ICT Based Student Support Services in IGNOU: A Study of IGNOU Regional Centre, Aligarh and Lucknow

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Abstract

Before independence, the large majority of poor and marginalized people were illiterate due to limited options of Education. Therefore, in order to ensure access and education of a reasonably good quality, distance education system capable of supplementing the role of conventional system has been evolved. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) which was established in the year 1985 is one of the best distance education imparting university in the world. IGNOU has started its journey with the launch of its programme in the year 1987 and subsequently number of programme grew many fold. In Open and Distance learning (ODL) student support plays a vital role towards the overall satisfaction of the learner which leads to the high performance of the student in terms of educational attainment, passing percentage etc. IGNOU mainly provides its students support through 67 regional centres and approximately 2700 study centres spread across leangth and breadth of India. In the last few years IGNOU further augmented it's student friendly services further by providing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based online services to its learners in the following areas:
1. Online filling for the new admission forms
2. Online filling of the Re Registration forms
3. Online filling of the examination forms
4. Activity based Short Messaging Services (SMS) informing learners of IGNOU about various deadlines, information like induction meeting, face to face counseling sessions, assignment submission schedule, examination submission schedule, re registration form submission schedule etc. The ICT based student support has changed the overall pattern of students support services and satisfaction level of the students pursuing various programme through distance mode.

Keywords: Short Messaging Service (SMS), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)

Introduction

Through various researches, it has been considered that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a mode of effective communication of knowledge in to the mind of student and clear-cut understanding of the subject. The ICT bring the understanding which reflects as a glint on the face of learner. This is glimpse of knowledge and romance of teaching learning process. It is obvious that emphasis on ICT is the need of present society as it acts as a capacity builder for educational institutions without compromising quality. Before independence, the large majority of poor and marginalized people were illiterate due non incorporation of ICT in Education and limited options of Education. Therefore, in order to ensure access and education of a reasonably good quality, distance education system capable of supplementing the role of conventional system has been evolved. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) which was established in the year 1985 is one of the best distance education imparting university in the world. IGNOU has started its journey with the launch of its programme in the year 1987 and subsequently number of programme grew many fold. In Open and Distance learning (ODL) student support plays a vital role towards the overall satisfaction of the learner which leads to the high performance of the

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student in terms of educational attainment, passing percentage etc. IGNOU mainly provides its students support through 67 regional centres and approximately 2700 study centres spread across leangth and breadth of India. In the last few years IGNOU further augmented it's student friendly services further by providing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based online services to its learners. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is playing important role in submission of Online new admission forms, Re Registration forms, examination forms and Activity based Short Messaging Services (SMS) informing learners of IGNOU about various deadlines, information like induction meeting, face to face counseling sessions, assignment submission schedule, examination submission schedule, re registration form submission schedule etc. The ICT based student support has changed the overall pattern of students support services and satisfaction level of the students pursuing various programme through distance mode. With advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the delivery of educational programmes has witnessed a paradigm shift from print based teaching-learning to e-Learning. The IGNOU is fulfilling the educational needs of deprived sections of the society and fulfilling the dreams of quality education. The slogan for the Open and Distance System is very pertinent to mention here,

Har Ghar IGNOU, Ghar Ghar IGNOU

Education at your doorsteps for the inclusive knowledge development of all the sections in the country.

The motive of IGNOU Regional Centres to serve best student support services through Online Support Services for the Students enrolled at Study Centres under the Regional Centres.

It has been seen that ICT has significantly impacted society and education in the last two decades and the advancement in ICT has enabled learner's community to move from paper based learning to digital learning. With the introduction of second generation of internet tools i.e. Web 2.0 ICT has emerged as changing the environment and introducing newer possibilities for education (Mc Carroll and Curran 2013). In continuation of it research shows that ICT enabled education has a positive impact on teachers and learners (Christensen 2002); (Marshall and Cox, 2008). Social Networking tools e.g. blogs, wikis, media-sharing services etc are harnessing the "collective intelligence" of students and teachers, promoting collaboration and the sharing of knowledge (Mason & Rennie, 2008). The interactive tools like Facebook/Twitter etc can be used as a potential mode for delivering the supplementary course material and repetition of the teaching learning process (Muñoz and Towner 2009), (Griffith and Liyanage 2008).

