

Effectiveness of Online Grievance Redressal and Management System: A case study of IGNOU Learners

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Abstract

Online grievance redressal systems have a very crucial role in retention of learners in open and distance learning (ODL) systems where learners are geographically away from institution, teachers and peer group and they get very few opportunities otherwise to get their grievances resolved. At any given time IGNOU is having enrolment of more than 3 million and to address grievances of these large numbers of learners, an online grievance redressal and management mechanism has been developed. In this paper, effectiveness of IGNOU online grievance redressal and management System (iGRAM) in handling learners' grievances have been examined by carrying out a survey among the learners who have used iGRAM for their grievance redressal. A questionnaire was developed and administered online to iGRAM users. Apart from demographic questions the survey model consists of a set of statements regarding effectiveness of iGRAM portal in handling learners' grievances. Survey results show that majority of learners were satisfied with this online grievance redressal and management system of IGNOU, however, with few additions/changes like development of mobile app based iGRAM portal, by addressing issue of non-receipt of study material and by putting more efforts in its popularization, iGRAM can be made more effective.

Keywords: Online Grievance Redressal, Open and Distance Education (ODL), Learners, Learner Support, iGram, IGNOU

Introduction

Grievance is generally defined as any communication that expresses dissatisfaction about an action or lack of action, about the standard of service/deficiency of service of an institute and the complainant asks for remedial action. Grievance redress mechanism is part and parcel of the machinery of

any academic institution. No academic institution can claim to be accountable, responsive and student-friendly unless it has established an efficient and effective grievance redress mechanism. In fact, the grievance redress mechanism of an academic institution is the gauge to measure its efficiency and effectiveness as it provides important feedback on

the working of the institution.

In Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions, grievance redressal and management are a very important component as it critically supports the final learning outcome of the learners. In ODL, learners do not get regular opportunities to interact with their peer group and tutors and learners perform a major part of their studies themselves. In comparison, in conventional mode of higher education, students regularly visit their institutions and they have ample opportunities to get their grievances resolved.

IGNOU has an enrollment of more than 3 million learners and the total fresh intake of learners in 2019, was close to 7.67 lakhs, spread across the 56 Regional Centers (RCs), 11 Recognized Regional Centers (RRCs) of the Army, Navy & Assam Rifles and nearly 1800 Learner Support Centres (LSCs) located across different states of India at various places. To address grievances of this huge number of learners, IGNOU has various mechanisms like e-mail, telephone, by post, social media etc. However, to provide a one-stop integrated IT solution for all types of student grievances in an efficient, effective and transparent manner a learner friendly grievance redressal web portal named, 'IGNOU Grievance Redress and Management" (iGRAM) was launched by the university. After being on hold for a while for upgradation, it was relaunched with modification and addition of new features on 5th September, 2018 (IGNOU Annual Report, 2018-19). Prior to the launch of the integrated grievance management system, iGRAM, the university has a

system of redressing grievances of the students through email/phone/face to face interactions through help desks at regional centres. However, one of the biggest limitations of such a system was that tracking of the grievance in terms of its status, earlier reply given & its correlation was not possible. Besides this the top management is also not able to track how many grievances are pending at different levels i.e. Regional Centres, Schools of Studies, Divisions along with the areas to which it relates, so as to take corrective measures on it. With the help of iGRAM university is able to consolidate the different levels/areas in where grievances are emerging, so that appropriate policy interventions could be taken to minimize the grievances of different stakeholders.

As per the National Education Policy 2020, ODL must play a significant role in increasing Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) to 50 percent by 2035. In order to support it's essential that the innovation and expansion of ODL must be encouraged, while ensuring quality at the same time. At the same time there is an urgent need to institutionalize learner support services at all institutions offering ODL. These must be as responsive, effective and relevant as the ones on offer for full time students of the same Higher Educational Institution (HEI). These services will include: providing learning material (e.g. hosting courseware, repositories, Open Educational Resources or OERs, MOOCs), support from help desk services, tutoring and counselling, conduct of classes (through webinars, discussion forums, webcasting), library facilities, virtual labs, e-learning modules, timely feedback

on performance, online examinations, declaration of results, granting of certifications, redressal of grievances, etc. It ensures the delivery of time-bound and reliable quality of student services and grievance redressal; fines or other penalties or actions may be suitably levied on the concerned persons if not delivered as promised.

