

Is the Sree Narayana Guru Open University of Kerala Ready for Take Off?

Krishnan Chalil

Dean, School of Social Sciences and Policy, Central University of South Bihar, Gaya, Bihar, India

Corresponding author: drckcalicut@gmail.com

Received: 14-05-2022

Revised: 29-07-2022

Accepted: 06-08-2022

ABSTRACT

Open and distance education has been accepted as an effective and credible mode of education since the middle of the 20th century. As a follow up of this, many institutions and states have come forward in offering distance education through single mode and dual mode university structures. This has resulted in increased enrolment at affordable cost and easiness to access. The people in the remote areas, employed people and the people on the margins used the system effectively to realise their educational dreams. In Kerala, the demand for higher education is on the rise and this demand could not be met through conventional brick and mortar system. This realisation has led to the establishment of a state open university, 'Sree Narayana Guru Open University' in 2020. The university is in its embryo stage. Still, the university has to expedite the process for offering courses and appointment of workforce and other infrastructure requirements. The current structural deficiencies are to be broken through pragmatic actions and practices. The university has to follow best practices in distance education especially with regard to; (a) design and development of courses, (b) student support services, (c) management and financing of institution and (d) integration of technology.

Keywords: SNGOU, Distance education, SIM, open university, Student support services

Kerala, a South Indian State, has always been in the academic discussion in the light of her high literacy and social development without achieving economic development. It is this 'Kerala Model' which gives way to several initiatives in the past several years in various sectors of the state economy. In the sphere of education, the state has evolved novel measures to improve the quality as well as quantity of education. It has resulted in the growth of colleges, universities, autonomous colleges, deemed universities etc. However, the demand for a state open university in Kerala has not materialised until 2020, the year in which the state government announced the opening of the state open university under the name, "Sree Narayana Guru Open University (SNGOU). The SNGOU was established by the promulgation of an Ordinance to that effect by the Hon. Governor of Kerala on 25 September 2020 and it was formally

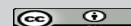
inaugurated by the State Chief Minister on 2nd October 2020. Though more than one and half years are over after its formal announcement, the university has not been able to take off by offering any programme of studies. It is in this context that this paper looks into the structural constraints that the university faces in its formal operation.

Objectives of the study

This articles looks at the need for an open university in Kerala in the light of the existing institutional set up for higher education. Specifically, the paper looks into the status of the higher educational institutions in the state and the structural constraints which the

How to cite this article: Chalil, K. (2022). Is the Sree Narayana Guru Open University of Kerala Ready for Take Off?. *Educational Quest: An Int. J. Edu. Appl. Soc. Sci.*, 13(02): 145-150.

Source of Support: None; **Conflict of Interest:** None



new state open university is facing to fully launch its programmes.

Methodology

The study is based on secondary evidences. Previous studies on distance and open education, the various reports and journals are the key source of information for this paper.

Presentation of the paper

This paper has three parts. In part A, we discuss the existing institutional arrangements for the provision of higher education in the state. In Part B of the paper, we examine the features of the SNGOU and its structural issues and in the last part discussion and conclusion.

PART A

Kerala has always exhibited heavy demand for education from the higher secondary to higher education. This is mainly due to the high enrolment

in the secondary education and its consequent pressure on admission to higher education. Also the higher pass percentage¹ and political pressure forces the government to open more and more institutions to cater to the needs of the teeming students' population.

Universities in Kerala

From Table 1, one can see that there has been an increase in the number of State universities and other institutions in the last several years. As of now, there are 15 state universities in Kerala. In addition to these 14 state universities of Kerala, there are one central university, two deemed universities viz. Kerala Kala Mandalam and Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology in the state.

Autonomous Colleges in Kerala

Under the three affiliating universities, there are 19 autonomous colleges currently functioning in Kerala. Table 2 gives the details of these colleges.