Pre Admission Support

1. Providing support services to choose Programmes & courses and Job related programmes by sending the SMS to the prospective learners. The details of prospective learners had been collected from various sources to make aware about IGNOU Programmes.

2. On the reply of students email, IGNOU Regional Centre Aligarh providing support services to choose Programmes, courses and Job related programmes to the prospective learners. These prospective students always been advised to circulate the information to other relatives and prospective learners.

3. Through offline mode, IGNOU Regional Centres facilitate distribute broachers/pamphlets of knowledge about various programme in the various camps, meetings and seminars. To make aware and vigilant the people living in different regions, IGNOU use the all possible platforms.

Support During Programme
Fresh Admission, Re-Registration, Term-End Examination, Convocation Registration

These online support/services student can avail at their doorstep by clicking IGNOU website www.ignou.ac.in and its related links by using their mobiles, tablets ,laptop and other electronic gazettes. Students may fill the Fresh Admission, Re-Registration, Term-End Examination or Convocation Registration by uploading the required documents, submitting the fee from Debit/Credit card or internet banking. There is no need to take printout of any of them, but it is advisable to save the information at any secure place for future reference.

The camp and facilitation centres have been created at the Regional Centre and its Study Centres for those students, who do not access and facility to fill and submit these forms online.

RC/SC Change, Change of Address, Change of Medium and Correction in Name/Father's Name etc

These support/services are also online but are handled by Regional Centres, the student get resolved the problems related to above by sending emails or offline request in the form of letter addressed to the Regional Director of concerned IGNOU Regional Centre, where the student is enrolled. However, we always encourage the students to send their quarry through emails for quick and speedy solutions.

The action from the Regional Centres are on these matters are very high and speedy and try to update the required change within next day if it is as per IGNOU norms and supported by all requisite documents.

Post Admission Counselling information, Distribution of study material and Induction meeting, Knowledge about Assignments and Term-End Examination, Practical classes, Library facilities and Campus placement facilities

These support/services are necessary and very important, IGNOU Regional Centres inform the students about the time schedule and other details through SMS, RC website, emails, face book, twitter and phone calls to the student. Regional Centres are uploading the small videos for information and knowledge on Youtube. However, we always

encourage the students to visit IGNOU website time to time for updates.

Post Programme Completion Support

Completion of IGNOU programme information, Distribution of Mark sheet and Provisional Certificate, Convocation for receipt of Final Degree, Migration Certificate and Campus placement facilities

These support/services are also necessary and very important, IGNOU Regional Centres inform the students about the time schedule and other details through SMS, RC website, emails, face book, twitter and phone calls to the student. Regional Centres also upload the success story of IGNOU students on Youtube.The Students always been encouraged to visit givien links from time to time for updates.

Review of Related Literature

Dikshit (2003): mentioned in his study about Growth of Open and Flexible Learning in India: Emerging Challenges and Prospectus and pointed out that ODL system is new, pragmatic and dynamic. Murthy, C.R.K. (2004): Programmes for Professional Development in Distance Education: Perceptions and Views of International students revealed the Face-to-face counseling is extremely useful to the learners on various counts of academic and administrative activities of their programmes. Ojo, D. O. and Olakulehin, F. K. (2006): Attitudes and Perceptions of Students to Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria find that most students held positive perceptions and attitudes towards ODL. The 120 students who responded to this survey indicated their interest in the unique features that make-up ODL institutions, such as open access, opportunity for flexible learning, provision of quality learning materials, the use of multi-media and ICTs, etc. Tripathi, P. and Fauzdar, B. I. (2007): studied on Learner Perceptions of Continuous Assessment in the Bachelor Degree Programme of IGNOU ,the findings of the study indicated that continuous assessment is the has a key role in ODL settings in promoting regular study and enhancing learning of distantly placed learners. Gogoi, Manashee & Hazarika, Mukut (2009): find out the Awareness and Attitude of the College Students towards Open and Distance Learning. The findings of the study indicated that there are significant difference of the college students toward Open and Distance Learning and awareness of people and a healthy attitude can ensure the equity, access and quality in and through ODE system.

