

CORRELATION BETWEEN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF STUDENTS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AND THEIR PERFORMANCE

* M. Selvam and M.A. Akbarsha

The concept of distance education has caught the attention of educational planners all over the world. The principal objective of distance teaching institutions is to widen the accessibility for all sections who can't enroll themselves as full - time learners in the regular stream. In other words, distance teaching institutions aim at throwing open the portals of higher education to those who, for one reason or another, can carry on their studies at their own pace and according to their convenience. In short, all the distance teaching institutions have the common objective of bringing higher education within the reach of those who have had no access to the conventional educational institutions.

Access to Education

It is true that during the last 48 years since independence, there has been a remarkable expansion in education; in 1951 there were only 22 universities in our country; today (1996) there are 226 universities. Similarly the number of distance education institutions now is 46, in addition to the five open universities, and it is expected that 16.5% of students will be covered by distance mode by the end of 8th plan. However, the needs and demands of the different segments of the society in India have created the necessary condition for the establishment of many more distance

education institutions / universities of open learning.

The Centre for Distance Education, Bharathidasan University, established in 1992, offers several under-graduate, post - graduate and job-oriented courses. One of the popular job-oriented course at master's level is the Master of Computer Applications (MCA). It is the first distance education unit in India to offer a computer science programme at the master's level on par with what is practised in the regular stream.

It is inherent in the developing countries to crave for a "degree". The level of the degree is considered an elitistic status. It is also inherent that where something new is introduced, and if it offers some job opportunity, the students flock towards such programmes. But the desire is limited primarily by the economic affordability and social constraints.

Objectives of the study

The study has the following major objectives:

1. To find out the socio-economic background of the students of MCA course in the distance education unit of Bharathidasan University, and
2. To find out the correlation between the socio - economic background of the students and their performance in the examinations.

* Centre for Distance Education, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapalli, Tamilnadu.

Prospective Applications of the Outcome of the Study

The important applications of the outcome of the study are:

1. Distance education being student - centred, requires to be aware of the nature and composition of the students in order to design the curriculum, prepare the course material and develop the appropriate organizational structure for student support service, etc.
2. It would help to make an assessment of the students in relation to the social background, age, sex, etc., so as to decide on the sections which distance education is supposed to reach and would serve better.
3. It also would help to understand the relationship between the background of the students and their performance in the studies.

Methodology

The present study was conducted at the Centre for Distance Education, Bharathidasan University, in relation to the MCA students of 1992-95 & 1993 - 96 batches and who have completed the course period of 3 years. In order to select the candidates of MCA, complete enumeration method was adopted in both the batches. The study mostly depended on secondary information, the experience of the teachers and the co-ordinators of the contact programme centres for the MCA course have also been taken into consideration.

MCA - A profile

- The duration of the MCA degree course is 3 years.
- It is offered under the semester pattern with English as the medium of instruction.
- The regulations, syllabus, scheme of examinations, evaluation, passing minimum, classification, ranking, etc., are the same as for the regular students admitted in the colleges affiliated to the university.
- The method of instruction is through (a) lesson materials and (b) personal contact programmes.
- The contact classes are arranged on Saturdays, Sundays and other notified holidays.
- The laboratory course is offered in the computer lab of the Centre for Distance Education and at institutions having adequate computer facility; each student is given a separate terminal; one instructor is appointed for every 10-15 students.
- 50% attendance is compulsory, both in the theory and the practicals, to take the university examinations.
- Continuous Internal Assessment (CIA), consisting of attendance, assignments and tests as the components, is part of the evaluation in addition to the end examination; it is practised more rigorously in the distance stream than in the regular one.

Eligibility for admission

- A candidate who is a graduate in Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Statistics, Computer Science, Industrial Electronics, Applied Science (i.e. any degree with Mathematics as the main or allied subject) or B.Com. or B.B.A (having taken Business Mathematics / Statistics as a paper) of this University or an examination accepted by the syndicate as equivalent there to.
- B.E., B.Tech., A.M.I.E. (Other than Computer Science)

Selection procedure

- The University may evolve such procedures for selection as may warrant from time to time, in which merit, community etc., will be given due weightage. The number of seats at each centre is limited to 60 each in two sections.
- As of now, students with a score 60% and above in the qualifying degree have been admitted on first - come first - served basis. No relaxation is extended in respect of age, gender, geographic and occupational distribution of students; however, 5 marks relaxation is given to SC/ST candidates.

