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21ST CENTURY LEARNERS OF HIGHER EDUCATION (ODL & CONVENTIONAL SYSTEM) IN RELATION TO THEIR LEVEL OF ASPIRATIONS: A CRITICAL STUDY

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Abstract: *In the field of education motivation to learn is important for learners in all types of system in general and ODL (Open and Distance Learning) system is particular. In ODL system learners should take ownership of the learning process, should link what they are being taught and toward which they are directing their efforts. These can be characterized as their aspirations of learners. ODL institutions should know the aspirations of learners and have a mechanism to assess the level of aspiration of learners. It's important to match between learner's aspirations and behaviors. It is important for learners aspiring to careers, choice of courses, and enthusiasm for doing the kinds of things necessary to achieve their aspirations. Understanding learners' aspirations is important to develop a learning culture of learners in any system of education. This type of a culture helps the learners to be a self learner, they need to consider their aspirations and make clearer and connect their plan of action with their goals. The ultimate aim is to improve the overall learning environment and supports to the success of learners. Knowing and understanding more about learner's aspirations; valuing and implementing on such important information is crucial for any educational institution to improve learner's outcomes and the quality of the educational process.*

Key words: Learning Environment, Level of Aspiration, Conventional system.

Introduction

Learner's aspiration is one of the key components for designing, development and implementation of instructional design in the field of Higher Education (HE) in general and in the field of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system in particular. In ODL system it has a great bearing on the policy perspectives of the Universities, Government and its outcomes as well, particularly in today's world of communication and technology. Aspiration of adult learners has an important role in overall development of learners in the field of education. For educational administrators, policy makers, teacher educators/trainers it is always important to understand factors contributing to shape realistic aspirations of adult learners. Aspiration of learners has a direct bearing on the academic achievement of learners at all levels. For learners of ODL system challenges are different from that of the learner's o conventional system. Ability and competency of learners to cope up with new challenges depends upon the availability of resources, system, and structure of implementation in the institution. These are essential to contribute to the positive development in children which leads to shape the aspiration of adult learners. Present study is an attempt to assess the level of aspiration of young adults perusing under graduate programmers in ODL system and Conventional system in higher education in our country. Attempt has also been made to compare the level of aspiration of learners of ODL system with that of the learners of Conventional system in terms of gender, category, and areas to understand the young adult's aspirations, needs and expectations in the system.

Review of Literature

In India Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system is a potential alternative of education and training to democratize quality education for all sections of the society at all levels. Cost-effectiveness, flexibility and accessibility of ODL system are some of the important parameters in widening its scope for all. In our country the movement of ODL system with separate Open University is in place since the 1980s, is proved to be at its peak to achieve the target of GER in the field of higher education. In last four decades the ODL system has established its credibility and recognition in our country with establishment of Indira Gandhi National Open University in 1985. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) played a vital role in this movement. Research in the field of ODL system increasing progressively in our country with the initiatives of NCERT to have an exclusive chapter of 'Open and Distance Education' in the Fifth Survey of Educational Research (1988-92). With the rapid expansion of ODL system research and innovations in ODL system also gain its momentum. The main issues of research studies were enrolment trends, learner's characteristics, policy, planning and management, problems of distance learners, role of multimedia, economics of ODL SYSTEM etc. Koul (1997) It is clearly known that distance education provides adult learners with the advantage of life-long learning due to its flexibility. Distance education is defined as the planned teaching and learning activities provided through the use of a communication channel within an institutional organization without any time and place limitations (Moore and Kearsley, 2011). With the advancement of ICTs, online distance education empowered the flexibility of educational opportunities where adult learners comprised the largest target for online distance education (Ke and Xie, 2009; Lim, 2001). The heterogeneity among the distance learners is due to the fact that they mostly continue their education with their work and family responsibilities. Adult learners have distinct characteristics in comparison to traditional conventional students. They are aware of why and what they need to learn (Knowles, 1996). Adult learners, with diverse educational background and goals, want to reflect their experiences on their educational process (Lindeman, 2015). Adult learners are different from other learners in terms of their responsibilities in their daily lives, which influence their educational experience (Cercone, 2008). Therefore, there is a need for an educational environment where adult learners are allowed to determine their own educational processes; to share their ideas comfortably, and to sustain

