

**Attitude and Perception of the Learners towards a Higher Education through
Open and Distance Learning in Uttarakhand, India**

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Abstract

Open & Distance Learning aims at the dissemination of learning and acquiring knowledge through distance education mode including the use of any communication technology to provide opportunities for higher education. It provides easy access to education to different sections of society and caters to the educational needs of the target groups through the open systems of learning. In ODL study materials and counseling session are one of the important tools of learning. The present study deals with the analysis of the satisfaction level of the students enrolled in Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani (India) study centre with respect to counseling sessions, delivery of study materials & other relevant information related to students.

Key Words: Open and Distance Learning, Study Material (Self Learning Material), Study Centers, Conventional System.

Introduction

Higher education plays a vital role in shaping leadership in the society. Education is a catalyst of social change and an instrument to spread education in society and lay the foundation of success in countries that are latecomers to development. In this direction, Distance education playing an important role in providing higher education to those who are unable to be a part of the conventional system of education. Education is the basic rights of every human being; however, it is not possible for everyone to be part of the educational mission or to be part of the regular educational system. Keeping all these facts in mind the concept of open and distance learning was visualized and started in India. The first distance education programme was started in 1830s with the appearance of business correspondence courses. The Open University System was begun in the nation to increase open doors for advanced education as an instrument of democratizing training and furthermore to make it a long lasting procedure. The first Open University in the nation was set up by the state legislature of Andhra Pradesh in 1982. In 1985, the focal government established the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). The Open University projects have demonstrated very savvy, adaptable and students inviting. The Open Universities in the nation have commonly built up their projects and quality investigation materials so as to guarantee that they ought to be at standard to the financial and business needs. The rogrammes offered in Open Universities are like that of customary University framework yet the instructional method of instructing is entirely unexpected from the regular arrangement of training. Open Universities offer mixed method of training to the students through directing session, workshops, classes and contact program which are essential pieces of the Open University framework. They are designed and developed in several modules to assist the potential students to choose such modules as they perceive are relevant to their needs. The universities have also sought to diversify their course provisions and developed high quality

multi-media open learning curriculum designed to meet the academic, technical and vocational needs of diverse student groups.

This system of distance education is suitable for the persons who wanted to enhance their qualifications but are not in a position to attend classes on a regular basis. Such distance courses proved a boon to the service persons as well as others desirous of pursuing higher education. As a result, a large number of in-service persons, professionals, entrepreneurs, job-less youth, school teachers, housewives and old aged free persons made a beeline for admission to distance education study programmes. (Ahmed, Asif, 2010) .

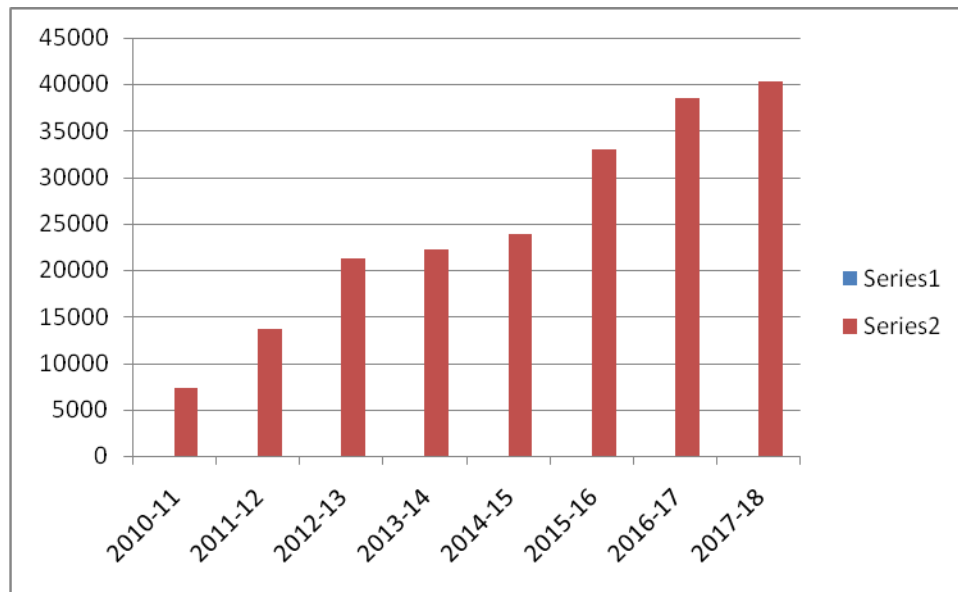
The main objective of distance learning concept introduced in the country with a view to democratize education, so that it covers large segments of population, vocations and professions. The essential accentuation is on advancement, adaptability and cost viability. It goes for the spread of learning and gaining information through separation instruction mode including the utilization of any correspondence innovation to give chances to advanced education. It provides easy access to education to different sections of society, especially to those with seemingly geographical isolation & difficulty, and caters to the educational needs of the target groups through the open systems of learning. The Open and Distance Learning institutions aim at providing support and facilitate quality learning process in distance learners through interactive activities. According to Daniel (1992) Open and Distance Learning offers a number of advantages to learners one of which is to provide opportunities for learning. Over the past decades, there has been a noticeable growth in distance education around the world. This is very much evident from the increasing enrolment in Open Distance Learning (ODL) institutions (Cavanaugh, 2005). ODL institutions are not only imparting education as an alternative to the

