

COMMUNICATION

Distance Education and Job Market: A Case Study of IGNOU Graduates

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Abstract: *The main focus of the present research study was to know the learners' objective of joining with IGNOU and utilisation of graduate degree in the job market. The study further investigated the employers' views about the preference of candidates with degree obtained from IGNOU and other institutions at the time of recruitment. The study further suggested some success stories of the learners after getting the degree from IGNOU. Also attempts was made to ascertain the reasons if any for non- acceptance of IGNOU degrees in the job market and other higher education institution, if any.*

Introduction

Employment of graduates from the institutions of higher education is considered an essential element of national development, not only because the employment market is at the core of social and economic development but also to give individuals a social role to play through gainful employment. Therefore, education is one of the most well developed social services in developing countries, like India. The tremendous expansion that education has achieved during the last four decades is highly impressive in itself, and in fact, education has been a major growth sector of the economy.

The nature of linkage between the job market and graduate supply assumes a great significance in any study of trends in the development of higher education. How do the graduates themselves assess the job market? What do employed graduates feel about their education when they look back? This self-assessment, in retrospect, should provide useful insights for introducing structural reforms in 'Students have expectations about their employment opportunities in different fields, the likely duration of their job search, their initial earnings, and the rate of growth of their earnings, can be compared with actual labour market outcomes. A growing number of studies of these expectations in both developed and less developed countries reveal that these expectations tend to be reasonable accurate (McMohan, 1987 : 182).

Objectives of the Study

The main focus of the present research study was to (1) know the learners' objective of joining with IGNOU and the advantage of obtaining the IGNOU degree to (a) get employment, (b) get promotion, (c) continue education, (d) self-employment, (e) social and other reasons; (2) know the utilisation of graduate degree; (3) find out the reasons if any for non-acceptance of IGNOU degrees in the job market and other higher education institution, (4) know the employer's views about the preference of candidates with degree from IGNOU and others at the time of recruitment in their institutions.

Methodology

The study had been planned in two phases. First, the survey was conducted for non-practical programmes at graduate level i.e. BA./B.Com. a sample of 1755 successful graduates who qualified during June 1992 to December 1995 examinations in BA/B.Com was selected for data collection. A questionnaire containing 28 items was administered on all the 1,755 successful students. At the second stage, for the qualitative study, the technique of depth interview was applied to know the employers' preference of graduates from either formal institutions or Open and Distance Learning System at the time of recruitment.

Findings

416 (23.70%) filled in questionnaires out of the total 1,755 were received back from the respondents at the time of writing this report. The findings presented below are based on the analysis of responses received from these respondents and the secondary sources.

Demand for Graduates in Indian Job Market

The analysis of data collected through the secondary sources revealed that the job availability in the organised sector was very low compared to the number of job seekers in the labour market. The fresh graduates face very steep competition in order to secure regular job in public and organised private sectors. There is a large number of mismatch between demand and supply of human resource in the country. There were some vacancies in some establishments in the organised sector for want of suitable applicants. In the year 1991 the UPSC could not fill up as many as 477 posts, because of non-availability of suitable persons (*Employment News*, Vol.XX, No.3, 1995). Most of the employment generation took place in the un-organised sectors, small-scale industries and self-employment sector. Employment generation in both public and organised private sectors is on the decrease. Fresh graduates and unemployed youth, therefore, have to concentrate on unorganised sectors, small-scale industries and self-employed activities.

Supply for Graduates in the Job Market

The statistics in the employment exchanges of India gave sufficient indication of the situation prevailing in the job market. Above 3807 thousand persons were registered in Employment Exchanges as per the study conducted by Directorate General of Employment and Training (*Employment News*, 1995). The study found that :

- Majority was from arts background (42.43%), followed by science (19.73%) and commerce (17.57%).
- Some students (12.44%) were from Education background as against 128 (3.36%) from Engineering background.
- Only 4.57% of students were from other disciplines like Medicine, Veterinary Science, Agriculture, Law, etc. Majority of them might have registered for suitable jobs or for jobs in the organised sector.

Socio-Economic Background of the Respondents

Age-wise responses reveal that the majority (39.86%) belonged to age group between 31 to 40 years followed by 27.40% who belonged to 21 to 30 years age group, 24.91% belonged to 41 to 50 years age group and 4.63% belonged to 51 to 60 years age group. Only one student was less than 20 years and three students were above 60 years. It indicates that those who were below the age group of 25 years were fresh graduates and were looking for regular jobs.

