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Original Article

Determining Distance Education Students Opinion about Distance Education Courses: A study

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Abstract: *The objective of this study was to discover what postgraduate students thought about distant learning courses. This research used a questionnaire-based survey method. 1435 out of 1650 questionnaires distributed were completely filled and received. The survey results revealed that 980 individuals (68.2%) were employed, 173 (12.1%) identified as businessmen, and 130 (9.1%) were classified as students. Furthermore, 931 respondents (64.9%) expressed a preference for distance education over formal education. The majority of respondents, 1017 (71.0%), stated that they pursued their studies because they aspired to attain higher education. Subsequently, 906 (63.3%) were pursuing their studies in order to secure a promotion within an organization, while 435 (30.3%) were doing so due to family-related issues. The course materials provided were found to be neutral by 763 (53.2%) users, while 471 (32.8%) users expressed dissatisfaction with them.* The study's findings led to the recommendation that, *Information literacy workshops will be introduced during the academic term as part of the distance education program offered by universities and academic institutions. This will enable and encourage effective information searching techniques, with the goal of making the material related to teaching as well as learning needs the main focus. Therefore, it is advised that advanced training be initiated for users ranging in experience level.*

Key Words: Distance Learning, Online Learning, Kuvempu University, India, Post Graduate Students, Distance Education, Information literacy.

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INTRODUCTION

Distance learning has vast potential in a country like India; distance learning holds immense promise for the millions of ambitious young individuals seeking higher education and with traditional universities and colleges are unable to cater to their needs. It has emerged as a new system to meet the new demands of education in Open and Distance Learning which has emerged as a powerful tool in education (Muzata, 2013). Distance education could be explained as a type of education where learners have minimum face to face contact with their instructors. It might also be described as a type of instruction where the student and the educational institution are separated geographically. (Sampson, 2003).

One of the most important tools for the ongoing creation of a knowledge society is the system of open and distance learning. Due to its cost-effectiveness, flexibility in delivering education, and capacity for both self- and lifelong learning, it is essential for addressing the requirements of individuals and societies during this critical stage in the swift transition from the business to the information epochs. (Parsons, 2010). Since the traditional face-to-face educational system was unable to meet the expanding demands of society, distance learning has been acknowledged as an effective substitute. (Hensle and Miller, 2010). Distance learning holds a special place in the higher education system of India because of its primary role in improving the gross enrolment ratio and democratizing higher education for large segments of the population. This is especially important in meeting the demands of lifelong learning, which is becoming more and more necessary in the knowledge society, and reaching the unreached. (Kaur,2018).

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dilmac (2020) conducted a study to find out student views on distance education courses. For this study45 undergraduate students from various disciplines at İzmir Katip Çelebi University in Turkey participated in the research study group during 2019–2020 year. This study examined qualitative data collection methods using a semi-structured interviewing style. The results of the study shown that undergraduate students believe distance learning is crucial. They claimed that it allows all students to have equal access to education, that technological advancements mandate its use in the classroom, that digital resources lower the cost of education while increasing students' responsibilities, and that it promotes equality in education by allowing students at all levels to access information whenever they choose.

Fidalgo (2020) opined that, in order to meet the numerous instructive demands of students and keep up with the rapidly growing field of technology, several universities provide Distance Learning (DL) courses and programmes. Some Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) may find it difficult to adhere to the protocols desirable to offer DE programs. IHEs that are thoughtful about increasing the usage of DE formats can benefit from guidance and recommendations derived from examining learners' perspectives, attitudes, and readiness to try DE. The findings of the study demonstrated that time management, motivation, and English language expertise were the three main issues raised by students in all three nations regarding these kinds of programmes.

Distance Education in Kuvempu University.

In 1987, Kuvempu University was founded. It is situated in Shankaraghatta's Jnana Sahyadri campus. The university began offering distance learning in 2002–2003 and is associated with the UGC DEB (Indian government's Distance Education Bureau). To assist the student body in obtaining a high-quality higher education, the Kuvempu University Directorate of Distance Education has been providing higher education via distance learning. There are numerous UG, PG, and diploma courses available at the DDE right now.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ✓ To know the purposes for taking distance education among students of Kuvempu University.
- ✓ To find out the respondents opinion about Distance education compare to Formal Education
- ✓ To know the students Motivation for joining Distance Education
- ✓ To identify the students satisfaction with Distance Education Programme

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The study's respondent population was selected from the following categories of Post Graduate students pursuing Master degree in Distance Mode of Kuvempu University. The study does not cover students of any other distance education universities or open universities. The study does not include regular students, teachers and scholars of Kuvempu University. The data collection was conducted from 2019 to 2021.

