

OPEN DISTANCE EDUCATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

The progress of a country depends on the progress of its citizens, now the people of any nation are not recognized as the feeding mouths only but they are being considered as the human resource and that is true only when the population is vocationally and technically trained and educated. Progress of a country is possible only when its citizens are dynamic, resourceful, enterprising, and responsible. The educational system of our Nation is progressing day by day in leaps and bounds but the women of our country are still being neglected in many fronts of life, they are being subjected to lot of problems in our male dominated society. Women which constitute 48.5% of our population (as per the 2011 census of India) are not well represented in social, economic and political life as they deserve, despite of constitutional provisions for their positive discrimination in the state. It is an accepted fact that educating a boy is educating a person and educating a girl is educating a family. The woman, in the role of mother is doing wonders by providing a conducive environment in the home which is the basic unit of society. The need of hour is to empower our women of the country in all fields which can be done through proper education. The open distance education system has the capacity to do a wonderful job in this respect. In this paper I will try to highlight the broader fields wherein open and distance education can be of great help in empowering the women of our Nation.

Key words: *Women, positive discrimination, enterprising, human resource.*

Introduction:

Today the attention of the whole world is on the women empowerment; United Nations has included gender equality and women empowerment in its development goals. Women empowerment is an essential ingredient for achieving all the development goals. Like other nations of the world, India has adopted education as an instrument for social and economic transformation. At present the right to education and other necessary constitutional provisions are the guiding forces for providing basic and necessary education to every child especially the women, but the efforts of Indian government in education has not yielded significant positive results on girls and women education, Girl-child educational attainment in India is still low as records have shown that fewer girls go to school than boys. Female enrolment dwindles as they move up the educational hierarchy. The increasing cost of schooling is the major reason why many parents cannot send their children particularly girls to school. Observations have shown that poverty is widespread and parents could not meet the private or individual cost of education. It was observed that most poor parents from rural house-holds send their daughters into the domestic labor market as a source of income. This draws many promising young girls away from schools. The only goodwill gesture in our country is the ODL system which has indeed been a grace saving device to salvage women's

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course as far as education is concerned. It is the ODL that can reach to the unreached irrespective of any gender bias.

Need for the Study:

Today we are living in an era of Globalization by tremendous progress in IT sector in the world; now we can find solutions to the problems confronting humanity with cooperation and consultation. We have solved some myths and have succeeded in raising the status of living to a considerable extent, but still some aspects of our life are lagging behind. The most important among them is that we are still facing gender inequality and the women are considered yet inferiors in some parts of the world and our country India is not the exception. There is a need to highlight strategies by which we can find a solution to this global problem.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of this paper are:

1. To highlight the various educational programmes offered by the Open and Distance Learning system in India.
2. To find out the existing role of ODL in empowering women in India.
3. To suggest certain measures for women education through ODL in India.

Review of the Related Literature:

Many studies have been done on Rights of Women in Islam by the individual scholars, religious organizations, NGO's as well as by some governmental agencies; the findings of some important studies are mentioned here:

The case studies of five brave women who persevered through all difficulties to emerge successful and empowered. From Shanta, a grassroots worker at one end to Seema Pal an engineering graduate at the other, we have profiles of women who believed in the power of education to enrich their lives. Not only did they become aware of their rights and responsibilities, but they also became more competent professionally. Their self-esteem rose as a result of this confidence, and they became more aware that women are an asset to their families and to society. The process of engaging with their course materials was not an easy one. Children had to be cared for and household duties performed. Sacrifices had to be made: there could be no socializing with family and friends. There were moments of doubt, despair, and dejection. Sometimes family members lost their patience. And yet these women persevered. Again, as Shanta commented, "I never thought I could study and pass an examination. This has provided me with a very high level of self-confidence. With this newfound confidence, I will work with fresh zeal. Yes, education is liberating." (BRAVE NEW WOMEN OF ASIA: How Distance Education Changed Their Lives by Asha S. Kanwar and Margaret Taplin, Editors, 2001, ISBN: 1-895369-79-7)

