



Empowerment of women through distance education: A case study of center for distance education, Maulana Azad national Urdu university, Hyderabad

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Abstract

Development is a process of structural change in the economic, political, social and cultural domains. It starts with people, their education and their capabilities because people are the primary and ultimate focus of all development. The broader goal of development is to bring the entire population into the mainstream of the national development process, both as contributors and beneficiaries. Development is the development of an individual, each according to his or her potential and in this sense education is a crucial aspect of development.

Women constitute about fifty percent of the total population, but they form only nine percent of the total productive work force. The main reason for this poor share is low literacy level among women. When this major chunk is educated, they can contribute significantly for the development of the country and can there by empower themselves to participate in all development activities. In this aspect distance education has emerged as a boon to women of all ages to equip themselves intellectually through acquisition of knowledge, leading them to new radical methods of thinking, and alternative, lateral perspectives on existing information thus rendering them more autonomous and liberated.

Large increase in population coupled with a growing awareness of the benefits of education are leading governments to explore the possibility of using alternative means to provide education on a large scale, particularly as conventional educational methods are becoming increasingly expensive. One such alternative that countries in the region are considering is *Distance Education*.

An attempt is made here to study empowerment of women through distance education and the data are collected through a structured questionnaire framed for this purpose. The questionnaire containing various aspects; their motivation, persistence and success rate in distance education was collected from a sample of 250 women acquired their level of education through the Center for Distance Education, Maulana Azad National Urdu University distributed mostly 65% among social science and 35% among science and Certificate and Diploma Courses. The results shows that women have gradually become empowered at the individual and collective levels through distance education, they have been able to address themselves to problems such as access to drinking water, payment of minimum wages, access to health services, ensuring functions of the village school, children's participation in education and have taken collective action against domestic and social violence. Hence it is suggested to include confidence building and personally development in the courses list of the university distance education center.

Keywords: economic, political, social and cultural

Introduction

Distance education is a global and rapidly growing phenomenon which offers formal learning opportunities to people who would not otherwise have access to schooling or college education. Teachers and students are separated by physical distance and the means by which they communicate from basic print material and the use of postal services to highly sophisticated communication technologies.

Distance Education: The Indian Experience

India is the seventh largest and the second most popular country in the world. About three-quarters of the population live in villages and their main occupation is agriculture. India achieved Independence in 1947 and has adopted a parliamentary form of government based on universal adult franchise and a mixed economy. India had made notable advances in various sectors, but still is a developing country. Distance education in India has a history of nearly three decades. Persistent efforts have been made by both

government and voluntary organizations to achieve universal literacy and expand opportunities for female education.

The special characteristic of distance education is that it is endowed with high flexibility and can meet the demands of education for all and 'continuing education' which the conventional education system is unable to meet. Further, distance education takes education to places and people hitherto unreached, transcending social, economic and geographical equality and thereby opens a new vista in our striving towards breaking the barriers of 'opportunity and equity'. Through distance education it is easier to transport knowledge to people than transport people to the people of knowledge. Because of these special features of distance education, it benefits certain categories of people who for various reasons are unable to avail of the formal education system.

These include persons without formal qualifications, persons belonging to different age groups, disadvantaged groups, and employed persons. There are large percentages of women in

all the above categories. Thus women as a category could really take advantage of the provision of distance education in a large measure.

Women constitute about fifty percent of the total population, but they form only nine percent of the total productive work force. The main reason for this poor share is low literacy level among women. When this major chunk is educated, they can contribute significantly for the development of the country and can there by empower themselves. Women empowerment is a global issue. Empowerment is an active multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life.

Women form the pivotal point around whom family life and living revolves. When economic level of a family goes down, women are the worst sufferers. The poorer the family the greater is its dependence on women's economic productivity. Also illiteracy among women often leads to a poor self-image, lack of knowledge and self-worth, making them susceptible to being deprived of their rights and playing an active role in the society and restricts their economic productivity. Literacy among women opens the possibility of unlimited exposure to new information and more importantly to new ways of thinking and new perspectives on existing information. Further, literate women are able to constructively express their talents and give direction to their aptitude. This enables them to lead a life which is fulfilling and satisfying.

Women's Development since 1901 shows the slow growth of female literacy. It was 0.60%, in 1901 and grew slowly to 1.05 in 1911, to 1.81 in 1921, 2.93 in 1931, 7.30 in 1941, 7.93 in 1951, to 12.95 in 1961, 18.69 in 1971, to 24.82 in 1981 39.29 in 1991 54.16 in 2001 and in 2011 it was 65.5%.

