Learner's Drop out in the Distance Learning Programme: A Case Study of the Institute of   Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University

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Abstract

During the last 45 years in India, open and distance education has emerged as accepted philosophy of education and accorded national credibility, however, it is not without problems. Drop out problem is one of the major problems of distance education in India. Dropout rates reported by open and distance learning (ODL) institutions are typically higher than those reported by conventional universities. The investigators have selected the present study to understand the drop out problems of the students and to investigate the factors and root causes leading student drop out in distance education with special reference to the Institute of Open and distance Learning of Gauhati University. The target population of the study consist the entire drop out distance learners of Institute of Open and Distance Learning Gauhati University who were admitted during 2006-2010. Sample of the study have been selected on the basis of convenient sampling technique. The study reveals that in spite of considerable progress of IDOL during the last few years, drop out of learners is a significant problem and various institutional and personal factors are responsible for dropout of learners.

Key words: Distance Education, Open learning, Learners, Drop out

INTRODUCTION

During the last 45 years in India, open and distance education has emerged as accepted philosophy of education and accorded national credibility. It has evolved a very complex socio politico-economic environment as a vastly organized, vibrant and dynamic system endowed with capacity and capability to reach the door step of the learners anywhere of the globe. National Policy on Education (1986) advocated the introduction of alternative system of education as a movement, home study, correspondence education, open and distance education to support conventional system of education. The National Knowledge Commission mandated to suggest strategies, the road map and action plan for India to emerge as knowledge super power has

analysed possible scope and opportunities for the ODL system to meet the current and future requirements for creating knowledge workers to drive world knowledge economy. It has recommended that the ODL system must get full support to reach out to all, including the differently able and disadvantaged people.

Distance learning is an excellent method of reaching the adult learner. Because of the competing priorities of work, home, and school, adult learners desire a high degree of flexibility. The structure of distance learning gives adults the greatest possible control over the time, place and pace of education; however, it is not without problems. Drop out problem is one of the major problems of distance education in India. Dropout rates reported by open and distance learning (ODL) institutions are typically higher than those reported by conventional universities. Within ODL educational systems, dropout rates also vary depending on the educational system adopted by each institution and selected subjects of study. The problem of drop-out in distance education is widely recognised and has been subject to considerable investigation.

Conceptual Background

Dropout is a frequently used term and most discussed topic in educational contexts. People share a general understanding of it, in spite of its complex nature. It can be looked into in a number of ways. Regularly speaking, it concerns with the students who start courses but do not complete them. In the area of distance and open learning, drop out has wider variation in its use. The study behaviour of distance students is different from that of campus based students and this alters dropout behaviours. There is obvious difficulty about the definition of the concept of dropout. Inactivity or non-submission of assignments to the institute does not necessarily mean a dropout. The generally understood meaning of dropout would not hold good in distance learning content as it does not do justice to the various ways in which distance students drop out of their courses.

A student who either voluntarily or otherwise ceases to be on the rolls of the institute is a dropout. He does not complete the course nor sits for the final examination for the degree or diploma of the University. In Indian context there are two types of dropout learners- firstly, dropped out because of compulsions including as family problems including ailment, unfavourable service conditions and high tuition fees etc. Secondly, because of voluntary reasons

such as uninteresting lessons, less contact with the teacher poor service by the institute, lack of regular college life and loneliness of the learner etc.

In the context of distance learning programme a great deal of research has been done regarding dropout in various educational settings. Much of the research on drop out problem consists of descriptions of casual factors attained through empirical research. New conceptual models are now being evolved recognizing the complex interplay of variables which interact over a period of time to produce dropout. Some of these are narrow and some are wider, covering the interaction of student, institutional and environmental factors.

Statement of the Problem

The investigator has selected the present study to understand the drop out problems of the students in the Institute of Distance and Open Learning of Gauhati University. The problem has been stated as " Learners drop out in the distance learning programme : A case study of Institute of distance and open learning , Gauhati University."

Objectives of the study

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

(1) To estimate the dropout rate of distance education learners in the Institute of Distance and Open Learning, Gauhati University.

(2) To identify the causes of learners drop out in the Institute of Distance and Open Learning.

(3) To what extent is student dropout due to intrinsic (related to the student) factors and to what extent is it due to extrinsic (non-student) factors? (e.g., study methods and materials)

Research Methods, Tools and Sample

In order to achieve the objectives of the present study the investigator has selected normative survey method. This method is generally used to ascertain what is the normal or typical condition or practice at the present time, solve current problems and to suggest some remedial measures. This is the most appropriate method to survey the current problem of drop

out and the causes of students' dropout from IDOL, GU. Hence normative survey method has been applied for the study.

