

An Assessment of Motivation of Distance Learners — A Case Study

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Sustenance of Distance Education Institutions (DEIs) depends mainly on the continuance of students with those Institutions. In other words, it depends on the motivation of the Distance learners (DLs) to pursue their programmes till successful completion. Assessment of the motivation of DLs thus becomes an important tool in the effective management of DEIs. The present study is an attempt to assess the motivation of DLs of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU).

The data pertaining to the student records of fresh batch of 1993 IGNOU Management Programme MBA of Bhopal Region is used for this case study. The evaluation records of their first semester of study were also analysed. As indicators of student motivation, submission of assignments and performance in the term-end examinations have been studied.

These criteria are correlated with the re-registration patterns observed for three more consecutive semesters, since the Programme comprises four semesters in all. Similar studies on other IGNOU Programmes are welcome.

Introduction

Distance Education has widely been accepted as a mode of education suitable for the present day 'knowledge era' as evidenced from the increasing number of courses of institutions in this field throughout the world (Kulandaiswamy 1992). In India, the establishment of Andhra Pradesh Open University (1982) was the curtain raiser for Open University system which was further strengthened by the establishment of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) by an act of Parliament in 1985. IGNOU is also the apex body in the country for promoting Distance Education. Keeping in view the diverse needs of the society, IGNOU is offering various programmes starting from conventional Bachelor's Degree to the advanced Computer and Engineering Courses.

The main difference between a conventional student and a distance learner is that the former is compelled to complete the course in the stipulated time, while the latter can do so at his own pace and convenience. This may be attributed to the fact that for a conventional student studies are supposed to be the only prime activity, whereas for a distance learner studies are one among many of his family, social and official commitments. But it is expected that a truly motivated distance learner may try to complete the courses in the minimum possible time, despite his/her other

commitments. The present study is an attempt to assess the motivation of distance learners from this aspect.

The sample for this study comprises MBA students of IGNOU registered in 1993 from Bhopal Region. So it would be appropriate to mention the salient features of the Management Programme of IGNOU.

Management Programme of IGNOU

The admission to MBA is open to candidates with graduation and 3 years of Supervisory/Managerial/Professional experience, and the non-graduates with 6 years of Supervisory/Managerial experience. *Non-graduates are eligible for DIM only.* Admission notification will be issued in all leading news papers in the country during the month of May every year. All the eligible candidates will be screened through a National level objective written test conducted by the university. As per the merit list, offers are made. The academic session starts from the subsequent January. The academic year consists of two semesters, i.e. January to June (as semester 1) and July to December (as semester 2). A student has to register semesterwise with a maximum of 4 courses per semester. It is expected that a student with strong motivation will utilise the maximum opportunity and may register for 4 courses for each semester. But the converse may not indicate less motivation (*vide infra*).

Continuous and term end evaluations are appropriately weighted. In the continuous evaluation, the student has to submit three assignments per course. Of these, two will be of descriptive/short answer type, known as 'Tutor Marked Assignments (TMA). These have to be submitted to the Study Centre. They will be evaluated and graded by the Academic Counsellors with tutor comments and returned to the students. Third assignment is of objective type, known as Computer Marked Assignment (CMA). The best two of these three will be taken for computing the 30% weight assigned to continuous evaluation for the final result. For the remaining 70% one has to appear in the Term End Examination. For successful completion of a course, one should get minimum D grade in a continuous and term end evaluation separately and a overall C grade when put together.

Term End Examination will be conducted in every June and December. Assignments submission is a pre-requisite for appearing in the Term End Examinations. A student who registers for a particular course in a semester can appear in the four consecutive Term End Examinations, without re-registration.

Though the submission of assignments and appearing in Term End Examinations at the first instance are not compulsory as in conventional system, it can be assumed that a student with strong motivation will try to submit all the assignments, appear in the Term End Examinations at the first instance and also will register for maximum number of courses in each semester. One or all of these may be taken as a measure of motivation of the student. It should be cautioned here that the affirmative of these may prove motivation, but the converse may not be true because there

may be many factors like social, personal or official commitments of the students which prevent them from giving more attention to their studies.

Methods

The sample for the present study consists of fresh batch of I semester 1993 Management Programme (MBA and DIM) students of Bhopal. The students records and the reregistration data upto II-Semester of 1994 as available at the Regional Centre were used. The evaluation record (i.e.) grades for the assignments and term end examinations were based on the comprehensive result list of Management students compiled upto June '93 Term End Exams by the Evaluation Division of IGNOU.

