



IGNOU Regional Centre, Port Blair: An Assessment

Dr. R V R Murthy

Regional Director

IGNOU-Regional Centre Port Blair

Abstract

Indira Gandhi National Open University popularly known as IGNOU is world's largest and Standalone University to disseminate higher educational needs through open and distance mode was established on September 25, 1985 by an Act of Indian Parliament. Every year on 19th November IGNOU celebrate its foundation day to mark birth anniversary of Smti. Indira Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India and who is remembered for her bold decisions and tactility of diplomatic achievements during her regime. Over the years IGNOU has gained momentum and popularity in deliverance of higher educational needs at the door steps of the learners by minimising gaps between geographical distribution and other socio-economic milieus, the learners can wish to complete higher educational needs at one stop. Most programmes are structured on a modular pattern with provisions for multiple entries and exist points as well as mobility across and within programmes. IGNOU has designed the curriculum to over emphasizing market potential and skill enhancement through comprehensive mechanism to streamline the course contents and its dissemination. Conduct of exams on regular intervals attains learners' confidence and also receives support from learners, which paved way for more innovations to create market-oriented course structure. New Education Policy-2020 speaks volume of reforms in higher education, indeed IGNOU has embarked prior to NEP-2020 and some of the provisions have been effectively implemented by IGNOU on pilot basis. Initially IGNOU has started with 02 under-graduate courses later alleviated to more than 233 programmes offered for all segments of society. With this tremendous response of one million enrolment in any one academic and calendar year is milestone achievement in dissemination of higher education.

IGNOU Regional centre, Port Blair (RC Code-02) is one among 56 Regional Centres operated in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, was functional since March 2006 to cater the higher educational needs of the islanders besides also through which regional centre facilitate all the administrative and financial requirements of the various study centres functional across in Andaman and Nicobar region. Currently, the enrolment stands for various under-graduate and post-graduate courses are about 2300. The present study aims to highlight the challenges and to point out the opportunities available for higher education in the Union territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. This paper is mainly focused on the overall scenario of higher education in India. This paper aims to identify issues and challenges in the field of higher education in India. Finally, the paper concluded here is all stakeholders have to make jointly effort to get solutions of the problems in higher education in India.

Introduction

Indian Higher education system is the world third largest in terms of student's enrolment and infrastructure. The structure of Indian Higher Education is three-layered, consisting of Universities, Colleges and Courses. The universities and colleges work in unison with regulatory as well as accreditation bodies to deliver standardized education. Currently the higher educational needs are manned by several universities and colleges. As of 2020, India has over 1000 universities, with a break up of 54 central universities, 416 state universities, 125 deemed universities, 361 private universities and 159 Institutes of National Importance which include AIIMS, IIMs, IIITs, IISERs, IITs and NITs among others besides more than 42,000 colleges imparting higher education needs of pan-India. In the last 7 decades we could able to have achieved 27 percent GER only and by 2047 targeted ourselves to achieve 50 percent GER, which is almost impossible to draw the numbers with existing HEIs infrastructure. In this context IGNOU can play a vital role in shaping

and achieving the twin objectives to provide good quality and accessible education to masses. The Government of India has been continuously strived to improve mechanism to create world class institutions. In this regard New Education Policy-2020 mandated to create new vistas and restructuring the whole education set-up towards holistic development of higher education. Further the National Education Policy (NEP) has laid out a grand vision about what education in India should be like over the next 50 years. The major policy objectives of NEP-2020 are as under:

1. Moving forward with multi-disciplinary and holistic education;
2. Skill development courses;
3. Imparting education in regional languages;
4. Online and digital education;
5. Ensuring Access, Equity, inclusion and GER enhancement;
6. Promotion on Indian languages, arts and culture;
7. Internationalization of higher education; and
8. Institutional development plan: A new vision for the way forward.