Geographical background of the respondents : It was found that most of the respondents belonged to urban (31.65%) and metropolitan areas (19.41%) as against to rural (30.80%) and semi-urban areas (13.92%); 4.22% students had not responded.

Community background : Only a few respondents belonged to the scheduled castes (9.25%) and scheduled tribes groups (1.78%), followed by other backward class (11.74%) and backward class (4.27%). Majority of them (68.33%) belonged to the general category. 11 (4.64%) students did not respond to this item. This reflect the character of the source of graduates for IGNOU, but not the gregarious nature of the general population.

Gender and marital status of the respondents : Graduates respondents were predominantly males (73.31%). A large majority of the students were married (71.53%) as compared to only 23.13% unmarried students. 12 (4.98%) students did not mention about their marital status. One student however, responded that he was separated.

Educational background of respondents' parents : Graduates from IGNOU were not a completely homogenous lot. But one thing which was common to all of them was that as per their parents' education/culture, they belonged to the lower rank of society. 47.69% respondents' father were below matriculation and 18.51% were matriculate. Those who were married, most of them (45.55%) did not inform about educational background of their spouse.

Activities Before Joining IGNOU

Majorities of the respondents, (56.62%) were doing regular job and 11.03% were studying in formal schools and colleges. Some of them (9.96%) were doing both part time job as well as pursuing thier studies. 12.82% of them were searching for job and doing nothing. 6.76% respondents were self-employed and 2.81% did not express their views about their previous activities.

Educational Background Before Joining IGNOU

The majority of the students (37.72%) had secondary (matriculation) as against 83(35.23%) below secondary at the time of joining IGNOU. It is understandable as the eligibility for the Bachelor's Programme in Arts (B.A.) and Commerce (B.Com.) in IGNOU admits two streams of students. *Formal stream* — those who had passed the 10+2 examination are admitted directly; *Non-formal stream*— those who did not have formal qualifications but have attained the age of 20, and, after an entrance test, were admitted to a preparatory course which starts in September each year.

Performance of Students in their Respective Examination Before Joining IGNOU and After Completion of Graduation in IGNOU

(a) *Performance before joining IGNOU*: The majority of the respondents (47.33%) had not given any views about their performance. A good number of them (35.23%) scored 41 to 60 percent marks in their respective examinations. Very few of them (7.83%) scored less than 40 percent marks as against 7.47% respondents who scored between 61 to 74 percent marks. Only 5 (2.14%) respondents got more than 75 percents marks in their respective examinations. The performance before and after joining IGNOU can be seen in the Table 1.

Table1: Performance of students before and after joining IGNOU

<i>Students' performance before joining IGNOU</i>	<i>Students' performance after joining IGNOU</i>					
	<40%	41-60%	61-74%	>75%	No reply	total
< 40%	—	15 (83.3)	2 (11.1)	—	1 (5.6)	18 (100.0)
41-60%	1 (1.2.0)	68 (82.6)	14 (16.8)	—	—	83 (100.0)
61-74%	—	10 (55.5)	5 (27.8)	1 (5.5)	2 (11.2)	18 (100.0)
>75% (20.0)	—	1 (60.0)	3 (20.0)	—	1	5 (100.0)

Note: Figures in the brackets are the percentage to total

An interesting result emerged from the analysis — majority of those who scored poor before joining IGNOU improved their performance; on the other hand, those who scored better before joining IGNOU showed poor performance in IGNOU. It is understandable that most of them before joining IGNOU were full time students and after joining IGNOU, they were on the job and devoted less time to their study. The performance in the examinations would have a wide spectrum of determinants, some of which are purely educational in nature and many of which are non-educational.

Utilisation of IGNOU Degree

Students' objective of joining IGNOU and utilisation of degree

(a) *To continue education:* 181 (43.42%) who responded that their objective was to continue education, 35.9% of them got admission in different institutions in the country. Most of them had had their post graduation in Sociology, Economics, Public Administration, and M.Com. LLB, Company Secretary, ICWA, CA, Diploma in Management, B.Ed, M.Phil from other institutions. It is also very interesting to note here, one respondents was doing M.B.B.S from Russia. All of them got admission in the reputed formal and dual mode institutions in the country (Since IGNOU students are allowed to take up another course elsewhere simultaneously) 25.4% of them utilised IGNOU degree for other purpose which they have not specified. 14.4% of them got job and 3.3% were self-employed.

