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EDUCATION BEYOND BARRIER: A Case Study on the aged learners of KKHSOU, Assam

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Assam being one of the states in the Northeast region of India, occupies a distinct place in the field of education. From the last decade distance education system of Assam has become popular among the people of the state, especially for those who are working or are engaged in the household works and the elderly persons who are eager to enroll themselves for a course. Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) primarily focuses on women education and adult learners who could not complete higher education and who hailed from far flung remote areas and living in other disadvantageous conditions. KKHSOU with an approach of flexible learning options offers different courses to adult learners with educational tools including learner friendly Self Learning Materials (SLM), mobile apps, various online support system, counseling sessions, continuous assessment, workshops and seminars. Against this background, this paper examines the determinants of adult learner's enrolment into KKHSOU in Assam. The objectives of the study are to determine whether demographic factors like occupation, income and gender influences adult learners to enrol into KKHSOU; whether geographical factors influence adult learners to enrol into KKHSOU; to examine the "push" and "pull" factors to influence adult learners to enrol into KKHSOU. The sample of the study considers adult learners (above 50 years) from both Bachelor and Master degree programme of KKHSOU from its inception. The sample has been selected through judgmental sampling technique. An 18-item questionnaire named "Determinants of Adult Learners Questionnaire" (Balami Y.G and Sakir A, 2014) and questionnaire instrument based on pushes and pulls has been (Wallace L,1996) administered to examine the reasons for a adult learner to enrol itself in the courses of KKHSOU. Descriptive and analytical statistics has been used to analyse the data using SPSS 20.

Keywords: Adult Learner, ODL, Push and Pull factors

INTRODUCTION

India being the fastest developing country in every field, the development and changes has also revolutionized the method of education in India. With the new innovative technology education has become more flexible and accessible to the people all around.

Over the last few decades the revolution in communications and technology has opened out vast possibilities for widening, strengthening and deepening the educational system. Open and distance education in today's changing world which is more moving towards technology and ICT is growing fast because of the development of Internet-based information technologies.

Now-a-days open and distance learning (ODL) is one of the most rapidly growing fields of education now a days and it has substantial impact on all education delivery systems. The new ODL system growing fast because of the development of Internet-based information technologies, and in particular the World Wide Web.

Assam being one of the states in the Northeast region of India, occupies a distinct place in the field of education. From the last decade distance education system of Assam has become popular among the people of the state, especially for those who are working or are engaged in the household works and the elderly persons who are eager to enrol themselves for a course.

With this background, the present paper focuses on the advantages offered by the distance and open learning institutes like Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU)with special reference to adult learners.

About Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU)

The first state open university of Assam, a northeastern date of India, is one of its kind in the entire North East India. In the expedition for spreading the light of education far and wide in the North-eastern region of the country, focusing mainly in Assam, KKHSOU functions with a motto of "Education Beyond Barrier". KKHSOU specially strives to cater to the needs of the learners from far flung areas cutting across barriers of age, sex and backwardness

so that they can have access to quality education. The university mainly aims at providing quality education and knowledge in various skills to the following groups of people:

1. Women learners, especially housewives, who wants to empower with higher education
2. Adult learners
3. Differently abled learners
4. People hailing from far flung remote areas and living in the disadvantageous conditions
5. Persons who couldn't get access to higher education in conventional system various reasons.
6. Working people who wish to improve their professional skills

KKHSOU which is a premier institution in the field of Distance Education in the State of Assam, continues its journey towards expanding its horizon through Self Learning Materials along with audio-video materials. KKHSOU primarily depends on ICT to facilitate an efficient LLS (Learning Support Services) like university website, community radio services, phone-in-programme, inter study centre phone service, e-bidya (the e learning portal), KKHSOU mobile app.

The present study primarily focuses on the adult learners (above 50 years) from bachelor degree and master degree programme and to examine the factors that motivates them to enrol themselves at KKHSOU. It will be worth mentioning here that a learner from KKHSOU aged 88 years old and 9 months is still enrolled for a course and many adult learners aged in their 70s both male and female has enrolled themselves for different courses.

Adult learners in Distance Learning

In the above paragraphs we have highlight some of the aspects of Open and distance learning and how it is becoming widespread because of so many reasons. Being able to study when we are ready and not following any timetable, age no bar, fewer distractions, diverse environment, lower expenses and many other advantages have made open and distance learning more prevalent among the adult learners.

The advantages that open and distance learning offers is in terms of when and where the adult learns will study at their pace.

