

Distance Learning & the Women's Participation in it

Surender Singh Charan

Lecturer,
Deptt.of Economics,
Govt.College,
Dholpur, Rajasthan

Rajesh Kumar Sharma

Head,
Deptt.of Sociology,
Govt. College,
Dholpur, Rajasthan

Anita Sharma

Principal
Vivekanand Girl's College,
Dholpur, Rajasthan

Abstract

The modern age claims a constantly increasing rate of women-literacy, but still there are women who are forced to remain within the walls of their houses and to spend their whole life as illiterate beings. Apart from the commonly known agencies of education, the open and distance education centres in India are playing a tremendous role in empowering women through education. The development of Computers and the Internet have made distance learning distribution easier and faster and have given rise to the 'virtual university, the entire educational offerings of which are conducted online. Dholpur in Rajasthan is a backward district where most of the working women give up their studies due to the lack of facility of studying privately. A few of them continue their studies from open universities. Weekly and monthly classes in the open and distance learning centres are held as well as the hand-outs are supplied to them for help. Courses of Bachelor degree in Arts and Commerce, B. Ed., M. Ed., M. A. in Education and other subjects, M.S.W., M.B.A., B. Lib., courses of journalism and mass-communication etc. are some of the courses that are benefitting the working women of Dholpur in Rajasthan to satisfy their desire to make higher studies.

Keywords: Distance Education, Hybrid, Correspondence, Open University, Women Empowerment

Introduction

In the age of globalization when the whole of the world seems to have arrived at the one and same platform, the education of women in India is being considered an essential condition for their social, cultural and political upliftment. The modern age claims a constantly increasing rate of women-literacy, but still there are women who are forced to remain within the walls of their houses and to spend their whole life as illiterate beings. The villages in India form its clear and transparent picture. The women-literacy rate in the Indian villages is horribly lower than in the cities of India. It is true that now in the villages the fundamentalists have brought about a revolutionary change in their mentality and have started sending their daughters and their daughters-in-law to schools and colleges. Apart from the commonly known agencies of education, the open and distance education centres in India are playing a tremendous role in empowering women through education. At present all over India there are hundreds of such centres where the women in particular are getting benefitted through several courses. These centres are making various courses of education accessible not only to the village women, but also to the working women who because of shortage of time fail to continue their studies. Both the rural and the urban Indian women are now getting benefitted by the system of open and distance learning. This system allows them to join the courses of their own choice and thus, to prove their hidden potential in various fields.

Meaning of Open and Distance Learning

Distance education or distance learning is a field of education that focuses on teaching methods and technology with the aim of delivering teaching, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional educational setting such as a classroom. It has been described as "a process to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both"¹ Distance education courses that require a physical on-site presence for any reason (including taking examinations) have been referred to as Hybrid or blended courses of study.² Distance education dates to at least as early as 1728, when "an advertisement in the Boston

Gazette...[named] 'Caleb Phillips, Teacher of the new method of Short Hand" was seeking students for lessons to be sent weekly.³ Modern distance education initially relied on the development of Postal Services in the 19th century and has been practised at least since Isaac Pitman taught shorthand in Great Britain via correspondence in the 1840s. The University of London claims to be the first University to offer distance learning Degrees, establishing its External Programme in 1858. In the United States William Rainey Harper, first president of the University of Chicago developed the concept of extended education, whereby the research university had satellite colleges of education in the wider community, and in 1892 he also encouraged the concept of correspondence school courses to further promote education, an idea that was put into practice by Columbia University. In Australia, the University of Queensland established its Department of Correspondence Studies in recently 1911. More, Charles Wedemeyer of the University of Wisconsin-Madison is considered significant in promoting methods other than the postal service to deliver distance education in America. From 1964 to 1968, the Carnegie Foundation funded Wedemeyer's Articulated Instructional Media Project (AIM) which brought in a variety of communications technologies aimed at providing learning to an off-campus population. According to Moore's recounting, AIM impressed the UK which imported these ideas when establishing in 1969 The Open University, which initially relied on radio and television broadcasts for much of its delivery. Germany's Fern Universität in Hagen followed in 1974 and there are now many similar institutions around the world, often with the name Open University (in English or in the local language). All "open universities" use distance education technologies as delivery methodologies and some have grown to become 'mega-universities'⁴ a term coined to denote institutions with more than 100,000 students.

