

Teacher Training through ODL in Maharashtra: The IGNOU Experience

Challenges and Achievements

Theme: Formal Education

Sub Theme: Revamping teacher education

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INTRODUCTION

Quality Teacher education is crucial for the development of society and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly to achieve universal primary education. IGNOU offers a Bachelors Degree in Education through Open and Distance Learning mode. This B.Ed degree is recognized by the National Council for Teacher Education and is much valued and sought after. From a single study centre in Nagpur for the whole of Maharashtra, there are now eleven study centers, out of which six are in Pune region. 100 learners are allotted to each study centre. The total number of applicants for the entrance test each year runs into more than 12 thousand in Maharashtra. The demand for quality teacher education through ODL mode is increasing. The B.Ed programme of IGNOU has provided access to several government primary school teachers who aspire to upgrade their skills and move upward in their career paths. Not only has IGNOU provided the access to in-service graduate teachers to upgrade their qualifications, but it has also been successful in transforming the quality of teaching in the rural areas of the State of Maharashtra where these

student teachers are employed. Most of the applicants and the admitted B.Ed learners in Maharashtra are primary school teachers teaching in the government district schools. IGNOU's B.Ed degree is recognized by the National Council for Teacher Education. IGNOU is the apex body of Distance Education in India and the degrees, diplomas, certificates awarded are of an exceptionally good quality. Some objectives of IGNOU are democratizing higher education by taking it to the doorsteps of the learners; providing access to high quality education to all those who seek it irrespective of age, offering need based academic programmes by giving professional and vocational orientation to the courses.

This paper attempts to examine the perceptions of successful B.Ed learners of IGNOU and find out whether they have succeeded in achieving their objectives and to know the challenges that they faced and how they overcame any difficulties. An attempt is made to find out how they have benefited from this programme.

OBJECTIVES OF IGNOU's B.Ed PROGRAMME

IGNOU's B.Ed programme through distance education mode is of minimum 2 years duration whereas the regular B.Ed through face to face mode is of one year duration. Distance learners are permitted to complete the programme within four years. The medium of instruction is English and Hindi. In-service graduate teachers having at least

55% marks at graduation or a higher degree and a minimum of 2 years full time teaching experience in a recognized school at the primary, secondary or the higher secondary level are eligible to apply for the B.Ed programme through distance education mode.

The B.Ed Programme aims at developing the understanding and competencies required by practicing teachers for effective teaching learning process at the secondary stage. The programme also provides opportunities of sharing experiences gained by practicing teachers. It enables in-service teachers to select and organize learning experiences according to the requirement of learners. In addition, it provides knowledge and develops in them an understanding of areas such as educational evaluation, school management, etc.

The programme aims to enable practicing teachers to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) To systemize experiences and strengthen the professional competencies of in-service teachers.
- 2) To imbibe knowledge and develop and understanding of the various methods and approaches of organizing learning experiences of secondary school students.
- 3) To develop skills required in selecting and organizing learning experiences.
- 4) To understand the nature of the learning process.
- 5) To develop skills involved in dealing with the academic and personal problems of learners.
- 6) To acquire knowledge and develop an understanding of the various procedures and techniques of evaluation and their classroom applications.
- 7) To develop skills involved in selecting, developing and using evaluation tools.
- 8) To acquire knowledge and develop an understanding of various aspects of school management.
- 9) To develop competencies for organizing various instructional and student support activities.
- 10) To develop an appreciation of the role of the teacher in the prevailing socio-cultural and political system in general and the educational system in particular.

