Perception towards quality and effectiveness of social work education through open and distance learning
A study in Delhi

Bishnu Mohan Dash
Department of Social Work, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to highlight the perception of the students towards the quality and effectiveness of social work education offered by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) through open and distance learning (ODL).

Design/methodology/approach – The sample size consisted of 150 students, 15 academic counsellors engaged in either teaching or development sectors, or faculty members of School of Social Work of IGNOU. The methods of data collection included interviews and content analysis. Interview schedule for students, interview guide for academic counsellors and interview guide for faculty members were used.

Findings – The study centres were allotted as per student's choice. Students were satisfied with the counsellors because of their support, availability, contact, accessibility and assisting the students to clearing their doubts. The study found that the student's attendance in counselling sessions was found to be negligible, even a large number of respondents were not aware of the ODL system. The study also shows that students face lots of problem with regard to their field work supervision and other components of field work as were also neglected.

Practical implications – The findings of the study are extremely relevant for formulating necessary guidelines for improving the social work education through ODL mode. The study recommends revision of course materials translated in Hindi language, holding of individual and group conferences regularly as well as proper evaluation of field work reports.

Originality/value – This is first such study conducted in India to examine the effectiveness of social work education through ODL.

Keywords Social work education through open and distance learning, India, Field work practice

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Distance education has become a platform for delivery of education around the globe (Gabriel *et al.*, 2015). The open and distance learning (ODL) system in India has emerged as an important mode for providing education to diverse sections of society. Besides that, the changing dynamics of the ODL system in the last six decades have been encouraging. With the proliferation in the ICT, the boundaries of classroom or campus are becoming blurred. As it is said, the temporal and spatial boundaries have disappeared (Kulandaiswamy, 1992) due to the impressive number of ODL institutions in the country bears testimony to the fact. Single-mode open universities have increased from 4 in number during the 8th Plan period to 14 in the 10th Plan period. The number of dual mode universities offering programmes

through the distance mode (DEIs) has risen to more than 200. This is due to the fact that the growth in the infrastructure for face-to-face instruction is unable to match the educational demands of the ever-increasing number of aspiring students. At present, nearly 25 per cent students of higher education in the country are enroled in the ODL system. One of the unique characteristics of ODL is reaching the unreached in which adults of all ages (after 18 years and above) participate in various educational programmes. Unlike the existing conventional systems where admission is usually given to freshers after completing their education from higher secondary schools or after graduation from regular colleges/universities, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) system facilitates people from every walk of life to benefit from the ODL system. Some of the beneficiaries include retired persons, house wives and people in employment.

The phrase distance learning itself is not a single construct but it is nonetheless used in this shorthand way as if it were. When applied to the education of social workers, the lack of clarity of definition deepens (Vicary *et al.*, 2018). Vicary *et al.* (2018) also cites Collins "distance learning is perceived as a subset of open learning provided usually to individual learners and study materials delivered to their home either through hard copy materials, television or other media" (Collins, 2008, p. 423).

The Masters in Social Work (MSW) programme in IGNOU was started in 2008 also offered in Nepal and Ethiopia both in Hindi and English medium. The BSW Programme was launched in the year 2004 also being offered both in the Hindi and English medium. (Saumya, 2013). The BSW and MSW Programmes at IGNOU were developed in response to requests from social service agencies across the country and the desire to reach the unreached towards an accessible and affordable graduate and post graduate education. With its national network of student support services, IGNOU provides social work education through distance mode in various parts of the country.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) vides its regulations dated 25 November 1985 laid down the minimum standards of instructions of the grant of the first degree through non-formal/distance education. With regard to private universities, the UGC laid down the UGC (establishment and maintenance of standards in private universities) Regulations 2003, which was notified in the Gazette on 12 December 2003. These Regulations, *inter alia*, laid down that a private university established under State Act shall operate ordinarily within the boundary of State concerned. However, after the development of main campus, in exceptional circumstances, the University may be permitted (by the UGC) to open off campus centres, off-shore campus and study centres after five years of its coming into existence, subject to certain conditions indicated therein.

State wise distribution of universities offering social work through ODL
According to the data available from the UGC, there are 25 universities offering social work through ODL in India. The state wise distribution of universities presented in Table I shows social work education programmes offered via the ODL mode in Indian universities.

In India, the maximum number of universities/institutions is located in the state of Tamil Nadu followed by Uttar Pradesh. Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Maharashtra have two universities/institutions each. The rest of the states have one university each. However, given the vast geographical and demographical landscape of India with hugely populated 29 states and 7 union territories, the number of universities delivering social work programme via ODL is meagre. If all the state open universities take initiatives to offer quality social work education through ODL programme then all the states could be well covered. It is to be mentioned here that IGNOU, the largest Open University in India, having reach to all the states and union territories in the country is offering social work education through distance mode in various study centres.

Name of the state	Name of the university	Level of social work education
Andhra Pradesh	Acharya Nagarjuna University	MA (Social Work)
	Dravidian University	MPhil (Social Work)
		PhD (Social Work)
		MA (Social Work)
Haryana	Maharshi Markandeswar University	Post graduate diploma in Social Work
Karnataka	Karnataka State Women's University	BA (Social Work)
Maharashtra	Padamshree Dr D.Y. Patil Vidyapith	BA (Social Work)
	Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth	MA (Social Work)
		MA (Social Work)
Odisha	Utkal University	MA (Social Work)
Rajasthan	Janardan Rai Nagar Rajasthan Vidyapeeth	MA (Social Work)
	Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University	BA (Social Work)
		MA (Social Work)
		BA (Social Work)
Tamil Nadu	Annamalai University	MA (Social Work)
	St Peters Institute of Higher Education and Research	BA (Social Work)
	Alagappa University	MA (Social Work)
	Periyar University	MA (Social Work)
	Vinayak Mission University	MA (Social Work)
		MA (Social Work)
Uttar Pradesh	Rajarshi Tandon Open University	MA (Social Work)
	Sam Higginbottom Institute of Agriculture, technology and Sciences (Deemed University)	MA (Social Work)
		Certificate Programme in Social Work
	Teerthankar Mahaveer University	
West Bengal	Netaji Subash Open University	MA (Social Work)
	Rabindra Bharti University	MA (Social Work)
Delhi	Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi	BA (Social Work)
		MA (Social Work)
		MPhil (Social Work)
		PhD (Social Work)
		PG Diploma in Social Work
Chhattisgarh	Chhattisgarh Open University	MA (Social Work)
Nagaland	Global Open University	MA (Social Work)
		BA (Social Work)

Table I.
List of universities/ institutions offering social work education through open and distance learning

Social work education through ODL mode – the IGNOU efforts
The School of Social Work (SOSW) at IGNOU started offering social work programmes since 2004 and is spread to different states and union territories (Table II).

