

ATTITUDE OF WOMEN LEARNERS TOWARDS DISTANCE EDUCATION: A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted in Uttar Pradesh's Meerut district and data were collected from 43 women distance learners of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and 77 women distance learners of Swami Vivekanand Subharti University (SVSU) following purposive sampling method. The comparative attitude level was measured in eight sub-areas of distance learning viz., general, admission procedure, self learning material (SLM), multimedia, assignments, counseling, study centers and evaluation system. The findings revealed that women distance learners have positive attitude towards distance learning and no significant difference was found between the overall attitudes of learners from both universities. However, the IGNOU learners exhibited more favorable attitude than SVSU learners on five sub-areas of attitude towards distance learning namely admission procedure, assignments, counseling, study centre and evaluation system with a significant difference only in assignments area ($P < 0.05$). The related implications for distance education are discussed.

Keywords: Distance education, attitude of women learners, India.

INTRODUCTION

Education is regarded as the key factor in overcoming the barriers that women face. However, access to education for women has been limited because of institutional factors within the society and family which have contrived to exclude the majority of women from participating in educational opportunities (Kamla, 1995).

Women consider distance education as a panacea which may solve their numerous problems because it is economical as well as flexible. Despite all development measures, constitutional and legal guarantees leading to betterment of the social and economic life, women still lag far behind men in almost all the sectors including education. There are large numbers of women who never had gone to school or had dropped out early in their educational career. Several social, economic and political reasons seem to act as constraints to access and equity in higher education in India. Lower status of women, lack of easy access, lack of effective implementation of existing programmes, inadequate utilization of resources, absence of political will and inadequacies in coordinated actions across all equity fronts within institutions seem to be the other reasons.

The rural, urban and gender disparities must be kept in mind by policy makers in planning and implementing the higher education system (UGC, 2003).

The unit cost of traditional education, particularly of professional education, is quite high and has gone out of reach of the Indian middle and lower classes. Distance education offers an economic use of educational resources to large number of learners and can satisfy the educational needs of learners, especially women with different social and occupational backgrounds. The changing needs and aspirations of anticipated learner groups in particular and society in general can influence the planning and management of distance education system with a view to making the system socially responsive. Therefore research is needed to identify the needs of existing distance learners as well as

future target group keeping in view the general course of socio-economic development of the country.

Tripathi and Kanungo (2010) analyzed types of research published in *Indian Journal of Open Learning* from 2000 to 2009 and concluded that there were certain gaps in the research which had been reported in a ten year time period. Nembiakkim and Mishra (2010) studied distance education research attitude and barriers and concluded that respondents were positively disposed towards research in distance education, and believed in the need for more research, that is quantitative and collaborative. Distance education can be more learner centered if distance educators are aware of the problems, needs, attitudes and characteristics of their learners (Biswas, 1999).

In designing an effective learner support system, the institution should be familiar with the students' home and community environments, community's attitudes to education, availability of peers that can render academic assistance and a lot more other related issues (Andrew, 2003). Keeping this in view, the present study was carried out with the following objectives:

- to study demographic description of women distance learners; and
- to assess and compare the attitude of women learners towards distance education.

METHODOLOGY

The study was undertaken following survey research in Meerut region of Uttar Pradesh. The population selected was the women distance learners of graduate and postgraduate classes of Meerut region of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and Swami Vivekanand Subharti University (SVSU). Using purposive sampling, data were collected from 43 women learners from IGNOU study centers and 77 women learners from SVSU study centres, thus arriving a total sample of 120.

Attitude scale developed by Kumar (1999) was used which consists of 70 statements (30 positive statements and 40 negative) on 8 sub-areas of distance education viz., general, admission procedures, self instructional material (SLM), multimedia instruction, assignments, counseling sessions, study centers and evaluation system. The scale was administered on five point continuum viz., strongly agree, agree undecided, disagree and strongly disagree with a scoring of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 for positive statements and 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 for negative statements, respectively with a total score range of 70 to 350.

RESULTS

The demographic description of women learners presented in Tabl: 1 reveals that, 60 per cent women learners were graduates and 40 per cent were postgraduates, majority of learners were below 25 years of the age (65 per cent), unmarried (65.8 per cent), have urban background (75 per cent) and employed (61.6 per cent).

Table: 1
Demographic description of the respondents Group Variable Frequency Percentage

Group	Valuable	Frequency	Percentage
Academic	Graduate	72	60.00
	Postgraduate	48	40.00
Age group	Belove 25	65	54.10
	Above 25	55	45.80
Marital status	Married	41	34.10
	Unmarried	79	65.80
Lokal	Urban	90	75.00
	Rural	30	25.00
Employment Status	Employed	74	61.60
	Unemployment	46	38.30

The mean attitude score of IGNOU learners (245.47) was slightly higher than SVSU learners (237.94) with no significant difference (Table 2).

Table: 2
Comparison of attitudes towards distance Education between IGNOU and SVSU women learners

University	Frequency	Mean Attitude Score	S.D.	t-value
IGNOU	43	245.47	23.308	1852 (Sig 0.067)
SVSU	77	237.94	20.201	

*Significant at 0.05 level of confidence

Out of 8 aspects of attitude towards distance learning, significant difference was noticed on assignment area ($P < 0.05$). The IGNOU learners have significantly higher attitude in assignment area than SVSU students.

No significant differences were noticed on remaining 7 aspects namely general, admission procedure, SLM, multimedia, counseling, study centre and evaluation system (Table: 3).

