

programme; and (ix) illiterates like to view TV alone whereas the neo-literates like to view TV in the company of members of the family.

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Dropout of Distance Learners: A Case Study

Distance Education System (DES) has revolutionised the present mode of education. The growing population of a country demands a system of education which brings the learning to the door steps of the learners. As a result, the major percentage of the population living in remote areas, working in the offices and involved in business and agriculture gets benefitted. The credit for undertaking the experiment of conducting correspondence courses for the first time in India goes to the University of Delhi (1962). At the close of 1983, there were 29 institutions offering education through the distance /open mode. The Hand Book of Distance Education (1986) prepared by the Association of Indian Universities reveals that there were 46 institutions, including 5 Agricultural Universities and 2 Science and Technology Universities, offering correspondence/open education. As on date, there are seven open universities of which one is at the national level (IGNOU, New Delhi) and others are state level universities (Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh). In addition to this, 49 formal education institutions have correspondence/open education units.

A Brief History of Centre for Distance Education

The Bharathidasan University was established in February 1982 under an Act of the Government of Tamil Nadu as an affiliating University. It was recognised by the University Grants Commission in 1985. It is a member of the Association of Indian Universities. The Centre for Distance Education. (CDE), Bharathidasan University, established in 1992 offers several professional, undergraduate and post-graduate courses at different PCP centres all over the southern states.

Problems of Learners

The DES is operated with the help of four actors (Institutions, Learners, Public and Government). Each actor may have its own problems and these problems may vary from actor to actor. This study seeks to identify the problems encountered by the most significant actor of the DES namely the LEARNER. The learners are responsible for the existence of the system. Hence, their point of view contributes substantially to the successful operation of the DES in the country. As consumers, their appraisal of the system's output is valid. In terms of input, they contribute their time, cost/fee etc., Therefore, it is apparent that the success of DES is synchronised with the satisfaction of the learners by solving their problems

related to the learning process. In this study, one of the serious problems prevailing in the DES is identified as the dropout of learners.

A higher incidence of dropout rate is observed in the DES than in the formal education system. The term "dropout" means different things to different people. Considering the question of students' dropout at the global level, educationists have identified the following factors to determine the concept.

1. **Non - Completion of Final Registration:** Student did not complete final year registration.
2. **Withdrawal Rate:** Students registered but did not sit in the term-end examinations.
3. **Failure Rate:** Students sat at the term-end examinations, but did not gain a course credit.
4. **Overall Wastage Rate:** It included both withdrawal and failure.

Statement of the problem

The dropout problem is faced by almost all Distance Education Institutions. This results in a huge wastage of money, time and efforts. The dropout pattern can be explained as a tug-of-war between certain push factors which force the learners to leave the DES, and certain pull factors which lead them to enroll. The present study aims to identify the factors which are responsible for learners dropout from DES, so that, appropriate steps can be taken to reduce the number of dropouts in future.

Hypothesis of the Study:

Distance learners are different by their age, income, sex, occupation and social status. Hence, their perception of DES will also be different. In the light of the above observation, the hypothesis of the study is that the sex of learners and status of Course are independent of the factors which influence the dropout of learners from the Distance Education System.

Methodology of the Study:

The Centre for Distance Education, Bharathidasan University, was taken as the subject of the study. In order to collect primary data from the learners through questionnaire, they were classified on the basis of sex and status of Course. From the available list of candidates who dropped from CDE, about 150 learners giving equal representation for sex and status of Course were chosen. The questionnaire, after pre-testing and pilot study, was mailed to them. 100 completed questionnaires were taken into account for further analysis of the study. The learners who dropped

out from the CDE, during the academic year 1996-97, were covered in this study.

Many studies have been conducted to identify the reasons for large scale dropouts from the DES. However, these studies have not given concrete ideas to solve this problem. The views of experts and researchers in the field of Distance Education need to be given here to understand the various factors responsible for dropout of distance learners from the DES.

Woodly¹ et al. (1983) enumerates the reasons for some students succeeding while others dropping out from DES. The author acknowledged the complex interplay of push and pull factors for the dropout level. The push factors encourage the students to continue while pull factors lead them to withdraw. The following are the push and pull factors identified.