SOSW, IGNOU, has reached all the states with its 56 regional centres in India with an equal distribution of having minimum one centre in every state (Table V). While Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have four regional centres each, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Delhi and Kerala each have three regional centres and the other states and union territories either have one or two regional centres. Every regional centre in turn has hundreds of study centres; these study centres are facilitated by the regional centres and other supports and services are provided by the headquarters, IGNOU.

The University offers several programmes (228 in 2016) leading to certificates, diplomas and degrees of professional, vocational, technical and awareness generating areas. IGNOU is also offering BSW, MSW, PGDSW, MPhil and PhD in social work. In fact, IGNOU is probably the only university in India to have indigenously developed textbooks on social work, supplemented with audio and video programmes in both English and Hindi. There is

S. No.	State/UT	RC–IGNOU	S. No.	State/UT	RC–IGNOU
1	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	1	17	Maharashtra	3
2	Andhra Pradesh	3	18	Manipur	1
3	Arunachal Pradesh	1	19	Meghalaya	1
4	Assam	2	20	Mizoram	1
5	Bihar	4	21	Nagaland	1
6	Chandigarh	1	22	New Delhi	3
7	Chhattisgarh	1	23	Orissa	2
8	Goa	1	24	Pondicherry	–
9	Gujarat	2	25	Punjab	1
10	Haryana	1	26	Rajasthan	2
11	Himachal Pradesh	1	27	Sikkim	1
12	Jammu and Kashmir	2	28	Tamil Nadu	2
13	Jharkhand	2	29	Tripura	1
14	Karnataka	2	30	Uttar Pradesh	4
15	Kerala	3	31	Uttarakhand	1
16	Madhya Pradesh	2	32	West Bengal	3
Total					56

Source: Thomas (2015)

Table II.
Social work education
through IGNOU
regional centres

also interactive radio counselling and teleconferencing sessions for social work students, which no other university in the country provides.

The School of Social Work at IGNOU
The SOSW was established on 16 August 2007 with the approval of the President of India who is also the Visitor of the university. The school currently offers eight programmes of study in social work and two on HIV and family education. Over 30, 000 students currently pursue these programmes of study through ODL from within India and 12 other countries from India's neighbourhood and the African continent. This makes SOSW the largest School of Social Work. SOSW gives utmost importance to research and has about more 60 students pursuing MPhil/PhD currently. The school also recognised Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kalamassery as a Research Centre for research work.

SOSW is known for developing indigenous material on social work keeping in view the core value of competence. The school has produced over 200 titles with ISBN numbers and offers over 60 courses on social work and closely related topics in both English and Hindi. Apart from print materials, the school also has produced about 75 video programmes, which are on regular telecast and most of them are available in YouTube. The school also has direct interactive teleconferencing sessions and interactive radio counselling for social work students within India and for the students covered under Pan African e- network.

Social work education through ODL mode has gained wider acceptance in India as it offers college/university level of education which is flexible and open in terms of methods and pace of learning; selection of courses and subjects; eligibility for enrolment; age of entry; conduct of examination; and implementation of the programmes of study. Besides providing opportunities for adding qualifications, it has remained an important source for updating knowledge and acquiring new knowledge in diverse disciplines.

Review of literature
In terms of student learning and satisfaction, distance education courses have been found to be comparable to traditional classroom courses (Schoech and Helton, 2001). Rafferty and Waldman (2006) reiterated the need for social workers to stay abreast of communication technologies that support virtual contact and practice. Distance education has become a

critical method of delivering social work education because it has opened access to education for many people, including those in rural areas and in underserved communities, those who are far along in the careers, and those who are financially strained. Recently social work education is being completely delivered through distance education via online. The University of North Dakota and Texas State University offer complete MSW programme through online. The Metropolitan State College Denver and Florida State University offers online BSW and MSW programmes, respectively. Even in Canada, the University of Calgary offers a one-year MSW degree online. In one study "online student" outcomes were comparable to the outcomes for "face-to-face" students in terms of knowledge and skills gained in class (Wilke and Vinton, 2006).

One of the major limitations in the distance education in social work is the lack of effective field work practice and supervision leading to lack of competency in doing work in the field. With respect to assessing practice effectiveness, the profession faces a much more complex and daunting task than those in professions where outcomes are more concrete. Documenting those social workers interventions halted further delinquency or resolved marital conflicts is usually more difficult than measuring whether an engineer's plans produced a good bridge or a surgeon's operation cured a physical defect (Bisno and Cox, 1997). Since its inception, social work education through ODL mode in India is often debated for its quality and standards (Dash, 2018). Due to the absence of a systematic study to evaluate the effectiveness of social work education through ODL mode, it is always considered inferior to the programmes offered through regular/conventional mode. However, the easy access, affordability and convenience for the marginalised and disadvantaged sections of population, the distance education system has received immense popularity and growth in India (Dash and Botcha, 2018).

Siegel *et al.* (1998) cited in Vernon *et al.* (2009) examined the status of distance learning in social work and foreshadowed the emergence of distance education as a viable medium for delivering accredited education. The system of ODL has been highly flexible and dynamic to suit the convenience of learners. The technology of designing and developing self-instructional material (SIM), which is very different than writing a textbook, is based on a well-researched area taking into account self-learners' competence level and understanding, availability of time and similar such factors. In essence, the purpose is to ensure that the learner feels encouraged to go through SIM in print or Interactive Multimedia mode without feeling deprived of the availability of teachers on a regular basis. The programme delivery of course provides condensed contact sessions and field experience or practices as per requirement of the type of programmes (Dikshit, 2016). Distance education has great potential in India but to realise this potential we have to ensure its standards and quality and equivalence to other modes of education. It should not be thought of as a financially cheap alternative or as a cash cow for raising financial resources (Veeraraghavan, 2016). A number of studies have been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of distance education. The various aspects of distance education like learner outcomes, cost effectiveness and the growth of students have been studied by Garrison (1987), Fulford and Zhang (1993), Holmberg (1986) and Verduin and Clark (1991), and agree on the effectiveness of distance education. Some other research studies conducted by Berman and Wilson (1995), Forster and Rehner (1998), Raymond (1996) and Thyer Polk and Gaudin (1997) have examined the quality of distance education programmes in social work in terms of technology related issues, faculty and students' perceptions and cost effectiveness revealed positives outcomes of distance education.

