

Assessing the Significance of ‘Distance Learning’ for higher education and Women Empowerment among the probabilities of combined role of Media & Study Center (SC)

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ABSTRACT

There have been two platforms for Higher Education since inception. One is ‘Conventional Learning’ being imparted through regular attendance in colleges and universities. The other one is ‘Distance Learning’. Distance learning though appears to be new phenomenon, it is not! As a matter of fact, Distance Learning has been in vogue probably, for over 100 years or more but developed into full-fledged Open University syndrome in modern times. At this juncture, there is no intention of any comparative or analytical exercise between these two patterns of learning. Focus on Distance Learning nonetheless, is to passionately enquire into its significance, credibility inasmuch as it stands in meeting expectations of those who would like to recompense the lost opportunity of higher education in their life due to various reasons. Open University, is a momentous step in this direction. Therefore, while taking the preeminence of Distance Learning on its face value, sincere effort of course, is to study its viability and versatility to its aspirants. We can comprehend that emergence of ‘IGNOU’- being the most authenticated Open University by special Parliament Act of 1985 has erased the blemish of illiteracy for those who usually play their victim card of ‘missed opportunity’. In this context, IGNOU is a ‘watershed’ reality in the realm of education. Now dealing with ‘women empowerment’, Distance Learning provides an excellent opportunity for working women as well as those who prefer to be indoors and yet, want to learn. In other words, It can be understood very well and said without any exaggeration that the platform of Open University Learning has a tacit character of women empowerment along with flexible nature. Consequently, this paper is intended to assess/analyze the significance of Distance Learning (DL) and, IGNOU in specific, for higher education bearing ‘Advantage Woman’. Other characters like affordability and validity are its crowning glory.

Keywords: Distance Learning, Conventional Learning Pandemic, women empowerment, illiteracy

INTRODUCTION

The genesis of Distance Learning is not a new phenomenon. The emergence of IGNOU as the recognized Open University by Special Parliament’s IGNOU Act of 1985 was like an epoch making development in the field of higher education. Understandably, Conventional Learning through the corridors of regular college and university where young blood converge in their different ambitions, attitude and background is widely accepted. Full time classroom learning has its own popularity and charisma. It teaches punctuality, discipline and develops mind to grow around subject, forms perspective and so on. The whole human ambition designs of ‘to be’ starts with schooling.

However, Distance Learning proffers a good level playing field for those who believe learning has no age, but not able to attend classroom coaching for various reasons apart from the age. Such group of candidates are engaged with professional responsibilities and cannot bide time as regular students. In other words, Distance Learning is like never late in life provided burning desire is simmering within the individual. Besides, Distance Learning has gratifying element of providing fuller scope of learning to women, in specific. If she is a working woman or domesticated and yet, wants to go for higher education, there is nothing like Distance Learning by which she can grow as a confident, self-independent woman building upon her career ladder for future assignments in the field of choice.



Being attached to IGNOU for more than 14 years, my empirical observations led me to extend my humble contribution through this citation that how convenient it is to undertake higher education both for male and female gender by ODL. Specifically, woman can enrich her personality by higher education from the platform like IGNOU. Besides, those who are mired with Hijab controversy in recent circumstances can have a second thought by opting for ODL enrolment through IGNOU Platform in variety of courses with their utility and recognition.

Theoretical/ Conceptual Framework:

There have been two important sources of learning viz. Conventional and Distance. Conventional has found resonance and response from population. As long as Distance Learning is concerned, doubts and misgivings about its authenticity and recognition both in social and professional life has been a big roadblock until IGNOU has opened the gateway. Open University Learning through IGNOU is now accepted, if ever-increasing turnout of Learners during exams is any indication.

Distance Learning is affording bigger promise and brighter prospects particularly, for women when female education is still being considered as socially inhibited in many pockets and orders of Indian society. Apart from some prominent women from the elite class, middle and lower middle income groups are facing dilemma of sending their young daughters to Academy for higher education. After the success of Women's Lib and subsequent refrain of woman empowerment reaching every nook and corner, phenomenal turnaround has been noticed. However, in rural India, the situation is far from satisfactory because of the basic rural mindset of having more sons than daughters as sons are a big help in farming and related laborious jobs. Having daughter is to bearing expenses for her rearing including education only to be wedded as the property of stranger. Hence, she has to be tied down to daily domestic chores and away from schooling. The slogan of 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' saying it all. If the slogan is switched the other way round, the message of uplifting female gender through educating her per se, would have been more clear and impacting. (*I am mulling over the idea of an exclusive paper playing around nuances of the basic slogan*).

