

AWARENESS AND ATTITUDE OF THE COLLEGE STUDENTS TOWARDS OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

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The University Grants Commission has set the target of enhancing the enrolment ratio by 5% during the 11th Five Year Plan. In order to achieve this target, tremendous amount of expansion of higher education would be necessary. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) may be a supplementary approach to fulfill the target through its more flexible and liberal yet quality programmes. The enrolment in the distance education programmes in Assam offered by the three state universities and the IGNOU cannot be considered as satisfactory. The enrolment of students in a particular programme depends on the awareness of the students about the programmes as well as their attitude towards them. This study was aimed at finding out the level of awareness of the college students about the programmes offered by different institutions through distance mode and their attitude towards these programmes. The study has revealed that the level of awareness and attitude of the college students towards ODL system is not very high. Besides, there exists significant differences between male and female; and rural and urban students as far as their awareness and attitude towards ODL system is concerned. It is expected that the findings of this study would help the policy makers of distance education to come up with awareness programmes so that the attitude of the learners towards the programmes offered through distance mode becomes highly positive.

INTRODUCTION

The Planning Commission of India has set the target of 15% GER by the end of the 11th Five Year Plan. In order to achieve this target, tremendous amount of expansion of higher education would be necessary. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is a supplementary approach to fulfill the target through its more flexible and liberal yet quality programmes. The enrolment in the distance education programmes in Assam offered by the three state universities and the IGNOU cannot be considered as satisfactory. The enrolment of students in a particular programme depends on the awareness of the students about the programmes as well as their attitude towards them. This study aims at finding out the level of awareness of the college students about the programmes offered by different institutions through distance mode and their attitude towards these programmes. It is expected that the findings of this study would help the policy makers of distance education to come up with awareness programmes so that the attitude of the learners towards the programmes offered through distance mode becomes highly positive.

OBJECTIVES

- 1 To find out the level of awareness of the college students (male and female and rural and urban) towards ODL.
2. To find out the level of attitude of college students (male and female and rural and urban) towards ODL.

HYPOTHESES

There is no significant difference between male and female college students as far as their awareness towards ODL is concerned.

There is no significant difference between rural and urban college students as far as their awareness towards ODL is concerned.

There is no significant difference between male and female college students as far as their attitude towards ODL is concerned.

There is no significant difference between rural and urban college students as far as their attitude towards ODL is concerned.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Method of Research

Considering the objectives, hypotheses and the nature of data to be collected, the descriptive method was adopted in the present study.

Population and Sample

The population of the present study comprises of all the college students studying at first degree level in the colleges under Dibrugarh University. There are a total of 143 Degree colleges affiliated to Dibrugarh University. The purposive incidental sampling technique had been used in selecting the sample of the present study. The sample comprises of 144 male and 116 female college students drawn from six colleges under Dibrugarh University.

Tools

Awareness scale to assess the awareness of the college **students** towards ODL was constructed by the researchers. The scale consists of 25 items covering the areas: General concept of ODL; ODL Universities/ Institutions of the Nation and the State; Regulatory bodies of the ODL system; Contents covered and skills developed through ODL; Instructional Methodology adopted in ODL system; and Job opportunity for the graduates from ODL institutions. Two-choice, multiple-choice and open ended items were included in the scale. For each correct response, the respondents were awarded one mark. The scale had been verified by a number of experts for obtaining content validity of the scale. The Odd-Even Reliability of the scale was calculated with a sample of 60 students and found to be .72. A Likert-type Attitude scale consisting of 22 items developed by the researchers was used in the present study. Out of the 22 statements, 12 were of favourable attitude and the rest 10 statements were of unfavourable attitude. The items covered the areas ; Instructional Methodology; Student support services; Self learning materials; Quality of the programmes offered by existing ODL institutions; Preference in getting jobs; Examination procedures; and Equivalence with the degrees awarded by the institutions through conventional mode. The draft scale was scrutinized and modified by a number of experts for ensuring its validity. The Test-Retest Reliability of the scale was found to be .76.

Data Collection : The researchers themselves administered the scales among the students and collected the data.

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND FINDINGS

Awareness of the College Students towards ODL System

Level of Awareness of Students: The mean, median and standard deviation of the distribution of scores were found to be 12.48, 12.32 and 2.88 respectively. The distribution was slightly positively skewed ($S_k = 0.167$) and Leptokurtic ($K_u = .251$) in nature. It was observed from the table that 43% of the students scored between 11 and 13, whereas only two students could score in the range of 20 to 22.

