

Teacher Education Programme of IGNOU: Student Teachers' Perception

DARSHANA P. SHARMA

Directorate of Distance Education, University of Jammu, Jammu-180006, India

Abstract: *There is no doubt that of the factors which determine the quality of education and its contribution to national development, teacher education is the among most important. It is on the qualities and character, educational qualifications and professional competence of the teachers that success of all educational endeavours depends. Thus quality professional training of the teachers is of crucial significance. The need for teacher education through distance mode is felt as all in-service education programmes cannot be organized in face-to-face mode, particularly in view of the numbers involved. The National Policy of Education (1986) has reposed faith in the ability of Distance Education and Open Universities to design courses in the area of teacher education. Now several technologies including audio and video programmes, radio and TV broadcast, radio and teleconferencing are in use in distance education, which have the potential to provide education and training experiences to a large clientele. As a consequence of this demand and possibilities and techniques available, IGNOU since January 2000 has been offering In-service Secondary Training Programme. Feedback exercises with the students are significant for 'quality assurance', which is being given highest priority in higher education. This paper, on the basis of the feedback exercise discusses the reactions and suggestions of the student teachers on various components of the teacher education programme of IGNOU. The reactions of the student teachers are positive on all the major components of the programme except interactions during counselling and workshops, feedback on assignments, audio-video inputs and schedules of the activities.*

Introduction

"The status of teacher reflects the socio-cultural ethos of the society and no people can rise above the level of its teachers" (NPE, 1986). The usefulness and effectiveness of the education system largely depends upon active, resourceful and competent teachers. It is widely recognized that teacher performance is the single most crucial input to improve the quality of education. Researches have often emphasized the importance of link between the quality of education and adequacy of professional training of teachers. The standard of teacher education programmes determines the quality of training provided to teachers. The maintenance of standards and quality of teacher education has been necessitated as NCTE, responsible for maintaining quality and regulating the functioning of teacher training programmes in the country is insisting on 'Quality Assurance' by the teacher education institutions. The need for teacher education through distance mode is felt increasingly, mainly on account of a large number of untrained teachers who are already in schools.

As a consequence of this demand, and possibilities and techniques available, IGNOU since January 2000 has been offering a B.Ed. programme. The programme has a duration of two years and has been developed for practicing teachers at the secondary and senior secondary level with a view to provide necessary knowledge, understanding and skills of teaching in the classroom as well as to strengthen their professional competencies. The programme consists of eight theory courses and four practical courses comprising forty-eight credits.

Obtaining feedback from the students on the programme is important for quality assurance, and is being given highest priority in higher education. Chaffe Stengal (1992) observes the 'desirability of combining Programme reviews with student outcomes' assessment to enhance Programme and Instructional improvement'. Raussaria and Lele (2002) also state, 'Programme review is an important activity and main step in maintaining quality in a programme. The inputs received and observations made from learners, employees, parents etc., are critical for further improvements'. Since students' reactions are essential in quality assurance, it was considered relevant to study the reactions of the student teachers to various components of the Bachelor of Education Programme of IGNOU. Reactions of the student teachers to the different components of this programme will help in making necessary modifications and in identifying better strategies of imparting in-service teachers' training through distance mode. With these objectives in mind, a survey was conducted in October/November 2001 at the IGNOU B.Ed. Programme centres of Jammu and Srinagar.

Review of Related Studies

A number of research studies have been carried out in India and abroad on the students' perception of the various programmes of distance education so as to know the strengths and weaknesses of DE Programmes (Nagaraju, 1982; Ashalata, 1990; Tyagi and Sahoo, 1992; Manohar et al, 1995; Atan et al, 2000; Mishra et al, 2001; Nyondo, 2001; Sharma and Singh, 2001).

