Acceptability of Distance Education among Students' Society

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Abstract: **Education is a life-long process. Objectives and medium of education are changing with the demand of society from time to time. With the chronological transformation of residential institutions for education, education in monastery, sanskrit schools, organizational education, student- centered education, vocational education etc., open and distance education has been flourished. The existence and expansion of any medium of education mainly depends on its acceptability and success. In this research work, acceptability of distance education has been discussed. The present work has been conducted to study the acceptability of distance education among students. A sample of 100 distance learners from West Bengal (in India) was selected. Two sets of questionnaires were employed to gather opinion or attitude towards distance education from the students, different teachers and administrative personals. The findings of the study revealed that majority number of students favour for the distance education and the acceptability of distance education among students were satisfactory.**

Keywords: **Distance Education, Acceptability of Distance Education, Success of Distance Education, Necessity of Distance Education.**

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of education continues till the death of a living animal. Democracy and socio-economic condition of a certain country are influenced greatly by education. According to Kabi-guru Rabindranath Tagore, we are carrying education instead of being carried by education. To expand the education globally, the importance of distance education is immense. With the huge increment of number of people after independence in India, it is not possible for education to reach every whereby by improving the schools, colleges and universities. Swami Vivekananda said that education should reach to the child rather child reaching for education. But yet, this has not been completely successful in India. To make this real, many education commissions have made their specific suggestions in our country. The government also has taken many effective steps to flourish education among every portion and remote areas of our country by making appropriate arrangements and proper planning. One of such determined steps is the expansion of distance education in the country.

Keeping the aims and objectives and curriculum of the formal educational institutions unchanged, provision of relaxation of rules and regulations of the formal education system is considered as the distance education. Formal teaching-learning and sharing of knowledge as in case the of formal education system are not transacted by distance education. A student far away from formal educational institutions can learn easily through distance education. For universalisation of education, this type of education system has grown vastly today. In India, this type of education system has been flourished centrally or state-wise.

Modification or mutation is the inherent property of nature or our society. Man bears those cultures which play important role for prosperity of our society. Now education system of India or the whole world has been changed a lot. With the effect of globalization, the whole world has been shrunk. Now all social and economical factors are becoming market-

centered where education is also transforming into goods in the world market. Economically, developed countries influence on the on the developing and undeveloped countries. And this thing also influences on the education system of our country.

The word "Brain Drain" is often discussed today. Now-a-days, USA, UK, Australia, Canada, France and other developed countries are attracting the students of developing countries by offering them many advantages or arranging education fair. A huge number of children are not capable of joining in the Indian formal educational institutions. Under – development of socio-economic situation hinders the way of universalisation of education. For huge expansion and accessibility of education and for after all, 'Education For All', distance education is indispensible for our society. In the era of ICT, advent of distance education is an epoch-making revolution.

2. REVIEW STUDY

Distance learning provides "access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both." (Honeyman & Miller, 1993). Large numbers have earned degrees by taking advantage of distance educational opportunities. Increased access to a higher education in this form has allowed people living in rural areas, working professionals, military personnel in distant locations and single parents with busy schedules to earn college credits (Grenzky & Maitland, 2001).India has 9.2 million students, 15,000 colleges, 350 university institutions. But today India's higher education system provides access to less than 10% of the 18-23 age cohort despite massive growth in distance education (John Daniel; 2007). Distance education is best suited to a mature learner (N Barney Pityana; 2004). As the population at large becomes more involved in lifelong learning beyond the normal schooling age, institutions can benefit financially, and adult learning business courses may be particularly lucrative (Oblinger & Diana, 2000).

3. OBJECTIVES

Acceptability and success of distance education largely depend on its proper implementation. So the objectives of the study are-

➢ To find out acceptability of distance education among the distance learners.

➢ To get conception about expansion of distance education.

➢ To gather knowledge about necessity of distance education.

➢ To find out merits and demerits of distance education.

➢ To understand why students are accepting distance education.

➢ To understand the problem of learning through distance education.

➢ To find out whether there are any complexity in joining services after completing the courses from distance education.

➢ To find out whether the quality and affordability of distance education are maintained or not.

➢ To find out and to understand whether there is any faith and reliability on distance education of the students.

Study Area:

The distance learners are the fundamental basis of this study. Also the teaching community, administrative personals and their views are considered as the periphery of this study. The views of the students of distance education, related teaching and administrative personals are reflected in this study which is the main area for discussion.

4. METHODOLOGY (Sources of Data)

This paper is prepared on the basis of primary data from field survey. Still, secondary data are used which are collected from different research papers, journals, and websites. Different sets of questions were asked to the distance learners and administrative personals including teachers. Ten closed ended questions were asked to the students and four open ended questions were asked to the students and administrative personals including teachers. After collecting those data, statistical analysis (chi square test of equal probability hypothesis) has been done.

A total number of 100 students were asked the open and closed questions to know their opinion or attitude towards distance education. These 100 students were the sample of the present study.

