

***Mapping the Performance of IDOL
: An Insight into the Feedback from Learners***

***Bhaskar Sarmah
AC, Economics
K K Handique State Open Univ.
&
Dr. Kandarpa Das
Director, IDOL, GU***

ABSTRACT

Well designed Self Learning Materials (SLMs) and Learner Support Services (LSS) are considered to be the cornerstones in an Open Distance and Learning (ODL) System. It is true that the teaching-learning methodology in an ODL is desired to be different from the conventional class room system. It is often argued that an ODL institute (or University) provides much more flexibility in courses and in timings to the learners than the conventional one. But still, many a time students remain unsuccessful; they drop out. What factors are responsible for such drop out? Are those factors inherent in the operational aspects of the system, or beyond the control of it? Can promotion of ‘independent learning’ have some affect on the drop out rate? And how can it be promoted? Again, of those who successfully complete a course, how many of them are really benefited from it? How the courses affect their careers? Where are the mismatches? What need to be done? This paper makes an attempt to examine such vital issues. While taking IDOL (erstwhile PGCS) of Gauhati University as a case study, the paper makes an attempt to map its performance in some of such operational aspects. In doing this, both primary data and secondary data have been utilised. Primary data have been collected from past students with the help of structured questionnaires. Names of students were selected from the records of registration at random. Students who visited the Institute during the study were also served the questionnaires. Personal interviews (telephonic as well as direct) were also conducted. Questionnaires were also sent through post (with postage-paid feedback envelopes). Apart from this primary data, the study also utilises data from earlier studies conducted by IDOL. The data analyses show the indicative performance of IDOL. It is, however, suggested that a wider survey (covering larger number of students) may reveal a better picture. The issues that stemmed from the analysis of the questionnaires have been discussed in the perspectives of developing countries in general, and the South-Asian developing countries in particular.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Distance education is one of the path breaking innovations in the field of education in the Twentieth century, yet not an at all new phenomenon. It existed for centuries, in varied contexts and forms. Indian mythology depicts the character of ‘Ekalavya’ as a prominent distant learner. ‘Ekalavya’ had to impart to ‘distance’ training himself (worshiping an idol of Dronacharyya as ‘guru’) marred with the factor of casteism. Since such times, human civilisation has witnessed many progresses; though many of those erstwhile problems sustains today. The period between “1960-1985” has witnessed remarkable growth of distance education all around the world (The International Scene -1, 2001). In our country as well, correspondence education started in as early as 1960s. However, with the establishment of the B.R. Ambedkar State Open University in 1982 and the IGNOU in 1985, distance education has emerged as a distinct educational system. In fact, governments in all around the world and in the developing countries in particular today have accepted ODL (Open and Distance Learning) as a legitimate means of meeting educational goals. For example, Government of India (GOI) in its Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) aimed for wide expansion of the ODL institutions with an aim to enroll 40% of all tertiary students in such institutions by 2007. The governments of Namibia and Ghana declared their national policy to be of dual mode instruction. Similarly, national open universities have been established in other South-Asian countries viz. Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Thailand, and Bangladesh to meet respective national policy objectives (Raza, 2008).

1.2 NEED OF THE STUDY

In the context of the North-Eastern part of India, setting up of state-level distance education institutions started with the establishment of the Post Graduate Correspondence School (PGCS) in Gauhati University in 1998. The institution turned from correspondence educational institute to distance education institute in 2001-02 with the establishment of a network of study centres all around the state. Decades passed, the name has now been changed to Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL) with an aspiration to offer ICT based ODL in the near future. It is true that well designed Self Learning Materials (SLMs) and Learner Support Services (LSS) are considered to be the cornerstones in an ODL System. It is argued that the teaching-learning methodology in this educational system is desired to be different from the conventional class room system. It is also argued that a Distance Education Institution (or University) provides much more flexibility to its learners in the

Published in the post-conference proceeding entitled “ODL System in Transition: Experiences and Reflections”, edited by Dr. Kandarpa Das. ISBN: 9788125944584, Vikash Publications, New Delhi, INDIA.

delivery of the courses than a conventional educational one. But still, many a time learners remain unsuccessful; they drop out. What factors are responsible for such drop out? Are those factors inherent in the operational aspects of the system? Are those factors beyond the control of the system? Can promotion of ‘independent learning’ have some affect on the drop out rate? And how can it be promoted? Again, of those who successfully complete a course, how many of them are really benefited from it? Are their expectations fulfilled? How the courses affect their careers? Where are the mismatches? What need to be done? This paper makes an attempt to examine such vital issues; more particularly some of the issues relating to SLMs, LSS and Drop-out. While taking IDOL as a case study, the paper provides a macro perspective of some of such operational aspects.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

In doing this, primary data have been collected from past learners with the help of structured questionnaires. Names of learners were selected from the records of registration at random. Learners who visited the Institute during the study were also served the questionnaires. Personal interviews (telephonic as well as direct) were also conducted. Questionnaires were also sent through post (with postage-paid feedback envelopes). The paper also utilises secondary data from an earlier study about some of the aspects of drop-out conducted by the institute. The data have been analysed and presented using Microsoft Excel.