NEP is based on five pillars, “Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability” and carries the potential of transforming India into a vibrant knowledge hub. NEP also speaks about the data available in the form of colleges, autonomous colleges, Institute of excellence, Deemed Universities and central universities and variety of courses offered by various stake holders needs to be rearranged in manner that can be used as information and instruction. The available information applied to build a knowledgeable society which is ultimate goal of NEP-2020. Further, NEP aims to increase the GER in Higher Education to 50% by 2035 and the current GER 26.3% which needs to be improved by brining uniformity in course contents and restructuring whole gamut of higher education.

This is reflected in the formulated vision of IGNOU keeping its objectives in focus to support and promotes problem-solving, innovation, creative thinking and recognizes students’ interests, inherited skills, and the need for well-resourced infrastructure. Moreover a trained, passionate team of teachers focuses on recognizing, identifying, and fostering the unique capabilities of each student through the development of conceptual understanding. The mandate of IGNOU is to:

1. Provide access to higher education to all segments of the society;
2. Offer high quality, innovative and need based programme at different levels, to all those who require them;
3. Reach out to the disadvantaged by offering programme in all parts of the country at affordable costs; and
4. To promote, coordinate and regulate the standards of education offered through open and distance learning in the country; and
5. To achieve the twin objectives of widening access for all sections of society and providing continual professional development and training to all sectors of the economy, the university uses a variety of media and latest technology in imparting education.

Higher Education in A & N Islands: At a Glance

The Higher education institutional (HEIs) density is lowest in A & N Islands when compared to national level. As per the AISHE Report 2019-2020 there are only 8 colleges including polytechnics to cater the needs of 50,691 eligible pupils in the age group of 18-23 years for higher education. Of which only 10,131

aspiring students get admission in higher educational institutions (HEIs). The remaining are deprived of admission in their choice of subject and very few go for mainland, who can also afford to take admissions in private institutes or colleges. Large number of prospective students fail to get admission either they don't pursue or ideally sitting at home. In this context IGNOU has been instrumental in providing access to every aspiring candidate to choose degree programme as per the choice and playing a catalyst role to provide opportunity to take admission in various flexible courses.

