



REACHING THE UNREACHED THROUGH ODL - CASE STUDY OF SPECIAL STUDY CENTERS OF IGNOU WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO STUDY CENTERS IN JAILS

Kanan Sharma, IGNOU, India

Summary

The setting up of IGNOU was a significant milestone in imparting education to people who otherwise have little access to any system of education. In addition to large sections of population deprived of education due to varied reasons of gender, caste, creed and geographical diversity, even Jail inmates who could not have imagined that while they are serving their terms in prison, could add on and contribute constructively towards self development, are now pursuing studies from IGNOU.

The benefit derived by virtue of extending higher education to Jail inmates draws no parallel. This is brought out in the case study done on inmates of Tihar Jail in New Delhi. Before their Jail term, a large percentage of these inmates had remained deprived of higher education. However when they were empowered educationally while undergoing their Jail term it helped them to rehabilitate and contribute effectively to the society and themselves on release.

Introduction

The Indian Constitution is committed to the equality of citizens. The Directive Principles of the Government Policy are also for the promotion of the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the society, in particular, of the SC/STs and Minorities. To achieve the objective of "Equality" with many facets, special provisions have also been made in the constitution of India. Keeping this spirit of the Indian Constitution IGNOU was established in 1985 with a mandate to democratize Higher Education and to reach the unreached. The setting up of IGNOU was a significant milestone in imparting Higher Education to people who otherwise had little access to any system of education. In addition to large sections of population who were deprived of education due to various reasons of caste, creed, gender, religion and geographical barrier, even jail inmates who could not have imagined, that while they are serving their terms in jail, could add on and contribute constructively to self development, are now doing courses from IGNOU.

Concept of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)

In Its endeavor to reach the unreached, to democratize higher education and to provide better Student Support Services, University has designed and developed a vast network of Regional Centres and Learner Support Centers. In view of the geographical, social, economical and other kinds of barriers a diversified delivery system has been evolved which needs different kinds of Learner Support Centres.

IGNOU has adopted a collaborative approach for the establishment of these Learner Support Centers. It strives for the cooperation and collaboration with existing universities and other institutions of higher learning in its mission to reach the underprivileged and disadvantaged sections of the society.

Concepts and Objectives of Special Study Centers in IGNOU

Article 46 of the Indian Constitution states that, "The State shall promote, with special care, the education and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes." The establishment of Special Study Centers by IGNOU is one of the ways of enacting the provisions laid down in this Article. Therefore Special Study Centres have been established by the University, primarily for reaching the unreached, for those disadvantaged groups of the society who for one reason or the other could not access higher education. Under the category of Special Study Centres following groups have been identified:

1. Women
2. Minority community
3. Physically challenged
4. Rural community
5. Residents of Remote and Isolated areas
6. Scheduled Castes
7. Scheduled Tribes
8. Jail inmates

In the endeavor of reaching the unreached the University has established Special Study Centres at organizations like National Association for the Blind, Al Ameen Education Society, Amar Jyoti Rehabilitation & Research Centre, All India Women's Conference, Deaf & Dumb Association, Jana Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) etc. JSSs are institutes funded by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India, for conducting Vocational Training Programme to different clientele groups varying from illiterates, neoliterates to literates. Working of these JSSs is in tune with IGNOU's objective of reaching out to the disadvantaged sections.

India is a country with vast disparities. Literacy rate is the lowest among the Muslim population, especially among Muslim girls' population. Sachar Committee (A Committee constituted by the Prime Minister on Social, Economic and Educational development of Muslim community of India) has identified 100 Muslim dominated districts, where educational opportunities are limited. IGNOU envisaged establishing at least one Special Study Centre in each of these Educationally and Economically Backward Blocks. So far 18 such Special Study Centres have already been established.