Relationship between socio - economic background of the learners and their performance

The socio - economic background of the MCA students of the Centre for Distance Education has been studied with the following

as the criteria:

- (1) Age distribution
- (2) Gender distribution
- (3) Geographic distribution
- (4) Community distribution, and
- (5) Occupational distribution

The performance of the learners has been studied then and there while studying the various aspects of the socio - economic background. The performance of the learners is taken as successful completion of the course within the course period.

Table - 1 reveals the age distribution of the learners and their performance among 1992 - 95 and 1993 - 96 batches. The majority of the learners who joined during 1992 - 93 (83.3%) and 1993-94 (85.49%) are below the age of 30, followed by the learners in the age group of 31-40 and 41-50 respectively, i.e., 19% in 1992-95 and 13% in 1993 - 96 in the age group of 31-40 have enrolled in the MCA programme; in both the batches no student in the age group of 51-60 sought enrolment. From the table, it is inferred that only young learners who dropped out from the formal system have been attracted at a higher proportion.

Regarding performance, higher number of learners in the age group of below 30 have passed the course successfully, i.e., 80.95% in the 1992-95 batch and 93.18% in the 1993 - 96 batch. This is followed by the learners in the age group of 31-40 (17% in 1992 - 95 and 6% in 1993 - 96). Only one learner in the age group of 41-50 has

completed the course in 1992 - 95. From this, it is concluded that the slogan "educate the young" seems to be more effective in the distance mode of learning as well.

Gender distribution of the learners and their performance are given in Table-2. More number of male learners enrolled in 1992 - 95 (79.35%) and 1993 - 96 (74.09%) and completed the course period; the percentage of female learners numbered only 20 in 1992-95 while it increased to 25 in 1993-96. Women constitute only slightly less than 50% of the population of the country; their disproportionate enrolment in the distance mode of learning may be due to the low literacy rate of the women, hesitation to invest huge money in education and social hurdles for women education. On the other hand, there is no reservation of seats in the admission for women. It can not be expected that women would avail their due share in the education even in the distance mode in view of facing various constraints as mentioned above, without being given any special concession /relaxation in admission.

Regarding the performance of the learners, though the proportion of women getting enrolled is low, i.e., 20.64% in 1992 - 95 and 23.56% in 1993 - 96, their passing rate is higher than that of male learners - more than 60% in 1992 - 95 and 1993 - 96. This indicates that the Centre for Distance Education opened up avenues for improving the knowledge / skills of female learners, especially in this type of professional education to facilitate them to acquire more professional knowledge without disturbing

their household chores

Table-3 depicts the distribution of the learners and their performance. The distribution of learners is almost even among urban and rural learners did - 95 and in 1993 - 96 but rural learners would be not register proportionately it is heartening if the distance mode enrols still higher number of rural learners in proportion to their total percentage (80% of the population). As stated earlier, the cut-off given by the university based on admission marks; no relaxation is given in the admission to rural learners. This may be the vital reason for the low participation of rural learners in the MCA course. Moreover, lack of library facilities, guidance, motivational etc are still prevailing in the rural areas of the country. Literacy background of the parents, a very important factor in the choice of the course, may also be one of the reasons.

The performance of urban learners in 1992 - 95 is better than that of rural learners in 1992 - 95 (52.32%) and 1993 - 96 (57.95%). However, the passing rate of rural learners is not really very low and it stands at 47.16% in 1992 - 95 and 42.04% in 1993 - 96. This shows that the right opportunity and proper training at the time would nurture the intelligence of rural learners; their calibre is in no way inferior to that of the urban.

Analysis of community distribution of the learners reveals (as given in Table-4) that the majority of the learners in MCA are from backward communities in 1992 - 95 (57.41%) and 1993 - 96 (58.03%). The next

group is from the forward communities (33.45% in 1992-95 and 33.16% in 1993 - 96), followed by MBC's and SC/STs. The share of MBCs and SC/STs is insignificant, i.e., MBCs occupied 6.45% in 1992 - 93 and 7.25% in 1993 - 96 while SC/STs numbered 2.58% in 1992 -95 and 1.55% 1993 - 96. The reasons may be a low literacy level of these sections, inadequate financial position, and non-affordability of the facilities like hostel accommodation at the PCP centre. One major factor would be that the intending candidates do not fulfill the cut - off mark requirement for admission. Whatever be the reasons, the learners' profile shows that the Centre for Distance Education offers little attraction to the deprived sections of the society.

