

IGNOU Interactive Radio Counselling : A Study

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Abstract : *In distance learning, the students support services play a major role in teaching-learning process. Recently, Indira Gandhi National Open University introduced the interactive radio counselling to strengthen its students support service system. There has been a long felt need of the students to interact with the eminent speakers, professors and guest faculty members at the time of teaching-learning process. The interactive radio counselling system provides an excellent opportunity to learners, especially from remote places, to interact with the speakers at the teaching end and also get their doubts clarified. The general public also get an opportunity to interact with the eminent speakers and upgrade their knowledge and sharpen their skills. In order to ascertain whether the programme is effective among the learners for their independent, autonomous learning, this study was carried out. The study reveals that the interactive radio is received well, but needs more attention to be effective.*

Introduction

The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has been broadcasting its curriculum based interactive radio counselling in its jurisdiction since October, 1999. This is a weekend extended counselling service provided in collaboration with the *Prasar Bharati* through local AIR (All India Radio) station. Invited experts provide 'on line' counselling on Radio. Questions can be put across to them during the session for clarification from homes by using the telephone. The target audience of the interactive radio counselling is the regular IGNOU students. Broadcasting curriculum based interactive programmes is an important component of distance education. It is expected that this interactive radio counselling provides necessary inputs in making the process of teaching-learning interesting and beneficial to both the students and the teachers. It is also expected that this programme will be useful for the students to understand the course related subject matter. Due to the enormous success of this programme, IGNOU has now extended it to 69 AIR stations. At present it is believed to benefit over 700,000 students of IGNOU as well as equal number of students studying in other universities and institutions. This network is expected to expand further in the due course to touch about 150 AIR stations. At present, Trivandrum AIR station under Cochin Regional Centre of IGNOU is one among the 69 AIR stations. Thus, with an honest desire to

assess the utilisation of the interactive counselling for IGNOU students, a survey was conducted among the IGNOU students and the public participated in the interactive radio counselling programme under Cochin Region.

This study was undertaken to provide with vital information on the utilization of the counselling by the students. It was also to get insights on the quality of the programmes as per assessments of the students. On the basis of the findings, the future course of action could be taken to improve on the programmes and some concrete steps could possibly be taken to maximize the utilization of the interactive radio counselling.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to get a feedback from IGNOU students on the radio counselling; their opinion regarding the usefulness of the programme, their views on the quality of the programmes, and suggestions to improve the programmes.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- determine the media-habit of the IGNOU students;
- find out the opinion of the students regarding the various facilities provided at the IGNOU study centres vis-a-vis radio counselling;
- find out how useful the radio counselling has been for the students; and
- find out the reactions of the students on various components of the programme.

Methodology

It was a one-shot survey research study. Only the IGNOU students and the public who participated in the interactive radio counselling at the Cochin region were considered for this study.

Respondents

Those who participated in the interactive radio counselling during October, 1999 to January, 2000 were considered as the respondents. A total of 256 participants were selected. Among which, the questionnaire were circulated to 150 participants. For others, the feedback was obtained over phone.

Sampling

- a) The participants from different districts of Kerala state under the Cochin Region were identified as the areas for collecting data.
- b) The total number of participants from each district was determined.
- c) The number of IGNOU students and the people from outside IGNOU (the public) were determined.

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- d) Total, 115 IGNOU students and 141 people from outside IGNOU (the public) were selected for the study.
- e) For the purpose of calculation, all samples were considered.

Instrument

A questionnaire containing the following 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 sub-items for clear understanding. The variables studied were as follows:

- A. Profile:
- Name
 - Sex
 - District
 - Marital Status
 - IGNOU student or public
- B. Educational background:
- Educational achievement
 - Reasons for participation
- C. Questions asked:
- Subject related
 - General
- D. Knowledge about IGNOU interactive radio counselling:
- E. Media access, use and relevance:
- F. Feedback on interactive radio counselling:
- Quality of Audio
 - Quality of Academic Content
 - Topic presentation by experts
 - Answering the queries
- G. Reaction by participants in terms of:
- Language
 - The pace of delivery
 - Pronunciation
 - The time of the broadcast
- H. Suggestions, if any, for improvement:

The questionnaire was divided into eight sections — A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H each having a theme.