Nagaraju (1982) reported the dissatisfaction of the majority of the student teachers with the training they were receiving. The duration of the personal contact programme and learning experiences during PCP were perceived to be inadequate. Ashalata (1990) found that a majority of the students appreciated the course materials but counselling sessions and library facilities at the study centres were found to be very poor. Tyagi et al (1992) noted that IGNOU students did not find the study materials difficult. However, they suggested that course materials should reach them in time and should be made more elaborate and interesting. Manohar et al studied learners' perception of Management Programmes of IGNOU and BRAOU. A majority of the students opined that the main advantage of joining the programme was to improve qualifications followed by enhancing professional opportunities. Respondents suggested more practical orientations of syllabus and compulsory counselling.

Atan et al (2000) conducted a study on students' perception regarding the effectiveness of audio-graphics tele-tutorial as a delivery system for science courses in distance education. The study reported that the students perceived good sound for system and intelligible graphics on the T.V. screen to be some of the important prerequisite effective audio-graphics delivery system. Mishra (2001) found that to a large extent IGNOU's Bachelor Degree Programme learners were satisfied with the quality of the materials and presentation of the content. Nyando (2001) reported that the learners found the study materials user-friendly and appropriate and support from administrative staff and tutors adequate. Sharma and Singh (2001) found that the reactions of the student teachers to a large extent were positive on the major components of the B.Ed. Programme.

The research studies reported so far reveal the perception of distance learners about different DE Programmes. It is the question of learners' perception of the Teacher Education Programme of IGNOU, which is the subject of this research paper.

Objectives

The study had the following objectives:

- To analyse the profile of student teachers.
- To find out the reactions of the student teachers on different components of the Bachelor of Education Programme of IGNOU.
- To elicit suggestions from student teachers for improvements in the ongoing Bachelor of Education Programme of IGNOU.

Methodology

To achieve the objectives of study, the survey method of research was used.

Sample

A sample of 39 student teachers of B.Ed. Programme of IGNOU was randomly selected from the programme centre of Jammu and Srinagar (21 from programme centre of Jammu and 18 from programme centre of Srinagar).

Tool used

To collect the data, a comprehensive questionnaire was used which contained both structured and open ended questions. The specific areas covered in the structured portion of the questionnaire were:

- Students' Profile
- Admission Procedure
- Study Material
- Course Components
- Counselling/Workshop based Activities

- Practice Teaching
- Assignments
- Miscellaneous

Suggestions for improvement in the different components of the programme were sought through an open-ended question.

The questionnaire was developed in two-step process-planning and reviewing. Questionnaires on students' perception about different programmes and student teachers handbook prepared by School of Education, IGNOU, New Delhi were studied. Based on information derived from the literature review, a questionnaire consisting of 53 questions covering different components of Teacher Education Programme of IGNOU was constructed. In step two, after construction of the first draft of the questionnaire it was submitted to faculty members and Resource Persons associated with the IGNOU B.Ed. Programme for review and suggestions. The reviewers provided valuable criticism and many constructive suggestions for improvement.

The modified questionnaire was again administered on a test basis to a sample of six student teachers. Further modifications and alterations were made in the questionnaire, on the basis of the observations made by the respondents during this test. After repeated revision, a final draft of the questionnaire consisting of forty-seven questions was developed.

Collection of data

The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to the student teachers during the 2nd year workshop at the Jammu Programme Centre whereas the questionnaires were mailed to ARD Srinagar Regional Centre, who got responses on those during the 2nd year workshop.

Statistical technique

To analyze the reactions of student teachers on various components of the course, the mode of response was 'Yes' or 'No'. The respondents were asked to give their reaction in 'Yes' or 'No' against each item given in the questionnaire. The data was analysed by using the simple statistical method of percentage.

Findings

The collected data was analysed in terms of student teachers' profile and reactions of student teachers on different components of programme, which are presented in Tables 1-8.

Table 1: Students' Profile

Sex	Percentage
Male	36
Female	64

Age	Percentage
20-24	18
25-29	41
30-34	26
35-39	15

Residence	Percentage
Rural	49
Urban	51

Educational background	Percentage
B.A., B.Sc., B.Com.	69
M.A., M.Sc.	31

The disadvantaged group i.e females have higher enrolment in programme than the males. The Programme is equally accessible to candidates living in rural and urban areas (Table 1).