Review of the related literature

Mukerji, S. and Tripathi, P. (2005), deliberated in detail about the different dimensions of the quality education through open and distance learning institutions in India with the primary focus on the student support imparted at different levels i.e. Learner Support Centres, Regional Centres, HQ etc.

Arambewela et al. (2005) indicated that the quality of education, adequacy of student facilities, reputation of the institutions, marketability of degrees for better career prospects, and the overall customer value provided by the universities were the most important factors that had a strong impact on student satisfaction. It was revealed that students, in general, were satisfied with teaching quality and the quality of lecturers, but were unhappy with the university support and facilities.

The use of the Internet in the operation of government institutions has been emphasized by many workers (Cohen and Eimicke, 2002; Jorgensen and Cable, 2002). The worldwide explosion and acceptance of the Internet has shaped several implications for the public sector. Rather than duplicating their traditional brick and mortar equivalents, government agencies with digital delivery systems are non-hierarchical,

non-linear, interactive in nature, and never closed (Schaupp et al., 2010; West, 2008). The current development of e-government services has opened new opportunities to deliver information and services more conveniently and cost effectively to the citizens (Wang and Shih, 2009). Nowadays the existence of an online system to redress grievances of the public is an integral part of E-Government.

While studying e-governance systems already in use at Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) for delivering various student support services online, Bhatnagar (2013) concluded that IGNOU needs to allocate more to its ICT budget so that learners and facilitators in its ODL system can seamlessly interact and gain in the process.

During their study on learner's expectations on future education policies Gowthaman et al. (2017) found that nearly 83.5percent of the learners preferred online grievance submission and redressal and recommended that the ODL policy should incorporate technology driven student support.

Flores (2017) highlighted that support resources must be available at all times for the distance courses and a grievance procedure should always be available for learners, including electronic faculty course evaluations.

Santosh and Dixit (2018) discussed e-governance in the context of distance education and stated that effective use of ICT in the education sector will help in enhancing the efficiency, bringing in transparency and cost reduction.

Subrahmanyam (2018) while discussing use of technology for learner support

services in IGNOU highlights effective use of technology by the university for internal processes, digital initiatives being provided for learner's support, challenges faced in implementation of technology and best ICT practices being followed by the university. He also talks about the digital initiatives for learners' grievance redressal such as UGC (University Grants Commission) online portal, Public Grievance portal and other platforms and how these have helped in channelizing the learners' grievances to the right place for speedy solutions.

Das and Biswas (2018) discusses the current use of ICT in higher education in the developing countries, the advantages of the ICT tools, and also explores the learner readiness in these countries to use ICT for learning purposes. They also describe the different types of learner support services being offered by the ODL system and the ICT tools being used to offer the services.

Singh and Sahay (2020) analyzed the queries received through iGRAM at IGNOU Regional Centre Delhi-1 and gave recommendations regarding efforts which may be made to minimize the number of queries at iGRAM further. They advocated the need to include the Learner Support Centres also in iGRAM network so that they may be made to respond through the network itself and thus the response time will be minimized. They also recommended creation of some automated response systems in iGRAM for general queries related to procedures, in order to save time on responses.

Based upon the above reviews, the need for comprehensive online

grievance management is very much essential to manage grievances of millions of learners enrolled in the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions. It is also a fact that learners in ODL institutions comes from diverse background like some are in jobs, some are freshers preparing for the other competitive examinations, some are doing one additional ODL course in addition to the their regular course in other institutions, retired people, jail inmates, transgenders, anganwadi workers etc. and it order to facilitate them to raise query/grievance at the convenience of their home, it's of utmost importance to have an integrated online support system for learners to resolve their issues related to their course of study.

Objective of the Study

The main aim of the study is to analyze the effectiveness of online grievance redressal and management systems for learners in IGNOU. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To study the usefulness of the IGNOU Grievance Redressal and Management (iGRAM) with reference to demographic variables.
- To study use of iGRAM mechanism with respect to ICT infrastructure/environment available with the learners.
- To study the effectiveness of iGRAM mechanism in resolving learners' grievances.