To know the causes of dropout from distance learning, a self structured questionnaire was administered. The questionnaire prepared for the dropout was completely close ended and there were 10 items excluding prior information of the dropout sample. The items specifically related to dropout including student related factors, institutional factors etc.

To find out the rate of dropout the investigators personally collected secondary information i. e. number of students appeared in the examination and number of students pass out from the office of the statistical records of Gauhati University after seeking prior appointment with the Director of IDOL, GU. To collect the relevant information regarding the reasons of dropout the investigators first collected the address and phone numbers of drop out learners from the office of IDOL. After that they personally met the dropout learners. They were requested to response the questionnaire freely prepared for knowing the causes of their dropout from distance learning programme of IDOL. The investigators have collected the information from 146 male learners and 104 female learners on the basis of convenient sampling.

Findings and Discussion

Objectiev-1

To know the dropout rate of the distance learners in the Institute of Distance and Open learning, Gauhati University, the investigators collected the required data from the office records of the office of the IDOL, GU. The data only for the last 6 years i.e. 2008-9 to 2014-15 have been collected for the purpose of the present study. The Institute of Distance and Open learning, Gauhati University has extended its Academic Programmes not only in Assam ,but also some other states like Nagaland, Tripura, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, West Bangal, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. However dropout rate in the various programmes is also alarming. The following table revealed the dropout rate of learners in various programmes from 2008-9 to 2014-15 which were collected in the year 2017. (Data for only some selected programmes have been presented).

Table –1

Dropout rate of Learners (Session 2008-9 to 2014-15)

Sl. No.	Programmes	Enrolment (2008-9 to 2014-15)	Drop Outs (2017)	% of drop outs
1	MA Assamese	3551	245	6.9s
2	MA English	1754	166	9.46
3	MA Economics	787	90	11.43
4	MA History	624	87	13.94
5	MA Pol.Sc.	2279	161	7.06
6	MA Maths	564	35	6.20
7	M.Com	1265	22	1.73
8	MA Philosophy	516	25	4.84
9	MA Bengali	326	25	7.66
10	MA Bodo	713	20	2.80
11	PGDSMM	321	68	21.18
12	PGDHRM	1264	190	15.03
13	PGDBM	1232	321	26.05
14	PGDJMC	1048	147	14.02
15	PGDFM	169	19	11.24
16	PGDIM	54	15	27.77
17	PGDBFS	202	30	14.85
	TOTAL	16669	1666	10%

From the above table it is revealed that there is still considerable number of dropout learners in the distance education programme of IDOL as 10% of the learners in various programmes are drop out during the period 2008-9 to 2014-15. However the dropout rate varies from subject to subject. The analysis is done on the basis of 2008-9 to 2014-15 data. Highest rate of drop out is found in PGDIM which is 27.77 percent followed by PGDBM 26.05 percent and PGDSMM 21.18 percent. The lowest rate of dropout i.e. only 1.73 percent is found in M.Com. programme. Highest enrolment of learners is found in MA programme in Assamese which 3551 from 2008-9 to 2014-15 where dropout rate is 6.9 percent. In MA Political science enrolment was 2279 and dropout rate is found 7.06 percent. Similarly in English dropout rate is 9.46 percent and enrolment was 1754 from 2008-9 to 2014-15. The highest dropout rate among the Master degree programme of general courses is found in M.A. in History where total enrolment is 624 and dropout rate is 13.94% followed by M.A. in Economics where total enrolment is 787 and dropout rate found 11.73 percent.

Objective-2

As there found to be a considerable number of drop out learners in the distance learning programme of IDOL in various courses in spite of its flexibility, the investigator tried to identify the causes of drop of learners. For this purpose the investigator selected total 250 number of dropout learners as sample for the present study on the basis of convenient sampling which is 15% of the total drop out learners (1666) identified from the office records. Questionnaire was constructed for the drop out learners where they had to identify the reasons of drop out. They could identify one or more reasons of drop out. The result is shown in the following table-

Table-2

Reasons of Drop out

Sl.No.	Reasons	No of responses	Percentage
1	No Time for Study	165	66%
2	Hiking of fees	15	6%
3	No Prospects of the course	66	26.4%
4	Study Centre is not helpful	58	23.2%
5	No Family Support	12	4.8%
6	Insufficient reading materials	70	28%