For many adult learners who are fully employed or who could not complete their education, distance education has provided them the accessibility of education with more flexibility. These learners are the adult learners who now cannot peruse courses in conventional education system. Hence, in many open and distance learning institutions the enrolment of adult learners is growing day by day.

Theoretical Framework

The objective of the present study is to identify the attributes that motivates the adult learners to enrol into various programmes of KKHSOU. To carry out the study “Determinants of Adult Learners Questionnaire” (Balami Y.G and Sakir A, 2014) and (Wallace L,1996) administered to examine the reasons for an adult learner to enrol itself in the courses of KKHSOU.

The theoretical framework includes the “Pushes” factors (attributes related to barriers) and “Pulls” factors (attributes related to attractions of adult learners) that has been developed as a foundation for the development of the present study research instrument. A structured survey questionnaire was developed to elicit the reasons why adult learners are choosing to enrol in KKHSOU. The different attributes are represented in the following table, where the “Pushes” and “Pulls” statements are represented.

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“Pushes” factors (attributes related to barriers that influences adult learners to enrol at KKHSOU)
I enrol into degree studies to upgrade a job
I enrol into degree studies to increase my monthly salary
I would not have enroled into degree courses if my salary would not increase on completion
I enrol into degree studies to secure a job
Open and distance education courses gave me more opportunity to learn at my own pace
I enrol into degree studies because it is easier for me to meet work commitments while continuing my education
I enrol into degree studies due to physical disabilities (e.g. vision, hearing, mobility.)
I enrol into degree studies because it is less stressful
“Pulls” factors (attributes related to attractions of adult learners to enrol at KKHSOU)
I wanted to have the freedom to choose when and where I did my learning
I prefer to study and learn on my own
I enrol into degree studies for just the pride of becoming a graduate
I enrol into degree studies to broaden my knowledge
I enrol into degree studies for better understanding of the happening around the world
I enrol into degree studies just interest in learning
I enrol into degree studies to have confidence to discuss with others at workplace /another place
I enrol into degree studies to upgrade myself with my family members education

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the changes in economic, political, social, and demographic conditions in society, the popularity of education among adult learner has enhanced. As per the MHRD reports, Census 2011 revealed that Literacy in stands at 72.98%. Overall Literacy rate has grown by 8.14 percent points in the last decade (64.84% in 2001 & 72.98% in 2011). Adult literacy rate has also grown up at both primary and higher education level. Adult education aims at extending educational options to those adults, who have lost the opportunity and have crossed the age of formal education, but now feel a need for learning of any type, including literacy, basic education, skill development (Vocational Education) and equivalency. (mhrd.govt.in). Open and distance learning provides an opportunity to these adult learners to enhance their educational qualification. Many studies have been conducted in this regard in different countries. Some of the remarkable studies were mentioned in this section.

Oksana Pozdnyakova and Anatoly Pozdnyakov (2017) conducted a study on adult learners in Latvia. From the study, it can be stated that despite the promises and the obvious advantages of distance learning for adult people involved in family and career affairs, there are still problems requiring certain solution. Each of problems has an influence on the overall quality of distance education as a product. The results of the research conducted by the authors shows that anxiety may be caused by different reasons, among which it can be mentioned the loss of learning skills, the lack of experience in distance education, the financial cost of education, the lack of support by the family or by the employer, a sense hopelessness and irrelevance of their education, etc.

Joyce Neroni et. al (2018) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between goal orientation and academic performance in adult distance learners. A sample of 1128 distance university students (age 18-75 years) filled out an online questionnaire. Their exam grades were collected from the files of the Open University of the Netherlands (OUNL). In their quantitative analytical study, they found that, performance approach goal orientation is a positive predictor of academic performance, whereas performance avoidance and work avoidance were negative predictors of academic performance. Non-significant results were found for mastery approach as well as for mastery avoidance.

Yusufu Gana Balami, Aishatu Sakir (2014), in their study surveyed determinants of adult learners' enrolment into open and distance learning institutions in the north east of Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to determine if; increase in income is a factor influencing adult learners to enrol into open and distance learning programme; updating of knowledge and skills is a factor influencing adult learners to enrol into open and distance learning programme; psychological interest is a factor influencing adult learners to enrol into open and distance learning programme. The sample sizes considered were 987 learners out of 13, 406 adult learners. A 25 – item questionnaire named “Determinants of Adult Learners Questionnaire” (DALQ) was administered to the sample respondents. The findings showed that, increase in income has significantly influenced adult learners to enrol into open and distance learning programme, updating of knowledge and skills has not significantly influenced adult learners to enrol into open and distance learning programme, and psychological interest has not significantly influenced adult learners to enrol into open and distance learning programme.

