

Student Satisfaction with Open Distance Learning:

Experiences of Open Universities



Edited by
Manas Ranjan Panigrahi

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CEMCA

**Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia
New Delhi**

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Foreword

Satisfaction is a sense which is delightful and is obtained when any individual needs are accomplished. Importance of satisfaction originated from industry but later surfaced in educational institutions.

Students Satisfaction is what students think about their educational experiences during their stay in institution. Students involvements make the universities alive. There are several studies on Student Satisfaction where researchers have studied various models, determinants, survey tools etc of student satisfaction.

In India, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi conducted Student Satisfaction Survey on all India basis. Students from all higher education institutions formed the sample. National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), Bengaluru conducts Student Satisfaction Survey regarding Teaching – Learning and Evaluation. Several formal universities, engineering institutes etc are also conducting Student Satisfaction Surveys.

Commonwealth of Learning (COL) established Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) in the year 1994. CEMCA assists governments and institutions to expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning in open, distance and technology-enhanced learning. To achieve outcomes and impact, CEMCA adopts different strategies like capacity building, developing models, framing policies, developing course materials and partnering with different institutions. During the Strategic Plan Period 2015-2021, CEMCA partnered and supported several Open Universities in India and the Asia region. One of the support areas was development of courses. It was important for CEMCA to understand the perceptions of students at open universities which are supported by CEMCA.

The Handbook: Student Satisfaction with Open Distance Learning: Experiences of Open Universities edited by Dr. Manas Ranjan Panigrahi has eight chapters with 7 case studies of Open Universities viz. Bangladesh Open University (BOU), Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU), Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU), Odisha State Open University (OSOU), Uttarakhand Open University (UOU) and Vardhman Mahaveer Open University (VMOU) and one review chapter by the editor.

The survey was implemented by the seven open universities. I thank the authors of the case studies who conducted the Satisfaction Survey in their respective Universities.

I appreciate the efforts of Dr. Manas Ranjan Panigrahi for initiating this. To assure the quality, he reviewed the manuscripts and provided inputs to the authors.

Findings from the survey are a message for the university management, faculty and staff of respective university. Hope they will consider the perceptions of the learners for running their corresponding Universities based on the results of the satisfaction survey as students are demanding quality education. Hope these case studies will encourage other open universities to conduct the survey so that they are rated excellent in assessment and accreditation.

Madhu Parhar

Director,

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)

Preface

The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system of education has brought with it a new wave that has revolutionised education. It has opened a copious number of opportunities to learners, especially for ones from the developing countries where learners face difficulty in getting access to campus-based learning at the higher levels. The ODL system has been in place for a few decades now and within this span, it has established its base in education systems across the world. Any system always has space left to improve, and it is high time to identify the important issues in ODL that need attention and the areas demanding immediate focus, in order to equip its learners better. Yet another indispensable question is that how does the ODL learner feel about the system that he/she is a part of? There is no opinion more important than that of the learner(s) who remain the central figure while addressing these matters that are so essential to evaluate the ODL system. Therefore, CEMCA, in collaboration with different Open Universities from Commonwealth Asia, undertook a survey that sought to evaluate the satisfaction of the learners enrolled in the respective universities.

The opening chapter of this book discusses the aspects that the survey focussed on and the methodology that was employed. The survey mapped the demographic details of the learners and focussed on specific aspects such as the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT); the availability of learning resources; Assessment, Evaluation and Feedback; and the academic support provided by the universities. Several questions were put forward to the learners regarding each of these aspects to gather a crystal-clear understanding of their opinion.

The later chapters provide a detailed description of the respective surveys undertaken across seven Open Universities from Commonwealth Asia, out of which six were from India and one was from Bangladesh. Each of these chapters interprets the data collected from the survey and scrutinizes the issues faced by the learners. It gives a picture of how satisfied the learners are with the different services provided by their respective universities and points out the areas that need immediate attention to make the learning ecosystem better across the different aspects which were evaluated.

It is with great pleasure that I seize this opportunity to thank everyone who were a part of this project; my gratitude extends out to both the educational leaders and the learners who made this study successful. I express my sincere thanks to all the universities involved- Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU), Bangladesh Open University (BOU), Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU), Odisha State Open University (OSOU), Uttarakhand Open University (UOU), and Vardhman Mahaveer Open University (VMOU). I once again thank all the contributors for their efforts and support. As always, we at CEMCA, look forward to your suggestions that will help us improve further.

Manas Ranjan Panigrahi (PhD)

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAOU:	Asian Association of Open Universities
AICTE:	All India Council for Technical Education
AIOU:	Allama Iqbal Open University
AIPC:	All India Professionals' Congress
BAOU:	Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University
BOU:	Bangladesh Open University
CBE-LSE:	Cell Biology Education- Life Sciences Education
CC:	Creative Commons
CCA:	Courses on Computer Application
CEC:	Consortium for Educational Communication
CEGCS:	Courses on e-Governance and Cyber Security
CIQA:	Centre for Internal Quality Assurance
COK:	Centre for Open Knowledge
COL:	Commonwealth of Learning
COLRIM:	Commonwealth of Learning Review and Improvement Model
COVID-19:	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DIT:	Diploma in Information Technology
ECU:	Edith Cowan University
EDI:	Enterprise Development Institute
HA:	Home Assignment
HEI:	Higher Educational Institution
ICDE:	International Council for Open and Distance Education
ICSSR:	Indian Council of Social Science Research
ICT:	Information and Communication Technology
IGNOU:	Indira Gandhi National Open University
IVRS:	Interactive Voice Response System
KKHSOU:	Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University
LPG:	Liberalisation, Privatisation, and Globalisation

MOOC:	Massive Open Online Course
MOODLE:	Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment
MPA:	Master of Public Administration
NAAC:	National Assessment and Accreditation Council
NIEPID:	National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities
NIOS:	National Institute of Open Schooling
NSOU:	Netaji Subhas Open University
ODL:	Open and Distance Learning
OEP:	Open Education Practices
OER:	Open Educational Resources
OMKAR-e:	Open Matrix Knowledge Advancement Resources for Empowerment
ORSI:	Operational Research Society of India
OSOU:	Odisha State Open University
OU:	The Open University (of United Kingdom)
PCP:	Personal Contact Programs
PIMT:	Pranavananda Institute of Management & Technology
RCI:	Rehabilitation Council of India
RQ:	Research Question
SERVQUAL:	Service Quality
SLM:	Self-Learning Material
SPSS:	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SVS:	School of Vocational Studies
SWAYAM:	Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds
SWOT/C:	Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats/Challenges
TEE:	Term-End Examination
TEL:	Technology Enabled Learning
TOJDE:	Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education
UDHR:	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UOU:	Uttarakhand Open University
USERC:	Uttarakhand Science Education and Research Centre
VMOU:	Vardhman Mahaveer Open University

Chapter

1

Student Satisfaction with Open Distance Learning: A Review of Participating Open Universities

Manas Ranjan Panigrahi

Introduction

A very significant and sustainable innovation in the form of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) was necessary for making education accessible to everyone. In other words, a system was needed for continuous support to all learners within all sub-systems of education so that education could reach the unreachable. The ODL system emerged in Commonwealth Asia three decades ago to provide access to education to all. The ODL system is more flexible in nature and is ready to make desirable changes as per the situation.

However, target output in ODL has faced a challenge of increasing non-completion rates, which lead to high student attrition or dropouts. In March 2010, Simpson argued “Does distance education does more harm than good?” and showed that at the Open University of United Kingdom (UK), the dropout rates among new students was around 45 per cent while closer to graduation this increased to 80 per cent (Simpson, 2010). In 2013 Simpson showed how the students were progressing and dropping out from a UK foundation programme by using a river diagram (Simpson, 2013). To avoid dropouts quality procedures must be introduced as a continuous process. There is a critical link between student retention and the quality of services in ODL (Chakuchichi, 2011).



Looking at the present scenario, the whole world has been affected by the outbreak of COVID-19. Educational institutions have been closed in the Commonwealth Asian countries as a precautionary measure to prevent the further spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this situation, the role of ODL institutes has become bigger in engaging students meaningfully during their stay at home as also to continue their educational activities with the help of their parents and teachers. However, merely providing education will not serve the purpose as we also need to understand the students' needs in terms of support services provided by ODL institutions. Hence, student satisfaction in ODL has become a key factor in the successful completion of distance learning study programmes, with increasing demand for distance learning as a result of the limitations in the formal higher education system. A distance learning environment is created when students and teachers are separated in a transactional distance or there is loss of a face-to-face relationship (Moore, 1993; Moore and Kearsley, 2011). This has led to challenges in keeping pace with advances in technology and practices (Garrison, 2000). However, this particular communication and psychological space between teachers, learners, and technology must be considered as different interaction issues (Gunawardena, 1999; Mbwesa, 2014; Moore, 1989; Moore et al., 1996). The key interactions are those between student and instructor followed by student-content, student-student, and student-technology (Moore and Kearsley, 1996). In the end, students seek out ODL institutions that provide personal, unique, and memorable educational experiences (Archambault, 2008), and search for programmes that will prepare them for career advancement. Some of them even expect to gain better jobs. By envisaging those expectations, it becomes imperative to establish adequate support services including online and other ICT support services, learning and academic resources, study centres, conducting of examinations, and assessment and feedback. The overall functioning of ODL institutions as well as their strengths and weaknesses also need to be reviewed.

This chapter reviews the ODL institutions' support services through their direct stakeholders -- students. The support services can be categorised into:

Online and other ICT Support Services

Learners at the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), Guwahati reported that they mostly visited the university website and used the official mobile app for accessing information about the university. Some of them added that they directly approached the concerned study centres. Sometimes, the counsellors at the study centres used some ICT tools other than the printed self-learning material (SLM) offered by the university during counselling sessions. The students agreed that use of ICT tools enhanced the effectiveness of the counselling sessions. In addition, they could access supplementary learning material like audio/video/radio counselling provided by the university in the study centres. Overall, KKHSOU's learners were satisfied with the accessibility of the online services offered by the university.

On the other hand, the students from the Bangladesh Open University (BOU) reported



being satisfied with the availability of study material in digital formats. They agreed that technologies used in the courses were meaningful and so was the counsellors' use of technologies in counselling sessions. A majority of the respondents were happy with the online services provided by the university and they found them easily accessible.

Learners at the Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU) in Gujarat, were satisfied with the availability of radio and TV lectures on the university's channels allotted by the state government and newer digital media such as the university's website and YouTube channel. Further, students said that they were satisfied with the online services provided by the university. They agreed that BAOU provided access to digitised self-learning material which was easily available and downloadable from the university's official website.

A majority of the learners at the Uttarakhand Open University (UOU) accessed information about the university using online means. This fact indicates that the university is committed to making its resource and information available online. During the student satisfaction survey, it was also noted that most of the students agreed that the university provided learning material in forms such as videos and audios apart from the traditional printed material. The learners also agreed that technological assistance was used in the counselling sessions.

At Odisha State Open University (OSOU) too most of the learners had access to information about the university through online means with the offline prospectus not being preferred to at all. Learners reported that apart from the printed learning material, their learning was supplemented by adequate support through other media forms such as audio, video, and radio. Almost all the learners agreed that they had access to digital learning material which means that they did not have to be entirely dependent on the printed material. Most of the learners also agreed that the learning sessions were aided with technology.

Even though a majority of the learners at Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) accessed information about the university using online resources, the number of learners who also accessed the prospectus for this information was also substantial. The university can improve on this front and step towards a more digital approach. As per the survey report, the printed learning material was adequately supported by other media like videos and audios.

Most of the learners at the Vardhman Mahaveer Open University (VMOU) accessed information about the university using online means such as its website, mobile app, and social media. The use of printed prospectus was almost negligible. The university can do better in terms of making the learning material digitally available and also improving the use of ICT in counselling sessions. More content can be created and the already available content can be modified.

Learning Resources

Accessibility of quality learning resources may be considered as an important aspect of students' satisfaction with ODL support services.



Learners at KKHSOU expressed their satisfaction with the induction programme conducted by the university. Most of the learners received printed self-learning SLM at the time of admission. Learners expressed positive views about the concepts in SLM provided by the university. They also reported that the counsellors could clearly explain the concepts. In fact, they found the counselling sessions interactive.

Most of the students at Bangladesh Open University (BOU), were satisfied with the study material in terms of content, delivery speed, and format. Overall, the study showed that BOU's students were mostly satisfied with the study material.

Learners at BAOU were satisfied with the relevance and usefulness of the printed self-learning material, its on-time delivery, and the coordinators and representatives of the university at the various study centres. Most of the students felt that the induction programmes conducted at the study centres were helpful and they served the purpose of orienting and introducing students to the procedures of an open university.

At Uttarakhand Open University, the learners responded very positively to the clarity of concepts in the learning material. Almost all the learners also agreed that they had access to learning material in digital form. Students also did not have any problems with the delivery of learning material.

Learners at OSOU were satisfied with the clarity of the concepts in the learning material provided by the university. Though a majority of the learners agreed that they received the printed learning material on time, the process can still be bettered. Supplementary learning resources have also helped the learners. The availability of digital learning material can be improved.

All the learners at NSOU were satisfied with the quality of learning material as reported in the survey. Only a very small percentage said they were dissatisfied with availability of the printed learning material and its delivery on time. But the availability of the learning material in digital form can be considerably improved.

Most learners at VMOU were of the opinion that the concepts were clearly explained in the learning material provided, but the timely delivery of the printed learning material can be improved. Learning material's availability in digital form should also be improved. Making the content digital can make it easily accessible to the students and can help more than the traditional printed form.

Academic Support Services

Learners at KKSHOU reported that they received prior intimation about changes in the schedule of the counselling sessions and received timely help from the centre coordinators on academic and other matters. Most of the time, they received help from the support staff at the study centres. Overall, the learners found the infrastructural facilities at the centres adequate.



Similarly, students at BOU were also satisfied with the tutorial sessions conducted at the study centres. These were useful and interactive and the teachers could be reached easily for clarifying any academic doubts. The students reported that the sessions were satisfactory as the academic counsellors explained the concepts clearly. Students were by and large satisfied with the on-time communication of information about any changes in counselling sessions. Personnel in the study centres were helpful and the infrastructure at the study centres was adequate for facilitating distance learning in Bangladesh. BOU's students were satisfied with the academic support services as a whole.

The survey report from Uttarakhand Open University suggests that the learners were satisfied with the support provided by the counsellors and the sessions were interactive and useful. Any changes in schedules were communicated on time and they also received timely response on their queries. Their experience with support staff was also satisfactory. The learners agreed that the infrastructure and other facilities provided by the university were good.

Learners at OSOU were satisfied with the academic counsellors as they were able to explain the concepts clearly and the interactive sessions were of great help to the learners. They were also satisfied with their interactions with the support staff and the assistance provided. A majority also agreed that the infrastructure and other facilities were up to the mark. Grievance redressal by the university was also appreciated by the learners.

At NSOU, learners were satisfied with the academic counsellors and their support in counselling sessions. The sessions were innovative, helpful, and engaging. None of the learners expressed dissatisfaction with the sessions. The schedules were communicated to the learners on time and the interactions with the support personnel were satisfactory. The university's infrastructure and grievance redressal were also appreciated by the learners.

The survey at VMOU showed that the students expected more from the academic counsellors in terms of clarity in teaching. The sessions could be made more interactive and engaging. The communication between the university and the students can also be bettered along with interactions with personnel. Improvement in these areas can help learners in doing better by creating a good learning environment.

Assessment, Evaluation, and Feedback

KKSHOU's learners said that they received assignments, counsellors' feedback on the assignments, clear guidelines with regard to conduct of term-end examinations, and declaration of the results of term-end examinations on time.

Likewise, BOU's students were also satisfied with the return of assignments and feedback on the assignments as these helped them get clarity about the concepts. They were satisfied with the procedure followed for term-end examinations as the information was communicated properly and adequate evaluation of the project reports/master papers was done. The respondents were satisfied with the response of BOU offices on their queries and getting



responses on time. Moreover, students reported that they were happy with the current activities being conducted by the university.

BAOU's learners were satisfied with the declaration of term-end examination results on time.

Learners at Uttarakhand Open University were satisfied with the assessment and evaluation procedures. They agreed that the assignments were evaluated and returned on time. The feedback provided helped them improve. The procedure for the exams was clearly communicated to the learners and the project proposals were clearly marked.

Even though a majority of the learners reported a satisfactory experience at OSOU, the assessment and evaluation process can be improved to provide a better learning opportunity to the students. The exams procedure was communicated clearly and the declaration of the results was also satisfactory.

At NSOU a majority of the learners responded positively towards the evaluation and assessment aspect of the survey. The feedback helped the students and none of the students surveyed expressed dissatisfaction with this aspect. The learners also expressed their satisfaction with the examination process. The timely declaration of results is one aspect that the university can improve.

The survey at VMOU suggested that the learners sought a better response from the university in terms of assessment and evaluation. There should be timely return of assignments and feedback should be improved. Also, the declaration of results and grievance redressal should be improved to help learners be more comfortable.

Overall Reflections on the Strengths and Weakness of the ODL Programmes

KKHSOU's learners were satisfied with the timely response received from the university. The strengths mentioned by the learners were the learner friendly nature of the university, its rules and regulations, administration, well-designed quality of SLM, good communication and examination systems, and availability of SLM. On the other hand, the weaknesses outlined by the learners were inadequate examinations procedures and counselling process, no response or late response to learners' queries and communication problems, not receiving SLM on time, and poor functioning of the study centres and assignment system.

BOU's students identified the competence of the teachers and flexibility of the programmes as its most important strengths. Lack of coordination between the concerned BOU offices and study centres, delay in exam results, and lack of library facilities were identified as the key weaknesses of BOU programmes. Openness, gender responsiveness, and continuous improvement of knowledge and skills were identified as the key benefits of BOU programmes. At Uttarakhand Open University, students were very satisfied with the university's services.



The learning material, counselling sessions, support by the counsellors, interaction with the personnel, infrastructure, and almost all other areas were dealt with satisfactorily. However, the students seemed to seek more in terms of placement efforts.

Coming to OSOU, the students were fairly satisfied but there are many areas that the university can improve so that the learners can benefit more. The availability of learning material, evaluation process, and assignment feedback are some areas that the university needs to pay close attention to. The NSOU survey showed that the university garnered a satisfactory response from the learners in terms of academic aspects but there are some areas like being more digital on the academic and administrative fronts which can help the learners keep pace with the changes in modern-day education. Reports from VMOU show that the university has to improve in a lot of areas to help its learners do better. Overall student satisfaction can improve with significant improvements in areas such as grievance redressal, counsellor interactions, and digital SLM.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, the learners at various open universities/institutions which formed part of this survey were by and large satisfied with the overall academic, administrative, extra-curricular and extension activities, and other related services provided by the respective universities. However, the open universities need to work on some areas and aspects to make ODL more adept at educating learners and making them more competent.

The COVID-19 pandemic all over the world revealed new challenges for the ODL system. Steps have to be taken to redesign pedagogy, updating study material, updating the ODL and OER policy, along with improving learner-based co-creation of resources, updating technology for teaching-learning and evaluation, facilitating teaching staff and students with a technology enabled learning environment, and skill enhancement of students. These need to be done for enhancing the ODL system and providing learners with access to quality education during the pandemic.

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Chapter 2

Students' Satisfaction: Paramount for Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University

Ami Upadhyay and Jainee Shah

Introduction

To provide easy access to higher education to a larger population and for providing a fuller opportunity to people with various geographical, economic, social, cultural backgrounds, academic institutes and the government has established an alternative system of education. The earliest signs of Open and Distance Learning were found in an advertisement in the Boston Gazette, which said, 'persons in the Country desirous to learn this Art, may be having the several lessons sent weekly to them, be as perfectly instructed as those that live in Boston. This advertisement showed that communication via a mailing system can be used for spreading education among learners when the source of information is separated by time and distance or both.¹ This model of the Open and Distance Learning system was adopted in India. It gained impetus with the establishment of the Indira Gandhi National Open University in 1985 as a Central Open University. Presently, there are 14 State Open Universities in India.

Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, is the only state Open University in Gujarat, which was established by the Government of Gujarat through Act No. 14 of 1994 passed by the Gujarat State Legislature. It was the 7th open university in the country. Since its inception, the university has aimed at advancing open and distance learning in the state's educational structure. The university offers education to interested learners, free of categories such as age, place, and time. It offers a variety of degree, diploma, and



advanced post-graduate diploma, certificate, and vocational and professional courses. In all it provides 83 courses. More than 1,00,000 students are enrolled in the university every year. For their guidance and counselling the university has opened 190 study centres in various grant-in-aid and government colleges across the state. In keeping with the pace of technology and digitisation, the university has generated wide opportunities for its students. It provides an online system starting with the admission process and ending with the examinations. The university is the first in the state to initiate Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). It has its own state-of-the-art Chaitanya Studio, which facilitates web-based learning. The studio has initiated OMKAR-e (Open Matrix Knowledge Advancement Resources for Empowerment), which is an enriching archival system for MOOCs at the university. An interactive virtual classroom is enabled for distance learners, who can get a feel of a conventional classroom.

The Board of Management at Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University under the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Dr Ami Upadhyay has undertaken various innovative steps for it believes in promoting and facilitating newer endeavours that benefit larger society. The university has ratified academically enhancing and socially uplifting initiatives such as:

- Sponsoring higher education of the wives and children of Indian Army martyrs by exempting their fees for any course offered by the university.
- Allowing a flexible exit, that is, after completion of the first six months, a student earns a certificate in the subject, after one year he gets a diploma, after the second year an advanced diploma, and after completing the third year a student earns a degree.
- Offering on-demand exams and on-demand admissions to facilitate students' specific needs.
- Offering flexibility in the choice of language used for the exams -- Gujarati, Hindi, or English.
- Implementing the choice based credit system.
- Adopting an open educational resource policy to reach keen learners at the global level.
- Establishing the Gurukul - Model Study Centre at the university, which is affiliated to all the study centres. This is an attempt at facilitating counselling of students in their respective subjects. The Gurukul is a centre for professors and students getting together where teaching and learning is carried out on an on-demand basis.
- Establishing the Atri Special Learner Support Centre, which offers a variety of short term professional courses to its 497 students from underprivileged sections of society such as sex workers, transgender persons, HIV positive persons, jail inmates, specially-abled persons, and persons with special needs.
- Vice-Chancellor, Professor (Dr) Ami Upadhyay has initiated a smooth interaction system between the students and the university, especially as it works in an open and distance mode. The university communicates with its stakeholders through its official website, e-mail, SMS, and telegram services. However, to provide easy access to



students separate departments have been set up for various tasks so students can easily reach out to the university through e-mails and toll-free numbers and contact numbers of consulting heads are provided to ensure communication with students and the university.

Objectives

In the Open and Distance Learning system, 'learners' are the most vital unit. The endeavours of the university's faculty and management is making learning a successful process which can be considered impactful only to the extent that the learners are satisfied. Their satisfaction level is decided by the kind of experiences they undergo at different levels ranging from admission and teaching-learning to examinations and certification. At all the stages, learner support facilities play a pivotal role. Students' feedback significantly showcases the actual quality of the teaching-learning process. It enables the university to learn about its achievements and shortcomings. Learner satisfaction is a direct indicator of the effectiveness of the functioning of teaching-learning in the university.

This survey was undertaken to analyse various aspects of the university's systems such as the utility of study material, on-time delivery of printed study material, availability of study material in digital form, availability of video/radio lectures, counselling, utility of the induction programmes, on-time declaration of exam results, academic initiatives, other online services, and overall satisfaction of the students.

The aim of the survey was gauging the university's strong and weak areas of functioning encompassing academics and other services. Feedback from the students allows the university to evaluate the end-results of the established systems and the new initiatives implemented with the objective of benefitting the students.

Methodology and Sample

In affirmative response to the proposal of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) the Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University used the 'survey questionnaire' prepared by the organisation. As per the suitability of the students certain deletions and modifications were made to the survey questionnaire.

The survey's target group was students enrolled in Bachelor of Arts in English and vocational and professional courses such as a diploma, bachelors, and post-graduate programmes in Business Administration, Computer Application, Hotel and Tourism Management, Air Travel Management, Finance, and Marketing and Human Resources consisting of all the years and semesters of the courses. Google form was used as the survey administration application. The university prepared the Google form, the URL of which was sent via SMS to each member of the target group for ease of access and functioning



The data collected is real as each entry is unique as it has mandatory fields such as a student's e-mail address, enrolment number, programme, and a gender and social category.

The methodology used is a descriptive quantitative analysis for analysing the data at different levels of 'satisfaction' of the students; the levels were categorised as 'very satisfied', 'satisfied', 'average', 'dissatisfied', and 'very dissatisfied'.

Analysis

Self-Learning Material

Academics is the foundation of every academic institute, and more so for an ODL university. A survey was conducted to analyse the utility of study material, its on time delivery, and its availability in digital form. Figure 2.1 gives a graphic representation of the data collected.

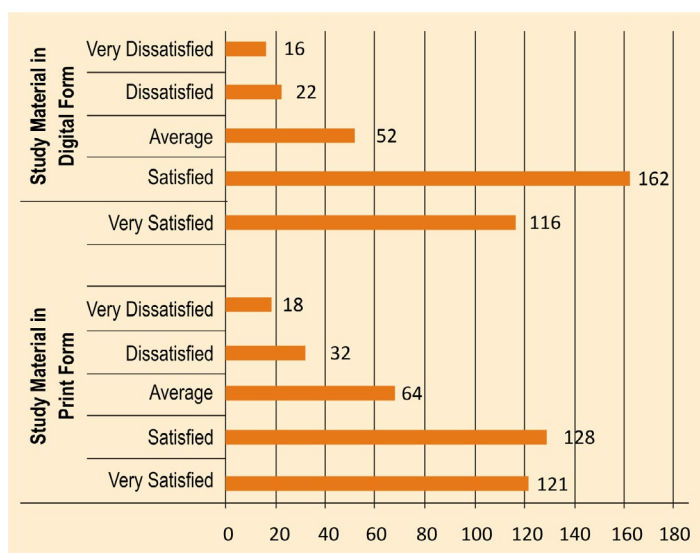


Figure 2.1: Students level of satisfaction on learning materials

Figure 2.1 shows that 67 per cent of the students were satisfied and very satisfied with the relevance and usefulness of the printed self-learning material and its on-time delivery. On the other hand, 75 per cent of the students said they were satisfied with the digitisation of self-learning material, its easy availability, accessibility, and downloadable feature from the university's official website. The survey also emphasised on the reach of

digital forms of study material and technology which is widely used for academic purposes.

