

## **A study of Academic Problems of Distance Learners of IGNOU**

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### **Abstract**

*Open and Distance Education Programs are becoming popular day by day. But open and distance learners are facing several academic problems. The researcher has conducted an investigation on a total of 200 distance learners of 12 selected IGNOU study centres of Bihar and found that there were many academic problems related to admission, enrolment, study material and medium of instruction.*

### **Introduction**

Open education system is a hope for millions who desire education, but are either not able to receive the regular face to face traditional mode of education or desire alternative inputs or even have varying requirements regarding the academic courses.

Distance education is emerging as an alternative system for providing educational opportunities to all those who want to have access to education. Four important problems faced in education in India are access, quality, relevance and finance. IGNOU has been established with well defined goals for strengthening and maintaining standards at tertiary level in the distance education system.

Open learning system is emerging as a parallel to the conventional formal system. The efforts are on for making this system foolproof and for increasing the efficiency of this system. The open learning system has adopted an instructional design which provides more autonomy and flexibility to learners. Learners are more dependent on self study materials and other electronic media. Learners are provided a brief opportunity to make face to face interaction with teachers in order to discuss identified hard points in their self study materials. Preparation of study materials is a challenging task for academicians working for the open learning system. Counseling is another challenging task for teachers and learners both. At present the success of open learning institutions in India depends upon their co-existence with conventional regular institutions which generally function as program /study centres of open institutions.

Evaluation of open learners through various measures and providing them regular feedback are also challenging task as it requires the involvement of teachers outside the open learning system. As the Open Learning System is flexible, based on self study approach and interdependent on

conventional learning system, there is need to examine the system time to time in order to enhance effectiveness and efficacy of the system.

IGNOU caters to learners from the entire country with different socio-economic, cultural and demographic backgrounds. IGNOU has a large network of 30 Regional Centres in the country. Over twenty thousand students were enrolled in Patna Regional Centre alone when data was collected in 2004 which gradually declined to half of this strength by 2017 . The present study was intended to find out the different problems faced by distance learners in different aspects of the education system.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The following objectives have been identified for the present study:

1. To identify academic problems faced by the distance learners.
2. To identify admission and enrollment related problems
3. To identify problems related to study material
4. To identify problems related to the medium of instruction
5. To analyze the identified problems and earmark weak areas

### **Method of Study**

In the present study, 12 study centres located at different places in Bihar taking maximum variations into consideration were selected. The respondent sample consists of 200 students, 32 counselors and four coordinators. A mix of purposive and random sampling technique was adopted, for data collection.

### **Data Collection**

The investigator gathered data from students with the help of a questionnaire from twelve study Centre of Bihar namely – 1. Vanijya Mahavidyalaya, Patna; 2. B.R.A. Bihar University, Muzaffarpur; 3. Marwari College, Bhagalpur; 4. Patna College, Patna; 5. A.N. College, Patna; 6. Women’s Training College, Patna; 7. B.N. College, Patna; 8. Xavier Centre for Computer Studies, St. Xavier’s School; 9. A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna; 10. Purnea College, Purnea; 11. Rajendra College, Chapra and 12. Gaya College, Gaya. She also gathered data from counselors and coordinators with the help of two different interview schedules from four study centres.

Investigator visited study centres to administer the questionnaire and interview schedules and established rapport with learners, counselors and Coordinators to obtain frank and unbiased comments and information. All students of different courses available at the day of visits of study centres were administered the questionnaire. The responses of respondents were analyzed and classified dimension-wise.

## Findings

### Reasons for joining ODL

**Table-1**  
Showing reasons for joining IGNOU

Reasons for joining IGNOU	No. of Students	Percentage (%)
Household engagement	20	10
Low Marks	13	6.5
Job Holders	31	15.5
Break in Study	14	7
Get More time for Competitive exam preparation	86	43
Financial Problems	12	6
Quality Education in IGNOU	14	7
Did not give any reason	10	5

Data revealed that over ninety percent students studied in conventional regular institutions before joining IGNOU. The respondents gave a number of reasons for joining the ODL system offered by IGNOU; the most important reason given by respondents for joining the IGNOU was that they got more time for preparation of different competitive examinations (43 percent).

About one-fourth of student respondents (25.5 percent) joined IGNOU courses due to their engagement in jobs and household work. It is noteworthy that only seven percent students joined IGNOU courses for its quality education.