(IGNOU's Student Handbook and Prospectus Bachelor of Education 2011 pp.14,15)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The B.Ed programme was first launched in 2001. From one Programme Study Centre at Nagpur, today there are 11 centres in the entire State of Maharashtra. Pune Region earlier catering to the entire State of Maharashtra has been trifurcated into three Regional Centres. The metropolis of Mumbai and the four coastal districts come under Mumbai Regional Centre. Nagpur Regional Centre has 14 districts of Vidarbha and parts of Marathwada under its jurisdiction, whereas Pune Regional Centre caters to the remaining 15 districts of Western Maharashtra and parts of Marathwada. This was necessitated due to increasing number of learners and also academic programmes as well as the large size of the State. There are six Programme Study Centres for B.Ed in Pune region located at Pune, Aurangabad, Shrirampur, Sangamner and two centres at Jalgaon. 600

learners are admitted every year under Pune Region.

Thousands of applicants appear for the entrance test. Those who qualify are further selected on the basis of a Region-wise merit list. Seat Reservation for persons belonging to the Scheduled Castes (15%), Scheduled Tribes (7.5%), Other Backward Castes- Non Creamy Layer (27%), Physically Handicapped (3%), War-Widows (5%), Kashmiri Migrants (One Seat) is as per the Government of India rules. Merit lists are drawn up category wise on the basis of marks awarded at the Entrance Exams. Where ever there is a tie-up for the seats, consideration is given to whether the candidate has a post-graduate degree followed by the number of years of experience. In further tie-up, date of birth is considered and the candidate who is older is offered the seat. Each Programme Study

Centre has the proportionate number of reserved category seats as stipulated in the rules. Obtaining an offer of admission for B.Ed is considered to be quite prestigious. Although Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) also offers B.Ed through Distance Education mode, IGNOU is the preferred option of a large number of primary school teachers especially government teachers because the quality is good. It is understood that YCMOU gives preference to the number of years of experience and those with less experience, unable to secure a seat in YCMOU which offers the local Marathi language as a medium of instruction, choose to apply to IGNOU.

The total number of schools, pupils and teachers in Maharashtra at the primary and secondary level of schooling is as follows:

PRIMARY LEVEL

No. of Schools	No. of Pupils	No. of Teachers
67,044	11,314,000	3,15,000

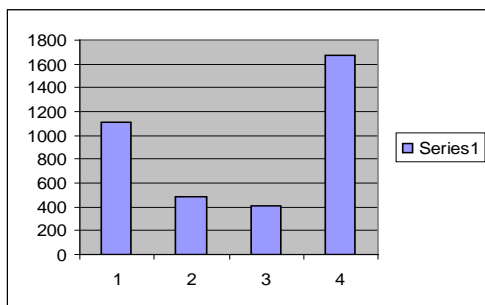
SECONDARY/HIGHER SEC. LEVEL

No. of Schools	No. of Pupils	No. of Teachers
17,356	90,00,000	2,51,000

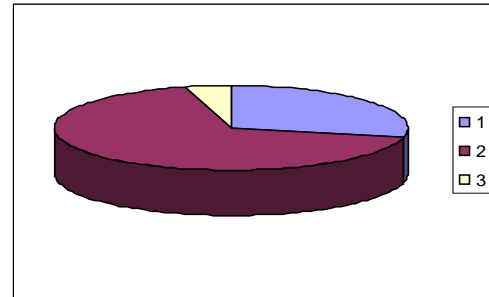
(Source: Handbook of Basic Statistics, Government of Maharashtra.)

Since 2001, 3688 B.Ed learners were admitted at IGNOU Regional Centre. The Composition is as follows:

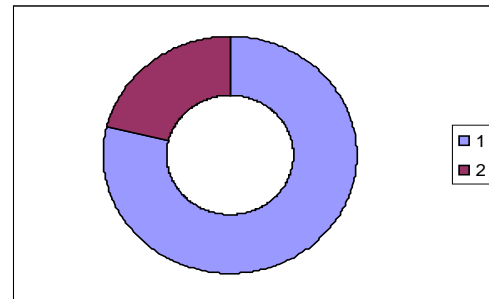
Open category=30%; SC=13.29%; ST=11.14% and OBC=45.44%



Rural=67.33%; Urban=28.39% and Tribal = 4.28%

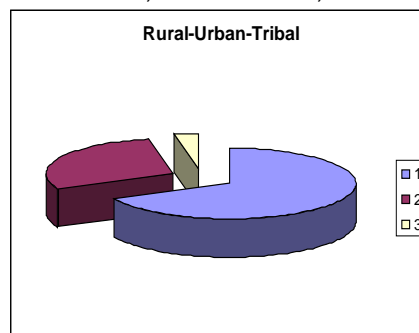


Males= 78.96% and Females =21.04%.

