

A STUDY OF ATTITUDE AND PERCEPTION OF THE LEARNERS TOWARDS DISTANCE EDUCATION IN RELATION TO THEIR BIOGRAPHICAL FACTORS

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ABSTRACT

Distance education may play an increasingly important role during this decade in helping address the growing shortage of teachers, educational administrators and other educational professionals experienced in both developing and developed countries. In this study, with the help of one self made tool and a sample of 150 graduate distance learners, it is revealed that gender plays no important role to develop positive attitude and perception. It means, both male and female learners have similar positive attitude towards distance education and biographical factors i.e. locality, stream, SES and caste plays a vital role to develop positive attitude towards distance education

Keywords: Distance education, attitude and perception, biographical factors

INTRODUCTION

India is a developing country with having second largest population of the world. Due to lack of resources and limitations of the formal system of education, policy makers attracted towards non-conventional modes of education for providing non-residential studies like correspondence courses. The Distance Education mode, in which it is not necessary to bring all the students together to listen face-to-face lectures, was considered worthwhile.

However in distance education system, the provision of occasional meetings between the teachers and the students is made. These meetings are popularly known as Personal Contact Programs (PCP). The learners receive their study material through postal services for study at their home or workplace. The efforts of the students are supplemented by assignments, which are checked and evaluated by the concerned subject experts. So, Correspondence education is a piece and part of open learning. Distance education system is also known by some other common names like Correspondence Courses, Correspondence Education, Distance Education and External or Private Appearance etc.

This system of education is suitable for the persons who wanted to enhance their qualifications but were not in a position to attend classes on a regular basis. Such distance courses proved a boon for the service persons as well as others desirous of pursuing higher education. As a result, a large number of in-service persons, professionals, entrepreneurs, job-less youth, school teachers, housewives and old aged free persons made a medium for admission to distance education study programs.

The benefits and drawbacks of distance education have been researched by various individuals. Wheatley & Greer (1995) saw the primary benefit of distance education as saving travel time, given that students do not have to travel to and from a home campus. With Web based courses, the instructor also does not have to travel and can work from home. Another benefit is that students can work on the class according to their own schedules. It was found that teaching costs may be reduced in two ways: first, because different campuses can utilize the same instructor as a resource for a tele-course, and second, with some Web based courses an instructor can handle a larger number of students, ultimately reducing the overhead costs of faculty (Wheatley & Greer, 1995, p. 243). Further, in fields where information is constantly changing, the use of distance learning allows professionals the ability to remain current without having to travel long distances to do so (Bisciglia & Monkturner, 2002). Gagne and Shepherd, (2001) found little difference in the quality of education received through distance education versus conventional university classroom settings. Many studies have determined that students taking distance learning courses perform as well as students taking courses via traditional methods.

In India there is much diversity at every level. Some communities are much more developed than others. And also due to geographical and cultural diversities it is a need to enroll him in distance education. Due to some cultural and religious taboos there is a major obstacle to access traditional education system so in this way distance education provides a platform to the learner.

LITERATURE REVIEWED

Hall (2001) concluded that in designing, developing, and delivering distance education courses, students' needs and perceptions should be central. A course failing to meet student expectations and needs may lead to low levels of student involvement. Indeed, without investigating what satisfies undergraduate students in distance education courses, it is difficult to meet their needs and improve their learning. Technology as an essential link in student outcomes, with greater enjoyment associated. Gagne and Shepherd (2001) found that perceptions of the distance education system in the instructional process is influenced by an individual's beliefs about the advantages of distance education, for himself, as a student, as an employer (whose employees are also distant learning students), or as an educational planner (desirous of providing potent solutions to educational problems). ME Implementation Plan and Blueprint (2002) found that at NOUN, guidance counselor from the Directorate of Learners' Support are available at the study centre to provide individual students with the necessary information, support, and study skills.

For NTI students, counseling services are provided at the point of registration for their course. Investigator concluded that students taking distance learning courses perform as well as students. Helland (2002) found that lack of capacity has brought to fore the issue of open and distance learning as an innovative and cost effective approach to the educative process.

To bridge the gap between participants in the instructional process, open and distance learning offers structured learning in which the instructor and students are separated by time and space, making use of instructional materials such as print materials, audio and video cassettes, CD ROMS, television and radio broadcasts, as well as multimedia components such as computers and satellites transmission courses. Maor (2003) concluded that conceptualization of satisfaction from with higher levels of student engagement, which in turn is associated with increased student learning. Moreover, distance education involves a student-centered approach in which the instructor takes the role of the facilitator and students engage in peer learning. It is clear that Web-based learning environments having a student-centered approach should consider student satisfaction.

