**Summary Proceedings
of a half-day Seminar on**

**DEVELOPING A MOBILE APP FOR
IGNOU STUDENTS**

5/16/2018

InnovationClub@IGNOU, NCIDE, IGNOU

Summary Proceedings of

Half Day Seminar on Developing a Mobile App for IGNOU Students

Held on 16 May 2018, IGNOU, Maidan Garhi, New Delhi

Under the aegis of the InnovationClub@IGNOU, National Centre for Innovation in Distance Education (NCIDE), IGNOU

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BACKGROUND

The main aim of NCIDE is to promote and facilitate innovations by the stakeholders of the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system. The student innovators of IGNOU are being specially encouraged at present by the Centre though intellectual and technological facilitation. The InnovationClub@NCIDE is a forum to brainstorm and discuss on the possibilities of scaling up such innovations. The ideas and suggestions generated in the discussion are expected to increase the feasibility of the adaptation of these innovations by the ODL system. Mr. Shekhar Roy is an IGNOU student innovator. He is pursuing Master of Computer Application (MCA) (Enrolment no : 137886284) from the School of Computer and Information Sciences (SOCIS). He has developed a handy and feature-packed android based mobile application (app) named "IGNOU Mate: Your IGNOU Guide", which provides a precise, personalized and simplified real-time information to the IGNOU students. It has been made available in the Google Play Store and it has been used by more than 1,00,000 students.

This half day Seminar was expected to serve as a forum for sharing of experiences and exploring the usefulness of mobile apps. It was expected to generate the necessary information on the part of stakeholders to develop a useful and cost-effective mobile app for the IGNOU learners.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the seminar were to :

- explore the usefulness of the features of this innovation, IGNOU Mate, for the students of IGNOU.

- work out the feasibility of scaling up and adaptation of this innovation for providing quality learner support at IGNOU.

OVERVIEW

The half-day Seminar deliberated on the two main themes of (i) evaluating the IGNOU Mate app and (ii) exploring the possibility of designing an app for IGNOU students. The event brought together about 30 teachers and academics of IGNOU who deliberated on the different issues of the seminar themes. The event also saw the participation of about ten research scholars, one of whom was a speaker in the seminar. There were other experts drawn from the IGNOU teachers and academics who made their presentations as follows:

Speakers

1. Prof. Manoj Kulshrestha, Director, NCIDE, IGNOU
2. Dr. Bini Toms, Director, Student Service Centre, IGNOU
3. Dr. V. V. Subrahmanyam, Director, SOCIS
4. Dr. P. V. Suresh, Associate Professor, SOCIS, IGNOU
5. Ms. Nisha Rani, Ph D Scholar, SOCIS, IGNOU

Seminar Coordinator

Dr. Moumita Das, Assistant Director, NCIDE.

Presentation and Discussions

Welcoming the participants to the Seminar, **Dr. Moumita Das** presented the background of the Seminar. She said that NCIDE had in-house discussions to develop mobile app for IGNOU students and for this activity it was decided to involve IGNOU students and innovation club members. In 2016, an SOCIS student Shekhar Roy, submitted his paper for Gold Medal for Innovations, but at that time there was no provision for Gold Medal entry for students. Professor Manoj Kulshrestha, Director, NCIDE suggested involving Shekhar Roy in this seminar to present his work. However, due to some urgent work he was not able to attend and present his work in the seminar. She emphasized that Seminar was aimed to explore the possibilities of developing an official app for IGNOU and the feasibility and scalability and adoption of the app developed by Shekhar Roy.

She presented a background to put the topic of the seminar in perspective. She gave a brief overview of the mobile apps being used by the national and international universities. The Stanford Mobile Inquiry Learning Environment app, the Thrive app of Harvard University and the NOUN-Mobile APK of National Open University Nigeria were some of the examples she cited. At the national level, the State Open Universities have also developed mobile apps for their learners, and she cited the apps such as 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. She also enumerated the various student support services provided through these apps.

She emphasized that the mobile apps are much needed at IGNOU to facilitate its learners. Many faculty members of IGNOU have carried out research studies on mobile-based educational services wherein they have suggested the key areas of intervention based on their findings. These research studies could provide a data driven basis for development of appropriate mobile apps for IGNOU learners. She also mentioned that there are many free mobile appmakers available online, such as appypie, appmakr, appsbar, mobincube, buildfire, and the MIT appinventor, that could be customised to develop specific educational apps for IGNOU. Thereafter she invited Prof. Manoj Kulshrestha to chair the session.

