
A Study of Human Resource Development System of IGNOU:

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ABSTRACT

Effective training empowers the staff to carry out their functions more effectively and efficiently. Therefore, professional development is an important component of human resource development. In case of open and distance learning system, the training and development activities gain more importance since majority of the staff joining ODL system hails from the conventional system of education who share the ideologies different from the former. As the learners joining the ODL system are adults in majority of cases, they have peculiar educational and support service requirements different from the conventional students who are in their young years.

The Indira Gandhi National Open University is a national institution of open and distance learning with a base of over 30 lacs students getting higher education in different disciplines and faculties. It has a wide network of 67 Regional Centres and 3136 study centres which provide seamless support services to the admitted learners. The Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education established by the University caters to the staff training and development requirements of not only IGNOU but other ODL institutions in the country as well. The present paper seeks to study the human resource development system of IGNOU in detail.

Keywords: Human Resource Development System, IGNOU, ODL

1. INTRODUCTION

Training and development of staff is an important component of human resource development. Effective training empowers the staff to carry out their functions more effectively and efficiently. It provides them with an opportunity for developing skills, enhancing knowledge, and improving attitude which contribute to overall behaviour in the organisational context. The impact of training is meant to stay beyond the completion of training itself while at the same time contributing to achievement of overall objectives and goals of the organisation.

The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system is a unique system of imparting education at mass level different from conventional face to face education system. It provides the educational aspirants with an alternative to satisfy their educational needs while staying in fulltime employment or carrying out their day to day affairs. Keegan¹ describes separation of teacher and learner unlike face to face system of education, influence of educational institution on the learner, use of technical media to unite teacher and learner for transaction of learning, provision of two-way communication for the benefit of learner, occasional personal contact for didactic and socialization purpose of the learner and industrialised form of education signifying division of labour as the unique characteristics of open and distance learning as a system.

The persons joining ODL system are new to the system. Even their prior experience, if at all they have, does not help them much in empathizing with the system. In view of this, training and development of the personnel in an open and distance learning institution becomes important in order to achieve its overall educational goals.

2. OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING SYSTEM IN INDIA

The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is the established mode of education in India. It provides complimentary and supplementary paths of progression to the educational aspirants hailing from different

social strata including the under-privileged and the marginalized ones. The Open and Distance Learning formally stepped in India with the establishment of School of Correspondence Courses in the aegis of Delhi University in 1962. The success of this experiment inspired the educational planners and policy makers of the country to establish first ever Open University in the State of Andhra Pradesh with the name 'Andhra Pradesh Open University' in 1982 (later renamed as DrBhim Rao Ambedkar Open University) followed by the establishment of a National Open University in the name of Late Mrs Indira Gandhi (Indira Gandhi National Open University- IGNOU) in 1985. As of now, there are 14 state open universities and one national open university in the country. In addition, over 220 conventional universities recognised as dual mode universities are also running ODL programmes through their directorates of open and distance learning and are substantially contributing to the overall growth of student enrollment in higher education.

3. IGNOU: AN ICONIC OVERVIEW

The establishment of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was not only seen as a way of democratising higher education in the country but also as gateway to the world of Open and Distance Learning. It is the national resource centre for development, promotion and maintenance of standards in Open and Distance Learning. Since, the ODL system differs from the conventional education system in its approach, pedagogy and logistic arrangements, therefore, it has special staff training and development needs for its functionaries across the board. IGNOU with a cumulative strength of over 30 lac active students on its rolls, is one of the mega universities of the world propagating and practicing the philosophy of open and distance learning. The 21 Schools of Studies offer ODL programmes in different areas and disciplines supported by 11 functional Divisions. The student support services network of the University is supported by 67 Regional Centres, 3136 Learner Support Centres and 58,400 part-time academic counsellors. A total of 785 teachers and academics, and 2,499 administrative personnel are permanently deployed to handle different academic and administrative activities falling under different systems and sub-systems.