Based on the above literature review, we have stated the following objectives and hypothesis:

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The overall purpose of this study is to examine the determinants of adult learner's enrolment into different programmes at KKHSOU. The objectives of the study are to:

- determine whether demographic factors like occupation and income influences adult learners to enrol into KKHSOU;
- examine whether the geographical (urban and rural) factors influence adult learners to enrol into KKHSOU;
- examine the “push” and “pull” factors to influence adult learners to enrol into KKHSOU.

HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

After going through a number of studies carried out by researchers on different facets of studies related to adult learners in distance education, the following hypotheses has been formulated:

H₀₁: increase in income will not significantly influence adult learners to enrol into KKHSOU

H₀₂: occupation will not significantly influence adult learners to enrol into KKHSOU

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design:

The present study is a descriptive research study and has adopted survey method for data collection. The sampling frame includes the adult learners of KKHSOU from both rural and urban places of Assam. The sample of the study consists of adult learners (above 50 years) from both Bachelor and Master degree programme of KKHSOU from its inception. The sample size has been restricted to 100 adult learners. The sample has been selected through judgmental sampling technique. Descriptive and analytical statistics has been used to analyse the data using SPSS 20.

Questionnaire Development:

For analyzing the factors contributing to enrolment of the adult learners of KKHSOU 18-item attributes have been identified with the help of “Determinants of Adult Learners Questionnaire” (Balami Y.G and Sakir A, 2014) and (Wallace L,1996).

Table 1: Attributes related to enrolment of adult learners’ questionnaire

Sl No	Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I enroll into degree studies to upgrade a job					
2	I enroll into degree studies to increase my monthly salary					
3	I would not have enrolled into degree courses if my salary would not increase on completion					
4	I enroll into degree studies to secure a Job					
5	I enroll into degree studies to broaden my knowledge					
7	I enroll into degree studies for better understanding of the happening around the world					
8	I enroll into degree studies for just interest in learning					
9	I enroll into degree studies for just the pride of becoming a graduate					
10	I enroll into degree studies to have confidence to discuss with others at my work place					
11	I enroll into degree studies for psychological satisfaction					
12	I enroll into degree studies to relieve stress and boredom at workplace					
13	I enroll into degree studies to upgrade myself with my family members education					
14	Taking an independent study course made it easier for me to meet work commitments while continuing my education					
15	I prefer to study and learn on my own					
16	I wanted to have the freedom to choose when and where I did my learning					
17	Open and distance education courses gave me more opportunity to learn at my own pace					
18	I enroll into distance education due to physical disabilities (e.g vision, hearing, mobility ...)					

These attributes are measured in a 5-point Likert Scale where “1” stands for “Strongly Agree”, “2” stands for “Strongly Agree”, “3” as the neutral point stands for “Neither Agree nor Disagree”, “4” stands for “Strongly Agree” and “5” stands for “Strongly Disagree”.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

After conducting the survey, it was observed that 100% responses were obtained. The following tables shows the results of mean values, chi square tests conducted on the sample.

When we examine the “Pushes” and “Pulls” factors for adult learners enrolled in KKHSOU, we have found the following mean score which are shown in the following tables:

Table 1: Mean score of “Pushes” factors			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I enrol into degree studies to upgrade a job	100	1.68	.851
I enrol into degree studies to increase my monthly salary	100	2.03	1.039
I would not have enroled into degree courses if my salary would not increase on completion	100	1.91	.996
I enrol into degree studies to secure a job	100	1.85	1.048
Open and distance education courses gave me more opportunity to learn at my own pace	100	2.18	.672
I enrol into degree studies because it is easier for me to meet work commitments while continuing my education	100	2.10	1.000
I enrol into degree studies due to physical disabilities (e.g. vision, hearing, mobility.)	100	2.63	.991
I enrol into degree studies because it is less stressful	100	2.30	1.000

