

**OPEN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN INDIA: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY**

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ABSTRACT:

Distance education is an effective tool for the provision of education to a heterogeneous group of learners as well as an alternative channel to democratize education all over the world. In such a stream of education the importance of libraries are unquestionable. The present study examines the existing library scenario, use of library resources by the learners in the country. The study is conducted on students of three selected Open Universities in the country, viz, Indira Gandhi Open University, BR Ambedkar Open University and Karnataka State Open University. Study reveals the pathetic situation of library facilities provided by the Open Universities in the country.

Key words- Open University Libraries, Library use study, Distance education libraries, Electronic Information resources, web technology, IT application.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

Student support services are considered as backbone of distance education. The importance of libraries as the most important student support system in the field of distance education is undisputable. In their absence the students will be unavoidably driven cheap publications in the form of guides, low quality study aids etc. they give the students just minimum information often erroneously and shabbily presented, for passing examinations. The students would get no access to serious books and periodicals in different disciplines and imbibe knowledge of their subject in depth. Even at present when the main thrust is on formal education the consequences of under utilization of library resources are evident. Therefore when distance education facilities are widened and number of students increase with little opportunity for personal contact programs, the tide decline in the standard of education is bound to assume serious proportions unless proper steps are taken in advance in the form of developing library facilities and encouraging the students to make their self study library centred.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

For the development of a country like India the massive educational means should be popularised with the help of modern computer and communication infrastructure, adequate library services extending even the remotest places. Especially in a situation where traditional Universities and higher education centers fail to fulfill their objectives and Virtual Universities and Tele-teaching methods are going to handle the place of higher education systems. Open Universities and number of distance learners are increasing day by day. In order to provide a strong infrastructure for the successful operation and implementation of distance education programs, student support systems are essential. Library being the most important student support system, the present study is highly relevant in the emerging socio technological context.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To study about the Open University libraries in India.
2. To study about the use of libraries by the students of Open Universities in India.

3. To find out the use of library by the faculty in Open Universities.

4. METHODOLOGY:

The basic research methodology applied to carry out the present study is a survey with a structured questionnaire for students and interview with faculty members of three selected Open Universities in India such as Indira Gandhi Open University, BR Ambedkar Open University and Karnataka State Open University. Students who underwent different courses of study in the headquarters/ study centres during the period of data collection have been included in the study. 250 questionnaires were selected from each sample University, thus a total of 750 questionnaires were selected for the final analysis. Faculty from the head quarters are selected for the data collection purpose.

5. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

The detailed analysis of the data collected from the respondents and its interpretations are presented as follows:

5.1 Libraries in distance education

Libraries are the symbols of cultural maturity of the society. Here an attempt has been made to analyze which type of library the distance learners are using, i.e., whether they are using the libraries of their institution or other libraries. This is to get an overview picture about the importance of libraries in the distance education system. Their responses about the type of library they used are given in Table 1.

Table 1

Type of library used by distance learners

University	No use	Attached to OU	Conventional University	Special	Public	Total
IGNOU	119 (47.6)	9 (3.6)	49 (19.6)	21 (8.4)	52 (20.8)	250 (100)

BRAOU	180 (72)	4 (1.6)	14 (5.6)	12 (4.8)	40 (16)	250 (100)
KSOU	179 (71.6)	6 (2.4)	11 (4.4)	7 (2.8)	47 (18.8)	250 (100)
Total	478 (63.73)	19 (2.53)	74 (9.87)	40 (5.33)	139 (18.53)	750 (100)

