



Analysis with Learner Input of Student Support Services in India

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ABSTRACT :

In the present paper an attempt has been made to critically analyze the crucial issues of student support services with reference to Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) by taking the perception of successful learners into consideration. Paper mainly focuses on strategy for information dissemination in order to popularize the ODL programmes and to identify most popular means of communication beneficial for ODL learners. Role of pre-admission, counseling and difficulties faced by learners during the course of studies are also analysed. Attempt has also been made to assess flexibility of duration in terms of completion of programmes. Paper also analyse various aspects such as growth of enrolment as well learners support centers, accessibility of print and audio-video materials during the course of their pursuit to higher education through ODL. Attempt has also been made to analyse the feedback of learners on use of teleconferencing as a tool to address the issues pertaining to counseling.

Keywords: Learner support, open and distance education, print materials, audio-video materials

1. INTRODUCTION

Open and Distance Learning System (ODL) has gain impetus in India during the last two and half decades particularly since the establishment of Indira Gandhi Nation Open University (IGNOU) in the year 1985, as a result it has witnessed exceptional growth in terms of enrolment. In IGNOU alone 0.636 million learners were registered during 2009 and 2.47 millions were on the roll of the university. It has also been estimated that about one-third learners among college entrants would be accommodated in ODL system. Shift of learners to ODL system in their pursuit to higher learning is mainly due to relaxed and flexible rules and regulations

in terms of place, pace and duration of the study as well as availability of diversified learning packages including print and audio-video material etc. ODL system also provides opportunity to the learners to interact with the teachers in face to face (f2f) counselling and discussion with the peers during their visit to Learners Support Centres (LSCs). The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has opened up the new channel of e-learning, e-board, e- *gyankosh* (digital library) and on line discussion among divergent groups including teacher, taught and peer. World Wide Web (WWW) has become common utterance for distance learners because their reliance for on- line support services is increasing day by day.

Therefore the growing awareness has posed serious challenges before the educationists, planners and policy makers. Consequently necessary adjustments have to be made to cope up the ever-increasing demand for on line support services, analysing its pros and cons. Use of internet has already captured the attention of urban learners and rural learners are likely to take its advantage, therefore corrective measures are required to be made in the student support services (SSS). IGNOU has visualised the implications of a large-scale use of internet by its learners in time to come and initiatives have been taken to supplement its LSCs with computer and internet facilities.

The use of ICT to supplement the learning stated in IGNOU in 1991 by outsourcing production of audio-video programmes, nevertheless it gain momentum with the establishment of Electronic Media Production Centre (EMPC) (Khan 2006). Consequently it has equipped its LSCs with teleconferencing (TC) facilities to facilitate tele-counseling, where one way video and two way audio is possible. The educational input is also provided through Gyan Darshan, Gyanvani, and Interactive Radio Counselling (IRC). On line interaction by using EduSat and *Shakhat portal*, which are specially designed to supplement the on line learning are like to play major role in due course of time. Therefore, EduSat has added new dimensions to ODL system, particularly in India as both ways audio-video interaction and opportunity of on line interaction and chatting with the tutors would encourage a large number of learners to join ODL system. With the evolution of electronic media to support the learners through the audio, video tapes/discs, broadcasting, computer mediated and online learning, virtual classroom, fax, telephone teaching-mail etc, the nature of the support service has also undergone tremendous change (Naidu 1999).

PARADIGM SHIFT

Distance Education is essentially a mode of education whose main focus is helping learners in their learning. This mode of imparting quality education has crossed many stages of evolution starting from private study to correspondence courses, distance mode and then ODL. Distance Education involves both teaching and learning at a distance. The theoretical framework for distance education is the concept of distance as separation between teacher and learner. The reaching of the so-called unreached learners is the concern of the ODL (Crellin 2000). Since it is often said that equal access to education is a basic human right and it is not a privilege, therefore, education shall reach the unreached also. Besides people who are at work in the country, especially those who are in the far-flung areas need opportunities to upgrade their expertise and qualifications, ODL mode can provide opportunities for updating, broadening and diversifying their knowledge and skills so that they can also contribute in the development of the nation.

