

ATTITUDES OF GRADUATE STUDENTS TOWARDS DISTANCE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT:

Distance education is very important for any developing country around the world as of populace and resources. Firstly face-to-face or formal education is not adequate to meet the entire population due to the vast demographic structure. The purpose of this paper is to recognize the present attitude of graduate students towards distance education and informal education. The other objective is to evaluate the attitude of the students towards higher education and enrollment ratio. An in a detailed study of entire Higher Educational institutions is categorized into three board categories, namely universities, colleges and stand-alone institutions. Apart from formal education distance education plays a pivotal role in higher education, as per AISHE report, 2015-16, student enrollment in distance education courses constituted a total of 11.05% of the total enrollment in higher education. It is very important for those students who have no time for regular class because of different sought of problems. The scope is increasing day by day in distance education and Open University play a pivotal role in this regard.

KEYWORDS:

Attitude, Distance education, student's enrollment

INTRODUCTION:

India is a developing country with having the second largest population of the world. Due to lack of resources and limitations of the formal method of education, policymakers enticed towards nonconventional or non-formal methods of education by giving non-residential studies like correspondence and online courses. The Distance Education system, in which it is not essential to bring all the students jointly to listen to face-to-face lectures, was considered worthwhile. A distance is maintained between the teachers and taught. It is a sort of non-formal education in which there are no limitations of age, class, duration and even qualification, etc. for obtaining a degree. There is pliability in all features of distance education from admission to the examination. In distance education one of the earliest attempts was advertised in 1728. This was in the Boston Gazette for "Caleb Philipps, Teacher of the new method of Short Hand", who sought students who wanted to learn through weekly mailed lessons.^[1] The first distance education course in the modern sense was provided by Sir Isaac Pitman in the 1840s, who taught a system of shorthand by mailing texts transcribed into shorthand on postcards and receiving transcriptions from his students in return for correction. The element of student feedback was a crucial innovation of Pitman's system.^[2] This scheme was made possible by the introduction of uniform postage rates across England in 1840.^[3] This early beginning proved extremely successful, and the Phonographic Correspondence Society was founded three years later to establish these courses on a more formal basis. The Society paved the way for the later formation of Sir Isaac Pitman Colleges across the country.^[4] The

first correspondence school in the United States was the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, which was founded in 1873.^[5] The University of London was the first university to offer distance learning degrees, establishing its External Programme in 1858. The background to this innovation lay in the fact that the institution (later known as University College London) was non-denominational and, given the intense religious rivalries at the time, there was an outcry against the "godless" university. The issue soon boiled down to which institutions had degree-granting powers and which institutions did not. The compromise solution that emerged in 1836 was that the sole authority to conduct the examinations leading to degrees would be given to a new officially recognized entity called the "University of London", which would act as examining body for the University of London colleges, originally University College London and King's College London, and award their students University of London degrees. As Sheldon Rothblatt states: "Thus arose in nearly archetypal form the famous English distinction between teaching and examining, here embodied in separate institutions." ^[6] Nowadays it is known in miscellaneous names such as education through correspondence, home study, postal tuition, external study, off-campus study, open learning, open school, open university, education without walls and soon.

However, in the distance education system, the provision of occasional meetings between the teachers and the students is made either by face-to-face or by online mode. These meetings between the lecturer and students are popularly known as **Personal Contact Programs (PCP)**. The learners receive the study material through postal services or they can collect from the concerned office for study, the projects and workbooks are checked and evaluated at regular intervals by the concerned subject experts. So, correspondence education is a piece and part of open learning and informal education. The distance education system now days are also known by some other common names like Correspondence Education, Distance Education and External or Private Appearance etc. This method of education is suitable for those persons who wanted to enhance their qualifications to achieve promotions but were not in a position to attend face-to-face classes on a regular basis. Such distance courses proved a boon for the service persons as well as others who desirous of pursuing higher education to enhance their degrees and knowledge. 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. **Borjholmberg** defines distance education as "Distance study indicates dialogic learning opportunity in which physical distance between the learner and the helping organisation is reached by an artificial carrier"^[7].