With all intents and purpose, IGNOU is an excellent option for female gender as well, in terms of flexibility, cost-effectiveness, recognition and utility.

LITERATURE REVIEW

All citations speak of the identical language of women empowerment if she undertakes education by Open Distance Learning (ODL). Enough has been said and done about education, however, when it comes to female education, there is still a second opinion of not sending her to college and university. Conservatism and all cultural taboos and practices stand in the way of woman who otherwise is intrinsically raring to throng university premises in order to educate her, meet and mix with her peers and learn lessons of life and develop her perspective on things and issues. Why she is being prevented from getting education at least that could easily empower her to take decisions of life and not to become a burden on parents and the society as it is still generally believed in. It is by way of education, woman can expect rather demand social justice and equality. If woman is independent and confident she takes up half of the responsibility and thus relieving her family, parents or husband to a greater extent. There is an exclusive women university named after Mother Teresa somewhere in Down South.

Education supports woman to have her footprint in every social and professional calling. Education sets the pathway to many aspects of life, mainly setting woman free from all kind unnecessary pressures and taboos. Distance Learning can play an outstanding role in upgrading women through open education. Though the concept of women empowerment was floated from the International Women Conference at Nairobi in 1985, real empowerment could get only by providing state-of-art education opportunities to women. There are scores of policies, announcements and ordinances let loose by the competent authorities to uplift women's position from social subjugation to a semblance of social acceptance with pertinent social justice. However, nine out of ten policies and programs are still lagging behind due to women's own stature has been made to be swarming around uncertainties. It is education that takes any woman from rural setting to the highest echelons of power and dignity. E-Learning puts women to the test of time very fast and if women is allowed to avail this facility of distance learning, woman can definitely do wonder.

Somewhere in Nigeria, girls and women's education through ODL with tactical role of library is being practiced upon in order to empower women. Naturally, educated women prepare educated children and that eventually adds values to social and national repute. As far as library is concerned, it offers a greater scope where women can access to books of her choice and syllabus and refer lessons and requirements of study they undertake. It is said that fertile and rich library prepares students with mind that broods over themes and things and brings wisdom and sagacity. Library is the storehouse of information and women with proper library during ODL makes a big difference of preparing educated

woman that defines freedom with responsibility and paves the way for progressive and dynamic society and the nation at large.

Post Covid-19, there has been a great spurt noticed in women's going to online education. Women are generally considered weaker section of the society with lesser rights in patriarchal social network. Women are basically willing that they must grow and break the chain of male-dominated society. It is man who has to break this pernicious traditional mould. In the conservative rural setting, woman is just cut out for domestic chores that makes her bogged down right from dawn to dusk. There are many social cultural issues not allowing women to break free. In this context, Distance Education is the panacea. Educated woman at least can think out of box on traditional stereotypes. Educated woman is the very basic need of the progressive society and that of the national development at large. Distance Education foots the bill here if it could be explored, exploited and professed about for woman's advantage and empowerment.

One particular citation talks about women empowerment and the significant role of IGNOU in vogue. IGNOU has done substantial work in empowering women through ODL. Even widows of soldiers are given 50% discount on all courses available on IGNOU. Therefore, ODL has a tremendous scope for distance learning, especially for women in order to be a changed and empowered woman who can defy punishing social measures particularly targeting woman. Social backwardness, ignorance, poverty, family wrangling and social animosity and lots of other social vices could be easily eliminated if women is given equal opportunity of learning. One researcher of Indian origin based in South Africa has talked about sustainable development through ODL along with woman's fair share.

In totality, women's education is posing a pressing demand that she may be allowed to educate her. ODL is the vital space where woman can constructively equip with education to make a difference evolving Indian society is always seeking for.