Overall, the literature suggests that there is a need to understand better the variables that affect student enjoyment of distance education. Bradshaw & Hinton (2004) found that distance education has the potential to provide students with high-quality learning experiences. If the course content is prepared by considering students' value system, along with their social and cultural context, learning is more likely to occur. Owoeye, (2004) studied that since the colonial period; correspondence colleges from the United Kingdom have provided intermediate. Investigator noticed that level training to a number of suitably qualified Nigerians via correspondence courses. Jones et al., (2004) criticized the assumption that most students have the ability to use the information and communication technologies within an educational setting and suggest that many undergraduate students entering the university have no experience with the Internet and very little with information technology generally. Yusuf and Falade (2005) showed that both perceived usefulness and perceived satisfaction directly affect undergraduate students' intention to use Internet-based learning resources. Cheung & Huang (2005) found that shortcoming is more a reflection of the entire education system throughout Nigeria and, by extension, its entire socio-economic system. Indeed, most Nigerians still grapple with problems inherent in the digital divide; access to instructional technology and capacity to use such technology is negligible compared to those of developed nations. That Internet use might be stimulated by two dimensions of motivators; extrinsic (perceived usefulness) and intrinsic (satisfaction).

Chambers (2006) concluded that much research has been conducted on distance education. The literature emphasizes the importance of research into student for professional practices of course designers and tutors, and for improving students' distance learning experiences. After reviewed the related literature and forgoing discussion with the experts to know the attitude and perception of distance education learners towards distance education. Both researchers decide to undertaken a study entitled "A Study of attitude and perception of the learners towards distance education in relation to their biographical factors."

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF THE TERMS USED

Attitude and Perception

An attitude is a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of something. Attitudes are generally positive or negative views of a person, place, thing, or event. People can also be conflicted or ambivalent toward an object, meaning that they simultaneously possess both positive and negative attitudes toward that particular things, place, and person for the present study.

Perception is the process of attaining **awareness** or **understanding** of the **environment** by organizing and interpreting **sensory information**. For the present study perception means that awareness of distance education among students.

Distance Education

The term *distance education* reflects both the fact that all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in time and space from the learner, and that the mission aims to include greater dimensions of openness and flexibility, whether in terms of access, curriculum or other elements of structure.

Biographical Factors

The term biographical factors is denoting to all the biographical qualities of the particular population such as income, caste, gender, socio economic status, education etc.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To compare the attitude & perception of graduate students towards distance education on the basis of gender.
- To investigate the attitude & perception of graduate students towards distance education on the basis of their residential status i.e. Rural & urban.
- To study the attitude & perception of students towards distance education between professional and general stream graduate students.
- To investigate the attitude & perception of graduate students towards distance education on the basis of some biographical factors such as socio economic status, caste.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

- There exists no significant difference in attitude and perception between male and female graduate students towards distance education.
- There exists no significant difference in attitude and perception between urban and rural graduate students towards distance education.
- There exists no significant difference in attitude and perception between professional and general stream graduate students towards distance education.
- There exists no significant difference in attitude and perception between students belongs to high and low socio economic status towards distance education.
- There exists no significant difference in attitude and perception between students belongs to general and sc category.
- There exists no significant difference in attitude and perception between students belongs to general and obc category.
- There exists no significant difference in attitude and perception between students belongs to obc and sc category.

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study is limited to Rampur, Moradabad and Bareilly districts of Uttar Pradesh, India.
- A sample of 150 learners is taken for the study.

- The study is delimited to learners those are doing graduation level courses from IGNOU and Uttar Pradesh Rajarshi Tandon Open University, Allahabad through distance mode.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As per the need and the nature of the study researchers used descriptive survey method.

Population and Sample

There are many institutions that are providing distance education to the students in Rampur, Moradabad and Bareilly. These institutions are affiliated to Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi and Uttar Pradesh Rajarshi Tandon Open University, Allahabad. All students enrolled in these institutions were considered as population in this study. Than from the same population 150 students (75 male and 75 females) selected by using purposive sampling method. In these 150 students 75 students were urban residents and 75 students were rural residents.

Instrument Used

No published instrument was found suitable by the authors. So a self made Attitude and perception scale was used in this research. This scale consists of 30 questions. Reliability and validity was established by the help of statistical technique and consultations with the experts of the concerned field. Scoring was done by assigning 4 marks to Strongly Agree, 3 to Agree, 2 to Disagree and 1 to Strongly Disagree. For assessment of socio economic status, Socio Economic Status Index by R. P. Verma, P. C. Saxena and Usha Mishra. (SESI–VSM) was used.

Analysis of Data

Table: 1

Significance of difference in attitude and perception between male and female graduate students towards distance education. (*Not Significant)

GROUP	N	MEAN	S.D.	SE _D	t'ratio
MALE	75	34.84	5.56	1.33	0.56*
FEMALE	75	32.26	7.45	-	-

It is revealed from the table 1 that the mean scores of male and female graduate students regarding attitude and perception towards distance education. are 34.84 and 32.26 with S.D. 5.56 and 7.45 respectively. The t ratio comes out to be 1.33, which is not significant at any level of significance. It means there is no significant difference in attitude and perception between the male and female graduate students towards distance education. So the hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Table: 2

Significance of difference in attitude and perception between rural and urban graduate students towards distance education. (Significant at 0.05 level)

GROUP	N	MEAN	S.D.	SE _D	t'ratio
URBAN	75	36.67	5.53	1.46	2.51*
RURAL	75	31.56	8.66	-	-

It is revealed from the table 2 that the mean scores of urban and rural graduate student's attitude and perception towards distance education. are 36.67 and 31.56 with SD 5.53 and 8.66 respectively. The t- ratio comes out to be 2.51 which is significant at 0.05 level of significance. That difference between the urban and rural graduate students towards distance education.