Education, particularly ODL system has all the characteristics of entrepreneurship and developing such skills in the learners right from the college stage, will provide them opportunities of creativity, freedom and ability to generate wealth through setting up ventures producing marketable products. Open Universities (OUs) are making this possible by introducing such programmes and imparting training in productive skills that are relevant to the world of work (Abdul Kalam, University News, 2004). The last decade has seen a phenomenal growth in the enrolment of distance learners as DE institutions particularly OUs have joined the bandwagon to meet the increasing demand for such type of education. Distance Education, variously known as open learning, distance learning, flexible learning, distributed learning, online learning, e-learning,

resource-based learning, technology-mediated learning and such other nomenclature, with different shades of meaning and also used interchangeably, has come to stay as an important philosophy and form of education in the 21 century (Dainiel et al. 2005). Ever increasing enrolment share of ODL in higher education at tertiary level has encouraged the ODL educationalists and manager to predict its share as high as 40 percent at tertiary level. This phenomenon shift will necessitate continuous need for skill development, regular monitoring and strengthening of support services to ensure quality, efficacy and efficiency. This is an indication of the important place distance education has come to occupy in India's education and human resource development efforts. At the same time, there is insufficient public understanding of distance education functions and awareness about concerns regarding its quality assurance. Even though distance education systems and practices greatly vary and are context-specific, the experts in the field consider quality assurance as the common priority (Prasad 2005).

Therefore ODL system has emerged as an alternative as well as complementary channel of education and training in India. It has already established its credibility and recognition. The growth of distance education, both quantitatively and qualitatively, has been phenomenal during the last two decades, particularly after the introduction of the single mode open universities in the country. Further, the application of ICTs gave a major flip to the accelerated development of distance education (Panda et.al 2005). But, so far the progress in this direction has been quite limited. Use of ICT has become an essential requirement of distance education for delivery of programmes as it facilitate the learning and provide the flexibility of place. It increases the interest of the user in addition to providing consistency, privacy, and reduced learning. Multi-media technologies can motivate the students and increase their interest in the learning

ODL SYSTEM IN INDIA: GROWTH OF IGNOU

In order to accomplish the marathon task, IGNOU has developed a suitable SSS network, not only across the country but its presence can also be witnessed in 36 countries of the world. SSS network of the university include Regional Centres (RCs), Recognised Regional Centres (RRCs), Learners Support Centres (LSCs) and Partner Institutions (PIs), based on the principle of convergence, networking and resource sharing. In order to provide efficient and effective SSS across the country, IGNOU has so far established more than 3000 LSCs and 61 RCs, and 60 PIs involving premier institutions of variant nature including medical and engineering colleges, leading NGOs, paramilitary forces and armed forces as well as conventional and technical universities and colleges.

University has made in-credible progress since its inception in the year 1985. The total enrolment has increased manifold during the last two and half decades. It is evident to note that in the year 1987 the total enrolment of the university was 4528 and only 2 academic programmes were on offer and the same has increased to 636489 in 2009. On the other hand, while looking at the enrolment figure of the university for last 10 years, a growth of 224 percent has been registered, consequently number of learners appeared in the Term End Examination (TEE) also increased considerably. Therefore, the number of candidates who appeared in TEE has also increased from 144098 in 2000 to 639407 in 2009 recording 343.73 percent growth. This phenomenon growth in enrolment has set the platform for all round development of SSS network. While analysing the other crucial aspects, it has been revealed that the number of successful candidates, who were awarded university degrees, diplomas and certificates also increased significantly. It may be noted that in the first convocation 1171 learners were the recipients of university degrees/diplomas and certificates. During the last two decades,

there has been phenomenon increase in the number awardees; as a result 1,33,628 learners were the recipient of university degrees, diplomas and certificates in 21st convocation held in March 2010.