Researches around ODL and women only work across aspects of learning theory, critical theory and post-structuralism to explore the question "access to what?" In doing so, important questions, again are raised about the embodied nature of teaching and learning and the potential of both 'embodied' and 'disembodied' teaching, to produce counter marginalization. My argument is that all decisions about the appropriateness of particular pedagogical practice must engage with such question considering the women

angle, to empowering them to compete better and enhance their place and roles in society. Although, it is an obvious fact, that this is indeed an enormous task, considering the question of, how to balance the narratives about marginalization. One may be tempted to ask, why must the methods traditionally used to marginalize women include male-centered interpretations of culture and religion? What best practice can we use to reduce or eradicate ‘zoning out’ of strong and intelligent female members of the society? and lots more. (DISTANCE LEARNING AND WOMEN MARGINALIZATION by Fadeyi Olalekan Abiodun, Esq., 13- 17 July 2008-03-30)

ODL programme in Nigeria and its place in making education accessible to average Nigerian woman. It discusses women empowerment and the significance of education as a tool for women empowerment. It discusses ODL as a supplement and complement to regular school learning; a strategy for government to alleviate the problem of inadequate funding, and making quality education accessible to Nigerian women. (Open and distance learning as a mechanism for women empowerment in Nigeria Comfort Olufunke Akomolafe, 2011)

STATUS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA:

It is known fact, that there are ample evidences from research that in pre-colonial times, the public and domestic domain in Asian societies were not as rigidly delineated as they had become in the nation states of industrialized western world. There was considerable overlapping between domestic and public spheres in the traditional societies. The capitalist system, which Asian countries acquired in the colonial era seriously, affected the status of women in the society because; women were seriously disadvantaged from entering the changing new labour market. In the pre-industrial societies, women had influence, power and authority. Status was not a vertical male-female divide. The emphasis translate from Victorian societies that the women’s place was only in the kitchen reduced the influence of women and therefore her status in public affairs. Since then the quest for gender equality in open learning has consistently attracted attention and provoked debates of vigorous academic discourses. Over the past 15 to 20 years for instance, the quest has been catapulted to incredible heights and has assumed an overwhelming dimension, and in fact, promoted to a recognized academic exercise.

This might not be unconnected to the fact that women, the victims of the skewed gender structure in the world system have reached a critical threshold and are challenging rigorously technological and religious beliefs, traditional myths, reactionary sexist notions, anthropological theories that define humanity regarding men’s experience. Such views have not only structured our societies to be male-dominated, male – centered, thereby treating women as appendages of men and not as separate, autonomous human beings that are anointed to co – exist with men, according to a code of conduct that treats both as equals. While it becomes more imperative to use communication technologies to increase learners’ access, the question “access to what?” should be addressed in all of its complexity especially as it relates to women. A disparate terrain of new literature about teaching and learning, technology and corporeality has brought fresh perspectives to bear on the nature and prospects of pedagogical work from women.

The 2011 census tells us that only 65.46 percent of Indian women are literate. Women’s participation in higher education rose from around 9% in 1947/48 to 34% in 1995/96. Of these, 59% opted for arts, 26.75% for commerce, and 11% for education and only 2.5% enrolled in science courses (Mani, 1989). According to a University Grants Commission (UGC) Report (1976), there are 29.6% women in

college-based courses, whereas in correspondence courses there are 34.3%. Distance education is preferred by women. Why? It is particularly suitable for Indian women for two main reasons: first, as no classroom attendance is required, there is no need for the woman learner to dislocate herself and, second, because of the degree of flexibility in course completion the learner can adjust her study timetable within her schedule of household responsibilities. Moreover, in India, distance education is cost-effective; a learner pays only a third of the total fees of a conventional institution.

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) PROGRAMMES IN INDIA:

The development of ODL has indeed been a revolution, the problems of inaccessibility, high drop - out rates and lack of opportunities that have always constituted barriers to education are gradually phasing out. ODL is the type of education that takes place outside the traditional school system, it is imparted without necessarily having personal interaction with the learners, and there are liberal admission procedure and requirements. The practice of ODL in India takes various forms which include; Open University, part-time programmes, continuing education, correspondence education, and adult education programmes.