Pearson Chi-square: 200.585, df=10, p=0.00000

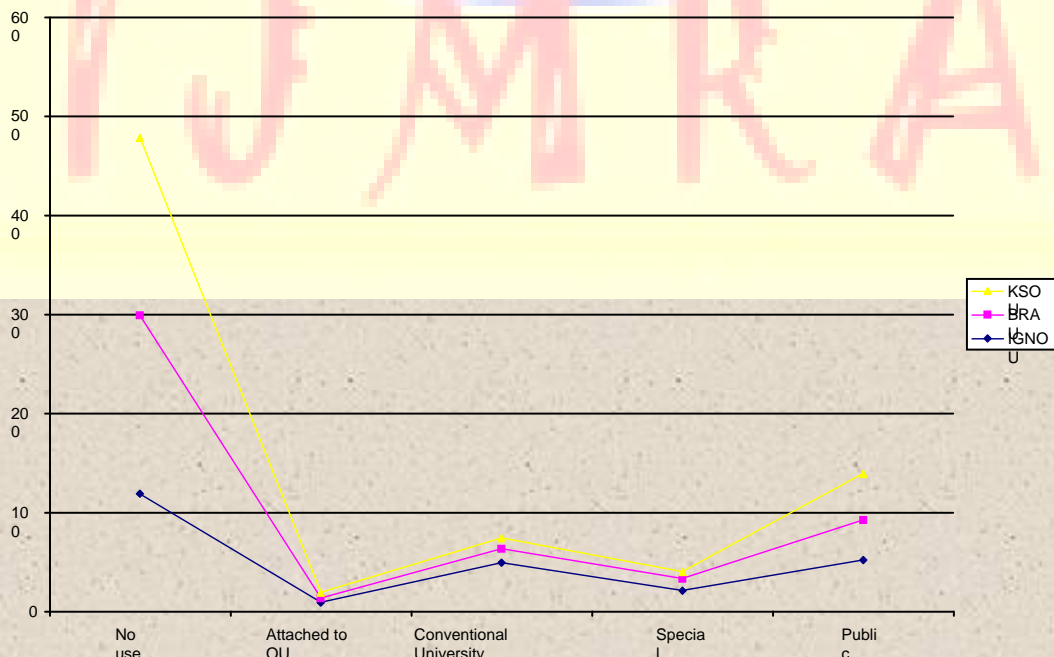
(Figures in brackets indicate percentage)

Majority (63.73) of the respondents are not in the habit of using the library. Among those who use the library (18.53) percentage are using the public libraries. It indicates that public libraries can act as a greater promoter of life long education, which is one of the major goals of public libraries. Only 2.53 percent of the respondents are using the libraries attached to the Open Universities.

There exists significant difference among the distance learners of various Open Universities in the country in their use of library resources. Figure 1 gives a clear picture about the types of library used by the distance learners.

Figure 1

Type of library used by distance learners



The gender wise analysis is done Table 2.

Table 2

Type of library used by distance learners -Gender wise

University	No use	Attached to OU	Conventional University	Special	Public	Total
Male	255 (59.86)	14 (3.29)	53 (12.44)	27 (6.34)	77 (18.08)	426 (100)
Female	223 (68.83)	5 (1.54)	21 (6.48)	13 (4.01)	62 (19.14)	324 (100)
Total	478 (63.73)	19 (2.53)	74 (9.87)	40 (5.33)	139 (18.54)	750 (100)
Pearson Chi-square: 14.0594, df=10, p=.015252						

(Figures in brackets indicate percentage)

The study reveals that the number of male learners who use the library facility is more (40.15%) than female learners (31.17%). It is against the common picture in the conventional University setup, where normally female learners are more using library facilities. It is to be notable that only 1.54 percent of female learners and 3.29 percent of male learners are using the libraries attached to the distance education institute. This indicates the pathetic situation of libraries attached to the distance education institutes in the country. But no significant differences can be seen in the case of gender acceptance of various types of libraries, as the p value is more than .05. The responses of learners on the basis of their level of education is given in Table 3.

Table 3

Type of library used by the Distance learners- level of education

Level	No use	Attached to OU	Conventional University	Special	Public	Total
UG	248 (62.78)	10 (2.53)	42 (10.63)	25 (6.33)	70 (17.72)	395 (100)
PG	230 (64.79)	9 (2.54)	32 (9.01)	15 (4.23)	69 (19.44)	355 (100)
Total	478 (63.73)	19 (2.53)	74 (9.87)	40 (5.33)	189 (18.54)	750 (100)
Pearson Chi-square: 8.29093, df=5, p=.140948						

(Figures in bracket indicate percentage)

Table 3 shows that there is no significant difference between the Undergraduate (37.21%) and Postgraduate learners (35.22%) in using the library facilities of different institutions in the country.