Table 1: State Universities of Kerala

Sl. No.	University	Year of Establishment	Discipline	Headquarter
1	University of Kerala	1937	Multi-disciplinary	Thiruvananthapuram
2	University of Calicut	1968	Multi-disciplinary	Malappuram
3	Cochin University of Science and Technology	1971	Multi-disciplinary	Kochi
4	Mahatma Gandhi University	1983	Multi-disciplinary	Kottayam
5	Kannur University	1997	Multi-disciplinary	Kannur
6	APJ Abdul Kalam Technological University	2014	Engineering, Technology, Management	Thiruvananthapuram
7	Kerala University of Health Sciences	2010	Medical, Paramedical, Health Sciences.	Thrissur
8	Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University	2010	Animal sciences	Wayanad
9	Kerala Agricultural University	1972	Agriculture, Engineering	Thrissur
10	Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies	2010	Fisheries, Climate science	Kochi
11	National University of Advanced Legal Studies	2005	Law	Kochi
12	Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit	1994	Sanskrit and Vedic studies	Kalady
13	Thunchath Ezhuthachan Malayalam University	2012	Malayalam language and literature	Tirur/Malappuram
14	Kerala University of Digital Sciences, Innovation and Technology	2020	Science and Technology	Thiruvananthapuram
15	Sree Narayana Guru Open University	2020	Multi-disciplinary	Kollam

Source: Department of Higher Education, Government of Kerala.

Table 2: Autonomous Colleges in Kerala in 2022

Sl. No.	Name of College	Name of the District	Affiliating University
1	Fatima Mata National College	Kollam	University of Kerala
2	Mar Ivanios College	Thiruvananthapuram	
3	Assumption College, Changanassery	Kottayam	Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam
4	C.M.S. College	Kottayam	
5	Maharajas College	Ernakulam	
6	Mar Athanasius College, Kothamangalam	Ernakulam	
7	Marian College, Kuttikanam	Idukki	
8	Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kalamessery	Ernakulam	
9	Sacred Heart college, Thevara	Ernakulam	
10	Saint Albert's College	Ernakulam	
11	St. Berchmans College, Changanassery	Kottayam	
12	St.Teresa's College	Ernakulam	
13	Christ College, Irinjalakkuda	Trichur	
14	Farook College	Kozhikode	
15	MES Mampad College	Malappuram	
16	St. Joseph's College Devagiri	Kozhikode	
17	St. Josephs College Irinjalakuda	Trichur	
18	St. Thomas College	Trichur	
19	Vimala College	Trichur	

Source: Websites of various colleges.

Whenever, the government of Kerala sanctions autonomous status to colleges witnessed severe protest against such decisions in the past. Not only the students' organisations but also some teachers' organisations see the autonomous colleges as a threat to their freedom of expression and view that these colleges will charge high fee from the students. So, there is slow progress in the growth of autonomous colleges in the state. The status of these colleges show that only one college among these belong to government owned institution. Also one can see skewed distribution of these colleges among the universities.

Arts and Sciences Colleges

The major institutional structure for higher education in the state is various Arts and Science and other professional colleges affiliated to the universities. Above 90 percent of the higher education enrolment in the state are in such colleges. There are three types of management structure in the state for running educational institutions, viz., government, private aided and self-financing. Under the government sector institutions all the overhead and recurring expenses are met by the government. In the private aided sector, the buildings and other

infrastructure is built by the Management and they have the power to appoint the employees based on the qualifications prescribed by the government and UGC. However, their salary is disbursed by the government. It is at par with that of government institutions. In the third category, the self-financing colleges, the entire cost has to be borne by the management for which they charge higher fee from the students. However, there is social control on the part of the government at various levels. Table 3 gives a snapshot of the distribution of the colleges, management-wise. It is clear that the self-financing colleges outnumber the government and private aided in all the categories of colleges except physical education college. Despite these infrastructure facilities, many a number of students could not find admission in these institutions. Hence, many of them join with private parallel colleges² who provides facilities for private registration for courses in universities. Similarly, a good number of students enrol with the various schools of distance education attached to conventional universities and other outside universities. Krishnan (2009) has examined the need for an open university in Kerala and substantiated arguments for the state open university scientifically.