The horizontal and vertical expansion of IGNOU affirms that it must have a robust system of human resourcedevelopment and capacity building in the area of Open and Distance Learning. The current study seeks to analyse the human resource development system of IGNOU being a pioneering ODL institution of higher education and one of the Mega Universities of the world.

4. ORGANISATONAL STARUCTURE OF IGNOU

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is an autonomous institution of higher educationaided by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. It has different statutory authorities responsible for different functions and activities. The President of India is the highest authority in his capacity as the Visitor whereas the Vice-Chancellor is the institutional head of the University. The Board of Management is the apex executive body which is responsible for management and administration of the revenue, finances and property as well as conduct of all academic and administrative affairs of the University². The Academic Council is responsible for deciding the academic policies and the Planning Board takes care of the short term and long term plans for development of the University. The design, development and launch of new programmesand different expansion schemes come under their purview. The Finance Committee looks after all financial matters including the recurring and non-recurring expenditure for the year. It takes an account of the income generated by the university from different student activities and pattern of expenditure including development plans.

5. ACADEMIC AND STUDENT SUPPORT SYSTEM

In 1991, IGNOU constituted a committee to decide a structure for its academic and student support system. The committee undertook the work of job analysis and identified different academic positions in various Schools and Divisions while identifying the functions to be undertaken by them. The committee also invited their opinion and discussed in detail with the representatives of IGNOU teachers association, engineering staff, technical and professional staff, and representatives of the regional centres. Consequently, a level-wise

structure of positions based on activities mandated for each of the Schools and Divisions was proposed³. This created a new class of employees in the university called the “Academics” not usually available in conventional educational institutions. They perform different academic activities at the headquarters as well as the regional centres spread across length and breadth of the country.

6. HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN IGNOU

The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system is different in its approach to delivery of education and pedagogy. The methodology adopted by the ODL institutions is more suitable to its clientele of adult learners. The IGNOU being an institution of open and distance learning differs in its functioning from a conventional university. In order to meet the specific human resource requirements, the university has created a set of positions for carrying out different functions and activities.

The Establishment Committee which is the standing committee of the Board of Management, looks after the human resource (HR) planning and personnel matters in the University and submits its recommendations on different HR matters and welfare schemes for the staff to the Finance Committee and/or Board of Management, as the case may be. The decision taken by different bodies are placed before the Board of Management being the apex executive body for final approval before implementation or ratification.

Initially the Board of Management of IGNOU approved the staffing norms in 1991 on the basis of which the sanctions for creation of various positions in the university are accorded. The committee mandated to frame the staffing norms, conducted an in-depth study of functions and responsibilities assigned to various work locations and analysed the workload minutely in quantifiable terms. Wherever it was not possible to quantify the workload, practice of making best judgment based on experience was adopted. This staffing pattern was created for each of the Schools, Divisions and other units in the university⁴.

The university follows Government of India rules in case of personnel welfare schemes and staff matters wherever the same have not been prescribed/adopted/formulated by the University. The recruitment and promotion rules in case of non-academic staff were adopted by the University initially in 1991-92 which were last revised in 2010 pursuant to revision of scales of pay consequent upon implementation of recommendations of the 6th Central Pay Commission. The UGC Regulations in case of service matters pertaining to academics and teachers are adopted by the University from time to time - Regulations 2010 being the last ones.

As mentioned earlier, being a Government of India autonomous institution, IGNOU adopts different policies and rules implemented by the Government of India. However, IGNOU may take a different view beneficial to the university and its employees in diversion to the Policy of the Government of India in certain matters with the approval of the concerned bodies and Board of Management. The policy matters pertaining to human resource in the university in case of any deviation need to be got approved/ratified by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India before implementation.