Data Collection

This study was the first of its kind conducted in the Cochin Region. The questionnaire with the required variables was finalised. Responses from the participants were obtained: over phone, by interview and by post. As the delay occurred in getting the responses from some of the participants, the data analysis could not be done as per the time schedule.

Data Analysis

A total of 256 responses were collected through questionnaire and over the phone. The data collected from responses were tabulated. In addition to this, suggestions and guidelines were collected from participants, subject experts and those who were associated with this programme, to study the maximum use of interactive radio counselling. The main purpose of this study was to have as much information as possible on various items mentioned earlier and analyse the data in detail. Further, based on the suggestions and feedback, necessary improvement could be made in the IGNOU interactive radio counselling system in order to deliver it in a more effective manner.

Background of the respondents

The background of the participants in terms of sex, the place to which they belong, whether IGNOU student or a public, educational qualification and reasons for participation was sought in the questionnaire. The items analysed are as follows:

Gender Distribution

Of all the respondents about 79% are males and 21% are females. It seems, males access interactive radio counselling programme more freely than the females (Table-1).

Table-1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

| Sex | Student | Public | Total |
|--------|---------|--------|-------|
| Male | 88 | 70 | 79 |
| Female | 12 | 30 | 21 |

Marital Status

Sixty-eight per cent participants are married (Table-2).

Table-2: Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status

(in percentage)

| Marital Status | Student | Public | Total |
|----------------|---------|--------|-------|
| Married | 62 | 74 | 68 |
| Single | 38 | 26 | 32 |

Rural/Urban Distribution

Participants from rural areas are less than the participants from urban areas (Table-3).

Table-3: Distribution of Respondents by Rural/Urban

(in percentage)

| | Student | Public | Total |
|-------|---------|--------|-------|
| Rural | 44 | 40 | 42 |
| Urban | 56 | 60 | 58 |

Educational Background

Amongst the participants 66% are under-graduate, and 34% are post-graduates (Table-4).

Table-4: Distribution of Respondents by Educational Background

| (in percentage) | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|
| <i>Educational Background</i> | <i>Student</i> | <i>Public</i> | <i>Total</i> |
| Post Graduate | 24 | 44 | 34 |
| Under Graduate | 76 | 56 | 66 |

Reasons for participation

IGNOU has been offering the facility of radio counselling to a large number of people. A good number of them participated seriously in order to get their doubts clarified, and a few participated in a casual manner. Serious participation is higher (in both the categories of students and the public) than casual participation.

Table-5: Distribution of Respondents by Reasons for participation:

| (in percentage) | | | |
|-----------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|
| <i>Reasons</i> | <i>Student</i> | <i>Public</i> | <i>Total</i> |
| Serious | 78 | 84 | 81 |
| Casual | 22 | 16 | 19 |

Nature of Questions Asked

The findings on the nature of questions asked are presented in Table-6. The nature of questions asked is important for Interactive Radio Counselling system.

Nature of questions asked by the participants

The questions asked by the participants were tabulated under three categories, namely, subject related, information on IGNOU and general queries. It is observed that even though the subject to be broadcast is announced in advance over radio and other means through study centres, the number of questions or clarifications asked by the students on the subject matter delivered by experts is very low. Instead, the number of questions related to pre-entry qualification, admission process, fees structure, etc., is very high. In each session, majority of the questions were of this type, irrespective of whether they were from students or the public. A few questions were of general nature, like the recognition of IGNOU degrees, information about study centre locations etc. Altogether, among 256 questions asked during October, 1999 to January, 2000 sessions, 92% questions were related to information, as shown in table-6.

Table-6: Distribution of Questions asked by the participants

| (in percentage) | | | |
|----------------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|
| <i>Questions</i> | <i>Student</i> | <i>Public</i> | <i>Total</i> |
| Subject related | 6 | 0 | 3 |
| Information on IGNOU | 86 | 98 | 92 |
| General | 8 | 2 | 5 |

Among the questions asked, the ones related to Computer Programmes are nearly 48%. The next is Management Programmes (25%). The remaining percentage consists of questions pertaining to Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, Health Science, Engineering etc.