Based on the result data, the following categories were made.

- Type A : Those who have submitted at least one assignment during their first semester of study and which is reflected in the result list — in other words, students who are 'active'.
- Type B : Those who have not submitted even a single assignment i.e. students who are 'inactive'.

Type 'A' is further divided as follows.

- Type 'A(+4)' : Those who have registered for 4 courses and successfully completed all the 4 courses.
- Type 'A(-4)' : Those who have registered for 4 courses and submitted atleast one assignment in each course, but could not complete any of the 4 courses in TEE.

A(+3), A(-3) etc. are of similar type.

The study focuses on the following aspects:

- Part I : To compare the various aspects of A and B categories.
- Part II : To compare the various aspects of A(+4), A(-4), A(+3), A(-3) etc. This includes the comparative study of assignment submission patterns and the performance of the students in the assignments and term end examinations.
- Part III : Re-registration patterns of these students upto II Semester-1994.
- Part I : There is a total registration of 301 fresh students for the first semester of 1993. As per the above classification, Type A represents those who have submitted atleast one assignment during their I Semester of study and Type B represents the complementary group of the total population. Table I gives the distribution of these two types among various categories of students. Those two types are in the 3:2 ratio, which shows that 60% of the admitted students submitted atleast one assignment per course.

Table 1 General distribution of students of Type A and Type B.

	Type 'A'	Type 'B'
Total	184	117
Marital Status: Married	102	72
Unmarried	82	45
Sex: Male	169	109
Female	15	08
Urban	158	104
Rural	23	09
Tribal	03	04
S.C.	09	03
S.T.	03	03
General	172	111

Though the general distribution among various categories follows this ratio. The following are a few specific observations.

- 1) Unmarried population is a little more in 'A' than 'B' (1.7:1). Is it a reflection of less family responsibilities?
- 2) Females are more in A than B (1.8:1).
- 3) Scheduled Caste students are 3:1 compared to 1:1 for Scheduled tribe students.
- 4) As per the age criteria, at 25 it is 2.4:1 and for the 41-45 age group it is 4.2:1.
- 5) For engineering graduates it is 2.8:1.

A similar observation of (2) above was made earlier by Ross and Powell (1990).

Part II : There are 42 students under A(+4) category and 35 students under A(-4) category. The engineering graduates are distributed in 3:2 ratio between A(+4) and A(-4) (Table 2).

Table 2 Distribution among A(+4) and A(-4)

	A(+4)	A(-4)
Total	42	35
Marital Status: Married	23	17
Unmarried	19	18
Sex: Male	36	35
Female	06	00
Urban	39	30
Rural	02	04
Tribal	01	00
S.C.	02	01
S.T.	00	02
General	40	32
Academic Discipline: Engineering	24	16
Others	18	19

An interesting observation is that there are 6 female students of A(+4) against Nil of A(-4). It shows that female students are more motivated and their motivation leads them to complete the course successfully. In other words, it substantiates the similar observation of Ross and Powell (1990).

b) Though the grades of the best two assignments are taken for final grading, submission of all the assignments prescribed for a course may also indicate the motivation of the student to some extent. Table 3 gives the relevant data of this aspect for various types of +4, -4, +3, -3, etc of students.

It can be observed that always the percentage of course with 3 assignments are high for '+' type' than '-type', in all cases. (i.e.) it is 81.5 to 64.0 for ± 4 , 80 to 43 for ± 1 etc. This is an indication that + and - classification represents motivation.

c) The gradewise distribution for all the types for the continuous evaluation, term end exams and final grades is given in Table 3 (see p. 14).

The grades for continuous evaluation shows that the percentage of A grades are higher for +n than -n, for all values of n. It shows that +n students attempt well the assignments than the -n students. This also strengthens the + and - classifications.

The table also indicates that the percentage of A grades decreases in term end exams (TEE) as compared to continuous assessment. This may be due to the time they get for answering assignments and also partly the open book system involved in answering the assignments. In term end exams the time to answer the questions is limited and students might also be under examination stress.

The table also shows that getting an A grade finally is not easy and it shows the validity of the evaluation system.

The near absence of E grades indicates that students attempt assignments and TEE after thorough preparation and avail of the relaxed conditions, if they feel that their preparation is not satisfactory:

d) It will be interesting to know how the grades in continuous assessment and term end exams of individuals' cases correlate with each other. The correlation is represented in matrix form in *Fig. 1* for the A(+4) type. It shows that percentage of A and B grades is higher in continuous assessment and B and C grades in term end examination.

