

Online Graduates & Employment: A Case Study Of Ignou Graduates

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ABSTRACTS

Abstract: The objective of this micro research study is to know how online graduates are accepted in the job market. The findings of the study (37 respondents) indicate: majority of the respondents got job, joined further study and enhanced their skills despite of facing problem at initial stage.

INTRODUCTION

The nature of linkage between the job market and graduate supply from any mode of education assumes a great significance in a study of trends in the development of higher education. There is also a possibility of mismatch between demand and supply of the human resources in a country. International Labor Office (ILO) reports stated that people out of work and looking for work available in the world was 185.9 million in 2003 in comparison to 185.4 million in 2002. The number has increased marginally in all the continents, but the situation in South Asia remains stable during this period. The unemployment rate has not changed much despite 5.1% of GDP growth rate. (ILO, 2003). But, it does not affect India much. 55th Round (1999-2000) Survey of NSSO found that the absolute number of unemployment as well as the incidence of unemployment as a percentage of labour force increased. The unemployment rate has been increased from 7.32% in 1999-00 to 5.99% in 1993-94. Our employment elasticity (the ability to generate jobs) went down from 0.52 in 1980s to 0.16 in late 1990s. Therefore, the graduate unemployment situation is also not too bright. The number of job seekers registered with 939 employment exchanges in the country (all of whom are not necessarily unemployed) were 41.6 million during September 2002. 70% among them were having qualification of 10th standard and above, and 32% were aged between 20 to 24 years. (GOI, 2003). The focus of the present paper is to know, how online graduates are accepted in the job market, whereas the fresh graduates from the traditional mode of teaching (F2F) and traditional mode of distance education programmes are facing very steep competition to get employment.

NEED FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING THROUGH ONLINE

Demand for skilled labour has risen significantly as a result of globalization, changes in technology, and the organization of work. The information technology and software industry have roared back from recession and are likely to create more than 1,00,000 new jobs in 2004, compared to the 75,000 jobs it did in 2003. In the business process outsourcing sector, the

number of new jobs this year is likely to be more than 1,50,000. The job market grew 30% last year. This year it could be 50% (Bhatia, G, 2004). The process of skill development in the informal sector in developing countries is more important, since formal training institutions do not have the capacity to train all those, who want to acquire skills, and a few of those, who want to acquire the skills, have the means to afford formal training. The ability to learn, to transform existing knowledge into new knowledge, is a source of competitive advantage of increasing significance. In such enterprises, daily learning has become an integral part of the job. A part of such learning relies on the exchange of tacit knowledge among employees. To meet this need, one should pursue a model of Internet based learning such as the virtual campus model. The workplace of tomorrow, at least in the leading and successful organizations, will comprise of Internets, Intranets and Extranet. It is presumed that students, who would have obtained their education by negotiating their learning resources over the Internet, would find themselves much more acceptable to their employers. To find out their acceptability is the major focus of this micro study.

Studying through the Internet will also bring to the learners a large amount of current information related to curriculum. Many employment agencies, including those recruiting for positions abroad are using the Internet for this purpose. Higher education opportunities abroad, including formats for financial aid etc., are also available more easily through the Internet. The use of the Internet by the students, therefore, gives access to a whole new way of learning, although there is some additional effort and cost towards this; the end result is much more significant in terms of quality of learning and future employment. The workplace of the future is moving towards use of teleworking to create virtual organizations and to achieve global presence. Students learning through the Virtual Campus fit into these very naturally. To meet growing demand nationally and internationally IGNOU had introduced Bachelor of Information Technology (BIT) programme through virtual mode.

BACHELOR OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PROGRAMME

The rapid development of Internet, since 1990, has made online learning admired among higher education institutions in India. In view of this trend, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, India introduced Virtual Campus in September 1999 and offered 'Bachelor of Information Technology (BIT)' programme through online delivery mode. This programme has been developed keeping in view the changing market demands, particularly to meet the demands of multi-national companies entering into the Indian market due to economic reforms over the period of last couple of years.

