Social Acceptability of Learner Centered Education: A Comparative Study

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INTRODUCTION

After food, education is one of the primary needs of the human beings. Education an input for development is the second greatest challenge for human being. Major challenges being faced by the Indian education system are:-

i)   The challenges of numbers

ii)   The challenges of credibility

iii) The challenges of quality

Since, independence in 1947, the conventional education system has been endeavouring to provide appropriate response to these challenges. However, it has certain limitations with regard to expansion, access, equity and cost effectiveness. Due to various limitations/ circumstances, many children and adults are not in a position to avail access to education provided by the formal education system.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development, through the National University of Educational Planning & Administration, has developed an education development Index (EDI) to track progress of the States towards Universal Elementary Education (UEE), for Primary and Upper Primary levels as well as for a composite look at elementary Education.The Government is already focusing on districts with substantial population of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Minorities, educationally backward districts where there are large numbers of out of school children, high gender gap and large infrastructure gaps. Delhi tops the EDI for primary level and ranked at 1st. Pondicherry is 2nd and Kerala is at No.3 and Bihar at 35th Jharkhand at 34, Uttar Pradesh 24, West Bengal 30 and Arunachal Pradesh at 33. At the Upper Primary level, Kerala is on the top, followed by Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and Chandigarh. Like Primary level, Bihar and Jharkhand are respectively ranked 35th and 34th at the upeer primary levels of education also. For composite primary and upper primary level of education, Kerala is ranked 1st followed by Puduchery, Delhi and Tamil Nadu. Bihar and Jharkhand are also ranked at 35th & 34th respectively. In the previous year 2005-06 Kerala was also ranked 1st in case of composite primary and upper primary levels of education. However, the Delhi which was ranked 2nd in 2005-06 is moved to 3rd position in the year 2006-07. (PIB 2008)

There are many ways by which the problem of illiteracy can be solved and distance education is one of them. Distance education has opened a new window of opportunities for those who desired for further studies. It is helping numerous professionals, drop outs, pushed outs, house wives etc. to accomplish their unfinished dreams. There are indications that distance education works best for matured, motivated, well organized and already accomplished learners.

The open and distance learning (ODL) mode has provided a viable alternative to meet the educational needs of people who for certain reasons are not in a position to avail the opportunities provided by the formal schooling system. The revolution brought about by the growth of information and communication technology (ICT) has greatly facilitated operationalization of the ODL system.

The credibility of open and distance education system is no longer needs to be established. The expected educational goals as well as national aspirations can not be fulfilled unless the conventional

education is supplemented by an innovative educational system. Conventional education and open education should be seen as supplement and not supplant each other. The Pioneers in India who supported the relevance of ODL are Gupta (1982), Gupta (1982), Singh (1983), Paramji (1984), Dutt (1985), Ansari (1986), Balasubramanium (1986), Sanswal (1986), Bahuguna (1988), Koul et. al; (1988), Mukhopadhyaya (1988), Reddy (1988), Hommadi (1989), Panda (1990), Mohanty (1991), Sharma (1991), Lal (1992) etc.

The NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling) has been providing educational facilities through ODL mode up to pre degree level through various course of study at open basic education, secondary, senior secondary level and VET(Vocational Education and Training). NIOS has been started in 1989 and since then it has continuously spreaded their network all over the country and presently more than 13,30,427 lakh students are enrolled under NIOS programme under various courses. So, it is a matter of interest and also of research, what are the attitude of the parents of those children taken education from NIOS as well as Non-NIOS i.e. conventional education. Because the attitude study of NIOS students parents and Non-NIOS/ Formal Schooling students parents are directly related not only to the further enrolment of that very student in higher classes of academic course/ vocational course but they also influence the member of other target groups of the NIOS for enrollment under NIOS which helps in the growth of NIOS network. This study may reveal the effectiveness of the ODL system in terms of strength and weakness. This can also indicate the effect of ODL on social and economic development. Keeping this in mind a study was undertaken entitled "Social acceptability of learner centered education: a comparative study" with the following objective:

Objective

1. To determine the difference of opinion between the open and distance learning (ODL) schooling parents and conventional schooling parents towards social acceptability.

