VALUE-ADDITION FOR EMPOWERMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH INTERVENTION OF ODL MODE OF IGNOU

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ABSTRACT

In the developing country like India, the output of graduates from higher educational institutions is high. But, the major concern is that majority of graduates are not employable, especially from rural areas for want of skills expected by the employer. The soft skills, communication skills and multidisciplinary knowledge are essential to become employable. In this context, the short-term six months courses of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) delivered through the ODL mode is an alternative intervention to the graduates towards empowerment. This article analyses the benefits of self-learning though ODL mode of IGNOU. The IGNOU Regional Centre, Madurai has made a pilot attempt in enrolling formal mode college going students in a few specific certificate programmes of IGNOU for enrichment and empowerment. The certificate level programmes of IGNOU which match the discipline of study at the graduation level as a value added course are also explored in this work. Self-study through ODL promotes the many skills and builds confidence to link learning to real-life situations and as well as ability to understand the changing demands in the world of work. Also, ability to manage information is a significant dimension of self-learning. Thus, the short-term programmes of IGNOU extend value-addition to the graduates in the form of transferable skills and the value-added outputs are expected to be employable or self-employable, thus contributing to the growth of the nation.

Keywords: Open learning; self-learning; skills; value-addition; empowerment; employability.

INTRODUCTION

The higher education system covering both formal and open and distance learning modes of higher education system is functioning on a massive scale in India. The number of students admitted every year in higher education system of education comprising 600 universities and 30,000 colleges in formal mode and 200 odd open and distance learning (ODL) institutions is around 20 million (MHRD, Government of India statistics, 2011). That is, in India, the output of graduates in Liberal Arts, Science and Engineering is very high. However, the overall employability of graduates, especially Engineering graduates in the country stood abysmally at a low level of 20-30% only (Andreas Blom and Hiroshi Saeki, 2011). The left out graduates are unemployable or underemployed for want of desired employable skills. An employer is willing to recruit the graduates and job-eekers provided they possess the required skills and ability to match the job profile of emerging and changing global economy. In fact, unemployment or underemployment rates are a serious concern for developing country like India and the human resources potential of millions of graduates could not be exploited towards the productivity and growth of the nation. Moreover, aspirations of millions of such youth are not channelized for the cause of the social and economic capital of the nation.

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In the 21st century, the higher education is highly globalised. The Government has taken a number of initiatives and schemes in India to impart the skills for inclusive growth. The linkage school education with higher education through National Vocational Educational Qualification Framework (NVEQF) and role of the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) for addressing the unorganized sector towards skill development are some of the significant skill development initiatives of the Govt. of India in the 12thfive Year Plan (An Approach Paper to the 12th Five year Plan, 2011). Strengthening the existing Polytechnics and Industrial Training Institutes and increasing their number in the country are also the steps taken in enhancing skilled manpower required for employment. These initiatives will be expected to yield desired results at the end of 12th Plan by the year 2017.

In fact, each industry/employer prescribes different skill sets according to their job profile and tasks to be performed. Besides, there is an urgent need to address the issues of skill mapping and skill inventory through institutional—industrial tie-up for generating information base for employer and those seeking employment. Any employer/industry while recruiting manpower normally looks for the skills like soft skills, creative skills, communication skills, critical thinking and analytical skills. The graduates from higher educational institutions in the country will be made employable only if the skill sets possessed by them match the job profile of the employer/industry. Now, the moot question is how to impart these job-oriented-skills to the graduates to make them employable or productive. Only in-service training or customized courses is a way forward to gain the desired employment skills for any graduate or one pursuing graduation from higher education system. Here, the intervention of open and distance learning mode (ODL) mode plays a significant role in terms of flexible approaches and availability of courses mainly to give a holistic approach to gain self-learning skills. In fact, learning through ODL gives an ample scope to unlearn, re-learn, thinking, doing, practicing, experimenting, allowing creative thinking, analytical ability and problem solving skills.