It is gaining prominence because it reaches a broader student audience, addresses student needs, saves money and uses principles of modern learning pedagogy (Zarghami and Hausafus, 2002). Although differences exist between distance education and face-to-face instruction, evidence suggests that distance education can make graduate study available to

a larger number of students and that it is at least as effective as classroom instruction, in terms of student learning (Weinbach *et al.*, 1984 quoted in Blakely, 1991). However, in India, social work education through open and distance mode is still looked at by social work educators and practitioners with suspicion, some have rejected it altogether while some still question, exhibit inhibition, raise doubts and concerns and are still not ready to accept it completely (Lange, 1986 cited from Pawar, 2000). There is no research available in India on the effectiveness of social work through distance education as it is still in its nascent stage. The flexibility of the system and the rapid advancement of technology have contributed to the recognition of ODL as an effective means of education. Though the technological facility to impart distance education varies from institutions to institutions, it is accepted by learners who are marginalised and disadvantaged owing to various reasons. The demand for distance education in India is growing as it provides flexibility in learning. ODL offers a more convenient and cost-effective method of learning to its students. Governments worldwide are promoting more and more use of ODL as a complementary approach to traditional educational structures in order to meet the new and changing demands for education and training in the twenty-fifth century (Gutierrez, 2010). So, the study has attempted to examine the role and effectiveness of IGNOU in offering social work education through ODL.

Methodology

The paper is based on the responses of the students (BSW and MSW), academic counsellors and four faculty members of the SOSW, IGNOU. In this chapter, various aspects relating to the quality and effectiveness of social work education through ODL mode has been discussed. The sample consisted of 150 students selected through simple random sampling method, 15 academic counsellors and 4 faculty members of SOSW of IGNOU selected through convenience sampling. The academic counsellors were mostly engaged in colleges/ universities. Out of 15 academic counsellors, 3 were from development sectors.

The data were collected both from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources of data comprised of the students, academic counsellors, from various centres of IGNOU, namely, Laxmibai College, Shyamlal College, Jamia Millia Islamia, All India women's conference, Urmi Vikas charitable trust, Sradhananda college and faculty members of SOSW, IGNOU for gaining first-hand information from the respondents. The secondary sources of data were tapped and information procured was analysed through content analysis. This primarily pertained to the UGC reports, IGNOU literature on social work, NAAC reports, IGNOU prospectus and IGNOU annual reports and other relevant documents.

The methods of data collection included interviews and content analysis. Interview schedule for students, interview guide for academic counsellors and interview guide for faculty members were used. Data were processed both manually and through the use of computer programmes. The processing of analysis involved categorising the qualitative raw data (obtained through administering interview schedule) under some common headings and then coding the same. The quantitative data were precoded. The codes were then transferred to the master sheets and then to Excel spreadsheet. Through Excel, tables and figures were made for easy understanding and viewing. Diagrammatic representation of data was also attempted to provide clarity and easy comprehension.

Findings and discussions

Reasons for joining social work courses

The study has aimed to find out the reasons for admission into BSW and MSW programmes. About 30 per cent of the respondents reported that they joined BSW programme to help people effectively. A significant section of the respondents also viewed

that they can do something for the society and aware of the people about their needs, problems and resources (Figure 1).

The MSW student respondents also gave multiple responses for joining the MSW programme. A large size of the respondents reported that they joined the MSW programme for helping people effectively.

Some of the respondents also viewed that they wanted to do something for the society. They can pursue their jobs simultaneously along their study. Most of them got information about BSW and MSW programmes of IGNOU from their friends and family members. More than 30 per cent of the respondents got to know about the BSW/MSW programme from their teachers and faculty members (Table III).

Allotment of study centre

The study also aims to find out whether the study centre allotted to the students were as per their choice. A majority of the students reported that the study centre was allotted to them as per their choice. It helps the students to visit the study centre without many hassles. A majority of the MSW students viewed that the study centre coordinator was very cooperative
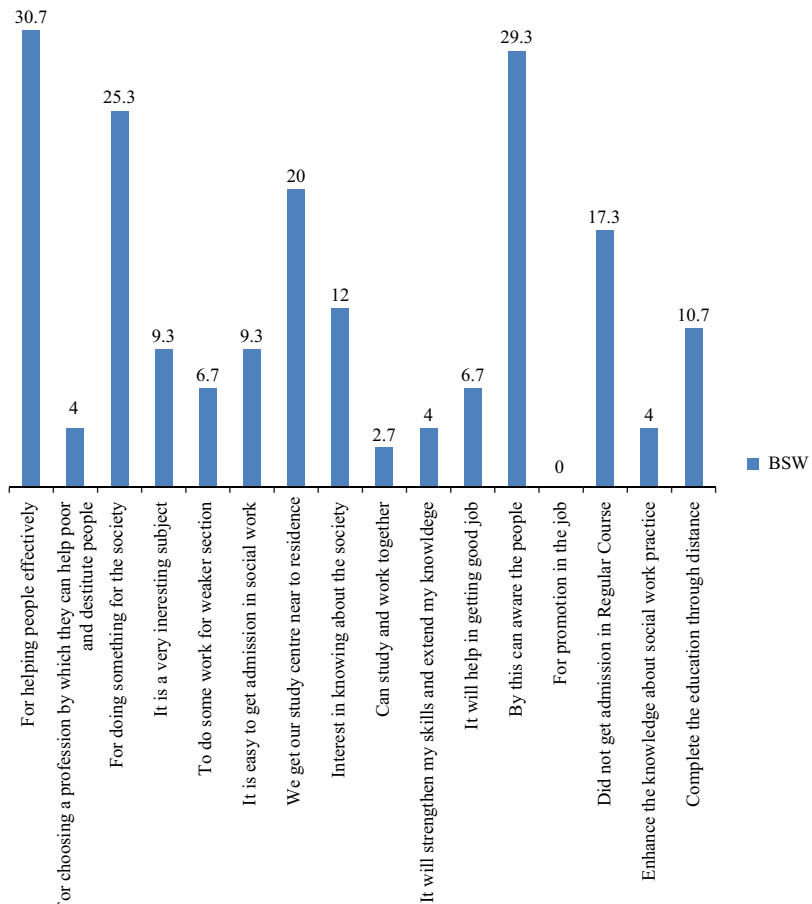
Figure 1.
Reasons for joining social work courses among BSW students