Theme of the study

The primary theme of this study was to examine the perceptions of the secondary and senior higher secondary students' parents, regarding the social acceptability of ODL schooling as well as conventional schooling.

Social acceptability in the study has been defined in line with the definition proposed by Brunson (1996) as "It is a judgmental process of comparison between conventional education system and open distance education system in terms of superior, inferior or similar".

It is reflected in individual's attitude. It is very difficult to observe it. Therefore it is inferred. Individual makes choices of positive or negative responses based on information filtered through the network of communication.

Individual judgments in variably are based in part on the perceived judgments of reference groups, i.e.; groups to which a person belongs (or aspires to belongs) which serve as standards for judging appropriate behaviours in situations when more direct cues such as previous personal experience are ambiguous or non existent (shibutani 1955).

It is much more efficient to target new information at reference groups, which may be relied upon to subsequently influence the judgments of large members of their members. Probably the most effective information strategy will be one that target both groups and individuals (Burnson 1996).

The acceptability of the ends may depend on the acceptability of the means employed to achieve it. To be acceptable ODL must be seen as the best means to achieve educational needs of the people.

Research methodology

The study was carried out in Varanasi district of Uttar Pradesh which was purposely selected. There are 10 centers of distance school in the main city of Benaras. One center located at Kendriya Vidyalaya, Banaras Hindu University was selected purposely. There were 200 students enrolled in 10th and 12th standard classes in ODL system of academic year 2006-07. Out of 200 enrolled students 50 students were selected randomly whose parents were contacted for data collection. There were 800 students enrolled in 10th and 12th standard classes in conventional system of same academic year. Out of 800, 50 students were selected randomly whose parents were contacted for data collection. An Interview

schedule was developed for the data collection. The data collected were subjected to suitable statistical test for interpretation.

Findings and Discussion

To determine the difference of opinion between the ODL Schooling Parents and conventional schooling Parents Towards Social Acceptability

Open Schooling

The range of the scores of the respondents on the present study varied from 126 to 184.

The overall mean score of the respondents was found to be 155.24. Based on the mean score obtained by the respondents, standard deviation was calculated and on the basis of overall mean score and standard deviation, the opinion of the parents was classified into three categories: less favorable, more favorable and most favorable opinion.

1. The respondents who obtained the mean score below and equal to 155 were classified as having less favorable opinion towards social acceptability of distance/ open schooling.

2. The respondents who obtained the mean score between 155 to 182 were categorized as having favorable opinion towards social acceptability of distance/ open schooling.

3. The respondents who obtained the mean score more than 182 were categories as having most favorable opinion towards social acceptability of distance/ open schooling.

Distribution of open school parents according to the degree of opinion towards social acceptability has been presented in a tubular form.

Table - 1: Distribution of open school parents according to the degree of opinion towards social acceptability.

S. No.	Opinion Score	Degree of Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Below and equal to 155	Less favorable	06	12
2.	Between 155 to 182	More favorable	37	74
3.	Above 182	Most favorable	07	14

Overall Mean: 155.24　　　　　　　　　**S.D.: 24.42**

The table 1 shows that majority of the respondents i.e. 74 per cent had more favorable opinion towards distance/ open schooling and 14 per cent of the respondents had most favorable opinion. So a total of 88 per cent of the respondents had very optimistic views towards social acceptability of distance schooling. Only 12 per cent of the respondent had less favorable opinion.

Hence, it can be concluded that majority of the parents of open schooling had more favorable opinion towards the social acceptability of open schooling. This might be due to the fact that the status of distance or open schooling is gaining the same status as conventional education.

Conventional Schooling

The range of scores of the respondents on the present study varied form 104 to 141.

The overall mean score of the respondents was found to be 130.74. Based on the mean score obtained by the respondents, standard deviation was calculated and on the basis of overall mean score and standard deviation the opinion of the parents was classified into three categories – less favorable, more favorable and most favorable opinion.