It is a common belief that Science students are more using the library facilities than non-science students. So the subject wise analysis about the percentage of students who use the library and which libraries they are using is important. It is given in Table 4.

Table 4

Type of library used by the learners- Subject wise

Subject	No use	Attached to OU	Conventional University	Special	Public	Total
Science	41 (51.25)	3 (3.75)	10 (12.5)	3 (3.75)	23 (28.75)	80 (100)
Non-science	437 (65.22)	16 (2.39)	64 (9.55)	37 (5.52)	116 (17.31)	670 (100)
Total	478 (63.73)	19 (2.53)	74 (9.87)	40 (5.33)	139 (18.54)	750 (100)
Pearson Chi-square: 16.1303, df=5, p=.006491						

(Figures in brackets indicate percentage)

Science students (48.75%) outnumber the non-science students (34.77%) in using the library facilities. It is clear from the table that most of the science and non-science students are using the public libraries in satisfying their information requirements. P value also indicates that, there exists significant difference in using various libraries by the science and non-science students in the field of distance education.

5.2 Attitude of learners towards the libraries

Another important area of study was the seriousness and attitude of learners towards the libraries. This has been studied using three criteria such as:

1. Mode of library use
2. Purpose of library visit
3. Time allotment in libraries

5.2.1 Mode of library use

Library is the heart of an institution. So the students should be regularly attached with the library in a serious learning system. This is an enquiry about to what extent the students feel the

importance of libraries in their learning system. Responses of learners regarding their mode of library uses are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Mode of library use by the distance learners

Library use pattern	IGNOU		BRAOU		KSOU		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Once in a week	26	10.4	18	7.2	14	5.6	58	7.73
Twice in a week	22	8.8	10	4	2	0.8	34	4.53
More than twice / week	26	10.4	15	6	9	3.6	50	6.66
Irregular	61	26.4	37	14.8	35	14	133	17.73

(No= Number, %= Percentage)

Table 5 clearly shows that the students in distance education institutes are not in the habit of using libraries regularly. It indicates the adequacy of the study materials provided by their Universities and lack of development of knowledgebase among the learners on the other. The percentages of irregular users are high in the entire sample Universities, i.e., IGNOU (26.4%), BRAOU (14.8%), and KSOU (14%) while comparing with other categories. The percentage of those who attend the libraries more than twice in a week is very low in all the Open Universities, i.e. IGNOU (8.8%), BRAOU (4%), and KSOU (0.8%)

From this discussion it is very clear that though the libraries are the most important supporting system, it is the most neglected supporting system in the field of distance education. In libraries attached to the headquarters of IGNOU and BRAOU, there is no access or membership to students, and it is restricted to the faculty members only. Similarly the libraries attached to the study centres and regional centers have lot of limitations such as lack of fund, lack of staff and lack of adequate infrastructure facilities. Moreover the percentages of students who use the library facilities are very small.

5.2.2 Purpose of library visit

The second criteria used by the investigator to study about the purpose for which the distance learners are using the libraries. Their responses are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