Open learning

There are about 14 open universities and around 200 institutions in India offering ODL mode courses and enrolling 3.5 million students annually constituting around 18% of the total enrolment in the higher education system in the country (MHRD, Govt.of India Statistics, 2011). These institutions offer a number of courses in a variety of subjects ranging from basic disciplines to applied disciplines. Many need-based, skill-oriented, vocational courses are also offered by ODL system.

The aim of the ODL is to reach out all possible target groups including the school drop-outs.Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) at the national level, a leader in the national arena and established to maintain and coordinate the standards of distance education in the country, offers around 400 programmes at the Certificate, Diploma Bachelors' degree and Masters' degree levels.

Annually, it enrolls 0.5 million learners annually and has cumulative enrolment of around 2.7 million active students (IGNOU Profile, 2012). The major thrust of IGNOU programmes is its focus towards certification, life-long learning, continuing education, enrichment and empowerment and for professional development. The major advantage and attraction of the IGNOU courses are the flexibility, choice of place, pace and time of study suiting to learners located in far-flanged areas and also to benefit learners irrespective of their age. ODL mode through IGNOU also is convenient for the target groups like in-service, pre-service personnel, those willing to join higher education after a gap, rural women, housewives, and those and school drop-outs. The tribal, minorities, and jail inmates are also benefited out of IGNOU courses. Moreover, the courses offered are very cost-effective and hence attracts marginalized and socio-economically weaker sections of the society.

IGNOU offers a number of need-based programmes in almost all fields, areas, and disciplines. The sector wise coverage of subjects through its 21 schools of studies is very wide and gives scope for gaining competencies. The prime advantage is that those pursuing graduation can also simultaneously pursue short-term programmes of IGNOU simultaneously to sharpen their skills. Besides, courses create plethora of opportunities and training in an allied area/subject/ discipline to show case their add-on skills in the competitive employment sector. Thus, for any graduates coming out of formal system of colleges and universities and trying to seek employment, ODL mode of IGNOU offers tailor-made courses in multi-disciplinary areas to get value-addition to the Bachelors' degree obtained.

The strategy of the institutions like IGNOU is to ensure the possibility of pursuing study with the help of programmed quality self-instructional print material, and it plays crucial role towards self-learning with a minimal support from the institution and teacher. Also, IGNOU uses a wide array of technology mediated intervention for learning and the multimedia like television, radio, audio, VCD and teleconferencing, interactive radio counselling supplement the self –learning for an isolated or an independent learner.

The key features of self-instructional material of IGNOU for promoting independent learning for an isolated adult learner are as follows:

> - Material written by experts
> - Programmed structured material
> - Contains introduction, main body, and summary
> - Learner centred approach
> - Contains access devices
> - Written in simple language
> - Incorporation of instructional design and instructional events
> - Pre-requisite aspects are recalled
> - Makes learning active
> - Learning through personalized style
> - Self-assessment of progress possible
> - Immediate feedback available
> - Allows study skill advice
> - Promotes critical thinking and analytical ability
> - Content linked to real –life situation
> - Builds confidence and ability to face the world of work
> - Create opportunities for review, retention and recall
> - Overall, learning occurs through thinking, doing and practice

Self –learning and its potential

The learners of ODL mode will always find it convenient to study the print material if the material is programmed structured material. The programmed structured or learner-centred material, is also called Self-Instructional Material (SIM) was introduced first by Universities like IGNOU, an apex body in the country for distance education, and later adopted and adapted by other ODL institutions. The salient features of SIM format are to impart learner the required subject knowledge and allow learners to learn, self-assess their progress, ability to create analytical thinking, problem solving skills, besides retention, review and recall. These aspects are important keys to self-learning.

