

A Study of Effectiveness of Tutor Marked Assignments for NIOS Learners

Project Report

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Introduction

NIOS reaches out to a prioritized client group which includes school drop-outs and marginalized groups such as rural youth, urban poor, girls and women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, backward classes, disabled and ex-service personnel. Currently, the National Institute of Open Schooling has on its rolls approx 2.02 million students from almost every State and Union Territory of India- an indication that Open Schooling is attempting to reach out to a large segment of people.

Tutor Marked Assignment (TMA) by NIOS is one of the important tools for engaging the students in the process of teaching-learning. If TMAs are taken seriously, they could form the habit of reading the study material and finding answers to the assignments. It will help the students to understand how to give to-the-point answer in examinations. In fact, TMA could help the students to get involved in the process of gaining knowledge throughout the session. It will also help to form a good base for preparation for the ensuing examination and could be an added incentive of getting good grade and for better performance in the examination. The Tutors' comments on Assignments-Responses may also be quite useful for the learners to know their strengths and weaknesses and accordingly improve their performance in future.

Keeping in view its relevance, the present study on Effectiveness of Tutor Marked Assignments (TMA) was visualized. The study centres strived to find ways and means to improve the system of Tutor Marked Assignments (TMA) in order to make learning effective. The study was confined to the selected learners of classes X and XII of the two Regional Centres of Delhi and Pune which also included the opinions of Coordinators of Study Centres, Academic Facilitators and Academic Officers of NIOS through questionnaires designed and developed for each category separately.

Objectives of the Study

As one goes by the definition of the term **Effectiveness**, it implies empirical usefulness with respect to the achievement of objectives in behavioral terms. The objectives of the study are to:

- develop questionnaires to seek the opinion of experts, tutors/coordinators of Accredited Institutions (AIS) on the TMAs.
- get the feedback on the quality and usefulness of TMAs from the learners of NIOS.
- find ways and means to improve the system of TMAs in order to make learning more effective.

Delimitations of the Study:

The present study is delimited to:

- Selected learners of classes X and XII of NIOS under the jurisdiction of the two Regional Centres of NIOS (Delhi and Pune) covering partially Northern and Western Regions of the country.
- Academic Officers, Academic Facilitators and Coordinators of Accredited Institutions of NIOS.

Methodology and Procedure

Under the study, it was planned to obtain feedback about effectiveness of TMA from the following.

- Learners of Classes X and XII of NIOS.
- Coordinators of the Academic Study Centres (AIs) of NIOS.
- Academic Officers of NIOS.
- Academic Facilitators appointed by NIOS to oversee the implementation of NIOS programmes in the Study Centres of NIOS.

Findings

The analysis of data is testimony to the facts that TMAs can help the learners to improve their academic pursuits if some steps suggested by way of conclusions and suggestions are taken care of.

- Under the project, effectiveness of TMAs was assessed through feedback to Questionnaires for (i) Learners, (ii) Coordinators of Study Centres, and (iii) Academic Officers in NIOS and Academic Facilitators appointed by NIOS for Study Centres. Analysis of responses to the Questionnaires is given in Chapter Two of this Report. Highlights of responses and suggestions emerged from responses are as follows.
- There is a schedule of dispatch of Assignments Booklet to learners. Several learners mentioned delay in receipt of the Assignments Booklet. The **Schedule of Dispatch of Assignments Booklet to learners need to be adhered to by NIOS**, failing which it would be difficult for learners to adhere to the Schedule of submission of their Response Sheets. About 20% respondents have mentioned that time at their disposal to solve the assignments was not sufficient.
- Some students mentioned that **language of Assignments should be simple, precise and comprehensible.**
- Whereas 38% learners have mentioned that **comments/ suggestions of tutors on their Assignments-Response Sheets (TMAs)** are helpful, 32% learners have mentioned that tutors comments/ suggestions are not helpful. It is therefore desirable that for ensuring effectiveness of TMA Programme, the **comments of tutors should be such they prove helpful for learners.** Harmful, negative, misleading, incomplete, hollow, crude and damaging comments should be avoided. **The comments/ suggestions should be discussed by tutors with students during PCP classes.** The comments of tutors on Assignments-Response Sheets are helpful in initiating dialogue with learners as they may seek further guidance, support or clarification from tutors. Under the present study, 25% learners have mentioned that comments of tutors on the Assignment-Responses are casual. Keeping these facts in view, **there is a need for organizing training programmes for the tutors of study centres on TMA.**
- In the **Counseling Sessions**, the learners should be provided **proper guidance about solving the Assignments and conducting the “Project Work”.** It would encourage the learners to attempt the questions with confidence.
- Till such time a policy decision is taken about conducting an internal examination for solving assignments in PCP classes, **only those learners may be allowed to deposit the examination fees who have submitted the Assignments-Response Sheets as per schedule.** However, the

Study Centres may be advised to remind the students in PCP Classes or by post/ by telephone to submit their Assignments-Response Sheets in time.