their educational process alongside their private lives. ODL system offers those opportunities through its flexibility to all distance learners who are aware of their own learning responsibilities and are expected to manage their own learning processes. Though there is increase in the number of adult learners and increase in diversity of the learners in ODL system, there are very few studies than those studies about conventional learners (Chu and Tsai, 2009; Ke, 2010; Remedios and Richardson, 2013). Adult Learners in ODL system, considering the learner-centered approach to all instructional design models, it is a necessity to design and implement programmes that meet the needs of diverse learners including adults. Interaction is also considered as a key factor in ODL system and it is a good predictor of learning (Picciano, 2002). The learners who have low perception of competency in these issues or the older adult learners might have challenges in this process and this might cause learner dropout (Appana, 2008). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges faced by adult learners in ODL system through their level of aspiration to create such a framework. Specifically, the current study is an attempt to answer the research questions such as what is the level of aspiration of adult learners in the field of ODL system in 21st century in our country. Distance education to provide alternatives and interaction among the students and teachers (Ashen, 2006). Distance education is a flexible means of learning and an alternative means of self learning. It is used by the learners in most common way and become most common among the learners (Roy et al., 2004, Ghalib Ashen et al., 2006). There is a positive attitude towards distance education among the adult learners. It will be worthwhile to review these studies throwing light on the phenomenon of aspiration for education. It is also seen that a very few works have been done on the subject of educational aspiration of distance (adult) learners and its comparison with aspiration of learners of conventional system.

Size of the family, educational facilities and recreational facilities were influencing educational aspirations; Parental education and income were found to have significant influences on educational aspiration. A positive relationship was found to exist between attainment and the level of educational aspiration. Urban male had higher educational aspiration than rural male (Bisht, 1972). Educational and vocational aspirations are influenced by sex, socio-economic standard and locality. Urban students differed significantly from their rural counter parts in their educational preferences and vocational aspirations. While rural students were found to aspire for high academic degree / a degree in arts, the urban students aspired for high professional degree / a degree in science Kaur (1990). There is a consistent pattern of relationship between the intelligence level and the socio-economic status; as the educational level increases, the socio-economic status and intelligence profile shows an upward trend; location, too, exerts an influence; level of education does influence the vocational aspirations of urban and rural female Nagar (1991).

Research Questions
The findings of the study would answer to the following research questions:
1. Whether there is a difference in level of aspiration of learners of ODL system with that of the level of aspiration of learners of conventional system?
2. Whether there is a significant difference between the level of aspiration of learners of ODL system and conventional system in terms of gender?
3. Whether there is a significant difference between the level of aspiration of learners of ODL system and conventional system in terms of gender and area?

Objectives
The following objectives are set forth in the present study:
1. To assess the level of aspiration of learners of ODL system and conventional system in the field of higher education.

2. To compare the level of aspiration of learners of ODL system with that of the learners of conventional system in the field of higher education.
3. To compare the level of aspiration learners of ODL system with that of the learners of conventional system in terms of gender in the field of higher education
4. To compare the level of aspiration learners of ODL system with that of the learners of conventional system in terms of area in the field of higher education

Methodology
The study was descriptive survey in nature. Survey was done using qualitative and quantitative method together with a purpose to deeply analyze the aspirations of learners in the field of higher education belonging to ODL system and conventional system. It is important to design develop and implement pogrammes to meet the expectations of the digital learners in 21st century.

Sample: The sample of the study constitutes 200 learners (100 from ODL system and 100 from conventional system.) from the field of higher education using simple random sampling technique. From each system 50 male and 50 female samples were selected randomly to represent the population. From each gender group, equal representation was made from rural and urban areas. From each area 20 male and 30 female learners were selected to constitute the sample. The questionnaire was administered on 200 learners of ODISHA through online tool survey monkey. All precautions were taken to include the learners of same socio-economic status as sample of the study in each category and from each area as well.