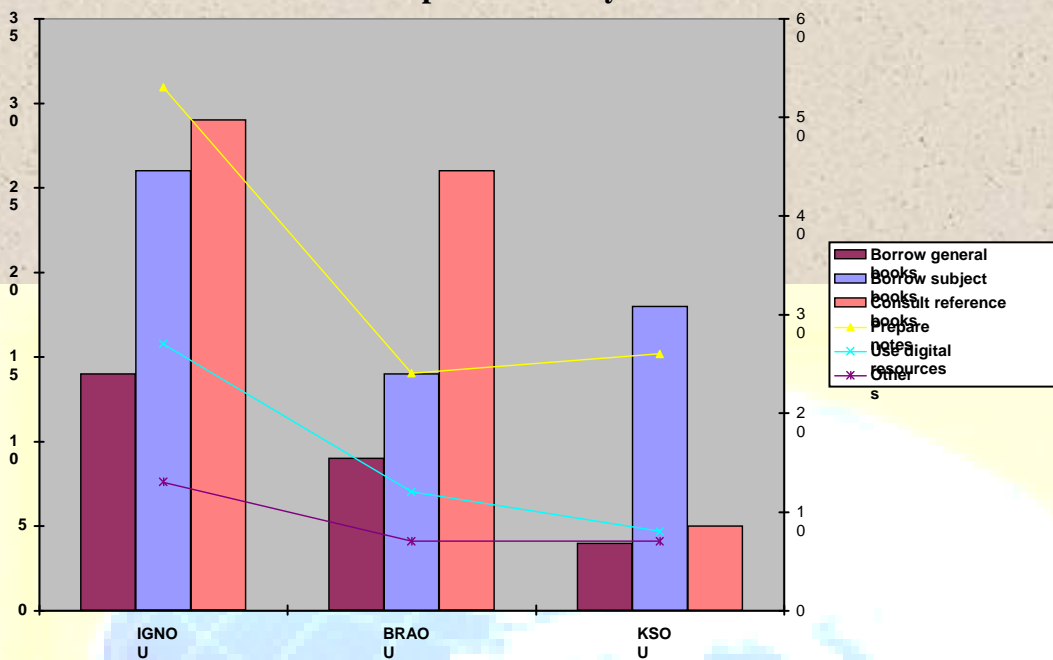
Purpose of library visit

Purpose	IGNOU		BRAOU		KSOU		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Borrow general books	14	5.6	9	3.6	4	1.6	27	3.6
Borrow subject books	26	10.4	14	5.6	18	7.2	58	7.73
Consult reference books	29	11.6	26	10.4	5	2	60	8
Prepare notes	53	21.2	24	9.6	26	10.4	103	13.73
Use digital resources	27	10.8	12	4.8	8	3.2	47	6.26
Others	13	5.2	7	2.8	7	2.8	27	3.6

(No= Number, %= Percentage)

Majority of the respondents (13.73%), though it is small, marked that they are coming to libraries to prepare notes relating to their subject of study. Their next preference were to consult reference books (8%), followed by to get subject books (7.73%). Purposes for which distance learners are using the library are given in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Purpose of library visit



The point is to be added with this is the inadequacy of the collection in libraries attached to the Open Universities as it is mentioned by the students. All these clearly state that the importance of library in the Open Universities is in ultimate chaos.

5.2.3 Seriousness in the library use

Another attempt has been made by the investigator to analyze the time allotted by the students during their visit to the libraries. It is to identify the seriousness of students in using the library resources during their time of visit. It is given in Table 7.

Table 7

Seriousness in the library use

Time allotted / Day	IGNOU		BRAOU		KSOU		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
< Hour	28	11.2	13	5.2	5	2	46	6.13
1-2 Hours	22	8.8	12	4.8	12	4.8	46	6.13
2-3 Hours	6	2.4	0	0	1	0.4	7	0.93
3-4 Hours	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
> Five hour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Irregular	79	31.6	55	22	42	1.8	176	23.46

(No= Number, %= Percentage)

As the students are attracted to the system due to its flexibility, it is reflected in their opinion regarding mode of use and seriousness in library use. Majority of the students, i.e. IGNOU (31.6%), BRAOU (22%) and KSOU (16.8%) are irregular in their timing during their visit to the libraries. It is evident from the study that during their visit distance learners are spending very few hours only for the purpose of study and reference.

5.3 Availability of documents in the libraries attached to distance education institutes

To what extent the libraries of Open Universities can satisfy the information requirements of its clientele is another area of major concern. So an enquiry has been done regarding the opinion of learners about availability of different types of documents in the libraries attached to the distance education system. The learners' responses are given in Table 8.

Table 8

**Availability of documents in the libraries
attached to distance education institutes - (In percentage)**

Type of books	IGNOU	BRAOU	KSOU	Total
General books	7.60	5.60	6.40	6.53
Subject books	9.20	4.80	2.40	5.47
Reference books	18.40	10.00	8.40	12.27
Digital resources	0.80	1.20	0.00	0.67
Journal/magazines	5.2	0.8	1.6	2.53
Not available	58.80	77.60	81.20	72.53
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Pearson Chi-square :48.9887, df=16, p=.000034				

Majority of the respondents (72.53%) of total students are on the opinion that the documents which they want for their learning purposes are not available in their libraries. Among the different documents available reference books comes first (12.27%), followed by general books (6.53%), followed by subject books (5.47%). Journals got only 2.53 percent and only 0.67 percent opined that digital resources are available in the libraries of Open Universities.

