबल का पहला एडिशन 'शिक्षा विचार' प्राप्त हुआ, धन्यवाद।

मैं कामना करती हूँ कि संस्करण शिक्षा जगत के लिये उपयोगी सिद्ध होगा। प्रकाशन की सफलता हेतु मेरी शुभकामनाएँ।

भवन्निष्ठ,

(आनंदीबेन पटेल)

डॉ. अभय जेरे,
प्रबन्ध निदेशक एवं सीइओ,
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Smt. Anandiben Patel

About This Issue



Dr. Abhay Jere

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The University That Nobody Talks About

There is a nurse in Nagpur studying for her B.Sc. Nursing through an Open Distance Learning (ODL) Course after 12-hour shifts. There is a retired school teacher in Jaipur, finally pursuing the psychology degree he always wanted through ODL. And there is a young data analyst in Bengaluru whose SWAYAM certification is valued by her employer but remains outside India's formal recognition framework.

"These three people are not edge cases. They are part of the Open Distance Learning system. And the system that governs them has not yet fully decided whether to serve them—or merely tolerate them."

This edition of Shiksha Vichar is dedicated to learners and to every educator, policymaker, employer, technologist, and institution shaping the future of education. India's Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education is approximately in the range of 28%-30%, while the National Education Policy targets 50% by 2035. Reaching nearly 80 million additional learners cannot be achieved by building more campuses alone. Open and distance learning, though often underestimated, remains India's most scalable path to equitable, lifelong education. The challenge extends beyond India. UNESCO estimates that 272 million children and young people worldwide remain out of school, reinforcing that expanding access through flexible learning is a global priority.

This edition explores the evolution of open universities, digital learning, lifelong credentials, quality assurance, and propositions for India's Learning Future. More importantly, it asks a simple question: If open learning is essential to the future of education, are we ready to give it the recognition and investment it deserves?

— The Editorial Board, Shiksha Vichar

WHAT THIS ISSUE COVERS

Pg No.	Title
06	Walls Without Walls: The Century-Long Rise of Open Universities
08	The Future of Open Learning: IGNOU's Journey Towards an AI-Enabled University
10	The Infinite Classroom: What Open Universities Actually Offer Today
11	From Correspondence to Cloud: The Technology Metamorphosis
13	The Watchmen's Dilemma: UGC, AICTE & DEB in the Age of Open Learning
14	Shaping Tomorrow or Responding to Change? The Role of India's Higher Education Regulators
15	mySATHI - Beyond Marks, Beyond Academics : Powering India's Future-Ready Generation
17	The Credential Continuum: When Learning Refuses to Stay in the Box
19	Quality's New Frontier: Rethinking Standards When the Classroom Is a Kitchen Table
21	The Global Laboratory: How the World Learns Without Walls
22	The Open Manifesto: Nine Propositions for India's Learning Future

Walls Without Walls: The Century-Long Rise of Open Universities

The remarkable journey of India's open universities—from postal learning to digital classrooms—and the transformative role they play in expanding access, equity, and lifelong learning



From brown paper envelopes to 13 lakh students a semester — this is the university India built without a campus, and why its story deserves to be told from the beginning.

In 1962, the University of Delhi did something unassuming and quietly revolutionary: it started mailing study materials to students who could not attend class. (A postal experiment. A brown envelope with a printed booklet.) It was called the School of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education. Nobody gave it a standing ovation. (Source: University of Delhi archives / SOL history)

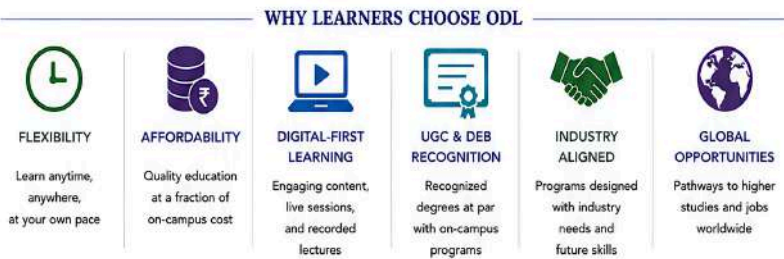
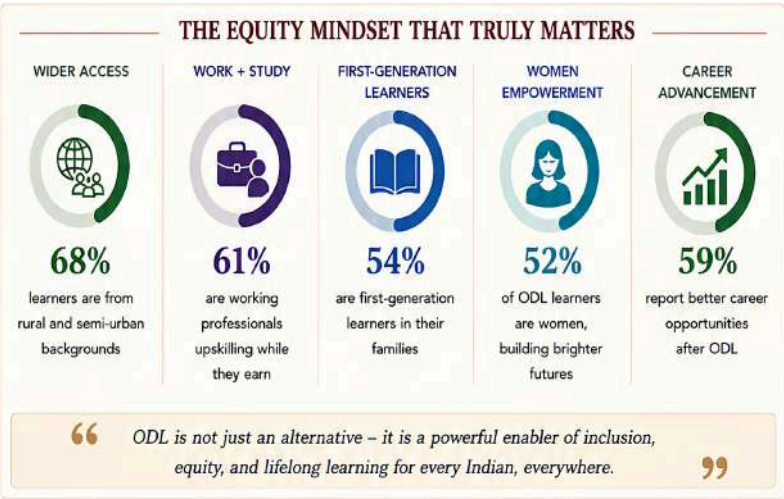
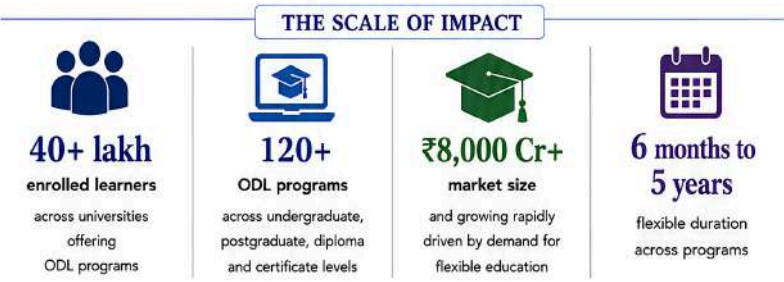
Nobody could have predicted that more than sixty years later, the same principle — learning wherever you are, and not where you are told to be — would give India the largest university on Earth. The journey from that first brown envelope to a real-time digital classroom accessible from a village in Manipur or a mining town in Jharkhand is one of the most consequential and least celebrated stories in Indian public policy.

“ The first dedicated open university in Asia was not in Tokyo or Singapore. It was the Andhra Pradesh Open University in Hyderabad, founded in 1982 — thirteen years after Britain's Open University had proven the idea could work. India moved faster than anyone remembers. Its story simply was never told. ”

The Numbers Every Education Journalist Should Confront Universities Leading Open and Distance Learning

Expanding access. Empowering learners. Enabling futures.

Universities across India are at the forefront of Open and Distance Learning (ODL), delivering **quality** education that is **flexible, affordable, and future-ready**.



Open doors. Open minds. Open futures.

Universities across India are redefining education through Open and Distance Learning – making quality education accessible to all.

Numbers tell us how large a system is. Equity tells us why it matters. More than half of Open Distance Learners come from rural India and almost half are women—evidence that open learning has succeeded where many conventional institutions still struggle.

The story of open universities is therefore not just about scale, but about widening access to education for those who have historically remained beyond its reach.

The Network Nobody Has Mapped

India's open university network is not just IGNOU. It is 15 State Open Universities — from Nalanda Open University in Bihar to YCMOU in Maharashtra, from NSOU in West Bengal to TNOU in Tamil Nadu — each serving regional populations in regional languages, each filling gaps the conventional system never tried to fill. Together they form one of the largest distributed education networks on earth, and the cumulative annual learner count across all institutions likely exceeds 40 lakh. (Source: UGC, AIU)

A 28-year-old homemaker in Coimbatore pursuing a B.A. in psychology because she stopped after 12th and never stopped thinking about it. A 62-year-old retired government clerk in Bhopal doing a Diploma in NGO Management because he has time now, and conviction. A 19-year-old first-generation learner in rural Odisha whose nearest college is 40 km away and whose family needs him to keep working. These learners are not choosing open education because they lack options. Increasingly, they are choosing it because it is the only system that does not ask them to pause their life in order to improve it. That is not a weakness of the system. It is its defining moral achievement.

“Open universities did not lower the bar. They removed the wall that separated ambition from opportunity. India has 1.4 billion people. Only a fraction can afford to stop working to study. and deserve a system built to serve them without apology.”