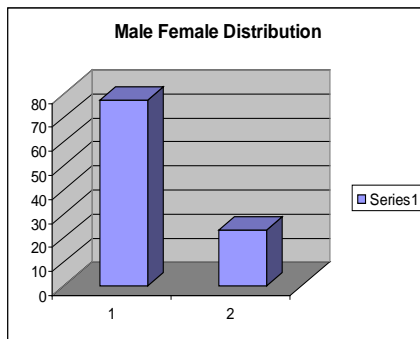


Out of total 3688 learners admitted, 287 successfully completed the programme from Pune Regional Centre. The composition of these successful learners is as follows:

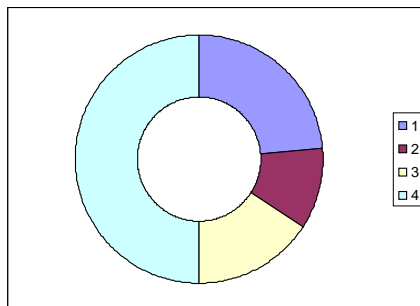
Rural= 68%; Urban = 29%; Tribal = 3%



Male = 77%; Female = 23%



Open Category = 23.72%; Scheduled castes = 10.58%; Scheduled tribes = 15.69%; Other Backward Classes = 50%



These figures indicate that the B.Ed programme is reaching out to the so far disadvantaged sections. Most of the candidates are government primary school teachers working at remote places at the district and taluka and village level and they act as change agents responsible in bringing about the much needed positive development in society. They work with children who are the forbearers of the future new society. Education is a slow but certain process of development and these trained teachers go a long way in securing the desired change.

DATA COLLECTION AND FINDINGS

A questionnaire was mailed to all successful candidates by post. It was divided into five sections. The first section gathered personal information from the candidates; the second section sought to inquire into the perceptions of successful learners and find out what had motivated them to register for and complete the B.Ed programme. The third section dealt with the challenges that they faced and how they tried to overcome the difficulties. The fourth section sought information about feedback on the Programme; the programme design; the study materials, shortcomings and the support that they received from the study centre functionaries and the academic counselors. The fifth and last section sought to find out if the learners have benefited in any way and how? Also whether any change in their teaching was perceived by themselves or by others like their colleagues or superiors.

The questionnaire was posted to all 287 successful learners, but the response was not satisfactory. Only 16 learners responded. If self addressed stamped envelopes had been sent along with the questionnaires, it is felt that the response may have been better. The cost was a deterrent factor for the author, and it was believed that teachers would return the questionnaires. There is no guarantee that had self stamped envelopes been sent, they would have been returned. The questionnaire carried the mobile number of the author who could be contacted in case of any doubt or query.

Although the number of questionnaires returned was few in number, they were found to be qualitatively good. Several respondents called on telephone to inform that they had gained immensely and were motivated to study further. They had enjoyed filling out the questionnaire and were happy to be given an opportunity to fulfill their

aspirations. They were happy to be associated with a reputed large University like IGNOU.

An attempt has been made to compile the responses received from these teachers.

Rural learners= 11; Urban=3; Tribal Area=2
Caste composition: General=10; SC=2; OBC=4

Districts: Pune=2; Beed=2; Yavatmal=2; Latur=2; Amravati; Gondia; Buldana; Solapur; Thane; Mumbai; Nasik and Aurangabad 1 each. Total=16. (This indicates the spread of the districts all over the State of Maharashtra).

