

# COMMUNICATION

## Freshers in IGNOU : A Study of their Awareness, Interest and Motivation

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**Abstract:** *The present study was conducted with 196 freshers in IGNOU to study (i) their awareness of open learning system and IGNOU in particular, (ii) interest in study centre activities, and (iii) motivation for joining a specific programme. A questionnaire consisting of 24 items was administered on them individually during the third week of September, 1998 at Regional Centre, Calcutta when they took 'spot admission' at IGNOU. The findings revealed that most of the learners did not have clear knowledge about the open learning system and they were not fully aware about IGNOU structure and functions. A large percentage of learners had joined the specific programme for acquiring educational qualification with the hope to get better job opportunities. Most of them were interested to visit study centres for attending counselling and consulting library.*

### Introduction

Distance educators are of the opinion that amongst all the important research areas which need urgent attention 'learners and learning' is an important one (Moore, 1995; Panda, 1992). As distance education is learners-centered, distance educators should be fully aware of the background characteristics of the learners, their needs, attitude towards distance education, awareness, interest, motivation, expectation, study habits, problems and so on. Some researchers in India (e.g. Patheneni, 1996; Rathore, Singh and Dubey, 1996) have focused their attention on some of these aspects. The data for these studies were collected from the learners of some particular regions of the country. Some regions in India have not yet been received proper attention by the researchers e.g. eastern and north-eastern regions.

Open learning system is innovative in nature. It relaxes entry qualifications, uses specially designed learning materials and modern educational technologies, provides student support services and applies advanced method of evaluation. If the learners are not fully aware of this system before joining, they may find themselves in an unfamiliar situation. They may face difficulty to learn through unfamiliar learning packages that are sent to them. Thus, the awareness of open learning system at the time of entry may be an important aspect of study. This is more important in the context of a vast country

like India where the experiences of learners vary considerably from one region to another due to geographical, social, cultural and psychological factors.

The open university offers various support services to its learners through a network of study centres. How far the learners are interested in these activities may be another important aspect of study.

Using modern technologies an open university offers various programmes of study in which unlimited members of learners may take admission. The learners' choice vary considerably while selecting programmes. Why the learners select a particular programme may be another aspect of study.

Findings obtained from this kind of study will help the distance educators to plan for various kinds of student support services in advance and to modify the existing pattern of student support services, if necessary.

The present study has concentrated on (i) a group of learners who have taken admission to various programmes of IGNOU for the first time, and (ii) comparatively a new region for investigation in the area of distance education i.e. West Bengal region.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of this study were: (i) to study the background characteristics of the freshers in IGNOU, (ii) to find out the reason for joining a specific programme of study, (iii) to study their level of awareness of open learning system and IGNOU in particular, and (iv) to study their interest in attending various activities at study centres of IGNOU.

### **Methodology**

A few hundreds of learners visited IGNOU Regional Centre, Calcutta during the month of September, 1998 for taking 'spot-admission' to various programmes at IGNOU. The author of this article was attached to Regional Centre, Calcutta as Assistant Regional Director at that time.

The data were collected by the author using a questionnaire which was administered on those learners only who were interested and volunteered for this study. Thus, the sample of this study consisted of 196 learners who took 'spot-admission' at IGNOU Regional Centre, Calcutta during the third week of September, 1998.

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of 24 items. The questionnaire was bilingual – in English and Bengali. The items were prepared as per the objectives of the study. Some items were divided into smaller units for better understanding and clear-cut responses from the learners. The specific areas covered in the questionnaire were as follows:

- Background characteristics of the learners-age, sex, marital status, employment status, family income, educational qualifications;

- access to media — newspaper, radio, TV, VCR-VCP, computer;
- reasons for joining a specific programme at IGNOU;
- awareness of open learning system in general and IGNOU in particular;
- interest in study centre activities.

The questionnaire was administered individually just after the learner took 'spot-admission'. The learners were asked to respond to all the items/questions frankly. The respondents took about 25 minutes in average to respond to all the items/questions.

## Findings

**Selection of programmes :** It was found that all the 196 learners who volunteered for this study had taken admission to 11 different programmes viz., Bachelor of Computer Application (BCA), Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com.), Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.), Bachelor of Library and Information Sciences (BLISc.), Diploma in Computer in Office Management (DCO), Diploma in Tourism Studies (DTS), Diploma in Nutrition and Health Education (DNHE), Postgraduate Diploma in Journalism & Mass Communication (PGJMC), Postgraduate Diploma in Distance Education (PGDDE) and Master's of Library and Information Sciences (MLISc). Number of learners (both males and females) were more in BCA, BA and DTS programme (Table 1).