Instructional system

A student in this programme is expected to be a very intense student who can independently access learning resources and participate in learner interactions, which take place through the Internet and the worldwide web (www). Apart from the I.T. resources infrastructure, some human element at the tele-learning centre ensure that the it works, and that there is a conducive environment for independent and collaborative learning; and while experts on all subjects may not be available, there would be a number of people with a facilitating approach towards the student.

In this programme, innovative teaching methodologies have been used with emphasis on using emerging technologies to empower students. The teaching methods include: (a) live satellite based teleconferencing lectures; (b) recorded video lectures; (c) computer lab; (d)

CBT's - Computer Based Training / Tutorials; (e) internet learning resources by internet browsing; (f) online interactive chat- with peer group, with faculty, with external experts. In addition to this, face-to-face Academic Counselling at Study Centres, the School regularly supports counselling through other media modes like (a) radio counselling; (b) telecast of lectures through Gyan Darshan TV Channel. TLCs empanelled are having the infrastructure including sufficient number of appropriate computer systems vis-à-vis number of students, specified software, internet connectivity, facilities to receive telecast through Gyan Darshan, teleconferencing, etc. These centers organizes a short duration orientation through personal contact programme to train students on how to study the course through the above modes of delivery. In terms of the design of the academic content itself, significant changes from the traditional distance education approach are pursued. Outcome based education, a mode of study drawn from the UK educational system is the thread, which runs across the implementation of these programmes.

The programme is offered on a trimester basis. The learning model available to a student are: (a) The teacher takes online counselling of a course by hosting on the web, materials for about a week's study and informing them of what material would be hosted during which week. This schedule are available on the website. (b) The learning materials have been divided into smaller, intensive, interactive sessions of about 25-30 minutes each. This is somewhat similar to an episode of a serial TV programme. During the first trimester, the students rely mainly on an instructor delivered video lecture format, supplemented with self-learning materials on CBT's and Internet based resources. Gradually, this changes towards a greater self-learning and mentoring approach. A typical matrix reflecting the change in learning styles has been presented in Table 1:

Tri- mester	Live Satellite Based lectures	Record ed video	Labora- tory	CBT's	Internet learning resources	Internet Chat		
						With faculty	With peer group	With external experts
1st	35%	5%	35%	5%	4%	10%	4%	2%
2nd	25%	10%	25%	10%	5%	15%	5%	5%
3rd	10%	5%	20%	10%	15%	20%	10%	10%

Table 1: Learners learning style in BIT programme.

Source: Prospectus of BIT programme, 2003, IGNOU

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The trend of learners profile in BIT programme indicates that the majority (about 65%) of the learners were unemployed before joining IGNOU programmes. The objectives of this study are to identify the utilization of degree for learners' career path in terms of getting employment, promotion, continuing education and other reasons and to study the perception related variables to measure views on the acceptability of their degree in the job market.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Learner's profile at the time of joining online programme: the trend of enrollment of online learners presented in Figure 1. Of the total population, most of them (87%) were male, about

99% were having 10+2 qualification (minimum requirement for enrolment in BIT programme), 74% were from urban areas and all of them were unmarried. Originally, the study was designed in three phases. In the first phase, survey method was adopted among the first batch of 180 BIT learners, who had completed their graduation in December 2002 and 217 ADIT learners, who had completed their graduation in December 2001. In the second phase of the study, interview was to be conducted among 30 learners to know the utilization part of the degree in their career path. The sample for interview was suppose to be taken to those learners, who got employment after getting online degree. In the last phase of the study, employers' interviews were to be taken to know the performance of online graduates at their respective enterprises, who provided employment to online graduates. The next two phases of the study was based on response rate of the first phase. But, the response rate of the survey was not much encouraging. Therefore, the present research study is based on survey design. The next two phases were not attempted in this study.