Number of years taken to complete the Programme: 13 learners within 2 years minimum duration. 3 learners took 2 to 3 years.

Government Primary Teachers =14; Private School Teachers = 2.

Motivation factors: To get a Degree in teaching; to earn a higher qualification; to gain knowledge on how to teach; because it is a necessary requirement; to get a promotion etc.

Support received from various quarters: family; wife; colleagues; friends; former successful colleagues; counselors and teachers, even children. The support was of various kinds. Study material was made available, tips given on how to study; cooperation and encouragement. The support was emotional, mental and moral support and also physical support without which it would have been more difficult to complete the programme.

Challenges: Commuting to the study centre; difficulties faced in finding accommodation during the period of the workshops; the practical schedules were very intensive; the assignments were application oriented making the student teachers think well; problem of getting leave from school at the time of term end examinations; some faced personal problems like illness; pregnancy; one learner's son aged 4 days was admitted in ICU, yet he states that no problem is insurmountable if there is determination to succeed; some felt that the language was difficult. **The problem faced by most of the respondents was the medium of**

instruction. They are government primary school teachers who have studied in the vernacular medium. They also teach in Marathi medium schools and are not well versed with either English or Hindi. The script for both Marathi and Hindi is Devnagari and hence they feel that Hindi is easier to understand than English. However later they find that although the script is the same, Hindi is of a very high level and they find it difficult to understand and communicate. Opting for English medium is also not an easy proposition. Almost all the respondents stated that if the materials were available in the local language, it would have made easier reading.

All the respondents tried to solve the difficulties that they faced with determination and persistence. The study centre functionaries helped the learners in finding suitable accommodation or in some cases also provided hostel accommodation at nominal rates. The other colleagues helped in the schools and in some cases the Principal or superior officers were cooperative in sanctioning leave to take the exams. A suggestion was made to have exam centres at all the District headquarters as the learners would not have to travel very far. Language barriers were overcome as the Academic Counsellors at the study centres used all three languages during Counselling sessions and at practical sessions. Also the practice teaching sessions were held in Marathi as the pupils in the High schools were being taught in Marathi medium. Discussions with other student teachers during the contact sessions and workshops helped the learners overcome the difficulties and challenges.

Feedback on Programme: Most learners were extremely happy with the study material. It was very comprehensive, detailed and the concepts were explained very well. The material was learner oriented and also helped them while they were working on the assignments. Some respondents also expressed satisfaction with the in-text questions which clarified the main concepts. The study material was used by many learners to prepare for National Eligibility Test for College teachers /State Level Eligibility Test / Union Public Service Commission exams and the Maharashtra

Public Service Commission exams and other competitive exams as it is of excellent standard. Some felt that the material should be translated and made available in the local language, Marathi. They also felt that more Audio-visual aids should be made available. One suggestion was to add child health education and morals and value education, guidance and counselling in the syllabus.

The learners were also satisfied with the Programme design. It was intensive and yet it was possible for them to complete the programme within the minimum duration of 2 years although they were holding full time jobs and have a lot of work to do. Since the practical workshops are held for 12 days during the summer break in the month of May, it was possible for them to attend the workshops. The B.Ed programme is well designed and well paced. The teachers at the Study centres were well qualified and experienced. The respondents stated that they received excellent support at the study centres. They enjoyed coming together at the workshops and the school based activities. It was suggested that theory counseling be arranged at the District places. Also it was felt by some respondents that the supervised practice teaching lesson schedule should be given to them at the time of attending the workshop. If the schedule is prepared well in advance, it is convenient to take leave from school and come prepared to the study centres.

The respondents were happy and satisfied with the work and painstaking efforts of the Academic Counsellors. There was some amount of dissatisfaction with the clerical staff as the assignment awards were sent late or there were errors leading to protracted communication with the Regional Centre and the Head Office.

