



Distance Education as a Catalyst for Women's Empowerment in India

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Abstract

The concept of distance education has been developed in various developed countries of the world. Distance education also serves dropouts, older students, and disadvantaged groups. In India, distance learning is a useful tool in closing the gender gap and empowering women. It plays a significant part in providing women with access to higher education. This paper attempts to study the enrolment of female students at higher education levels in distance education for upgrading the status of women in India. his study was qualitative and documentary in nature. Results showed that the enrolment of female students in undergraduate and postgraduate is higher than in PG diploma and certificate courses. The study concluded that distance education played a significant role in women's empowerment through female students' participation in higher education. The study suggests remedial measures to overcome constraints faced by female students in pursuing higher education.

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Introduction

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said "If you educate a man, you educate an individual; however, if you educate a woman, you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered." Women are the foundation of society, establishing families, homes, and communities, and their contributions are crucial for the formation of civilization. (Bhakta, 2019). Education is crucial for women's empowerment, enabling them to confront challenges, challenge traditional roles, and change their lives. Educated women can greatly contribute to the development of a country (Singh, 2016). The global movement for women's rights emphasizes education as a key tool for addressing societal subjugation and enhancing nation-building. However, women's education backwardness stems from gender inequality, hindering economic growth and poverty reduction (Rahaman, 2014). Indian women often face social inequalities, including segregation from mainstream education, employment, rights, and empowerment opportunities. Education directly empowers women by raising awareness about their rights, capabilities, and available choices and opportunities. (Kumari, Deo & Sarkar, 2020) ^[10]. Socioeconomic factors, particularly uneducated and conservative parents, hinder women's enrolment in higher education. Parents resist investing in girls' education and may hesitate to send girls to exclusive women's colleges if there is no hostel accommodation available (Janaki, 2013) ^[8]. Distance Education is a rapidly expanding global trend because of its flexibility. DE provides learning opportunities to those who lack access to traditional schooling or college education (Kapinga & Mtani, 2019). Women can engage in higher education through distance learning, which plays a significant role in that regard (Indiresan, 1996). Distance programs often reach a significant number of women in societies where they lack equal opportunities for education and training (Moore, 2002) ^[11]. Thus, the researcher studied Distance Education as a Catalyst for Women's Empowerment in India.

Review of related literature

Kumari, Deo, and Sarkar (2020) ^[10] discovered that graduate students in Chapra town are knowledgeable about women's empowerment and remote education, but those in the Saran district are not.

Msoffe (2016) ^[12] concluded that taking courses via open and distance learning gives students the freedom to learn while taking care of their families and jobs.

Njaya (2015) ^[17] discovered that women's empowerment was greatly enhanced by open and distant education, which enabled them to get around time, place, resources, and socioeconomic obstacles. During or after their college education, most women took a sabbatical to handle their many responsibilities.

Mujiaba (2011) ^[13] argued that distance education is a significant advancement in higher education and holds tremendous promise for bringing access to higher education to women and promoting equal opportunity. It is anticipated that this distance learning institution would increase women's emancipation, particularly for women from rural and tribal areas.

Bukush (2007) found that in the formal education system, girls were enrolled at lower average rates than boys at all levels, and there were more male-only institutions at the elementary, middle, and high levels than there were female-only institutions. The percentage of women enrolled in DE programs at Allama Iqbal Open University in Islamabad, Pakistan, is greater from the SSC to the Ph.D. levels.

By reviewing the previous studies, the researcher has concluded that various topics have been worked on about distance education but how much distance education helps women in the empowerment has not been highlighted, and how important it is mainly in the Indian context, so the researcher has shed light on this topic and researched it.

Rationale of the study

- Distance education has the potential to overcome geographical barriers and provide education to women in remote areas where traditional educational institutions may be lacking. Investigating the role of DE in enhancing women's access to education is crucial for

understanding its impact on their empowerment.

- Education is a key driver of socio-economic empowerment. Education contributes to the improvement of economic opportunities, financial independence, and overall socio-economic status for women in India.
- Empowered women positively impact their communities. Empowerment of women through distance education influences community development, breaking the cycle of poverty, and fostering a more inclusive and progressive society.
- In India, despite significant progress in various sectors, gender disparities persist, especially in education. The proposed research aims to contribute to the ongoing efforts to bridge the gender gap by focusing on the empowerment of women through distance education.

From the above-mentioned grounds, the study was justified

Objectives

Objectives of the study were

- To study the enrolment status of women in UG and PG courses through distance education mode in India.
- To investigate the enrolment status of women in PG Diploma courses through distance mode in India.
- To reveal the enrolment status of women in integrated courses through distance mode in India.

