

**STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION:
A STUDY OF INDIA'S FIRST OPEN UNIVERSITY**

PROJECT REPORT

BY

Dr. L. VIJAYA KRISHNA REDDY
Assistant Director,
Student Services Branch,
Dr. B.R.Ambedkar Open University,
Hyderabad, India.
Mobile: 09490467484,
E-mail:drlvkreddy1965@gmail.com

**IN ASSOCIATION WITH
GRADE –CIQA**

**Dr. B R AMBEDKAR OPEN UNIVERSITY
HYDERABAD**

2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the administration of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, [BRAOU], Hyderabad, for permitting me to carry out this research study.

I thank the Director of GRADE & CIQA of Dr. B R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad for providing me library facilities and support for this study.

I express my thanks to all the learners for providing me their feedback.

I am thankful to my all my colleagues at BRAOU for extending me cooperation while pursuing this study.

20 December 2017
Hyderabad

Dr. L. Vijaya Krishna Reddy

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

1. INTRODUCTION

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

3. METHODOLOGY

4. STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES OF Dr. BRAOU

5. ONLINE SERVICES

6. STUDY MATERIALS

7. FINDINGS

8. SUGGESTIONS

9. REFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

The demand for Higher Education and thirst for knowledge has paved way for the establishment of the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions in the country. The failure of conventional education system to meet the increasing demand for higher education was the major factor for the emergence of the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system. It is believed that the Open Distance Education alone can reach the Unreached, especially in developing countries where there is dearth of resources.

Distance Education has proved to be an alternative to the conventional system because of its potential to reach the large segments of the unreached on one hand and its cost effectiveness on the other. The Distance mode of education developed in 19th century took the form of correspondence education in early stages. Later on it has taken the shape of Open Distance Learning with the employment of technologies to impart knowledge. The vision of the ODL institutions is to establish an egalitarian society by providing an access to higher education to the socially depressed and economically backward sections of the region/nation. In India, the Andhra Pradesh Open University is the first Open University which was established in the year 1982 by an Act of state legislature is known at present as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University. After that Indira Gandhi National Open University was started in 1985 and now there are 14 State Open Universities in the country. Many conventional Universities are offering Distance Education courses besides Dr. BRAOU in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana States.

In Open and Distance Learning, there is vast gap between the Institution and the Learners. Effective support services alone can place the ODL system on a respectable platform in the academic world. The student support services can be divided into two types (1) Academic services and (2) Non-academic services. The support services must be learner centered and facilitate the learner to learn at his own pace and place. The Services shall stand as a bridge between the institution and the learner. Many experts of Open Distance Learning expressed in several platforms the necessity of ODL system and their writings about the importance of student support services are worth mentioning here. As mentioned by Pirdeaux. A (1989) "The quality of both the materials and the support Services are critical to the success of a distance learning system". According to Croft (1991), "the goal of most support services is to help the student realize the instructional objective of the course by minimizing the negative effects of isolation and the lack of regular personal contact". The student support services in distance education

resembles the customer service of an industrial enterprise. Normally the Open Distance Learning Institutions focus on support services whereas the dual mode institutions concentrate on regular programmes and attach least priority to the distance learners in the sense that the surplus generated from the distance learners is being transferred for the strengthening of conventional system. In this context, an attempt is made to understand the current practices of student support services and discuss the issues thereof in the first Open University of India i.e Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To understand the different types of student support services practised in Dr. BRAOU.
2. To examine the student support services of Dr. BRAOU in relation to the level of satisfaction of learners.
3. To suggest measures to improve the support services in Dr. BRAOU

METHODOLOGY

The study is primarily based on primary data collected from a sample of 200 students studying in Dr. BRAOU Study Centres, choosing them on random sampling basis. The information was sought through interview method. First, the courses offered by the University have been stratified into Under-Graduate (UG) and Post Graduate (PG) programmes. From each stratum a programme with maximum enrolment has been identified. Students of Post-Graduation, Diploma and Certificate programmes were excluded from the purview of the study as they constitute a small percentage of total learners enrolled. Therefore, the learners who were selected are from U.G programmes only. The study centres have also been chosen at random covering the students of 2013- 14 and 2014-15 batches.