**Age :** The learners were grouped into four different age ranges : 18-22 years, 23-27 years, 28-32 years, and above 32 years. Majority of learners of BCA, BA, B.Com., B.Sc., DCO, DTS and DNHE belonged to first 2 groups, whereas, majority of the learners of BLISc., MLISc., and PGJMC belonged to 3rd and 4th group.

**Employment status :** All the learners of PGJMC, 75% learners of BLISc, 55.5% learners of MLISc., 66.67% learners of PGDDE, 24% learners of DCO and 28.57% learners of DNHE programmes were employed at the time of taking admission.

**Marital status :** Most of the learners of MLISc (66.67%), 25% learners of BLISc, 33.33% learners of PGJMC, 12% learners of DCO and 28.50% learners of DNHE programme were married.

**Family income :** The learners were grouped under three different family income ranges: less than Rs 5000, Rs 5000 to Rs 10000, and above Rs 10000 per month. Out of 196 learners of 11 programmes under study, only 44.44% learners of MLISc programme belonged to the highest income range (above Rs 10,000). Most of the learners of B.Sc. and BLISc programme fell under lowest income range (less than Rs 5000) and learners of other programmes belonged to middle income range (Rs 5000 to Rs 10000).

**Highest qualification :** All the learners who had joined various bachelor degree programmes (except BLISc.) were non-graduates. A large percentage of non-graduate learners had also joined DTS (63.64%) and DNHE (71.43%) programmes. A large chunk of the post-graduate learners had taken admission in MLISc. (55.55%) and a moderate percentage of post-graduate learners had taken admission in PGDDE (33.33%) programme.

Table 1 : Programmes as selected by the learners

( In Number )

Learners	BCA	BA	BCom	BSc	BLISc	DCO	DTS	DNHE	PGJMC	PGDDE	MLISc
Male	22	17	10	10	9	21	10	3	5	4	3
Female	11	22	8	2	7	4	12	4	4	2	6
Total	33	39	18	12	15	25	22	7	9	6	9

Table 2 : Learners' access to various media

( In Percentage )

Media	BCA	BA	BCom	BSc	BLISc	DCO	DTS	DNHE	PGJMC	PGDDE	MLISc
Newspaper	100.00	84.61	100.00	100.00	100.00	80.00	90.91	85.71	100.00	100.00	88.89
Radio	63.64	71.79	77.78	83.33	87.50	72.00	90.91	100.00	100.00	100.00	88.89
TV	63.64	92.31	77.78	83.33	87.50	96.00	90.91	85.71	100.00	100.00	88.89
VCR/VCP	27.27	35.90	11.11	8.33	6.25	24.00	9.09	28.57	22.22	16.67	11.11
ACR/ACP	21.21	20.51	22.22	25.00	18.75	28.00	27.27	28.57	66.66	33.33	11.11
Computer	18.18	23.08	11.11	0.00	6.25	56.00	4.54	0.00	33.33	0.00	44.44

Table 3 : Information received by the learners from various sources

*(In Percentage)*

Sources	BCA	BA	BCom	BSc	BLISc	DCO	DTS	DNHE	PGJMC	PGDDE	MLISc
Book	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	11.11
Newspaper	45.45	38.46	55.55	66.67	37.50	48.00	36.37	28.58	55.22	33.33	44.44
Friends	18.18	23.08	11.11	16.67	0.00	0.00	9.09	14.28	11.11	0.00	0.00
Information Brochure	36.37	30.77	33.33	16.67	62.50	52.00	54.54	57.14	33.33	66.67	44.44
Radio	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
TV	30.30	5.13	22.22	33.33	25.00	24.00	54.54	42.85	55.55	33.33	55.55
School	0.00	2.56	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Table 4 : Learners' awareness of open learning system and IGNOU (structure and functions)

*(In Percentage)*

Variables	BCA	BA	BCom	BSc	BLISc	DCO	DTS	DNHE	PGJMC	PGDDE	MLISc
Open Learning System	18.18	12.82	11.11	16.67	12.50	20.00	9.09	14.28	22.22	16.66	22.22
IGNOU Structure & Functions	15.15	7.69	0.00	0.00	12.50	16.00	0.00	14.28	22.22	0.00	22.22
IGNOU Programme in Doordarshan	66.67	69.23	88.88	66.67	75.00	76.00	90.98	71.43	55.55	100.00	55.55
IGNOU Teleconferencing Facility	15.15	7.69	11.11	16.67	6.25	20.00	0.00	0.00	11.11	0.00	22.22