Media Access and Knowledge About Interactive Radio Counselling

The findings about the media accessibility of the respondents are presented in this section. Media accessibility of the students is very significant for distance education system. Among the various media and materials offered by IGNOU, almost all students have been using printed course materials to a large extent as it is the main media. However, very few use radio and television as effective study media. Computers have been used apparently only by the students who have opted for IGNOU's on-line programmes through internet mode. Next to the printed course materials the often used media has been Television followed by Radio, Video Tapes and Audio Tapes.

Location and accessibility

The participants were asked to identify the places or locations where they had access to telephone to interact with radio counselling. The Table given below indicates the location of home, study centre and other places. The other place may be the neighbour's house, friend's house, public telephone booth, etc. Most of the participants (81%) identified home as the location where they had access to telephone. Neighbours, friends, public booth were mentioned by the students as significant locations. The study centres did not figure as a location to none.

Table-7: Distribution of Respondents by Telephone accessibility

| <i>Location</i> | <i>(in percentage)</i> | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| | <i>Student</i> | <i>Public</i> | <i>Total</i> |
| Home | 76 | 86 | 81 |
| Study Centre | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Any other Place | 24 | 14 | 19 |

Source of Information

Almost 78 percent of the participants learned about IGNOU's Interactive Radio Counselling through Newspaper, Radio and other printed media and another 6.5 per cent learned from friends and family sources. The remaining percentage learned about this medium from employer, teacher, colleagues and IGNOU Study Centres/Regional Centres. Written advertisement appears to help the students considerably. Frequent announcements on the Radio appears to be an important source. Obviously, some of the participants learned about IGNOU's Interactive Radio Counselling from more than one source which is reflected in Table-8.

Table-8: Distribution of Respondents by Source of Information about IGNOU's Interactive Radio Counselling

| <i>Source</i> | <i>(in percentage)</i> | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| | <i>Student</i> | <i>Public</i> | <i>Total</i> |
| Printed Material/Radio | 68 | 88 | 78 |
| Employer | 1 | 2 | 1.5 |
| Teacher | 5 | 0 | 2.5 |
| Study Centres/ Regional Centre | 20 | 0 | 10 |
| Friends and Family | 5 | 8 | 6.5 |
| Any other | 1 | 2 | 1.5 |

Findings

This section deals specifically with the findings regarding the various aspects of Interactive Radio Counselling. The questionnaire contains items in order to find out from the respondents their level of awareness, their source of information about it, frequencies of listening, and their reactions and feedback and various other aspects of the programme.

Level of awareness

It has been found out only 42 per cent of the respondents enrolled for IGNOU programmes were aware of the topic of presentation in advance. The remaining respondents from among the students were aware of the topic of presentation only at the time of Radio Counselling. Due to this, no advance preparation could be made for effective interaction. Respondents from the public also could not come to know about the topic of presentation in advance.

Source of Information on the topic of presentation

The respondents who were aware of IGNOU Radio Counselling, were asked to identify their source of information on the Radio Counselling topic. Nearly 78 per cent respondents identified 'Repeated Radio Announcement' as their source of information. The remaining (10%) identified Study Centres/Regional Centres and a few (2%) identified 'friends' or colleagues as their source of information on IGNOU Radio Counselling topic. There is certainly a need to strengthen the source of information in other aspects too.

Listening Habit vis-a-vis IGNOU Radio Counselling

Among the respondents, only 34 per cent from the students and 18 per cent from the public were listening to the Radio Counselling regularly. Others were listening to it occasionally. Those listening regularly were asked to indicate the reason(s). Their answers showed that apart from subject matters, the general information about IGNOU pertaining to courses, eligibility criteria, fee structure etc., could be obtained by students without having to visit Regional Centre or Study Centres. Those who were not listening regularly were asked to give reasons. Their responses showed that the time of Radio Counselling

was unsuitable, some did not possess Radio set at homes and some did not have advance information about the topic.