The development of Computers and the Internet have made distance learning distribution easier and faster and have given rise to the 'virtual university, the entire educational offerings of which are conducted online.⁵ In 1996 Jones International University was launched and claims to be the first fully online university Accredited by a regional accrediting association in the US.⁶ In 2006, the Sloan Consortium, a body which arguably has a conflict of interest in the matter, reported that: More than 96 percent of the very largest institutions (more than 15,000 total enrollments) have some online offerings, which is more than double the rate observed for the smallest institutions. during the Fall term of 2005.⁷ Today, there are many private and public, non-profit and for-profit institutions worldwide offering distance education courses from the most basic instruction through to the highest levels of degree and doctoral programs. Levels of accreditation vary: some of the institutions receive little outside oversight, and some may be fraudulent Diploma mills, although in many jurisdictions, an institution may not use terms such as "university" without accreditation and authorization,

often overseen by the national government - for example, the Quality Assurance Agency in the UK.

Objective of the Study

1. To explore the meaning and concept of open and distance learning.
2. To interpret the historical perspective of the open and distance learning.
3. To find out the significance of open and distance learning in India.
4. To explore the open universities in India.
5. To explore the open universities in Rajasthan.
6. To be familiar with the courses run by the open and distance learning universities.
7. To discuss and interpret the significance of the open universities in Rajasthan.
8. To study the conditions of living of the students who do various courses from the open universities.
9. To find out the causes that force the students to study in the open universities.
10. To find out the differences between the open and the non-open universities.
11. To study the working women who are the students of the open universities.
12. To have a peep into their conditions of working and living.
13. To learn about the courses which they join.
14. To know about their enthusiasm and their frustrations as students of the open universities.
15. To learn about the contribution of the open universities in the career of the working women.

Hypothesis

1. Literacy is the key to all the problems of human life.
2. Illiteracy is one of the several problems in the path of the Indian women.
3. There are many working women who want to continue their education, but fail to continue it due to their conditions of jobs.
4. The job-conditions of the women force them to give up studies in the non-open universities.
5. Dholpur in Rajasthan is a backward district where most of the working women give up their studies due to the lack of facility of studying privately.
6. A few of them continue their studies from open universities.
7. Weekly and monthly classes in the open and distance learning centres are held as well as the hand-outs are supplied to them for help.
8. Courses of Bachelor degree in Arts and Commerce, B. Ed., M. Ed., M. A. in Education and other subjects, M.S.W., M.B.A., B. Lib., courses of journalism and mass-communication etc. are some of the courses that are benefitting the working women of Dholpur in Rajasthan to satisfy their desire to make higher studies.
9. The courses run by the open universities help the working women to seek better job- opportunities.
10. The open and distance learning centres need better infrastructure and other facilities to attract more and more students.

Methodology

The paper is an empirical study of 100 working women selected randomly. The study was

conducted on the 100 working women of five colonies of Dholpur, namely, Adarsh Colony (20), Girraj Colony (20), Mittal Colony(20), Madina Colony(20) and Kaila Colony(20). For the preparation of the paper, the observation method was used, and detailed fruitful conversation was made with the units of information. No doubt, the investigator faced a little problem during the process of filling the schedule, but once he made his purpose of study clear to the units of information, he got their full-cooperation. He followed all the steps of scientific method in order to make his work scientific.

For the purpose, besides the secondary data from the reference books, newspapers and journals, the primary data was collected through an interview-schedule with the following 20 questions in it-

Findings**Age-group**

age-group 20-25—17%, age-group 25-30- 64%, age-group 30-35- 16% and age-group- above 35 years- 3%

Background

Rural - 93% and Urban - 7%

The academic qualification

Primary education- 2%, Middle- 5%, High School- 19%, Intermediate- 12%, Graduation- 37%, P.G.- 22% and Doctorate- 3%.

Sector of working

Private sector- 43% & Govt. Sector- 57%.

Marital Status

Unmarried- 49%, Married- 44% and Widows- 7%.

Religion

Hindu- 77%, Muslims-11%, Sikhs- 7%, Christians- 3% and Jains- 2%.

Departments where they are working

Education- 64%, Health-17% Games & Sports- 6% Police- 11% Other- 12%.

Years since they have been working

0-5 Years- 61%, 5-10 Years- 22%, 10-15 Years- 15% and More than 15 Years- 2%.

Duration working hours

0-4 hours- 6%, 4-8 hours-84%, 8-12 hours- 8% and More than 12 hours- 2%.

Courses for which they are enrolled

Traditional educational courses- 71%, Library Science- 1%, Education- 21%, Journalism and Mass communication-3%,/ Other- 4%.

Name of the university where they enrolled for the course-

Vardhaman University76%, Annamalai University- 1%/ IGNOU- 23%, Other- nil

Which is better- Open Universities or Non- open universities?

Open universities- 81%, Non-open universities- 12%, Both- 6% Neither of the two- 1%.

Causes of the open universities being better than the non-open universities-

Cheaper education- 53%, accessible to everyone- 11%, no tension of admission and attendance-36%.

