Research Article

DESIRABLE FEATURES AND PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY STUDENTS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION MODE

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Distance learning offers enormous potential for students who want to attend a class but are physically unable to attend a traditional classroom. It affords a flexibility that many students find appealing.However, there is a general view of distance learning that it is challenging, intimidating and frustrating. Distance-learning classes can present problems for students in the areas of support, interactivity, commitment and technology. This paper covers about the problems faced by the students who are undergoing distance learning. Some problems like nature of study material, lack of multimedia instructions, insecurities about learning, lack of feedback, contact with the teacher, lack of support and services, lack of social interaction among learners, lack of student training and low status of distance education institutions exists. In this context, we arrived the desirable features of distance learning and problems faced by the students and valuable suggestions also given in the same criteria.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21th century, it is obvious that all the societies have become in more need of education owing to aninformation explosion. In turn it has led to the development of new educational technologies and methods to have caused change in education by degree. Traditional educational institutions fall behind the increasing education demand. Resulting education deficit has been gradually growing day by day.

This situation has urged people to search for alternative education to traditional one and the concept of "Distance Education" is an output of this search. The main driving force behind these developments is the effort of meeting educational demands of people as a result of rise in numbers of student, education demand of different student populations, former students, rise in jobs and working bringing with it a lifelong learning. Education is a concept on which much stress is placed in the world. It is clear that those societies with highlevel of education feature fast development course and have caught competitive advantage in various areas. This potential could not be achieved by a common educational system. Here the importance of educational quality reveals. Education leading to development means quality education. Quality is a relativistic concept which varies depending on personal needs.

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Literature Review

Dr. Ajay Kumar Attri, 2012, Distance Education

Problems and Solutions, International journal of behavioural social and movement sciences, Vol 01, Oct 2012, Issue -04 - This paper deals with problems associated with distance education and their tentative solutions. First, it identifies those problems which were faced by distant learners during their course of study. Second, it also identifies the problems associated with the distance education system. Finally, it provides tentative solutions to these problems and some recommendations for the betterment of distance education. For this related content collected from different books, journals and internet was reviewed and then problems associated with distance education were identified**.**

J. B. Ohene, 2014, Challenges Faced by Distance Education Students of the University of Education, Winneba

Implications for Strategic Planning, Journal of Education and Training ISSN 2330-9709 2014, Vol**. 1, No. 2-**The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative research designs with interviews and questionnaire as the data collection techniques. One hundred and fifty-six students comprising sixty-eight males and eighty-eight female responses out of initial three hundred were received which is equivalent to a response rate of 52%. This constitutes the sample size for the study. Among the challenges identified were - institutional, instructional, social, psychological, and financial. The findings of the study, it is expected, will be utilized

instrumentally and conceptually in informing policy directives by public universities presently involved in DE programs.

Sadhasivam Panchabakesan, 2011, Problems And Prospectives In Distance Education In India In The 21st Century, Problems of Education in the 21stcentury Volume 30, 2011- This research paper attempts to introduce the problems and prospective in Distance Education System in India. This paper begins with the definition of distance learning and then proceeds to tell about the types of distance learning. It discusses and analyses the synchronous and asynchronous of distance education delivery system and emphasizes that the asynchronous method is more flexible than synchronous instruction. It also emphasizes that the instructional design, technology and support are the elements which are of paramount importance to any successful distance education program.

Statement of Problem

Distance learning is a new form of the educational process organization, based on the principle of student independent training with the help of developed information resources. The environment of training is characterized by that students generally are remote from the teacher in space and in time. However, distance education mode of learning also challenging in the sense of required educational quality and services regarding education. So, a study was conducted to find the desirable features and problems faced by the students undergoing distance education mode.

Objectives

- To identify the desirable features in distance education mode.
- To get awareness in the problem faced by the respondents through distance education mode.
- To give possible suggestions for the betterment of distance education quality.