Awareness of Male and Female College Students : The following null hypothesis was formulated for testing if there was any significant difference between male and female college students regarding their awareness towards ODL system : “ *There is no significant difference between male and female college students as far as their awareness towards ODL system is concerned.*”

The ‘t’ value was found to be 5.92 which is very significant at .01 level and hence the null hypothesis could be rejected. *Thus, it can be concluded that there exists a significant difference between the male and the female college students as far as their awareness is concerned.*

Awareness of Rural and Urban College Students: The following null hypothesis was formulated for testing if there was any significant difference between urban and rural college students regarding their awareness towards ODL system: *“There is no significant difference between urban and rural college students as far as their awareness towards ODL system is concerned.”* The ‘t’ value was found to be 8.85 which is very significant at .01 level and hence the null hypothesis could be rejected. *Thus, it can be concluded that there exists a significant difference between the urban and rural college students as far as their awareness is concerned.*

Some interesting findings on awareness of the college students on different aspects of ODL were deduced from the data. Only 34 % of the respondents could name the State Open University of Assam, out of which 8% were respondents from rural colleges and 71% were from urban colleges. None of the rural students could name the Directorate of Distance Education, Dibrugarh University and IDOL, Gauhati University while, 6% and 3% of the respondents from the urban colleges could name these institutions respectively. 70% of the respondents had acquaintance with the term ‘IGNOU’ and more than 50% of the respondents knew that IGNOU is the largest (in terms of numbers of students) University in India. About 52% of the students were not aware that education in science subject could also be pursued through ODL mode. Only 20% of the respondents were aware about the existence of Distance Education Council.

Attitude of the College Students towards ODL System

Level of Attitude of College Students: The mean, median and standard deviation of the distribution of scores were found to be 68.63, 70.19 and 14.47 respectively. The distribution was slightly negatively skewed ($S_k = - 0.323$) and Leptokurtic ($K_u = .204$) in nature. The overall attitude could not be considered as highly favourable. It was observed that most (43%) of the students scored between 65 and 75, whereas only 9 students could score in the range of 90 to 99.

Attitude of Male and Female College Students: The following null hypothesis was formulated for testing if there was any significant difference between male and female college students regarding their attitude towards ODL system: *“There is no significant difference between male and female college students as far as their attitude towards ODL system is concerned.”* The ‘t’ value was found to be 0.76 which is not significant at .05 level and hence the null hypothesis could be accepted. *Thus, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between the male and the female college students as far as their attitude is concerned.*

Attitude of Rural and Urban College Students: The following null hypothesis was formulated for testing if there was any significant difference between urban and rural college students regarding their attitude towards ODL system: *“There is no significant difference between urban and rural college students as far as their attitude towards ODL system is concerned.”* The ‘t’ value was found to be 2.49 which is not significant at .01 level but significant at .05 level and hence the null hypothesis could be rejected at .05 level. *Thus, it can be concluded that there exists a significant difference between the urban and rural college students as far as their attitude is concerned.*

Some interesting findings on awareness of the college students on different aspects of ODL were deduced from the data. Only 12% of the respondents agreed that the degrees awarded by ODL institutions and that by the Conventional institutions are equivalent. Majority of the respondents (about 70%) opined that the students who pass through conventional mode get priority in the job market. About 57% of the respondents did not agree that only non-meritorious students go for distance education. About 60% of the respondents were of the opinion that most of the institutions providing education through at present are not of very high quality.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is found from the above study that the present scenario of the level of awareness and attitude of the college students towards ODL system is not very encouraging. Unless the students are aware about the merits and accessibility of the ODL system and form a healthy attitude towards it, it will not be possible to attain equity and access of the higher education, which is the need of the hour. In order to make the students aware and inculcate a healthy attitude in them, the ODL institutions and the policy makers should come forward with open mind. Different awareness programmes may be organized at micro level especially in the rural areas. Advertisements through the News Papers, TV and other media are though good means of keeping the people aware, they may not be able to convince all the readers and spectators, rather they may make them more confused. Good articles and programmes through these media may perhaps be more useful in this regard. The funding authorities may allot a sizeable amount of fund for promoting ODL among people. The ODL institutions should also spend a portion of their earning for making the people aware and developing a healthy attitude in them. Highlights of the achievements of the students of ODL system needs to be made.

CONCLUSION

In order to achieve the target set by the Planning Commission of India to achieve the target of 15% GER by the end of the 11th fifth year plan, the proper implementation of the ODL in India is very much essential as the target could not be achieved through conventional mode alone. Awareness of people and a healthy attitude can ensure the equity, access and quality in and through ODL system.