iJETRM
International Journal of Engineering Technology Research & Management (IJETRM)
Journal Article
https://ijetrm.com/issue/?volume=January~2026

CHANGING PATTERNS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AMONG STUDENTS: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF KOTDWAR CITY, UTTARAKHAND

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ABSTRACT
Higher education in small urban centers of India has been undergoing noticeable transformation in recent years. This study examines the changing patterns of higher education among students in Kotdwar city, Uttarakhand. It explores the influence of digital learning, skill-oriented education, and socio-cultural factors on students' educational choices and aspirations. The study is based on secondary sources, field observation, informal interaction, and a structured questionnaire administered to 35 higher education students. Percentage-based analysis was used to interpret the data. The findings reveal a shift from exclusive reliance on traditional classroom learning towards blended and digital learning methods. Students increasingly view higher education as a means of employment and social mobility rather than only academic attainment. The study highlights the need for adaptive and inclusive educational practices in small urban settings.

Keywords
Higher Education, Skill Oriented, Semi- Urban, Changing Pattern, Digital learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a central role in shaping social mobility, career opportunities, and individual life chances. In India, higher education has traditionally emphasized classroom teaching, prescribed curricula, and examination-oriented learning. However, rapid social and technological changes have altered these patterns, particularly in small urban centres.

Kotdwar city in Uttarakhand represents a transitional urban space where traditional educational practices coexist with emerging modern influences. Improved access to the internet, digital learning platforms, and exposure to national-level employment opportunities have broadened students' educational outlook. Students are no longer dependent solely on classroom teaching; instead, they increasingly combine formal education with online resources, recorded lectures, and skill-based training.

From a sociological perspective, these changes reflect wider processes such as urbanisation, technological diffusion, changing labour markets, and shifting family expectations. This study attempts to understand how these factors influence higher education patterns among students in Kotdwar.

Review of Literature

Existing studies on higher education in India indicate significant changes, especially in semi-urban and small-town contexts. Sharma (2010) points out that globalization has expanded educational access by enabling students to connect with resources beyond their local institutions. Kumar (2015) notes that digital platforms and online courses have become an important supplement to classroom education.

Rao (2016) highlights the continued influence of parents on students' educational decisions, particularly in smaller towns where education is closely linked with economic security. Bhattacharya (2017) emphasizes the role of peer groups in shaping academic aspirations and introducing students to new learning tools and career paths. Singh and Verma (2018) observe a growing preference for skill-oriented and employability-focused education among Indian students.

These studies collectively suggest a transition towards flexible, technology-enabled, and career-oriented higher education, which forms the context for the present study.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are:

1) To examine the changing patterns of higher education among students in Kotdwar city.
2) To analyze the role of digital technology in shaping learning practices.

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3) To understand students' perceptions of traditional and modern learning methods.
4) To explore the influence of social factors on educational choices.
5) To suggest measures for improving higher education in small urban areas.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a **descriptive and interpretative research design**. Data were collected from both secondary and primary sources.

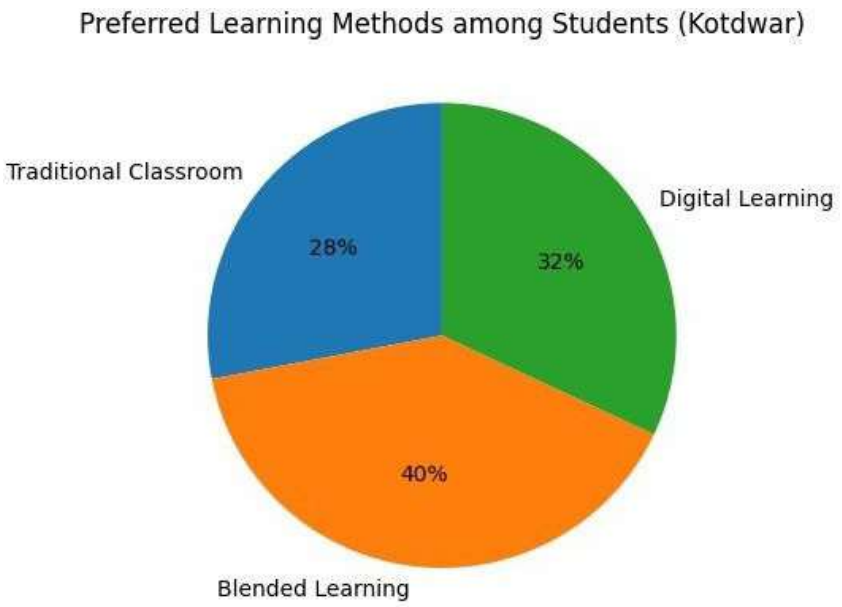
Primary data were gathered from **35 higher education students** in Kotdwar city using a short structured questionnaire, informal interaction, and field observation. The sample was selected using purposive and convenience sampling. The data were analysed using the **percentage method**, and the results were interpreted with the help of pie charts to identify major trends.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The analysis of the data reveals several important trends in higher education patterns among students in Kotdwar.