The Timeline Nobody Teaches

Year	What Happened	Why It Matters
1962	University of Delhi starts correspondence courses	Asia's first distance education at scale — the seed of everything that followed
1982	Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad	First dedicated open university in Asia — two years after Britain's Open University
1985	IGNOU established by Act of Parliament	National mandate for mass open learning; the institutional bet India placed on access
2000	IGNOU crosses 1 million students	Proof of concept at population scale — a moment that should have changed the policy conversation
2017	SWAYAM launched; IGNOU integrates MOOCs	Digital open learning goes national; 56 million enrolments by 2024
2020	NEP 2020 recognizes ODL-conventional equivalence	Policy parity — 40 years after practice proved the case
2022	UGC revises ODL/Online regulations; ABC (Academic Bank of Credits) operationalised	Most significant regulatory update in a generation
2024	SWAYAM crosses 56 million enrolments; 5.2 million certificates	Scale that private EdTech cannot match — and a completion gap that demands honest accounting
2025	UGC approves 101 universities + 20 Category-I (HEIs) for ODL	Expanding ecosystem; rising quality pressure; the system is growing faster than its governance
2026	UNESCO GEM Report: 272 million still out of school globally	India's open learning challenge is part of a planetary emergency — and a planetary opportunity

In 2025, a government job advertisement in three major states still specified 'regular mode only' for a position that an Open University graduate was perfectly qualified to fill. The wall is down. The signage has not been updated. That is the gap between declaration and delivery that this edition is determined to close.

The Network Nobody Has Mapped



Who actually enrolls in an open university? Not the student who failed to get into a regular college. That is the cliché, and it is largely wrong. The open university student is: a 34-year-old CRPF constable in Chhattisgarh completing an LL.B. because he wants to become a sub-inspector.

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



The Future of Open Learning:

IGNOU's Journey Towards an AI-Enabled University

An exclusive conversation with

Prof. Uma Kanjilal
Vice Chancellor, IGNOU

India's higher education landscape is undergoing one of its most significant transformations. With the aspirations of NEP 2020, the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, and rapid advances in artificial intelligence, higher education institutions are redefining how learning is delivered, experienced and valued. At the forefront of this transformation stands IGNOU, the world's largest university with nearly 3.9 million learners, having spent four decades democratising higher education through Open and Distance Learning (ODL).



In an exclusive interaction with DEXIT Global's COO Chintan Turki for our edition of Shiksha Vichar, Prof. Uma Kanjilal, Vice Chancellor, IGNOU, shares her vision for the future of open learning, technology-enabled education, employability, lifelong learning and the evolving role of universities in nation building.

Four Decades of Reinventing Education

Reflecting on IGNOU's remarkable journey, Prof. Kanjilal highlighted how the institution has consistently evolved alongside technology while remaining committed to accessibility.

IGNOU has been widely acknowledged as the world's largest university by enrolment with



3.9 Million Learner on its roll

The university alone registered 14.70 lakh students across January & July 2025 admission cycles; out of which



56%
were women



61%
came from rural India

Over 50%

belong to socio-economically disadvantaged categories

Prof. Kanjilal explained how IGNOU has successfully moved through multiple generations of Open and Distance Learning—from self-learning materials supplemented with audio and video content, to television and radio broadcasting, satellite-enabled two-way education, digital learning ecosystems, and eventually fully online programmes. Looking ahead, she believes the next phase will be powered by Artificial Intelligence. "If you talk about future vision, I think next decade will be all AI enabled. Where we will be using AI for content development, using generative AI, predictive AI for reaching out to our learners, customizing, personalizing their learning path... perhaps in the next 10 years to come, we intend to evolve as an agentic university where AI will play an anchoring role."

Redefining the Perception of Open and Distance Learning

One of the long-standing challenges for Open and Distance Learning has been the misconception that it is merely an alternative to conventional education. Prof. Kanjilal believes that perception has already begun changing. "People used to think that ODL system is for giving a second chance. But I think that perception has changed."

Prof. Kanjilal noted that students with excellent academic records are increasingly choosing IGNOU as their first preference, while its alumni continue to excel across civil services, technology, administration and multiple professional domains.

Prof. Kanjilal emphasized that IGNOU's strength lies in five guiding principles: "Our institutional mandate is driven around ensuring access, equity, quality, flexibility and affordability in higher education." These principles are reflected in IGNOU's nationwide network of 70 Regional Centres, over 2,000 Learner Support Centres, 60,000 academic counsellors.

"Open and Distance Education is not a supplementary strategy for fulfilling the requisite Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 50% by 2035, it is rather a structural necessity", she added. IGNOU's own scale illustrates this with 328 academic programmes, a presence across every state and union territory, and 3.24 lakh degrees, diplomas and certificates conferred at this year's convocation alone.

Aligning Education with Employability

Discussing NEP 2020, Prof. Kanjilal described it as a transformational policy that integrates vocational education directly into higher education. According to Prof. Kanjilal, "NEP 2020 is the real game changer." She further explained how IGNOU is embedding skills into degree programmes through the National Credit Framework, Recognition of Prior Learning, experiential learning and industry-aligned curricula. Highlighting IGNOU's efforts to upskill its learners, Prof. Kanjilal said, "IGNOU has a strategic roadmap with a mission to integrate skill component so that in future our students secure employment based on the industry needs."

Prof. Kanjilal shared IGNOU's vision of developing Regional Centres into Skill Centres equipped with industry-supported laboratories, offering practical skill development courses to learners. IGNOU has progressed in vocational and skill integration through PMKVY, NCVET, and industry collaboration with CII.

Building an AI-Powered Learning Ecosystem

Technology continues to remain central to IGNOU's future plan.

Prof. Kanjilal outlined strategic blueprint to integrate Artificial Intelligence, Extended Reality (XR), Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), gaming and immersive learning into educational delivery. "Talking about AI, AI has lot of potential."

In Prof. Kanjilal's view, "Content should not be static... learner analytics can be taken into consideration. And customization and personalization of learning can be also brought in." The university also plans to transform its Electronic Media Production Centre into an Extended Reality Studio while making learning resources increasingly interactive using Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming and Comics (AVGC).

Quality at Scale

Managing quality for millions of learners presents a unique challenge. According to Prof. Kanjilal, the answer lies in intelligent automation supported by human oversight. She explained that IGNOU is progressively digitizing the learner lifecycle using ERP platforms while introducing AI-assisted assessment, on-screen evaluation and evidence-based assessment methods. At the same time, Prof. Kanjilal emphasized that technology will complement and not replace the academic expertise.

"Technology is meant to augment academic expertise, not replace it. The human touch will continue to define the learning experience. Our focus is on using AI to accelerate routine tasks, improve productivity, and deliver high-quality education more efficiently."

Towards Hybrid and Lifelong Learning

Prof. Kanjilal believes the future of education lies in blended learning, where physical interaction and digital education complement each other. "I believe the future belongs to a blended learning ecosystem, where digital and physical interaction complements one another."

Prof. Kanjilal also stressed that Open and Distance Learning naturally supports lifelong learning, particularly through stackable micro-credentials and flexible learning pathways.

"We are thinking now in terms of providing micro-credentials which are stackable." Combined with the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), these modular programmes will enable learners to continuously upskill and eventually accumulate qualifications throughout their careers.

The Policy Imperative

While technology continues to evolve rapidly, Prof. Kanjilal believes policy reforms must keep pace. "I think the first and foremost thing is the mindset of the regulators have to change."

Prof. Kanjilal called for a regulatory ecosystem that views conventional, online and Open and Distance Learning with equal confidence while ensuring robust quality benchmarks. Such reforms, she believes, are essential for India to achieve its ambitious Gross Enrolment Ratio targets and make quality higher education universally accessible.

A Vision for Viksit Bharat 2047

Concluding the conversation, Prof. Kanjilal reiterated the transformative role that Open and Distance Learning can play in India's development journey. "Open and distance learning can play a major role in increasing the gross enrollment ratio."

She further added: "With the technological interventions that are there, with the quality of content that we provide, with the quality of engagement that we provide to the learners, I think IGNOU as well as the ODL and online learning systems can play a major role in future education system which can bring in social transformation for the country and be ready for the Viksit Bharat 2047."

Her vision presents IGNOU not merely as an educational institution, but as a catalyst for creating future-ready human capital capable of driving India's journey towards becoming a developed nation.

As India advances towards Viksit Bharat 2047, institutions like IGNOU demonstrate that quality education need not be constrained by geography, age or conventional classrooms. By embracing technology while remaining deeply committed to inclusion, affordability and academic excellence, Open and Distance Learning is poised to become one of the strongest pillars of India's higher education ecosystem.

