

## Towards Virtualization: Open and Distance Learning

(Eds.) V. Venugopal Reddy and Manjulika, S. (2002)  
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What was a prophesy twenty five years ago that the home would become the center of society, in which work, education, service consumption and leisure would be mediated through new technologies has been very well exemplified in this mammoth book edited by Reddy and Manjulika. The electronic revolution powered by the developments in ICTs particularly the Internet and the World Wide Web have not only changed the traditional sources of knowledge but have also altered the mode of delivery, instructional methods and even the sites and places of dialogical learning.

The first chapter written by the editors themselves has provided a comprehensive backdrop to the entire book comprising four major sections namely: 7 case studies of Virtual Universities; 15 case studies of Dual Mode Universities; 12 case studies of Open Universities and an Epilogue written by 12 visionaries of distance education about the future of open and distance learning in the 21st century. In this chapter the editors have presented the entire landscape of the spread of ICTs across continents and have also highlighted some of the prominent issues of the new millennium, such as the changing demographics, the convergence of formal and distance education systems, the new learning environment and pedagogy and learning networks. While enumerating all the changes that higher education is undergoing due to the cause the emerging and effect of this very competitive environment, they have not forgotten to mention the most important issue of the emerging digital divide the new reality of the new millennium. A few of the inequalities highlighted in this chapter are worth mentioning here (pp.6-18). 6 industrial countries together accounted for 64.3% of the world GDP learning 35.7% to rest of the 200 countries.

47 countries had less than the 1/10th of world s average (US \$ 5258) per capita GDP in 2000. Many of these countries are in Africa (28) and Asia (16). 30 countries in the world had less than one main telephone line per 100 habitants in 1999. Many of these are in Africa (24) and Asia (5). Interestingly, 35.94% of the main telephone lines (absolute number) are located in Asia although it has the lowest tele-density (after Africa).

15 countries in the world are yet to have any cellular mobile subscribes (mostly from Africa and Asia). 88 countries had less than one cellular subscriber for 100 inhabitants in 2000. Interestingly, although per capita income is much lower in many of the African countries yet they have higher number of cellular subscribers as compared to main telephones. Africa and Asia have the lowest number of Internet hosts. USA alone accounted for 73.9% of the total hosts in 2000. Although Americas have 77.8% hosts, the largest number of Internet users are from outside Americas. The share of Internet users is 1.5% in Africa as compared to 22.3% Asia, 30.1% Europe and 43.7% Americas. Africa (35.14) and Asia (185.48) had the lowest internet users per 10,000 inhabitants. Africa (0.90) and Asia (2.53) had the lowest PCs which was much below the world's average (6.84) per 100 inhabitants. Interestingly, 36.2% of the total PCs are in the USA.

Some of these facts reveal that the growth of ICTs has been phenomenal in the industrial countries. Hence, virtual education in different forms has become more popular in the industrial countries. Growth of ICT based education continent-wise and emerging

**organizational models of virtual education have been narrated with specific examples. In addition, the editors have also made an attempt to describe the possible scenario that is likely to emerge in the next two or three decades of the 21st century.**

**Subsequently, the editors have presented, three types of case studies viz., Virtual Universities (VU) (07), Dual Mode Universities (DMU) (15) and Open Universities (OU) (12). Interestingly, all continents have been represented in one form or the other under the above three categories. The editors have not mentioned any reasons as to why less number of case studies have been presented from South America although it has a vast distance education setup. Most of the VUs covered in the book are from the North America and Europe. It is good that the editors themselves presented the case study of African Virtual University presenting a collaborative model between developing and industrial countries supported by the World Bank. Similarly, they have included Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Spain (the first virtual university in the world). Thus through the first 8 chapters the editors have succeeded in presenting the changing scenario of higher education in the 21st century: i.e. ICT enabled education and learning networks.**

**The editors have chosen to present a few case studies of dual mode universities and open universities too. The obvious reasons are: although VUs are growing day-by-day yet dual mode and open universities are attracting a large number of students; some of the DMUs and OUs have also adopted virtual education concepts suitable to their local conditions with in the existing infrastructure; and some of them are doing yeoman service enrolling large number of students irrespective of the size of the country, population, economy, infrastructure and availability of technology.**

**These case studies are an invaluable source of information as each case study includes the status of distance education of that country in general and specific institutional experiences in the form of: organizational structure; academic programmes offered, pattern of student enrolment, success rates, methods and media adopted in developing courseware and support services networks; mechanisms of credit transfer, partnerships and collaborations, quality assurance mechanisms; and sources of funding and expenditure, etc.**

**Interestingly, most of the case studies have also presented their plans for the 21st century. The important issues being confronted by these institutions as well as their plans for the 21st century have also been included under each case study. From all these types of case studies it is observed that some of them are high-tech oriented with large number of courses and student enrolment and vice-versa irrespective of the type of institutions and the model with which it is being operated and the country in which it is located. Each case study presented clearly reveal that each of them are meeting local needs of their countries. Thus, the book provides diversity and richness of the content for readers. It will serve as a major source of information and knowledge for further research not only for students, distance educators, researchers and policy makers around the globe but also for industrialists and business exclusives who are today players in the global higher education market place. In other words is an important resource for distance education all over the world.**

**At the end the Epilogue written by the who s who of distance education today truly embodies their vision of what ODL would take in the new millennium (pp. 621-695).**

**Thus this book explores the wide range of initiatives that are taking place all over the world. Contributors to this book are well known Vice-Chancellors, distinguished policy makers and leading practitioners, internationally renowned theorists and researchers of distance education viz., Desmond Keegan, Michael Moore, Sir John Daniel, Ing Carlos Cruz Limon, Tam Sheung-wai,, Rory McGreal, Mary Oakes Smith, Xingfu Ding, Lorenzo Garcia Aretio, Hassan Zohoor, Ramegowda, Cem S. Sutcu, Albert Sangra, Carla R Payne, Chris Morgan, Cisco M Magagula, Hakur Agustsson, J.W.Kamu, Jae-Woong Kim, Jeannet**

**Kirkwood, Judith Gal-Ezer, Mark Salopeck, Miles Allen, Paul A Kirschner, Ryosuke, Sophie M Delouis, etc.**

**Lastly I would like to add a line about the editors Dr. V. Venugopal Reddy (vvgreddy@hotmail.com) and Dr. Manjulika Srivastava (smanjulika@hotmail.com) who are working with IGNOU. Reddy and Manjulika are co-authors of two books viz., Distance Education in India: a Model for developing countries (1996) and Unexplored Dimensions of Open Universities (1999). Together they have edited another book entitled The World of Open and Distance Learning (2000) . Dr. Reddy is the Deputy Director and Incharge for Student Service Centre and Dr. Manjulika is Reader at the Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education of IGNOU, New Delhi.**

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