The analysis of the performance of learners reveals that forward communities achieved a higher rate of passing 1992 - 93 (51.92%) and 1993 - 94 (48.43%), though their share of enrolment is less than that for the BCs. This is followed by BCs and MBCs, i.e., BCs shared 37.07% in 1992 - 95 and 46-42% in 1993 - 96 while MBCs numbered 30.00% in 1992 - 95 and 35.71% in 1993 - 96. It is a surprise to note that SC/ST learners of both the batches (1992 - 95 & 1993 - 96) represented a zero rate of passing the degree during the stipulated period of 3 years. Hence, it is suggested that special training for the improvement of self - study skill of SC/ST learners may be helpful for them to complete the course within the prescribed period.

Table-5 depicts the occupational

distribution of the learners and their performance in the university examination. Most of the learners who enrolled in 1992 - 95 (65.80%) and 1993 - 96 (70.89%) are unemployed though distance education is meant essentially for working people; this may be due to the peculiar social situation of the country or the practises of attendance. Further, employed candidates are not given any preference in admission.

Regarding the performance of the learners in 1992 - 95 employed learners achieved a higher rate (47.16%) while in 1993 - 96 unemployed learners (49.63%) achieved higher passing rate.

The highlights of the study

The study highlights the following inferences which may help plan strategies for the future:

1. Young learners who dropped out from the formal system have been attracted at a high proportion by the MCA course offered by the Centre for Distance Education, Bharathidasan University during 1992 - 95 and 1993 - 96. Similarly, the performance of young learners (below 30 years) of the MCA programme in 1992 - 95 and 1993 - 96 is better than the performance of others.
2. It is unfortunate that the women's share in the enrolment in the MCA is highly disproportionate to their population. However, their passing rate is higher than that of men.
3. Though the number of urban and rural

learners enrolled in the course is more or less equal, the share of rural learners is disproportionate to the total rural population of the country. However, the performance of urban learners is better than that of rural learners during 1992 - 95 and 1993 - 96.

4. The majority of learners who enrolled during 1992 - 95 and 1993 - 96 are from backward communities, followed by forward communities, most backward communities and SC/STs in this order. However, a higher passing rate has been noted among the students belonging to the forward communities followed by BCs & MBCs. The passing rate of SC/STs of the MCA programme in 1992 - 95 and 1993 - 96 is nil.
5. The major beneficiaries of the MCA course are unemployed learners.

The recommendations of the study

1. The reason for the course not attracting learning of higher age groups must be identified through further research.
2. It is clear that there is a need to attract more women learners to achieve equality in education. In order to achieve this, 30% reservation for women in employment and education may have to be followed in the distance education also; if need be, relaxation can be extended in the cut - off marks for admission.
3. The study clearly reflects that it is necessary to take all possible steps to

attract more rural learners and to motivate them through special training / coaching for their performance in the university examinations. For a higher rate of participation of rural learners, preference for first generation rural learners may be given for admission.

4. It would be appreciable if steps are taken to change the social disparities in the admission. The reservation policy of the Government needs to be implemented. Besides, in the case of SCs/STs, if need be, special training / coaching may be conducted to uplift the educational status of SC/ST learners.
5. The concept of distance education could be fully achieved if it is to become also useful to employed learners. The employed learners may be benefitted by the distance mode of education if they are given preference in admission.

Conclusion

The Centre for Distance Education has become more popular over the last four years, and it has been able to extend educational opportunities to many sections of the people irrespective of sex, gender, geographic location etc., who are deprived of the privilege of joining the MCA course under the regular stream. This trend indicates that the Centre for Distance Education has made a beginning in popularising computer educational opportunities and making accessibility easier.

Table - 1

Age Distribution of the Students and Their Performance

Age	Candidate completed the course			Candidate passed the course in course period				
	92-95	93-96	Total	92-93	Rate of passing%	93-96	Rate of Passing%	Total
below-30	130.00 (83.87)	165.00 (85.49)	295.00 (84.77)	51.00 (80.95)	39.23	82.00 (93.18)	49.69	133.00 (88.07)
31-40	21.00 (13.54)	26.00 (13.47)	47.00 (13.50)	11.00 (17.46)	52.38	6.00 (6.81)	23.07	17.00 (11.25)
41-50	3.00 (1.93)	2.00 (1.03)	5.00 (1.43)	1.00 (1.58)	33.33	00.00	00.00	1.00 (0.66)
51 & above	1.00 (0.64)	0.00 (0.00)	1.00 (0.28)	00.00 (0.00)	00.00	00.00 (0.00)	00.00	00.00 (0.00)
Total	155.00 (100.00)	193.00 (100.00)	348.00 (100.00)	63.00 (100.00)	40.64	88.00 (100.00)	45.59	151.00 (100.00)