SIM material has been designed to impart self-learning, by which the learners are able to cope with the self-study without the help of physical teacher. The features are known as Instructional Events (Handbook on Transformation of Print Material into SIM, IGNOU, 2007) which are:

- ➢ **Gaining attention**
- ➢ **Learning outcomes**
- ➢ **Review and recall of already learnt and study guidance**
- ➢ **Graded content presentation**
- ➢ **Learning guidance**
- ➢ **Eliciting performance**
- ➢ **Providing feedback**
- ➢ **Retention and transfer of knowledge**
- ➢ **Assessing performance**

Thus, instructional events incorporated in SIM are with a specific purpose to give learners access to content, required motivation, make learning problem centered, help learner assume control of learning, self–assess progress and to get a meaningful practice. The instructional events also make the print material not only structured but also makes it self-explanatory, self-centered, self-directed, self-motivated and self-evaluating for the independent study.The above aspects are able to enhance study skills, writing skills, communication skills, and ability to understand, analyse, evaluate, think independently and improve the required confidence to link learning outcomes in practical situations. Thus, self-learning makes one holistically empowered.

Study workload in IGNOU. To maintain quality of ODL courses, the learners study workload has to be kept at par with the conventional classroom system of higher education. Therefore, to maintain credibility and quality of the system among the apex bodies, universities in the country and employers, the minimum study work load in terms of credits (1credit=30 study hours) has been maintained. The levels of programmes structured in ODL mode, especially by IGNOU, have following credit based study work load (Student Handbook and Prospectus, IGNOU, 2012).

Certificate level   – 16 Credits = 480 hrs of study hrs
Diploma level   -- 32 Credits = 960 hrs of study hrs
Bachelors' degree level -- 96 credits = 2880 hrs of study hours
Masters' degree level   -- 64 credits = 1920 hrs of study hrs

The workload covers the self-study of SIM, attending study centre for counselling, doing practical, writing assignments and viewing multimedia for supplementary support. A learner has to undergo study at least 20 hours per week to complete the programme.

Support for self- learning
The ODL mode of IGNOU course delivery methods is entirely different from the formal classroom face-to face education. Here in ODL, thrust is given to learning and self-study. But every ODL institution has the obligation to support self-study and strengthen the pedagogical process by giving importance to student support in the form of study centres, counselling-cum- personal contact programmes, library support, ICT intervention etc. Normally, only limited number of counseling -cum-contact programmes is arranged at study centres during week-ends with a view to advice, discuss, guide, clarify doubts and help the learners to study effectively. The one-to-one discussion, group discussion, peer group interaction and role play also form part of the academic counseling. The ICT intervention through VCD, Television, Radio, and Teleconferencing facilities in IGNOU strengthens learning and the learners are given an opportunity to interact with subject experts as well as get feedback.The continuous assessment methods form part of the study through mechanisms like writing assignments for theory courses and evaluated at the study centre. Moreover, for the courses having practical and projects, the counsellor guides the learners. The practical and project work and experiential learning all along go a long way for the learners in gaining hands-on exposure and experience and contribute in gaining relevant skills.

PILOT EXPERIMENT OF IGNOU REGIONAL CENTRE, MADURAI IN EXPLORING VALUE-ADDITION

IGNOU Regional Centre,Madurai is one of the 65 Regional Centres functioning all over India. Regional Centre, Madurai covers 17 districts in the state of Tamilnadu. This Regional Centre has been established only in the year 2008 with the view to reach the predominantly rural and remote areas in the southern part of Tamilnadu.There are around 100 Study centres functioning under this Regional Centre. Majority of the Study Centres are located in conventional Colleges and the location of these centres is in either in rural/remote areas. The men and women students undergoing study through formal system at the Bachelors' degree level in these regular host institutions housing IGNOU study centres are hailing from rural areas and also from socio-economically weaker sections of the society. Among them, there are many first generation learners and hence these students may not be able get suitable learning support. They have to only depend upon the classroom teaching to progress. On visiting many formal colleges where IGNOU study centres are located, it came to light that the formal mode host institution students are taught only in regional language, while the medium of instruction is in English. The students lack the requisite competency in English and the motivation and confidence levels are very low. The most revealing fact is that in remote areas, many students hailing from poor socio-economic background also go to part-time work during evenings and holidays for earning the livelihood for their family. As a result, many students are not able to give sufficient focus to their studies. In the above circumstances, Regioanl centre, Madurai made many visits to the selected study centres and had meetings with the students pursuing Bachelors' degree in the formal mode to explain merits of short-term ODL certificate programmes of IGNOU to them. This exercise has been regularly performed for the past two years and as a result the Regional centre is able to impress upon them about the utility and value-addition of Certificate programmes of IGNOU to them. The efforts yielded positive results and regular students of these colleges were able to understand the significance of IGNOU programmes, the importance of self-learning and its benefits. They enrolled in select certificate programmes as an add-on programme while pursuing the formal three years Bachelors' degree.The following short-term programmes become popular among the regular college going students in the selected rural pockets. The value-addition as perceived from the need to bridge the gap between education and employment to make higher education holistic from the career perspectives is given in the following Tables