to them and used to clarify any doubts related to submission of examination form, assignment submission and field work related issues (Figure 2). However, a significant number of BSW students viewed that study centre coordinator never cooperated with them (Figure 3).
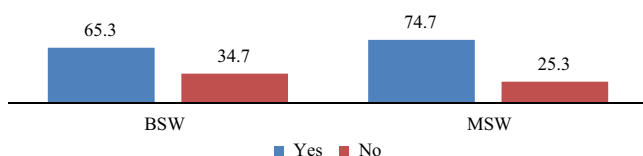
Awareness of the ODL system
Awareness of the ODL system is very important for the success of any ODL programme. ODL programme is quite different from the correspondence education. In the present study, a large number of respondents about 100 per cent BSW students and 92 per cent of the MSW students were not aware of the ODL system. They have not even heard of the term ODL. They consider the MSW and BSW programmes offered by IGNOU as correspondence course (Figure 4).

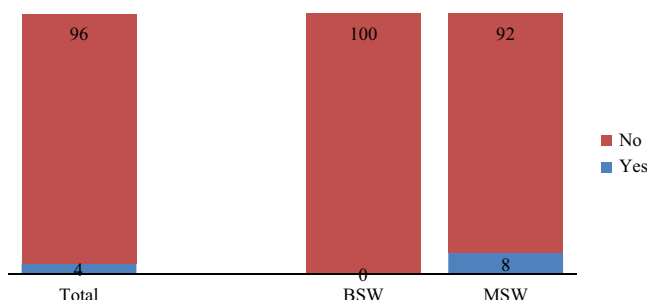|	BSW	MSW	Total
Friends	60 (45)	45.3 (34)	52.7 (79)
Family members	38.7 (29)	30.7 (23)	34.7 (52)
Newspapers	9.3 (7)	10.7 (8)	10 (15)
Organisation staff	0 (0)	20 (15)	10 (15)
Teacher/faculty	16 (12)	45.3 (34)	30.7 (46)

Table III.
Source of information
regarding BSW/MSW
course of IGNOU
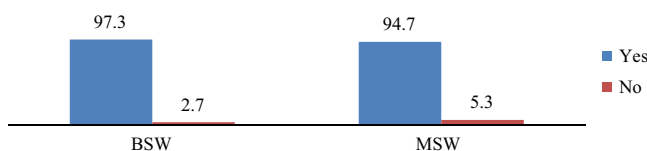
Figure 2.
Allotment of study
centre of choice

Figure 3.
Coordinators
cooperation with
the students

Figure 4.
Awareness about
ODL system

Satisfaction with counselling sessions

By and large a majority of the students were satisfied with the counselling provided by the academic counsellors. From the responses of 150 students, it is found that 72 per cent of the MSW students and 65 per cent of the BSW students were satisfied with the counsellors because of their support, availability, contact, accessibility and assisting the students to clearing their doubts (Figure 5). The respondents who were not satisfied with the counselling sessions viewed that academic counsellors/faculty members were not regular and sincere in their classes. They used to come late and sometimes remain absent in their counselling sessions. The respondents suggested that the number of counselling sessions should be increased.

About 77 per cent of the respondents viewed their relationship with academic counsellors as cooperative. The academic counsellors provide them continuous guidance in the matters of counselling, field work report writing, assignment submission and preparation for the term end examinations. As compared to the BSW students, the MSW students reported that academic counsellors were more cooperative to them.
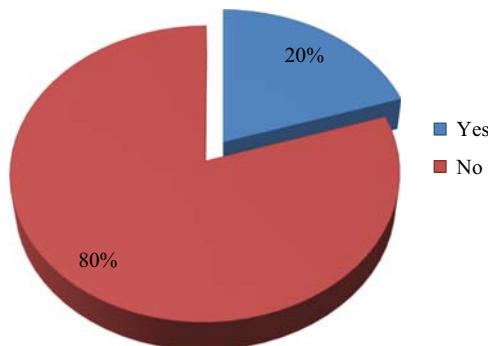
A majority of the academic counsellor's reported that students were irregular in attending the counselling sessions. Most of them reported that SIMs are easy to understand and they do not feel it necessary to attend the lectures. A significant number of respondents also viewed that as per IGNOU, student's attendance is not mandatory. A majority of the students are also self-employed and find it difficult to attend the counselling sessions (Figures 6 and 7).
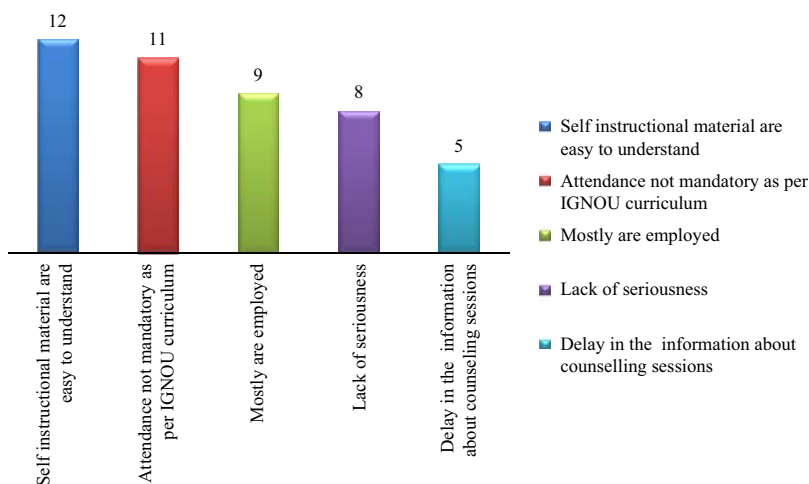
Views on self-instructional course materials

