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Correlation Between Level of Dissatisfaction and Dropout of Distance Learners: A Case Study

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Abstract: *The distance education system has been designed to bring the education at the doorsteps of learners. The enrolment of learners has been continuously increasing in the distance education. All enrolled students are not able to finish the course due to a number of factors. This paper identifies various courses responsible for dropout and establishes correlation between the level of dissatisfaction and dropout of distance learners.*

Introduction

Distance Education System (DES) has revolutionised the present mode of education. The growing population of a country demands a system of education which brings the education to the door steps of the learners. As a result, the major percentage of the population living in remote areas, such as those working in the offices or involved in business or agricultural activities get benefited. The credit for undertaking the experiment of conducting correspondence courses for the first time goes to the University of Delhi (1962). At the close of 1983, there were 29 institutions offering education through the distance open mode. The *Hand Book of Distance Education* (1986) prepared by the Association of Indian Universities reveals that there were 46 institutions including five Agricultural Universities and two Science and Technology Universities offering correspondence/open education. As on date, there are nine state level open universities besides one national level (IGNOU, New Delhi). In addition to this, 50 formal institutions have correspondence distance education units.

Brief History of CDE

The Bharathidasan University was established in Feb 1982 under an Act of Government of Tamil Nadu as an affiliating University. It was recognised by the University Grants Commission in 1985. It is a member of the Association of Indian Universities. The Centre for Distance Education. (CDE), Bharathidasan University, established in 1992

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offers several professional, U.G. and P.G. courses at different PCP centres all over the southern states.

Problems of Learners

The DES is operated with the help of four actors *(Institutions, Learner, Public and Government).* Each actor may have its own problems which may vary from actor to actor. This study seeks to identify the problems encountered by the most significant actor of the DES, namely the *learner.* The learners are responsible for the existence of the system. Hence, their point of view contributes substantially to the successful operation of the DES in the country. As consumers, their appraisal of the system's output is valid. In terms of input, they contribute their time, cost/fee etc. Therefore, it is apparent that the success of DES is synchronised with the satisfaction of the learners by solving their problems related to the learning process. In this study, one of the serious problems prevailing in the DES is identified as the *dropout of learners.*

Meaning of Dropout

A higher incidence of dropout rate is observed in the DES than in the formal education. The term "dropout" means different things to different people. Considering the question of students' dropout at the global level, educationists identify the following factors to determine the concept.

- **Non-completion of final registration :** Students do not complete final year registration/year.
- **Withdrawal rate :** Students register but do not sit for the final examination.
- **Failure rate :** Students sit for the final examination but do not gain course credit.
- **Overall wastage rate :** It includes both withdrawal and failure.

Statement of the Problem

The dropout problem is faced by almost all distance education institutions. This results in a huge wastage of money, time and efforts. The learners' dropout from DES may be the result of the effective role of various factors. Those factors ultimately affect the level of satisfaction of the learners. There is no doubt that higher the level of dissatisfaction higher the rate of dropouts. The lower the level of dissatisfaction lower the rate of dropout from DES. Hence, the present study aim at evaluating the level of dissatisfaction of distance learners so that appropriate steps can be initiated to reduce the level of dissatisfaction.

Methodology

The Centre of Distance Education, Bharathidasan University was taken as the subject of this study. In order to collect primary data from the learners through questionnaire, they were classified on the basis of sex and status of course (UG and PG). From the

available list of candidates who dropped from CDE, about 150 learners giving equal representation for sex and status of course were chosen. The questionnaire after pre-testing and pilot study was mailed to them. In total, 100 filled-in questionnaire from learners who dropped out from the CDE, during the academic year 1996-97 were taken into account for further analysis of the study.

Results

Factors Responsible for Dropout

Many studies have been conducted to identify the reasons for large scale dropouts from the DES. However, these studies have not given concrete ideas to solve this problem. The views of experts and researchers in the field of distance education need to be given here to understand the various factors responsible for dropouts of distance learners from DES.

Woodly et. al (1983) enumerates the reasons for some students succeeding while others dropping out from DES. The author acknowledged the complex interplay of push and pull factors for the dropout level. The push factors encourage the students to continue while pull factors lead them to withdraw. The following are put and pull factors identified.