METHODOLOGY

This investigation used a questionnaire-based survey method. Data from the Social Sciences discipline, Science/Technology discipline of Kuvempu University's distance learners were gathered using a well-structured questionnaire. The formula developed by Krejcie and Morgan was used to know the sample size of respondents. (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970)

$$S = \frac{\chi^2 NP(1-P)}{d^2(N-1) + \chi^2 P(1-P)}$$

The sample size, determined by applying the Krejcie Morgan formula, is 1650, given the total population of 21743 and a margin of error of 0.025 at a 95% confidence level. A total of 1650 surveys were given, and 1435 fully completed ones were received, yielding an 87.0 percent response rate.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table: 1. Gender -wise Distribution.

Sl. No.	Gender.	Discipline			
		Social Sciences (N=806.).	Science/ Technology (N=187.).	Commerce/ Management (N=442.).	Total (N=1435.).
1	Male.	329 (40.8%)	77 (41.1%)	185 (41.9%)	591 (41.2%)
2	Female.	477 (59.2%)	110 (58.9%)	257 (58.1%)	844 (58.8%)
3	$\chi 2$- Value,	$\chi 2$ =.127., df=2., p=.939.			

The above table 1 depicts that, about 844 (58.8%) of respondents are female respondents and 591 (41.2%) are male. The results showed that both men as well as women were using distance learning to pursue higher education, and that in all three faculties, there were more female respondents than male respondents. The $\chi 2$-test, which was performed for two d.f. , 5% level of significance, provides a clearer picture of the analysis by indicating that there is not at all significant link amongst the two groups of occurrences ($\chi 2$=0.127 , p=.939.>0.05).

Table: .2. Age -Wise Distribution

Sl. No	Age Group.	Discipline			
		Social Sciences. (N=806).	Science/ Technology. (N=187).	Commerce/Management. (N=442).	Total. (N=1435).
1.	Below 25 years.	156 (19.3%.).	33 (17.7%.).	89 (20.1%.).	278 (19.4%.).
2.	26-35 years.	326 (40.4%.).	76 (40.6%.).	177 (40.1%.)	579 (40.3%.).
3.	36-40 years.	281 (34.9%.).	67 (35.8%.).	155 (35.0%.)	503 (35.1%.).
4.	41 –50 years.	43 (5.4%.).	11 (5.9%.).	21 (4.8%.)	75 (5.2%.).
5	χ2- Value.	χ2 =0.840 , df=6 , p=.991 .			

The table 2 displays age group of respondents. The table shows that 579 (40.3%) of the respondents are primarily between the ages of 26 and 35, while 503 (35.1%) are between the ages of 36 and 40, 278 (19.4%) are under the age of 25, and 75 (5.2%) are between the ages of 41 and 50.

There is no significant correlation between these frequency groups, according to the χ2-test performed for 6 d.f. then 5% level of significance (χ2=0.840., p=.991.>0.05.).

Table: 3. Residential Distribution by Area

Sl. No	Area	Discipline			
		Social Sciences. (N=806.).	Science/ Technology. (N=187).	Commerce/Management. (N=442).	Total. (N=1435.).
1	Rural.	419 (51.9%).	94 (50.1%).	238 (53.9%).	751 (52.3%).
2	Urban.	323 (40.1%).	77 (41.0%).	172 (39.0%).	572 (39.9%).
3	Semi-Urban.	64 (8.0%).	16 (8.9%).	32 (7.1%).	112 (7.8%).
4	χ2- Value.	χ2 =.889 df=2 , p=.926			

Table 3 displays the respondents' residential locations and faculty distribution. It indicates that around 751 (52.3%) of the respondents lived in rural areas, followed by 572 (39.9%) who lived in urban areas, and 112 (7.8%) who were from semi-urban backgrounds. According to the table, the majority of students come from rural areas.