Table 2: Student teachers' reactions to Admission Procedure of B.Ed. (IGNOU) programme

Sl. No.	Admission Procedure	Responses in percentage	
		Yes	No
1.	Problems of getting information about start of B.Ed. Course	90	10
2.	Problems in getting admission brochure	36	64
3.	Instructions' clarity in admission brochure	90	10
4.	Problems in filling up admission form	10	90
5.	Timely receipt of admission intimation letter	82	18
6.	Difficulty in getting information about selection for the programme	11	72
7.	Reasonableness of fee	85	15
8.	Sufficiency of specified days for getting admission	82	18

Reactions of the student teachers to a large extent are positive on the admission procedure (Table 2).

Table 3: Student teachers' reactions to Study Material

Sl. No.	Study Material	Responses in percentage	
		Yes	No
1.	Timely receipt of study material	59	41
2.	Good presentation of study material	95	5
3.	Need for improvement of study material	67	33
4.	Simplicity of language	79	21
5.	Sufficient illustrations in the study material	69	31
6.	Clarity of the concepts	82	18
7.	Sufficient check your progress questions	67	33
8.	Motivating check your progress questions	97	3
9.	Feedback through check your progress questions	100	-
10.	Knowledge of study material before counselling/workshop	31	69

Study material got positive ratings from a majority of the students but delay in receipt of study material to some extent needs to be taken care of.

Table 4: Student teachers' reactions to Course Components

Sl. No.	Course Components	Responses in percentage	
		Yes	No
1.	Components of different courses are sufficient	87	13
2.	Addition of courses in the Programme	69	31

Majority of the students wanted additions in the content based methodology course (Table 4).

Table 5: Student teachers' reactions to Counselling/Workshop

Sl. No.	Counselling/Workshop	Responses in percentage	
		Yes	No
1.	Briefing about counselling/workshop	97	3
2.	Effectiveness of counsellors	97	3
3.	Sufficient Interaction between the counsellors & peers	21	79
4.	Problems, queries discussed with the counsellors	97	3
5.	Activities undertaken under school based practical components	90	10
6.	Activities undertaken under workshop based practical components	79	21
7.	Activities helpful in developing teaching competencies	92	8
8.	Audio-video programmes used during workshop/counselling	8	92

Insufficient interaction with the counsellors and peers is reported by the student teachers. Negligible audio-video input is provided in the Programme (Table 5).

Table 6: Student teachers' reactions to Practice Teaching

Sl. No.	Practice Teaching	Responses in percentage	
		Yes	No
1.	Start of practice teaching as per schedule	67	33
2.	Presentation of micro lessons	72	28
3.	Demonstration lessons by Resource Persons	79	21
4.	Feedback by Resource Persons on micro lessons	64	36
5.	Suitable time table from school principal for Practice Teaching	95	5
6.	Cooperation from the school principal for practice teaching	95	5
7.	Casual attitude of the school principal for practice teaching	31	69
8.	Use of teaching aids	97	3
9.	Feedback by supervisor on lessons	97	3
10.	Mastery of teaching skills	97	3
11.	Completion of Practice Teaching seriously	97	3

To a large extent students are satisfied with Practice Teaching Component (Table 6).

Table 7: Student teachers' reactions to Assignments

Sl. No.	Assignments	Responses in percentage	
		Yes	No
1.	Clarity of assignments/practical work	92	8
2.	Difficult assignment work	54	46
3.	Submission of assignments as per schedule	79	21
4.	Discussion of assignment questions by the Resource Persons	21	79
5.	Consultation of books for writing assignments	72	28
6.	Feedback on assignments by the Resource Persons	31	69

A majority of the student teachers expressed dissatisfaction regarding discussion of assignment questions and feedback on assignments by the Resource Persons (Table 7).