Prof. Manoj Kulshrestha thanked Dr. Moumita Das for giving an overview of use of mobile app world over and in India especially in 3 state open universities. In his introductory remarks, he presented the genesis and objectives of the half-day seminar. He emphasized that nowadays mobile devices have become an essential part of our lives. With a rise in smartphone ownership globally, India will have the second highest number of smartphone users, 530 million, in 2018, just behind China with estimated 1.3 billion users in 2018. The US will be a distant third, with 229 million users. According to a new study by US-based media agency Zenith, smartphone ownership globally will continue to expand in 2018. Needless to say, the IGNOU students are also not exempted from falling in this bracket.

Mobile technology, such as mobile apps could be a very useful tool for establishing quick communications and social engagement with the distance learners and indeed many Universities and institutions are already doing so. As per the informed estimate, the number of available apps in the Google Play Store was most recently placed at 3.5 million apps in December 2017, after surpassing one million apps in July 2013.

The NCIDE is working towards the use of new and emerging technologies for the benefit of the learners and strongly believes that mobile technology can be developed for the facilitation of IGNOU learners. The Centre aims to identify innovative technology in the ODL system for adaptation after a feasibility study. It has also been encouraging student innovators of IGNOU. In this context, NCIDE has identified the student innovator, Shekhar Roy who has developed a mobile App IGNOU Mate for the benefit of IGNOU students. There is a need to explore this product for its adaptation by IGNOU. The suggestions by different stakeholders might be needed to improve it further before its presentation before authorities for formal adaptation. He requested the participants to give their valuable inputs as an important stakeholder of the system and app is the need of the day, as it is handy and accessible.

Dr. Bini Toms informed that the staff of the Student Service Centre (SSC) is using IGNOU Mate for providing student support. She, therefore, requested Director NCIDE to invite Mr. Anuj and Mr. Sandeep from the SSC to brief the present participants about the app. As per the request of the Director, NCIDE, Mr. Anuj and Mr. Sandeep, staff participants of SSC gave a brief overview of the features of IGNOU Mate. They informed that IGNOU Mate has a rating of 4.5 stars and is available at Google Play Store, which can be downloaded on the mobile.

Most of the students enrolled in IGNOU have problems related to courses, registration, grade card, etc. This app effectively tries to help the students to solve these issues by coordinating with the SSC staff. They informed that the SSC came to know about this app through such students only and therefore they are also using this app to provide student support. A student can download the app, register with his/her enrolment number and click on their course, or use the guest log in option as shown below.
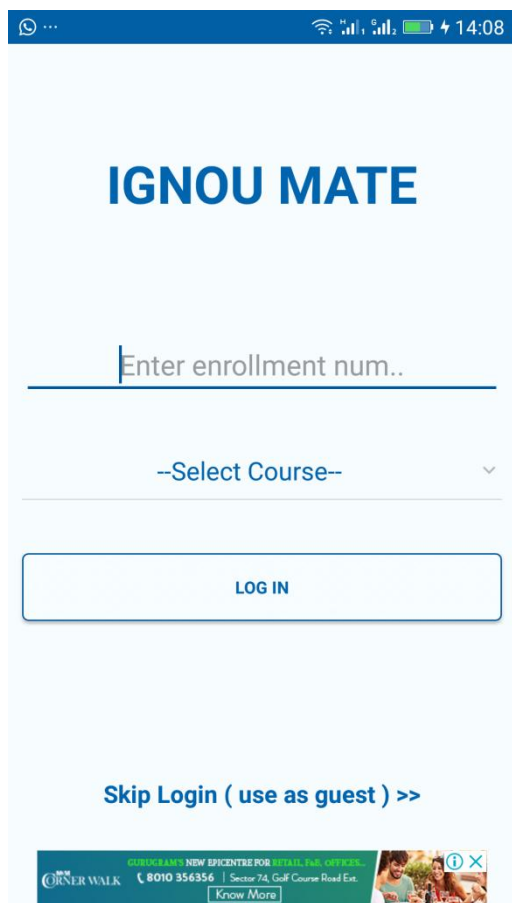

