A STUDY OF FACTORS INFLUENCING INDIVIDUAL PREFERENCE FOR EDUCATION- A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Dr S Radha
Sr Regional/ Additional Director -IGNOU
sankhavaramradha@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION:

The Indian education system can be classified into two categories, one is regular mode (full time) and another one is non-regular mode (flexible) based on structure, teaching & learning methods and flexibility.

Regular education system is a structured one with campus-based teaching and learning. This education is offered at (a) school education for class 1 to 12, (b) bachelor and master degree programmes at Colleges & Universities, (c) professional courses like, Medical, Engineering, Law etc., (d) Polytechnic diplomas, Vocational courses in ITI, NSTI etc.,

Whereas non-regular education system is flexible one without campus-based teaching and learning and studying with the help of study material with few contact classes. This education is offered at (a) bachelor degree, master degree, diplomas, certificate programmes under Distance Education offered by State & central government and non-government universities. (b) Online education system contains online classes, online assignments and virtual labs system. This education is offered by (i) Massive Open and Online Courses (MOOC), short duration courses offered by NPTEL, SWAYAM, Udemy and Course era etc., educational platforms. (ii) Online bachelor, master degrees, diploma and certificate programmes offered by educational institutions (iii) Competitive examination preparation courses / bridge courses offered by training institutions, (c) the part time mode of education through evening and weekend classes particularly for BE, MBA etc programmes.

The present paper is study of various factors influencing the individual preference for education for holistic development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study is analytical and comprises secondary data which is collected from books and periodicals, websites of UGC, AICTE, newspapers and personal interviews with the students, faculty, parents and other employees.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To define the quality of education

2. To study the various aspects influencing the individual preference for education

3. To analyse the reasons for gap between admissions and completion of programmes

GOOD QUALITY EDUCATION:

The good quality education should meet the requirements of learners through good quality curriculum, quality institutional facilities and quality faculty. The quality is related to the educational institution, which provides an opportunity to the students to develop their skills and provide the best employment suitable to their individual skills. The curriculum & trainings of colleges should be responsive to the type of skills required by the industry.

The following diagram shows the requirement of good quality higher education.