(b) *To get job:* 56(13.52 %) students who informed that their objective was to get job, 23.7% of them got regular job, 34.2% of them joined other higher education institutions in the country for further education and 26.3 per cent utilised IGNOU degree for other purpose which they have not specified. 7.09 % of them are self-employed. Among those who got job 54.2% joined private sector while 45.8% joined the public (government) sector. It is assumed from this exercise that Graduates who had part time job and unemployed were proceeding to further education from IGNOU got permanent job than graduates who were unemployed and doing nothing.

(c) *To get promotion:* Among 43 (10.32%) respondents, who responded that their objective was to get promotion, 27.61% of them got promotion. 27.61% of them joined other institutions for further study.

Respondents' activities before joining IGNOU and utilisation of IGNOU degree

- Out of 46 (11.05%) respondents, who were **regular students** in formal institutions, most of them (48.0%) *joined other formal as well as dual mode institutions in the country for further their education. 20.0% of them got job and 17.0% were self-employed.*
- Of the 41 (9.85%) respondents who were doing **part time job**, 39.02% of them joined other higher education institutions for further studies; 24.39% of them got regular job; and rest of them utilised IGNOU degree for other purposes, which they have not specified.

- Of the 237 (56.97%) respondents who were **on the job**, 29.9 % joined further education and 15.61% got promotion. Most of the respondents (40.9%) utilised IGNOU degree for other purposes, which they have not specified.
- Of the 28 (6.73%) respondents who were **self-employed**, 25.0% joined further education and 14.2% got job. 14.2% students were self-employed and 28.6% respondents utilised their degrees for other purposes.
- 54 (12.9%) respondents who were **unemployed**, 50.0% of them joined further education and 22.2% got job. 29.6% students utilised degree for other purposes.

The IGNOU degree not only helped the respondents for continuing education, getting regular job and promotion but also for the self-employment purpose: eight respondents responded that IGNOU degree helped them for self-employment. Those who got job and promotion opted for Language subjects, Economics, Public Administration, Sociology, and Political Science as a major. *They also informed that foundation and application courses helped them get job and promotion, which is unique, and are not available in the formal system.*

Views of Students' Who Got Job After Qualifying from IGNOU

- Of the 41 respondents, who got regular job, 17.86% got job less than six months after qualifying from IGNOU followed by 15.35 % who took six months to one-year time. Rest of them took more than one-year time.

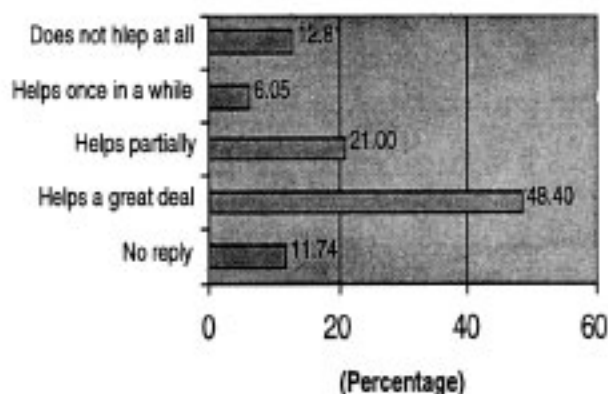


Fig. 1: To what extent IGNOU degree facilitates job performance.

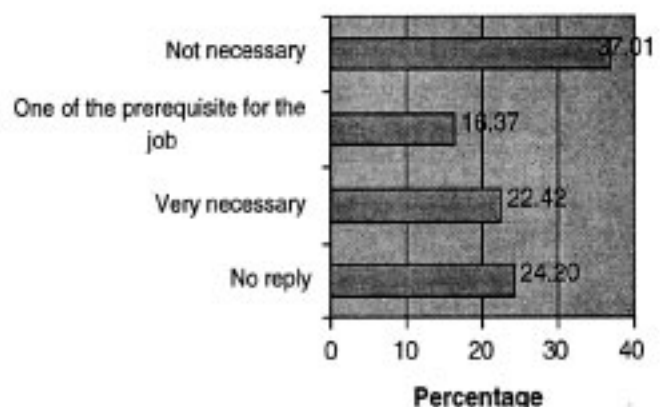


Fig. 2: To what extent degree from IGNOU was necessary to get job?