Certificate programmes	Value-addition as perceived from empowerment and employability
Certificate in Functional English	Communication skills in English
Certificate in Information Technology	Computer skills and hands-on experience
Certificate in Business Skills	Knowledge about business organizations and skills for business enterprise
Certificate in Entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurial culture and opportunity to become entrepreneur
Certificate in Consumer Protection	Consumer behavior and consumer Laws
Certificate in Teaching of Primary School Mathematics	To become school teacher
Certificate in Teaching of English	To become English Teacher in a school
Certificate in Food and Nutrition	Nutrition value of foods and staring small cafeteria

The resulting enrolment status has increased over two years in the Certificate programmes in the IGNOU Madurai Region as shown in the table below (Student Admission data, IGNOU, Madurai):

Year	2009-10	2011-12
Enrolment in Certificate Programmes	697	3520

SELECT SHORT-TERM PROGRAMMES OF IGNOU FOR VALUE-ADDITION

IGNOU at present offers a number of short-term programmes of six months duration.

Study in formal system	Suggested Value-added programmes of IGNOU through ODL made
Bachelor of Arts **Disciplines:** **History, Economics, Political Science, Public Administration, Sociology,** **Library and Information Sciences, Anthropology, Social Work**	**Certificate in Functional English** **Certificate in Information Technology** **Certificate in Tourism Studies** **Certificate in NGO Management** **Certificate in Human Rights** **Certificate in Disaster Management** **Certificate in Environmental Studies** **Certificate in Teaching of Primary School Mathematics** **Certificate in Guidance** **Certificate in Teaching of English** **Certificate in Entrepreneurship** **Certificate in Communication and IT Skills**
Bachelor of Science **Disciplines:** **Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Zoology, Microbiology,** **Bio-chemistry**	**Certificate in Functional English** **Certificate in Environmental Studies** **Certificate in Teaching of Primary School Mathematics** **Certificate in Teaching of English** **Certificate Programme in Laboratory Techniques** **Certificate in Organic Farming** **Certificate in Poultry farming** **Certificate in Sericulture** **Certificate in Food and Nutrition**
Bachelor of Commerce **Discipline:** **Commerce**	**Certificate in Functional English** **Certificate in Business Skills** **Certificate in Consumer Protection** **Certificate in Entrepreneurship** **Certificate in Information Technology** **Certificate in NGO Management** **Certificate in IT and Communication Skills** **Certificate Programme on Cooperation ,Cooperative and Business Laws**
Bachelor of Engineering **Disciplines:** **Civil, Mechanical, Electrical, Electronics and** **and Communication Information Technology**	**Certificate in Functional English** **Certificate in German Language** **Certificate in Energy Technology and Management** **Advanced Certificate in Power Distribution Management** **Certificate in Business Skills** **Certificate in Entrepreneurship**
Bachelor of Computer Science	**Certificate in Functional English** **Certificate in Communication and IT Skills** **Certificate in Business Skills** **Certificate in Entrepreneurship**

The university offers about 100 certificate level programmes in various disciplines/subject. The programmes have multi-disciplinary approach and learning through distance mode creates wider possibility for employability.

Based on the pilot experiment of IGNOU, Madurai, the short-term programmes of IGNOU which would be relevant to the students studying or completed the Bachelors' level study are explored and suggested in the following Table at a glance.