Findings of the study revealed that most of the learners had expressed a positive perception and attitude towards Open Distance Learning (ODL) system of Dr. BRAOU. The study ended with some recommendations which in a way would help the institution and the concerned authority to plan and design not only an effective student support services mechanism but also to promote a healthy open distance learning environment.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES OF Dr. BRAOU

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University has a three tier system of support services to serve its customers. As already mentioned the effective support services can only make the Open

Distance Institutions to position themselves on a respectable platform in the academic pyramid. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University provides support services to its learners in the form of Academic and Non -academic services.

Academic services

- Self-instructional Print material
- Audio lessons
- Video lessons
- Tele conferencing
- Contact cum Counselling Classes
- Library
- Winter Classes
- Workshops
- Summer Sessions

Non -academic services

- Pre-enrolment guidance,
- Induction programmes
- Information through mass media
- Information on mobiles
- Information through Internet (websites)
- Online registration services
- Help Desks
- Enquiry counters

Reiterating the importance of the student support services in Open Distance Learning Mr. Croft (1991) says... “The development of policies which govern the provision of Student Support Services requires an institutional commitment and should take into consideration the academic side of the enterprise as well as the administrative, as both academic and support services must mesh to meet the needs of the learner, if either is to be truly successful”. Therefore, all the Distance Education institutions should focus on support services to maintain standards of learning. Dr. B.R.Ambedkar Open University is operating

with a network of 216 Study Centres, which include 23 Regional Coordination Centres (RCC's) for the delivery of the programmes. In fact it emerged as a role model to many of the institutions in preparing self-instructional print material and also to organise other support services. It has a three tier support system to provide services to its learners. Earlier, there was a two tier system, but due to the increase in enrollment year after year in University, it was decided to have a three tier system from 2001 comprising (1) Headquarters, (2) RCCs and (3) Study Centres. Though there was a three tier system, the Regional Coordination Centres and the Study Centre would play a vital role in the provision of support services. Thus, RCCs and Study Centres have been functioning as heart and soul of the University. They provide both academic and non academic services to the students as detailed earlier.

Services at headquarters: The students may require a variety of services from the University like latest information of dates and period of admissions, contact classes, examinations, change of subjects, media, study centre, address etc. In order to address these problems, the University has set up a learner service centre at the headquarters. The students can also obtain further information from RCCs and Study Centres. The head office will send all information to its RCCs and Study Centres from time to time so as to provide the same to the students. The headquarters mainly concentrates on major academic services like preparation of academic calendar, printing and supply of material, preparation of audio-video programmes, Tele-conferencing, radio lessons etc.

The student support services branch at headquarters takes up the responsibility of planning and monitoring of delivery services through study centres /RCC's. There is also a coordination committee in the University to discuss and monitor the services being provided to learners from time to time. Academic Directorate, Examinations Branch, Student Services Branch, Material Production Branch and finance branch will play a vital role in this committee. This committee will meet frequently and discuss the services being rendered to the students from time to time. There is an enquiry desk and a Help desk in the head office to give information to the students either in persons or over phone.

Services at Regional Coordination Centres (RCCs): The University established Regional Coordination Centres (RCCs) in all the District Headquarters of erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh. At present, out of 23 RCCs, 12 are headed by permanent teachers of the University

i.e. Deputy Directors and Assistant Directors and the rest by the part time coordinators, who happened to be senior lecturers of the host colleges. These RCCs will act as representative units of the university at district level coordinating the activities of study centres located in the respective district. It may be noted that the Study Centres offer some programmes only. BA programme is offered at all the Study Centres and programmes like B.Com./ B.Sc., PG and Diploma are offered at some of the Study Centres. RCCs offer all the programmes of the University except one or two professional programmes.