7. USE OF ICT IN HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

IGNOU has introduced intranet based Entrepreneur Resource Planning (ERP) System for handling different organisational activities including personnel and financial matters. Since the environment has been developed on the ‘PeopleSoft’ Platform which makes use of the customized services for ODL institution (IGNOU), it has been named as ‘ODLSoft’. The software has been designed and developed by Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and implemented in 2007⁵. The system provides for different modules dealing with specialised activities. Human Resource Management System (HRMS) and Financial Management System (FMS) are the two major modules functioning at the backend of the environment. It is a one step portal for all users. Various self-services like Employee Personal Information Management, Workforce Administration, Position Management, Advances, Expense Claims, Leave Management, LTC, Medical Reimbursement, e-Performance, e-Recruitment, Training etc. are being processed efficiently through this system. The FMS module deals with the payroll of the employees along with other processes like budgeting, costing, accounts, inventory, maintenance management, etc.

The ERP system provides support to the Human Resource Information System (HRIS) of the university in a big way. The profiles containing the qualifications acquired by the staff, their quantitative and qualitative experience of working at different levels and substantial contribution to the sub-system(s) handled by them, have been digitized constituting important input to the HRIS.

The system supports generation of different reports pertaining to human resource, their deployment and vacancy position related to different Schools and Divisions. It helps in different processes starting from recruitment and induction to deployment of staff at different jobs as per requirement in the university. It is easy to plan for the human resource and go for nominating the employees for in-house and external training programmes in a planned way. These reports provide valuable input to the decision making mechanism in the University. It facilitates deployment of right kind of people in optimal number at the right place to get maximum contribution from them thereby advancing the overall institutional objective of providing seamless opportunities of quality higher education at an affordable cost to the masses including the under-privileged and the disadvantaged sections of the society. However, the self-appraisal forms and annual confidential reports are yet to be integrated with the HRIS which would contribute substantially to the health of training and development system in the university.

The functional training on ERP was imparted to all the employees in the University in an organized way through a team of master trainers developed by the vendor (TCS). Under this strategy, 26 Master Trainers were developed for training of IGNOU staff (existing end-users and new users) in all the 22 modules of the 'ODLSoft'. These training programmes were organized 3-4 hours on daily basis preferably in the afternoon. This way the participants were given a chance of hands-on-practice before they attended the next session. They could come up with difficulties and doubts in use of the module, if any, in the next class. Therefore, the participants were able to master the new knowledge quickly and easily. Since then, the organization of training on different modules of ERP has become a regular feature in the University.

8. HUMAN RESOURCE PLANNING

Human Resource Planning helps an organization in forecasting the future demand for and supply of the right type of manpower in the right strength. It helps the organization in realizing its objectives by optimally utilizing limited human resource available with it. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is in existence for the last 29 years. During this period, lot of multi-dimensional expansion has taken place. New Schools of Studies have been established in addition to different functional Divisions. As on date there are 21 Schools of Studies and 11 functional Divisions to look after various functional requirements of the University. The University has already laid down norms regarding creation of positions for handling activities at different levels for a new School of Study. A detailed proposal for creation of School and requirement of different resources is put up before the Planning Board, Finance Committee and Establishment Committee, and finally the same is approved by the Board of Management for creation of a new School along with provision of required infrastructure and manpower.

In case of requirement of additional manpower in the existing Schools and Divisions, a Committee is constituted from time to time with specific terms of reference to conduct the job analysis of different positions. The standard principles for this activity are: working capacity of a normal individual on that particular seat, quantum of workload and number of manhours being currently devoted by the individual in accomplishing the activity. After the detailed study, new norms are developed on the basis of which the Committee recommends creation of new positions in the existing Divisions and Schools. The recommendations of this Committee are placed before the Establishment Committee for considering viability of creation of new positions as recommended; and Finance Committee for taking a holistic view on additional financial liability on account of creation of such positions. Once both the above Committees approve the recommendations, the same are placed before the Board of Management for final approval, and notification for creation of new positions follows.