Tool: The present study was an attempt to understand the level of aspiration of learners of higher education belonging to different system such as ODL system and conventional system. A question was developed to collect the desired information from them. The items of the questionnaire focused on important factors such as i) willingness, ii) personality, iii) experience, iv) values, v) sex and environmental factors such as i) willingness of parents, ii) social expectations, iii) peer group influence, iv) culture and tradition, v) family and social values and vi) responsibility and accountability etc. The items of the questionnaire were finalized with on the basis of discussion and interaction with experts.

Data Collection: online link was created and used to collect the information from the selected sample.

Statistical Analysis: Mean, Standard Deviation and z-test were used to analyze the data to understand the level of aspiration of learners and compare them as per the objectives of the study.

Analysis and Interpretation
On the basis of the perusal of the table 1, it is found that there exists a significance difference (t=3.16**; P<0.01) between the level of aspiration of learners of ODL system and conventional system and the difference in the mean score of aspiration (12) goes in favour of learners of conventional system. This shows that overall level of ODL system. In case of female learners though there is a difference in mean score of aspiration of female learners among ODL system and Conventional system and in conventional system the mean score of aspiration (M= 128.6) is higher than that of the mean score of aspiration of learners in ODL system (117.2), however, Female learners of ODL system and Conventional system did not differ significantly in level of aspiration (t=1.92). Thus, it can be said that female learners belonging to ODL system and Conventional system occupied the similar position in their level of aspiration.

Table 01: Comparison of the Level of Aspiration of Learners of ODL System and Conventional System

#	Systems of Higher Education	Sample Size (N)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-Value
1.	ODL System (Male + Female)	100	116.0	23.4	3.16**
	Conventional System (Male + Female)	100	128.0	30.4	
2	MALE (ODL + Conventional)	100	121.1	25.8	2.09*
	FEMALE (ODL + Conventional)	100	128.0	21.1	
3.	Female (ODL System)	50	117.2	24.8	1.92
	Female (Conventional System)	50	128.6	31.3	
4.	Male (ODL System)	50	114.8	21.9	2.60*
	Male (Conventional System)	50	127.5	29.6	

*P<0.05 and **P<0.01

Complete profile of the level of aspiration of learners in terms of gender indicates that the measures of the level of aspiration of female learners (M=128.0) significantly higher than male learners (M=121.1; t= 2.01, P<0.05). On the basis of the intra group comparison it is found that there is no significant difference in level of aspiration of female learners belonging to ODL system and Conventional system. However, mean score of aspiration of male learners of conventional system (M= 127.5) is higher than that of the mean score of aspiration of male learners of ODL system (M= 114.8). This difference goes in favour of male learners of conventional system and was found to be statistically significant (t= 2.60, P<0.05).

On the basis of the comparison of the mean scores it can be concluded that the learners of conventional system appeared to be superior in the level of aspirations than their ODL counterparts. This reflects the efficacy of the systemic approach of conventional system over and above the ODL system.

Table 02: Gender Wise Comparison of the Level of Aspiration of Learners of ODL System and Conventional System

#	Systems of Higher Education	Sample Size (N)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-Value
1.	Female (ODL System)	50	117.2	24.8	0.52
	Male (ODL System)	50	114.8	21.9	
2.	Female (Conventional System)	50	128.6	31.3	0.18
	Male (Conventional System)	50	127.5	29.6	

*P<0.05 and **P<0.01

On the basis of the examination of the table 2 it is found that in ODL system the mean score of aspiration of female learners (M= 117.2) was found to be higher than that of the mean score of aspiration of their male counterparts (M =114.8). However, the difference in mean score of aspiration (2.4) is not statistically significant (t= 0.52). This shows that level of aspiration of male and female learners in ODL system was found to be at par with each other.

Similar is the situation among the learners of male and female in conventional system. However, in both cases (comparison of learners within ODL system among male and female and within Conventional system among male and their female counterparts) the mean score of aspiration is tilted towards female learners.

The mean score of aspiration of female learners belonging to conventional system was found to be 128.6 which are the highest mean score in comparison to other groups. On the other hand, male learners belonging to ODL system are found to be at lowest level (M= 114.8). This shows that in terms of gender level of aspiration of learners belonging to ODL system and conventional system are at par with each other. Overall analysis shows that though the differences in mean score of the level of aspirations of male and female learners are not statistically significant but the mean score of female learners are comparatively higher than that of their male counterparts in each system of education.