formal system i.e. education in conventional courses/programmes, but also in areas such as vocational and technical, and continuing education, teacher education and even in high technology based education(UNESCO, 2002 and Bourne *et al.*, 2005). Open distance learning has also made some contributions in vocational and technical education (Mehrotra and Sacheti, 2005). Open and Distance Learning system has a potential of inclusive growth of education because of its user friendly system. ODL system is not only cost effective but it can also contribute in the sustainable development through learning processes that transcend distance, gender, regional, cultural and socio-economic barriers. The distance education also has the potential to reach the un-reached and even marginalized and excluded groups such as tribal populations and women.

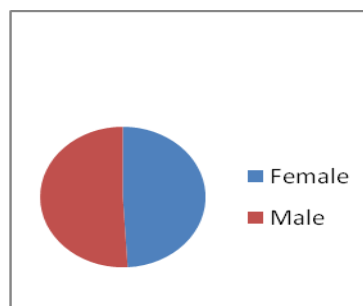
In the present research paper an attempt has been made to assess the attitude and perceptions of the students enrolled in the post graduate degree programme offered by the Uttarakhand Open University. Majority of the students enrolled in the P.G programme of the University has completed their Bachelor degree from the conventional educational system, so keeping this fact in mind it was decided to assess the attitude and perception of the learners towards ODL. The Uttarakhand Open University, Uttarakhand (UOU) is the first full fledged Open University in the state of Uttarakhand that operates in an exclusively open and distance learning (ODL) mode of education. UOU focuses mainly on open and distance teaching and learning system, and delivers its courses materials by means of print related to data and correspondence innovation (ICT), when appropriate. UOU playing an important role in fulfilling its mission of reaching to unreached through its study centers located in various distant location and tough geographical terrain of uttarakhand state. UOU emerge as a option for the learners to continue their education through the quality material as provided to the learners through its study centers. UOU reflects a

novel development in the provision of higher education in Uttarakhand. The below graphical representation shows the growth of total students during 2010-17:

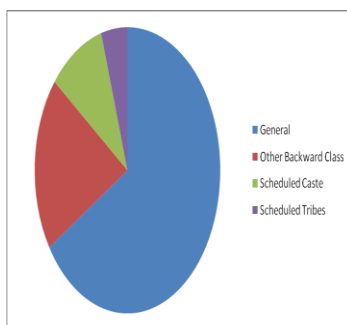
Fig-1



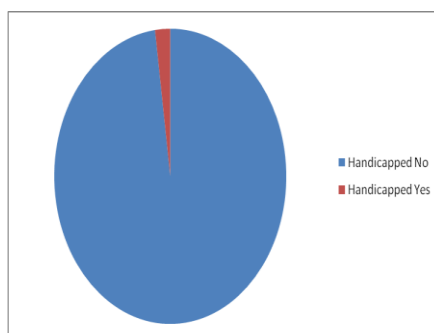
In 2017-18 summer sessions, 32138 students got admitted in the University; out of these 15772 were female and 16366 were male students as shown in the following pie chart-