P value also indicates that there exists significant difference among the learners of different Open Universities in their opinion regarding the availability of various documents in the libraries of Open Universities in the country.

The data pertaining to the availability of the documents clearly shows that the libraries of the Open Universities have to strive forward for satisfying the information requirements of the learners. The Government and the authorities should give much more care and attention towards the development of collection in libraries attached to the Open Universities. Especially in a situation where digital resources and electronic information sources are becoming the major

concern of the learners, Open Universities should give emphasis to the digital information resources in the libraries.

5.4 Opinion of DL about the libraries of the institute.

Distance learners were asked to indicate their opinion about the libraries of their institute. Their responses are given in Table 9.

Table 9

Opinion of DL about the libraries of the institute.

Opinion	IGNOU		BRAOU		KSOU		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Excellent	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Good	50	20	38	15.2	13	5.2	101	13.47
Satisfactory	72	28.8	61	24.4	44	17.6	177	23.6
Not satisfactory	128	51.2	151	60.4	193	77.2	472	62.93
Total	250	100	250	100	250	100	750	100

(No= Number, %= Percentage)

Table 9 shows that majority of the respondents (62.93%) are on the opinion that the libraries of their institute are not satisfactory in terms of its resources and services. Only a small percentage of users have the opinion that their libraries are good (13.47%). It is to be noted here that most of the study centers are attached to the regular schools or colleges where the classes are going on in Sundays and holidays for the distance learners. There is no library for them to access. In most of the study centres there is no exclusive library for the distance education students. It will be difficult for the students to go and use the libraries of the regional centers on a regular basis. That is the major reason for this amount of backwardness in the case of libraries in the field of distance education.

It is seen that, in the sample as whole, only a little learners exclusively depends on the SSS of DEIs. The inadequacy of the facilities and the poor SSS of Open Universities force the learners to make alternative arrangements for successful pursuance of the course. Some of the

learners depend on notes and guides published by agencies other than their Universities. This is true for IGNOU learners as well. A few depend both on private coaching centres and published guidebooks. As a result of these arrangements, the private cost of distance learning goes up and the claim of its cost effectiveness is called into question. In the circumstances, distance education constitutes only an agency to grant registration to students for a course or a program.

IGNOU maintains a main library and documentation centre at the headquarters at New Delhi and small collections at various regional centres and study centres relevant to the needs and requirements of various courses of study. In spite of these library facilities most of the IGNOU students are not satisfied with the present library and information services made available to them. The public library system in most of the states is not very well developed and hence many Distance learners are not able to derive the desired library support services from the existing public libraries. The existing regulations of University libraries in various regions primarily permit their own students, research scholars and teachers to use library facilities.

5.5 Requirement of learners from the libraries in future

Learners of the Open Universities are changing their attitude towards distance education. So they were asked to indicate their expectations from the libraries in future. Their preferences are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10

Requirement of learners from the libraries in future

Item	IGNOU		BRAOU		KSOU		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Network based Services	195	78	139	55.6	136	54.4	470	62.67
CD-ROM search	159	63.6	111	44.4	175	70	445	59.33
Database search	87	34.8	95	38	66	26.4	248	33.07
Others	20	8	30	12	27	10.8	77	10.27

(No= Number, %= Percentage)

Table 10 shows that majority of the students (62.67%) expect network-based services from the libraries in future. It may be due to the importance and acceptability of Internet technology in the society. A very good percent of learners (59.33%) prefer CD ROM search facility and 33.07 percent expect data base search facilities from the libraries in future.

It shows that the students of Open Universities expect sophisticated information services from the libraries. It also indicates the students' opinion about the promotion of library services through IT application. For this the libraries should get access to e-learning resources such as e-journals to meet the information requirement of its clientele in the present and future.

5.6 Opinion of faculty members about library services

The opinion of students regarding the library facilities is proved from the above discussion. The opinion of faculty members regarding this issue is assessed and tabulated in Table 11.

