

Issues and challenges for Non Formal Education A case study of Indira Gandhi National open University (IGNOU) With Reference to J&K State

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SECTION A: AN OVERVIEW

Introduction

Change is a natural phenomena and is inevitable, where as, its nature and the pace at which it occurs, varies within the 'time and space' matrix. Efficacy and survival of any system therefore, depends on how well it responds to the imperatives of change. This probably is true more in the field of education, wherein, the frontiers of knowledge keep on expanding at such a rapid rate, that the earlier methods and methodologies tend to become obsolete. In today's world means and resources to seek knowledge are so enormous and diverse, that the process of learning has become deinstitutionalised. The pattern of education and its delivery mechanism, Changes in higher education, keeping India in view, have traditionally been slow, interms of its pattern and delivery, mainly because of its elitist nature and the ivory tower existence of its institutions. After world war IInd, higher education, world over, has undergone transformation from elitist systems to mass focused systems. As a consequence, there have been remarkable developments in individualising mass-learning. At the global level, higher education is undergoing a paradigm shift from an instruction-centred college / university model, to a learner-centred integrated network model which is based on access to learning resources and student initiative (ICDE, 1996).

In India, at present there are 60 Distance Learning Institutions (DLIs), including 9 open Universities. Indira Gandhi National open University (IGNOU), has emerged as one of the India's pioneering and biggest open university and the second biggest in the world after Central Radio and Television University, China, Established in 1985. The aim was to provide cost-effective, quality education to large sections of population including those living in remote and far-flung areas. It was also intended to provide ample opportunities to those, who for one reason or the other, could not seek or improve their educational standards. Therefore, IGNOU, stated imparting education to the professional managers, primary and secondary school teachers, computer professionals, construction-workers, medical and health personnel, Panchayat (local bodies) members, host of NGO activists. IGNOU is endeavouring to reach out to all sections and stratas of masses, who otherwise, would have remained deprived of higher education.

Issues and Challenges

Most of the programmes offered by IGNOU fall within the spectrum of non-formal education and are very popular, as these are intended for self-enrichment and professional upgradation. However, IGNOU's reach-out policy in spreading mass education through distance mode must also reorient itself to the local conditions. This is warranted to ensure that the impact and achievements are sustainable in local level in different parts of country. Issues which have emerged in respect to IGNOU functioning in J&K State, need to refocus its delivery system, to popularize mass education both in terms of qualitative and quantitative aspects. Some of such issues which have come to surface are:

- The growth in enrolment has not been uniform across all programmes and at

different study centres. Enrollment of a small number of students with some of the study centres has rendered them virtually non-functional.

- The present study centre net-work is urban based, leaving small towns and rural areas out of reach and focus.
- Locational access to study centres and their timings, have in many cases, made it difficult or impossible for students to attend counselling sessions regularly to seek clarification and advise with regard to courses and specialisations to be chosen. In view of the above whether study centre approach alone can take education to the doorsteps of the students in the state is a questionable proposition.

In the light of the issues discussed above, the challenges for IGNOU in effective management of its non-formal education programmes are:

- There is an urgent need to create awareness amongst study centre spread over different locations about the programmes being offered by IGNOU.
- Net working of various study centres has to be integrated with the rural areas of the region, in which they operate. It is expected to enhance the accessibility of the distant learners seeking education through IGNOU.
- IGNOU has to match and balanced various educational packages with the expectations and felt needs of the prospective learners.

SECTION B: IGNOU PROGRAMME AND J&K

J&K : A Profile

J&K State is situated in extreme northern part of India, boarding Pakistan, Afganistan and china as border countries with unique features in terms of geographical conditions, population, literacy, economy and other prevailing conditions (extreme weather conditions and cross-border sponsored terrorism). State has witnessed a phenomenal growth in student enrolment because of free education policy of the state government. Since 1986, IGNOU has also been imparting education in the state. As such, it is an opportune time to introspect the delivery system adopted by IGNOU in J&K to assess its success matrix of educational programmes, in terms of their effectiveness and impact as also evaluate its delivery system. Has the objective of educating all sections of the society, living even in the remotest corners and backward regions been accomplished as to nullify, the imbalances in the development of education in the state. Though there has been increase in enrolment as also academic programmes and courses, being offered by IGNOU have multiplied in J&K State. However, nature of facilities and support system required to sustain such academic endeavours have to match up such an expansion.

