

# Research Mate : A Mobile App for Research Scholars

## Background

A mobile App named ResearchMate has been conceptualized, designed and developed specially for the IGNOU research scholars (Figure 1). The prototype app has been developed using free app builder software. This app is a one stop portal for the research scholars in their life cycle as an IGNOU student. The app has innovative features to nurture their research skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills and academic scholarship to help them be successful. The app also provides learner support by providing information on various requirements pertaining to their course of study. This app has been transferred to the Research Unit of IGNOU for implementation.

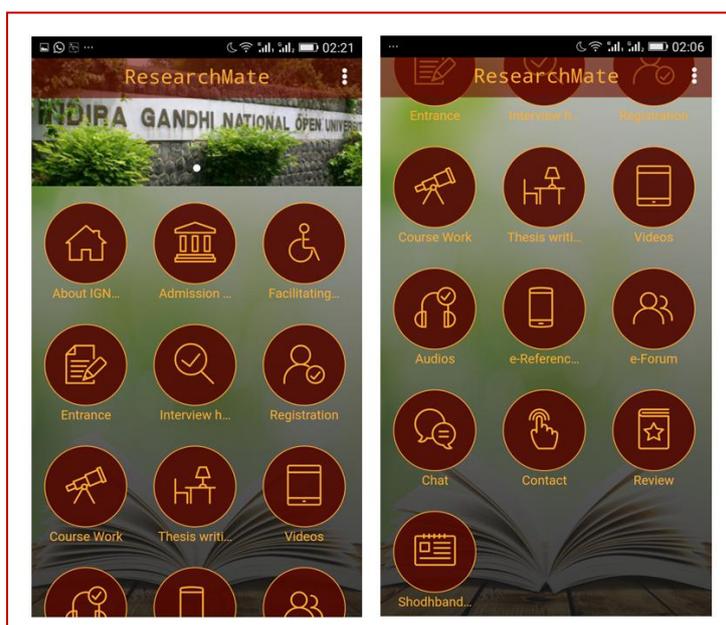


Figure 1 : Screenshots of the Main Menu of ResearchMate

## Need of the Innovation

Mobile devices have become an essential part of our lives. The Telecom Regulatory of India estimated that in 2017 there were 1.19 billion telecom subscribers. Needless to say the IGNOU students are also not exempt from it. Many Universities and institutions are using mobile technology in offering various student support solutions.

Mobile technology could not only be a very useful tool for establishing quick communications and social engagement with the distance learners but also a didactic tool for imparting subject based modular audio-visual content, which is commonly known as m-learning. Delivered in a personalized or customized package, these apps can help develop learner competencies in a desired manner. Indeed many Universities and institutions are already doing so. To cite three examples, at the international level, the Stanford University offers the SMILE, which is acronym for Stanford Mobile Inquiry Learning Environment app for its students. This app provides a tool to the students to inquire or ask questions, create a homework item, generate multimedia from their own environment, track their academic performance, work on competitive games and collaborate among themselves in real time as the class is in progress on that day, essentially becoming a research lab in their pockets. Additionally, the app provides information on the shuttle services, events of the university and other operational activities of the University. The Harvard University has its

mobile app Thrive, that provides emergency contact and health and wellness information in addition of other information, such as campus map, lunch and dinner options for the students at the University café etc. The National Open University Nigeria has its app NOUN-Mobile APK that allows the student to view their profile, fees payment history, registered courses, check results, view and download course materials and even view the information offline after viewing it online. As it is obvious, these apps are built to facilitate the students very well.

In India, some examples of mobile apps are presented here from three state open universities. In January 2017, the Odhisha State Open University launched its mobile app "OSOU. The app makes available general University information to its students, an OER repository and a facility to collect feedback on support services. The Krishna Kanta Handiqui Open University has developed the mobile app Smart KKHSOU for its students, which received the IGNOU Gold Medal for Innovations in Open and Distance Learning for the year 2016. This app enables the learners to read the study materials, watch video online and also listen to the Internet radio of the University, in addition to providing access to the regular university information. The official mobile app of the Yashwant Rao Chavan Maharashtra Open University is named *e-suvidha* to access their digital University web portal. It enables the earners to access their learning management system and also facilitates learner support services through alerts, in addition to emails and sms. It is beyond any doubt that ICT has become an indispensable part of the ODL system.

IGNOU is in the process of developing its own mobile app. The millions of learners of IGNOU, with their unique profile, have the need for obtaining information anytime anywhere through mobile phones. The research scholars of IGNOU have a special need for this app. Firstly, they need to app for obtaining information on various schedules, such as dates of proposal presentation, coursework training, coursework examination, presentations, etc. They also need information on various guidelines for research scholars. They need information about their supervisors and other related functionaries. They need access to the library resources and other academic resources. They need personalized interaction with their supervisors. They need skill development on communication and presentation skills. All these needs could be addressed through a one-stop solution through mobile technology. The NCIDE is working towards the use of new and emerging technologies for the benefit of the learners and believes that mobile technology can be developed for the facilitation of IGNOU learners, especially research scholars to cater to their specific needs.

## Description of the Innovation

The motivation to develop this mobile app was a seven-day workshop for the M.Phil and PhD research scholars of IGNOU. This workshop was conducted by NCIDE and Research Unit on the topic "Research and Innovation-A Road Ahead" on 19-27 March, 2018 in which the ResearchMate developers were closely involved. The scholars' feedback was the motivating factor and provided a vision for developing this mobile app. Following the workshop, a half day seminar was organized by the InnovationClub@IGNOU, NCIDE on 16 May, 2018 on "Developing a Mobile App for IGNOU" inspired by Prof Kulshrestha, which further gave the innovators an impetus to appropriately design a mobile app based on the experiences and feedback shared by the students and faculty members. The prototype app is available at the following link.