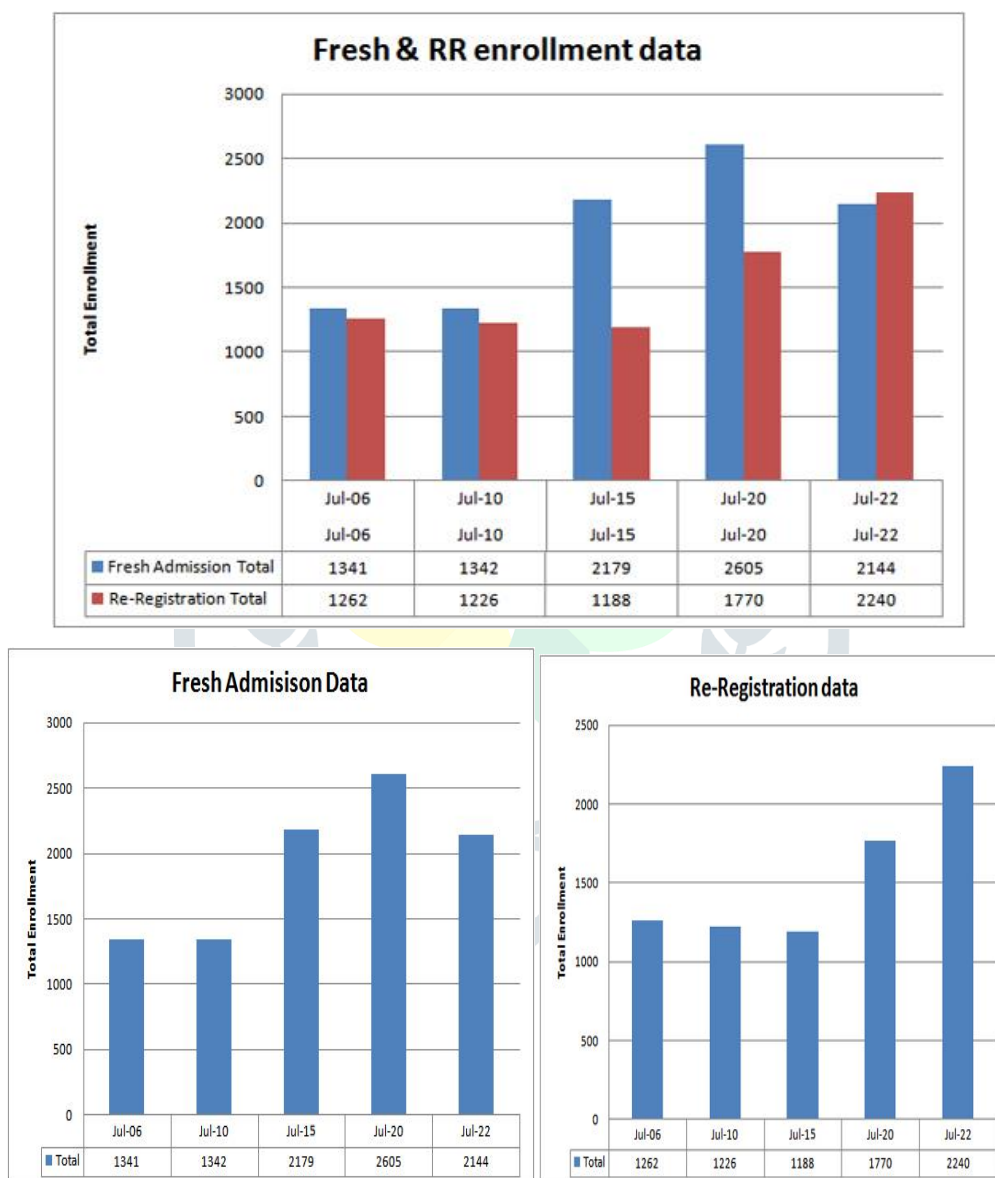
IGNOU Regional Centre Port Blair: An overview

IGNOU Regional Centre was established at Port Blair in the year 2006, in an attempt to provide and to fulfil gaps of higher educational needs as part of initiative of post-Tsunami rehabilitation programme. Initially the Regional centre office was established at Jawaharlal Nehru Rajkeeya Mahavidyalaya (JNRM) to augment the needs of the study centres established across the Andaman and Nicobar Islands especially to cater the needs of remotest islanders of Car Nicobar district, which is predominantly tribal societies and somehow they are marginalized tribal groups with less prospectus for higher studies. As compared to mainland India, the islands are educationally under less developed with limited intakes. In the absence of University at the Union Territory level, IGNOU Regional centre shall play major role in providing reliable, market oriented and accessible courses for aspiring learners. Since its existence the Regional Centre with the help of Study centres sprawling from Campbell Bay to Mayabunder housing more than 2500 learners every year.