Research Methodology

A questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale was designed in which 1 was

strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 disagree and 5 strongly disagree. A Google form containing the questionnaire was developed and an SMS with the link of this Google form was sent to 1,200 learners registered under IGNOU Regional Centre Varanasi who had used iGRAM portal during the period of July 2019 to June 2020 for getting their grievances resolved. There were two sets of questions, the first set asked for demographic and internet access related information and the second set included 11 questions about the effectiveness of the iGRAM portal in resolving learner's grievances. The questions were drafted in Hindi and were structured in such a way that it would be easy for learners to understand the topic and answer

properly. The demographic information which was asked for included: Learners programme of study, their age and gender, employment and marital status, area (urban or rural) they belong to, device used for internet access, place where they use internet, how they came to know about iGRAM and type of problem they raised on iGRAM.

Findings and Discussion

Objective 1: In order to examine the usefulness of IGNOU Grievance Redressal and Management (iGRAM) system with reference to demographic variables, learners were asked some basic questions related to their demography.

Table-1: Data related to demographic variables of iGRAM users

Demographic Variables		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Gender	Female	21	21.4	21.4	21.4
	Male	77	78.6	78.6	100
Area	Rural	40	40.8	40.8	40.8
	Urban	58	59.2	59.2	100
Employment Status	Employed	28	28.6	28.6	28.6
	Unemployed	70	71.4	71.4	100
Marital Status	Married	29	29.6	29.6	29.6
	Unmarried	69	70.4	70.4	100
Age Group	Age Up to 20	9	9.2	9.2	9.2
	Age 20-30	63	64.3	64.3	73.5
	Age 30-40	17	17.3	17.3	90.8
	Age 40-50	8	8.2	8.2	99
	Age above 50	1	1	1	100
Programme in IGNOU	Bachelors	41	41.8	41.8	41.8
	Certificate	8	8.2	8.2	50
	Masters	40	40.8	40.8	90.8

	Post Graduate Diploma	7	7.1	7.1	98
	Diploma	2	2	2	100
Came to know about iGRAM from	Friend	13	13.3	13.3	13.3
	IGNOU Website	71	72.4	72.4	85.7
	Induction Meeting	10	10.2	10.2	95.9
	Regional Centre	2	2	2	98
	Study Centre	2	2	2	100
Category of grievances	Non-receipt of study material	55	56.1	56.1	56.1
	Non updation of awards/ grades	13	13.3	13.3	69.4
	Admission related	10	10.2	10.2	79.6
	Non receipt of degree/ mark-sheet	8	8.2	8.2	87.8
	Change of electives	2	2	2	89.8
	Synopsis/ Project related	2	2	2	91.8
	Refund of fee	2	2	2	93.9
	Others	6	6.1	6.1	100
Days in which received response on iGRAM	Same day	27	27.6	27.6	27.6
	In 03 days	32	32.7	32.7	60.3
	In 05 days	12	12.2	12.2	72.5
	In 10 days	6	6.1	6.1	78.6
	More than 10 days	21	21.4	21.4	100

Interpretation of table

Total 98 learners, who had used iGRAM portal for getting a response of their grievance, participated in the survey. Out of these 98, majorities of the learners were male i.e. 78.6 percent and 21.4 percent were female.

40.8 percent of learners using iGRAM were from rural areas and the rest 59.2 percent were from urban areas. Availability of internet facilities in rural areas is facilitating rural learners also to use online grievance redressal mechanisms. A good number of learners from rural areas used iGRAM for getting their grievances resolved shows that iGRAM is gaining popularity.

Out of the total respondents who provided their responses in the survey, 28.6 percent were employed and 71.4 percent learners were unemployed, whereas 29.6 percent learners were married while 70.4 percent were unmarried.

Maximum 64.3 percent of the respondents belong to the age bracket of 20-30 years, followed by 17.3 percent between 30-40 years, 9.2 percent are of below 20 years, 8.2 percent are in the age bracket of 40-50 years and only 01 percent of the respondents are of above 50 years of age.

Maximum 41.8 percent of learners who responded to the survey were of Bachelor degree programme, followed by 40.8 percent from Post Graduate Degree programme. Whereas respondents from Certificate programme, Post Graduate Diploma and Diploma programme constitute only 8.2 percent, 7.1 percent and 2 percent, respectively.