About the Directorate Distance Education (DDE)

Higher Education in recent years, has undergone significant paradigm shifts including the shift from 'Teacher-Centered' to a 'Learner-Centered' learning and the replacement of the traditional method of 'Learning over a specified period of time' by the concept of informal and continuous 'lifelong learning'. Keeping pace with the changing scenario, Maulana

Azad National Urdu University has started the Directorate Distance Education (DDE) in 1998.

1. Started in the academic year 1998-1999.
2. Admissions are made once a year i.e. Academic year Batch in May or June
3. Examinations are held onces in a year in July or August
4. Weekend Classes / Practical's through Regional Centre / Study Centers of
5. Student's Choice.
6. Wide network of Examination Centers for the convenience of the students.
7. E-learning portal and self-learning material in CD's available to students.

The Following Courses offered by Centre for Distance Education

B.A, B.SC (Life Science), B.SC (Physical Science), B.Com, B.Ed. at the Bachelor's Degree level and PG Diploma in Journalism and Communication, PG Diploma in Teach English, PG Diploma in Tour and Management, Certificate Programmes in Proficiency in Urdu through English, Certificate Programmes in Proficiency in Urdu through Hindi, Certificate Programmes in Functional English, Certificate Programmes in Food and Nutrition, at PG level PG in Urdu, History, English.

Academic Programs and Students Enrolment

The Academic Programmers of the university can be broadly classified into, UG, PG, Diploma and Certificate programs. The programs and courses are intended not only for self-enrichment but also for professional upgrading. In keeping with the open nature of the University, the requisite flexibility has been provided to enable learners to space out their studies. For e.g. the Bachelor's Degree Programs (viz. B.A. /B.Sc (Life Science), /B.SC Physical Science courses, B.Com) of 3 years duration, but a learner can take up to 6 years to complete it. Diploma programs of one year duration can be completed over a period of 2 years. Master's Degree program 2 years duration, but a learner can take up to 4 years to complete it.

Table 1: Enrolment of Students in Distance Education Centre, MANUU during Academic Years 2007- 2008 to 2015- 16 (Gender and Social Status wise)

S. No.	Enrolment	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010- 2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014- 2015	2015- 2016
1.	Gender									
	Male	16,539 (53.19)	21,264 (55.38)	23,700 (53.78)	27,604 (53.83)	33,678 (3.62)	19,522 (51.92)	23,163 (53.02)	17,188 (51.47)	22,182 (51.41)
	Female	14, 51 (6.81)	17,579 (44.62)	20,362 (46.22)	23,675 (46.17)	29,122 (46.38)	18,072 (48.08)	20,518 (46.98)	16,201 (48.53)	20,969 (48.59)
2.	Social Status									
	OC	25,579 (82.27)	31,514 (81.13)	35,343 (80.21)	39,238 (76.51)	46,907 (74.92)	27,955 (74.36)	31,068 (71.12)	22,849 (74.44)	32,555 (75.44)
	S.C	1,59 (0.51)	1,93 (0.50)	2,04 (0.46)	243 (0.47)	389 (0.61)	2,28 (0.60)	2,19 (0.50)	2,13 (0.63)	2,18 (0.50)
	S.T.	1,168 (3.75)	1,044 (2.71)	1,169 (2.65)	1,264 (2.46)	1,627 (2.59)	1,012 (2.69)	1,337 (3.06)	1,032 (3.09)	1354 (3.13)
	OBC	3,872 (12.45)	5,645 (14.70)	6,827 (15.49)	9,691 (18.89)	14,206 (22.62)	8,579 (22.82)	9948 (22.77)	7,281 (0.91)	9025 (1.80)
	P.H	3,12 (0.01)	3,70 (0.96)	3,64 (0.826)	3,44 (0.67)	343 (0.54)	1,95 (0.51)	-----	-----	-----

Source: Manuu, DDE, Hyderabad

It is found from table - 1 that the total number of students enrolled in the distance education centre has been increasing every year, the percentage of female students enrolled in all the years is also encouraging and their percentage range is 44.6 to 48.6 during the period under study. Therefore, it is hoped that this increasing trend will fulfill empowerment of women through distance education to some extent. Further, it is also found from the table that the students enrolled under general category are in good number than that of reserved categories. In case of other backward classes the student enrolment is also increasing. However, the enrolment of students under scheduled castes category is very low and students enrolled under handicapped category is less than one per cent of total enrollment. With regard to scheduled tribes enrolment their percentage range is 2.5 to 3 during the study period. Hence there is need to encourage the students to join in the courses offered through distance mode in MANUU.