The data analysis maps an indicative performance of IDOL. It is, however, suggested that a wider survey (covering larger number of learners) may reveal a better picture. The issues that stemmed from the analysis of the questionnaires have been discussed in the perspectives of developing countries in general, and the South-Asian developing countries in particular.

In the remaining sections, Section 2 clarifies definitions of some terminologies. Section 3 deals with the conceptual discussions to SLMs, LSS and Drop-out. Section 4 presents the discussion of these issues specific to IDOL (through analysis of both primary and secondary data). Section 5 discusses the results and policy implications and it concludes with Section 6.

2 SOME DEFINITIONS

2.1 SLMs and LSS

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Arguments exist regarding the scope of SLMs and LSS. While some include SLMs within the purview of LSS (Chander, 1998), others discuss them as two different components (Choudhry et al., 2008). Notwithstanding such debate, we have considered the two components as two distinct entities. Thus, by SLMs we shall mean the actual course materials that the institution provides to its learners to realize the instructional objective of the course (Choudhry et al., 2008). On the other hand, by LSS we shall mean any other services provided to the learners other than the SLMs. Thus, complementary services like: personal contact programmes, counselling, organisation of resource centres, library facilities, telephone teaching, interactive teaching through TV and Radio, and other similar activities form the components of LSS (Chander, 1998; Venkaiah, 1998).

However, it is true that strict compartmentalisation between the two is a difficult task to maintain. Again, as such strictness has not been maintained in the earlier research discussions, hence, at times, both the concepts may overlap. But, in general, we shall try to stick to the above compartmentalisation.

2.2 Drop-out, Course Completion Rate

Outcomes in an open and distance education system can be measured in numerous ways including completion rate, graduation rate and pass rate. Other complimentary measures include drop-out (also called wastage) rate, withdrawal rate and failure rate. Enrollment Completion Ratio (CR) is defined as the completion of a programme or course as the percentage of enrollment in a specified, given period of time. Graduation Rate (GR) measures the actual numbers of learners who go through a convocation process and acquire certification of qualification. Pass rate (PR) on the other hand is the percentage of learners passed out of total learners appeared in the examination of a particular programme or course (Raza, 2008).

Contrary to the above, learners who enroll in a programme but cannot complete the same are said to be drop-outs or wastage. And the measurement quantifying the aggregates of such drop-outs is called the drop-out rate or wastage rate. Woodley and Parlett (1983, in Raza, 2008) have broken down drop-out rate into two segments: ‘withdrawal rate’ – it refers to learners who have registered in a programme, but failed to sit in the examination; ‘failure rate’ – it refers to learners who sits in the examinations but fail to pass out.

3. CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Self Learning Materials (SLMs)

We have already argued that well-designed SLMs are a pre-requisite for the success of any distance education system (Padhi, 2004 in Aridurai et al, 2005). Thus, it is argued that well designed interactive course material, either print or electronic technology based, is the foundation for the successful teaching-learning process in all the flexible learning modes (Kuruba, 2004 in *Ibid*). It is true that distance education materials take a learner-centred approach rather than the content-centred approach of traditional textbooks. Unlike in the traditional education, the responsibility in an ODL system lies on the part of the learners to learn themselves, rather than on the teachers to teach. So, the concern is how the ‘traditional’ learners can develop the skill of self learning, and particularly in the absence of an immediate teacher? This becomes important as study (Andrews et al in *Ibid*) has revealed that in the absence of instructor’s guidance and supervision Asian distant learners find it comparatively difficult to adjust to the distant learning educational environment, which requires the art of ‘independent learning’. So, what are those aspects that should be taken care of in the design of SLMs such that they promote ‘independent learning’ among the distant learners – is the vital issue.

Murphy (2000) put forward three important criteria for making materials (i.e., SLMs) in distance education most effective: *first*, they should be written according to precise objectives. *Second*, activities should be included in a way that breaks the content into suitable learning blocks. Activities should be encouraging and motivating and should enable the learners to gauge their understanding and progress of study. *Third*, instructions should be clearly laid down. Again, unless aimed at developing critical thinking, questions should be simple and answerable. Swales (2000) also supports the above view regarding the preciseness of the learning objectives. She has argued that good planning in the construction of objectives is very much essential for the effective designing of SLMs. Such objectives may also be utilised in the construction of the assessment items. Hartley (1994), on the other hand argues that in the preparation of SLMs, writers should keep in mind learners’ isolation from an

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immediate teacher. Use of friendly and interactive style, short and simple sentences produce desirable results.