An institution should popularize its grievance redressal mechanism among its clients. In this study 72.4 percent learners reported that they came to know about iGRAM from IGNOU website, 13.3 percent from friends, 10.2 percent in Induction meeting and 2 percent from IGNOU Regional Centres (RCs) and equally 2 percent of the student users of iGRAM came to know about it from Learner Support Centres (LSCs). It shows that RCs and LSCs need to play a more proactive role in popularizing the iGRAM facility among learners. Learners should also be informed properly about the availability of online grievance redressal mechanisms in IGNOU during induction meetings which are held after the start of every academic session on a regular basis.

During this study, it was found that maximum grievances received at iGRAM are pertaining to non-receipt of study materials. 56.1 percent of the learners who participated in the survey reported that the grievances raised by them were pertaining to non-receipt of study materials. As per the present policy of the University, study materials are dispatched to learners from the Regional Centre as well as the Material Production and Distribution Division (MPDD) of the Head Quarters, addressing the issue of non-receipt of study material can significantly reduce the iGRAM grievances. It was followed by non updation of awards (assignment and Term End Exam awards) in Grade Card comprising 13.3 percent of total grievance. 10.2 percent of the grievances were admissions related and 8.2 percent were related to the non-receipt of degree/marksheet, 02

percent each related with change of electives, synopsis/project related, refund of fee etc. Remaining 6.1 percent of grievances categorized as others were of miscellaneous nature like, evaluation of answer scripts, name/address correction, examination form submission etc.

The grievances in iGRAM are attended to on a day-to-day basis. As per the University's policy, the grievances received at iGRAM are to be responded to in three working days. In most of the cases at iGRAM the response is given to learners in 03 working days, however, in few cases where the information is to be collected from another place like LSCs or from headquarter or in other cases where grievance is to be forwarded to concerned division at headquarters, the response is delayed by another few

days. In this study it was found that 27.6 percent learners received a response on the same day of filing their grievance while 32.7 percent learners received their response in 03 days. 12.2 percent learners received responses in 05 days, only 6.1 percent learners received their response in 10 days and in the rest 21.4 percent cases it took more than 10 days to respond to learners.

It means in about 60 percent cases learners received their responses within 03 days of submitting their grievance at iGRAM which is as per the University's policy of responding to learners at iGRAM within 03 working days.

Objective 2: With reference to this objective feedback from the learners were taken on various parameters related to the availability of the ICT infrastructure /environment with them.

Table-2: Data of ICT infrastructure available with the iGRAM users

ICT infrastructure available with learners		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Device used for internet access	Desktop	2	2	2	2
	Laptop	6	6.1	6.1	8.2
	Smart Phone	90	91.8	91.8	100
Place of internet access	Cyber Cafe	2	2	2	2
	Home	91	92.9	92.9	94.9
	Office	5	5.1	5.1	100

Interpretation of table

In response to the question regarding devices used for internet access, 91.8 percent learners said that they use smartphones for internet access, 6.2 percent use laptops and only 2.0 percent use desktop for internet access. The present iGRAM portal is basically a desktop/laptop version. As more than 90 percent of iGRAM users access

the internet on their smartphone, the development of a dedicated mobile app for iGRAM will increase the accessibility of iGRAM.

This study reveals that the maximum number of iGRAM users i.e. 92.9 percent access the internet at home, 5.1 percent use the internet in office and only 2 percent users visit cyber cafes for internet access.

Objective 3: With reference to this related to the effectiveness of iGRAM objective feedback from the learners mechanism in resolving learners were taken on various parameters grievances

Table-3: Feedback of the learners on various statements regarding effectiveness of iGRAM portal