Table 2: Mean score of “Pulls” factors			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I wanted to have the freedom to choose when and where I did my learning	100	2.13	.630
I prefer to study and learn on my own	100	2.03	.731
I enrol into degree studies for just the pride of becoming a graduate	100	2.21	.891
I enrol into degree studies to broaden my knowledge	100	1.87	.971
I enrol into degree studies for better understanding of the happening around the world	100	1.84	.707
I enrol into degree studies just interest in learning	100	2.21	.957
I enrol into degree studies to have confidence to discuss with others at workplace /another place	100	2.20	.876
I enrol into degree studies to upgrade myself with my family members education	100	2.28	.922
I enrol into degree studies due to physical disabilities (e.g. vision, hearing, mobility.)	100	2.63	.991
I enrol into degree studies for psychological satisfaction	100	2.51	1.105

From the above Table 1 and Table 2, it has been observed that the items (relating to “Pushes”) with high mean score, which has an influence on adult learners enrolment at KKHSOU are “Open and distance education courses gave me more opportunity to learn at my own pace”, “I enrol into degree studies because it is easier for me to meet work

commitments while continuing my education”, “I enrol into degree studies due to physical disabilities (e.g. vision, hearing, mobility.)” and “I enrol into degree studies because it is less stressful”.

In Table 2, it has been observed that the items like “I enrol into degree studies for just the pride of becoming a graduate”, “I enrol into degree studies to upgrade myself with my family members education”, “I enrol into degree studies due to physical disabilities (e.g. vision, hearing, mobility.)” and “I enrol into degree studies for psychological satisfaction” is found to have an influence on the enrolment of adult learners at KKHSOU.

The following Table 3 represents the analysis of Chi Square to test hypothesis H_{01}

Table 3: Overall impact of Income on enrolment of adult Learners: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23.021 ^a	8	.003
Likelihood Ratio	20.723	8	.008
N of Valid Cases	100		

The chi square test is found to be significant, which indicates that we will reject the null hypothesis (H_{01}) and will accept the alternate hypothesis. So, it can be inferred that, increase in income will significantly influence adult learners to enrol into KKHSOU.

The following table shows the different statements which reflect relationship between income and enrolment of learners at KKHSOU. For the present study four statements were considered to measure income, which are presented in the following table:

Table 4: Income and enrolment of learners at KKHSOU

Statements	Options						
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
I enrol into degree studies to upgrade a job	Below 10000	20(56%)	12(33%)	3(8%)	1(3%)	0	36
	10,001-50,000	25(58%)	14(33%)	4(9%)	0	0	43
	above 50,000	7(32%)	6(29%)	6(29%)	1(5%)	1(5%)	21
I enrol into degree studies to increase my monthly salary	Below 10000	14(39%)	14(39%)	6(16%)	2(6%)	0	36
	10,001-50,000	16(37%)	14(33%)	8(19%)	5(11%)	0	43
	above 50,000	8(38%)	5(24%)	5(24%)	1(5%)	2(9%)	21
I would not have enroled into degree courses if my salary would not increase on completion	Below 10000	13(36%)	17(47%)	4(11%)	1(3%)	1(3%)	36
	10,001-50,000	25(58%)	11(26%)	5(12%)	1(2%)	1(2%)	43
	above 50,000	5(24%)	4(19%)	9(43%)	3(14%)	0	21
I enrol into degree studies to secure a job	Below 10000	16(44%)	13(36%)	5(14%)	2(6%)	0	36
	10,001-50,000	22(51%)	11(26%)	6(14%)	3(7%)	1(2%)	43
	above 50,000	11(52%)	4(19%)	4(19%)	0	2(10%)	21

Table 4 shows the relationship between upgradation of job and adult enrolment at different income levels. Majority of the learners irrespective of income levels agreed that there is a positive relationship between learner's enrolment and upgradation of job. Similarly, majority of the learners irrespective of income levels agreed that there is a positive relationship between learner's enrolment and increase in monthly salary. Again, from the table we can infer that increase in salary is a motivating factor for learner's enrolment.

From the above table, it has been observed that most of the respondents were strongly agree with the statement of "I enrol into degree studies to secure a job".

Table 5: Overall influence of occupation on enrolment of adult learners at KKHSOU

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.412 ^a	8	.134
Likelihood Ratio	11.721	8	.164
N of Valid Cases	100		

The above table 5 shows the overall influence of occupation on enrolment of adult learners at KKHSOU. The chi square test found to be insignificant, which implies that we will accept the null hypothesis (H_{02}) and will reject the alternate hypothesis. It can be inferred that, occupation will not influence adult learners to enrol into KKHSOU.

When we compare the population geographically, we have found that the enrolments of adult learners are not influenced by geographical differences, which are reflected in the following tables.

