

## **A Case Study of Learners Support Services in the National Institute of Open Schooling**

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*Abstract: Throughout the world, growth in terms of number of enrolments in distance learning institutions is increasing at a faster pace resulting in the demand of increased learner support services. Same is applicable on the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). Today this educational institute is fulfilling the aspirations of a lot of learners. This present paper is a case study of learners support services in the NIOS. Learners support services play an important role in the Open and Distance Learning system from the time a learner joins the system till the end of his/ her successful completion. It consists of a range of services including academic and non-academic support to the present as well as potential learners. Major support services are pre-admission counselling, tutoring, interactive teaching through television and radio, feedback concerning assessment and progress, career guidance, peer group support, administrative problem solving etc. As education is regarded as a key to the growth of every nation, maximum utilization of educational services is a must. Just as the learning of the enrolled students is highly significant so is the successfully meeting the challenge of reducing the dropouts' rate by the means of efficient learner support services. In light of the above, the present paper would mainly focus on the support services in terms of motivating the learners, keeping them on the right track till the completion of their study, encouraging them to make use of the facilities provided and ensuring their access as well as success in learning. An indicator of the above is the satisfaction level of learners. Hence, this study was conducted to analyse the current trends and prospects of the support services of NIOS.*

**Keywords:** NIOS, Learner, Support services, ODL.

### **Introduction**

The National Institute of Open Schooling was started in 1979 as a Project on Open School by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). The National Policy on Education (NPE-1986) suggested strengthening of Open Schooling System for extending open learning facilities in a phased manner at Secondary level, all over the country as an independent system with its own curriculum and examination leading to certification. Consequently, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India set up the National Open School (NOS) in November 1989. The pilot Project of CBSE on Open Schools was amalgamated with NOS. The National

Open School (NOS) was vested with the authority to register, examine and certify students registered with it up to pre-degree level courses. In July 2002, the Ministry of Human Resource Development amended the nomenclature of the organization from the National Open School (NOS) to the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). The NIOS exists today as the largest open schooling system in the world.

Support services are necessary and complementary in the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system across the country. These support mechanisms help learners from the time a learner joins the system till the end of his/her successful

completion. The learner support services identify itself mainly in the fields of academic and non-academic ways. From academic point of view, the NIOS provides tutorial and advising services. From administrative point of view, it supports in forms of enrolment, admission, registration, record keeping, information provision, and delivery of study materials. At pre-entry stage, the NIOS provides counselling facilities for deciding what kind of individual support they might need and the best way of achieving their goals and objectives without disturbing their daily routine activities.

During the learning programmes at the beginning of classes, when the learners have already received their packages (study materials), they need some guidance. Many learners might have returned to their studies after a long gap, so they need constructive help at this stage. As the learners are unfamiliar with the self learning materials, assignments etc. they may ask for some guidance on study skills: the process of dealing with the assignments. During the middle stage of the class, the learners may want to discuss about their progress, assignments, grades, study visits, practices and improvement in study skills in order to overcome personal

### **Significance of the Study**

This study helps ODL educationists and administrators to gain information about support needs and preferences of distance learners and identifies possible areas of improvement in existing learner support

### **Analysis of the Support Services of NIOS**

The Learner Support Service System is the fundamental component of success in the ODL system. Learners get attracted to the ODL system due to its open and flexible character. In the beginning, counselling is essential to a new learner and then feedback which is also an important factor in ODLs. These can help not only in increasing enrolment ratio but also checking the drop-out rate. Keeping the

and technical problems. At the final stage, the learners may need some guidance on incomplete tasks/assignments, difficult units, revision work and preparation for term-end examination. Keeping all these in view, the institute gives help and guidance to learners according to their rules and regulations. The institute also provides information on new programmes.