Table 8: Student teachers' reactions to Administrative Support

Sl. No.	Administrative Support	Responses in percentage	
		Yes	No
1.	Cooperation from the Regional Centre's staff	92	8
2.	Activities of the programme took place as per schedule	31	69

Cooperation from the administrative staff at the IGNOU Regional Centres is perceived to be adequate. Programme activities are perceived as not taking place as per operational schedule.

i) Students' Profile

Table 1 reveals that 36% of the student teachers enrolled for the programme were males and 64% were females. Maximum number of student teachers were i.e. (41%) were in the 25-29 age group followed by 30-34 (26%), 20-24 (18%) and 35-39 (15%). Rural and urban population was having equal access to IGNOU B.Ed. programme i.e. 49% and 51% respectively. Majority of the student teachers' (69%) were with B.A/B.Sc./B.Com background followed by M.A, M.Sc. (31%).

ii) Admission Procedure

90% of the respondents agreed that they had timely information of the start of IGNOU B.Ed Course. 64% revealed that they did not face any problem in getting admission brochure. 90% were fully satisfied with the clarity of instructions and the same percent revealed that they did not face any problem in filling up the admission form. 82% of the respondents said that they got admission intimation letter in time and 72% opined that they did not face any difficulty in getting information about their selection for the programme. Also 85% opined that the amount of fee (Rs. 10,000) was reasonable and 82% expressed that one-month time for getting admission was sufficient.

iii) Study Material

59% of the respondents agreed that they received the study material in time. A very high percentage of respondents (95%) considered the presentation of study material good and only 33% opined that the study material needed further improvement. Analysis of data further revealed that 79% of the respondents considered the language of the study material simple. 69% of the respondents agreed with the sufficiency of illustrations in the study material and 82% opined that their concepts about the topics were clarified after going through the study material. A substantial percentage of respondents i.e. 67% agreed that the study material contained sufficient check your progress questions and a large percentage i.e. 97% opined that these check your progress questions motivated them for studies. 100% were of the opinion that feedback provided through answers to check your progress helped in their self-assessment. 69% expressed that they did not go for counselling/workshop sessions after going through the study material.

iv) Course Components

Further analysis of data revealed that 87% of the respondents agreed that the components of the different courses in B.Ed programme were sufficient to develop necessary skills and competencies for teaching profession. A sufficient percentage i.e. 67% wanted addition of content based methodology courses especially Urdu.

v) Counselling/Workshop

A very high percentage of respondents i.e. 97% agreed that the coordinator of the programme centre did general briefing about the counselling/workshop on the first day. An equal percentage of respondents agreed that the counsellors engaged for counselling/workshop were effective in delivering the goods. Only 21% opined that sufficient interaction took place between them and the Resource Persons and among the peers during counselling/workshop sessions. Again 97% were of the opinion that the Academic Counsellors discussed the problems of the students and attended to their queries. 90% and 79% respectively opined that they completed satisfactorily the activities under the school based practicals component and workshop based practicals component. 92% agreed that workshop/counselling helped extensively in developing teaching competencies. In all, 8% agreed that audio-visual programmes were satisfactorily used during counselling/workshop sessions.

vi) Practice Teaching

In all, 67% of the respondents agreed that Practice Teaching started as per schedule. 72% agreed that micro lessons were presented during workshop in simulated conditions and 79% agreed that demonstration lessons were given by the Resource Persons. 64% opined that Resource Persons provided feedback on Micro Lessons. 95% agreed that school Principals/Headmistress gave them

suitable time table for Practice Teaching. Only 31% opined that school principals had a casual attitude towards Practice Teaching. 97% of the respondents said that they made use of different teaching aids in order to make their lessons more interesting and effective and that proper feedback was given by the mentors/supervisors. Further, 97% opined that they completed their Practice Teaching seriously in schools and that they acquired mastery of teaching skills during this process.

vii) Assignments

Only 8% of the respondents opined that assignments/practical work lacked clarity but 54% were of the opinion that assignments/practical work was difficult. 79% reported having submitted their assignments according to schedule. In all, 79% expressed that they did not get any opportunity to discuss theory and practical oriented assignments with the Resource Persons. 72% of the respondents agreed that they consulted textbooks for writing the assignments. A substantial percentage of respondents (69%) opined that they did not receive feedback on their assignments from the Resource Persons.

viii) Administrative Support

A very high percentage of students (92%) agreed that the administrative staff of the Regional Centre was cooperative but 69% opined that the activities of the course could not take place as per the operational schedule.

