Attitude of College Students of Assam towards Open and Distance Learning

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Abstract

Open and Distance Learning(ODL) an emerging innovative movement that enhances learning opportunities within formal education and learning opportunities broadening learning opportunities employing the telecommunication to profess knowledge wide worldly. Teachers and students communicate in the most interactive way by the utilization of ICT improving ODL in the most efficient way. This paper employs the descriptive survey method which specifies the present status of the subject in which limited sampling was preferred due to paucity of time. The present study revealed that female college students of rural area have more positive attitude towards the ODL in comparison to that of the male students of rural area but condition is reverse in the urban area.

1. Introduction: Open learning is an innovative movement in education that emerged in the 1970s and evolved into fields of practice and study. The term refers generally to activities that either enhance learning opportunities within formal education systems or broaden learning opportunities beyond formal education systems on the other hand the term Distance education also known as distance learning or distributed learning, or remote education, as conceptualized by Isaac pitman a British ."distance education" is a way of learning and gaining information , remotely without being in regular face to face contact with the teacher in the classroom. Both teacher and students who may not always be physically present at the school are separated geographically, being a good option indeed for people who are working full-time trying to upgrade ones skills, live in a remote community or the ones want to formulate a career change.

Therefore, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is a general term for the use of telecommunication to provide or enhance learning to achieve an extended classroom or learning experience around the world, the academic community in action discovering and exploring the Internet, teleconferencing, and related means.

Although the terms "open" and "distance" education are used interchangeably, there are important differences like Open learning is an umbrella term for any scheme of education or training that seeks systematically to remove barriers to learning, whether they are concerned with age, time, place or space with which, individuals take responsibility for what, how, where they learn, who helped them not restricting to classroom teaching methods, approaches maxims etc in the process of learning. Distance learning, on the other hand, is one particular form of open learning in which tutors and learners are separated by geographical distance also called a home- study or correspondence course, employing modes of communication like postal correspondence encompassing all means of learning experience which "educate" in the broadest sense.

Correspondence education, the initial form of distance education, developed in the mid-nineteenth century in Europe and then spread to the United States and so on employing the postal system which was considered as the finest technology at that time for the ones who was devoid of attending traditional schools. Not being a new concept, first major correspondence occurred when teachers and students were at different locations occurred in Chicago at the University of Chicago. In the pre industrial Europe education had been available primarily to the privileged males of the higher societies. Isaac Pitman, started by teaching shorthand via correspondence in 1840 when the Students were asked to copy passages from Bible and send them for grading via the new penny post system in American the distance education began in 1874 at Illinois Wesleyan University where bachelor and graduate degrees could be obtained without being actually present in the classes. The Chautauqua movement in the year 1882 gave the much required thrust to correspondence education. Correspondence education became quite famous by 1900 and problems of excellence and fair practice came with the popularity. The National Home Study Council (NHSC) was formed in 1926 in part to deal with such issues.

India witnessed the beginning of school of open learning as an alternate mode of education when the school started with a modest admission of 900 students in 1962. India supported regular curriculum through the use of radio in the early 50s supported by the television from its introduction in 1959. The process continued with the significant development by the launching of the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) and Further the INSAT programme followed SITE and presently provides educational programmes as well as area specific programmes for primary school children and area specific rural viewers in selected clusters in a few states.

ODL brought learners and teachers under one place which looked down as inferior concept before. Undergoing a major change after the invention of radio in the 1920s and the arrival of television in the 1940s Distance education has gone through a major change. In 1900, after the arrival of computer, distance education took a big leap in the present scenario where now the teachers and student can converse sitting face-to-face by conferencing technique known as one-way video/two-way audio where pictures from television are transmitted to particular sites, employing combination of different technologies to enhance communication between teacher and student .A number of world

conferences have been held on ODL and many experimental projects are underway. Huge amount of money has been invested in this by government and private owners.ODL system in India was governed by the Distance Education Council (DEC), established by the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in 1991. DEC   primarily entrusted with the promotion, coordination and maintenance of standards of ODL system in India was expected to create an effective regulatory framework. With a modest genesis in 1962, the open and distance learning (ODL) system has grown exponentially into a dynamic and vibrant mode of teaching and learning that boasts of one national open university, 13 state open universities and more than 200 distance education centres functioning under conventional universities and private/autonomous institutions. More than four million students are enrolled in the ODL programmes and account for about 22% of the total enrolment in higher education. The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is serving as a major vehicle in improving the efficiency of educational process in the present scenario.

