# ATTITUDE OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF THE TINSUKIA DISTRICT TOWARDS OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

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**ABSTRACT**
The present research work intends to study the opinions of undergraduate students in the Tinsukia district of Assam towards open and distance learning. Participants included 100 undergraduate learners selected by a simple random sampling technique. Information from the participants was collected by using the Scale for Attitude Towards Open and Distance Education, developed by Dr Vishal Sood (2012). Statistical techniques like measures of central tendency, standard deviation, and t-tests were used for data analysis. The results demonstrated that male undergraduate learners possessed a higher attitude than female undergraduate learners, and learners residing in rural areas possessed a better attitude in comparison with undergraduate learners residing in urban areas towards open and distance learning. But statistically, no mean differences were found to be significant. At the end, the implications of the findings were stated, followed by the conclusion and references.
**Key Words:** attitude, open and distance learning, undergraduate students, gender, location, etc.

## Introduction

Open and Distance Learning (ODL), comparatively a new phrase used in the field of education, plays a significant role. There are several terms used for non-traditionally delivered courses, including distinction education, open learning, online learning, and distance education. This system has become a crucial component of education worldwide. The growing need for education, the desire for knowledge, and the conventional education system's restricted capacity to fulfill that demand were the primary reasons for the rise of the ODL system.

Open learning is an educational philosophy that seeks to broaden access and provide learners with greater freedom and choice, whereas distance education is a mode of instruction in which teachers and learners are separated by geographical distance and often by time. ODL is a self-directed, flexible, education system physically separated from teachers and students, and equitable. Open and Distance Learning in India has its origins in the 1960s. The first single-mode Open University was founded in Andhra Pradesh in 1982, which was soon followed by the establishment of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). Subsequently, during the 1980s and 1990s, additional universities were set up in states such as Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh. The creation of these single-mode distance education institutions was driven by the government's goal to democratize education and promote lifelong learning.

This study intends assessing the disposition of individuals pursuing an undergraduate education of the Tinsukia district of Assam towards ODL. This study intends to address the existing gap in the literature concerning the attitudes of undergraduate students towards open and distance learning in the Tinsukia district of Assam, aiming to furnish useful and practical information for those involved in open and distance education provision.

## Review of Literature

Saroha (2014) conducted a study examining attitudes towards distance learning, utilizing a sample of 30 students from two universities in Delhi. Among these, 15 students, referred to as group A, were enrolled in a postgraduate program, while the other 15, known as group B, were pursuing various undergraduate courses. The study aimed to evaluate their attitudes towards distance learning through an open-ended questionnaire specifically designed to capture diverse perspectives. Additionally, the research included an analysis of gender differences within the selected sample. The findings revealed that female students exhibited a more favorable attitude towards distance learning compared to their male counterparts. The positive outlook among female respondents was largely attributed to the convenience they experienced in achieving their educational goals through distance learning. In contrast, male respondents pointed to the limited interaction with peers and the lack of direct engagement with instructors as key reasons for their negative attitudes.

Bhartiya & Borah (2017) studied the attitude of college students of Assam towards open and distance learning with the intention to find out the attitude of male and female college students of urban and rural areas of Assam towards open and distance learning. A descriptive survey method was conducted on a sample of 80 college students from the Tinsukia district, drawn from both urban and rural areas. The study found that female college

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students in rural regions have a more optimistic attitude towards Open and Distance Learning (ODL) compared to their male peers in rural areas, whereas the situation is reversed in urban settings.

Madubhashini & Weligamage (2021) conducted a study on perception and attitude towards open and distance learning education in Sri Lanka with reference to the Open University of Sri Lanka. The primary goals of the study were to evaluate students' perceptions and attitudes regarding their decision to engage with the ODL education system, to pinpoint the key questions that arise within this system, to devise solutions within a constrained time frame, and to enhance the effectiveness of digital technology utilization in the ODL framework. The sample represented 2.10% of the total student population enrolled in the undergraduate degree programs at the Open University of Sri Lanka over the past two years, focusing on the regional centers of Kandy and Colombo. A structured questionnaire, crafted by the researchers, was employed to collect the necessary data. Final-year students from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Natural Sciences, the Faculty of Management, and the Faculty of Education were randomly selected to participate. The questionnaire consisted of 17 items, utilizing a Likert-type scale and short-answer format, aimed at assessing distance learning students' attitudes and perceptions towards ODL. The instrument was administered both face-to-face and via Google forums during tutorial sessions and online. The findings revealed that most students held a positive ideology regarding the ODL concept. Nevertheless, a subset of students, particularly those aged between 18 and 35 and those aged 36 and above, exhibited a lesser understanding of the ODL concept.