Study Centres

The university has a network of more than 190 study centres across Gujarat. Orientation programmes, known as induction programmes, are conducted twice a year at all these centres which orient students who are newly enrolled in the university regarding its procedures and services. Due to geographical barriers, at the time of enrolment every student chooses a study centre in close proximity of his/her choice. The coordinators at these study centres are



immediately responsible for students’ overall concerns. Hence, the study centres are a vital mediator between the university’s headquarters and students.

Figure 2.2 shows that 77 per cent of the respondents were satisfied with the coordinators and representatives of the university at the various study centres whereas 71 per cent of them felt that the induction programmes conducted at the study centres were helpful and they served the purpose of orienting and introducing students to the procedures of the open university.

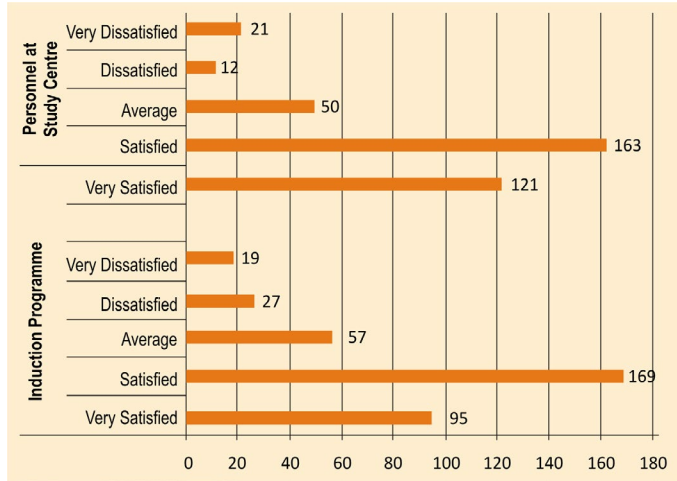


Figure 2.2: Students responses towards study centers

E-Services

The university campus houses a state-of-the-art Chaitanya Studio where subject experts and faculty conduct video lectures for bachelors and master’s degree courses which are recorded, edited, and made available to students on different platforms such as the university’s website and its YouTube channel for easy access and wider reach among students as well as other interested persons. The university also promotes digitisation by implementing cashless transactions, online admissions and exam forms, learning material archives, conducting webinars, and more.

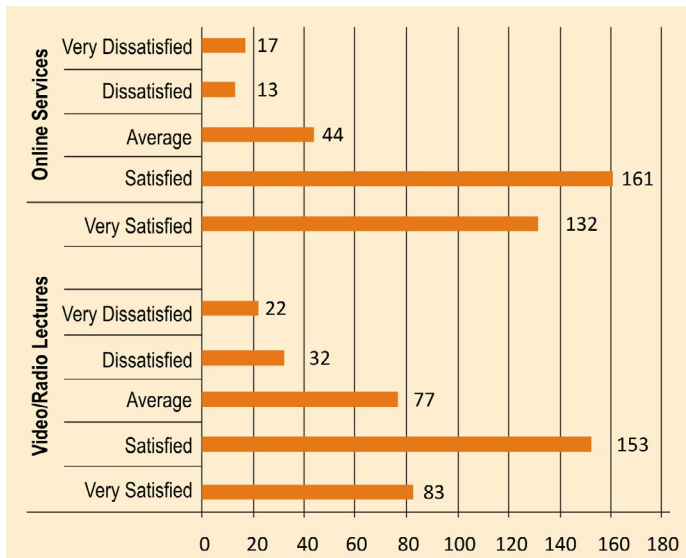


Figure 2.3: Students responses towards E-services

Figure 2.3 shows that 64 per cent of the students were satisfied with the availability of radio lectures on the university’s Swadhyay Radio and video lectures on Swadhyay TV, Vande Gujarat, the university’s TV channel allotted to it by the state government and newer digital media such as the university’s website and YouTube channel. Seventy-nine per cent of the students were satisfied and very satisfied with the online services provided by the university.



Certification and Academic Initiatives

The university conducts term-end examinations twice a year; recently it has taken a decision to conduct on-demand examinations with flexibility of language for the larger benefit of the students. The university regularly encourages new academic initiatives such as a choice based credit system and adopting an open educational resource policy for reaching out to keen learners at the global level and providing a flexible exit through earning certificates, diplomas, and advance diplomas in various courses.

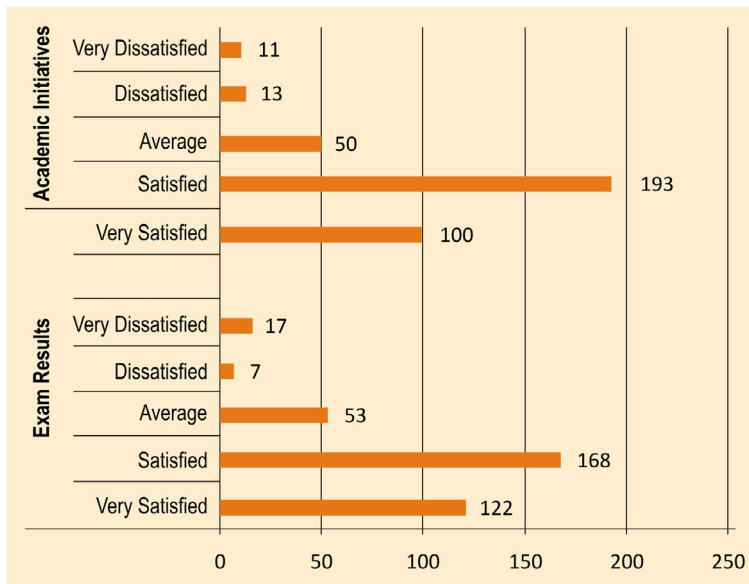


Figure 2.4: Responses with regard to the examinations and certification

Figure 2.4 shows that 78 per cent of the students were satisfied with the declaration of term-end examination results on time whereas 79 per cent were satisfied with the academic initiatives taken up by the university.

Overall Performance of the University

When it comes to the overall performance of the

university 84 per cent of those who participated in the survey were satisfied with the overall academic, administrative, extra-curricular activities, extension activities, and other related services provided by the university.

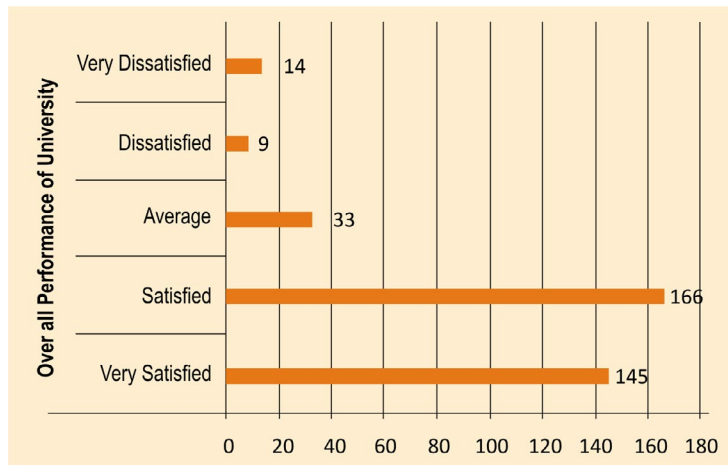


Figure 2.5: Students responses on overall performance of the university

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that 74.88 per cent of the students of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University who took part in the survey were



satisfied with the university's self-learning material, study centres, e-services, certification and academic initiatives, and overall satisfaction with the university.

This study provides an important glimpse into the university's efforts, decisions, and initiatives which are directed at its students and which are appreciated by the students. It is critical for academic institutes, especially the ones in higher education – Open and Distance Learning -- to understand that the demands of the learners are changing. With the continuing explosion of knowledge and changing patterns of employment, there is an increasing demand for education that is flexible and not binding. Hence, certain grass-root level reforms are required in the Open and Distance Learning field. In keeping with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 'Quality Education,' which aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' the university has taken some critical decisions which facilitate quality and inclusive education not only to disadvantaged and marginalised groups of society but also to young and enthusiastic minds.

This survey proposed by CEMCA and undertaken by the university also provides the university an opportunity to serve its students better besides reiterating that the university has implemented best practices for students' satisfaction which is of paramount importance for Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University. The university is hopeful that this survey and its results will inspire best practices for Open and Distance Learning universities to be able to bring a knowledge-revolution in the nation.

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Chapter 3

Student Satisfaction with Open and Distance Education in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic: The Case of Bangladesh

Mostafa Azad Kamal and Asma Akter Shelly

Introduction

Education is a universal right of all people (UDHR, 1960). Therefore, discrimination in accessing education is in no way desirable. There is global consensus that no person or group of persons should be deprived of access to education of any type or at any level and also that students should not be limited by providing them inferior education (UN, 1948). In the context of global declarations and commitments, the emergence of ODL has become a reality at the international, regional, and national levels.

The essentiality of ODL is high mostly in developing nations where access to campus-based education is narrow especially at the secondary and tertiary levels. ODL has opened up a new era in the education sector at the national, regional, and global levels. Over the last few decades, ODL has become very close to mainstream education in some countries. Support and interventions by inter-governmental organisations like UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) have helped ODL institutions get priority in national educational policies thereby providing recognition to national higher education agencies like UGC or the Higher Education Commission.



Traditionally, ODL systems in developing countries like Bangladesh are mostly dependent on self-learning modules, face-to-face tutorials, audio-video broadcasts, and limited online interaction. Due to unprecedented advancements in information and communication technologies, ODL's dependence on the digital media has been growing in many countries. However, a bias in favour of face-to-face teaching and learning and adherence to teaching-centric pedagogy has made a transformation towards technology enabled ODL very slow.

However, this scenario was forced to change due to Covid-19 pandemic. It is too early to predict a full transformation of traditional ODL practices to technology-enabled ODL; however, all the educational practices right now have either been paused or are confined to online platforms. Consequently, the dependency of ODL programmes on e-books, OER, online conferencing tools, and online learning platforms has increased dramatically. Since the learners are isolated in the ODL system, learner satisfaction is the key to the sustainability of these programmes. The essentiality of learner satisfaction has become more important in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic where ODL as well as on-campus educational programmes are heavily dependent on online digital resources. This study is the output of a research conducted on student satisfaction with ODL in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey was administered to students in tertiary level programmes of the School of Business at the Bangladesh Open University (BOU). BOU, established in 1992, is the only public university in Bangladesh that offers ODL programmes all over the country. The university provides learning material, digital content, limited face-to-face tutorials, and students support services through its regional and sub-regional centres.

This study focused on student satisfaction with ODL programmes offered by the School of Business, BOU. The responses to the randomly chosen students from BBA, MBA, and Commonwealth MBA/MPA programmes were used in the analysis. The findings of the survey showed students' mixed experiences in terms of the study resources shared, support services, and the assessment and feedback process. However, the overall level of satisfaction with the programmes was satisfactory on a five-point Likert scale ranging from highly dissatisfactory to highly satisfactory. The study also covered some general reflections of the students on the programmes in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Objectives

The main objective of this study was examining and analysing students' level the satisfaction with BOU's ODL programmes. Its specific objectives were:

- Assessing student satisfaction with respect to learning resources developed and shared by BOU.
- Assessing student satisfaction with respect to academic support services provided to the students of BOU.
- Assessing student satisfaction in the area of assessment and feedback.
- Assessing students' overall gaps in BOU's higher education programmes.



- Suggesting measures for improving student satisfaction with ODL programmes in Bangladesh.

The study explored the following research questions:

RQ1. What were the students' satisfaction levels with ODL practices in Bangladesh?

RQ2. What were the students' reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of BOU's ODL practices?

Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature. However, it also uses some quantitative data to strengthen its qualitative findings and analysis. A structured questionnaire was administered among the students of BBA, MBA, Commonwealth MBA/MPA, and professional MBA programmes of the School of Business at the Bangladesh Open University. The questionnaire (Google form) was distributed among 800 students randomly through email and social media groups. A total of 252 students responded to the survey, which was 31.5 per cent of the total students that we communicated with. Due to Covid-19 crisis and the consequent lockdown, the students were scattered and had low accessibility to the internet which the researchers assumed were the main reasons for the poor responses to the survey. However, since the respondents were from the study centres all over the country, the responses reflect what students felt in general. Among the respondents 68 per cent were from the BBA programmes and 32 per cent were from the MBA programmes. Most of the respondents were male (81 per cent) and the rest were female. Both the authors are engaged directly in coordinating ODL programmes at the Business School at BOU and have long experience in ODL practices. They used their experience along with the ideas acquired from similar research reports while developing the questionnaire. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale with response options ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). A few questions used the open-ended format to get an overall picture of students' satisfaction with specific ODL programmes at BOU. Simple descriptive tools were used for analysing the data.

Literature Review

The term 'open and distance learning' reflects both the fact that all or most of the teaching is done by someone removed in time and space from the learner and the aim of this learning is more openness and flexibility whether in terms of access, curriculum, or other elements of the structure (UNESCO, 2002). Various research studies have been carried out on the objectives of such a study. ODL institutions generally depend heavily on course material, technology, and media and administrative support. Therefore, quality assurance and continuous improvements play a vital role in the effectiveness and efficiency of these institutions. Distance education is a unique method of study since instruction and learning takes place in an environment where the instructor and students are geographically remote from each other most of the time (Burns,



2011). Hence, when the learners are satisfied with the content and other educational services provided by ODL, they continue with their learning and attract new learners. Thus, identifying students' satisfaction is a basic requirement for ODL institutions' sustainability. Therefore, HEIs, particularly ODL institutions should provide effective support services that meet students' unique needs, enhance their learning experience and academic success, and empower them to be self-directed lifelong learners (Paniagua and Simpson, 2018; Workman and Stenard, 1996).

Teachers do not directly communicate and teach students in the ODL system. Therefore, ODL institutions need to develop effective learning resources for their students so that the students are able to learn and practice by themselves. 'Learning resources are any resource – including print and non-print materials and online/open-access resources – which supports and enhances, directly or indirectly, learning and teaching. Typically, the use of a learning resource in the classroom is subject to a process of evaluation and approval at the school, local or national level. Evaluation criteria may include relevance to the curriculum and expectations for learning, social considerations, and age or developmental appropriateness' (UNESCO, 2002). Hence, it can be said that learning resources are resources available to students as well as teachers for teaching and learning. Open and distance learning material for the teaching-learning of a course should be adapted to create a holistic educational experience for students for promoting active and effective learning and allowing an assessment of its effectiveness (Petroman and Petroman, 2013). A descriptive qualitative research conducted by Harasasi (2015) on students' perceptions of using OER in e-learning in a course using a questionnaire found video as the most interesting OER for students.

Academic support services are an integral part of any education system. For a better understanding of the topic and overcoming various obstacles regarding learning, educational institutions arrange different academic support services for their students. ODL institutions need to arrange well defined and prompt academic support services like tutoring and coaching. In a nutshell, learner support is tailored towards meeting the learners' academic and socio-psychological needs and also towards realisation of an institution's mission (OFOLE, 2014). ODL institutions' success is reflected in how satisfied their students are with the services that they provide. Thus, maintaining the quality of student support services and making them available as well as easily accessible for students is vital for ODL institutions (Herman et al., 2015). In the ODL system, students are allowed to access support services and study from any location. However, although most of the support services are in place, students in rural areas are not able to access them adequately, thereby impacting their studies adversely (Arko-Achemfuor, 2017). Ciobanu's (2013) research shows that although many academic institutions and systems offer a wide variety of services, they are not very well developed or adapted to students's needs that are constantly growing and diversifying.

Assessment and feedback in distance learning is a crucial factor in the success or failure of a distance-learning course. These courses generally have a high dropout rate as assessing and managing quality in a widely spread system of education is challenging. Mir and Iqbal (2019) recommend using software in ODL students' assessment to mitigate this problem. The



ODL system should ensure that students earn marks/grades according to their competency. At the end of the assessment there is a need to discuss the results with all the stakeholders such as programme coordinators, course coordinators, tutors, academic counsellors, students, observers, and supervisors. Based on their feedback, further necessary improvements in the assessment system should be made. By doing so, a valid and reliable assessment system can be developed and implemented in ODL, and the confidence of students can be gained (Chaudhary and Dey, 2013). Segoe (2013) concluded that feedback strategies are crucial in an ODL environment and therefore have to be planned with utmost care. His study showed that interaction by means of written feedback through comments on assignments is an essential element of ODL students' academic performance. It plays a crucial role in opening and maintaining a dialogue between students and tutors. Nayak (2017) adds that student assessment in ODL is a crucial aspect of quality assurance because it drives student learning. Hence, methods of student assessment have to be clear, consistent, effective, valid, reliable, and in line with current practices and must clearly support the achievement of learning outcomes. A valid system of assessment, which can ensure the fulfilment of the course's objectives, needs to be practiced. Information communication technology-based assessment tools like portfolio and e-portfolio should be used on a large scale for establishing a student friendly and innovative practice of assessment in the ODL system.

The conceptual framework designed for this study on the basis of a literature review, author's experience, and a theoretical understanding is given in Figure 3.1.

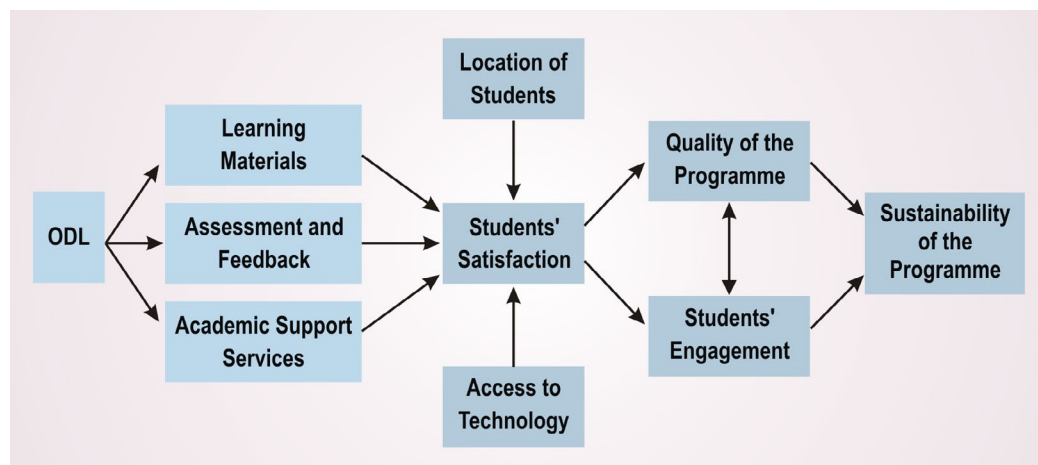


Figure 3.1: Conceptual framework

Findings and Analysis

Student satisfaction with respect to learning resources

Figure 3.2 shows that 60 per cent of the respondents were at least satisfied with the study material in terms of content, delivery speed, and format. Further, the figure also shows that



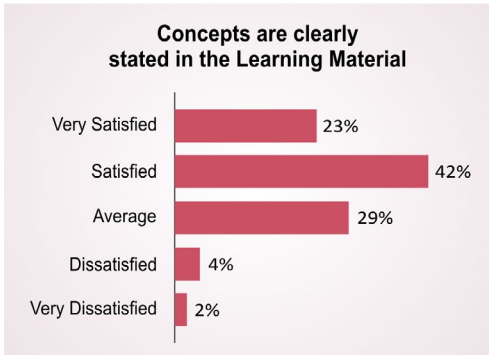


Figure 3.2: Concepts are clearly stated in the learning material

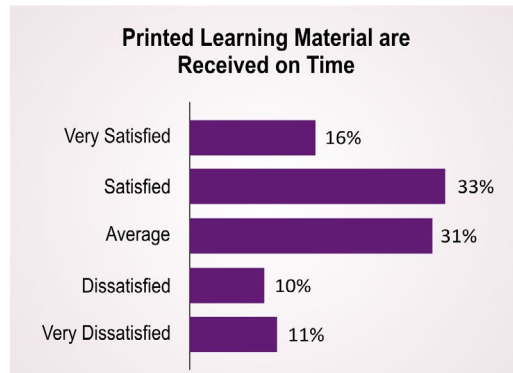


Figure 3.3: Printed learning material are received on time

42 per cent of the respondents were satisfied and 23 per cent were highly satisfied with the learning material in terms of concepts. Figure 3.3 shows that 33 per cent of the respondents were satisfied and 16 per cent were highly satisfied with the delivery speed of printed learning material. The rest of the respondents found the delivery of the study material not on-time and a few of them were dissatisfied with the delivery speed. Figure 3.4 shows that most of the respondents (56 per cent) did not have a strong positive opinion about the university’s supply of relevant supplementary learning material. However, some were satisfied (35 per cent) and highly satisfied (22 per cent) with the availability of study material in a digital format (Figure 3.5).

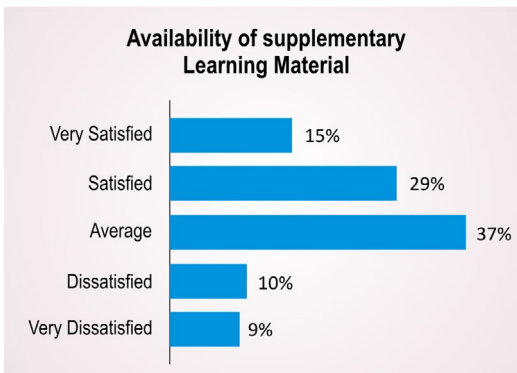


Figure 3.4: Availability of supplementary learning material

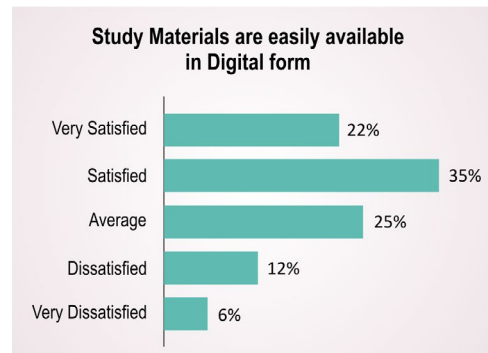


Figure 3.5: Study materials are easily available in digital form

Table 3.1 shows both absolute and relative frequencies against all the statements on learning material. The table shows that the weighted average of the Likert points was more than 3.3 for all the statements related to learning material. This shows that the students were mostly satisfied with the study material as a whole.



Table 3.1: Student satisfaction with the learning material

Statements	Very Dissatisfied [1]	Dissatisfied [2]	Average [3]	Satisfied [4]	Very Satisfied [5]	Average score
Concepts are clearly stated	5 (2 per cent)	10 (4 per cent)	72 (29 per cent)	106 (42 per cent)	59 (23 per cent)	3.81
Printed learning material is received on time	28 (11 per cent)	24 (10 per cent)	78 (31 per cent)	82 (33 per cent)	40 (16 per cent)	3.33
Supplementary learning material like video/radio counselling is available	22 (9 per cent)	25 (10 per cent)	94 (37 per cent)	72 (29 per cent)	39 (15 per cent)	3.32
Study material is easily available in the digital form	14 (6 per cent)	30 (12 per cent)	64 (25 per cent)	88 (35 per cent)	56 (22 per cent)	3.56

Source: Survey findings (2020).

Student satisfaction with academic support services

Table 3.2 shows that 41 per cent of the respondents were satisfied and found the tutorial sessions conducted at the study centres useful while 38 per cent of the respondents were satisfied and 33 per cent were very satisfied with their teachers as they could be reached easily. Most of the students (90 per cent) agreed that technologies used in the courses were meaningful though a few of them had a different opinion. It was also found that most of the students (92 per cent) were happy with academic counsellors as they explained the concepts clearly. Further, more than half the students were satisfied with the interactive counselling sessions. Additionally, 89 per cent of the students were more or less satisfied with the on-time communication of information about any changes in counselling sessions; 62 per cent of the students were satisfied and very satisfied with the use of technology in the counselling sessions. Nearly half the students said that personnel in the study centres were helpful and the infrastructure at the study centres was adequate for facilitating distance learning in Bangladesh. However, 35 per cent of the students considered the infrastructure and personnel at the study centres average. Most of the respondents (71 per cent) were happy with the online services provided by the university and found them easy to access. Table 3.2 shows that the weighted average Likert points against each statement was more than 3.5, which indicates a better level of satisfaction about academic support services as a whole.



Table 3.2: Student satisfaction with academic support services

Statements	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Average	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Average score
Induction programme conducted at the study centres is useful	8 (3 per cent)	15 (6 per cent)	74 (29 per cent)	104 (41 per cent)	51 (20 per cent)	3.69
Teachers can be reached easily	6 (2 per cent)	12 (6 per cent)	55 (22 per cent)	97 (38 per cent)	82 (33 per cent)	3.94
Technology is meaningfully used in the courses	7 (3 per cent)	23 (9 per cent)	62 (25 per cent)	80 (32 per cent)	80 (32 per cent)	3.81
Academic counsellors explain the concepts clearly	4 (2 per cent)	15 (6 per cent)	72 (29 per cent)	96 (38 per cent)	65 (26 per cent)	3.81
Counselling sessions are interactive	7 (3 per cent)	15 (6 per cent)	84 (33 per cent)	108 (43 per cent)	38 (15 per cent)	3.62
Changes in counselling sessions are communicated in time	8 (3 per cent)	21 (8 per cent)	73 (29 per cent)	101 (40 per cent)	49 (19 per cent)	3.64
Technology is used during the counselling sessions	11 (4 per cent)	18 (7 per cent)	67 (27 per cent)	96 (38 per cent)	60 (24 per cent)	3.70
Personnel in the study centres are helpful	7 (3 per cent)	17 (7 per cent)	61 (24 per cent)	109 (43 per cent)	58 (23 per cent)	3.77
Infrastructure at the study centres is adequate	9 (4 per cent)	18 (7 per cent)	87 (35 per cent)	99 (39 per cent)	39 (15 per cent)	3.56
Online services provided are easily accessible	9 (4 per cent)	16 (6 per cent)	50 (20 per cent)	82 (33 per cent)	95 (38 per cent)	3.94

Source: Survey findings (2020).