Success of ODL system can also be attributed to the design, development of high quality self instructional material (SIM) and delivery of the programmes in efficient and effective manner. IGNOU not only supports its learners through print material but also supplement their pursuit to learning by producing and supplying high quality audio-video cassettes and CDs. The production of SIM and audio-video has also increased substantially over the years, as 1,61,76, thousand blocks of print material and 1526 audio video cassettes and CDs were produced during. It may be noted that audio- video material is also made available at its LSCs, where learners can make best use of it to enrich knowledge. Following the principal of resource sharing and networking, part time functionaries and academic counsellors are mainly drawn from the host institutions and institutions within the vicinity of LSCs. The number of part time staff and academic counsellors has also increased significantly which indicates that IGNOU as a mission and ODL as a mode has gained significant momentum during last two half decades.

Realising the growing importance of ODL system, an attempt has been made to assess the crucial aspects of SSS to necessitate corrective measures in support services at the cutting edge level. Therefore, all the learners who attended the 18th convocation at RC Lucknow were considered for the purpose of study irrespective of their background, caste, age, sex and programme of study. The perceptions of successful learners who have been awarded degrees, diplomas and certificates in the 18th convocation have been analysed. The important issues on which feedback was received from 335 successful candidates include pre-admission counselling, receipt of study materials, receipt of various communications which are very important

to decide the pace of the learning, feed back on the counselling, assignment evaluation, project work, TEE and use of ICT to supplement the study etc. Therefore the main objective of the study is to make critical assessment of existing SSS practices and suggest corrective measures. In order to accomplish the task a well-structured questionnaire was designed and administered among the successful candidates at the venue of convocation. The finding of the study is placed in a coherent framework of the study.

PROFILE OF THE LEARNERS

Out of 335 learners, 187 (62.64 percent) were male and 148 (37.36 percent) female, whereas one fourth (24.48 percent) learners were from rural areas while 235 (75.52 percent) were from urban areas. Therefore the proportion of learners from urban areas was significantly higher (table- 2). While looking at the employment status of the learners it was noticed that 130 (38.81 percent) learners were employed and 295 (61.19 percent) were unemployed. The learners represented different social groups and majority of them, 264 were from general category followed by 49 from other backward classes (OBC). The learners from various social groups were proportionally distributed in rural and urban areas.

Table-1 Background and Social Status of the Learners

Background/ Social Status	SC /ST	OBC	Gen- eral	Total
Rural	10	19	53	82
Urban	12	30	211	253
Total	22	49	264	335

While analyzing the age- wise distribution of learners, it has been noticed that representation of learners was maximum (54.03 percent) from age group 25-35. On

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the other hand the proportion of female learners was marginally higher in the age group 25-35 which indicates that relatively aged women take ODL system as an opportunity to fulfill their dream of pursuing higher education (table-3). It is

also observed that with the increasing age the success rate of female learners has also increased which indicates that even the social and household commitments do not avert the temptation of female learners.

Table- 2 Successful Learners by Age Group

Sex/Age	18-25	25-35	35 and above	Total
Male	72 (38.50)	98 (52.40)	17 (9.10)	187
Female	48 (32.43)	85 (57.43)	15 (10.14)	148
Total	120 (35.82)	181 (54.03)	33 (9.85)	335

ASSESSMENT OF SUPPORT SERVICES: PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES

Information regarding the various programmes of the university is made available by using different channels including print and electronic media, on line uploading and broadcast through IRC and TC. At the cutting edge, RCs and LSCs play catalytic role in disseminating the information to the perspective learners. However, while analyzing the responses, it is revealed that in urban areas

print media has played significant role primarily due to its easy accessibility. It is evident to note that 129 (38.51 percent) respondents came across about IGNOU programmes from newspapers, whereas 29.58 percent from fellow learners. It is important to note that only 16.71 and 5.07 percent learners visited RC and LSCs respectively to collect information, which indicate that RC and LSCs will have to play proactive role in providing information particularly at entry level. (table -3).