1. The respondents who obtained the mean score below and equal to 118 were classified as having less favorable opinion towards social acceptability of Distance/ Open schooling.

2. The respondents who obtained the mean score between 118 to 130 were categorized as having more favorable opinion towards social acceptability of Distance/ Open schooling.

3. The respondents who obtained the mean score more than 130 were categorized as having most favorable opinion towards social acceptability of Distance/ Open schooling.

The data have been presented in the table No. 2

Table 2: Distribution of conventional schooling parents according to degree of opining towards the social acceptability.

S. No.	Opinion Score	Degree of Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Below and equal to 118	Less favorable	33	66
2.	Between 118 to 130	More favorable	11	22
3.	Above 130	Most favorable	06	12
Overall Mean: 130.74			**S.D.: 11.82**	

The table 2 shows that majority of the parents of conventional schooling i.e., 66 per cent had less favorable opinion towards distance/ open schooling and 22 per cent of the respondents had more favorable opinion. Only 12 per cent of the parents had most favorable opinion towards social acceptability of ODL.

Hence, it can be concluded that majority of the parents from conventional schooling had less favorable opinion towards the social acceptability of ODL. This might be due to the fact that the status of distance or open schooling are not gaining the same honour as conventional education. ODL may not be perceived as best means for achieving the educational needs of the Country. It might have been perceived as a second rate arrangement for the people.

To determine the difference in opinion between the ODL schooling parents and conventional schooling parents towards social acceptability

Fisher't' test was used to measure the difference in the opinion of the distance/ open schooling parents and conventional schooling parents towards social acceptability. The data have been presented in the Table No. 3.

Table 3:. Overall mean scores and difference in mean score between the distance/open schooling and non-distance/ non-open schooling towards social acceptability.

Parents	Overall mean score	Difference in Mean score	't' value
Open schooling	155.24		
		24.5	6.4**
conventional Schooling	130.74		

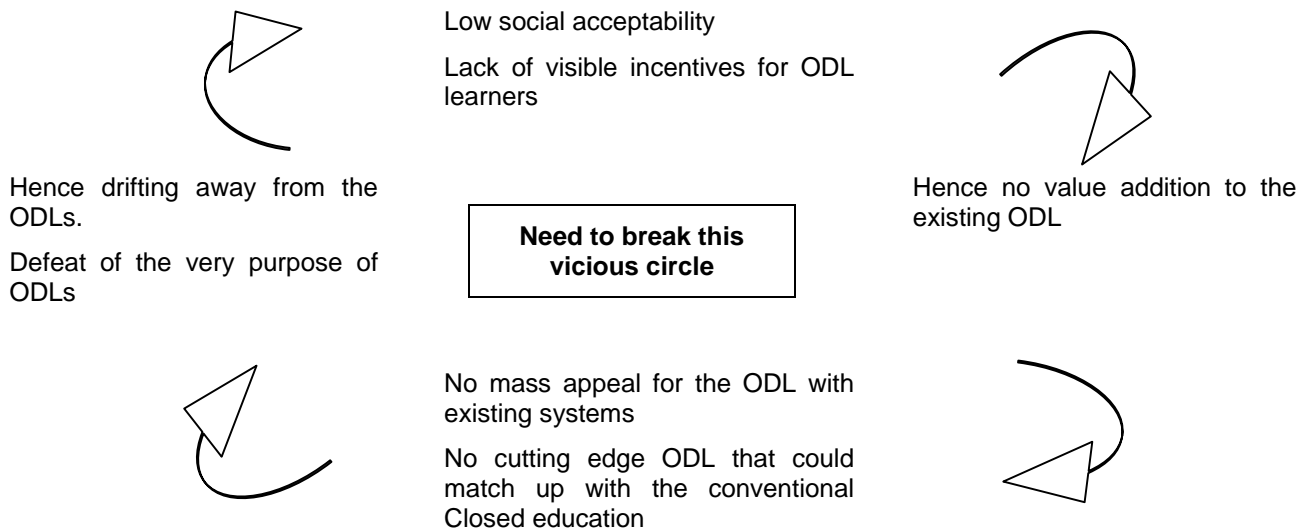** Significant at 1 per cent level of probability.