Push Factors	Pull Factors
• Wants a degree to get promotion	• Wants to spend more time with family
• Likes to finish something which was started	• Course is very difficult
• Very much interested	• Fees are high
• Spouse is very much encouraging to continue	• Course does not have tutor facility
• Allowed time-off for summer school	• P/T degree course available nearby

Mani (1983) identifies the following eight factors responsible for dropout from DES in the University of Madras.

- Family circumstances
- Late despatch of lessons
- Lack of proper guidance
- No liberty facility
- Transfer to other place
- High fee rate
- No academic help, and
- Lack of variety of teaching methods

Based on a survey conducted among women respondents, Murli (1993) found that the reasons for dropping out from DES in the University of Madras, were as follows:

- Marriage
- Husband disagrees with continuing the studies
- Ill-health
- Burden of work at home

- Less retentive power in studies
- Burden of work at home
- Unable to attend the seminar class, and
- Unable to get enough teaching work

- Unable to attend the seminar class, and
- Unable to get enough teaching work

The above selected studies are useful to understand the background of learners who had dropped out from DES and also various factors responsible for it. The findings of the above studies are used as models for this study.

All the factors that are identified for the present study are classified under the following seven major heads. They are used as tools to evaluate the level of dissatisfaction of learners.

- Psychological factors
- Family factors
- Social factors
- Occupational factors
- Health factors
- Educational factors, and
- Institutional factors

Sub-Components of above Major Factors

Each major head of factors which is responsible for learners dropout from distance education can further be classified below as revealed from the response of learners. Accordingly the psychological factors include sub-factors namely "no intention for further study", "less retention/memory power", "inferiority complex" and "teasing by others". In the case of family factors, it could further be classified as "more time required for the care of children", "other kinds of commitments to the family", "heavy family expenditure", "scarcity of money/poor income" and "no motivation from family".

The various sub-division of social factors are: "family restriction", "marriage", "no co-operation of spouse", "objection by family members" and "objection by relatives". The occupational group of factors includes "heavy office work", "job and promotional opportunities", "transfer from one post to another", "transfer from one place to another" and "assignment of additional responsibility". The sub-factors of "physical handicap", "personal ill-health", "children ill-health" and elders ill-health are included under health factors.

Educational factors include "high standard of syllabus", "no library facility", "lack of comprehension of the subject". "lack of job-orientation", "no facility to discuss the subject with peers" and "difficult exam system". While institutional factors consist of "delay in the despatch enquiry", "no proper response to written communication", "improper public relation of officials" and "high tuition fee".

Level of Dissatisfaction of Learners

It is a known that a satisfied distance learner is the best and most powerful publicity medium for the institution than any other media which may swallow huge money to no

effect. On the other hand, a dissatisfied learner would be positively injurious to the interests of the institution. Now-a-days the field of distance education is becoming highly competitive and even a slight rumour about any aspect of mismanagement on the part of DEIs would ultimately lead to disastrous consequences. Further, it would take a longtime to rebuild the damage. Hence there is an urgent need for imparting good quality educational service to the maximum number of distance learners at their own pace and time.

One of the serious problems faced by all DEIs in India as stated elsewhere is high rate of dropout from DEIs. Learners' dissatisfaction about the functioning of DEIs is one main reason for their dropout. In otherwords high level of dissatisfaction may lead to more number of learner dropout from DES. It is high time for the DEIs to evolve methods to improve the satisfaction level of the learners taking into account all factors responsible for large scale dropout for which further research is to be conducted.

In the light of the above discussion, an attempt is made here to scientifically analyse the learners' dissatisfaction by using different indices i.e. number of dissatisfied learners, level of their dissatisfaction and weighted indices of dissatisfaction. It is felt that the group of factors as discussed earlier may affect the level of dissatisfaction. Hence some of the important causes for dissatisfaction are also referred to for analysing dissatisfaction indices".

Dissatisfaction Index

The technique of preparing a — "Satisfaction Index" was originally developed by M. Selvam (1989) — (not the present author) who used this technique to evaluate the satisfaction level of tourists and the same method is used, here as 'Dissatisfaction Index'.