Table- 3 Information about IGNOU Programmes

Variables	Newspapers	Visiting RC	Visiting SC	IGNOU Hqtr	Fellow Learners	Total
Rural	21(25.61)	14 (17.07)	9 (10.97)	13 (15.85)	25(30.49)	82
Urban	108(42.68)	19(7.51)	8(3.16)	43(17.01)	75(29.64)	253
Total	129(38.51)	33(9.85)	17(5.07)	56(16.71)	100 (29.58)	335

It is also noticed that 36.01 percent learners approached RCs and LSCs for pre admission counseling and the proportion of such learners was relatively more from rural areas. On the other hand fellow learners have definite influence

and played important role to motivate the perspective learners as a result 44.27 percent urban and 34.15 percent rural learners have not sought any kind of assistance at pre admission level from RC and LSCs. (table-4)

Table – 4 Pre- Admission Counselling

Variables	Assistance from RC	Assistance from SC	Assistance from fellow Learners	No Assistance	Total
Rural	27 (32.92)	12 (14.63)	15 (18.29)	28 (34.15)	82
Urban	53 (20.95)	32 (12.64)	56 (21.29)	112 (44.27)	253
Total	80 (23.88)	44 (12.13)	71 (21.19)	140 (41.79)	335

In ODL system pace of the learning is determined by timely receipt of various documents which is highly relevant due to the nature of learners, as they are pursuing the programme from distance. Timely dispatch of confirmation letter, counseling schedule, self-instruction material, intimation slip for TEE and time-to-time status of grade card is mandatory. Though, IGNOU has made sincere efforts to upload the vital information on its website for the benefit of the learners, however considering the prevailing socio-economic and geo-physical conditions of the country, the reliance of rural learners on postal receipt is paramount. Accordingly attempt was made to analyse the status of confirmation letters received by the learners and it was found that

majority of them (278) received the same before the commencement of the session, 48 middle of the session and 9 respondent never received by post (table-5). The problem was more acute in the urban areas as 14.43 percent learners received the confirmation letter during the middle of the session being deprived of initial advantages of attending induction meeting and counseling sessions. The learners who do not receive the confirmation letter approached RCs for duplicate. Significance of confirmation letter is explicable because it not only confirms the admission and provide useful information on examination, counselling, submission of assignments but also contains fee receipt and Identity card which are vital for future course of action.

Table-5 Status of Receipt of Confirmation Letter and SIM

Variables	Receipt of confirmation letters			Receipt of SIM		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Before the commencement of session	72 (78.80)	205 (81.03)	278 (82.90)	75 (91.46)	190 (75.10)	265 (79.10)
Middle of session	6(7.31)	42(16.60)	48(14.33)	7 (8.54)	52 (20.55)	59 (17.61)
Never/after the commencement of session	3(3.66)	6 (2.37)	9 (2.66)	0	11 (4.35)	11 (3.28)
Total	82	253	335	82	253	335

Similarly timely receipt of SIM also plays vital role to ensure timely completion of programme. From the table-7 it is pertinent to note that majority of the learners in rural as well as urban area received the SIM before the commencement of the session. Nevertheless, in urban areas, some instances were noticed where learners did not receive material in time mainly due to frequent transfer of learners from one city to another and change of residential address. Therefore SIM in such cases returns back to the MPDD, where sincere attempts are made to re- sent it. Besides, RCs also provide material to such learners from its stock to ensure that the pace of the study does not get slowed down. Nevertheless about 20.89 percent learners have received SIM either during the middle of the session (17.61 percent) and once the session is over (3.38 percent) and the proportion of such learners is more in the urban areas. This phenomenon warrants immediate attention to ensure corrective measures because non-availability of SIM does influence the pace of the learning.

In order to facilitate the learning at the LSCs counseling sessions are organized both for theory and practical courses and comprehensive schedule is circulated to the learners in the induction meeting, which is organized at the beginning of the session, besides dispatching through post and placing at

the notice board of respective LSC. Attendance in theory counselling is not compulsory; on the other hand 75 percent attendance is compulsory in the practical counselling. Table-7 clearly indicates that majority of the learners have regularly attended theory (87.37 percent) as well as practical (91.79 percent) counseling. While analyzing the attendance in counselling session with respect to sex, it is revealed that male candidates were more serious in attending the counselling session corresponding to female, however the margin was not very significant. At the same time the proportion of learners who have attended regular counseling session was relatively more in rural areas (92.68 % in theory and 95.65% in practical). It is also noticed that the number of learners who did not attend the counseling was significantly low, as only 7 learners, 2 with rural and 5 with urban background never attended the counseling sessions. Positive response of learners towards the counseling session can be attributed to the importance counseling in shaping the pace of learning, nevertheless in-depth analysis with respect to programme of study pursued and number of counseling sessions attended would provide more clear picture. However, from a sample of 335 learners, 280 (154 male & 126 female) have opted for the programmes where practical component was involved and 55 without practical component.