Significance of The Study

Based on survey of related literature, this is the most important case for significantly recognizing and strengthening the Open and Distance Education in our country. it is the need of today to provide education to all persons for building capacity as "Well Human Capital" for growth and development of the nation. It is essential that Distance Learners are instructed, helped and trained to take up the access and use of Open and Distance Education to their effective participating. This study arouses keen interest in the Researcher as being part of the IGNOU. The present study, therefore, be more authentic and realistic in its findings, conclusions and

suggestion. Also, it is being helpful to the society to make aware about Open and Distance Learning (ODL), its programme and its functioning.

Aim of The Study

The main objectives of the study are:
1. To study the Perception of Distance learners towards ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres
2. To study the Expectations of Distance learners towards ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres
3. To study the activities related to Skill Development under ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres.

Research Methodology
Sampling

For above objective the investigator has collected the information through Google form from the enrolled students under Regional Centre Aligarh and Lucknow.

Type of the Study

This study is a descriptive study based on the primary data available at the admission section of IGNOU Regional Centre Aligarh and Lucknow.

Stastical Technique Uses

Data has been collected through the Google form questionnaire. The SMS was sent to the Master Degree Programme Students of IGNOU Regional Centre Aligarh and Lucknow.

Delimitation of the Study

The Study will be delimited to the students admissions under Aligarh Regional Centre Aligarh and Lucknow only. Only master degree programme student has been considered for study.

Analysis and Interpration Of Data

Analysis of the data means studying and interpretation the tabulated material in order to determine the research outcomes. The process of interpretation is essentially one of stating what the result show? What is the answer of original problem? That is all limitation the data must enter into and become a part of interpretation of the results. As per research objectives the data collected from admission section and analyzed the data in following tables.

Objective 1

To study the Perception of Distance learners towards ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres, Based upon the above objective, the data has been collected through a Google form questionnaire and analyzed .The data of 203 learners in was collected through the questionnaire containg of 10 items of Perception of Distance learners towards ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres. The data collected is framed in the table and analyzed as given below:

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Table: 1
Perception of Distance learners towards ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres

SN	Statements	Strongly Agree	%	Agree	%	Averagely Agree	%	Disagree	%	Strongly Disagree	%
1	The concept of digital society will lead our nation to developed country.	90	44.33	62	30.54	21	10.34	18	8.37	12	5.91
2	In IGNOU the online filling the admission form, re-registration form and examination form facility is paperless and save the time and money.	115	56.65	69	33.99	13	6.40	4	1.97	2	0.99
3	The submission of online forms curtail the compulsion to visit RC/SC.	98	48.28	59	29.06	33	16.26	8	3.94	5	2.46
4	Students can fill the online admission forms conveniently at any time and from any where.	141	69.46	43	21.18	16	7.88	2	0.99	1	0.49
5	The Online submission of form helps in selection of programme study centre and courses.	90	44.33	58	28.57	26	12.81	18	8.87	11	5.42
6	The submission of online examination helps in selection of exam centre and course options automatically.	93	45.81	65	32.02	26	12.81	13	6.40	6	2.96
7	Online payment is safe as compare to other transactions.	88	43.35	45	22.17	47	23.15	12	5.91	11	5.42
8	SMS is tool/services to provide the information quickly and to the masses.	137	67.49	50	24.63	8	3.94	5	2.46	3	1.48
9	SMS services are economic as compare to other modes of communications.	90	44.33	50	24.63						
10	Now a days the students are familiar with submission of online admission form, re-registration forms and examination forms.	102	50.25	58	28.57						
	Average of Perception of Distance learners towards ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres		51.43		27.54						

The investigator has tried to examine the extent of Perception of Distance learners towards ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres. The following observations are made based on responses on Perception of Distance learners towards ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres

1. The 44.33% learners of IGNOU were strongly agreed, 30.54% learners of IGNOU agreed that the concept of digital society will lead our nation to developed country. 10.34% learners of IGNOU were averagely agreed with the statement. Only 8.87% learners of IGNOU were disagreed and 05.91% strongly disagreed with the statement.