Thus the hypothesis that 'there exists no significant difference in attitude and perception between urban and rural graduate students towards distance education.' is rejected.

Table: 3
Significance of difference in attitude and perception between professional and general stream graduate students towards distance education

GROUP	N	MEAN	S.D.	SE _D	't'ratio
PROFESSIONAL	95	34.00	6.10	3.60	4.10*
ACADEMIC	55	26.78	7.90	-	-

- Significant at 0.01 level

It is revealed from the table 3 that the mean scores of professional and general stream graduate students regarding attitude and perception of towards distance education. are 34.00 and 26.78 with S.D. 6.1 and 7.9 respectively.

The t-ratio comes out to be 3.60, which is significant at .01 level of significance. It means there is significant difference between the Professional and general stream graduate students towards distance education. So the hypothesis 3 is rejected.

Table: 4
Significance of difference in attitude and perception between students from high SES and Low SES

GROUP	N	MEAN	S.D.	SE _D	't'ratio
HIGH SES	43	36.45	6.95	3.25	4.36*
LOW SES	35	29.38	7.65	-	-

- Significant at 0.01 level

It is revealed from the table 4 that the mean scores of high SES and Low SES students regarding attitude and perception of towards distance education. are 36.45 and 29.38 with S.D. 6.95 and 7.65 respectively. The t-ratio comes out to be 3.25, which is significant at .01 level of significance. That means there is significant difference between the high SES and Low SES students towards distance education. So the hypothesis 4 is rejected.

Table: 5
Significance of difference in attitude and perception between students belongs to General and SC category

GROUP	N	MEAN	S.D.	SE _D	't'ratio
GENERAL	60	39.35	7.15	4.65	5.36*
SC	39	27.38	6.65	-	-

- Significant at 0.01 level

It is revealed from the table 5 that the mean scores of students belonging to general and sc category regarding attitude and perception of towards distance education. are 39.35 and 27.38 with S.D. 7.15 and 6.65 respectively. The t- ratio comes out to be 5.36, which is significant at .01 level of significance. It means there is significant difference between the students belonging to general and sc category towards distance education.. So the hypothesis 5 is rejected.

Table: 6
Significance of difference in attitude and perception
between students belongs to General and OBC category

GROUP	N	MEAN	S.D.	SE _D	t'ratio
GENERAL	60	39.35	7.15	3.76	4.67*
OBC	51	34.38	7.10	-	-

- Significant at 0.01 level

It is revealed from the table 6 that the mean scores of students belonging to general and obc category regarding attitude and perception of towards distance education are 39.35 and 34.38 with S.D. 7.15 and 7.10 respectively.

The t-ratio comes out to be 4.67, which is significant at .01 level of significance. It means there is significant difference between the students belonging to general and obc category towards distance education. So the hypothesis 6 is rejected.

Table: 7
Significance of difference in attitude and perception between students belongs to OBC
and SC category

GROUP	N	MEAN	S.D.	SE _D	t'ratio
OBC	51	34.38	7.10	1.45	0.67*
SC	39	27.38	6.65	-	-

- Not Significant

It is revealed from the table 7 that the mean scores of students belonging to obc and sc category regarding attitude and perception of towards distance education. are 34.38 and 27.38 with S.D. 7.10 and 6.65 respectively.

The t-ratio is 0.67, which is non significant at .01 level and .05 level of significance. It means there is no significant difference between the students belonging to obc and sc category towards distance education. So the hypothesis 7 is accepted.

MAIN FINDINGS

- There is no significant difference in attitude and perception between the male and female graduate students towards distance education.. It indicated that both male and female students' graduate students had same attitude towards distance education.
- There is a significant difference in attitude and perception between the urban and rural graduate students towards distance education. It indicated that both urban and rural graduate students had different attitude towards distance education.

- There is a significant difference in attitude and perception between the professional and general graduate students towards distance education. It indicated that both professional and general stream graduate students had different attitude towards distance education
- There is a significant difference in attitude and perception between the students belongs to high SES and low SED towards distance education. It indicated that both groups of students had different attitude towards distance education.
- There is a significant difference in attitude and perception between the students belonging to general and sc category towards distance education. It indicated that both general category students and sc category students had different attitude towards distance education.
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here is a significant difference in attitude and perception between the students belonging to general and obc category towards distance education. It indicated that both groups of students had different attitude towards distance education.
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here is no significant difference in attitude and perception between the students belonging to obc and sc category towards distance education. It indicated that students belonging to obc and sc category had same attitude towards distance education.

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