Challenges Faced by Students of PULC Twinning Programme

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ABSTRACT - Over a decade, Pondicherry University and Loyola College are conducting a twinning Distance Education for the benefit of working people in Chennai. Despite the induction of knowledge through quality faculties and teaching aids there is a significant difference in effort and result in most distance education programme. Proper and effective Distance Education Programmes demands that strategic planning in preparation of course materials and teaching aids. Such planning could be done well if challenges faced by students in the Programme are identified and addressed. This paper focuses on to get a clear picture of the challenges faced by students in Distance Education with special reference to Pondicherry University and Loyola College twining programme. The analysis is carried out with respect to various variables identified under the construct - desirable features and problems. The descriptive research design was utilized and the data has been collected from 82 respondents through interview and questionnaire.

Keywords: PULC Twinning Programme, Distance Education, Institutional and Psychological barriers.

I.   INTRODUCTION

Distance education involves the process of educating individuals who cannot attend conventional school, college or universities, but willing to utilize their free time or study at home (Keegan, 1996). Distinct characteristics that separates traditional education from distance education system is that, there is no frequent interaction or no interaction between teacher and students, also there exists only brief discussion on subjects rather than elaborative explanation of each and every concept prescribed in syllabus though the syllabus is no way less compared to traditional educational (Knapper, 1988). Hereby for the purpose of distance education the institutions are forced to develop a Self- Instructional Materials (SIM) for all courses conducted in the distance education programme.

In Chennai there are lots of Colleges and Universities to give higher education, but always all are not getting the opportunity to continue their higher education. The people who are not able to go for regular courses have a big thirst for acquiring knowledge through distance education by going to work and continuing their studies after their work. Therefore, universities have opened their doors to accommodate this huge number of people who are in need of professional courses for their better employment during evenings, weekends and on online courses. In this context

Loyola College has joined hands with Pondicherry University to offer MBA Programmes by conducting classes on Sundays only in Loyola College Campus. From the origin of this Programme, there is an urge and demand for this course by the working community and undergraduates who are interested to continue their Higher education. Within a short period of time the strength of the students has reached to 5000 it is because of the passion and interest showed by the people of Chennai to send or admit in Loyola College. The main areas of study are on the desirable features and the problems faced by PULC Students of Loyola.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Distance learning is a new form of the educational process; it is based on the principle of student independent training with the help of developing information resources. The environment of training is characterized by that students generally are remote from the teacher in space and in time. However, the distance education mode of learning also challenging in the sense of required educational quality and services regarding education. So a study was conducted to find the desirable features and problems faced by the students undergoing distance education mode in Pondicherry University and Loyola College Twinning Programme.

OBJECTIVES

- To identify the desirable features in PULC Programme.
- To know the problems faced by the PULC students through distance education mode.
- To give possible suggestions for the betterment of quality in PULC Programme.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURES

Ever since the manifestation of distance learning, the educationists are more concern in implementing and testing new approaches and techniques to make distance-learning equivalently effective to conventional learning techniques adopted in the traditional educational system. The study made by (Sewart, 1980) illustrated that, the traditional learning is concerned towards improving the quality of the students while the distance learning is concerned towards completion rates. Therefore, the quality of the students depends on his or her own effort to maximum percentage, while with respect to traditional educational system; the students are forced to become competent with an effort from institutional side. It is being reported by (Edge & Loegering, 2000), that, the distance educations demands high-level service relating to course material, exams, grading turnaround times, assignments and counselling sections. It is teachers with high aspiration and achievements are employing modern information and quality teaching techniques, which are innovative enough to compensate limited classes in distance education (Vig & Singh, 2004). Henceforth, the overall effectiveness of the teaching in distance education is reduced due to lack of such competent teachers in respective subjects, leading to overall dissatisfaction to the students and the administrators by the approach that is been adopted in distance education (Stella & Gnanam, 2004). In attempt with various techniques employing Information and communication technology, the effectiveness of teaching is increased also the students' involvement in class and concentration is demonstrated to be better in comparison to traditional interactive and teaching section (Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler, 2007). Henceforth the Information and communication technology is seen as a major solution and one among the important features for handling open and distance education learning problems (Valk, Rashid, & Elder, 11(1):2010).