The distance learners were required to indicate the level of dissatisfaction they experienced in respect of each factor by stating most highly dissatisfactory, highly dissatisfactory, dissatisfactory. For objective analysis, these qualitative grades are converted into quantitative terms. A pilot survey was carried out by taking 30 respondents and they were asked to assign points (out of maximum of 10) for the particular level of dissatisfaction they experienced from earth factor. To ensure uniformity, a "forced" distribution of points was adopted for convenience namely 7.5-10.0 for most highly dissatisfactory, 5.0-7.5 for highly dissatisfactory, 2.5-5.0 for dissatisfactory and 0.0-2.5 points for satisfactory.

The average values, when multiplied by the respective "frequencies" would give the total dissatisfaction. The same when divided by the total frequencies for the respective factor would give the dissatisfaction index for that factor.

The factor-wise level of dissatisfaction of learners for different factors, dissatisfaction index, its positional rank and the number of respondents chosen for each factor (given in parenthesis) are revealed by Table 1. The family group of factors scores 6.73 points. As it got first rank in the dissatisfaction index, it is most serious cause for learners' dissatisfaction. The solution to reduce level of dissatisfaction regarding family factors rests on learners' family.

Table 1 : Factor-wise level of dissatisfaction (average value assigned by respondent)

Sl. No.	Factors	Most highly dis-satisfactory	Highly disatis-factory	Dissatisfac-tory	Satisfactory	S.I. (out) of 10)	Posi-tional Rank
1.	Psychological Factors	1.5 (13)	3.4 (30)	6.1 (25)	7.8 (32)	5.20	6
2.	Family Factors	2.1 (10)	4.6 (28)	7.3 (30)	9.5 (32)	6.73	1
3.	Social Factors	1.4 (13)	3.5 (24)	5.9 (21)	7.9 (42)	5.60	4
4.	Occupational Factors	1.6 (11)	3.7 (20)	6.4 (24)	8.3 (45)	6.20	3
5.	Health Factors	1.2 (11)	3.0 (20)	5.8 (20)	7.6 (49)	5.60	4
6.	Educational Factors	2.0 (11)	4.5 (31)	6.9 (22)	9.0 (36)	6.40	2
7.	Institutional Factors	1.9 (16)	4.0 (33)	6.5 (21)	8.5 (30)	5.50	5

Source : Primary data.

Note : 1. Average values are arrived on pilot survey.
2. Figures given in the parenthesis represent number of learners.
3. Formula adopted for calculating S.I.

$$SIi = \sum mini / N$$

Where SIi = dissatisfaction index for the jth factor.

mi = numerical value for a particular level of dissatisfaction for the jth factor.

ni = No. of respondents deriving level of dissatisfaction for the jth factor (given in the parenthesis)

N = Total number of respondents (100) for the factors for all level of dissatisfaction.

The next serious group of factors (2nd rank) is educational group of factors (6.40 point), while the occupational group of factors got third rank (6.20 points).

The factors that cause low level of dissatisfaction, come from psychological group of factors as they are in the 6th place (rank). This is followed by institutional group of factors (5th rank) and health group of factors (4th rank).

The institutional group of factors occupies 5th rank and solution to solve this rests with the centre for distance education.

In this study, the level of dissatisfaction of learners in respect of each major group of factors is evaluated. Each major group of factor, as discussed earlier, has many sub-factors. Each sub-factor in each major group of factor plays different level of role in the dropout rate of learners from DES. Further the effect of role may also vary from factor to factor. The role of each sub-factor is to be identified through further research based on the recommendations of such research, the abnormal rate of dropout could be reduced. It is no doubt that the reduction of abnormal rate of dropout of learners may save huge amount of money, time and efforts put in by the DEIs.

Conclusion

In India DES shares the educational demand to a great extent. However, DEIs are directly or indirectly responsible for learners' dropout. Therefore, there is an urgent need to

identify those factors responsible for dropout with a view to solve them. The abnormal rate of dropout could be reduced considerably if the DEIs provide education with good quality at the doorsteps of the learners and learners' changing requirements are attended to then and there. Above all DEIs should have "good quality of education" as main motto.

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