Design and quality of SLMs in a particular style depends on the choice of the model in their preparation. Various models exist. Important ones (Aridurai et al., 2005) include: *first*, CT (course team) model. In this model, representation and active involvement of different categories of experts, and hence the outcome in general is of high quality. But this model is rather time consuming and a costly affair especially for a developing country. Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) follows this model. *Second*, CWE (Co-ordinator - Writer - Editor) model. This is single author model. This model is followed by IGNOU and most of the open universities in the region. *Third*, Adaptation model. Here, a document is prepared based on the available resources on the courses under preparation. *Fourth*, Self-study book model. In this model a faculty design a detailed course outline based on an exhaustive survey of existing resources. In case of both the third and the fourth models, producing of fresh materials is avoided. Rather, faculties prepare a few pages of study guides for the learners as to how to use of the existing materials. All the above models have their own merits and demerits. The choice of the effective model is often a ‘trial and error’ process.

3.2 Learner Support Services (LSS)

In general, the objectives of LSS are: *first*, to provide all information learners need; *second*, to encourage students to fully utilise the available facilities; *third*, to motivate learners to assimilate what they learn; *fourth*, to provide necessary counselling; and *fifth*, to create a friendly environment among students, the faculty and the administration (Chander, 1998). We have already mentioned various broad components of LSS. Each of such components has its own importance. For example, researcher (Hegde, 2008) argues that lack of proper correspondence to learners is in part one of the major causes of drop-out of learners. However, of all the components of LSS, we shall basically discuss two: viz., *academic counseling* and *library services*.

Conceptually, in the distance education system, it is generally argued that frequent faculty-learner contact is desirable on the assumption that such experiences contribute to the growth and development of the learners (Shivanna, in K. Murali Manohar, 2001). Learners get the chance to clear their doubts in such counseling sessions. Studies have shown that counseling sessions, which include presentation in interactive audio-visual media, are more interactive

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and effective. There is no doubt that an ODL institute/ university should take utmost attention for attaining higher degree of effectiveness of the counseling sessions.

3.3 Moving from Instructor-directed Distance Learning to Independent (or Self) Learning and from Absolute Independent Learning to Independent Learning in a Collaborative Control Environment

The basic philosophy of distance education pertains a passive role on the part of the teacher, and a more proactive role on the part of the learners. However, in practice, learners seem to be as dependent on the instructions of ‘a’ teacher as a conventional student. In recent years in distance education a debate has been raised regarding the issues of autonomy, control, independence or self-directed learning (or self learning or independent learning). The debate largely relates to the close examination of the meaning of learner independence and how it relates to roles of learners and the nature of their learning environments. It represents an important critique of the traditional view of learner independence as an ideal associated with traditional distance learning environments, and points ahead to the possibilities for learners to exercise their autonomy through collaborative control of learning experiences within technology-mediated environments (White, 2003). Now, let us discuss the above two concepts of learning in brief.

Learner’s independence: The focus on the independence of the learner in the field of distance education has been emphasised to be one of its major goals for a quite long time. Researcher (Savithri, 1998; Ross Paul, 1990 quoted in White, 2003) has argued that the real challenge for an ODL institute/university is to produce ‘independent learners’ who, by virtue of their ability to look after their own learning needs will be able to sustain in any kind of educational systems. The design of high-quality SLMs, including a comprehensive range of learning sources, has been seen as the key component in fostering and maximising learner independence. Thus, in this approach, quality is measured by the extent to which course materials support the self-instruction process and maximise self-sufficiency on the part of the learner. The basic philosophy underlying this approach is that the transparency of the

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framework of the course supports learners, who are then free to make decisions and develop awareness of their learning within the set parameters, like: rate of study (White, 2003).

Collaborative Control: Contrary to such above ‘absolute’ independence of the learner, researchers (Anderson and Garisson, 1998 in *Ibid*) argue that learner’s autonomy (i.e., independence) is best developed in a ‘collaborative control’ environment rather than when he is placed in an ‘absolute’ independent learning environment. Thus, in many instances in distance education, group interactions have been promoted. This has been occurred in two ways: *first*, through physical meeting and interaction among learners. *Secondly*, ‘virtual groups’ have been formed among the learners, especially in those countries with wide-spread Internet facilities (UNESCO, 2002). After an extensive review of literature on independent learning, Meyer et al (2008) write:

[The literature suggests that key elements of independent learning may be comprised of factors which are internal and external to learners. The external elements.... are the development of a strong relationship between teachers and pupils and the establishment of an ‘enabling environment’ in which ICT has a part to play. The elements that are internal are the skills - cognitive, meta-cognitive and affective - that individual pupils have to acquire.]

Thus, it has been argued that Internet today has created a ‘virtual space’ for the formation of ‘virtual groups’ among the distance learners (Tomei, 2007).