The Infinite Classroom: What Open Universities Actually Offer Today

If you think open universities only offer B.A. and B.Com., you're already decades behind the future of higher education.

Most people think Open Distance Learning means B.A. or B.Com. They are embarrassingly wrong; and that misperception costs graduates jobs and the country talent. Ask a group of educated Indians what Open Distance Universities offer. You will hear B.A., B.Com., maybe an MBA. You will not hear: a B.Sc. in Optometry. An M.Sc. in Actuarial Science. A Post-Graduate Diploma in Disaster Management. A Certificate in Beekeeping. A Ph.D. in Women's Studies. A Diploma in HIV and Family Education. A Post-Graduate Diploma in Cyber Law. A Certificate in Urdu Language. A Master's in Sustainable Development.

The breadth is not a feature; it is a philosophy: that higher education should be available to everyone who wants it, in whatever shape they need it, at whatever stage of life they find themselves. That philosophy has never been more relevant than it is in 2026, when the half-life of professional skills is shrinking faster than any conventional curriculum can track.

THE PERCEPTION GAP	THE REAL COST
A common misconception among employers is that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions offer only a limited range of programmes. In reality, the ODL ecosystem provides a vast portfolio of academic, professional, and skill-oriented qualifications.	This perception gap costs ODL graduates jobs they would have earned, promotions they deserved, and recognition they are owed. It is not a marketing failure. It is a national credibility gap that every employer, every journalist, and every policymaker has a responsibility to close.

What ODL Courses Actually Look Like

LEVEL	DURATION	EXAMPLES — SOME YOU HAVE NEVER HEARD OF
 Certificate Short-term skills for real-life needs	3–6 months	Food Safety, Yoga, Beekeeping, Disaster Management, NGO Management
 Diploma Practical knowledge for career pathways	6–12 months	HIV & Family Education, Journalism, Early Childhood Care, BPO Skills, Nutrition & Health
 PG Diploma Advanced expertise for specialized roles	1–2 years	PGDBA, PGDHRM, Cyber Law, Public Health, Sustainable Development, Disaster Management
 Bachelor's Foundational degrees across disciplines	3 years	B.A., B.Com., BTS (Tourism), B.Sc. (Physics/Chemistry/Maths/Life Sciences), B.Lib., B.Ed.
 Bachelor's (Hons) Deep learning in chosen subjects	3–4 years	B.Sc. Hons (Physics, Chemistry, Maths, Life Sciences), B.A. Hons (Economics)
 Master's Postgraduate degrees for expertise & growth	2 years	MBA, MCA, M.Ed., M.Sc. Actuarial Science, M.A. in Economics/English/History/Psychology/Hindi
 Doctoral Research that creates knowledge & impact	3–5 years	Ph.D. across all 21 schools of study — fully recognised by UGC; fully equivalent to any conventional Ph.D.

The Programmes That Deserve Their Own Story

Nursing: The Invisible Healthcare Backbone

IGNOU's B.Sc. Nursing programme — offered in partnership with hospitals across India — serves thousands of working nurses who cannot leave their posts to study.



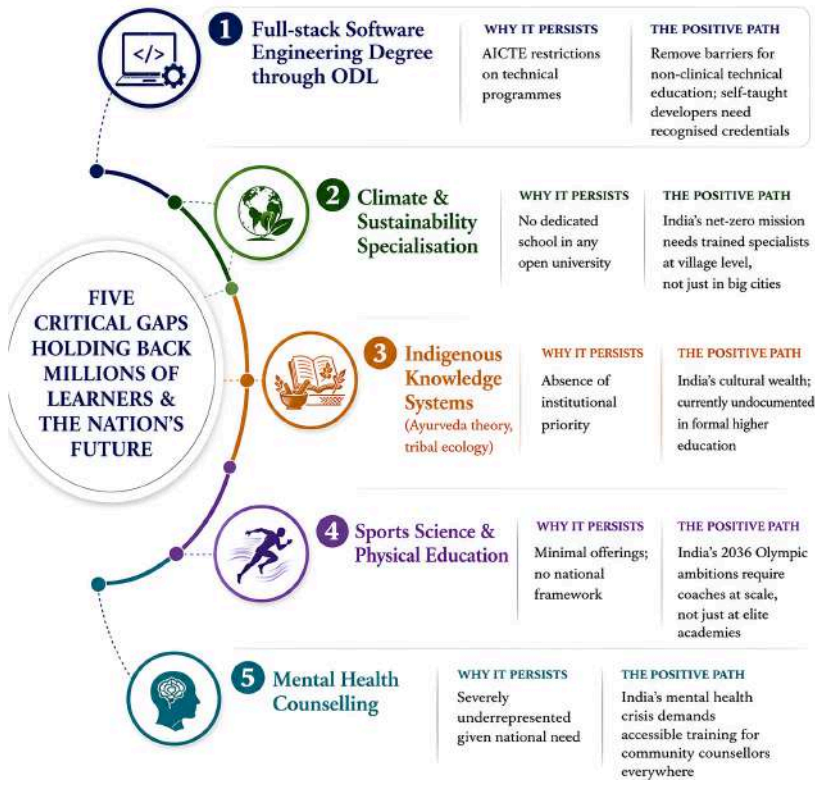
Recognized by the Indian Nursing Council, IGNOU's distance nursing programmes allow nearly 12,000 working nurses to upgrade their qualifications while continuing to serve patients. With India facing an estimated shortage of 6 million nurses, they are among the country's few scalable workforce solutions—yet they remain largely overlooked in national healthcare policy.

The YCMOU Cooperative Management Story

Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University offers something that no IIM, no conventional business school in India offers at any meaningful scale: specialised management programmes designed specifically for cooperative societies — the backbone of Maharashtra's sugar, dairy, and textile sectors. Over 600,000 learners have passed through YCMOU's programmes since 1989. Many manage cooperative banks, milk societies, and agricultural marketing federations. Their qualifications are invisible in business school rankings. Their impact on Maharashtra's rural economy most certainly is not.

The Gaps That Still Hurt

Despite their breadth, significant gaps remain where demand far exceeds provision. While some restrictions are justified, others require urgent reform—not years from now, but today.



From Correspondence to Cloud: The Technology Metamorphosis

56 million SWAYAM enrolments. 5.2 million certificates. The gap between those two numbers is the biggest story in Indian EdTech — and it contains both the problem and the solution.

In 2017, when SWAYAM launched, the government announced it as a revolution. Free courses from India's best faculty like IITians, IIM professors, central university scholars — available to anyone with internet access. No fees. No entrance exam. No age limit. The response was extraordinary.

By 2024, SWAYAM had attracted over five crore cumulative enrolments across thousands of courses. The numbers commanded international attention. India had built, arguably, the largest free public learning platform in the world. And then the arithmetic became uncomfortable.



~9.3%

The SWAYAM Completion Gap

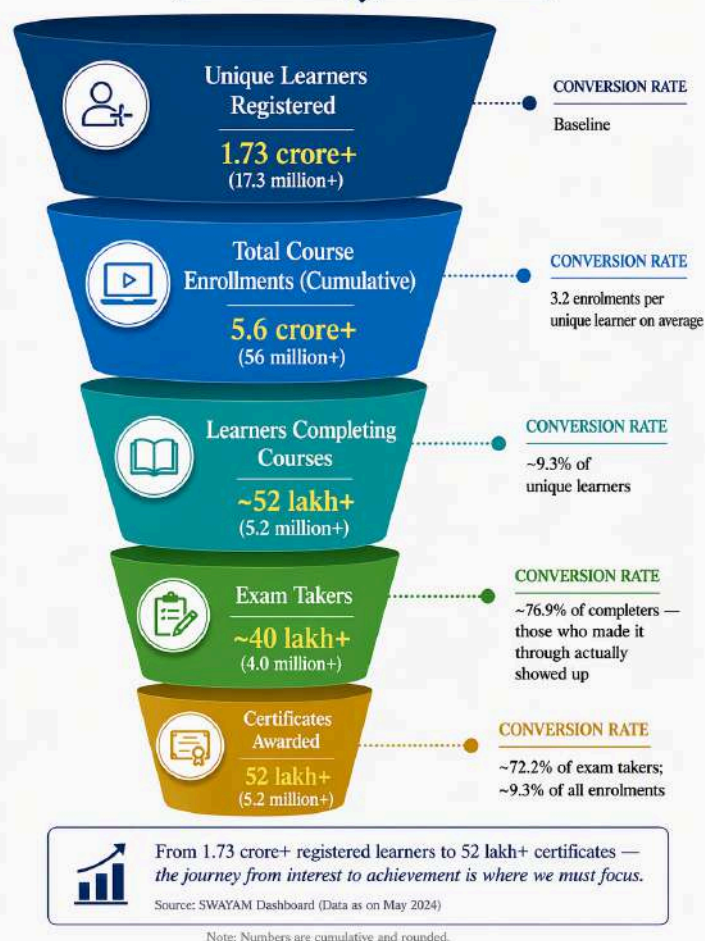
Only 5.2 million of 56 million enrolled learners earned certificates.