2. The 56.65% learners of IGNOU were strongly agreed, 33.99% learners of IGNOU agreed that in IGNOU the online filling the admission form, re-registration form and examination form facility is paperless and save the time and money. 06.40% learners of IGNOU were averagely agreed with the statement. Only 1.97% learners of IGNOU were disagreed and 00.99% strongly disagreed with the statement.

3. The 48.28% learners of IGNOU were strongly agreed, 29.06% learners of IGNOU agreed that the submission of online forms curtail the compulsion to visit RC/SC. 16.26% learners of IGNOU were averagely agreed with the statement. Only 03.94% learners of IGNOU were disagreed and 02.46% strongly disagreed with the statement.

4. The 69.46% learners of IGNOU were strongly agreed, 21.18% learners of IGNOU agreed that Students can fill the online admission forms conveniently at any time and from any where. 07.88% learners of IGNOU were averagely agreed with the statement. Only 0.99% learners of IGNOU were disagreed and 0.49% strongly disagreed with the statement.

5. The 44.33% learners of IGNOU were strongly agreed, 28.57% learners of IGNOU agreed that The Online submission of form helps in selection of programme study centre and courses. 12.81% learners of IGNOU were averagely agreed with the statement. Only 8.87% learners of IGNOU were disagreed and 5.42% strongly disagreed with the statement.

6. The 45.81% learners of IGNOU were strongly agreed, 32.02% learners of IGNOU agreed that the submission of online examination helps in selection of exam centre and course options automatically. 12.81% learners of IGNOU were averagely agreed with the statement. Only 06.40% learners of IGNOU were disagreed and 02.96% strongly disagreed with the statement.

7. The 43.35% learners of IGNOU were strongly agreed, 22.17% learners of IGNOU agreed that online payment is safe as compare to other transactions. 23.15% learners of IGNOU were averagely agreed with the statement. Only 05.91% learners of IGNOU were disagreed and 05.42% strongly disagreed with the statement.

8. The 67.49% learners of IGNOU were strongly agreed, 24.63% learners of IGNOU agreed that SMS is tool/services to provide the information quickly and to the masses. 3.94% learners of IGNOU were averagely agreed with the statement. Only 02.46% learners of IGNOU were disagreed and 1.48% strongly disagreed with the statement.

9. The 44.33% learners of IGNOU were strongly agreed, 24.63% learners of IGNOU agreed that SMS services are economic as compare to other

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modes of communications. 13.79% learners of IGNOU were averagely agreed with the statement. Only 12.32% learners of IGNOU were disagreed and 04.93% strongly disagreed with the statement.

10. The 50.25% learners of IGNOU were strongly agreed, 28.57% learners of IGNOU agreed that Now a days the students are familiar with submission of online admission form, re-registration forms and examination forms. 10.84% learners of IGNOU were averagely agreed with the statement. Only 06.90% learners of IGNOU were disagreed and 03.45% strongly disagreed with the statement.