Table 03: Area Wise Comparison of the Level of Aspiration of Learners of ODL System with that of Conventional System

#	Systems of Higher Education	Sample Size (N)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-Value
1.	RURAL ODL System	50	116.6	22.8	
	RURAL Conventional System	50	123.7	25.9	1.44
2.	URBAN ODL System	50	125.5	23.9	
	URBAN Conventional System	50	131.2	35.1	0.95
3.	RURAL FEMALEODL System	30	101.7	19.7	
	RURAL FEMALE Conventional System	30	117.6	25.6	2.74**
4.	URBAN FEMALE ODL System	30	116.4	29.9	
	URBAN FEMALE Conventional System	30	120.6	37	0.49
5.	RURAL MALE ODL System	20	131.5	25.8	
	RURAL MALE Conventional System	20	129.8	26.1	0.21
6.	URBAN MALE ODL System	20	134.6	18.0	
	URBAN MALE Conventional System	20	142.8	33.1	0.97
7.	RURAL FEMALE ODL System	30	101.7	19.7	
	URBAN FEMALE ODL System	30	116.4	29.9	2.26*
8.	RURAL FEMALE Conventional System	30	117.6	25.6	
	URBAN MALE Conventional System	30	120.6	37	0.37
9.	RURAL MALE ODL System	20	131.5	25.8	
	URBAN MALE ODL System	20	134.6	18.0	0.44
10.	RURAL MALE Conventional System	20	129.8	26.1	
	URBAN MALE Conventional System	20	142.8	33.1	1.38

*P<0.05 and **P<0.01

Mean score, standard deviation, t-value (i.e., in level of aspiration) of learners for various group combinations generated by gender (male and female learners), area (rural and urban) of ODL system and Conventional system are given in table-3. The mean score of the level of aspiration of rural female in conventional system were found to be 142.8 which are the highest mean score in comparison of other groups. On the other hand, rural female learners from ODL system are found to be at lower level (M= 101.7). Statistical analysis reveals that there is no significant difference in rural learner's level of aspirations of ODL system and Conventional system. Similar was the situation with respect to urban learner's level of aspirations in two different system of education. This indicates that learners of learners of rural areas belonging to ODL and Conventional system occupied similar position in level of aspiration. Similar is the situation with respect to learners of urban areas belonging to the two different system of education such as ODL system and Conventional system.

The difference in level of aspiration of female learners of urban areas belonging to ODL system and Conventional system are not statistically significant (t= 0.49, P<0.05). Similar is the situation between the learners of rural male belonging to ODL system and Conventional system (t= 0.21, P<0.05) and urban male learners of two systems of education (t= 0.97, P<0.05). On the basis of the comparison of the mean scores it can be concluded that urban female, urban male and rural male belonging to Conventional system found to possess higher level of mean score in level of aspiration than their counterparts belonging to ODL system, though the difference are not statistically significant. In Conventional system mean score of the level of aspiration of urban female (M= 120.6) was found to be higher than rural female (M= 116.4). Similar is the situation in terms of rural male (M= 129.8) and urban male (M=134.6). In each case the difference in mean score of aspiration was not found to be significant. This holds good among learners of urban male and rural male belonging to ODL system. This reflects that there is no difference in level of aspiration of learners in terms of gender in each system of education.

Findings and Implications

The major findings of the present study establish the perception of learners belonging to two different system of education (ODL system and conventional system) in our country. ODL system is one of the potential alternatives to meet to the expectations achieving the target of GER with quality higher education in the present context of our country. It's high time to design, develop, and implement the programmes through ODL system to sustain and further improve the level of aspiration of learners. With this the learners of ODL system can compete with the learners of conventional system in all dimensions in the open market one hand and a positive perception can be developed towards ODL system at all level by all stakeholders in true sense on the other hand. The findings of the present study would be of immense help to strengthen the real implementation of ODL programmes in general and improving the instructional delivery mechanism of the system to meet the level of expectations of the distance learners in particular.

