

## Role of Distance Education in Higher Education and Skill Development: Focus on Psychology Programmes of IGNOU for the North-Eastern Region

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**ABSTRACT:** It is not a truism to state that Higher Education is directly related to the National Development. The Indian Education Commission of 1964-66 has explicitly mentioned the role which is being played by Higher Education for the National Development. Despite the number of Universities in India, there is a segment of population who are still unable to access Higher Education due to various factors. The role of Higher Education for the Development of North-Eastern Region assumes significance as it will propel the region to economic development. In order to increase the access of Higher Education in India, the role of Distance Higher Education Institutions/Universities like IGNOU needs attention of the planners from North-Eastern Region. This paper will examine the status of Higher Education in the States of NER and also try to highlight that it is with Higher Education that the NER will prosper and will march towards the road to the development. Of late, there is a need to offer Skill Development Programmes and IGNOU offers many skills Development Programmes. The focus of this paper will be on the programmes offered in the area of Psychology and how these programmes would be useful to the learners to develop their knowledge, understanding, skill and application in the area of Counselling and Clinical Psychology. It helps them to seek employment in various sectors of the economy and also be self-employed. The paper will also examine the issues of depression and also the suicidal tendencies among the population of NER and suggest ways to overcome by training the learners in the area of Psychology which would empower them to deal with psychological disorders which have afflicted the population in NER States.

**KEY WORDS:** Higher Education, Distance Education, Psychology, Skill Development

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Date of Submission: 28-11-2018

Date of acceptance: 13-12-2018

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### I. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Improvement of Higher Education prospect in the Special Category State i.e., North Eastern Region has been one of the key concerns of the Government of India for some time. It is candidly believed that the overall development of North-East has strong relation with expansion of education network (Annual Report 2015-16 Chapter – 13 Pg. 241). Out of the 11 States which enjoy Special Category Status in terms of the support for the expansion of educational network from Govt. of India, there are 08 States which are under North-Eastern Region (NER). These States are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim & Tripura. These States have geographical disadvantages and also suffer from lack of proper infrastructural development. With regard to the Higher Education in these NER States, the following Universities have been established to cater to the needs of the people of this region.

Sl.No.	State	Central Universities & Institutes of National Importance	State Universities & Other Universities	Deemed Universities	Total
1.	Arunachal Pradesh	02	06	01	09
2.	Assam	05	16	00	21
3.	Manipur	04	00	00	04
4.	Meghalaya	02	08	00	10
5.	Mizoram	02	01	00	03
6.	Nagaland	02	02	00	04
7.	Sikkim	02	05	00	07
8.	Tripura	02	01	00	03
9.	TOTAL	21	39	01	61

Out of the 61 Institutions of Higher Learning in NER, 06 Universities offer Master's Degree Programme in Psychology. The following are the Universities which offer MA/M.Sc. Psychology at the Master's level.

- 1) Dibrugarh University, Assam
- 2) Gauhati University, Assam
- 3) Mizoram University, Mizoram
- 4) Nagaland University, Nagaland
- 5) Sikkim University, Sikkim
- 6) Tripura University, Tripura

In addition to all the above Universities, IGNOU which is a Central University and has a National Jurisdiction offers Psychology Programme at Master's Level in NER.

### **Importance of Skill Based Programmes for NER**

There is a tremendous need to offer skill based programmes in the region to propel the economic development as the NER lags behind the national average in terms of offering the skill based programmes. It is obvious to see that there are number of suicidal cases in these States and in one of the Chapters listed in the Report Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India 2015 by NCRB (Chapter 3 of the Report, Pg. 293-294), the number of CAPF who committed suicides during the year 2015 and the reasons for their suicides have been shown as family problems (27%), financial problems and indebtedness (12%), property disputes (4%), marriage related issues (3%), service related issues (1%) and causes unknown (9%) and this is a significant number of personnel who are lost their lives without being provided proper support in terms of counseling. Other than this, there are other problems which the NER face and quite a considerable number of people commit suicide with States like Assam which has registered 3231 suicides during the year 2015 (Report Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India 2015 by NCRB, Pg. 194).

Further, in comparison to the national average of rate of suicides in the States/UTs in the year 2015, three States from NER have more suicides than the national average i.e., 10.6. It indicates that there are more suicidal tendencies among the people of this region. The two examples which have been quoted from the reports i.e., the suicides among the CAPF and the other people clearly demonstrates that the Govt. of India has to make a positive intervention to revert this trend of suicides in this region and implement such strategies which would help the people of this region to provide with skill based programmes and also proper counseling in order to avoid the untimely deaths among the people of this region.

### **The Role of Psychologist and the offer of the Counselling**

As the population of the NER is more than 1.25 crores, the needs of the people in terms of the availability of the support of Psychologists is comparatively less as out of 61 Universities in the region, only 06 Universities are offering the Psychology Programme at Master's level in the Region. There is one more Institution of National Level importance under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare which offers M.Phil. & Ph.D in Clinical Psychology. Other than this, IGNOU has also its presence in the Region which also offers M.A. in Psychology in some of the States.

Among the salient features of the Mental Healthcare Act of 2017, it has been highlighted that there are several people across the world who have been afflicted with mental health problems. According to an estimate released by the World Health Organization in its latest report, more than 300 million people in the world with depression which is an increase of more than 18% between 2005 & 2015 (Employment News Vol. XLII No. 4, Page 2 dt. 22-28 April, 2017). As there is a tremendous increase around the globe with the people suffering from depression and psychological problems, NER region is no exception and in fact, the region has registered more suicidal deaths when compared to the national average in India.

Looking into this scenario many people would be suffering from depression and other mental disorder in the region and pro-active steps need to be initiated in order to curb the increase of depression and other psychological disorders in the region. One of the strategies which the Govt. of India and the State Governments of these States have to implement is to offer Psychology Programmes in all the Universities both Central & State in order to train Psychologists who would be available to counsel the people of this region. Further, the role of IGNOU in the region to offer the Programme of M.A. Psychology needs to be strengthened by the various Regional Centres in the various States of NER.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

As it has been suggested in this paper that there is an urgent need to evolve the strategy of offering Psychology Programmes in all the Universities of NER in order to train the Psychologists who should be recruited in the various Hospitals, Jails, Education Institutions, and various armed forces organizations in order to help the people who are suffering from the mental health problems and to overcome problems of depression and other psychological disorders, it is but imperative to focus on the importance of Psychology Programmes of

IGNOU which will be offered to the learners of NER and this will help the region to minimize all the psychological problems among the people of this region.

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#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I acknowledge my sincere thanks to Dr. S. Fiayaz Ahmed, Regional Director, Indira Gandhi National Open University Regional Centre Hyderabad for preparation of this paper.

B. Prasad Babu "Role of Distance Education in Higher Education and Skill Development :Focus on Psychology Programmes of IGNOU for the North-Eastern Region" International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI), vol. 07, no. 12, 2018, pp.48-50