Based on above analysis the opinions of researchers by interpretation of above results concludes that
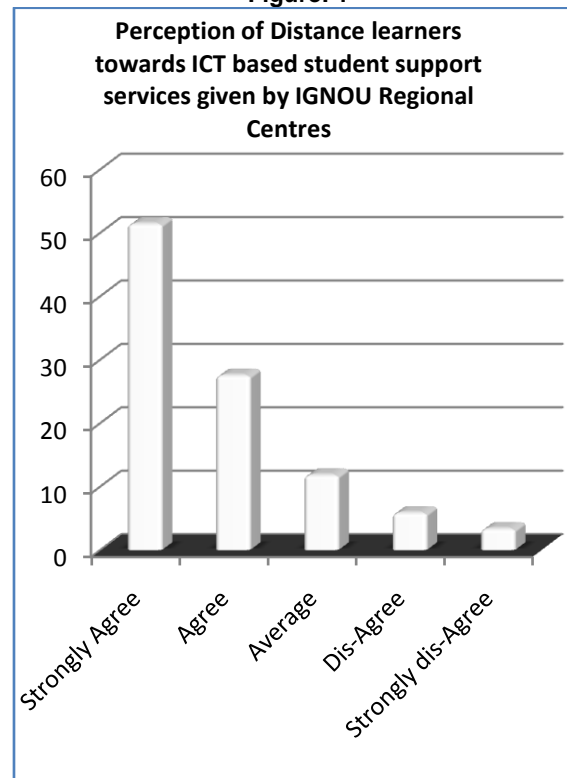
1. It is clearly shows 85.22% learners of IGNOU were more or less agreed and only 14.78% learners of IGNOU were found more or less disagreed that the concept of digital society will lead our nation to developed country.

2. It is clearly shows 97.04% learners of IGNOU were more or less agreed and only 02.96% learners of IGNOU were found more or less disagreed that In IGNOU the online filling the admission form, re-registration form and examination form facility is paperless and save the time and money.

3. It is clearly shows 93.60% learners of IGNOU were more or less agreed and only 06.40% learners of IGNOU were found more or less disagreed that the submission of online forms curtails the compulsion to visit RC/SC.

4. It is clearly shows 98.52% learners of IGNOU were more or less agreed and only 01.48% learners of IGNOU were found more or less disagreed that Students can fill the online admission forms conveniently at any time and from any where.

5. It is clearly shows 85.71% learners of IGNOU were more or less agreed and only 14.29% learners of IGNOU were found more or less dis-agreed that Online submission of form helps in selection of programme study centre and courses.

6. It is clearly shows 90.64% learners of IGNOU were more or less agreed and only 9.36% learners of IGNOU were found more or less dis-agreed that the submission of online examination helps in selection of exam centre and course options automatically.

7. It is clearly shows 88.67% learners of IGNOU were more or less agreed and only 11.33% learners of IGNOU were found more or less disagreed that online payment is safe as compare to other transactions.

8. It is clearly shows 96.06% learners of IGNOU were more or less agreed and only 03.94% learners of IGNOU were found more or less disagreed that SMS is tool/services to provide the information quickly and to the masses.

9. It is clearly shows 82.76% learners of IGNOU were more or less agreed and only 17.24% learners of IGNOU were found more or less disagreed that SMS services are economic as compare to other modes of communications.

10. It is clearly shows 89.66% learners of IGNOU were more or less agreed and only 10.34% learners of IGNOU were found more or less disagreed that now days the students are familiar with submission of online admission form, re-registration forms and examination forms.

The result may also be represented graphically as under:

Figure: 1

Perception of Distance learners towards ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres

As per data, the learners of IGNOU are having good Perception of Distance learners towards ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres. On an average 51.43% learners of IGNOU strongly agreed, 27.54% learners of IGNOU agreed,11.82 were average,05.86 were dis-agreed and 03.35 learners of IGNOU were strongly disagreed that ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres are excellent. It is clearly shows on an average 90.79% learner of IGNOU were more or less agreed and only 09.21% learners of IGNOU were found more or less disagreed with ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres.

Objective 2

To study the Expectations of Distance learners towards ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres. Based upon the above objective, the data has been collected through a Google form questionnaire and analyzed as given below:

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1. The Training programme regarding online submission form and payment should be start from grass root level i.e rural areas.
2. To achieve 100% success of the Digital economy, women's may be motivated, as the first education starts from home.
3. The Academic programmes should be developed by the Open Universities for the people on Digital Literacy and online submission of forms.
4. The Digital Economy should be incorporated in the syllabus of 10+2 or Graduation,so that Youth may learn it by doing practical in society.
5. Government should not charge any fee for online transactions limited to some level and there should be some additional motivational scheme as it is applicable to BHEEM app.
6. IGNOU is doing noble work, but it is the matter of self realization,we all should be united to be aware about the Digital Economy.
7. Internet facility should be un-interrupted in rural areas for this noble work.

