

Evaluation of Distance Learning Pedagogy

Tanveer Ahmed Darzi and Afshan Yousuf

University of Kashmir, J & K, India.

Corresponding author: afshan82@gmail.com

Abstract

Quality of education has been an area of interest among many. Educational institutions aim at improving their quality of education. One way of improving quality is through gap analysis. This study has been attempted to ascertain the quality of education provided to Distance Education students. An analysis of students expectations based on 5 dimensions has been conducted. The study found that students of Distance education are satisfied with their contact classes and the quality of self-instructional material provided. Some areas where gaps were found included internal and external assessment.

Keywords: Quality, Distance Education, Contact Classes.

Quality of education is a matter of concern for all its stakeholders, which requires educators to demonstrate capability of providing high quality educational opportunities at reasonable cost. Quality of education encompasses how the teaching and learning is organized and managed, what is the content of learning, what level of learning is achieved, what it leads to in terms of outcomes and what goes on in the learning environment. The mission of any educational system is to ensure that students realize certain learning outcomes. In general it is observed that educational outcomes are largely affected by teaching and learning processes. The instructor's contribution to the student knowledge gain is considered as the most important source of learning. However according to Karapatrovic and Rajamani (1998), a student's learning is not necessarily directly proportional to instructor's teaching performance. From the quality of education view point, most of the research has been conducted on educational outcomes rather than processes that generate such outcomes. Therefore to obtain a better quality of education along with better outcomes, main focus should be on the processes i.e.; teaching and learning activities inside a classroom. The effectiveness of instructions in terms of learning outcomes depends on a number of factors such as:

- The quality of instructor's lecture,
- Student's ability to learn,
- Human factors-motivation, interest, intention, readiness etc,
- Availability of texts, reference books and classroom notes,
- Classroom ambience

Therefore all of the above factors should be taken into consideration as far as possible while measuring the learning outcomes or the effectiveness of instructions.

Distance learning can expand access to education and training for both general populace and businesses since its flexible scheduling structure lessens the effects of many time constraints imposed by personal responsibilities and commitments. Distance education can also provide a broader method of communication within the realm of education. Due to inherent limitations that distance education suffers from, an evaluation of teaching learning process becomes inevitable. Some of the problems faced by distance education learners include lack of presence of teacher, misconceptions related to distance mode of learning and lack of social interactions etc. Thus a need arises to have an in-depth evaluation of teaching learning in distance education system to enhance the overall quality of education. It is in this context that the present study is carried out to analyze the quality of distance education learning.

Review of Literature

It is customary in higher education for students to evaluate traditional course instructors and activities each semester and this ritual has carried over to distance courses. While this practice has value, there is a great deal of dissension regarding just about every factor involved with data collected via student evaluations. Reliability, validity, usefulness and the presence or absence of confounding factors are only a few of the arguments against the use of these instruments (Paswan & Young, 2002). These very same arguments actually emphasize the need to lay aside the traditional course evaluation and develop a different tool for student evaluation of distance education courses. Surprisingly, little time or effort has been directed towards the development of proper yet different instrument for evaluating distant education courses. Once recognized as having only a minor role in education, distance education is now viewed to be an ordinary choice if instructional delivery in higher education (Dwyer and Li, 2000). Allan & Seamen (2004) report that since 2002, public institutions offering online courses have remained at a rate of around 90%. The first attempt to describe the structure of distance education discipline proposed by Holmberg (1985). Over the years a number of reviews of distance education literature have been published in which the authors have developed categorization schemes of research areas that they mapped onto the articles under review. Scriven (1991) used the following nine headings to classify articles that were published in the first ten years of the journal distance education: Students and their characteristics, specific programmes and courses, telecommunications and media, specific countries-practices and procedures, theory, course design and development, economics and management, counseling and student support and tutor's, staff development and staff involvement.

Panda (1992) reviewed 142 studies on distance education conducted in India. Furthermore he has provided a conceptual framework for distance education research based on the model of systems philosophy, distinguishing between inputs, process and output variables. A similar study was conducted by Koble and Bunker (1997) for the American Journal of Distance Education with the following classification:

- Theory policy and development,
- Media and delivery systems,
- Institution, staff and management,
- Student psychology ,motivation and characteristics,
- Faculty participation and instructional process,
- Course design and curriculum development,
- Student administration and support

Fortunately for some students, distance education courses have resulted in an effortless switch from traditional classroom learning (Oravec,2003). The change in instructional delivery methods, communication with the teacher and other students, and greater use of technology has not presented a challenge. Even when distance education was considered more difficult than face to face courses, sometimes the benefits outweighed the costs. For example the rural under-served learner may find distance education as their only alternative for receiving an education (Seay &Chamberlain,2001).