Push Factors

- Wants a degree to get promotion
- Likes to finish something which was started.
- Very much interested in the Course
- Spouse is very much encouraging to continue.
- Allowed time -off for summer school

Pull Factors

- Wants to spend more time with family.
- Course is very difficult.
- Fees are high.
- Course does not have tutor facility.
- P/T degree course available near by.

Mani's² study identifies the following eight factors responsible for dropout from DES in the University of Madras.

- Family circumstances
- Late despatch of lessons
- Lack of proper guidance
- No library facility
- Transfer to other place
- High fee rate
- No academic help, and
- Lack of variety of teaching methods.

Murali³ (1993) found that the reasons for dropping out from the DES in the University of Madras based on a survey conducted among women respondents, are as follows:

- Marriage
- Ill -health

- Less retentive power in studies
- Poor concentration power
- Promotion in job leading to more work,
- Husband disagrees with continuing the studies
- Burden of work at home
- Unable to attend the seminar, class, and
- Unable to get enough teaching work

The above select studies are useful to understand the background of learners who had dropped out from the DES and also the various factors responsible for such dropout. The findings of the above studies are used as models for this study.

All the factors that are identified for the present study are classified under the following seven major heads:

1. Psychological Factors
2. Family Factors
3. Social Factors
4. Occupational Factors
5. Health Factors
6. Educational Factors, and
7. Institutional Factors

Each major head of factors responsible for learners' dropout from distance education, can further be classified below as revealed from the responses of learners. Accordingly, the psychological factors include the sub-factors namely, 'no intention for further study', 'less retention/memory power', 'inferiority complex' and 'teasing by others'. In the case of family factors, it could further be classified as 'more time required for the care of children', 'other kinds of commitments to the family', 'heavy family expenditure', 'scarcity of money/poor income' and 'no motivation from family'.

The various sub-divisions of social factors are: 'family restriction', 'marriage', 'non co-operation of spouse', 'objection by family members and 'objection by relatives'. The occupational group of factors includes 'heavy office work', job and promotional opportunities', 'transfer from one post to another', 'transfer from one place to another' and 'assignment of additional responsibility. The sub-factors of 'physical handicap', 'personal ill-health', 'children's ill health and elders' ill-health are included under health factors.

Educational factors include 'high standard of syllabus', 'no library facility', 'lack of comprehension of the subject', 'lack of job orientation', 'no facility to discuss the subject with peers' and 'difficult examination system, while the insti-

Table - The factors Responsible for Learners Dropout (Based on Sex and Status of Course)

Sl. No.	Particulars	Sex		Positive Respondents			Status of Course		Total	Ranks For Each Group	For Total
		Male	Female	Total	U.G.	P.G.	7	8			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
I. Psychological Factors											
1.	Less retention/memory power	39	35	74	30	49	74	1	2		
2.	Inferiority complex	34	30	64	29	35	64	2	3		
3.	No intention for further study	25	35	60	24	36	60	3	7		
4.	Teasing by others	20	35	55	25	30	55	4	8		
II. Family factors											
5.	Heavy commitments to the family	40	42	82	40	42	82	1	1		
6.	No motivation from family	23	38	61	32	29	61	2	6		
7.	Heavy family expenditure	20	25	45	22	23	45	3	11		
8.	Scarcity of money/poor income	22	20	42	21	21	42	4	13		
9.	More time required for the care of children	10	29	39	19	20	39	5	14		
III. Social Factors											
10.	Family restriction	19	24	43	18	25	43	1	12		
11.	Marriage	17	20	37	17	20	37	2	15		
12.	Objection by family members	11	20	31	20	11	31	3	18		
13.	Non co-operation of spouse	10	16	26	16	10	26	4	19		
14.	Objection by relative	8	10	18	8	10	18	5	22		