SIMs developed by IGNOU are indigenous in nature. These materials are specially prepared and designed for the BSW/MSW target groups. Though in the ODL mode, the students get very little opportunity to interact with the teachers and peer groups in classroom situations.
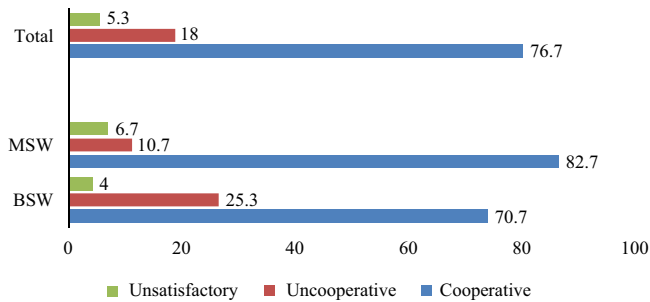
Figure 5.
Relationship with academic counsellors

Figure 6.
Academic counsellors views on student's regularity

Self instructional material are
easy to understand

Attendance not mandatory as per
IGNOU curriculum

Mostly are employed

Lack of seriousness

Delay in the information about
counselling sessions

Figure 7.
Reason of
casual attendance

This loss is compensated by a special kind of self-learning material which includes all the study materials developed to stimulate independent learning.

These course materials are prepared in such a way that a learner can learn from the materials independently without any difficulty. Majority of the student respondents (86 per cent) reported that the SIMs are easy to understand. They cover the basic concepts, statistical information and very helpful to the students in navigating through the course materials. About 91 per cent of the BSW students and 81 per cent of the MSW students expressed satisfaction with regard to the course materials as good and updated materials. About 40 per cent of the respondents who were dependent on course materials in Hindi literature found it difficult to understand. They viewed that course materials in Hindi should be written in a simple and lucid language.

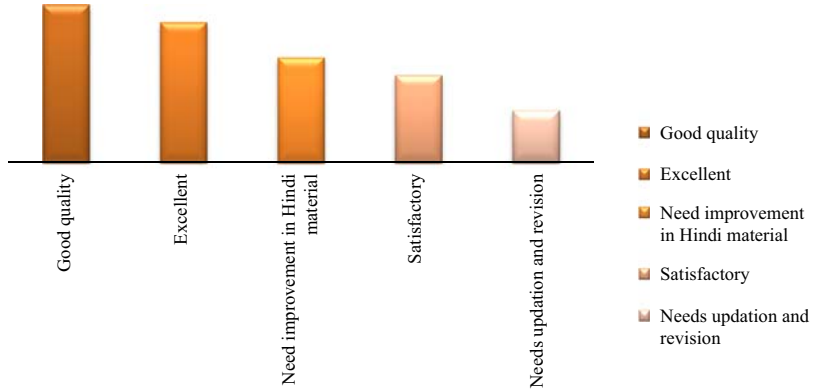### Views of academic counsellors on the quality of course materials

However, a majority of the academic counsellors reported that the SIMs developed by IGNOU are good and excellent as it is written by various experts and mostly senior academicians engaged in various universities in India (Figure 8). A significant number of academic counsellors suggested that the SIMs produced in Hindi medium need improvement and revision. However, a few counsellors suggested that updating and revision is required in the SIMs so that the latest developments in policies, theories are incorporated in the text (Figure 9).

Good and updated material ■ Needs revision
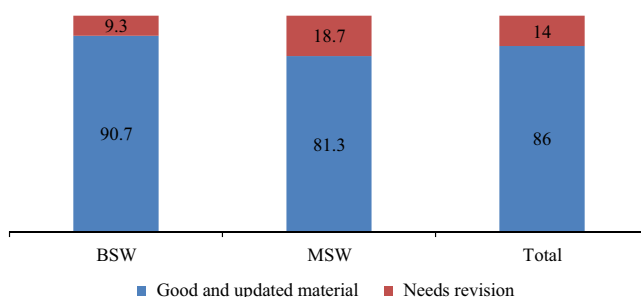
Figure 8.
Quality of
course materials

More than 92 per cent of the respondents were not aware of the quality of instructions provided to them through other multimedia programmes. They were not aware of the video, audio and teleconferencing programmes provided by IGNOU for them (Figure 10).

A majority of the academic counsellors reported that there were significant differences in the course materials produced for the BSW programme and the MSW programme (Figure 11). The academic counsellors reported that the MSW course materials are much more comprehensive than the BSW course materials.

Figure 9.
Views of academic counsellors on the quality of course materials
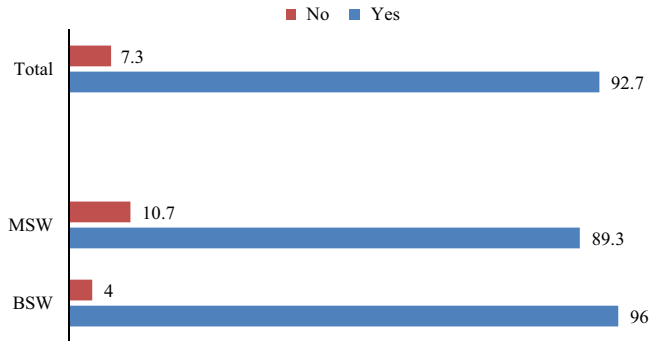
Figure 10.
Participation in radio, teleconferencing and video programme
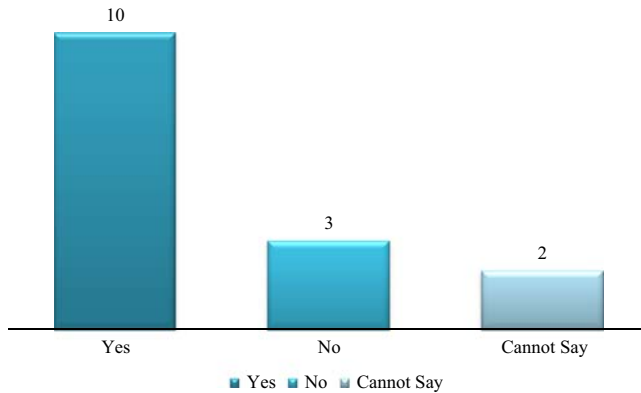
Figure 11.
Difference in BSW and MSW material
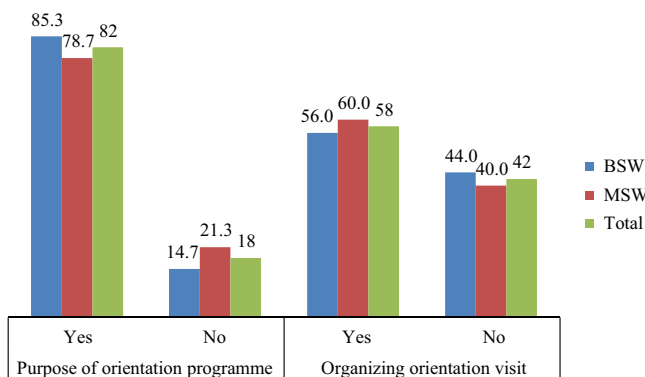
Orientation programme
The orientation programme informs the students about basic objectives, components, values and ethics of professional practice in social work. The UGC Model curriculum also mentions two types of orientation: orientation to social work practice and orientation to social work setting/agency of placement. NAAC manual for social work education 2005 has also specified that orientation is essential for making aware of the students regarding the objectives of field placement.