Diagram 1:
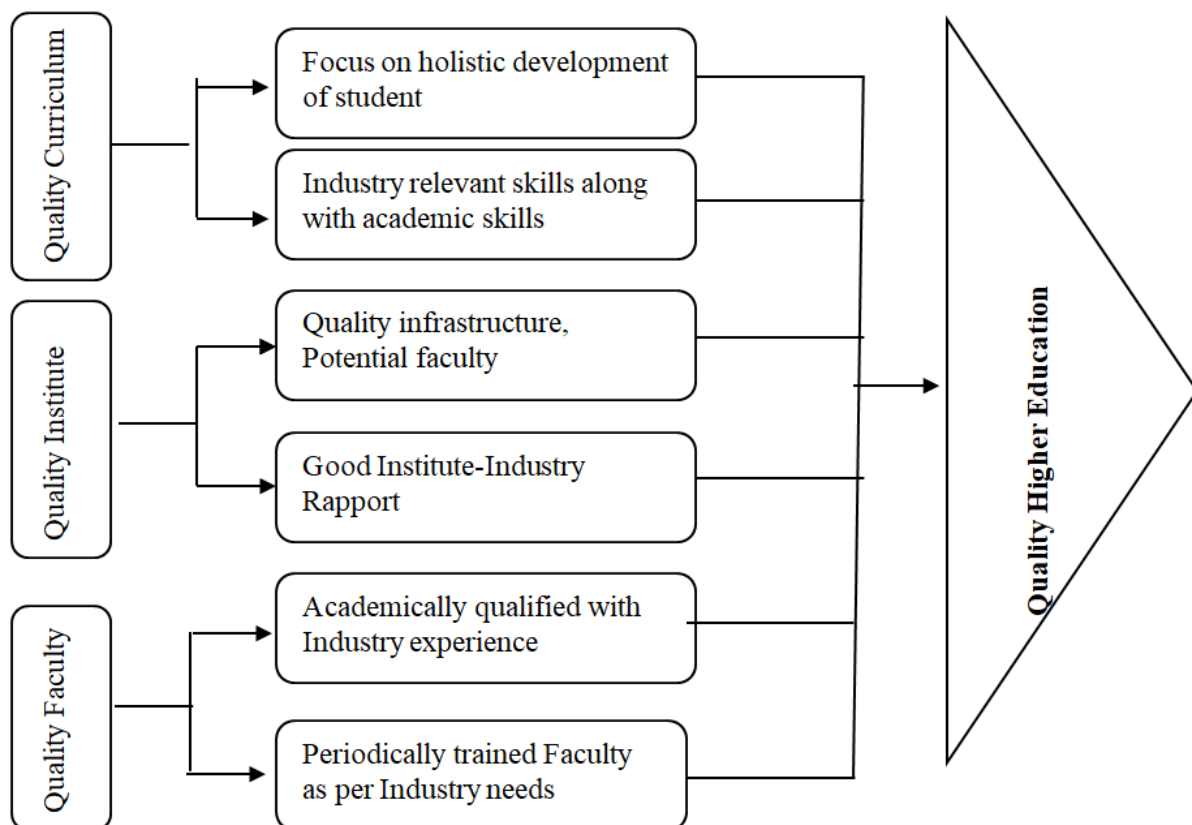
Source: Author Compilation

The Factors Influencing the Individual Preference for Education System:

The choosing of education system depends on various aspects like age, geographical location, economic status, cost of living, learning facilities, time management etc.,

Geographical Location:

The preference of education also varies between the learners from urban areas and learners from rural areas. The individual differences between the urban and rural learners are stated below.

a. **Access to formal education:** Urban learners join in well-developed private schools, international schools for education. Whereas rural learners join in government schools and depend on scholarships.

b. **Access to online education**: Urban learners prefer the online courses and e-learning platforms. Rural learners have limited internet facility and prefer the formal or distance education

c. **Higher education:** Urban learners have more opportunities in India and abroad. Where as rural learners have to migrate to metro cities to access the higher education.

d. **Career Opportunities:** Urban learners prefer IT, Law, Engineering, medical , research and startups etc, as a result they get more global exposure. where as rural learners prefer Government jobs (like UPSC, KPSC etc,,), teaching, farming related careers etc.,

Economic Status:

The economic status of the family influences the preference for education. The economic status is relative to the place of living i.e. cost of living of the place. Hence, the economic status will be good for people with limited income and staying in low cost of living place and prefer for good education. The preference for education by difference income level background of students is explained below.

a. **Urban and high income learners** prefer best online courses, private universities and foreign universities. They show less interest in distance education.

b. **Middle class learners** prefer affordable online courses and cost effective degrees from central and state universities including the distance education.

c. **Rural and Low income learners** prefer free education from government schools and colleges and distance education from government organisations.

Regional trends also influence the individual preference for education. For example, IT and Tech hubs are more in South India. Business and financial hubs are more in Western India.

Cost of Living:
Cost of living plays a vital role in choosing the education system and career development. Cost of living has direct impact on the economic status of the people i.e. above middle class, middle class & below middle class etc., and individual preference for education. Hence, there may not be any positive relation between the total population and access for higher education. It is also observed that, highly populated and backward / rural area people need job oriented programmes/ short duration programmes at affordable fees/ free waiver rather than bachelor and master degrees.

The following diagram shows the impact of cost of living on economic status and opportunities for education.

Diagram 2:

Cost of Living → Economic Status → Opportunities for Education
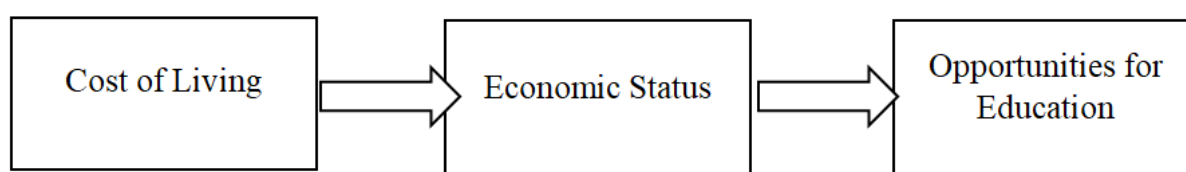
Source: **Author Compilation**

Medium of Education:
The choice of education sometimes depends upon medium of education. Rural area learners prefer education in regional language, whereas urban people prefer in English medium.