The University imparts education to different communities like scheduled castes, other backward classes, Scheduled tribes etc. as shown in the below chart:



The University also facilitate education to physically challenged persons, at present 676 physically challenged students are being given education, as shown below:



Need and Scope of the Study

In order to remove/eradicate Illiteracy and empower the youth, the government has launched and started various programmes and schemes to upgrade the quality and status of the youth so that they act as a development ambassador of the mission. However the growth of the Indian economy and the compulsion to maintain it, forcing the Indian government to accelerate the process of developing all the branches of the Indian education system. Therefore, it would be very interesting to understand and analyze the various structures of education in India, its present condition and future developments. Efforts are also being taken to improve the access to

higher education among the women of India by setting up various educational institutes exclusively for them or reserving seats in the already existing institutes and running various schemes and scholarships especially for the girls students like “**Beti Bachao Beti Pado**” is such an initiative taken by GOI to save girl child and bring women in the mainstream. Higher education is the most critical element of growth in this era of knowledge economy. We need to at least double the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) to remain active contributors to growth in this era. In this context, role of Open and Distance Learning System becomes significant and unique. The growing acceptance of distance learning courses and expansion of the Open University system is also contributing a lot in the democratization of higher education in India. Following the philosophy of Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Uttarakhand Open University (UOU) was established in the year 2005 (vide Act No. 23 of the Uttarakhand Government) with an objective to take education to the doorsteps of various sections of society. UOU is progressing leaps and bounds due to its new, innovative and useful educational programmes. All this has been made possible through the use of latest information and communication technology and contact sessions with our learners. The main objective of the University is to develop trained and skilled human resource for sustainable development and progress. However, to meet this goal the University has never compromised with the quality of education it imparts. Keeping in mind the fast changing trends in vocational and technical education, the University has built up its projects in such a way, that they open entryways of work and independent work to its students.

The University mainly caters to the development of women, tribals and those sections of society which have been left out of main stream education. In a short time span of eleven years, the University has evolved considerably and has been successful in reaching out to the unreached.

Coordination between the different Study Centre's and the University is ensured by Regional Centre's. The University has 8 regional centers .These centers also help in disseminating information about the programmes offered by the University to the learners residing in far-flung areas of Uttarakhand. At present, the University has eight (08) Regional Centres, of which four (04) are located in the Garhwal region, viz., Dehradun, Roorkee, Pauri, Uttarakashi and four (04) in the Kumaun region, viz., Ranikhet, Haldwani, Bageshwar, Pithoragarh. The educational programmes of the University are offered through study centres under these eight regional centres.

The primary unit of the Open University Education System is the Study Centre, at present University has 244 study centers. Each learner has the freedom to opt for the Study Centre of his/her choice. In addition to dealing with the admission related matters of the University, the Study Centres also arrange counseling and laboratory sessions for its learners. In this manner, each learner remains connected with the University.

Review of Literature

Pulist (2001) conducted a study on "Student Support Services in Correspondence/Distance Education in India: A Historical Perspective". In the study author highlighted the necessity of Open and Distance Learning in imparting quality higher education through optimum use of technology. According to the author the student support services eventually aim at compensating for the absence of live support from teacher for the benefit of the isolated individual learners and making the necessities basic facilities available to them directly or indirectly.

Srivastava (2002) in his study “A Comparative Study on Current Trends in Distance Education in Canada and India” highlighted that the formal system was unable to meet the demand for higher education in India and distance education was adopted as an alternative mode at the University stage in 1962. In both Canada and India DE opportunities at the university level have increased enormously. Many trends are putting new pressures on the conventional education system, forcing many institutions to review and amend their existing policies and procedures.

Ngumi and Mwaniki (2009) in their study revealed that there is a need to create awareness among aspiring students and to provide better information dissemination avenues on the part of the universities. Further, the study suggested that a comprehensive pre-programme orientation exercise is to be included through which students can learn what to expect in their course of their study.