According to Smith students find many features of distance education e.g; a) Convenience, b)flexibility, c)accessibility, d) participative style, e) absence of labeling, f) written communication experience, g) experience with technology interesting. Institutions have enjoyed enrolment increases and have become aggressive competitors in themarketplace (Wagner& Thompson, 1997). All three(institutions, faculty and students) share the benefits of reduced classroom sizes and have witnessed institutional transformations due to distance education programmes(Eastman and Swift,2001). Spooner, etal (1999) asserted that not only did distance education work, it provided the institutional benefit of serving more people with the same resources.

Research Design Methodology

The literature review conducted in this study identified features that were similar but most importantly, once that actually distinguished distance education courses from traditional education courses. The present study involves data collected from primary as well as secondary sources. The primary data was collected from students studying in the Directorate of Distance Education of the University of Kashmir through a structured non-disguised questionnaire. Sample was selected randomly. 100 questionnaires were distributed from which 85 questionnaires were received back. The present study was investigated through simple random sampling technique. Questionnaire developed by Karapetrovic&Rajamani(1998),

was modified and administered to the selected respondents. The questionnaire consists of two parts; the first part includes background information of the students such as age, gender, course etc. The second part of the questionnaire contained questions related to different dimensions of evaluation. The items responses are measured on a five point likert scale viz very important, important, moderately important, little important, unimportant with a weight of five to very important and one to unimportant.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	40	47.05	47.05
Female	45	52.94	100
Total			

Analysis of Data

After collecting the information, data was carefully scrutinized and coded so that all the information could be brought to proximity. The data was analyzed by computing the mean value and standard deviations of the various elements of all the dimensions.

S.No.	Dimensions	Mean Value	Rank
1	Contact Classes	4.03	3
2	Admission Procedure	4.18	1
3	Internal Assessment	3.93	4
4	Study Material	4.13	2
5	External Assessment	3.75	5
	Total (Averaged on all dimensions)	4.004	

Interpretation

Table clearly shows that dimension related to admission procedure with a mean score of 4.18 ranks highest. Students are informed about the admission procedure through print media. Also under e-governance initiative of the Directorate, students are regularly updated about admission and any course related information. Admissions are conducted under merit system. Also DDE has a higher intake capacity than formal departments which has resulted in higher Gross Enrolment ratio. The students are satisfied with their contact classes and study material quality. Contrary to traditional mode of learning, which is also known as the formal mode, distance education offers students with a flexible schedule wherein contact classes are conducted for some days only. Students who cannot regularly attend classes find these contact classes easier to attend owing to their busy schedules. Students are also provided with self-instructional study material to clear their doubts and preparation for their examination. Internal assessment and external assessment rank at number 4 and 5. Students are moderately satisfied with their internal and external assessment. This could be attributed to delay in conducting external examinations.

Conclusion

An attempt into analyzing the quality of distance education learning along the lines of formal mode has been done by the authors. Mean scores obtained from the survey reveal that students are satisfied with the quality of distance education at DDE. The main objective of distance education is to provide education cutting across boundaries created by time and space. The objective of distance learning is reaching the unreached. However one has to be cautious as distance mode is different as compared to formal mode of education. Students attend contact classes for a limited period. Hence it becomes a challenge to address all the issues of distant learners in a short period of time wherein face to face interaction occurs. The study has implications for policy makers to further enhance the quality of distance education. The study was limited to distance education students of Kashmir University. It can be further applied to students from other institutions.

References

- Allen, I. E. and Seaman, J. (2004). *Entering the mainstream: The quality and extent of online education in the United States, 2003 and 2004*. Needham, MA: Sloan-C. Retrieved from http://sloanconsortium.org/sites/default/files/entering_mainstream_1.pdf
- Dwyer, F. and Li, N. (2000). "Distance Education Complexities: Questions to be Answered". *International Journal of Instructional Media*, **27**(1): 25-28.
- Eastman, J. and Swift, C. (2001). New horizons in distance education: The online learner-centered marketing class. *Journal of Marketing Education*, **23**(1): 25-34.
- Holmberg, B. (1985). Status and trends of distance education. Sweden: Lector.
- Karapetrovic, S., Rajamani, D. and Willborn, W. (1998). ISO 9001 quality system: An interpretation for the university. *International Journal of Engineering Education*, **14**(2): 105-118
- Koble, M., and E. Bunker. (1997). Trends in research and practice: An examination *The American Journal of Distance Education*, **11**(2): 19-38.
- Oravec, J. (2003) Some influences of online distance learning on US higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*. **27**(1): 89-104.
- Paswan, K.A. Young, J.A. (2002). Student evaluation of instructor: a nomological investigation using structural equation modeling. *J Mark Educ* **24**(3): 193-202.
- Seay, R., Rudolph, H., and Chamberlain, D. (2001). Faculty perceptions of interactive television instruction. *Journal of Education for Business*, 99-105.
- Spooner, F., Jordan, L., Algozzine, B., and Spooner, M. (1999). Student Ratings of Instruction in Distance Learning and On-Campus Classes. *The Journal of Educational Research*, **92**(3): 132-140
- Wagner, N. and Thompson, D. (1997). Teaching with television: One university's model. *International Journal of Instructional Media* **24**(3): 221-27.