Table 5 : Learners' objectives for joining the programme

(In Percentage)

Objectives	BCA	BA	BCom	BSc	BLISc	DCO	DTS	DNHE	PGJMC	PGDDE	MLISc
Complete unfinished education	0.00	17.95	33.33	0.00	0.00	12.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Attain higher education	36.37	30.37	22.22	33.33	25.00	20.00	36.36	28.57	11.11	33.33	11.11
Only for academic interest	0.00	2.56	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Acquiring educational qualification and job	60.60	43.59	44.44	66.67	50.00	48.00	71.43	71.45	44.44	0.00	0.00
Promotion and higher wages	3.03	5.13	0.00	0.00	25.00	12.00	0.00	0.00	44.44	66.67	88.89

Table 6 : Learners' interest in attending study centre activities

(In Percentage)

Activities	BCA	BA	BCom	BSc	BLISc	DCO	DTS	DNHE	PGJMC	PGDDE	MLISc
Counselling	63.64	56.41	33.33	16.66	37.50	68.00	45.45	42.85	44.44	100.00	66.67
Library	54.54	28.20	44.44	50.00	87.50	52.00	36.36	85.71	88.89	100.00	100.00
Audio programme	36.36	20.51	0.00	33.33	12.50	28.00	9.09	28.57	44.44	33.33	44.44
Video programme	33.33	25.64	0.00	0.00	12.50	36.00	27.27	14.28	33.33	66.67	33.33
Collection of information	45.45	53.85	44.44	33.33	37.50	44.00	9.09	28.57	33.33	66.67	66.67
Others	3.03	5.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	12.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

**Access to media :** Learners in distance education need to use various media like newspapers, audio cassette, video cassette, TV, Computer etc. for learning purposes and for collecting information related to various programmes of the University. An attempt was made to know the learners' access to various media. Programme-wise analysis revealed that almost all the learners had access to newspapers, but access to other media varied from one group to another. For example, learners of BCA, B.Com., BLISc, DTS, B.Sc., PGJMC, MLISc, PGDDE programmes had equal access to radio and TV, while learners of DCO and BA programmes had more access to TV than radio (Table 2). A good percentage of learners of DCO programme (56%) and MLISc programme (44.44%) had access to computer. The learners in other programmes had poor access to computer.

**Awareness and sources of information :** In response to specific questions the learners responded that they had come to know about open learning system through various media like newspaper, TV, friends and information brochure developed by IGNOU Regional Centre, Calcutta. Books, radio and school have not been mentioned as important sources of information (Table 3).

Some learners in various programmes had mentioned that they had clear knowledge about open learning system and IGNOU in particular (Table 4).

A large number of learners in all the programmes were aware of TV broadcast (Doordarshan) of IGNOU programmes, but a small number were aware about the teleconferencing facility at IGNOU (Table 4).

**Motivation for joining the programme :** The learners of all the programmes except PGDDE and MLISc. had identified 'acquiring educational qualification and job opportunities' as an important objective for joining their respective programmes. The learners of PGDDE and MLISc were motivated to join the programmes for 'promotion and higher wages' (Table 5).

**Interest in study centre activities :** The freshers were presented with various activities of study centres of IGNOU and were asked for what purpose they would like to visit the study centres.

All the learners of PGDDE and most of the learners of BCA, BA, DCO and MLISc preferred 'counselling'. A large number of learners of BCA, DCO, BLISc., DNHE, PGJMC and B.Com. and all the learners of PGDDE and MLISc had showed interest for consulting library at the study centres. A good number of learners of all the programmes were also interested in collecting information from study centres. Their interest in the audio and video programmes was comparatively low (Table 6).

**Days of the week preferred to visit study centre :** The learners were asked as to which days of the week they would prefer to visit study centres. Most of them had given almost equal preference to Saturday and Sundays. Amongst other 5 days they preferred Friday most to visit study centres.

## Discussion

The findings presented in this paper are discussed under different heads, as follows:

### ***Background characteristics of the learners and motivation for selecting specific programme :***

It is found that majority of the learners who selected MLISc, BLISc and PGJMC programmes belonged to the higher age groups. A large percentage of these learners were employed and a good percentage were married. These learners' choice for joining a programme through open learning system was fully justified. Open learning system is the only system for these learners to fulfill their academic and professional need. Being employed these learners were interested in promotion and higher wages. Many were also interested to get a better job after obtaining this educational qualification through open learning system. These are the factors which motivated them to join these programmes (Table 5). So it may be stated that their selection of programmes which were related to their fields was completely in right direction.