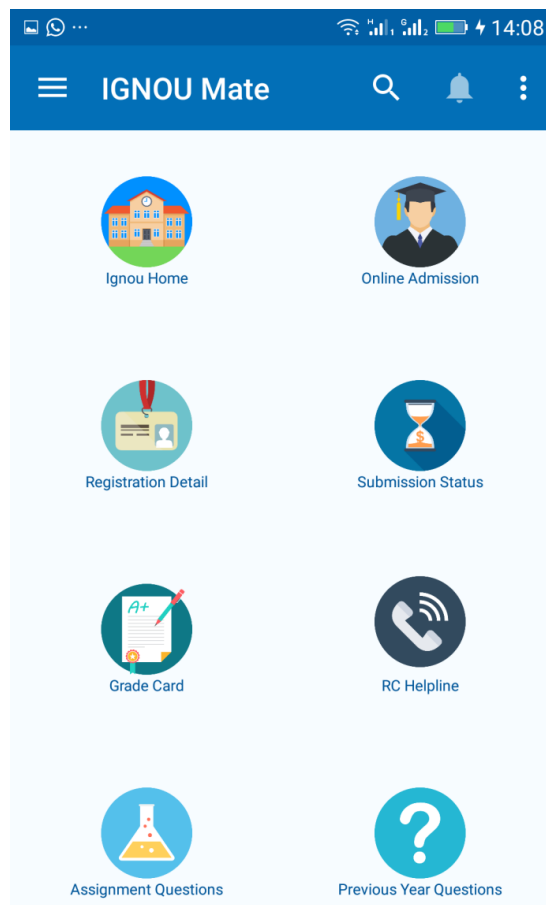**Figure 1 : The Log in Screen of IGNOU MATE**

Figure 2 : The Menu Screen of IGNOU MATE

As shown in Figure 1, the student can click the IGNOU Home icon and reach the IGNOU homepage link www.ignou.ac.in; this provides a comprehensive platform for the student to find relevant information at one place. They said queries of students are re-directed to the SSC and they reply to these queries at SSC. They also mentioned that size of the app is 2MB as the app uses only links of the information present in the IGNOU website. They suggested if this app can be further developed as per IGNOU needs it will be very helpful and accessible to students. They circulated the app on their mobile so that participants can view the features.

After their presentation the house was open for discussion.

Dr. P. V. Suresh observed that IGNOU Mate is a student friendly, light app and can run on android mobile phones; in addition it is important to develop it for iOS based mobile users and also for Windows based phones. An IGNOU app will be very useful for students and teachers as information is linked to IGNOU website. He also emphasized that as Shekhar Roy is a student of SOCIS, the school can speak to him for further use of app by IGNOU. He can be given recognition in the form of certificate and some award money. He emphasized the need to follow guidelines given under UGC, ODL Regulations 2017 for the use of ICT.

Dr. Bini Toms informed that 40 per cent of students are from villages and they find it difficult to apply online and pay their fees online. This is because they have to pay money to cyber café to pay online and in case of refund it goes in account of the person who manages the cyber café, as the credit card used for online transaction is in the name of that person. If an app is developed and a payment portal is in place it may help the students.

Prof. Manoj Kulshrestha emphasized that if an IGNOU official app is made available then the problems of the students could be reduced. Small-sized apps, such as IGNOU Mate of 2 MB are manageable, and now with the mobile service provider Jio offering almost unlimited connectivity, it will be easy for students to use such an app. At present there is no gateway available for payment though IGNOU Mate. However, with added security features it will be very helpful for the students.

Dr. V. V. Subrahmanyam presented a talk on "IGNOUMZONE". He provided an overview of the different mobile apps being used in education world over and in India, highlighted the benefits of mobile app, and enumerated the technical details of the apps. He proposed a plan for developing mobile apps in a phased manner for IGNOU.

Phase I – Information Functionalities: He proposed that in the first phase, the IGNOU Mate app interface with app icons can be used and linked with website.

Phase II – Learner Support Functionalities: Database activities, log in password facilities and dashboard for interaction to be provided.

Phase III- Streaming Functionalities: Gyandhara, YouTube, Live events, Online classes, blogs, chats, apps for Regional Centers and Study Centers etc., can be integrated.

He also emphasized that the information can be provided in groups, and links can be provided for easy use. Push notifications will encourage students to go through the messages. Keeping the app light will make it work fast. A database is required for app maintenance and therefore the Computer Division should be taken into the team.

After above presentation the house was open for discussion.

The participants emphasized that as per the IPR policy IGNOU Mate should be placed at IGNOU Website as an official IGNOU app. Security of the databases are needed to be taken care of. The participants agreed that app development should start from Phase I as presented by Dr. V. V. Subrahmanyam.

Dr. Bini Toms emphasized that since IGNOU Mate is already available and is being used by about a lakh students, it can be further developed and adapted by IGNOU.

Prof. Lalita Kumar and **Prof. Shubha Gokhale** emphasized that information at IGNOU website should be updated and all participants agreed. Students have many queries and face problems. Therefore a chat feature in the app will help to solve the students' problems.