As such for state like J&K, keeping in view its socio-economic conditions IGNOU programmes must focus on the following:

- Empowering Women Through Distance Education
- Panchayati Raj Project
- District Primary Education Project
- Human Rights Project
- Community Awareness in Disaster Preparedness
- Education and Training of Rural Youth Through Distance Education Mode
- Project for Providing Vocational Training to Tannery Workers.
- HIV and Family Education
- Commonwealth Youth in Development
- Commonwealth of Learning Literacy Project
- Mapping Experiences in The Education of Adolescent Girls

- **Certificate Programme for In-service ANMS/FWHS**
- **Certificate Course for Professional Development of Adult Education Functionaries**
- **Awareness and Preparedness Among Rural Parents for Effective Primary Schooling**
- **Computer Literacy for School Drop-outs.**

Research Study & Design:

a) The present study is an attempt to critically examine and evaluate issues and challenges for non-formal education in the state of Jammu & Kashmir (India). The study as such was expected to facilitate identification of appropriate strategies so as to benefit distance-learners of the state in best possible manner. Besides, study has identified policy guidelines for improving IGNOU functioning in the state.

The twin objectives of the research study therefore were :

- To examine types of non-formal programmes which have been introduced in J&K State and find their relevance.
- To suggest suitable policy measures in respect to delivery channels of IGNOU programmes for their effective implementation/execution.

b) Method & Sample

The present study is outcome of an empirical research study and is exploratory in nature. Data was collected with the help of a structured questionnaire based on personal interview method. Questions administered to the respondents enrolled with IGNOU programme covered issues like : study materials; quality & distribution, counselling and evaluation of learner's assignment. Universe of sample comprised of 50 students pursuing non-formal programmes through IGNOU. They were chosen from the study centre located in Jammu University. Based on stratified random sampling it consisted of males as well as female students studying at undergraduate and post graduate level with the mean age of 22/23 years. Analysis of data was done with the help of simple statistical method based on percentages, calculated on the basis of responses of respondents.

SECTION C: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A detailed analysis of the data collected on the basis of present research study can be discussed and categorised as under:

I Study Material: Quality and Distribution.

II Counselling

III Evaluation of learners: Assignment.

The present research findings about the quality and distribution of study material of various programmes being offered by IGNOU are shown in table 1, given here under:

Table 1: Quality and Distribution of study material

S.No.	Responses	N=50	Percentage 100
1.	Receipt of the material in time	21	42
2.	Adequacy of material in terms of coverage of topics to learn subject matter.	36	72
3.	Comprehension of the script	41	82
4.	Non availability of reference books suggested in the study material.	35	70
5.	Dispatch of course material not pertaining to the subjects chosen	35	70

Table 1. shows that 42 percent respondents agree that they receive the study material in time, meaning thereby, that 58 percent received the material late. This is attributed to the delay in dispatch from MPPD and as well due to delayed postal delivery. 72 percent respondents feel that the subject material adequately covers the topics of their study. This means that majority of learners are satisfied while 28 percent still remain dissatisfied. It is because of their comprehension and understanding of material contents which appears to be too modest primarily their being from rural, far-flung and educationally backward areas.

82 percent respondents felt that the script is comprehensible while 18 percent did not agree with it. It could be due to the reason that they either do not have a base in that subject or must have enrolled due to demonstration effect, 70 percent respondents among learners felt that the reference books suggested were not usually available in the study centre libraries. 30 percent of such respondents, very strongly felt that books were available at study centres.

Above research different researchers also in conformity to various such studies carry out findings. The studies conducted by Biswal (1979), Singh (1980), Khan (1982), Sahoo (1985) Kumar et al . (1986) and Pillai and Mohan (1985) revealed that majority of students i.e. 85 percent basically depend on study material for completion of their courses. Further Tyagi (1990), Singh (1993), Rana (1994) and Das & Das (1995) found that study materials were comprehensive and of a very high standard , some times making it difficult for average students or learners of remote regions to cope-up with it.

It can therefore be observed that the MPPD at headquarters of IGNOU, must have a second look on the study material production which must cater to the needs of not only sharp and intelligent students with strong communication base but equally take care of millions of such learners whose communicative skills and understanding are average in respect to subject contents which otherwise are of very high quality.