The structured questionnaires sent to all 180 BIT learners (online graduates), who completed BIT programme through online mode during December 2002 term end examination. The questionnaires were administrated through ordinary post to all the successful 180 learners during the month of October, 2003. The researcher waited for three months. At the end of three months i.e. January 2004, a total of 37 (about 21%) filled-in questionnaires were received from the learners. Therefore, the findings were based on these responses. The findings indicate that the majority of the respondents (89.2%) were female, all of them were from urban areas and 23 students (62%) were from Delhi. Most of them 32 (86.5%) belonged to age group in between 21-25 years and the rest of them were between 26-30 years. 28 (75%) were having 10+2 qualification and the rest of them were graduate and post graduate. About 90 % respondents were having their own computer. 15(40.5%) were having intermediate internet skill before enrolling BIT programme in comparison to 13 respondents (35.1%), who were beginner, and 5 (13.5%) who were experienced and expert in online environment. All the respondents' parent were graduate (10th standard and above) and 27 respondents' parents were in service sector, 5 respondents' parents were retired from service. Most of the respondents parents (20) belonged to higher income group i.e. Rs. 15,000 (about US \$ 330). The source of funding of 33 respondents was their parents for this programme and 4 respondents were self-financing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Objective: the objective of most of the respondents (35%) was to get job and better career prospects. 27% respondents informed that they took the programme out of interest. 24% said that they had particular occupation in mind before enrolling for this programme.

Respondents status before and after getting degree through online: All the respondents were fresh learners. They had obtained their 10+2 qualification from formal institutions before their enrollment in BIT programme. Most of the students 10 (27%) got regular job followed by 9 respondents (24.3%) who were doing job and studying in higher education through distance mode after completion of BIT programme. 5 respondents (13.5%) joined further studies and were looking for job in comparison to 4 respondents (10.8%) studying and doing part time job and the same number of respondents were doing nothing as shown in following Figure 2.

Out of those respondents (18), who joined further studies vis a vis doing job, most of them (16) were doing MCA and MBA programmes from IGNOU and the rest of them joined regular MCA programme in different formal institutions.

Job analysis

On the other hand, those respondents, who got regular and part time job were working as software designer, digital coordinator, digital multimedia designer in private sector and UNDP project. 10 respondents among them were getting salary less than Rs. 5000 p.m. (about US \$ 110) and 5 respondents (13.5%) were getting salary in between Rs. 5001-10,000 (US\$ 111-220) and the same number of respondents were getting salary in between Rs.15,000- Rs 20,000 (US \$ 221-440) PM. How many person were working at their respective enterprises were also questioned? Most of the respondents (27%) replied that number of staff at their respective enterprises were in between 101-125, 5 respondents said they were employed more than 150. The same number of respondents said that they were in between 41-50. 54 % respondents said that the BIT degree was one of the prerequisite for obtaining job.

Respondent's views on the usefulness of BIT programme's content

- Most of the respondents 10 (27%) were natural with the statements that BIT programme helped them in getting job.
- 15 (40.5%) respondents agreed and 9 strongly disagreed that BIT programme enhanced their skill.
- 9 respondents agreed and 5 respondents strongly agreed this statement that the programme helped them in their job performance.
- 14 respondents 'disagreed' and 9 strongly disagreed to do the statement that due to common group of this programme they were able to get job.
- Majority of the respondents were neutral, disagreed and strongly disagreed that due to optional units of BIT programme, they were able to get job.
- Most of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that they were well aware of the content of this programme before enrollment.
- 5 respondents each agreed and strongly agreed that due to this programme they were able to manage and develop themselves for the present job.
- Majority of the respondents were agreed (10) and strongly agreed (5) to the statement that due to this programme, they were able to work effectively as a team member.
- A large number of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that due to this programme, they were able to communicate in writing and participate in verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Most of the respondents strongly disagreed to the statement that this programme did not help them at all.

