

# A Study of the Problems Faced by IGNOU Students of Darbhanga Regional centre

Cyma Anjum

*Asst. Professor of Education, LNMCBM (Edu .Prog.), BRA Bihar University, Muzaffarpur*

**Abstract—In any transition from one system of education to another, students are found to face not only cultural shocks but also operational difficulties. While cultural change spans a long period during which altitudinal changes occur gradually, operational difficulties faced by the large open universities can be solved in a short time, provided the appropriate managerial strategies based on research are evolved. The operational difficulties faced by IGNOU at the moment are challenges not only to students but also the University Management. Studies of this kind would help the management to take informed decisions in some key areas of the Universities' operations.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Distance education is a learner centered education. It is so because, if education is to function as a means of social upliftment and democratization, it cannot but be learner centered. Distance education can be more learners centered if distance educators are aware of the problems, needs, attitudes and characteristics of their learners. The present study intends to assess the different types of problems that learners come across in the course of their interaction with the distance education institution they are attached to.

Students who enroll in distance education institutions may have their unique needs to fulfill before they enroll. These students are relatively independent and they have various roles in society. They might be working as teachers or parent at different times and participate in many other activities as well. Thus, the students of open learning are more goal oriented and highly motivated on the one hand and on the other, they face certain problems in their choice of being a student, of the open learning institution. The problems they face may generally emanate from the weak student support services of the institutions, and also from the learner's commitments and responsibilities towards his home, office and society. As a result, the distance learners may become dissatisfied, frustrated,

confused which would lead to drop ping out from the system. The distance students have no direct contact between the teacher and the taught as in the conventional universities. Teacher and learner are physically away from the institution as well as their peer groups. They do not get immediate clarification for the doubts that come up during their studies. If the students happen to live in economically and technologically backward areas, they may not be able to make use of the audio-video programmes or the educational broad casts. All these problems have definite implications on their studies. Distance educators, therefore, have to be well informed about these problems, if distance education has to be socially relevant and pedagogically effective.

### Objectives:

The main objectives of this study are:

- to study the problems learners face on account of their own situations and environments:
- to study the problems created from the provisions and practices of the distance education institutions;
- to study the need to strengthen the student support services and make them adapt to the students' need; and
- to study the need to stimulate students to integrate learning.

### Methodology:

This study concentrates on the students of IGNOU Regional Centre, Jaipur. Primary data was collected on the basis of a questionnaire. Tabulation, classification, and percentage calculation were used for data analysis. The sample size included 100 distance learners, covering generally all IGNOU programmes. Secondary data was used from the published literature,

as available from the IGNOU, and from various other libraries.

A questionnaire was served to 100 distance learners of IGNOU Regional Centre, Darbhanga of the various programmes like Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, Diplomas and Certificate programmes. The age group of these learners varied from 18 to 45 years. A full 80 per cent of the participants were employed, and they remaining 20 per cent were of the unemployed category which included those who were simultaneously pursuing some academic programme, along with IGNOU programme such as, students of other courses and the Research scholars doing their P.G. and unmarried girls pursuing graduation, School teachers and so on.

#### Findings:

The learners had different objectives in mind while enrolling themselves for the study programmes. 60 per cent of the learners took admission in the various programmes, from the viewpoint of job advancement; 15 per cent enrolled with the aim of getting a job. The students of this category were either those who were unemployed, or those who were to switch to some higher government services.

The 5 per cent learners were those who pursued some academic programmes, for furthering their academic interest. This included persons generally serving the high echelons of government or private sector in higher position. The remaining 20 per cent of the learners gave different reasons. The housewives felt they had enough time so they sought to utilize their leisure time in studying; some students felt that attaining knowledge will help them in starting some enterprises like opening a crèche or preschool; yet others felt that knowledge about nutrition, health, child care, etc, would help them to manage things at home front in a better fashion. After taking admission, the students also face certain educational problems, especially related to the receipt of the study material. only 15 per cent of the learners received the course material on time in January. These learners were of the DRD and BLISC programmes. The other 15 per cent got the course material in February. 35 per cent of the learners got the course material in March and the remaining got the course material in April or by the first week of May.