Now the grant of Transfer of Credit to the learners has also been extended. It has been resolved that the learners who had not applied for the TOC at the time of registration and later on requested NIOS for that, may also be provided with the facility of TOC. Moreover, the NIOS also offers its courses to jail inmates and has study centres in 17 Jails countrywide. 357 learners are registered in this academic year (2011-12) for various courses. The NIOS also decided to waive off the registration and examination fees for both academic and vocational courses, thereby expanding its education-reach. Thus, the NIOS provides academic, administrative, and informative support to the distance learners. The division dealing with the learner support services is known as the "*Student Support Services*".

services. The findings of this study might have implications for similar distance education institutions in developing and implementing quality learner support services.

current circumstances of NIOS in mind, the learners were contacted to know exactly the kind of support they want. This study was conducted using the survey method. About 200 distance learners pursuing different classes in the NIOS were approached. The learners were contacted randomly in the NIOS Regional Centre, Chandigarh and NIOS Regional Centre, Kolkata. They were asked

questions about the support services provided by their institute.

Sl.No.	Questions	%age of NIOS learners (yes)	%age of NIOS learners (no)
1.	Received sufficient advice and support in getting admission	64	36
2.	Received right information from institution staff when needed to	30	70
3.	Received study materials on time	48	52
4.	Good advice available from institution when learners have questions about their studies	52	48
5.	Received any support and supervision to assignment Services from institution	56	44
6.	Satisfied with Examination related Services	40	60
7.	Institute provide ICT (Information and Communication Technology) support to learners	56	42
8.	Want any Improvement in the Existing System	100	0
9.	Staff positive attitude towards Learners	30	70
10.	Satisfied with Availability of Media facilities	10	90

**TABLE 1.1: LEARNERS OPINION ON THE SUPPORT SERVICES OFFERED BY NIOS**

Table 1.1 shows response to the questionnaire. 100 learners responded from each regional centre. 64% of total learners in the NIOS expressed their satisfaction regarding easy process in respect of receiving sufficient advice and support during the admission processes. But 70% NIOS learners did not receive right information from institution's staff when they needed to. Most of the learners did not receive their study materials in time. 36% learners did not receive good advice and guidance about their study.

56% NIOS learners have problems in the assignments. 60% NIOS learners have difficulties in examination related services. 56% NIOS learners received ICT support and expressed a desire that audio/video programmes should be made available during the contact sessions at Study Centres. Nearly all the learners expressed a desire to see a big change in the attitude of the staff of the institution. They also wanted to see improvement in the existing system.