The challenge isn't enrolment—it's completion.

(SOURCE: SWAYAM platform statistics; cumulative figures reported in 2025–26)



The SWAYAM Conversion Funnel: What the Data Actually Says



The platform works. The content is largely good. The faculty is often excellent. But somewhere between enrolling and completing, millions of Indians drop off. The honest answer is multiple, uncomfortable, and well-understood in global open learning research: learners have jobs and families; courses are not adapted to mobile-first, low-bandwidth reality; there is no human support at the moment of difficulty; and the credential at the end is not always recognized by employers. Fix those four things and the certificate rate climbs from 7% to 35%. The platform already exists. The will to fix the last mile is still catching up.

THE SWAYAM PLUS BREAKTHROUGH

In February 2024, the Ministry of Education launched SWAYAM Plus — designed by IIT Madras in collaboration with L&T, Microsoft, and Cisco. Within a year, it had 500+ industry-backed courses from 70+ partners including TCS iON, Tech Mahindra Foundation, and TimesPro. The model: courses that connect directly to employment outcomes. This is the version of SWAYAM that makes employers pay attention — and it points toward what the full platform can become if the will is there.

The EdTech Boom, the Bust, and What India Learned

Between 2020 and 2022, India's EdTech sector became one of the most heavily funded education markets in the world. Driven by pandemic-induced digital adoption, investors poured billions of dollars into online learning platforms, creating a wave of unprecedented optimism. Companies such as Unacademy, Vedantu, Eruditus, upGrad, Physics Wallah, and several others collectively attracted billions in funding, while multiple startups achieved unicorn status within a remarkably short span. The prevailing belief was compelling: technology would democratise education, remove geographical barriers, and unlock learning opportunities for India's vast population of over 600 million young people.

As classrooms reopened and learner behaviour evolved, the industry entered a phase of market correction. Several high-growth companies faced slowing demand, tighter funding environments, leadership transitions, workforce rationalisation, and the need to rethink their expansion strategies. Others pivoted towards hybrid learning models, combining digital platforms with physical centres to improve learner engagement and business sustainability. The period served as an important reminder that while technology can transform access to education, long-term impact depends on strong pedagogy, sustainable business models, learner trust, and measurable outcomes—not growth alone. One company that continued to demonstrate resilient growth during this period was Physics Wallah. Built on a foundation of affordable education, community trust, and a learner-first philosophy, it grew from a YouTube channel serving students who could not afford traditional coaching into one of India's most influential education companies. It reached a valuation of approximately US\$2.8 billion, reported ~₹1,940 crore in FY24 revenue, and successfully completed its IPO in November 2025. Its journey illustrates that sustainable success in education is built not merely on technology or investment, but on consistently delivering value to learners and remaining closely aligned with their needs.

Source: Reuters; Moneycontrol; TechCrunch; Physics Wallah public filings and IPO disclosures

THE LESSON THAT SHOULD DEFINE THE NEXT DECADE

The last few years have offered an important lesson for India's education ecosystem. Capital can accelerate growth, but it cannot replace educational value. Companies that expanded rapidly without building resilient learner-centric models faced significant challenges, while those that prioritised affordability, trust, and measurable learning outcomes demonstrated greater resilience. The same lesson applies to India's public open learning ecosystem. Institutions such as IGNOU, SWAYAM, and State Open Universities may not command headlines in the way venture-backed startups do, but they have consistently fulfilled their mandate of expanding access to education at scale. Built on public purpose rather than rapid commercial growth, they continue to provide opportunities for millions of learners across the country. As India works towards the aspirations of NEP 2020 and Viksit Bharat 2047, the future of education will not be defined solely by the pace of innovation, but by the ability to build systems that are accessible, trusted, sustainable, and designed to serve learners over the long term.

AI: The Next Wave — Promise and the Precondition

The global AI education market reached approximately \$7.57 billion in 2025 and is projected to exceed \$112 billion by 2034. AI-driven personalisation is already demonstrably improving completion rates in distance learning contexts: adaptive systems identify knowledge gaps in real time, chatbot tutors provide 24-hour support, and early-warning algorithms flag at-risk learners before they quietly disappear from a course. This is not speculation. The research from open learning institutions in South Korea, Australia, and the UK shows 20–30% recovery rates for dropout-risk learners when AI intervention is deployed intelligently. But the revolution has a precondition: connectivity. India's school internet access rose from 22.3% in 2019-20 to 53.9% in 2023-24; a remarkable improvement that should be celebrated. And yet 46% of schools still lack internet.



The AI-powered tutor that transforms urban learning cannot reach rural areas if there is no signal. The risk is a two-tier open learning system: AI-enhanced for the connected, print-only for the rest. That is not democratization. That is a digital caste system. India must refuse to build it.

“ India is building AI tutors that can operate in multiple Indian languages. At the same time, millions of learners still face limitations in connectivity, devices, and infrastructure. Both realities exist simultaneously, and education policy must serve both—not one or the other. ”

The Watchmen's Dilemma: UGC, AICTE & DEB in the Age of Open Learning

22 fake universities in 2025, 101 approved for ODL, and a 3-year programme approval wait. The regulators are simultaneously the system's greatest protection and its most significant bottleneck.

On March 20, 2025, the UGC issued a public notice warning students about unrecognized institutions offering invalid degrees. It urged them to send an email to a gmail account if they found such institutions. Think about that for a moment. India's apex higher education regulator; a statutory body overseeing a \$28 billion education market is managing a significant portion of its anti-fraud infrastructure through a common email account. This is not a criticism designed to wound the UGC. It is an observation designed to locate the gap between the scale of the challenge and the infrastructure of the response. The UGC is doing what it can with what it has. What it has is not enough and acknowledging that honestly is the first step toward giving it what it needs.

“The UGC was created in 1956 for a much smaller higher education system. Today, it oversees more than 1,000 universities, around 45,000 colleges, and over 100 institutions approved for ODL. The architecture has not kept pace with the scale. The solution is not blame but to redesign.”

The Fake University Problem: More Real Than You Think



Every year, the UGC publishes a list of unrecognized institutions. In 2025, that list had 22 entries. In 2024, it was 21. Delhi consistently leads the count in 2025, the capital had the highest number of flagged institutions, followed by Uttar Pradesh. The names are instructive: 'United Nations University, Delhi.' 'Commercial University Ltd., Daryaganj.' These institutions are not subtle. They operate in plain sight, often for years, collecting fees from students who have no way of knowing their degree is worthless until a job application is rejected.

The DEB: What It Does, What It Can't

The UGC's Distance Education Bureau (UGC-DEB) is the principal regulatory body overseeing Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and online higher education in India. For the 2025-26 academic year, the UGC recognized 101 universities and 20 Category-I institutions to offer ODL programmes, while more than 120 institutions received approval to offer online programmes. The DEB establishes quality standards covering areas such as learner support, academic resources, assessment practices, faculty requirements, and institutional infrastructure. The effectiveness of the ODL ecosystem depends not only on these regulations but also on consistent monitoring, compliance, and enforcement across institutions.

DEB Governance Areas

The Honest Reality — and the Path Forward



BETTER GOVERNANCE.
STRONGER INSTITUTIONS.
HIGHER LEARNING OUTCOMES.



AICTE's 40% Moment: A Quiet Revolution

In 2022, AICTE — historically the most resistant body to distance learning in technical education — permitted online delivery of up to 40% of approved technical programme curricula. For an organisation that had, for decades, insisted that engineering could only be taught in a classroom with a blackboard, this was a tectonic shift. The practical implication is significant and real: a working engineer in Pune can now complete 40% of an AICTE-approved M.Tech. through an online platform & only SWAYAM courses were allowed. For the first time, the engineer who cannot relocate has a credible upgrade pathway. The 40% threshold is not enough. But it is a genuine start — and it signals that even the most resistant regulatory bodies can move when the evidence is overwhelming and the argument is made persistently. The 60% barrier that remains is the next frontier.

“When AICTE said 40% online is acceptable, it admitted something important: the previous 0% threshold was never about educational quality. It was about institutional convenience. India cannot afford institutional convenience at the cost of 450 million informal workers who need credentials to improve their lives.”