Mandal (2022) conducted a research work for measuring the perspective of undergraduate students' perspectives on distance education in the Murshidabad district. A self-made five-point summated rating scale was used as a tool for assessing the perception regarding ODL among undergraduate learners. Through descriptive survey method, the numerical data were collected and analyzed with the help of statistical techniques. This study reported undergraduate learners in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal exhibit a favorable attitude towards ODE.

Suna, G. & et al. (2024) studied the perception of students towards the personal contact programme of distance education. It intended to examine personal contact programmes of IGNOU and OSOU students of Odisha in terms of challenges about the existing quality and quality education. The research employed the descriptive survey method. Researchers selected 76 samples from both (38 each from the IGNOU and 38 from the OSOU) by using a simple random sampling technique. A self-made questionnaire was used by the investigator for collecting data from the students who pursue distance education from the Gangadhar Meher study center. Data analysis was conducted through the application of simple percentages and t-tests. Result of the study found that the personal contact programme provided speedy and easy access to study-related information. The study material received was of better quality than the lecture notes received in the regular course. Additionally, it was determined that a notable distinction exists between students of IGNOU and OSOU concerning their personal contact programmes.

The survey of existing literature, so far attempted, reveals a significant research gap in the field, even though the previous contributions of scholars and researchers to the field cannot be ignored. There are some studies on the attitude towards distance education among undergraduate students in India and some of them in many states of India, but very few of them in Assam. With this context, the researchers have chosen their field of study as perception of undergraduate learners regarding ODE in the Tinsukia district.

**Significance of the Study**

The changing social circumstances and rising demands have led towards expansion of ODL throughout the globe. Conducting a study on perception of undergraduate learners in respect of ODL in Tinsukia district is essential since it helps educational institutions understand their attitudes and preferences regarding open and distance learning. This insight gained from studying these attitudes may help teachers, policymakers, curriculum designers, and educational administrators plan and promote open and distance learning programmes for the learners. By identifying barriers and challenges, institutions can provide support and resources to enhance students' competence. Ultimately, understanding undergraduate students' attitudes towards open and distance learning allows for better preparation of their future affordable learning and ensures their ability to meet the demands of modern widespread education. This study concentrates study of undergraduate students perspectives of Tinsukia district towards open and distance learning. Furthermore, the study analyzes the attitudes of both male and female undergraduate students, making a comparison of their views on open and distance learning.

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**Objectives of the Study**

4.1 To investigate gender-based differences in the attitudes of undergraduate learners of Tinsukia district, Assam, towards open and distance learning.

4.2 To examine the differences in attitudes towards open and distance learning between urban and rural undergraduate learners of Tinsukia district, Assam.

**Hypotheses**

5.1 There is no significant difference between the attitudes of undergraduate learners of Tinsukia district towards ODL in respect to their gender.

5.2 There is no significant difference between the attitudes of urban and rural undergraduate learners of the Tinsukia district of Assam towards ODL.

**Methodology**

To achieve the goals, this study was conducted using a descriptive survey research method that outlines the current status of participants regarding attitudes, effects, and trends. All the sixth-semester degree students studying in different colleges of the Tinsukia district of Assam in the faculties of arts, science, and commerce comprised the universe of the study. Considering time, effort, and cost factors, the investigators randomly picked 100 undergraduate learners studying in various udergraduate institutes of Tinsukia District, Assam as the sample of the investigation. Proportion of students and students with respect to their gender and habitation was maintained equally as per the requirement. Therefore, out of these 100 participants, 25 were males and females from rural areas, and 25 males and females from urban areas.

Information's have been gathered from the undergraduate learners using a research tool known as the 'Scale for Attitude towards Open and Distance Education,' developed by Dr. Vishal Sood (2012), Assistant Professor in Education, ICDEOL Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla. The method of summated rating, as given by Likert (1932), has been employed for the development of the attitude scale. Each item of the scale was rated on five successive points, i.e., strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. An individual's score on this attitude scale was the total of his/her ratings on all statements or items.