7	Difficulty of the course	18	7.2%
8	Non submission of assignment	8	3.3%
9	Lack of library study facilities	4	1.77%
10	Difficulties to study without teacher interaction	3	1.33%
11	Could not achieve well in previous semesters examination	14	6.22%
12	Course content not as expected from the course description	2	0.8%
13	Lack of adequate contact from institute of study	2	0.8%
14	Another goal takes priority	12	4.8%

From the above table it has been observed that majority of the learners i.e. 66 percent were drop out for the reason that they have no time for study. Although 6 percent drop out learners have opined that the fees is high but the percentage is quite a negligible. According to only 26.4 percent dropout learners the course has no prospects. It is also to be noted that 28 percent of the learners have drop out because of insufficiency of reading materials while 7.2 percent were dropout because of the difficulty of the courses along with other reasons. 23.2 percent have opined that the study centres were not much helpful which is also a contributing factor of learner's dropout. Again only 4.8 percent of the respondents did not have family support which is also one of the reasons of their dropout.

To study the extent of students drop out due to student related factors and institution related factors the reasons of drop out were divided into two parts. Students related factors include - (1) No time for study (2) No family support (3) Difficulty of the course. The institute related factors include – (1) High fees (2) No prospects of the course (3) Study centre is not helpful (4) Insufficient reading materials and (Analysis is shown in the following table no.3

Table- 3

Student related and institution related reasons of drop out

Student related Factors	Frequency	Percentage
(1)No time for study	165	66%
(2) No family support	12	4.8%
(3) Difficulty of the course	18	7.2%
(4)Non submission of assignment	8	3.3%
(5) Difficulties to study without teacher interaction	3	1.33%
(6) Could not achieve well in previous semesters examination	14	6.22%
(7) Another goal takes priority	18	7.2%
Institution related factors	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
(1) Hiking of fees	15	6%
(2) No Prospects of the course	66	26.4%
(3) Study centre is not helpful	58	23.2%
(4) Insufficient reading materials	70	28%
(5) Lack of library study facilities	4	1.77%
(6) Course content not as expected from the course description	2	0.8%
(7) Lack of adequate contact from institute of study	12	4.8%

Analysis of the above table shows that majority of the learners i.e. 66 percent drop out due to student related factors like 'no time for study' (66%). Some other student related factors like 'no family support' identified by 4.8% and 'difficulty of the course' identified by 7.2% , 'difficulties to study without teacher interaction' is 1.33% , 'could not achieve well in previous semesters examination' 6.22% and 'another goals takes priority' 7.2% of the drop out learners. Institution related factors like 'hiking of fees' has been mentioned by only 6 % of the respondents. Among the institution related factors the highest is 'insufficient reading materials'

as identified by 28% of the respondents followed by 'no prospects of the courses' (26.4%) and 'study centre is not helpful' (23.2%). It is observed that total 227 responses are related to student related factors while non student related factors identified by 238 respondents. However it is found that although institution related factors have been one of the important contributing factors of learners drop out but student related factors are also not negligible.

Recommendations

- The courses in distance education should be more job-oriented.
- It should be shaped in such a way so that it becomes more interactive, keeps the learners engaged and counters issues like isolations and disconnectedness.
- The study center should be well equipped so that a student feels good to visit it, spends more time and stay connected.
- Provide study materials which are simple, easy to understand, have in depth discussion and provide all required information.
- Increased number of full time faculties can help better engagement of the students through different course activities. Also it can help increase the duration of personal contact programme.
- For building self-confidence among them, students from distance education should be allowed to take part in different on campus placement events.
- The duration of personal contact programme should be increased.
- The fee structure should be rationalized, should be as low as possible so that it does not hamper the students from continuing the courses and helps meeting the basic theme of distance education to enlighten as many people as possible.

Concluding remarks

The increasing enrolment in distance education during the last couple of decades both in India and elsewhere in the world have led to think that distance education is a significant alternative of formal on campus learning which is rigid in time duration and age etc. Although distance education is becoming popular but some weak points are also found in distance education. The result of the study also reveals that the progress of the academic programmes of Institute of Distance and Open learning is although satisfactory, but drop out of learners is still

one of the major problems, it has also increased the non completion rate. The study has revealed that there is still considerable number of dropout learners in the distance education programme of IDOL. GU, however the dropout rate varies from subject to subject. Proper care must be taken so that reading materials reach the learners in time. The IDOL may open more job oriented and professional courses for the benefit of the learners. Training programme for preparation of materials, assessment and evaluation should be frequently organized. Still it is expected the IDOL will be able to cater the educational needs of a large number of students of different groups and create manpower for the country.

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