In order to reach such sections of the society through Special Study Centers, collaborating arrangements are worked out with following kinds of organizations and institutions-

- (a) Govt. Departments
- (b) Public Institutions
- (c) Panchayats
- (d) Voluntary organizations
- (e) Cooperatives
- (f) Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs)

IGNOU has also collaborated with the confederation of NGOs of Rural India (CNRI) and has established Special Study Centre in rural and remote areas.

Out of the various Special Study Centers established to extend education to these sections of the society, which are disadvantaged as far as accessibility to education is concerned, the Special Study Centers in the Jails for Jail inmates have a significant place.

Learners' Profile and Feedback - A Case Study

IGNOU has 27 Special Study Centers for Jail inmates across the country. This study was conducted in four of these study centers. These were (a) Tihar Jail, New Delhi (b) Distt. Jail, Ambphalla, Jammu & Kashmir (c) Distt. Jail Udampur, J & K (d) Central Jail, Kote Bhalwal, J & K. Data was obtained on 184 inmates from these Jails. Apart from this data a questionnaire was distributed and the responses of the inmates were analysed.

The age distribution showed that 35% students (65 out of 184) were in the age group between 30-35 years. The next highest group belonged to the 25-30 years age group and included 29% students (53 out of 184). This also implies that majority of these enrolled students (i.e. 64%) have a long productive life ahead at least when they are released after they do their courses while serving their term in jail.

Out of 184 inmates enrolled for various courses, 69 inmates were those charged with murder and other similar serious charges, 19 for dacoity and 19 for kidnapping/rape and serving jail terms varying from 5 years to life imprisonment. Thus, a total of 107 out of 184 (58%) were serious offenders serving long jail terms but enrolled for various courses. This shows a keen desire to now modify / evolve and lead a respectable life.

Out of these 107 serious offenders 12 were less than senior secondary level and pursuing Bachelor Preparatory Programme following which they planned to undertake graduation. The other 95 were enrolled for graduation (63) and post graduation (32) courses.

The overall distribution when observing all types of offenders showed that 85 out of 184 (46%) offenders were enrolled for the BA course, thus, aiming to be a graduate while undergoing their jail term. It was also interesting to note that the next highest enrollment was for Certificate in Human Rights. This seems to reflect on the area of interest among the offenders.

It was also observed that 124 out of 184 enrolled jail inmates (67%) were not aware of IGNOU or any other Open and Distance Learning Institutions before coming to jail. It was only after starting their jail term that they were informed about IGNOU and how they could undertake studies through Open and Distance Learning while serving their jail term. In fact, none of the students, including those who were aware of ODL, were aware that facilities exist for jail inmates to enroll for courses through ODL and develop educationally while serving their jail term.

It was noticed that the fees for these inmates was being borne by the Jail Administration (Prison Welfare Funds) / State Government. However, at Tihar Jail, New Delhi, as per the earlier practice, the fees was being borne by the Jail Administration. But in order to discourage non serious learners, the fees for only the needy and deserving learners was being borne by the Jail Administration. The learners who are otherwise well off and can afford, were bearing their own fees.

The facility of counseling sessions which used to be held previously had now been withdrawn. It was learnt that this was done as some inmates had tried to develop contacts with the people outside through the academic counselors and the academic councilors were being asked by the inmates to serve as messengers.

The inmates informed that they had adequate provisions for writing their Assignment Responses; however, the library in the Jail was seen to be ill equipped with not many books for all the programmes. Also most of the books available were quite old editions. However, most of the inmates were able to devote adequate time for studies. 172 inmates out of the sample (93%) responded that they were able to devote more than 10 hrs. per week for studies. Only 12 inmates (7%) stated that they were able to devote less than 10 hrs. per week.

Peer Group interaction was limited to within the jail inmates.

The facilities of Interactive Radio Counselling/Teleconferencing/Gyan Darshan/Gyan Vani were not available for these learners. It is felt that as limited TV viewership and earlier limited radio listening was permitted in the jail, it makes a strong case for introduction of these limited educational channels to be viewed / heard.