Benefits and Achievements: Most of the respondents expressed that they had gained immensely after completing the B.Ed programme. They were promoted to a higher pay scale; given higher classes to teach; the nature of their jobs was widened to include supervisory tasks. Several of

them have been promoted as Education Officer (Extension). They have availed of this promotion after passing a competitive departmental examination. They stated that the B.Ed study materials helped them in preparation for the promotional exams. A large number of respondents have registered for further programmes with IGNOU like M.A; M.A (Education); M.Ed etc. They state that they have achieved a lot of intangible benefits like greater confidence; clarity of thought; systematic approach; better comprehension etc. They have tried to inculcate into their regular teaching what they have learnt during the B.Ed programme. They make better use of teaching aids, computers and other ICT methods etc. Mention has been made of the formation of a Sangharsh samiti of primary teachers with B.Ed qualifications. A case before the Nagpur High Court has resulted in more than 2500 primary teachers in several districts getting a higher pay scale from Rs.5200-20200-GP-2800 to Rs.9300-34800-GP-4300, which is considerable. They feel happy at the path their careers have taken from being just an SSC; D.Ed freshly appointed teacher to a post graduate trained teacher today. They want to study further and wish to complete M.Phil and also do a Ph.D. Their latent ambitions and desire to learn more have wakened and they wish to study further. Their image among their students, other teacher colleagues and the society in which they live has improved. They are looked upon with dignity not only in society but also in the school administrative set up. They notice an improvement in their teaching and they themselves feel more confident. Other teachers come to them for guidance and advice. Earlier students would shy away, but now they try to understand and befriend them. They feel that their popularity has increased. One successful lady teacher states that from being just a primary school teacher teaching a few classes, she has risen to become an Education officer supervising 200 District Government (Zilla Parishad) schools and she is also completing M.Ed with IGNOU.

CONCLUSIONS

From the above discussion it can be inferred that the Programme objectives listed seem to have been achieved. In informal discussions with the academic counselors, it has been noted that they enjoy teaching these distance learners, even though it means giving up their own vacation. Since the distance B.Ed learners are experienced teachers, working with them is an altogether different and challenging experience. Through contact with these teachers who come from all over rural Maharashtra, it is possible to reach to the vast majority of children who are living in the rural hinterlands.

The demand for B.Ed distance mode from the Government Primary School Teachers is so large that all applicants cannot be accommodated. But there appears to be a dichotomy as a newspaper report in Pune Newslines supplement of The Indian Express dtd. 15th September 2010, states that regular full time B.Ed colleges have vacant seats this year to the tune of about 10,500 in the State of Maharashtra. Several B.Ed graduates are unemployed as the demand is not equal to the number of B.Ed learners graduating every year. There were 3500 vacant seats in 2009 and 3000 vacancies in 2008. It is noted that regular seats lie vacant whereas there is a demand for distance B.Ed from Primary Teachers, who do not require a B.Ed degree to teach at the primary school level. One fails to understand the rush for Primary Teachers to do B.Ed. If the Government had a policy of paying equal scales to a D.Ed holder as is granted to a B.Ed holder, the rush may reduce. To give an incentive for more learning, a pay hike could be granted after each increase in educational qualification. For example, a D.Ed holder with a post graduation may be granted a scale equal to a Graduate with B.Ed. Primary level teaching is the base on which further education of a child is built and it is necessary that equal dignity and salary is given to all the levels, primary, secondary, higher secondary teaching. Something is surely amiss as on one hand there is an excellently designed B.Ed Teacher training programme with a lot of demand from working government primary school teachers whereas on the other hand regular

B.Ed seats are not being filled. The policy-makers must look at distance education with the respect that it deserves. Society seems to have realized the potential and worth of distance education, yet some bureaucrats still give a step motherly treatment.

All respondents seem to have fulfilled their objective and have personally benefited greatly. IGNOU's B.Ed programme has succeeded in reaching out to teachers in the remotest areas of the State and provided learning opportunities to aspirants.