Student Teachers' Suggestions

An open-ended question asked student teachers to make suggestions for improvements in the Teacher Educational Programme. The student teachers made the following suggestions:

- Frequent radio counselling sessions should be organized. This technology will be more useful especially for the student teachers living in hilly and far-flung areas of the J&K State.
- Provision should be made by IGNOU to enable the student teachers to avail the library services of the programme centre. Indira Gandhi National Open University can sign a MOU with the Government College of Education at Jammu and P.G. Deptt. of Education, University of Kashmir whereby IGNOU student teachers can avail of the facilities of borrowing books from the college and department library and make use of reading room facilities.
- Counselling should not be dominated by lecturing. Counselling sessions should be made effective by more interactions.
- Workshops should not be lecture oriented but activities based.
- Workshops should be organized as per the schedule in the programme guide. These should be organized as per local vacations. Delayed conduct of workshops especially when exams are drawing nearer is not welcome.

- There should be considerable gap between workshops and term end examination.
- Marks card-showing grades in aggregate in different courses with term end examination and assignments' grades pooled together should be available to the student teachers at the end of the first term. This will be more useful to the student teachers who want to improve upon their aggregate grade of the 1st year within the stipulated period of two years.
- Keeping in view the regional demands, Urdu should be included in the content-based methodology courses.
- Since counsellors/workshops facilitators are from the conventional system, they should be given training/orientation so as to make them aware of IGNOU's mode of education.
- Assignments should be returned to the student teachers with tutor comments from the resource persons for feedback. This will help the candidates to improve further.
- Workshop/counselling sessions should be held before the submission of practical oriented assignments so that student teachers can interact and discuss their problems and seek guidance from the Resource Persons.

General Observations

“Teaching is a profession for which aspirants have to be prepared through rigorous education and training for developing needed skills and competencies and essential skills and competencies can be developed through distance mode of education, provided it is properly planned, implemented, monitored and evaluated” (Student Teachers' Handbook 2000). In the light of this assumption, the following observations are made regarding the Teaching Education Programme of IGNOU:-

- It is well planned. Its theoretical framework is good but its implementation, monitoring and evaluation part needs to be strengthened.
- Contrary to the assumption, the motivation level of the student teachers is very low. Since counselling is not compulsory, only 1% to 2% of the student teachers turn up for counselling at the programme centres and those who turn up, do not come after having read the study material.
- Counselling sessions are insufficient. Keeping in view the nature of content, justice cannot be done with one block in one counselling session.
- There is much of conventional teaching/lecturing during counselling and workshop sessions. Interactions between student teachers and resource persons and among student teachers are rarely encouraged.
- Absence of expert guidance, close monitoring and supervision is felt in practice teaching component. It seems that the student teachers are not properly guided at the school level. After completing the schedule of 30 lessons at school, when the student teachers come to programme centres for delivering 10 lessons under the guidance of teacher educators, no skill development and competency is reflected in their teaching.

- Evaluation work needs improvement. Tutor comments are not written on the response sheets.
- Assignment responses are not returned to the student teachers. Even the student teachers do not ask for the return of the assignments. As per programme centre coordinator, “supporting staff for manual work like packaging, stamping, despatching etc., is not provided at the programme centre and it is not possible to carry out this exercise because of this handicap.”
- The programme centre has been provided audio-video equipments like Television, VCD and Audio-Video system but no audio-video programmes are available with the programme centre. Video cassettes of demonstration lessons could have helped at the micro teaching.