### Admission

For most of the courses, admission is done on the basis of marks secured in the qualifying examinations. Out of nearly hundred courses offered by IGNOU, admission tests were conducted only for about 11 courses. Generally, students did not face any sort of mental tension during admission.

**Table-2**  
Showing Nature of the Admission related Problems

Problems	No. of Students	Percentage (%)
Difficulty in getting forms	14	7
Difficulty in filling of	40	20

form		
Difficulty in submitting forms	33	16.5
Difficulty in getting admission related queries after submission of forms	48	24
Difficulty in getting admission related queries after confirmation of admission	68	34
No Problem	67	33.5

Table-2 revealed that over ninety percent of students admitted into IGNOU programs did not find any difficulty in getting admission forms; eighty percent IGNOU students did not find any difficulty in filling and submitting forms; pre and post admission related queries were satisfactorily addressed for seventy-six and sixty-six percent students respectively. From the above data it can be inferred that a high proportion of students found the admission process of IGNOU satisfactory and did not face any problem.admission .

### **Understanding of ODL**

More than ninety percent (93.5) student respondents did not get any study materials from IGNOU which helped them to make a better understanding of open learning system. It appears that IGNOU works on the assumption that students are generally aware of ODL and its uses and relevance.

### **Medium of Study and Availability of Study Material in Hindi**

**Table-3**  
**Showing medium of study in IGNOU**

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Hindi	42	21
English	158	79

Table-3 showed that nearly three-fourth students (79 percent) studied IGNOU courses in English. For a large number of popular courses, medium of study offered by IGNOU is only English. Hence a large number of students had no choice but to accept English as medium of study.

**Table-4**  
**Showing availability of study materials in Hindi for Hindi medium student**

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	34	80.9
No	08	19.1

Table-4 revealed that nearly one-fifth of Hindi medium students (19.1 percent) could not get study material in Hindi. Nearly all Hindi medium students who got study material in English faced various difficulties like reading, comprehending concepts and checking their progress (an important component of IGNOU study material).

One fourth of Hindi medium students could not read study materials properly. Nearly half of Hindi medium students had difficulty in comprehending concepts. The most striking revelation is that all the Hindi medium students could not check their progress, an important part of IGNOU study materials. Evaluating oneself while going through self study materials is an essential element of any self study material. If half of the Hindi medium could not check their progress, the usefulness of study materials in English for these students becomes very limited.

**Table-5**  
**Showing complain registered with IGNOU about English medium study materials by Hindi students**

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	11	26
No	31	74

Table-5 revealed that nearly one-fourth (26 percent) of Hindi medium students registered complaints with IGNOU regional office regarding their difficulties, but most of these students (88.1 percent) did not get any response from IGNOU.

**Table-6**  
**Getting study materials in time**

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	80	40
No	120	60

Table-6 revealed that 60 percent students did not get study materials in time. Only 40 percent students got study materials in time.

Majority of these students (84%) who could not get materials in time opined that study materials arrived late in study centres. But some of them were of the opinion (16%) that study materials were distributed late by study centres.

### Quality of Study Materials

**Table-7**  
**Showing Quality of study materials**

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Study materials easy and self understandable	136	68
Language of Hindi study materials very difficult	30	15
Difficulty in answering evaluation questions under the head 'check your progress' after reading study materials	70	35
Insufficient examples	33	16.5
Concepts presented very briefly hence difficult to understand	72	36

Table-7 revealed that over three-fourth of total student respondents found IGNOU study materials easy and understandable. But over seventy percent of Hindi medium students found language of Hindi study materials quite difficult. A substantial proportion of students (36 percent) found that concepts were presented in the materials very briefly; hence they felt difficulty in understanding them. Nearly sixteen percent students felt that number of examples given in study materials were insufficient.

### Conclusion

On the basis of the above discussion, it is concluded that the major reason for students joining IGNOU programs in Bihar was getting more time for competitive examinations. The majority of the students was satisfied with the admission process of IGNOU. For many a program study materials was not available in Hindi. For Hindi medium students of such programs, these study materials were of little or no help. A small proportion of Hindi medium students found these materials difficult to comprehend. A small proportion of students wanted more examples to be cited in the study materials as they found insufficient examples in study materials given to them. The most striking revelation is that nearly one-third of the total student respondents could not answer evaluation questions asked in the study materials itself after reading the same. Nearly one-third student respondents failed to understand various concepts due to much brevity in explanation of concepts. The major problem of IGNOU lies with its study materials.

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