

# “Evaluation of Student Support Centre: A case study of IGNOU Regional Center, Port Blair”

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## INTRODUCTION

Each Regional Center is student centric and it has a Student support Center as mandated by IGNOU Regulations. The student service center is designated to function as a focal point for solving students problems related to admission and examination. Learners can approach the SSC designated academics on a one-to-one basis to enhance their academic activity. This cell is primarily responsible to render pre-admission and post admission guidance and assistance to the prospective learners, who have either admitted to various courses as per their choice and interest. In this proposed study, the focus would be on post-admission related problems which will be analysed by using various tools of evaluation. In the course of program study, the learners confront with various problems including non-receipt of ID card, Admission confirmation, Payment of fees, study materials, counselling sessions and lastly but not least Term End Exam and subsequently certification.

The Student Service Center is backbone of Regional Center and through this mechanism the learners get required services and the success of Regional Center basically lies on its shoulders. Through proper infrastructure and guidance, the Regional Centre can mitigate the problems of the learners in a coordinated manner and also reduce the number of grievances registered by the learners. The SSC RC-Port Blair is well functional and connected through social networks to reach out the learners as well as placed to meet the requirements of the learners. There are several other issues related to student welfare, but among the following issues were taken into account, as they are significantly important to deal with it are uploading assignments marks and non-receipt of study materials. Indeed, both are more relevant to this study center and they are critical issues pertain to Regional Center, Port Blair.

### IGNOU Regional Centre Port Blair

IGNOU popularly known as standalone ODL University and it is the world largest Open University with maximization of regional centers across Pan India and also has international and overseas presence to offer a large number of courses / programs at one go. Over the decades, IGNOU has developed robust system of dissemination of knowledge through its constituent called “Regional Centres” a localized or serving centre to meet the requirement of the learners with its agent’s viz., Study Centres /LMS/Program centers and specialized study centers. The Regional Centre has been defined under Section 2 (J) of the IGNOU Act. The Regional Centre is responsible for the promotion of the Open University system, development, maintenance and is also responsible for the delivery of programs and student support services and the organisation of staff development programs. Besides, regional centers are also mandated to monitoring of LSCs for promotion of ODL system in the region.

Regional Center Port Blair (02) was established in the year 2006 as an independent office. Prior it was under the control of Chennai Regional Center. Undoubtedly, IGNOU Study center (0201) was one of the oldest study Center which was established in the year 1988 to cater higher educational needs of the islanders. Today IGNOU has presence in almost all districts including Nicobar District, which is predominantly tribal in nature. There are 12 study centers of which 06 are dedicated study centers fully geared up and fulfil the aspirations of the learners through 09 exam centers are functional for the convenience of the islanders from 703 kms distance between north to south of Andaman and Nicobar islands.

### Objectives:

Evaluation is a wider concept than testing and measurement. Indeed, it is a continuous appraisal of the achievements of an institutional aim of teaching and learning with a view to continuous improvement so that the learning becomes dynamic and self-developing. It involves the self-appraisal by the learner of their success and failures. The main objective of the present study is qualitative improvement and to identify the bottlenecks in the process of dissemination of knowledge through various services. In the distance mode, the learners constitute an important universal group and the issues are based on objectives and specifications of particular services. Objectives play an indispensable role in distance education. In other words, objectives form the basis of evaluation process. The following objectives will be addressed in the course of this study.

1. To analyse the process of student support services offered by IGNOU;

2. To focus on student participation through SSC;
3. To assure quality of distance education through various services including assignment and study materials; and
4. To provide window for grievances.

## METHODOLOGY

The topic intended above is about a case study in particular about the student services offered by Regional Centre Port Blair. Therefore the study would be limited to specific activities. To understand its functionality and successes of Regional center the required data gathered using various techniques including face to face interviews and observation of events associated with the problems confronted by the learners and office staff, who handle the issues. This kind of studies involves in-depth research into a given subject, in order to drawing conclusions about the available data.

### Evaluation of Evidence

The purpose of the study intended that the IGNOU, RC-PB provides various student centric services through student service center collecting the evidence is to the successful evaluation of an improvement the services provided to learners. It is particularly important to collect data for objectivity. In this study the required data has been gathered through observations, face to face interviews, and simple questionnaires and self-surveys. To understand the aims of evaluation of the present study, it is designed to identify the following hypothesis:

### Post-admission and student support center and its challenges

To provide administrative and academic support, the IGNOU has developed effective mechanisms with dedicated help desks/student support cells at all the 56 RCs and a dedicated centre namely the Student Service Centre (SSC) at the Headquarters. Presently there are 56 Regional Centers and 1843 Learner Support Centers are functional across the country along with 21 Overseas Partner Institutions. For better coordination between the units, IGNOU has re-constituted the Student Grievance Redressal Committee (SGRC) as per UGC (Redressal of Grievances of Students) Regulations, 2023. The Committee shall look into the grievances of the students and ensure their redressal in a time bound manner. The term of the Committee w.e.f. the date of Notification shall be Two years for members and One year for the student representative respectively.