The major objectives of the orientation visits are to acquire observation skills and develop a spirit of enquiry, to understand society responses to social problems through various services, to understand, appreciate and develop ability to critically evaluate the initiative of voluntary and government programmes. Orientation visits also aims at developing an appreciation for social work intervention in these programmmes by recording relevant information about the client system and the problem/concern; the selection of programmes/strategies for solving the problem and its relevance to the client system: the role of social workers and its relevance to the client's needs and the problems; the relationship between micro problems and the macro problems, the appropriateness of the organisations resources and the nature of intervention, gaps identified and suggestions (IGNOU MSWL 007, 2009, p. 75). Regarding the orientation visit, the researcher tried to find out awareness of the students regarding the purpose of the orientation visit. Majority of the students (82 per cent) reported that they were aware of the orientation visit. In total, 58 per cent of the students viewed that their study centre organises orientation visit of their students before they begin for their field work. A majority of the respondents viewed that the study centre organises one day orientation programme for both MSW and BSW students (Figure 12). However, the rest of the respondents reported that orientation programmes are held in the mid of their academic sessions.

Concurrent field work
Concurrent field work is one of the important components of field work practice in social work education. As per NAAC Manual, 2005 and UGC Model curriculum 2001, concurrent field work provides the students an opportunity to develop intervention skills in field situations and aims at developing professional skills among the students. As per IGNOU field work manual, MSW students are required to undergo 45 days concurrent placement every year and the BSW students to undergo 25 days of concurrent field work placement every year.

The study shows that majority of the students were aware of the various components of field work practice (Figure 13). The results show that all the students were placed in either governmental or non-governmental organisations for field work placement. None of the student was placed in the open community settings.
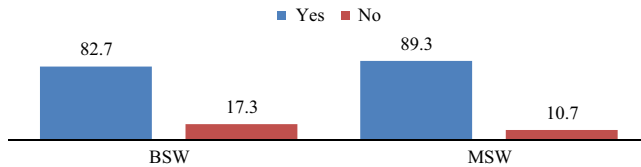

Figure 12.
Orientation
programme

A large number of the respondents reported that they were not given the same kind of treatment and importance to the students placed for their concurrent field work than their counterparts from the other conventional schools offering BSW and MSW programme (Figure 14). A majority of the students (90 per cent) reported that they were placed in the agencies where the professional social workers are employed who guide them in carrying out their field work. A majority of the students also reported that they contact with the agencies for their placement without any support of the school supervisors (Figure 15). Moreover, study centres do not provide specific list of agencies where students can go for their field work placement. Students were free to select the agencies as per their choice for their field work placement.

In the BSW and MSW field work curriculum, students are required to apply various methods of social work in their field of practice. Besides that, students are expected to be competent to apply various tools, techniques and principles of social work in their field work practice. Students are required to practice mainly six methods in field settings. These methods are social case work, social group work, community organisation, social work research, social action and social welfare administration. The study has aimed to obtain information relating to the methods practiced by the students during their field work practicum (Table IV).

The students of the MSW expressed that they had learned various methods of problem solving and intervention skills by the use of various methods particularly social case work, group work, community organisation, social action, social welfare administration and social work research methods. The MSW students reported that they had successfully used social case work, social group work methods in the field settings. A large size of MSW students also reported that they had used social work research methods during their field work practice. For BSW students the results showed different findings. A large number of BSW students reported that during their first year programme, they only used to understand the
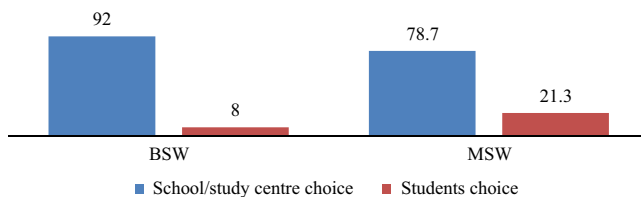

Figure 13.
Awareness about various components of field work practice

Figure 14.
Same importance or treatment compared to regular students
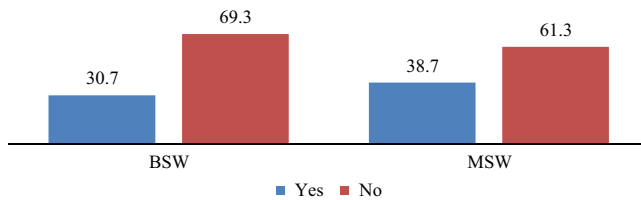
Figure 15.
Basis of allotment of field supervisor

field settings. However, in the second and third year they have used social case work and group work methods (Table V).

A large section of the BSW and MSW students reported that the guidance of the school/college supervisor helped them to some extent in the development of various skills required for successfully performing in the field work settings. Most of them reported that they had learned significantly the application of social work tools and techniques in the field settings.

Individual and group conferences

Individual conferences help the students to sort out their specific problems related to field work as well as those related to their studies. Accordingly, IGNOU guidelines for field work (IGNOU MSWL 007, 2009) states that at least five individual conferences and five group conferences to be conducted. It should be made clear to the students that only those problems should be brought to the individual conference that cannot be brought to the group conference. The problem can be specific to the agency or the learner otherwise group conferences are better place to discuss field work matters as all other students will also benefit from the experience. (NAAC, 2005) Individual conference is also one of the important roles of supervisors. It also states that individual conferences to be held for at least 30 min per student per week. During individual conferences, reports are to be checked, making written comments on them and discuss the same in the individual conferences. The UGC first and second review committee on social work education also views that individual conferences are essential in the process of supervision in field work. In the present study only 20 per cent of the respondents reported that individual conferences are held with the supervisors and rest of the respondents reported that individual and group conferences are rarely held.