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
IV. Occupational Factors									
15. Lack of promotional opportunity		30	22	52	20	32	52	1	9
16. Assignment of additional responsibility		17	25	42	20	22	42	2	13
17. Heavy office work		19	20	39	18	21	39	3	14
18. Transfer from one post to another		16	21	37	26	11	37	4	15
19. Transfer from one place to another		11	22	33	20	13	33	5	16
V. Health Factors									
20. Elder's ill - health		15	17	32	12	20	32	1	17
21. Children's ill - health		20	11	31	15	16	31	2	18
22. Personal ill - health		12	10	22	10	12	22	3	21
23. Physical handicap		4	8	12	5	7	12	4	23
VI. Educational Factors									
24. High standard of syllabus		33	31	64	30	34	64	1	3
25. Difficult exam system		39	23	62	30	32	62	2	5
26. No library facility		30	31	61	29	32	61	3	6
27. Lack of comprehension of the subject		22	30	52	32	20	52	4	9
28. Lack of job - orientation		24	22	46	22	24	46	5	10
29. No facility to discuss the subject with peers.		22	20	42	21	21	42	6	13

Contd

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
VII. Institutional Factors									
30. Delay in the despatch of study materials		38	25	63	31	32	63	1	4
31. High tuition fee		14	18	32	17	15	32	2	17
32. No proper response to personal enquiry		15	16	31	20	11	31	3	18
33. Improper public relation of officials		15	10	25	10	15	25	4	20
34. Non-despatch of study materials		5	7	12	7	5	12	5	23

Source: Primary dataNote: 1) - χ^2 Value for sex: 36.428, df: 33, Accept N.H.Note: 2) - χ^2 value for status of course: 32.033, df: 33, Accept N.H.Note: 3) - Since $df > 30$, $2\chi^2 - 2v - 1$ is used as $N(0,1)$

tutional factors consist of 'delay in the despatch of study materials', 'non-despatch of study materials', 'no proper response to personal enquiry', 'no proper response to written communication', 'improper public relations of officials' and 'high tuition fee'.

Analysis of Factors Responsible for Learners' Dropout:

Table on next page shows the various factors responsible for learners' dropout from DES. The following interpretation is made on the basis of the responses from learners of both sexes. There are 34 factors identified under seven heads. All of them, in one way or other, are responsible for learners' dropout from CDE. They are rearranged in the above table according to the rank order for each group.

As far as psychological factors are concerned, 'less retention/memory power' ranks first with 74 respondents, while 'teasing by others' ranks fourth with 55 respondents. In the case of family factors 'heavy commitments to the family' occupies the first place (82), while 'more time required for the care of children' occupies the last place (39).

With reference to social factors, the top ranking factor is 'family restriction' (43) while the low ranking factor is 'objection by relatives' (18). In the occupational group of factors, 'lack of promotional opportunity' gets first rank with 52 respondents while 'transfer from one place to another' gets last rank from 33 respondents.

Dropping out on health grounds is an important factor. The above Table reveals that 32 respondents cite 'elders ill health' as a serious factor forcing them to dropout, while for 12 respondents 'physical handicap' is the reason for dropping out. Among the educational group of factors, the first and the least ranking factors are: 'high standard of syllabus' and 'no facility to discuss the subject with peers, respectively. Among the institutional group of factors, 'delay in the despatch of study materials' is stated to have affected 63 respondents, while 'non-despatch of study materials' is stated to be the reason for dropping out by 12 respondents.

An overall analysis of the above Table reveals that of the 34 factors, the top most one is 'heavy commitments to the family' and this is followed by sub-factors like 'less retention/memory power', 'inferiority complex' and 'delay in despatch of study materials'. On the other hand, factors which affected less number of learners in their study are 'Physical handicap' and 'non-despatch of study materials'.

In order to solve the serious problem of 'heavy commitments to the family', the following solution may be feasible. Members of the learners' family may come to their rescue by lessening the burden of work and also by extending the necessary support. The second and third ranking problems i.e., 'less retention/memory power' and 'inferiority complex' are of a psychological nature. Hence they can be solved only by offering psychological training to the learners.

The fourth serious problem, viz., 'delay in the despatch of study materials' is concerned with institutional group of factors for which the solution rests with the CDE. The management of CDE has to ensure the despatch of materials in time to the learners. Similarly the fifth serious problem is 'difficult examination system' coming under the educational group of factors for which defects in the Indian educational/examination system is to be blamed. This could be rectified through serious discussion by academic experts and educational administrators.

Testing of Hypothesis:

The above Table reveals that the calculated value is less than 1.96 (after normal approximation) and therefore we accept both Null Hypotheses. Therefore it is concluded that both sex and status of Course (under-graduate or post-graduate) are independent of the factors which influence the dropout of learners from Distance Education System.

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