With the economic uncertainties combined with rising unemployment it's important to think how you can stand out in a cut throat job market picking up a new vocational course by distance learning will allow a student to display confidence and motivation to do something worthwhile in life.

> *"Distance learning and broadband access to the world wide web of knowledge and information is a great Equaliser .maybe someday it will even move us towards world peace environmental balance and personal fulfilment - Gordon p.hanson, IT Management Consultant ,DOA TEACH.*

UNESCO.S role in International Corporation for spreading ODL system which consist of both technical assistance. Great importance is given to international interregional and regional co-operation for the promotion of open and distance learning, such as awareness, confidence and capacity building, mapping of relevant experience, success and failures, networking between key players in distance education and educational technology, piloting and adapting educational technologies in different settings, shared development of learning systems programs, and learning materials involving inter-country and industry-country exchanges and joint ventures, technology assessment, examining the actual costs and impact of alternative delivery systems, and support for the development of system wide policy and planning on new technology in education. Co-operation is pursued with intergovernmental organizations such as other UN system agencies, the Commonwealth of Learning, the World Bank, the Commission of the European Union, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and development, regional development banks, private and public sector partners, governmental organisations, notably with the international council for Open And Distance Education (ICDE) With the advancement of technologies, learning and collaborative work in the future can become radically different from what it is today. Although no one can expect that educational networks will totally replace the traditional lecture. The traditional lecture has some drawbacks: students have to attend at a fixed time, the needs of students with different backgrounds cannot be met and students have no control

of their learning pace or environment. Many web-based training and learning platforms have been developed. However, none of these platforms offer an integrated and open platform for learning according to our requirements. Some of them do not support all the necessary ODL services (synchronous, asynchronous and collaborative learning). The ODL system is now a fast growing subject and time is not far from now when the entire education and training system will be fully controlled by ODL system. In India especially IGNOU is doing key role in this area. On the one hand ODL has defeated numerous barriers and promoted free flow of knowledge and information through ICT but in some aspects it lacked some features of successful teaching and learning process combined with the dissatisfaction of academicians and educationist. Hence the consequence is that distance learning has resulted in diversified responses from people. People are becoming more aware and conscious of this mode of education and people have started building different attitudes towards this. This awareness is hence required amongst all as this will result in further awareness because it predict the extent to which target individuals will choose to make use of this learning as well to understand the will influence others. Hence this is therefore an attempt and effort amalgamated to know the attitude of the college students towards Open and Distance learning.

2. Review of Related Literature: Rashmi Saroha (2014) studied the attitude towards the distance learning (a comparative study) where she have taken a sample of 30 students enrolled in distance learning education in two universities located in Delhi where 15 of the students (called group A) were enrolled in post graduate course ,while the remaining 15 (called group B) were enrolled in various undergraduate course. Their attitude towards distance learning was assessed during an open ended questionnaire designed with express purpose of tapping into different viewpoints. Further, an assessment of gender differences was also made from among the selected samples and results along with implications for society have been discussed.

Ramzi, Nasser and Kamal, Abouchedid (2013) conducted study on Attitudes and Concerns towards Distance Education. The study surveys 7 school directors and 112 school teachers unequally divided among fourteen urban and rural schools. School directors were negative about the possibility of distance education meeting the training needs of school teachers. They even reported costly training and the purchase of technologies for distance education as inconceivable. On the other hand, teachers held a more positive view of distance education. Though more than 50% of the teachers reported willingness to put forth the effort needed to familiarize themselves with the new technologies and practices.

Collins, K. Osei (2013) studied the perceptions of the students towards use of Distance learning. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions held by graduate students and about distance learning offered by the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana. The survey utilized a 20 question survey with 691 respondents, who were adult learners enrolled in an executive Masters of Business/Public Administration Program. The results of the study indicate that distance learning is most patronised by an older (>30 years) and married student population largely because it

allows them to combine work and study. The data indicates that the student perceptions of distance learning were positive. Respondents indicated that they were satisfied with teaching and learning by distance and also with learner support provided by the host institute.

Lenka, S. K and Ravikant (2012) studies the attitude and perception of the learners towards the distance education. in this study self made tool is employed and a sample of 150 graduate distance learners ,it is exposed that gender plays no significant role to develop positive attitude and perception . Both male and female have similar positive attitude towards distance education and biographical factors like locality, stream, SES and caste plays and important role to inculcate and develop positive attitude towards distance education.