Student satisfaction with assessment and feedback

Assessment and feedback are a crucial part of any teaching-learning process. Choosing an appropriate assessment technique is vital in ODL. Table 3.3 gives students' responses to



BOU's assessment and feedback system. Forty-two per cent of the students were satisfied and 19 per cent were very satisfied with the timing of the feedback on the assignments. Most of the respondents were satisfied (40per cent - satisfied and 19per cent-very satisfied) with feedback on the assignments as these helped them get clarity about the concepts. However, 33per cent of the respondents were not sure whether feedback on the assignments clarified the concepts. Sixty-eight per cent of the students were aware of term-end examinations as the information was communicated properly and 25per cent of the respondents found this service to be average. Very few of the respondents (7per cent) were dissatisfied with the procedure followed for term-end examinations. For MBA programmes, students are required to submit a project report/master paper. More than half the respondents (74per cent) were satisfied and very satisfied with the evaluation of project reports/master papers. Students had a mixed response about exam results: 44 per cent were satisfied, 27per cent were dissatisfied, and 29per cent found it average. Almost half the respondents were satisfied with BOU offices' response to their queries though a few of them claimed that they did not get responses to their queries on time.

There were mixed reactions about the initiatives taken by BOU for placements though the participants reported that they were happy with the current activities of the university.

Table 3.3: Student satisfaction with the assessment and feedback process

Statements	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Average	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Average Score
Assignments are returned on time	11 (4 per cent)	15 (6 per cent)	71 (28 per cent)	107 (42 per cent)	48 (19 per cent)	3.66
Feedback on the assignments helped in clarifying the concepts	7 (3 per cent)	13 (5 per cent)	83 (33 per cent)	100 (40 per cent)	49 (19 per cent)	3.68
Term-end examination procedures were given clearly	3 (1 per cent)	15 (6 per cent)	64 (25 per cent)	118 (47 per cent)	52 (21 per cent)	3.80
Projects/master papers were clearly marked*	2 (2 per cent)	1 (1 per cent)	18 (22 per cent)	48 (59 per cent)	12 (15 per cent)	3.63
Exam results were declared on time	43 (17 per cent)	24 (10 per cent)	72 (29 per cent)	79 (31 per cent)	34 (13 per cent)	3.15
Timely response was given to queries	21 (8 per cent)	24 (10 per cent)	81 (32 per cent)	88 (35 per cent)	38 (15 per cent)	3.39



Initiatives taken by the university for placements	8 (3 per cent)	17 (7 per cent)	75 (30 per cent)	116 (46 per cent)	36 (14 per cent)	3.62
Overall level of satisfaction with the university	8 (3 per cent)	6 (2 per cent)	59 (23 per cent)	111 (44 per cent)	68 (27 per cent)	3.66

*Note: * Calculated only for respondents from the MBA programmes.*

Source: Survey findings (2020).

Students’ overall reflection on the strengths and weakness of BOU’s ODL programmes

The respondents were asked to give their overall reflections on the strengths, weaknesses, and benefits of BOU’s programmes. Table 3.4 summarises their comments under different categories. Most of the respondents identified the competence of the teachers and flexibility of the programmes as the most important strengths of the university. Lack of coordination between concerned BOU offices and study centres, delay in publishing exam results, and lack of library facilities were identified as the key weaknesses of BOU’s programmes. Openness, gender responsiveness, and continuous improvements in knowledge and skills were identified as the key benefits of BOU’s programmes.

Table 3.4. Summary of comments by the respondents

	Category	No	(per cent)	Summary of the Open Comments
Strengths	Curriculum	7	4 per cent	The curriculum and the course outline is up-to-date.
	Teacher quality	64	37 per cent	Teachers are competent. They are very cooperative and caring. They explain the concepts in an easy language for better understanding.
	Module quality/ learning material	25	14 per cent	The learning material is excellent in terms of content and design.
	Flexibility/life-long learning opportunities	79	45 per cent	BOU’s programmes are suitable for jobholders and students who have dropped out from the conventional educational system due to socioeconomic barriers. The programmes are flexible and help students enhance their capabilities through formal and non-formal lifelong learning.



Weaknesses	Lack of library facilities	56	25 per cent	Library facilities, socialisation, and entertainment opportunities are missing.
	Lack of coordination between regional centre and the study centre	44	20 per cent	Coordination between regional and sub-regional centres is not sufficient and that is why there is an unnecessary delay in information transmission.
	Delay in the publication of exam results	89	40 per cent	It takes a long time to publish the exam results.
	Long syllabus and very hard assessment procedure	31	14 per cent	The length of the syllabus is much longer compared to the semester's duration. The assignments are very difficult to solve following the tight deadlines. There is no scope for re-submitting the assignments.
Benefits of BOU Programmes	Continuation of study and job	92	41 per cent	BOU's education helps learners continue their studies and job simultaneously.
	Opportunity for female education	33	15 per cent	Females can continue studying by staying at home without hurting their work at home.
	Developing various skills	51	23 per cent	BOU helps learners develop their skills and gather practical knowledge.
	Improving knowledge	49	22 per cent	Continuous improvement of knowledge is possible.

Discussion

Learning resources are seen as the most influential component of the ODL system, which highly impacts students' learning engagement and satisfaction. Students were asked to reflect on various dimensions of the learning resources like the clarity of the content, delivery time for printed material, availability of supplementary learning material, and availability of course material in a digital format. Most of the students were satisfied with BOU's learning resources. However, the learning material was not updated regularly or synced with fast-changing societal needs. This shows a gap in implementing an instructional strategy applicable for ODL.

Academic support system is another important pillar of ODL. This study found that students had mixed views on BOU's academic support services. They specified some gaps in the coordination between study centres and BOU's regional and sub-regional offices. This reduced BOU services' trustworthiness gradually. Without a trustworthy academic support system, ODL will not get its actual shape.



Another important component of the ODL system is the assessment process and giving feedback on time. The students were more or less satisfied with the assessment process, but were frustrated by the delays in publishing results, tight marking, and delayed feedback on the project/master papers. This shows the necessity of implementing a monitoring mechanism across all the activities of BOU's ODL programmes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

ODL programmes are not the same as on-campus programmes where the teacher is in the central position. Learner satisfaction is highly critical for ODL as the learners are isolated and distant. ODL's importance has already been established in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. This research identified the satisfaction levels of students enrolled in BOU's ODL programmes and found some gaps in updating learning material, academic support services, results, and the feedback mechanism followed. In this rapidly changing world, ODL programmes need to pay more attention and need to be synced with societal changes. It is time to re-engineer the ODL system to make it learner friendly. Based on the findings of this study, it can be said that BOU's students need more structured support in areas of learning resources, service delivery, and academia-industry collaborations. The study also showed that ODL programmes need to be more learner-centric and future driven. Otherwise, the institution will face problems in the post-Covid new normal situation.

The following steps can be taken by BOU to improve learner satisfaction and engagement of students in its ODL programmes:

Redesigning the pedagogy: In a time of drastic change, it is learners who inherit the future. The older cohorts are usually equipped to live in a world that no longer exists (Hoffer, 1973). BOU needs to redesign its pedagogy and instructional strategy to make its programmes future driven and learner-centric.

Regular updating of the study material: BOU needs to redesign its pedagogy and instructional strategy to make its programmes future driven and learner-centric. It can involve experts, industry people, and learners for this.

ODL policy: BOU needs to develop an ODL policy for its academic and administrative activities. All the stakeholders should be involved in the consultation process during the development of the policy as well as during its implementation.

Using open educational resources and learner-based co-creation: BOU can use OER in its courses and training programmes as this will reduce time and costs thus helping avoid unnecessary delays in content delivery. Moreover, BOU can avoid copyright issues if OER is used meaningfully. BOU can also use its graduate students to find relevant OER and help the faculties develop the content quickly.

Using appropriate technologies: BOU needs to use appropriate technologies that can



be easily accessed by the learners. The open source learning management system can be used extensively to allow learners access to educational resources remotely and submitting their assignments digitally. Learners will also need to be engaged in forum discussions to enhance their collaboration skills and improving their learning.

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Chapter 4

Learners' Satisfaction with Various Aspects of Learner Support Services: Reflections from Learners' Satisfaction Survey at KKHSOU

Pranab Saikia and Bhaskar Sarmah

Introduction

Since the introduction of ODL in India in the first half of the 1960s much has changed in terms of its delivery, quality, and content particularly with the advent of information and communication technologies since the early 1990s. Open and distance learning has revolutionised its various uses for increasing the efficacy of the delivery of the course curriculum, enhancing the effectiveness of the programmes, and learning outcomes. One major difference between the traditional mode of learning and the distance mode of learning is that in the latter a teacher (for face-to-face interaction) is not there, leaving a learner to study on his/her own. This necessitates that the learner be supported by a host of other support services so that his/her queries, transacted in the curriculum do not remain unsolved and at the same time, he/she receives proper guidance for studying.

Researcher like Wang (2013) argue that satisfaction with any educational institution has to be asserted from the level of pleasure and an effective method of teaching and learning that learners experience. Thus, it can be argued that the service quality provided by an academic institution determines learners' satisfaction and their persistence in the distance education programme (Agbanu et al., 2018).



Significantly, studies also indicate that even when certain aspects in the delivery of distance education programmes is good, learners may be dissatisfied with certain areas like support services and accessing other learning resources (Sampson, 2003).

This chapter evaluates the satisfaction of learners of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), Guwahati with learner support services provided by the university.

Literature Review

According to Tait (1995) student support services should be comprised of advice/counselling, tutoring (individually or in groups), learning study skills, peer group support, feedback concerning assessment and progress, and language support and administrative problem-solving where the aim is supporting students' individual learning whether alone or in groups. There is no doubt that student support is a key issue in the provision of distance education. Further, as has been mentioned by Sampson (2003), while talking about support services in ODL, three services appear repeatedly in literature: timely student feedback, on-site support, and access to library material.

Surveys conducted among online learners by Choe et al. (2019) show that multimedia learning promotes learners' satisfaction as well as effectiveness. Haghaghi and Tous (2014) cite a few crucial elements for planning and designing distance learning programmes after their survey of students' satisfaction. The crucial elements identified by them include reducing a sense of isolation, holding a number of workshops, allocating financial aid, providing learners with video and audio tools, and facilitating an interaction between the instructor and the learners. Based on their analysis, the authors came to the following conclusions:

.....identifying mismatches between the expectation of distance learners and what has been provided by student support system might facilitate the level of learner satisfaction. Also, identifying the gaps showed several specific areas where developments in the distance learning course could be made.

Agbanu et al., (2018) did a study of distance learners in Ghana and found that administrative support services that focused on students, course evaluation by students, the instructor's performance, and student-instructor interactions influenced students' satisfaction in distance education programmes.

Irungu (2016) did a study of learners at the University of Nairobi and suggests that learners' satisfaction was influenced by their personal characteristics, learning content, and learner support services.

Ali and Ahmad's (2011) study of learners at the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Pakistan revealed a high level of satisfaction with the courses offered by the university. The main reasons for this satisfaction were: (a) just like in traditional education, in distance learning at AIOU, there was enough interaction between students and instructors, (b) AIOU's courses



were up to date and well-designed, (c) instructors were devoted, motivated, and equipped with the required competencies, (d) AIOU's faculty members also fulfilled students' needs with regard to student-instructor interactions, instructor performance, and course evaluation.

Need for this Study

There is no denying that ODL institutes should philosophically as well as ideally use technologies to impart programmes through the distance mode. KKHSOU has been offering a host of learner support services through its study centres so that learners can advance in their studies more effectively. Support services offered by the university, other than printed self-learning material (SLM) include a library in the study centres, audio-visual CDs/DVDs (including TV, computer, and projector), and mobile phones. The university also offers a number of support services like an interactive voice response system (IVRS), All India Radio phone-in-programmes (every Thursday), communication through websites, Facebook, android mobile apps, multi-media resources through YouTube, internet radio, and community FM radio services at its headquarters.

In the existing Covid-19 pandemic situation, there has been wide application of ICT tools and technologies to reach the unreached all over the world. KKHSOU is also actively implementing a plan to offer a learning management system to its learners from the academic session starting in January 2021.

Limitations of the study

This study is based on the feedback received from learners. An online Google form was submitted among past and present learners at KKHSOU to which 128 learners responded. The analysis in this study is based on this feedback.

Research Questions

The study centred on the following research questions (RQs):

1. Did the learners of KKHSOU use online and other ICT support services offered by KKHSOU?
2. How did the learners view the support services offered by KKHSOU?
3. How did the learners view the way in which term-end examinations were conducted?
4. How did the learners view the services offered by their study centres?
5. How did the learners perceive the overall functioning of the university as well as its strengths and weaknesses?



Research Methodology

The study is based on primary data collected from KKHSOU's learners on various aspects of learner support services that the university provides. An online survey was conducted among KKHSOU's learners; 128 learners responded, of which 119 are currently enrolled, while the remaining have passed out. Location-wise, the learners responded from 30 districts in Assam. The study was conducted during May-June 2020.

Use of research tools

This study used no sophisticated statistical tools. Its research questions were analysed based on feedback received from the learners on four or more related issues making the study completely analytical in nature.

General characteristics of the respondents

Table 4.1: Total number of respondents

No.	Parameter	No.
1	Total number	128
2	Currently enrolled	119
3	Passed out learners	09
4	Total districts covered	30

Source: Learners' survey.

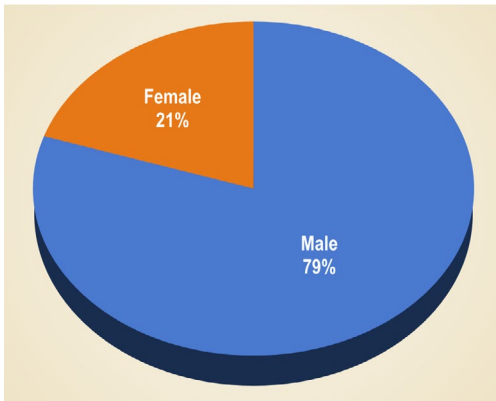


Figure 4.1: Gender-wise distribution distribution of respondents
Source: Learners' survey.

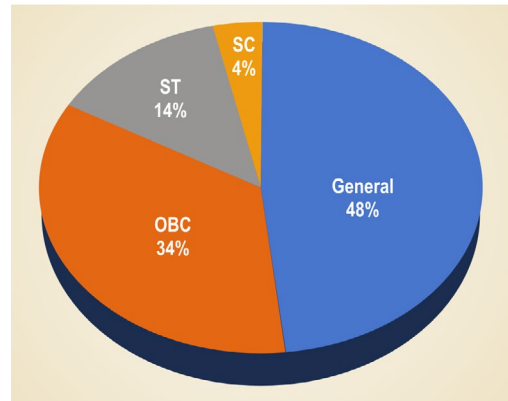
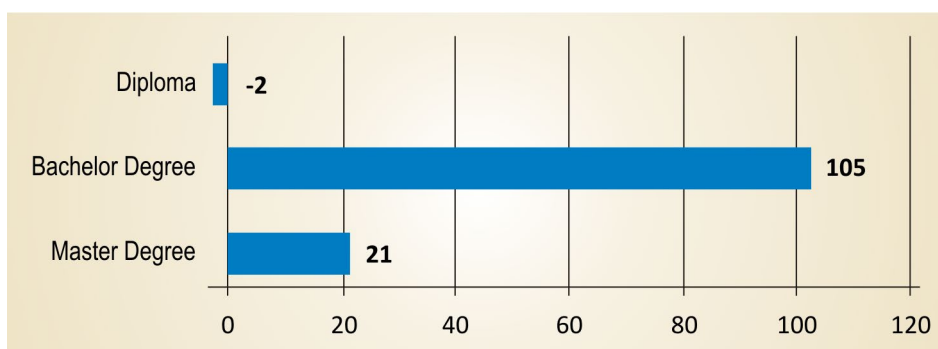


Figure 4.2: Social category-wise distribution of respondents
Source: Learners' survey.





*Figure 4.3: Programme level-wise distribution of respondents
Source: Learners' survey.*

Findings of the Survey

- **Did KKHSOU's learners use online and other ICT support services offered by the university?**

To analyse this research question, learners were asked to respond to the following questions:

Q 1: From where do you access the university's information?

Q 2: Do the counsellors use ICT tools for counselling along with printed self-learning material?

Q 3: In your view will the use of ICT tools enhance the effectiveness of the counselling sessions?

Q 4: Are the online services provided by the university easily accessible?

Sources used for collecting information about the university

When the learners were asked the source from which they collected information about the university, 55 per cent (70 of the 128 respondents) said that they visited the university's website, while 8 per cent (10 respondents) said that they went through the prospectus, 36 per cent (46 respondents) said that they used the mobile app of the university, and 47 per cent (60 respondents) said that they approached the study centres.

Use of ICT tools by counsellors during counselling sessions

Learners were asked if the counsellors in the study centres used any ICT tools during counselling sessions other than the printed self-learning material offered by the university (Figure 4.4).

Effectiveness of using ICT tools during counselling sessions

When the learners were asked to express their views on the effectiveness of using ICT tools during counselling sessions, 72 per cent said that they agreed that using ICT tools enhanced the



effectiveness of the counselling sessions, 21 per cent maintained a neutral position, and 7 per cent said that the use of ICT tools was unlikely to have any impact on the effectiveness of the counselling sessions.

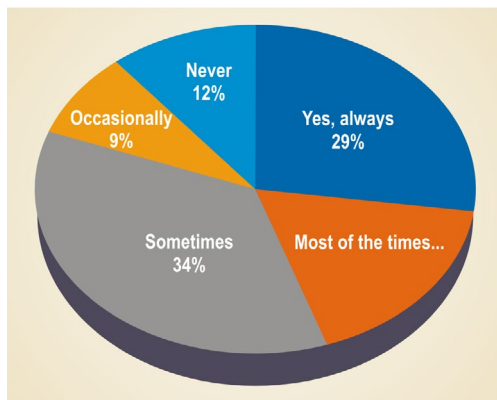


Figure 4.4: Use of ICT Tools by counsellors during counselling sessions
Source: Learners' survey.

Learners' satisfaction with accessibility of online services offered by the university

Learners were asked if they found it easy to access the online services offered by the university (Figure 4.5).

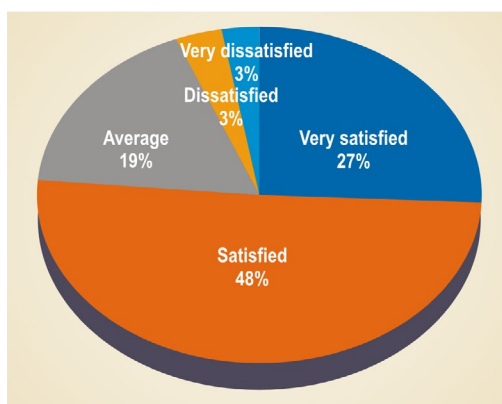


Figure 4.5: Learners' satisfaction with accessibility of online services offered by the university
Source: Learners' survey.

• How did the learners view the learners' support services offered by KKHSOU?

To analyse this research question, learners were asked to respond to a few questions/statements like:

- Q 1:** Did you attend the induction programme conducted by the study centre? If yes, how was your experience?
- Q 2:** Did you receive printed SLM at the time of admission?
- Q 3:** Do you agree that concepts are clearly explained in SLM?
- Q 4:** How do you find the conduct of the counselling sessions?
- Q 5:** Can you access supplementary learning materials like the audio/video/radio counselling provided by the university at your study centre?

If the learners had attended the induction programme and their level of satisfaction

Sixty-three per cent of the participants said that they had attended the induction programme, while the rest said that they had not attended it.

Further, when asked to rank their satisfaction with the way in which the induction programme was conducted on a five-point Likert scale (very satisfied, satisfied, average, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied), 84 per cent of the learners expressed satisfaction (very satisfied and satisfied) with the programme, while 14 per cent said that the programme was of average



quality and 2 per cent were very dissatisfied with the way the programme was conducted.

If the learners received printed self-learning material at the time of admission

KKHSOU has a policy of providing printed SLM at the time of admission. Hence, learners were asked if they had received printed SLM at the time of admission (Figure 4.6).

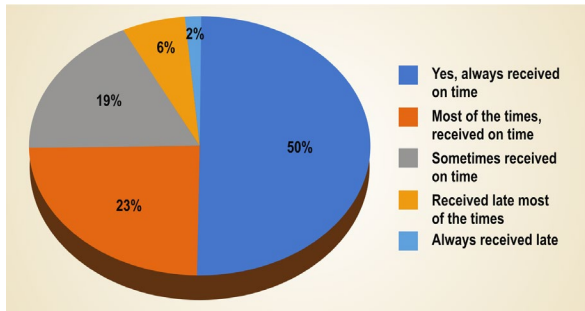


Figure 4.6: Learners' response to printed SLM received at the time of admission
 Source: Learners' survey.

Learners' views on the explanation of the concepts in SLM

Learners were asked if they agreed whether the concepts in SLM were clearly explained and were asked to rate their responses on a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree). More than 25 per cent of the learners strongly agreed that the concepts had been clearly explained

in the SLM while 55 per cent agreed, 18 per cent maintained a neutral position, 2 per cent disagreed, and less than 1 per cent learners responded that they strongly disagreed.

Learners' feedback on the conduct of the counselling sessions

Learners were asked if the counsellors could clearly explain the concepts. They were asked to rate their responses on a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree).

Further, they were also asked if they found the counselling sessions interactive; the same five-point Likert scale was used for their responses (Figures 4.7 and 4.8).

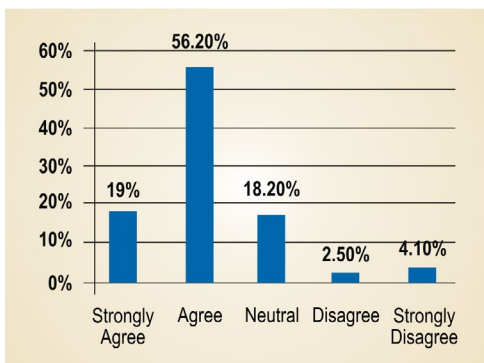


Figure 4.7: If the counsellors clearly explained the concepts
 Source: Feedback survey.

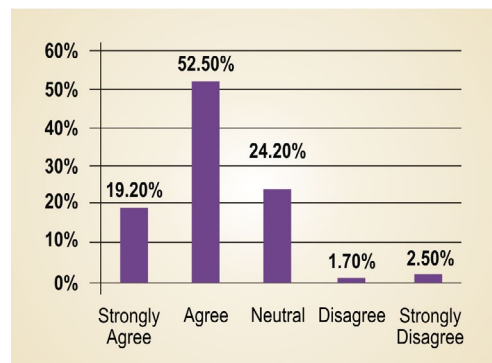


Figure 4.8: If the counselling sessions were interactive
 Source: Feedback survey.



Learners' access to supplementary learning material offered by the university

Learners were asked if they could access supplementary learning material like audio/video/radio counselling provided by the university at the study centres (Figure 4.9).

- **How did the learners view KKHSOU's evaluation activities?**

To analyse this research question, learners were asked to respond to a few questions/statements like:

Q 1: If they received assignments on time?

Q 2: If they received feedback on assignments on time?

Q 3: If the term-end examination procedures were clearly explained to them?

Q 4: If they received the term-end examination results on time?

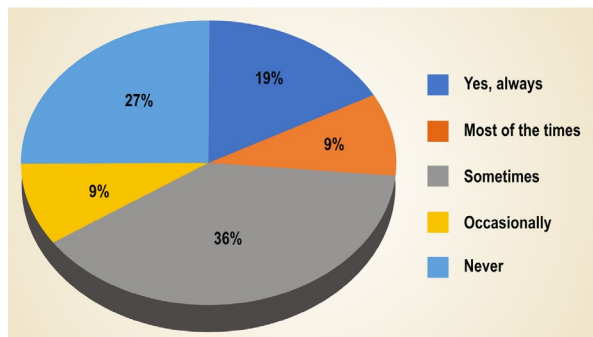
It is to be noted here that like other open universities, KKHSOU also undertakes evaluation at two levels -- home assignments (HAs) and term-end examinations (TEEs). Home assignments get 20 per cent weightage. In each course (barring practical courses), learners need to submit home assignments within the stipulated time at the study centres. Though these home assignments carry 50 marks in total, they carry a 20 percentage weightage in the overall assessment. Ideally, counsellors in the study centres have to evaluate the HAs and return them to the learners before the TEE with marking as well as feedback for improvement. As summative evaluation, TEEs are conducted at the end of each semester and they carry an 80 percentage weightage. KKHSOU follows a system in which if there is a gap of more than 30 per cent between the two evaluations (HAs and TEEs), the score in the HAs is automatically scaled down.

Learners' response to receipt of assignments and feedback on time

Learners were asked if they received assignments on time. Ninety-one per cent said that they received assignments on time, while 8 per cent learners did not give any response and 1 per cent said that they did not receive assignments on time.

Further, they were also asked if they received counsellors' feedback on the assignments on time. Sixty-nine per cent learners said they did, while the rest said no.

Learners' response to receiving clear guidelines with regard to term-end examinations



*Figure 4.9: Learners' access to supplementary learning material offered by the university
Source: Feedback survey.*



Learners were asked if they received clear guidelines on TEE procedures. They were asked to rate their responses on a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree). More than 83 per cent learners agreed (strongly agree and agree) that they received clear guidelines, 12 per cent learners remained neutral while around 5 per cent learners disagreed (disagree and strongly disagree) that they received clear guidelines regarding TEEs' procedures.

Learners' response to declaration of the results of term-end examinations on time

Learners were asked if they agreed that the results of the TEEs were declared on time and rate their responses on a five-point Likert scale (Figure 4.10).

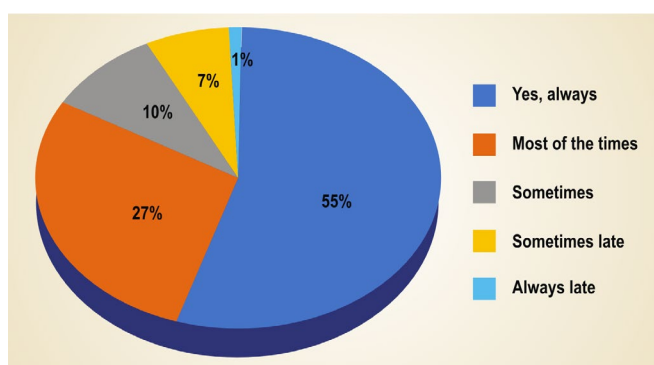


Figure 4.10: Learners' feedback on the declaration of TEEs' results on time

Source: Feedback survey.