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I shall suggest others to use iGRAM portal	30.6	45.9	10.2	7.1	6.1
iGRAM portal is effective in resolving learners problems	26.5	42.9	11.2	11.2	8.2
Language used in iGRAM reply was very courteous	27.6	58.2	6.1	4.1	4.1
iGRAM is more effective than email and telephone request in handling student grievances	31.6	41.8	11.2	12.2	3.1
Grievance can be registered on iGRAM easily in one go	34.7	48.0	7.1	7.1	3.1
I believe that after the iGRAM complaint was made, the authorities were more responsive	22.4	30.6	20.4	18.4	8.2
iGRAM portal helped me in establishing my faith in IGNOU grievance management system	21.4	44.9	11.2	14.3	8.2
iGRAM portal is an effective platform for addressing all types of query/grievances	26.5	36.7	19.4	12.2	5.1
Using iGRAM portal increases my chance of completing IGNOU programme in time	20.4	36.7	18.4	17.3	7.1

Using iGRAM portal I can get responses of my query/grievance in reasonable time	17.3	37.8	20.4	12.2	12.2
Information received through iGRAM was very useful	21.4	37.8	11.2	18.4	11.2

Interpretation of table

There were 30.6 percent learners who strongly agree with the statement that they shall suggest others to use iGRAM portal, while 45.9 percent agree with it. Thus, there were a total 76.5 percent learners who agree that they shall suggest others to use iGRAM portal. 7.1 percent learners disagree and only 6.1 percent strongly disagree with the statement and the remaining 10.2 percent learners gave their opinion as neither agree nor disagree.

26.5 percent learners strongly agree with the statement that iGRAM portal is effective in resolving student’s problems and 42.9 percent learners agree with the statement. On the other hand, 8.2 percent strongly disagree and 11.2 percent disagree with the statement. 11.2 percent of learners remained neutral.

In the survey, the majority of the learners i.e. 58.2 percent learners agree with the statement that the language used in iGRAM reply was very courteous and 27.6 percent learners strongly agree on it. Thus, about 85 percent of learners agree that the language used by officials to respond to their query was courteous in nature. The percentage of learners who strongly disagree with the statement is 4.1 percent and equally 4.1 percent of learners disagree with

this statement. In response to this statement, 6.1 percent of learners opted for neither agree nor disagree.

In response to the statement that iGRAM is more effective than email and telephone requests in handling student grievances, 31.6 percent learners strongly agree and 41.8 percent learners agree to it. Hence, in view of about 73 percent learners, iGRAM is a more effective medium than other modes like email and telephone in handling learners’ grievances. Only 3.1 percent learners strongly disagree while 12.2 percent disagree with the statement.

There are 34.7 percent learners who strongly agree with the statement that grievances can be registered on iGRAM portal easily in one go and 48.0 percent learners agree with this statement. 7.1 percent learners disagree with this statement and only 3.1 percent strongly disagree on it.

In this survey 22.4 percent learners strongly agree and 30.6 percent agree with the statement that after the iGRAM complaint has made the authorities more responsive to their queries. While 18.4 percent disagree and 8.2 percent strongly disagree with the statement. Thus, only about 53 percent of learners are convinced that complaints on iGRAM made the authorities more responsive and about 26 percent are not in favour

of it. 20.4 percent learners remain undecided about the statement.

About 44.9 percent learners agree with the statement that iGRAM portal helped them in establishing their faith in IGNOU grievance management system and there are 21.43 percent learners who strongly agree with this statement. On the other hand, 14.3 percent learners disagree with the statement and there were 8.2 percent learners who strongly disagree with the statement. 11.2 percent of learners neither agree nor disagree with the statement.

Apart from this, 26.5 percent learners agreed with the statement that iGRAM portal is an effective platform for addressing all types of query/grievances and 36.7 percent learners strongly agreed with the statement. 12.2 percent disagree and 5.1 percent strongly disagree with the statement. 19.4 percent remained neutral i.e. neither agree nor disagree.

In response to the statement that using iGRAM portal increases their chance of completing the IGNOU programme in time, 20.4 percent learners gave their opinion as strongly agree and 36.7 percent agree. On the other hand, 17.3 percent learners who participated in the survey disagree and 7.1 percent strongly disagree with the statement. 18.4 percent of learners gave their opinion as neither agree nor disagree.

17.3 percent learners strongly agree with the statement that using iGRAM portal they can get responses to their query/grievance in reasonable time. 37.8 percent of learners agree with this statement. Percentage of learners who strongly disagree is 12.2 percent and equally 12.2 percent of learners disagree with this statement. Thus, about 54 percent of learners were satisfied with the response time within which they received solutions to their grievances.