Ahmed Awad Amin Mahmoud/Raba According to his research review, Shahin (2008) investigates the relationship between student characteristics including learning styles and their perceptions and satisfactions in web-based courses in higher education. This investigation used Kolb's learning styles inventory and Walker's distance education learning environment instrument plus demographic questions to survey 279 students in five web-based undergraduate courses in Midwestern universities. The study finds that the three dimensions of Moore's Transactional Distance Theory may be linked with Kolb's two dimensional views of individual learning styles. The researcher recommended designing courses that accommodate multiple leaning styles with variety on all dimensions of transactional distance.

Bandalaria (2008) discusses the impact of ICTs on open and distance learning (ODL) in the Philippine. In this paper the researcher examines how ICTs have influenced the development of ODL in this country ,as well as, the different stages or generations of distance education in the Philippines ,which are characterized by the dominant technology used for the delivery of instructional content and student support service .He also described the different ICTs used in ODL and their specific application to the various facets of this mode of delivery .In addition ,he included an examination of how quality of education is ensured in a technology –driven system of teaching and learning ,which includes the employment of the "quality circle approach" in the development of courses and learning packages and the provision of appropriate technologies to perform academic processes and achieve institutional goals.

Ibara (2008) in his study discussed Open and Distance learning as alternatives for higher education in Nigeria. He also addressed the importance of open and distance education which is necessary to meet the demand of time for higher conventional education especially that the demand is higher than what the system can cope with. The researcher concluded that considering the level of infrastructural decay in the conventional higher education has become imperative for the realization of the primary objectives of higher education.

Tao and Yeh (2008) in their study of the teachers' perception toward distance education issues aimed to clarify teachers' perceptions on key distance education issues and to develop a discernible typology of different groups of teachers based on their perceptions. The target was teachers in information related departments in Taiwan's colleges who were more familiar with current technology. To achieve their goals the researchers used factor and cluster analysis to derive the typology. The results of this study indicated that five higher–level issues constructs emerged from the factor analysis; learning effect, customization, administrative challenges, geographic and resource integration and instructional design challenges. Four groups of teachers; namely the skeptics, the optimistic, the mild- promising group and the outlier were identified using cluster analysis of teachers' perception on the five higher level issue constructs.

Ural (2007) investigated the views of the doctoral students at traditional universities on the use of distance education systems, technologies and independent learning in Turkey where there is a great demand for higher education. The researcher indicated that there is a great demand for higher education in Turkey and the use of distance education systems and technologies in traditional universities is not common. He added that those traditional universities can make use of the distance education systems and technologies in certain lectures and cope with the pressure of the increasing number of students and they can affect the mega Turkish education system in a positive way .He concluded that the findings of his research indicated that doctoral students do not have a positive attitude towards the use of distance education system and technologies and they did not agree with the idea that distance education systems can support independent learning.

Mashhour (2007) presented a distance education model for Jordanian students based on empirical study. In his study on a sample of Jordanian students in distance education system the researcher addressed the need of such education at the national level .The response of his sample showed that distance education is offering a viable and satisfactory alternative to those who cannot enroll in regular residential education. The study also showed that the short –comings of the regular and the current form of distance education could be overcome by the use of modern technology.

Rosi and Hopkinse (2007) contrasted two distance foreign language programmes developed at two European institutions of higher education (the modern language program at the open university, UK and the English program at the Universidad Oberta de Catalunya, Spain) as instances of two pedagogical models used to address the many challenges posed by teaching language at a distance .The analysis of the two approaches revealed that the pedagogical choice made by both universities are in great measure determined by the historical and cultural contexts in which both institutions are embedded.

Nartgun (2007) carried a diagnostic study of Open University students' perceptions about the problem of distance education application. The subjects of this study are the open faculty students (n=45) who attend its courses. Data were collected through interviews and indicated that students preferred mostly the open learning as they worked at

different offices. They also pointed out that most of the students had positive attitudes towards the university. However, they reported that they had difficulty in studying by themselves and that they believed they would have problems in finding a job in future.

3. Importance of the Study: Distance Education has been around for a long time which has been evolved in a number of ways indeed. Social trends and increasing demand have led to the development of Distance and Open learning. An increasing number of adults from varying backgrounds, age groups, and income levels are beginning to appreciate the importance of lifelong learning. Open learning is a more recent phenomenon and its definition varies from country to country. Therefore the combination of distance education (the ability to study from a distance) and Open learning (i.e. the ability for anyone to access the educational offer) is often referred as ODL.

This paper focuses on the Attitude towards Open and Distance learning among the college students of Assam. It studies the attitude of the male and female students respectively and a comparison is made in the attitude of the college students towards Open and Distance Learning. Educational opportunities specific to a learner's particular needs can be covered using a variety of media including electronic technologies.