Frequency of interaction

Respondents were asked to indicate their frequency of interaction with resource persons at AIR station over the phone. A majority of the respondents (82%) said that their frequency of interaction with their resource persons was very limited. The reasons quoted were, expensive telephone charges; difficulty in getting the telephone line; and the repetition of questions. Appropriate steps need to be taken to strengthen the interaction by way of reducing the telephone call charges during the time slot of Radio Counselling.

Is the IGNOU Radio Counselling time convenient?

In order to strengthen the listening habit of students, a question was asked about the time allotted from 9.30 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. was convenient or not. Nearly, 92% respondents indicated that the time allotted in the morning was very appropriate and they were not in favour of any other timings. Only 8% responded that the time slot could be in evening due to their domestic affairs. Therefore, to make IGNOU Radio Counselling available to a large number of students, there must be a time slot in the morning only. Some of the respondents (44%) indicated that if there is any recorded transmission in the evening or night, it would surely strengthen their listening habit, and also would be useful to those who might have missed the live transmission.

Evaluation of the presentation

There are many components in the Radio Counselling programme. The success of a programme depends on each and every component and how far it reaches effectively the target group. The questionnaire had the items with a view to finding out the reactions of the respondents on various such components as quality of audio, quality of academic content, topic of presentation by experts, answering the queries, language, the pace of delivery, pronunciation, the time of broadcast etc. Ratings were assigned to each of these aspects and the respondents were asked to identify the ratings they agreed most.

Knowledge of Subject Matter

A lot depends on the presenter, for a programme to be successful. Since IGNOU Radio Counselling programmes are educational in nature, the presenters must not only be presentable but also convince the respondents that they have enough knowledge on the matter. In this regard, the presenters had done well, as 87 per cent of the respondents had mentioned. Nearly 13 per cent had mentioned that generally the subject resource persons did not give any impression of having enough knowledge on the subject they presented.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation is a vital element in the presentation of a programme. The question was not of accent but of clarity. The respondents were asked to evaluate the pronunciation of the presenters of the programmes with the values of 'excellent', 'satisfactory', 'unsatisfactory' and 'poor'. Majority of respondents (88%) mentioned that the pronunciation of programmes listened to, was either 'excellent' or 'satisfactory'.

Pace of Speech

The pace with which the subject matter is delivered is an important factor in the success of the Radio programme. In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to comment on the speech pace with the categories of 'very fast', 'fast', 'appropriate', 'slow' and 'very slow'. The categories of 'fast' and 'very fast' do not help the students in getting the content or the teaching points registered in their minds, while 'slow' and 'very slow' do cause some irritations. It was found that a good percentage of respondents (93%) had mentioned that 'the speech pace' was appropriate.

Voice Quality

The voice of the presenter must be clear and attractive. A combination of these two is difficult to find. The respondents were asked to evaluate voice quality with the following values: 'attractive', 'average' and 'not attractive'. Among the respondents, 78 per cent responded that the voice quality of the presenters was 'average', while 17 per cent had evaluated the voice quality as 'attractive'. A very small percentage (5%) of the respondents only mentioned that the voice quality was not attractive.

Style of Presentation

Style of presentation is also an important aspect to create interest in the programme. The respondents were asked to evaluate the style of presentation with 'pleasant', 'average' and 'not pleasant' categories. Nobody evaluated the style as 'not pleasant' but 56 per cent evaluated it as 'average'.

Presentation of the Topic

In order to get the feedback on the presentation of the topic by the experts, the respondents were asked to rate it in the five point scale of 'excellent', 'good', 'satisfactory', 'partially satisfactory' and 'not satisfactory'. It was rated by 78 per cent as 'good' and 12 per cent as 'excellent', 7 per cent as 'satisfactory', 2 per cent as 'partially satisfactory' and only 1 per cent as 'not satisfactory'.

Answering the queries

Feedback from the respondents on answering the queries was obtained in the three point scale as 'fully satisfied', 'partially satisfied' and 'not satisfied'. It appeared, all were satisfied either fully (81%) or partially (19%).

Sound Quality

Technical input such as sound quality does enhance the quality of presentation. The respondents were asked to evaluate sound quality. They were asked to use the ratings of 'good', 'average' and 'poor' to evaluate their experiences with the sound quality of the radio programme. A majority of respondents (68%) and 34 per cent responded as 'good' and 'average' respectively. Only 8 per cent said that it was 'poor'.