Table 11

Opinion of faculty about library services provided by the University

Opinion	IGNOU		BRAOU		KSOU		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Highly effective	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Effective	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Satisfactory	8	8.69	7	18.42	8	33.33	23	14.93
Not effective	67	72.82	29	76.31	14	58.35	110	71.42
No idea	17	18.47	2	5.26	2	8.33	21	13.63
Total	92	100	38	100	24	100	154	100

(No= Number, %= Percentage)

Table 11 shows that majority of the faculty members (71.42%) are on the opinion that library services provided by their University is not effective. Only 14.93 percent of faculty members marked it as satisfactory.

6. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

- 6.1** The study reveals that the majority (63.73%) of the Open University students are not in the habit of using the library. Among those who use the library, 18.53 percent are using the public libraries. Only 2.53 percent of the respondents are using the libraries attached to the Open Universities. Majority of the respondents (62.93%) are on the opinion that the libraries of their institute are not satisfactory in terms of its resources and services.
- 6.2** There exists significant difference among the distance learners of various Open Universities in the country in their use of library resources.
- 6.3** Number of male learners who use the library facility is more (40.15%) than female learners (31.17%). Only 1.54 percent of female learners and 3.29 percent of male learners are using the libraries attached to the distance education institutes. This indicates the pathetic situation of libraries attached to the distance education institutes in the country.
- 6.4** There is no significant difference among the Under Graduate (37.21%) and Post Graduate learners (35.22%) in using the library facilities of different institutions in the country. Similarly Science students (48.75%) outnumber the non science students (34.77%) in using the library facilities. It is evident from the study that most of the science and non science students are using the public libraries in satisfying their information requirements.
- 6.5** The students in distance education institutes are not in the habit of using libraries regularly. The percentages of irregular users are high in all the sample Universities, i.e., IGNOU (26.4%), BRAOU (14.8%), and KSOU (14%), while comparing with other categories. The percentage of those who attend the libraries more than twice in a week is very low in all the Open Universities, i.e. IGNOU (8.8%), BRAOU (4%), and KSOU (0.8%).
- 6.6** 13.73% of the distance learners are coming to libraries to prepare notes relating to their subject of study. Their next preference were to consult reference books (8%), followed by to consult subject books (7.73%).
- 6.7** Among the available a high percentage of the students, i.e. IGNOU (31.6%), BRAOU (22%) and KSOU (16.8%) are irregular in their timing during their visit to the libraries. Distance learners are spending very few hours for the purpose of study and reference.

- 6.8** Majority of the Open University students (72.53%) are on the opinion that the documents which they want for their learning purposes are not available in their libraries. Among the different documents available reference books comes first (12.27%), followed by general books (6.53%), followed by subject books (5.47%). Journals got only 2.53 percent and only 0.67 percent opined that digital resources are available in the libraries of Open Universities.
- 6.9** Majority of the faculty members (62.93%) also feel that the libraries of their institute are not satisfactory in terms of its resources and services.
- 6.10** Maany of the students from Open Universities (62.67%) expect network based services from the libraries in future. It may be due to the importance and acceptability of emerging Internet technology in the society. 59.33 percent of learners prefer CD ROM search facility and 33.07 percent expect data base search facilities from the libraries in future. It shows that the students of Open Universities expect sophisticated information services from the libraries. It also demands the promotion of library services through all the ways including IT application. For this, the libraries should get access to e-learning resources such as e-books and e-journals to meet the information requirement of its clientele in the present and future.

7. CONCLUSION:

From the study it is clear that in the field of distance education lack of integration of the library services are very evident. Students are at present using public libraries or the libraries of conventional Universities for the sake of reference purposes. Others may be satisfied with the study materials provided by the Universities. It not only decreases the standard of students, but it also creates awareness among the society that distance education is a liberal and flexible way of getting a diploma or a degree. The learners of all the Distance Education Institutes frequently make use of the study materials and contact classes. However, the utilization of library and multi-media services is scanty. Even at IGNOU, only a very small percent of the learners frequently use library facilities. In other Open Universities, the situation is a bit worse. All these have significant impact on making distance education quite unsuccessful as an alternative channel for higher education.

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