With the vision to make education accessible to all and sundry, the Government of India introduced the system of distance learning. This form of learning is often equated with online education, but in reality, it is very much different. Unlike the latter which is quite costly, the courses of distance learning India have been designed specifically for the under-privileged, and for this reason, they are quite low-priced. In addition to regular educational courses, distance learning India also conducts a number of professional and job-oriented courses like MBA, MCA, BE.d, B.Tech, M.Tech, and so forth. Short-term vocational courses in areas like marketing, finance, environment science, social science, and so on are also provided. Presently, there are 11 open universities and 54 distance learning institutes in India. IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University) a premier institute of distance learning India provides education to approximately 1.5 million students; all these students are not disadvantaged, many of them are those people who wish to improve their career opportunities or want to pursue other more engrossing activities.

In our country we have some State Universities which are providing Distance education to the aspirants spread through the Country and the two main Institutions of International jurisdiction are providing quality education to all sections of people. The IGNOU is the main University providing higher Education to the students. The University began by offering two academic programmes in 1987, i.e., Diploma in Management and Diploma in Distance Education, with the strength of 4,528 students. Today, it serves the educational aspirations of over 4 million students in India and 36 other countries through 21 Schools of Studies and a network of 67 regional centers, around 3,000 learner support centers and 67 overseas centers. The University offers about 490 certificate, diploma, degree and doctoral programmes, with a strength of nearly 420 faculty members and academic staff at the headquarters and regional centers and about 36,000 academic counselors from conventional institutions of higher learning, professional organizations, and industry among others. The second main University is the MANUU though it is yet in its infancy but in a very short period it has achieved a great respect and 6th Number in ODL in the country, MANUU's Directorate of Distance was established in 1998. The DDE operates on the premise of propagating Urdu and reaching the unreached. Education of the underprivileged is at the heart of the mandate of DDE, and through its undergraduate and graduate programmes it caters to the educational needs of several thousands of Urdu speaking people. DDE at present offers three Post-Graduate, three Under-

Graduate, and eight PG Diploma/Diploma/Certificate programmes in the distance mode, apart from the B. Ed. programme. All these programmes have been approved by DEC and the B. Ed. programme is recognized by the NCTE. The total number of students registered in distance education is over 1, 00,000 spread over 169 study centers all over India. At present the University's distance education support network has nine Regional Centers one each at New Delhi, Bangalore, Patna, Darbhanga, Kolkata, Mumbai, Bhopal, Srinagar, and Ranchi; six Sub-Regional Centres one each at Jammu, Mewat, Lucknow, Sambhal, Hyderabad and Amaravati and an Examination Centre is in Jeddah, (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia).

The ODL is providing opportunities to all irrespective of their cast, colour, creed and other variables like economic conditions, sex, and profession. But the thrust areas are the women education and the weaker sections of the community. Women are benefiting from the ODL programmes as they can educate themselves and can get technical training in varied fields while continuing their primary engagements as professional or as homemakers.

CONCLUSION

The opportunities and accessibility created by ODL have generated a lot of enthusiasm in India. It is a grace saving device for government to make education available to average Indian. ODL is only cost-effective for government in running the programmes because it attracts heavier school fees more than the regular school programme, therefore, it is cost intensive for students. Many women are still scared of the money spent on education. The poor economic situation has pauperized most Indian women. Hence the use of basic technological and communication gadgets are the preserve of the rich people. Thus computer related telecommunication facilities might not be useful for most Indians, as the computer is still a luxury in institutions, offices, and homes. This may make integration of necessary online resources into ODL in India difficult. The problem of electricity constitutes adverse effects on ODL; several rural areas in India are yet to have electricity while the urban areas experience irregular power supply. The prospects of ODL for women are noteworthy. Government should translate the goal and objectives of ODL stated in the national policy on education into reality, and should encourage, regulate and promote ODL programmes, Women should be encouraged through relevant ODL programmes that are designed to meet their needs. Educational Institutions offering ODL should be encouraged to expand the scope of the programmes to meet the needs of various categories of women in rural locations, urban centers, nursing mothers, market women, illiterate women and semi-literate women. Technological mediated learning should be intensified to get more dividend of ODL in India. We could indeed, go on and on to list the many strategies and medium that can promote ODL, but we believe that the pathetic plights of women alluded to earlier has already dawned on us. Should that be the case, as we hope it is, then it is time for action. Change must as matter of factly change. Only concrete action will make ODL be seen as a viable route to achieving what to us is a basic human right, the treatment of women as equal human beings in the participation and provision of education.

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