Development of the Content of programmes

The character of an educational programme is different from that of the entertainment programmes. The only purpose of the educational programme is to impart knowledge and information to the target group. Therefore, the subject matter of educational

programme has to be treated with utmost care. Each step is carefully designed to obtain maximum results. With a proper introduction, the students are led to the subject under discussion. At regular intervals, the teaching points are repeated in one form or another, so that, the students keep track of the content. In case notes are to be taken down, opportunities are provided for. The content of the programmes is required to be treated with proper coordination. Thus, the teaching points are arranged in such a way as to give the programme a holistic shape with proper and logical conclusion. We discuss the findings of the survey on these aspects below.

The questionnaire was framed with items seeking the opinion of the respondents on: (a) periodic recapitulation of the main points in the programme; (b) information/content load; (c) development of the central theme and sequencing of facts leading to a proper conclusion; and (d) explanation of the technical terms. Ratings were attached to each of these aspects. The respondents were asked to identify the ratings they felt as appropriate.

Periodic Recapitulation of Salient points

The respondents were asked to state the frequency of periodic recapitulation of the radio programmes they had listened to in terms of 'always', 'most of the time', 'sometime', 'rarely' and 'never'. Of the respondents, 68 per cent mentioned that they found the salient points which were periodically recapitulated either 'always' or 'most of the times'. Similarly, a sizeable percentage (24%) of the respondents opined that they found the programmes had periodic recapitulation only 'sometimes'. The remaining only found this element in the programmes 'rarely' and 'never'. An effort is required to ensure that this aspect to be incorporated in future.

Information/Content Load

The respondents were asked to give their opinion on whether the information/content load was 'heavy', 'enough' or 'little'. No respondent opined that the content load was 'heavy'. A good percentage of the respondents (82%) opined that the content load was 'enough', while the remaining percentage had the opinion that the content of subject matters delivered by the experts was 'little'. Even though less percentage of respondents mentioned that the content load was 'little', the content of each session should be measured with attention and care to make a generalisation.

Logical conclusion on the presentation

The respondents were asked to give their opinion on the presentation of the subject matter. Did they find the programmes leading the theme to a logical conclusion always?, most of time?, sometimes?, rarely?, or never? To this question, 45 per cent respondents found that it was done 'always', while a good percentage (50%) found that it was done 'most of the time'. Only 5 per cent respondents found that the logical conclusion was only 'sometimes' and 'rarely'. No one gave the opinion 'never'.

Explanation of Technical Terms

Educational programmes do have technical and difficult terms. These need to be explained adequately. The respondents were asked to give their opinion on whether or not these terms were explained clearly. They were to say: 'explained clearly', 'explained to some extent' and 'remain unexplained'. Of those who answered, 40 percent were of

the opinion that these terms were 'explained clearly'. Majority of the respondents (53%) were of the opinion that the terms were 'explained to some extent'. But 7 per cent had the opinion that the terms 'remain unexplained'. The subject experts concerned should see that these terms are explained in each programme.

Detection of Factual Errors

The respondents were asked to mention whether or not they detected any factual errors in the programmes. No one mentioned "yes" to the query.

Difficulty with the Language of presentation

In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to mention whether or not they had any difficulty with the language of presentation. 22 per cent of the respondents mentioned they had difficulty with the presentation. It was mentioned that the difficulty was due to the presentation in Malayalam. They were asked to mention their preferred language for presentation. English was the most preferred language for the presentation of the programme. The other preferred medium of presentation mentioned was Hindi.

Some suggestions from the respondents, AIR staff and subject experts

The respondents were asked to provide comments and suggestions on issues where attention is needed from the University. Similarly, suggestions were collected from subject experts as well as from AIR staff, in order to improve the programme further. The following were some of the areas of concern as seen by the respondents, AIR staff and subject experts:

- Repeat the live programme in a recorded form in the night the same day at a particular time slot so that those who missed the programmes are benefited.
- Apart from Sundays, programmes may be extended on general and public holidays.
- The time allotted from 09.30 to 10.30 a.m. is more appropriate and convenient for students.
- The recent change in timings from 4 to 5 p.m. is not attractive.
- Very difficult to interact with the subject experts at Delhi over phone.
- All Sundays should be allotted to the Regional Centre (Cochin).
- Students get confused with certain Sundays allotted to Delhi.
- STD calls may be made Toll free.
- Arrange the counselling over radio logically and serially—semester by semester and programme by programme. At present, they are arranged haphazardly.
- As the medium of the instruction for majority of the programmes is English, the presentation may be made in English rather than in pure Malayalam language. It will benefit the students of other States and other students enrolled for Science and Engineering programmes.