4.1 Preferred Learning Methods

The findings show that **40% of students prefer blended learning**, **32% prefer digital learning**, while **28% rely mainly on traditional classroom learning**. This indicates a clear shift away from exclusive dependence on conventional teaching methods. Technology is increasingly viewed as an essential support to formal education.



4.2 Skill-Oriented Education

The study reveals that **66% of students have enrolled in skill-oriented or certificate courses** along with their degree programmes, while **34% have not**. This reflects a growing awareness among students about the importance of skills and practical knowledge for employment.

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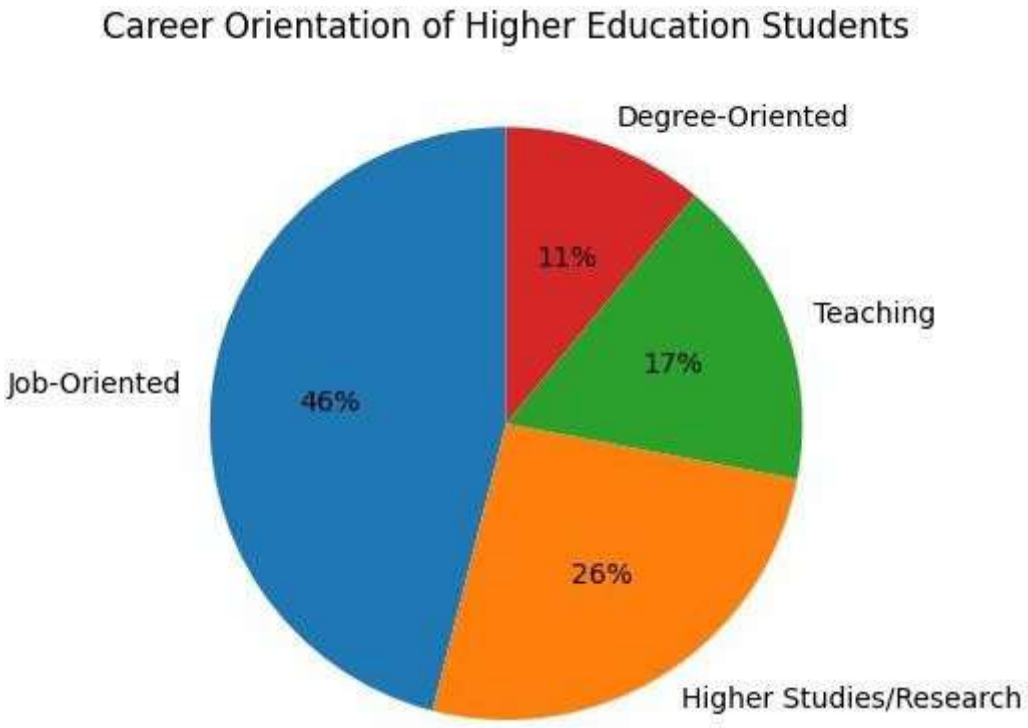
4.3 Career Orientation

With regard to career aspirations, **46% of students are job-oriented**, **26% aspire for higher studies or research**, **17% aim for teaching professions**, and **11% pursue higher education mainly for degree completion**. This distribution suggests that employment remains the dominant motivation, though academic and professional diversity continues to exist.



4.4 Social Influences

Family expectations strongly influence students' educational choices, particularly in encouraging stable and respectable careers. Peer groups play a significant role in introducing students to digital learning platforms, competitive examinations, and alternative career options. Media exposure and increasing urban interaction further shape students' aspirations.

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5. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that higher education among students in Kotdwar city is undergoing gradual but meaningful transformation. While traditional classroom education continues to play an important role, it is no longer sufficient on its own. Students increasingly adopt blended and digital learning methods and actively seek skill-based education to improve their employment prospects.

These changes are closely linked to broader social and technological transformations. To remain relevant and inclusive, higher education institutions in small urban areas must adapt their teaching practices and course offerings to meet contemporary student needs.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1) Higher education institutions should integrate digital tools into regular teaching practices.
2) Skill-based and career-oriented programmes should be offered alongside traditional degrees.
3) Teaching methods should promote interaction, critical thinking, and practical learning.
4) Parents should be sensitized to changing trends in higher education and employment.
5) Equal access to digital infrastructure should be ensured for students from all socio-economic backgrounds.

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