

Attitudes of Payame Noor University Students toward Distance Education

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Abstract

This paper examines the distance education students' attitudes at the Payame Noor University of Iran toward distance education. The statistical universe of the study consisted of 7831 students of Payame Noor University, Ardebil center. Using stratified random sampling, 396 students (139 male and 257 female students) were selected based on Kreschi- Morgan table. Research method was an ex-post-facto study. The attitude questionnaire made up of 41 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale with reliability calculated using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha=0.85$) was used to collect data. One-sample t-test was used to analyze the obtained data. Findings ($t_{(395)} = -26.14$) showed that the total mean score of attitudes of students (98.35) toward distance education is significantly lower than the conceptual mean (test value, 123).

Keywords: Attitude, Distance education, Payame Noor University

Introduction

Distance education is any type of education in which learners and instructors are separated by physical distance (Whalstrom, 2003) or time. It has a substantial history that begins in the mid 1800's with correspondence type of print-based courses (Verdiun & Clark, 1991). Besides the print-based materials, distance education benefited from telecommunication technologies of radio and television broadcasting and audio-video recording during the past years (Tekinarsalan, 2008).

An attitude is a hypothetical construct that represents an individual's degree of like or dislike for an item. Attitudes are generally positive or negative views of a person, place, thing, or event—this is often referred to as the attitude object. People can also be conflicted or ambivalent toward an object, meaning that they simultaneously possess both positive and negative attitudes toward the item in question. The ABC model of attitude contain: affect, behavior, and cognition (Eagly, & Chaiken, 1995). The affective response is an emotional response that expresses an individual's degree of preference for a person, place, thing, or event. The behavioral intention is a verbal indication or typical behavioral tendency of an individual toward a person, place, thing, or event. The cognitive response is a cognitive evaluation of the entity that constitutes an individual's

beliefs about a person, place, thing, or event. Most attitudes are the result of either direct experience or observational learning from the environment

Allport (1935) believes that attitude is mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experiences, exerting a direct or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related.

Research data on students' attitude toward distance education can be grouped into these categories: attitude toward technology, teaching method, student-teacher interaction, student-student interaction, attendance or non-attendance at the university. Studies show that the academic achievement of students and their success in university are influenced by the interaction between situational variables such as schedule, teaching methods, affective and physical conditions of the educational environment and also individual variables of learners such as their attitude toward educational issues and field of study (Brunstein, & Maier, 2005). Bassey (2002) found that attitude had an important role in the prediction of students' academic achievement. Findings of Smith and Mcnelis (1993) showed that the students with negative attitude toward distance education had lower academic achievement in comparison with other students. Findings of Farrajollahi, and Moenikia (2010) indicated there is a positive and significant relation between learners' satisfaction of components of student support services. Among the components of student support services, general services has the highest and counseling services has the least relation with academic achievement.

Peng, Tsai and Wu (2006) found that there was a notable correlation between students view on internet in distance education their attitude. For example, students who viewed the Internet as technology or tool tended to feel more negatively and have lower self-efficacy than those who viewed it as toy or tour. The differences in attitudes, perception and self-efficacy between graduate and undergraduate students were not as significant as those between male and female students. Female students tended to perceive the Internet as tool or technology, and so had a more negative attitude and lower self-efficacy than their male counterparts, who perceived the Internet more often as toy or tour.

The results of previous studies, which describe the difference between gender and attitude towards distance learning, conflict with together. For example; Carswell, Thomas, Petre, Price, and Richards, (2000) compared the experiences of a group of undergraduate Internet students to those of conventional distance learning students on the same course. The number of females in the Internet study group was slightly higher than in the conventional study group. According to mentioned article, females were not discouraged from studying the course in the Internet version, although some previous studies (Shashaani, 1994; Durndell et al., 1995; Durndell & Thomson, 1997; cited in Tekinarsalan, 2008) suggested that women were likely to be less ready to have access to computers than their male counterparts.

According to findings of Tekinarsalan (2008), there were statistical differences between the male and female learners' mean scores on the two subscales of attitude toward distance education (i.e. affective, communication) at %95 significance level. These results revealed that, on the affective and communication subscales, male learners indicated significantly more positive attitudes towards the internet-based learning than female learners did. However, male and female learners, mean scores on the perceived characteristics subscale did not differ drastically.

According to the aforementioned issues, the main problem of distance education system is positive attitude of students toward distance education. This paper is going to answer these questions:

- What is the rate of students' attitude toward distance education and its dimensions among male and female students separately?

Materials and Methods

Participants: The statistical universe of this study consisted of 7831 students of Payame Noor University, Ardebil center in 2009-2010 academic years. Using stratified random sampling, 396 students (139 male and 257 female students) were selected based on Kreschi- Morgan table as statistical sample.

Materials: The attitude questionnaire made up of 41 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale was used to collect data. The questionnaire included attitudes toward educational materials (5 items), face-to-face supporting (10 items), official services (11 items), examinations (6 items), distance graduates' skills (9 items). The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = .85$). Also the reliability components: educational materials, face-to-face supporting, official services, examinations, distance graduates' skills was calculated .68, .73, .78, .74, and .76 respectively.

Procedure: Research method was an ex-post-facto study. One-sample t-test was used to analyze the obtained data. For this purpose, a computed average was compared with the conceptual average among two groups and hole of groups.

Results

According to Figure 1, the mean scores of both male and female students' attitude toward three components of distance education (fase-to-fase supporting, official services, and graduates' skills) are lower than conceptual mean.

Participants' attitudes toward distance education and components are compared with the conceptual mean. Conceptual means is equal the number of items multiplied by intermediate .For instance attitudes toward educational materials containing 5 items and each item was designed in 5-point Likert scale so conceptual mean score of attitudes toward educational materials is equal ($5 \times 3 = 15$).