Dr. Shivaji Bhaskar emphasized that a website and an app have different functions. It is better to conduct a pilot study of an app with some schools with certificate programmes. This will help in identifying the crucial features related to the usability and effectiveness of the app, the challenges faced by students in using the app, and their solutions, which will be very helpful.

Dr. Oum Prakash Sharma insisted that IGNOU should have its own app with a consultant appointed at NCIDE to develop the app.

After deliberations, the participants expressed that the existing IGNOU Mate can be developed further.

The views of the PhD students from the School of Health Sciences (SOHS) present in the Seminar were also invited, who opined that apps are needed for the research scholars of IGNOU.

Mrs. Nisha Rani Ph D student of SOCIS presented her views on the development of apps for IGNOU. She highlighted that there were many features that could be built in the apps to help the teachers develop their own content. This would be highly beneficial for the students.

Most of the participants felt that a team should be constituted for this work involving NCIDE, Computer Division, SOCIS, SSC, Regional Centres etc., and work simultaneously on updating the information at website and developing the IGNOU Mate app. A competition can be organized among the IGNOU students to develop apps, which can be evaluated and awarded. In case Shekhar Roy agrees to handover the IGNOU Mate app to IGNOU, he should be awarded or given recognition. In case he is not willing to handover, a legal opinion can be sought.

Prof. S. B. Arora, Vice Chancellor, IGNOU emphasized that IGNOU students should be encouraged to be involved in the development of app and a competition can be organized. He agreed to the proposal of the participants to constitute a team and work in a phased manner to develop an IGNOU App, which should be hosted at IGNOU Website, and the Computer Division should be involved. The team should make a road map and

a time line to complete all the phases and activities of designing, developing and implementing the IGNOU app.

Prof. Arora wished to be included as a member of the InnovationClub@IGNOU.

Prof. Kulshrestha apprised Prof. Arora that several InnovationClubs@RCs have been set up across India. Prof. Arora suggested that during the web-meetings with the RCs the Director, NCIDE may be present for discussion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. IGNOU needs have an official app hosted at IGNOU website.

2. IGNOU Mate will be further developed in phased manner. Phase-I to be initiated.

3. SOCIS in consultation with NCIDE, will invite the student, Mr. Shekhar Roy and speak to handover app to IGNOU.

4. Team should be constituted at IGNOU to work on it in mission mode.

5. NCIDE should take lead while taking cooperation with other concerned units like SOCIS and CD etc. in developing the App.

6. NCIDE should hold meeting with Computer Division (CD) for sharing data and updating website.

7. NCIDE will initiate the concept paper on this for the in-principle approval of the competent authority.

8. An App Development Competition can be organized at IGNOU HQs and Regional Canters along with the involvement of students for developing an App.

9. It was decided to organize next seminar on Use of ICT for the Online Programmes as per UGC Online Regulations, 2018 at earliest.

List of Participants in the Half-day Seminar on

Developing a Mobile App for IGNOU Students

May 16, 2018

1.   Ms. Neerja Sood, SOHS
2.   Dr. Lalita S. Kumar, SOS
3.   Dr. Sujata Santosh, NCIDE
4.   Dr. Mansi Sharma, SOL
5.   Ms. Nisha Rani, SOCIS, PhD Scholar
6.   Mr. Vikas Bhaskar, SOHS, PhD Scholar
7.   Mr. Ashok, SOHS, PhD Scholar
8.   Ms. Rohini Shaa Bhardwaj, SOHS
9.   Mr. Vadivukkarasi, SOHS, PhD Scholar
10. Ms. Elizabeth Mealy Varghese, SOHS, PhD Scholar
11. Dr. P. Vijaya Kumar, SOA
12. Ms. Jatinder Jit Kour, EMPC
13. Dr. V. V. Subrahmanyam, SOCIS
14. Dr. Leena Singh, SOMS
15. Dr. M. K. Bhardwaj, SOET
16. Dr. K. T. Mannan, SOET
17. Prof. Kamalika Banerjee, SOS
18. Dr. Shivaji Bhaskar, SOFL
19. Dr. Nisha Singh, IUC
20. Dr. Shubha Gokhale, SOS
21. Dr. Bini Toms, SSSC
22. Dr. P. V. Suresh, SOCIS
23. Dr. Heena K. Bijli, SOCE
24. Prof. Manoj Kulshrestha, NCIDE
25. Dr. Hemlata, NCDS
26. Mr. Anuj Hans, SSC
27. Mr. Sandeep Kumar, SSC
28. Mrs. Rimple Sharma, SOHS, PhD Scholar
29. Dr. O. P. Sharma, NCIDE
30. Dr. Moumita Das, NCIDE