Services at Study Centres (SCs): The study centres are known as the resource centres of the University. Many learners do not know where the University is, because they visit study centres for all information. They attend the contact cum counseling classes and write the examinations at study centres only. Information relating to distribution of study material, dates of classes and examinations of the University will be provided at the study centres. The point to be kept in view is that open distance education system is dependent on strong foundation of the study centres.

ONLINE SERVICES

The University has launched online registration for admissions and examinations from the academic year 2013-14. This is an excellent facility started by the University to provide timely and accurate services. The online does not allow a student to commit mistakes like paying fee for the subjects those opted at the time of admission and write other than those registered for examinations.

STUDY MATERIALS

The printed study materials and electronic based study materials are widely used by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University. Since attending contact cum counseling classes is not compulsory, many students show least interest in this regard. As the teacher is away from the student, the only way for the student to learn is the study materials. In other words, the print material acts as a teacher in direct teaching. The ideal study material includes the characteristics comprehensiveness, simplicity in style and self Instructional approach in its content format. It is worth to note that the self instructional print material of Dr. BRAOU is appreciated by many academicians, candidates appearing for competitive and civil service examinations. Though the University is taking utmost care in bringing up the print material, yet the learners are not using their optimum level due to the availability of test papers/guides

in the market. Most of the students expressed their dissatisfaction over the print material of the University not related to the content therein, but its delay in sending to them by the University.

STUDENTS PERCEPTION ABOUT THE SERVICES OF DR. BRAOU

SNO	DESCRIPTION	GOOD	AVERAGE	BELOW AVERAGE	TOTAL
1	Overall services	80 (40%)	75 (37.5%)	45 (22.5%)	200
2	Self instructional print Material	55 (27.5%)	95 (47.5%)	50 (25%)	200
3	Audio lessons	32 (16%)	67 (33.5%)	101 (50.5%)	200
4	Video lessons	34 (17%)	49 (24.5%)	117 (58.5%)	200
5	Information about exams and classes dates	87 (43.5%)	61 (30.5%)	52 (26%)	200
6	Response for telephone Calls	44 (22%)	67 (33.5%)	89 (44.5%)	200
7.	Contact cum counselling Classes	48 (24%)	51 (25.5%)	101 (50.5%)	200

The survey was conducted within the university campus with simple questions about the services of the University and the level of satisfaction which they have in their mind. A total of 200 students were interviewed based on the enrollment of students at Karimnagar, Mahaboobnagar, Srikakulam, Krishna and Ananthapur district were selected to cover all the parts of University. The students were asked to answer their choice for the questions.

An analysis of the aspect of overall services, of the total respondents 40 per cent said that they were good and 37.5 per cent as average. As far as Self instructional print material is concerned only 27.5 per cent of the respondents expressed that it was good, 47.5 per cent as average and the rest as below average. With reference to the Audio lessons, the respondents opined as good and average were in the order of 16 per cent and 33.5 per cent. In respect of Video lessons, 17 per cent of respondents felt that they were good and 24.5 per cent as average. The views of the respondents in regard to the dissemination of information about exams and counseling classes were good to the extent of 43.5 per cent and average 30.5 per cent. Similarly, the responses for the telephonic calls were felt good

by 22 per cent and average by 33.5 per cent. Finally, the respondents expressed their view on contact cum counselling classes, of the total respondents 24 per cent said that the classes were good and 25.5 per cent as average.

Therefore, there is a need to strengthen the above aspects to enable the students to realize the real fruits of the services offered by the University.

Further, majority of the students said that irregular talking up of counseling classes by some of the counselors, absence of minimum basic amenities at the study centres, lack of proper help desk services and library services, non-availability of proper space to view the video and listen the audio lessons were some of the problems coming in the way of their learning process.

It can be drawn from the results declared by the University over the years that the pass percentage of student enrolled in various programmes was around 15 per cent, indicating that a lot of improvement is require in the support services to keep on motivating the students in complete their programmes. This finally reduces the dropout rate. For this there is a need to evolve a suitable monitoring system in coordination with all the units of the University.