The methodology for carrying out this study can be categorized into four steps (Figure - 1)

1. Question framing and selection of test groups.

2. Data collection through field survey.

3. Data analysis by statistical method.
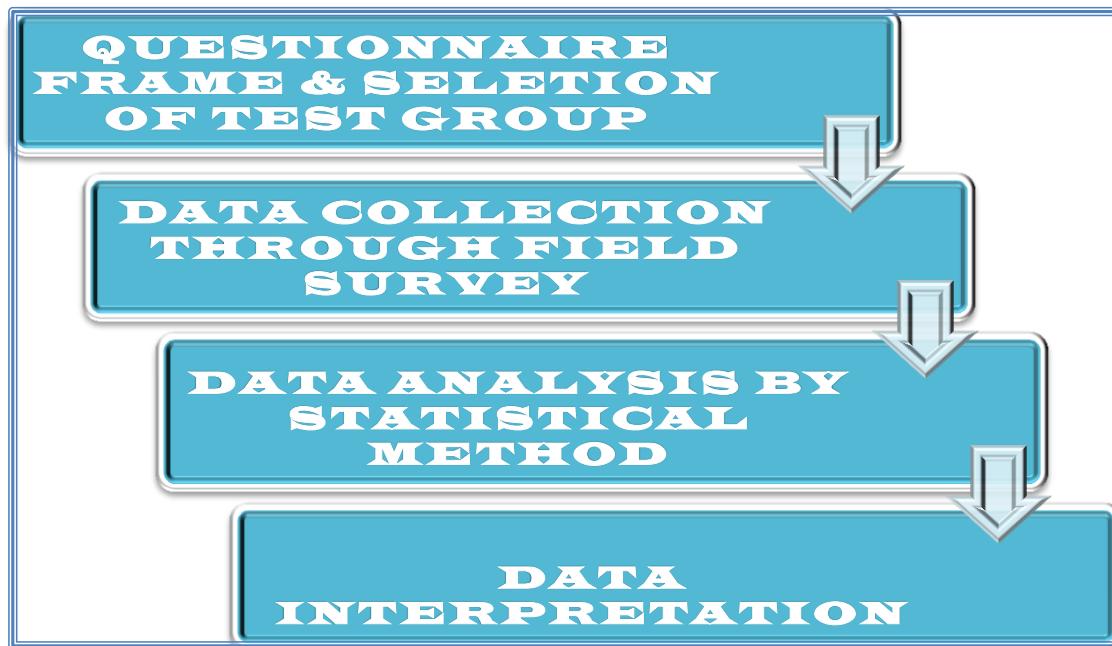
4. Data interpretation.

Figure – 1 Methodology of the study

5.   RESULT AND DISCUSSION

With the huge increment of number of people after independence in India, it is not possible for education to reach every whereby by improving the schools, colleges and universities. Swami Vivekananda said that education should reach to the child rather child reaching for education. But yet, this has not been completely successful in India. To make this real, many education commissions have made their specific suggestions in our country. The government also has taken many effective steps to flourish education among every portion and remote areas of our country by making appropriate arrangements and proper planning. One of such determined steps is the expansion of distance education in the country.

Table:-1 India's leading Open Universities

LEVEL	NAME	STUDENTS
National	IGNOU	1,500,000
West Bengal	NSOU	80,000
Tamil Nadu	TNOU	60,000
Maharashtra	YCMOU	200,000

Source: CHEA International Commission 2007-02-01

From the above table it is revealed that about15 lakh students are studying in Indira Gandhi National Open University, 80,000 thousand students are in Netaji Subhas Open University, about two lakh students are studying in YCMOU in Maharashtra. And many other students are related in different open universities. These huge numbers of distance learners are suggesting that the distance education courses are gaining popularity day by day.

To understand why this huge number of students are studying in distance and open universities, ten open ended questions were asked to the students. Questions are asked about distance education with which the student is related. This Question are (Table - 2)-

1. How the study material of the course is?

2. How the curriculum of the course is?

3. How is about class teaching?

4. What is your opinion about type of courses offered?

5. What is your opinion about admission procedure?

6. How is about administration?

7. How is about examination system?

8. What is your opinion about fees of the courses?

9. Is the teaching useful for competitive examination?

10. How is the situation in case of employment after completing course?

After collecting different opinions from different students, these are categorized and test of significant (χ^2 test) has been made.