• How the learners viewed the services offered by their study centres

To analyse this research question, learners were asked to respond to a few questions/statements like:

Q 1: If they received prior communication of any changes in the counselling schedule.

Q 2: If they received help from the coordinators in academic and other matters?

Q 3: If they found the support staff at the study centres helpful.

Q 4: If they found the infrastructural facilities at the study centres adequate.

Learners' response on receiving prior communication of any changes in counselling sessions

Learners were asked if they received prior communication in changes (if any) in counselling sessions at the study centres. More than 68 per cent learners maintained that they received prior intimation about changes in the schedule of the counselling sessions, 7 per cent learners said that they did not receive any prior information, while the remaining 25 per cent learners did not respond.

Learners' response to receiving timely help from centre coordinators on academic and other matters

Learners were asked if they received timely help from the centre coordinators on academic and other matters; 77 per cent of the learners maintained that they received timely help from the centre coordinators on academic and other matters most of the times, 16 per cent said that



they received timely help sometimes or occasionally while more than 7 per cent learners said that they never received timely help from the centre coordinators.

Learners' response to support staff at the study centres

Learners were asked if they found the support staff at the study centres helpful and to rank their level of satisfaction on a five-point Likert scale (very satisfied, satisfied, average, dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied). Eighty per cent of the learners maintained that they were satisfied (very satisfied and satisfied) with the help received from the support staff at the study centres, while 15 per cent said they received average help, and 5 per cent expressed dissatisfaction (dissatisfied and very dissatisfied) with the services received from the support staff at the study centres.

Learners' response to adequacy of infrastructural facilities at the study centres

Learners were asked if they found the infrastructural facilities at the study centres adequate. More than 82 per cent learners maintained that they found the infrastructural facilities at the centres adequate, 15 per cent said that the study centres had average infrastructural facilities, and 3 per cent said that the infrastructural facilities were not adequate.

- **How did the learners perceive the strengths and weaknesses of the university?**

To analyse this research question, learners were asked to respond to a few questions/statements like:

- Q 1:** Please rank your level of satisfaction on timely response to your queries by the university.
- Q 2:** Please rank your overall level of satisfaction with the university.
- Q 3:** Please mention any three strengths of the university.
- Q 4:** Please mention any three weaknesses of the university.

Learners' level of satisfaction on timely response received from the university

Learners were asked to rank their level of satisfaction with timely response received from the university on a five-point Likert scale (very satisfied, satisfied, average, dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied). Eighty-two per cent of the learners maintained that they were satisfied (very satisfied and satisfied) with the timely response received from the university, while 14 per cent learners said this service was average, and 4 per cent expressed dissatisfaction (dissatisfied and very dissatisfied) with timely response from the university.

Learners' rankings of overall satisfaction with the university

Learners were asked to rank their overall level of satisfaction with the university on a five-point Likert scale (very satisfied, satisfied, average, dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied). More than



88 per cent learners maintained that they were satisfied (very satisfied and satisfied) with the timely response received from the university, 10 per cent learners said the response was average, and 2 per cent expressed dissatisfaction (dissatisfied and very dissatisfied) with the university's response.

University's strengths and weaknesses according to the learners

Learners were asked to mention any three strengths and three weaknesses of the university. These were summarised under certain broad categories. The strengths mentioned by the learners were broadly categorised as: (a) the university's rules and regulations and administration are learner friendly, (b) well-designed quality of SLM, (c) good communication system, (d) examination system, and (e) timely provision of SLM.

The weakness outlined by the learners were broadly categorised as: (a) examinations, (b) counselling process, (c) no response or late response to learners' queries and communication problems, (d) not receiving SLM on time, (e) poor functioning of the study centres, and (f) assignment system.

The overall strengths and weaknesses of the university as perceived by the learners are summarised (as a percentage of the total responses received) in Figures 4.11 and 4.12 respectively.

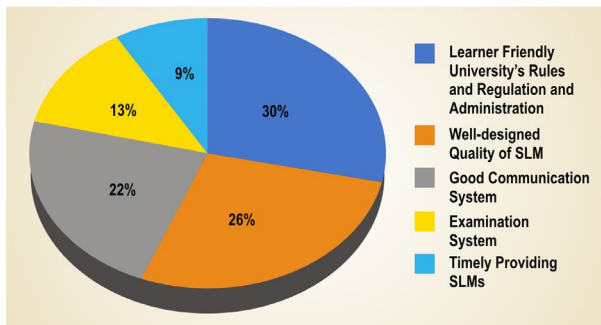


Figure 4.11: University's strengths as perceived by the learners
Source: Feedback survey.

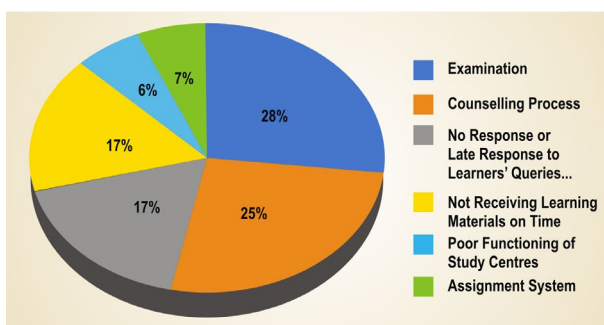


Figure 4.12: University's weaknesses as perceived by the learners
Source: Feedback survey.

A Discussion of the Findings of the Survey

This study shows that learners used the internet to collect information about the university as well as other online services offered by it. Significantly, 72 per cent of the learners said that they agreed that the use of ICT tools will enhance the effectiveness of the counselling sessions. This leaves a wide scope for the university to actively consider providing ICT based supporting learning material to the learners. There are numerous studies that agree with the thinking that ICT services have a positive impact on the effectiveness and delivery



of open and distance learning programmes. For example, UNESCO's World Conference on Higher Education (Paris, 1998) reiterated: 'distance learning and new information and communication technologies secure a wider access to higher education, to new social groups in particular. It is important to exploit their potential in education' (UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education, 2002).

The survey also shows the SLM prepared by the university was able to fulfil the needs of a majority of the learners, as nearly 80 per cent learners agreed (either strongly agreed or agreed) that the concepts were clearly explained in the SLM. This statement is further validated by the fact that a well prepared SLM was also mentioned as one of the strengths of the university by the learners.

Further, with regard to the conduct of counselling sessions by the counsellors at the study centres, more than 75 per cent of the learners agreed (strongly agreed and agreed) that the counsellors could explain the concepts clearly. Significantly, 72 per cent also agreed that the counselling sessions were interactive. These two statements related to the conduct of counselling sessions at the study centres, however, contradicts the finding that 25 per cent learners mentioned counselling as one of the weaknesses of the university. Available literature suggests that there exists a positive relationship between an instructor's performance and student satisfaction (Agbanu et al., 2018). Yukselturk and Yildirim (2008) also came up with similar findings that high quality instructional and other staff support services also resulted in higher student satisfaction with the educational environment.

In our survey, 91 per cent of the respondents said that they received assignments on time, while 69 per cent learners mentioned that they got feedback on the assignments on time. Significantly, 7 per cent learners also mentioned the assignment system as one of the weaknesses of the university. It should be noted here that as argued by Delbecq and Scates (1989), the response of tutors and 'turn-around time' for comments and grading of the assignments is cited again and again as being a critical component of student support, with students who receive timely feedback on assignments responding more positively to the course than those who have to wait for feedback.

Another important finding of our study is that 68 per cent of the learners said that they received prior intimation about changes in the schedules of the counselling sessions while 77 per cent learners maintained that they received timely help from centre coordinators on academic and other matters most of the times. Eighty per cent learners also mentioned that they were satisfied (very satisfied and satisfied) with the help received from the support staff at the study centres. When asked about the infrastructural facilities, more than 82 per cent learners maintained that they found the infrastructural facilities at the centres adequate. However, this response about the study centres contradicts the response of 6 per cent of the learners who mentioned poor functioning of the study centres as one of the weaknesses of the university.

Available literature suggests that in a low technological environment, study centres can play a pivotal role in offering remote learner support (Mutambo et al., 2018).



Learners' perceptions about the strengths and weaknesses of the university also have policy relevance. It is worth considering that certain areas like communication, examinations, and timely receipt of SLM were mentioned both as strengths and weaknesses of the university. Significantly, communication and examinations were also found to be its weaknesses by the Verification Team of the Commonwealth of Learning: Review and Improvement Model (KKHSOU, 2013).

It should be noted here that in the recent years, the university has undertaken strict examination monitoring activities in all the examination centres across the state. This might have resulted in a few learners mentioning it as a weakness. Secondly, as some learners also mentioned it as a strength, there is scope for further research on this aspect. Similar is the case with communication system and on-time delivery of printed study material.

Policy Implications

Based on the findings and analysis, the university may adopt the following measures to increase its learners' satisfaction levels:

- (a) Move towards adopting an ICT based learning environment. In fact, the university is currently working on a plan to implement a learning management system soon.
- (b) Undertake further studies to review the effectiveness of the counselling sessions conducted at the study centres.
- (c) Undertake further studies on existing practices undertaken by counsellors to provide feedback on assignments.
- (d) Routinely monitor the functioning of the study centres.
- (e) There is the need to do a proper SWOT analysis of the university involving its larger stakeholders.

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Chapter 5

Vocational Education and Training Programmes of Netaji Subhas Open University: Students' Perspectives

Anirban Ghosh, Barnali Roy Choudhury and Kasturi Sinha Ghosh

Introduction

Providing access to educational facilities to rural/ tribal /disadvantaged people is the prime objective of any HEI. Development is possible only through education in rural areas, particularly for disadvantaged groups. NSOU, the only State Open University in West Bengal, has been a significant contributor to empowering the people of West Bengal through vocational education and training. With its mission of 'Reaching the Unreached,' NSOU has a vision of building a qualitative human resource base in the state. The objective of setting up an open university is bringing all eligible individuals into the arena of higher education. To make this possible, a major expansion programme has been undertaken by the university to meet the huge apparent and latent demand for higher education in a meaningful manner. Keeping in mind the mission and vision of the university of contributing to social development, the university is keen to expand its reach to cater to the needs of thousands of rural and other disadvantaged people like SCs/ STs/OBCs/transgenders through its quality academic inputs, resulting in improved quality of their lives thus helping contribute towards social development. Netaji Subhas Open University is not only imparting education as an alternative to the formal education system of conventional courses but also in areas such as vocational and non-conventional courses. This is an area where distance education can be used extensively to



provide education that can prepare a skilled workforce. The university is providing vocational and non-conventional courses so that students can engage themselves in income-generating activities. Its School of Vocational Studies is providing an opportunity to the existing workforce to upgrade its skills as well as to fresh graduates by providing seamless vocational education and a platter of pioneering courses that are non-conventional in nature.

The School of Vocational Studies (SVS), Netaji Subhas Open University has worked on a three-year project, 'Increase Access and Improve Institutional Capacity for Sustainable Development through Vocational Education and Training (2017-20)' with support from the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA). The main objectives of the project were up-skilling trainees to get into the job market and make them employable with job ready skills.

This study was designed to measure students' satisfaction with CEMCA supported courses being offered since 2017-18 by SVS, NSOU.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were:

- Assessing student satisfaction with respect to learning resources developed by NSOU.
- Assessing student satisfaction with respect to the academic support services provided.
- Assessing student satisfaction with assessment and feedback.
- Assessing students' overall satisfaction with respect to various programmes.
- Suggesting measures for improving programme outcomes.

Methodology

SVS, NSOU conducted this study among vocational students from different parts of West Bengal -- Murshidabad, Birbhum, Sundarban, Purulia, Kolkata, Malda, and Bankura. Eight hundred copies of the questionnaire were sent to the vocational study centres, PIMT (6 centres), Nari Siksha Samity (2 centres), Vivekananda Institute of Education, Nazirpurpur Rainbow Educational Institute, Shanti Devi Vidyanketan, EDI, Vidyasagar Foundation, Anjali Academy of Management and Technology, and the Jaynagar Gram Vikash Kendra, Sundarban. Most of the learners were from marginalised and disadvantaged areas. These centres generally offer courses to the community which help them survive in their day-to-day lives better by strengthening them as skilled professionals. Learners can opt for these vocational programmes in terms of certificates/diplomas. Students' feedback on the different parameters is given in Figure 5.1.



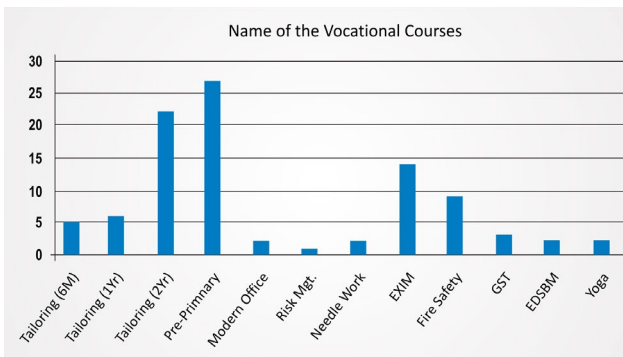


Figure 5.1: Course-wise distribution of enrolled students (in per cent)

Sample

For the data collection, students from 12 vocational courses were selected and learners from these courses responded to a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was shared through Google form and as a hard copy; in all 310 learners responded.

Instrument for data collection

The study used a structured questionnaire divided into different sections to capture students' feedback on different areas like demographic information, the teaching-learning process, availability of e-content, university services, and services provided at the study centres.

Result and Findings

The data was analysed under demographic information and an exploratory analysis of the learning material, induction programmes, counselling, assignments, examinations, and services provided by the university.

Demographic information about the Respondents

Demographic information of the respondents was analysed to explore their basic profiles. This included information on locality, gender, and social category (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2 shows that 61 per cent of the respondents were from the rural area, while 38per cent and 1per cent were from the urban and semi-urban areas respectively. This shows that the university has been able to reach learners in the rural belt to a great extent.

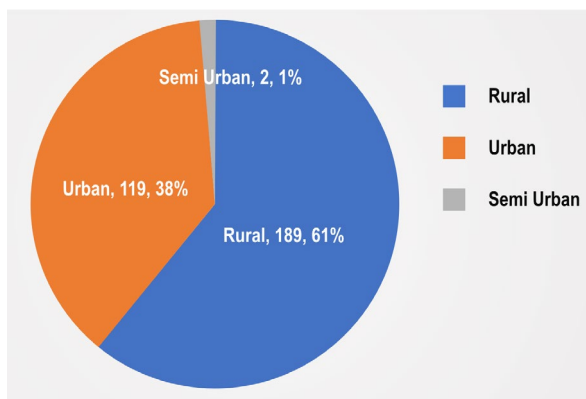


Figure 5.2: Students' locality

Figure 5.3 shows that out of the 310 respondents, 56per cent were female and 44per cent were male. This shows that female students were more interested in pursuing vocational courses as compared to their male



counterparts. Thus, it may be stated that the female learners may find good opportunities to find suitable employment and be economically independent in the long run. This also shows that the vocational courses are more suitable for female employment as compared to male employment.

The social categorisation of the respondents given in Figure 5.4 shows that out of the 310 respondents, 50 per cent belonged to the general category, 24 per cent belonged to the OBC category, 18 per cent belonged to the SC category, and 8 per cent were from the ST category. It may be noticed that about 50 per cent of the university's students were from marginalised sections. The sample given here also shows the same caste distribution as the overall enrolment in the university.

Among the 310 respondents, 55 per cent accessed information about the university from its website, 34 per cent used the prospectus, and 11 per cent accessed the information through the mobile app. As shown in Figure 5.5 students visited the university's website frequently as this was user friendly and had updated information.

Exploratory Analysis

This section analyses the responses to learning material and induction programmes, counselling, examinations and assignments, and online services. The respondents' responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, average = 3, agree = 4, and strongly agree = 5.

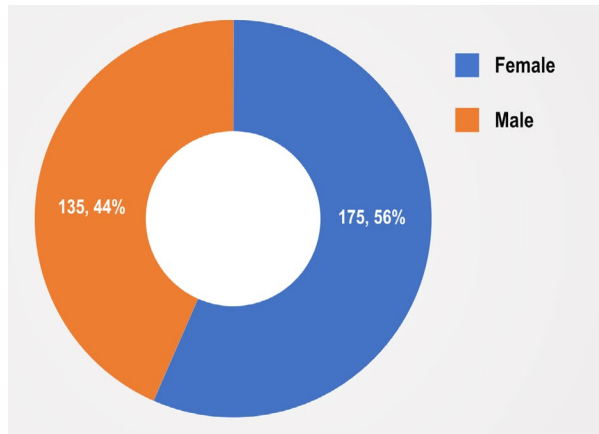


Figure 5.3: Students' gender

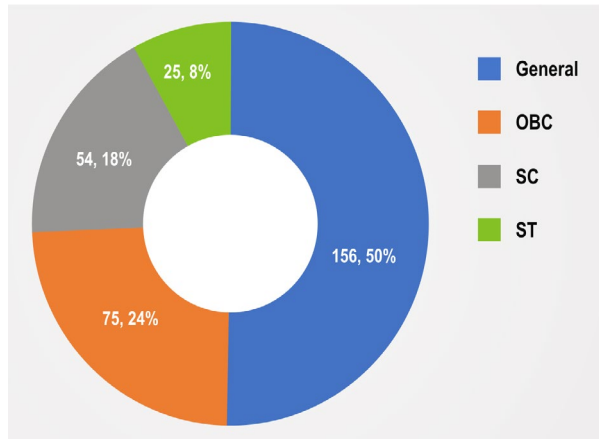


Figure 5.4: Social category

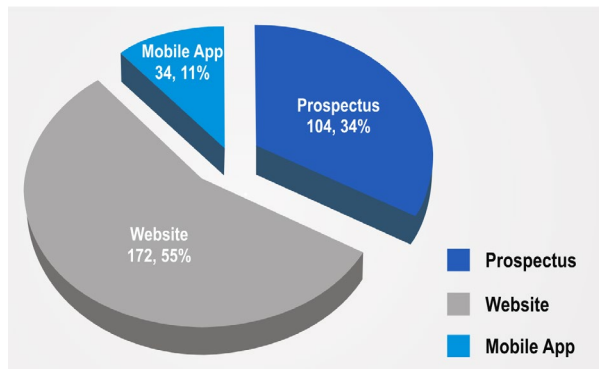


Figure 5.5: Access to information provided by the university



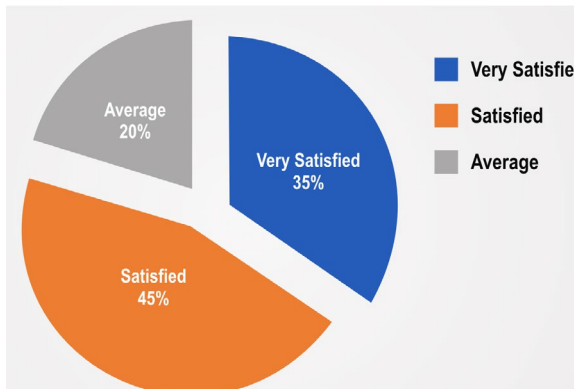


Figure 5.6: Responses to SLM

SLM where 57 per cent and 33 per cent of the respondents said that they were very satisfied and satisfied respectively as they received printed study material on time. Only 9 per cent

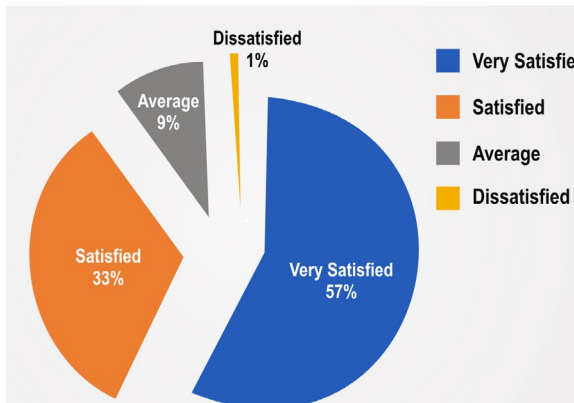


Figure 5.7: Availability of printed SLM

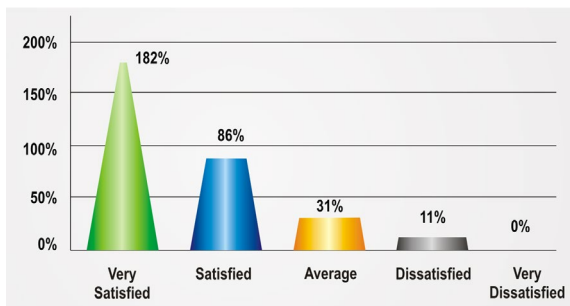


Figure 5.8: Supplementary material like AVLs

of the respondents were neutral to the statement and 1 per cent were dissatisfied with the availability of printed learning material.

Figure 5.8 shows the availability of supplementary learning material like video/radio counselling. Most of the learners were satisfied with these, while 31 were neutral to the statement and 11 were dissatisfied.

With the advent of information and communication technology, content/ resources being provided in digital form are in high demand. The easy availability of study material in a digital form is very important from a student's perspective. Figure 5.9 shows that 55 per cent of the learners rated the digital availability as average while 21 per cent were totally satisfied with it.

Figure 5.6 shows an important issue of understandability of content included in the self-learning material (SLM). The study shows that 35 per cent of the respondents were very satisfied and stated that the concepts in the SLM were clearly stated while 45 per cent were satisfied with the concepts, and 20 per cent said that the clarity of concepts was average. No learner said anything negative about the study material.

Figure 5.7 shows the availability of SLM where 57 per cent and 33 per cent of the respondents said that they were very satisfied and satisfied respectively as they received printed study material on time. Only 9 per cent of the respondents were neutral to the statement and 1 per cent were dissatisfied with the availability of printed learning material.

Figure 5.9 shows that 55 per cent of the learners rated the digital availability as average while 21 per cent were totally satisfied with it.

Figure 5.10 shows that 62 per cent of the learners were very satisfied with the induction programmes organised by the university. In the induction programmes, learners were provided all the information to help their learning attitudes; 31 per cent of the respondents were satisfied and 7 per cent reported that the induction programmes were average.



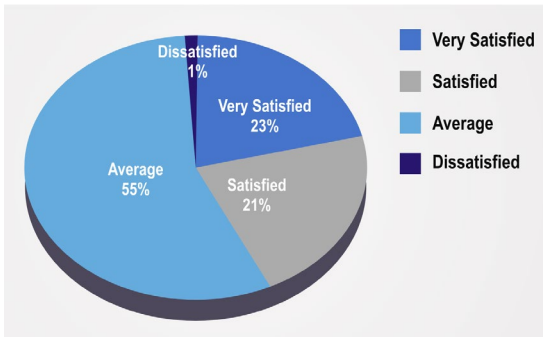


Figure 5.9: Availability of SLM in digital form

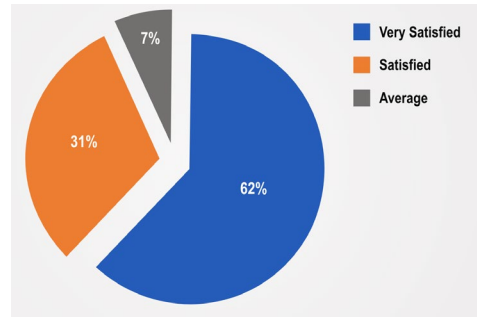


Figure 5.10: Conducting induction programmes

On the basis of the results presented so far, it can be inferred that the students were satisfied with the digital form of academic content. Our survey shows that a substantial number of students were using the digital form of SLM and audio-visual lectures for their learning.

The study looked at another important issue of the teaching-learning process to find out if the counsellors were capable of explaining the concepts in personal contact programmes or not. It is clear from Figure 5.11 that 93 per cent (66+27) per cent of the learners were satisfied while only 7 per cent were dissatisfied with the academic counsellors.

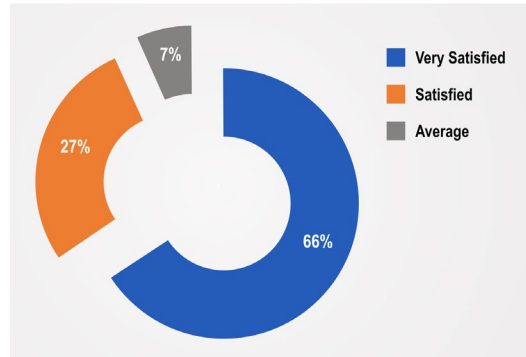


Figure 5.11: Responses to counselling

The counsellors adopted innovative and interesting teaching-learning processes and constantly motivated the learners to actively participate in class activities. Figure 5.12 shows that 90 per cent of the learners were satisfied with the counselling sessions while 10 per cent opined that the sessions were average. However, none of the learners expressed dissatisfaction with the counselling sessions. Reportedly the sessions were participatory and interactive in nature. This led to the development of clear concepts and enhancing learners' cognitive abilities.

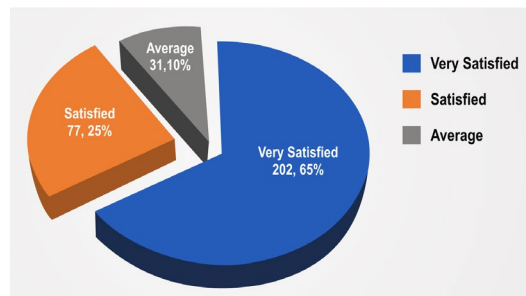


Figure 5.12: Response to counselling sessions

Our study shows that 74 per cent of the respondents were satisfied with the way the changes in the counselling sessions were communicated to them on time (Figure 5.13) while 26 per cent reported that this was average. This might be due to some technical reasons. Overall, it is seen that the concerned counsellors and coordinators were responsible enough to communicate about the upcoming counselling



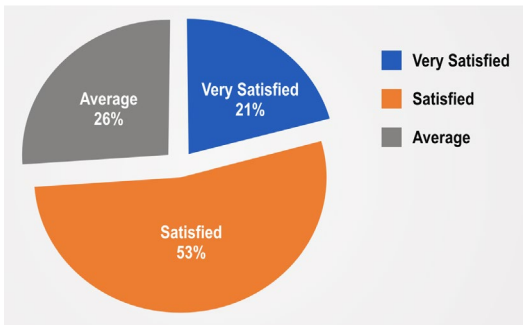


Figure 5.13: Counselling schedule

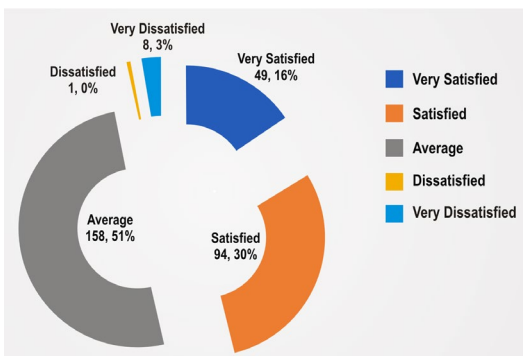


Figure 5.14: Use of technology

any time anywhere learning. The study also showed that the students were satisfied with their counselling sessions and schedules though most of the students said they were average in the use of computers.

