

Distance Education in Higher Education: Postgraduate Students' Opinion

Dr. Veena G., Kavya N., Puneeth, B. M.

Lecturer, Dept. of Library & Information Science, Mangalore University, Karnataka
Assistant Librarian, University of Agricultural Sciences GKVK, Bengaluru, Karnataka
Documentalist, University of Agricultural Sciences GKVK, Bengaluru, Karnataka
veenanaik50@gmail.com

Abstract: *Distance Learning inhabits a special place in the Indian higher education system because of its chief role in enhancing the gross enrolment ratio and democratization of higher education to large segments of the Indian population particularly to reach out to the unreached and to meet the demands of lifelong learning which has become more of a necessity in the knowledge society. The purpose of this study was to find out what postgraduate students thought about distant learning courses. This research used a questionnaire-based survey method. 1650 questionnaires were distributed and 1435 completely filled questionnaires were received. The findings of the survey showed that 980 (68.2%) were Employed, 173(12.1%) were 'Businessmen' and 130(9.1%) belonged to 'Students' category, **931(64.9%)** of the respondents stated that distance education was better than the formal 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, **About 763(53.2%)** users were neutral and **471(32.8%)** users were dissatisfied with the course materials provided'.*

Keywords: Distance Learning, Post Graduate Students, Distance Education, educational system

I. INTRODUCTION

Students' academic success in the university is one of the essential factors in their long-term career and social growth in life. Additionally, it is one of the most critical concerns in any educational system (Ghasempour et al., 2025). Distance learning has vast potential in a country like India with millions of young aspirants eager to receive higher education and with conventional universities and colleges simply not being in a position to accommodate them. 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 form of education where learners have minimum physical contact with their instructors. It could also be depicted as a form of education in which there is geographical separation between the learner and the learning institution (Sampson, 2003). The development of modern technology and the Internet has enabled the explosive growth of distance learning. distance learning is a process that is increasingly present in the world. This is the field of education focused on educating students who are not physically present in the traditional classrooms or student's campus (Pandza, H., & Masic, 2010; Alam et al., 2022).

The open and distance education system is a crucial vehicle in the sustained development of a knowledge society. Its potential for flexible education delivery, scope for self and life-long learning and cost effectiveness makes it instrumental in meeting the needs of individual and communities at this juncture - in the rapid transition being made from the industrial to the information age (Parsons, 2010). Distance learning has been recognized as an effective alternative educational system as the conventional face-to-face system of education became inadequate to accommodate the growing needs of the society (Hensle and Miller, 2010). Distance Learning inhabits a special place in the Indian higher education system because of its chief role in enhancing the gross enrolment ratio and democratization of higher education to large segments of the Indian population particularly to reach out to the



unreached and to meet the demands of lifelong learning which has become more of a necessity in the knowledge society (Kaur,2018).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dilmac (2020) conducted a study to find out student views on distance education courses. For this study 45 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 various educational demands of students and keep up with the rapidly growing field of technology, several universities provide Distance Education (DE) courses and programmes. It can be challenging for some Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) to follow the procedures required to provide DE courses and programmes. IHEs that are thinking about increasing the usage of DE formats can benefit from guidance and recommendations derived from examining learners' perspectives, attitudes, and readiness to try DE. Undergraduate students in Portugal, the United Arab Emirates, and the Ukraine were given a survey. The findings of the study demonstrated that time management, motivation, and English language proficiency were the three main issues raised by students in all three nations regarding these kinds of programmes.

Distance Education in Kuvempu University

Kuvempu University is established in 1987. It is located at Jnana Sahyadri campus, Shankaraghatta. The university started the distance education in 2002-03, affiliated to UGC DEB (Distance Education Bureau, Govt. of India). The Directorate of the Distance Education of the Kuvempu University has been offering higher education through distance mode to help the student community get a quality higher education. Currently, the DDE is offering several courses in UG, PG and Diploma levels.

Objectives of the Study

To know the reasons for choosing distance education among students of Kuvempu University

To find out the **users 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 study

The respondent population for this study was drawn from the category 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 research used a questionnaire-based survey method. A well-structured questionnaire was designed to collect data from the various disciplines of distance learners of Kuvempu University, namely the Social Sciences, Science/Technology, and Commerce/Management. The sample size of respondents was calculated based on Krejcie & Morgan formula (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970)

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

By using Krejcie Morgan formula of sample size with a margin of error 0.025 and with a confidence level of 95%, the total population of this study was 21743 and hence the sample size is 1650. 1650 questionnaires were distributed and 1435 completely filled questionnaires were received obtaining a response rate of 87.0 %.



