

Regular Telecasts by IGNOU: Feedback from Students

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Sisir Basu's study presented here is perhaps the first attempt to assess the impact of IGNOU video programmes on the students of the University. The Indian Television Doordharshan has been telecasting IGNOU programmes for quite some years but their educational use has yet to be assessed systematically. Such an assessment is possible through the feedback from IGNOU students, besides the opinions of experts and others. The issues identified and the data collected on them by Basu would help others to delve deep into specific areas of study to assess the utility of multimedia facilities offered to IGNOU students.

Introduction

The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has been telecasting its curriculum based video programmes since May 20, 1991. The target audience of these telecasts are the IGNOU students. Telecasting curriculum based video programmes is an important component of distance education which aims at making the process of teaching – learning interesting and beneficial both for the students and the teacher. It is also hoped that these programmes are useful for the students to understand the course related subject matter. To assess the actual utilisation of the telecasts by IGNOU students, a survey was conducted among the Bachelors Degree Programme (BDP) and the Management students by the Communication Division, IGNOU, in March, 1992.

This study was undertaken to provide the Communication Division with feedback on the utilisation of the telecasts by the students and to get insights on the quality of the programmes as assessed by the students. On the basis of the findings, future course of action, it was intended, could be taken to improve on the quality of the programmes, and also some concrete steps could possibly be taken to maximise the utilisation of the same.

Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to: get a feedback from the IGNOU students on the telecasts, their opinion regarding the usefulness of the programmes, their feedback on the quality of the programmes; and suggest ways to improve the package.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were to :

- determine the media-habits of the IGNOU students;
- find out the opinion of the students regarding the various facilities provided at the IGNOU study centres;
- find out how useful the telecasts are for the students; and
- find out the reactions of the students on the various components of the programmes.

Design

It was a one-shot survey research project. A total of 33 IGNOU study centres located in the 16 Regional Centre cities were considered for this study. Thus, the representation of all the 16 regions was ensured.

Respondents

The active students of all the Management Programmes (i.e. Masters in Business Management, Diploma in Management, Post Graduate Diploma in Human Resource Management, Financial Management, Operations Management and Marketing Management. Henceforth we shall refer to all these different courses as Management Programme) and the Bachelor's Degree Programme (BDP), enrolled in the academic year of 1992-93 and attached with study centres located at the cities where Regional Centres are located were considered as the respondents for this study. A total of 1498 questionnaires were sent to the students and only 431 respondents returned the duly filling in questionnaires.

Sampling

1. The regional headquarter cities — sixteen of them were identified as the areas for collecting the data from.
2. The total number of students enrolled in the BDP and the Management Programmes in each study centre was determined.
3. The number of students year wise (1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year) was determined.
4. In total, the regional headquarter cities had 2943 and 7175 students in the Management and the BDP programmes respectively.
5. For the purpose of simplifying the calculation, 501 and 997 students were considered for the Management and the BDP programmes respectively. A total of 1498 students constituted 14.80 per cent of the population of 10,118 (total number of the BDP and the Management Programmes students in the Regional Centre cities).

6. The number of the questionnaires per study centre was determined as per the ratio of the students enrolled in the study centres. That is, the total number of the questionnaires was determined first, and then the questionnaires were distributed among the study centres as per the ratio. The questionnaires per study Centre were again distributed as per the ratio of the students in each year by way of random sampling.

Instrument

A questionnaire of twelve pages containing 27 items was prepared for the purpose of the survey. The items were prepared as per the objectives of the study. Some items were divided into smaller units for clear understanding. This instrument was pretested in Delhi region.

The questionnaire was bilingual — in English and Hindi. The variables studied were as follows:

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| A. Audience | * | Sex |
| B. Educational background | * | Educational achievement before joining IGNOU. |
| | * | Reasons for Joining IGNOU |
| C. Economic Status | * | Profession |
| D. Media Habits | * | Ownership/Access: Radio Set |
| | * | Ownership/Access: TV Set |
| | * | Ownership/Access: VCR/VCP set |
| | * | Subscriber/Access: Newspaper |
| | * | Time spent with the above mentioned media. |
| E. Utilisation of IGNOU
Telecasts | * | Viewing habits of the telecasts |
| | * | Reaction to the telecasts in terms of |
| | | — Language |
| | | — Content |
| | | — The speed of delivery |
| | | — Pronunciation |
| | | — The presenters skills, and the quality of their presentations |
| | | — The time of the telecast |
| F. In addition, the following variables with regard to the utilisation of the facilities (library, counselling sessions, audio/video cassettes and players etc.) provided at the study centres were also studied to have a comprehensive view: | * | Usage of facilities at the study centres |
| | * | Adequacy of facilities at the study centres |

The questionnaire was divided into four sections, each having a specific theme.