Most of the learners reported that they get back their assignments on time (79 per cent) while 2 per cent of the learners expressed their dissatisfaction (Figure 5.15).

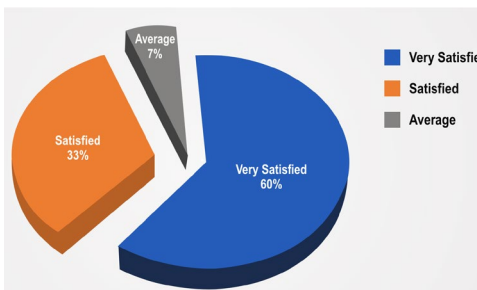


Figure 5.16: Feedback on assignments

that 93 per cent of the learners were satisfied as most of their concepts were cleared and only 7 per cent learners reported that this service was average.

sessions and were thus committed to maintaining regularity and discipline in their respective learner support centres. The learners could attend their PCP sessions regularly to interact with their counsellors and peers.

Figure 5.14 shows that about half of the learners were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the use of technology in the counselling sessions, while 46 per cent of the learners were satisfied with the use of technology in the counselling sessions and 3 per cent of the learners were not satisfied.

Counselling sessions play an important role in the teaching-learning process. These are held at the respective study centres. All the vocational courses are supported by both face-to-face counselling sessions and recorded lectures. Since these are pre-recorded lectures, students can access them as per their convenience which facilitates

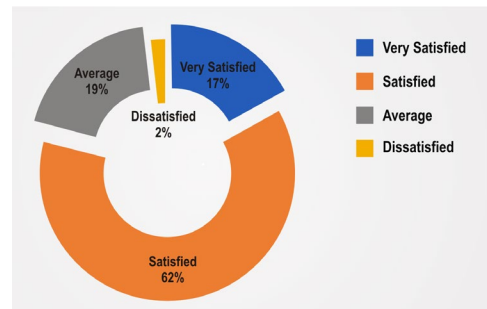


Figure 5.15: Returning assignments

Figure 5.16 shows that the learners were able to clarify their concepts while preparing their assignments. They got help from their counsellors easily in case they faced any difficulties while writing their assignments. These assignments gave them an opportunity to prepare for the term-end examinations. The study found

The learners were quite satisfied with the explanations given by the counsellors and centre coordinators regarding the various formalities related to the examinations. All their queries related to the examinations were addressed by the study centres with utmost care. Thus, no confusion about examinations existed amongst the learners. Figure 5.17 shows that 63 per cent of the learners were very satisfied with the exam procedure while 5 per cent of the learners were dissatisfied and 32 per cent learners found them to be average.

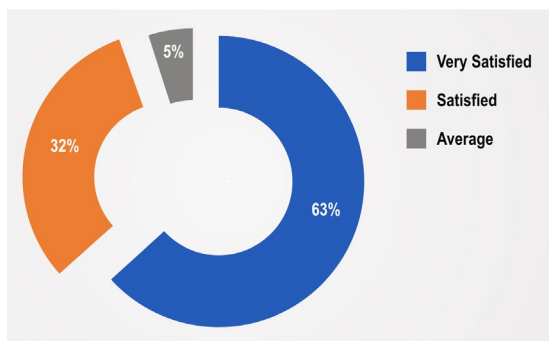


Figure 5.17: Term-end examination process

The learners had no complaints with the marking system. Thus, it may be said that proper transparency was maintained by the examiners while evaluating the learners in their final examination.

As per Figure 5.18, 178 of the learners agreed that the results were declared on time. However, 86 gave an average response to the statement while 46 expressed dissatisfaction.

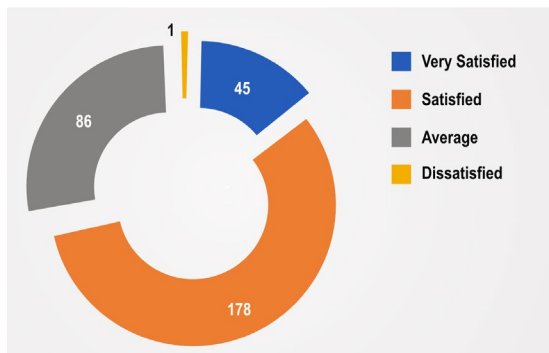


Figure 5.18: Declaration of exam results

There are two components of examinations in the ODL system--internal assessment or formative assessment and term-end examinations or summative assessment. The survey's results show that the students were satisfied with the process of both the examinations (internal assessment and term-end examinations).

Figure 5.19 shows that most of the learners believed that the personnel at the learner support centres were quite helpful, as a considerably large percentage of learners expressed satisfaction-92 per cent of the learners were satisfied with the personnel. No participant responded that he/she was dissatisfied with the personnel. The counsellors and coordinators at the study centres were successful in establishing a very congenial relationship with the learners. They were cooperative and were able to provide all the required information and services to the learners enrolled in vocational courses under their study centres.

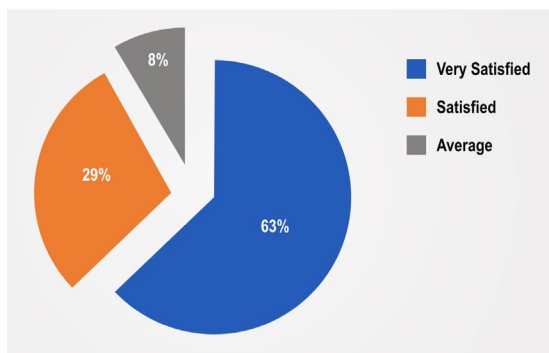


Figure 5.19: Personnel at the study centres



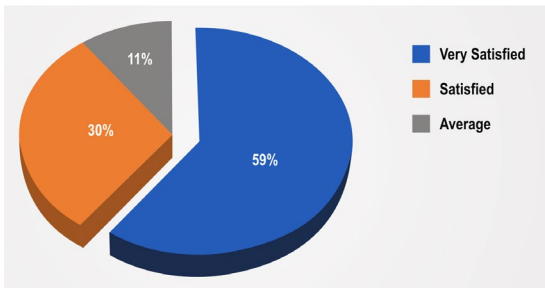


Figure 5.20: Infrastructure at the study centres

Any vocational course needs good hands-on training under the supervision of an efficient teacher. Figure 5.20 shows that the study centres were able to provide all the infrastructural facilities to their learners which were required by them during their training as 59 per cent of the learners reported high satisfaction and 30 per cent were satisfied with the infrastructural arrangements at the centres.

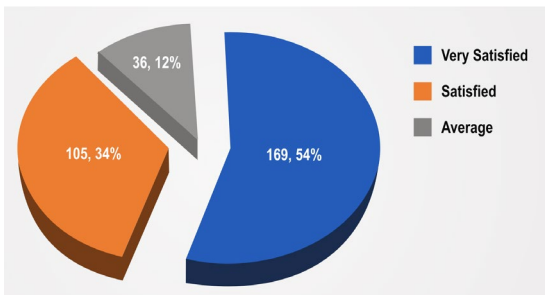


Figure 5.21: Response to Learners' queries

As Figure 5.21 shows, 54 per cent of the learners expressed a high level of satisfaction as their queries were responded on time by the concerned coordinators and counsellors while 34 per cent of the learners were satisfied, making a total of 90 per cent who agreed with the statement. Nobody was dissatisfied. Since there is a good relationship between the counsellors and the learners, the learners found it easy to raise queries and the counsellors were responsible enough to answer their questions and resolve their doubts if any.

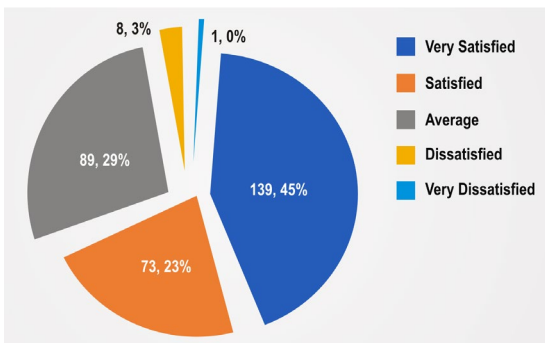


Figure 5.22: Placement drives

The university organises job fairs from time to time to let the learners know about the available job opportunities. Figure 5.22 shows that 68 per cent of the learners were satisfied with this initiative, 29 per cent of the learners gave an average response, and about 3 per cent reported that they were dissatisfied. Job fairs were announced on the university's website. The counsellors were also advised to share information related to job opportunities with their learners.

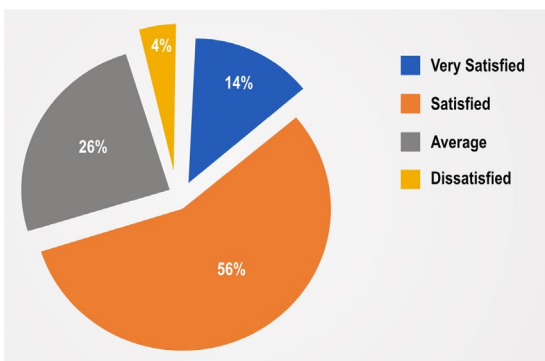


Figure 5.23: Online services

Figure 5.23 shows that a majority of the learners were satisfied with accessing online services; 26 per cent gave an average response on this issue and 4 per cent were dissatisfied.



Figure 5.24 shows that overall satisfaction levels with the university was average – 19 per cent learners were highly satisfied, 23 per cent were satisfied, 52 per cent said it was average, and 6 per cent learners were dissatisfied.

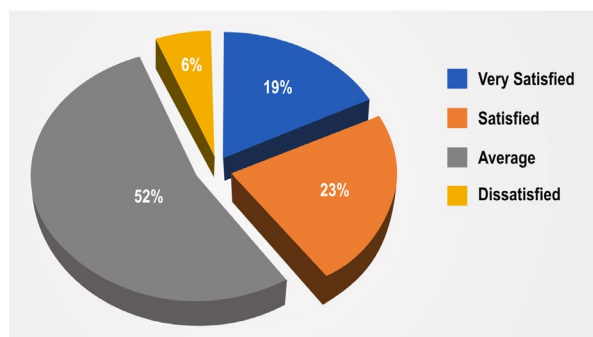


Figure 5.24: Overall satisfaction

Outcome of the Survey

The survey's findings show that most of the learners enrolled in NSOU's various vocational courses come from the rural areas and a majority of them are women. Thus, the university is contributing to women's economic empowerment. The university is serving all the categories where 50 per cent of the learners belong to the general category and the remaining 50 per cent are SCs, STs, and OBCs. The data also shows that more than 50 per cent of the learners were accessing the university's website for information.

It is observed that 80 per cent of the learners were satisfied with the self-learning material provided by the university and more than 90 per cent reported that they received the SLM on time. Eighty-six per cent of the learners were satisfied with the supplementary material and 43 per cent were satisfied with the digital study material. However, 55 per cent learners held an average opinion about digital content.

NSOU's learner support centres are learner friendly. There is a good teaching-learning environment in most of the centres. The counsellors were able to establish a good rapport with the learners which probably enabled the learners to approach their respective counsellors freely whenever they needed any academic assistance. The counsellors as well as the centre coordinators tried to extend all support to the learners and were committed to providing these services with dedication. They identified and engaged the best counsellors and trainers for imparting training to the learners. The survey reflects that a high level of transparency was maintained in evaluation and examination related matters.

The learners had slight issues with the teaching-learning process adopted by the university as perhaps they were still not accustomed to ODL practices. Some of the learners who came from remote and rural areas may have faced a problem of poor network connectivity in accessing ICT support or using internet services while filling up online forms during the admissions and examinations. The university has made consistent efforts to make placement opportunities available to its students through job fairs and support centres also make the learners aware of various job opportunities.



Recommendations

The survey data reflects a positive picture regarding the overall working of the university among its students. However, there is always scope for improvement. There is always a need for updating the SLM and timely delivery of SLM. Learners are an important component of ODL. Supplementary learning material can also be updated and made available to learners to ensure their satisfaction levels. Assignments being an important aspect of the ODL system need to be marked and shared on time with the learners. There is also a need to improve the ODL system of evaluation to make it faster and timelier.

Digital content and use of ICT during counselling sessions is an area of concern which needs special attention of the university for improvement. More technical training is needed for the counsellors so that they are well-versed with the use of ICT facilities available in the university. In many instances, learners failed to avail of these facilities due to lack of awareness; therefore, orientation programmes should be organised for both the counsellors and learners to make the entire teaching–learning process more technology-based thus equipping the learners to enter the competitive workspace with more confidence. Support centres can also have help desks to assist learners so that they can pursue their desired courses smoothly.

Conclusion

The Netaji Subhas Open University has been successful in its mission of reaching the unreached and has been able to contribute to raising the urge of effective learning amongst community members thus ensuring development which is sustainable. With its committed resource pool, the university has been able to render services to its learners in an efficient manner. There may be some shortcomings, but the university has been working in the best interests of its learners. This survey was useful in getting an idea not only about the perspectives of its learners but it also provides scope for further improving the teaching-learning environment thus providing accurate support services.



Chapter 6

Learners' Satisfaction Study at the Odisha State Open University

Ansuman Jena

Introduction

Educational institutions should be learner centric. This means all a university's activities should be planned, designed, and executed keeping learners' expectations and requirements in mind and fulfilling all the statutory obligations. As the youngest open university in India, OSOU has successfully completed five years. It has established its footprint as a progressive university by adopting several initiatives to take education closer to the learners. Over the years the university has catered to the needs of more than 20,000 learners. Its list of achievements is commendable. However, the university has not undertaken a formal and full-fledged survey of learner satisfaction so far. Measuring and analysing learners' perceptions and satisfaction reflects learner centeredness at the university.

Objectives

This study's aim was accessing learner satisfaction with respect to the following resources developed and services provided by the Odisha State Open University (OSOU) to its learners:

- Learning resources (self-instructional material both print and digital, audio, video, and tutorials) developed by the university.
- Academic support services provided to the learners.
- Assessments.
- Grievance redressal and feedback.



The study also captures students' overall satisfaction and suggests measures for improving their satisfaction levels.

Literature Review

ODL possesses a unique ecosystem of teaching and learning. It encompasses learners with diverse demographic and psychographic backgrounds. Developing the curriculum, providing support, and creating a conducive teaching-learning environment is a challenge for ODL institutions and universities. Udo et al. (2011) define student satisfaction as, 'overall assessment of the student learning experience' when expectations are met or exceeded by the students' perceptions about the campus reality (Schreiner and Juillerat, 1994).

Wei and Ramalu (2011) found that student satisfaction is significantly related to the responsiveness, assurance, and empathy realised by them. Hasan et al. (2008) did a comparative analysis of student satisfaction in Malaysia and found that all the five dimensions of the service quality (SERVQUAL) model given by Parasuraman et al. (1985) were met. By using the same model, Mansori et al. (2014) found that tangibility, empathy, and responsiveness were significantly related to learner satisfaction. An empirical study conducted by Sembiring (2014) in Indonesia showed that learners' satisfaction was significantly related to reliability, responsiveness, and empathy.

A learner centric approach in the context of ODL is critically important (Bonk and Reynolds, 1997; Burge, 1989; Gibbs, 1992; Piccinin, 1997; Pulist, 2001; Schmidt, 1996; Tam, 2000). Gibbs (1992) defines learner centeredness as, 'the process of learning that provides learners with greater control and autonomy to choose the programme, time, method, place and pace of study'.

A review of literature on learner satisfaction with the ODL environment points out the critical importance of concepts both from planning as well as implementation points of view. High level of learner satisfaction indicates greater learner centeredness which should ultimately result in greater attachment, belongingness, engagement, and goodwill for a university or institution.

Research Methodology

a. Approach

This empirical study involved quantitative approaches including an online questionnaire survey.

b. Research instrument and Data collection

The online questionnaire was sent to learners at the university through email. However, participation was voluntary.



c. Coverage, Sample, and Sampling

The online survey was conducted between 8 May 2019 and 27 July 2019. It included existing and past learners of the university; 179 responses were selected for data analysis.

Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis was done using the SPSS 23.0 software package using appropriate methods.

Year of Enrolment

The learners were asked to mention the year of their enrolment. Of the total respondents, 78 per cent had enrolled in 2018, 19 per cent in 2019, 2 per cent in 2017, and 1 per cent in 2015.

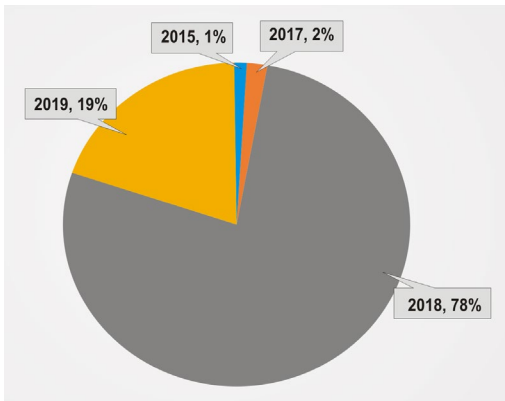


Figure 6.1: Year-wise enrolment status of the respondents

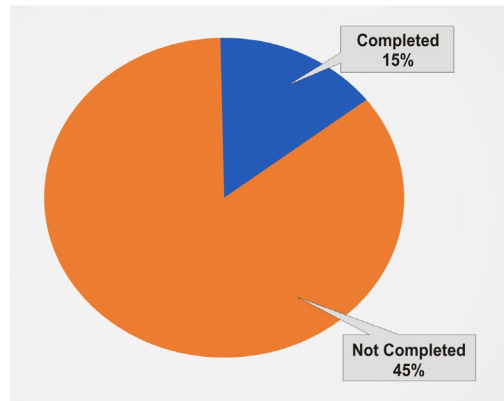


Figure 6.2: Course completion status of the respondents

The respondents were asked to mention their programme completion status. Fifteen per cent had already completed the programme and 85 per cent were pursuing different programmes at OSOU (Figure 6.2).

District-wise Participation

Odisha has 30 districts and responses were received from learners of all the districts. The largest number of responses were received from Khordha district. State capital Bhubaneswar falls in Khordha district. The learners were asked to mention the district to which they belonged (Figures 6.3 and 6.4).

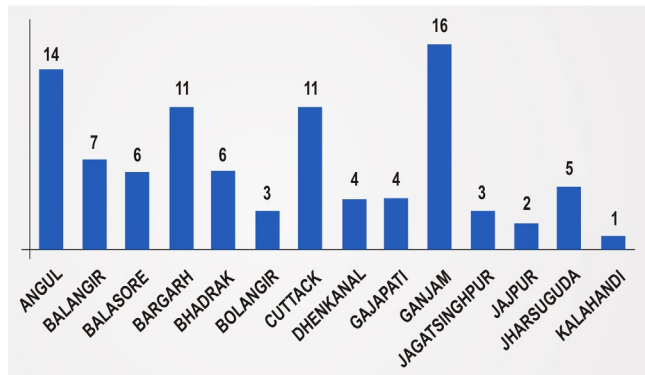


Figure 6.3: District-wise participation of the respondents



Programme-wise response

Respondents were asked to mention the programme in which they were enrolled. The maximum number of learners were enrolled in Master of Arts (Odia) followed by Master of Arts in Rural Development, Master of Arts (journalism), and Master of Commerce. Respondents from these four programmes constituted 54.2 per cent of the total responses received. Learners enrolled in 29 programmes of the university took part in this satisfaction survey (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Programme wise learners participation in the satisfaction survey

Programmes	Frequency	Per cent
MAOD - Master of Arts (Odia)	46	25.7
MARD - Master of Arts in Rural Development	19	10.6
MJMC - Master of Arts (Journalism)	17	9.5
MCOM - Master of Commerce	15	8.4
MAPS - Master of Arts (Political Science)	9	5
MASO - Master of Arts (Sociology)	8	4.5
MAHI - Master of Arts (History)	7	3.9
MAEG - Master of Arts (English)	5	2.8
MSCS - Master of Science (Cyber Security)	5	2.8
CJMC- Certificate in Journalism & Mass Communication	4	2.2
DJMC- Diploma in Journalism and Mass Communication	4	2.2
PGDCA - Post Graduate Diploma in Computer Applications	4	2.2
BAOD - Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Odia	3	1.7
CGC- Certificate in Geriatric Care	3	1.7
DFHT- Diploma in Functional Hindi & Translation	3	1.7
DRD- Diploma in Rural Development	3	1.7
PGDIM - Post Graduate Diploma in Management	3	1.7
PGDJMC - Post Graduate Diploma in Journalism and Mass Communication	3	1.7
PGDRD - Post Graduate Diploma in Rural Development	3	1.7
PGDRM - Post Graduate Diploma in Rural Management	3	1.7
CRD- Certificate in Rural Development	2	1.1
DIM- Diploma in Management	2	1.1
MAPA - Master of Arts (Public Administration)	2	1.1



ADJMC - Advance Diploma in Journalism & Mass Communication	1	0.6
CCS- Certificate in Communication Skills	1	0.6
CDL- Certificate in Digital Library	1	0.6
DCS- Diploma in Cyber Security	1	0.6
DED- Diploma in Entrepreneurship Development	1	0.6
MAHD - Master of Arts (Hindi)	1	0.6
Total	179	100.0

Gender Distribution

Of the total respondents 78 per cent were male and 22 per cent were female (Figure 6.4).

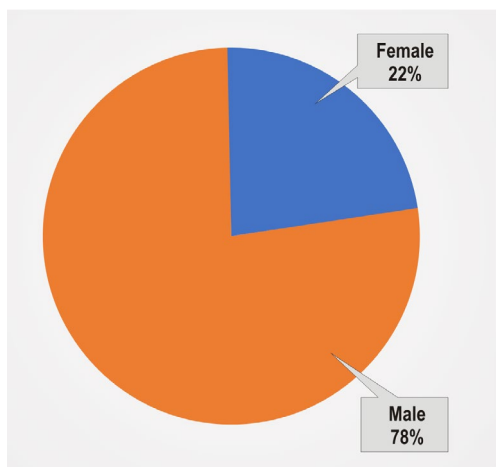


Figure 6.4: Gender data of the respondents

The respondents were asked to mention the most frequently visited source to access information about the university and its programmes. The university’s website emerged as the most popular and frequently accessed source for accessing information about the university, courses, learning resources, and support services. This was followed by the mobile app. The prospectus was found to be the least popular source (Table 6.2).

Social Category

The learners were asked to mention their social category; 53 per cent belonged to the general category, 33 per cent to OBCs, and 7 per cent each to SCs and STs (Figure 6.5).

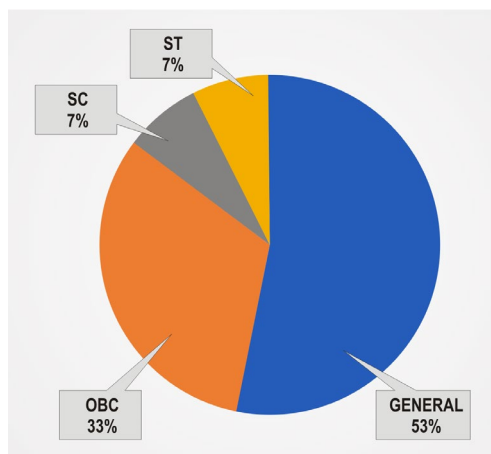


Figure 6.5: Social category of the respondents

Table 6.2: Source to access information about the university and its programmes

Choices	Frequency	Per cent
Website	108	60.3



Mobile App	30	16.8
Website, Mobile App	20	11.2
Website, Prospectus, Mobile App	9	5
Prospectus	7	3.9
Website, Prospectus	5	2.8
Total	179	100.0

Clarity of concepts discussed in Learning Material

A majority of the learners (81 per cent) were either satisfied or very satisfied with the clarity of concepts stated in the learning material. However, 5 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied and 14 per cent gave an average rating to the clarity of content (Figure 6.6).

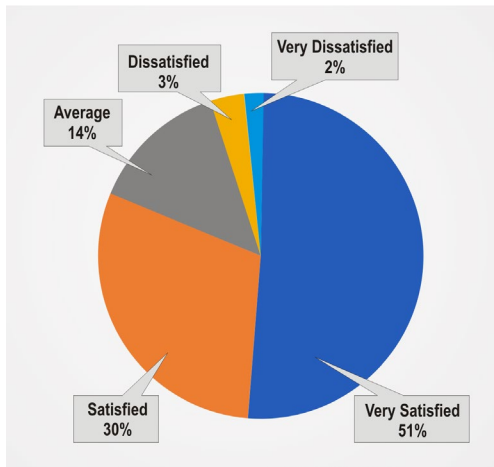


Figure 6.6: Clarity of concepts discussed in learning material

material received on time and mentioned that they received the printed learning material on time while

21 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied and 17 per cent gave it an average rating (Figure 6.7).

Printed Learning Material received on Time

Sixty-two per cent of the respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the

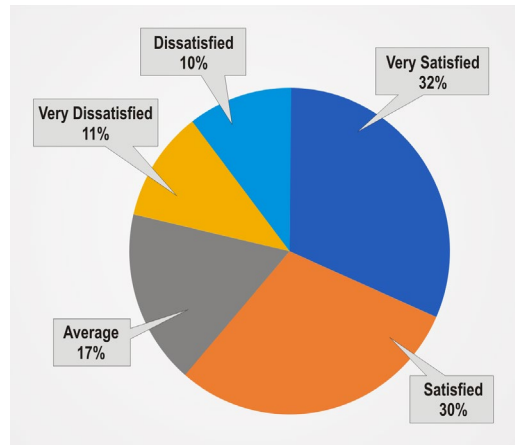


Figure 6.7: Printed learning material received on time

Availability of Supplementary Learning Resources

Half the respondents (53 per cent) were either very satisfied or satisfied with the availability of supplementary learning resources like video/radio counselling. However, 25 per cent gave this aspect an average rating and 22 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 6.8).