It doesn't have to be delivered in an educational institution but can be used anywhere – at home, at work, on the train, even abroad. The aim is to "promote active learning" (Rowntree, 1986) through various activities, experiences and connections, and by doing so, the learners become involved in their own learning and "learn better" (Rowntree, 1986). Curzon (1997) argues, "It [distance learning] possesses a quality of personal   involvement and stimulates the feelings and cognitive aspects of personality" this suggests that the student becomes autonomous in their learning.

This study reveals the opinions and attitude of the college students of Assam towards Open and Distance learning .college students are the ones who are targeted as they are the ones who can feel the necessity and importance of a system of education at present and future. There is of course a difference in the deliverance of education via regular mode of education and Distance and Open mode of education which can be termed as Open and Distance education together.

4. Objectives:

There are following objective of the study;

- To study the attitude of male and female college students of urban area of Assam towards Open and Distance Learning.
- To study the attitude of male and female college students of rural area of Assam towards Open and Distance Learning.
- To study the attitude of students (male and female) college students of urban and rural area of Assam towards Open and Distance Learning.

5. Hypothesis:

The null hypothesis is assumed of:

HO1: There is no significant difference in attitude of male and female college students of urban area of Assam towards Open and Distance Learning.
HO2: There is no significant difference in attitude of male and female college students of rural area of Assam towards Open and Distance Learning.
HO3: There is no significant difference in attitude of students (male and female) of college of urban and rural area of Assam towards Open and Distance Learning.
HO4: There is no significance difference in attitude of female college students of urban and that of rural area of Assam towards Open and Distance Learning.

6. Methodology used for the Study:

6.1. Method The present study had been descriptive survey method, which specifies the present status of the subjects used in the study in terms of conditions, practices, beliefs, attitudes .effects trends etc.

6.2. Sampling: It is very difficult to conduct the investigation on a large population due to paucity of time, so it was preferred a limited sample and as sample if selected properly is considered to be a representative of a large population.

Keeping in view the time and financial constraints, the author have selected 80 college students of different colleges present in Tinsukia District of Assam. Out of 80 students, 20 was females from rural area, 20 males from rural area, 20 females from urban area and 20 males from urban area.

6.3. Selection of Tools: In this study, the author have used "scale for attitude towards Open and Distance Learning" prepared by Dr. Vishal Sood, Assistant professor (education) ICDEOL Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla (H.P) for the collection of data. The method of summated rating as given by Likert (1932) has been employed for development of present attitude scale. Each item/ statement of the scale is rated on five consecutive points i.e. strongly agree, agree, undecided disagree and strongly disagree. An individual's score on the attitude scale is the sum total of his/ her ratings on all statements/ items,

6.4. Reliability of attitude scale: The reliability of scale was established with the help of split half method and test retest method.

6.4.1. Split – Half Reliability - positive and negative items of attitude scale were distributed to two halves of attitude scale by employing odd- even procedure. The reliability coefficient for half of the scale was found to be 0.69. after applying Spearman – Brown Prophecy formulae the reliability coefficient (r) for whole attitude scale came out to be 0.816 which also indicates a fairly high index of intrinsic validity of the attitude scale.

6.4.2. Test – Retest Reliability: For this, the Karl- Pearsons Product Moment correlation Method was adopted. The value of correlation of coefficient came out to be 0.732 which

was greater than the table value (r= 0.251) at 0.01 level of significance at 98 and hence, is highly significant.

6.5. Validity of Attitude Scale:

The Validity of attitude scale was established in the following manner:

6.5.1. Content validity: The content validity involves essentially the systematic examination of test content to determine whether it comes a representative sample of the behaviour domain to be observed only those items were retained in the preliminary draft of attitude scale for which there had been at least 90% agreement among the judges (experts) with regard to their relevance to the attitude towards Open and Distance Lerning (ODL).

6.5.2. Item validity: The scale can be considered to be valid enough in terms of items validity because only those items were retained in the final form of the scale which were having t- value equal to or greater than 1.75 (highly discriminating items).

6.5.3. Intrinsic Validity: The split half reliability coefficient of 0.816 was also fairly high and ensured intrinsic validity of the attitude scale.

6.5.4. Face Validity: The face validity was established by having the reactions of college teachers, Teachers of Open and Distance education and research scholars towards present attitude scales.

6.6. Administration of the test: The authors themselves distributed the questionnaire among the student with proper clearance of queries. The students were allowed to answer the questions with their own pace but without any discussion with the others.