- **Forty five per cent Coordinators** of the study centres have stated that **quality of ‘Assignments’ is good**. 35% coordinators have stated that quality of ‘Assignments’ is **average**. The matter needs to be considered seriously by NIOS.
- **Sixty percent Coordinators** have stated that **it is difficult for learners to submit the Assignments-Response Sheets in time (as per schedule) as they are pre-occupied in their family work/ responsibilities**. In such situation, many learners copy the solved ‘Assignments’ of their fellow learners and submit them as a matter of formality. It is a sad commentary on the entire scheme of ‘TMA’ as it tells negatively about effectiveness of ‘TMA’ programme of NIOS. **The entire Scheme of TMA needs to be reviewed and reformulated in order to make it workable and effective**.
- As far as the **design of development of TMAs is concerned, it should be 25% knowledge based, 50% based on understanding and 25% application based**. The Academic Officers of NIOS shall be the key persons to maintain continuity and look after the overall design aspect. The resource persons should be drawn by changing them periodically so that the questions are not of the same style and are not monotonous.
- The learners and coordinators of Study Centres have raised doubts on the quality of Assignments. **Some have stated that the Assignments are lengthy and also they have no time to write the answers in details**. There are responses which seem to suggest that the assignments-responses are not prepared/ written by the persons other than the learners and submitted to the study centres. Learners also copy the Assignments of other learners which reflect upon the malpractices in the study centres.
- **Orientation of Academic Officers of NIOS and Tutors in preparation, transaction and evaluation of TMAs is needed**.
- **Supplementary study material with suggested media programmes and related CDs may be made available to learners** to facilitate them to solve the Assignments.
- **NIOS is required to provide guidance to the Study Centres periodically about academic and operational aspects of the Scheme of TMA**.
- The Project Work provides practical knowledge to learners about subjects and gives them opportunity to understand the relationship between theory and practice, making learning more

effective and enjoyable. Some of the learners are not able to complete the project work. They need guidance in this regard. Their **difficulties regarding Project Work may be discussed during Personal Contact Programme Classes. Some special PCP sessions may be organized exclusively for Project Work.**

- In order to make the scheme of TMA more effective, the amount of **remuneration to Tutors** in the Study Centres may **be made more attractive.**
- Presently TMAs are only meant for the learners in the First Year of admission although admission is valid up to Five Years. What about the assignments in the subsequent years when a learner seeks to appear in later years. This needs consideration by NIOS.
- Many revealing facts based upon the responses deserve consideration to relook the system of Assignments so as to make them effective for improving the quality of education.

Recommendations/ Suggestions

- There is a need to introduce some kind of compulsion in attempting assignments by the learners. Of the three assignments per subject, at least **submission of one assignment may be made compulsory.**
- The questions (assignments) are already known to the students in the beginning of the academic session through the booklet of the assignments popularly known as “TMA Booklet” in NIOS. They have ample time to prepare the assignments. It is suggested that the **learners may be asked to solve the assignments in the Personal Contact Programmes (PCPs) at the Study Centres under the supervision of the tutors.** This may be treated as term examination like comprehensive and continuous evaluation (CCE).
- The tutors are required to give their **detailed comments and suggestions on the assignments** which are known as Tutor Marked Assignments (TMA) under the ODL System. They are also required to **assign Grades on the assignments** of the learners which are to be communicated to NIOS for **reflection in the Marksheets and Certificates.**

- The tutors are required to **discuss the comments/ suggestions** related to strengths and weaknesses of the learners **in PCP Classes**. It is also suggested the **Xerox Copies of the TMA may be provided to the learners for their use**. Capacity Building Programmes of Tutors of the Study Centres particularly about theory and practice of Tutor Marked Assignments may be organized.
- It is suggested that **20% weightage** may be given to evaluated assignments-responses (TMA) in the final examination result.
- As regards the Project, it is suggested that the **tutors may guide the learners in the PCP Classes** about their conduct upon receipt of Project Work from learners. The **Viva-Voice about the project** may form an integral part of the evaluation framework for TMA. **The marks/ grades of the project work may also be included in the final result.**
- There is a general complaint that the study material and TMA booklets do not reach to the learners in time. This makes the entire schedule of submission of assignments-responses by learners. NIOS should take steps that **dispatches** of materials are sent to learners well in time.
- If some learners do not submit the assignments-response sheets as per schedule, they may not be allowed to deposit the examination fee.
- Some learners have stated that the assignments are lengthy and they find it difficult to adhere to the schedule of their submission to the Study Centres. NIOS may take steps to prepare the assignments simple and comprehensible.

Suggestions about PCPs

- The importance of PCPs may be conveyed to the learners in counselling sessions to be organized in the beginning of the academic session. In order to take benefit of the Contact Classes, it is suggested that **50% attendance of learners in PCP may be made compulsory**. The implications of this suggestion may be worked out by NIOS.

- Keeping in view the flexibility given by NIOS for completion of a course in five years, it is suggested that **learners may be allowed to attend PCP classes in subjects that are yet to be cleared after the first year of admission.**
- Use of ICT may be one of the significant inputs in the PCP Classes. It may include projects and programmes such as Web Radio, multi-media programmes, teleconferencing.
- The NIOS faculty is required to remain in touch with the Study Centres, particularly to oversee/ monitor the PCP Classes. Each faculty members may adopt two to three Study Centres to begin with for intensive and extensive monitoring. They may be paid TA, DA and Honorarium for the purpose.

Educational Implications

- The present study shows how TMAs can significantly improve the quality of education under ODL mode of education. The findings of the study are beneficial for the learners, Tutors/ Coordinators and help them to make the process of teaching-learning interactive. It can create more interest among the learners and add creativity by making them more active, alert and involved.
- Revision and recapitulation of concepts and main points is a big advantage through TMA when key points can be easily highlighted and mastered. Variety is a good tool in the hands of learners for self study and self evaluation at their own pace. Through TMA, learners can develop positive attitude, critical thinking and synthesis of knowledge. They can learn faster and have deeper understanding of the whole subject which can help in avoiding stress and strain by repeating all the concepts at the time of final examination.