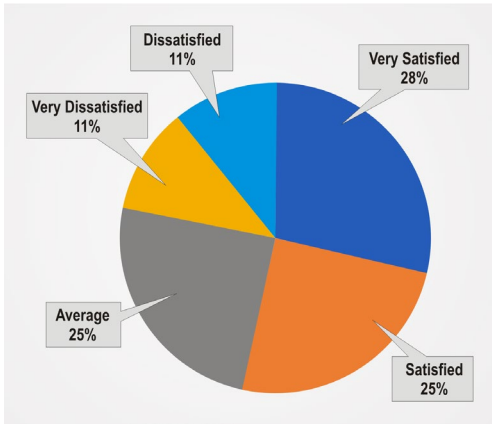


Figure 6.8: Availability of supplementary learning resources

Usefulness of the induction programmes conducted at the study centres

A majority of the respondents (85 per cent) were either very satisfied or satisfied with the usefulness of the induction programmes conducted at the study centres. However, 10 per cent gave it an average rating and 5 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 6.10).

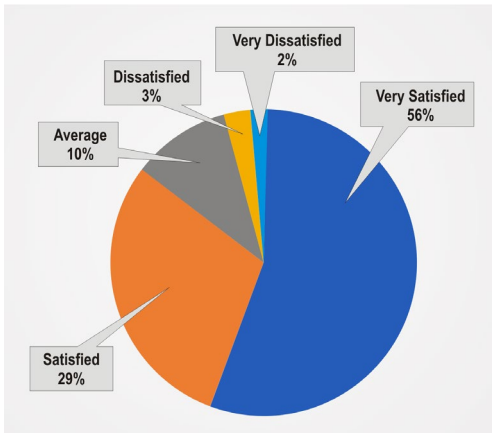


Figure 6.10: Usefulness of the induction programmes conducted at the study centres

A majority of the respondents (87 per cent) were either very satisfied or satisfied

Availability of Study Material in Digital form

Seventy-six per cent of the respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the availability and convenient accessibility of supplementary learning resources like video/ radio counselling while 13 per cent gave it an average rating and 11 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 6.9).

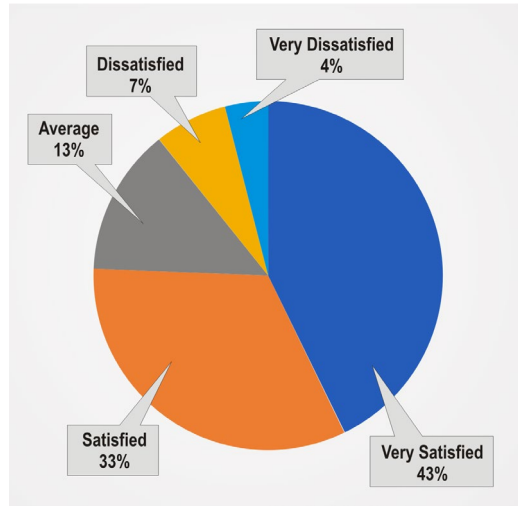


Figure 6.9: Availability of study material in digital form

Academic Counsellors explain the concepts clearly

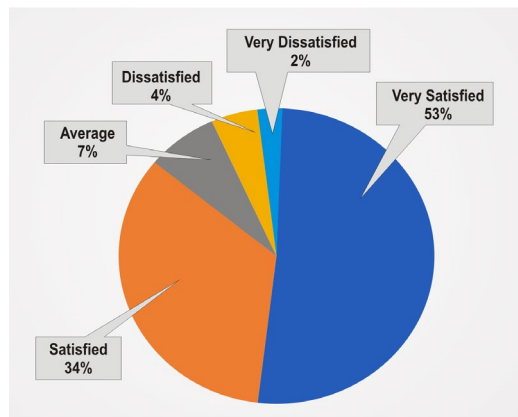


Figure 6.11: Academic counsellors explain the concepts clearly



with the usefulness of induction programmes conducted at the study centres. However, 7 per cent gave this an average rating and 6 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 6.11).

Interactive Counselling Sessions

A majority of the respondents (83 per cent) were either very satisfied or satisfied with the interactive counselling sessions conducted at the study centres. However, 12 per cent gave it an average rating and 5 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with this service (Figure 6.12).

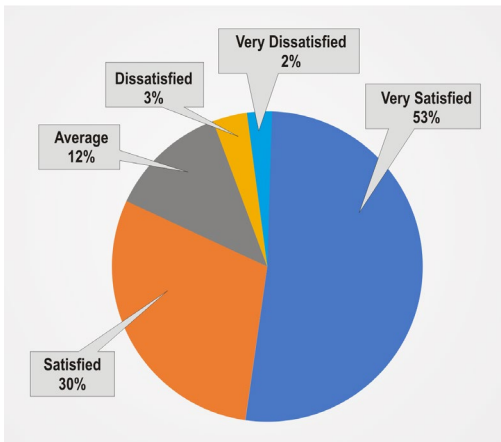


Figure 6.12: Interactive counselling sessions

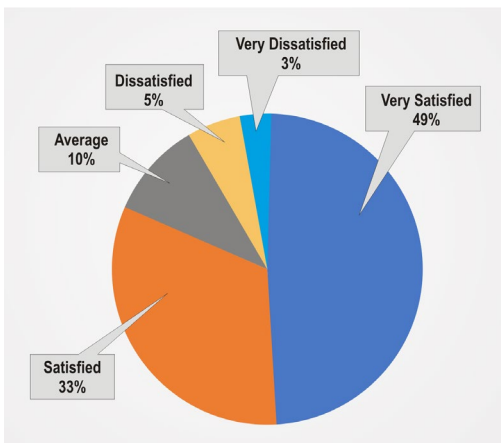


Figure 6.13: Changes in counselling sessions are communicated in advance

while 18 per cent gave it an average rating and 18 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 6.14).

Changes in counselling sessions are communicated in advance

A majority of the respondents (82 per cent) were either very satisfied or satisfied with advance communication about changes in counselling sessions conducted at the study centres. However, 10 per cent gave this an average rating and 8 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 6.13).

Use of technology during Counselling Sessions

Sixty-four per cent of the respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the use of technology during counselling sessions

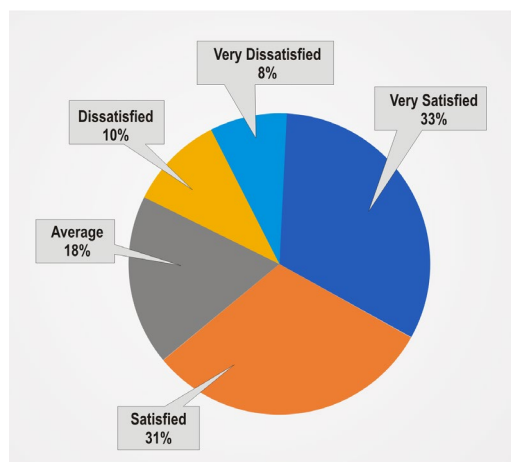


Figure 6.14: Use of technology during counselling sessions



Helpfulness of the Study Centres' Staff

Eighty-one per cent of the respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the helpfulness and cordial behaviour of staff members at the study centres and 11 per cent gave this average rating and 8 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 6.15).

Adequacy of the Study Centres' Infrastructure

A majority of the respondents (81 per cent) were either very satisfied or satisfied with the adequacy of the infrastructure at the study centres though 12 per cent gave it an average rating and 7 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 6.16).

Timely return of Evaluated Assignments

Sixty-seven per cent of the respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the timely return of evaluated assignment copies by the study centres. However, 16 per cent gave this an average rating and 17 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 6.17).

Assignment Feedback

Seventy-four per cent of the respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the evaluators feedback on their assignments and believed that it helped them clarify concepts and improve their writing. However, 13 per cent gave it average rating and 13 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 6.18).

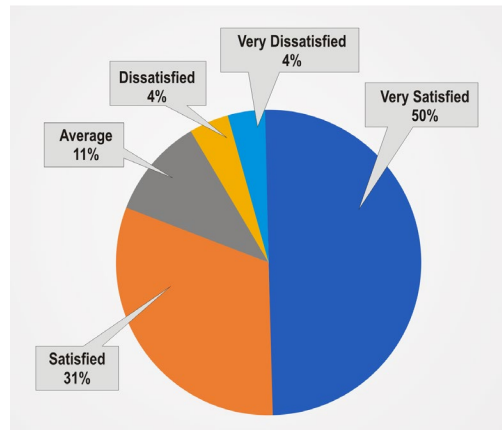


Figure 6.15: Helpfulness of the study centres' staff

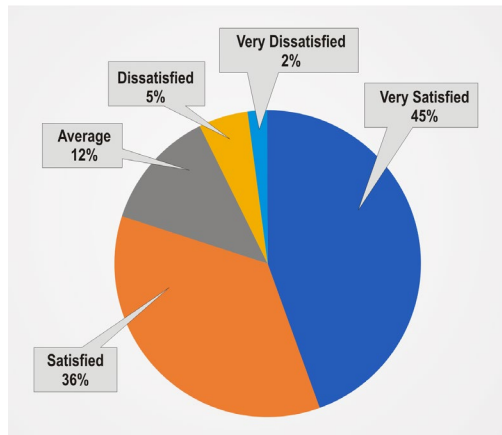


Figure 6.16: Adequacy of the Study centres' infrastructure

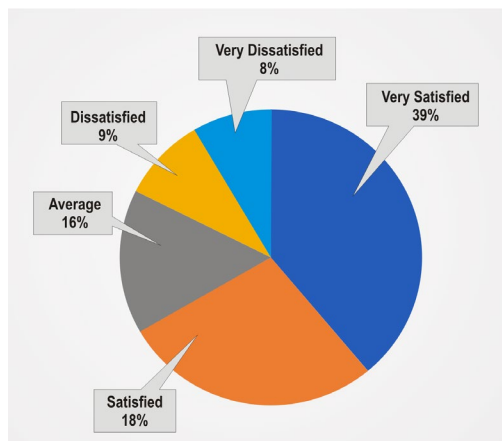


Figure 6.17: Timely return of evaluated assignments



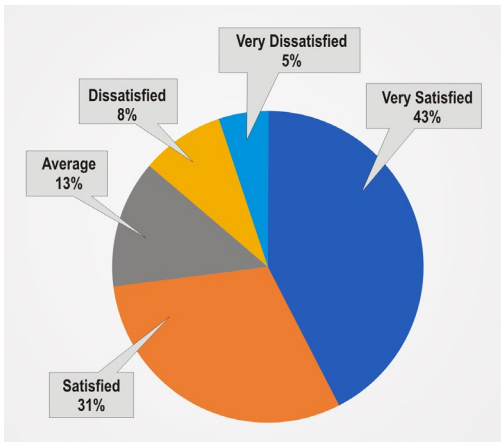


Figure 6.18: Assignment feedback

Ten per cent gave this an average rating and 5 per cent were either very dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 6.19).

Evaluation of Project proposals

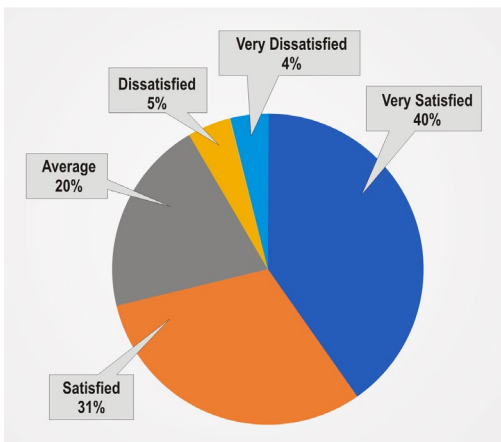


Figure 6.20: Evaluation of project proposals

Timely declaration of Examination results

Eighty-two per cent of the respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the timely declaration of examination results while 12 per cent gave it average rating and 6 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 6.21).

Clarity on Term-End Examination procedures

Most of the respondents (85 per cent) were either very satisfied or satisfied with the clarity about the term-end examination procedures.

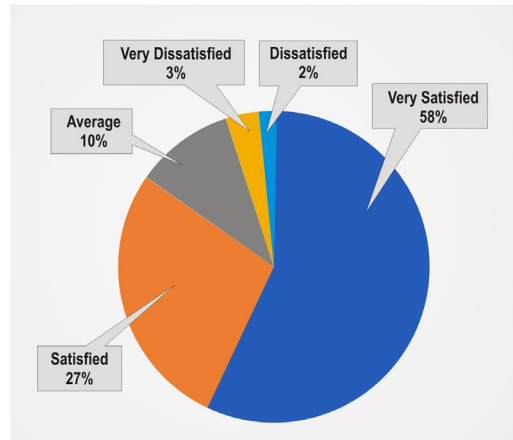


Figure 6.19: Clarity on term-end examination procedures

Seventy-one per cent of the respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the evaluation of project proposals. However, 20 per cent gave this an average rating and 9 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 6.20).

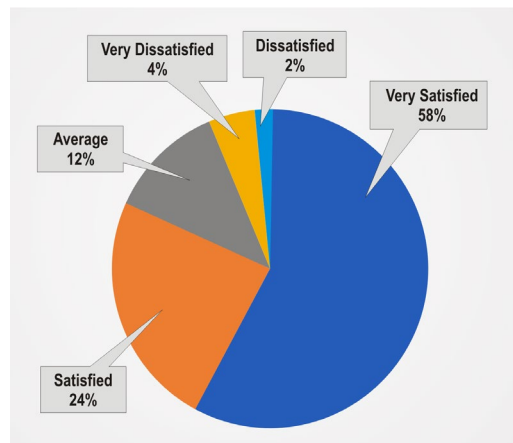


Figure 6.21: Timely declaration of examination results



Timely response to queries and redressal of grievances

Seventy-six per cent of the respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the timely response to queries and redressal of grievances while 11 per cent gave it an average rating and 13 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 6.22).

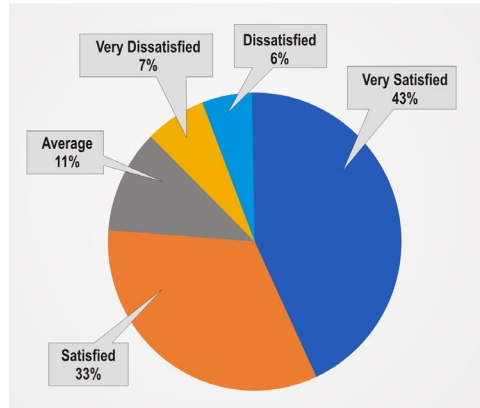


Figure 6.22: Timely response to queries and redressal of grievances

Support and Guidance related to placements

Sixty-six per cent of the respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the support and guidance on placements provided by the university. However, 22 per cent gave it an average rating and 12 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 6.23).

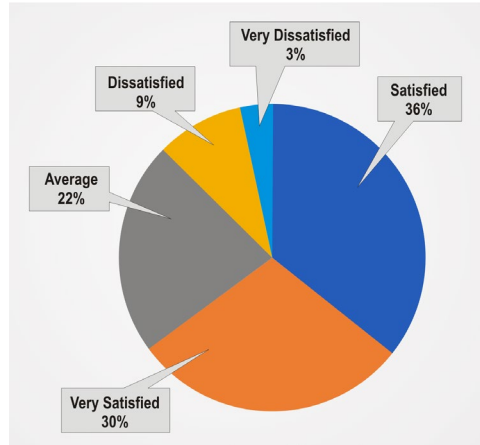


Figure 6.23: Support and guidance related to placements

Online Facilities and Support

Most of the respondents (85 per cent) were either very satisfied or satisfied with the online facilities and support provided by the university while 8 per cent gave it an average rating and 7 per cent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 6.24).

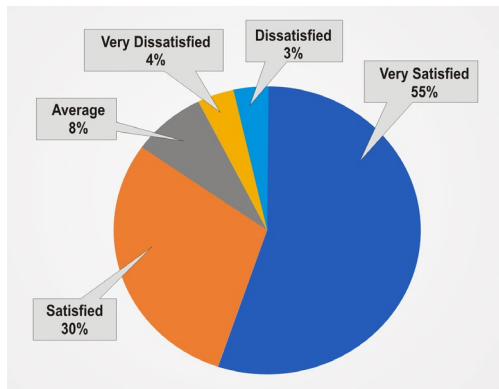


Figure 6.24: Online facilities and support

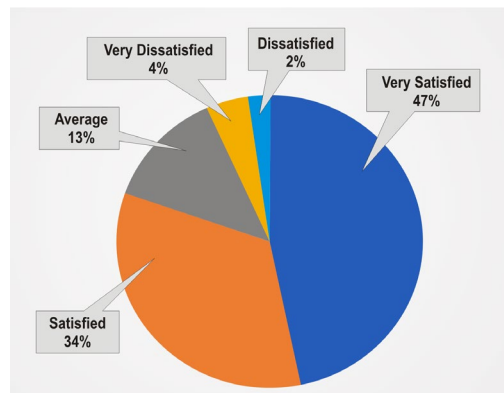


Figure 6.25: Overall satisfaction level

Overall Satisfaction Level

The overall satisfaction level of the learners with Odisha State Open University is given in Figure 6.25.



Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are made:

- Printed SLM should be sent directly to the learners through post.
- A separate portal should be created for the redressal of learners' grievances.
- A placement portal should be created for timely dissemination of information, smooth coordination related to various recruitment agencies, and convenient job applications.
- OSOU should conduct placement drives for learners besides providing them information about vacancies.
- Provision should be made for the learners to receive acknowledgement from the study centres on submission of assignments.
- A portal for assignment mark entries, acknowledgement, award list generation, and automatic bill processing should be developed.
- Number of audio and video lectures should be increased.
- An alumni cell should be created and a dedicated web page or portal should be created for coordination and alumni engagement.
- Online counselling should be provided to the study centres where sufficient number of qualified academic counsellors are not available.
- Programmes and development of learning resources in Odia language should be done as a priority.

Conclusion

This was the first ever learner satisfaction survey conducted by the university. The responses received motivated the authorities, faculty, and staff members of the university to rethink, redesign, re-engineer, and revamp its efforts to take quality learning at affordable prices to learners. This survey also exposed the stakeholders to several new aspects and pain points faced by the learners.

To remain committed to learner centric education, the Odisha State Open University has already initiated action on several fronts based on the recommendations of this study. The university has also sanctioned a grant-in-aid for a Minor Research Project to Dr Ansuman Jena, Academic Consultant (Management) to enhance the scope of the learner satisfaction survey.



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Chapter

7

Experimenting with Online Learning at Uttarakhand Open University

Jeetendra Pande

Introduction

Teaching and learning has changed in the 21st century. The British Open University and other traditional universities have developed online distance courses (British Open University, n.d.). Private institutions are also offering online courses. In the coming years, students the world over will be using e-learning tools more than printed text material, and India is not far behind (Bates, 2019). It is estimated that the worldwide e-learning industry will be worth over \$325 billion by 2025 (Mccue, 2018).

Open universities have moved from print material to web-based courses for delivery of instruction in the last two decades. With the emergence of new technologies, universities have to move fast and keep pace with the rest of the world. Online learning is mainly the transfer of skills and knowledge through computer-based interfaces. The content is delivered via internet, audio/video, satellite, and CD ROMs (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2011).

Keeping these new technological developments in mind, teachers should be prepared to meet the challenges of the future. In this regard, UOU in collaboration with CEMCA, organised a three-day training workshop on how to create/develop online courses. The training objectives of the workshop were orienting teachers towards open educational resources, explaining and describing instructional designs for online courses, highlighting some of the tools used for creating online courses, understanding the learning management system,



publishing the resources for an online course, and creating an online course using Moodle. The workshop comprised of 11 intensive and hands-on sessions which included face-to-face delivery and online engagement. The workshop page for training on the university's Moodle platform was created at moodle.uou.ac.in. The platform was refreshed from time to time with updated new courses and e-learning resources. The updated platform can be accessed at e-learning.uou.ac.in.

Development of Online Courses

1. Uttarakhand Open University conducted a baseline study in the university with special reference to enrolments, content, student support services, use of ICT, the teaching-learning process, learning outcomes, and employability.
2. Designed, developed, and hosted a web interface along with Moodle LMS including app customisation for content delivery and learner support including career counselling. The courses were prepared in text as well as video format.
3. Experts were involved in content development and recording video lectures.
4. The programmes are hosted on Uttarakhand Open University's e-learning portal: elearning.uou.ac.in and video lectures are also available on the YouTube channel of the university under the name UOULIVE.
5. Till date 138 video lectures have been recorded and uploaded and 15 courses that consist of 195 modules are available on the e-learning portal.
6. Student support services: For retaining students and providing them support services, SMS and emails are sent via an email credit system.

Courses offered

UOU offers online courses through its Moodle platform. The following courses are selected from the Computer Science discipline and offered as non-credit courses to enrich learners' skills and knowledge about computers which are essential for employability:

a) Courses on Computer Application (CCA)

- Introduction to MS-Word
- Introduction to MS-Excel
- Introduction to MS-PowerPoint
- Introduction to Information Technology
- Introduction to DTP

b) Courses on e-Governance and Cyber Security (CEGCS)

- Fundamental of Information Security
- Cyber Security Techniques



- Cyber Attacks and Counter Measures: User Perspective
 - Information System
- c) **DIT**
- Database Management System
 - Introduction to Networking and Web Technology
 - Introduction to Programming using C
- d) **Others**
- Introduction to Video Editing
 - Discreet Mathematics
 - Theory of Computation

Objectives

The objectives of this study were:

- Finding students' preferences for accessing information about the university.
- Exploring students' satisfaction with learning material and supplementary media tools.
- Studying students' satisfaction with assignments, examinations, and various services provided by the university.

Methodology

A five-point questionnaire was developed for a baseline of the students. The data was gathered through Google form. Out of all the responses received only 269 valid responses were accepted for the analysis. The data was analysed quantitatively by employing statistical measures. Frequency measures were used for presenting the demographic as well as other data along with mean, range, and standard deviations wherever needed. The analysis was done in SPSS.

Analysis and Results

The data was analysed in different parts dealing with demographic information and an exploratory analysis of learning material, induction programmes, counselling, assignments, examinations, and the services provided by the university.

Demographic information of the Respondents

Demographic information of the respondents was analysed for finding out their basic profiles. This included a description based on locality, gender, and age of students studying in the university.



Description of data based on students' locality

Data based on students' locality shows that of the 269 respondents, 136 (50.60 per cent) were from urban areas, 127 (47.20 per cent) were from rural areas, and 6 respondents (2.20 per cent) did not respond to the question (Figure 7.1).

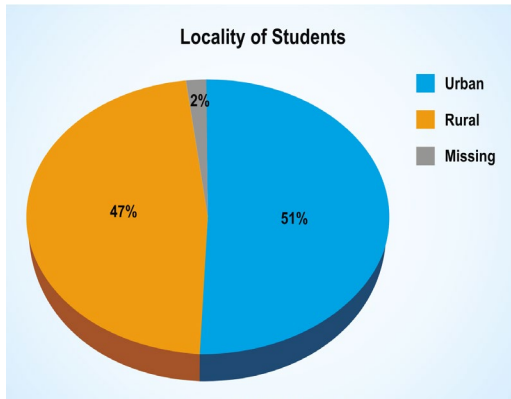


Figure 7.1: Description of the data based on students' locality

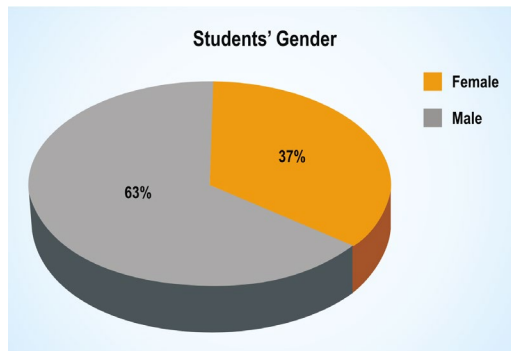


Figure 7.2: Description of the data based on students' gender

in the age group 25 to 34 years, 37 (13.75 per cent) were in the age group 35 to 44 years, 5 (1.85 per cent) were in the age group 45 to 54 years, and 2 (0.745 per cent) were in the age group 55 to 64 years. Most of the respondents belonged to the age group 17 to 24 years while there were the least number of respondents in the age group 55 to 64 years. Figure 7.3 helps understand the age categorisation better.

Description of the data based on students' Programme levels

Description of the data based on students' gender

Data based on students' gender shows that 99 respondents (36.80 per cent) were female, 168 (62.45 per cent), were male, and 2 (0.74 per cent) did not mention their gender, which means that a majority of the students were male and points to a significant difference in the male-female ratio when it comes to studying the courses offered by the university (Figure 7.2).

Description of the data based on students' age

To collect this data, age was categorised into six mutually exclusive groups as: below 17 years, 17 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, and 55 to 64 years. The results showed that 3 (1.11 per cent) respondents were below 17 years, 139 (51.67 per cent) were in the age group 17 to 24 years, 83 (30.85 per cent) were

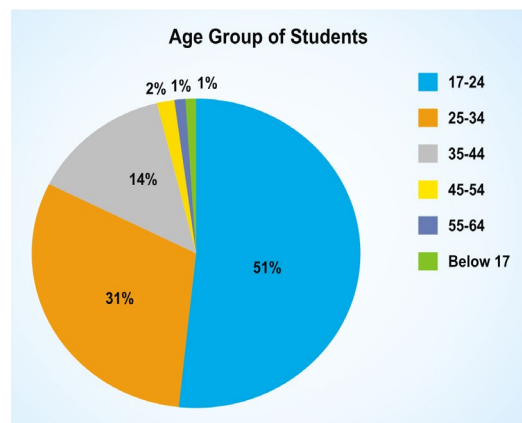


Figure 7.3: Description of the data based on students' age



The collected data on students' programme levels showed that the respondents were enrolled in the university in four different categories - certificate, diploma/PG diploma, post-graduate, and under-graduate. Thirty students (11.15 per cent) were enrolled in certificate courses, 33 (12.26 per cent) in diploma/PG diploma certificates, 104 (38.66 per cent) in post-graduate courses, 101 (37.54 per cent) enrolled at the undergraduate level, and 1 (0.37 per cent) did not mention their programme level. The data shows that the maximum number of respondents were enrolled in post-graduate courses while the minimum was in certificate courses (Figure 7.4).