A common problem faced by most of the learners was that the course material was incomplete, as they found

some blocks missing. Sometimes the assignments were not sent along with the booklets and no information about when they will be sent is made known to the learners. In such matters, when the students wrote to the Regional Director and Material Distribution Division, their letters were seldom answered. The students felt that the study material should reach by January itself. The students of Management Programme for example, could hardly prepare for the semester examinations as they received the study material only in March/April. Similar is the problem with students of Certificate Programmes. The students of the Certificate in Computing 1996 programme received the course material in April, only two months before their final examinations. Counseling is considered to be an essential and vital part of the student support services. But many of the learners are not keen to attend it and they do not even know about its importance.

10 per cent of the students attended counseling regularly. These students opted for the programmes which had the practical component e.g., library science and computer and also the students from management programme. 10 per cent responded that they attend the counseling only sometimes. 35 per cent attended the counseling sessions only rarely and 45 per cent never attended counseling. A notable fact was that even those who were not going for job did not attend counseling.

They go to the study centre, only when there are problems with the grade card or with the assignments etc. Those who are employed say that they do not find time to attend counseling. Some of them remarked that their office timings are over by late evening, so they can hardly visit the study centre except on Sundays. Some of the students of Library Science say that libraries close by 8 O'clock in the evening, making it difficult for them to attend counseling sessions. Besides, there are problems of conveyance, especially for those who are coming from far off places. Those attending practical, find it expensive staying in some lodges and boarding houses.

On being asked whether they got help in doing assignments, those who attended counseling regularly or occasionally admitted that they got help in doing assignments. However, their level of satisfaction with the help they got in doing the assignments varied. The students of Management Programme felt that they should get more help in their project work. Likewise,

students of DNHE, ACC, AHE also wanted the counselors help in selecting the topic, theme and also in doing their project work. They also complained that sometimes the answers for questions in the assignments were found in very short or precise form in the course material. Sometimes, the assignments were incomplete. Some questions were found missing in the printed assignments.

The display of audio and video cassettes was also found to be irregular at the study centres. The students who attended counseling found that audio and video cassettes were not shown on a regular basis. The basic reason was that audio and video cassettes were not available for all courses. The counselors, sometimes, were found lacking the initiative to make the counseling session more interesting.

More so, as the counseling was basically held on Saturdays and Sundays, for most of the programmes, it was not possible for all the students to view the videos. No time was, however, left for the display of cassettes in the 2 1/2 hours counseling session.

30 per cent of those interviewed faced problems related to examination. Some of them did not receive the intimation slip for the examination and their names were not found in the examinees list. They wanted that some provision should be there which will enable such students to take the term end examinations. They remarked that one should be allowed to sit for the examination when one has enough evidence of submission of the examination form in time. It was found that students were not aware as to when they had to fill the examination form. Those who received intimation slips also had problems. The examination centre shown in the slip was other than the one they opted. The courses opted were also found missing. The date sheets reached the student just 15-20 days before the commencement of examinations, which gave very little time to prepare for the courses accordingly.

## II. DISCUSSION

IGNOU should strengthen its student support services and has to make changes in its policies according to student's needs, besides responding to the needs of the institution and the society. At the individual level, IGNOU students might be concerned about the contribution of the programme to their desired goals, the effectiveness of learning strategies, the availability of courses, the matching of programmes in accordance

with their needs and skills. The students may also have personal, psychological problems about restarting their education after a long gap.

At the institutional level the University has to be concerned about the availability of resources, the internal efficiency, the improvement of students' educational and professional qualifications and the institutional responsiveness to the external environment.

The present study pinpoints two basic reasons for the students joining the IGNOU Programmes:

- (a) For job advancement: Students aim at acquiring knowledge or skills to enhance their job prospects and career. These students are concerned not only with their current jobs but also about their future job prospects. or career.
- (b) For academic support: The students opt for higher education because they need to acquire academic knowledge for further studies.

In order to fulfill the above two goals, the student faces two types of problems, viz.; personal and academic.

Personal: As evident from study, the students have personal problems relating to their own situations and environment like office work, household activities, physical and mental health, etc.