Ojo, (2010) in his study pointed out that distance learners need a range of various counselling services that will help them to be successful and further highlighted that technically approached counselling will not only eliminate socio-psychological encumbrances but they will also foster personal development and accomplishment of learning goals.

Objective of the Study

The following objective has been visualized for the present study:

- To analyze the satisfaction level of the students enrolled in UOU study centre with respect to counselling sessions, delivery of study materials & other relevant information related with students.

Research Methodology

Attitude is the condition of awareness inside the individual person. It alludes to specific regularities of a person's sentiments, considerations, and inclinations to acts towards certain parts of his condition. Frame of mind is a sorted out pre-attitude to think, feel and carry on towards a referents or subjective items. It is a suffering structure of convictions that inclines the person to carry on specifically towards demeanor referents. According to L.L.Bernard, "The behaviour which we define attitudinal or attitude is a certain observable 'set' of organism or relative tendency preparatory to and indicative of more complete adjustment. The present study has been conducted to assess the attitude and perception of the learners enrolled in Uttarakhand Open University towards Higher Education as provided through Open and Distance Learning. Open and distance learning is imparting higher education to anyone anywhere, anytime in the country. In numerous regards, in any case, ODL remains an outsider arrangement of teaching information to understudies in Uttarakhand, because they are more accustomed to conventional universities. ODL and its mechanism of learning are new to the learners. Keeping all these facts in mind and objectives set forth the information has been collected from 30 students selected purposively who are enrolled in MSW and M.A Sociology programme of the University.

Results and Discussions

- **Response towards Support Services and Programme Delivery**

In ODL study materials and counseling session are one of the important tools of learning. Study centers act as a backbone of the University. The majority of the study centers of the University are located in the difficult hilly terrain and they are providing

education to the learners. However, there is some basic and genuine problem of the learners with respect to the student center. Through this an attempt has been made to know the attitude of the learners towards the support services as provided by the University. The majority of the learners(70%) were satisfied with the support services as provided by the university, they were of the view that every information remain available in the website of the university, so it become easier to them to solve their query through online mechanism as provided by the university and minimum number of the respondents (30 %) were of the view that due to the problem of net connectivity they are unable to utilize the benefit of the ICT mechanism as provided by the university. The majority of the students enrolled in the University are from the interior hilly region of the state and it is not possible to visit frequently either to study center or University for their query. The second important point on which the learner emphasis is, the delivery of the Study material in time, the majority of the learner (65 %) reported that they got books in time because of which they are able to perform well in the exams and also able to submit the assignment in time and minimum number of the respondents (35%) were of the view that they didn't get study materials in time and when analyzed the information received from the learners it is found that the study centers itself get study material late from the University Headquarters due to which they are unable to provide the books to the learners in time. It is clear from the response of the learners that the delivery of the study material and communication gap between the learners and office staff is the main problem which needs to be sorted out. There is a need to develop the mechanism so that the students get the study material in time, however the university is providing the soft copies of the material which can be downloaded from the website,

but the main problem is the internet connectivity and problem of the poor economic condition of the majority of the students. The majority of the centers are located in the Hilly regions where there is always the problem of internet connectivity, However, it is a great help to the students enrolled in the study centers located in the cities but in interior region it doesn't work. So there is a need to develop the fool proved mechanism in the interest of the learners so that they continue their education without any barriers. No doubt that ICT plays an important role in sharing and supplying the information to the learners; however, different concept map has to be developed as per needs and geographical condition of the state.

- **Response towards the Self Instructional Learning Material (SILM):** The printed study material (written in self-instructional style) for both theory and practical components of the programmes is supplied to the learners. Through this statement researchers try to find out the view of the students towards the SILM. The majority of the learners (70 %) satisfied with the quality of the SILM however they were of the view that the material should be provided in both the languages, i.e. English and Hindi, as the material provided was in Hindi medium only. They were also of the view that language should be made more simple and accurate. 30 % of the respondents said that they only used SILM for assignment preparation and for examination purposes only and further reading they generally make use of text and reference books as per the syllabus of the University. Thus, it may conclude that there is a need to develop the SILM in both the languages so that the learners as per their need may choose the language of their choice.