Table 2: IGNOU- Counselling

S.No.	Responses	N=50	Percentage
			100
1.	Receipt of counselling schedule in time	35	70
2.	Doubts clarified in counselling	36	72
3.	Need of lecturing in counselling	50	100
4.	Radio counselling favoured	42	84
5.	No interaction with radio counsellor	37	74
6.	Doubts not clarified in Radio Counselling	43	86
7.	Unsuitable timings of doordarshan telecast	45	90
8.	Co-operative staff of study centre	32	64

The above table shows that among learners 70 percent respondents agree that they receive counselling schedule in time and while 30 percent of such respondents did not agree with it. 72 percent opined that their doubts are clarified in counselling, 100 percent felt that there was need of lecturing during counselling sessions, 84 percent favoured radio counselling, 74 percent felt that they could not interact with the radio counsellor, 86 percent respondents were not satisfied with the clarification of their doubts in radio counselling, 90 percent of them were not happy with the timings of doordarshan telecast and 64 percent learners agreed that study centre staff was Co-operative and helping. Counselling being the heart and soul of distance education, the present study has shown

that it helps clarify doubts, provides inspiration for further studies and also solves academic problems but then it needs to be improved as suggested in the studies conducted by Sahoo (1985), Renu (1992), Singh (1995), Das and Das (1995).

Table 3: Evaluation of Assignments

S.No.	Responses	N=50	Percentage 100
1.	Satisfied with assignment procedure.	50	100
2.	Self check exercises and their utility appreciated.	50	100
3.	Utility & conduct of term and examination	50	100
4.	Overall evaluation of learners is satisfactory	50	100

The present research findings as also the studies carried out by different researchers referred, herein, collaborate with the observation that student attending counselling sessions normally do not come well prepared on specific blocks/topics for which counselling has been fixed on specific date. Most of the counsellors tend to handle counselling sessions in a formal classroom lecture mode rather than address to the specific queries pertaining to the specific block of given course. This often creates a very non serious and a casual atmosphere, thereby, defeating the very purpose of counselling.

The above table shows that 100 percent respondents are satisfied with assignments, self check exercises and their utility. Term end examination and overall evaluation of learners, as being done at present, appears to be systematic. Since evaluation is an integral part of the instruction mechanism and is used for evaluating end - products has yet to be perceived as a process of providing regular feedback to the distant learner. This is supplemented by studies conducted by Rana (1994), Raghunath (1994), Rathore (1994), Renu (1992) and Singh (1995).

Despite clear instructions from IGNOU, evaluators of assignments often are casual about evaluation of the assignments. Their comments about the poor grades are often vague and of generalised nature. This does not help a distant learner to identify his areas of weakness in term of contents and subject as also because of the fact that regular feedback is not provided to the students.

SECTION D: POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The present study as also various other studies of similar in nature have attempted to visualise the type of policy-framework IGNOU, must evolve so as to ensure that distant mode of learning becomes most effective mean of learning for those who otherwise would remain deprived of education. Regular policy reformulation is desirable to make distant mode of learning compatible to the emerging needs of a growing society, besides according due recognition and place to an apex institution like IGNOU in the spread of mass education. Based on the present research study some of the policy implications which must be taken into account while restructing IGNOU functioning in a state like J&K, are discussed hereunder:

***There is an urgent need to create awareness amongst study centres spread over different locations about the programmes being offered by IGNOU.**

*** Net working of various study centres has to be integrated with the rural areas of the region, in which they operate. It is expected to enhance the accessibility of the distant**

learners seeking education through IGNOU.

*** IGNOU has to match and balance various educational package with the expectations and felt needs of the prospective learners.**

*** The approach to spread of education should be to create a technology-rich learning environment.**

*** Quality and equity must continue to be the guiding principles behind academic endeavors of IGNOU.**

*** Diversification of existing delivery channels including the present ones, be so designed that access to IGNOU programmes and enrolment of students, must occur at all places within the state.**

*** Electronic media packages and support system should prominently supplement the printed study materials. Access to the facilities and services pertaining to media packages be ensured at different study centres, across the country as early as possible. Mere supply of media and other electronic support system by IGNOU to different regional study centres does not per se meaning that the students, either use them or have easy access to them.**

• Necessary in house competence in providing technology rich distance learning environment to the learner has to be institutionalised so that and more and more students seek opportunities to access education based on latest technologies.

• Interactive communication has new watchwords like: teleconferencing, radio paging, satellite communication and group telephone tutorials. A beginning should be made even partially to facilitate non-formal education programmes through distance mode in the country based on this system of delivery mode.

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