Academic counsellor's views on student's reports

Most of the counsellors reported that students copy their field work reports as well as their assignments from their peers. The IGNOU assignments are also available from the market in readymade form and students just copy from it and submit to the study centres (Figure 16).

Methods of social work practiced during field work (MSW and BSW)			
Methods of social work	BSW	MSW	Total
Social case work	53.3 (40)	57.3 (43)	55.3 (83)
Social group work	37.3 (28)	48 (36)	42.7 (64)
Community organisation	21.3 (16)	25.3 (19)	23.3 (35)
Social action	4 (3)	5.3 (4)	4.7 (7)
Social welfare administration	2.7 (2)	8 (6)	5.3 (8)
Social work research	37.3 (28)	68 (51)	52.7 (79)

Table IV.
Methods of social work practice during field work

	BSW Great extent	BSW Some extent	BSW Hardly any	MSW Great extent	MSW Some extent	MSW Hardly any
Enhancing skills	10.7 (8)	60 (45)	29.3 (22)	17.3 (13)	72 (54)	10.7 (8)
Improving theoretical knowledge	16 (12)	70.7 (53)	13.3 (10)	36 (27)	60 (45)	4 (3)
Developing values and ethics	9.3 (7)	57.3 (43)	33.3 (25)	16 (12)	52 (39)	32 (24)
Changing attitudes	13.3 (10)	68 (51)	18.7 (14)	22.7 (17)	73.3 (55)	4 (3)
Applying methods	28 (21)	62.7 (47)	9.3 (7)	37.3 (28)	57.3 (43)	5.3 (4)
Application of social work principles	32 (24)	57.3 (43)	10.7 (8)	22.7 (17)	65.3 (49)	12 (9)
Application of tools and techniques	9.3 (7)	78.7 (59)	12 (9)	17.3 (13)	77.3 (58)	5.3 (4)

Table V.
Development of skills due to the guidance of school supervisor

Contribution of the school supervisors

School supervisor plays a significant role in grooming the students of social work to be professional social workers. The school supervisor has to undertake various initiatives to capacitate the learners in the development of their skills, knowledge levels, values, attitudes, etc. Most importantly, the school supervisor helps the students to apply theoretical knowledge taught in the classroom to apply in the practical settings. The role and contributions of the school supervisor in guiding and supervising the students of social work is presented in Table VI and Figure 17.

Supervision aims at teaching the core skills of social work like interviewing, listening, observation, recording and administrative tasks like planning, drafting, budgeting, etc., professional aptitudes like accountability, responsibility, punctuality and commitment to the work have to be imbibed by the students (IGNOU MSWL 007, 2009).

The supervisor should also plan the field work in consultation with the agency officials keeping in mind the objectives of the agency, the existing programmes of the agency, the resources available to the agency and the needs of the community/client are to be taken into consideration. The role of the learner should be clearly explained to the agency officials. She/he has to be given only those tasks that help in achieving the social work objectives. A majority of the respondents reported that the guidance of the field work supervisor helped them to some extent in developing their skills relating to developing skills, knowledge, changing attitudes and in the application of social work tools and techniques in the field settings.

The study also pointed out that the school/college coordinator allots field work supervisor to the students. Some of the respondents also pointed out that sometimes their preference for school supervisor is also considered.

The supervisors have a multi-faceted academic role. They can aid learners by helping them to improve their knowledge and skills, establish priorities among work tasks and develop increased self-awareness. They also orient learners to social work values and
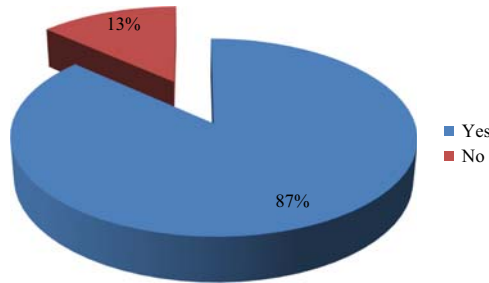
Figure 16.
Plagiarism in field work reports/ assignments

	BSW			MSW		
	Great extent	Some extent	Hardly any	Great extent	Some extent	Hardly any
Enhancing skills	22.7 (17)	64 (48)	13.3 (10)	25.3 (19)	70.7 (53)	4 (3)
Improving theoretical knowledge	4 (3)	78.7 (59)	17.3 (13)	14.7 (11)	52 (39)	33.3 (25)
Developing values and ethics	22.7 (17)	68 (51)	9.3 (7)	25.3 (19)	65.3 (49)	9.3 (7)
Changing attitudes	22.7 (17)	74.7 (56)	2.7 (2)	30.7 (23)	52 (39)	17.3 (13)
Applying methods	25.3 (19)	52 (39)	22.7 (17)	22.7 (17)	46.7 (35)	30.7 (23)
Application of social work principles	17.3 (13)	50.7 (38)	32 (24)	24 (18)	54.7 (41)	21.3 (16)
Application of tools and techniques	16 (12)	81.3 (61)	2.7 (2)	22.7 (17)	70.7 (53)	6.7 (5)

Table VI.
Development of skills due to the guidance of agency supervisor

how to use social work knowledge while dealing with clients during field work process (IGNOU MSWL 007, 2009).

About 30 per cent of the respondents reported that the school supervisors played a significant role and have made great impact with regard to enhancing skill sets, improving knowledge levels, imbibing values, changing attitudes, as well as applying social work methods, principles, tools and techniques which were of great use in the field work settings. A significant section of the respondents also viewed that the school supervisors were less interested and put little time in checking their reports and were very casual in their approaches towards individual and group conferences. A few percentages of the respondents (16 per cent) were of the opinion that the school supervisors never paid any interest and also never spent any time except the counselling sessions to enhance the skills, competencies and knowledge levels of the students (Figures 18 and 19).
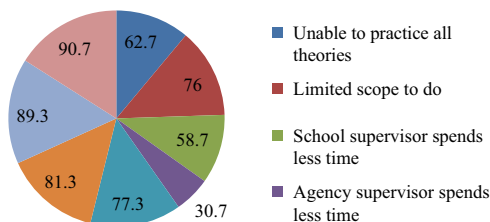
Sources of employment for BSW and MSW students
The study also tried to find out the employment opportunities for the students after passing out BSW and MSW Courses from IGNOU. A large number of MSW students (88 per cent) were not aware of campus placement drive undertaken by IGNOU. Similar is the case with BSW students. In total, 68 per cent of the BSW respondents were not even aware of campus placement programme undertaken by IGNOU (Figure 20).