Scope Of The Study

The purpose of this paper is to reveal the problems and desirable features of distance education that received from the educational institutions. It intends to evaluate what students facing from education service they receive and what are the problems they are encountering while undergoing distance education mode.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted with the sample size of 117 students from various disciplines pursuing education through distance mode using a questionnaire.In this study, thelevel of desirable featuresandproblems in distance education mode are captured and identification of the level of variables that are influencing desirable features and problems are revealed. The research analysis tool, chi-square test has been used for the analysis to find the association between the various independent variables and desirable features as well as problems faced by the students and ANOVA has been used to find out the difference in opinion with respect to gender.

Data Analyses And Interpretation

The data obtained from the questionnaire are thoroughly scrutinized before they analyzed using statistical tools. The quantity of the results obtained from the statistical technique

and their subsequent interpretation depends to a degree on how well data were prepared and converted into a suitable form of analysis. The respondents were obtained from the students who are undergoing education through distance mode in different respective.

Table 1 classification of respondents based on demographic variables

Demographic Variable	Respective Options	Frequency	Percent
Age (years)	below 25	63	53.8
	25-40	50	42.7
	41-55	4	3.4
	Total	**117**	**100.0**
Gender	Male	28	23.9
	Female	89	76.1
	Total	**117**	**100.0**
Educational qualification	UG	80	68.4
	PG	37	31.6
	Total	**117**	**100.0**
Marital status	married	52	44.4
	unmarried	61	52.1
	separated	4	3.4
	Total	**117**	**100.0**
Family Income (Rs.)	<15000	66	56.4
	15000 to 30000	26	22.2
	30001 to 45000	7	6.0
	>45000	18	15.4
	Total	**117**	**100.0**
Occupation	Government job	11	9.4
	Private job	44	37.6
	Business	9	7.7
	Others	53	45.3
	Total	**117**	**100.0**

From the descriptive statistics made with demographic variables, it can be interpreted that, with respect to age group, major respondents are at the age below 25 whose respective percentage is 53.8 followed by age category of 25-40, consisting 42.7 percentage of the respondents. With respect to gender 76.1 percentage of the respondents are female and rest of the percentage are male. Most of the respondents pursuing distance education had UG qualification i.e. 68.4 percentage of the respondent are UG qualified and 31.6percentage of the respondent are PG qualified. Considering Marital status, 52.1 percentage of the respondent are unmarried and 44.4 percentage of the respondent are married and 3.4 percentages are separated after married life. It is being found that majority of the respondent i.e. 56.4 percentage of the respondent's family income is below Rs. 15,000, followed by 22.2 percentage of the respondent has a family income betweenRs. 15,000 – Rs. 30,000. It can be interpreted that 37.6 of the respondents are working in a private firm, 11 percentages are working in government sector, 9 percentages are running their own business and 45.3 percentage are employed through other means.

Reliability test on items considered under a construct

Table 2 Item reliability determination using Cronbach's Alpha Value

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Value
Features	8	.788
Problems	8	.760

The calculated Cronbach's Alpha value for the construct – "Feature" is 0.788 and for "Problems" is 0.760.Since the calculated value for both the construct is greater than 0.7(reliability coefficient of .7 or higher is considered "acceptable" in most social science research situations)i.e.

Cronbach's Alpha Value > 0.7, the items considered under the construct are reliable.

Sub - Factors discovery within constructs using factor analysis
Factor Analysis on Desirable features

Table 3 Test for factor analysis utility using KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.697
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	307.482
	Df	28
	Sig.	.000

High value of KMO (0.697 >.05) of indicates that a factor analysis is useful for the present data. The significant value for Bartlett's test of Sphericity is 0.000 and is less than .05 which indicates that there exist significant relationships among the variables (Table-4). The resultant value of KMO test and Bartlett's test indicate that the present data is useful for factor analysis.