Table: 1 The Details of Outsourcing centres under Regional Centre, Port Blair

Sl. No	Study Centre Code	Name of the Study Centre	Date of Establishment	Remarks
1	0201	Jawaharlal Nehru Rajkeeya Mahavidyalaya (JNRM) Study Centre, Port Blair	January 1988	Learners Study Centre
2	0202(D)	Govt. Senior Secondary School, Sabri, Rangat, Middle Andaman	14 th March 2006	Exam centre
3	0203 (D)	Govt. Senior Secondary School, Hut Bay, South Andaman District	14 th March 2006	Special study centre
4	0204(D)	Office of the Education Officer, Car Nicobar, Nicobar District	14 th March 2006	Special Study centre
5	0205 (D)	Office of the Assistant Education Officer, Nancowrie, Nicobar District	14 th March 2006	Special Study centre
6	0206 (D)	Coast Guard School, Campbell Bay, Nicobar District	14 th March 2006	Special Study centre
7	0207 (D)	Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Institute of Technology (DBRAIT), Port Blair	22 nd July 2008	Abeyance
8	0208	Mahatma Gandhi Government College (MGGC) Mayabunder N & M Andaman District	January 2006	Regular Study Centre
9	0209 (P)	Central Inland Agricultural Research Institute (CIARI) South Andaman District	21 st January 2008	Abeyance
10	0210 (P)	Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Institute of Technology (DBRAIT), Port Blair	15 th May 2008	Abeyance
11	0211 (D)	District Jail, Port Blair	02 nd November 2010	Special Study Centre
12	0212(P)	Andaman and Nicobar Institute of Medical Sciences (ANIIMS) Port Blair	05 th July 2018	Programme Study Centre

Since its inception IGNOU Regional Centre Port Blair has committed to provide need based 102 degree, diploma and certificates courses disseminate knowledge through online and offline modes with the help of various study centres. 2,144 fresh students have been admitted to various courses for the Academic year 2022 and 1240 learners are re-registered for second year. There are more prospectuses for IGNOU to increase its intake capacity by way of disseminating information about courses offered at its end. Efforts are being made to attract more students to take admissions in various courses. The below given chart: 1 gives vividly the intake of learners (fresh and Re-registration) randomly to compare the available figures to understand how the enrolment has been increased over the years.



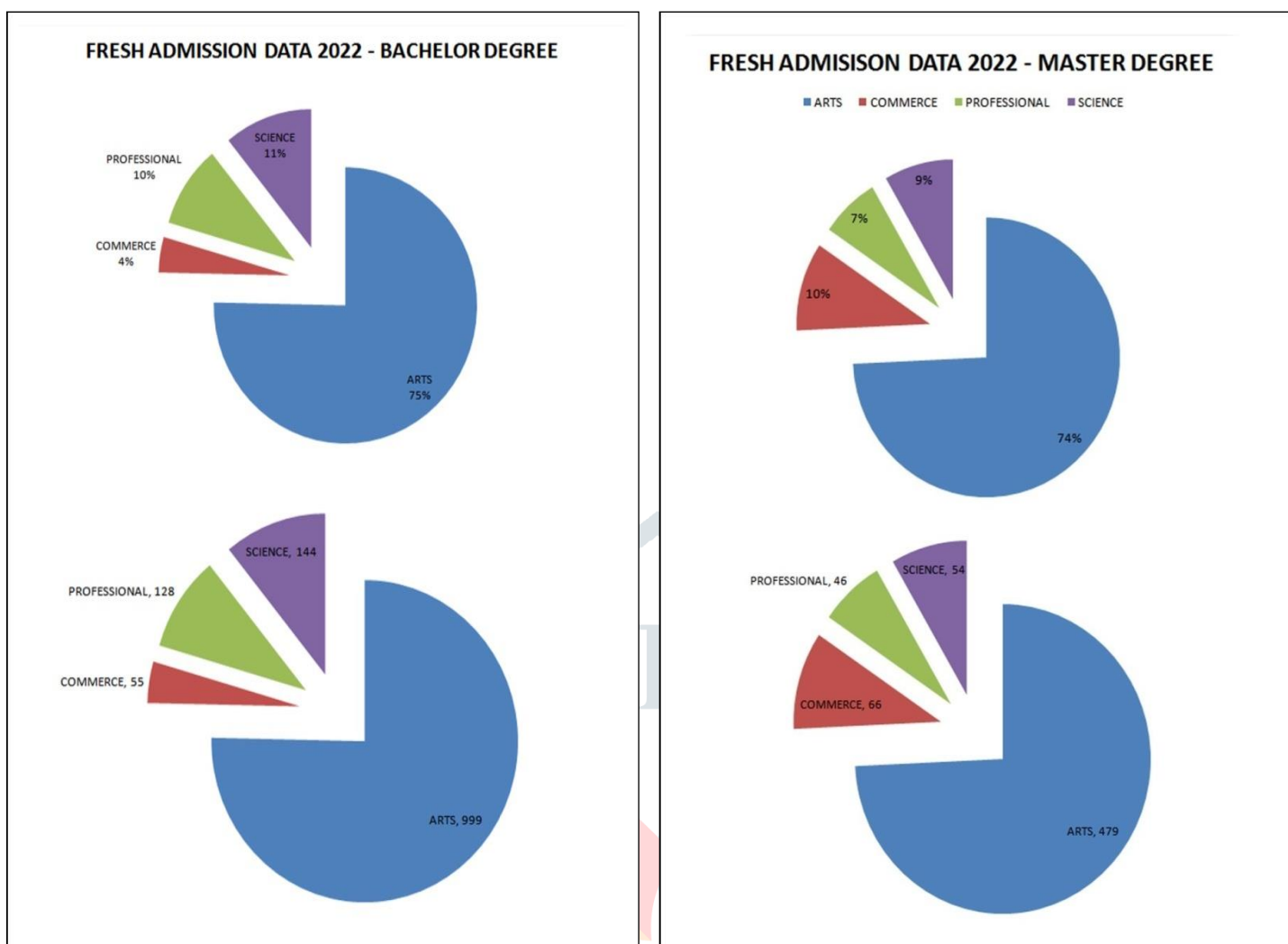
IGNOU Regional Centre Port Blair has succeeded in its efforts to disseminate knowledge through online and offline by upholding gender equality. It becomes evident from the strength of the girls in the overall enrolment for various programs for the calendar year 2022. Of which 54.69 percent girls have opted admissions. Interestingly, women candidates enrolled for varied courses like Post-graduate and diploma courses as compared to their counterparts. The Regional Centre Port Blair has provided women friendly environment to such an extent that the ratio of the girl student is much higher than that of males. Further, the

