

# A Critical Study of Distance Education Programmes offered by IGNOU at Higher Level in Himachal Pradesh

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## Abstract

Distance education can satisfy the educational needs of learners with different social and occupational backgrounds. It is necessary, however, to verify from time to time whether it has provided the desired access to the groups for whom it was primarily intended. Moreover, the changing needs and aspirations of anticipated learner groups, in particular and society, in general can influence the planning and management of distance education with view of making the system socially responsive. This study was guided by five objectives. To study the status of distance education programmes offered by IGNOU at higher level in Himachal Pradesh. To study the functioning of distance education programmes offered by IGNOU at higher level. To study the support services provided by IGNOU to distance education learners. To identify and enumerate the problems faced by distance education learners of IGNOU during the course of studies. To formulate suggestions for bringing improvements in distance education programmes offered by IGNOU. "Status Survey Technique" under descriptive research was used in the conduct of the present investigation. The Survey method was used to study the views and perception of different functionaries, teachers and students of IGNOU. The study centres of IGNOU were selected by adopting convenient sampling technique. Data obtained through various documents, records, official reports were interpreted by making use of 'Content Analysis' technique. The study suggests that the present time excelled by rapid developments in the field of science and technology as well as the declining resources and inclining unemployment necessitates the requirement of ODL system. It must be ensured by the providers of open and distance education in the state that adequate and appropriate facilities should be made available at different study centres. The study centres must be facilitated as information centres for all courses/programmes run by IGNOU and they should not merely act as a study centre.

**Keywords:** Distance Education, Study Centres, Higher Level, Director/Deputy Director

## Introduction

Education is as old as human race. It is a never ending process of inner growth and development and its period stretches from cradle to grave. Education in the real sense is to humanize humanity and to make life progressive, cultured and civilized. It is through education that man develops his thinking, reasoning, problem solving, creativity, intelligence and attitudes, skill, good values and attitude. It is through education that he is transformed into human, social, moral, and spiritual being. Men learn something every day and every moment. His entire life is education. Hence education is a continued and dynamic process. Though the distance education is a new concept in educational system but it has been catching up very fast in all countries- developed, developing or underdeveloped, socialist or capitalist, western or non- western, hence, its importance is being realized all over the world and certainly in developing countries. Distance education is considered as close substitute for the conventional on-campus teaching keeping in mind the premises that different types of media (print, audio, video, telephone, computer based communication

system, etc.) are synchronized in the delivery process in distance education and open learning system.

## **Distance Education: The Historical Evolution**

Open and distance learning acquires a large purpose than merely providing higher education. Distance education dates back to as early as the 18th century. The development of the postal service in the 19th century led to the growth of commercial correspondence colleges with nationwide reach. The university of London was the first university to offer distance learning degrees. There are now many similar institutions around the world often with the name 'open university' and more than a dozen of them have grown to become mega universities, a term coined to denote institution with more than 100000 students.

## **Distance Education in India**

At the time of Independence, India inherited an education system with glaring disparities between males and females, between upper and lower classes, between economically advantaged and disadvantaged groups and urban and rural populations. Consequently, one of the primary responsibilities of the Government of India after independence was to make education available to all the people. This responsibility was sought to be realised through the opening of more and more primary, secondary schools and colleges. However, the formal educational system alone was found to be unable to meet the demand for education. Even the most affluent countries are convinced that they will not be able to provide adequate education as long as they exclusively depend on the formal education stream.

## **Need of Distance Education in Present Scenario**

Higher education has to adapt itself to the increasing demands from various sections of the people. For this we ought to have alternative higher educational pathways, we need to have an efficient but at the same time flexible system which makes possible for the young people to learn while they work i.e. combining work learning and work. It should not however be aimed at substituting or replacing the existing formal system of higher education. Many individuals who cannot complete school education could still make very useful contributions to the society and could have creative lives of their own if there are alternatives. Distance education is an effective alternative to the formal education. It has immense significance for the emerging learning society in general and educational underdeveloped or developing society in particular. This study point out weaknesses/strengths of the system, suggest remedies for improvements, parameters for policy making and monitoring of distance education system in the state.

## **Objectives of the Study**

1. To study the status of distance education programmes offered by IGNOU at higher level in Himachal Pradesh.
2. To study the functioning of distance education programmes offered by IGNOU at higher level.
3. To study the support services provided by IGNOU to distance education learners.