7. Data Analysis, Result and Discussion: Data were entered into the Microsoft Office Excel 2010 for the purpose of analysis of the data. For the purpose of analysis of data researcher used descriptive and inferential statistics. They have used mean, median, mode, standard deviation, skewness and t-test in this study.

Table No-1: Scores of male and female college students of rural area of Assam

Gender	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Confd. level	t-value
Male	132.95	132.5	138	11.38	0.324	5.326	0.539
Female	131.15	130.5	141	8.54	-0.121	3.995	

The mean, median and mode of male students of rural area are 132.95, 132.5 and 138 respectively, while those of female students are 131.15, 130.5 and 141respectively. Male students performed slightly better than the female students. In term of skewness, distribution of male students is slightly positively skewed (S_k = 0.324), while that for female students is slightly negatively skewed (S_k = 0.121). So more number of female students have positive attitude towards the Open and Distance Learning in comparison to that of the male students.

The t-value is found to be 0.539 which is not significant at significance level 0.05 (t Critical = 2.093) and 0.01 (t Critical = 2.861) both. So hypothesis HO1 "there is no

significant difference in attitude towards open and distance learning of male and female college students of rural area of Assam" is accepted.

Table No-2: Scores of male and female college students of urban area of Assam

Gender	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Confd. level	t-value
Male	134.45	135	130	13.01	-0.956	6.089	0.223
Female	139.75	139.5	122	12.61	-0.083	5.902	

The mean, median and mode of male students of urban area are 134.45, 135 and 130 respectively, while those of female students are 139.75, 139.5 and 122 respectively. Female students performed rightly better than the male students.

In term of skewness, distribution for male students is slightly more negatively skewed (S_k= -0.956) than that of female students (S_k = -0.083). So more number of male students have positive attitude towards the Open and Distance Learning in comparison to the female students.

The t-value is found to be 0.539 which is not significant at significance level 0.05 (t Critical = 2.093) and 0.01 (t Critical = 2.861) both. So hypothesis HO2 "there is no significant difference in attitude towards open and distance learning of male and female college students of urban area of Assam" is accepted.

Table No-3: Scores of male and female college students of rural area and urban area of Assam

Area	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Confd. level	t-value
Rural	132.05	132	141	9.97	0.266	3.189	0.058
Urban	137.1	138.5	145	12.93	-0.505	4.135	

The mean, median and mode of students of rural area (male and female both) are 132.05, 132 and 141 respectively, while those of students of urban area (male and female both) are 137.1, 138.5 and 145 respectively. Students of urban area performed better than the students of rural area.

In term of skewness, distribution for students of rural area is slightly positively skewed (S_k = 0.266), while that for students of urban area is slightly negatively skewed (S_k = -0.505). So more number of students of urban area have positive attitude towards open and distance learning in comparison to that of the students of rural area.

The t-value is found to be 0.058 which is not significant at significance level 0.05 (t Critical= 0.022) and 0.01 (t Critical= 2.707) both. So hypothesis HO3 "there is no significance difference in attitude of female college students of urban and that of rural area of Assam towards Open and Distance Learning" is accepted.

8. Conclusion: The finding of the present study demonstrate that among the college student of rural area, more number of female students have positive attitude towards Open end Distance Learning in comparison to the male students. But among the college students

of urban area, more number of male students have positive attitude towards Open and Distance Learning in comparison to the female students. In term of students which comprise of both male and female more number of students of urban area have positive attitude towards Open and Distance Learning in comparison to the students of rural area. The most important reason of having positive attitude towards open and distance learning in more number of female students of rural area is that the female students of rural area have almost no or very low accessibility to higher education.

9. Educational Implication of the Study: The present study has tremendous importance and relevance in the present scenario. We all know the role of open and distance education plays in the field of education. All educators therefore should give sincere efforts for the propagation of it in all courses for the good of the interested candidates. It plays a very vital role for the one of the most essential requisite that is spreading of literacy among the mass for making our nation at least a literate one. With the flexible mode of education offered by open and distance education large the population is getting ample opportunities as students do have a keen desire to get education through open and distance learning . These findings are strongly emerging from the wide range of advantages and benefits offered by open and distance education as opposed to its few limitations.

10. Limitation of the Study: In order to find out the attitude of the college students towards distance education which certain problems were faced by the author like lack of interest on the part of the students to give appropriate information, time limitation for the students to answer in a rational way and fear of leakage of personal views by the students, students copying from their peer mates and not giving solid answers based on their intellect, fickle attitude of the students to somehow answer the questionnaire and continue with other stuffs.

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