Options	No reply	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
(a) Programme helps me in getting my job.	9 (24.3)	4 (10.8)	5 (13.5)	10 (27.0)	4 (10.8)	5 (13.5)	37 (100.0)
(b) Programme enhanced my skill.	4 (10.8)	9 (24.3)	0	0	15 (40.5)	9 (24.3)	37 (100.0)
(c) Programme helps me in my job performance.	4 (10.8)	9 (24.3)	0	5 (13.5)	9 (24.3)	5 (13.5)	37 (100.0)
(d) Due to common group of this programme, I am able to get Job.	4 (10.8)	9 (24.3)	14 (37.8)	5 (13.5)		5 (13.5)	37 (100.0)
(e) Due to optional units of this programme I am able to get job.	9 (24.3)	9 (24.3)	4 (10.8)	10 (27.0)	5 (13.5)	0	37 (100.0)
(f) I was well aware about the content of this programme before enrolment.	4 (10.8)	0	5 (13.5)	9 (24.3)	14 (37.8)	5 (13.5)	37 (100.0)
(g) Due to this programme, I am able to manage and develop myself for the present job.	9 (24.3)	9 (24.3)	4 (10.8)	5 (13.5)	5 (13.5)	5 (13.5)	37 (100.0)
(h) Due to this programme, I am able to work effectively as a team member.	9 (24.3)	9 (24.3)	4 (10.8)	0	10 (27.0)	5 (13.5)	37 (100.0)
(i) Due to this programme, I am able to communicate in writing and participate in verbal and non-verbal communication.	4 (10.8)	9 (24.3)	4 (10.8)	5 (13.5)	10 (27.0)	10 (27.0)	37 (100.0)
(j) This programme does not help me at all.	4 (10.8)	19 (51.4)	0	5 (13.5)	0	9 (24.3)	37 (100.0)

Table 2: Respondents views on the content of BIT programme

Note: Figures in the brackets are the percentage total. 0= not responded to this item.

Preference to online mode than F2F and traditional mode of ODL

Majority of the respondents (10) informed that they preferred online mode of teaching to F2F and traditional ODL because this programme is being affiliated with international university. Out of those respondents (19), who got job, 9 among said that this programme was not available in F2F and traditional ODL institutions. 4 respondents said they preferred online mode to get admission, though online was easy and the same number of respondents informed that they preferred online because they could study other programmes together vis a vis they could do job as well.

Problem faced by the learner due to online degree: Of 28 students who got job and joined further studies after getting degree from IGNOU through online, 24 of them faced problem for obtaining job and admission in higher education programmes at first instance. But at later stage, the degree was accepted.

Usefulness of BIT degree in career path

Getting better pay: Most of the respondents informed that they did not get better pay, promotion, new job as shown in following Table 2. However, 10 respondents informed that they became self-employed after getting BIT degree and degree was crucial and helpful.

Changes	No, it hasn't happened	Yes, it has happened and getting BIT degree from IGNOU in my course was:				
		No Reply	Crucial	Helpful	Not important	Don't know
(i) Got better pay	19 (51.4)	13 (34.1)	0	5 (13.5)	0	0
(ii) Got promotion	24 (64.9)	13 (34.1)	0	0	0	0
(iii) More specialist job in the same promotion	14 (37.84)	13 (34.1)		5 (13.5)	5 (13.5)	0
(iv) Got new job in another institution	19 (51.8)	13 (34.1)	5 (13.5)	0	0	0
(v) Entered first time in job	10 (27.0)	27 (73.0)	0	0	0	0
(vi) Become self-employed	4 (10.81)	18 (48.7)	5 (13.5)	5 (13.5)	5 (13.5)	0

Table 3: Importance of BIT degree in respondent's career changes since completion of BIT Programme

Most of the respondents (51.4%) projected themselves that they would be doing the same type of work at higher rank in comparison to 27% respondents who said that they would be doing a different type of work at higher rank than the present ones.