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The main reason of this paper is to find the problems faced and desirable features available and those wanted by the students pursuing PULC Programme. Thereby, through the study made, the need and progression to be made in the PULC programme can be identified and rectified in forth coming time. Also the study with its variables can be used to assess the desirable features wanted and problems faced by the various distance education system.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted with the sample size of 82 students from various disciplines pursuing education through PULC Programme using interview and questionnaire. In this study, analysis is made on the various variables influencing with respect to desirable features and problems. The SPSS research analysis tool is used for the purpose of study, analysis such as descriptive, reliability test, ANOVA and factor analysis is been employed for interpreting the result.

IV. ANALYSES AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1 – Descriptive statistics of demography

Demographic Variable	Respective Options	Frequency	Percent
Age	below 25 yrs	71	86.6
	25-40	10	12.2
	41-55	1	1.2
	Above 55	0	0
	Total	**82**	**100.0**
Gender	Male	30	36.6
	Female	52	63.4
	Total	**82**	**100.0**
Educational qualification	upto +2	1	1.2
	UG	70	85.4
	PG	9	11
	Others	2	2.4
	Total	**82**	**100.0**
Marital status	married	6	7.3
	unmarried	75	91.5
	separated	1	1.2
	Total	**82**	**100.0**
Family Income	<15000	12	14.6
	15000 to 30000	27	32.9
	30000 to 45000	21	25.6
	>45000	22	26.8
	Total	**82**	**100.0**
Occupation	government	5	6.1
	Private	61	74.4
	Business	7	8.5
	Others	9	11.0
	Total	**82**	**100.0**

Interpretation:

From the descriptive statistics made with demographic variables, it can be interpreted that, with respect to age group, major respondents are at the age below 25, whose respective percentage is 86.6 followed by age category of 25-40 which is consisting 12.2 percentages of the respondent and rest 1.2 are at the age between 41-55. With respect to gender 63.4 percentages of the respondents are female and the rest of the percentage is male. Most of the respondents' perusing distance education had UG qualification i.e. 85.4 percentage of the respondent is UG qualified and 11 percentage of the respondent is PG qualified, it is only 1.2 percentage of the respondent who hasn't got graduation. Considering Marital status 91.5

percentages of the respondent are unmarried and 7.3 percentages of the respondent are married and 1.2 percentages are separated after married life. It has been found that majority of the respondent i.e. 32.9 percentage of the respondent family income is between 15,000 - 30000 Rs. Followed by 26.8 percentage of the respondent has a family income above 45,000. It can be interpreted that 74.4 percentage of the respondents are working in a private firm, 6.5 percentage are working in government sector, 8.5 percentage are running their own business and 11 percentage are employed through other means.

Reliability test on items considered under a construct

Table 2 – Item reliability determination using Cronbach's Alpha Value

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Value
Features	8	.710

Interpretation:

The calculated Cronbach's value for the construct – "Feature" is 0.718. Since the calculated value for the construct is greater than 0.7 i.e. Cronbach's Value > 0.7, the items considered under the construct are reliable.

ANOVA test for finding significant differences in opinion with respect to genders on features and problems

Table 3 – ANOVA (Gender Vs Features)

ANOVA				
Features	Mean	F	Sig.	Null Hypothesis
Course material	2.82	6.688	.012	Rejected
Quality of instructing	2.55	.425	.516	Accepted
Multimedia instruction	2.82	.103	.749	Accepted
Course information during PCP	2.72	.016	.900	Accepted
Support and services	3.51	1.467	.229	Accepted
Social interaction with other students	3.11	4.997	.028	Rejected
Class environment	3.27	.444	.507	Accepted

Interpretation:

From the list of items under the construct "features", it is only "Course material" and "Social interaction with other students" items whose significance value is i.e. Sig. < 0.05; hereby the Null hypothesis is rejected. This means, with respect to gender there are significant differences in opinion in relation to following items under the construct features. Other items are having Sig. > 0.05, thereby null hypothesis is accepted, which means there is no significant difference in opinion with respect to gender. Considering items meeting null hypothesis criteria the mean value ranges from 2.55 – 3.27, this illustrates they neither agree

nor disagree that the following items plays an important role in distance education.