Shaping Tomorrow or Responding to Change? The Role of India's Higher Education Regulators

This is not a question about whether we need regulations. We do. The real question is whether the frameworks we have today are the ones best equipped for the challenges ahead, and whether we are open to rethinking them when required.

Let us be precise about what this article is not arguing. It is not arguing that India should deregulate higher education. One of the Ed-tech story - a \$22 billion company that collapsed into insolvency proceedings while millions of students learning was disrupted - is a masterclass in what happens when an unregulated market serves itself rather than its learners.

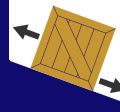


Regulation is not the enemy of access; effective regulation can be an enabler of it. The concern is not that India has regulatory institutions, but that they may not yet be fully equipped for the scale and complexity of the challenges they are being asked to address. Recognizing that distinction is the first step toward meaningful reform.

“UGC, AICTE, and DEB are not obsolete. The institutions remain fit for purpose, but the regulatory architecture around them has not kept pace with the challenges they now face. What is needed is not replacement, but renewal—and NEP 2020 has already sketched the blueprint.”

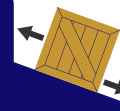
Three Real Friction Points — and Three Constructive Paths Forward

Friction 1: The Approval Lag That Costs India Crores



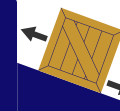
IGNOU's Data Science programme took three years (2017–2020) to secure approval. During that period, private EdTech providers launched competing courses, capturing a rapidly growing market. The public university that could have delivered the same programme at lower cost with full UGC recognition was left waiting. A regulatory sandbox with 90-day fast-track approvals for priority programmes would allow public institutions to respond at the speed of industry.

Friction 2: The Credit Transfer That Does Not Transfer



The Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), operational since 2021, promised seamless credit transfer, lifelong learning, and MOOC integration. Yet implementation remains slow, with the UGC still issuing advisories in 2024 for institutions to upload academic records from 2021–23. As a result, learners cannot convert employer-valued SWAYAM Plus certifications into academic credits, exposing the gap between policy intent and real-world implementation.

Friction 3: The Equivalence Gap That Cost Someone a Job



Despite the UGC declaring ODL degrees equivalent to conventional qualifications, many public sector recruitments still specify 'regular mode'. A 2024 survey found that 34% of state government job advertisements could disadvantage ODL graduates. Until equivalence is backed by enforcement, it remains policy on paper rather than practice.

The Case Against Abolition: What Regulators Actually Do Right



UGC

FAKE UNIVERSITY LIST
Protects students from fraud and deception



DEB

MINIMUM STANDARDS REGULATION
Ensures quality standards in open and distance education



AICTE

TECHNOLOGY CRITERIA
Sets baseline quality for 4,000+ engineering colleges



REGULATORS EXIST BECAUSE THE MARKET, LEFT TO ITSELF, HAS REPEATEDLY EXPLOITED LEARNERS.

REFORM DIRECTION:

WHY IT MATTERS — AND WHY IT IS URGENT



REGULATORY SANDBOX FOR ODL PILOTS

Data science programmes should not wait 3 years. Fast tracks pilots protects learners while enabling innovation



OUTCOMES-BASED REGULATION

Regulate what graduates can do, not how they were taught. Gives institutions delivery flexibility; maintains accountability.



VBSA BILL (AS PROPOSED IN NEP 2020)

Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhithan bill is currently with JPC; Eliminates UGC-AICTE-DEB jurisdictional confusion.



INDEPENDENT DATA VERIFICATION

Audit self-reported placement and enrolment data. Ends the fake statistics problem at source.



EQUIVALENCE ENFORCEMENT

Mandate recognition of ODL degrees in all public hiring. Publish audit results. The declaration means nothing without enforcement.



Beyond Marks, Beyond Academics

Powering India's Future-Ready Generation



Sujatha Kshirsagar

*President, CL Educate | mySATHI Foundation
Co - Founder & CEO TalEvate*

India stands at one of the most significant moments in the evolution of its education system. The National Education Policy 2020 has redefined the purpose of education—from merely imparting knowledge to developing competencies that prepare learners for higher education, meaningful careers, and lifelong success.

At the same time, universities are rethinking admissions, employers are seeking skills beyond degrees, and students are entering a world where adaptability matters as much as academic achievement.

Yet, one challenge continues to persist. We still measure students primarily by what they know, rather than by what they are capable of becoming. That is the gap mySATHI seeks to bridge.

Vision

At mySATHI, we envision an education ecosystem where every learner is recognized not only for academic achievement but also for the skills, competencies, and potential needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

Built as India's first longitudinal learning and talent intelligence platform, mySATHI aims to create a common framework that connects learners, educational institutions, employers, and policymakers—enabling better decisions throughout the journey from school to higher education and ultimately to careers.



Purpose & Philosophy

mySATHI (Scholastic Aptitude Test for Higher Education Institutions) is India's first global standard, on-demand, computer-adaptive, stream neutral examination. It is designed to transform undergraduate admissions by shifting focus from memory-based testing to future-ready skills.



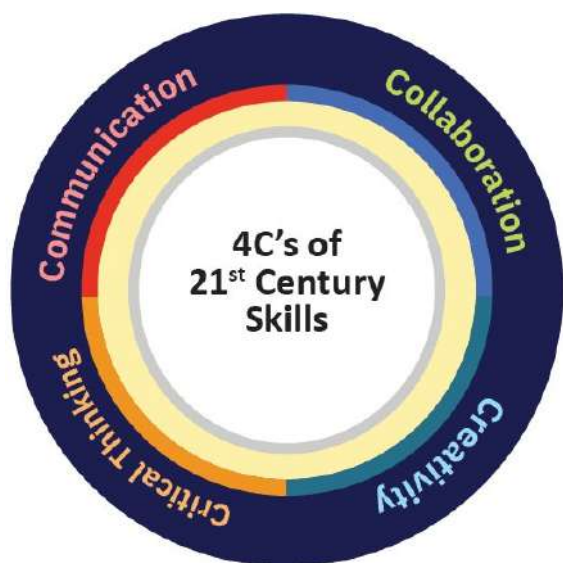
It is anchored in NEP 2020 and aligned with OECD, UNESCO, and WEF frameworks. At its heart lies a simple principle: "Pull forward talent, not filter out."

mySATHI is not just a test. It is a companion for students, schools, universities & employers - offering a roadmap of strengths and growth areas, not merely a rank.

The mySATHI Framework

The platform measures the 4Cs— acknowledged as the competencies most critical for success in higher education and future careers:

- Critical Thinking
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Creativity



Designed to be stream-neutral, multilingual, AI-adaptive and non-eliminatory, mySATHI focuses on understanding learners—not filtering them. Every assessment generates meaningful insights and personalised development pathways instead of simply assigning scores.

Our Impact

Validating Future Readiness Across Diverse Learning Ecosystems

mySATHI has already begun demonstrating its impact through successful pilot implementations across multiple learning environments. From higher education institutions such as Lovely Professional University and BITS Digital, to school education, competitive exam aspirants, corporate cohorts, and sports & youth development programmes, the platform has proven its ability to assess future-ready competencies across diverse learner groups.



These pilots have validated mySATHI's adaptability across age groups, disciplines, and learning contexts, while reinforcing its role as a scalable, AI-enabled framework for measuring and developing the 4Cs—Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, and Communication.

As the pilot ecosystem continues to expand, mySATHI is laying the foundation for a common language of future readiness—one that empowers learners, strengthens institutions, and helps bridge the gap between education and employability.

Strengthening the Education Ecosystem

mySATHI creates value for every stakeholder.



Schools can identify learner strengths early, strengthen competency-based education, and align with the vision of NEP 2020.



Universities gain holistic student profiles that support admissions, mentoring, student success, and career readiness.



Employers receive validated indicators of cognitive, behavioural, and workplace readiness, enabling stronger alignment between education and employability.

Built by an expert ecosystem comprising former IAS leaders, IIT and IIM academicians, ETS researchers, school leaders, and global education experts, mySATHI reflects a shared vision—to create an India-origin benchmark for holistic assessment that can serve not only our nation but also learners across the Global South.

The future of education will not be defined by examinations alone. It will be defined by how effectively we identify potential, nurture capability, and prepare young people for a world that rewards continuous learning, innovation, and collaboration.

mySATHI is more than an assessment platform. It is a national movement towards recognising every learner's potential—beyond marks, beyond academics, and towards a future where education truly prepares students for life.