Having argued for the promotion of collaborative control (i.e. group learning), our prime concern however remains on the development of ‘independent learning’ skills among the distance learners. Along with this, group learning skills should serve as a complimentary tool in his learning achievement. But, how an ODL institute/university can achieve this? More precisely, how to ‘acculturate’ a teacher-directed traditional learner in this new learning environment? Supply of self-contained course material is not however, a one and all device (Savithri, 1998) to achieve this. While saying this, we do not however decline the importance of self-sufficiency of the SLMs. Self-sufficiency of SLMs must be taken care of. What we want to argue is that to promote independent learning among the learners, much more need to be done. A desirable way to promote the same is: “....to encourage students to read, listen to

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and /or watch presentations of various kinds, to compare and criticize them and try to come to conclusions of their own” (Savithri, Ibid). Proper use of ICT based LSS, can serve as a desirable instrument to produce such behaviours among the distant learners. Evidence (*Sudhakar et al,*) suggests that media in ODL has already played a role to supplement the teachers. Researcher (*Chandok, S*) has argued that in the absence of teachers, learners in distance education has to largely depend on SLMs and on library services. Thus, library services help to bridge the gap of a teacher. And hence, it can be argued that an ICT based effective library services can be another way to produce independent learners. Along with this, promotion of group learning skills can also help the distance learners achieve better outcomes (The Commonwealth of Learning, 2003).

3.4 The Issue of Drop-out

It is true that drop-out in distance education (in case of both universities and institutions) is higher than the conventional education system (Sudhakar, 2001). Conceptually, it can be argued that in conventional system, students get in touch with education regularly. He is kept engaged with such regular activities by virtue of the system itself. While, in case of ODL, the learner is made responsible to study at one’s own convenience, pace and time. Thus, it can be argued that students in conventional system, is made to be more serious and regular by the system itself. *Secondly*, it can also be argued that in conventional system, the student is engaged in the educational process on a continuous basis. While, this does not hold good in case of ODL. *Thirdly*, in conventional system, age plays an important role. In case of ODL age has very little to play. *Fourthly*, conventional system maintains very strictness regarding the discipline/course of study. In case of ODL, such strictness is maintained at the minimum. *Fifthly*, supply of SLMs is an important issue in ODL. When and in what quality such SLMs are supplied can be argued as important issues in determining the drop-out rate. Such arguments make the point that by virtue of its systematic arrangements, drop-out in the ODL system tends to be higher than the conventional system.

Apart from the above academic issues, many social issues also play important role in determining the drop-out rate. A case study (Sudhakar, *ibid*) has shown that social factors like: a) examination of children at the time of learner’s examination, b) lack of co-operation from family members, c) family tradition and customs, d) responsibility to look after old age elders in the family, e) lack of hostel near the exam centre affects the drop-out rate. These factors

become decisive especially when the learner is female. Among the academic factors, the case study holds these factors responsible viz., a) lack of educational knowledge, b) tough subjects, c) lack of course material distribution, d) lack of early educational background, e) failed in examinations, f) de-motivation of the learner on the realisation that the course has no future, g) course materials are not from examination point of view and h) the learners joins other short-term professional (computer) courses.

Many a time, learner profiles themselves raise the drop-out rate. This means that, ‘casual’ approach of the learners towards study often raises the drop-out rate. We shall elaborate this point in our discussion about PGCS’ Study of Drop-out in the subsequent section.

4 THE CASE OF IDOL

4.1 Findings from Primary Data:

a) The basic data of the primary study are as follows:

Table 1: The Basic Data of the Primary Study

Subjects	Respondents	Completed	Not Completed	NET Qualifier	R.F.¹	NET + R.F
Assamese	20	20	0	1	1	
English	14	13	1	1	1	
Economics	2	2	0	2		
History	1	1	0		1	
PGDCA*	8	8	0		4	1
Bengali	1	1	0			
Mathematics	1	1	0			
PGDMC*	1	1	0			
M.com	1	1	0		1	
PolSc	1	0	1			
TOTALS	50	48	2	4	8	12
PG Courses	41	39	Total Pass Out (TPO) in PG Courses			39
*PG Diploma Courses R.F. ¹ = Research Fellowship			NET+R.F. (As % of TPO)			30.77

b) Students have taken admission in PGCS for these varied reasons:

1	Percentage was not enough to get admission into regular courses
2	Financially, not capable to enroll into regular courses
3	No time to attend regular classes due to other engagements - service etc.
4	Distance education is superior mode of education
5	Validity of degree/diploma is same with regular courses
6	Wanted to gain knowledge by utilising spare time