Methodology

This study is purely qualitative in nature. Qualitative data was collected and Qualitative data analysis was done. Documentary analysis approach has been followed in the study. Documentary analysis is the rigorous process of reviewing and evaluating textual and electronic sources (Bowen, 2009) ^[2]. Qualitative research includes documentary analysis. Qualitative research is best when you want to explore a problem or topic in depth. (Creswell, 2013) ^[4]. For the present study data was collected from AIHSE reports, various Books, research papers, doctoral theses, national and international magazines, state reports, newspapers, websites, etc.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Enrolment of female students in UG & PG level in distance mode

Year	Undergraduate				Postgraduate			
	Total (Male & Female)	Total Female	Percentage (%) of Female	Growth Rate	Total (Male & Female)	Total Female	Percentage (%) of Female	Growth Rate
2010-2011	1921356	774001	40.28	--	1165335	469107	40.25	--
2011-2012	2133053	902282	42.30	2.02	1015526	482626	47.52	7.27
2012-2013	2212071	940575	42.52	0.22	1092247	534556	48.94	1.42
2013-2014	2354698	1018988	43.27	1.12	1277621	638703	49.99	1.05
2014-2015	2352422	1026796	43.64	0.37	1206826	623480	51.66	1.67
2015-2016	2499390	1077682	43.11	-0.53	1108362	597836	53.93	2.27
2016-2017	2656625	1106381	41.64	-1.47	1198448	644261	53.75	-0.18
2017-2018	2554411	986873	38.63	-3.01	1178507	565601	47.99	-5.76
2018-2019	2700212	1083611	40.13	1.5	999087	544447	54.49	6.5
2019-2020	2917847	1172409	40.18	0.05	1121446	616735	54.99	0.5

Source: AISHE reports

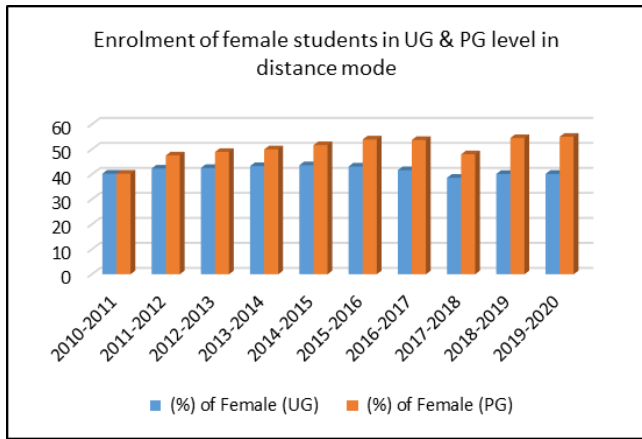


Fig 1: Percentage of enrolment of female students in UG & PG level in distance mode

Interpretation: The above table and figure show the enrolment of female students at higher education levels in distance mode from 2010-2011 to 2019-2020. Data of enrolment collected from AIHSE reports published by the Ministry of Education Government of India. At under undergraduate level enrolment of female students has increased except in the last four academic years. The percentage of highest enrolment is 43.64 in the academic year of 2014-2015. At post-undergraduate level enrolment of female students has increased year by year except for the academic session 2017-2018. The percentage of highest enrolment is 54.99 in the academic year of 2019-2020.

Table 02: Enrolment of female students in PG diploma courses in distance mode

Year	PG Diploma			Growth Rate
	Total (Male & Female)	Total Female	Percentage (%) of Female	
2010-2011	59773	16986	28.41	--
2011-2012	74557	24868	33.35	4.94
2012-2013	80228	22556	28.11	-5.24
2013-2014	62088	21789	35.09	6.98
2014-2015	64030	24218	37.82	2.73
2015-2016	68635	27252	39.70	1.88
2016-2017	77782	29212	37.55	-2.15
2017-2018	90079	38421	42.65	5.1
2018-2019	99391	42331	42.59	-0.06
2019-2020	88966	38103	42.82	0.23

Source: AISHE reports

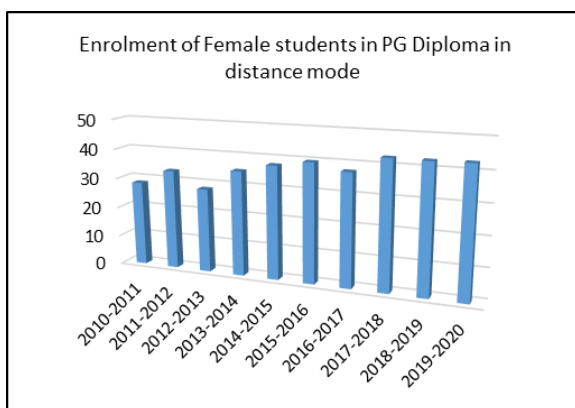


Fig 02: Percentage of enrolment of female students in PG diploma courses in distance mode

Interpretation: The above table and figure show the enrolment of female students at higher education levels in distance mode from 2010-2011 to 2019-2020. Data of enrolment collected from AIHSE reports published by the Ministry of Education Government of India. In the PG diploma course enrolment of female students has increased except the 2012-2013 academic years. The percentage of highest enrolment is 42.82 in the academic year of 2019-2020 and the highest enrolment growth rate is 6.98 in the academic session 2013-2014.