8.1 Norms Committee Approach

In the past, the University has created additional positions by following Norms Committee method as discussed in the foregoing paragraph. The first Norms Committee took place in the year 1991. Similarly, the second Norms Committee gave its report in the year 2007. However, it is always a prerogative of the Board of Management to take a view on the number of such positions to be created, for example, the Board of Management approved creation of only 50 per cent of the positions at different levels recommended by the Norms Committee in the year 2007.

As far as the creation of new disciplines and teaching & administrative positions to support them is concerned, the Planning Division or the concerned School of Study looking after the discipline in its nascent stage, moots a proposal for creation of a full-fledged discipline which later on leads to establishment of new School of Study. Approval for creation of such a Discipline/School is followed by creation of skeleton teaching and administrative positions as per standard norms e.g. one Professor, two Associate Professors and four Assistant Professors are required for creation a Discipline in addition to creation of specific administrative positions to assist the Discipline as per norms.

9. TRAINING POLICY

Training and Development of staff is an attempt to enhance potential of current and future performance of an employee by increasing ability to perform through continuous learning usually through changing his/her level of attitude, knowledge and skills⁶. This demands a serious consideration and planned move in the form of a policy document on the part of the institution. The diverse range of operations of the University necessitates specific training initiatives for faculty as well as different non-academic officers and staff. Major impetus is provided to orientation/induction programmes and refresher courses according to their needs and specific requirements.

9.1 Objectives of Training in IGNOU

The objectives of training as recommended by the Administrative Reforms Committee constituted by IGNOU in the year 1999⁴ are as under:

- *“To prepare the staff for active participation in the system at the point of entry – a sort of familiarization;*
- *To upgrade knowledge and skills and consequently enhance efficiency in performing the assigned functions through continuous training;*
- *To equip the staff to cope with varying responsibilities which have to be shouldered due to transfer of personnel from one functional area to another and also due to promotion from one cadre to another;*
- *To cope with new technologies and systems and innovations therein;*
- *To develop a positive attitude towards work, colleagues and students; and*
- *To inculcate a sense of belongingness to the institution.”*

These objectives are the guiding force behind different types of training programmes organised in the university at different levels.

9.2 Staff Development for Teachers and Academics

Well developed and trained faculty is required by an educational institution to provide its learners with access to quality education. In view of this, IGNOU is to focus on professional development activities for the faculty. The staff development policy of IGNOU for academics lays emphasis on wider career development opportunities in general focusing on open learning goals in particular⁷. The salient features of the policy are:

- ~ *Research facilities*
- ~ *Scope for participation in conferences and seminars*
- ~ *Scope for mobility*
- ~ *Periodic upgradation of skills and competencies especially in ODL*
- ~ *Career development activities*
- ~ *Capacity building activities*
- ~ *Comprehensive needs assessment of various categories of staff*

~ *Intensive interaction with diverse categories of staff for identification of training needs, and*

~ *Skill development of part-time faculty (counsellors etc.)*

9.3 Training of Non-academic Staff

The Training Policy of IGNOU for non-academic staff as recommended by the Administrative Reforms Committee under the chairpersonship of Prof. Habibur Rahman⁴ envisages the following:

- Training may be conducted in terms of a comprehensive policy for human resource development;
- Training programmes may be categorized as general training initiatives and specialized training initiatives;
- General training initiatives would cover aspects relevant to the role of staff in distance education in general and IGNOU system in particular focusing on the core areas like sensitivity towards distance learners, adherence to good practices, office norms and procedures and applications of information technology;
- Specialized training initiatives would refer to personnel matters, financial rules, printing, storage and delivery of self learning material, admission process, learning support services, communication skills, information and communication technology etc.;
- The attitudinal development will form an important component of all training programmes;
- Training on information technology be made compulsory for all and throughout the career starting from awareness programmes to specialized programmes; and
- Incentive in cash or kind may be offered for acquisition of more knowledge and skills of higher grade which may include exemption from payment of fees/reimbursement of fees paid for academic programmes and advance increment in the relevant pay scale.