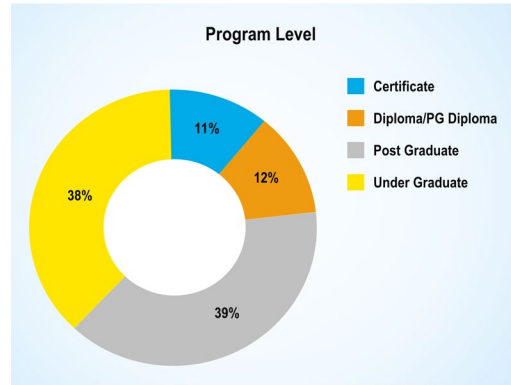


Figure 7.4: Description of the data based on students' programme level

Description of data based on social category

Data based on social category shows that the respondents came from four social categories: general, OBC, SC, and ST. Of the 269 respondents, 173 (64.31 per cent) belonged to the general category, 53 (19.70 per cent) were OBCs, 38 (14.12 per cent) were SCs, and 5 (1.85 per cent) were from the ST category. The maximum number of respondents belonged to the general category while the minimum belonged to the ST category (Figure 7.5).

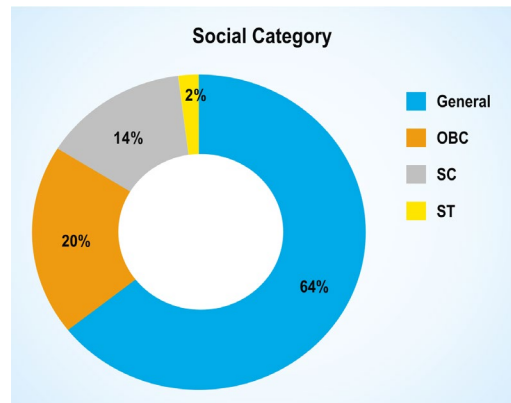


Figure 7.5: Description of the data based on students' social category

Access to University Information

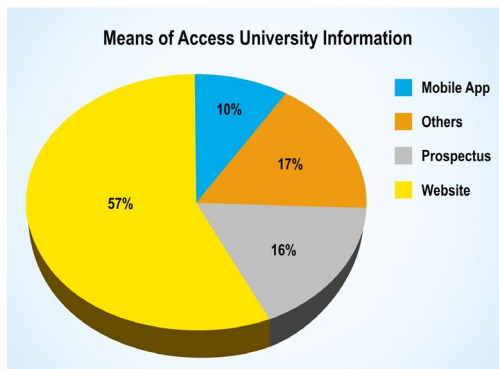


Figure 7.6: Accessing information about the university

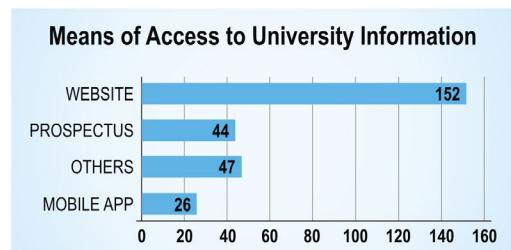


Figure 7.7: Accessing information about the university

The survey asked the respondents where they accessed information about the university from. The data shows that 26 (9.66 per cent) respondents accessed information through



the mobile app, 44 (16.35 per cent) used the prospectus, 152 (56.50 per cent) got it from the university's website, and 47 (17.47 per cent) used other sources (Figures 7.6 and 7.7).

Exploratory Analysis

Respondents' answers to learning material and induction programmes, counselling, examinations and assignments, and online services were analysed. Their responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, average = 3, agree = 4, and strongly agree = 5. The responses were analysed using a histogram and an exploratory analysis was done using the descriptive statistics based on the following rules:

- A mean value less than 3 showed that on the average, the respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with the given statement.
- A mean value equal to 3 showed that on the average, the respondents were neutral (neither agreed nor disagreed with the given statement).
- A mean value greater than 3 showed that on the average, the respondents strongly agreed and agreed with the given statement.

Responses to Learning Material and Induction Programmes

The descriptive statistics includes the number of observations, minimum, maximum, mean values and standard deviations. Table 7.1 shows the descriptive statistics of responses to learning material and induction programmes conducted at the study centres. The mean and standard deviations for clearly stated concepts in learning material were recorded (Mean = 4.1561 and SD = 0.91717). The mean value was more than 3 which indicates that a majority of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed with the statement that the concepts were clearly stated in the learning material. The average value of the responses to receiving the printed material on time were also recorded (Mean = 3.5502 and SD = 1.12398); the mean value is more than 3 indicating that most of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed with the statement. Similarly, the mean value of responses to supplementary learning material was also noted (Mean = 3.9033 and SD = 1.08842); a mean value greater than 3 shows that a majority of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed that supplementary learning material was available. The mean value of the responses to easy availability of study material in digital form were also recorded (Mean = 4.0074 and SD = 1.07548). Mean value greater than 3 suggests that a large number of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that the study material was easily available in digital form. A positive result was also noted regarding the induction programmes at the study centres as the recorded mean value (Mean = 3.6840 and SD = 1.08954) is greater than 3. The most positive response was noted for clearly stated concepts in the learning material. The maximum standard variations in the responses were noted on timely receiving of printed learning material while the minimum was for clearly stated concepts in the learning material.



Table 7.1: Descriptive Statistics of Learning Material and Induction Programmes

	Statements	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Concepts are clearly stated in the Learning Material	269	1.00	5.00	4.1561	0.91717
2.	Printed Learning Material is received on time	269	1.00	5.00	3.5502	1.12398
3.	Supplementary Learning Material like Video/Radio counselling is available	269	1.00	5.00	3.9033	1.08842
4.	Study Material is easily available in digital form	269	1.00	5.00	4.0074	1.07548
5.	Induction programmes conducted at the study centres are useful	269	1.00	5.00	3.6840	1.08954

The responses were recorded on different statements. Figure 7.8 presents the responses to learning material and induction programmes conducted by the university. A majority of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed with the statements showing that the students were comfortable with the current concepts and the availability of sources of learning. The induction programmes conducted at the study centres were also considered useful.

Figure 7.8 shows that the respondents were very comfortable with the concepts in learning material both in printed and digital form and they admitted that the learning material was easily available. The respondents also reacted positively to the induction programmes conducted at the study centres.

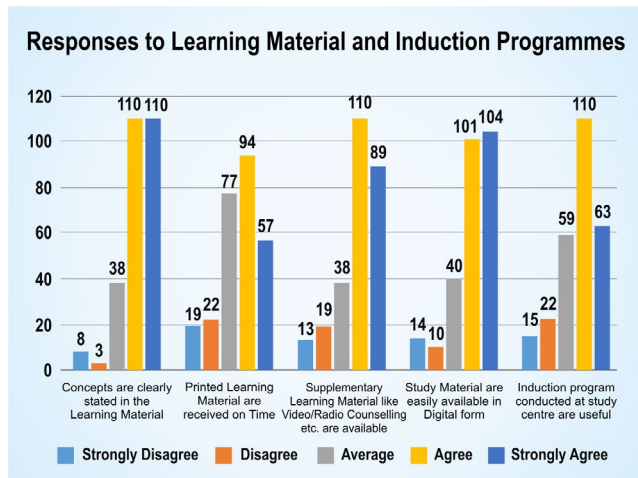


Figure 7.8: Responses to learning material and induction programmes

Responses to Counselling

Descriptive statistics of responses to counselling provided by the university included the number of observations, minimum, maximum, mean values, and standard deviations. The mean and standard deviations of the responses to academic counsellors, clarity of concepts, and explanation were recorded (Mean = 3.7955 and SD = 1.06462). The mean value is more



than 3 indicating that a majority of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed with the statement. The average value of responses to interactive counselling sessions were also noted (Mean = 3.8848 and SD = 1.09515). The mean value is more than 3 which indicates a positive impact. The mean value of responses to on-time intimation of any changes in counselling sessions were also recorded (Mean=3.8737 and SD = 1.07151). The mean value is greater than 3 showing more respondents agreed and strongly agreed that any changes in counselling sessions were communicated to them in time. The mean value of responses to use of technology during counselling sessions in the university were recorded (Mean = 3.9294 and SD = 1.09894) which shows a positive response. This indicates that the academic counsellor(s) used technology during the counselling sessions. The highest mean was noted for technology use during counselling sessions and the least was recorded for clear explanations by academic counsellors. The maximum deviation from the mean value was recorded in technology usage during counselling sessions (Table 7.2).

Table 7.2: Descriptive Statistics Regarding Counselling

Descriptive Statistics						
	Statements	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Academic Counsellors explain the concepts clearly	269	1.00	5.00	3.7955	1.06462
2.	Counselling sessions are interactive	269	1.00	5.00	3.8848	1.09515
3.	Changes in counselling sessions are communicated on time	269	1.00	5.00	3.8736	1.07151
4.	Technology is used during the counselling sessions	269	1.00	5.00	3.9294	1.09894

Figure 7.9 gives the responses to counselling in the university. For each given statement, a large number of respondents reacted with agreed/strongly agreed comments which shows that students were comfortable with the current style of counselling that the university was providing.

Summing up, students' responses showed that they were very comfortable with concept clarity provided by the academic counsellor(s), interactive counselling

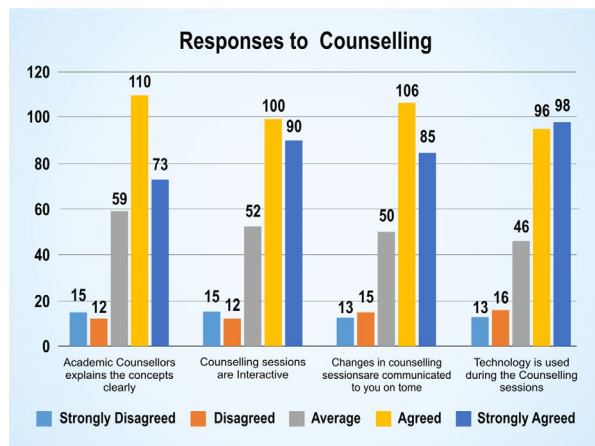


Figure 7.9: Responses to counselling



sessions, on time communication of any changes in counselling sessions, and the technology used during the counselling.

Responses to Assignments and Examinations

Responses to assignments and examinations conducted by the university are given in Table 7.3. These include the number of observations, minimum, maximum, mean values, and standard deviations. The mean and standard deviations of the responses to timely return of assignments were recorded (Mean=3.1636 and SD=1.26786). The mean value is more than 3 showing that a majority of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed that their assignments were returned by the university on time. The average value of the responses to feedback on assignments (if it was helpful in clarifying concepts) were noted (Mean = 3.1413 and SD = 1.30817). The mean value shows that this was helpful. Similarly, the mean value of responses to term-end examination procedures were observed (Mean = 3.8848 and SD = 0.98388). Many respondents agreed/strongly agreed that term-end examination procedures were very clear and comprehensible. The responses to marking of project proposals showed a Mean = 3.5688 and SD = 1.12299 positive reaction suggesting that many respondents agreed/strongly agreed that the proposals were clearly marked by the university. The mean value of responses to timely display of examination results were recorded (Mean = 4.0816 and SD = 0.91200) which show that most of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed with the statement. The highest mean was noted for timely declaration of exam results. The maximum variations in the responses said that feedback on assignments was helpful.

Table 7.3: Descriptive Statistics Regarding Assignments and Examinations

	Statements	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Assignments were returned on time	269	1.00	5.00	3.1636	1.26786
2.	Feedback on assignments helped in clarifying the concepts	269	1.00	5.00	3.1413	1.30817
3.	Term-end examination procedures are given clearly	269	1.00	5.00	3.8848	0.98388
4.	Project proposals were clearly marked	269	1.00	5.00	3.5688	1.12299
5.	Exam results were declared on time	269	1.00	5.00	4.0186	0.91200

Figure 7.10 gives the responses to assignments and the university's examination system. For all the given statements, a majority of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed showing that the students were comfortable with the current system of assignments and examinations in university.



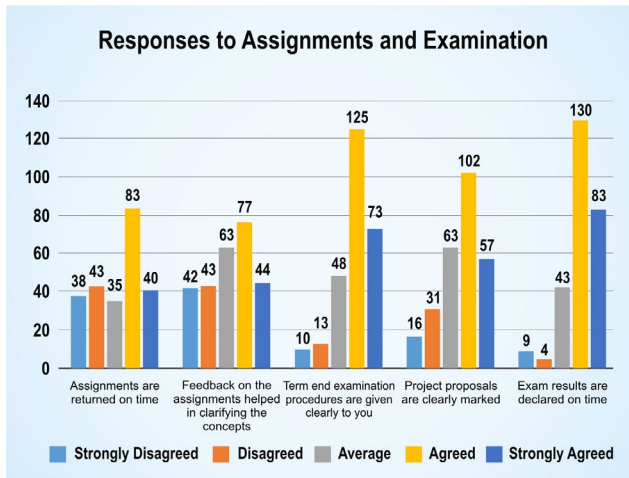


Figure 7.10: Responses to assignments and examination

Overall, the estimated output of students’ responses to assignments and examinations suggests that the respondents were comfortable with the system followed by the university.

Responses to Services provided by the university

Responses by the students to services provided by the university are given in Table 1.4. These include the number of observations, minimum, maximum, mean values, and

standard deviations. The mean and standard deviations of responses to helpfulness of personnel at the study centres were recorded (Mean = 3.7732 and SD = 1.03153). The mean value indicates that the overall response was positive, that is, the personnel at the study centres were helpful. Responses to infrastructure at the study centres were recorded (Mean=3.6803 and SD=1.00094). The mean value shows a positive response and that most respondents agreed/strongly agreed with the statement that the infrastructure at the study centres was adequate. Similarly, the mean value of responses to timely response to any query was also observed (Mean = 3.7844 and SD = 1.12882). Most of the responses were positive, indicating that most of the students agreed/strongly agreed that responses to any query sent to the university were provided on time. The mean value of responses to initiatives taken up by the university for placements were also recorded (Mean = 2.6543 and SD = 1.37522). This is one area where the responses were negative; many respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement that the university took initiatives for placements. The mean value of responses to easily accessible online services provided by the university were observed (Mean = 3.9071 and SD = 0.96714), which were positive. Most of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed that online services provided by the university were easily accessible. Mean value of responses to overall satisfaction with the university were observed (Mean = 3.8625 and SD = 0.99983), which again showed a positive response. Most of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed with the statement that they were satisfied with the university. The highest mean value was noted for easily accessible online services suggesting a negative reaction to the university’s initiatives for placements. The maximum deviations in the responses from the mean values were also recorded for initiatives taken by the university for placements.

Table 7.4: Descriptive Statistics Regarding Services provided by the university

	Statements	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Personnel at the study centres were helpful	269	1.00	5.00	3.7732	1.03153



2.	Infrastructure in the study centres was adequate	269	1.00	5.00	3.6803	1.00094
3.	Queries were responded to in timely manner	269	1.00	5.00	3.7844	1.12882
4.	Initiatives taken by the university for placements	269	1.00	5.00	2.6543	1.37522
5.	Online services provided were easily accessible	269	1.00	5.00	3.9071	0.96714
6.	Overall satisfaction with the university	269	1.00	5.00	3.8625	0.99983

Figure 7.11 gives the responses to services provided by the university. Except initiatives taken by the university for placements, most of the respondents said that they agreed/strongly agreed with the other statements. This shows that the students were comfortable with the current services being provided by the university.

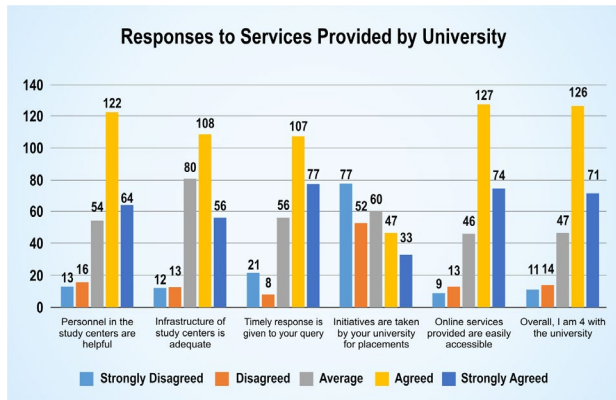


Figure 7.11: Responses to services provided by the university

The estimated output of students’ responses indicates that the respondents were comfortable with the infrastructure and personnel at the study centres, timely response by the university, easily accessible online services, and were satisfied with the university. They were not satisfied with the initiatives taken by the university for placements.

Responses to the University’s Strengths and Weakness

The respondents were asked to mention any three strengths of the university. The responses show that of the total 269 respondents, 89 (33.08 per cent) were positive and 6 (2.23 per cent) were negative regarding the university’s strengths. However, 174 (64.69 per cent) respondents did not respond to this question (Figure 7.12).

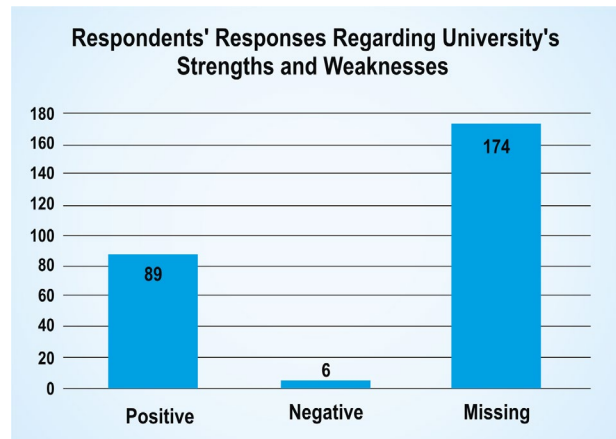


Figure 7.12: Responses to the university’s strengths and weaknesses



Major Findings

Data was collected from both male and female students who came from rural and urban areas and was analysed using different statistical approaches.

The findings of the study show that students were satisfied with the learning material provided by the university and also its induction programmes. The findings also suggest that the students were satisfied with the academic counselling provided. They were comfortable with the current assignment and examination systems followed by the university. This study shows that the different online and other services provided by the university were good and were well received by the students. However, the survey also suggests that the initiatives taken by the university for placements need improvement.

Recommendations

The respondents had a positive attitude towards the different services provided by the university like learning material, induction programmes, study centres' infrastructure and facilities, online services, counselling, and the assignment and examination systems.

However, they did not find the placement services up to the mark. This area therefore needs improvement as it connects with implementing the learning in the field.

Conclusion

This study was carried out on a sample of 269 students. The data was collected from university students through a survey and analysed using different statistical approaches for the different services provided by the university. The results show that the learning material provided by the university was helpful and of high standards. The learning material provided by the university for each level ensured high output. The induction programmes at the study centres were also productive.

The study suggests that the academic counselling provided by the university was useful and knowledgeable. Also, any changes in interactive counselling sessions were communicated by the university on time.

The respondents were comfortable with the university's current assignment, examination, and marking systems. The assignments were concept-bound and objective oriented. The feedback provided by the university's counsellors was helpful. The marking system was appropriate, and the results for all levels of the programmes were declared by the university on time. Along with these, online services, different initiatives, and services provided by the university were found favourable by the students. The study centres' infrastructure was adequate, and the personnel were supportive.



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Chapter

8

Learners' Satisfaction with Vardhman Mahaveer Open University

Akhillesh Kumar and Ratanlal Godaraa

The ODL system has gained popularity as an industrialised form of education after thinker and philosopher Otto Peters, one of the pioneers of thought and philosophy about the ODL system (Peters, 2010). According to Peters distance education was not created by pedagogues, but by entrepreneurs who embraced this ideology and applied the new and successful methods of the industrial production of goods to education for profit. Further developments of tools of information and communication technology contributed to its significant growth across the world. The main reason for the rapidly increasing interest in distance education is, of course, the unbelievable advances and proliferation of information and communication technologies. Prior to the advancement in ICT tools, the ODL system was not in as good a position as it is now. As Otto Peters (2010) notes:

'Never before were there so many persons weighing the pros and cons of this form of learning and teaching, never before were so many respective experiments conducted in this field, and never before were there so many new protagonists of this form of learning and teaching. Now even experts outside the field of traditional distance education see its unique possibilities.'

In an era of LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation, and Globalisation) satisfaction of end-users has gained central importance. Without the satisfaction of end-users, products and services lose their worth. Satisfaction of end users is also an indicator of success and quality concerns of production units or service providers. Although quality is a very comprehensive word with



several facets but the satisfaction of end-users with services and products can be a measure of quality and is considered to be a quality concern. Industries are more conscious now about the satisfaction of their customers. As far as the education system is concerned it is an issue of debate whether students can be considered customers. However, in the present market driven world students are generally considered the primary customers of a university even in countries where they do not pay tuition fees (Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013). In the higher education system, student satisfaction is a higher concern as learners' satisfaction leads to a long-term relationship between a learner and the higher education institution which can provide the institution with a competitive advantage, particularly as positive word of mouth publicity to present and future students, as well as through possible collaborations in the future (Alves and Raposo, 2007).

Many education stakeholders, however, are resistant to the notion that post-secondary students benefit from being treated like customers (Mark, 2013). As compared to customer satisfaction in an industry, learner satisfaction with the ODL system is pivotal. In addition, with the emergence of quality concerns, higher education institutions are increasingly recognising that higher education is a service industry and are placing greater emphasis on meeting the expectations and needs of their participating customers, that is, students (DeShields et al., 2005). A rapid expansion of ODL based higher education institutions is fundamental in analysing and studying student satisfaction as institutions of higher education can benefit from being able to establish lasting relationships with their pupils (Alves and Raposo, 2007). With the entry of private players and industrialists, the higher education system has moved to a business model and universities are in the business of providing higher education. Hence, it is expected that students' classroom experience is a primary determinant of their satisfaction (Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013).

The Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, Kota, established in 1987, is one of the leading open universities in India which was established during the days when the ODL system in India was in its infancy. When its foundation was laid it was known as the Kota Open University which was later renamed Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, Kota in the beginning of this century. Since then, the university has been imparting ODL and regularly updating its system to encompass global standards and developments. Prior to the introduction of online systems, the jurisdiction of the university was confined to the boundaries of Rajasthan but as a result of adopting online systems in 2013, the boundaries are blurred and the university has been fostering the needs of learners across the nation and beyond. As the Vardhman Mahaveer Open University has experienced exponential growth after introducing a fully online admission system, it is important to know the level of student satisfaction to provide better services and upgrading these services as per the needs of the learners to get them to their level of satisfaction. This study was done to find out the level of satisfaction of learners enrolled in VMOU and identifying the areas which need to be strengthened as per their feedback.

The study had five objectives:

- Assessing student satisfaction with respect to learning resources developed by the university.



- Assessing student satisfaction with the academic support services.
- Assessing student satisfaction in the area of assessment and feedback
- Assessing students' overall satisfaction with various programmes.
- Suggesting measures for improving student satisfaction.

Methodology: As this was a preliminary study, it adopted a survey research design based on a 'student satisfaction survey' as suggested in the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) Manual for open universities, first introduced in 2019.

Sample: The sample consisted of 250 participants who had either passed out from the university and received their relevant degrees or had completed at least one year of their study in some VMOU programme and were still enrolled in the university.

Tool: Being a preliminary study, the student satisfaction survey was carried out as per the Manual for Self-Study Report for Open Universities developed by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), an autonomous body of the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India which is the apex regulator of higher education in India.

Data Collection Procedure

The survey tool was converted to a Google form and published on the university's website with an appeal to learners to fill the form. Additions were made from the university's side to capture the data if the respondents had certain disabilities to get a picture of issues and concerns of learners with disabilities for inclusive growth; concerns of other marginalised groups were also of great concern. A self-reporting rating scale was designed for learners which included 20 items for rating and two subjective questions related to three strengths and three weaknesses of the university to supplement the quantitative data. The scale used a continuum of a five-point rating scale ranging from a continuum of responses totally dissatisfied to highly satisfied rated between a score of 1 (lowest) and 5 (highest).

Data Analysis

The sample had 250 learners who had at least passed one examination at the university (Figure 8.1).

As shown in Figure 8.1, around 20 per cent of the participants who had passed out and 79.90 per cent enrolled students reported that they had to appear in their final year of examination.

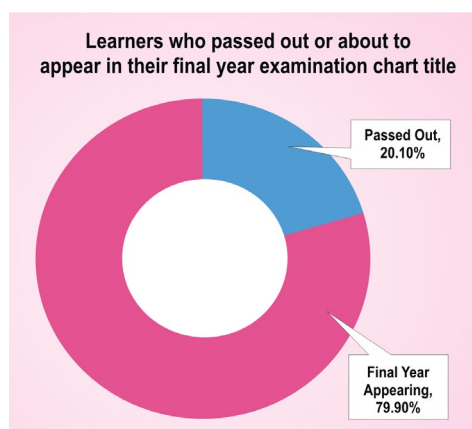


Figure 8.1: Learners who passed out or about to appear in their final year examination chart title



Around 49per cent learners were enrolled in master’s programmes, 37per cent were enrolled in under-graduate programmes, and 14per cent were enrolled in certificate and other programmes (Figure 8.2).

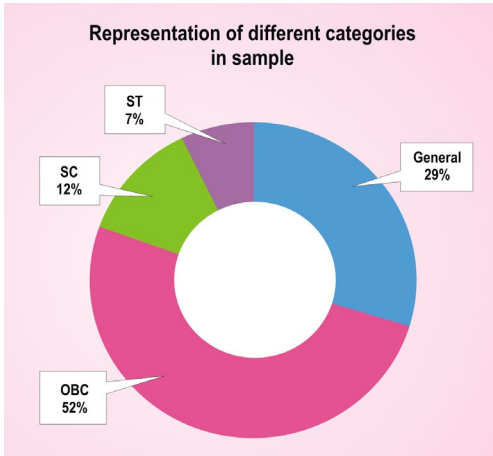


Figure 8.3: Representation of different categories in sample

Figure 8.3 shows that of the 250 participants 29per cent were from the general category, 52per cent were OBCs, 12per cent were SCs, and 7per cent were from the ST category.