There is no significant correlation between these frequency groups, according to the χ2-test performed for 2 d.f. with 5% level of significance (χ2=0.889, p=0.926>0.05).

Table: 4. Marital status of Students

Sl. No	Marital Status	Discipline.			
		Social Sciences. (N=806).	Science/ Technology. (N=187).	Commerce/Management. (N=442).	Total. (N=1435).
1	Married	505 (62.7%)	110 (58.9%)	275 (62.2%)	890 (62.0%)
2	Unmarried	301 (37.3%)	77 (41.1%)	167 (37.8%)	545 (38.0%)
3	Total	806 (100.0%)	187 (100.0%)	442 (100.0%)	1435 (100.0%)

The Table 4 illustrates the marital status of respondents. It shows in aggregate of 890 (62.0%) respondents are married and remaining 545 (38.0%) are unmarried. Interestingly there are more number of married respondents interested in Social Sciences as well as Commerce and Management. studies

Table: 5. Designation of Respondents

Sl. No	User Category.	Discipline			
		Social Sciences.	Science/Technology.	Commerce/Management.	Total
1.	Student.	62 (7.6%.)	20 (10.7%).	48 (11.0%.).	130 (9.1%).
2.	Employed.	503 (63.1%.)	145 (77.1%).	332 (75.1%).	980 (68.2%).
3.	Unemployed.	131 (16.2%.)	9 (5.1%).	12 (2.7%).	152 (10.6%).
4.	Businessman.	110 (13.1%.).	13 (7.1%).	50 (11.2%).	173 (12.1%).
5	χ2- Value.	χ2 =75.349, df=2 ,p=.000.			

The distribution of responders by category is displayed in table 5. The table shows that 980 (68.2%) of the respondents are working, followed by 173 (11.1%) are business owners, 130 (9%), who are students. A greater proportion of those wishing to pursue education will do so through regular or informal distance learning courses. At the 5% level of significance, the $\chi 2$-test for two d.f. reveals a substantial correlation between these frequency groups ($\chi 2=75.349.$, $p=.000<0.05.$).

Table: 6. Students view about Distance education is better than Formal Education

Sl. No.	Opinion.	Discipline.			
		Social Sciences. (N=806).	Science/ Technology. (N=187).	Commerce/ Management. (N=442).	Total. (N=1435).
1	Yes	460 (57.0%)	50 (26.6%)	334 (75.5%)	931 (64.9%)
2	No	346 (43.0%)	137 (73.2%)	108 (24.4%)	504 (35.1%)
3	Total	806 (100.0%)	187 (100.0%)	442 (100.0%)	1435 (100.0%)
4	$\chi 2$- Value.	$\chi 2$ =49.479, df=2,p=.000			

Table 6 displays that, most 931(64.9%) of the respondents stated distance education was better than the formal education and remaining 504(35.1%) of the respondents pointed that the formal education is better than distance education. However, this cannot be generalised, because as that a large number of educators took the opportunity to continue their studies in distance mode for various reasons and constraints, for example promotion and financial problems, unable to get admission and so on. Again in Social Sciences, and Commerce and Management this opinion of distance education seemed to be better as it is offered through distance mode to a larger extent.

There is a substantial correlation between these frequency groups, according to the $\chi 2$-test for 2 d.f. with 5% level of significance, ($\chi 2=75.349.$, $p=.000>0.05$).

Table: 7. Reasons for undertaking Distance Education

Sl. No	Reasons	Discipline.			
		Social Sciences. (N=806).	Science/ Technology. (N=187.).	Commerce/ Management. (N=442.).	Total. (N=1435.).
1	For Higher Education	659 (81.7%)	94 (50.3%)	264 (59.7%)	1017 (71.0%)
2	Promotion in Organization	492 (34.3%)	137 (73.2%)	277 (63.0%)	906 (63.3%)
3	Due to financial problems	253 (31.3%)	85 (45.4%)	91 (20.0%)	429 (29.8%)
4	Due to family problems	230 (28.5%)	23 (12.2%)	182 (41.1%)	435 (30.3%)
5	Non availability of seats in regular Universities	97 (12.3%)	82 (43.8%)	95 (21.4%)	274 (19.1%)

The table 7 shows the reasons for joining under distance education. The distance learners have different purposes and some of them are such as; need for higher education, to get promotion or job benefits, financial problems, and family problems. The details of each of these reasons are presented below. According to the table, the majority of respondents 1017(71.0%) said that they were pursuing their studies because they wanted to pursue higher education, followed by 906(63.3%) who said that they were studying in order to advance in their careers. Additionally, 435(30.3%) said that they were studying because of family issues,429(29.8%) said that they were studying because they were experiencing financial difficulties, and 274(19.1%) said that they were studying because there weren't enough seats available in regular courses.