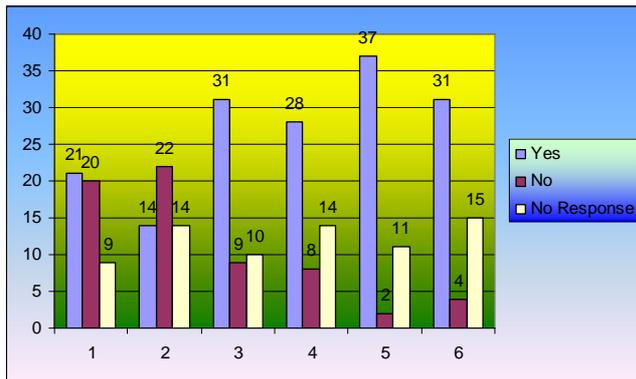


Figure 1: Reasons for Taking Admission at PGCS (Table:Keys to the Reasons 1-6)

Research Comment (based on above two findings a & b): IDOL has been pretty successful in reaching its motto: “ACCESS TO QUALITY HIGHER EDUCATION TO THOSE HITHERTO UNREACHED.”

c) What learners have to say about the importance of the various aspects of LSS in an ODL?

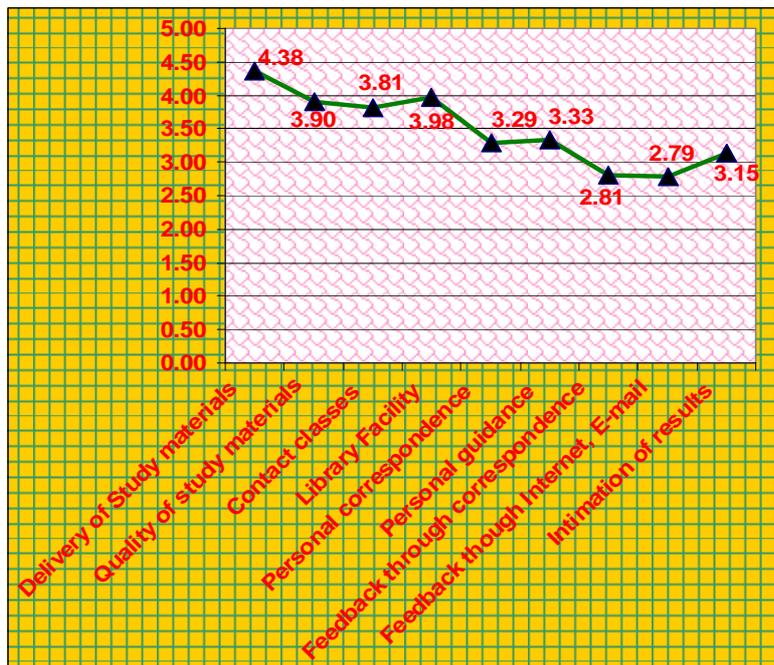


Figure 2: Learners' Ranks of Importance about Various Aspects of LSS in an ODL

Research Comment: Delivery of quality study materials and an effective LSS (esp. contact classes and library facilities) are the backbone of the ODL system – empirically established once again!

d) What learners have to say about their satisfaction levels on various aspects of LSS in the context of IDOL? *The Overall Picture (Inclusive of All Programmes)*

