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Title – Empowering Girls’ Through ODL System of Education: A Case Study

Sub-Theme: Access and Inclusion

Key words- Empowering, ODL

Sustainable development is a multidimensional concept based on three pillars- environment, economy and society. Education is capable of generating a wide variety of capabilities; as these three pillars are interrelated and interdependent. Meeting the sustainable development goals requires real investments and innovations in education. Education is a powerful tool to empower women; it improves the quality of life at home, outside, promoting education of their girl children, better guidance to all their children etc. Malala Yousafzai has rightly quoted that “We cannot succeed when half of us are held back”. Women education plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. It not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside. As UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has stated, "Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance." Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. In order to realise this aim, a broad coalition of national governments, civil society groups and development agencies such as the World Bank and UNESCO committed to achieving six specific educational goals (The World Bank 2009) which includes early childhood care and education, free and compulsory education for all children by 2015, providing appropriate like skill, adult education with an emphasis on women, gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005, improving all aspects of quality education. Out of which three goals are related to women and girls’ the most important is ‘Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, (which already passed with little success) and gender equality in education by 2015, (same is the situation after the target passed) with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

According to John Dewey “Education is not a preparation for life but life itself”. He further stated that – Education is the process of living through a continuous reconstruction of experiences. The abilities of the girls are developed in accordance to the demands of the society, thus, education performs important functions towards the individual as well as towards the society. The COL has developed its new strategic plan 2015-2021 titled ‘Learning for Sustainable Development’. It has made transition from ‘learning for development’ to ‘learning for sustainable development’ to align itself to the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals. It will be achieved through two pillars they are- ‘Education’ and ‘Skills’, with gender as a cross-cutting theme. It is therefore, appropriate to say that both the broader and narrower views of education have their appropriate and distinct roles to play in the life, therefore education is synonymous with the ‘act of living’ thus education is not always connected with the schools, colleges and universities alone, but beyond that.

Now question arises after concentrated efforts of Various International forums, Nations, societies and Non-governmental Organisations what are the reasons responsible for low literacy rates of girls’ and women? To find out the solution for the reasons mentioned above a case study was conducted and the positive results shown can be replicated in other situations or not is the only concern of the researcher.

Background of the study -Open and distance learning addresses social and educational inequality and fulfils the needs of disadvantaged group especially the education of girl child, which is an equally essential mandate for the growth of our society. The purpose of the present paper is to find out the opinion of parents towards formal school and ODL. Before interviewing they were told about the advantages of ODL such as flexibility, feasible fee structure, education at their door step etc., which were motivating for them. Some questions were framed beforehand based on the formal system of education as they were conversant with it and others on the need and queries of the parents, mostly related to ODL.

Research Design

Objectives-

1. To study the attitude of parents towards girls’ education.
2. To check the difference of parents attitude towards formal system and ODL.

Hypotheses-

- A. There will be positive attitude of mothers towards girl’s education.
- B. There will be positive attitude of parents towards educating girls through ODL.

Delimitation of the study- The study is limited to Bhopal city and only 50 parents of lower strata of society.

Methodology – Descriptive survey method was adopted for the study.

Sample- The study was conducted on 50 parents. They were selected randomly from socially and economically deprived categories (Bhopal Madhya-Pradesh, India)

Tool- Interview method was applied for the study. Questions were framed according to the need and educational level of the sample. As most of the parents were illiterate the questions asked were in local language and were unstructured and some were framed then and there according to the queries of the parents.

Objective.1.- To study the attitude of parents towards girls’ education-

S.No.	Attitude of parents towards Girls Education	
1)	Mother attitude towards education of Girls	Mothers’ had more positive attitude for continuing their daughters education, because they wanted to secure their future and didn’t want them engage them as domestic helpers like them.
2)	Fathers’ attitude towards Girls’ education	Fathers’ were not very positive about the education of their girl child due to many social and cultural taboos existing in the society , especially in the lower strata of the society

Therefore the first hypothesis i.e.- “There will be positive attitude of mothers towards girl’s education” , is accepted.

The second objective of the study’ is checking the difference of parents’ attitude towards formal system and ODL.