Table: 8. Motivation for joining Distance Education

Sl. No.	Motivation	Discipline.			
		Social Sciences. (N=806).	Science/Technology. (N=187).	Commerce/Management. (N=442).	Total. (N=1435).
1	Self	694 (86.1%)	137 (73.2%)	329 (74.4%)	1160 (80.8%)
2	Parents/Family Members	337 (41.9%)	112 (59.9%)	262 (59.2%)	711 (49.5%)
3	Teachers	258 (31.9)	129 (69.0%)	314 (71.0%)	701 (49.0%)
4	Friends	338 (42.0%)	25 (13.3%)	161 (36.4%)	524 (36.5%)

The information about the reasons behind distant learners' decision to enroll in distance education is displayed in Table 8. According to the table, majority 1160(80.8%) of respondents stated that they pursued their studies out of self-interest, while 71(49.5%) of them said their parents and other family members had motivated them to pursue their education. Moreover, it is found that around 701 (49.0%) respondents indicated that their teachers had inspired them to pursue their studies remotely, while the remaining 524 (36.5%) respondents said that their friends had influenced them.

Table: 9. Users views about Satisfaction with Distance Education Programme

Sl. No	Users Views		Discipline.			
			Social Sciences. (N=806).	Science/ Technology. (N=187).	Commerce/ Management. (N=442).	Total. (N=1435).
1	Satisfied with the course materials provided	Highly Satisfied	12 (1.6%)	4 (2.1%)	4 (0.9%)	20(1.4%)
		Satisfied	104 (12.9%)	8 (4.2%)	19 (4.2%)	131 (9.1%)
		Neutral	614 (76.1%)	55 (29.5%)	94 (21.2%)	763 (53.2%)
		Dissatisfied	55 (6.8%)	113 (60.4%)	303 (68.5%)	471 (32.8%)
		Highly Dissatisfied	21 (2.6%)	7 (3.8%)	22 (5.0%)	50 (3.5%)
2	Satisfied with response to queries	Highly Satisfied	135(16.7%)	36(19.2%)	81(18.3%)	252 (17.5%)
		Satisfied	528(65.5%)	120(64.2%)	283(64.0%)	931 (64.9%)
		Neutral	92(11.4%)	15(8.1%)	36(8.1%)	143 (10.0%)
		Dissatisfied	27(3.4%)	9(4.8%)	21(4.7%)	57 (4.0%)
		Highly Dissatisfied	24(2.9%)	7(3.7%)	21(4.9%)	52 (3.6%)
3	Satisfied with the length of time given to complete assignments	Highly Satisfied	94(11.7%)	18(9.7%)	50(11.3%)	162 (11.3%)
		Satisfied	548(68.1%)	126(67.3%)	262(59.2%)	936 (65.2%)
		Neutral	61(7.5%)	18(9.6%)	63(14.3%)	142 (9.9%)
		Dissatisfied	67(8.3%)	16(8.5%)	45(10.2%)	128 (8.9%)
		Highly Dissatisfied	36(4.4%)	9(4.9%)	22(5.0%)	67 (4.7%)
4	Satisfied with the level of support provided	Highly Satisfied	26(3.2%)	10(5.3%)	20(4.6%)	56 (3.9%)
		Satisfied	589(73.0%)	28(25.1%)	63(14.2%)	680 (47.4%)
		Neutral	60(7.6%)	101(54.0%)	242(54.7%)	403 (28.1%)
		Dissatisfied	96(11.9%)	39(20.8%)	96(21.8%)	231 (16.1%)
		Highly Dissatisfied	35(4.3%)	9(4.8%)	21(4.7%)	65 (4.5%)

The above table 9 indicates the percentage of users whether they are satisfied or not satisfied with present distance education programme provided by the Kuvempu University. About 936(65.2%) users were 'Satisfied' and 162(11.3%) users were 'Highly Satisfied' with the 'length of time given to complete assignments', followed by 931(64.9%) users were 'Satisfied' and 252(17.5%) users were 'Highly Satisfied' with 'response to queries', 680 (47.4%) users were 'Satisfied' and 403(28.1%) users were 'Neutral' about 'the level of support provided'. About 763(53.2%) users were 'Neutral' and 471(32.8%) users were 'Dissatisfied' with 'the course materials provided'.