Collection of Data

This study was the first of its kind conducted by the Communication Division with the help of the in-house faculty.

The printed questionnaires were sent to respondents with a request that they should send back the duly filled in questionnaires. Stamped and self-addressed envelopes were used for faster communication. However, due to various reasons, the questionnaires could not be sent to the respondents in time. Therefore, the arrival of the responses was considerably delayed. The data collection was restricted to mail survey only. A total of 341 out of 1498 students sent back the duly filled in questionnaires.

Analysis of Data

The data collected through the questionnaires were collated. The background data as enumerated in Section A of the questionnaire are presented in the findings. The media habits of the students as per the data of Section B of the questionnaire, utilisation of the facilities provided at the study centres for the students had been collected from Section C of the questionnaire. And Section D provided the information regarding the utilisation of the telecasts by the students. In addition to these, enough suggestions and guidelines given by the students to maximise the use of telecasts had also come.

Findings

Background of the Students

This section presents the background of the IGNOU students under study. The background of the students in terms of sex, age, marital status, highest educational qualifications before joining IGNOU, occupation, and motivation to enroll in the IGNOU academic programmes have all been provided by the 431 respondents in items 1 to 8 of the questionnaire.

Sex and Age

There were no female respondent from the Management programmes. However, a quarter of the BDP respondents were females. A total of 192 (55.97%) BDP students were in the age group of 20-25 years, whereas, 40 respondents (64.51%) of the Management students are between 26 and 35 years.

Marital and employment status

This difference in age between the Management and the BDP students was clear when the marital and employment status were considered. A total of 147 (75.80%)

respondents from the students of the Management courses were married, while it was the reverse with the BDP students — only 142 (38.12%) were married.

59 respondents (96%) of the Management students were employed i.e. only 4% were not yet employed. In comparison, 129 respondents (36%) of the BDP students were unemployed. This was because the BDP students were comparatively younger in age than the Management students. The Management students joined the IGNOU programmes to improve their career prospects as they had already completed their basic degree course, and were employed. A total of 268 respondents from the BDP programme joined IGNOU to complete their higher education to improve their prospects for employment.

Media habits

More management students (55%) devoted time to watch television than the BDP students (45%), whereas the BDP students devoted more time to radio (31%) than the Management students (16%). Comparatively, the BDP students devoted less time to print medium than the Management students. Therefore, attention is required for media selection for various groups of students enrolling in different academic programmes.

Utilisation of facilities

The IGNOU study centres are provided with various facilities such as books, journals, audio cassettes, audio cassette players, video cassettes, video cassette players, etc. These facilities help the students in the process of learning.

It has been found that the students from both the Management and the BDP programmes preferred to visit the study centres on Saturdays, Sundays and to some extent on Mondays and Wednesdays. The main purpose for the students to visit the study centres was to attend the counselling sessions. The students (21% — Management and 18% — BDP) visited the study centres to use the library. A few visited the study centres to watch the video programmes or to listen to audio programmes. Though a large percentage (Management 58% and BDP 48%) of the respondents had said that they found the required books and journals either 'always' or 'most of the time' in the library, quite a few (Management 42% — BDP — 52%) had mentioned about their bad experience with the availability of books and journals.

The respondents were not happy with the working condition of the audio sets. The students (Management — 27% and BDP — 36%) found the audio sets either 'seldom' or 'never' working. 27% of the Management and 23% of the BDP respondents said that they could find the audio set working only 'sometimes'. They had similar experience with the availability of audio cassettes. This is a matter of concern as these cassettes may have very important teaching points and information for the students.

The Management students had better experience than the BDP students with the working condition of TV and VCR. The respondents (58.4%) from the BDP programmes either found the TV and VCR 'never' or 'seldom' in working condition. But the experience with the availability of video cassette were more or less the same. The respondents (Management 20% — BDP 38%) had mentioned that they either 'seldom' or never 'found' the relevant video cassettes.

The respondents (Management 88% — DBP 90%) had found the counsellors available at the study centres either 'always' or 'most of the time'. However, 10% each of the BDP and the Management respondents 'did not find' or 'seldom found' the counsellors in the study centres.