Above table 3 shows that there was a significant difference between the opinion of the parents towards open schooling and conventional schooling. The calculated 't' value was 6.4 which was highly significant at one per cent level of probability. It rejects the hypothesis i.e., there is no difference between opinion of open schooling parent and conventional schooling parents. It accepts the alternate hypothesis i.e., there is difference between opinion of the open schooling parents and conventional schooling parents. The overall mean score of open schooling was 155.24 and conventional schooling was 130.74 i.e. parents of open schooling is having more favourable opinion towards social acceptability in comparison to parents of conventional schooling. Parents of conventional schooling might be having a

fear regarding the quality of education imparted through ODL system. It might be viewed with considerable suspicion and low grade because till now parents are inclined to send their wards to regular and popular school for prestige in our Country.

Issues Related To ODL

From the present study the following issues are forthcoming:

1. The social acceptability of ODL schooling system is being questioned by many. Even though legally the ODL certificates are considered equal to those of conventional, informally the former is being looked down by the society. The ODL education in our Country is being preferred by the following people:
   i. The school push out, drop out, failed by the conventional schooling system.
   ii. Those who are in their mid careers and are in need of additional qualifications.
   iii. Those who could not join regular courses due to personal and economy reasons.
   iv. Some of the students join ODL system because of its flexibility and other learner friendly features.
   v. Differently able students.
2. It is not preferred by the average citizen because of several reasons. The following vicious cycle needs to be broken.

Low social acceptability

Lack of visible incentives for ODL learners

Hence drifting away from the ODLs.

Defeat of the very purpose of ODLs

> **Need to break this vicious circle**

Hence no value addition to the existing ODL

No mass appeal for the ODL with existing systems

No cutting edge ODL that could match up with the conventional Closed education

3. The quality of evaluating the learning is being questioned. The system of evaluation in ODL has often ended up with the open book examinations. Evaluatory aspect and overall effect are the important factors for making ODL popular and acceptable among the people.
4. The ODL system is projected as the educational pedagogy of the future. Some predicts that the traditional face- to- face system may disappear. It appears hyperbolic. Even though how to recognize the intensity of this need.
5. How to make ODL as a supplementary/ complementary mode of conventional education rather than alternative mode?
6. How to change the attitude of people towards ODL?
7. How to specify contexts which become the initial and important step for understanding the acceptability of ODL?
8. How to judge people's values for understanding the acceptability of ODL?
9. How to make goals and outcomes of ODL clear to people? Goals and outcomes of Distance Education are still some what unclear (http://www.educationatlas.com/the-future-of-distance-learning.html)
10. How to match the scheme of studies between ODL and conventional system.
11. Variation in passing criteria, vertical mobility across different education system, transfer of credit across different Board/ Universities.

Conclusion

An attempt has been made in this paper to identify the important theme of ODL system of education. It is to provide some structure at least one of the important domains of ODL education. Issues identified need to be carefully debated in this PCF5 special workshop session to be organized for 90 minutes. The outcomes of this workshop session will be towards identifying mechanism for integration of ODL with conventional system, evaluatory aspect and overall effect of ODL system, proper publicity and due information regarding ODL with its prospects for making people knowledgeable, methods of collaboration and co-ordination with neighborhood Institutions, establishing, research based evaluation of ODL system, constant revision and improvement of course material, implementation of necessary programmes of facilitating, feedback from the students, course writers, counselors, and experts in the area etc. there is a need of dichotomy between ODL and conventional system so that any point of time learners from any one of the system of learning can switch over to other system. This study can be discussed in the forum and come out with some recommendations for consideration of policy makers, stake holders of educational system. One can hope that this paper provides useful frame work for beginning the problem - solving task of complex concept like social acceptability of learner centered education.

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