Academic: Besides, the students face problems related to the studies, such as:

- lack of proper information about the admissions, examinations, assignments, etc.;
- late receipt of the study material and inadequate time to study;
- lack of proper study skills to study through the self instructional material;
- the post study problems relating to the procedure for obtaining provisional certificate, duplicate certificate, rechecking form, migration certificate, etc.

Besides these, there are certain problems that emanate from the structure and complexity of the University related to its policy of open entry, the plethora of divisions catering to the various aspects of students' problems, lack of uniformity of courses as compared with other academic institutions, etc.

Therefore, certain degree of concentrated action is required to make the system more effective and

responsive to the needs and problems of the learners. The following may be considered in this regard:

- Student support services must be more informal and should have more facilities. Viewpoints of students should be taken into consideration for developing effectiveness in support services. There must be more consultation hours so that students may discuss their individual difficulties.
- An efficient administrative structure should be developed and standardized. There should be permanent coordinators and counselors at the study centres.
- Study centres must be equipped with technological facilities like dish- antennas, photocopier machines, telephones, FAX, etc.
- Counseling should be made emphatic. Academic counselors must not only be experts in their subjects, but also be, familiar with distance education methodology. Counseling should be more student-centered. There is a need for the counselors to have necessary human attributes such as patience, and sympathetic attitude towards students.
- Most of the students do not visit the study centres. The students do not go through the course material before coming to attend counseling at the study centre. Sometimes, there is lack of proper seating arrangement at the study centres. Thus in order to fulfill the basic purpose of providing a study centre; efforts are required to make these centres more effective and viable centres of counseling.
- The University incurs big expenses for the production of audio and video cassettes which are being seldom used or displayed. The counseling session is wholly utilized for discussions. There should be some time provided for the display of audio and video cassettes in the counseling session.
- Staff development is of utmost importance. Since most of the faculty and staff including the counselors are drawn from the conventional system, they are not familiar with open learning system, which requires a proper understanding of its concepts, various aspects and characteristics typical of the system, as also the operational mechanism.
- There is need to create an atmosphere in which each student may seek self identification. They suffer from an inferiority complex in comparison to the students coming from the conventional system. There is need to develop a consciousness of their potentiality and encourage students to develop their self image positively.
- Students who come to seek admission undergo certain tensions related to the course choices available, procedures of the University, eligibility conditions, admission process, fee payment etc. This has to be streamlined.
- With the commencement of session, the dispatch of the study material should commence immediately. The study material, in practice, is received very late by the students. Sometimes the blocks are found missing, sometimes assignments are not sent along with the study material. A system of checks should be introduced to verify the appropriateness of the contents in each packet of the course material being sent. Brief information about the commencement of the second dispatch should be sent along with the first study material to the students. It is also suggested that the camera copy of the course material should be made available to the Regional Centres and they should be authorized to printing of the course material as per their requirements. Decentralization of the printing of study materials and assignments is therefore necessary.
- The greatest plight of the IGNOU students was that even if results were declared after four months of the examinations, the results were found incomplete. The grades of the assignments were generally found missing. Sometimes the grades of the courses not opted by them were also found in the grade card.
- The books in the library at the study centre and the regional centre should be made available to the students, not only for purposes of reference but they should also be issued to them. Lending facilities should be there. Photocopying facility should also be made available and some nominal charges can be collected from the students for this facility.
- The regional centres and study centres should be adequately staffed. Besides, the appointment of coordinators and counselors, the location of these

centres should be done in the best interests of the students.

- There is also a need to stimulate the students to integrate learning. The contact-cum-counseling sessions should guide the students in the methodology of learning. An educational climate should be created which will encourage relationships among teachers, administrative staff and students, which will also bridge the communication gap.
- The regional centres should have an effective monitoring system to check the student support services rendered by the study centres.
- A feedback system should be evolved to obtain feedback from the students about their ideas and problems related to the course material, facilities at studycentre, examination, etc.

All the above will reduce the problems of distance learners, and will make the student support services effective in meeting the needs of the distance learners of IGNOU.