Table - 2

Gender Distribution of the Students and Their Performance

	Candidate completed the course			Candidate passed the course in period				
	92-95	93-96	Total	92-95	Rate of passing%	93-96	Rate of Passing%	Total
Male	123.00 (79.35)	143.00 (74.09)	266.00 (76.43)	41.00 (65.07)	33.33	57.00 (64.77)	39.86	98.00 (64.90)
Female	32.00 (20.64)	50.00 (25.90)	82.00 (23.56)	22.00 (34.92)	68.75	31.00 (35.22)	62.00	53.00 (35.09)
Total	155.00 (100.00)	193.00 (100.00)	348.00 (100.00)	63.00 (100.00)	40.64	88.00 (100.00)	45.59	151.00 (100.00)

Table - 3

Geographic distribution of the students and Their performance

	Candidate completed the course			Candidate passed the course in period				
	92-95	93-96	Total	92-95	Rate of passing%	93-96	Rate of Passing%	Total
Urban	69.00 (44.51)	101.00 (52.33)	170.00 (48.85)	33.00 (52.38)	47.82	51.00 (57.95)	50.49	84.00 (55.62)
Rural	86.00 (55.48)	92.00 (47.66)	178.00 (51.14)	30.00 (47.61)	34.88	37.00 (42.04)	40.21	67.00 (44.37)
Total	155.00 (100.00)	193.00 (100.00)	348.00 (100.00)	63.00 (100.00)	40.64	88.00 (100.00)	45.59	151.00 (100.00)

Table - 4

Community Distribution of the Students and Their Performance

	Candidate completed the course			Candidate passed the course in period				
	92-95	93-96	Total	92-95	Rate of passing %	93-96	Rate of Passing %	Total
O.C	52.00 (33.54)	64.00 (33.16)	116.00 (33.33)	27.00 (42.85)	51.92	31.00 (64.77)	48.43	58.00 (38.41)
B.C	89.00 (57.41)	112.00 (58.03)	201.00 (57.75)	33.00 (52.38)	37.07	52.00 (59.09)	46.42	85.00 (56.29)
M.B.C	10.00 (6.45)	14.00 (7.25)	24.00 (6.89)	3.00 (4.76)	30.00	5.00 (5.68)	35.71	8.00 (5.29)
SC/ST	4.00 (2.58)	3.00 (1.55)	7.00 (2.01)	0.00 (0.00)	00.00	0.00 (0.00)	00.00	0.00 (00.00)
Total	155.00 (100.00)	193.00 (100.00)	348.00 (100.00)	63.00 (100.00)	40.64	88.00 (100.00)	45.59	151.00 (100.00)

Table - 5

Occupational Distribution of the Students and Their Performance

	Candidate completed the course			Candidate passed the course in period				
	92-95	93-96	Total	92-95	Rate of passing %	93-96	Rate of Passing %	Total
Employed	53.00 (34.19)	56.00 (29.01)	109.00 (31.32)	25.00 (39.68)	47.16	20.00 (22.72)	35.71	45.00 (29.80)
Unemployed	102.00 (65.80)	137.00 (70.98)	239.00 (68.67)	38.00 (60.31)	37.25	68.00 (77.27)	49.63	106.00 (70.19)
Total	155.00 (100.00)	193.00 (100.00)	348.00 (100.00)	63.00 (100.00)	40.64	88.00 (100.00)	45.59	151.00 (100.00)

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP AND OTHER PARTICULARS ABOUT THE PERIODICAL INTERNATIONAL EDUCATOR

- Place of Publication
Triannual
Printer's Name
Whether citizen of India?
Address
- Thiruvananthapuram
Triannual
Harish Kumar.S
Yes
Harishree Job Centre
Thiruvananthapuram
- Publisher's Name
Whether citizen of India?
Address
- Harish Kumar. S
Yes
Kalaniketan Publishers.
Nandavanam, Thiruvananthapuram-33
- Editor's Name
Whether citizen of India?
Address
- Dr. K. Sivadasan Pillai & Dr. Bernd Pflug, Ovelil
Yes
C/o Kalanikethan Publishers.
Nandavanam, Thiruvananthapuram-33
- Name and Address of individuals who own the magazine and partners or shareholders holding more than one percent of the capital
- The Partners of Kalaniketan Publishers.
Regd firm

1. Hansh Kumar. S. hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Sd/-
Harish Kumar. S
Publisher & Managing Partner, Kalaniketan

20-8-1998