Despite these shortcomings 100% of the inmates responded that undertaking these studies would serve as an important confidence building measure and would help to rehabilitate them on their release from jail. The pass percentage was also very encouraging; however the exact pass percentage could not be ascertained.

Out of the suggestions received from the inmates, some relevant suggestions are as under:

- Ø All the programmes of the University should be made available for the inmate learners also.
- Ø Study Material for all the programmes on offer by the University should be in Hindi also.
- Ø Study Material in Hindi/Regional languages should be in simple language.
- Ø Academic Councilors should be available for all the courses.
- Ø Academic sessions should be conducted at par with other Study Centres.

- Ø There should be facility for projects, as part of the course.
- Ø Information about Results of Term End Examinations should reach the learners of Jail timely.
- Ø Assignments' grades should be informed well within time.
- Ø Frequent visits should be made by the officials of the concerned Regional Centre/Headquarters.
- Ø There should be some forum/platform for the redressal of grievances of the inmate learners

Conclusions and Recommendations

There are certain restrictions due to which the all suggestions received from these Special Study Centres of this kind cannot be implemented. However, the study has certainly brought out the usefulness and significance of these types of Special Study Centers and proved that this mode of imparting education is an effective method especially for this section of people. The results are also very encouraging.

It was also revealed that counselling sessions were not being held at these Special Study Centers for Jail inmates. However, this problem can be overcome by providing Teleconferencing facility at these centers. In this way, the inmates will be able to interact with the faculty and subject experts through these TC sessions through EduSat. In a similar manner Interactive Radio Counselling which are aired on Sundays and Tuesdays through Gyan Vani Channels, could also be made available and prove to be very useful. This could be easily done as limited TV viewership is as such allowed to these inmates. If required, a moderator could be positioned at these centers at the time of Interactive Counselling sessions.

CDs of all the programmes which are on offer at these Special SCs, could be made available at these centers. CDs of the Tele Conferencing sessions could also be made available.

The concept of 'Markat Nyaya' (the manner in which mother monkey brings up its baby) and 'Marjar Nyaya' (the manner in which a cat brings up its kittens) as explained in the old Sanskrit scriptures draws parallel with the formal system of education and the Open and Distance Learning system. In the formal system of education the student is closely attached to the teacher as the baby monkey is attached to its mother. In the case of ODL, though the teacher is closely guiding and training the student like the cat coaches its kittens, the student/kittens are not clinging to the teacher/cat. Cat has to carry her kittens by holding them by their neck. Thus by adopting special measures, at the Special Study Centers, ODL can prove to be an effective method of imparting education to the Jail inmates.

Special care should be taken so that the results of the Term End Examinations are available and Self Instructional Material are dispatched timely to these learners. The Assignments should be sent to these learners as Hard Copy, as such Study Centers do not have the facility to download the same and the evaluated Assignments with detailed comments should also be sent back to these learners in time. For providing better support services to these Special SCs and redressal of problems of these inmates, a 'Single Window System' may be initiated at the Headquarter level.

To conclude, the benefit derived by virtue of extending education to jail inmates draws no parallel. This is also brought out in the study done on inmates of the four Jails covered in this

study. A large number of these people remain deprived of any kind of education due to various reasons before their jail term. However, when they develop themselves educationally while undergoing their jail term, it helps to transform them into effective supports to the society and themselves on release. The confidence level is also given a boost.

It must be realized that through these Centers IGNOU is not only imparting Higher education to the learners, but also providing an opportunity for the reformation/rehabilitation of the inmates to bring them back to the mainstream of the society. Better support services through constant humane approach, will transform the Jail to serve as a remedial home. Thus, sincere efforts are required to be put in on the part of IGNOU, to provide better support services for the inmates, so that they are completely transformed for the better and make them more resilient and patient; to develop a positive attitude; to facilitate them to attain a situation where –

'Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world had not broken u into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where the words come out from the depth of truth;

Into that heaven of freedom, my father, let my country awake.'

--Rabindranath Tagore