IGNOU Regional Centre is the sub-office of the University and it is the regional face of the university. It is also supposed to serve as a resource centre of the University in the region. Apart from being regional academic and administrative hub of the University, RC is also a focal point of enquiries pertaining to academic programmes of IGNOU and its activities and important node for every kind of grievance redressal. This arrangement has strengthened and made the Grievance Redressal Mechanism of IGNOU more robust. For CPGRAMS, INGRAM, RTI MIS online and iGRAM Portals, grievances received are forwarded through the portal itself by the Student Service Centre at headquarters to the RC concerned to respond to the grievances within stipulated time.

Besides IGNOU provides support services to its learner via Learner Support Centre (Study Center). LSC is the most important linking node of the University for the learners as it offers an interface between the learners and the University by providing various sensitive academic and administrative support services, for the maintenance of the quality of the services of the University. Study Centers works as part-time functionaries for IGNOU without causing any hindrance to the normal functioning of the host institution. Programmes of the University are activated on the basis of viability in terms of enrolment, infrastructure and academic expertise (faculty) available for providing support services to the learners at that LSC. The various information services at the SSC including general and specific enquiry.

- Correction or Change of Address/Email/mobile no/ username.
- Change of RC/SC.
- Change of Medium, Courses and Programme.
- Identity card related issues.
- Receipt of study materials.
- Issue of Migration Certificate.
- Non-receipt of Mark sheet/ Degree.
- Issue of Transcripts
- Issues related to Grade Card Status
- Issue related to Assignment
- Issues related to Result
- Issues related to Exam

A sample study of 20 learners were recorded personally and based on available data the following inference have been drawn for better understanding of the problem.

- 80 % students are aware that the Student support center at RC Port Blair has been functional;
- 60% students reveals that the staff at the Student Service counter will never give satisfactory answer to queries;

- 25% students felt that the staff at RC Port Blair never pick up phone;
- 40% students finds difficult in updating assignment marks on website. Certain times, the concerned takes year to update mark sheet and provisional certificates.
- 30% students feel that they are not given proper attention while submitting assignment at Study centers.
- 30% students are also feels that the concerned study center informs about Practical classes on short notices. It should be informed well in advance.
- 80% students expressed satisfaction about study materials and to conduct of TEE on regular intervals.
- 80% students submit that the study center staff attitude is rude and misbehave.
- 60% students said that there is no platform to register complaint, complaint about RC/Study centers.

Distribution of study materials constitute a significant activity of this RC. The Material Production and Distribution Division (MPDD) is one of the most important subsystems of the Distance Education and Open Learning System need to be more effective. Enquiries are regularly received from prospective learners. iGram complaints received from April 2022 to April 2023 is about 219 followed by issuance of mark sheet related queries. To find out the reasons for large number of grievances, a study has been conducted to elicit reasons for complaints. To conduct study the required data was collected randomly from IGNOU Student Materials status. All the samples are belongs to undergraduate courses of July 2022 session. After analyzing the available data, the following are the findings:

1. 40 % students have not received single book /study materials from MPDD even after lapse of 1 year;
2. 20% students have received only 50% of study materials;
3. 10 % students have received 40% of study materials; and
4. 10% students have received only 20 % of study materials.
5. Due to Geographical inaccessibility, the postal service find difficulty to deliver the goods at right address and the same is returned to RC stating that undelivered.
6. It involves incurring additional funds to resend/ dispatch the packets to learners.

#### **SUGGESTIONS**

1. Re-instate old practice of decentralization of study materials.
2. Make available Bar code to learners to trace out the consignment.

#### **CONCLUSION**

IGNOU operates its multi-layers of administrative and academic activities through a network of dedicated Regional centers to provide student support services to millions of the students across the country. Considering the quantum and complexity of students grievances, IGNOU has standardize all grievance mechanism procedures and the same has been meticulously worked at each Regional centers thus to bring about uniformity in the resolution of grievances in a coordinated manner through its Regional centers operate across the country. Students have a specific enquiry related to academic activity, therefore it is mandated that such mechanism should be placed within the reach of students. IGNOU has developed a common grievance portal to mitigate the problems encountered by the learners particularly since 1990s. Regional Center Port Blair trying its best to provide hassle free support services to its learners with the motto of maintaining “Zero grievance” and advancing a culture of satisfaction, transparency and justice, thereby improving learner experience and attaining absolute learner satisfaction. To ensure successful transition of the student an orientation is conducted for all newly admitted. Meetings are organised with the help of Study centers occasionally to understand the challenges and problems of the learners if any. The learners are given an opportunity to discuss on various topics related to their academic activity. Last but not least, SSC at RC-Port Blair functions with central objective of building the career of students and brighten their prospects for job opportunities.

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