Table 3: Distribution of Colleges in Kerala 2021-22

Type of College	Government	Private Aided	Self-Financing	Total
Arts and Science	66	163	418	647
B.Ed College	7	17	144	168
MBA College	—	—	57	57
Law College	5	1	19	25
Physical Education College	2	—	1	3

Table 4: Open Universities in India

Sl. No.	Name of University	Year of Establishment	Name of State
1	Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)	1985	Delhi
2	Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU)	1982	Telangana
3	Vardhman Mahaveer Open University (VMOU)	1987	Rajasthan
4	Nalanda Open University (NOU)	1987	Bihar
5	Yashwantrao Chavan MAharashtra Open University (YCMOU)	1989	Maharashtra
6	Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University (MPBOU)	1991	Madhya Pradesh
7	Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU)	1994	Gujarat
8	Karnataka State Open University (KSOU)	1996	Karnataka
9	Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU)	1997	West Bengal
10	U.P. Rajarshi Tandon Open University (UPRTOU)	1999	Uttar Pradesh
11	Tamil Nadu Open University (TNOU)	2002	Tamil Nadu
12	PAndit Sundarlal Sharma Open University (PSSOU)	2005	Chattisgarh
13	Uttaranchal Open University (UOU)	1996	Uttarakhand
14	Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University (KKHSOU)	1995	Assam
15	Sree Narayana Guru Open University (SNGOU)	2020	Kerala

Source: Websites of the concerned Open Universities.

PART-B

Despite having a fine tuned structural design for the provision of higher education in Kerala, there is unmet demand. This realisation compels the government to have an open university which provides provision for entry into higher education to all those who are interested. The conventional system of education has failed to accommodate those who are on the margins, employed and persons with other constraints like married/lactating women. The conventional system of delivering education has not proved to be sufficiently responsive, for different reasons to the needs of modern India in ensuring equity and providing low-cost, efficient and relevant education programmes to all who demand them and wish to upgrade their knowledge and skills at their own convenience and pace of learning (Ansari, 1992). Conventional education systems in India are constrained, in the face of rapidly increasing demand for education and

qualifications, economically and geographically. Distance learning offers a low-cost, equitable, and efficient alternative (Ansari, 1993). So all over the world, the administrators have gone for setting up of open universities which is flexible and at the same time equivalent to the regular education. It is a cost effective method of providing education to the masses. In India, anchoring on the success of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), many a state has come forward to set up their own state open universities. Now we have 14 state open universities in the country. The details are provided in Table 4. The SNGOU is the 14th State Open University in India and 15th state university of Kerala.

SNGOU-Concept and functions

The SNGOU has been structured on the basis of the Ordinance of the University. The territorial jurisdiction of the university is all over the state

of Kerala. The headquarter of the university is in Kollam and the university functions through its regional centres and study centres. It has statutory officers like the Chancellor, Pro-Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Pro-Vice chancellor and other officers. The major objectives of the university includes the preparation of various courses of study on the basis of higher education system prevailing in the State, other states and at international levels by utilizing modern technological methods through distance education and to award certificate, diploma, degree, post graduate degree, research degree or other academic distinction after imparting instruction and by conducting examination and evaluation to persons either or not engaged in any employment, irrespective of age; and to give necessary encouragement for education, research and teacher-student training for the cultural progress in the State based on heritage. The academic activities of the university are proposed to be managed through various Schools. There shall be a Board of School of Studies for each School of Studies.

The authorities of the University include: (i) The Advisory Council; (ii) The Executive Council; (iii) The Academic Research Council; (iv) The Finance Council; (v) The Cyber Council; (vi) The Board of School of Studies; (vii) The Council of Directors for School of Studies; and such other bodies of the University as may be designated by Statutes to be the authorities of the University.

The government has already appointed the statutory officers and some staff on deputation. However, so far the university has not officially started offering any under-graduate or post-graduate programmes. This is due to some of the structural constraints the university has been confronting which needs to be corrected. Now let us discuss those issues which are to be addressed by the administrators.

Problems faced by the University

1. Recognition of the UGC and Distance Education Bureau

“Any newly set up state university needs to obtain UGC’s approval for its courses within three years of its inception. However, varsities offering distance education and online courses need to obtain prior approval from UGC’s Distance Education Bureau”.

Also, at least 60 per cent of the study material need to be prepared in advance. Though the University has started the constitution of Board of Studies, it will take long time to develop the self-instructional study materials and other lesson contents. It is understood that the university has not yet started the preparation of study materials.

2. Preparation of study materials in Self-Instructional Material(SIM) format

One of the success criteria of any distance education programme is in its quality study materials. Since distance education is different from the face-to-face education, the learners should feel that their teachers are in front of them through their study materials. Thus, it should be in the SIM format which is possible only through trained manpower. The university is now in the process of its material preparation. But, it will take its own time.