Figure 8.4 shows that 3per cent of the learners had some disability. It may be noted here that prior to the enactment of the Rights

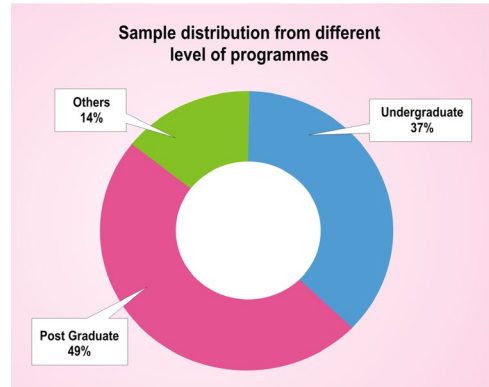


Figure 8.2: Sample distribution from different level of programmes

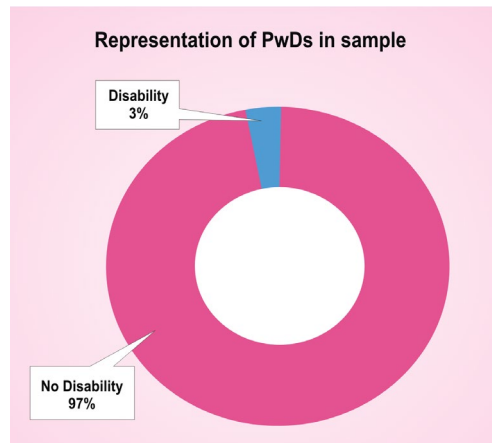


Figure 8.4: Representation of PwDs in sample

of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, there was a 3per cent reservation for PwDs in enrolment which has now been increased to 5per cent.

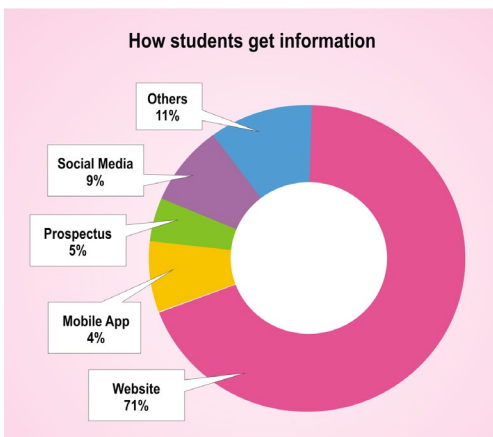


Figure 8.5: How students get information

As shown in Figure 8.5, most of the learners (71per cent) said that they used the university’s website for accessing information. The mobile app was the least popular among learners for accessing information and 9per cent of the learners reported that they used social media platforms to access information about the university.



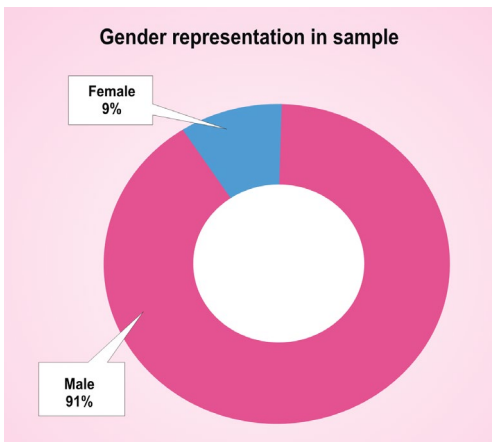


Figure 8.6: Gender representation in sample

they were satisfied while 15per cent said that they were dissatisfied with it. Dissatisfaction was the lowest for conceptual clarity in the self-instructional material as compared to the other statements (Figure 8.7).

Sixty per cent of the respondents reported that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the timely delivery of printed learning material.

As indicated in Figure 8.8, around 60per cent of the learners reported that they were satisfied with the timely delivery of printed self-learning material whereas around 30per cent of the respondents were not satisfied with the timely delivery of SLM.

When it comes to availability of video/radio counselling sessions 41 per cent of the respondents were dissatisfied whereas 38 per cent of respondents were satisfied and 20 per cent were very satisfied with this service (Figure 8.9).

Figure 8.10 shows that student satisfaction was high for availability of study material in a digital format as 60 per cent of the respondents reported that they were satisfied with the availability of study material in a digital format.

Of those who took part in the survey 91per cent were male and 9per cent were female learners (Figure 8.6).

When asked about conceptual clarity in the self-instructional material provided by the university, 65per cent respondents said that

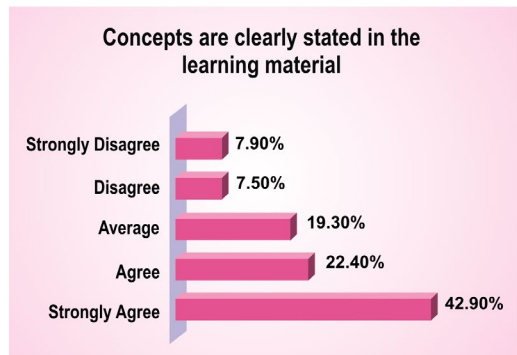


Figure 8.7: Concepts are clearly stated in the Learning Material

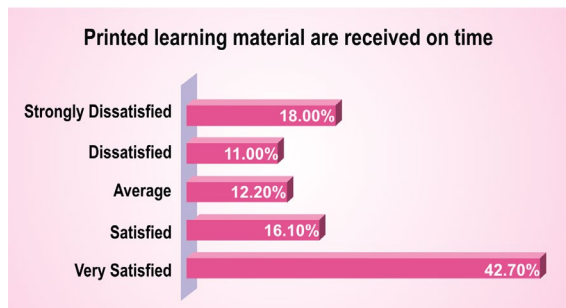


Figure 8.8: Printed learning material are received on time

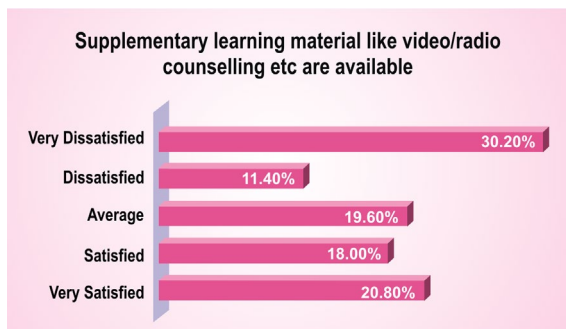


Figure 8.9: Supplementary Learning Material like Video/ Radio counselling etc are available



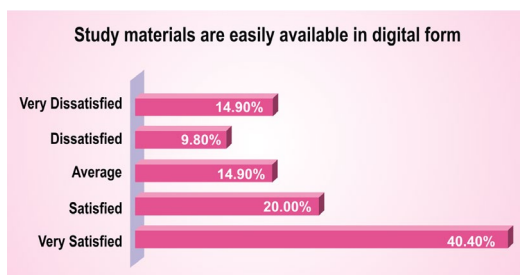


Figure 8.10: Study Materials are easily available in Digital form

As can be seen in Figure 8.11, about 50 per cent of VMOU's students were satisfied with the usefulness of the induction programmes conducted at the study centres while 35 per cent were dissatisfied with the induction programmes.

Fifty per cent of the respondents agreed that academic counsellors at the study centres clarified the concepts while 34 per cent of the respondents were dissatisfied (Figure 8.12).

Responding to interactivity of the counselling sessions, 50 per cent of the respondents were satisfied whereas 27 per cent reported that they were dissatisfied. According to 23 per cent of the respondents the interactive counselling was of average quality (Figure 8.13).

As shown in Figure 8.14, 55 per cent of the respondents were satisfied with the

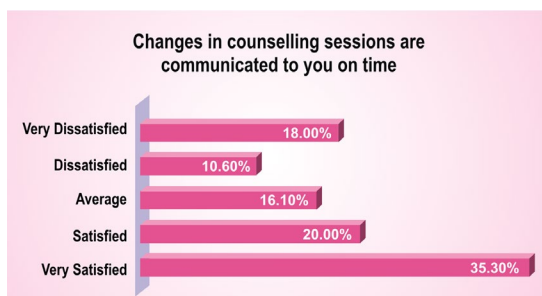


Figure 8.14: Changes in counselling sessions are communicated to you on time

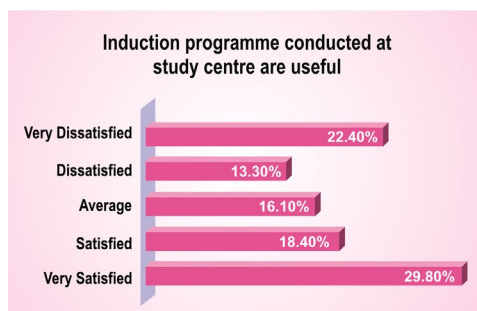


Figure 8.11: Induction programme conducted at study centre are useful

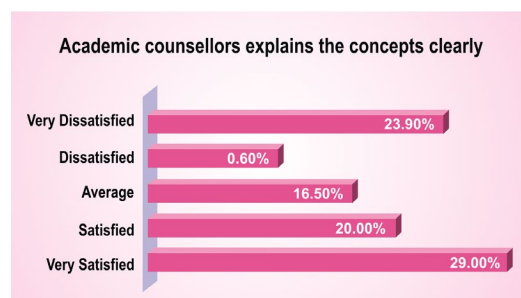


Figure 8.12: Academic Counsellors explains the concepts clearly

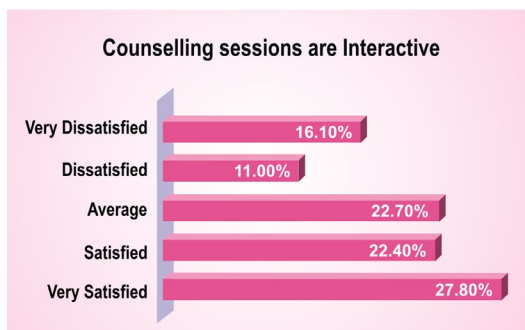


Figure 8.13: Counselling sessions are Interactive

university's communication about changes in counselling sessions while 16 per cent found it to be average and 29 per cent were dissatisfied.

As indicated in Figure 8.15, 48 per cent of the learners were satisfied with the use of ICT during classes and 22 per cent of the learners reported that it was of average quality. Thirty per cent of the respondents



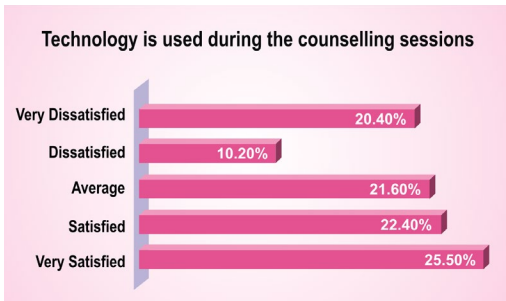


Figure 8.15: Technology is used during the Counselling Sessions

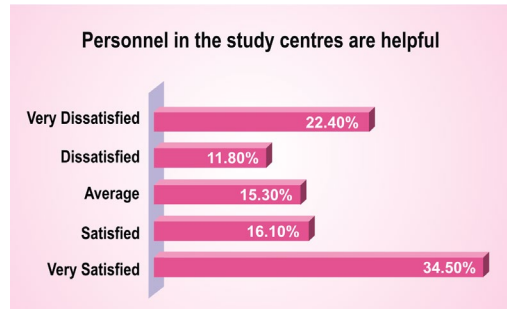


Figure 8.16: Personnel in the Study centres are helpful

reported dissatisfaction with the use of ICT during counselling sessions.

Fifty per cent of the respondents found the personnel at the study centres were helpful while 34 per cent were dissatisfied (Figure 8.16) and 16 per cent found them average.

As far as infrastructure at the study centres is concerned, 54 per cent of students were satisfied whereas 31 per cent of the respondents found it inadequate. The remaining 15 per cent respondents were of the opinion that it was average (Figure 8.17).

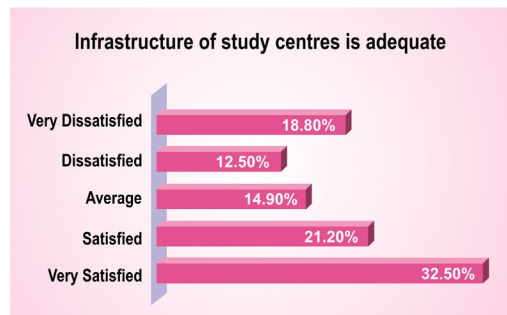


Figure 8.17 Infrastructure of Study Centres is adequate

As Figure 8.18 shows, 55per cent of the learners reported that they received tutor marked assignments on time and 29 per cent were dissatisfied with the time taken to get back their assignments.

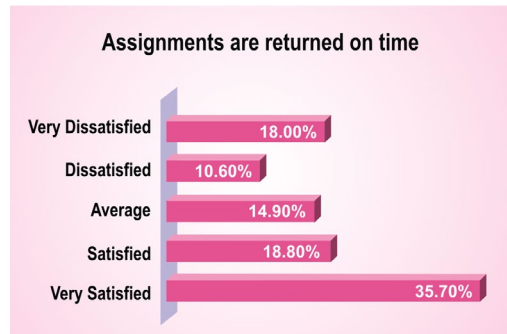


Figure 8.18: Assignments are returned on time

When asked whether the feedback on assignments was helpful in clarifying concepts, 58per cent of the respondents said that they were satisfied while 20 per cent were dissatisfied (Figure 8.19).

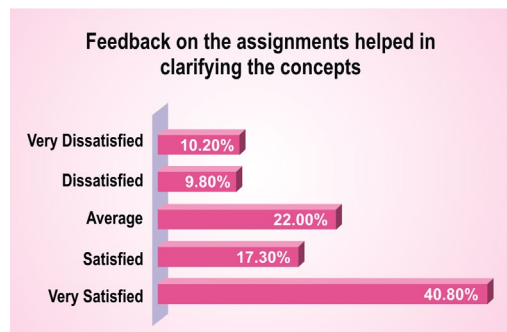


Figure 8.19 Feedback on the assignments helped in clarifying the concepts

Sixty-six per cent of the respondents were satisfied with communication related to examinations which is notable. As Figure 8.20 shows 21 per cent of the respondents were not satisfied with communication related to examination procedures.



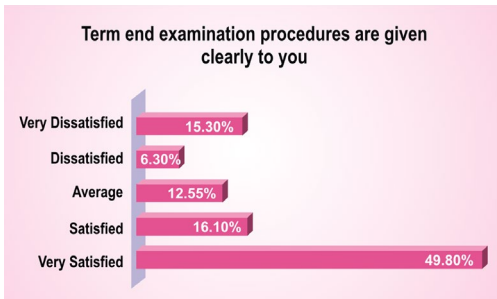


Figure 8.20: Term End Examination procedures are given clearly to you

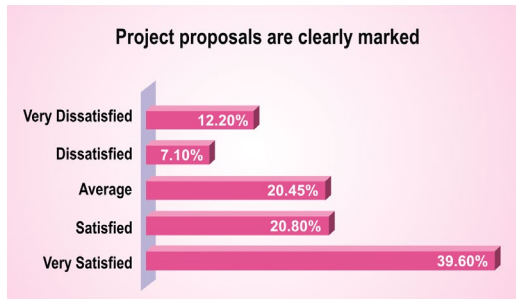


Figure 8.21: Project proposals are clearly marked

Sixty-two per cent of the respondents were satisfied with the instructions and marking of project proposals and 20 per cent of the respondents were dissatisfied with this service (Figure 8.21).

A little more than half the respondents (56 per cent) were satisfied with the timely declaration of results whereas 28 per cent of the respondents were dissatisfied with the timely declaration of results and 16 per cent found this service to be average (Figure 8.22).

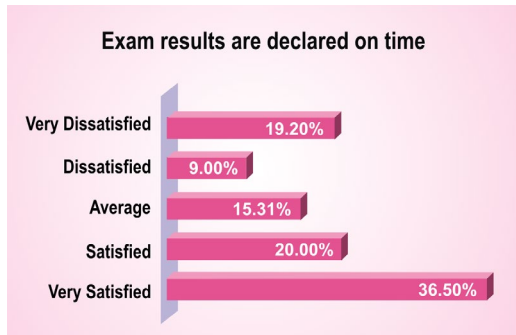


Figure 8.22.: Exam results are declared on time

Forty-five per cent of the respondents were satisfied with timely response to their queries while 41 per cent of the respondents were dissatisfied (Figure 8.23).

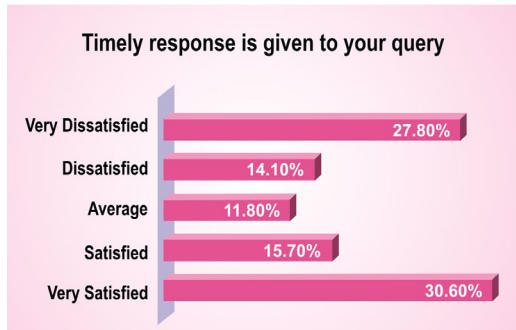


Figure 8.23: Timely response is given to your query

When asked about placement initiatives taken by the university, about half the respondents said that they were dissatisfied while 32 per cent were satisfied (Figure 8.24). This shows that the university needs to strengthen its placement services.

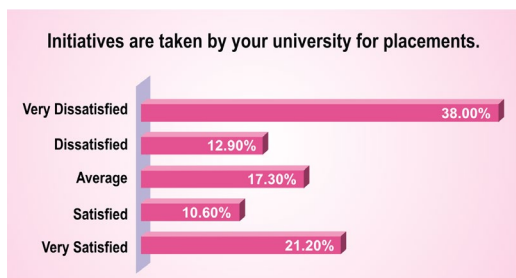


Figure 8.24: Initiatives are taken by your university for placements

When it comes to accessibility of online services provided by the Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, 63 per cent of the respondents expressed satisfaction and 24 per cent learners said they were dissatisfied with this service (Figure 8.25).

Finally, when it comes to overall satisfaction with the university, 30 per cent



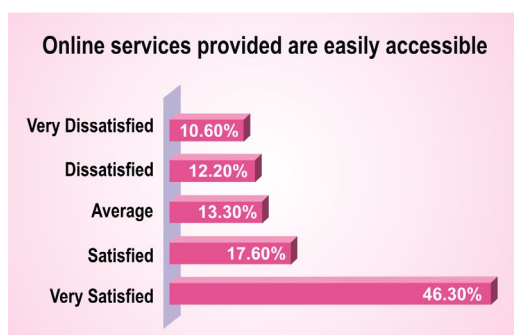


Figure 8.25: Online services provided are easily accessible

of the respondents were very satisfied, 25 per cent were satisfied, 18 per cent found it average, and the remaining 27 per cent were dissatisfied (Figure 8.26).

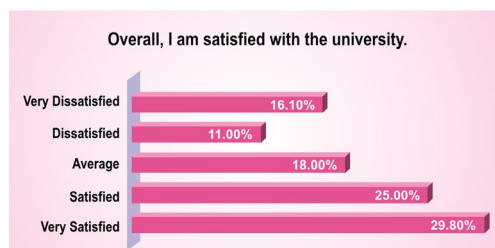


Figure 8.26: Overall, I am satisfied with the university

Results and Discussion

An analysis of the data was helpful in identifying the university's strengths and weaknesses. A majority of the students were satisfied with services like conceptual clarity of self-learning material, online services, ease of access to online services, timely declaration of results, clarity in instructions given for projects and assignments, availability of digital content, and timely information on changes in counselling sessions. Though this is encouraging feedback for the university these systems need to be strengthened to keep them updated, for example, the university can introduce payment of fee through UPI / digital wallet/ mobile banking making it easier for learners to pay for their studies. The university also needs to develop an online fee collection system for purposes other than admission and examination fee like getting certificates, duplicate copies of certificates, and migration certificates which will lead to more satisfied learners. It was also observed that around 73 per cent of the respondents were satisfied with the university's overall services.

Further, dissatisfaction was higher than satisfaction in case of timely response to queries, availability of supplementary learning material, radio/video counselling, and initiatives for placements. Higher dissatisfaction of learners about these aspects shows that the university needs to strengthen quick and time bound responses to queries and strengthening its placement cell by establishing collaborations with industry. Learners' dissatisfaction with availability of supplementary material and video/radio counselling despite the fact that supplementary material is available on the VMOU Online YouTube channel means that the university needs to focus on this. Although intermittent radio counselling is organised, this dissatisfaction indicates the need to make learners familiar with the VMOU Online YouTube channel and organising radio and video counselling on a regular basis.

Concerns about higher education systems have been in focus recently particularly in ODL. Till recently student satisfaction surveys were carried out in the traditional system and not regularly but intermittently (Elliott and Shin, 2002). Measuring student satisfaction in ODL higher education institutions is different from measuring it in a traditional face-to-face system. In case an institution is operating in an ODL mode, student satisfaction is dependent on a



wide range of factors including satisfaction with pedagogic aspects, support services, study centres, full time and part time counsellors, the examination system and its flexibility, the quality of services provided by the administrative staff, and quality of ICT support and ICT based pedagogy. As observed by Wiers-Jenssen et al. (2002) the quality of services provided by the administrative staff should not be underestimated when trying to improve student satisfaction and opportunities for learning.

This study showed that interactivity during counselling sessions may be a predictor of learners' satisfaction which contradicts Kim et al.'s (2011) findings: 'While media integration and instructor's quality teaching were significant predictors of both social presence and learning satisfaction, interactivity among participants was a predictor of social presence but not of learning satisfaction.' The reason for this may be the difference between face-to-face education and the ODL system. In the face-to-face education system, lots of social interaction takes place whereas a learner in the ODL system feels a sense of loneliness due to lack of face-to-face interaction and thus interactive counselling classes could be a predictor of learners' satisfaction with the ODL system. This study found that the respondents were satisfied with the academic and administrative support extended by the university staff which is consistent with Gibson's (2010) findings: 'Not surprisingly, academic factors such as the quality of teaching, skills and knowledge acquired and the curriculum itself are the most significant determinants of overall satisfaction. A number of other non-academic factors, however, such as the student's feeling of "belonging" and perceptions of the institution's responsiveness and concern, also contribute significantly to overall satisfaction.'

It was also observed that student satisfaction in ODL is of great importance as it can reduce dropout rates, gives the institutions word of mouth publicity, and also provides a higher education institution an opportunity to carry out a SWOC analysis so that it can improve its services. Although this was a preliminary study, it provided several insights for the university about the areas which it needs to strengthen further. Also, the overall satisfaction level of the learners indicated that the university has been consistently improving its services as per the learners' needs and as per recent developments in ICT tools. Such surveys need to be carried out periodically for the benefit of the learners and ODL institutions using a larger sample.

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Appendix I

Learners Feedback/Satisfaction Questionnaire

Objectives of the Feedback

The objectives of this feedback are:

- To assess student satisfaction with respect to learning resources developed by open and distance learning institutions;
- To assess student satisfaction with respect to academic support services provided to the students;
- To assess student satisfaction in the area of assessment and feedback;
- To assess student's overall satisfaction with respect to various programmes and
- To suggest measures for improving student satisfaction.

Data Collection

1. The sample of the study will be collected through an Online or Face-to-Face medium or Both.
2. For Online: A Google Form (Draft Form in Appendix 1) will be created which can be posted on the university's website. Student can go to the university's website. On home page of the university, the student can click on the Student satisfaction/Feedback Form.
3. University can assign one coordinator to look into this activity. He/she can be part of the Research Project Team.

OR

4. Email IDs of the students are there with the university and the Google form will be attached to the email IDs.
5. Initially Data will be analysed, which will be received within one month of posting the Google form and or face-to-face.

Ethical Issues

While conducting this survey, the following ethical issues will be taken care of:

- The identity of the students involved in the survey will be kept confidential.
- Data gathered will be kept confidential.



Student Satisfaction Survey

Prepared by:

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia

Dear Learner,

The objective of this Student Satisfaction Survey is to find out the satisfaction of Open and Distance Education Learners. The content of this Survey will be used for research, dissemination and improving the quality of the system.

Required

Email Address:

Background Information

E Mail Address: -----

Enrolment Number: -----

Year of Enrolment: ----- (only 2018-19 and 2019-2020)

Status: ----- Passed/Continued

Locality: ----- (Rural and Urban)

Programme: -----

Level: ----- (Certificate Diploma PG-Diploma UG PG)

Age: -----

Gender: **Male** **Female** **Other**

Social Category: **General** **SC** **ST** **OBC**

From where you Access University Information: **Website** **Prospectus** **Mobile App**

Please indicate as how much you are satisfied or dissatisfied with the following statements

S. No	Statements	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Average	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
1	Concepts are clearly stated in the Learning Material					
2	Printed Learning Material are received on Time					



3	Supplementary Learning Material like Video/Radio counselling etc. are available.					
4	Study Materials are easily available in Digital form					
5	Induction programmes conducted at study centre are useful					
6	Academic counsellors explain the concepts clearly					
7	Counselling sessions are interactive					
8	Changes in counselling sessions are communicated to you on time					
9	Technology is used during the counselling sessions					
10	Personnel in the study centres are helpful					
11	Infrastructure of study centres is adequate					
12	Assignments are returned on time					
13	Feedback on the assignments helped in clarifying the concepts					
14	Term-End Examination procedures are given clearly to you					
15	Project proposals are clearly marked					
16	Exam results are declared on time					



17	Timely response is given to your query					
18	Initiatives are taken by your university for placements					
19	Online services provided are easily accessible					
20	Overall, I am satisfied with the university					

21. Please write Three Strengths of the university as you perceive.

22. Please mention Three Weaknesses of the university as you perceive.



Brief Profile of the Editor and Authors

Akhilesh Kumar is presently working with the School of Education, Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, Kota, Rajasthan. He received his professional training at institutions of repute like Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi and the National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (NIEPID, Secunderabad). He possesses immense knowledge and experience in education of children with special needs in general and education of children with intellectual disabilities in particular. In addition, his areas of expertise include distance education, e-learning, and vocational education. He has more than 10 years of experience in teacher training. He was instrumental in introducing normalisation and social role valorisation in India. He is a member of the Zonal Coordination Committee of Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI). He likes to discuss inclusive education, intellectual disability, research methods, psychology of teaching and learning, and information and communication technologies for children with disabilities. He has written and published two books, more than 15 research articles, and more than 50 chapters in several books. Apart from all this he has developed many multimedia-based video lectures on several topics related to disability which are available on YouTube channels of VMOU and NIOS. In addition, he is a disability rights activist particularly for the most vulnerable group of disability i.e. intellectual disability.

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8). This publication is available in Open Access under the Attribution-Share-Alike 3.0 IGO (CC-BY-SA 3.0 IGO) licence and was published in 2015 by UNESCO. She acted as consultant for developing the OER repository for Bangladesh Open University, Gazipur, Bangladesh. Her areas of interests include open access, open source software, open and distance learning, e-learning, MOOCs, open license and copyright, content management software, library management software, digital library software, community information service & systems, information and communication technology, open harvesting system, and open journal systems. She has published a number of research articles and self-learning materials in national and international publications and is a member of the Curriculum Development Committee at NSOU, Kolkata.

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