- The overall mean score of aspiration of learners of conventional system is higher than that of their ODL counterparts and the difference is statistically significant. Learners of conventional system appeared to be ahead in the level of aspirations than their ODL counterparts. It reflects the efficacy of the systemic approach of conventional system over and above the ODL system. This necessitates improvement in various aspects and dimensions in the implementation of programmes in ODL system, as the sample of the study in both systems are at par in terms of socio-economic status and age level is concerned.

- There exists a difference in mean score of aspiration of female learners of ODL system and conventional system, however, this difference is not significant. This shows that female learners are inclined towards ODL system for quality education and contribute significantly in the national development. To add strength to it the present study shows that measures of the level of aspiration of female learners as a whole is significantly higher than that of their male counterparts. Intra group comparison reflects that there is no significant difference in level of aspiration of female learners belonging to ODL system and Conventional system.

- In ODL system the mean score of aspiration of female learners was found to be slightly higher than that of their male counterparts, though this difference is not significant difference. The situation is also equally the same in conventional system. However, in both cases (comparison of learners within ODL system among male and female and within Conventional system among male and their female counterparts) the difference in level of aspiration is tilted towards female learners. This is a positive indication in the light of education of women in higher education. With change in time, technology share of women education is improving in the digital era in terms of their willingness,

motivation to peruse higher education in our country. This shows that in terms of gender level of aspiration of learners belonging to ODL system and conventional system are at par with each other.

- In rural areas no significant difference in level of aspirations was found among learners of ODL system and conventional system. However, mean sore of the level of aspiration of rural female learners in conventional system was found to be highest in comparison of other groups. On the other hand, in rural female learners from ODL system were found to be at lower level. Similar was the situation with respect to urban areas also. This shows that learners of rural areas belonging to ODL and conventional system occupied similar position in terms of their level of aspiration. Similar is the trend with respect to learners of urban areas also. Difference in two different systems of education (ODL and conventional) hardly matters among learners in each area. We can say that people want quality education for their sustainable livelihood from the institutions of higher education. On the other hand, ODL system seems to have progressive and significant impact on the learners in terms of quality, cost effectiveness and its accessibility for the poorest of the poor in the society and many other target groups for whom conventional system is a distance dream.

- In urban areas the difference in level of aspiration of female learners of belonging to ODL system and conventional system are not statistically significant. Similar is the situation between the learners of urban male as well. However, overall findings shows that learners of urban female, urban male and rural male belonging to conventional system found to possess higher level of mean score in level of aspiration than their counterparts belonging to ODL system.

- In conventional system mean score of the level of aspiration of urban female was found to be higher than rural female (M= 116.4). Similar is the situation in terms of rural male and urban. In each case the difference in mean score of aspiration was not found to be significant. Similar is the situation in ODL system as well. With this one can conclude that that there is no difference in level of aspiration of learners in terms of gender in each system of education. This reflects the efficacy of ODL system in one hand and a sprite of competition among the two systems in providing quality need-based education to people in the society.

Conclusion

Aspirations of people for quality higher education are growing day by day in terms skill development and competency enhancement in our country. Skill components constitute an important dimension of undergraduate programme in all system (ODL and conventional) of education. Need based education for competency enhancement of people is considered to be the prime focus policy makers, educationists and implementers at all levels. There is a competition among all education institutions for providing quality education to all. In ODL system the competition is providing quality education to all segments of the society in one hand and contributing to the national target of increasing GER on the other hand. There are multiple options with ODL system to design, develop and implement programmes as per the needs and expectations of the society and level of aspirations of young adults associated with ODL system. The most significant demographic differences were between males and females' learners. Findings of the present study show that female's learners exhibit higher levels of aspiration towards quality higher education over and above their male counterparts in both systems of education. In view of the strength and weaknesses of the system it's high time in today's world to make the system of education flexible with integration of technology. Distance learners are not just at a distance, they are all digital learners they expect the gap to be bridged through quality digital learning interventions. With these issues of access, equity and

opportunity to quality higher education for all Indians will be at their reach. The two systems of education (conventional system and ODL system) should complement and supplement to each other for the achieving national target of enhancing the GER in higher education and also proved to be a weapon for providing constitutional right to all segments of the society in the country.

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