4. To identify and enumerate the problems faced by distance education learners of IGNOU during the course of studies.
5. To formulate suggestions for bringing improvements in distance education programmes offered by IGNOU.

## **Review of Related Literature**

Jumani (2009) conducted a study to find out the opinion of the students who were enrolled at higher education level through distance learning and revealed that the learners are well aware of the importance of higher education the matter of equivalence of distance education with formal education. He revealed that distance mode of education in Pakistan is going to be successful and it possesses all the requirements of delivery of effective education.

Gupte (2009) found that learner support plays very crucial role in open and distance learning system. Interaction with the learners in ODL is in-built through wide variety of means. SLM, counselling, assignment feedback, audio-video lessons, teleconferencing, interactive radio counseling, are some of the means through which learner - counsellor interaction with each other is ensured.

## **Method and Procedure**

"Status Survey Technique" under descriptive research was used in the conduct of the present investigation. The information pertaining to growth of distance education programmes at higher level through IGNOU (H.P. region) was collected from various sources viz. documents, official records, previous studies, interviews, discussions etc.

The Survey method was used to study the views and perception of different functionaries, teachers and students of distance education courses regarding various aspects of courses offered through distance mode.

## **Sampling**

Sampling was carried out in the following manner:

### **1. Selection of the Study Centres**

The regional office and study centres of IGNOU located in Hamirpur and Kangra districts of H.P. were selected by the researcher. The study centres of IGNOU were selected by adopting convenient sampling technique.

### **2. State Functionaries of Distance Education in H.P.**

Regional Director/Deputy Director of IGNOU, Regional Centre are the main functionaries to look after planning, organisation and implementation of distance education programmes of their respective institutions. Hence, it was thought worthwhile to include them in study.

### **3. Selection of Teachers**

A sample of 40 teachers associated with selected study centres of IGNOU were selected for study by employing incidental sampling technique.

### **4. Selection of Students**

A sample 80 IGNOU students (H.P. region) were selected by making use of incidental sampling technique.

## Research Tools Developed

Keeping in view the nature and objectives of the study, the following tools were developed.

1. Interview Schedule for Director/Deputy Director (IGNOU, Regional Centre)
2. Interview Schedule for Academic Counsellors (IGNOU, Regional Centre)
3. Questionnaire for Distance Learners

## Procedure for Data Collection

Documentary analysis was carried out to study the status of distance education courses offered by IGNOU at higher level in Himachal Pradesh. This was done through reviewing various documents, official records, previous research studies, govt. and organizational reports etc. In the second phase, interviews were carried out personally with Director/Deputy Director of IGNOU, Regional Centre. After this, interviews with teachers and resource persons were conducted at study centre level. At last, questionnaires were got filled- up by the students of distance education mode (IGNOU).

## Analysis of Data

Data obtained through various documents, records, official reports were interpreted by making use of 'Content Analysis' technique. The data collected with the help of interview schedules and questionnaire were analyzed mainly with 'Content Analysis' technique and certain information obtained through the questionnaire was put to frequency count and percentage analysis along with content analysis technique.

The analysis of data leads us to conclude that there are few programmes with IGNOU which are popular among students and where the enrolment of students has increased. On the other extreme, most of the courses have shown a mixed trend of enrolments with increase and decline over period of years under observation. In certain programmes like BTWRE, CPMF and CHE, no enrolment was observed throughout which may be due to the lack of awareness about the programmes among learners. However, in some programmes like CCYP, CDM, CLD and PGCCP, there was less enrolment initially which later on ended with no enrolment, reason being less job avenues available for learners in these fields.

**Table 1**

### Responses of Distance Educators/Academic Counsellors Regarding Academic Support Provided to the Study Centres, 2009-2013

Item no.	Statement	IGNOU (N=40)
1	Type of teaching/ resource material provided	
A	Study material	40(100%)
2	Type of Orientation programmes organised by organisation for professional development of teachers	
A	Workshops	17(42%)
B	Seminars	13(32%)
C	Summer schools	-
D	Refresher courses	9(22%)

It has been expressed by all the academic counsellors that the only study material as resource

material is provided to them. Further, it was reported by 42% academic counsellors that workshops are arranged for professional development of faculty engaged in study centres. Similarly, 32% indicated that seminars are organized and 22% revealed that refresher courses are organized for updating the faculty engaged by study centres.