Table –6 Attendances in Counseling

Variables	Regularly		Occasionally		Rarely		Never		Total	
	T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P
Male	164 (87.70)	142 (92.21)	19 (10.16)	10 (6.49)	03 (1.60)	0	01 (0.54)	02 (1.30)	187 (100)	154 (100)
Female	122 (82.43)	115 (91.27)	23 (15.24)	08 (6.35)	02 (1.35)	0	01 (0.68)	3 (2.38)	148 (100)	126 (100)
Total	286 (85.37)	257 (91.79)	42 (12.54)	18 (6.43)	05 (1.49)	0	02 (0.60)	05 (1.78)	335 (100)	280 (100)
Rural	76 (92.68)	66 (95.65)	03 (3.66)	02 (2.90)	02 (2.44)	0	01 (1.22)	01 (1.45)	82 (100)	69 (100)
Urban	210 (83.00)	191 (90.52)	39 (7.58)	16 (1.18)	03 (1.18)	0	01 (0.40)	04 (1.90)	253 (100)	211 (100)
Total	286 (85.37)	257 (91.79)	42 (12.54)	18 (6.43)	05 (1.49)	0	02 (0.60)	05 (1.78)	335 (100)	280 (100)

Note: T= Theory, P= Practical

In order to supplement learning f2f counseling, workshop, seminars, tele-counseling, IRC, on line counseling are organized and it is expected that f2f counseling will be supplemented by the use of audio video cassettes and CDs. An attempt has been made to seek the feedback from successful learners on f2f counseling, IRC and use of audio-video. It has been revealed that majority of the male (164) as well as female (143) have preferred f2f counsellings followed by tele-counsellings, therefore, preference for f2f counseling was more strong (table-7).

The use of TC and audio-video was not very encouraging, though the university has made considerable expenditure for technology mediated learning, however desired awareness among the learners is yet to be created to change the mindset. Therefore, more proactive approach is required to draw the attention of learners as well as academic counselors for more effective use communication technology in order to make the optimal use of infrastructure created across the country for this purpose.

Table-7 Preference for Counseling

Variable	Face to Face	Tele-Conferencing	Audio/ Video	Total
Male	164 (53.42)	14 (93.33)	9 (69.23)	187 (55.82)
Female	143 (46.58)	1 (6.67)	4 (30.77)	148 (44.18)
Total	307	15	13	335
Rural	72 (23.45)	4 (26.67)	6 (46.15)	82 (24.48)
Urban	235 (76.55)	11 (73.33)	7 (53.85)	253 (75.52)
Total	307	15	13	335

Assignments are integral part of learning in ODL system and the learners are supplied assignments along-with the SIM which have to be completed as per schedule. It may also be noted that timely submission of assignments is prerequisite for appearing in the TEE. On the other hand learners are expected to receive feed back on assignments before they actually submit next set of assignments. The assignments also carry 25-30 percent weightage in the overall assessment depending on its nature and study component. Out of 335 learners, 304 were in a position to submit the assignments in time and timely submission has contributed significantly in shaping the pace of the learning and preparation for the TEE. Similarly 259 (77.31 percent) learners reported that proper feedback was

given on the assignment and 154 (45.97 percent) learners have received the feedback before preparing another set of assignment.

Timely reflection of assignment grades/marks helps in completion of degree in time. Therefore, 236 learners (70.45 percent) have reported that the assignment grades/marks were reflected timely in their grade card, but the problem persisted with the 30 percent learners whose assignment grades/marks were not reflected in time. Problems related to non reflection of assignments grade/marks was further investigated and it is observed that wrong enrolment, course code, assignment number and expiry of registration are some of the common error responsible for non reflection of assignments marks. Therefore learners as well as academic counselors

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should be cautious while posting the enrolment, course code, assignment number in order to ensure timely reflection of assignment marks/grades.