The investigators personally administered the attitude scale among the sampled undergraduate students with their consent and clarified all the doubts and queries. The students were allowed to answer the questions at their own pace but without any discussion with the others.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

After the collection, the data were tabulated for analysis and interpretation. The researchers used descriptive statistics like the mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and skewness and inferential statistics like the t-test in this study with the help of Microsoft Office Excel 2010. The analysis and interpretation of data, along with findings and discussion, have been presented in the following subheadings:

**Attitude of Male and Female Undergraduate Students of Tinsukia District of Assam towards Open and Distance Learning.**

The first objective of the study was to compare the attitude of male and female undergraduate students of the Tinsukia district of Assam towards open and distance learning. In order to achieve this objective, the t-test was used, which has been presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Showing the Difference between the Attitude of Male and Female Undergraduate Students of Tinsukia District of Assam towards Open and Distance Learning

| Gender | Mean | Median | Mode | SD | df | t-value | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Male** | 124.72 | 127 | 118 | 18.47 | 98 | 1.36 | Not significant at .05 level |
| **Female** | 118.42 | 123 | 129 | 27.12 | | | |

Table 1 shows that the mean, median, and mode of the male students were found to be 124.72, 127, and 118, respectively, whereas those of female students were found to be 118.42, 123, and 129, respectively. The mean values indicate that the male students performed slightly better than the female students. The t-value was found to be 1.36, which is not significant at the .05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis that "There is no significant difference between attitudes of male and female undergraduate students of the Tinsukia district of Assam towards open and distance learning" may be accepted. This clearly indicates that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of male and female undergraduate students of the Tinsukia district of Assam towards open and distance learning.

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**Attitude of Urban and Rural Undergraduate Students of Tinsukia District of Assam towards Open and Distance Learning.**

Another objective of the present study was to compare the attitude of urban and rural undergraduate students of the Tinsukia district of Assam towards open and distance learning. In order to attain this objective, the t-test was used. Table 2 represents the data pertaining to the t-test.

**Table 2**

Showing the Difference between the Attitude of Urban and Rural Undergraduate Students of Tinsukia District of Assam towards Open and Distance Learning

| Location | Mean | Median | Mode | SD | df | t-value | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Urban** | 121.98 | 126 | 118 | 23.32 | 98 | 0.28 | Not significant at.05 level |
| **Rural** | 123.16 | 124.5 | 118 | 18.21 | | | |

Table 2 indicates that the mean, median, and mode of the undergraduate students of the urban area of Tinsukia district were found to be 121.98, 126, and 118, respectively, whereas those of undergraduate students of rural areas were found to be 123.16, 124.5, and 118, respectively. The mean values indicate that the undergraduate students of rural areas of the Tinsukia district performed somewhat better than the students of urban areas. The t-value was found to be 0.28, which is not significant at the .05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis that "There is no significant difference between attitudes of urban and rural undergraduate students of the Tinsukia district of Assam towards open and distance learning" may be accepted. This clearly indicates that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of the undergraduate students of urban and rural areas of the Tinsukia district of Assam towards open and distance learning.

**Results and Discussion**

The present research work was carried out to study the attitude of undergraduate students of the Tinsukia district of Assam towards open and distance education with respect to their gender and place of habitation. The findings of the study demonstrated that the attitude of the undergraduate students towards open and distance education was moderate. It was also discovered that the male undergraduate students had somewhat more positive attitudes as compared to female undergraduate students towards open and distance education. Further, there were no significant differences in the attitude of urban and rural undergraduate students towards open and distance education. But it was revealed that rural undergraduate students possessed a better attitude towards open and distance education as compared to urban undergraduate students. Open and distance education centers should be maintained in each college to provide information to the undergraduate students about the usefulness of different programmes and courses offered by them. It is also recommended that effective information and communication technologies should be used in open and distance education study centers, which will, in turn, improve the quality of students' education offered by them.

**Implications**

The present study will have tremendous theoretical as well as practical consequences. Results of the current research work are intensely in favour of ODL. We are all aware of the fact that ODE performs a significant role within the realm of education. Thus, every educator ought to invest their genuine efforts in fostering this within all courses for the advantage of the candidates who are keenly interested. With the flexible approach offered by ODE, number of people are provided with numerous opportunities, as they possess a strong desire to pursue education via open and distance learning. Although this research is limited due to its small sample size, it remains a valuable effort that will greatly emphasize the significant role that open and distance learning plays in society overall and in the educational field specifically. A broadly positive perspective indicates a greater social acceptance and enhances the prospects of promoting and endorsing this learning method for the collective good of society.

**Conclusion**

ODL represents a worldwide and swiftly expanding trend that provides formal educational opportunities to individuals who might not otherwise have access to schooling or higher education. This educational model is essential for those facing challenges in traditional learning environments, enabling a wider audience to reach their academic objectives. Consequently, ODL should be planned and facilitated by the educational institutions for different courses.

It contributes to enhancing the literacy rate of the nation. Through this system of leaning, a large population has an opportunity to get an education with flexibility in all aspects, from admission to examination. This is the reason why the concept of ODL is commonly acknowledged as a substitute for traditional education to provide a

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second opportunity to offer learning to the people who lost the chance of attaining it in due time. Thus, this system of learning would assist in the process of universalization of educational opportunities for all.

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