Touchbasing probabilities of combined role of Media & SC (Study Center):

Media's presence is ubiquitous. In today's information world, every word, news or information could only be shared by the active involvement of Media. Media's participation in this scenario is to be seen like a 'campaigner' who is supposed to be canvassing for women empowerment through articles, narratives and public discourse. In this rants and revs of empowerment for women, the job of showing the pathway is what Media's role is all about. Media & SC can lead a silent revolution of changing male mindset and perspective concerning women education which is the dire need of the society. Media have to deal with all these subtleties 'pro-actively' to effect change that is needed. However, as the popular saying goes, there is no free lunch anywhere in the world. It is a kind of pro-active approach of Study Center with due diligence accorded by higher authorities can do the trick. Local news media have to be roped in for publicity through Townhall or Seminars in town and around. Subsequently, the event may be highlighted in newspaper either as feature article or full-length advertisement. The issue here is not to engage into commercial exercise/Branding for invoking enrolments for IGNOU. The main objective have to be popularizing education through Open University in order to eradicate illiteracy from the society. In this regard, a kind of unique and innovative approach is the need of the time. This could be undertaken by equally aggressive stance from SC so outlined by higher authorities to ensure desired impact.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the importance of Distance Learning 'vis-a-vis Media's role and how it can help women through flexible, cost-effective and credible education that empowers women.
2. To reemphasize through a systematic research studies and what further could be done and facilitate not only women but education needs of the male gender as well.
3. To pinpoint the role of 'Study Center' in this regard to propagate Distance Learning among women that might support government agenda working for girls and women's education (*Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao*). The platform of Distance Learning is better alternative to the cause.

Research Gap:

All research citations are advocating Distance Learning together with women empowerment. Theoretically, it looks all glittering and acceptable. However, practically, all measures have to be well-disposed and that too, in practice by and large, to bail women out of social barriers and banality.

At times, policies are framed and well-documented. In the same way, research citations shouldn't be restricted to 'patents' like syndrome and an intellectual pastime. Instead, all said in the doctrine ought to have been complied with so as to get all expected/anticipated changes have got to be predominantly prevalent.

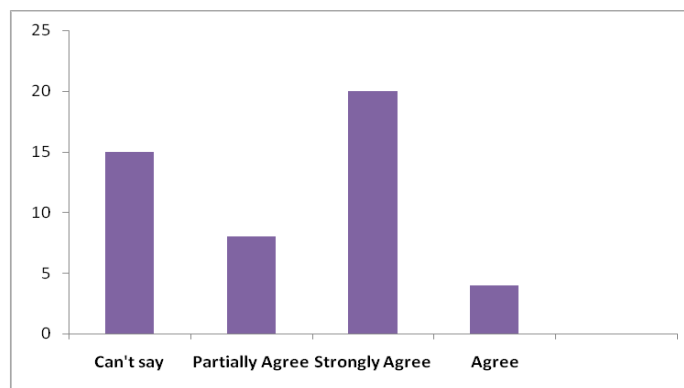
Research Design/Methodology And Analysis:

Unlike regular universities and colleges, Open University has no daily roster made to be available whereby one can easily pick-n-choose target audience to achieve the object of investigation. In this context, if any research methodology comes to mind, it is '**non-probability**' **snowballing sampling technique**. Snowballing is 'reference-to-reference' method reaching out intended target to get the feel of respondents.

Consequently, following brief questions were put up before each individual. The total 47 students in aggregate (M/F) were contacted.

Questionnaire:

1. Do you think students in great numbers are falling for Distance Learning?
2. Do you really foresee 'higher studies through ODL & the roles of Media & SC'?
3. Distance Learning leads to women empowerment. Do you agree with the statement?
4. Does Distance Learning satisfy promotional aspirations of the professionals?



Major Findings:

- I. In the age of marketing when every sector from health to banking to educational institutions and the vast array of other commercial Handles are in the same boat, Open University platform too, can aggressively take a call and get into publicity drive in order to awaken people to importance of Distance Learning. Yearly Seminar on ODL (Open Distance Learning) for mass enrolments won't be out of place.

I haven't come across any proper 'Branding' on Distance Learning by keeping news media and SC/RC on the same page. In this regard, recognized university like IGNOU may use Media for reaching out in its grandstanding. Open University is a global trend. However, in Indian conditions it has to be augmented by rekindling education awareness through IGNOU. By prodigious and pro-active use of Media as a great caterer and enabler of the information, Open University can draw a huge following and a good credible alternative to Conventional Option.

- II. 'Digital inequality' was observed when students with equal or greater amount of female come for enquiry at Study Center. Probably, they are not aware of IGNOU's informative Website or they have no tools to access information they need. In this case, Study Center's role as an active facilitator is quite desirable where every help and guidance could be easily had mitigating hassles and confusions of students.
- III. The Study Center in a broadbased manner can innovate rural outreach to create an awakening on importance of women's education through IGNOU.

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