Table 4 Factor Analysis on Desirable features (Construct)

Desirable features	Component Matrix			Rotated Component Matrix			Identified Sub-factors
	1	2	3	1	2	3	
Course information during PCP	0.802			0.777			Communication during course
Quality of instructing	0.750			0.746			
Class environment	0.747			0.814			
Support and services	0.631	-0.530			0.764		Technical Support
Social interaction with other students	0.625			0.423	0.528		
multimedia instruction	0.561		0.590		0.818		
Course material	0.555	0.633				0.679	Course Curriculum
Course fee structure	0.452	0.517	0.583			0.870	

From the component matrix, the loadings (extracted values of each item under 3 variables) of the eight variables on the three factors extracted. The higher the absolute value of the loading, the more the factor contributes to the variable (We have extracted three variables wherein the 8 items are divided into 3 variables according to most important items which similar responses in component 1 and simultaneously in component 2 and 3). We suppressed all loadings less than 0.5. According to rotated component matrix, it reduces the number factors on which the variables under investigation have high loadings. From the table above, we can see that Course information during PCP, Quality of instructing, Class environment, are substantially loaded on Component 1 (named as communication during course) while support and services, social interaction with other students and multimedia instruction are substantially loaded on Component 2 (named as technical support). All the remaining variables are substantially loaded on Component 3 (named as course curriculum).

Factor Analysis on Problems

Table 5 Test for factor analysis utility using KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.672
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	289.269
	Df	28
	Sig.	.000

High value of KMO (0.672 >.05) of indicates that a factor analysis is useful for the present data. The significant value for Bartlett's test of Sphericity is 0.000 and is less than .05 which indicates that there exist significant relationships among the variables (Table-4). The resultant value of KMO test and Bartlett's test indicate that the present data is useful for factor analysis.

Table 6 Factor Analysis on Problems (Construct)

Problems	Component Matrix		Rotated Component Matrix		Identified Sub-factors
	1	2	1	2	
Lack institutional network of technical assistance	0.702	-0.485	0.85		Contribution to learning
Difficulty in admin service	0.750		0.71		
Lack of time for study	0.747		0.6	0.44	
Lack of support from employer/family	0.479		0.59		
Conflicts between work/ family, study schedule	0.512		0.48		
Financial constraints		0.847		0.83	Finance and Course material
Poor course material	0.710			0.7	
Delayed study material	0.689		0.42	0.62	

From the component matrix, the loadings of the eight variables are extracted as two factors. The higher the absolute value of the loading, the more the factor contributes to the variable (We have extracted three variables wherein the 8 items are divided into 2 variables according to most important items which similar responses in component 1 and component 2).According to rotated component matrix, from the table above, we can see that the Lack of effective institutional network of technical assistance, difficulty in administrative services, lack of time for study, lack of support from employer/family, conflicts between work/family and study schedule, are substantially loaded on Component 1 (named as Contribution to learning) while financial constraints, poor course material and delayed study materialare substantially loaded on Component 2 (named as finance and course material).

Test to find significant difference in opinion with respect to genders on desirable features and problems

H_0: There is no significant difference among male and female with respect to opinion on desirable features on distance education mode.

Table 7 ANOVA (Gender Vs Desirable features)

ANOVA				
Desirable features	Mean	F	Sig.	Null Hypothesis
Course material	3.84	1.820	.180	Accepted
Quality of instructing	3.74	.022	.882	Accepted
multimedia instruction	3.87	6.557	.012	Rejected
Course information during PCP	3.82	3.469	.065	Accepted
Support and services	3.99	.006	.939	Accepted
Social interaction with other students	4.09	.965	.328	Accepted
Class environment	4.19	.124	.726	Accepted
Course fee structure	3.70	.345	.558	Accepted

From the list of items under the construct "desirable features", it is only "Multimedia instruction" item whose significance value, Sig. < 0.05; hereby the Null hypothesis is rejected. This means with respect to gender there is significant difference in opinion in relation to desirable features. Other items have sig.

> 0.05, thereby null hypothesis is accepted, which means there is no significant difference in opinion with respect to gender. Considering items meeting null hypothesis criteria the mean value ranges from 3.70 – 4.19, this illustrates they agree that the following items plays an important role in distance education. With respect to the study area the respondent agrees that they possess good quality course material, quality instructing, good course information during PCP, good support and services, good social interactions with other students, good class environment and acceptable fee structure.

Hypothesis

H_0: There is no significant difference among male and female with respect to opinion on problems faced by respondents though distance education mode.