HISTORY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIA:

The history related to the distance education system in India is not very much old; it's the era of the post-independence. Immediately after independence, the government of India felt the need that the traditional full-time education had turned out to be restricted and accessible not too many. Distance Learning in India for higher education was initiated in the form of Correspondence Courses in 1962, in response to the ever-increasing demand for higher education which could not be met by the conventional system of education. The education commission (1964-66) points out that "It becomes evident that the present system of education will need radical changes. If it is to meet the purpose of modern democratic and socialist society changes in objective ----besides the knowledge explosion and consequences demand acquiring new skills and knowledge is placing pressure on the educational system to accommodating more and more". The Kothari committee constituted in 1961 by the Department of Education paved the way for the institution of correspondence courses in India. Later on, the basis of the recommendation of the committee, the University of Delhi was invited by UGC to consider taking up the institution of correspondence courses on a pilot basis. Accordingly, the country's first school of correspondence

courses and continuing education was established in the University of Delhi in 1962. The Punjab University Patiala (1968) was the second Indian University to set up a full-fledged directorate of correspondence courses. After this many other universities also started directorate of correspondence courses. The true revolution in distance education in India was heralded with the establishment of the first open university in the country namely Andhra Pradesh open university Hyderabad in 1982 which was later renamed as Dr. Ambedkar Open University. After this many other open Universities established all over the country. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was established as a significant source of distance education in 1985.[7] The main objective behind setting up the IGNOU as a central organisation is a guide and co-ordinate the activities of all distance education institutes and state open universities in the country. It has popularized the concept of open learning system resulting in the establishment of three more state open universities in the late eighties viz. – Kota Open University in Kota (Rajasthan), Yashwant Rao Chavan Maharashtra Open University at Nasik (Maharashtra) and Nalanda Open University at Patna (Bihar). States of Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka have also established Open Universities recently. With a few numbers of students in 1962-63, the enrollment in correspondence courses rose to about 65,000 students in 1975-76. During the last fifteen years, the annual growth rate of enrollment in open universities and the institutes of correspondence studies attached to conventional universities has been appreciably higher than in the conventional universities and in 1990-91 it was approximately 600,000. The proportion of students enrolled in distance education has steadily increased from 2.6% of the enrollment in higher education in 1975-76 to 11.5% in 1990-91. During 1992-93 the enrollment for Distance Learning in India programmes was over eight lakhs. In the year 2015-16, the amount rises to about 38,24,901.

Table-1.1 Level wise distribution of enrolment in distance education for 2015-16

Level	Distance Enrolment		
	Male	Female	Total
Ph.D	87	49	136
Post Graduate	510526	597836	1108362
Under Graduate	1421708	1077682	2499390
PG Diploma	41383	27252	68635
Diploma	64175	40053	104228
Certificate	17374	26775	44149
Integrated	1	0	1
All	2055254	1769647	3824901

SIGNIFICANT OF THE STUDY:

Immediately after independence, India has made a great advancement in its education system. Initially, education was accessible only to the high profile class of India, and a lot of poor & middle-class Indians remained unlettered. There was an immense pressure on various state governments by common men to initiate more & more institutes, colleges and universities. This pressure has led to the rapid growth of higher education in our country. But the sad thing is that this progression is more quantitative than qualitative, all because of the high demand. Therefore, an alternative methodology was required in order to ensure quality education & success. And distance education is one such alternative. [8]