Method of Studies

Self-study-4%, Tuition- 2% At the allotted centres- Nil and With the help of notes and hand-outs- 94%.

Problems in arranging notes from the open universities

Yes- 94%, No-1%, Neutral- 4% and Ignorant- 1%.

Types of problems faced in getting notes?

Insufficient material- 41%, Late-receiving- 20%, Unsystematic material-38% and Other problems- 1%.

Classes at the distance learning centres

Yes- 33%, No- 12%, Neutral- 40% and Ignorant- 5%.

Attending the classes by the students

Yes- 27%, No-59%. Neutral- 13% and Ignorant- 1%

Causes of studies

For availing better opportunities- 55%, For self-satisfaction-11%, In order to be in touch with books- 2% and for getting departmental promotion- 32%.

Satisfaction of the units with the ways of working of the open universities

Yes- 56%, No- 36%, Neutral- 6% and Ignorant- 2%.

Satisfaction of the units with the infrastructure and other facilities Yes- 34%, No- 51%, Neutral- 14% and Ignorant- 1%.

Advantageousness of the distance learning-

Yes- 82%, No-12%, Neutral- 4% and Ignorant- 2%.

Ways of its being helpful in future

In getting higher education- 40%, In getting promotion- 32%, In getting better jobs- 27%, In other ways- 1%.

future of learning through distance education

Bright- 95%, Dark- Nil, Neutral- 4% and Ignorant- 1%.

Suggestions for the improvement in the learning through distance learning

Opening more and more centres-4%, New courses-13%, Placement- 71%, Improvement in infrastructure and other facilities- 2% and Faster notes-supply- 10%.

Conclusion

Distance learning is growing more and more popular day-by-day. The open universities and distance learning centres are playing a dominant role in educating the male and female members of the various age-groups and of different castes and religions by making it possible for them to get education at lower fees and by providing them useful study material. Distance education is capable of linking the common men with the world of literacy, modernization and globalization. It is benefitting particularly the working women in both the govt. and the private sectors by enabling them to avail themselves of the better opportunities in the various fields.

References

1. *Arbaugh, J.B. "An Exploratory Study of the Effects of Gender on Student Learning and Class Participation in an Internet-Based MBA Course." Management Learning. Vol. 31(4). (2000): 503-519.*

2. Barker, Bruce. "Strategies to Ensure Interaction in Telecommunicated Distance Learning." ACSDE Research Monograph, 1995. <http://www.csusm.edu/ilast/vcyear3/transactional/Barker.htm>. Accessed 06/23/04.
3. Blum, Kimberly Dawn. "Gender Differences in CMC-Based Distance Education." *Feminista*. <http://www.feminista.com/blum.html>.
4. Burke, Catherine. "Women, Guilt and Home Computers." *Cyber Psychology & Behavior* 4 (2001): 609-615.
5. Clegg, Susan. "Theorising the Machine: Gender, Education and Computing." *Gender and Education*. Vol. 13, No. 3. (2001): 307-324.
6. Clegg, Susan and Trayhorn, Deborah. "Gender and Computing: Not the Same Old Problem." *British Educational Research Journal*. Vol 26, No. 1. (1999): 75-89.
7. Evans, Karen. "Barriers to Participation of Women in Technological Education and the Role of Distance Education." *The Commonwealth of Learning*. 1995. <http://www.col.org/barriers.htm>. Accessed 10/30/2002.
8. Faith, Karlene, ed. *Toward New Horizons for Women in Distance Education: International Perspectives*. London: Routledge, 1988.

Foot Notes

1. Honeyman, M.; Miller, G. (December 1993). "Agriculture distance education: A valid alternative for higher education?" *Proceedings of the 20th Annual National Agricultural Education Research Meeting*: 67-73.
2. Tabor, Sharon W. (Spring 2007). "Narrowing the Distance: Implementing a Hybrid Learning Model". *Quarterly Review of Distance Education (IAP)* 8 (1): 48-49. ISSN 1528-3518.
3. Vaughan, Dr Norman D. (2010). "Blended Learning". In Cleveland-Innes, M.F.; Garrison, D.R.. *An Introduction to Distance Education: Understanding Teaching and Learning in a New Era*. Taylor & Francis. p. 165. ISBN 0415995981.
4. Holmberg, Börje (2005) (in German). *The evolution, principles and practices of distance education*.
5. "Key Facts", University of London External Programme Website, http://www.londoninternational.ac.uk/about_us/facts.shtml
6. Levinson, David L. (2005). *Community colleges: a reference handbook*. ABC-CLIO. p. 69. ISBN 1576077667
7. White, M. (1982). "Distance education in Australian higher education — a history". *Distance Education* 3 (2): 255-278.