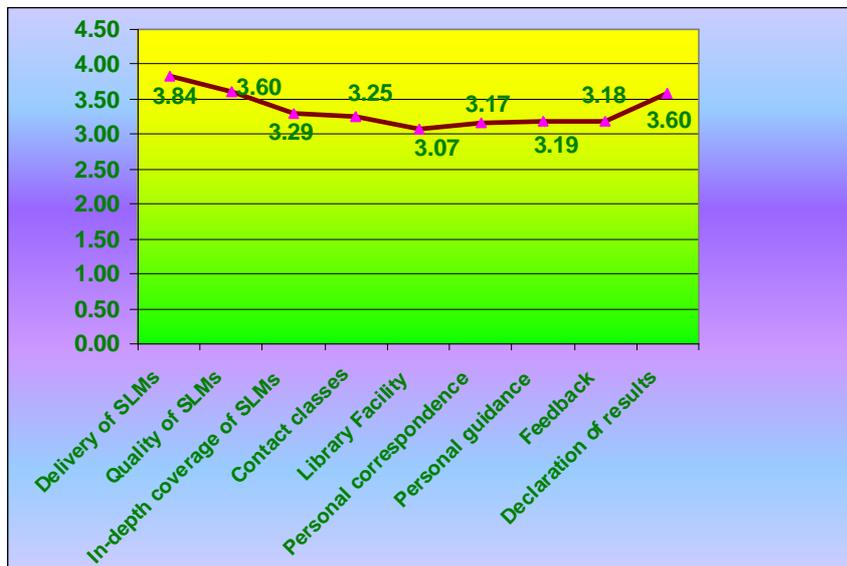
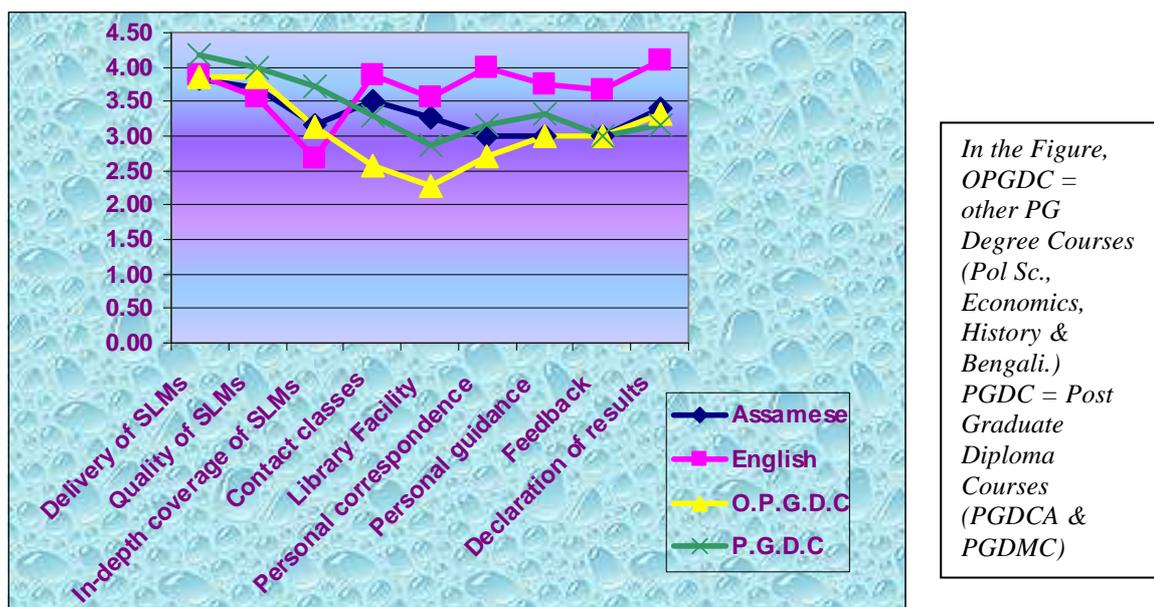


Figure 3: Mapping the Performance of IDOL: Feedback from Learners

Research Concern: IDOL should work for improvement of its library facilities. But on which to emphasise? Accessibility and/or quality? A matter of further review. Is ‘e-library facility’ a desirable solution?

e) What learners have to say about their satisfaction levels on various aspects of LSS in the context of IDOL? *The Comparative Picture of the OPGDC and PGDC courses*



In the Figure,
 OPGDC =
 other PG
 Degree Courses
 (Pol Sc.,
 Economics,
 History &
 Bengali.)
 PGDC = Post
 Graduate
 Diploma
 Courses
 (PGDCA &
 PGDMC)

Figure 4: Group-wise Mapping the Performance of IDOL: Feedback from Learners

Research Concern: An attention should be vested on OPGDCs, to improve their basic two components of LSS: contact classes and library facility. Can English show the desired path?

(Curves in the above figures 2 to 4 have been derived based on the respective mean scores).

4.2 Findings from Secondary Data:

Table 2: Subject-wise and Overall Enrollment-Completion Ratios

	ECRasm	ECReng	ECReco	ECRhst	ECRpsc	ECRmth	ECRcmr	ECRphl	ECR All
2000	15.69	5.81	2.44	12.24	3.08	1.72	0.00	0.00	5.25
2001	28.23	5.51	3.81	9.26	1.90	2.14	0.00	0.00	8.05
2002	30.23	8.25	13.33	17.39	6.21	6.12	4.44	0.00	11.08
2003	33.21	15.47	12.66	11.65	13.56	4.50	22.62	0.00	17.58
2004	38.43	21.45	17.86	8.40	15.30	16.04	31.97	0.00	24.35
2005	59.95	22.82	21.21	17.02	26.23	11.82	48.44	27.00	34.35
2006	40.97	21.76	16.18	21.33	32.07	8.99	43.17	29.00	31.17

Abbreviations: ECR = Enrollment Completion Ratio. asm = Assamese, eng = English, eco = Economics, hst = History, mth = Mathematics, cmr – Commerce and phl = Philosophy. Thus, ECRasm means ECR in the subject Assamese and so on.

(N.B.: All the above ratios are authors’ own calculations based on available secondary data).

Mehodology: An ECR has been calculated by dividing the number of students that passed out in the final examination with the initial total enrollment in the first year. Thus, ECR for the year 2000 means the number of students passed out in the final examination of 2000-01 out of the total number of students who had taken admission in the first year course in 1999.)