Table 6: Geographical Differences and factors influencing enrolment of adult learners

Statements	Options					
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I enrol into degree studies to upgrade a job	Rural	31	8	8	2	1
	Urban	21	24	5	0	0
I enrol into degree studies to increase my monthly salary	Rural	18	17	10	4	1
	Urban	20	16	9	4	1
I would not have enroled into degree courses if my salary would not increase on completion	Rural	23	11	11	4	1
	Urban	20	21	7	1	1
I enrol into degree studies to secure a job	Rural	26	11	9	2	2
	Urban	23	17	6	3	1
Open and distance education courses gave me more opportunity to learn at my own pace	Rural	7	31	12	0	0
	Urban	4	33	9	4	0
I wanted to have the freedom to choose when and where I did my learning	Rural	10	32	8	0	10
	Urban	1	36	10	3	1
I prefer to study and learn on my own	Rural	16	32	2	0	16
	Urban	3	33	8	6	3
I enrol into degree studies to relieve stress and boredom at workplace	Rural	19	28	3	0	19
	Urban	0	24	6	20	0
I enrol into degree studies for just the pride of becoming a graduate	Rural	15	27	8	0	0
	Urban	5	23	11	11	0
I enrol into degree studies to broaden my knowledge	Rural	21	20	8	1	0
	Urban	23	14	6	6	1
I enrol into degree studies for better understanding of the happening around the	Rural	20	24	6	0	0
	Urban	13	27	9	1	0

world						
I enrol into degree studies just interest in learning	Rural	14	20	9	7	14
	Urban	11	21	13	5	11
I enrol into degree studies to have confidence to discuss with others at workplace/other place	Rural	14	20	9	7	0
	Urban	11	21	13	5	0
I enrol into degree studies because it is easier for me to meet work commitments while continuing my education	Rural	7	21	12	7	3
	Urban	22	24	4	0	0
I enrol into degree studies to upgrade myself with my family members education	Rural	14	19	14	3	0
	Urban	8	19	16	7	0
I enrol into degree studies due to physical disabilities (e.g vision, hearing, mobility.)	Rural	6	22	6	16	6
	Urban	3	25	10	12	3
I enrol into degree studies for psychological satisfaction	Rural	14	18	10	8	0
	Urban	6	17	11	14	2

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

When we considered the demographic factors, the study found that increase in income has significantly influenced adult learners to enrol into KKHSOU. This finding is supported by Yusufu Gana Balami, Aishatu Sakir (2014). The study couldn't find any relationship between occupation and adult learner's enrolment. Our next objective was to evaluate whether geographic factors has any impact on adult learners' enrolment. In this regard we have considered both rural and urban learners of KKHSOU. The study found that irrespective of the geographical differences, learner's preference for enrolments were same. We have found some push factors like "I enrol into degree studies to increase my monthly salary", "Open and distance education courses gave me more opportunity to learn at my own pace", "I enrol into degree studies because it is easier for me to meet work commitments while continuing my education", "I enrol into degree studies due to physical disabilities (e.g. vision, hearing, mobility.)", "I enrol into degree studies because it is less stressful" where the mean score is high. Similarly the pull factors where mean scores were high are: I wanted to have the freedom to choose when and where I did my learning, I prefer to study and learn on my own, I enrol into degree studies for just the pride of becoming a graduate, I enrol into degree studies just interest in learning, I enrol into degree studies to have confidence to discuss with others at workplace /another place, I enrol into degree studies to upgrade myself with my family members education, I enrol into degree studies due to physical disabilities (e.g. vision, hearing, mobility.), I enrol into degree studies for psychological satisfaction

Conclusion

The modern education development strategy envisages an increase in the proportion of adult learners. The growth of the adult learner population makes distance learning an increasingly popular choice of teaching methods. Many adult learners went to KKHSOU after a long period of time, having lost the necessary learning skills. The adult students have personal and professional experience and their social status might be high enough; in the process of involvement in the educational environment, on the one hand they hope to make a good impression, but at the same time they fear of failure and mockery. There are some motivating pull factors and some push factors which influences the adult learners to take enrolment into KKHSOU.

Based on the findings of this study with limited number of learners, it is concluded that increase in income is a significant determinant of adult learners' enrolment into open and distance learning programmes which supports the findings of Yusufu Gana Balami, Aishatu Sakir (2014). The study couldn't find any relationship between occupation and adult learner's enrolment.

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