3. Future prospects of the existing employees of the distance education centres of conventional universities.

Currently, the distance education courses are run by the departments of distance education attached to conventional universities. In Kerala, there are four universities viz., Kerala, MG, Calicut and Kannur Universities with their own distance education centres. In these centres, both teaching and non-teaching employees are working on permanent and contract basis. It is proposed that by the functioning of the SNGOU, all the distance education centres of the conventional universities shall be closed down. So, it is a question mark that whether the SNGOU shall absorb the existing workforce.

4. Recruitment of faculty and technical experts

The success of any education system in general and distance education in particular is dependent on the availability of qualified workforce. The faculty to be appointed in distance education should be those who have flavour to teach through distance mode. So, the conventional teachers cannot teach effectively through distance education unless they are trained or obtained professional qualification in distance learning. So, the recruitment policy of the university is a matter of importance to run the university effectively.

PART C

Discussion and Conclusion

The hue and cry for a state open university is over by the setting of the SNGOU. There is no doubt that the university can do wonders in the higher education landscape of the state through its technology driven pedagogy. However, the university is currently not adequately prepared to deliver the education as imagined by the open educators. So, earnest efforts are needed on the part of the authorities to streamline the system and effectively intervene to break the structural constraints. From the above discussion it is clear that the authorities should try on a war footing way efforts to get recognition from the UGC and Distance Education Bureau. If the university wanted to float any course/programme during this academic year demands an early approval from these authorities. Otherwise, it will affect the future of thousands of students, some of them may join with other open universities.

Secondly, the integration of the existing distance education centres of the conventional universities with the Open University needs imagination. The employees may be given option either to continue with their parent university or be absorbed by the open university. There should be clarity over this issue. For the time being deputation policy may be followed. Thirdly, distance education, being an industrial form of education, the mechanism for its functioning should take place in SNGOU. Efforts in this direction is a dire need.

Fourthly, the university should follow a model of open university functioning. For example, the IGNOU or British Open University model are largely followed by various universities in and outside the country. Fifthly, as the New Education Policy 2020, suggests, the attainment of 50 per cent enrolment in higher education is possible only by the success of open and distance education universities. So, we hope that under the able leadership of the authorities of the SNGOU, the

state of Kerala be able to provide opportunities for higher education for all those who are desirous to obtain higher education. In addition, the university may contribute to materials the vision of the NEP 2020 in a larger way. Sixthly, the success of any open education depends on the strength of its student support services. Main student support services include timely despatch of study materials, timely conduct of personal contact programmes, timely release of results, timely evaluation of assignments and so on. Krishnan (2004) elaborated on the deficiency of the student support services offered by the conventional dual mode universities to distance learners. Finally, in an era of inclusive growth, inclusive education is the way to achieve it. Open Universities can contribute too much in this sphere.

NOTES

1. The overall pass percentage of Kerala SSLC 2022 exam is 99.426 - a drop by 0.21% as compared to 2021. The pass percentage stands at 83.87 % for higher secondary and 78.26 % for the vocational higher secondary in 2022.
2. Parallel colleges are a type of informal institutional structure for the provision of higher education through private individuals/co-operatives like private tuition. It is a vast network in Kerala employing large number of qualified manpower. (For more details see, Sivasankaran and Krishnan, C. 1999).

REFERENCES

- Ansari, M.M. 1992. Economics of Distance Higher Education, Concept Publishing Company Ltd., pp. 58.
- Ansari, M.M. 1993. "The Role for Distance Education in India: Quality, Opportunity and Cost- Effectiveness", *Industry & Higher Education*, 7(2).
- Government of India, 2020. New Education Policy 2020, MHRD, New Delhi
- Krishnan, C. 2009. "The Need for an Open University in Kerala", *University News*, 47(42): 8-12.
- Krishnan, C. 2004. Distance Higher Education in Kerala: Students' Assessment, Discussion Paper No.101, KRPLLD, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram.
- Sivasankaran and Krishnan, C. 1999. "Economics of parallel colleges—A study", *Asian Economic Review*, 41(3): 499-513.