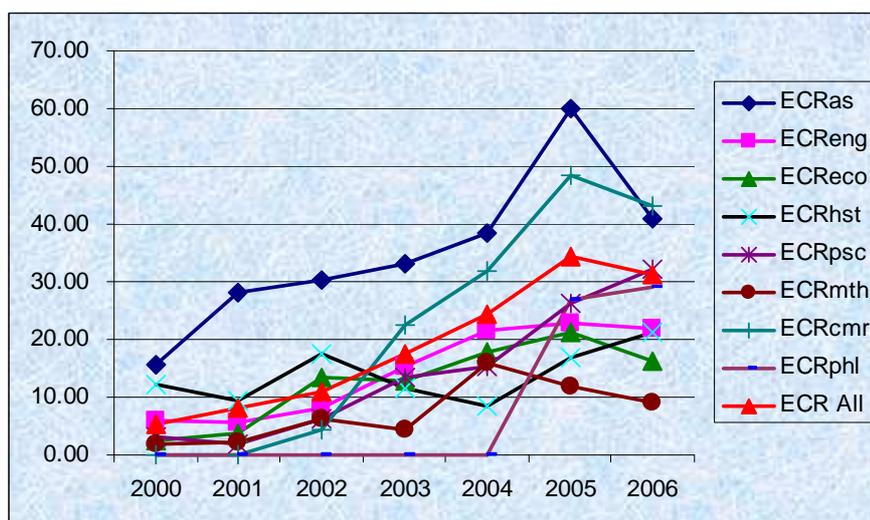


Figure 4: Mapping of ECR over the Years : (Subject-wise and Overall)

Research Concern: In spite of its best performance mapping (figure 4), why the ECR is less in English? ECR in English is less than Assamese, Political Science and Commerce and also

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*the average of all the PG Courses? Is it because of the fact that English is a foreign language?
What literature has to say about this?*

4.3 Learning a Foreign Language in Distance Education: The Context of IDOL

Studies (Wallis, 2005; White, 2003) have shown that ‘independent learning’ (like: vocabulary building, practice of grammar) skills in a collaborative control environment (like: interaction with other co-learners and teachers) can enhance the learning skills of a foreign in an ODL system. A concern that arised from the above study of White (2003) was to investigate the ways learners respond to independent learning experiences in the new learning spaces. Apart from the above factors, another important issue in this regard that stemmed from a recent study of IDOL (Das, 2008) is the ‘acculturation’ of the learner. This becomes important because a student from a vernacular medium is unlikely to garner the prior knowledge about the socio-economic, religious life of the ancient English society. It has been argued that such an understanding becomes important for the better interpretation of the English literature. Such an ‘acculturation’ is thus, seen as an important ‘background builder’ in learning any foreign language through ODL.

4.4 The Issue of Drop-out: The Case of IDOL

In a recent case study (Das & De, 2007) of PGCS (IDOL) among the drop-out of learners from the *MA English* course, the following factors were found responsible. These factors have been enlisted along with the respective percentage of learners as below:

- 1) Lack of proper communication due to problems like frequent bandhs, terrorist violence. (20%)
- 2) Absence of trained resource persons in Study centres/contact centres to give counselling. (46%)
- 3) Absence of “community feeling” among the students. (20%)
- 4) Inadequate access to necessary “human contact” in terms of counseling both academic and non-academic in order to compensate the class room contact of the conventional system. (64%)
- 5) Casual enrollment among the female students without any aim to complete the programme. (40%)
- 6) Could not grasp the contents of the materials supplied and prepare for examinations. (85%)
- 7) Could not afford to clear the course fees in time. (40%)

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8) Lack of library facilities. (80%)

Research Comment: At a first glance, results of the two studies (primary study and secondary study about the drop-out) might seem to speak two opposite stories! However, this may be because a) the present case study considers a wide number of students from a wider variety of subjects; b) it considers both pass outs and drop outs.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

We had mentioned in the beginning that IDOL aspires to offer ICT based ODL to its learners in the near future. With a view to this, following measures have been suggested:

First, IDOL should take action to improve the quality and in-depth coverage of its SLMs. While, quality and in-depth coverage of SLMS in its PG diploma courses (mean score 4.0, 3.71 respectively) seems to be fairly better, the quality and in-depth coverage, it seems, needs to be improved in case of the English subject (mean score 3.25 and 2.58 respectively) (Please refer to Annexure-A for the detail about the mean scores of different subjects). It can also introduce “Library Bag Services” for the benefit of its learners at a very minimum effort. (Concept of “Library Bag Services” has been discussed in Annexure –B).