Respondent's comments

One of the respondents (Divya Bhatia) said that “she enrolled with BIT programme for better career prospects. She was a fresh student and passed 10+2 before enrolling in this programme. During the study, she got job in a company which was not related to BIT programme. Her nature of job was not related to her course. Therefore, she preferred to enroll in MBA programme than MCA programme after getting degree through online. She further stated that due to online mode of delivery she was able to do job and completed her graduation. But due to BIT degree, she was able to learn basic skills in computer, which has valuable weight age”.

CONCLUSION

Online teaching has been breaking all barriers for those people, who could not have access to higher education programme, but also for those who can earn while learn. Although this is a small survey, which has shown a little change of the respondent's career, but it is the grey area of research particular in developing countries. The study was conducted with the intention to finding out as to how the BIT online graduates utilized their degree. In the process, we could see quiet a few problems faced by the respondents. The presents study is not a final one, further research requires to be conducted at macro level on the employers' choice of online graduates in comparison to F2F or traditional ODL programmes.

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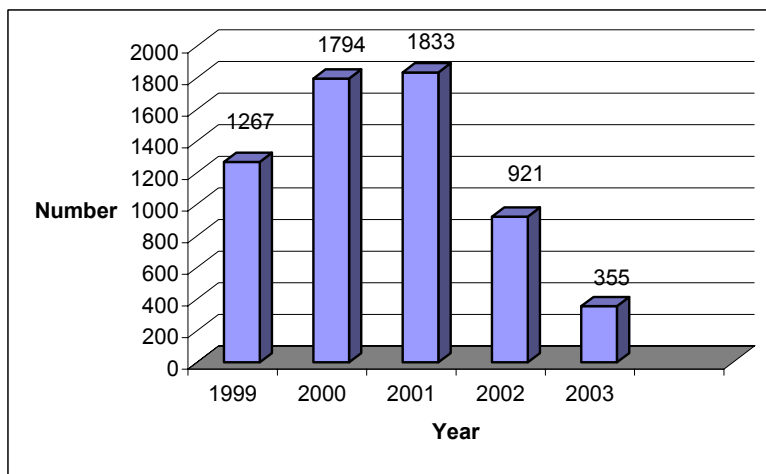


Figure 1: Trend of enrollment of BIT programme through online mode

Source: School of Computer & information science, IGNOU, New Delhi

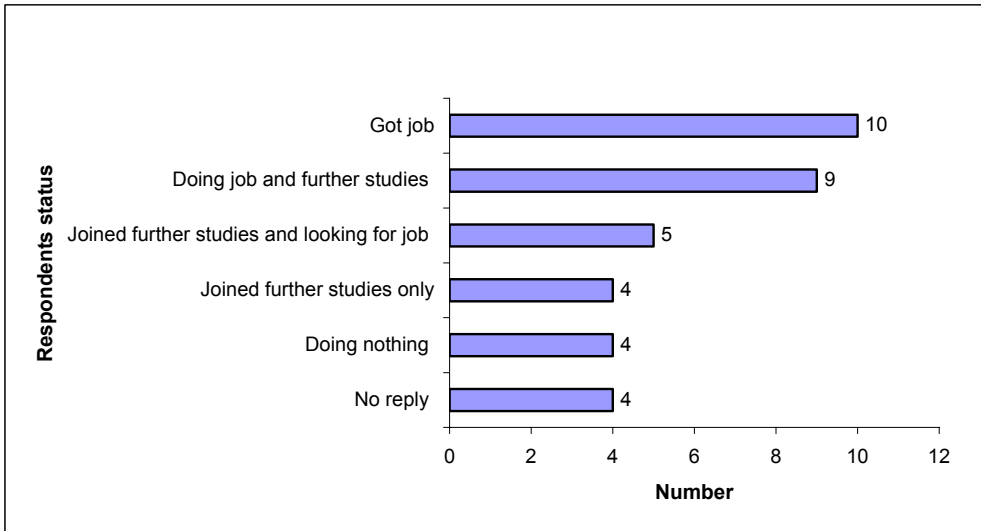


Figure 2: Respondents' status after obtaining BIT degree through online mode