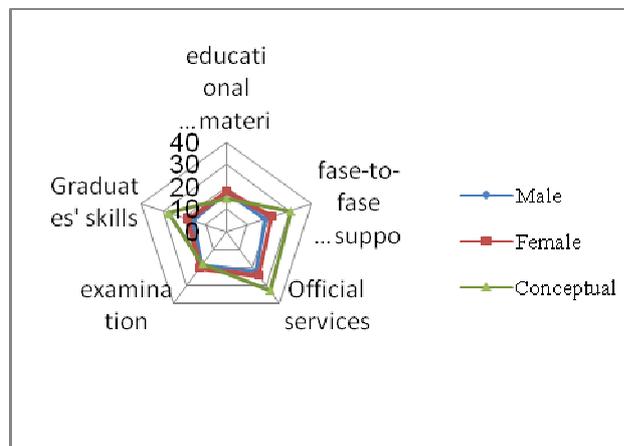


Figure 1. Mean score of males and females students' attitude toward components of distance education

Table 1. One-Sample statistics and t test for male and female students' attitude

Components of attitude	gender	Mean (Std.deviation)	test value*	t	df.	Sig.	Effect size
	male						
educational materials	139	17.4 (2.8)	15	10.1	138	.000	6.21
fase-to-fase supporting	139	18.0 (5.4)	30	-26.4	138	.000	3.33
official services	139	22.2 (6.8)	33	-18.7	138	.000	3.26
examination	139	18.5 (3.7)	18	1.6	138	.000	5.00
graduates' skills	139	15.6 (4.8)	27	-28.2	138	.000	3.25
total	139	91.7 (17.2)	123	-21.5	138	.000	5.33
	female						
educational materials	257	17.9 (2.9)	15	16.1	256	.000	6.17
fase-to-fase supporting	257	21.2 (5.2)	30	-27.1	256	.000	4.08
official services	257	24.4(6.0)	33	-23.2	256	.000	4.07
examination	257	20.5 (4.6)	18	8.9	256	.000	4.46
graduates' skills	257	18.1 (5.5)	27	-26.0	256	.000	3.29
total	257	102.2 (19.1)	123	-17.5	256	.000	5.35
Total (attitude)	396	98.5 (19.1)	123	-25.6	395	.000	5.16

* Conceptual mean

As shown in table 1, $t_{(395)} = -25.6$, $P < 0.01$ indicated that attitude of students toward distance education (98.5 ± 19.1) is significantly lower than the conceptual mean (123). Moreover, $t_{(139)} = -21.5$, $P < 0.01$ indicated that the mean score of the male students' attitude (91.7 ± 17.2) is significantly lower than the conceptual mean (123). Also $t_{(257)} = -17.5$, $P < 0.01$ indicated that the mean score of the female students' attitude (102.2 ± 19.1) is significantly lower than the conceptual mean (123).

Also according to table 1, $t_{(139)} = -26.4$, $t_{(139)} = -18.7$, $t_{(139)} = -28.2$, indicated that attitude of male students toward fase-to-fase supporting component (18.0 ± 5.4), official services component (22.2 ± 6.8), graduates' skills component (15.6 ± 4.8) is significantly ($P < 0.01$) lower than the conceptual means (30, 33, 27) respectively.

However, $t_{(257)} = -27.1$, $t_{(257)} = -23.2$, $t_{(257)} = -26.0$, indicated that attitude of female students toward fase-to-fase supporting component (21.2 ± 5.2), official services component (24.4 ± 6.0), graduates' skills component (18.1 ± 5.5) is significantly ($P < 0.01$) lower than the conceptual means (30, 33, 27) respectively.

But according table 1, $t_{(139)} = 10.1$, $t_{(139)} = 1.6$, indicated that attitude of male students toward educational materials component (17.4 ± 2.8), examination component (18.5 ± 3.7) is significantly ($P < 0.01$) higher than the conceptual means (15, 18) respectively.

However, $t_{(257)} = 16.1$, $t_{(257)} = 8.9$, indicated that attitude of female students toward educational materials component (17.9 ± 2.9), examination component (20.5 ± 4.6) is significantly ($P < 0.01$) higher than the conceptual means (15, 18) respectively.

Conclusion

Findings of present study showed that, attitude of students both male and female toward distance education is low. These results are in compliance with the findings of Carswell, and et al. (2000), Tekinarslan (2008). In Tekinarslan's study (2008) the married students in

comparison with single ones, employed students in comparison with unemployed ones, married students with a child or children in comparison with married ones without a child, and finally adult students (37-41 years old) in comparison with younger ones had more positive attitude toward distance education. However the main problem of distance education system is some applicants who are youngest and are not allowed to enter the traditional system of higher education because they have not obtained the academic requirement necessary to enter this system or cultural and social limitations prevented them. Also this University has recently developed a lot of. One of the main dimensions of development in Payame Noor University is accepting too many students and the same time transferring traditional system to electronic system.

Other findings of study indicated that attitude of male and female students toward educational materials and examination is significantly higher than the conceptual means. These findings are justified based on the Motamedi (2009). Motamedi (2009) argued that preparing the scientific content according to the approved topic of every subject by using the advanced scientific findings is one of the main activities of Payame Noor University. These scientific books are regulated by programming instruction to facilitate the learning processes. More than one hundred books in the different topics and different courses are compiled every year. The B.D. and M.D. students have to read the whole content of the books and they participate in the centralized final exams. Also Central Organization of P.N.U. in Tehran determines the common educational content and therefore it is possible to design and execute the similar examination for all the students in different P.N.U. campuses (or branches).

Researchers suggest that when entering the university, students be aware with the conditions of study in distance mode. In the end it is necessary that the participants in this study, we appreciate.

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