Parents attitude about formal system of education	Parents attitude about open and distance learning	Total no. of parents
Mother - Father (25) + (25)=50	Mother - Father (25) + (25)=50	50+50= 100
Mothers attitude- 20(positive attitude)	Mothers attitude 24 of mothers had positive attitude	
Fathers Attitude 18 only had positive attitude	Fathers attitude 22 of fathers had positive attitude	
For Formal system of education – 20 mothers had positive attitude, where as only 18 of fathers agreed.	For ODL 24 of mothers had positive and 22 of fathers too had a positive attitude	

After analysing results it was found that the parents had positive attitude towards ODL in comparison to formal system of education, thus, the 2 hypotheses, “There will be positive attitude of parents’ towards educating girls through ODL”, is accepted.

The most revealing positive observation of the case study was that the mothers were also motivated to continue their education especially programmes of skill development to further improve their financial status.

While going through other studies conducted, at various parts of the world, it reveals that the situation of girls' education throughout the world especially in third world countries is more or less similar. Reviews on the topic reveals that, societal attitude towards ODL to quote, **Yasmin and Others (2014)**, the study titled "streamlining female school dropouts through ODL distance education" mentioned that – In Bangladesh – The government and NGOs are actively participating in imparting gender responsive education to improve the rate of women literacy and to reduce female dropouts, it is giving encouraging results in India also. Bridge courses run by IGNOU, are encouraging teen age girls to streamline their education. It has been observed that it is through ODL only access, equality and justice can be achieved by 'reaching the unreached'. ODL has given new dimension to girl's education and the success rate of girl's education is increasing.

The objective of all the plans should be to holistically empower the girl child in all aspects so that they can become an equal partner in the process of development. An important reason for girls dropping out from formal schools is the lack of proper toilet and sanitary facilities, for that also ODL can be a better alternative. Further, Bridge schools with quality education package should be provided to girl children, especially street children, child labourers, seasonal migrants, who may have not been in formal education system should be encouraged to join ODL. These bridge schools should ultimately lead to their integration with Open and distance learning or online courses.

After having interaction with parents an informal discussion was held with the girls' the enthusiastic girls had many aspirations and dreams for their future and suggested and shared their difficulties for learning, which are as under:-

- Many of the learners are first generation learners so their needs are different so bridge courses to bring them at par with school dropouts were felt badly.
- Support to the learners of a counsellor is very important – therefore orientation for counsellors at regular interval is essential.
- Community centres with e- learning facilities should be set up.
- Online/ Wi-Fi availability to access teaching- learning material at the centres.
- Some learner expressed that the best part of ODL is its' approach. Step by step the details are mentioned in the prospectus.
- ODL is a comparatively new approach hence it needs to develop the confidence of its people.
- Some of the girls also suggested if formal and open distance schools work together it can give better results as the teachers will be available for longer duration.
- The demand for study material in local simple languages was felt as most of the girls migrated from adjacent rural areas.
- The heterogeneity of the group was a challenge for the counsellors too.
- Some of the girls enquired about its recognition and value.
- There was demand for more skill development programmes instead of formal courses.
- There was also a sense of empowerment amongst young girls, that they have all the opportunities to grow and contribute in national development.

Conclusion –In the last two decades, ODL has developed, as strong systematic intervention mechanisms to cater to the quality educational needs of millions of deprived women and girls with very low cost. Massive development in the information and communication technology through ODL got established. In this present scenario the future of educational delivery belongs to open and distance learning. Many of the world governments have committed to ODL and open schooling for long term educational expansion. In this backdrop, ODL has paramount importance for achieving the sustainable goals from prior educational, financial, geographic, time, gender or any other related constraints.

There is no dispute that ICT benefits both teacher and learner both. The increasing use of ICT has enabled the scope for educating increasing number of learners in a country like India, where more than 40% of people are illiterate. They can be educated through ODL and ICT, coupled with can, provide quality education along with equity. With the advent of 21st century it has passed many more challenges for the educational planners and

administrators and it was realised that it is through multi-model schooling system only it can 'reach the unreached'. In actual sense, the open schooling strengthens the progress of education and as the learners are from heterogeneous groups more and more flexible mode of teaching –learning is required. Lessons from developing countries can be replicated in other parts of the world to save money and other resources, especially in third world countries.

In country like India its' not possible to educate all its population through formal system of education therefore, education with various modes, along with ODL and online courses are gaining popularity .In various universities of India the curriculum of teacher training Institutes made it mandatory for all teacher trainees to go for Citizenship training, under which all students have to give community services under social responsibility and the trainees are working with many NGOs which are functioning with concentrated efforts to increase girls enrolment in education.

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