The Credential Continuum: When Learning Refuses to Stay in the Box

A SWAYAM Plus certification is worth ₹1.2 lakh more per year in salaries. Yet, credentials like these remain outside the UGC's formal recognition framework. That gap is the most honest summary of where Indian credentialing stands in 2026.

Take 100 working Indians between 25 and 45. Ask them what they have learned in the last two years that directly improved their work. Most will mention something they did not learn in a classroom: a YouTube course, a corporate training programme, an online certification, a workshop, a podcast series, a set of tutorials on Python or Canva or data visualisation. Now ask how much of that learning is formally recognized by any Indian regulatory body. The answer, in almost every case, is: none of it.



India has approximately 450 million workers in the informal economy. A significant additional proportion of the formal workforce is continuously learning through unrecognized channels. This is not a marginal phenomenon. It is the primary way most working Indians are acquiring the skills of the 21st century. And it is entirely invisible to the systems supposed to certify, count, and value human capital. The good news is that the architecture for fixing this already exists. What is missing is the political commitment to deploy it.

“ If learning makes you more capable, its value should not depend on whether a regulator recognizes it. Yet India’s credentialing system often treats unrecognized learning as if it does not exist. That is the wrong approach—and one that can be changed. ”

The Academic Bank of Credits: Vision Versus Reality



The ABC launched with an inspiring vision: a learner's credits, earned anywhere from any recognized institution, stored digitally and redeemable toward formal qualifications — like a bank account for learning. By 2025, the infrastructure exists. The platform is live. APAAR IDs are being issued. But as of 2026, many of the ABC's most transformative features remain aspirations rather than operating realities for most learners.

THE ABC PROMISE VS. 2026 REALITY

Where India Stands on Academic Bank of Credits
and Recognition of Learning

ABC Feature	Formally Available?	Working in Practice for Most Learners?
Credit storage from recognised institutions	Yes — since 2022	Partially — many institutions delayed upload well into 2025; compliance still incomplete
Credit transfer between institutions	Yes — permitted under UGC norms	Rarely used; institutional resistance; awareness dangerously low among students
Multiple entry and exit	Yes — NEP 2020 mandates	Patchy implementation; not all institutions honour exit qualifications
SWAYAM MOOC credits (up to 40% of degree)	Yes — framework exists	Implemented at some institutions; far from universal; students often unaware
International MOOC credits (Coursera, edX)	No — not yet recognised	Learner's certification: invisible to ABC, invisible to UGC, visible to her employer
Corporate training credits	No — no UGC pathway	TCS, Infosys, HDFC training: professionally vital, academically non-existent
Apprenticeship credits (NAPS)	No — DGT & ABC are not integrated	Skill India and academic credit remain in completely separate silos in 2026

*The framework exists. The execution is uneven.
Recognition remains the missing bridge.*

The Off-Stream Learners: A Typology of India's Invisible Graduates



Different learners. Different journeys. One reform can recognise them all.



The Singapore Model - And Why India Needs Its Own Version

Singapore's SkillsFuture programme gives every citizen over 25 a learning credit (approximately SGD 500, roughly ₹30,000) redeemable at approved providers. In 2026, mid-career Singaporeans aged 40+ received up to SGD 4,000 in additional credits and a monthly training allowance of SGD 300. The model is simple: government funds learning, while individuals own their learning journey. India has elements of this through PM-KAUSHAL, but the seamless integration of funding, ABC credentialing, and employer recognition that makes SkillsFuture transformative is still missing. The architecture exists—the political commitment to implement and fund it at scale is the missing variable.



“India is building the Academic Bank of Credits. Singapore has SkillsFuture in its fourth evolution. The gap between those two sentences is not technology. It is the depth of political commitment to treating every adult learner as a citizen who deserves investment — not as a problem to manage.”

Quality's New Frontier: Rethinking Standards When the Classroom Is a Kitchen Table

The conversation about open learning's quality has been dominated by its critics. It is time for its defenders to get serious about the real challenges and equally serious about the real solutions.

The critique of open learning quality is familiar: completion rates are low; self-instructional materials go unread; study centres exist only on paper; examinations are gamed. Some of this is true in some places, but not everywhere, and it is not inevitable in any case. But here is what defenders of open learning rarely say with sufficient honesty: quality in the open learning system is uneven in ways that matter, and the unevenness falls hardest on the learners who most need the system to work.



The nurse in Nagpur deserves as rigorous and well-supported a B.Sc. Nursing programme as her colleague who attended a residential nursing college. The fact that she is studying from a kitchen table at midnight is not an excuse for lower standards. It is a reason - a compelling, urgent, morally inescapable reason to invest in better support.

“Open learning's quality problem is not that it is inherently inferior. It is that quality assurance systems designed for campuses with blackboards are being applied to a system that operates on mobile phones in rural kitchens. The tool is wrong. The aspiration is right. Change the tool.”

The Completion Rate: A Nuanced Crisis

SWAYAM's completion rate of roughly 7–10% is alarming. ODL completion rates in some programmes have been cited as below 40% within the standard time period. These numbers demand honest accounting and equally honest context.



Open university learners are not 18–22-year-olds in residential colleges whose primary responsibility is to study. They are working adults balancing employment, family responsibilities, financial pressures, caregiving, and often unreliable internet connectivity. Judging their outcomes by the same metrics used for conventional universities ignores the realities they navigate every day. A learner who pauses because life intervenes should not automatically be counted as a failure. Open learning was created precisely to accommodate non-linear learning journeys.

The more important question is not simply how many learners complete a programme within the prescribed duration. It is how many eventually achieve the knowledge, skills, or qualifications they set out to acquire, and how many discontinue for reasons that the education system could reasonably prevent. India does not yet collect this evidence systematically. Completion data is reported, but learner journeys, dropout causes, re-entry patterns, and long-term outcomes remain largely invisible. Without that information, institutions cannot distinguish between unavoidable life interruptions and failures of programme design or learner support. Quality cannot be improved if the reasons behind learner's attrition remain unknown. That absence of evidence is itself a quality gap.

Fortunately, international research has already identified interventions that consistently improve learner persistence in open and distance education. AI-enabled early-warning systems, mobile-first learning design, structured peer communities, flexible assessment schedules, modular recognition of progress, and sustained mentorship have all demonstrated measurable improvements in learner retention across leading open universities worldwide. The challenge for India is therefore not discovering what works; it is adapting and implementing these proven practices at national scale. The evidence already exists. The next step is to act on it.

COMPLETING THE JOURNEY: STRATEGIES THAT WORK



Evidence-backed strategies to improve learner completion



AI early-warning systems for at-risk learners

- Evidence:** International studies: 20–30% recovery of dropout-risk learners
- India's Current Status:** Piloting at IGNOU; not yet at scale nationally



Mobile-first content (not PDF adapted for phone)

- Evidence:** Completion rates 2x higher in mobile-optimised formats
- India's Current Status:** Most ODL content still PDF; SWAYAM partially adapted; global data on mobile shows 45% faster lesson completion



Peer learning communities (online cohorts)

- Evidence:** Social learning dramatically improves retention in distance settings
- India's Current Status:** Informal only; no structured national peer cohort programme



Flexible assessment windows (year-round exams)

- Evidence:** Reduces exam anxiety; significant completion improvement
- India's Current Status:** IGNOU allows some flexibility; not yet system-wide



Modular completion recognition

- Evidence:** Reduces dropout after partial completion; ABC framework supports this.
- India's Current Status:** Partially enabled by NEP 2020 multiple exits; unevenly implemented



Mentorship (assigned human mentor per learner)

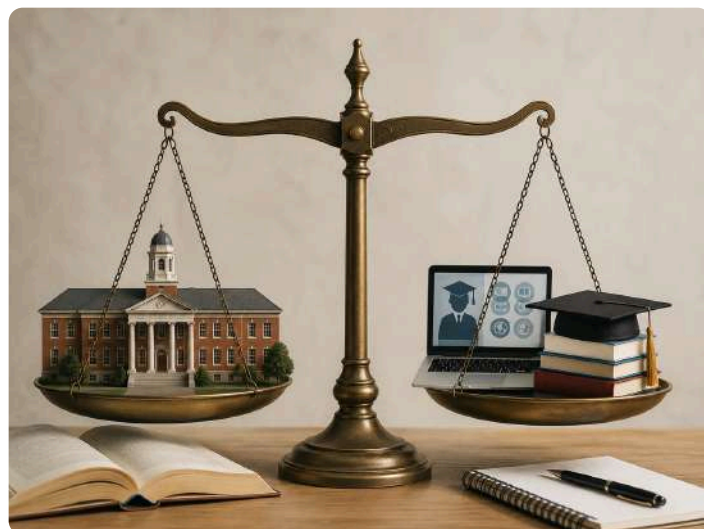
- Evidence:** 15–25% completion improvement in international studies
- India's Current Status:** No national mentor programme; some scheme-specific exceptions only

These interventions define quality in an open learning ecosystem. The problem is that India's accreditation framework still measures something else.