FINDINGS

1. Since ODL is a dependent model, qualitative and skilled resource persons are not available due to marginal payment of remuneration for their services in cities and major towns.
2. As far as rural and tribal areas are concerned, the situation is worse in the sense that the resource persons with minimum qualifications are not available for certain of the subjects like Sociology, Psychology, and English etc.
3. The infrastructure and accommodation in many study centres is grossly inadequate due to the problems of the host college itself.
4. Lack of recruitment at headquarters the services are affecting adversely and the learning materials are not truly reflecting to the contemporary situation.
5. The host college staff is working on part time basis in many of the study centres, showing least interest for the Open University.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. In order to avoid delay, the course materials have to be delivered through multiple channels — through Study Centres, postal services and courier services. Printing must be planned well in advance to adhere to the schedules of classes and examinations.
2. While establishing the study centres utmost care may be paid to the infrastructure available at the colleges and also the resource persons in the respective region. Indiscriminate establishment of study centres result in dilution of academic standards.
3. As counseling classes a renowned persons in the subject area may be invited now and then to motivate and increase the levels of learning by paying attractive remuneration.
4. As the college and study centre timings are overlapping, it is better to utilize the services of outside qualified persons as part time staff at all study centres so as to make them available in office and serve during the office hours.
5. Finally, to improve the pass percentage a bridge course may be introduced to the learners who come from non-formal stream to seek admission into under graduate programme.

REFERENCES

1. Pirdeaux, A (1989), "Support for Open and Distance Learners", in Tait.A (ed), Conference Papers, International Conference in distance education and Open Learning, September 19-22, Cambridge, Downing College, 203-210.
2. Agboola, Bade, A (1993)., "Contact Session in Distance Education: An Asset as well as a Burden", Indian Journal of Open Learning, 2(1), 17-22.
3. Croft, M (1991), "Student Support Services: An Overview", in the Report of Round Table on Student Support Services, Vancouver, Commonwealth of Learning, April 29-May 3, 3-30.
4. Government of India (1966), The Report of the Education Commission (1964-66), New Delhi.
5. Krishnan, C (2001). Learners Perception and Utilisation of O DL services —A Case Study. Paper presented in the VIII Annual Conference of IDE A, SDLCE, Kakatiya University, Andhra Pradesh, pp22-24.
6. Laxma Reddy G. (2006), Organization and Management of Student Support Services in ODL System, Kakatiya Journal of Distance Education, Vol. 10, to.1, pp. 46-68.
7. Prasad V.S. and Venkaiah, V.(2005), India's First Open University — Experience of Two Decades, Hyderabad: GRADE, Dr.BRAOU, pp. 73-86.
8. Dr. P. Krishna Rao (2011) Finances of Open Universities in India. Booklinks Corporation, Hyderabad.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. L.VIJAYA KRISHNA REDDY (LVK)

Assistant Director, Student Services Branch, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Road No.46, Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad – 500 033, Andhra Pradesh, INDIA. E-mail: drlvkreddy@yahoo.com; Mobile: 09490467484



EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS:

S.No	Name of the Course	University	Year
1	Ph.D (Telugu)	S.V.University, Tirupati	1994
2	M.A. (Telugu)	S.V.University, Tirupati	1987
3	M.C.J	Potti Sriramulu Telugu University	2009
4	B.Ed	Annamalai University,	1990
5	PG Diploma in Epigraphy	S.V.University, Tirupati	1989

- Awarded Ph.D., for the work done on "CREATION OF NEW WORDS IN TELUGU DAILIES" from S.V.University , Tirupati (1994)

Books published : 08

Research Articles / Chapters Published in Books : 26

Seminars & Workshops Organized :

International : 01

National Seminar : 04

Workshops & Orientation Programmes : 37

Seminars attended & Presented papers

International : 18

National : 35

Resource Person in Workshops : 11

Workshops attended : 11

Teleconferences (live programmes- Dr. BRAOU) : 26

Administrative Position held :

1. Officer on Special Duty (Trainings) : one year (I&PR Dept)

2. Member Board of Studies : 2 Universities.