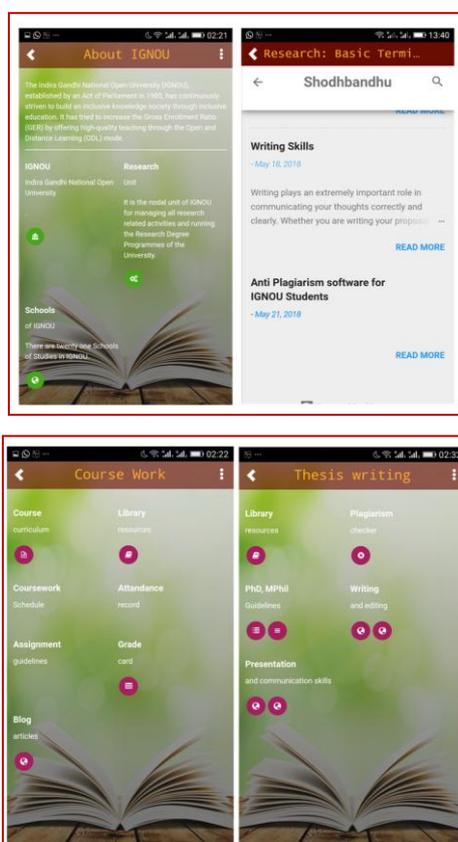
**Weblink :** <https://snappy.appypie.com/index/app-download/appId/ad99b5617682>

## Innovative Features

The innovativeness of ResearchMate lies in its design concept. Such an app does not exist in IGNOU at present. Mobile app providing administrative information to undergraduate, post graduate and research students, of course, are in existence in at least three State Open Universities in India; the OSOU app of Odhisha State Open University, Smart KKHSOU of Krishna Kanta Handiqui Open University and e-suvidha app of Yashwant Rao Chavan Maharashtra Open University. However, there is no mention in the literature about a mobile app created specifically for the MPhil and PhD research scholars in any Open University in India.

Some of the unique features of ResearchMate are highlighted below :

- Provides anytime, anywhere access to IGNOU research related information (IGNOU, Research Unit, SRD, SED, Schools).
- Facilitates direct communication with IGNOU functionaries for learner support (Research Unit and Schools).
- Facilitates quick and easy interaction with Programme Coordinator; supervisor and co-supervisor.
- Facilitates quick and easy interaction with the peer group.
- Provides academic support during entrance examination, proposal writing during interview, presentation, and communication skills through various media, such as audio, video, blog, and website links.
- Provides administrative and academic support on IGNOU guidelines, literature review, tips for finalization of proposal, research methodology, writing and editing skills and publishing, using various media.



**Figure 2 : Various Facilities Provided by ResearchMate**

## Achievements

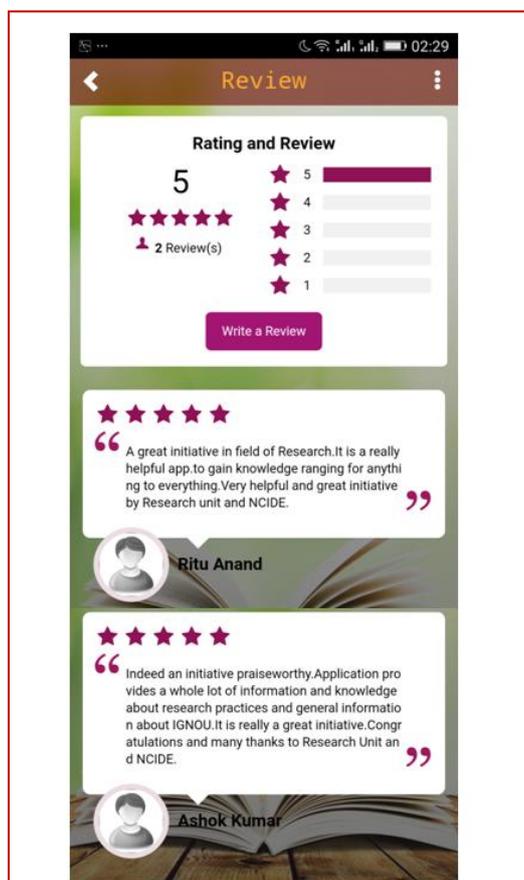
A prototype and first version of the app has been developed and tested on IGNOU's Research Scholars. The work is in progress for further development and implementation of the app.

## Applications and Uses of the Innovation

The app was tested on IGNOU research scholars. They were asked to provide their feedback on ResearchMate (Figure 3), which is provided below :

1. "A great initiative in field of Research. It is a really helpful app to gain knowledge ranging for anything to everything. Very helpful and great initiative by NCIDE. Rated it 5 star."
2. "It is a very very good app and its operation too is very easy. This endeavor is really appreciable."
3. "App contains every area for research students...I like this app...is necessary for researchers."
4. "A praiseworthy effort."
5. "The app is very good and will be beneficial to the research scholars once it becomes functional. The lecture videos and of course references are great and informative for students who are unable to access the foreign author books of good publications."

The above feedback indicates the usefulness of this app for the research scholars. The applications of this app have been described in the sections above.



**Figure 3 : Feedback from Research Scholars**

## Way Forward

ResearchMate has been transferred to the Research Unit for implementation. This app can be appropriately customized for each discipline, wherein the PhD Supervisors can provide personalized guidance to each and every research scholar in their specific subjects. A bouquet of app on different subjects can be developed on the model of ResearchMate for IGNOU and other ODL institutions.

## Innovators

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**Period : 2018**