The policy acts as a guiding force behind organisation of different types of training programmes for the non-academic staff of the university.

10. TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN IGNOU

The Open and Distance Learning is a new genre which is drastically different from face to face mode of learning. The people joining this system as service provider are either completely new to the system or hail from the conventional education system. In the latter case their bias towards the activities handled by them all these years comes in the way of their discharging the duties for the ODL mode. Being a complex system, it requires multiple skills and competencies.

The training needs of the staff working in IGNOU have been identified by scholars like Koul and Panda⁸, Koul and Murugan⁹, Mullick¹⁰, Manohar¹¹, Koul¹², Panda, Mishra, and Murthy¹³ and Mishra¹⁴ among others. All of them have emphasised that training should be imparted to the employees in the university at the following three levels:

- Short-term programmes in the form of induction/orientation focusing on single activities or concepts for the part-time and full time faculty and policy makers;
- Medium-term programmes of training for full time functionaries of ODL system; and
- Long term training programmes leading to development of staff according to future needs.

11. TRAINING UNITS IN IGNOU

IGNOU has a wide employee-base comprising, teachers, academics, administrative staff, technical staff and professionals (computer/ICT, media production etc.). As a general philosophy and as mentioned elsewhere, the functions and activities of ODL system are entirely different from a conventional university. The administrative structure and processes are equally important in this system for efficient functioning of the university. Therefore, the Human Resource Management (HRM) activities in the university have been broadly entrusted to the following Divisions:

11.1 Administration Division:

The Administration Division is responsible for planning, staffing and management of the administrative staff including the technical and professional (computer/Engineering only). This Division acts as cadre controller for all activities of the above mentioned categories of staff. It deals with processes and procedures for selection of staff, their promotion and transfer, salary fixation, leave records etc. It provides administrative support to the University for fulfillment of its objectives. Deployment of right type of manpower/support staff at the right place is the responsibility of this Division.

11.2 Academic Coordination Division:

The different activities pertaining to teachers, academics and professionals (media production) are managed by Academic Coordination Division. The responsibility of planning, staffing and management of the affairs of the said categories of staff lies with Academic Coordination Division. It deals with processes and procedures for selection of academic staff, their promotion and transfer, salary fixation, leave records and travel grant for attending the workshops/symposia/conferences etc. Prior to 1989 these activities were being carried out by the Administration Division. The erstwhile 'Teachers Affairs Division' was re-incarnated as Academic Coordination Division in 1995.

The following units in the University take care of the training and staff development requirements of academic and non-academic staff:

- **Administration Division:** This Division nominates the existing non-academic staff for training outside the university. In case of new entrants, a requisition is made to the Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE) in IGNOU for conducting an induction programme in-house. This practice is also followed for getting the special training programmes organised on policy matters from time to time.
- **Academic Coordination Division:** This Division provides travel grants to the teachers and academics for attending conferences/symposia/workshops in the country and abroad which is an important gateway to professional development of teachers and academics. The Teachers and academics are also nominated to other organizations for training/orientation/refresher programmes on their request. The Division organizes induction and specialised training/refresher programmes for academics with the help of STRIDE.
- **Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE):** The STRIDE of the university conducts training programmes, workshops, conferences and symposia for in-house faculty and academics as well as for the ODL functionaries from other dual mode institutions and state open universities. This Institute conducts training programmes for non-academic staff also.

In order to manage the large number and plan different staff training and development activities suitable to the specific people in the university, human resource database is created by the cadre controlling Divisions with periodic updates.

12. STRIDE – A TRAINING HUB

Since IGNOU is a premier institution in ODL and functions as a national resource centre, it is bound to have a robust training system that not only caters to its own requirements but also to those of other ODL institutions in the country including the open universities. Keeping this in view, IGNOU established a separate institute with staff training and development as its core activities, called Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE) in 1993. The STRIDE is functioning as a nodal agency for training and research in distance education in the South Asian Region. It is responsible for staff development, research and development, programme evaluation, and system development in open and distance learning and its allied fields¹².