III. 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	χ^2 - Value	$\chi^2 = .127, df=2, p=.939$			

The table 1 shows gender-wise distribution of distance learner's of Kuvempu University. Out of 1435 respondents, 844 (58.8%) are female and 591 (41.2%) are male respondents. The results of the study revealed that both males and females were pursuing their higher education through distance education mode and the number of female respondents were more compared to male respondents in all the three faculties.

To have a better view on analysis the χ^2 -test conducted for 2 d.f. at the 5% level of significance shows that there is no significant relationship between these groups of frequencies ($\chi^2=0.127, p=.939.>0.05$).

Table: 2. Age group -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	χ^2 - Value	$\chi^2 =0.840 df=6 p=.991$			

The age and faculty-wise distribution of respondents is shown in the above table 2 .The table indicates that, the majority 579 (40.3%) of the respondents fall into the age group of 26-35 years, whereas 503(35.1%) respondents belong to the age group of 36-40 years, 278 (19.4%) respondents belong to the age group of below 25 years and 75(5.2%) respondents belong to the age group of 41-50 years.

The χ^2 -test conducted for 6 d.f. at the 5% level of significance shows that there is no significant association between these groups of frequencies ($\chi^2=0.840, p=.991.>0.05$).

Table: 3. Residential Area-Wise Distribution

Sl. No	Residential Area	Discipline			
		Social Sciences (N=806)	Science/ Technology (N=187)	Commerce/ Management (N=442)	Total (N=1435)



1	<i>Rural</i>	419 (51.9%)	94 (50.1%)	238 (53.9%)	751 (52.3%)
2	<i>Urban</i>	323 (40.1%)	77 (41.0%)	172 (39.0%)	572 (39.9%)
3	<i>Semi-Urban</i>	64 (8.0%)	16 (8.9%)	32 (7.1%)	112 (7.8%)
4	<i>χ²- Value</i>	$\chi^2 = .889 \quad df=2 \quad p=.926$			

The residential area and faculty -wise distribution of respondents is shown in the above table 3 shows that, about 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 shows that, maximum number of students are from rural areas.

The χ^2 -test conducted for 2 d.f. at the 5% level of significance shows that there is no significant association between these groups of frequencies ($\chi^2=0.889, p=0.926>0.05$).

Table: 4. Marital status-Wise Distribution

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

The Table 4 shows 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 studies and Commerce and Management.

Table: 5. Designation-Wise Distribution

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

The above table 5 shows the category-wise distribution of the respondents. The table depicts that, a large number of respondents 980 (68.2%) are employed, followed by 173(12.1%) who are businessmen and 130(9.1%) belonging to students category, as it is likely that more number of education aspirants intend to follow the regular or informal course through distance courses of study.



The χ^2 -test is conducted for 2 d.f. at the 5% level of significance shows that there is a significant association between these groups of frequencies ($\chi^2=75.349, p=.000<0.05$).

Table: 6. Users opinion about Distance education is better than Formal Education

Sl. No	Opinion	Discipline			
		Social Sciences	Science/ Technology	Commerce/ Management	Total
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	χ^2 - Value	$\chi^2 = 49.479, df=2, p=.000$			

The table 6 shows 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 stated that the formal education is better than distance education. However this cannot be generalised, because as that a large number of educates 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.

The χ^2 -test showed for 2 d.f. at the 5% level of significance shows that there is significant association between these groups of frequencies ($\chi^2=75.349, p=.000>0.05$).

Table: 7. Reasons for undertaking Distance Education

Sl. No	Reasons	Discipline			
		Social Sciences	Science/ Technology	Commerce/ Management	Total
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. The table shows that, majority 1017(71.0%)of the respondents indicated that the reasons of pursuing study was with respect to their ambition for higher education, followed by 906(63.3%) respondents who indicated that they were pursuing their study to get promotion in an organization,435(30.3%) opined that they were pursuing their study presents due to family problems,429(29.8%) opined that they were pursuing their study now as they had 'financial problems and 274(19.1%) respondents opined that they were pursuing their study due to non-availability of seats in regular courses.



Table: 8. Motivation for joining Distance Education

Sl. No	Motivation	Discipline			
		Social Sciences	Science/ Technology	Commerce/ Management	Total
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 table 8 shows the data relating to distance learners motivation for joining under distance education. The table depicts that, majority 1160(80.8%) of respondents opined that they pursued their study as they have self-interest. It is revealed from the Table that 71(49.5%) respondents indicated that they have been inspired by their parents and family members for continuing their study. Further it is determined that the data relating to teachers as source of inspiration to pursue their study in distance mode is of the order of 701(49.0%) responses and remaining 524(36.5%)respondents responded that they have been inspired by their friends.