- **Response towards Audio-Visual Material Aids:** In open and Distance learning, audio-visual play an important role in imparting education. The learning package contains audio and video CDS which have been produced by the University for better Clarification and enhancement of understanding of the course material given to the learners. The video cassettes are screened at the study centers during specific sessions which are duly notified for the benefit of the learners. When asked how much time they devote to Use audio-visual aids, it was surprisingly to know that majority of the respondents (80%) do not prefer to use Audio-visual material aid for study purpose. As majority of the respondents were either working or housewife so they totally depend on the learning materials as provided by the university. Thus, it is that the majority of the learners are totally dependent on the learning material, however the present scenario Audio-Visual Material aids is important. So there is a need to create awareness among the learners to use also the audio-visual material aids for learning which will be of great use in the coming future.
- **Response towards Counseling Sessions:** Majority of the respondents (65%) were of the view that they didn't go to the counseling session. Information regarding examination and assignments were communicated by the study centers, even counselors of the subjects are not available. 35 % of the learners were of the view that they didn't get time to visit the study centers and whenever they have some query then only they visit the centre. Normally counseling sessions are held as per schedule drawn from the Study Centers. These are mostly held outside the regular working hours of the host

institutions where the study centers are located. Thus, it is very clear from the view of the respondents that counseling session is not an important issue for them as the majority of the respondents didn't visit the centers for the counseling session. The counseling session is the one platform in ODL where students interact with the faculty members to solve their queries and get advice for future also. But the mindsets of the learners are still in transition, they didn't give much importance to the counseling session which is evident from the above findings. So there is a need to review the importance of these sessions and find out another alternative for the counseling sessions. As the majority of the learners are engaged in some work so they didn't get time to attend the counseling session because of engagement in other work. There is a need to find out another way for the welfare of the learners.

- **Reasons for taking admission in ODL programme**

Majority of the respondents have completed their bachelor degree from Conventional University system and for P.G degree they shifted towards ODL. There always remain a predefined hypothesis in mind, that those who didn't get time for regular study or those who are working somewhere and women specially preferred the ODL mode of education. The majority of the learners i.e. 65 % reported that they enroll in various programmes of ODL to get higher education and to improve their knowledge and skill along with their jobs. Thus, it may be concluded that ODL is playing a vital role in imparting higher education to those who left the study in between and want to be part of the regular system and want to be part of the learned society.

Conclusion

Open universities and distance learning activities, systems are set up to overhaul abilities at ordinary interims and grow new skills. Individuals' needs of deep rooted learning are continually growing. Advanced education organizations are putting forth learning chances to fulfill these differing requests. Simple access and adaptability are the signs of these activities. Distance education is a mode to provide an opportunity to those who left the study in between and want to be part of the regular system and want to be part of the learned society. Through its various professional, vocational and practical courses distance education is playing an important role in the overall development of the students. There is no doubt that distance learning is playing a vital role in imparting higher education through distance mode. In any case, the need of great importance is that more accentuation must be given to distance learning so that the left out and those who enable to carry on their study through regular mode of education can get a chance of learning through distance mode of education and be a part of learned society.

There is no uncertainty that Open Universities assuming a significant job in giving quality instruction to all segments of the general public. In the ongoing years enormous increment has been appeared in the enlistment number in ODL establishments. However there is a need to keep bird eyes on the private University or institutions offering the Distance programme without any recognition from the University Grants Commission of India. The main thing to check here that the experts of the colleges running distance education programmes ought to pointedly guarantee that these organizations of higher learning don't get decreased to degree circulating establishments. So universities and

distance institutions higher experts keep guarantee that solitary quality instruction ought to be given through separation learning programs. Distance learning caters the instructive needs of the objective gatherings through the open arrangement of learning and give adaptability of concentrate as indicated by their own pace and comfort. The Distance education system provides opportunities not only to younger students but also to those from the older age groups. Learners of age group 75 + are doing courses from UOU, it show the sprit and positive side of the ODL to provide opportunity to everyone without any bar of age, caste and sex. The main reason for increasing interest in Distance education lies in the need for continuing education in today's competitive world.

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