Table 8 ANOVA (Gender Vs Problems)

ANOVA				
Desirable features	**Mean**	**F**	**Sig.**	**Null Hypothesis**
Delayed study material	2.91	65.820	.000	Rejected
Difficulty in admin. Service	3.10	18.709	.000	Rejected
Lack institutional network of technical assistance	3.13	10.682	.001	Rejected
Poor course material	2.78	37.862	.000	Rejected
Lack of time for study	3.13	8.409	.004	Rejected
Financial constraints	3.16	18.931	.000	Rejected
Conflicts between work/family, study schedule	3.38	5.366	.022	Rejected
Lack of support from employer/family	3.28	4.970	.028	Rejected

From the list of items under the construct "Problems", every itemhas significance value i.e. Sig. < 0.05 thereby the null hypothesis is rejected, which means there is a significance difference in opinion on various problems faced in distance education modewith respect to gender.

Table 9 Ranking Analysis on Desirable features

		Course fee	**Course material**	**Instructor**	**Infrastructure**	**Teaching Aids**
N	**Valid**	**117**	**117**	**117**	**117**	**117**
	Missing	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Mean		3.36	2.93	2.79	3.09	2.89
Median		4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Mode		5	4	3	2	1
Std. Deviation		1.663	1.291	1.270	1.222	1.536
Variance		2.767	1.668	1.613	1.493	2.358
Range		4	4	4	4	4
Sum		393	343	327	361	338

From the ranking analysis,it was revealed that the course fee is considered first rank and the Infrastructure, course material, teaching aids and instructor are subsequently given successive ranks.

**Table 10** Ranking Analysis on Problems

		Delayed study material	**Difficulty in Administrative services**	**financial constraints**	**conflicts between work/family and study schedule**	**lack of technical assistance**
N	Valid	117	117	117	117	117
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		2.30	3.06	2.91	2.61	4.07
Median		2.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	4.00
Mode		1	3	3	2	5
Std. Deviation		1.385	1.101	1.304	1.456	1.096
Variance		1.918	1.212	1.700	2.120	1.202
Range		4	4	4	4	4
Sum		269	358	341	305	476

From the ranking analysis, it was revealed that thelack of technical assistance is considered first rank and the Difficulty in administrative services, financial constraints, conflicts between work /family and study schedule and delayed study material are subsequently given successive ranks.

Test to find the significant association in opinion with respect to age on improvement about class environment and teaching aids

Table 11 Age verses improvement about class environment and teaching aids Cross tabulation

			Improvement about class environment and teaching aids		Total
			yes	No	
Age	below 25 yrs	Count	60	3	63
		% within Age	95.2%	4.8%	100.0%
		% within improvement about class environment and teaching aids	63.2%	13.6%	53.8%
		% of Total	51.3%	2.6%	53.8%
	25-40	Count	33	17	50
		% within Age	66.0%	34.0%	100.0%
		% within improvement about class environment and teaching aids	34.7%	77.3%	42.7%
		% of Total	28.2%	14.5%	42.7%
	41-55	Count	2	2	4
		% within Age	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
		% within improvement about class environment and teaching aids	2.1%	9.1%	3.4%
		% of Total	1.7%	1.7%	3.4%
Total		Count	95	22	117
		% within Age	81.2%	18.8%	100.0%
		% within improvement about class environment and teaching aids	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	81.2%	18.8%	100.0%
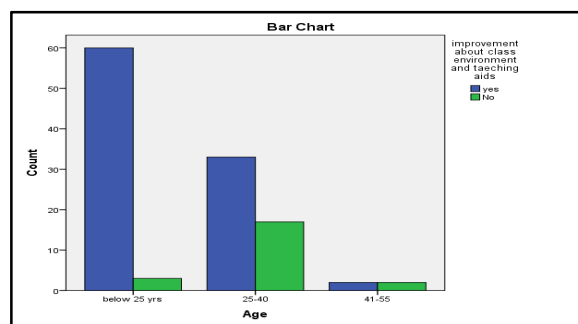
From the above table we can understand that there is significant association between age and opinion about improvement about class environment and teaching aids. From the bar chart, we can easily identify that 63.2 percentage of the respondents below 25 years need improvement about class environment and teaching aids and 13.6 percentage of the respondents accept no improvement need to carried out in class environment and teaching aids. Similarly, respondents between 25 to 40, 34.7 percentage need improvement and 77.3 percentage need no improvement and vice versa from the chart.