In response to the statement that information received through iGRAM was very useful, 21.4 percent and 37.8 percent of learners strongly agree and agree respectively. 11.2 percent and 18.4 percent learners strongly disagree and disagree respectively with the statement. 11.2 percent responded as neither agree nor disagree. Thus, about 59 percent of the learners found that information received at iGRAM portal was useful for them and about 29 percent of the learners who took part in the survey found the information at iGRAM not very useful.

Summarily, during the analysis of data it has been found that in response to the 11 different statements regarding effectiveness of iGRAM in resolving learners' grievances total 67.4 percent learners agree with the effectiveness of iGRAM and only 19.2 percent learners disagree.

Table-4: Gender-wise feedback of the learners on various statements regarding effectiveness of iGRAM portal

Gender	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Male	22.3	41.9	14.5	12.4	8.9
Female	37.2	42.0	9.1	11.7	0.0

Interpretation of table

During the analysis of data 64.2 percent male learners found to be satisfied with the effectiveness of iGRAM in resolving learners’ grievances as in response to 11 different statements of the questionnaire they gave their opinion as either strongly agree or agree and 21.3 percent male learners found to be dissatisfied with iGRAM effectiveness as they gave their opinion as either strongly disagree or disagree.

On the other hand, comparatively higher percentage of female learners found to be satisfied with the effectiveness of iGRAM in resolving learners’ grievances as 79.2 percent female learners gave their opinion as either strongly agree or agree and only 11.7 percent female learners found to be dissatisfied with iGRAM effectiveness as they gave their opinion as disagree. None of the female learners gave her opinion as strongly disagree regarding effectiveness of iGRAM in resolving learners' grievances.

Conclusion

Keeping in view the immense potential of IGNOU online grievance redressal and management in speedy and effective handling of learners’ grievances, Regional Centres and Study Centres

should make more efforts to popularize it among the learners.

Nowadays more and more people are accessing the internet on smartphone/mobile which is also evident from the feedback received from learners during the present survey (91.8 percent iGRAM users access internet on mobile), IGNOU should develop a dedicated mobile app of iGRAM which will increase its accessibility.

During the present study it has been found that more than half of the iGRAM grievances (56.1 percent) comprise grievances related to non-receipt of study material. If timely delivery of study material is ensured then it will significantly reduce the number of grievances on iGRAM and as result officials can devote their saved time in addressing other grievances of important nature.

This study is based on a survey of iGRAM users of only one Regional Centre. It is hereby recommended that similar study be conducted from all the Regional Centres of IGNOU with a large sample so that results and viewpoints from larger databases could be utilized for further improvement of iGRAM portal.

Implications of the study

The implication of the research findings were given below:

1. The comparative studies of student satisfaction in relation to various demographic variables provide important insight on its effect on student satisfaction regarding IGRAM.
2. The finding of the study also throws light on correlation between effective use of IGRAM portal with respect to ICT infrastructure/ environment available with the students.
3. Findings of the present study will serve as a base for the research scholars doing research in the field of other institutes of Higher learning Institutions; hence, it may serve a wide spectrum of research scholars.
4. The findings of this study may also serve as a primary data source to the research scholars for further in-depth study in this field.
5. The findings of this study may be useful for Policy makers of ODL Institutions to study student satisfaction and may take appropriate measures to improve the student satisfaction.
6. The findings may also be used to improve the handling of the IGRAM Portal at the Regional Centres and in different divisions at Headquarters to improve the students' satisfaction regarding IGRAM Portal.
7. The findings of the study also focus on the practical suggestions to improve upon the student satisfaction in respect to use of IGRAM portal, which may be proved beneficial to Management of grievance portals while formulating the policies in this regard.
8. This study may lead to further research at the micro-level involving other related variables.

Limitations

The feedback of the learners, who had used iGRAM portal for grievance redressal, was taken from only one Regional Centre i.e. Regional Centre Varanasi out of the 56 Regional Centres across India. A comprehensive feedback from the learners using iGRAM from all the Regional Centres would give more insights and that would provide a larger database of valuable inputs of learners for further improvement and better utilization of iGRAM portal in IGNOU.

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