NAAC and the Open University Mismatch

NAAC's accreditation framework was designed for the broader higher education system, with significant emphasis on institutional resources, infrastructure, governance, teaching, and learner support. While some open universities have performed strongly within this framework, many of the indicators do not fully capture the distinctive realities of Open and Distance Learning (ODL), where learning is delivered through distributed, digital, and learner-centric models rather than a traditional campus experience.



India would benefit from a dedicated accreditation framework for ODL institutions that places greater emphasis on dimensions such as study-material quality, learner support services, digital accessibility, student progression, completion rates, and graduate outcomes.

As the ODL ecosystem continues to expand, quality assurance mechanisms must evolve alongside it to ensure that evaluation frameworks remain aligned with the modes of learning they are intended to assess.



“You cannot assess whether ODL is serving lakhs of learners well by counting the books in a library that most of those learners will never visit. India needs an accreditation framework built for the institution it actually has – not the institution someone once imagined it should be.”

The Global Laboratory: How the World Learns Without Walls

Six countries. Six models. Six lessons that India can act on before 2030 — not because the world has the answers, but because the evidence from elsewhere is too useful to ignore.

India did not invent open learning. But it has embraced it more ambitiously than almost any other nation. What it sometimes struggles to do is borrow — with discrimination, with adaptation, with the confidence that what works in Seongnam or Milton Keynes can be reimaged for Nagpur and Nalanda. This article does exactly that.



The UK Open University: The Gold Standard — and the Gap

The UK Open University, founded in 1969, is the institution all other open universities measure against. In 2024/25, it enrolled approximately 124,580 students — smaller than IGNOU in raw numbers, but with a tutorial system that is the envy of the global ODL sector. Personal tutors who mark assignments and conduct small-group tutorials for groups of 15-20 students is the feature that most distinguishes it from Indian open universities. At an Open Learning University, one academic counsellor can be responsible for 100 or more students. That ratio — 1:15 versus 1:100 — is not a minor operational difference. It is the single biggest determinant of whether a learner who gets stuck finds support or drops out.

1:15 VS 1:100+

The Ratio That Explains Everything

UK Open University tutor-to-student ratio vs ODL counsellor-to-student ratio. This gap lives inside every completion rate difference.



South Korea's KNOU: The Credit Parity Story

South Korea's Korea National Open University achieved full credit parity, allowing graduates to pursue higher education without credential bias. Through sustained quality assurance and political commitment, it turned policy into practice. India has the ABC framework—the next step is consistent implementation.



Singapore's SkillsFuture: The Adult Learner as a Citizen Worth Investing In

Singapore's SkillsFuture demonstrates how lifelong learning can be scaled through government-funded learning credits, enhanced support for mid-career learners, and employer incentives. Rather than prescribing what citizens should learn, the government funds their choice—creating a culture of lifelong learning that is operational, not aspirational. India has the foundations through PM-KAUSHAL and the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), but seamless integration of funding, credential recognition, and employer acceptance remains incomplete. The architecture exists; what is still needed is sustained political commitment—and the budget to support it.



Open Universities Australia: The Multi-Institution Portal

Australia's OUA is not a single institution — it is a portal through which students access programmes from multiple conventional Australian universities through a unified interface. Griffith, Curtin, Macquarie, and others all participate. Credits are portable across institutions. The learner chooses. The Indian equivalent would be a platform where a learner could compare IGNOU, YCMOU, or Nalanda Open University programmes based on quality, fit, and preference — with credits portable between all three through the ABC. The ABC system theoretically enables this. An OUA-equivalent discovery portal to make it navigable does not yet exist. It should.



MIT's OpenCourseWare: What Free Content Means for ODL

When MIT made its course materials freely available online in 2001, it transformed global open learning. Today, an ODL learner can access content from MIT, Stanford, and Harvard at no cost—the internet has made knowledge a commodity. What remains valuable are recognized credentials, learner support, assessments, and qualifications trusted by employers. That is where India's next investment should be focused upon.

“India has built the infrastructure equivalent of every model on this list. What it has not yet built is the connective tissue — the credit portability, the support ratios, the universal crediting mechanism — that can make these individual pieces work as a coherent system. The parts exist. The assembly is the challenge.”

The Open Manifesto: Nine Propositions for India's Learning Future

Neither a policy paper nor a wish list, this is a call to action. Nine steps that those with the power to act can take now, because the learners who need them cannot wait.

Every article in this edition has built toward this one. We have met the nurse in Nagpur, the retired teacher in Jaipur, and the analyst in Bengaluru whose most valuable credential does not officially exist. We have seen the data: 4.8 crore SWAYAM enrolments and a 7.7% completion rate. 22 fake universities. 80 million learners India needs to add by 2035. A GER in the range of 28-30% in higher education, chasing a target of 50%. 272 million young people still out of school globally.

We have also seen the possibility. The existing infrastructure. The precedents from South Korea, Singapore, Australia, and the UK. The technology already being deployed, imperfectly, in SWAYAM Plus and IGNOU's AI pilots. Everything that India needs to transform in its open learning system already exists — in institutions, in regulations on paper, in technology already built, and in the ambition already latent in 80 million people who want to learn. Now we get specific.

“The future of Indian education will not be decided in academic conferences or policy seminars. It will be decided by a UGC chairman's approval signature, a DoPT circular, a Finance Ministry line item, and a Vice-Chancellor's enrolment decision. This manifesto is for those people.”



PROPOSITION 1:

Treat Open Learning as Primary, Not Supplementary

You cannot build 80 million conventional university seats in 10 years. You can build the open learning system that serves them — if you decide to, and if you fund the decision.



Budgetary allocations for State Open Universities should reflect their scale. These universities serve ~40 lakh students per year and receive a per-student central allocation that is a fraction of what elite central universities receive per student. The arithmetic is not just unfair. It is strategically self-defeating.



PROPOSITION 2:

Complete the Higher Education Regulatory Reform

NEP 2020 envisioned the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) as a unified regulatory architecture for higher education. Six years later, that vision remains only partially realised. Even as the proposed Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill with the Joint Parliamentary committee (JPC) seeks to consolidate the regulatory landscape, institutions and learners continue to navigate a fragmented system in practice.

As reform moves forward, ODL and online education must be embedded at its core. A modern regulator needs dedicated digital-learning expertise, outcomes-based oversight, and faster approval pathways for high-demand programmes. The goal is not less regulation, but regulation that is coherent, responsive, and fit for the scale of twenty-first-century learning.



PROPOSITION 3:

Complete the ABC —

Set a firm deadline for 100% credit upload compliance. Recognize international MOOCs and corporate training credits. Integrate NAPS apprenticeships with ABC and build pathways for SWAYAM and ABC credits to be mapped against internationally recognized credit frameworks, enabling Indian learners to pursue global academic and professional opportunities with greater portability of credentials.

When a SWAYAM Plus certification counts towards MBA through the ABC, it will have achieved its purpose. Until then, it remains an administrative obligation masquerading as a transformative tool.



PROPOSITION 4:

Fix the Counsellor Ratio

The minimum standard is 1 counsellor per 100 students. The UK Open University standard is 1 tutor per 15-20 students. The gap between those two numbers is where India's completion rate problem lives.



Moving from 1:100 to 1:40 — achievable through AI-assisted support tools, trained student mentors, and targeted counsellor hiring — would have measurable impact on completion rates within two academic cycles. The investment required is modest. The return, in human terms, is transformational.



PROPOSITION 5:

Make Equivalence Real, Not Just Declared

The UGC has declared ODL degrees equivalent to conventional degrees. Employers—including government—have not uniformly acted on that declaration.

Issue a binding circular with consequences for non-compliance. Audit public sector job advertisements annually for non-adherence.

Recognition must be measured not by policy documents, but by equal opportunity in recruitment and career progression. A B.Sc. Nursing from an Open University should open the same doors as a B.Sc. Nursing from a residential college. If it does not, the policy has failed the person it was designed to serve.



PROPOSITION 6:

Transform SWAYAM Plus into a Lifelong Learning Platform

Create a National Lifelong Learning Credit that provides every Indian above the age of 25 with an annual learning allowance of ₹5,000, redeemable across ABC-recognized providers—including open universities, SWAYAM Plus courses, and accredited industry training partners.