Hypothesis

H_0: There is no significant association in opinion with respect to age on improvement about class environment and teaching aids.

Table 12 Chi-Square tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Null Hypothesis
Pearson Chi-Square	18.248ᵃ	2	.000	Rejected
Likelihood Ratio	19.336	2	.000	
Linear-by-Linear Association	17.763	1	.000	
N of Valid Cases	117			

From the above table, we are interested in the results of the **"Pearson Chi-Square"** row. We can see here that, $p = 0.000$ (Since the P-value 0.000 is less than the significance level **0.05**). This tells us that there is a significant association between Age and opinion on improvement about class environment and teaching aids.

DISCUSSION

- From the descriptive statistics, major respondents are below 25 years and major percentage of the respondents are female. Approximately half of the respondent family income is below Rs.15,000.
- From the reliability test, both desirable features and problems constructed are greater than the reliability coefficient and therefore the items are reliable.
- From the ANOVA test, the statement of null hypothesis is accepted for all variables in desirable features except the multimedia facilities provided in the distance education contact program with respect to gender.
- Ranking analysis for the desirable features, reveal that course fee is considered first rank and the Infrastructure, course material, teaching aids and instructor are subsequently given successive ranks.
- Ranking analysis for the problems, reveal that the lack of technical assistance is considered first rank and the Difficulty in administrative services, financial constraints, conflicts between work /family and study schedule and delayed study material are subsequently given successive ranks.
- Test for significance association results that there is a significant association between age and opinion on improvement about class environment and teaching aids.
- The technical facilities should be improved as the survey results are major focussed in the technical support and multimedia facilities.
- Since the major respondents are below 25 years, the institutions can focus people above 25 years, in order to make use of the distance education facilities.
- Since the major respondents are UG holders, there is a possibility of encouraging them to do PG courses in distance education.
- Private job holders are also the major respondent's, focus to be needed for government job holders also to make them use the distance education facilities.
- Regarding problems, lack of technical assistance and Difficulty in administrative services are considered as major problems, so some steps to be taken to improve the technical assistance and the difficulty in administrative services.
- Finally, the other desirable features like course material, teaching aids and instructor should be focussed for the better quality and improvement as they ranked behind from the ranking analysis.

Implications

Findings of the present study, creates a general opinion of the students in distance education mode to the administration and the academic department of the university. The discussion from the above study should make an eye opening for the university in sake of implementing technical aids for teaching instead of conventional methods.

Limitations

The results should be considered with great care because samples from one university have been taken as respondents. In future, to get a clear and refine conclusion, the respondents from multiple universities all over India should be taken. Future studies can be conducted in qualitative basis to implement an in depth analysis and to get a fine result.

CONCLUSION

From the survey results, all expected desirable features are satisfied with the givendesirable features except multimedia faculties. The survey overall giving a view of lacking in technical support in study desirable features. From the customer oriented approach, which is important in terms of modern marketing, is adapted to education service marketing, focal point appears to be is educational expectations of students, parents andsociety. Education institutions giving educational services should follow the quality as well as support.Service quality measurement is an opportunity for enterprises to accurately define their goals and correctlyperceive needs of their customers accordingly to reshape their services. Moreover, measuring service quality allow for productive usage of operating assets. Enterprises operating in education sector should work on increasing service quality. Therefore, it is necessary to equip the technical desirable features in study area and in the way of instruction in order to fulfill their expectation. It is also significant to empathize with students in order to understand their educational problems and to ensure that courses made just in time in accordance with the curriculum by well-made organization. Universities, especially at the stage of planning and executing the services, should form administrative and academic cadres in pursuant of defined quality targets. As a result, these adjustments increase educational service quality and student satisfaction.

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