**Table 3**

### Responses of Learners Regarding Academic Support Provided by Study Centres, 2009-2013

Item no.	Statement	IGNOU (N=80)
1	Whether teachers engaged during PCPs teach in effective way to learners	
A	Yes	78(97.5%)
B	No	2(2.5%)
2	Whether teachers are competent	
A	Yes	78(97.5%)
B	No	2(2.5%)
4	Ranking of teachers depending upon their content knowledge and working efficiency	
A	Very effective	17(21.25%)
B	Effective	63(78.7%)
C	Ineffective	-
5	Where learners get regular information from study centres related to their problems.	
A	Yes	74(92.5%)
B	No	6(7.5%)
6	Mode of getting information	
A	Telephone	73(91.2%)
B	e-mail	-
C	Letters	-
D	Personally	17(21.2%)
7	Whether support staff & teachers help in solving the problems during entire course	
A	Yes	74(92.5%)
B	No	6(7.5%)
8	Behaviour of support staff with the learners	
A	Co-operative	73(91.2%)
B	Non- Co-operative	7(8.75%)
C	Rude	-

It has been expressed by 97.5% learners of IGNOU that academic counsellors appointed by study centres teach in an effective manner whereas only 2.5% learners of IGNOU were entirely of different opinion. It has been expressed by 97.5% learners of IGNOU that academic counsellors were competent in subject matter. From the data pertaining to the ranking of subject experts, 21.25% learners reported that the teaching by the academic counsellors is very effective while 78.7% learners reported that the teaching by the academic counsellors is effective. Further, almost all (92.5%) held that they receive regular information from study centres. Out of such

learners, 91.2% indicated that telephone is the medium of supply of information whereas 21% received information through personal contacts with study centres. The main problems faced by distance learners (IGNOU) during workshops/ counselling sessions were conveyance problem during workshops/ counselling sessions. Accommodation problem during PCPs classes was also expressed by 58% learners. Library facility was reported generally lacking by 59% learners. 83% learners reported that modern techniques are not used by teachers while delivering lectures.

## Findings

The state regional centre functionaries responded that their organization has its own study centres throughout state and while establishing the study centres, consideration is generally given to those institutions which are already running the same courses through regular mode of education. Course writers are engaged by the headquarters of IGNOU. Study material is the main support service provided to learners and other modern accessories are still not provided to them. Main problem faced by the IGNOU regional centre is that of inability to make use of IT in imparting education through distance mode.

On the basis of views and perception of faculty engaged in IGNOU study centres it can be concluded that vast majority (68%) of academic counsellors were of the opinion that the ODL cannot be an effective substitute to regular mode of education. Only study material is provided as a support service to the students, was reported by all the academic counsellors. All the academic counsellors reported that there is no provision of placement services to the learners.

IGNOU learners revealed that figures, diagrams, charts, tables, illustrations and examples given in the study material were up to the mark. Vast majority (66.2%) of IGNOU learners revealed that the study material is presented in self-learning format. All the learners enrolled in different programmes of IGNOU reported that no modern techniques were used during workshops/ counselling sessions and hence, were not satisfied with such services.

## Conclusion

Academic, certificate and professional programmes are being offered by IGNOU. There are few programmes with IGNOU which are popular among students and where the enrolment of students has increased. On the other extreme, most of the programmes have shown a mixed trend of enrolment with increase and decline over period of years under

study. Director /Deputy Director, (IGNOU, Regional Centre), revealed that main problem faced by the IGNOU regional centre is that of inability to make use of IT in imparting education through distance mode. Director /Deputy Director, (IGNOU, Regional Centre), as well as large majority (78.7%) of learners of IGNOU were of the opinion that open and distance learning is as effective as formal mode of education.

## Suggestions

No feedback is generally taken from the learners regarding their experiences of ODL system. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the feedback and suggestions should be taken from the learners at the end of the contact programmes or at the completion of whole programme and necessary changes should be brought out in the nature and functioning of the respective courses/programmes. IGNOU should take into consideration the local socio-economic conditions and accordingly design certain programmes which can also reach to the people residing in far-flung areas, who can also get benefit from such programmes.

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