Table: 3
Comparison of attitude towards distance education between IGNOU and SVSU students

Areas	IGNOU (N=43)			SVSU (//)			
	Mean	S.D.	SE	Mean	S.D.	SE	t-values
General	38.5814	3.79368	0.57853	37.1818	4.27578	0.48727	1.788
Admission Procedure	17.3953	2.92069	0.44540	16.8312	2.70673	0.30846	1.064
SLM	35.4419	4.53191	0.69111	35.2857	4.88245	0.55641	0.172
Multimedia	28.7907	4.39999	0.67099	28.6104	3.04854	0.34741	0.264
Assignment	34.4884	5.599920	0.85387	32.6883	3.56245	0.40598	2.15**
Counselling	32.6047	4.60403	0.70211	31.7532	4.31691	0.49196	1.012
Study Center	28.5814	5.12339	0.78131	27.1948	4.34087	0.49469	1.572
Evaluation System	29.5814	4.80195	0.73229	28.4416	4.02457	0.45864	1.387

***Significant at 0.05 level**

Out of 8 factors, the means were in favor of IGNOU learners on five factors namely general, admission procedure, assignments, counseling, study centre and evaluation system.

In other words it may be said that the IGNOU women learners' attitude found to be more favorable in these five aspects as compared to SVSU students. The mean score of rest of the factors were almost same in both universities.

DISCUSSION

The success of the distance education institutes lies in their ability to extend educational opportunities to all, including the unreached, disadvantaged, underprivileged and the community as a whole, thereby, contributing to the manpower development and growth. The results of this study have provided evidence that in Meerut region, distance learning is most patronized by urban students and single student population.

There is a widespread impression that the distance education learners are generally adults, who are over the age of approximately 25 years. However, the study showed that though the distance learners cover a wide range of age, the largest group were below 25 years of age (65 per cent).

Similar findings have been observed by other workers in the past (Krishnan, 2004). The study also revealed that 61.6 per cent students were employed and the remaining 38 per cent unemployed and therefore they had no income and were dependent on their guardian's income. The study by Kumar (1999) also observed the same phenomenon and reported that 60 per cent first degree learners were employed.

Attitude is one important criteria of success in distance learning. One of the reasons for students dropout from distance mode is the learner's attitude and aptitude. Attitude of

learners towards distance education has been treated as one of the criteria in studying the success of distance education.

One of the reasons for students dropout from distance mode is the learner's attitude and aptitude. Since the learners do not interact on a daily basis with their teachers, they tend to be demotivated and ultimately discontinue their studies.

Several researchers reported a positive attitude of the learners towards distance education (Sultana et al, (2011); Osei (2010); Adeoye (2010); Kumar (1998 and 1999). In comparison with the male students, the female students had expressed more favorable attitude and employed students were more positive than unemployed students towards distance education (Sahoo and Bhatt, 1987). Gaba (2010) and Pant (2005) found that students have favourable attitude towards information and communication technology. Some of the studies conducted by Sahoo (1998); Singh and Chaturvedi (1996) and Das (1992) reported attitude and academic performance of distance learners differ from students of traditional universities.

But the study of Thompson (1990) found that students negatively disposed toward correspondence based distance education programme. The restricted interaction with the instructor was the major disadvantage.

The positive and negative attitude towards distance learning is one factor which can determine the success and failure of programmes. Once the learner is satisfied with the course/programme that may lead to have positive attitude towards the system (Kumar, 1999).

CONCLUSION

Though this study reveals that women distance learners in Meerut had a positive and above average attitude, there is no significant difference between the National Open University and a private University because it may be that all Open Universities come under Distance Education Council and they follow the same rules and regulation. The IGNOU learners exhibited more favorable attitude than SVSU students on five sub areas of attitude towards distance learning namely admission procedure, assignment, counseling, study centre, evaluation system, may be because IGNOU provides a well organized support system to their students, but SVSU is a new University which started in 2008, and is in developing phase in terms of support system.

The result of this study points towards to rethink about the support system provided by the private universities. Institute plays an important role in distance education system. Distance education institute serve as a bridge between the supporting organization and student. Holmberg (1989) defines distance education as guided didactic conversation means the learner is separated from the teacher and peer group, and they feel isolated.

The distance education institute should take care of this aspect, otherwise the moral of distance learner will be disoriented and disenchanted from distance education.

Counseling sessions, workshops, group discussions need to be organized to improve the attitude of distance learners.

Timely feedback on assignments, timely declaration of results, better evaluation system, video/audio and library facilities in study centre etc. help in nurturing more favorable attitude towards the distance learning.

The Distance Education Council has to implement and enforce its rules strictly on private universities to maintain the standards of education, so that students under private universities are at par with IGNOU.

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APPENDIX
The Questionnaire

	I agree	Sometimes	I do not agree
Statements			
1. There is no relationship between private sector institutions and Saudi universities and colleges to understand the labor market needs.			
2. The university is not concerned with quality assurance of the students while graduating capable and appropriately skilled cadre for labor market.			
3. The university does not transfer the new trends in work field to its departments which consequently force the private sector to modify, polish and renew the skills of graduates.			
4. Increasing number of university graduates against limited jobs in the public sector.			
5. Annual increase in population with same infrastructure as it was, a situation that has its effects over unemployment through limited availability of fields.			
6. Increasing number of graduates from theoretical departments against small number of graduates from applied departments.			
7. Lack of communication between the university at one side and labor market with its both sectors on the other side, by sending job applications for graduates to the labor market.			
8. Graduates refusal to work in the private sector because of low wages.			
9. Competition of foreign labor with university graduates in private sector.			
10. Lack of interest shown by the private sector in employing Saudi nationals because of the high cost as compared to foreign labor.			
11. Fear of graduates from non-abiding of private sector to fulfill the legal obligations in favor of the worker during and after the end of service period as compared to public sector.			
12. Lack of acceptance from some graduates to work in far flung areas.			
13. Social customs and traditions that limit the fields of work for woman to few fields like education for example.			