Sub - Factors discovery within constructs using factor analysis

Table 4 – (Factor Analysis on Features) Test for factor analysis utility using KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.692
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	123.712
	Df	21
	Sig.	.000

Interpretation:

High value of KMO (0.692 >0.05), indicates that a factor analysis is useful for the present data.

The significant value of Bartlett's test of Sphericity is 0.000 and is less than .05 which indicates that there exist significant relationships among the variables.

The resultant value of KMO test and Bartlett's test indicate that the present data is useful for factor analysis.

Table 5 - Factor Analysis on Features (Construct)

Features	Component Matrix		Rotated Component Matrix		Identified Sub-factors
	1	2	1	2	
Course information during classes	.489	-.332	.590	-.044	Interactivity
Quality of teaching	.637	-.043	.574	.281	
Class environment	.653	-.432	.782	-.049	
Support and services	.760	-.075	.696	.314	
Social interaction with other students	.782	-.122	.739	.284	
Multimedia instruction	.423	.800	-.032	.904	Instruction Medium
Course material	.578	.496	.253	.718	

Interpretation:

The factor loading is ranging from 0.574 – 0.904. The two factors identified using factor analyses are Interactivity and Instruction medium.

Table-6: Descriptive analysis on Problems faced by PULC students of Loyola

Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
Difficulty in admin service	82	2.74	1.255	3
Lack institutional network of technical assistance	82	3.34	1.239	6
Poor course material	82	2.66	1.209	1
Lack of time for study	82	2.68	1.304	2
Financial constraints	82	2.87	1.438	4
Conflicts between work/family, study schedule	82	2.74	1.284	3

Lack of support from employer/family	82	3.06	1.417	5
Valid N (list wise)	82			

Interpretation:

The mean value calculated is ranging from 2.66-3.34 whose corresponding notation is neither disagree nor agree. The ranking made using the mean value indicates that, a lack institutional network of technical assistance and Lack of support from employer/family is least problems to be considered, as the respondents disagree with the following items under the construct. Similarly for other items respondents neither agree nor disagree with other items considered as the problem construct.

Correlation analysis

Table-7: Correlation analysis with respect to Problems and Desirable features

Correlations			
		Features	Problems
Features & Problems	Pearson Correlation	1	-.621
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.038
	N	82	82

Interpretation:

From the correlation analysis made, the significance value is calculated to be 0.038, thereby the null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted i.e. there is significant relationship between features and problems. The features and problems as per the correlation analysis are negatively correlated by the value -.621 or features and problems are inversely proportional to each other or as the features increases the problems reduces and vice versa.

V. FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS & SUGGESTIONS:

From the descriptive statistics, major respondents are below 25 years and major percentage of the respondents is female. Respondents' family income is equally distributed from Rs. 15,000 to above Rs. 45000. From the test made, the statement of null hypothesis is accepted for all variables in desirable features except the multimedia instruction and course material provided in the PULC programme with respect to gender. Thereby it can be interpreted that irrespective of gender the respondents are not much satisfied with quality of course materials and social interaction with students. Considering problems associated with distance education; poor course material, lack of time for study, Conflicts between work/family, study schedule and difficultly with administration service are identified variables. Through the correlation analysis it is clear that, when the desirable features are increased, the problems will decrease proportionally. Hence if the study is conducted by identifying more number of variables in features and problems with more samples there is better

possibility for rectifying the problems and finding a new approach to effectively conduct distance education.

LIMITATIONS

The study is limited to the students of Chennai district. There are various distance mode programmes but this study is made only on Pondicherry University and Loyola College Twinning Programmes. The study is made by taking a sample of students so their views are only given as the results so it may differ from the views of all the students who study in this programme.

VI. CONCLUSION

Poor course material, lack of time for study and Conflicts between work/family, study schedule are the major challenges faced by the respondent. They also need better support and services to be offered by Loyola Twinning Programme office. The examination made indicates that the problem decreases with increase in features. Hence on identification of each problem from the students' side and desirable feature for the respective problem if identified and implemented, there will be effective learning mechanism existing with respect to distance education.

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