Table 02: Enrolment of female students in Integrated Courses in Distance Mode

Year	Integrated Courses			
	Total (Male & Female)	Total Female	Percentage (%) of Female	Growth Rate
2010-2011	2396	376	15.69	--
2011-2012	1958	478	24.41	8.72
2012-2013	389	92	23.65	-0.76
2013-2014	63	20	31.74	8.09
2014-2015	1	0	00	31.74
2015-2016	1	0	00	00
2016-2017	242	55	22.72	22.72
2017-2018	251	73	29.08	6.36
2018-2019	313	79	25.23	-3.85
2019-2020	3687	2913	79.00	53.77

Source: AISHE reports

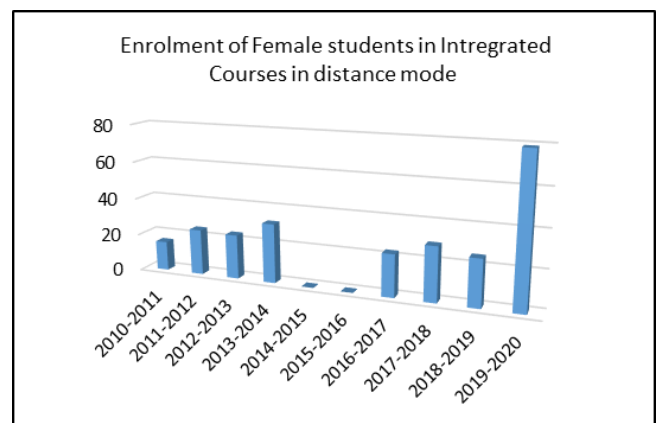


Fig 2: Percentage of enrolment of female students in Integrated courses in distance mode

Interpretation: The above table and figure show the enrolment of female students at higher education levels in distance mode from 2010-2011 to 2019-2020. Data of enrolment collected from AIHSE reports published by the Ministry of Education Government of India. In the integrated courses course enrolment of female students has increased except academic years 2014-15 and 2016-17. The percentage of highest enrolment is 42.82 in the academic year of 2019-2020 and the highest enrolment growth rate is 31.74 in the academic session 2014-2015.

Findings

The study revealed the following findings-

- It was found that enrolment of female students at the undergraduate level in distance mode is not increasing simultaneously and the growth rate is very low but at the postgraduate level in the distance mode enrolment has increased each year and the growth rate is better than

undergraduate level.

- It has been revealed that enrolment of female students in PG diploma courses in distance mode is increasing simultaneously but the enrolment growth rate is very alarming in a few academic sessions.
- It was found that enrolment of female students in integrated courses in distance mode is increasing simultaneously and the growth rate is very good except for the two academic sessions. Zero enrolment was found in the academic sessions 2014-15 and 2015-16.

Discussion and Conclusion

Women's Empowerment is a global issue and discussion (Singh, 2016). When developing programs about the empowerment of women, there are likely to be diverse opinions (Sharma, 1996). Open learning and distance learning are widely appreciated in every corner of the sector of education (Daniel Mbunda, 2022). In general, many female students who wish to attend any sort of education find that open and distance learning are essential (Daniel Mbunda, 2022). Open and distance education significantly promoted women's empowerment by enabling them to overcome time, location, resource, and financial limitations (Njaya, 2015) ^[17]. Open and remote learning's adaptability has drawn a lot of female students, irrespective of their age or level of community involvement. (Naidu, 2017). Open and Distance Learning could not only help in gender equality but also, in women's empowerment (Msoffe, 2016) ^[12]. Distance education is a significant advancement in continuing education and has immense promise for democratizing access to higher education and empowering women (Mujiaba, 2011) ^[13]. Higher education makes it easier for women to deal with the gender inequities in society and politics, which ineluctably limit academic achievement and self-determination. Women have less power to make decisions in home if they do not have a higher education (Njaya, 2015) ^[17]. The emergence of distance education is a significant turning point for the education field and offers women the chance to access higher education and achieve greater equality in their lives. Women should be empowered as a result of this distance education institution (Janaki, 2013) ^[8]. In conclusion, it can be said that distance education in India can significantly empower women by breaking geographical and cultural barriers, enabling them to pursue academic and professional goals, and fostering self-reliance, economic independence, and social participation.

Implication of the Study

- According to the research, fostering collaborations among educational institutions, government bodies, NGOs, and private enterprises to develop and promote distance education programs aimed at women's empowerment.
- The results could influence educational initiatives that support women's empowerment and gender equality. To reach a bigger audience of women, policymakers may think about integrating tactics for online education into more comprehensive educational efforts.
- The research suggests that distance education programs can be customized to cater to the unique needs and challenges of women in India.
- Distance education can empower women by facilitating knowledge dissemination, especially in traditionally

marginalized areas, and providing opportunities for women to acquire knowledge.

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