girl student excels not only in academic excellence by scoring high first class and the pass percent is much higher in University exams. Moreover, they do fairly well in all co-curricular activities conducted by the Regional centre, inter-collegiate and State level competitions. Special career guidance cell exists in the Regional centre level and the cell functions meticulously well by creating awareness to establish individuality and self-identity. Many co-curricular activities are conducted for boosting the morale of girl student. Males and females are given equal opportunities and focus in exhibiting their caliber. Similarly, large number of females registered as Academic counselor and they are assigned prime role to play in the developmental activities of the Regional centre. As per the GOI, Regional centre Port Blair has also included the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups by providing stipend/scholarship to OBC, Minorities and ST candidates. Fee exemption was given to ST students of A & N Islands and besides also extended the benefit of scholarship schemes on NSP under Pre-Matric, Post Matric and MCM Scholarship Scheme for Minorities.

To enhance outreach programmes, the Regional Centre Port Blair has entered in collaboration with various research centres functional in these islands like Botanical Survey of India (BSI), Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), Regional Medical Research centre (RMRC), Central Island Agriculture Research Institute (CIARI), National Institute of Oceanic Technology (NIOT), Andaman Nicobar Islands Institute of Medical Science (ANIIMS). Furthermore, Regional centre Port Blair will also collaborate with Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI), Andaman & Nicobar Tribal Research Institute (ANTRI) in the field of Arts and Humanities. To enhancing employability through internship/apprenticeship, RC Port Blair is committed to take help of MSME to create awareness among MSMEs / individuals on proper procedures and documentation for availing loans, and various facilities for self-employment. Large numbers of IGNOU pass outs secure jobs in different government departments and private firms. RC Port Blair having good pool of Alumni holding in these islands and remains actively involved in philanthropic activities.