Integrate the program with the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) so that every learning milestone contributes towards formal qualifications. For a rapidly evolving economy, reskilling can no longer be treated as a personal expense; it must be viewed as a national investment. If Singapore could commit over SGD 1 billion to lifelong learning, India should pursue a proportionate ambition. The payoff would be a workforce equipped for continuous adaptation and growth.



PROPOSITION 7:

Build the India Open Learning Research Centre

India knows remarkably little about its own open learning system in rigorous, longitudinal terms.

How many ODL graduates are employed in their field of study? What are the lifetime earnings of open university graduates compared to equivalent conventional graduates?

What completion interventions actually work at Indian scale?

Establish a National Centre for Open Learning Research with access to anonymised learner data, a mandate for annual evidence reports, and funding for the longitudinal studies that can finally prove and improve — the system's impact. Evidence-based policy requires evidence. Build the institution that generates it.



PROPOSITION 8:

Make Multilingual Learning Non-Optional

Educational opportunity is shaped not only by cost and connectivity, but also by language. Much of India's digital higher-education content, including many SWAYAM courses developed by IIT faculty through NPTEL, continues to be offered primarily in English.



While NPTEL has made significant progress by translating content into 11 Indian languages, multilingual access remains uneven across courses and providers. AI-powered translation, supported by initiatives such as BHASHINI, now makes large-scale language access achievable.

India should set an ambitious target: By 2028, every SWAYAM course offered in English should also be available in at least five scheduled languages, and every AI learning assistant deployed in open learning should support at least ten Indian languages. The remaining barriers are increasingly institutional and operational rather than technological—and addressing them will require deliberate policy choices.



PROPOSITION 9:

Tell the Story

The open learning system's most persistent problem is not regulatory. It is reputational. The nurse upgrading her qualification at midnight, the retired teacher pursuing psychology at 58, the constable completing his law degree between field postings — these are not stories of compromise or second-best choices.

They are stories of extraordinary human aspiration meeting a system that made it possible. They deserve to be told — in newspapers that cover education, in employer communications that define hiring criteria, in government speeches that set national priorities, and in the family conversations that shape what young Indians believe they can aspire to.



Changing perceptions is not about marketing; it is about recognising achievement wherever learning takes place. When society values these learners, institutions respond with greater investment, employers respond with greater confidence, and policymakers respond with greater urgency. The open university system will be funded, reformed, and respected only when the people it serves are visible, celebrated, and treated with the same dignity as every other learner. That is not a campaign. It is an obligation.

A Closing Thought

Nalanda, at its 7th-century peak, enrolled 10,000 scholars from across Asia. They came to it. The knowledge did not go to them. In 2026, Open Universities enrolled ~40 lakh learners in a single year. The knowledge went to them to kitchen tables in Nagpur, to army barracks in Sikkim, to fishing villages in Kerala, to women's self-help groups in Rajasthan.

The medium changed completely. The ambition did not. India has always believed that knowledge belongs to everyone. The UNESCO 2026 Global Education Monitoring Report, released in Paris in March 2026, reminded the world that 273 million children and youth remain out of school. The gap between what is and what should be is not a statistic. It is a moral emergency.

India's open learning system built with brown envelopes in 1962, with satellite links in the 1990s, with SWAYAM in 2017 & SWAYAM Plus in 2024, and now with AI tutors and the Academic Bank of Credits is the most ambitious attempt in human history to answer that emergency at population scale. It is imperfect. It is under-resourced. It is under-celebrated. However, it is the only solution India has that is large enough to match the problem.

The open learning system is not the solution India is considering. It is the only solution India has. The question is not whether to build it. The question is whether to build it well enough — and to start now. ”

Knowledge belongs to everyone. The system must be worthy of that belief.

Recognized by Leaders in Education

Letter of appreciation received for the inaugural edition of Shiksha Vichar

Prof. (Dr.) Mahesh Verma

MDS, MBA, Ph.D, Dsc [hc], FDSRCS [Eng]
FDSRCS [Edin], FDS RCPG [Glas]

Vice Chancellor

- Padma Shri Awardee
- Dr. B. C. Roy Awardee
- National Science & Technology Awardee



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GURU GOBIND SINGH
INDRAPRASTHA
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01st July, 2026

Dear Dr Jere,

Thank you for sharing the inaugural edition of the magazine, "**Shiksha Vichar**." The magazine is truly informative, insightful and a valuable contribution to the field of education.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations on bringing out this timely and highly relevant publication dedicated to education and learning.

I am confident that *Shiksha Vichar* will serve as an important platform for the exchange of ideas and inspire meaningful discourse among educators, academicians, policymakers and learners alike.

I convey my best wishes for the continued success of this commendable initiative and for many more impactful editions in the years to come.

Prof. (Dr.) Mahesh Verma

Dr. Abhay Jere

Managing Director & CEO – DEXIT Global Limited
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Enabling Viksit Vishwavidyalaya for **Viksit Bharat 2047**

Transforming Higher Education through Digital Innovation, AI & NEP 2020 Enablement — empowering universities to be learner-centric, future-ready, and globally competitive.



OUR PURPOSE

“Reimagining Universities. Empowering Learners. Building the Nation.”



India's journey towards **Viksit Bharat 2047** demands universities that are digitally empowered and learner-centric. At DEXIT Global, we partner with Higher Education Institutions to accelerate this transformation through intelligent technology, AI-driven solutions and strategic implementation aligned with the vision of **NEP 2020**.

01 UNIVERSITY TRANSFORMATION SOLUTIONS



Digital University Ecosystem

- Digital Admissions & Student Lifecycle Management
- Academic Administration & ERP Integration
- Examination & Evaluation Systems
- Digital Credentials & Certificates
- University Governance Dashboards
- End-to-End Campus Digitization



Assessment & Examination Solutions

- Computer Based Testing (CBT)
- Remote Proctored Examinations
- Formative & Summative Assessments
- Learning Outcome Measurement
- AI-enabled Evaluation
- Large Scale Recruitment & Entrance Platforms



AI-Powered Learning & Student Success

- Adaptive Learning Platforms
- AI-based Skill & Employability Assessments
- Learning Analytics & Performance Dashboards
- Personalized Learning Journeys
- Career Readiness Solutions
- AI-enabled Student Support



Innovation & Smart Campuses

- AI & Data Analytics
- Smart Campus Solutions
- Digital Transformation Consulting
- Strategic PMO & Institutional Advisory
- Workflow Automation
- Innovation & Governance Frameworks



Flexible Learning Pathways & OPM Solutions

- Hybrid Learning Enablement
- Online Degree Enablement
- Work Integrated Learning
- OPM Solutions

NEP 2020 ENABLEMENT FRAMEWORK



FLEXIBLE LEARNING PATHWAYS



DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING & PROBLEM-SOLVING



MEASURING LEARNING OUTCOMES CONTINUOUSLY



PEDAGOGY IN THE AI AGE

03 WHY UNIVERSITIES SHOULD CHOOSE US



NEP 2020-Aligned Digital Transformation



End-to-End University Technology Partner



AI-Driven Learning & Assessment Ecosystem



Trusted Assessment & Examination Expertise



Secure, Scalable & Government-Compliant Platforms



Strategic Partnerships for Academic Excellence

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for **Viksit Bharat 2047**

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DEXIT's solution enables its customers to conduct exams on the move...anytime, anywhere

Portable end-to-end Services, our Test in a Box Tablet based Services offer clients the flexibility to conduct Exams Anytime, Anywhere, addressing client concerns related to locations with connectivity issues, lack of scaled computer infrastructure etc. We enable our clients to adapt and evolve based on the business landscape requirement



Key Features

- Secure Test environment
- Digital-ready application
- Identification, verification & impersonation checks
- Data Analytics
- Candidate support system
- Enhanced system security
- Results report management

Digital Examination & Assessment Solution



DEXIT Global offers comprehensive, End-to-End Digital Examination services that cover the entire lifecycle—from candidate onboarding, Conduct of Computer based Exams to Post results and analytics—enabling secure, scalable, and high-stakes assessments for Government clients, Universities, large Exam bodies and corporates.

Key Features

- Biometric-based candidate verification
- Real-time monitoring with central vigilance Robust
- Question Bank Authoring & management and cloud-based infrastructure ensuring high security, transparency, and seamless large-scale exam execution.



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SPOT stands for Secured Personal-Device Operated Testing — a smart solution for digital, secure, and paperless assessments.

Key Features

- Paperless & Cheat-Proof: Conduct exams securely, with zero paper and minimal cheating possibilities.
- Automatic & Accurate: Say goodbye to manual grading — automate surveys, quizzes, and polls.
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