Second, contact classes and library facility should be improved across all subjects. To improve the quality of its contact classes, faculties should be properly trained. Again, to improve its library services IDOL should aim at providing ICT and web-based library facilities to its distant learners and providing necessary training to the learners to make them convergent with the system. In the short-run, IDOL should make efforts to sign MOU (Memorandum of Understanding)s with its partner study centres (most of which are regular colleges) to make their library services available to its distance learners. In the long-run such tie-ups with other institutions like: IGNOU (e-Gyankosh) or UGC (*Inflibnet*) should be undertaken with a view to form a Consortium. In the preparation of the assignments, learners should be encouraged to refer to the resources available on the e-library. Higher grades may be given to learners doing the same, and this should be highlighted to them in the feedbacks. Such an ‘innovative’ approach can be expected to promote ‘independent learning’ among its learners to a large extent.

Published in the post-conference proceeding entitled “ODL System in Transition: Experiences and Reflections”, edited by Dr. Kandarpa Das. ISBN: 9788125944584, Vikash Publications, New Delhi, INDIA.

Third, ‘independent learning’ skills can also be developed by the supply of ‘Guide to Learning in ODL’ booklet at the time of admission. The Open University of UK supplies a ‘Charter’ to each of its students during admission, where the rights and obligations of the students are enlisted.

Fourth, to reduce the drop-out rate, steps should be undertaken, viz., a) introduction of more job-oriented courses, b) providing information in time, c) providing more facilities at the study centres, d) sending of regular newsletter to the learners, e) providing course materials which are simple, easy to understand and have in-depth discussion, f) proper maintenance of the academic schedule.

Fifth, in line with study conducted by Ariadurai et al (2005) in Sri Lanka, IDOL should conduct detailed study among its faculty members (in-house and study centres) about their interpretations of the system (like: content of the material, quality, presentation, etc.). This will help in taking various corrective measures and enhance the programme delivery.

Sixth, in line with study (Pena-Bandalaria, 2007) conducted in the Philippines, IDOL should undertake detailed study about the present status of infrastructure (physical and human) across the state. This becomes important to introduce ICT-based LSS in the state.

Last, but not the least, an overall and extensive study should be undertaken regarding the above and other important areas. Such a study is particularly important in the march from PGCS toward IDOL.

6. CONCLUSION

Lets hope that in the days to come, IDOL produces more modern ‘Ekalavya’s. ‘Ekalavya’s not having to worship an ‘idol’ of ‘guru’ and loss his thumb. Alternatively, in this new ‘avtar’ he browses over the Internet, chats with his co-learners, discusses his problems in his ‘virtual-group’, he reads more and more from the e-sources, he debates again on the issues in a ‘virtual-space’ with his e-teacher and his ‘virtual groups’ and finally, he reaches a conclusion on his own – not to be confused anymore by anyone.

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The authors may be contacted at:

Published in the post-conference proceeding entitled “ODL System in Transition: Experiences and Reflections”, edited by Dr. Kandarpa Das. ISBN: 9788125944584, Vikash Publications, New Delhi, INDIA.

Bhaskar Sarmah

+91 98642 62329

bhaskar_sarmah@yahoo.com

Dr. Kandarpa Das

+91 94350 43124

kandarpa4@rediffmail.com

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ANNEXURES

Annexure - A

Comprehensive Comparative Satisfaction Levels (In terms of Mean Scores)				
	Assamese	English	O.P.G.D.C	P.G.D.C
Delivery of SLMs	3.84	3.67	3.86	4.17
Quality of SLMs	3.68	3.25	3.86	4.00
In-depth coverage of SLMs	3.16	2.58	3.14	3.71
Contact classes	3.50	3.58	2.57	3.29
Library Facility	3.26	3.42	2.29	2.86
Personal correspondence	3.00	3.82	2.71	3.17
Personal guidance	3.00	3.55	3.00	3.33
Feedback	3.00	3.73	3.00	3.00
Declaration of results	3.39	4.33	3.33	3.17

Annexure – B

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Library Bag Services: In this type of service, a bundle of selected reference books are sent to learners. Learners need to return the same at the end of the course. Thus, the same set of books can be repeatedly sent to other learners a number of times. A refundable caution deposit is collected from the learners for the safe return of the books.

Annexure – C

Calculation of Mean Scores

Parameter / Level of Satisfaction	Extremely Satisfied	Very much	Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Not at all Satisfied	Row Value Totals	Total Resp.	N.R	Mean Score
Scores	(+5)	(+4)	(+3)	(+2)	(+1)				
Delivery of SLMs	13	15	13	2	1	169	44	6	3.84
Quality of SLMs	13	11	13	6	2	162	45	5	3.60
In-depth coverage of SLMs	9	11	14	6	5	148	45	5	3.29
Contact classes	8	6	22	5	3	143	44	6	3.25
Library Facility	8	9	14	6	8	138	45	5	3.07
Personal correspondence	7	8	17	5	5	133	42	8	3.17
Personal guidance	7	6	21	6	3	137	43	7	3.19
Feedback	4	9	18	6	2	124	39	11	3.18
Declaration of results	15	4	16	5	2	151	42	8	3.60

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