Future Strategy

Regional Centre Port Blair is foremost centre for Open and distance learning (ODL) in these Islands and people of these Islands has great expectation from the IGNOU particularly in higher education. At present other than IGNOU no university system prevails at UT level, therefore it has got more commitment to offer courses of skill enhancement so that the pass outs shall be employable. Presently RC Port Blair has offering 92 nos of courses like PG/UG/PG Diploma/ Diploma and certificate courses of varied interest. To cater the needs of the learners, RC Port Blair is striving to open more courses on demand and also planned to include more number of colleges functional in these islands so that every aspirant should have easy access to higher education at their doorsteps. . RC Port Blair continuously extending benefits to the learners of the remote islands by conducting entrance test for Ph.D courses, so that the islanders have access to higher education. The below mentioned diagrams clearly identifiable that large number of students opt for Arts, science, professional followed by commerce respectively.



Conclusion

Over the years IGNOU has proved to be a world-class university known for academic excellence, research, international collaborations, diversity, interdisciplinary studies, sustainability, social commitment, and community engagements. In addition, IGNOU has built a rich curriculum in close consultation and synergy with industry partners and other external stakeholders to develop its own content to be a responsible, ethical and collaborative partner to local industry, Government, and other organizations. In short, IGNOU has proved its mantle in market-driven courses committed to flexible and liberal education.

The degree programs have a Pan-India focus, regardless of whether New Education Policy (NEP) has been implemented or not. IGNOU has already implemented inter-disciplinary in its true sense. It has implemented credit based semester pattern to come and earn credits, which can be eventually transferred to future endeavour. Even much before the National Education Policy -2020 framed and implemented by the GOI, IGNOU has already embarked upon the commencement of the dual degree programs, they opened a range of learning opportunities for aspiring students. It could be collaboration in the Ph.D.'s research program or semester program at undergraduate or postgraduate level or a dual degree program and many other ways there are a range of learning opportunities for our students. To assist students in their pursuit it has recruited outstanding faculties, who are leaders in their chosen fields. It has forged substantive collaboration with key partners like IT industry, AICTE, UGC, other leading players of HEIs.

IGNOU Regional centre Port Blair has prepared a plan to expand its activities in the years to come by way of strengthening infrastructure including construction of new building modern state-of-art facilities exclusively for the purpose of providing world class education to Islanders. In future IGNOU will able to launch more programmes for the academic benefits, employability and skill enhancement. In the absence of University at Union Territory level, IGNOU can play a catalyst role and provide education at their doorsteps.

The paradigm shift of significance, IGNOU is in the process of dissemination of knowledge through digital mode aided by the integration of the latest innovation and technology. The transformed system focuses on the inclusive development of the learners and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 ensures the same. The main purpose of IGNOU is to implement and strengthen multidisciplinary, inclusive and technology-based learning that is accessible to all. It focuses more on imparting higher education that enables personal accomplishment for learners and prepares them to pave a good future.

The Regional centre, Port Blair was promoted in 2006 to offer higher education opportunities to students from all sections of society, particularly the marginalized and disadvantaged living in rural and inaccessible areas of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. In the last two decades the Regional centre Port Blair has remained true to its founders' vision, and plays a significant role in spreading higher education and providing access to rural poor who cannot enroll in formal higher education institutions. Indeed, IGNOU Regional centre has undoubtedly made ODL and Online education more student-friendly. Moreover, IGNOU Regional centre Port Blair is strongly committed to provide affordable higher education to deliver high-quality ODL education to those who cannot access conventional higher education. Recently the Regional Centre Port Blair has implemented the CBCS pattern to the various bachelors course including Under-graduate and others. As per the new guidelines examination will be conducted through semester system. There are numerous challenges but the positive note of the growth of higher education in the remotest part of India, the gross enrolment is much higher than their counterparts. Technically speaking IGNOU Regional centre Port Blair needs more expert hands to deal with academic activities. Further extension of activities, more and more study centers may be established across the island territory. With all those good things still we needs miles to go to achieve the objective of IGNOU.