The STRIDE (upgraded from Division of Distance Education in the year 1993) started offering the Post-graduate Diploma in Distance Education (PGDDE) which is an acclaimed programme, in the year 1987 as part of the mechanism to take care of the long term training and development requirements of the ODL functionaries. The Institute launched Master of Arts in Distance Education in the year 1993 as part of its long term strategy for training and development. Another programme Post-graduate Diploma in eLearning was

launched in the year 2010 to caters to the eLearning skill requirements of the ODL functionaries involved in design, development, and delivery of online programmes.

In addition to the above, induction, orientation, training of trainers, need-based and advanced level specialized programmes and programmes based on new ICT interventions in ODL system have become regular features of the Institute. The STRIDE has contributed immensely with its capacity building activities in the area of design, development and production of self-learning material. The broad principles of curriculum and self-instructional design developed by the Institute are followed not only by IGNOU but also by other institutions for transaction of knowledge to the adult learners¹⁶.

In order to train the large number, the Institute follows the ‘train the trainer’ approach so that trained people provide further systematic training to their colleagues in their respective institutions. It identifies small teams of trainers to provide training to the study centre functionaries who are associated with IGNOU and play a crucial role in student support service delivery mechanism of the university. In this way efforts are made to conduct as many training programmes as possible in different parts of the country so that a significant number of part-time functionaries are covered through training and skill development programmes.

13. TRAINING BUDGET

The IGNOU as a premier higher education institution of ODL mode at national level, has a huge student base of over 30 lac active students. This helps the University in generation of huge funds internally. The budgetary provisions on account of training and development activities of the staff are basically provided to Administration Division, Academic Coordination Division and STRIDE in addition to small amount allocated to different Schools of Studies for conducting seminars, conferences, symposia, workshop, etc. The training budget is primarily spent on training registration fee/training programme fee (in case of external agency), payment to resource persons (in case of in-house training), boarding and lodging of the participants (if from outside the headquarters), travelling and other expenses.

At the School level, the Budget is provided for conducting workshops, seminars, symposia and conferences depending on i) the size of the School, ii) number of faculty available, and iii) number of Disciplines housed in that School. National conferences and seminars are conducted by the university by making financial provision from the central budget available with Administration Division or Finance Division. However, the major portion of budget for training and development activities is provided to STRIDE. The budget includes payment of honorarium and TA/DA to the resource persons conducting the training programmes. The participants/staff sponsored by other institutions/universities for training through STRIDE are charged a non-refundable registration fee to cover the per capita cost of training programme.

The training programmes conducted by the STRIDE in other institutions are either sponsored by the host institution or are based on collection of participation fee to cover the expenses incurred on conduct of such programme. Such programmes end up with no extra cost or profit to the Institute. In addition to this, participation of faculty in conference, symposia, workshops, seminars etc. organised by other institutions/organisations is a major activity for professional development of academic staff. In order to fulfill this obligation, the university has introduced the Scheme of Travel Grant. The aspiring faculty members apply for financial assistance to meet the expenses on account of registration fee, TA/DA, boarding/lodging etc. for the events conducted within the country and abroad.

14. CONCLUSION

Staff training and development is essential for human resource development in any organisation irrespective of its horizontal and vertical dimensions. In order to gain maximum benefit out of training, it needs to be scientifically designed and systematically organised keeping in view the overall organisational objectives. It gains utmost importance in case of open and distance learning system because the new staff with its current experience and knowledge is not able to perform optimally without training in ODL system. In order to stimulate empathy in staff with regard to the requirements of distance learners, proper orientation and

sensitisation of the staff is essential. IGNOU being a pioneer institution of higher open and distance learning is able to cater to the training requirements of ODL system with its rich staff training and development base.

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