Findings of the study

- ✓ According to the survey, 591 (41.2%) and 844 (58.8%) of the respondents were men. The study's findings showed that both men and women were using distance learning to pursue higher education, and that in all three faculties, there were more female respondents than male.
- ✓ The findings showed that 579 (40.3%) of the respondents belonged 26-35 years, while 503 (35.1%)of the respondents who were 36-40 years and only 75 (5.2%) are between 41-50 years.
- ✓ The findings of the survey showed that 751(52.3%) respondents lived in the rural areas, followed by 572(39.9%) lived in the urban areas and remaining 112(7.8%) respondents were from semi-urban background. The table displays that, the maximum number of students belong to rural areas.
- ✓ The study results revealed that 890 (62.0%) respondents were married and remaining 545 (38.0%) were unmarried.
- ✓ The survey results displayed that, most of respondents 980 (68.2%) were Working, while 173(12.1%) were 'Businessmen' and 130(9.1%) belonged to 'Students'.
- ✓ 931(64.9%) of the respondents stated that distance education was better than the formal education and the remaining 504(35.1%) of the respondents stated that the formal education was better than distance education.
- ✓ Majority 1017(71.0%) of the respondents indicated that their reason of pursuing study was with respect to their ambition for higher education, subsequently 906(63.3%) were pursuing their study to get promotion in an organization, 435(30.3%) were pursuing their study due to family problems, 429(29.8%) were pursuing their study as they had financial problems then and 274(19.1%) were pursuing their study due to non-availability of seats in regular courses.
- ✓ Majority 1160(80.8%) of the respondents opined that they pursued their study owing to self-

interest, whereas 71(49.5%) indicated that they had been inspired by their parents and family members, 701(49.0%) indicated that their teachers were the source of inspiration and remaining 524(36.5%) respondents responded that they had been inspired by their friends.

- ✓ The findings indicates the percentage of users whether they are satisfied or not satisfied with present distance education programme provided by the Kuvempu University. About 936(65.2%) users were satisfied and 162(11.3%) users were Highly Satisfied with the length of time given to complete assignments.
- ✓ Most 931(64.9%) users were satisfied and 252(17.5%) users were Highly Satisfied with response to queries, 933(65.0%) users were satisfied and 187(13.0%) users were neutral about the feedback received.
- ✓ About 680 (47.4%) users were satisfied and 403(28.1%) users were neutral about the level of support provided. About 763(53.2%) users were neutral and 471(32.8%) users were dissatisfied with the course materials provided'.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The distance learning system was started primarily to cater to higher education needs of huge number of patrons who could not take advantage in the formal education system due to various reasons like job, financial problem, marital status, family problems, non-availability of seats in regular Universities and distance. It has been initiated in order to supplement openings for higher education, as a tool of democratizing education and to make life long process. It has emerged as a new system to meet the new demands of education in Open and Distance Learning which has emerged as powerful tool in education. The recommendations that follow are based on the results. Information literacy workshops will be introduced during the academic term as part of the distance education program offered by universities and academic institutions. This will enable and encourage effective information searching techniques, with the goal of making the material pertinent to teaching also learning requirements the main attention. Therefore, it is advised that progressive training be initiated for patrons ranging in experience level. The training sessions should include the following topics: (a) An overview of library information services then facilities, b).OPAC search, (c) Techniques also tools for information resource searching; and (d). Internet usage, among other things. Most of the distance learners mainly depend on the course materials and textbooks and this is obvious that the majority of them are engaged in full time or part time job and few in other activities. To ease the process of information seeking, it is recommended to digitize the course materials and offer quality information in it and the library should provide more number of books.

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Conflicts of interest
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