Methodology

Data are broadly collected from two sources; primary and secondary. In the present paper both the data are used, and the secondary data has been collected from various books and journals. Primary data to study empowerment of women is collected from Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Center for Distance Education through a structured questionnaire framed for this purpose.

In order to assess the impact of distance education on women, their motivation, persistence and success rate in distance education, a sample of 250 women were taken for study from Center for Distance Education, Maulana Azad National Urdu University distributed mostly 65% among social science and 35% among science and Certificate and Diploma Courses. A questionnaire containing various aspects of distance education was sent to this sample of 250 women distance education learners. The following are the impact of Distance Education on women learners drawn from responses of the sample.

- They gained confidence
- Improved their career opportunities
- Updated their skills
- Second chance of learning for disadvantaged or compelled dropout
- Acquisition of knowledge
- Change in socialization pattern of children
- Better decision making capacity
- Respect in family and community
- More opportunities for networking and communicating
- Flexibility in time and space
- Gives more freedom to the learner and extends the campus into the people's home and work places.
- Assists in facing the challenges in life of women, Increased the literacy rate of the country and State, Leads to empowerment of women.

As women have gradually become empowered at the individual and collective levels through distance education, they have been able to address themselves to problems such as access to drinking water, payment of minimum wages, access to health services, ensuring functions of the village school, children's participation in education and have taken collective action against domestic and social violence.

Technology is a tool that enhances a person's capacity to act

and achieve. It is making rapid progress and finding application in several domains. Distance education is an area which is getting revolutionized with the availability of emerging technologies. Distance education has also been perceived as a critical strategy that could enhance the participation of women in higher education. There is a common feeling and a fear that as technology progresses it replaces women and pushes them out of many sectors which had been originally their domain.

Barriers affecting women's advancement in Education

Conventionally, the historical exclusion of women from the respected ranks of the academy is blamed on women. Women are deficient in natural intellectual ability, women are temperamentally unstable, they lack motivation and women's domestic preoccupations preclude public life and so on. Throughout history, women have vigorously challenged the concept of preordained female subservience. Not until the twentieth century, however, have women been able to organize world-wide initiatives toward rectifying the imbalances.

The issue of women's lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem is well known through various research studies. The lack of self-confidence however is endemic to women and cuts across class, caste and even national boundaries. Coupled with the confidence issue is '*finding their voices*'. This is a positive reinforcement and an assurance that women are intelligent and that they are capable of learning. According to a few research studies, it was found that to their low self-esteem, some women stopped attending study centres because they were intimidated by their male colleagues or by the tutor. Most women think within the parameters of their traditional social conditioning and this is reflected in their choice of courses of study.

To sum up the barriers for the low percentage of enrollment of women in higher education, there are two distinct aspects to women's participation in higher education. One is *access* and the other is *continuation*. There are several socio-economic-cultural factors which hinder women's enrollment in higher education. The attitude of parents, especially the uneducated and very conservative parents is such that they do not see any value or necessity for educating girls. In fact, there is resistance and hesitation for investment in girls' education as the parents do not expect to get returns from this. Parents also hesitate to send girls to colleges, if no exclusive women's college is available in their vicinity. If the girls have to be sent out, availability of hostel accommodation in a women's college is an important consideration.

However, it is interesting to note that more and more women are not satisfied with their current levels of educational attainment and have aspirations to further their qualifications. In many countries, a trend is being noticed of women returning to higher education to enhance their qualifications to be able to enter job market after they have '*completed*' their '*reproductive role*'. Economic necessity of having to supplement the family income is also becoming a reality.

Summary and Suggestions

Distance Education carry educational messages from the humanities to science courses, from elementary to higher

education and training and from technical to health curricula. The following suggestions are made to increase the participation of women in distance education for their empowerment.

1. Awareness programme regarding the distance education courses for women in urban, rural and Tribal areas will provide opportunity for women to gain knowledge about existing educational facilities.
2. The courses for women in distance education should be application oriented so that it will help them in their economic and social empowerment.
3. The course materials should be simple, preferably in regional languages to make women more comfortable to use.
4. The gender component should be incorporated in the syllabus of all discipline.
5. The fee should be affordable to weaker sections of the society especially women.
6. Gender sensitization programmes should be organized to sensitize the teachers and learners.

Confidence building and personally building programmes are essential to help women to overcome resistance in distance learning. Women should be motivated and trained to use technology for faster and easier learning. A good response is required from the distance education providers for the enquiries of the learner from various places. The quality of the study materials should be enhanced and availability should be made in time for the learners. The contact programmes in distance education should be flexible to suit to the timing of working women in both urban and rural areas.

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