- Most (63.70%) of the total graduates who got regular job found the IGNOU degree more useful than the formal system. 6 (26.69%) respondents responded that the degree from the formal system was more useful than the degree from IGNOU for getting a regular job. 3 (9.61%) students did not express their views.
- Most of the respondents (67.61%) were fully satisfied with the nature of their present job and IGNOU degree helped them in this regard (Fig. 1).
- 48.7% respondents reported that IGNOU degree helped them in getting a job.
- For 38.79 % respondents IGNOU degree was useful and one of the prerequisite for the job. 24.20 respondents did not reply (Fig. 2).

Problem Faced by the Respondents Due to IGNOU Degree

Very few respondents faced problem due to INGOU degree. One of the respondents reported that the IGNOU degrees were treated with a step motherly attitude by his organisation for promotion.

One student could not get admission in Postgraduate degree due to non-recognition of IGNOU degree in Calcutta and other universities in West Bengal. These institutions could not understand the meaning of subject code.

Institutions Which did not Recognise IGNOU Degree

Very few respondent reported that some institutions had not recognised IGNOU degree. These are:

- i) Employment Exchange, Rohtak rejected IGNOU graduate application for registration as the degree was not recognised.
- ii) Kerala University rejected application for the MA (Sociology) because IGNOU degree did not have 10+2+3 pattern.
- iii) Department of Hindi, University of Calcutta rejected application of IGNOU graduate for PG in Hindi by stating that University of Calcutta does not recognise the validity of IGNOU. Meerut and Utkal Universities also rejected IGNOU graduates for the PG course.

Some Success Stories

After getting degree from IGNOU one respondent become self-employed and run his magazine called 'Yug Manas'.

Hawaumna from Port Blair writes that he could not have been able to get further education in the particular remote area, if IGNOU would not have opened study centre. He found IGNOU syllabus better than other formal institutions.

A.K. Chand from an ex-serviceman from Naval Military Service, Orissa expressed interesting views about the IGNOU degree. After retirement from the Navy he did graduation in English as a major subject from IGNOU. He gained confidence and became sports commentator, including for the Wills World Cup Cricket tournament, 1996.

Mr. Ajay Tiwa from Mumbai reported that after completing graduation from IGNOU his economic condition was improved. He was handicapped and could not earn more because of undergraduate degree.

Employers' Views

Mr. Naveen Kapoor from Cosmos Ferrites Ltd., New Delhi, recruited candidates based on their performance in the interview rather than the institutional background from where they completed their degree. The Pepsi Foods, P.K. Advertising Service, Delhi, BHEL Noida, and M/s Triton Medical Service Private Ltd., Delhi expressed similar views. They had already appointed IGNOU graduates in their respective enterprises.

Suggestions and Recommendations

IGNOU has been breaking all barriers for those citizens who could not have access to higher education for various reasons. This small survey has shown that IGNOU degree changed the personal lives of individuals by helping them get jobs, continue education and get promotions. This study was conducted with the intention to finding out as to how the graduates utilised their degrees. In the process, we could see quite a few problems faced by students. These problems are to be addressed with our firm commitment.

Recommendations

- IGNOU should provide information to all the students regarding the equivalence of its degrees with other institutions and the employment exchanges so that students do not face any problems.
- IGNOU should simplify its subject code so that other institutions can understand and compare their degrees with the IGNOU ones. It should also be mentioned in the degree Hons, instead of major credit. Most of the respondents suggested that IGNOU should start postgraduation in all the courses, which are presently offering in B.A/B.Com. Programmes.
- STRIDE should initiate this type of survey in almost all the IGNOU programmes. The present study on the utilisation of graduate degrees has been confined to the B.A/B.Com graduates only. It is also appropriate to know how the other programmes of IGNOU performed in the job market especially professional programmes.
- We received very few comments from employers' about IGNOU graduates. It would be better if we conduct a survey at the macro level to seek employers' comments on our programmes. Their comments and suggestions on IGNOU

programmes will provide a holistic view on the quality of our effort to impart education through the open and distance learning mode. Such views would be helpful for the planning future courses and programmes.

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