**FIG.1.1: PERFORMANCE OF THE LEARNER ON THE SUPPORT SERVICES OFFERED BY NIOS**

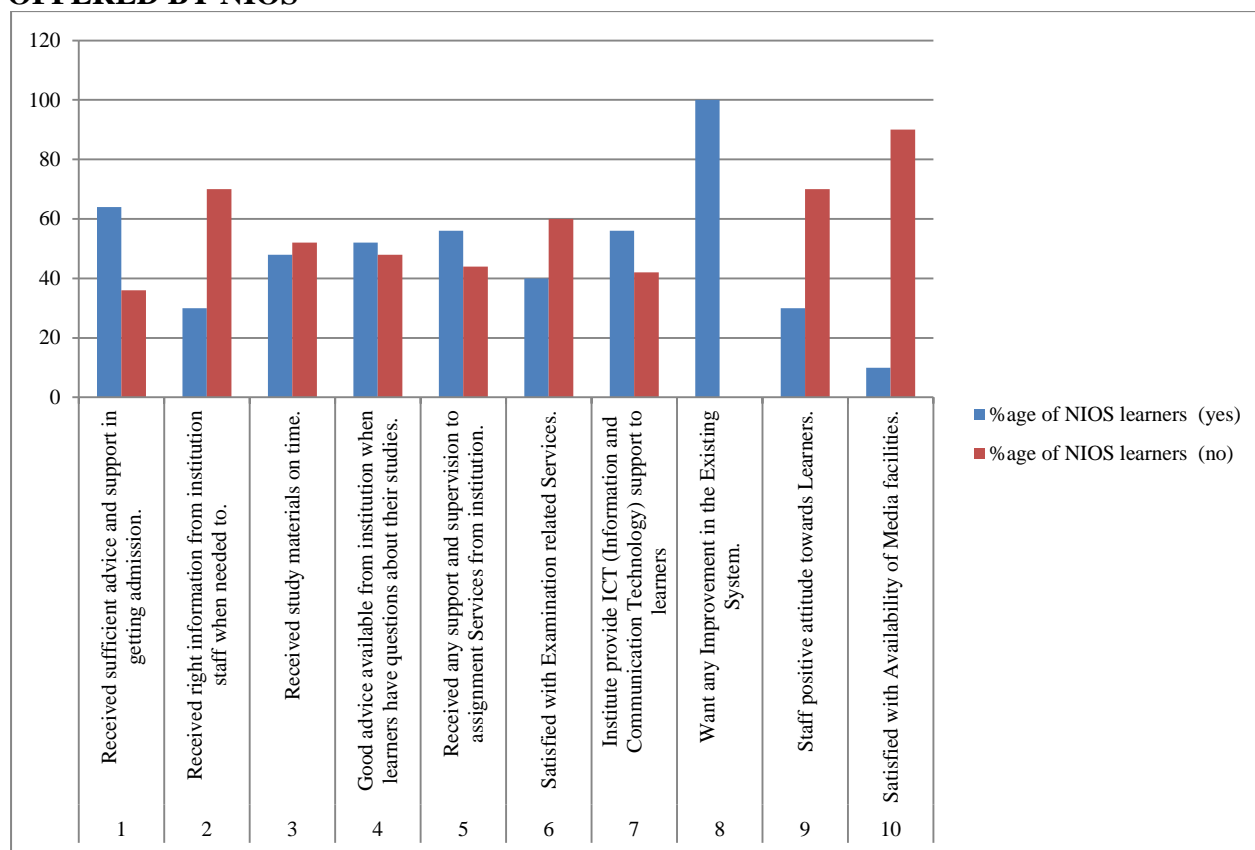


Fig. 1.1 gives interesting information about the support services offered by the NIOS to the learners. There is a category of both satisfied and dissatisfied learners. More than 50% learners are satisfied with the advice and support given during

admission process. Although, less than 50% learners are dissatisfied with the services provided, yet nearly all the learners want improvement in the existing system.

**Conclusion:**

The results of this study revealed that although Open and Distance education systems have installed a mechanism of support, the changing needs of the learners require the system to be evaluated from time to time and reformed accordingly. It is also concluded that the system does not have an effective method of receiving periodic feedback and hence is unaware of the felt needs of the learners. The largest felt need was for Support Services Staff-specifically trained in counseling. This would ensure an enabling environment,

positive staff attitude towards learners, dissemination of correct information especially about the availability of ICT facilities and counseling regarding the selection of subjects, career and self management. Almost all the learners want improvement in the existing system. Now, the NIOS has provided the facility of 100% online submission of application forms on 24 x 7 bases along with offline submission of forms. To augment efficiency, Bar Code has been introduced in the online submission of forms

providing early and rapid confirmation of the admission to the learners. A well-functioning learner support system not only helps the uninformed learners to develop attitudes and skills associated with

distance learning success but also plays a positive role in bridging the education gap, thus, fulfilling an important millennium development goal.

### Suggestions

- The learner support system should be learner centric and the needs and expectations of learners should be central to the development of effective learner support services. The staff of the learner support system should be trained in academic, career and personal counseling
- Clear and precise information about the course, the available facilities and what they can expect from these facilities should be provided to the learners
- The information provided to learners should be reviewed periodically to ensure that it is clearly understood and there are no gaps in the knowledge of the course they are studying
- Study materials should be dispatched on time. The materials should also be uploaded on the website so that they are available in

case of delay. Administrative information on the website should be updated immediately

- The materials both print and multimedia should also be placed in the Library of the study centre. Library and publication support for learners should be increased from the point of view of quantity and quality. The learners must have access to the library of the study centre
- Tutors should be trained to effectively handle the Personal Contact Programmes and the Tutor Marked Assignments. They should be supported by the study centers. These centers should aim at reducing each learner's deficiencies
- Tele-orientation/orientation programmes should be regularly organized by the institution for both learners and tutors

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