IGNOU conduct TEE twice a year in the month of June and December and the schedule for the examination is prepared well in advance and made available on the web site as well notice board of RCs, SRCs and LSCs. Further the time

schedule is dispatched to the learners along with the intimation slip. Accordingly the successful learners were asked to provide the feedback on the timely receipt of intimation slip and 285 learners have reported timely receipt of intimation slip and those who did not receive in time approached the RC for the same.

Table-8 Successful Completion of Degree / Diploma in Minimum Duration

Variable	Minimum Duration	After One Year of Minimum Duration	After Two Year of Minimum Duration	Maximum Duration	After Taking Re-admission	Total
Male	73 (39.04)	80 (42.78)	27 (14.44)	5 (2.67)	2 (1.07)	187 (100.00)
Female	70 (47.29)	54 (36.49)	19 (12.84)	4 (2.70)	1 (0.68)	148 (100.00)
Total	143 (42.69)	134 (40.00)	46 (13.73)	9 (2.69)	3 (0.90)	335 (100.00)
Rural	34 (41.46)	24 (29.27)	21 (25.61)	2 (2.44)	1 (1.22)	82 (100)
Urban	109 (43.08)	110 (43.48)	25 (9.88)	7 (2.77)	2 (0.79)	253 (100)
Total	143 (42.69)	134 (40.00)	46 (13.73)	9 (2.68)	3 (0.90)	335 (100)
Employed	50 (38.17)	55 (41.98)	20 (15.27)	4 (3.05)	2 (1.53)	131 (100)
Unemployed	93 (45.59)	79 (38.73)	26 (12.75)	5 (2.45)	1 (0.48)	204 (100)
Total	143 (43.28)	134 (40.00)	46 (13.73)	9 (2.69)	3 (0.90)	335 (100)
SC/ST	12 (54.55)	2 (9.09)	7 (31.82)	0	1 (4.34)	22 (100)
OBC	26 (53.06)	16 (32.65)	5 (10.21)	2 (4.08)	0	49 (100)
General	105 (39.77)	116 (43.94)	34 (12.88)	7 (2.65)	2 (0.76)	264 (100)
Total	143 (42.69)	134 (40.00)	46 (13.73)	9 (2.69)	3 (0.90)	335 (100)
18-25	59 (47.97)	51 (41.46)	13 (10.57)	0	0	123 (100)
25-35	72 (39.78)	71 (39.23)	26 (14.13)	9 (4.97)	3 (1.66)	181 (100)
Above 35	12 (38.71)	12 (38.71)	7 (22.58)	0	0	31 (100)
Total	143 (42.69)	131 (40.00)	44 (13.73)	9 (2.68)	3 (0.90)	335 (100)

ODL system provides flexibility to the learners to complete the programmes and the flexibility of duration may be

from two years to 8 years depending on the nature of the programme. A student can extend a 6 month certificate programme

upto two years, one year diploma programme upto 4 years and three years degree programme upto 6 year without seeking re-admission. This flexibility has both advantages as well as disadvantages, because on the one hand it may facilitate the learning particularly those who hardly find time due to pre- occupation. For instance armed personal posted in the difficulty localities hardly find times to complete the programme in time mainly due to prevailing service condition. The flexibility in terms of duration of the study is highly beneficial for them as they can continue their study once they return back to normal localities. On the other hand flexibility may encourage laxity, which will jeopardize the objective of the learning. While analysing the responses pertaining to the duration of completion of the study it is noticed that only 42.69 percent learners could complete the programme in minimum duration and 40.30 percent after one year of minimum duration and 13.73 percent after two years of minimum duration. It is also revealed that 56.41 percent learners took the advantage of flexibility and 2.69 percent learners took maximum duration. On the other hand 3 learners could not complete programme with in maximum duration and took re- admission to complete the degree (table-8).