The value-addition is matched depending upon discipline chosen at graduation, relevance and skill-orientation.

The major factors in deciding the course selection for value-addition in the present work are the current trends and opportunities for manpower in various sectors and fields, enhancing communication skills and computer skills, awareness about self-employment opportunities, enlightenment, enrichment and need for right learning traits and positive approach towards employability:

ODL and management of information

First, self-study or learning vis-a-vis classroom teaching gives the learners the ability to confidently comprehend the subject through Self- instructional material of IGNOU. Secondly, it helps to acquire key skills including personal skills. The self-learning through ODL mode is expected to increase personal traits like self-confidence, self-motivation, self-orientation, self-discipline, initiative, time management, adaptability, willingness to learn, communication skills, analytical ability, adjustment to new environment, face real-life situations and ability to solve problems and improves creativity. The following tangible skills are also acquired by the ODL learner:

- ➢ Management of self
- ➢ Management of others
- ➢ Management of Information
- ➢ Management of Task

The major advantages of learning through ODL are that apart from getting discipline or subject-oriented skills, generic skills interlocked with the communication skills and the willingness to learn will always help them to foresee an environment of learning, re-learning, continuous and life-long learning. These traits contribute to the success of any one both in life and work. The ODL programmes, thus empower the learners and prepares for acquiring skills.

Transfer of knowledge and value-addition for employability

The flexible strategies in-built in ODL mode of IGNOU are to include the excluded and have impact and implications for the society. Also, ODL mode of IGNOU offers a plenty of opportunities to gain competencies such as employment skills, entrepreneurship skills and avenues for self-enrichment. Against this background, the regular college going students can simultaneously study a shot-term certificate programme through IGNOU and get value-addition to the Bachelors' degree at the end of college life.   In the light of current worldwide globalization, privatization and liberalization (GPL) trends, requirements in every field are fast changing. Everyone including those already educated is expected to continuously improve knowledge and skills to cope with their future. In this context, it is not possible for anyone to remain complacent with knowledge, skills and attitudes in single field/area. It is necessary to continuously update knowledge and information in a multi-disciplinary domain and must be able to manage information about the recent trends in tune with the steady changing world of work.

In the 21st century for instance, one cannot afford to ignore disciplines like environment, energy, agriculture, health, sociology, rural development, business skills, entrepreneurship, sustainable development and social sciences as they form an integral part of societal transformation. Therefore, in absence of entire gamut of understanding about our societal and national needs, it is beyond ones capacity to succeed in life and work. For this to happen, there is certainly a compulsion for self-learning, continuous and life-long learning for acquiring skills and need for transfer of knowledge and skills beyond the scope of formal graduation.

Thus, the contribution of short –term programmes of IGNOU gains importance towards empowerment, employability as well as for the human resources development of the country. Also, the nation is also able to benefit in enhancing Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education and helps in creating a learning society with basic skills capable of nurturing the productivity and development.

CONCLUSION

- ➢ Graduates and those pursuing graduation, enrolling in the short-term programmes of IGNOU are to be further explored.
- ➢ Short-term programmes of IGNOU not only improve self-learning but also create scope for value-addition to graduates and increase the scope for employability.
- ➢ Short-term programmes open up scope for gaining knowledge and skills in an additional discipline.
- ➢ The value –addition through short-term programmes creates enrichment and empowerment towards learning.
- ➢ Additional certification is gained along with the graduation.
- ➢ Value-addition has its advantage of creating opportunity for self employment and income generation.

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Dr. KISHORE is working in IGNOU for about two decades. At present, he is currently working as the Deputy Director, IGNOU Regional Centre, Madurai. He has published widely in the area of Distance Education. The main research interest in distance education are reaching disadvantaged groups, quality parameters in student support services in IGNOU, skill development through distance education, inclusive education especially training school teachers in the area of disability. Intervention for education of prison inmates through ODL in the state of Tamilnadu, India has been also one of the significant contributions made by him.

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