- Very useful information on admissions, examinations and launching of new programmes should be announced apart from answering the queries.
- Questions were well taken and the answers were given appropriately.
- More questions were on the general issues like admission details, eligibility criteria etc. rather than subject specific issues.
- Instead of lecturing, a panel discussion will be good for presentation of subject matters.
- Topic of the presentation should be announced well in advance.
- Honorarium may be extended to AIR staff and Regional Centre staff involved in Radio Counselling.
- As access to Radio Counselling is easy, IGNOU may initiate the Interactive Tele-counselling at the Regional Centre level.

Conclusions

It was a one shot survey study conducted under the jurisdiction of Cochin Regional Centre to find out the utilization of Interactive Radio Counselling by the public and the IGNOU students. For the duration of three months (from October, 1999 to January, 2000) the total calls to the experts in the Cochin Region was 256. Of which 115 calls were from IGNOU students and 141 calls were from the public. It is evident that the public are equally or more interested in participating in the interactive radio counselling programme. The responses from females were encouraging as 24 telephone calls from IGNOU students and 30 from the public out of 115 and 141 respectively, were from women.

The majority of questions (109) asked were on Computer Science programme, followed by Social Sciences and Humanities (45), Management programme (35), Education (20), Continuing Education (15), Sciences (11), Health Sciences (6), Engineering (5) and others were of general nature.

As a whole, it could be said that by way of interactive radio counselling, the IGNOU has succeeded in breaking new ground in the field of education in the country. It is one of the efforts by IGNOU to make its education system reach the citizens who have been denied higher education for various reasons. The study has shown that among other support services like audio, video and teleconferencing programmes, the interactive radio programme is more attractive for students and the public and gives easy access to them to interact from their dwelling/working places. The study was a general one with an intention to find out how "interactive" the radio counselling programmes were. In the process, it could detect a few problems that hindered the broadcast from reaching the target group. These problems are to be addressed with firm commitment.

Recommendations

IGNOU has grown and developed at a fast pace within a short span of 15 years. The

pace probably is too fast in order to meet all the objectives of IGNOU. More attention is necessary to consolidate whatever support services have been built so far, and, if any shortcomings are found, they should be overcome. The best possible way to do so, is to evaluate the support service system of IGNOU and work out the modalities to reach the target group in an efficient manner. The following are some recommendations to strengthen IGNOU's support system:

- a) The possibility of interactive radio programmes from various places other than the place where the Regional Centres are situated can be considered in addition to the present nation-wide broadcast so that it may reach remote places further.
- b) As the objective of IGNOU is to take higher education to larger number of people, an effort is required to present the programmes as per their requirements and expectations.
- c) It has been found in the survey, the interactive radio programme is very successful and popular among the students and the public. Hence, the programmes be made in a sequential order so that a continuity in the subject presentation for each programme would be possible.
- d) Involvement of Regional Centres and All India Radio staff is equally important as that of subject experts to make the programme a success. Honorarium to both Regional Centre and AIR staff may be considered.
- e) Phone calls made during the sessions should be made either free or treated as local calls so that the target group from far-off places can have easy access. Also, it will reduce the private cost met by the students.
- f) Instead of lecturing on the subject matter by experts, panel discussions can be arranged.

On the above lines, IGNOU can think of Interactive Tele-counselling at the Regional Centre level with the collaboration of Doordarshan or cable TV network. Radio Counselling may be extended to the public and be broadcast on general holidays too.

Study Centres may give an opportunity for IGNOU students to interact by making free calls, as all study centres and programme centres are provided with telephone with STD facility by IGNOU.

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