Female learners were more focused towards their study as 47.29 percent completed their degree in minimum duration. On the other hand learners with

rural background took slightly more time than urban learners. It has also been revealed that 70.77 percent learners from rural areas were able to complete the programme after one year of minimum duration. Whereas, in rural areas proportion of such learners was marginally higher (86.54 percent), therefore only 29.27 per cent learners with rural background could complete their degree within one year of minimum duration which can be attributed that rural learners encounters more problems despite being more serious towards learning as their attendance in the counselling was also reported marginally higher than the urban learners. On the other hand higher proportion of unemployed learners to complete the programme in time was on expected line. Among the different age group 47.97 percent learners from age group 18-25 completed the programme within minimum duration of the study, whereas the learners in the age group 25-35 and 35 and above took more time.

While looking at the social background of the learners it has been noticed that more than 50 percent learners among SC (54.55%) and OBC (53.06%) were able to complete the programme within minimum duration of the study. While only 39.77 percent learners from the general category could complete the programme with in minimum duration of the study who took more time in completion of programme than SC and OBC learners.

Table-9 Learning Experience with IGNOU

Rating	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Total
Male	60 (32.09)	72 (38.50)	40 (21.39)	13 (6.95)	2 (1.07)	187 (100)
Female	47 (31.76)	53 (35.81)	33 (22.30)	12 (8.11)	03 (2.02)	148 (100)
Total	107 (31.95)	125 (37.31)	73 (21.79)	25 (7.46)	05 (1.49)	335 (100)
Rural	29 (35.37)	30 (36.59)	22 (26.83)	01 (1.22)	0	82 (100)
Urban	78 (30.38)	95 (37.55)	51 (20.16)	24 (9.59)	5 (1.98)	253 (100)
Total	107 (31.95)	125 (37.31)	73 (21.79)	25 (7.46)	05 (1.49)	335 (100)

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Majority of the learners (91.05 percent) were satisfied with ODL experience as 31.95 percent learners awarded high rating (excellent) followed by 37.31 percent learners very good. No significant variation was noticed among male and female learners (Table –10). On the other hand rural learners have

cherished more enjoyment in pursuing programme through IGNOU as compared to urban learners. Nevertheless 5 learners with urban background were not satisfied with their learning experience, which is insignificant. However it leaves scope for improvement in the support services.

Table-10 Response on Support Services

Rating	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Total
Male	55 (29.41)	73 (39.04)	36 (19.25)	19 (10.16)	04 (2.14)	187 (100%)
Female	37 (25.00)	51 (34.46)	40 (27.03)	18 (12.16)	02 (1.35)	148 (100%)
Total	92 (27.46)	124 (37.01)	76 (22.69)	37 (11.05)	06 (1.79)	335 (100)
Rural	26 (31.71)	32 (39.02)	15 (18.29)	10 (12.20)	0	82 (100)
Urban	66 (26.09)	92 (36.36)	61 (24.11)	25 (9.88)	5 (1.98)	253 (100)
Total	92 (27.46)	124 (37.01)	76 (22.69)	35 (10.45)	05 (1.48)	335 (100)

On the other hand, 27.46 percent learners have rated support services as excellent followed by 37.01 percent very good and 22.69 percent good. It is also noticed that male learners were more satisfied with the support services compared to their counterpart. On the other hand fractured opinion were received from rural as well as urban learners, nevertheless the rating of rural learners were relatively skewed towards excellent support services on five point scale. On the other hand 6 learners were not satisfied with the support services, though the number of such learners was insignificant; however it has drawn the attention of planners and policy makers to necessitate corrective measures.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Student support services are very essential and crucial aspect in the ODL system. Wide spread use of internet and

quest for on line support services have added new dimension to the pursuit for learning, particularly at tertiary level where learners have considerable freedom to select programmes of their choice. From the preceding analysis it has been revealed that successful learners have cherished study through ODL system by taking advantage of flexibility in terms of pace, pace and duration of study, however, it has also been realized that concentrated efforts are required to provide effective support services in order to cope up with the new development taking place in the field of higher education. The existing network of LSCs should be strengthen with internet accessibility right from the cluster level to the top order of hierarchy to provide equal access and opportunity both for rural and urban learners. Ultimate objective of reaching the un-reached will only be achieved once parity in support services is ensured by providing on line support services at the door steps of the learners particularly in remote and rural areas by

strengthening the cluster- e learning resource centres (Dimri, et.al, 2006).

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