The formal education system has different kinds of limitations and very limited recourses to educate this large population. The University Grant Commission has set-up a target of enhancing the enrolment ratio during the 11th five-year plan. In order to

execute the said target, a tremendous amount of expansion in the educational system is necessary. A growing realization of the urgency by the nation to make its population literate, higher educated and sensitize the existing illiterate and semi-literate millions about the progress and change led to the successive governments to launch various education programme.[9] As a result, terms like Distance Education, Correspondence Education, open education have been added to the terms – Formal, Non-formal, and Informal education. The concept of Distance Education has been universally accepted as an alternative system to the institutional teaching to provide a second chance for providing higher education to those who missed the opportunity of getting the same at their normal stage. All society and group have their own way of life. Students want to learn in a different way, they want freedom in the teaching and learning process. Distance education can able to teach students at their own pace and interest and provide flexibilities in terms of age, curriculum, time and others. [7] Distance education went through a major change after the invention of the radio in the 1920s and the arrival of television in the 1940s. Distance education is increasingly using combinations of different technologies to improve communication between teachers and students. In 1900, after the arrival of the computer, distance education took a big leap. Now the teachers and students can converse sitting face-to-face.

The student may receive information via satellite, microwave, or fibre optic cable, television (broadcast, cable or Instructional Television Fixed Services (ITFS), video cassette or disk, telephone – audio conferencing bridge or direct phone line, audio cassette, printed materials – text, study guide, or handout, computer – modem or floppy disk, and compressed video. The recent rapid development of technology has resulted in systems that are powerful, flexible, and increasingly affordable. The base of available information technology resources is increasing with dramatic speed. Much has been learned about connecting various forms of technology into systems so that the ability to link systems is growing. Most distance learning systems are hybrids, combining several technologies, such as satellite, ITFS, microwave, cable, fibre optic, and computer connections. Students from business and university level have used the conferencing technique known as one-way video/two-way audio where pictures from television are transmitted to particular sites, people can reply to the newscaster via telephone. Television pictures can also be broadcast in two directions at the same time through telephone lines so that teachers and students at one place can see and hear teachers and students in other places.

Distance education has become a useful mode of obtaining degrees for a large number of students who are staying in far off and remote areas and for whom accessing universities on a regular basis is still a dream. Distance enrolment constitutes 11.45% of the total enrolment in higher education, of which 55% are female students. Level wise distribution of students under distance mode is given in the adjacent table. At all Levels, share of male student is higher than females except Certificate course. Looking at the State-wise variation, out of the total reported enrolled students pursuing studies through distance education, 6 States of India are providing education to around 62.6% of the students, the States are Maharashtra 17.1%, Delhi 15.4%, Tamil Nadu 12.2%, Andhra Pradesh 7.5%,

Kerala 5.7%, West Bengal 4.7%. Distance Mode is mainly conducted by universities and the majority of the students (57.6%) enrolled in Universities and their Constituent Units are studying under distance mode which can be seen from the adjacent table. At Post Graduate, Under Graduate, PG Diploma, Diploma, Certificate level share of distance enrolment in university is 61%, 60%, 57%, 37% and 57% respectively. Distance enrollment at an integrated level is negligible.

Table 1.2 Comparisons between Regular and Distance Enrolment in University

LEVEL	REGULAR ENROLLMENT	DISTANCE ENROLLMENT
PH.D	123712	0
M.PHIL	25035	0
POST GRADUATE	760157	1197968
UNDER GRADUATE	1756975	2656564
PG DIPLOMA	59259	77754
DIPLOMA	156479	90750
CERTIFICATE	16134	49559
INTEGRATED	101696	242

SOURCE: AISHE 2016-17

Thus it can be analysed that students enrollment in distance education is gradually increasing. This attitude will bring a great change in the coming years.