Majority of the learners who had taken admission to BCA, BA, B.Com., B.Sc., DCO, DTS, DNHE and PGDDE were comparatively younger and unemployed. Interestingly a large percentage of learners of these programmes had stated that they were motivated to join their selected programmes for acquiring educational qualification and job (Table 5). BA, B.Com., B.Sc., learners who had selected these programmes for acquiring job after completion of these programmes may not get job immediately after their completion.

The present day job market is specially open for the professionals. It is assumed that the persons with professional and technical qualifications have better chances to get an entry into the job market. Though it is difficult to say at this stage that the learners of professional and technical programmes like BCA, DCO, DTS etc. will get better opportunity in job market, it may be expected that this will happen in future. It needs further and timely investigations. The main point of discussion here is that the learners of some programmes (e.g. B.A., B.Com., B.Sc., etc.) are young and have recently finished their schooling. So this is the high time for them to select a proper programme of study. Though the prospective learners of IGNOU are provided with a prospectus along with the application form to choose the right programme the learners need more information and guidance than the prospectus provides. In her recent book Longson (1997) has rightly commented that "students at university today have more worries about money and job market than their predecessors and many would say that they are under far more pressure." It was observed that most of the learners of some programmes didn't get any scope for pre-admission discussion or counselling with the experts. They had selected the programmes either on their own or after a discussion with a person who was not fully equipped to guide them properly. IGNOU may have a selected cell at each of Regional Centres to help the prospective learners in properly selecting a programme.

### ***Level of Awareness and Sources of Information***

Finding on these aspects are interesting. Very few learners in this study had detailed knowledge about open learning system and IGNOU in particular. They had heard the name of IGNOU and some of its programmes and had rushed to take admission. As the



learners were not aware of the structure and functions of IGNOU, they might have faced lot of problems during their course of study. The author came across a group of learners of IGNOU who had selected a particular study centre under the impression that they would be allowed to attend the regular classes (face to face) of that college (where the study centre located) alongwith the students of that particular college. On investigation it was revealed that they were not clear about the concept of the study centre of IGNOU at the time of admission.

Most important sources of information about distance education and IGNOU were reported to be newspaper and information brochure, prepared by the Regional Centre. More information brochure highlighting the important characteristics of open learning and structure and functions of IGNOU may be developed in various regional languages. More steps may be taken to create interest among the prospective learners and public in general to go through the information brochure. For more utilisation of the information brochure instructions or appeal may be printed on it to pass on the same to friends, relatives, and so on. Information brochure may be distributed in different higher secondary schools, colleges in remote areas and villages to increase the level of awareness of open learning system.

IGNOU Regional Centres and Study Centres arrange for an induction meeting of the freshers at the beginning of the session. This meeting lasts for an hour or two, where the learners may learn about some aspects of this system. Percentage of attendance of the freshers in this meeting vary considerably from one centre to another. A few more sessions may be arranged for the freshers to make them fully aware of open learning system, and the attendance in these sessions may be made compulsory. This goes well with the response of all the learners that they should have detailed knowledge about the open learning system and IGNOU in particular before joining a programme at IGNOU.

**Interest in study centre activities:** The learners' interest in study centre activities as depicted in Table 6 are in line with the responses obtained by Basu (1996) in his feedback study conducted with the learners of IGNOU. Basu reported that only a few learners of bachelor degree and Management programme visited the study centres to watch video programmes or to listen audio programmes; a good number visited the study centre to use library, and a large number to attend the counselling sessions.

Considering the access to various media by the freshers in this study (Table 2) it may be stated that their prior experience or habit of watching video and or listening to audio programmes are poor. But they have more experience of watching TV as majority have access to this media. The importance of the media role in distance education may be made clear to the learners at the beginning of the session preferably during the induction meeting, which shall facilitate their media choice and learning from media.

### Conclusion

More and more young and unemployed learners are taking admission at IGNOU who have very little knowledge about open learning system. These learners need more useful

pre-admission guidance and counselling for proper selection of programme. Most of them are motivated to join their specific programme for acquiring educational qualification and job. These learners have interest in some study centre activities like counselling, consulting library and so on. The importance of media role in distance education needs to be clearly highlighted to them. All these might further facilitate their effective learning at a distance.

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