A large number of BSW students (61.3 per cent) of the respondents were not aware of employment opportunities available after BSW programme and even more than 29 per cent of the respondents were not even aware of available employment opportunities for them.
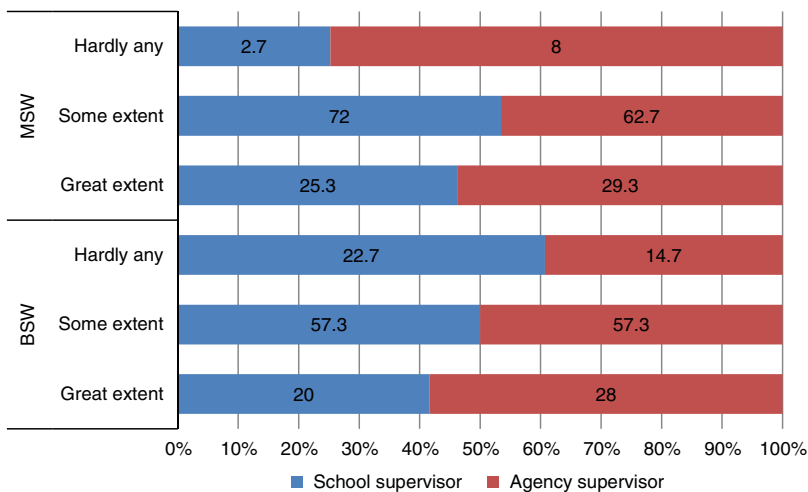
Figure 17.
Students' perception
towards quality of
supervision

Figure 18.
Challenges and
constraints during
field work practice
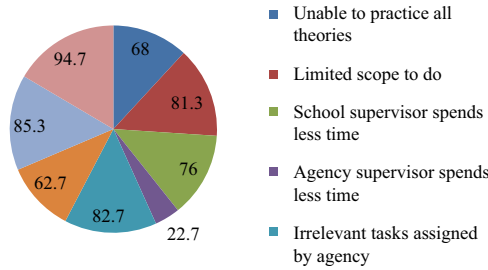at college level
(BSW students)

A significant number of BSW students (29.3 per cent) of the reported that NGOs are the major source of employment for them (Tables VII and VIII).

A large size of the respondents was not even aware of salary structure paid to MSW/BSW students after completing their course through ODL mode in IGNOU. However, the most of the BSW students were not aware of job opportunities available for students as compared to the MSW students.
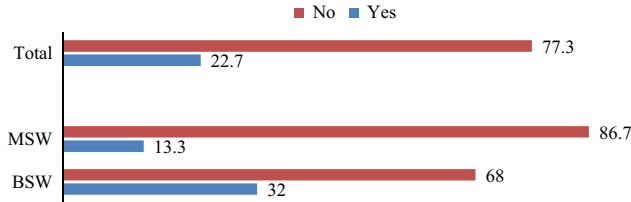
Conclusion

IGNOU is doing a remarkable work in providing education through ODL mode and opportunity to grow in life to all sections of society. It has revolutionized education system in India and has made education accessible to everyone as its presence is felt in all the states and union territories of India and also in few foreign countries. It is the first school

Figure 19.
Challenges and constraints during field work practice at college level (MSW students)

Unable to practice all theories
Limited scope to do
School supervisor spends less time
Agency supervisor spends less time
Irrelevant tasks assigned by agency

Figure 20.
Awareness about campus placement of students

No   Yes

Total	77.3 / 22.7
MSW	86.7 / 13.3
BSW	68 / 32

	BSW	MSW	Total
NGOs	29.3 (22)	30.7 (23)	30 (45)
Government sectors	2.7 (2)	9.3 (7)	6 (9)
Self-employment	6.7 (5)	30.7 (23)	18.7 (28)
Not aware	61.3 (46)	29.3 (22)	45.3 (68)

Table VII.
Major source of employment after education

	BSW	MSW	Total
Less than 5,000	4 (3)	9.3 (7)	6.7 (10)
5,000–10,000	25.3 (19)	25.3 (19)	25.3 (38)
10,000–15,000	5.3 (4)	28 (21)	16.7 (25)
15,000–20,000	2.7 (2)	5.3(4)	4 (6)
Above 20,000	1.3 (1)	2.7 (2)	2 (3)
Not aware	61.3 (46)	29.3 (22)	45.3 (68)

Table VIII.
Monthly packages

of social work in India to take social work education to all the states and union territories in the country. It has developed indigenous SIMs and uses multimedia approach for imparting social work teaching and training. It is adopting all means and is coming up with new ideas and technology to provide quality education. IGNOU has established itself as Peoples University in India. Not only are students found everywhere and anywhere undertaking their studies and earning their degrees, but geographical boundaries between nations no longer appear to have much relevance. As the new education paradigm irretrievably alters the way teaching and learning is conducted, the application of modern educational ICTs has a major role to play (Oladokun and Aina, 2011). The study found that a majority of the students had joined the course because they wanted to do something for the society. A majority of the students reported that the study centre was allotted to them as per their choice, so that they were able to attend the counselling sessions conveniently. It helps the students to visit the study centre without many hassles. A majority of the students were satisfied with the counsellors because of their support, availability, contact, accessibility and assisting the students to clearing their doubts. However, the student's attendance in counselling sessions was found to be negligible. In the present study, a large number of respondents were not aware of the ODL system. They have not even heard of the term ODL. The study reported satisfaction of the students with the counselling provided by the academic counsellors. Students were satisfied with the counsellors because of their support, availability, contact, accessibility and assisting the students to clearing their doubts. The study also shows that students face lots of problem with regard to their field work supervision. The field work practice component is not successfully conducted in the study centres selected for study. The orientation programme is not held timely, so they face lots of problems in pursuing their field work. Individual and group conferences which are one of the important components of supervision are practiced merely as rituals and are very much neglected in these study centres. The study recommends revision of course materials translated in Hindi language which should be very simple and easy to understand. It also recommends that the individual and group conferences should not be practiced merely as rituals rather it should be followed properly. The field work supervisors should properly check the field work reports and make constructive suggestions.

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