As summing we may conclude that the students of IGNOU are well aware about online submission of forms, new innovations and entrepreneurship of society as they are in Open and Distance Learning.

Objective 3

To study the activities related to Skill Development under ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres. Based upon the above objective, the data has been collected through a Google form questionnaire and analyzed as given below:

Activities related to Skill Development:

Regional Centre Aligarh has conducted a training-cum-sensitization programme on cashless transactions-**"Aao Hum Digital Ho Jayein"** for the staff of Regional Centre, Aligarh in collaboration with Union Bank of India on 20.12.2016. To identify the e-KRANTI volunteer, Google form designed at RC Aligarh level. In addition to his/her consent, we have invited various inputs from the learners like ; status of bank account, Aadhar card, familiarity with online transactions, willingness to work in Urban/Rural area etc.

1. A total of 205 learners have responded to our invitation to work as e-KRANTI volunteer out of which 142 male and 63 female.
2. Majority of interested volunteers belong to BA, BCA/MCA and B.Ed.programmes.
3. A total of 93% have bank account and 100% of them have Aadhar card also.
4. Interestingly, 72% of interested is familiar with online transactions already.
5. Out of them 63% are voluntarily ready to spread the awareness among rural area/village of their district.
6. Out of them 63 female learners, only 22 were Muslim. The 35% is good percentage of Muslim women students, who are showing learn cashless transactions through "AAO HUM DIGITAL HO JAYEIN" and are voluntarily ready to spread the

awareness among rural area/village of their districts.
7. The learners responded on e-KRANTI volunteer scheme through "AAO HUM DIGITAL HO JAYEIN",

110 Students have given some relevant suggestions are listed below:

Partially Agree	Agree with common suggestion like **yes/ok/very good/no, it is good attempt etc**	Strongly Agree with some good Suggestions
40	56	14

Conclusion

Through this research Survey the Investigator has come to the conclusion that IGNOU is fulfilling the purpose of their establishment. the learners of IGNOU are having good Perception of Distance learners towards ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres. On an average 51.43% learners of IGNOU strongly agreed, 27.54% learners of IGNOU agreed,11.82 were average,05.86 were dis-agreed and 03.35 learners of IGNOU were strongly disagreed that ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres are excellent. It is clearly shows on an average 90.79% learner of IGNOU were more or less agreed and only 09.21% learners of IGNOU were found more or less disagreed with ICT based student support services given by IGNOU Regional Centres.

In the last few year large number of reforms have been taken place to make education accessible across depth and breadth of India by various open and distance learning universities as well as stand alone institutions imparting distance education programmes. It has contributed lot in the enhancement of the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) as well as further enhanced the access of education among different segments of the society especially weavers, Scheduled caste, scheduled tribes etc. The present as well as future orientation of the government as well as universities to enable easy access of education in every home with the help of digital technology.

1. Digital Learning Centres
2. Open Access of the Study Material
3. Education through Radio Counselling and through Satellite Television
4. Live two way interactive counseling with the help of web conferencing.
5. 5Online Integrated interactive Portal for Student Support

These reforms have been focused upon creation of environment where simplicity, easy accessibilities, of every process of the distance imparting educational institutions from admission upto declaration of the result to award of degree is going to changed the way universities deliver education at present.

Thus, we conclude that the IGNOU is playing a vital role in fulfilling the dreams of Society to provide quality education at the doorsteps of the learners by developing its distance education system. Jugnu

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(जुगनु) is considered as the ambassador of **Light** in the dark, Similorly IGNOU can be considered as the ambassador of **Higher Education in India through its open and Distance Education** in all segment of society. The Slogan **"जहाँ न पहुँचे जुगन, वहाँ पर पहुँचे इग्नू"** is very significant for the development of the higher education in the country.

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