OPPORTUNITIES AND IMPORTANCE IN DISTANCE EDUCATION:

- * **Population:** The unexpected growth rate of population in India has reduced the chances for formal education to educate each & every student.
- * **Geographical limitations:** Many students who are living in places which are geographically isolated finds difficult to take education through regular classes.
- * **Qualification improvement:** Distance education provides opportunities for students who want to improve their qualification during their present jobs. Being capable of earning while learning is the most attractive advantage of distance education in India that's on a growth.
- * **Education for all ages:** Distance education can be used by people of all ages. Right from current students, working professionals, homemakers and more. Education with flexibility is only possible in the case of distance learning. Any time is good to learn and get educated.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To study the attitude towards Distance Education of graduate students.
- To study about the different components of distance education, its opportunities and challenges.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Lenka, S. K. and Ravikant (2012) studied the attitude and perception of the learners towards the Distance education. In this study, with the help of 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.

Ramzi, Nasser and Kamal, Abouchdid, (2013) conducted study on Attitudes and Concerns towards Distance Education. The study surveys 7 school directors and 112 school teachers unequally divided among fourteen urban and rural schools. School

directors were negative about the prospect of distance education meeting the training needs of school teachers. In addition, they reported costly training and the purchase of technologies for distance education as inconceivable. On the other hand, teachers held a more positive view of distance education. Though more than 50% of the teachers reported little acquaintance with the specifics of distance education, they reported willingness to put forth the effort needed to familiarize themselves with the new technologies and practices.

Collins, K. Osei (2013) studied the Perceptions of Students towards use of Distance Learning. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions held by graduate students about distance learning offered by the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana. The survey utilized a 20 question survey with 691 respondents, who were adult learners enrolled in an Executive Masters of Business/Public Administration Program. The results of the study indicate that distance learning is most patronised by an older (>30 years) and married student population largely because it allows them to combine work and study. The data indicates that student perceptions of distance learning were positive. Respondents indicated that they were satisfied with teaching and learning by distance and also with learner support provided by the host institute.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY:

This present study has great relevance and importance on the distance and correspondence education system. It had been clarified in the above paragraph that distance Education plays a very important role in the whole educational system. All the universities and educational institutions should plan and facilitate distance education in all the major professional courses with proper self-learning materials and contact programmes to maintain a proper quality, it will help in improving the literacy rate of our country and industrial sector will get good professionals. For the present large population of India, distance education had become an opportunity to get an education with flexibilities. These flexibilities are in all aspects of flexible admission time to examination. Now day students have a keen desire to get an education through distance education not only in the higher education domain but also in the secondary and senior secondary level. So the concept of Distance Education or correspondence education has been universally accepted as an alternative system to the institutional teaching to provide a second chance for providing higher education to those who missed the opportunity of getting the same at their normal stage. Despite having a great advantage of distance education it faces some challenges. The major improvements required for quality of education in distance mode are expanded technology; more linkages between schools, higher education, and the private sector; and more teachers who use technology well. Teachers must be involved in planning the systems, trained to use the tools they provide and given the flexibility to revise their teaching. Connections have been established across geographic, instructional, and institutional boundaries which provide opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing among many groups in the pooling of students and teachers, distance learning reconfigures the classroom which no longer is bounded by the physical space of the school, district, state or nation.

The key to success in distance learning is the teacher. If the teacher is good, the technology can become almost transparent. No technology can overcome poor teaching which is actually exacerbated in distance education applications. When skilled teachers are involved, enthusiasm, expertise, and creative use of the media can enrich students beyond the four walls of their classroom.

Teachers need training in the system's technical aspects and in the educational applications of the technology. Areas for assistance include the amount of time needed to prepare and teach courses, how to establish and maintain effective communication with students, strategies for adding visual components to audio courses, ways to increase interaction between students and faculty, planning and management of organizational details, and strategies for group cohesion and student motivation.

CONCLUSION:

The study showed that distance education and correspondence education is offering a good opportunity for higher education not only in the graduate and higher levels but also in the secondary and senior secondary levels to a great number of students who want to pursue their education by overcoming the spatial, economic, and other social barriers to achieve their dreams. The tables show the enrolment of students are getting more and more under distance education mode but still, it faces different kinds of the bottleneck which had to be cleared to render the best distance education materials and methods to the young and energetic students of India.

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