	Average Grade for Continuous Assessment			
	A	B	C	D
TEE Grade				
A	7	6	2	0
B	35	20	3	0
C	41	24	1	1
D	18	10	0	0

Fig. 1: Correlation of grades for corresponding continuous and term end assessments for A(+4) types.

Table 3 Data for Various A(\pm n) Categories

Type (\pm n)	No. of students	No. of* courses	No. of courses 3 Assignments	with %	Continuous Assessment		Term End Exams		Final	
					Grades	%	Grades	%	Grades	%
+4	43	168	137	81.5	102A+59B +6C+6D	60.7A+35.4B 3.3C+0.6D	15A+58B +68C+7D	9A+34.4B +40.8C+158D	13A+76B +79C	7.4A+45.41 +47.2C
-4	34	136	87	67.0	57A+52B +17C+8D +2E	41.9A+38.2B +12.5C+15.9D +1.5E	—	—	—	—
+3	10	30	21	70.0	19A+9B +C+D	6.3A+30B +3.5C+3.5D	A+6B +16C+7D	3.5A+20B 53C+23D	A+7B +22C	3.5A+23B +72C
-3	11	33	21	63.6	4A+20B +8C+D	13A+67B +26C+4D	—	—	—	—
+2	14	28	25	89.3	17A+9B +C+D	61A+32B 3.5C+3.5D	3A+3B 17C+5D	11A+11B +61C+17D	3A+7B +18C	11A+25B +64C
-2	13	26	10	38.4	10A+9B +3C+4D	38.4A+34.5B +11.5C+15.5D	—	—	—	—
+1	5	5	4	80.0	4A+— +C+—	80A+— +20C+—	-+2B +2C+D	-+40B +40C+20D	-+2B +3C+—	-+40B +60C+—
-1	7	5	3	60.0	2A+4B +—+D	28A+57B +—+15D	—	—	—	—

* No. of courses = (No. of students in the category * n), where n=1, 2, 3, 4 in (A \pm n)

Part III : Motivation of the students can also be estimated from his/her reregistration in successive semesters to complete the programme at the earliest. Though a student is allowed to register for one to four courses per semester, the one with high motivation tries to register for four per semester and tries to complete the programme in the minimum period given.

Table 4 gives the semesterwise distribution (upto II Semester '94) of the total students, (A+B) type and A type students. It shows that percentage of Type A are far higher than type B which proves that submission of at least one assignment per course is an indicator of student motivation.

Table 4 Reregistration Data For 'A' and 'B' Categories

	Total Students reregistered for the semester	Students from (A + B)	Students from (A)
II Semester-93	349	210	163
I Semester-94	261	109	101
II Semester-94	578	92	82

A similar comparison may be made for A(+4) and A(-4) categories. Table 5 gives values for those registered continuously for 4 courses in each semester and also atleast one course in each successive semesters. It can be observed that '+4' is always far greater than '-4'.

Table 5 Reregistration Data for A(+4) and A(-4)

	Total from (A + B)	A(+4)	A(-4)
Continuous 4 in each semester	26	18	4
Atleast one in each semester	67	27	9

Similarly Table 6 gives values for semesterwise breakup of +4 and -4 type, with 4 courses, less than 4 courses and Nil. Here the 4 courses in each semester are far higher and remained more or less the same, whereas for -4, it decreased 4 times and the value for 'Nil' registration increased. It further provides the motivation ascribed.

Table 6 Values for Semesterwise Breakup

	A(+4)				A(-4)		
	0	>4	Nil		4	>4	Nil
II Semester-93	32	73	3		20	11	4
I Semester-94	29	5	7		7	4	24
II Semester-94	25	6	11		5	7	23

Conclusions

This case study suggests that motivation of a learner can be gauged from his/her performance in the first semester of study. Various indicators of this are:

- (1) Submission of atleast one assignment.
- (2) Fulfilment of both continuous and term end evaluation requirements.
- (3) Submission of all the three assignments in a course.
- (4) Attempting the assignments well, which is reflected in grades.

These criteria are confirmed by the reregistration patterns observed for 3 more consecutive semesters.

A further study of these aspects on a larger data may throw more light on the validity of these aspects.

References

- Kulandaiswamy, V.C. (1992) "Distance Education in the Indian Context", *Indian Journal of Open Learning* 1(1): 1-4.
- Lyanda R Ross and Richard Powell (1990) "Relationships Between Gender and Success in Distance Education Courses: A Preliminary Investigation", *Research in Distance Education*, 2(2): 10-11.