Awareness of IGNOU educational telecasts

It was found that 96.72% of the respondents from the Management and 77.02% of the respondents from the BDP were aware of the telecasts. That means 23% of the BDP respondents were not aware of it. The findings determined that 20% of the Management and 40% of the BDP students did not watch the telecasts. The respondents indicated various reasons for this. The BDP respondents (48%) mentioned the unsuitability of the telecast time was the single-most reason for not watching the telecasts. The other reasons mentioned were non-possession of TV sets (BDP — 19%), and 'no information' about the telecasts. The responses of the Management students regarding the reasons for not watching telecasts were insignificant.

The respondents (Management-75% and BDP-53%) mentioned that they would not worry much if they would miss viewing any programme. A very small segment (Management-15% and BDP-35%) had mentioned that they would watch the missed programme at the study centres or take notes from friends or record it for later viewing.

Is the IGNOU telecast time convenient?

Respondents from both the Management (52.84%) and the BDP programme (56.59%) mentioned that the present telecast time was unsuitable. They indicated various time preferences ranging from early morning to late evening. It seemed that a repeat telecast in the evening would help a large number of students to watch the telecast.

Evaluation

Presentation

All (100%) the respondents of the Management programme and 87% of the BDP were satisfied with the convincing posture of the presenters as far as the knowledge of the subject matter was concerned. The respondents (Management 98% and BDP 96%) were also satisfied with the pronunciation. Though a majority (Management 71% and BDP 96%) of the respondents evaluated the speech pace of the program-

mes watched as 'appropriate', some of them (Management 26% and BDP 35%) thought that the pace was either 'very fast' or 'fast'. The 'voice quality' of the presenters was accepted by the respondents (Management 100% and BDP 97%) saying that generally it was either 'attractive' or 'average'. The 'narration style' had similar reaction from the respondents. The technical inputs such as sound (Management 53% BDP 67%), picture (Management 66% — BDP 63%) and illustrations (Management-98% BDP 89.7%) were rated highly by the respondents.

Conclusions

The IGNOU has succeeded in breaking new ground in the area of higher education in this country. A lot of efforts have been made by this institution to make it the 'light' for many citizens who have been denied higher education for various reasons. This study has shown that there are quite a few weaknesses at the study centres, in the audio-video programmes and in the channels adopted by IGNOU to communicate with the students. This study was a general one with an intention to find out the utilisation of the telecasts by the students and their opinion on various aspects of the telecasts and programmes. In the process, we could see how many problems hinder the telecasts from reaching the students. These problems are to be addressed with firm commitment. In brief, the following points could be emphasised.

- Many of the students are not aware of the telecasts. Many more do not watch them. Implementing the DE package is one thing and inviting students to exploit this package to the maximum possible to enhance the quality of education is another aspect. This study points out that some work is urgently needed in the latter.
- Students do face some problems while intending to use various facilities located at the study centres. The negative experiences may not encourage the students to look for such facilities. Eventually, such repeated experience by a sizeable number of students may defeat the very purpose of Distance Education.
- If the telecast time cannot be shifted and/or repeat telecast is not possible, some alternative channels of reaching the students, with the same teaching points, will have to be explored.
- The students, in general, liked the IGNOU programmes and they benefitted from them. But a lot of suggestions for improvement in the production of the video programmes have been made by them. A serious effort should be made to bring about a qualitative change in the programme production.
- In the following section some recommendations are being made to undertake various schemes for evaluation of the audio and video programmes.

Recommendations

The IGNOU has grown and developed in a very fast pace in the last ten years of its existence. The pace is probably too fast to take care of all the objectives that it has set forth for itself. Therefore, a little pause is necessary to consolidate whatever has been built so far. The best possible way to consolidate is to evaluate all that IGNOU has been doing to meet the various educational needs of the multitude. The following are some recommendations to strengthen the IGNOU instructional package, particularly the audio-video components:

1. The possibility of telecasting from various regional transmitters with different schedules can be considered, instead of or in addition to the present nation-wide telecast. Since the mandate of IGNOU is to bring higher education to the large number of the citizens, an effort is urgently required to produce programmes in the languages the students are comfortable with, i.e. in the mother tongues.
2. It has been found through the survey that a lot of students, specially those doing the BDP courses depend on audio channels. Their media habits suggest that for various reasons audio/radio is preferred. Therefore, it could be a good idea for IGNOU to send audio programmes/cassettes to the students in addition to the printed materials. Two to three audio cassettes with relevant programmes could enrich the students' understanding of their respective courses.
3. In Distance Education it is imperative to update, correct, and finetune the printed material over the years. The audio-video programmes should also be updated, corrected, and finetuned through evaluations and tests. After a gestation, courses consisting of printed materials, audios, videos, and probably computer inputs wherever possible, should be evaluated.
4. The present study on the utilization of the curriculum based telecasts has been confined to the IGNOU students only. It is also appropriate to know what the other sections of the population such as academicians, non-IGNOU-students, general public etc., say about the audio video programmes. Their comments and suggestions about IGNOU telecast together with that of students will provide a holistic view on the quality of our effort to impart education through electronic media. And this holistic view will be very helpful for the planning of our future audio/video programmes. Therefore, the panels of academicians, the non-IGNOU students and the general public can be formed and be assigned to evaluate audio/video programmes of various courses.
5. The above mentioned survey and panel research will definitely focus on the form, content and presentation of the IGNOU audio-video programmes. But, it will also be a fruitful exercise to find out how much knowledge and information each video and audio programme imparts to

the targeted students. The increment in the level of knowledge through the help of pre-test and post-test mechanism is a useful exercise. A suitable questionnaire to measure the knowledge should be devised. Such an exercise will also focus on how specific our audio-video programmes are.

6. Close interaction and cooperation among the producers, script writers, faculty members, and the production team is required for the making of an effective educational programme. It is desired that the process of the making of a programme is followed and documented from its inception to the end. This research will focus on the loopholes, weaknesses, bottlenecks and the strengths of the process. Thus, in future appropriate action could be taken to overcome the hindrances for a smooth and efficient process of programme production.
7. There are more than 250 study centres spread throughout the country. These study centres have the in-house facilities for the students to deepen and sharpen the process of gaining knowledge. The facilities are the libraries, audio/video sets, books, journals, counselling sessions, classrooms etc. But how do these study centres function? Are the facilities supposed to be at the disposal of the students available in working conditions? Are they adequate? How do the students look at these centres? etc. To have answers to all these questions, an indepth study is required. Some study centres can be picked up and their activities could be studied in detail. A beginning can be made with three study centres in a region.

Content of The Programmes

Periodic recapitulation of salient points

Majority of the respondents both from the Management and the BDP courses (Management 67% — BDP 57%) said that the salient points of the programmes watched were repeated at regular intervals. This style helped them to keep the teaching points in mind. However, a lot of students (Management 43% and BDP 32%) felt that it was not done regularly, or done only 'sometimes' or 'rarely'.

Information/content load

The respondents (20%) from both the disciplines complained that the programmes which they had watched had 'little' content. On the other hand 6% of the Management and 15% of the BDP respondents said that the 'content' was heavy. These complaints about 'heaviness' and 'littleness' of the content must be looked into. A few respondents — 5.8% of the Management and 16.7% of the BDP — mentioned that they detected some factual errors in the information.

Development of the central theme to a proper conclusion

The respondents (Management 77% and BDP 68%) found that all the programmes they watched had developed the central theme of the programme to a proper conclusion. Still, almost a quarter (Management 22% and BDP 28%) of the respondents from each discipline found that it was done only 'sometimes'.

Explanation of the technical terms

The technical terms of the programmes watched by the respondents were explained clearly as per 41.7% of the Management and 42.2% of the BDP respondents. Quite a few (Management 10% and BDP 5%), however, thought that the technical terms remained unexplained, the rest said that these were explained to some extent.

Difficulty with the language of presentation

More than 90% of the Management and 70% of the BDP respondents said that they had no problem with the language of presentation. However, 10% of the Management and 30% of the BDP students had difficulties with the language. They mentioned that they would prefer programmes in their mother tongues like — Bengali, Assamese, Gujarati, Oriya, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada and Urdu.

Proper preview session

The Communication Division faithfully conducts a preview session for each of the video programmes. These preview sessions are to be organised properly so that the discussions and deliberations on the programmes previewed could become meaningful. The data collected from the filled in questionnaires can help the staff of the Division to grade each and every programme. It may not be the best or the only way to judge the quality of the programmes, but a beginning could be made. This grading of the programmes could help the staff to gauge the quality of IGNOU productions.

It may be a good idea to pre-test a programme at the script stage so that many mistakes and weaknesses which generally creep into the finished product could be eliminated at the earlier stages.