Table-2 Survey question for distance learner of West Bengal

Question asked		Category					Total	χ^2	Significant or not
		Highly Unsatisfied (I)	Unsatisfied (II)	Undecided (III)	Satisfied (IV)	Highly satisfied (V)			
Ques. No.-1	Observed Ratings(f_0)	1	7	28	53	11	100	88.2	Significant at 0.01 level
	Expected Ratings(f_e)	20	20	20	20	20	100		
Ques. No.-2	Observed Ratings(f_0)	2	8	13	19	58	100	98.1	Significant at 0.01 level
	Expected Ratings(f_e)	20	20	20	20	20	100		
Ques. No.-3	Observed Ratings(f_0)	20	33	27	12	8	100	21.3	Significant at 0.01 level
	Expected Ratings(f_e)	20	20	20	20	20	100		
Ques. No.-4	Observed Ratings(f_0)	4	12	14	52	18	100	69.2	Significant at 0.01 level
	Expected Ratings(f_e)	20	20	20	20	20	100		
Ques. No.-5	Observed Ratings(f_0)	8	22	18	28	24	100	11.6	Significant at 0.05 level
	Expected Ratings(f_e)	20	20	20	20	20	100		
Ques. No.-6	Observed Ratings(f_0)	20	38	20	16	6	100	26.8	Significant at 0.01 level
	Expected Ratints(f_e)	20	20	20	20	20	100		
Ques. No.-7	Observed Ratings(f_0)	2	4	28	36	30	100	50	Significant at 0.01

	Expected Ratings(f_e)	20	20	20	20	20	100		level
Ques. No.-8	Observed Ratings(f_0)	4	7	12	47	30	100	65.9	Significant at 0.01 level
	Expected Ratings(f_e)	20	20	20	20	20	100		
Ques. No.-9	Observed Ratings(f_0)	6	21	15	42	16	100	36.1	Significant at 0.01 level
	Expected Ratings(f_e)	20	20	20	20	20	100		
Ques. No.-10	Observed Ratings(f_0)	3	3	21	18	55	100	90.4	Significant at 0.01 level
	Expected Ratings(f_e)	20	20	20	20	20	100		

Table 2 shows that for question no- 1, 53% were satisfied and 11% were highly satisfied about the study material of distance education and the different opinions were significantly different at 0.01 level of significance. This suggests that majority number of students were satisfied by the quality of study material the open universities are providing.

For question no -2, 58% were highly satisfied and 19% were satisfied about the curriculum of the distance education courses and this result is significant. So it can be said that students are highly satisfied with the curriculum.

The third question was asked about the class teaching and 20% were highly unsatisfied and 33% were unsatisfied and the ratings differ significantly at 0.01 level. So it implied that the maximum numbers of students were not satisfied about quality of class teaching in open universities.

The fourth question was asked about the type of courses offered and 52% students were satisfied and 18% students were highly satisfied about this. So students were satisfied about the type of courses offered.

In question no -5, about admission procedure, 28% students were satisfied and 24% students were highly satisfied, 22% were unsatisfied and 18% were undecided about this and it differs significantly. It means that majority numbers of students were satisfied with the admission procedure.

In case of administration of the open universities, the students were not satisfied because 20% students were highly unsatisfied and 38% students were unsatisfied and the opinions differ significantly. It implied that they were not satisfied with the administration.

For question no-7, 36% students were satisfied and 30% were students highly satisfied, 28% were undecided about examination system. So the students were actually satisfied with the examination system of the distance education. For question no-8, 47% students were satisfied and 30% students were highly satisfied about course fees. In response to the question no-9, 42% students were satisfied, 16% were highly satisfied with the view that the teaching was useful for preparation of competitive examination.

When they were asked about the employment after completion of the course, 55% were highly satisfied and 18% were satisfied. So this result showed that majority numbers of students were satisfied with the employment after the course completion.

When the students were asked about these following open ended questions different opinions were come out.

Open ended questions are as follows –

1. Have you admitted to the distance education course because you did not get chance to regular course?

2. Is course fee of distance education low?

3. Have you admitted to the distance education course because you face problems in regular course?

4. Are these courses more flexible than regular?

Some of the comments from the students and the administrators were-

➢ I have admitted to the distance education course because I am in service.

➢ The course fees are different in different universities.

➢ I have admitted to the distance education course because I did not get chance in regular course.

➢ The course fee is low in distance education.

➢ The distance courses are more flexible than regular courses.

Gathering all the opinions of the open ended answers, the present researcher found that most of the students, the teachers and administrators were agreed that distance education was more flexible in terms of access than regular one, the course fee was low in distance education, to get chance in distance education was more easy than regular courses and distance education course material was good.

7.   CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it can be said that majority number of students favour for the distance education. They are quite well satisfied with the major parameters of the distance education. The acceptability of open and distance education has been undoubtedly proved by this study. The importance of distance education is indispensible in expanding the education in developing countries like India. There are many ways by which the problem of illiteracy can be solved and distance education is one of them. Distance education has opened a new window of opportunities for those who desired for further studies. It is helping numerous professionals, drop outs, house wives etc. to reach out their unfinished dreams. The open and distance learning has provided an important alternative to meet the educational needs of people who are not in a position to avail the opportunities provided by the formal schooling system for certain reasons.

But all the teachers, different administrators, employees in government institutions do not accept the distance education positively. If this attitude towards distance education is abolished then acceptance of the distance education will be universal.

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