General Suggestions

The following suggestions demand attention from the School of Education, IGNOU:-

- The programme needs to be strengthened at the implementation, monitoring and supervision level.
- The distance student teachers need to be motivated. For this counselling should be made compulsory.
- The number of counselling sessions should be increased.
- Since most of the counsellors/resource persons are from the conventional colleges of education/university departments, they should be orientated to the methodology of Distance Education.
- It is advisable to organize, monitor and supervise the entire practice teaching from the programme centre.
- The resource persons can be asked to deposit the evaluated response sheets of the student teachers with the Regional Centre, which can return the same to the students for feedback.

Conclusions

The present study concludes that IGNOU is successful in reaching out to the student teachers from the disadvantaged groups (women and rural population). The reactions of the student teachers on major components of the B.Ed. Programme are positive except interaction of students with peers as well as teacher educators, audio-video inputs, discussion of assignment questions by the resource persons, feedback on the assignments and schedule of the activities. All the respondents have suggested holding workshop/counselling sessions before the submission of assignments, holding workshop during vacations, feedback on assignments, more interactions during counselling and workshop sessions and provision of audio-video inputs. Student teachers from Kashmir division have also desired inclusion of Urdu in the content based methodology courses. It is suggested that the counselling should be made compulsory, counselling days should be increased, counsellors should be orientated to the methodology of distance education and practice teaching programme should be monitored and supervised from the programme centre. The study has been able to identify some of the crucial areas of teacher education

programme in which IGNOU needs to provide more inputs so as to improve the effectiveness of the Programme.

References

- Ashalata, J. (1990) 'Perceptions of Learners about Distance Education', M. Phil dissertation, Osmania University, Hyderabad.
- Atan, H., Ismail, G., Rahman, A.Z., Azli, N.A. and Saleh, M.N. (2000) Students perceptions on the effectiveness of the audio-graphics tele-tutorial as a delivery system for science courses in distance education. *The Malaysian Journal of Distance Education*.
- Chaffe Stengal, P. (1992) 'Integrated Programme review: Lessons from Assessment Practices and Experiences in California State University' in Barak, R.J. and Sweeney, J.D., *Academic Programme Review in Planning, Budgeting and Assessment, New Directions for Institutional Research using Academic Program Review*, P.3.
- Government of India (1986) *National Policy of Education*, New Delhi: Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- Mishra, R.R., Nasim, A. and Rai, N.K. (2001) Print Materials in Distance Teaching: Learners' view, *Indian Journal of Open Learning*, Vol. 10, No.1, 52-59.
- Murli Manohar, K. et al (1995) 'Learners Profile and Perceptions in Management Programme – A Comparative Study', paper presented at VIII Annual Conference of Asian Association of Open Universities, IGNOU, New Delhi, February.
- Nagaraju, C.S. (1982) *Evaluation of Radio Correspondences cum Contact In-service Teacher Training Programme in Kerala*, Bangalore: Institute for Social and Economic Change.
- Nyondo, A.C. (2001) Quality Assurance in Open Distance Education, *Indian Journal of Open Learning*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 32-39.
- Raussaria, R.R. and Lele Nalini, A. (2001) Self-Assessment of Distance Education Institutions: Identification of Parameters for Programme Assessment, *Indian Journal of Open Learning*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 147-157.
- Sharma, Hemant Lata and Singh, Dharmender (2001) In-service Secondary Teachers Training through Distance Education in Haryana, *Indian Journal of Open Learning*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 203-209.
- SOE (2000) *Student Teachers' Handbook*, New Delhi: IGNOU.
- Tyagi, Poonam and Sahoo, P.K. (1992) IGNOU students' perception of its instructional system, *Media and Technology for Human Resource Development*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 239-245.

Darshana P. Sharma is a Faculty Member in Directorate of Distance Education, University of Jammu, Jammu.