Age & Learning Styles:
Age has direct influence on learning styles and preference for education. The various aspects are discussed below.

a. **Motivation for Learning:** The motivation for learning may varies for different age groups. For example:

i) Young learners prefer general education, because of parents and family requirements.

ii) Adult learners prefer career -oriented education / skill enhancement education for self satisfaction, personal enrichment and life long learning.

b. **Teacher /Peer impact:** The impact of peers or teachers on learning styles may vary for different age groups. For example:

i) Young learners are more influenced by teacher, group studies and peer comparison.

ii) Adult learners are self-motivated and their learning styles are depending on their working conditions and family obligations.

c. **Traditional education:** The preference of traditional / formal education varies for different age groups.

i) Young learners prefer the formal education to secure degree for future job and developing identity and social experience etc.,

ii) Adults learners prefer education for career development or delayed degrees, hence prefer the weekend classes /online classes / hybrid mode classes.

d. **Online education:** The preference for Online education is chosen for skill development purpose by the learners of any age group. It is observed that, the generally indivudal prefer the short duration online courses on educational platforms like NPTEL, Udemy, Coursera etc., The young learners choose for skill development and career oriented courses where as adult learners choose the courses directly linked to their jobs.

Gap between number of students admitted, appeared examinations and successful completion:
It noticed that, there is a gap between the total number of learners admitted, total number of learners appeared examinations and total number of learners successfully completed the programme in both regular education and

distance education. This gap is more in distance and online education rather than regular education. There are many reasons to drop out from the studies.

a. **Financial constraints:** Many learners from rural and economically weaker sections discontinue studies at school or college level due to lack of financial support and need to take a job for survival.

b. **Gender disparities:** The marriage, safety concerns, household responsibilities etc, may force the girls to discontinue their studies.

c. **Academic failure:** The lack of interest, lack of motivation, unable to coop up with higher studies, poor foundation at earlier school level etc., may make the learners to discontinue.

d. **Institutional skill deficiencies:** The poor quality of education, lack of well experienced faculty, lack of mentorship for weak students etc., may discourage the learners and lead to discontinue the studies.

e. **Lack of time management and stress management:** Not having pre-planning of preparation, fear of failure, examination stress etc prevent the learners appearing the examinations.

f. **Distance and online education challenges:** Most of the learners choose these distance and online education programmes as an add-on programme. The learner may join the programme initially and discontinue the studies due to lack of time management, lack of required resources, lack of connectivity with teacher and peers & due to work pressure etc., reasons,. Few surveys are conducted on online programme lerners of an distance education intuition. Some of the analyses are discussed below.

Analysis 1: An online survey form is sent 282 online learners of BA, BCOM & certificate programmes of a distance education institution. Among them only 37 (13%) learners responded to the google form survey, hence unable to trace the learning experience of remaining 245 (87%) learners.

(i) Around 9 emails bounced back. It is also observed during the interaction with the lerners in online meetings that, education institution emails were going to spam folder, hence not able to track.

(ii) It is also observed that, among the 37 learners responded, only 25 learners said that, they are interested to join online learning system and remaining replied that, by mistake joined. It is also observed, many rural and backward area learners depends on private computer centres to submit the application, as a result wrong admission taking place.

(iii) For a question about basic knowledge of computer like typing, MS office, internet operations, only 27 responded that, they have basic computer knowledge. Without basic knowledge, it is highly difficult to study and complete the online programme.

Analysis 2: Another survey is conducted on 895 computer science master degree, bachelor degree and PG diploma learners studying online in a distance education institution. Among them only 209 i.e. 23% responded for online questionnaire.

(i) During online interactions, it is understood that, majority are working professionals, hence unable to check emails. Some also reported that, education institution emails are going to spam folder.

(ii) It is observed that, among 209 learners, only 118 (56%) are using computer/laptop for learning purpose and remaining 91 are using mobile phones for learning purposes. But, practically it is not convenient to study effectively and prepare assignments over mobile phones.

(iii) For another question related to data usage limit of internet, 51 learners (24.4%) using 1 GB data, 99 learners (47.4%) using between1GB to 2GB data, 17 learners (8.1%) using between 2GB to 3 GB and remaining 42 (20.1%) using more than 3 GB data. For an online programme, minimum 2 GB data is required, hence 150 learners may not be complete the programme successfully within stipulated time.

Alumni Experiences:
The educational experiences of alumni also one of the factors influence the preference of education by the prospective learners. It is observed that alumni participation in events, contribution to organisation and sharing of experiences etc., are more effective in regular education system rather than distance education system. In distance education, very less alumni come forward to provide the support as resource persons for academic activities virtually and do not show much interest in alumni meetings either offline or online. Anyhow, the educational institutions are using the social media for showcasing the alumni, hence the sharing of educational experience is published now a days.

CONCLUSION:

So, the individual preference for regular or distance or online or international education is influenced by a mix of personal, social, economic and intuitional factors. In overall, the various aspects like career goals, cost & affordability, flexibility, technological access to education, accessibility and location, family requirements, educational institutions reputation, employment opportunities, government policies and schemes etc., influence the individual preference for any type of education.

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