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

Sl. No	Users Views		Discipline			
			Social Science	Science/ Technology	Commerce/ Management	Total
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%)
		<i>Neutral</i>	61(7.5%)	18(9.6%)	63(14.3%)	142 (9.9%)
		<i>Dissatisfied</i>	67(8.3%)	16(8.5%)	45(10.2%)	128 (8.9%)
		<i>Highly Dissatisfied</i>	36(4.4%)	9(4.9%)	22(5.0%)	67 (4.7%)
4	<i>Satisfied with the level of support provided</i>	<i>Highly Satisfied</i>	26(3.2%)	10(5.3%)	20(4.6%)	56 (3.9%)
		<i>Satisfied</i>	589(73.0%)	28(25.1%)	63(14.2%)	680 (47.4%)
		<i>Neutral</i>	60(7.6%)	101(54.0%)	242(54.7%)	403 (28.1%)
		<i>Dissatisfied</i>	96(11.9%)	39(20.8%)	96(21.8%)	231 (16.1%)
		<i>Highly Dissatisfied</i>	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’.

IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study found that 844 (58.8%) were female and 591 (41.2%) were male respondents. The results of the study revealed that both males and the females were pursuing their higher education through distance education mode and the number of female respondents were more compared to male respondents in all the three faculties.

The findings of the study revealed that a large number 579(40.3%) of the respondents belonged to the age group of 26-35 years, followed by 503(35.1%) of the respondents who were between the age group of 36-40 years and the remaining 75 (5.2%) are between the age group of 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 findings of the survey showed that a large number of respondents 980 (68.2%) were Employed, followed by 173(12.1%) were ‘Businessmen’ and 130(9.1%) belonged to ‘Students’ category, as it is likely that more number of education aspirants intend to follow the regular or informal course through distance courses of study.

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*'.

V. 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 opportunities 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. Based on the findings, following suggestions are made. The distance education program offering universities/ academic institutions is to introduce information literacy classes within the academic period to enable and encourage successful information searching methods so that relevant to teaching and learning needs becomes the focus. Hence, it is suggested that advanced training for users at different levels should be started. The contents of the training programs should be (a) Basic introduction to library services and facilities, (b) OPAC Search (c) Methods and tools for searching information resources, (d) Internet Use etc. 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. Distance learners live far away from their host institutions and noticeably they do not have the equal opportunities as their counterparts in residence regarding the use of library resources and services though the basic requirements are the same as those of formal students. They have special needs and concerns that differ greatly from those on campus. It is therefore desirable to understand the information necessitates of this group of students since they are also entitled to library services regardless of their location.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Ahamad, E. & Aqil, Z, (2015). Attitude towards Distance Education among Graduate Students. *International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research*.6 (8), 1858-1872.
- [2]. Ayorinde, D. (2001). Distance Education caring for learners in different sectors. *Ibadan Journal of Distance Education*, 6(2), 34-40.
- [3]. Behr, M. D., & Hayward, J. L. (2008). Do Off-Campus Students Still Use Document Delivery? Current Trends. *Journal of Library Administration*, 48(3-4), 277-293.
- [4]. Dilmaç, S (2020).Students' Opinions about the Distance Education to Art and Design Courses in the Pandemic Process.*World Journal of Education*.10 (3), 113-126.
- [5]. Dugan, R. E., & Hernon.P. (1997). Distance education: Provider and victim libraries. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 23(4), 315-324.
- [6]. Fidalgo, P., Thormann, J., Kulyk,O., & Lencastre,J A(2020). Students' perceptions on distance education: A multinational study. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* .17(18).



- [7]. Hensle, M. K., & Miller, R. (2010). Listening from a distance: A Survey of University of Illinois Distance Learners and its Implications for Meaningful Instruction. *Journal of Library Administration*, 6(6), 670-683.
- [8]. <http://www.kuvempu.ac.in/kan/index.php>
- [9]. Kaur, R. (2018). Exploring Studying Habits of Distance Learners of Distance Education Department of Punjabi University, Patiala. *Edu Tech e journal of education and technology* 1(1), 1-7.
- [10]. Muzata, K. K. (2013). Distance Education Students' Experiences of Learning from Audio Recorded Lectures: The case of Mufulira and Nkrumah Colleges of Education In Zambia. *International Journal of Education Chronicles*, 4(2), 252-260.
- [11]. Parsons, G. (2010). Information provision for HE distance learners using mobile devices. *The Electronic Library*, 28(2), 231 – 244.
- [12]. Sampson, N. (2003). Meeting the needs of Distance Learners. *Language Learning & Technology*, 7(3), 103-118.
- [13]. Pandza, H., & Masic, I. (2010). Distance learning perspectives. *Acta Informatica Medica*, 18(4), 229.

